

PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

**Interactions: Collaboration Skills
for School Professionals**
Marilyn Friend Lynne Cook
Seventh Edition



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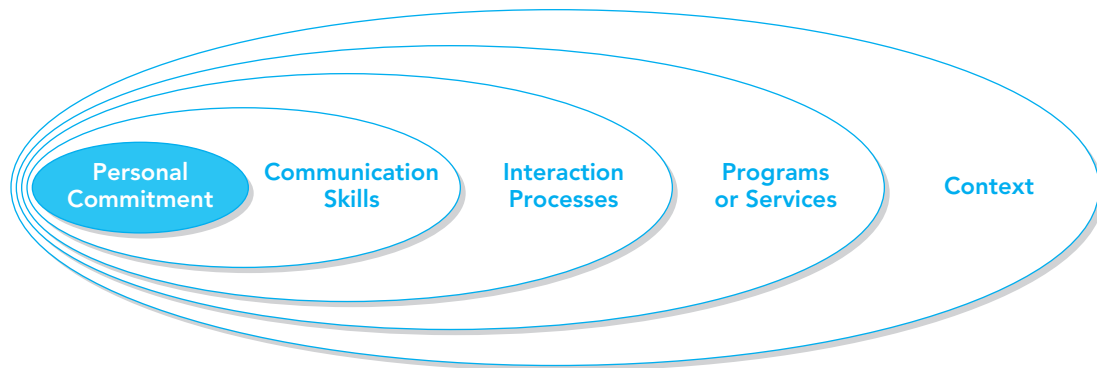
Foundations and Perspectives

From Chapter 1 of *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, Seventh Edition. Marilyn Friend, Lynne Cook.
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Bob Daemmrich/Alamy

Foundations and Perspectives



Connections

Collaboration is essential to the practices of effective educators and the culture of successful schools. This chapter begins your journey of the study of collaboration. You will learn what collaboration is (and is not) and how it fits into a broader societal context. You will also find out about the increasing attention collaboration is receiving throughout education as well as some of the challenges educators face as their collaborative responsibilities increase. Finally, you will be introduced to a framework for studying collaboration.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Define *collaboration* and describe its critical characteristics, distinguishing it from related but distinctly different concepts.
2. Outline the importance of collaboration from a broad societal perspective, including its place in disciplines such as business, health, and human services.
3. Analyze the place of collaboration within contemporary schools in the context of current legislation and other reform initiatives, including formal and informal collaborative practices.
4. Outline several challenges that may arise as educators increase their collaborative activities in schools.
5. Describe a framework for studying collaboration.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

A Day in the Life . . .

Holmes County School District prides itself on its efforts related to collaboration. At the district level, administrators meet regularly, and any initiative considered is examined in terms of its impact on all students, including those who are high achievers, those who are average, those who struggle to learn, those who are English learners, and those who have disabilities. Principals are held accountable for fostering a collaborative culture in their schools, and applicants for any job in the district are asked a number of questions about working with others, even when it is difficult. Here are examples of professionals' typical days and their collaborative roles in their schools.

Ms. Maharrin is a middle school social studies teacher. In addition to her daily teaching responsibilities, she is a member of her school's leadership team, and so today she attends a team meeting from 7:30 to 8:15 am to discuss several issues, including the staff development plan for the next school year. At lunch, Ms. Maharrin arranges to meet with Mr. Newby, the school psychologist, to design an intervention for the new student from Somalia who is experiencing considerable frustration in the classroom. Ms. Maharrin knows the upcoming field trip will be the primary topic for discussion during her team preparation period, and during her individual preparation period she needs to call two parents. After school, she plans to meet with her assistant principal, Mr. Okolo, to discuss the peer tutoring program the university interns would like to establish. At the end of the day, Ms. Maharrin wryly thinks to herself that on days like today teaching her students seems to be the smallest part of her job—something she never would have imagined when she entered the teaching profession 19 years ago.

Mr. Mendez is a second-year student support teacher (SST) at Hawthorne High School. Mr. Mendez begins each day touching base with his colleagues in the math department and working on paperwork. Once classes begin at 7:50 am, he spends the morning co-teaching two sections of Algebra I and teaching one section of a study skills class that has a math emphasis. During his preparation period, he meets with two students and the counselor about problems the students are experiencing in their classes. He also prepares directions for the paraprofessional who is assigned to support Matt, a student with significant physical disabilities, in a biology class and a geometry class. Mr. Mendez has time in his schedule for his assessment and individualized education program (IEP) writing responsibilities, and this afternoon begins with an annual review and transition planning meeting for one of the students on his caseload. After school, he works on lesson plans, meets briefly with Ms. Meyers, the social studies teacher with whom he cochairs the school's response to intervention (RTI) team, and makes a parent phone call. Mr. Mendez considers himself an advocate for students on his caseload, but he also knows that he influences teachers' thinking about students who are at risk. He finds that he must pay close attention to the personalities of the teachers with whom he works; if he establishes a strong working relationship with them, students are the beneficiaries.

Mrs. Lee is a literacy coach at River Bend Elementary School. Her primary responsibility is to assist teachers, especially those in the first two years of their teaching careers, to increase student achievement in reading and writing. Her job usually does not include directly teaching students unless it is to model a technique or demonstrate a strategy. Thus, Mrs. Lee spends her time observing in classrooms, meeting with teachers individually and in small groups, advising the principal about needs she identifies related to literacy, conducting staff development on specific strategies and approaches, and analyzing and sharing literacy data with school staff members. She also works closely with the school's parent advisory group to help families foster literacy at home. Sometimes Mrs. Lee misses her days as a teacher with its clear patterns and the joy of seeing her students succeed, but she also knows that she helps more students now by working with all the teachers and families and that her current job brings a different kind of satisfaction.

Introduction

Of all the complex tasks facing educators today, none is as demanding or as critical as creating a school culture of collaboration because it is a foundation of collaboration that enables all the other work of educators to be successful. To accomplish this goal, each person who works in schools must have the disposition, knowledge, and skills to collaborate. For example, each of the professionals just described has adult–adult interactions as a significant job responsibility. Ms. Maharrin, whose primary responsibility is instruction, also is expected to work with colleagues and parents. Half of Mr. Mendez’s teaching occurs in partnership with general education teachers in that setting. Mrs. Lee’s job illustrates the emphasis today on improving student outcomes. School leaders have realized that teachers need support in their classrooms in order to ensure that all students access the general curriculum and reach high standards. Taken together, these professional interactions illustrate three critical points for understanding the premise of this text.

First, collaboration has become an integral part of today’s schools (e.g., Barth, 2006; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). In the past, educators who were not very effective in working with other adults were often excused with a comment such as, “But she’s really good with students.” Although working effectively with students obviously is still the most important aspect of educators’ jobs, it is not enough. Everyone in schools—including special and general education teachers, administrators, related services providers, and other specialists—needs the knowledge and skills to work with colleagues, paraprofessionals, and parents. This is true in early childhood programs, in elementary schools, and in middle and high schools. It is true in schools that are still regarded as traditional in terms of programs and services as well as in those leading the way in educational innovation. Part of the reason for the importance of collaboration is the general trend of expanding and increasingly complex responsibilities, which are more realistically addressed when professionals pool their talents (e.g., Hindin, Morocco, Mott, & Aguilar, 2007; Kochhar-Bryant, 2008; Martinez, 2010). Part of it is legislation setting high standards for academic achievement and clear accountability systems for all students (e.g., Love, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2010), and part of it is the continued trend toward inclusive practices (Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008; Smith, 2007).

Second, examples of professionals’ collaborative activities demonstrate that such interactions occur both formally and informally. School leadership teams, middle school teams, co-teaching teams, teams that meet to discuss students who are struggling to learn, and consultative meetings are representative of the growth of formal structures and activities in schools that rely on collaboration for success. Models emphasizing collaboration such as these are described in detail later in this text. Meetings between teachers to respond to immediate student needs and phone calls to parents are examples of informal collaboration. Both types of collaboration are important. However, informal collaboration often occurs whether or not a context for collaboration has been fostered and whether or not any formal structures for collaboration are in place. Formal collaboration typically requires that strong leadership has ensured that a collaborative school culture—one that values collegial interactions—has been created.

Third, this text is based on the belief that collaboration is the common thread in many current initiatives for school reform (McCoach et al., 2010). Collaboration is crucial as educators move to implement RTI practices, differentiate instruction, meet standards of accountability for student achievement as measured through high-stakes testing, and design and implement local professional development strategies. Likewise, collaboration is crucial as professionals work with the parents and families of their increasingly diverse



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Working with Diverse Families

Collaborating with the parents and family members of your students is one of your first responsibilities as a professional educator, and doing this requires an understanding of the diversity and needs they represent. Ray (2005) offers some examples of family characteristics or circumstances and challenges that may arise.

- *Single-parent families* may experience a great deal of stress and isolation, and the children from these families are more likely than other children to live in poverty.
- *Blended families*, in which parents have children from former relationships, may need time to bond and to resolve issues related to child rearing (e.g., discipline). Sibling rivalry also may occur.
- *Multigenerational families*, in which grandparents, great-grandparents, or other relatives care for children, may face economic challenges, and the energy required to raise children may be daunting for the caregiver.
- *Foster families* are, by nature, temporary, and so the bonds may be a bit different from those in other families; children in foster families may experience stress because of not knowing exactly what the next steps in their lives may be.
- *Same-sex families* often face societal discrimination, and some teachers may feel uncomfortable interacting with these parents. Legal issues related to topics such as access to school records also may arise.

As a professional educator, you can enhance your interactions with diverse families by using strategies such as the following:

1. Be sure to know the correct last name of every parent, regardless of the family structure.
2. Avoid language that implies that “family” refers only to traditional family structure.
3. Regardless of family structure, offer information to parents or caregivers on their children’s strengths and abilities.
4. Avoid making requests that may place parents in an uncomfortable position related to time or money. Some families cannot afford to contribute materials for classrooms, and some parents cannot come to conferences during typical school hours or on a specific day; therefore, options and alternatives should be offered.
5. Remember that projects and activities that presume students are part of a traditional family may not be appropriate. For example, alternatives should be found to creating a family tree and making Mother’s Day gifts.
6. In some cases—for example, when grandparents or great-grandparents are raising children—you may need to explain school procedures if these caregivers are unfamiliar with them.

Most important, all educators should reflect on their own beliefs about nontraditional families and set aside any assumptions they may have about them. Being positive with students and families and being alert to and stopping teasing or bullying of students from these families are your responsibilities as a professional educator.

student groups. An initial illustration of this point is captured in Putting Ideas into Practice, which explores challenges that families may face and ways educators may effectively interact with them. Collaboration also is part of special education through initial referral and assessment procedures, IEP development, service delivery approaches, conflict resolution, and parent participation.

This chapter, then, is about effective interactions. It presents the universal concepts, principles, skills, and strategies that all school professionals can use to enhance their shared efforts to educate their students. Although slight variations in practice may occur related to one’s

specific area of expertise (teacher, special educator, speech/language therapist, or administrator), learning about collaboration generally is truly an area that brings educators together.

Collaboration Concepts

The term *collaboration* is something of an educational buzzword. One can easily get the sense that collaboration is viewed as the preferred approach in nearly any school situation. It is touted as the mechanism through which school reform can be accomplished (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2010; Dufour et al., 2008; Sagor, 2009) and the instrument through which diverse student needs can be met (Olivos, 2009; Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010; van Garderen, Scheuermann, Jackson, & Hampton, 2009). Principals are admonished to use a collaborative leadership style (e.g., Hines, 2008), and teachers are encouraged to use collaboration to improve student outcomes (e.g., Garrett, 2010; Levine & Marcus, 2007; Martinez, 2010/2011). Unfortunately, the term *collaboration* often is carelessly used and occasionally misapplied, as suggested in Figure 1.

Despite all the current discussion about collaboration, definitions of the term have remained unclear, which has contributed to confusion about its character and implementation. In fact, some dictionary definitions of *collaboration* include reference to treason or working together for sinister purposes! In education literature and practice, you may find that *collaboration* either is used as a synonym for related but distinctly different concepts—including teaming, consultation, co-teaching, and inclusion—or is not defined at all beyond a sense of working together (e.g., Gleckel & Koretz, 2008; Kampwirth & Powers, 2012; Sagor, 2009). Because we firmly believe that a precise understanding of the term *collaboration* is far more than semantics, we begin by carefully defining it. Knowing what collaboration is and is not and how it applies to school initiatives and other applications can help you articulate your practices, set appropriate expectations for yourself, and positively influence others to interact collaboratively.

FIGURE 1

Some of the many misunderstandings about collaboration in schools.



Definition

The term *collaboration* is used frequently in casual conversation, but it also has a technical definition that characterizes it as a unique professional concept:

Interpersonal collaboration is a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal.

Notice that we call collaboration a *style*. In the same way that writers use various styles to convey information to readers so, too, do individuals use interpersonal styles or approaches in their interactions with one another. Some professionals may choose to be directive when they interact; others may choose to be accommodative or facilitative; still others may choose to be collaborative. At first glance, referring to collaboration as a style may appear to detract from its significance by equating it with something ephemeral and seemingly lacking in substance. However, using this definition enables you to distinguish the nature of the interpersonal relationship—that is, collaboration—occurring during shared interactions from the activities themselves, such as teaming, problem solving, or co-teaching.

As just implied, because collaboration is a style of interaction, it cannot exist in isolation. It can occur only when it is used by people who are engaged in a specific process, task, or activity. To clarify this point, consider the following: If colleagues mentioned to you that they were collaborating, would you know what they were doing? Probably not. They could be collaboratively discussing strategies for supporting a student who has just enrolled at the school, sharing the responsibilities for an academic lesson in a co-teaching arrangement, or planning an interdisciplinary unit. What the term *collaboration* conveys is *how* the activity is occurring—that is, the nature of the interpersonal relationship occurring during the interaction and the ways in which individuals are communicating with one another. Think about this in relation to Ms. Maharrin, Mr. Mendez, and Mrs. Lee. In what activities are they engaged? Are these activities likely candidates for collaboration?

Defining Characteristics of Collaboration

Considered alone, the definition we have presented only hints at the subtleties of collaboration. Through our writing (e.g., Cook & Friend, 2010; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010), our own ongoing collaboration, and our experience facilitating the collaboration of others, we have identified several elements of collaboration that we refer to as defining characteristics, as they more fully explain the basic definition.

Collaboration Is Voluntary It is not possible to force people to use a particular style in their interactions with others. States may pass legislation, school districts may adopt policy, and principals may implement programs; but unless school professionals and their colleagues choose to collaborate, they will not do so. Perhaps the best illustration of this notion is the increasingly common mandate that professionals collaborate in designing and implementing programs for students with special needs in general education classes. If you are familiar with a school where this expectation is in place, you probably also are aware that some teachers are unwilling to collaborate, regardless of the mandate. For example, a teacher may spend a significant amount of time complaining about the demands of teaching certain students, apparently unaware that this is time that otherwise could be spent collaboratively designing instruction to help these students succeed. If that individual attends meetings as required but undermines the reading specialist's, English as a second language (ESL) teacher's, or special educator's efforts to support students, he or she is not collaborating in the sense outlined in this chapter. The professional relationship is constrained, the students are still in the classroom, and the specialist or special educator bears most of the

responsibility for making accommodations. Similarly, a specialist or special educator may repeatedly express doubts that student needs can be addressed in a general education setting. If this time were spent designing and carefully implementing strategies for supporting students, the concern could be addressed with data that would support or refute it.

Alternatively, a professional unsure about inclusive practices—whether it be a special educator, a general educator, a bilingual educator, or another professional—can express anxiety and uncertainty, but that person also may work closely with others to support students with special needs. In essence, schools and other education agencies can mandate administrative arrangements that require staff to work in close proximity, but only the individuals involved can decide whether a collaborative style will be used in their interactions. In our work in schools, we sometimes find ourselves emphasizing that there is no such thing as collaboration by coercion.

Does this mean that people cannot collaborate if programs are mandated? Not at all. Consider the situation at Jefferson High School, where general education teachers have been notified that each department will have collaborative planning time for the upcoming school year and will be expected to develop common assessments, implement consistent grading practices, and gather data to guide instructional practices. Mr. Turner might say, “I understand the need for us to be consistent in our work with students, but I’m not sure about this. I’m worried that this is going to take away my creativity as a teacher. But if we all work together, perhaps we can improve our students’ achievement.” The mandate is present, but so is the teacher’s voluntariness to carry out the mandate, even though he and others may be voicing objections to it or ignoring it.

As with the other characteristics of collaboration described in this section, it is important to think about voluntariness through a lens of cultural diversity. For example, you may interact with parents from a culture in which school and learning is the business of teachers and administrators, not parents. The typical notion of collaboration may be invalid, in part because the parents do not adopt the style because it would never occur to them that this would be appropriate. What are other interactions in which the characteristic of voluntariness may be affected by cultural differences? How might this affect your efforts at collaboration with colleagues? With paraprofessionals? With others?

Collaboration Requires Parity Among Participants Parity is a relationship status in which each person’s contribution to an interaction is equally valued, and each person has equal power in decision making; it is fundamental to collaboration. If one or several individuals are perceived by others as having significantly greater decision-making power or more valuable knowledge or information, collaboration cannot occur. To illustrate, think about a principal’s participation on a multidisciplinary team. If the principal is considered to have equal, not disproportionately greater, power in the decision-making process, other team members may disagree with the principal’s position, and the team’s ultimate decision may be one the principal did not support. Without parity, it is likely that some team members will acquiesce to the principal’s preferences because of concern about repercussions for disagreeing. Another example can provide further illustration: In an interdisciplinary teaching team, when one content-area (e.g., biology) teacher believes that another (e.g., English) does not have expertise to contribute to the instructional planning, parity is unlikely to develop. Look back at the case at the beginning of this chapter. How could the concept of parity affect each educator’s roles and responsibilities?

As with the notion of voluntariness, a discussion of parity must include consideration of diversity. For example, several young female special educators from a single school once shared privately that they were concerned about their roles when co-teaching. In their culture, younger people are expected to defer to those who are older. They found that even in their professional environment, their colleagues expected them to take all

direction and to function more as helpers than partners, and they were very discouraged about changing this, given the strong cultural basis for the situation. Even gender may sometimes be a factor in establishing parity, with either a male or a female educator perceiving imbalance in the value attributed to the contribution. In another example, think about parity when professionals interact with parents from a culture different from theirs. Who might be perceived as having the power to control the interaction? How might parents communicate based on their perception of whether their contribution is valued? Keep in mind that individuals may have parity as they work together on a specific collaborative activity even though they do not have parity in other situations. For example, you may have parity in interactions with a paraprofessional to plan a community-based activity, but you may interact directly and with appropriately greater authority and decision-making power when giving instructions to the same paraprofessional about working with students. Similarly, administrators and staff on a curriculum committee may have parity; outside of the committee, though, the relationship among the members may be markedly different.

Collaboration Is Based on Mutual Goals Individuals who collaborate must share at least one goal. Imagine a meeting at which a decision must be reached about what specially designed instruction and related services a student should receive and the setting in which they should be delivered. In one sense, the mutual goal of designing an appropriate education program seems to be obvious. In reality, however, at least two goals may be under consideration. The parents, social worker, and principal might think that the student should be in a general education setting for most of the day, whereas the special education teacher, general education teacher, and psychologist might believe—because of professional literature they have read and their interactions with the student—that great care needs to be taken before there is any discussion of placement in a general education setting. In this case, a collaborative group will look at the greater goal of designing a program in the best interests of the student and will resolve their differences. In a group without a strong commitment to collaboration, the focus is likely to remain on the apparently disparate goals, and the matter may become contentious.

Professionals do not have to share many or all goals in order to collaborate, just one that is specific and important enough to maintain their shared commitment. They may differ in their opinions about a new student's achievement potential but share the goal of ensuring that the student participate in the remedial reading program. Their differences can be set aside as not being essential to the immediate issue. They may agree that a student with multiple needs coming to the school should spend most of the school day with typical peers but disagree about who should have primary teaching responsibility for the student, how appropriate supports should be put in place, and what arrangement should be made for assessing student progress.

Collaboration Depends on Shared Responsibility for Participation and Decision Making If you collaborate with a colleague, you are assuming the responsibility of actively engaging in the activity and the decision making it involves. We have found it useful to distinguish between responsibility for completing tasks associated with the collaborative activity and responsibility for the decision making involved in that activity. Shared participation in task completion does not imply that the individuals involved must divide tasks equally or participate fully in each task required to achieve their goal. In fact, participation in the activity often involves a convenient division of labor. For instance, as a speech/language therapist, you might collaborate with a kindergarten teacher to plan a series of language lessons for the entire class. You volunteer to outline the concepts that should be addressed

and to prepare several activities related to each. The teacher agrees to locate needed materials and to plan student groupings and instructional schedules for the lessons. In this case, you and the teacher are both actively participating in accomplishing the task, even though the division of labor may not be equal.

The second component of responsibility concerns equal participation in the critical decision making involved in the activity. In the example just described, you and the teacher had different responsibilities for the task, but to be collaborative you must participate equally in deciding the appropriateness of and possible needed adjustments in the material you prepare, and you are equally responsible for deciding whether the grouping and proposed schedule are workable.

Individuals Who Collaborate Share Resources Each individual engaged in a collaborative activity has resources to contribute that are valuable for reaching the shared goal. The type of resources professionals have depends on their roles and the specific activity. Time and availability to carry out essential tasks may be the critical contribution that one person offers. Knowledge of a specialized technique may be another's resource. Access to other individuals or agencies that could assist in the collaborative activity may be a third person's contribution. If professionals cannot contribute a specific resource, they may be perceived as less committed to the collaborative goal, and they may encounter difficulty establishing parity. If you were collaborating with the professionals introduced in the case at the beginning of this chapter, what resources would you expect them to contribute? What resources would you contribute?

For a different type of situation in which resources are shared, think of working with parents. For example, sharing resources often occurs when parents and school professionals collaboratively plan home reward programs for students. The parent is likely to have access to rewards to which the student responds (e.g., video games, computer access, special meals, access to a bicycle or car). The special services providers may be able to recommend the number of positive behaviors the student should display, the frequency of rewards, and the plan for systematically phasing out the rewards once success has been achieved. The program would not be possible without the contributions that everyone makes.

You may have found that sharing resources is sometimes the key motivator for individuals to collaborate. In fact, pooling the available—but too often scarce—resources in schools can lead to tremendously satisfying efforts on behalf of students; at the same time, it enhances the sense of ownership among professionals. Unfortunately, the reverse also may occur: A scarcity of resources sometimes causes people to hoard the ones they control. Collaboration becomes unlikely when that happens. Ultimately, when resources are limited, the choice becomes this: Come together through collaboration and make the best of what is available, or fall apart as individuals compete to obtain resources that may even be inconsequential in terms of value. Or, as Benjamin Franklin is reported to have said at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, “We must, indeed, all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately!”

Individuals Who Collaborate Share Accountability for Outcomes Whether the results of collaboration are positive or negative, all the participating individuals are accountable for the outcome. Suppose you and several colleagues plan a parent information meeting. One person arranges for a room, another makes arrangements to provide coffee, and a third reserves a media projector for the presentation. Shortly before the meeting is to begin, you realize that no one has remembered to pick up the media projector. In a collaborative effort, all the professionals share the resulting need to change the program at the last minute or to arrange to have someone dash to retrieve the projector. Similarly, if



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Does Collaboration Improve Student Achievement?

Collaboration has intuitive appeal. That is, it seems to make sense that when school professionals work together, student outcomes will improve and teachers will gain increased knowledge and skills. But is there any evidence to support such ideas? A number of studies do indicate that collaboration makes a difference. Here are some examples.

A study commissioned by the Center for School Improvement in cooperation with the Office for Exceptional Children, Ohio Department of Education, examined 30 Ohio school districts that had made significant improvement in students' reading and math proficiency (Silverman, Hazelwood, & Cronin, 2009). The researchers found that these districts emphasized strong leadership that included shared leadership among professionals and principals, a strong collaborative culture and structures to support collaboration (e.g., common planning), co-teaching, and a priority on many types of teaming.

In a review of 23 studies spanning 15 years that examined school districts that were improving, Shannon and Bylsma (2004) found that four categories of themes characterized these districts. In addition to quality teaching and learning, effective leadership, and support for system-wide improvement, the authors reported that clear and collaborative relationships were essential. A nurturing professional culture, clear understanding of professionals' roles and responsibilities, peer support and trust, and related characteristics were integral in these districts.

Additional research on collaboration is needed to address topics such as the differences in collaborative activities between exemplary and struggling schools, ways to build a collaborative culture when it does not exist, and strategies for sustaining such a culture.

a school leadership team is meeting to discuss the results of the monthly student progress data collected, but one member has not finished compiling his part of the results, the team is accountable for rescheduling the meeting date or for assisting the member aggregating the information.

The examples just given relate to the outcomes of the shared work. However, in today's schools a second type of discussion of outcomes is equally important—that is, outcomes related to students. One question sometimes asked is whether collaboration makes a difference for students. The studies described in *A Basis in Research* address that question.

Emergent Characteristics

Several characteristics of collaboration can have multiple functions—they are mentioned both as prerequisites for as well as outcomes of collaboration. We refer to these as emergent characteristics. These characteristics must be present to some discernible degree at the outset of collaborative activity, but they typically grow and flourish from successful experience with collaboration.

Individuals Who Collaborate Value This Interpersonal Style Collaboration is difficult but rewarding. Professionals who anticipate collaborating must believe that the results of their collaboration are likely to be more powerful and significant than the results of their individual efforts, or else they are unlikely to persevere (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006). Typically, success in collaboration leads to increased commitment to future collaboration, and so beliefs and attitudes become increasingly positive. Two examples from former students illustrate this point. One student reported, "I used

to work in a school where there was no collaboration. I worked very hard, but it was like beating my head against a wall. Now I work in a place where collaboration is the norm. I work even harder than I used to, but now it's fun." Another former student commented, "I used to think that collaborating meant that I had to have answers and get others to agree to my ideas. What I've learned is that by talking less and listening more and being more open to others' thoughts and ideas, we get better results—and that makes collaboration really worth the effort." Individuals who collaborate truly believe that two (or even more) heads are better than one.

Professionals Who Collaborate Trust One Another Even if you firmly believe in the beneficial outcomes of collaboration, you cannot suddenly introduce it, fully developed, into your professional interactions. If you already have worked in a school, you probably recall your experiences as a new employee, a phase in which you learned about your colleagues, the norms of the school setting, and the manner in which to approach the other professionals with whom you worked most closely. And even though you interacted with other professionals during that time, the extent to which you could collaborate was limited. Only after a period of time in which trust and, subsequently, respect are established can school professionals feel relatively secure in fully exploring collaborative relationships. Once begun, however, those relationships may be strengthened until trust of colleagues becomes one of the most important benefits of collaboration. This scenario describes the emergence of trust: At the outset, enough trust must be present for professionals to be willing to begin the activity, but with successful experiences the trust grows and the relationship becomes better able to withstand problems or disagreements. Conversely, trust is most fragile when a collaborative relationship is relatively new, as may be the case for Mr. Mendez, the student support teacher you met at the beginning of this chapter. If he violates a shared confidence, fails to contribute to planning for instruction, or communicates inaccurately, trust is likely to be damaged, and such damage can take a long time to repair. How long trust takes to develop can depend on many factors, including the overall support and administrative expectations for collaboration in the school; the similarity or dissimilarity among participants in terms of professional preparation, culture, and life experiences; the number and quality of the opportunities for interacting; and the commitment each person makes to the shared work.

A Sense of Community Evolves from Collaboration In collaboration, participants know that their strengths can be maximized, their weaknesses can be minimized, and the result will be better for all. The concept of community is receiving significant attention in contemporary professional literature (e.g., Darling-Hammond & Friedlander, 2008; Hord, 2009; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). What is increasingly recognized is that the development of a sense of professional community leads to better outcomes for students and satisfaction and support for educators (Conoley & Conoley, 2010). Perhaps you have experienced the sense of community in a faith-based, social, or student group. The willingness to work toward a common goal is accompanied by a decrease in concern about individual differences. This is the goal of the Holmes County School District, as described at the beginning of this chapter.

Taken together, these emergent characteristics highlight the opportunities you have and the risks you take when you begin to collaborate. You may attempt to establish trust and either succeed or are rebuffed; you may attempt to communicate an attitude supportive of collaboration and find that some but not others share your beliefs. Collaboration certainly is not easily accomplished, nor is it appropriate for every situation. More than anything, the emergent characteristics capture the powerful benefits of accepting the risks

of collaboration. When collaborative efforts result in higher levels of trust and respect among colleagues and between professionals and parents/families, and working together results in more positive outcomes for students, the risks seem minor compared to the rewards.

Collaboration in a Societal Context

How has collaboration come to be so important in education that it is the subject of entire books and courses in professional preparation programs? What is fostering the development of so many collaborative structures in schools? Why is so much attention now devoted to the quality of the working relationships among professionals, paraprofessionals, and parents/families? What is occurring for students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, is simply a reflection of the direction of many endeavors in society and their application in education (O'Leary & Bingham, 2009; Rosen, 2009). By examining the larger context for collaboration, you can better understand its pervasiveness in today's world and its necessity for today's schools.

Societal Trends

Consider the world in which you now live. A valuable starting point is the arena of work: The vast majority of jobs available in the early twenty-first century are in service industries in which individuals interact with clients or customers to meet their needs (e.g., retail sales, telecommunications). This present situation is in sharp contrast to preceding eras in which many workers toiled in isolation on assembly lines. Contemporary life also is characterized by an accelerated flow of information: People are inundated with it, whether through the Internet, the deluge of advertising that arrives each day, the seemingly endless array of television talk shows, or the stacks of publications that pile up—often unread—in many homes, offices, and classrooms. Mass participation—for example, through social media and through electronic collaborations such as Wikipedia—also is routine. With the enormous amounts of information constantly available, few individuals can hope to keep up with even the most crucial events occurring in their communities and their professions, much less throughout the world.

One response to the pressures of contemporary society's changing labor needs and its information explosion is an increasing reliance on collaboration (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Gobillot, 2011). For example, business managers, much more so now than in the past, are involving employees in decision making as a strategy for improving organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, employees report that they find their jobs more satisfying if they participate in reaching decisions. Researchers agree that a sense of ownership and commitment appears to evolve through participation in such activity, and cutting-edge employers target team approaches that foster shared decision making and clear communication as a major training topic for employees at many levels (Euwema, Wendt, & Van Emmerik, 2007; Fang, Palmatier, Scheer, & Li, 2008). All of these ideas, coming not from education but from business and industry, are directly related to collaboration.

Business is not the only domain in which collaboration is essential. In fact, collaboration seems to have become a standard for much that is worthwhile in contemporary professional culture. For example, Bennis and Biederman (1997), in their examination of the most significant innovations of the twentieth century—including the personal

computer, aviation technology, and feature-length animated films—concluded that none of them would have been possible had it not been for a high degree of collaboration among very talented people. Fullan (2001, 2008) contends that the ability to bring people together to form professional relationships is a fundamental skill that enables leaders to help people develop commitment and tackle the exceedingly complex problems facing many disciplines, whether business management, industry, education, or computer or biological sciences.

Collaboration also has become increasingly important in the area of human services. For example, it is viewed as a means through which welfare, medical, mental health, and other services can be more effectively provided to children and their families (e.g., Horwath & Morrison, 2007). In health care, collaboration is a means of bringing together medical and health care providers to integrate the delivery of services (Fraser, Mounib, & Payne, 2007), a means of increasing the community's health (Kisely, Duerden, Shaddick, & Jayabarathan, 2006), a means of improving public health agency performance (Lovelace, 2000), and a means of improving community emergency services (McGuire, 2009).

School Collaboration

Beginning with the premise that schools are a reflection of the larger society, the current trend toward collaboration in the United States and around the world makes it quickly apparent why collaboration is such a significant trend in schools (Grangeat & Gray, 2008). Many examples of this trend are evident, and this section outlines just a few.

Response to Intervention Perhaps one of the most important types of collaboration emerging in twenty-first-century schools is one that originated in special education legislation but is implemented in general education: response to intervention (RTI). Response to intervention is an alternative procedure for identifying students as having learning disabilities, a move away from what has been called a “wait to fail” model that required a discrepancy between expected and actual achievement (Barnes & Harlacher, 2008; Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2007). It also is evolving as a data-driven vehicle for proactively responding to many students' learning difficulties. In RTI, students who are falling behind despite being taught through high-quality, research-based instructional approaches are placed in successively intensive interventions for specific periods of time (e.g., 16 weeks), most often because of concerns about reading, although this procedure is also being applied in some locales when concerns arise about students' math achievement or behavior (e.g., Fairbanks, Sugai, Guardino, & Lathrop, 2007). The interventions often are referred to as tiers (i.e., Tier 2 intervention, Tier 3 intervention). Detailed data are gathered to determine whether the interventions being implemented are resulting in



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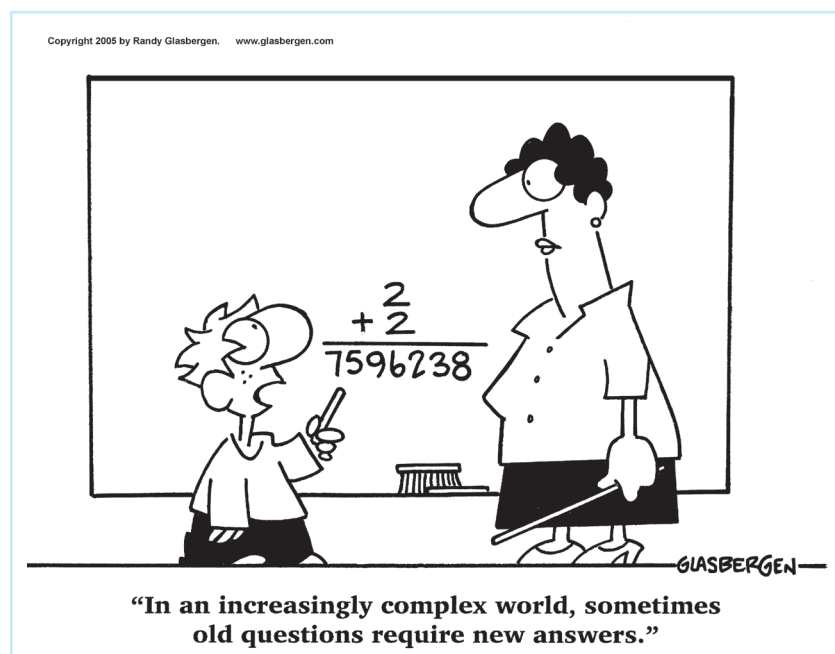
docent/Shutterstock

Collaboration characterizes many twenty-first-century professions, including those in business, science, and medicine.

accelerated student learning, a process referred to as progress monitoring. If the interventions are effective, they are continued, or if determined inappropriate, discontinued. If, after a series of such increasingly focused interventions, a student is not making enough progress to eventually reach the same level of achievement as peers, a team may decide that a learning disability exists and determine that the student is eligible for special education services. In a few states, just the series of interventions is a basis for that decision; in many states, additional assessment procedures also are used.

Response to intervention calls for a high degree of collaboration (e.g., Brown-Chidsey & Steege, 2010; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Consider the experience of Ms. Jackson. As a third-grade teacher, she is very concerned about Cecil's reading skills. As she has reviewed his progress and taught him for the first part of the school year, she has found that he still has tremendous difficulty with many basic phonics skills, affecting his ability to master the third-grade curriculum. She asks her school's RTI team to problem solve with her for Cecil. After reviewing Cecil's school records and assessment data, the team agrees that he is significantly behind his peers and is unlikely to make adequate progress without more intense intervention. The reading specialist, speech/language therapist, assistant principal, and Ms. Jackson decide that he should participate daily in a 30-minute specialized supplemental reading program that focuses on systematic development of phonics skills. After 10 weeks of this intervention, the same team reconvenes and reviews the weekly data on Cecil's progress. Although he has not caught up with his peers, the team decides that the intervention is resulting in significant progress and should be continued.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide detailed information about the many dimensions of effective RTI procedures. What is important for you to remember is that these procedures are based on collaboration. When a team of professionals come together to analyze student needs and design instruction that will accelerate learning, the results are better ideas, an increase in learning, and less need for the more structured and regulated services of special education.



Additional Examples of School-Wide Collaboration RTI is just one, albeit important, model emphasizing collaboration among school professionals. For example, teachers are being asked to team with each other and with other school professionals, including media specialists, science consultants, literacy coaches, counselors, and speech/language therapists (e.g., Bosma et al., 2010; Canter, Voytecki, Zambone, & Jones, 2011; Herrera, 2008; Simcox, Nuijens, & Lee, 2006). In all these efforts, the goal is to provide enhanced instruction to improve student learning.

Middle school approaches are an especially interesting application of teacher–teacher collaboration (e.g., Graham, 2007) because they are premised on strong collaboration among teaching teams in core academic areas. Teachers in middle schools have regularly scheduled shared planning time so that they can integrate curricula, coordinate assignments and other major activities such as field trips, and discuss issues related to their instructional work. They also share data about their shared students and collectively find strategies to effectively meet their students' special learning needs.

Another type of collaboration emphasized in the school literature concerns school–university partnerships, often under the guise of school reform (e.g., Gillespie, Whiteley, Watts, Dattolo, & Jones, 2010). One example of partnership for preprofessional preparation is a residency program (Solomon, 2009), in which university faculty members collaborate in school settings, especially urban settings, with school professionals to recruit, prepare, induct, and mentor new teachers. Another example is blended teacher preparation, in which general and special education preservice teachers learn together and sometimes receive dual licensure when they complete their professional training (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling, & Bushrow, 2007; Griffin & Pugach, 2007).

Yet another type of school collaboration receiving renewed attention is peer collaboration (e.g., Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008). When students work with partners on various instructional tasks, they generally learn more than if they had worked alone. Further, professionals have come to value peer interactions as a means of preparing students for their likely roles in the world of work (e.g., Oortwijn, Boekaerts, & Vedder, 2008).

Finally, collaboration has not been ignored by school administrators. Principals are forming school leadership teams and collegial work groups to share decision making on critical school issues (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Morgan & Clonts, 2008). They also are working collaboratively with teachers to nurture their skills as leaders, help them set professional goals for each year, and make judgments about their schools' reform efforts (e.g., Mangin & Stoelinga, 2010; Yost, Vogel, & Rosenberg, 2009). Principals are emphasizing that teachers should work with each other to solve problems about students experiencing difficulty, to establish and assess academic standards, and to create positive working relationships with parents and family members (e.g., Billingsley, 2007; Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2010). The school as a collaborative community of learners is now a central theme for effective administrators.

Keep in mind that even these examples represent only a small fraction of the collaborative activities in today's schools. Some additional examples are included in *Putting Ideas into Practice*.

Special Education Collaboration

Special education collaboration is a subset of school collaboration, but it has such a rich history and has become so much a part of policy and practice that it merits separate attention (Ludlow, 2011). For example, even before the passage of the first federal special education law in 1975, special educators were providing indirect services to students with disabilities by working with their general education teachers in a model called consulting teaching



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

The Many Faces of School Collaboration

Throughout this chapter, you will read about many school applications of collaboration. But there are so many ways professionals collaborate that not all can be adequately addressed between these covers. Here are just a few examples of formal and informal collaborative activities occurring in contemporary schools:

- *Professional learning communities (PLC)* are a structured approach for professional development. In PLCs, educators come together based on a shared need (e.g., all seventh-grade math teachers learning about the new curriculum; all teachers interested in learning more about co-teaching; all teachers teaching U.S. history and who are expected to incorporate writing and literature into the course). The teachers meet regularly, share readings, and take turns leading the group with the goal of jointly increasing their knowledge and skills.
- *School reform teams* often are formed when school professionals are faced with an urgent challenge to raise student achievement. There may be a leadership team that includes representative teachers, support staff, and parents. There also may be grade-level or department teams that meet regularly to create common assessments, review student data, discuss changes to instruction dictated by the data, and evaluate the effectiveness of the changes made.
- *School–community collaboration* usually has as its goal improving outcomes through a unified effort. Collaboration among school professionals, community members, and agency representatives may focus on preventing dropouts, raising achievement, reducing gang activities, and enlisting parents and families in educational efforts.

(McKenzie, 1972). Likewise, school psychologists have long been urged to multiply their impact by helping teachers, who could then better address the learning and behavior problems of all their students (Tharp & Wetzel, 1969). When P.L. 94–142 became law, collaboration was firmly integrated into special education with the provisions of parent participation and the mandate for the least restrictive environment. With each revision of special education law, the place of collaboration has been strengthened until now the law has, in essence, made collaboration a required part of special education services. As shown in Figure 2, collaboration is either mandated specifically or strongly implied in the entire process of identifying students who receive special services, delivering their instruction, and interacting with parents.

Unfortunately, considerable confusion has accompanied the evolution of collaboration in special education, especially since the increasing adoption of inclusive practices. For example, in some schools the terms *collaboration* and *inclusion* are used interchangeably, even though one is a style of interaction and the other is the belief system that creates a foundation for how students are educated. In others, collaboration is considered a way to deliver services, often confused with co-teaching, a service delivery approach.

A discussion of special education collaboration would not be complete without mention of early childhood programs, for which collaboration generally is integral (e.g., Branson & Bingham, 2009; Kochhar-Bryant, 2008). For example, early intervention services are based on the beliefs that parents or other caregivers are the primary teachers of young children and that professionals can foster their participation through collaboration. Further, early intervention programs are mandated to coordinate services among all providers (e.g., educators, social service agencies, medical professionals), and this mandate exists within a context of collaboration.

FIGURE 2**Direct and indirect expectations of collaboration in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).**

- *IEP teams.* Each student's educational program must be designed by an IEP team that generally includes special education and general education professionals as well as parents. This team also includes speech/language therapists, occupational and physical therapists, administrators, and any other personnel needed to contribute to the student's education plan.
- *Least restrictive environment.* The law requires justification for any placement that is not general education. This presumption strongly suggests that general education teachers, special educators, related services personnel, administrators, and others should work together on behalf of students.
- *Highly qualified teacher requirement.* Special educators who teach core academic content (e.g., math, social studies, science, English) to students not taking alternate assessments must be highly qualified in those areas. However, if a highly qualified general education teacher and a special educator share teaching responsibilities, the special educator may not have to be designated as highly qualified in the content area. That is, the special educator's highly qualified status in these situations relates to the learning process, whereas the general educator's relates to the core academic content. This requirement of the law can foster collaborative service delivery.
- *Assessment process.* Parents must give permission for their children to be assessed, and they also must have a voice in the decision making that occurs as a result of assessment. Even more communication responsibility occurs when students are reevaluated. Because a decision may be made in some cases to omit standardized testing, parent involvement in decision making is even more critical (although if parent input cannot be obtained, the process continues).
- *Transition.* Transition relies on strong collaboration among educators as well as students and parents. Further, transition plans often require the involvement of professionals from other agencies, and so interprofessional collaboration may be required.
- *Discipline and behavior support plans.* For any student with behavior problems, a functional assessment and behavior support plan is required. The process of gathering data, identifying the problem, designing alternative interventions, implementing them, and evaluating the outcomes typically will include participation by several professionals, paraprofessionals, and parents/family members.
- *Paraprofessionals.* Paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, and other individuals in similar roles should receive appropriate training for their jobs and supervision of their work. Although not all interactions with paraprofessionals may be collaborative, the specific expectation for teacher–paraprofessional interactions can foster collaboration.
- *Mediation and dispute resolution.* Unless declined by parents, states must make no-cost mediation available to parents as a strategy for resolving disagreements concerning their children with special needs. Further, prior to a due process hearing, the district must convene the IEP team members and parents in an attempt to informally resolve the dispute. The implication is that a strong bias exists for all parties, working together on behalf of students, to design the most appropriate education rather than escalating conflicts.

collaboration in early childhood special education you should realize that many professionals point to this area when seeking exemplary practices in school collaboration.

Another dimension of collaboration for special educators concerns the partnerships formed among the professionals who provide special education and related services. For



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Internet Resources for Collaboration

The Internet is a tremendous source of information about almost any topic. Although only a few sites specifically address the professional collaboration that occurs among school staff members, the following sites include information on collaboration and pertinent related topics.

www.beachcenter.org

The Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas has as a goal working with all stakeholders to enhance the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families. This family-focused site contains many articles of interest and links to other sites emphasizing family collaboration.

http://teachnet.edb.utexas.edu/~Lynda_Abbott/teacher2teacher.html

Teacher-to-Teacher Collaboration is a web site sponsored by the University of Texas. It includes links to sites that focus on assisting teachers to connect and interact with one another. It also includes links to information about professional development, instructional matters, student behavior, and other topics of interest to educators.

www.allthingsplc.info

At All Things PLC, you can learn about professional learning communities (PLCs), an increasingly common form of school collaboration, blog with others about

PLCs, and look at data related to the impact of PLCs on student achievement and other outcomes. Recent articles on the site addressed the use of technology and the implementation of behavior interventions.

www.powerof2.org

Power of 2 is a web site developed as part of a federally funded project to assist teachers and other educators in working together on behalf of students in inclusive schools. It features a wide variety of material focused on accommodating the educational needs of students with disabilities.

www.middleweb.com

As you might guess, Middleweb is a web site devoted to topics of interest to middle school educators. However, because collaboration is so integral to middle school models, you will find many helpful resources on this site. Some recent discussions included collaborating about grades and considerations related to working on a team instead of as an individual.

One other suggestion: As you seek information related to collaboration and related topics, don't forget to check your own state department of education's web site. Many have practical information that is directly related to state policies as well as links to other valuable local and national sites.

example, special educators often work closely with speech/language therapists to create effective language interventions that can be implemented across the special education and general education settings. Likewise, they may collaborate with a technology specialist to help a student with a communication disability become proficient using a new communication device. They also may interact on a regular basis with the school nurse, a counselor, and a consultant who advises the teacher on working with students with visual impairments. That is, collaboration within the field of special education is as crucial as collaboration between special educators and those outside the field.

The Challenges of Collaboration

Despite collaboration's clear importance and increasing emphasis in education, a number of challenges may arise when school professionals attempt to establish collaborative relationships. These issues pertain to school structure, professional socialization, power status among

participants in the relationship, and pragmatic issues. You can explore other issues related to collaboration and possible solutions for addressing them by visiting web sites such as those described in Putting Ideas into Practice.

School Structure

It has long been recognized that many professionals in schools typically do their substantive work in isolation from others (e.g., Lortie, 1975; Pomson, 2005; Sarason, 1982), and this recognition and concern about its implications for the teaching profession continue even today. This structure of professional isolation is contrary to the concept of collaboration, and its drawbacks are clear as the success of schools with a collaborative culture has been documented. When physical isolation from other adults is the norm, each school professional sets about working with students. How do these professionals accomplish this? Essentially, they take charge. In their classrooms or offices, they are the experts who hold authority and power over students, and so they typically use a directive style to promote student learning, which is appropriate. However, constant use of this style with students may interfere with professionals' ability to switch to a collaborative style for interactions with colleagues and parents. As school leaders increasingly create school structures that foster collaboration, they should be aware of the companion need to facilitate constructive interactions among professionals.

Professional Socialization

Physical isolation and the use of a directive style with students are part of what contributes to the wide variation in emphasis on collegial relationships. However, a norm of isolation sometimes is still fostered through professional socialization. First, in some teacher and other professional preparation programs, you may discover that as you are successfully completing your student teaching, practicum, or internship experiences, your supervisor must leave you alone to work with students. In other words, your professional training itself may encourage a belief that working in isolation is the role of the professional. Even if you entered the teaching profession through an alternative route to licensure, you might have found that your proficiency was directly or indirectly judged based on how well you handle instruction, student matters, and planning on your own . . . but not on your work with others.

Second, this socialization of isolation may continue as you enter your profession and gain experience. Even for some teachers who participated in collaborative preparation programs, school cultures of independence or self-reliance are so strong that what evolves is a belief that you should handle your professional problems yourself. If you seek help, it is often only after you have decided that whatever is occurring is no longer your problem; your goal becomes seeking another to take ownership of it.

This discussion of structural isolation and individual characteristics of professionals in schools may leave the impression that collaboration is unlikely in school settings. That certainly is not the case, as was illustrated by Ms. Maharrin, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. In fact, attention to collaboration has gained significant momentum over the past several years. We mention the issue of structural isolation only to raise your awareness of the difficulties in collaborating and to stress that, even if you have learned about the importance of collaboration and embrace its value, you may work with colleagues who have not and who may resist participating in collaborative work. We also want to convey some of the resulting challenges that you will undoubtedly experience as you attempt to collaborate. These challenges are not unique to your specific school setting or professional



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborating Through Blogging

You may already know that a blog (short for weblog) is a sort of electronic diary, updated fairly frequently, that offers insights on a topic and links to related sites. Here are blogs that you may find helpful:

<http://teacherlingo.com/blogs/default.aspx>

The Teacher Lingo web site is dedicated to providing teachers with a platform for collaboration. The web page provided opens to the teacher blogs. A wide variety of topics are under discussion at any point in time and may include the following: assistive technology, instructional dilemmas and possible solutions, teaching ideas, responses to conflict at school, and general information about working in schools, including not only working with students but also working with other professionals and parents.

www.proteacher.net/blogs

The ProTeacher blog site is designed to address topics for all educators, including those in all subject areas and at all grade levels. Conversations are grouped so that it

is simple to join a conversation directly related to your interests. Topics at the beginning of the school year focus on getting started with a new student group and setting up for success; other subjects have included responding to disruptive student behavior, working with students with autism, and educators' work conditions.

www2.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3752562

This Scholastic web site includes a list of the "Top 20 Teacher Blogs." These blogs span school levels, specific subjects (e.g., art, math, science), and special education and focus on both instructional techniques and stories about schools and students. There is a blog for student teachers, too.

You may find that you want to make your own blog. You can do so at several of the sites just mentioned or at others such as <http://blogger.com>. Once on a blogging site, just follow the simple directions, and soon you will be sharing your ideas and experiences with others.

role; they result from many factors that are part of all school professionals' experiences. Ultimately, these dilemmas provide the rationale for exploring the skills described later in this text because it is those skills that can empower school professionals to complement their other professional skills with collaborative ones.

Keep in mind that if you are in a school setting where isolation is more common than collaboration, possibilities for forming positive working relationships still exist. You might find one colleague with whom you can forge a partnership. It may be that teachers in your field from other schools in your district are eager to collaborate. A third way to address isolation is through the use of technology. E-Partnerships offers a few suggestions for accessing and using blogs as a means of reaching out to others and learning from them.

Power in the Relationship

Whenever there are interactions among people, the topic of power should be mentioned because the entire character of interactions is based in large part on each participant's power or perceived power (e.g., Raven, 2008). For example, Robin is a fourth-grade teacher who has worked in her school district for many years. She is well respected and

has a specialist's degree in reading. When she takes the role of reading coach, her colleagues are happy to follow her advice because she has expert power; that is, she is viewed by others as knowing more than they do on the topic of reading instruction. She also may have what is called referent power; that is, the likelihood that others will follow her suggestions because they admire her and value her input. Another type of power generally held by principals or other supervisors is called legitimate power; that is, educators follow the directions of administrators because those leaders have the right to require compliance. Other types of power include reward power (the perception that the other person controls valuable resources), coercive power (the perception that the other person may punish an individual for ignoring direction), and informational power (the perception that the other person's knowledge of the details of an explained change demonstrates a reason to implement it).

Think about the implications of power for collaboration. For example, if you are a preservice teacher, what will be your power base for collaboration as you begin your career? You may find that you have to work diligently to cultivate informational and reward power. If you are an experienced educator, you may already have referent power as well as expert power, and you may need to be aware that you are somewhat intimidating to novice educators because of your power. Consider other interactions in which power may be unbalanced: For example, an early career special educator co-teaching in an advanced high school class may perceive that the general educator holds nearly all the power. When educators interact with parents, especially those who live in poverty or who have recently come to the United States from another country, they should understand that they may be perceived as holding power. A similar situation might exist in working with paraprofessionals.

What is important to remember is that collaboration is based on parity; that is, a balance of power based on the valued contributions made by each participant. As perceived differences in power increase, the likelihood for true collaboration decreases. Further, if an expectation for collaboration exists and there is not a balance in power, stress, the topic of Putting Ideas into Practice, is likely to increase.

Pragmatic Issues

When we described the defining characteristics of collaboration, we noted that resource sharing is essential and mentioned items such as time, space, and materials. Sadly, collaboration in schools often is constrained when these items and other logistics are not adequately considered. For example, some professionals have regularly scheduled common planning time for their grade level, department, or team, but other educators can find only a few moments to touch base before or after school or during a hurried lunch (e.g., Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009). Similarly, some school administrators ensure that team members can attend meetings by providing coverage for their classes; others schedule all such meetings after school. Some special education co-teachers spend a significant amount of time or the entire class period with their teaching partner, but in other cases special educators or specialists are expected to provide services in two or even more classes during a single instructional period.

We mention the topic to acknowledge that logistics and other details of arranging for high-quality collaboration sometimes comprise the greatest obstacle facing those who collaborate.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Managing Stress

Collaboration not only offers support to educators but also may lead to stress. Here are sources of stress related to collaboration and ideas for how to deal with the inevitable stress of being a professional educator in a collaborative school.

Sources of Stress

- *Role responsibilities.* The evolving nature of the educators' jobs, including the increased expectation of working with many colleagues and managing student learning across settings, is a significant source of stress.
- *Assignment to collaborative tasks.* Teachers who are told they will co-teach, educators assigned to RTI teams, and professionals directed to contribute to professional development may find such assignments stressful.
- *Work conditions.* When educators must attend frequent meetings, participate in professional development activities, serve on committees, and still find time for their own planning, stress is likely to be high.
- *Support.* Educators who perceive that their administrators do not support their work experience a high degree of stress.
- *Collegiality.* In addition to administrative support, teachers need support from colleagues. If they believe their contributions are not valued, stress is likely.
- *Cultural differences.* When professionals interacting with each other and with parents are from different cultures, stress may increase as special care is needed to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication.

Dealing with Stress

- *Set realistic and flexible goals.* Some educators create a set of expectations that are so difficult to achieve that failure is inevitable, and guilt—and stress—may follow.
- *Focus on student learning.* Teachers can directly affect student learning. Stress can be reduced when

educators keep track of and can point to student gains in learning and appropriate behavior that they have directly influenced (Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, & Otis-Wilborn, 2008).

- *Establish priorities.* When there are so many tasks to complete that the list seems endless, it is very easy to tackle them from a crisis perspective; that is, giving attention to whichever item is most pressing or obvious. Instead, step back and set priorities. If you encounter difficulty in setting priorities, a more experienced educator or your principal may be able to assist you.
- *Take care of yourself.* Working nonstop sounds admirable, but it is not a healthy habit and can lead to burnout. Some educators try to keep up with their many job responsibilities by seeing students during their lunch period and working before and after school. They may take home a large tote filled with work each night, and they try to work for a couple of hours after their own children go to bed. Educators should follow the same general advice for stress reduction that could be offered to any busy professional:
 1. Take breaks (and teachers have precious few of those, lunch being one).
 2. Develop healthy eating habits.
 3. Exercise regularly.
 4. Make sure to keep a boundary between your work life and your personal life.
- *Celebrate your accomplishments and your profession.* Don't lose sight of all you are accomplishing. If you have led a committee that provided professional development to teachers, that is a reason to celebrate. If your students have made significant growth—even if it was not reflected in scores on high-stakes tests—that is a reason to be proud.
- *Access outside support.* Elsewhere in this chapter is information about accessing blogs and other teacher collaboration sites. Asking your questions of others, participating in discussions, and offering insights as you learn can be great ways to reduce stress.

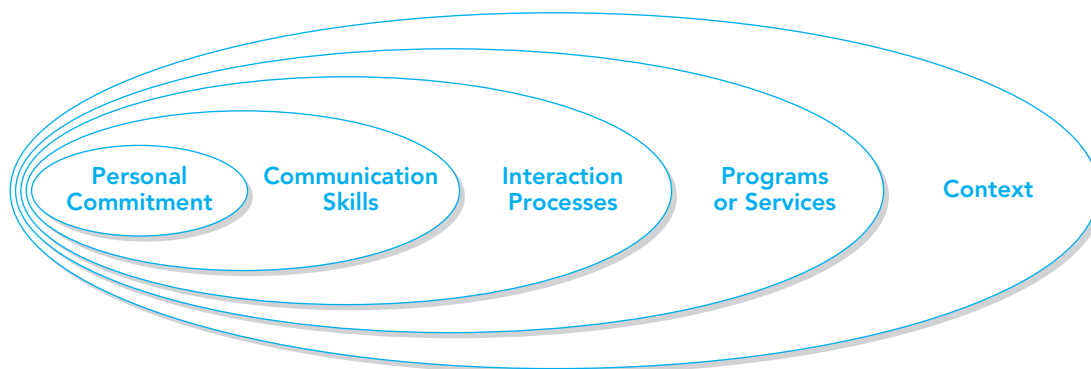
This discussion of the challenges that school structure, professional socialization, power, and pragmatic issues present for collaboration could have a somewhat sobering effect on your enthusiasm for it. In part, we hope this is so. Collaboration can be a powerful vehicle for accomplishing professionals' goals of educating students, but it can also be overused and misused. Collaborative efforts should be implemented only with a realistic understanding of their complexities and difficulties, because such understanding will lead to careful consideration of the extent to which collaborative efforts are feasible and recommended.

A Framework for Learning About Collaboration

The importance of collaboration in society and schools, and recognition of the challenges of collaboration form a rationale for studying it and for understanding that it is a technical field of study. That is, the fact that you interact well with others does not mean that you understand all the dimensions of collaboration. The complexity and subtlety of collaboration (e.g., Cook & Friend, 2010) suggest that in order to learn to form effective partnerships with others, you should strive for as complete an understanding of it as possible. To accomplish this purpose, we offer a framework for learning about collaboration in Figure 3 that presents the components of collaboration and their relationships to one another:

- Personal commitment
- Communication skills
- Interaction processes
- Programs or services
- Context

FIGURE 3 Components of collaboration.



This framework shapes the material presented in this chapter as well as its organization, and you will find that this chapter opened with a graphic to remind you which part of the framework is addressed in the chapter.

The first component of the study of collaboration concerns your *personal commitment* to collaboration as a tool for carrying out the responsibilities of your job, including your beliefs about the benefits of working closely with colleagues and parents/families and the added value of learning from others' perspectives. Although it is difficult to offer specific skill training related to this commitment and no text is devoted solely to this component of collaboration, you will find that throughout this text you are asked to reflect on the importance of and merit in collaborating with others. For example, the professionals introduced at the beginning of this chapter demonstrated through their actions that they are committed to their collaborative efforts.

The second component of collaboration is *communication skills*, the basic building blocks of collaborative interactions. Although most educators have relatively strong communication skills in order to be in their professions, the skills needed for collaboration are somewhat more technical and are best learned with focused practice. In addition, most educators need to consider their communication skills in the context of working with colleagues and parents from diverse cultures (e.g., Clark & Dorris, 2006). For this reason, outline those skills, provide many examples of their uses (and misuses), and offer opportunities to practice them. The assumption is that you will use these skills to implement services you learn in the text.

The third component of collaboration includes *interaction processes*—that is, the steps that take an interaction from beginning to end. The most common interaction process is problem solving. Many educators' collaborative activities are actually specialized forms of problem solving. Other processes include responding to conflict and resistance. For all interaction processes, strong communication skills are essential.

The fourth component of collaboration is the set of *programs or services* in which collaborative activities occur. In this text, the services emphasized include teams, co-teaching, and consultation and other indirect services. It is within these services that interaction processes to design and deliver strong educational programs and services occur.

The final component of collaboration is *context*, which refers to the overall environment in which collaboration occurs. Because people so often are critical in determining the climate for collaboration, special attention is given in this text to paraprofessionals, parents, and others (e.g., related services personnel, representatives of community agencies). Pragmatic issues, such as time for collaboration, and issues related to collaboration, such as ethics, complete this part of the framework.

As with any text, some topics cannot be adequately addressed. For example, although mention already has been made of student–student collaboration and of such collaboration being an important part of creating schools supportive of all students and improving outcomes, the emphasis here is on adult–adult interactions; and so student partnerships are mentioned only briefly but are not prioritized. Likewise, even though professionals often collaborate around designing and implementing academic and behavior interventions for students, those topics merit separate attention; we believe that attempting to address collaboration as well as instructional and behavioral strategies in one textbook does a disservice to both topics.

SUMMARY

- Collaboration is an interpersonal style that professionals may use in their interactions with colleagues, parents, and others. It can only exist voluntarily in situations in which individuals with parity have identified a mutual goal and are willing to share responsibility for key decisions, accountability for outcomes, and resources. Several characteristics of collaboration both contribute to its development and are potentially its outcomes: attitudes and beliefs supportive of a collaborative approach, mutual trust, and a sense of community.
- Collaboration is a reflection of contemporary societal trends related to changes in business and industry and the continued rapid increase in information flow and exchange, especially through electronic channels. In schools, collaboration is mandated or implied in legislation and related reform efforts, including various forms of teaming (e.g., response to intervention programs) and practices that provide curriculum access to all learners. Collaboration is particularly central to special education services.
- Individuals who collaborate may find that challenges occur related to the structural and professional isolation of schools, professional socialization, power in relationships, stress related to managing interactions with others, and practical matters concerning resources such as time.
- Studying collaboration includes understanding your personal commitment, learning communication skills and interaction processes, creating programs and services in which collaborative approaches can be used, and recognizing context factors that foster or constrain collaboration.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Select one of the professionals whose typical days were profiled in this chapter's opening case. Use this professional's profile as the basis for analyzing the extent to which the defining characteristics of collaboration are present or could be established. Which characteristics can most easily be met? Which may pose significant barriers to developing effective collaborative relationships? If you were the professional profiled, what are two challenges to collaboration that you might face? What could you do to address these challenges?
2. Think about the educators profiled in the opening case study in terms of power. What types of power does each of these educators have? What could be the impact of their power (or lack thereof) on their interactions with colleagues?
3. Discuss the issue of parity with your classmates. To what extent do they perceive that special educators, general educators, bilingual educators, administrators, paraprofessionals, parents, and related services providers have equal status in schools? If parity does not exist, how could issues related to it be addressed?
4. Suppose you are a new teacher in a school in which collaboration occurs informally among some teachers, but is not a highly valued part of the school's culture. Further, imagine that the school has received a mandate to move strongly toward inclusive practices. What do you believe your role is in accomplishing the dual goals of collaboration and inclusive practices? How might you use Figure 3 to analyze the steps that should be taken and to discuss them with your administrator?
5. If you have worked in a setting in which collaboration was valued and encouraged, write a summary of your experience. Use this as the basis for a discussion with others to generate specific examples of the characteristics of collaboration.
6. What is your responsibility if collaboration is needed but is not occurring? For example, what if you are on a grade-level or department team, and some members spend meeting time grading papers, or they seldom complete the tasks they agreed to do? What if you are a co-teacher, and your partner does not want to plan together or does not want to share classroom instruction?
7. Peruse recent issues of popular news magazines. What examples of societal collaboration are addressed? What universal themes related to the advantages and disadvantages of collaboration can you identify from these materials? How might current trends in collaboration in business, social services, and other disciplines affect school collaboration in the future?

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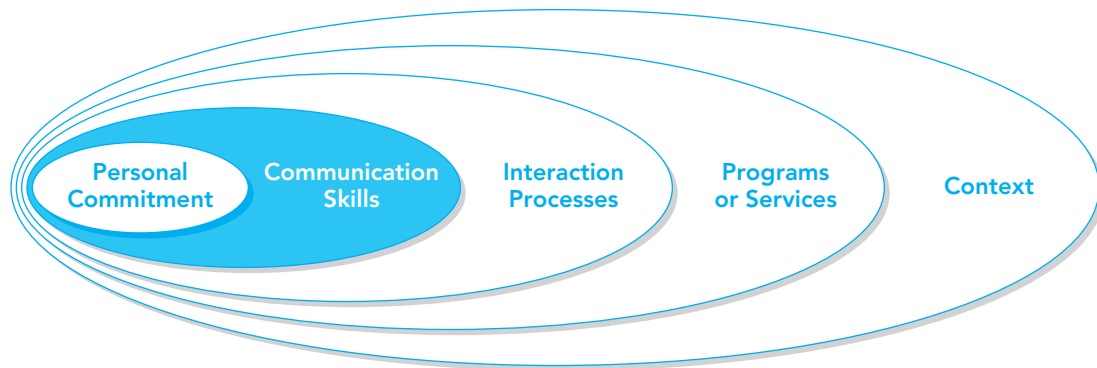
Interpersonal Communication

From Chapter 2 of *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, Seventh Edition. Marilyn Friend, Lynne Cook.
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Interpersonal Communication



Connections

In this chapter, we consider the nature of interpersonal communication and how it occurs. We identify prerequisite understanding and skills that are necessary for successful interactions, discuss how perspective influences communication, consider factors that affect listening, examine the impact of nonverbal communication, and outline principles to guide your interpersonal communication success. This text provides an essential framework for communication. We will use this information to examine and offer examples of the skills that are foundational for engaging in interpersonal problem solving and its use in teaming, co-teaching, and other collaborative activities.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Describe differing views of communication and identify their common elements.
2. Define the term *interpersonal communication*, and describe the process by which meaning is communicated through interpersonal communication.
3. Analyze interpersonal competence, its components, and strategies for attaining it.
4. Discuss perspective and describe how it is influenced by perception and cultural factors.
5. Use cultural self-awareness and other strategies as a basis for learning about other cultures and expanding your cultural perspectives.
6. Explain how the perceptual process creates misunderstandings, and generate ways to improve your perceptual accuracy.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

A Matter of Misunderstanding

Kim and Lena, two of the grade-level team leaders in Kirby Middle School, have worked together for a year and have come to view themselves as friends and good teammates. As Lena entered the cafeteria to get coffee before school, she greeted Kim enthusiastically and exclaimed, "How about Sparks last night? He's something else with those dunks. I'm so stoked for the next game!" She pretended to shoot a basketball to punctuate her comments as she almost squealed, "We're going to Bloomington!" Lena was talking excitedly about their alma mater's basketball game the night before. Without waiting for a reply, she plunged into more details, describing several of the plays as well as the team's certain chances for sweeping the league and the championship. Lena soon realized that Kim was looking at her with a seemingly disinterested, possibly irritated, expression. She couldn't determine whether Kim was unhappy, angry at her, or, for that matter, whether Kim's response had anything to do with her at all. Lena's sports commentary trailed off and she asked Kim what was wrong. Kim flatly said, "Nothing." She looked away and shook her head, got up from her chair, took her coffee, and as she left the cafeteria with what Lena now determined to be a disapproving look, Kim remarked, "Not everyone had the luxury of watching the game. Some of us had to work." Lena called after her saying she was sorry Kim had missed the game and suggested they could make up for it with a girls' night out on Friday. As Kim was leaving, Lena thought, "It's too bad that she had work to do, but I don't know why that has anything to do with me."

Introduction

Does the preceding story sound familiar? How you communicate is critical to both your personal and professional success. In this chapter, we focus on how communication influences your professional interactions and their effectiveness. The foundational understandings and the skills of communication are essential in the performance of your instructional, administrative, planning, or other educational responsibilities, as well as in your collaboration with colleagues and parents. Because of this, many professional preparation programs and school-based performance reviews include an evaluation of communication skills, and increasingly, certification and licensure in education and related professions require similar evidence of strong communication abilities.

Understanding Communication

To truly understand interpersonal communication, you must first become familiar with the general and universal aspects involved in all human communication. All communication shares a set of characteristics and elements, a set of root principles. By mastering these features, you will be able to analyze and more fully understand the interpersonal communication practices and skills that support effective collaboration.

Human communication is understood and described by the scholars and theorists who identify with the field, each of them describing it in diverse ways. That diversity represents the many disciplines from which this relatively new area of inquiry has developed—including psychology, sociology, social psychology, and philosophy. Consequently, the definitions of communication found in scholarly sources vary tremendously: A recently conducted

extensive review identified 15 different conceptual components associated with over 126 different definitions (Lustig & Koester, 2010). Some scholars view communication as a process of transmitting information from one person to another or to groups. Others are concerned more with the processes by which people make meaning and exchange understandings through communication. In order to establish a baseline, then, the definition we offer here is straightforward and useful for the purposes of this text:

Communication is the management of messages with the objective of creating meaning.

Using such a definition, communication occurs within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media and includes both verbal and nonverbal messages as well as technology-mediated messages (Beebe & Masterson, 2012; Korn, Morreale, & Boileau, 2000).

In recent years, traditional simple models of communication have been elaborated on in an effort to illustrate the many factors that constitute and influence it. Yet, even the earlier models are still useful in understanding many communication functions. In the sections that follow, we briefly present three views of communication and call attention to situations in which they are often used in schools. We then examine a model for interpersonal communication and explore the principles of interpersonal communication in order to clarify the approach that is used throughout this text.

Views of Communication

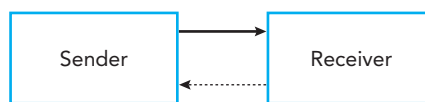
Advances in educational thinking and instructional practice encourage teachers to interact collaboratively with learners and extend learner interactions with others, both locally and globally, as part of their instruction (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2004; Council for Chief State School Officers, 2011). Those changes are occurring in schools; however, the primary instructional mode continues to rely on teacher presentation in many settings. In fact, the majority of communication in schools involves the presentation of information by one person to others. This is often the case when leaders provide information school wide and when teachers provide instruction. As we briefly consider three views of communication, we offer examples of how they are manifested in schools and encourage you to think of additional applications as you read. Figure 1 provides a preview of these perspectives.

Linear View In the linear view or model, communication is seen as a one-way “information transfer” event in which a sender encodes, or constructs, a message and delivers it to a relatively passive receiver who decodes or interprets it. A message is not limited to words; it is the totality of what is communicated—the words, noises, facial expressions, and stance of the communicator. Verbal messages are composed of printed or spoken words; nonverbal messages are conveyed by behaviors other than words (e.g., facial expressions, vocal noises, and gestures). Everything a communicator says or does, as well as the richness of the expression, is potentially part of the message. The communication occurs within an environment—that is, the surroundings or a physical location—but the environment is influenced by personal experiences. Naturally, that relationship goes both ways because the environment can also affect interpretation. Varying kinds of noise can interfere with the accurate transmission of a message. Noise may be physical (e.g., an alarm or siren), psychological (e.g., thoughts, biases), semantic (e.g., language differences), or physiological (biological influences). The nature of the message, the channel selected, the noise, and the environment are among the elements that influence the success of the communication. The terms used to label features in this model apply to the other models as well, and they are highlighted in Putting Ideas into Practice.

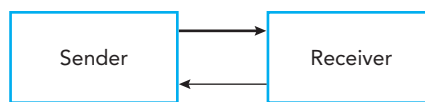
FIGURE 1 Views of communication.

Understandings of the communication process have advanced over the years. In each of the three views outlined here, the roles of the individuals involved and the understanding of the message being communicated vary according to the interactivity available to both the sender and the receiver.

Linear View. Communication is a one-way process in which a sender constructs and transmits a message to a relatively passive receiver who decodes it. It is generally not face-to-face, often technology mediated, and asynchronous. Feedback, if any, is delayed. The sender's message is to be understood as delivered.



Interactional View. In this two-way process, a sender and a receiver alternately exchange information. The sender transmits a message; the receiver decodes it and responds with feedback. If feedback indicates misunderstanding, the sender is likely to revise the message. Communication is complete when the receiver's feedback indicates understanding of the message.



Transactional View. As a communicator sends a message, he or she simultaneously receives information from the message itself and from the person with whom he or she is communicating. The communicators are interdependent in that they co-construct shared meanings by continuously exchanging messages.



The linear model is often seen in school settings; it is the unilateral communication that is used to transmit information through such differing channels as memos, podcasts, online modules, web postings, and announcements over the school's public address system. This type of communication is often technology mediated and generally does not occur in person. Feedback is not expected, and if it does occur, it is delayed. The sender's initial message contains the meaning of the communication, and others are expected to understand it as it was transmitted.

Of course, those who receive the message may understand the message in a manner not intended by the sender. An illustration of such misunderstood communication occurred in Lena's experience in the opening case, which is continued here.

Later that day as Lena was leaving the lunchroom, another team leader, Jill, asked rather pointedly where she had been the afternoon before. Lena was surprised at her directness, but explained she had left right after school to shop for drinks and snacks because she had invited college friends over to watch the playoff game that evening.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Coming to Terms with Communication Terms

Communicator: one who simultaneously performs the *sender* functions (formulates and sends messages) and the *receiver* functions (perceives and comprehends messages) in communication.

Encoding: the process of putting thoughts and feelings into verbal and/or nonverbal messages.

Decoding: the reverse process; involves developing a thought or meaning based on hearing and/or seeing messages, be they verbal and/or nonverbal.

Message: spoken, written, or unspoken information sent from one communicator to another.

Feedback: a verbal or nonverbal response to a message that provides information about how the

message was received. Feedback may be internal (how we assess our own communication) or external (feedback from others).

Channel: vehicle or pathway through which a message is sent.

Noise: anything that interferes with the accurate transmission or reception of a message. It may be physical (e.g., siren, pop-up ad), physiological (e.g., biological, hearing loss), psychological (e.g., biases, emotions), or semantic (e.g., language, jargon).

Environment: physical location, surroundings, or context that can affect how individuals understand others' behaviors.

Jill was again direct as she told Lena that their team leader meeting had lasted until 7:30 p.m. because there was no one there to represent Lena's area, and the other team leaders had to research the databases to gather the information she was to have collected earlier. Lena looked shocked and asked, "What team meeting?" Jill was hurrying to get to her class but quickly told Lena it was the meeting described in the e-mail she had been so happy to receive two days earlier.

Lena was confused and went directly to check her e-mail after she finished lunch. She had been happy to get the principal's message early the other morning. It described the ways the principal wanted some data to be managed and stated, "Team leaders may defer their meeting to aggregate the data sets until after school is out." Lena had been relieved that the meeting was deferred until next week after the school year ended. Now she realized, based on reactions from Kim and Jill, that there was more than one definition of "after school is out" operating. Apparently, it had meant "after school is out" on the day of the regularly scheduled team leader meeting.

This illustrates a misunderstanding caused by linear, or unilateral, communication. Without feedback or opportunities to seek clarification of the message, Lena gave it her own, albeit incorrect, meaning.

Precisely because of the lack of feedback, linear view communication of all kinds runs the risk of being misunderstood. Ensuring accurate understanding is difficult in the absence of reactions or responses indicating whether the receivers understand the message. Straightforward reports of facts, events, or previously debated policy are the types of information that are likely to have the least potential for troubling misunderstanding in e-mail communication.

Interactional View The interactional view extends the linear model to recognize communication as occurring through an interactive and two-way process in which



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E-mail communication is very useful, but it can lead to confusion and often does not provide immediate opportunities for clarification.

information is exchanged alternately between a sender and a receiver who take turns speaking and listening. Speaking and listening are considered sequential and separate acts that occur at different times and one after another. The sender encodes a message in a way that can be understood by the receiver and then delivers it to the receiver. The receiver perceives the message, decodes it, and responds. The receiver's response, or feedback, lets the sender know how the message was received and whether it was understood. This real-time, two-way communication is highly dependent on feedback. Feedback may be external, coming from the receiver, or internal, insofar as the sender assesses and reflects on his or her own communication. Communication is considered complete when the receiver's feedback lets the sender know or conclude that the information has been understood.

In schools, interactional communication occurs as someone describes, directs, explains, or lectures, and others read, listen, understand, and respond. Those interactions are routine as teachers present information or give directions to their students and students provide feedback in the form of questions, comments, or performances. Similarly, leaders deliver information or give directions in staff meetings, lectures, and professional development activities and receive feedback from those involved. Based on feedback, a teacher may decide to reteach or explain material differently, and a leader may see the need to rephrase a concept or describe something in a different manner. Had the information about rescheduling the team leader meeting to "after school is out" been given in face-to-face interaction, Lena may well have commented to the group or to Kim about how glad she was to have the extra time to prepare for her guests that evening. That statement would have served as feedback that she did not understand the meaning as others did, and it could have been corrected.

Transactional View A transactional view is regarded as a more contemporary and sophisticated framework that better represents the complexity and subtlety of the communication process (Beebe & Masterson, 2012; Harris & Sherblom, 2011; West & Turner, 2009; Wood, 2010).

In the transactional model, the concepts and roles of sender and receiver are extended and blended as both participants are in both roles simultaneously; both of them communicators. At the same time Communicator A is sending a message, she is also receiving information from Communicator B. At the same time Communicator B is receiving a message, he is also sending information to Communicator A. The communicators are thusly interdependent in that they co-construct meaning through their continuous, simultaneous communications. In a transactional view, both communicators share responsibility for developing and understanding the meaning of the message.

The concepts of channel, noise, and environment mentioned in association with the earlier models are also seen in this model, though they manifest in different ways. Their

influence on the transactional communication process is significant because transactional interactions are seen in familiar dyadic or small group relationships, in educational and community settings, in meetings you may have with individuals or small groups of students; and even when you jointly plan a project or facilitate student efforts on an assignment. Team meetings, interactions in the staff room or cafeteria, co-teacher planning and debriefing sessions, and parent conferences are all examples. In those and similar dealings, you interact with others with whom you have or are building relationships. You are likely to be working toward a shared goal. In such cases, you often share some background and common context with the people you are working alongside. Through verbal and nonverbal means, you exchange information with them, and the process takes you closer to or further from your goals. Through your interactions, you influence your relationships with varying degrees of interpersonal communication skills.

Generally speaking, transactional communication requires that both participants are equals in communicating meaning, because meaning in an interaction is truly a co-constructed product.

Defining Interpersonal Communication

Communication scholars have embraced the transactional communication model as the best representation of how interpersonal communication occurs. We, too, subscribe to it, using it as the foundation for the interaction skills and processes presented in this text. Earlier we defined basic communication as the “management of messages with the objective of creating meaning.” Our definition of interpersonal communication is an extension of that definition that incorporates transactional aspects:

Interpersonal communication is a complex, transactional process through which people create shared meanings through continuously and simultaneously exchanging messages.

This definition and the introductory description of the transactional model provide a foundation for thinking about effective interpersonal communication. Understanding transactional communication can promote your effectiveness in the full range of your professional and personal interactions.

Concepts Reflected in the Interpersonal Communication Process

The model shown in Figure 2 provides a basis for discussing several central concepts that help clarify the interpersonal communication process. Useful insights into the model identified by Adler, Rosenfeld, and Proctor (2009), DeVito (2009b), Steinfatt (2009), West and Turner (2009), and others are discussed next.

Interpersonal Communication Is Transactional Identifying interpersonal communication as transactional communication underscores that both communicators are simultaneously sending and receiving information, making it impossible to distinguish between a sender and a receiver. To illustrate that concept, try to discern who is sending and who is receiving information in the following instances:

- One teacher is telling another about a graphic organizer she thinks would be useful for a student in his class. The second teacher is shaking his head and scowling.
- The after-school program leader is asking a parent about her son’s study space and homework schedule at home. The parent is looking sheepish and uncomfortable.

- In a staff meeting, the principal is describing a new school-wide behavior support program she observed. Most teachers are sitting quietly, but two are whispering about an earlier disruption, another is filling out a field trip request, while three others are correcting papers.

It is tempting to see the teacher, after-school program leader, and principal as senders of messages and the other teacher, parent, and group of teachers as receivers. But the teacher being told about the graphic organizer is registering a negative response; the parent is communicating that she is uncomfortable either with the question or with her child's homework situation; and the teachers at the staff meeting are displaying a lack of interest while grading papers and whispering to one another. In those examples, the receivers are sending verbal and nonverbal messages to the speakers even as they speak.

Now imagine yourself in such a situation. If at the same time you are speaking the person you are addressing responds by nodding and showing you a piece of student work that illustrates exactly the point you are making, this person is letting you know your message is being received and understood. A confused look, a frown, or a question may cause you to restate your message, whereas a smile, a nod, or an interested look may encourage you to continue speaking or to go on to your next point. It is not just others' messages that may change your communication. Consider this: When you speak, you can hear yourself and judge whether you are saying what you intended. If you think that you are being unclear, you may elaborate on or restate your message to clarify it. You may also perceive that you are talking very quickly and decide to slow your rate of speech. In fact, messages are being sent constantly by everyone involved in the communication, including your messages to yourself.

Communication Through Multiple Channels *Channel* refers to the medium through which messages are transmitted. Messages are typically either seen or heard; they are transmitted through visual and vocal-auditory channels. However, all human senses may be involved in sending and receiving messages. A firm handshake or a literal pat on the back transmits messages through tactile channels. Similarly, the cologne one wears or other odors one emits communicate through chemical channels.

At any given point during interpersonal communication, several messages are probably being transmitted simultaneously over different channels. Logically, sending a single message over multiple channels can strengthen or emphasize the message. You do this when you smile, nod, and touch someone's shoulder while giving that person a compliment. Alternatively, simultaneously sending discrepant messages through different channels complicates the communication. A person who says, "Oh, it's fine; I can make some modifications later" while forcefully ripping up a report and angrily throwing it in the trash is sending contradictory messages over different channels. This causes confusion and misunderstandings.

It would obviously be upsetting to a parent to learn that his or her child was injured at school. It would be far easier for you to be supportive if you could tell the parent in person rather than through another medium. But the urgency of the situation may require that you communicate it as quickly as possible by telephone, text message, or e-mail. Other disturbing or complex information that is not urgent may best be held for a day or two until you can meet directly with the individual. Putting Ideas into Practice highlights some factors to consider when you are selecting the primary channel to use in a communication.

People Create Meanings When a colleague interrupts you and says, "I hate to bother you" after having interrupted several times earlier, there are several meanings this could



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

What Channel?

The channel you use as the primary one for your communication will affect the way an individual receives, understands, and responds to your message. It is likely that you use different means of transmitting messages if you are sharing daily assignments and progress reports with parents or colleagues or sharing potentially upsetting information with a parent or colleague. In the latter situation, for example, consider the level of support you can give when communicating face-to-face, via e-mail, or through a voice mail message. Many writers recommend considering the following factors when deciding which channel to use in communications with

colleagues, friends, or parents (Adler & Elmhorst, 2010; Brantley & Miller, 2008):

- The confidentiality of the message
- How promptly you desire feedback
- The amount and complexity of the information to be conveyed
- Your control over how the message is composed
- Your control over the receiver's attention
- Your ability to assess the other's understanding
- The channel's effectiveness in conveying detailed messages

have: a serious apology for another disturbance, an insincere effort to diffuse your irritation, or even a sarcastic dig because he thinks you should be helping him rather than being otherwise engaged. In fact, "I hate to bother you" seems to have almost no meaning in and of itself; it is merely a string of sounds. To have any of the aforementioned possible meanings, then, the sentence itself, and all sentences, realistically, relies on the subtle exchanges and contexts inherent in interpreting meaning.

The words and nonverbal signals are given meaning by those who use and those who interpret them. Whenever individuals interact, they must observe and interpret the symbols (e.g., words, nonverbal cues) of others. They must assign some significance to the behaviors in order to make meaning of others' actions. That is, meanings are created both in and among people who express and interpret them. Together, by exchanging multiple messages, the communicators develop shared meanings.

But the interpreting that occurs in communication often encounters barriers, and because there are many possible points of view, it is necessary to negotiate shared meanings. That negotiation creates tremendous possibilities for misinterpretation of messages, so the importance of the communicators working to establish shared meanings should not be underestimated. In order to grasp the principles at work, then, it is vital that you completely understand some of the barriers that can interfere with clear meaning.

Environment and Noise in Communication Communicators exist in different environments, or contexts, and the extent to which their environments differ can constitute a significant problem for interpretation. They are the fields of experience that help communicators derive meaning from each other's messages. In the model shown in Figure 2, the environments of Communicator A and Communicator B overlap to demonstrate that they share some common backgrounds or experiences that facilitate their ability to derive shared meaning from their communication. It is those areas of background or context where they differ that may interfere with, or cause misunderstanding in, their communication. Significant differences in age, political orientation, or cultural or ethnic background are examples of these areas.

Noise is another important element in understanding communication. *Noise* is anything that interferes with or distorts the ability of communicators to exchange and make meaning of messages, and three main types of noise are generally identified:

- *Physical* noise comprises sounds and visual distractions that are external to the communicators and may interfere with communication, such as public address system announcements, others' unique physical characteristics, visual gestures, or loud talking.
- *Physiological* noise is created by conditions internal to the communicators, such as physical discomfort or hearing loss.
- *Psychological* noise is a prejudicial or emotional barrier that allows biases, preconceived ideas, and the like to distort communication. An inappropriate choice of words, a person's tendency to frown, and a person's physical appearance are stimuli that may create psychological noise and interfere with the transmission of a message.

Recently a teacher observed that the appearance of a scantily dressed mother at a parent conference created so much "noise" that he was not able to concentrate fully on the mother's spoken concerns. In this case, the woman's appearance was jarring to such an extent as to disturb or interfere with the verbal communication. How might this noise have a negative effect on the conference?

Principles of Interpersonal Communication

To better understand interpersonal communication, here are a number of principles that may help you to appreciate how interpersonal communication develops and the effects it has on its participants.

Interpersonal Communication Is Unavoidable By understanding that messages are continuously exchanged through multiple channels, you will also understand that "one cannot not communicate" (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). Whether intentionally or unintentionally, you are always communicating. It might be through a prepared statement, a slip of the tongue, a welcoming gesture, or a disinterested expression. When you speak or remain quiet, act reserved or animated, laugh or maintain a straight face, you communicate feelings and thoughts. These may not be intended communications, but others observe and interpret them nevertheless.

Interpersonal Communication Is Irreversible What a luxury it would be to be able to edit some past conversations as we can do to word-processed documents! Everyone has seen television shows in which a calculating attorney asks a condemning question or makes a slanderous remark only to have the opposing attorney call to "Strike that remark from the record!" as it becomes indelibly imprinted on the minds of the jury. Most people can recall, often with regret, occasions when they have spoken out of turn, in frustration, or under similar circumstances when their better judgment or self-monitoring strategies failed them. What we say or transmit to others electronically cannot be taken back. Apologies and regrets may alleviate some of the consequences, but everyone knows all too well that they do not reverse the message. Increased mindfulness and self-monitoring can help to reduce the number of such occurrences.

Interpersonal Communication Has Both Content and Relational Dimensions Nearly every message exchange operates on two levels: The content level involves the explicit information being discussed, and the relational level expresses how the people involved feel about each other. This may be whether they like or dislike each other, or feel



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Using Old-Fashioned Technology to Your Advantage

Many new technologies are used to support communications, but we still rely on telephones for many interactions. Many professionals conference in the evening by telephone, and much communication with families takes place the same way. Throughout this text, we stress the importance of facial expressions, stance, gestures, and other behaviors in shaping others' perceptions of you and what you are communicating. Yet on the telephone, these parts of the message are missing. Instead, you are communicating feelings as well as meaning just as you are in face-to-face communications. Thus, it is just as important that you try to communicate the concern and attention you would in person.

- Use your body position and smile. If you are feeling anxious or angry and want to convey a calmer tone, try putting your feet on the desk or sitting in a comfortable armchair. It is also helpful to smile and nod as if you were speaking face-to-face. A smile often changes the tone of your voice. It is said that many successful salespersons have mirrors on their desks or near their telephones.
- If you take notes, tell the other person that you are doing so. Note taking is helpful for your memory and your records, but it may also lead to periods of silence as you try to keep up with the conversation. It is wise to tell the person in advance that you will be jotting down notes. This will help diminish the impact of the short periods of silence. It is also helpful to backtrack and ask for clarification of a previous point to demonstrate that you are indeed listening.
- When using the telephone, avoid using your computer to play games, take notes, or type e-mail messages. Computer activity is distracting, and you will miss points the other is making. Worse than that, the other person may hear your keyboard and realize that you are not fully attending.
- Signal that you are listening. Your nods and smiles may help the tone of your voice, but you will need to have more than a calm tone to indicate that you are listening. Small utterances such as "Uh, huh," "Really?" "Oh, how frustrating that must be!" and "I can imagine" let the person on the other end of the line know you are tuned in.

anxious or comfortable, angry, grateful, in control, subordinate, and so on. Content and relationship levels work simultaneously in a message, but their relative levels of importance vary in different circumstances (Beebe, Beebe, & Redmond, 2011; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Depending on the situation, the content dimension of a message may be paramount. For example, a department head may not care much about whether the customer service representative likes her as long as she gets a technician scheduled to repair the Data Director program. But the relational dimension is more important than the content when she communicates with her colleague who manages the data at the school site.

Interpersonal Communication Effectiveness Is Learned Interestingly, biology affects individuals' communication styles to some extent (Horvath, 1995; McCroskey & Beatty, 2000). Based on studies of fraternal and identical twins, sociability, anger, and relaxation seem to be partly a function of genetics. Fortunately, biology is not the only factor that determines how people communicate. Effective communication, or communication competence, is largely a set of skills that can be learned and continually refined, as will soon be discussed. It is the subject of this text, and the skills are described and illustrated both as individual units and as elements embedded in other processes throughout.

Interpersonal Competence

How do you become better at collaboration? How do you enhance your relationships with other professionals, your students, and your students' parents? Successful collaborative relationships require much more than just initiating interactions. They require interpersonal competence. As with any area of competence, interpersonal competence includes behavioral or skill dimensions as well as cognitive ability dimensions. The cognitive dimension, perspective, involves understanding how we and those with whom we interact perceive and understand the world—in other words, how we think and feel about issues, others, and ourselves. The behavioral dimensions are part of communication competence and are seen in communication skills: their development, adaptation, and skillful use. So, how do you maximize your collaborative effectiveness? It begins with the cognitive dimension: understanding the components and power of personal perspective. We approach this by discussing perception, cultural influences on perspective, and the subsequent impact these have on interpersonal interactions. Competent communication is considered in the final section of this chapter.

Perspective

Each individual brings a unique perspective to every life experience. Your past experiences, attitudes, values and beliefs, personal qualities, professional preparation, and expectations for others are among the things that affect what and how you observe and perceive, and ultimately how you behave. Your perspective is a personal lens through which you filter information; it affects how you view and interpret the messages you receive or make meaning from the information others provide you. Perception and perspective are intricately entwined, and both are affected by cultural influences.

Perception

How often do you discuss a shared experience with a friend or colleague only to find later that you have quite different opinions about what transpired? Your understandings of what occurred may be so different that you even question whether you were actually at the same meeting or whether you participated in the same interaction. This is not uncommon. People are constantly bombarded with more information than their sensory systems can handle. It is impossible for people to attend to and understand everything that occurs around them. Every experience has an infinite number of sounds, sights, smells, feelings, and tastes that compete for your attention; and it is not possible to attend to all of these stimuli.

Perception, then, is the process of selecting, organizing, interpreting, and negotiating meaning from all of the information available in a given situation (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 2009; West & Turner, 2009; Wood, 2010). Everyone uses that selective process. When individuals *select*, they choose, either consciously or unconsciously, to focus on certain pieces of information while largely ignoring others. This selective process is essential for coping with the tremendous amounts of both internal and external data that are part of every life experiences. This is often necessary in professional interactions because such communication is quite complex (Lustig & Koester, 2010). When you receive more information than you can assimilate, you ignore or filter out some information and focus your attention on other information. Generally, you pay attention to those things that capture your interests, address the purpose of the experience, or fit within a preconceived notion. After selecting and attending to specific information, you *organize* it, usually by assigning it to a category based on a schema that carries meaning for you, such as welcoming–rejecting,



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Perception Is a Selective Process

Perception is an active process of becoming aware of objects, events, and people through sight, sound, smell, hearing, and taste. It is a necessary process for managing the enormous amount of internal and external data accompanying every life event.

Attending and selecting involve sorting out stimuli—paying attention to some and ignoring others. With selective perception, attention is given to the things that are of most interest, are most pronounced, or seem most likely to meet one's needs.

Organizing is arranging selected information in some meaningful way. Typically this requires categorizing information using schema based on similarities (e.g., age, gen-

der, profession). This is also a selective process; choosing one category ignores another.

Interpreting occurs when meaning is assigned to what has been perceived. This is influenced by such factors as involvement and past experience with a person, general assumptions about human behavior, expectations for the situation, and knowledge of a similar experience.

Negotiating clearly reflects the transactional nature of communication. This is the process through which communicators influence each other's perceptions during communication and create shared meanings.

engaged—aloof, competitive—cooperative, hardworking—lazy, and so on. This categorization process is sometimes referred to as stereotyping and given a negative connotation. It is worth remembering that stereotypes can be both negative and positive. They are the products of categorizing in the perceptual process.

Perception does not necessarily follow a sequential process. You may categorize information and then consider and interpret it. Or as you categorize, you may *interpret* immediately, or assign meaning to the information without first considering what was imparted. When someone frequently says, "Let's get together for tennis sometime" but is never able to schedule a game, you are likely to interpret the message quickly based on experience. A final step, described by Adler and his colleagues (Adler & Elmhorst, 2010; Adler & Proctor, 2011; Adler et al., 2012), is *negotiating*. This requires the transactional communication through which the communicators negotiate or create a shared meaning for the information being exchanged. It requires open-mindedness, suspension of judgment, and commitment to developing mutual understanding.

The steps of perception are summarized in the next Putting Ideas into Practice. They illustrate that perception is a selective and, thus, an incomplete process because it does not necessarily grasp the totality of what is being communicated. Consequently, understanding perception helps us to recognize how we form impressions of people with whom we interact, how those influence our encounters, and how we then interpret our interactions and their meaning. Consider the following exchange during a district-wide meeting of the math department chairs.

Theresa, a recently appointed department chair, has been an active union member since she began teaching four years ago. In the last department chair meeting, she strongly supported district-wide adoption of a new instructional program for the math departments but advised against doing anything that might be perceived as violating the teachers' contract, especially regarding uncompensated time. She was asked to give a report and propose a solution at the next meeting.

Today she distributed a memo detailing five points and commented, “This proposal will honor the contract and teachers while requiring no additional costs. The program calls for 10 hours of uncompensated staff development time beyond the eight hours provided for in our contract, but we can’t make teachers do more than the contract requires. I’ve reviewed the contract carefully and discussed it with the chapter president. We agree that using some of the pooled collaboration times we’ve created for team planning would not violate the contract, and so it wouldn’t be the basis of a successful grievance either.”

Theresa was a bit self-conscious. This seemed so simple and the information hardly warranted a memo and presentation. “Everyone must think I’m trying to be in charge—or they think I don’t think they know anything! I need to avoid making this a bigger deal than it is.” She looked at the group and saw that Vanessa was frowning, shaking her head, and whispering to David. Sino and Elaine were also whispering, but smiling and pointing to a section of the memo. Jasmine and Andrea were quietly reading the memo. Theresa thought, “Vanessa is always so negative about everything. She seems to take joy in making others look bad. Let’s see what she has in store for me before I sit down.” She asked, “So, Vanessa, do you have a problem with this?” Vanessa said she had no questions. Theresa asked the others, and no one else had questions or comments. Theresa was satisfied that her introductory statement and memo were clear, and rather than continue with the details, she smiled and ended her report.

Before reading further, reflect on that vignette, and test your perspective-taking skills. Using just the information provided, what meanings could be attributed to each person’s behavior in the scenario? How would you evaluate Theresa’s perceptions of this experience? Did she believe others understood and accepted her proposal? What about the perceptions of the others? In this case, there were several different perceptions operating, including these possibilities offered here.

- Vanessa and David were talking about how difficult implementing any change would be in their departments. They did not listen to much of what Theresa had to offer.
 - They attended to the notion of change and its meaning to them.
 - Theresa perceived Vanessa’s behavior according to past experience.
- Sino thought, “Oh, of course! It’s Theresa, and here she goes with another collective bargaining lecture and why we should all be active in the union.” He looked at the memo and marked a few less-than-critical points.
 - His bias focused his attention only on union references in her memo and presentation.
- Andrea thought, “This really made it worth coming to this meeting! It’s a real advantage to have Theresa’s sensitivity to the contract in this group.”
- Jasmine wanted more details, but Theresa hadn’t welcomed even a questioning look from Vanessa. Jasmine didn’t want a similar response.
 - Her focus went to Theresa’s affect with Vanessa. She interpreted it as aloof and off-putting. Jasmine’s need to avoid such a response kept her from asking for information.

Throughout the day, different group members queried Theresa about details and thanked her for her insight and creative solutions. Jasmine talked with her individually and was surprised at how friendly and patient she was. Theresa provided Jasmine with the details she needed to understand the proposal. As Theresa welcomed her questions, Jasmine revised her initial perception of Theresa as aloof and off-putting, and Theresa revised her initial perception that her proposal had been simple and fully understood.

Following the exchange just described, group members gathered more information during the day, fleshed out the plan, and then adopted it. The scenario illustrates ways



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Managing Perceptions

Understand Your Personal Views

Each person enters interpersonal encounters with a unique perspective or worldview. This is an individual or personalized frame for viewing life and its events. You need to be aware of your own biases and monitor to ensure that they do not unduly influence how you regard and interact with others.

Analyze Your Personal State

Recognize how your emotional or physiological states influence your perceptions. An event may seem pleasant or enjoyable if you are in a good mood and unpleasant if you are not.

Avoid Early Conclusions

Recall that one of the purposes of the perceptual process is to select what gets your attention. Therefore, you

ignore other information. You should seek additional cues before making judgments.

Seek Clarification

Ask others for explanations or clarification about your perceptions. It promotes dialogue and communicates that you truly wish to gain an accurate understanding.

Watch for Confirmation or Disconfirmation Biases

People have a tendency to look for and believe that which supports their biases and to avoid or discount anything that challenges or disconfirms their position. Your task is to stay alert and avoid the effects of either of those types of bias.

in which members of the group picked up on information she presented, but attended to different aspects of it based on their prejudgments and individual needs. You can understand the thoughts of the various members when you consider their different biases and interests. The group members identified and selectively perceived something in Theresa's statements that corresponded with elements in their own perspectives. Theresa also responded to the messages she perceived were being communicated, and in this example she inaccurately assumed that the group did not need to discuss details to understand the proposal.

The message for professionals who engage in collaborative activities is clear: Your perceptions and prejudgments strongly influence your understanding of others and their communication with you. You can become more aware of how you perceive others and learn to consider multiple perspectives of others by constantly challenging yourself to develop alternative explanations for others' statements. Other approaches to improving the accuracy of your perceptions are suggested in Putting Ideas into Practice.

Professional Perspective Your general professional socialization contributes to your perspective. We and others have pointed to the traditional professional preparation experiences of many teachers and other school personnel that focus on solo professional or isolated practice. That is, their final student teaching or practicum is considered successful when they can manage their assignment independently. Despite these similarities, the specific discipline into which you were socialized (e.g., school psychology, literacy, library science, special education) and through which you prepared for a particular professional

role (e.g., English teacher, administrator, counselor, speech/language therapist) also contributes elements to your frame of reference. This latter component may be considerably different from that of colleagues in other disciplines.

For example, general education teachers and special services providers may have pronounced differences in how they perceive their responsibility for facilitating the learning of individual students. Consistent with their disciplinary preparation in general education, classroom teachers are likely to view their primary responsibilities as facilitating the progress of a *group* of students through a prescribed curriculum to meet established grade-level standards. Their professional studies emphasized curriculum scope and sequence, instructional methodology, techniques for group management, and strategies for delivering specific subject-matter content. Group instructional strategies, curriculum coverage, and assessment of performance based on established standards are central—appropriately so—in the ways in which they think about their responsibilities.

On the other hand, the professional preparation and socialization of special services providers probably placed more emphasis on individual variations in human development and learning, assessment of individual differences and learning needs, and intervention strategies to respond to unique needs of individual students. Not surprisingly, these professionals typically believe their primary responsibilities are to identify a student's current level of functioning, learning needs, and preferred learning mode and then to design and deliver services tailored to meet those needs. Their professional background, a major influence on their perspective, leads them to focus on the unique needs of *individual* students. These differences in teachers' and special services providers' professional perspectives may have a profound impact on how they interact with one another. For you to collaborate successfully, you will no doubt find that awareness of these variations and sensitivity to their influences are essential.

Although they share many similarities, substantial differences also can characterize the perspectives held by the various disciplines that provide specialized services. Some of these differences reflect the diverse philosophical and theoretical orientations within these fields (e.g., a preference for developmental versus behavioral approaches), some reflect variations in the nature of the special services provided (e.g., specialized instruction, therapy, or diagnostic evaluation), and still others relate to the specific knowledge bases of the disciplines. It is easy to understand how a speech/language pathologist with responsibility for a student's articulation therapy may have a very different frame of reference from the adaptive physical educator. The former may work individually with students, diagnosing the speech disability, designing interventions to remediate it, and perhaps delivering services in a one-on-one situation. However, the adaptive physical education specialist may focus on assessing a student's general physical status and then designing a program to maximize the strengths and reduce the deficits of the student. This specialist often will deliver individualized services for the particular student within the group of students served. Similarly, reading specialists are likely to have perspectives that differ in significant ways from those of occupational and physical therapists, administrators will differ from special education teachers, and so on.

Culture and Perspective There is a wealth of engaging literature on cultural competency and cultural responsiveness that can offer much guidance to education and related professions that is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this chapter to address. In order to draw a distinction, then, our concern here is cultural perspective—the connection between culture and interpersonal communication. With this focus, we adopt Lustig and Koester's (2010) definition of culture:

Culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people. (p. 25)



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Developing Cultural Self-Awareness

Awareness of your cultural roots is helpful as you strive to develop sensitivity and knowledge of others. Take time to explore your cultural roots using the suggestions in the text. Here are some topics you might address with classmates to get started. Think of and describe the following:

- A country (or countries) other than the United States that your family considers its “home” or country of origin
- Holidays or other celebrations your family may celebrate that derive from another country
- Family members who speak the language of their country of origin
- Languages other than English you heard at home while growing up
- A special piece of advice or perhaps a cultural adage that you recall from childhood

- A time growing up when something a parent or grandparent did seemed “old country,” out of place, or embarrassing in school or in front of other children who didn’t share your culture

For a more reflective interaction, discuss the following:

- An observation you made when involved with people from a different culture that shocked or upset you. Describe how you felt and reacted. Upon reflection, do you view it differently now?
- An occasion when you interacted with others from a different culture and did something particularly insensitive and thoughtless that you would now do differently. Describe the situation and your behavior. How do you understand the situation now? Describe how you would respond now.

Your cultural perspective is composed of your cultural background, your awareness of it, and how you have internalized it. It also includes your awareness, understanding, and views of others’ cultures. In terms of the previous discussions, it can be conceptualized as part of the environment in the transactional model. It is also easily understood as one of the factors that influence what and how you perceive an interaction or another person.

The component in understanding and expanding your cultural perspective of others is achieving cultural self-awareness. This begins with learning about your own cultural heritage and the values, beliefs, and customs that are identified with it. Scholars have observed that many Anglo-European Americans have less awareness of their cultural influences than do people from other groups, perhaps because the “melting pot” aspirations of early immigrants took a toll on their diversity awareness (Hammond & Morrison, 1996; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Gathering family narratives, reviewing documents, listening with greater interest to family stories, and researching countries of origin will enhance knowledge of family backgrounds. It is often instructive to compare your own beliefs with those attributed to your cultural group. Further, as part of your quest for cultural self-awareness, we encourage you to take a few minutes to consider the discussion points in Putting Ideas into Practice.

The second component of cultural perspective is awareness and understanding of others’ cultural perspectives. Whether or not we are immediately aware of it, our cultural backgrounds inform our decisions and provide contexts to our actions that may not be completely visible to others’ perspectives. How we behave during our day-to-day activities reflects, in some ways, composites of many ideologies that construct our identities. Though

not the focus of this chapter, a brief overview of some of the cultural patterns that underlie different cultures may provide solid material for self-reflection of how we perceive each other. It is thus helpful to have a general knowledge about the ways in which values, beliefs, norms, and practices may vary across cultures, if for no other reason than as preparation for enhanced sensitivity to others.

Consequently, several taxonomies and continua are used to describe such patterns, and we will briefly illustrate three here. However, any discussion of cultural similarities and differences must be preceded with a strong admonition: *There is no validity in adhering to culture-specific descriptions of cultures.* It is well established that significant variations exist within cultural groups, often based on such factors as gender, age, marital status, and socioeconomic status. Individual members of a group should not be assumed to possess the characteristics attributed to the group, nor should any group be considered to exemplify all of the characteristics associated with a continuum. With that qualification, we will consider three of the common cultural continua: high-ambiguity-tolerant and low-ambiguity-tolerant cultures; high- and low-context cultures, and individualist and collectivist orientations.

High-Ambiguity-Tolerant and Low-Ambiguity-Tolerant Cultures Uncertainty is responded to differently in different cultures. In some, it is a normal part of life and people take it in stride. Those are cultures with high ambiguity tolerance. Because the people in those cultures are comfortable with ambiguity and unknown situations, they are tolerant of those who do not follow the rules of the majority culture and may even encourage differences in perspectives (Hofstede, 1997; Lustig & Koester, 2010). Examples of high-ambiguity-tolerant cultures are Singapore, Denmark, Ireland, India, Malaysia, and the United States.

At the other end of the continuum, people from cultures with *low ambiguity tolerance* exert great effort to avoid uncertainty. They experience much anxiety in the face of the unknown; not knowing what will happen next is threatening and must be counteracted. Examples of such cultures are Guatemala, Greece, Japan, Chile, Spain, and Costa Rica (DeVito, 2009a). People from low-ambiguity-tolerant cultures prefer very concrete, specific rules for communication that are not to be violated. They prefer highly structured experiences, detailed instructions, and clear timetables.

High- and Low-Context Cultures In high-context cultures, people prefer to use high-context messages in which most or all of the meaning is implied by the physical setting or assumed to be something already internalized by the individual (Brantley & Miller, 2008). For example, there is a strong emphasis on verbal shorthand or nonverbal codes in communicating information that is known by the communicators but is not explicitly stated in the verbal message; it may be something that was in a previous communication or shared experience. The cultures of Japan, Mexico, and Thailand are considered high-context cultures, whereas Germany, Sweden, Norway, and the United States are viewed as having low-context cultures (DeVito, 2009a). In low-context cultures, the information would be explicitly and precisely in the words people use as they communicate.

The case that opened this chapter includes an example of high-context messages. Lena and Kim shared a background of supporting their college basketball team. Lena referred to a key player by name and signaled that she was certain the team would make it to national playoffs when she said, “We’re going to Bloomington!” where the championship games would be held. She emphasized the excitement of the basketball shots nonverbally by pretending to make one herself. Lena’s communication served to illustrate the types of nonverbal cues and verbal codes common in high-context cultures.

Individualist and Collectivist Orientations This continuum represents the emphasis a culture places on individual goals, achievement, and fulfillment versus interdependence and emphasis on the well-being of the group as a whole (Hofstede, 1997; Lynch, 2011). In these cultures, an individual's autonomy, uniqueness, self-realization, and self-expression are highly valued and people are supposed to take care of only their immediate families and themselves. Key words are I, self, independence, and privacy. Communication styles within the categories of context, talk, directness, and turn-taking and associated with both extremes of the continuum were described by Watkins and Eatman (2001) and are outlined in Figure 2. Generally, the dominant cultures of Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the United States are thought to reflect an individualistic orientation. However, about 70 percent of the world's cultures can be viewed as collectivistic (Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, & Garcia, 2009; Trumbull & Rothstein-Fisch, 2008). In collectivist cultures—such as those in Guatemala, Indonesia, most U.S. immigrant groups, as well as African American, Native American, and Alaskan Native cultures—the groups to which people belong are the most important social units. Those cultures require loyalty to the group and place value on meeting the needs of the group. In these cultures, the relevant group is likely to extend beyond the nuclear family and be oriented toward the extended family and kinship-help patterns.

Granted, no ethnic or other cultural group is only individualistic or collectivistic in its orientation, and not all members of a cultural group share the same values. Those orientations are used to describe a continuum of values that may help distinguish key

FIGURE 2

Individualistic and collectivistic influences in intercultural communication.

| Individualistic | Collectivistic |
|---|--|
| Low-context: Explicit and direct communication gets “right to the point.” | High-context: The context, past experiences, and indirect cues are the basis for communication. Parties talk about what they know and have experienced. |
| Talk: One asserts oneself through talk and talk is used to create a sense of comfort in interactions and especially in groups. | Silence: Silence is golden. It is valued and may be used to communicate respect and provide comfort. |
| Directness: Communication individuality and uniqueness; the intent of opinions is to oppose, disagree, persuade, and make explicit. | Indirectness: Ambiguity is often present. It reveals and is thought of as a means of maintaining harmony. Subtle cues and suggestions are used to maintain harmony. |
| Uneven turn-taking: One person may dominate, but both parties are likely to introduce subjects and talk at length about them. There is no apparent sense of parity or equity in turn-taking. | Balanced turn-taking: Parties take turns in an evenly distributed manner. Turns are short and relinquished so that others may speak. Parties do not shift topics; instead, they are likely to respond to what the other said. |

beliefs and patterns of groups and individuals. A continuum serves as a framework for considering characteristics of cultural styles and patterns that are evident in intercultural communication.

Just as the many aspects of a single culture cannot all be classified as fitting the same place on a given continuum, one continuum cannot be used to describe the central patterns of a culture. Any culture can be found to have a place on each of the three illustrative continua discussed here and on the others not addressed here.

Consider how your views match with those orientations. Match the orientations of others in your professional setting. You will likely find you are more aligned with certain individuals than others—this is one indication of cultural similarities and differences. Those individuals are probably those with whom you believe you can work collaboratively. Your efforts to achieve cultural self-awareness will help you begin to expand the range of people with whom you can relate effectively and develop culturally competent communication skills that will enhance your collaborative interactions with colleagues and parents.

In today's culturally pluralistic and self-conscious society, there is a temptation to try to avert the complexity of cultural differences by ascribing specific cultural values to groups of people who are of the same ethnicity, gender, or age. We hope that these examples of variation in perspective help you focus on how your perspective—unique because of your personal, professional, and cultural history—is both similar to and different from those of others with whom you may want to collaborate. What is most important to understand is that no two people experience a single interaction in exactly the same way. Your responsibility is to simultaneously be aware of how you are influenced by your own and others' perspectives and how others may dynamically react to yours.

Cultural-General Attitudes As you contemplate your cultural roots and their influences, you may also wish to consider some of the “cultural-general” attitudes and dispositions that have been identified and demonstrated as related to helping people improve the success of their intercultural communications with those from other backgrounds. Samovar and Porter (2004) present these four culture-general attitudes and characteristics:

1. Motivation to communicate effectively with people from other cultures is important because the differences between the cultures often present challenges.
2. Tolerance for ambiguity allows you to accept the uncertainty that accompanies intercultural communication. You may find the communication from someone with a very different background confusing and sometimes even incomprehensible. Developing your tolerance for ambiguity allows you to accept the sometimes equivocal messages and trust that you will gain more meaning.
3. Open-mindedness goes beyond tolerating uncertainties. It requires a nonjudgmental regard for others. It entails the recognition that others' behaviors that are inconsistent with your own strongly held beliefs (e.g., equal access to education, equality for women) are most likely consistent with the cultural rules and beliefs that they have lived by their whole lives.
4. Mindfulness involves being aware of your own behavior and that of others. When you are mindful, you may benefit from several strategies to become more interculturally aware (Burgoon, Berger, & Waldron, 2000). Observing the behaviors and patterns of others to discern their rules and norms of communication and then using these in your interactions in effective ways is one such strategy. Others such as reading, taking academic courses about diversity and intercultural communication, talking with others

about their cultures, and watching films have also helped people to become more interculturally competent communicators.

Competent Communication

Having considered perspective, the cognitive dimension of interpersonal competence, and how perception and culture influence perspective, we now turn our attention to competent communication. This is the second major component of interpersonal competence. It is the behavioral dimension that includes the development, adaptation, and skillful use of communication skills.

Most definitions of communication competence include two criteria: It is both effective and appropriate (Spitzberg, 2000). *Effective* communication is that which achieves the intended outcome or the goals of the specific situation in which it is used. Communication is considered *appropriate* when it is adapted to be proper and suitable to particular situations and people. Noted interpersonal and intercultural communication scholars offer the following definition (Adler et al., 2012; Lustig & Koester, 2010; Trenholm, 2011):

Competent communication is effective and appropriate communication that achieves its intended outcomes in ways that maintain or enhance the relationship in which it occurs.

The study and development of communication and interpersonal interaction skills is the subject of this chapter and of the course you are taking. The purpose here is simply to overview four factors considered central to the development of communication competence.

Develop a Skills Repertoire Effective communicators must develop and be able to use a large range of communication skills. No single style of communication is effective in pursuing all goals or for interacting with all people in all situations. One must also be able to perform the skills. Simply reading about communication skills, or even insisting that you already know them, will not be of much help unless you can put them to work. We encourage you to engage in the end-of-chapter activities throughout this text to see how wide your repertoire is and to expand it. As a starting point, completing the self-assessments in this chapter will help you to know whether your skills are as broad and well developed as you would like.

Choose and Adapt Behavior Having a variety of communication skills is a necessary but not a sufficient requirement for successful communication. Knowing what to do in specific instances is also important; for example, knowing whether being deferential, direct, or humorous is likely to have a positive or negative influence in a given situation or when pursuing a particular goal. A response that works well in one setting could be less successful in another. Appropriately adapted communication is sensitive to context (situation, time, and place), goals, and uniqueness of communicators (e.g., is your audience elderly, youthful, family, community?).

Watch Yourself! You learn to understand others better with increased perspective-taking skills, but competent communicators learn to understand themselves better as well. They employ self-monitoring to pay close attention to their own behavior and use these observations to change their behaviors. Monitoring occurs both before and during an interaction. Before talking with someone who recently expressed much unwarranted anger toward you and complained to the principal, you remind yourself not to get defensive and to avoid

getting pulled into arguing. During the interaction, you will stay alert and catch yourself if the person says something hurtful and you want to snap back with something equally so. In short, people who are aware of their behavior and the impression it makes are more skillful communicators than people who do not exercise self-monitoring.

Communicate Ethically with Others as Unique Individuals Competent communicators are committed to communicating effectively and ethically. They demonstrate this commitment in two ways. First, their commitment to the other person is evident. It is seen in their interest in the person's thoughts, ideas, and feelings; their desire is to spend time together; and their willingness to listen rather than talk all the time. All of this reveals their investment in the other person. The second way competent communicators demonstrate their commitment to effective and ethical communication is in their concern that the message is accurate, understandable, and understood. Their ethical commitment is reflected in their steadfast commitment to others as unique human beings, not simply as members of a particular category or a particular type of person.

Suggestions for Improving Your Communication Skills

Now that you have focused your methods and intentions to communicate competently with others, the next step requires that you mindfully seek to improve and refine your skills. Naturally, you may be wondering how best to begin honing your skills. It is a journey and one that takes practice. We have outlined some basic steps to help you refine your verbal and nonverbal communication skills.

Become a Student of Communication Because communication is the smallest unit of concern in interactions and comprises the most basic set of skills needed in collaborative activities, you should study and become a more skillful communicator. A note of caution is warranted, however. Like most people, you may conclude that you already have a high degree of communication skill, because you communicate regularly in your professional and personal life. "Practice makes perfect," right? As you read about the skills in this chapter, you may believe you have "had that course" or acquired the skills elsewhere. Keep these two points in mind: First, understanding or being aware of communication skills alone does not improve your communication. Only through self-reflection and continuing practice does improvement occur. Our students repeatedly share with us that focusing on and rehearsing the skills is somewhat humbling; implementing the skills is much more difficult than simply recognizing them. Second, regardless of your knowledge or proficiency level after much practice, you will never fully master communication, because each new person, interaction, and situation will require you to practice and refine your skills further. As all professionals teach and learn from one another, interactions are enhanced by being open to opportunities to acquire new knowledge and skills.

Nurture and Communicate Openness Perhaps the most pronounced theme that runs throughout the discipline of collaboration is an absolutely essential requirement for openness. Openness refers to a person's ability to suspend or eliminate judgment and evaluation of information and situations until he or she has explored adequately the various potential meanings and explanations. In order to collaborate, individuals should value joint decision making or at least be willing to experiment with it. In the perspective-taking exercises at the



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Planning for and Evaluating a Communication Event

Becoming a proficient communicator requires awareness of and attention to the factors that influence communication. As a student of communication, you should give advance thought to certain factors that will make your task easier or more difficult. In addition to the suggestions addressed in the text, we recommend that when you have a team meeting or planning period with a colleague, you do the following:

- *Establish your communication goal.* Identify ahead of time what information you want to share, obtain, or explore in this interaction.
- *Identify the most appropriate setting in which to accomplish this goal.* Think about such things as privacy needs, convenience of location, and access to materials or resources that may be needed.
- *Consider the potential message-to-noise ratio.* It is impossible to eliminate all noise or communication

interference, but you can and should work to minimize its effects on your interaction.

- *Evaluate the message and think about how the channel(s) to be used might affect the communication.* Assess the amount of information to be conveyed, your desired control over how the message is composed, your desired control over the receiver's attention, your ability to assess the other's understanding, and how quickly you need feedback. These elements should help you determine which channel(s) is most appropriate for meeting your communication goal.

After the interaction, assess your success in attaining your communication goal. Write a summary of your colleague's primary points and concerns. Summarize your listening behaviors, and decide which were most and least useful in accomplishing your listening goal.

end of this chapter, there are opportunities for you to practice and expand your openness to alternative meanings.

Hopefully, the importance of an attitude of openness has become very clear to you. Openness, in the context of verbal communication, is similar to the earlier caution to avoid drawing conclusions early, but the focus in that discussion was on eliminating judgments about people rather than deferring judgments about situations. In this context, the point is for you to set aside your biases and explore various aspects of a situation before attempting to decipher the message.

Keep Communication Meaningful People will invest more in communication when they believe the information shared will be meaningful to them. It is unlikely that you will invest significantly in communication pertaining to topics or information in which you are not interested or that you do not see as important. If you do not share a friend's interest in fly fishing, it is likely that you will not make a significant effort to engage in discussion about it.

The amount of information being communicated influences perceptions of the meaningfulness of communication. Too much or too little information is not meaningful. Have you had the experience of asking a colleague or coworker a simple question, such as, "How is the new student adjusting?" and getting a diatribe with more information than you ever wanted to know about the situation? You may have asked the question in passing or out of general interest and started a verbal landslide. You probably know a number of people who tend to give such lengthy responses. Do you try to avoid giving them an opening to speak? This, or simply "tuning out," is a common response to such highly talkative people.

Conversely, have you ever found yourself providing too much information to others? As you observe your own communication, you may find that you sometimes obscure the meaning of what you are trying to communicate by doing this.

Alternatively, everyone experiences exchanges in which too little information is shared. You may have had experiences trying to communicate with someone who seems to expect you to be a mind reader. If so, you know how difficult it can be to ensure clear understanding when others withhold needed information.

As you work toward effective interpersonal communication, you should ensure that communication is meaningful by judging what and how much information the people with whom you are interacting want to have. When you want information from others, you may find that they give you too little or too much information. Your task then is either to work to obtain more information or to focus and narrow the information they are supplying. Putting Ideas into Practice summarizes additional information to assist you in keeping communication meaningful.

Use Silence Effectively Silence and pauses are important nonverbal behaviors that are related to speech flow and pace, and they may be used as minimal encouragers. However, beyond these uses, silence is an extremely powerful communication tool in its own right. You are undoubtedly familiar with the “deadly silence” used by parents and teachers to communicate disapproval to children. You may have even used it or experienced it yourself in adult relationships. Surely, silence can be awkward or seem punishing in conversations, but few people seem to understand how powerful it is in communicating interest, concern, empathy, and respect to others. It also has another advantage as a very helpful communication strategy because it allows others to pause and think through their communication, thus enhancing the quality and meaning of their messages.

The definition of *silence* for our purposes is the absence of verbal noise or talk. But how long must there be no talk before a space in the talk can be considered silence? Goodman (1978, 1984) offers several concepts that help to clarify this. He suggests that the length of time between two speakers’ verbal expressions varies within each conversation, and the amount of silent time that qualifies as a “silence response” is dependent on each conversation’s tempo and patterns of speech. For example, if two people exchange several comments and pause for about one and a half seconds after each speaker completes a thought and before another starts, then a pause of two or three seconds may be required for a silence response. On the other hand, if two people are talking but only allowing about a quarter of a second of verbal space between taking turns to talk, one second may constitute a silence response.

Silence and its contributions to communication are more easily understood when you consider the alternatives: interruptions, overtalk, and reduced verbal spacing. Interruptions occur when one speaker disrupts another’s message in order to deliver his or her own. When someone is speaking and another interrupts, there is a period of overtalk in which both speakers are talking at the same time until one relinquishes the conversation to the other. The final alternative, reduced verbal spacing, is related to, but distinct from, silence and pauses. It refers to the pace of the turn-taking in verbal interaction. It occurs when a new speaker begins talking during what is meant to be a brief pause in someone else’s speech. In its most exaggerated form, one speaker appears to clip off the last word or two of the previous speaker’s talk.

There are similarities among all of these alternatives to silence—interruptions, overtalk, and reduced verbal spacing. Perhaps they occur because the person using them has a need to control the situation, to demonstrate knowledge, to try to reduce the speaker’s rambling talk, or simply to be at center stage. Whatever the reason, these responses are

likely to have a negative impact on the conversation and relationship. They seem to say, “Listen to me,” “It’s my turn,” or “What I have to say has more value than what you’re saying.” Those responses certainly suggest to the other person that he or she is less competent, less important, or less interesting than the person attempting to take control of the conversation. They are likely to produce frustration and sometimes anger as the person who is verbally “crowded” feels less and less understood and valued.

In your interactions, try to develop a habit of protecting verbal space. It will give the other person the opportunity to finish talking and give you the opportunity to consider what the other has said and how you want to respond. In addition to avoiding verbal crowding, the silence response or verbal space conveys that you are interested in the other’s comments and are taking the time to comprehend the message before responding.

A final point to consider is that the amount of silent space that creates the positive impact you desire varies with each conversational pair. Analogous to inadequate silence, unnaturally long periods of silence can convey disinterest or other negative messages. There are no precise rules about verbal spacing. Sometimes, in a fast-paced discussion, three seconds is a significant silence. At other times, particularly if the topic is emotional and one or more speakers are describing personal feelings, silences of several seconds or more than a minute may be appropriate nonverbal cues. Through experimentation you can learn to determine the desirable amounts of silence in each relationship and conversation within that relationship.

Adapt Your Communication to Match the Task and the Relationship Ultimately, effective communicators tend to adapt their communication according to the task, the relationship, and the characteristics of the individuals involved. They choose clear and efficient language, identify the information that is needed, and use verbal communication strategies that will best elicit their preferred responses. The nature of the desired responses and relationships and their levels of development should influence your choice of communication style. Simply, if you think about the individuals with whom you interact, you will probably include colleagues, administrators, parents, paraeducators, and professionals from other agencies. And you may further differentiate ongoing and regular relationships from more temporary and infrequent interactions, such as those in annual review meetings. The nature of your relationship and its level of development should influence your choice of the communication style. As you collaborate in established or developing relationships, one of your responsibilities is to use communication strategies that will best facilitate the collaborative activity. Because there are no simple rules or strategies for adapting your verbal communication, your ability to understand the principles and learn to use many of the skills included in this chapter can help you do this.

SUMMARY

- Successful collaboration requires competent interpersonal communication.
- Three primary views or models of communication include linear, interactional, and transactional.
- Attributes of these communication models include channel, message, communicators, environment, and noise. Transactional communication models are also characterized by continuous and simultaneous communication.

- Interpersonal communication is a transactional process by which communicators continuously and simultaneously exchange messages through multiple channels in order to create shared meanings.
- Interpersonally competent individuals have sophisticated perspective-taking skills. They continually work toward increased intercultural awareness and accurate perception. In preparing for collaborative interactions, you should
 - come to understand your own and others' perspectives and how these have been shaped by past experiences, professional preparation, and cultural identity.
 - Interpersonally competent individuals also use communication skills that are appropriate and suitable to the persons and situations involved, and they use skills that are effective in achieving their goals.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. As a way to practice considering alternative meanings and differing points of view, try to generate four distinctly different possible meanings for the following statements. Get additional practice by doing the same for statements made by others in the course of conversations during the next few days.

Teacher: I'm all for accountability. Let's start with the school board and their accountability for our working conditions! Then the administration—shouldn't they be accountable for us having books, supplies, and building maintenance? And then the *Times*—is it accountable for reporting about conditions as well as our individual value-added scores?

Parent: We do everything we can to protect Bobby. I bring him to school and pick him up as soon as school is out. He is in safe after-school clubs. But when he's with you, he can't even go to the restroom without getting beaten up or threatened at the least!

Speech Therapist: I haven't had any teaching courses or in-services about group instruction. How am I going to be able to provide Jill's program in her classroom?

2. No doubt you communicate with colleagues and/or parents using notes and e-mail, or forms that you have created or that have been created by colleagues or the district. Collect a sample of teacher- or district-developed forms and share them with colleagues from other settings. Work together to identify ways in which the forms could be made more teacher or parent friendly,

and modify the forms accordingly. Note that when you do this with classmates from other districts or settings, you are likely to get many more new ideas and time-saving strategies than if you simply exchange with colleagues who share your setting.

3. "It is well known that people don't always 'speak their minds,' and it is suspected that people don't always 'know their minds.'" Harvard University's Project Implicit web site, the source of this quote, presents a method that demonstrates the conscious-unconscious divergences much more convincingly than has been possible with previous methods. Learn about the method, and take a short confidential assessment at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo>. Consider taking two different assessments and comparing results.
4. Because culture affects communication, begin a search for your cultural roots. For example, ask the oldest family members for their recollections. Perhaps they have journals, photo albums, notes of important events, old letters, or any number of things that provide information about your family traditions. When this information is not available, document searches in courthouses can uncover marriage records, deeds, and birth certificates. As genealogy has become increasingly popular, online services have made such information accessible as well.
5. Identify someone with whom you seemingly have the most differences. Then individually, each of you should compile a short list of three or four differences that you believe both of you might consider as the primary distinctions between you. These differences might be your philosophies,

ideologies, most valued relationships (e.g., friends, family, spouse, or significant other), views of success, and so on. In order to reflect on how we all ascribe certain meanings to the differences we perceive in others, first compare your lists to see which items, if any, you agreed were your areas of greatest difference. Then take turns speculating about why those differences exist. The more you

clarify these differences and the possible reasons for them, the more you will be drawn to reconsider the impressions that you have of each other and, perhaps more important, why you formed those impressions. Others completing this activity have developed a list of categories of assumptions that they were prone to make. Such a list can serve as a reference throughout your course.

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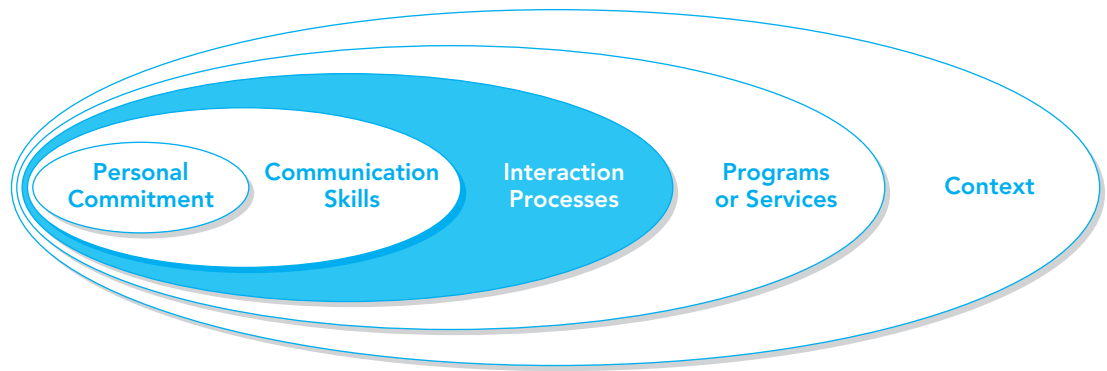
Interpersonal Problem Solving

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Interpersonal Problem Solving



Connections

This chapter presents interpersonal problem solving as the most commonly used interaction process through which professionals in education as well as other disciplines collaborate a process that relies on communication skills. Shared problem solving is the gateway to programs and services such as teaming, co-teaching, and indirect services. And, of course, it is essential during challenging or awkward interactions.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Identify three types of problems you may encounter in your professional role that would appropriately be addressed through interpersonal problem solving.
2. Distinguish between reactive and proactive approaches to problem solving.
3. Balance the potential value of interpersonal problem solving in terms of improved outcomes with the possible costs of time and personnel resources.
4. Analyze whether any specific professional problems you or your colleagues face are likely to be resolved through interpersonal problem solving.
5. State and carry out the steps in a systematic interpersonal problem-solving sequence with colleagues, other professionals, and parents or family members, using appropriate strategies to facilitate the process.
6. Identify context factors that may affect the effectiveness of group problem solving.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

The Complexity of Problem Solving

Ms. Perez (kindergarten teacher) and Ms. Turner (special educator) are meeting about Willie, a student identified as having a developmental disability and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Ms. Lewis, school psychologist, and Mr. Ennis, principal, also are present, along with Willie's guardian, his grandmother, Ms. Richardson. The professionals know that Willie came to kindergarten without any preschool experience and that he was quickly noticed because his functioning level was at least two years below that of his classmates. Even with the services he now receives through special education and the medication that has been prescribed for him, Ms. Perez thinks that he is overwhelmed, her evidence being his increasingly disruptive behavior. She also expresses concern for the other students and notes the pressures of the highly academic kindergarten curriculum. Ms. Turner echoes Ms. Perez's concerns; she spends approximately 45 minutes each day in the kindergarten classroom, and her assistant spends an additional 45 minutes there, supporting Willie.

Ms. Richardson states how pleased she is with Willie's progress and how sure she is that Willie will soon catch up with his peers. During the sudden pause in the conversation caused by this comment, both teachers turned to Ms. Lewis for support of their point of view: They have concluded that Willie should spend more time in a special education classroom, and they are expecting her to support their perspective.

Introduction

Whatever your role as a professional educator, your day is spent solving problems. You do this when you decide which materials, activities, intervention, therapeutic technique, or equipment would be best used with particular students. You also problem solve when you plan an interdisciplinary unit with a colleague, create a schedule for IEP annual reviews, and/or set priorities for supplies you need for the next school year. You problem solve as you decide how to ask your administrator for a schedule change or reassignment and how to approach parents who sometimes do not respond well to conversations focused on concerns related to their children.

Each of the examples of problem solving just noted shares the feature that it is carried out in isolation. You have the responsibility to address each problem and you do so, assuming responsibility and holding sole accountability for the outcome (Clark & Flynn, 2011). Increasingly in school settings, however, responsibility for problem solving is shared with others. This type of activity is referred to as interpersonal or group problem solving. For example, the team meetings you attend to determine appropriate interventions and placement for students are interpersonal problem-solving activities originating in special education legislation, as are your planning sessions with colleagues to discuss how to provide instructional accommodations and modifications to meet students' needs (e.g., Gansle & Noell, 2008; McNamara, Rasheed, & Delamatre, 2008). Interpersonal problem solving also is the basis for elementary grade-level and middle school teams, high school departments, and school leadership teams. Some interpersonal problem solving is fairly broad and involves many people, but other problem solving is quite specific and involves only two people. Even the other common activities in which you are likely to engage with colleagues or parents (e.g., meeting as a committee, interviewing, conferencing) often are specialized applications of interpersonal problem solving (e.g., Garbacz et al., 2008). A single set of principles applies to the entire range of problem-solving activities you undertake with others, and that set of principles is the focus of this chapter.

Interpersonal problem solving is perhaps the most fundamental component of successful interactions. In fact, we are convinced that it is virtually impossible to collaborate with colleagues and parents without systematically and effectively employing an interpersonal problem-solving process; and the centrality of problem solving to contemporary society is illustrated by the attention it receives in a wide variety of professions, including business, health, medical, psychology, technology, and economics (e.g., Association for Quality and Participation, 2008; Castledine, 2010; Jermann & Dillenbourg, 2008; McMains & Pollard, 2009). However, a dilemma often occurs when educators problem solve: School professionals spend so much time problem solving by themselves that they sometimes presume that they naturally have the skills for problem solving with others. What is essential to realize is that group problem solving requires all the skills of problem solving alone as well as additional skills for going through this process with others (Chiu, 2000).

A Context for Interpersonal Problem Solving

Before turning to the steps in the interpersonal problem-solving process, it is important to understand problem characteristics in order to set the problem-solving context. Analyze these three interactions.

Principal: At our last meeting, we discussed the priorities for this year for our school improvement plan. Today we need to be sure that someone is leading each element, who else will be on these teams, and the type of data we'll gather to document our work.

Teacher 1: Let's get ourselves assigned first and then decide who to place on each team. It seems the teams could then identify the data needed.

Teacher 2: I agree—I'll volunteer to lead the team working on a before-school homework program.

Teacher 1: And I'm fine leading the group working on setting up interdepartmental professional learning communities (PLCs).

Principal: Thanks for making the time to work on the schedule. The more innovative things we do for kids, the tougher it seems to be to fit everything into the master schedule. I wanted to be sure that we touched base about your schedules for co-teaching and consultation as well as resource services and schedules for the paraprofessionals.

Teacher 1: I don't know how I'm going to get a schedule that I can live with this year. Based on students' IEPs, I'm supposed to get to three different classrooms for co-teaching, and I just don't see how to do it and still see the students as necessary in the resource room.

Teacher 2: I know what you mean. I have four classes to co-teach, need to have a time to meet with two other teachers at least once per week, and have six students who need a resource period for study skills and reading instruction.

Teacher 1: Let's start with the "givens." One of us has to be available to cover English classes during first and second hour because so many students with IEPs are in those classes.

Teacher 2: And we promised that at least one of us would be free to meet with teachers during fourth-hour lunch.

Principal: Let's start blocking these "givens" on the master schedule, and perhaps we'll begin to see some ways to make the schedule fit student needs and keep it

feasible for both of you. Once we see where both of you need to spend time, we can talk about roles for the paraprofessionals.

Principal: We've taken many positive steps toward ensuring that our students with disabilities are educated with their peers in general education classes whenever possible, but we've actually created another set of dilemmas. We're offering all of our services for our students who are English language learners in separate classrooms, and we're doing the same for services for students who are gifted. It seems that being inclusive should lead us to a single integrated set of programs and services, all operating on the same basis, rather than each type of program operating as though it is the only one in our school.

ESL teacher: I see your point, but I wonder if we're ready to make more changes. I was just reading about co-teaching for ESL teachers, and it makes sense for some students, but I'm not convinced it's the best option for all our English learners.

General education teacher: Moving in this direction does seem to be complicated, but what comes immediately to mind for me is how great it would be to have all my students in class more of the time. Right now, one or more students are always coming and going and missing important instruction.

Principal: This conversation is making me think that we need to spend some time at our upcoming faculty meeting hearing from everyone. That will give us valuable information about the positives and negatives of moving in this direction. Then we'll need to figure out how we can create a more unified system for supporting our students while minimizing the issues that might arise.

Although we will address in detail the topic of problem identification in the next section, it is clear that the situation addressed in the first interaction illustrates a straightforward, *well-defined problem*: identifying specific actions to implement the school improvement plan. The primary task is to assign leadership responsibilities and then create teams to implement the plan and gather needed data. Well-defined problems usually are fairly easily identified and understood. Difficulties in solving them often are the result of overlooking necessary solutions or encountering obstacles in implementing the solutions (e.g., budget constraints prevent the establishment of a homework program). This type of problem generally can be readily understood by all involved and adequately addressed. In some cases, one person may be able to manage the change on behalf of the group and just confirm decisions with other members.

In the second interaction, the problem is somewhat more complex. The principal and teachers have identified the problem situation as arranging their schedules, but no clear-cut, single solution is apparent. Instead, they are working within a set of factors that have to be accommodated (e.g., the need to "cover" English classes, arrange for resource services, and have someone available during lunch). This is a *partially defined problem*, in which the goal is clear and some guidelines exist for addressing it, but the specific means for reaching it are varied. The problem could have multiple solutions, but the range is constrained by external factors. Partially defined problems typically are not difficult to identify. Resolving them depends on the potential for successfully implementing any of several possible solutions.

The third interaction is the most complex. The problem is identified as a need to expand inclusive practices to all the programs and services in the school. What types of changes are necessary to redesign services for students who are gifted and those who are English learners? What are reasonable expectations for teachers and other staff related to these changes? What resources are necessary to take the programs and services to the next level? How should decisions be made regarding the distribution of resources? The options for specifying and accomplishing the broad goal of increased inclusiveness are nearly infinite. This is an illustration of an *ill-defined problem*. It does not have clear parameters, nor

is it easily resolved. Further, it is quite possible that whatever solutions are implemented, at least some of those affected by the solutions will disagree that they're appropriate.

You'll undoubtedly address all three types of problems in your role as a professional educator, but ill-defined problems probably occupy a significant portion of your time. Much of the complexity of collaborating to provide services to students is related to the number of ill-defined problems that must be addressed. The steps for problem solving outlined in the next section are valid for the first two types of problems, but they are especially critical for successfully addressing ill-defined ones (Bullough, Young, Hall, Draper, & Smith, 2008). It is the problems you are most likely to face almost daily that provide the justification for becoming an expert in problem solving in a collaborative way (Martinez, 2010/2011).

Reactive and Proactive Problem Solving

Another aspect of problem solving that may vary is the urgency of the problem-solving activity. In *reactive problem solving*, you are faced with responding to a crisis or dilemma that requires attention and action in a relatively brief time frame. Some event focuses your attention on a matter to be resolved. Examples of this type of situation might include the following: the interactions you have with a parent concerning an incident in the classroom or the cafeteria, a meeting between an ESL teacher and a general educator to find resource materials at the proper reading level so a student can participate in a report-writing assignment, and a conference among seventh-grade team members about increasingly disruptive student behavior patterns. Much interpersonal problem solving in schools is reactive, as is the problem solving needed in the case of Willie introduced at the beginning of this chapter.

Conversely, in *proactive problem solving*, an anticipated situation focuses your attention and triggers the problem-solving process before a crisis occurs. For example, in the interaction described in the above two pages, proactive problem solving is illustrated: The principal and teachers are working to create effective teacher schedules so that all services can be delivered. Other illustrations of proactive problem solving include the following: creating a school-wide system of positive behavior supports prior to the start of the school year, arranging strategies for helping a student with autism transition from homeroom to his first-period class because of concerns he may not be able to navigate the rather noisy hallways without assistance, and deciding how best to use staff time (e.g., number of sections of co-teaching, number of sections of a study skills class) for the next school year given anticipated student enrollment and students' special needs.

Using a systematic approach for problem solving is beneficial in addressing both proactive and reactive problems. In fact, one benefit of following specific steps in problem solving is that less time may eventually be required for resolving reactive problems, so more proactive problem solving is possible.

Problem Solving and Diversity

The topic of interpersonal problem solving would not be complete without attention to the impact that cultural diversity may have on the process. This may occur in several ways. First, bias may occur among team members when the student who is the focus of problem solving is from a different background, a point illustrated by the long-term problem of certain groups of students being overidentified as having learning or emotional disabilities (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). A similar issue has been identified related to students who are English language learners when the problem solving occurs as part of the consideration to refer a student for special education services (e.g., Sullivan, 2011). The topic of bias in group problem solving is addressed in A Basis in Research.



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Understanding How Bias May Occur in Interpersonal Problem Solving

Just because professionals engage in interpersonal problem solving does not mean they are unbiased. These two research studies demonstrate how a process that appears objective on the surface can still reflect biases.

- Knotek (2003) observed elementary school teams. He found that when professionals' discussions of students began with negative comments or focused on misbehavior, students were likely to be referred for special education assessment. When students lived in poverty, their academic or behavioral difficulties often were attributed to their backgrounds—other explanations were not explored. Knotek discussed these findings in terms of the social processes occurring during problem solving, noting that teachers may support a colleague's perceptions because of their interpersonal relationship. He also noted that group problem solving can be significantly influenced by participants perceived as having the most power, for example, principals and school psychologists.
- Newell (2010) studied how school psychologists address cultural and racial diversity when conceptualizing acting-out behavior of boys in elementary schools. Using a case study approach and consultation with teachers, she found that the school psychologists did not consider the impact of race or culture on the students' behavior, nor did they adjust their problem-solving process because of potential cultural differences between the students and teachers. Some psychologists took a negative, within-student focus concerning the students identified as African American, but they did not do this for the students identified as European American. Newell concluded that professionals should be taught how to engage in constructive dialogue about race. Her findings are particularly sobering based on the conclusion drawn by Knotek (2003) about the influence of these professionals on decision making in group problem solving.

A second example of the impact of diversity concerns team members themselves (Euwema, Wendt, & Van Emmerick, 2007). When participants in problem solving hold strong beliefs, interpersonal problem solving may be particularly complex. For example, one teacher may believe, based on culture, that students have the obligation to behave in class, regardless of special needs. Another teacher may perceive that classroom expectations for behavior are not realistic for the student. Similarly, one educator may believe that parents should accept teacher recommendations without question, whereas others believe that parent acceptance depends on negotiation. At the same time, diversity in a problem-solving group often has a positive impact. For example, a group's varied backgrounds, experiences, and understandings may lead to better quality and more solutions, a fact supported in problem-solving research (Brophy, 2006; Larson, 2007).

Keep in mind that most collaboration is based in problem solving, and so reflection on your own culturally determined views should accompany your consideration of the information in this chapter. In addition, as you read about implementing programs (e.g., teaming, co-teaching), working with families, and managing difficult interactions, keep in mind that your own culture is likely to strongly influence your beliefs and communication with others.

Deciding Whether to Problem Solve

In addition to understanding the type of problem to be solved collaboratively and knowing whether the process will be reactive or proactive, you and your colleagues are faced with a crucial question prior to beginning problem solving: Is this a problem we should solve? Your

immediate answer to this question might be “Of course—it’s our job!” But that thinking is why professionals sometimes repeatedly discuss the same problem without progress. Any ill-defined problem, proactive or reactive, *must* be solved once it is recognized. Although laudable, it should be balanced by an analysis of the realities of the immediate situation.

Before even considering whether you should undertake problem solving with a colleague or group of colleagues, you should first consider the circumstances from the point of view of your own involvement. For example, you can reflect on whether the problem is one that you should even be involved in solving. If a student’s parent is dissatisfied with the remedial reading services delivered by the reading specialist, whether your time should be spent in interactions about the issue is questionable. Another consideration is whether a *collaborative* approach to problem solving is indicated. If you are an occupational therapist meeting with a group of teachers to develop fine-motor activities for students in inclusive classrooms, you are likely to provide technical assistance and use a somewhat directive style. Because you have the expertise that others need to access, this may be more efficient and effective than collaboratively problem solving.

After you consider your own role in the problem-solving situation, you can turn your attention to factors that affect problem solving with colleagues. The following are questions to ask yourself as you encounter a problem that you and others are being asked to resolve.

1. Are the persons who have responsibility and resources for addressing the problem committed to resolving it?
2. What might happen if nothing were done to resolve the problem?
3. Are adequate time and resources available to resolve the problem?
4. Does the problem merit the effort and resources required to make significant change?

Combined, the answers to these questions can help you decide whether undertaking collaborative problem solving is warranted. In some cases, the information will lead you to an affirmative decision: Perhaps you are not familiar enough with the situation to make judgments about the impact of not addressing the problem. Or perhaps the individuals involved have expressed a strong commitment to tackling the problem. On the other hand, sometimes the answers to these questions lead you to a negative decision. Perhaps the people who would be key in addressing the problem do not have adequate time to devote to it. Or perhaps the problem—although affecting a student, a program, or some other aspect of the school setting—is beyond the control of the people interested in addressing it and therefore not a constructive use of staff time. For example, a student problem may be the direct result of a family issue, and the best strategy might be referring the family to the appropriate social agency.

The problem-solving situation described at the beginning of this chapter is one that meets the criteria for shared problem solving: The participants seem committed to addressing the matter, not addressing Willie’s behavior is likely to lead to further discipline issues, time and resources apparently are available, and overall, the problem seems to merit an intervention. If Willie’s behavior difficulties had been ascribed to a change in medication, the need for group problem solving would have been diminished—a referral to his pediatrician would have been an immediate step to take. In *Putting Ideas into Practice*, other suggestions are outlined for what to do when interpersonal problem solving does not seem justified.

In addition to enabling you to assess the feasibility of problem solving, these preliminary questions also help you assess the possibility of collaborating to problem solve. The questions can alert you to participants’ beliefs that there are probably many “right” solutions for this or any problem and that group problem solving and decision making are the preferred approaches for this situation.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

When Problem Solving Is Not the Best Approach

What should you do if a problem is not appropriate for you and your colleagues to address? The following are options you might consider:

- In some cases, group members should try to reconceptualize the problem so that it becomes appropriate for them to address. For example, instead of focusing on the difficulty of implementing inclusive practices without additional staff members, a group might examine how to prioritize in-class services given the current resources.
- Changing some of the members of the problem-solving group might be helpful. Perhaps the reason the problem was not considered appropriate was because of specific member perceptions. Often, it can be helpful to bring in someone who can view the situation with a “fresh eye”—that is, without extensive background knowledge that might be shaping others’ opinions.
- If an issue is significant, but not worth the time of a problem-solving team, one member might take responsibility for following up on the situation. For example, if Willie, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, received a change in medication, the case might be an example of this type of situation.
- By having one person keep in touch with the parent as the medication is adjusted, time is saved but important information is available if needed by the team.
- If a problem is not appropriate for a team, it might be because directive or supervisory action is needed as opposed to a collaborative process. When this occurs, the problem should be referred to the principal or another administrator. Examples of problems in this arena include scheduling, teachers’ reluctance to work together in a classroom, and strong concerns expressed by a parent about a particular teacher.
- If problem-solving team members table a problem situation, a group member should keep a record of the action. That individual can then prompt the group to review the situation periodically. This might occur when a group of teachers meets as a grade-level or middle school team—in other words, when formal record keeping might not be typical.
- Occasionally, a problem situation needs to be brought to the attention of a professional or group outside the problem-solving team. For example, if a student does not get adequate clothing at home, a social services group might be able to help.

Because your judgment about whether to problem solve is based on preliminary information, throughout problem solving you should continually reassess the appropriateness of your decision. At any point in the process, you may find that a key participant has lost commitment to solving the problem, that the problem is no longer within the control of the persons addressing it, or that the problem is no longer significant. If any of these situations occurs, you may want to reconsider your initial decision to address it, or at least realistically assess the potential for meaningfully resolving the problem. One way to be sure that you have the information necessary to make such decisions is to use technology throughout problem solving, the topic of E-Partnerships, so that you have documentation of what has been accomplished that can be shared by team members to inform their next steps.

Response to Intervention: A Special Type of Problem Solving

You might be wondering why, among the examples already presented in this chapter, response to intervention (RTI) has not been mentioned. That is because RTI is a special type of problem solving. Specifically, RTI is a type of problem solving that is called *technical*; and



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Technology to Facilitate Problem Solving

Are you using technology to enhance group problem solving? Many options are available, from those that rely on relatively sophisticated systems to those that are available in most schools. Here are several examples.

- Webcams can greatly simplify problem solving when participants are not located in physical proximity. If you need to meet with a parent who cannot physically come to school or a representative from another school or agency, web conferencing may be a possibility. Such options are attractive when everyone has access to the necessary technology and when distance creates dilemmas, as in rural areas or even urban areas where traffic can create difficulty in scheduling face-to-face interactions.
- Does your school have SMART Board™ technology? If so, this computer-based display system can enhance problem solving by enabling you to easily display the identified problem for all participants, list ideas generated during brainstorming, summarize information regarding criteria for evaluating those solutions, and outline the specific tasks and responsibilities related to implementing a solution. You also can keep a copy of the documentation you create.
- If your collaborative problem solving involves creating documents, presentations, or charts, consider using Google™ Docs (www.documents.google.com). After logging in using your Gmail account, you can upload files (or even entire folders) related to your work. You then can share the documents with other participants, and they can edit and save new versions. The advantage over e-mail is that a single copy of a document can be worked on by everyone, instead of each professional having a copy and those copies then having to be integrated. One example of using this tool would be if you were developing a survey that you planned to use with all the teachers and other staff members at your school concerning ways to increase parent involvement.

although some of the information contained in this chapter applies to it, some of the ideas do not. For example, all the complexities of problem solving in a group versus in isolation are valid for RTI as is the influence of your own cultural background on the beliefs you bring to the RTI process. However, asking questions such as those just described about whether persons are committed to addressing the problem simply is not valid: If a student's data indicate she is not succeeding, problem solving must occur. In addition, RTI systems typically have a prescribed set of solutions (e.g., a particular remedial reading program offered four days per week for 40 minutes for 16 weeks), and so aspects of problem solving discussed later in this chapter, including brainstorming, might not be applicable. The chart in Putting Ideas into Practice highlights these and other similarities and differences between general interpersonal problem solving and the technical problem-solving approach of RTI.

Steps in Interpersonal Problem Solving

Once you and your colleagues have determined that you can and should address a given problem and that necessary conditions are in place for successful collaborative problem solving, you are ready to begin the problem-solving process. The steps for interpersonal problem solving have been described by many authors (e.g., Bahr et al., 2006; Kampwirth & Powers, 2012), and although the steps seem straightforward, their complexity lies in skillful implementation (Arslan, 2010; Staw, 2004).



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Response to Intervention: Technical Problem Solving

Response to intervention is an example of a very specialized type of problem solving that occurs in schools. This chart demonstrates how it is in some ways similar

to but in many ways different from the broader creative problem-solving process presented in this chapter.

| Problem-Solving Element | Response to Intervention | General Group Problem Solving |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Problem target | Student | Student, programs, practices, professionals, or other areas of concern |
| Approach | Reactive—Begins when evidence of a gap in achievement or behavior is identified | Proactive or reactive, depending on target |
| Domains of intervention | Generally, reading, math, and/or behavior | Unspecified; determined by the participants |
| Data utilized | Predetermined (e.g., DIBELS, quarterly formative assessments) and generally quantitative | Quantitative and/or qualitative, including perceptions, depending on the problem being addressed |
| Solutions available | Interventions specified in school district procedures (e.g., Reading Mastery) | Any idea generated by participants and not excluded as preposterous or unrealistic |
| Decision-making process | Primarily formulaic and established; analysis of target student data, data from typical peers, and assessment of the existing gap | Any procedure selected by participants (e.g., analysis of success criteria; plus/minus/implications [PMI] analysis) |
| Implementation timeline | Established in district or school policy, often 12 to 20 weeks | Determined by participants based on problem and solution |
| Evaluation of solution effectiveness | Decreasing gap between student achievement/behavior and achievement/behavior of peers | Effectiveness defined by participants in the process prior to implementation |
| Strategy if solution is effective | Implement a less intensive, prescribed intervention | Conclude problem-solving process or maintain implementation |
| Strategy if solution is not effective | Implement more intensive, prescribed intervention and/or refer for special education services | Review each step of the problem-solving process to determine the point at which a breakdown might have occurred; begin process again from that point |

The steps of interpersonal problem solving are outlined in Figure 1. Although in real life they rarely occur in the neat and linear fashion implied, if you are thoroughly familiar with the model and can easily and flexibly follow the process, you will be well prepared to make a significant contribution in all the different types of group problem-solving situations

FIGURE 1**A model for interpersonal problem solving.****ANALYZE THE PROBLEM-SOLVING CONTEXT**

- Assess factors related to the likelihood of problem-solving process success.
 - Are participants committed to engaging in group problem solving?
 - What might happen if the problem is not addressed?
 - Does the group have the necessary resources to address the problem, or can they obtain them?
 - Is the problem worth the time and other resources of interpersonal problem solving?
- Decide with others whether interpersonal problem solving is the appropriate approach.

IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

- Share data and other information from multiple sources to describe the problem, keeping participants' points of view in mind.
- Using concrete and specific language, state the problem, preferably as a question.
- Check to be sure that all participants agree with the description of the identified problem.

GENERATE SOLUTIONS

- Use a specific strategy to propose as many solutions as possible for the problem.
- Follow widely accepted rules for encouraging divergent thinking, including these: avoid evaluating solutions, include unusual and unlikely solutions, create a written record of ideas.

EVALUATE POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- Eliminate creative solutions unlikely to be implemented or inappropriate for the problem at hand.
- For student problems, eliminate ideas that are not evidence-based.
- For the remaining solutions, use a specific strategy to consider the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- Select one (or more) of the potential solutions for detailed consideration.
- Make a detailed plan for the solution(s) to be implemented.
- Set a time for reviewing the effectiveness of the solution.

SELECT THE SOLUTION(S)

- Make final selection based on low intrusiveness, feasibility, or preference.

IMPLEMENT THE SOLUTION(S)

- Carry out the solution(s) as planned.
- Monitor for consistency of implementation.

EVALUATE OUTCOMES

- Using data, determine whether the implemented solution has had the desired effect.
- Make a decision to (a) continue implementation; (b) discontinue the solution because the problem is resolved; (c) revise the solution to improve its impact on outcomes; or (d) discontinue the solution because of its ineffectiveness.
- If the solution was not effective, determine the reason and re-enter the problem-solving process at that point (e.g., generating more solutions).
- Having an Internet connection available during problem solving can be very helpful. For example, if a student record indicates an unfamiliar material the student has used, someone can look up details about that material.

that are part of your role. Each problem-solving step is explained in greater detail in the following sections.

Identifying the Problem

When professionals are asked to list the steps for interpersonal problem solving, they nearly always correctly specify at least the first one: identifying the problem. However, in working with educators, we have learned that this step is far more easily recognized than implemented. Problem identification is difficult to accomplish, and often it is made even more so when the problem is ill defined or the number of participants in interpersonal problem solving increases in number or diversity (Adejumo, Duimering, & Zhong, 2008; Olson, Parayitam, & Bao, 2007).

Not surprisingly, research supports the fact that problem identification is the most critical step in problem solving (Jayanthi & Friend, 1992; Newell, 2010) and that the rest of the process can be successful only if the problem is accurately delineated (Brightman, 2002). We also find that phrasing problems as questions is a successful means of encouraging constructive problem identification. Phrasing problems as questions conveys to participants that answers are possible and lends a constructive tone to collaborative problem solving. Problems worded as statements are more likely to be seen as insurmountable. Here are some examples to illustrate this point:

- *Statement:* Roger does not turn in his homework assignments.
Question: How can we increase the rate at which Roger turns in his homework?
- *Statement:* We don't have enough common planning time to effectively plan for our students.
Question: How could we use available time more effectively and efficiently or find some additional time to better plan for our students?

Using question sets creates a climate that fosters interpersonal problem solving. This question-wording approach to stating problems is followed throughout this chapter.

Characteristics of Well-Identified Problems When you identify problems, the issue may be as specific as addressing a student behavior problem (e.g., What strategies could be implemented to increase Jeff's appropriate play with other students on the playground?) or as broad as designing approaches for integrating students with disabilities (e.g., In what ways could we make our high school more inclusive for all students—those with disabilities and English learners, as well as those with other special needs?). Regardless of the scope of the problem, it should have the following characteristics.

An Identifiable Discrepancy Exists Between Current and Desired Situations In interpersonal problem solving, you should state the problem clearly enough so that the discrepancy between the current situation and the desired situation is apparent. For example, in a situation concerning a student's inappropriate classroom behavior, a description of the current conditions might focus on how often, for how long, and at what intensity the behavior is occurring. The desired situation might be the specification of appropriate behavior expectations for the classroom, using the same types of detail. In problem solving concerning a team's intent to plan a staff development program, the current situation might include information regarding the staff's knowledge about a topic of concern, and the desired situation might be a description of the knowledge required for proficiency to be demonstrated.

Participants Share the Perception That the Problem Exists For interpersonal problem solving to occur, all participants need to share recognition of a specific problem (Brightman, 2002; Lam, 2006). This is directly related to the concept of a mutual goal. If a teacher is dissatisfied with the progress a student is making, but the parent believes the progress is adequate, the shared recognition of a discrepancy between the actual and the ideal is missing. This is the situation in the case presented at the beginning of this chapter. Likewise, if a school social worker expresses concern about a student's self-concept, but the teacher does not perceive a problem, the teacher and social worker are unlikely to engage in interpersonal problem solving. Note that, in both examples, a different problem might be mutually identified if the participants discuss further their initial perceptions. But unless this occurs, the problem-solving process is not likely to be successful.

Participants Agree on the Factors That Indicate the Discrepancy Efforts to clarify the factors that define the gap between what is and what should be facilitate clear communication in problem solving. For example, analyze the problem of successfully including a student with a physical disability in a general education class. What is success? Without specifying how to define the current status of the student and the status after some intervention selected on the basis of interpersonal problem solving, there is no way to determine whether successful integration has been accomplished. In this example, success could be indicated by the student's improved attitude toward school, parents' and teachers' perceptions of student attitude, the extent to which other students interact with the student with a disability, the extent to which the student accesses the same general curriculum standards as other students, the student's performance on achievement tests, or any number of additional measures. (You will read about the importance of specifically measuring the factors defining the gap in a later section, "Finalizing Implementation Plans.")

Problem Statements Invite Many Kinds of Solutions The objective of problem identification is to describe in the clearest terms possible the discrepancy between the current and the ideal situations so participants can look for alternative strategies to move from the former to the latter. Therefore, you should avoid unnecessarily narrowing the problem statement (Reiter-Palmon & Ilies, 2004). To clarify this point, analyze this initial problem statement: How can we assist this student who is an English learner to succeed in his math class? Although the problem is as yet incomplete because the gap has not been specified and the factors defining the gap have not been outlined, it is appropriate because it does not attempt to suggest a single strategy that is needed to ensure success. But what if the problem had been stated in this way: How can we assist this student to learn his basic multiplication facts? The latter problem statement includes the assumption that success in math will occur if math facts are learned. If the goal of problem solving is to help a student succeed, it might be appropriate to provide a calculator and work on real-life problem-solving applications. The second problem statement might preclude this possibility from being discussed. The first problem statement is more likely to leave this option available, along with many other strategies that include the student, his peers, his teacher, other professionals, his family, and so on. The range of potential solutions is broadened because the problem statement is free of preferred strategies. In essence, the second problem statement transforms an appropriately ill-defined problem and artificially turns it into a partially defined one.

Suggestions for Identifying the Problem The following strategies can help you and your colleagues identify problems in ways that foster creative and effective thinking during your interpersonal problem-solving efforts.

Think of Problem Identification as Having Both Divergent and Convergent Elements

Too often in schools, problem identification is thought of as primarily a convergent process—that is, one that focuses on rapidly narrowing the problem description. Although this may appear expedient, it is usually neither efficient nor constructive. Instead, we encourage you to think of the early phase of problem identification as a divergent process—that is, as a phase in which the goal is to explore all possible problem definitions so that none is overlooked.

One means of keeping early problem identification divergent is to challenge the assumptions that underlie initial problem statements. For example, this is a problem statement that you might encounter:

- How can we get Josh's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Keller, to participate in the behavior management program that Josh needs?

It has a number of assumptions, including the fact that Josh's parents should be involved in a behavior management program, that Josh truly needs the program, and that “we” should take responsibility for involving Mr. and Mrs. Keller. What would happen if you negated one or several of these assumptions? Perhaps the problem would be reconceptualized as one of these:

1. How can we get Josh's behavior management program to work at school?
2. How can we improve Josh's behavior at school?
3. How could Josh be helped to be more involved in controlling his behavior?

Once underlying assumptions have been challenged and alternative conceptualizations of the problem have been explored, participants in problem solving are more likely to be able to identify the problem's most essential characteristics and use them to formulate a revised problem statement. This reformulation of the problem is convergent. It emphasizes that all participants need to reach agreement on the problem prior to generating solutions for it. However, it is also important to recognize that challenging assumptions may or may not lead to a redefinition of a problem; the point is that it is a strategy for making problem identification deliberate for all participants in the problem-solving process (Papalia-Beradi & Hall, 2007).

Describe the Problem Precisely The need for using concrete and specific language in verbal communication is necessary to learn about communication skills (Nardon, Steers, & Sanchez-Runde, 2011). Importance in problem solving, especially during problem identification, cannot be overstated (e.g., Arslan, 2010; Shelly & Shelly, 2009). For example, in problem solving about a student, you should strive to describe the observable behaviors or performance indicators that characterize the student's academic or social performance. Some teachers might describe a student as “unmotivated.” Your task during problem identification is to clarify what is meant by that descriptor. Does it mean that the student is absent? Does it mean that the student does not complete assigned work? Does it imply that the student sleeps during lectures? Only by specifying the exact behaviors or performance indicators that comprise the meaning of “unmotivated” can the problem be identified clearly.

In addition to using concrete and specific language, when identifying a problem you should confirm that all participants share the same understanding of the particular words used. An example of a term whose definition often is perceived differently by professionals is *inclusion*. For some special services providers, inclusion refers to integrating students

with disabilities into general education classes, primarily for social purposes. For others, it means having students attend classes in which they can complete the academic work. For yet others, inclusion means integrating students physically, instructionally, and socially, regardless of the disability. And for yet others, *inclusion* and *co-teaching* are used as synonyms. Imagine the difficulties that might result if a group of individuals were problem solving on this topic without establishing a shared meaning for the word! What other words might cause confusion in the schools where you work or will work?

Confirm Problems with Multiple Sources of Information One of the dangers in interpersonal problem solving is that participants will rely on a single source of information to identify a problem (Anderson & Lennox, 2009). An important strategy for ensuring successful problem identification is the use of multiple sources. In problems related to students, this might entail completing an observation of the target student in several different school settings; reviewing student data regarding academic achievement, behavior, social skills, or physical needs; and interviewing parents and teachers. In problems related to programs, teams, or services, this might include confirming district policies, reviewing available data (e.g., needs assessment or a staff development activity evaluation), and interviewing key people to ascertain their perceptions.

Problems can be confirmed in many ways. Sometimes data already exist in the form of student records, district surveys, or state guidelines. In other cases, some type of data collection may be needed, whether formal or informal, quantitative or qualitative. The important point is to be certain that the problem identified is an accurate description of what is actually occurring.

Allow Adequate Time for Problem Identification All of the strategies for accurately identifying problems require time. Successful problem identification relies on high-quality interactions between the participants in interpersonal problem solving and opportunities for reflection and analysis. Unfortunately, in many school settings the problem-solving context conveys the message that the problem identification step should be completed as quickly as possible so that the more important task of resolving the problem can begin. Such thinking overlooks one key point: Without adequate time, accurate problem identification is unlikely and problem resolution is improbable.

Our recommendation is to begin systematically to increase the amount of time spent on identifying problems. In some situations, multiple sessions are preferred for this, especially when additional data need to be gathered. Although this approach may seem awkward and time consuming at first, the long-term benefit is far more efficient problem solving. For example, at an initial meeting, a problem experienced by a student could be outlined and team members asked to consider the situation and gather information for the next week's meeting. At the follow-up meeting, the student's problem would be discussed in detail and the problem-solving process implemented.

One strategy for ensuring that adequate time is allowed for problem identification is to use a checklist for exploring various aspects of a problem. For problems related to students, the checklist could include medical factors, instructional items, social areas, family or community factors, and so on. For problems related to programs or services, the checklist might address scheduling, personnel/staffing, district policies, school priorities, professional development needs, and others.

Monitor the Problem-Solving Context At the beginning of this chapter, we noted the importance of monitoring the problem-solving context. This is particularly critical during problem identification. Participants may not have had enough information initially to

determine whether interpersonal problem solving was appropriate for a given situation; such information may emerge during this problem-solving step and lead to a different decision about the appropriateness of problem solving. Likewise, you should monitor to ensure that other participants remain committed to solving the problem once its parameters are set.

Generating Potential Solutions

After you have clearly identified the problem, you are faced with the sometimes daunting task of proposing alternative means for resolving it. The purpose of the second major step of problem solving is to stimulate the creation of the maximum number of potential solutions by the widest range of participants (VanGundy, 2005). This problem-solving step relies heavily on divergent thinking (Litchfield, 2009; Sarmiento & Stahl, 2008).

Suggestions for Generating Potential Solutions Studies of both creative processes and critical problem solving have contributed greatly to knowledge about how to generate potential solutions in interpersonal problem solving (Bahr et al., 2006; Paulus, Kohn, & Arditti, 2011). The following are some solution-generating techniques designed to encourage divergent thinking.

Brainstorming The most familiar strategy for generating potential solutions is *brainstorming*. In brainstorming, the participants in the problem-solving process call out solutions as they think of them, facilitating their own thinking by listening to the ideas generated by others. The rules typically given for brainstorming during interpersonal problem solving include the following:

1. Accept all ideas that are offered without evaluating them.
2. Propose solutions freely, even if they seem impractical.
3. Have someone write down the ideas being generated.
4. “Play” with the ideas to generate even more ideas.

In addition, you may find it helpful to set a time limit for generating solutions; this not only focuses attention on the process but also acknowledges the time constraints of school-based problem solving.

The following example is an illustration of brainstorming in order to resolve a student problem:

A teacher described this situation to colleagues at a problem-solving meeting. He was responsible for Jorge, a student with ADHD who demonstrated significant problems with peer and adult social interactions. The student’s behaviors included pushing other students, teasing and bullying, refusing to respond to requests by teachers and others, and often saying that any problem was someone else’s fault. The teacher was particularly concerned because other students were beginning to say they didn’t like Jorge and they didn’t want him in their groups. After the problem was identified as how to improve Jorge’s social interactions in the classroom, professionals generated these potential solutions:

1. Begin a formal social skills training program.
2. Enlist the assistance of the counselor to meet with Jorge.
3. Teach the other students tolerance.
4. Involve the family in designing an intervention.
5. Videotape Jorge so he can see his behaviors.
6. Videotape the teacher to see whether her responses to the behaviors might be maintaining them.

7. Videotape the entire class to observe students' interactions.
8. Transfer Jorge to another class so he can get a "fresh start."
9. Transfer the teacher so Jorge can get a "fresh start."
10. Ask the counselor to schedule several sessions with the class on respectful interactions and understanding diversity.
11. Ask the principal to visit the class to convey to students the seriousness of the matter.
12. Check the media center for a video on social interactions to use with the class.
13. Set up a class-wide system that rewards respectful interactions.
14. Give bonuses to Jorge for appropriate social interactions.
15. Design some nonthreatening activities and arrange small student groups that include Jorge in order to help him practice social skills.
16. Have a class meeting to discuss the problem.
17. Hire a paraprofessional for the classroom.
18. Ask the district to provide an external consultant to observe the student and classroom and make recommendations.
19. Ask the school psychologist to observe the class and offer input on the seriousness of the problem.
20. Ask the principal to teach the class for several days while the teachers work on a solution.
21. Look for a pattern based on the observations: Is Jorge experiencing more problems after weekends or holidays? Late in the day? During particular subjects (e.g., math) or activities (e.g., independent work time)?
22. Do an Internet search for web sites on addressing social interaction problems and generate additional ideas from that search.

This example demonstrates why brainstorming can be such a powerful technique in problem solving. First, notice that playfulness was an integral part of the brainstorming. For example, no one seriously expects the student or the teacher to transfer for a "fresh start," and yet letting those ideas surface led to the idea of asking the counselor to come to the class to work with students—in essence, a fresh start for the entire class.

Another brainstorming concept illustrated in this example is *chaining*, which is linking a series of ideas through a concept or other stimulus. Ideas 5, 6, and 7 form a chain about using video recording to understand teacher–student and student–student dynamics in the classroom. Ideas 18, 19, and 21 comprise a chain about classroom observation. In fact, the value of chaining in generating potential solutions is a primary reason why all ideas are accepted without evaluation: Each time you stop brainstorming to evaluate an idea, you decrease the likelihood that any participant will chain with the idea just presented.

Brainstorming is the preferred strategy for generating potential solutions in many problem-solving situations. It is best used when you and other participants

- Know each other reasonably well
- Have comparable knowledge about the problem context
- Comprise a relatively small problem-solving group
- Perceive the problem is not particularly emotion laden

When these conditions are not present, for example, when the group is large, members do not know one another, or the problem is particularly complex or sensitive, brainstorming is generally not recommended.

Brainwriting Another strategy for generating potential solutions is brainwriting (Heslin, 2009). In brainwriting, participants individually write three or four potential solutions on a blank sheet of paper. They then place their lists in a pile on the table, from which they select

someone else's list. The ideas on that list are the stimuli for them to generate additional solutions. This exchange of ideas continues until no new ideas are forthcoming. The complete set of ideas is then presented to the group with duplications eliminated. Figure 2 is an example of how brainwriting sheets might look.

Brainwriting is a productive option when open discussion of ideas may not be fruitful. For example, if you are problem solving about an emotionally charged issue, more ideas may be generated through this written process than through one involving verbal exchange. The same principle holds for topics that might be considered sensitive—for example, if teachers are uncertain about their responsibilities for helping students who are English learners. Another reason for choosing brainwriting is simply to change the procedure for generating alternative solutions to encourage a fresh perspective. Finally, brainwriting sometimes is preferred when the problem-solving group is so large that not everyone may have ample opportunity to speak if brainstorming is used.

Nominal Group Technique A third strategy to generate potential solutions combines aspects of brainstorming and brainwriting. In *nominal group technique* (NGT) (Giambatista & Bhappu, 2010; Lago et al., 2007), participants individually generate and write down as many potential solutions as they can. Then the ideas are shared by having one person state one idea, writing it so that all can see the idea. Then the next individual shares one idea. This process of persons sharing single ideas from their lists continues until all alternatives are presented. Individuals may “pass” at any time they are asked to share an idea and they do not have a new option to offer. The total list of ideas is then discussed by participants to identify the most important potential solutions and to begin the process of data reduction or idea combination. Each participant writes each prioritized solution on a separate card (as many as 10 ideas) and then rates each on a scale from very important (a ranking of 5) to unimportant (1). The facilitator gathers these cards and records all participants' votes for the ideas. If a clear pattern of preference for particular ideas emerges, the procedure is complete; if not, additional discussion is held and a second vote is taken.

Nominal group technique is valuable when many people need to participate in generating potential solutions and some means is necessary to ensure their equal opportunity for participation. This might occur when participants traditionally have had unequal status

or when some individuals tend to dominate the group. Although you might not use this technique in day-to-day group problem solving or even when a team meets to discuss options for students struggling to learn, it is a helpful technique with a long history of successful application that you might be able to suggest when, for example, the entire school staff needs to problem solve about an important issue.

Whether you choose to use brainstorming, brainwriting, nominal group technique, or other approaches for generating potential solutions, you should adhere to the rules outlined as part of brainstorming. Sometimes it is tempting to stop to evaluate each idea as it is expressed. But this derails the entire purpose of generating potential solutions; we have seen many problem-solving sessions in which participants never returned to this



James Marshall/The Image Work

When individuals from diverse cultures engage in problem solving, care must be taken that communication is clear and various perspectives are respected and considered in the process.

FIGURE 2 Example of brainwriting activity.

Problem addressed by the school staff: In what ways might we increase the involvement of parents and family members as instructional partners in our school?

ROUND ONE

| Anna | Jennifer | Travis |
|--|--|--|
| 1. Create a parent task force with lots of fanfare. | 1. Talk to J. Montgomery in Columbus Schools, where there is a high level of parent involvement. | 1. Search Internet for ideas on parent involvement. |
| 2. Set up a strong parent volunteer program with T-shirts, rewards, publicity. | | 2. Search Internet for formal programs or successful examples of parent involvement. |

ROUND TWO

| Travis (read Anna's list) | Anna (read Jennifer's list) | Jennifer (read Travis's list) |
|---|--|--|
| 3. Get materials from state department of education on parent involvement. | 2. Send a group of our staff to visit the Columbus program. | 3. Ask parents how they could partner with us electronically. |
| 4. Use our parent organization as a basis. Meet with them? | 3. Pay a parent to lead this effort and contact other parents. | 4. Explore options such as volunteer-staffed homework hotlines or homework e-mail. |
| 5. Ask students how they would like their parents to be involved at school. | 4. Survey parents to ask how they want to be instructional partners. | 5. Open school so parents can access technology. |
| 6. Be careful to work on ideas that will let lots of parents be involved, not just those who can come to school during the day. | | 6. Hold parent invitational coffees to solicit input. |
| | | 7. Find an off-site location to hold parent meetings (place of worship, community center). |

critical step once they began prematurely discussing an idea that had been offered. Worse, participants often seem to be unaware of the fact that they have derailed and of how this is limiting their problem-solving process. Remember, generating as many solutions as possible is the point of this problem-solving step.

Evaluating Potential Solutions

The list of potential solutions you generate serves as the raw material for making the specific decision about which solution to implement. In order to make an informed decision, each of the potential solutions should be evaluated. This involves two problem-solving steps: (1) delineating the positives and negatives of each potential solution and (2) outlining the tasks required to implement each.

Delineating the Positives and Negatives of Each Potential Solution In this evaluative step, your task is to examine each potential solution from a balanced perspective. This entails listing the positive and negative aspects of each intervention or strategy. For example, in the brainstormed list of options for Jorge, the student experiencing social interaction problems, one idea was to video the student. Positive aspects of that solution might include the following:

1. The very presence of the video camera might improve Jorge's interactions because of his concern about being captured on tape acting in an inappropriate manner.
2. A video recording would provide objective evidence of the seriousness of the problem.
3. A video recording would allow teachers and others to demonstrate to Jorge's parents the nature of the problem, hopefully enlisting their support for a planned intervention.

Negative aspects of that solution might include the following:

1. Jorge, as well as other students, might be distracted from their schoolwork by the video equipment.
2. Jorge's behavior might deteriorate as he "performs" for the camera.
3. District policies might prohibit the video recording of any student without explicit parental permission. Obtaining permission for all the students might make the entire project too difficult to implement.

On the basis of these positive and negative aspects of video recording, would you retain it as a potential solution? If your response is no, then you would eliminate it from the list. If your response is yes, then you would leave it on your list of options for further discussion.

This step of weighing advantages and disadvantages should be completed for all the items on the list of potential solutions, although for some the task will be brief. For example, another idea for addressing Jorge's behaviors was for a consultant to teach the class for several days. This was a preposterous idea that emerged from the playful part of brainstorming and then led to the generation of other possible solutions. This cost-prohibitive and unrealistic potential solution and others similar to it should be quickly discarded.

One way of formalizing this process of considering the opportunities and constraints of potential solutions is called Plus/Minus/Implications, or PMI. In a simple chart, each alternative is listed and three columns are used for the PMI. For example, idea 10, asking the counselor to intervene with the class, might include these points:

- *Plus (positive results).* Removes the teacher from the immediate situation, permitting someone with a fresh perspective to get involved.
- *Minus (negative effects).* Counselor has many responsibilities and may have to miss sessions if a crisis occurs.

- *Implications (possible positive or negative outcomes of the action).* Potential increased class understanding of Jorge's behavior and so fewer complaints about it; possibility that Jorge would not gain any understanding from this indirect intervention.

Outlining the Tasks for the Potential Solutions By eliminating some of the potential solutions on the basis of their positive and negative aspects, you shorten considerably the list of potential interventions or strategies. But you probably still have several options, all of which seem possible. The second evaluation step, outlining the tasks that would be required to implement each of the remaining potential solutions, is the means through which these possibilities are further analyzed and narrowed.

Consider another idea from the brainstormed list. One of the potential solutions is to set up a class-wide reward system for appropriate social interactions. What are the tasks that would have to be completed for this option to be implemented? You and your colleagues would have to discuss with Jorge's teacher what type of system might be consistent with classroom expectations already in place. You would need to specify what "appropriate social interactions" are and how they would be observed. Additionally, you would need to specify what the rewards would be and when they would be given. You might decide to discuss alerting parents/families that a system was being implemented, and so a letter of explanation might have to be generated. What other tasks would be required?

After considering the tasks associated with each of the possible solutions, you should decide whether each option still seems feasible. If not, you would discard the idea. If so, you would retain it as a likely solution, and you might select it for implementation.

Selecting the Solution

Following all of the steps described thus far should have led you to a list of several clearly articulated, carefully outlined potential solutions, all appropriate for resolving the problem. Now the task is to select one of these.

This selection can be based on several factors. One consideration may be intrusiveness. If an intervention or strategy will disrupt classroom routines or require changes in staff assignments, it may become the second choice after one that fits into existing routines and staff responsibilities.

Feasibility is another factor that influences selection of solutions. A simple solution that requires no new resources typically is preferable to one that involves separate budget items or inordinate amounts of time. Similarly, a solution that necessitates coordinating multiple activities and people may be less feasible in a busy school setting than one that minimizes the number of implementers.

A third—and admittedly not very systematic—means for selecting among the potential solutions is individual preference. Although all the solutions may be feasible and none particularly intrusive, the people who have the most responsibility for implementing them may simply be more comfortable with one over the others. This consideration should not be ignored; the likelihood of a successful outcome is dependent to some extent on the commitment and attitude of those directly involved in implementation. That is, some teachers might prefer a behavior contract written specifically for a student such as Jorge, whereas others might prefer a class-wide intervention strategy.

As you and your colleagues select a solution, try to identify the basis on which this decision will be made. There are no "correct" criteria for making this judgment, but the criteria used should be clear to all participants. The decision is one that should be made carefully, with a balance between caution and reliance on the collective careful judgment of the group (Hammond, Keeney, & Raiffa, 2006).



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Problem-Solving Practice

Problem solving in groups is often more easily discussed than implemented. Here are a few situations that might occur and some suggestions for addressing them. If you have time, you could set up each of these situations as a role-play.

- At the very beginning of a problem-solving meeting, one teacher says, “We know what the problem is. Let’s spend our time finding a way to solve it.”

Among harried educators, this type of comment is not unusual. However, it can undermine problem-solving success. You might respond using strong communication skills, stating that you are not completely clear on everyone’s perspective and that you would prefer that the group clarify the problem first.

- As ideas are being generated, one participant makes a negative comment about each idea, pulling the conversation into arguments about the merit of each potential solution.

Creativity and chaining are unlikely to occur when brainstorming is interrupted by such discussion. If the problem is chronic, the problem-solving group might want

to review its operating rules prior to the start of a meeting. Brainwriting could also be used as an alternative. A last-resort strategy is to say to the individual, “When we discuss each idea instead of getting a lot of ideas out together, it interferes with my thinking. I’d like to get a long list of ideas and then discuss whether each has value for this situation.”

- It is time to stop the meeting, but no one has agreed to take on responsibility for implementing the planned student intervention. People are packing up their belongings and moving toward the door.

Time problems can be especially acute for group problem solving. If a situation is complex, participants could plan to devote two sessions to the conversation. They might also use e-mail to complete the assignment of responsibilities after the meeting. However, if the issue is that everyone seemed reluctant to take on the responsibility of the selected intervention, participants might need to assess why that is occurring. If the solution is too time consuming to be realistic or too complex to be easily put into place, perhaps another idea should be selected.

Implementing the Solution

Now you have selected the solution to be implemented, and you have addressed challenges such as those outlined in the Putting Ideas into Practice. Because you have done a great deal of planning throughout the problem-solving process, many details of implementation plans have already been identified. However, one more planning phase is required before actual implementation of the intervention or strategy.

Finalizing Implementation Plans In preparation for implementation, your responsibility is to review with other participants the plans that were made during the evaluation step of problem solving. Finalizing these plans typically includes

1. Reviewing and refining detailed plans for implementing the solutions
2. Determining the criteria by which success will be determined
3. Scheduling a time to evaluate the outcome(s) of the applied solution

Detailed Arrangements The selected solution is more likely to be successful if you and your colleagues specify all necessary arrangements and assign all responsibilities. Some professionals find that listing responsibilities is helpful in accomplishing this. In the sample chart in Figure 3, the first column includes the task to be done, the second shows

FIGURE 3**Example of a problem-solving responsibility chart.**

Student: _____ Date: _____

Summary of problem: _____

Solution to be attempted: _____ Evaluation Date: _____

Results: _____

| Action/Task | Person(s) Responsible | Target Completion Date | Expected Outcomes | Outcomes Achieved | Other Comments |
|-------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| | | | | | |

the person responsible, the third includes the target completion date, the fourth addresses the outcomes expected, the fifth includes the outcomes achieved, and the final column contains space for writing comments.

Criteria for Success Yet another issue to clarify in the final planning for implementation is the selection of specific variables and criteria that will be used to determine whether the intervention or strategy has been successful. This is consonant with the definition of the desired situation discussed as part of problem identification. In interventions related to students, this could include specific levels of achievement on designated assessment instruments or a quantifiable improvement in attendance. In strategies that address problems about programs or services, this may require the development of a needs assessment questionnaire or survey and clarification of what outcomes will signal success. The form presented in Figure 3 includes space for specifying criteria.

Scheduled Time for Evaluation of Outcomes A final topic to address prior to implementation is a specific time for assessing the success of the solution (or the outcomes). Inattention to this issue is a mistake we repeatedly observe in interpersonal problem solving in schools. Well-intentioned interventions or strategies sometimes are abandoned because of failure to assess systematically whether they are having the desired impact, and the first step



Michael Dwyer/Alamy

The more complex the problem, the more important a formal interpersonal problem-solving process becomes.

of assessment is arranging for a time to jointly discuss the solution and its effectiveness. This discussion should be heavily based on data, not professionals' perceptions, and it should be intended to make a decision about continuing, revising, or discontinuing the solution.

Carrying Out the Solution After completing all of these steps, you are ready to implement the intervention or strategy. Quite simply, you *do* whatever it is you have planned—whether it is a student intervention concerning academic or social behavior, a new structure for school-wide professional development, a parent involvement project, a beginning Spanish course for teachers who wish to learn the language many of their students use, a co-teaching unit, or a schedule change for the following school year so that collaborative planning time can be arranged. The “what” of implementation is as varied as the problem situations you encounter. During implementation, you rely on the commitment and expertise of those in your problem-solving setting.

Evaluating the Outcome

The evaluation time scheduled during final planning functions as “no-fault insurance” for interpersonal problem solving. During this step of the process, you should determine whether the established goal has been reached. You also determine whether those involved in the problem-solving process are satisfied with the impact of the intervention or strategy.

Depending on what you learn during this problem-solving step, you will plan different courses of action. If the intervention or strategy (that is, the selected solution) is meeting with success, it becomes an opportunity for congratulating each other on that success. In such a case, the decision to be made is whether to continue the intervention or strategy for another defined period of time or, if the problem has been resolved, to terminate it. A school-wide positive behavior management system is an example of a “solution” that might be continued over a long period of time; a student reward system for completing assignments is one that you might choose to phase out.

If the implemented solution is only partially successful, your decisions focus on continuing the intervention for more time to see whether effectiveness will improve, or somehow revising the strategy to make it more successful. You and other participants in the problem-solving process would analyze whether elements of the solution are unsatisfactory and should be modified or whether a longer implementation might make a difference. In either of these situations, another date for feedback would be scheduled so that you can continue to monitor progress.

An unsuccessful outcome is a third possibility in interpersonal problem solving. Although this is much less likely if the steps in the process have been systematically followed, you still may need a set of strategies for addressing this type of frustrating situation.

The first action you and your colleagues should take when faced with an unsuccessful outcome is to analyze the reasons for the lack of success. You might examine the intervention or strategy itself to ascertain whether it was flawed, and consider whether the solution was implemented with fidelity or consistency. You also might consider whether other ideas might have been more effective in solving the problem, whether the problem was accurately identified, and whether the problem-solving context was inappropriate. For example, perhaps you lacked certain information that was important for the success of the solution, or perhaps new information emerged during the problem-solving process that affected implementation. Additional possibilities might also account for the lack of success. In fact, your analysis may include a reexamination of each phase of the problem-solving process in a search for information that would explain what prevented the intervention or strategy from being successful. This procedure of tracking back through problem solving helps all participants to reflect on decisions made and to consider alternatives to them. Some of the questions that might guide this process follow:

- Was the solution implemented consistently? If not, what prevented consistency? Could these factors be successfully addressed?
- Might another solution from those considered by the problem-solving group be implemented instead?
- Should the group generate several new possible solutions and evaluate those as alternatives?
- Has the problem been accurately identified? Is there a common understanding of the problem among all the participants in the process?
- Is this a problem that this group should be attempting to resolve?

After you and your colleagues have identified the source of the breakdown, the next task is to return to the point of the interpersonal problem-solving process at which the difficulty occurred and complete the steps again, correcting it. As implied in the questions presented earlier, this may be as simple as selecting another solution that was previously proposed and evaluated, or it may be as complex as returning to the very beginning of the problem-solving process to reanalyze the context and the presenting problem.

Putting the Problem-Solving Pieces Together

As you review the information you have learned about interpersonal problem solving, you may be thinking that the process seems cumbersome, that in your own experiences in schools no one seems to take such care in implementing each of the problem-solving steps. That often may be true, but here are some points to consider as you work to incorporate this technical information about problem solving into your own professional practice.

- The care with which problem-solving steps are implemented depends to a certain extent on the seriousness of the problem at hand. If a student with complex needs is being discussed, more explicit attention to each step may be warranted. If the problem at hand is well defined or partially defined, or if the matter is not particularly serious—perhaps how to revise an instructional unit to incorporate a specific evidence-based practice prioritized for implementation school wide—a somewhat less formal approach may be successful. It should follow the same steps, but they may occur quickly and without each one being explicitly discussed. One example of a situation in which this may occur is a conversation with a colleague about a student with an attentional problem.
- Even if your colleagues are not accustomed to using a clear problem-solving procedure, you can use your knowledge to guide the process. For example, during problem identification you might comment, “We’re assuming that Matthew does not want to come to school on time, and I’m not convinced that’s a valid assumption.” You are using the strategy of questioning assumptions, but doing so in a way that fits into the conversation in a natural manner. Can you generate ideas for how to work other problem-solving strategies into conversations as they often occur during school problem-solving meetings? Think about the case of Willie that opened this chapter. What questions could you ask to help clarify the problem-solving process that has just started?
- Interpersonal problem solving relies on collaboration, and as noted at the beginning of this chapter, it can be enhanced or constrained when participants are from different cultures. For instance, differences among participants may lead to some tensions. These can result in spirited discussions and the need to clarify terms being used and strategies being suggested. For example, one teacher believes strongly that the student should either be expected to behave or be sent to the office for classroom infractions. Another sees that the behavior is the result of being overwhelmed by classroom demands and that providing structure and clarity is the true problem. In another example, a teacher focuses on helping get a student ready for post-school employment, focusing on self-advocacy and independence, while the parent anticipates that her child will live at home and be supported by the family and is puzzled by the discussions about independence. Similarly, individuals with diverse backgrounds may think very differently about how to solve a problem. The result can be a longer list of potential solutions and a greater variety of ideas. Some individuals might believe that family involvement is essential for success, but others may stress focusing on what can be accomplished at school with or without parent involvement.
- Principals or other administrators who are participants in problem-solving sessions can play a key role in facilitating the process (Rafoth & Foriska, 2006; Taggar & Ellis, 2007). However, each person engaged in the process has a responsibility to help move the problem-solving process effectively through each step. All participants can slow down a discussion when a problem is being identified too quickly or by adding ideas during brainstorming. Likewise, they can help realistically analyze solutions with the most potential and offer to play a part in implementing them.
- Be especially aware of the tendency in some school situations for meetings or conversations to be described as “problem solving” when in fact they are primarily interactions in which one person is trying to convince another person that a particular predetermined solution is the right one. For instance, early in a meeting, someone says, “We all agree that we don’t like the way department meetings are scheduled, so don’t you think we should approach administration about changing how often they are required?” This type of comment suggests that one person has decided what the problem is without adequate discussion, that the same person has a favored way to address the problem, and that an expectation is being set that others will agree with the intervention. This example illustrates the point just made about

the importance of all problem-solving participants contributing to the process. As a professional who understands problem solving, your role should be to speak up, to slow down the process, and to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to participate in all phases of the problem-solving process.

SUMMARY

- Interpersonal or group problem solving is the central process used in collaborative activities, whether you are addressing well-defined, partially defined, or ill-defined problems.
- Prior to undertaking interpersonal problem solving, you should assess the problem-solving context.
- If interpersonal problem solving seems to be appropriate, then these steps are followed: Identify the problem; generate potential solutions; evaluate the potential solutions by outlining the pros and cons of each and then specifying the tasks that would have to be completed to accomplish each; select a solution from those preferred and finalize the implementation plan; implement the solution; and evaluate the outcome of the intervention or strategy.
- On the basis of the outcome, you may decide to continue with the implementation, make adaptations to it, or, if the outcome is unsuccessful, assess at which point the process may have broken down and return to that step in the interpersonal problem-solving process.
- Part of the success in problem solving is incorporating the concepts and strategies into the process as it occurs in day-to-day school applications.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Across nearly all disciplines—whether education, business, health and medicine, or technology—one of the most common pieces of advice concerning problem solving is to slow down at the beginning of the process to be absolutely certain that identification of the problem is accomplished with accuracy and agreement from all participants. Why is this advice so often needed? How important is this advice for educators? What difficulties arise when problems are not identified with accuracy and through consensus?
2. Use the case of Willie from the beginning of this chapter to practice interpersonal problem solving. Assign classmates to take on each of the roles. Try following the problem-solving steps to clarify the problem, generate solutions, and analyze them. Consider adding a twist to the case: Change Willie's age and school level, assign him to a particular cultural group, or add other professionals to the interaction. What does this role-play exercise teach you about implementing the interpersonal problem-solving process?
3. Describe a problem you are addressing in your school or field placement. After generating a list of potential solutions, use the PMI strategy to analyze them. Which ideas generate more plus comments than minus comments? Do any of the implications you list influence your thinking on the solutions' feasibility? Once you have identified three solutions that seem workable, create a chart that specifies all the tasks that would have to be completed to implement each of these remaining options.
4. Consider the concepts that characterize collaboration. Then think about the principles of group problem solving. How does the style of collaboration contribute to the process of interpersonal problem solving? Take each problem-solving step and analyze it using the defining and emergent characteristics of collaboration. How does this help you understand how these essential dimensions of school practice intersect?
5. Think about your responsibilities as a novice educator. What is your role if, during problem solving with a colleague or on a team, you notice that the process is not being followed—perhaps the first problem noted was too quickly accepted as the “correct” problem, or just one or two ideas for addressing the problem were generated, or details for implementation were not discussed? How would you respond in such a situation? Why?

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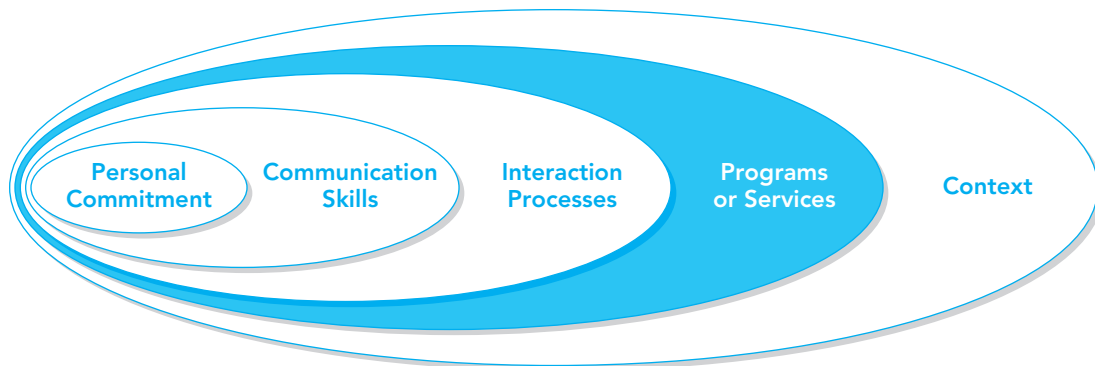
Teams

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Teams



Connections

Collaboration is critical to the success of structures and applications in schools. In this chapter school teams are examined as the first of several school structures and service delivery mechanisms that require collaboration and that are based on the problem-solving process. Co-teaching and consultation are collaborative service delivery options; and partnering with families is yet another option for collaborative efforts to promote success for students with disabilities and other special needs.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Define the term *team* and outline the essential characteristics of teams.
2. Enumerate the stages of team development and provide examples of team interactions during each stage.
3. Compare and contrast multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary teams.
4. Outline three different purposes of student-centered teams and discuss their importance for special services providers.
5. Apply strategies for promoting team effectiveness.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

A Team Decision?

Ms. Liberatore has organized everything needed for the team meeting about to begin—an annual review for Nathan, a student on her caseload who is moving from elementary to middle school. Nathan’s mother and father have indicated that they do not want Nathan to be placed in separate classes for his core academic instruction, but other team members doubt that Nathan can succeed in the general education setting. As the meeting begins, Ms. Liberatore distributes an agenda and makes sure that everyone has been introduced: Mr. Wayte, the principal; Ms. Stokes, the school’s new social worker; Mr. Sebastian, Nathan’s fifth-grade teacher; Ms. Springer, the middle school special education teacher who will be responsible for implementing Nathan’s IEP; Nathan’s parents; and Ms. Esposito, the family’s legal advocate. Mr. Wayte and the others use recent achievement data to stress the strides in achievement that Nathan has made, and they comment on how they will miss him. Nathan’s IEP goals are based on the sixth-grade curriculum, and when a special education setting is recommended for English and math instruction and Nathan’s parents decline, each team member is asked to address this topic. The key points offered by each person are listed in the electronic minutes being taken and projected on the wall. Ms. Liberatore takes notes but does not offer her opinion. By the conclusion of the meeting, the team agrees that Nathan should begin the year in all general education core academic classes, but that a meeting will be held after the first month of school to evaluate this placement decision. The team finishes its work shortly thereafter and all members sign the IEP. With best wishes, the team adjourns. Ms. Liberatore reflects on the meeting and feels a sense of loss at the conclusion of this team’s work for this student. She knows that middle school is more challenging for students like Nathan; departmentalized classes and new groupings of students for each period seem to her to be complexities that he may not be able to manage.

Introduction

You were born into a social group—your family—and you have become increasingly involved in a wider and wider range of groups and affiliations as you have become an adult and a professional. For example, you still are a member of a family group; and you may belong to a neighborhood or community group, sports group, faith-based community, recreational or fitness club, professional association, political party, or civic group. If you were to conduct an inventory of the groups to which you belong, you might be surprised to discover that your participation in these groups accounts for nearly all of your social activities. Although social scientists describe many different types of groups, they identify the three most important types relative to daily interaction as family, friendship, and work groups (Ephross & Vassil, 2005; Lustig & Koester, 2010). The focus of this chapter is on just one of these social groups: work groups or teams.

Team approaches have become increasingly popular structures for addressing a wide range of school matters (e.g., Friend & Cook, 1990, 1997; Rhodes, Stevens, & Hemmings, 2011). Teaming is the most frequently advocated structure for implementing school reform initiatives, as illustrated by continuing attention to site-based management teams, interdisciplinary and grade-level teaching teams, project-based teams, professional development teams, school improvement teams, and so on. Such teams engage in wide-ranging activities, and they make decisions in highly varied areas. For example, they address school improvement planning, curriculum redesign, student achievement goals, school-wide behavioral

interventions, governance, professional development, and resource management. The work of these teams has resulted in changes in such areas as school schedules, curriculum structures, budgeting priorities, school governance, and personnel roles and responsibilities (e.g., Kauffeld, 2006; Kaufman & Ring, 2011; Linan-Thompson, 2009; Sawchuk, 2011). The topics addressed throughout this text are appropriate for the full range of school teams, but in this chapter the focus is on teams that directly benefit students.

Most special educators are familiar with teaming. However, being a leader or a member of a team requires in-depth understanding of teams' characteristics and functioning—topics that increasingly are part of special education professional preparation but often not part of professional preparation for general educators. This chapter, then, is designed to clarify key concepts related to teams and to emphasize their collaborative nature. By carefully studying teams, you will be better prepared to contribute to the effectiveness of teams in your school.

Team Concepts

Special education and related services embraced team approaches for many years before teams were mentioned in federal and state laws. Teams of mental health specialists served the needs of students with emotional disorders long before schools were obligated to educate them (Elliott & Sheridan, 1992; Menninger, 1950; Walker & Schutte, 2005). Similarly, a rich tradition exists of professional teams meeting to discuss and plan for students with mild to moderate disabilities (Armer & Thomas, 1978) and for students with moderate to severe disabilities (Gallivan-Fenlon, 1994; Orelove & Sobsey, 1987). A team approach to assessment and decision making for students with disabilities has been mandated by federal law since the 1975 passage of P.L. 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and this continues today in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The importance of team structures has been emphasized in nearly every area of today's society. Teams have been touted as the unit that accomplishes extraordinary things in all conceivable disciplines including sports, science, emergency response, health and medicine, business, art, schooling, psychology, and counseling (Choi & Pak, 2007; DeChurch & Marks, 2006; Kauffeld, 2006; Qui, Qualls, Bohlmann, & Rupp, 2009). In discussing the wide impact of teams in today's world, Michelle Marks notes, "In an era characterized by technological sophistication and the need for rapid response, collaboration among team members has led to sensational outcomes that could not be accomplished by individuals alone" (2006, p. i).

Countless definitions of the term *team* have been offered by authors in the various disciplines. These definitions generally emphasize individuals from a variety of disciplines and experiences with unique



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Teams must develop and commit to common goals.

expertise getting together in order to reach specific goals through shared problem solving. They also stress the importance of clear and direct communication, interdependence, coordination, and clear procedures as essential features of teams.

Additional conceptualizations of teams that emphasize service delivery have emerged in the literature that addresses education and services for students with disabilities and other diverse learning needs. For example, interactive teaming is described by Correa, Jones, Thomas, and Morsink (2005) as a mutual or reciprocal effort made by groups to provide a student with the best educational program possible. One strength of interactive teaming is its emphasis on effective, comprehensive, and cohesive services derived from the collaborative work, rather than individual efforts, of team members. Other authors have stressed the importance of strong interpersonal relationships and a sense of team cohesion, clarity of team goals, and clearly defined outcomes as being essential to teams (e.g., Beebe & Masterson, 2012; Kozlowski, 2008). Certain definitions specify that the purpose of special services teams is to make decisions about programs for children (McNamara, Rasheed, & Delamatre, 2008; Torres-Rodriguez, Beyard, & Goldstein, 2010); others not only have decision making as their purpose but also include the direct delivery of services (Brandel & Loeb, 2011; Silverman, Hong, & Trepanier-Street, 2010; Snell & Janney, 2005). If all these definitions of teams—from outside the field of education as well as from within—are considered, the following working definition of team can be extracted to serve as a framework for this chapter:

An educational team is a set of interdependent individuals with unique skills and perspectives who interact directly to achieve their mutual goal of providing students with effective educational programs and services.

Characteristics of Teams

This definition and the preceding discussion provide the foundation for understanding teams. This foundation can be clarified further by examining the five characteristics integral to teams:

1. Teams have clearly articulated goals; an educational team's goal is effective service delivery leading to positive student outcomes.
2. Members are aware of their team membership, roles, and responsibilities.
3. Team interactions are regulated by shared norms.
4. Team members are interdependent.
5. Team members have unique skills and perspectives.

Another way of conceptualizing the characteristics of effective teams is an expansion of these characteristics and is summarized in Putting Ideas into Practice.

Clearly Articulated Goal of Effective Service Delivery Having a mutual goal is an essential element of every team definition across the various disciplines. Contemporary concepts of teams in education and related services specify their service delivery focus as the overall goal shared by all members of the team. Whether the team's specific purpose is to study and plan a child's program or to deliver specific services or interventions directly, service delivery is fundamental. From this perspective, teams include those groups (often comprised of some members who will not be working with a student) that make decisions about a student's eligibility for services, as well as co-teaching teams or teacher-parent teams working to implement home and school behavior intervention programs. Maintaining the team's focus on the delivery of services is an important team function (Gable, Mostert, & Tonelson, 2004; Snell & Janney, 2005). This is particularly true when



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

A Checklist for Effective Teamwork

Researchers and theorists have described many characteristics of successful and efficient teams (e.g., Bang, Fuglesang, Ovesen, & Eilertsen, 2010; Ephross & Vassil, 2005; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Consider the teams in which you participate. To what extent is each of the following characteristics descriptive of your teams? What are examples of each concept? What specific actions might you take to help your team reach these important benchmarks?

- Team members are committed to their work.
- The team understands its purpose and establishes clear goals.
- Team members differentiate their roles and responsibilities.
- The team works to ensure regular information sharing using appropriate communication skills.
- Members recognize that teamwork requires effort and recognize when they are being productive and should proceed versus when they are not being productive and should reconsider their work.
- Members value each other's unique expertise, experiences, perspectives, and ideas.
- The team uses a wide variety of interaction processes and strategies depending on the issue that it is addressing and its context.
- Team members can examine differences in their opinions openly and use those differences as a tool in their discussions. That is, differences are seen as valued parts of teaming.
- Team members are comfortable in assuming differing roles that help the team accomplish its work; for example, they may function as leader, follower, consensus builder, or information seeker. They may occasionally take on each other's roles.
- Members recognize the team's limits within the context of the school or agency.

disagreements occur or when team members are distracted from the central task. Research has produced convincing evidence that teams that develop and pursue clearly articulated goals have greater success than those without such goals (Bang et al., 2010; Crown, 2007).

Awareness of Team Membership, Roles, and Responsibilities Individuals cannot be part of a team unless they perceive themselves to be so. Extending this notion, team members also must be perceived by others as forming a team—a situation that clearly existed in the case study presented at the beginning of this chapter. Although this characteristic of teams may seem almost too fundamental to mention, it is an issue in many schools. For example, a group of professionals in diverse roles is assigned to a staff development team to help colleagues become more proficient at using inclusive practices. The group functions effectively in its initial planning meetings, but then two members express surprise that they are supposed to coordinate their efforts and participate with others in order to function as a clearly delineated work group that provides ongoing staff development. The two members thought they were included initially only to give advice and share their expertise. Their actions (or lack thereof) reflect this confusion. Thus, just knowing that someone is a team member and that others are, too, is a critical first step of teaming.

Membership for teams involved in making program decisions and delivering services to students is not as straightforward as it may at first appear. Changes and lack of clarity regarding membership sometimes make this a complex matter. For example, the role of a paraprofessional may be extremely important to a team, and that individual may be regarded as a member of a specific team. Yet schedule conflicts and time-limited work schedules may make it impossible for the paraprofessional to participate as an active and full member

of the team, especially in meetings and decision making that occur outside of the paraprofessional's scheduled work hours. In such situations, the paraprofessional may not be able to function as a team member despite the best intentions of the team. Similarly, a school psychologist who serves several schools may not be able to attend some decision-making meetings and, thus, may not act as a fully integrated team member. Another particular challenge—transient membership—occurs as the caseloads or school assignments of professionals change or as students are transferred to new programs or classes. The dynamic nature of school teams requires members to take special care in monitoring team membership and clarifying changes to it (Downing, 2008; Tonso, Jung, & Colombo, 2006).

Regulation of Interactions by Shared Norms A team is an organized system of individuals whose behavior is regulated by a common set of norms or values (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Rice, Davidson, Dannenhoffer, & Gay, 2007). For example, teams may have both formal as well as unspoken but clear expectations for members about arriving on time, using lay language when parents are present, articulating and resolving conflict among members, and so on. In addition, regular and direct interaction among team members is central to the concept of a team (Choi & Pak, 2007; Correa et al., 2005; Sargeant, Loney, & Murphy, 2008). Shared norms regarding how interactions occur, what acceptable team member behavior is, and many other agreed-on norms facilitate effective team functioning (Harris & Sherblom, 2011; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008).

When teams are first established, they need to devote considerable time to establishing these norms. This is sometimes a deliberate effort that results in written ground rules. More often, though, this process is less formal, even though it also may be quite deliberate. In these cases, team members establish and learn norms through their successful and unsuccessful interactions with one another. When team membership changes frequently, an already noted characteristic of many school teams, challenges may be encountered in maintaining team norms (Downing, 1999, 2008). In fact, as team membership changes, team norms likewise may change, and all members may need to review and recommit to them.

Interdependence of Team Members Members of teams are highly interdependent because their organizational roles are functionally interrelated (Harris & Sherblom, 2011; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). That is, an event that affects one member is likely to affect the rest of the team, and conversely team actions will affect each individual member. For example, if one team member is suddenly called into a conference that conflicts with a team meeting, the remaining members may not be able to make important decisions because of that person's absence. Interdependence extends to the delivery of services as well (Mellin et al., 2010). Consider a situation in which a team develops an integrated service plan that calls for one person to supply a communication device and teach a student to use it. A second team member is to design class discussions in which the student can use the communication device to develop better language skills. If the first person is unable to secure the needed device, it will be most difficult for the second team member to proceed with the planned language instruction. The effectiveness of one team member has direct impact on the effectiveness of another, and perhaps on that of the entire team.

Unique Skills and Perspectives of Team Members Concepts and definitions of teams in the context of service delivery emphasize the unique and diverse skills and abilities of team members as central characteristics. For example, the entire premise of an IEP team is that each of the professionals participating—special education and general education teachers, administrators, related services personnel, and parents—brings unique and valuable perspectives that enhance planning (Weaver, Rosen, Salas, Baum, & King, 2010). A similar perspective is offered for teams that exist to support preschool children with disabilities (Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liborion, & Bae, 2004). Of particular importance is the perspective

brought to a team by parents, a perspective that is essential for effective team outcomes (Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010). Regardless of the purpose or size of a team, the unique skills, expertise, or perspectives of team members create a rich context for creating effective programs and services (Dettmer, Dyck, & Thurston, 2005; Walker & Schutte, 2005).

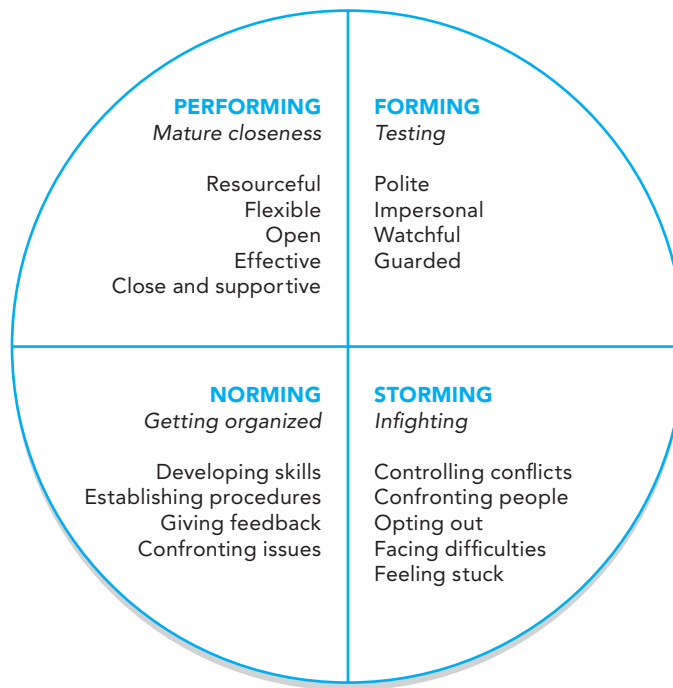
Developmental Stages for Teams

Professionals who study teams generally agree that teams progress through developmental stages in their formation and operation (Ephross & Vassil, 2005; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Teams have life cycles that progress from infancy to maturity regardless of their purposes or the tasks they must perform. Stages in the development of a team were described some time ago by Tuckman (1965) as forming, storming, norming, and performing. The notion of adjourning was later added (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977). The characteristics of teams at each of these stages are summarized in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

The life cycle of teams

More than four decades ago, Tuckman (1965) identified four stages that teams go through as members learn about each other and learn to work together to accomplish their goals—forming, storming, norming, and performing—with the following summary of how teams might function during each of these stages. Most professionals who have studied teams agree that teams are most effective when members spend time discussing their function, member roles, and their procedures rather than addressing only the work at hand.



Source: Richardson, J. (2005). Originally in Bruce W. Tuckman, "Developmental sequence in small groups," *Psychological Bulletin*, 63 (1965): 384–399. Copyright American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

Understanding the stages through which teams progress can help you appreciate how teams function. When a team initially comes together, its members do not fully understand their task; and they are not clear about how they will relate to each other and to the team leader, if there is one. During the initial stage, forming, members tend to want clear directions from others; and they are polite in their efforts to learn about each other and their purpose for becoming a team. They work to create social and task-oriented structures that will guide their interactions. The storming stage demonstrates that a group can become a team by resolving issues of leadership, procedures, and purpose. During the storming stage, members are more comfortable with one another and communicate freely—they recognize that creating consensus on an issue is often difficult and can lead to conflict instead. They may challenge the team's leadership and disagree with one another as they vie for influence and strive to gain a shared understanding of their task and how to approach it. Having weathered the storm, reconciled differences, and agreed on a course of action, a team enters the norming stage. It is at this stage that members begin to build trust as they redefine and establish roles, relationships, and procedures for accomplishing their work and handling conflicts. Norming is necessary for teams to establish their patterns of functioning that have to do with record keeping, seating arrangements, communication patterns, and so on. What is most important at this stage is that a team culture develops and gives the team its unique identity. The performing stage occurs when a team's development levels off and the team can focus its primary efforts on performing in order to accomplish its goals. Finally, a team progresses to adjourning when its tasks are complete. For many special services teams, this latter stage may occur only when a school year ends or a student leaves the school.

The developmental stages detail the stages that naturally occur during team development. With the knowledge of these stages, team members can take steps to improve their capacity to function in a manner that enhances the contributions of individual members and the effectiveness of the team. Team members may take actions to manage their relationships during team development. Some suggestions for doing so are presented in *Putting Ideas into Practice*.

Other suggestions for helping team development can be derived from research conducted by Sargeant et al. (2008). These researchers examined the development of interprofessional teams of health care providers and identified five major characteristics of successful teams: Team members (1) understand and respect each other's roles; (2) appreciate that teamwork requires commitment and effort; (3) have expertise in their assigned roles; (4) possess the ability to provide specialized services to an individual; and (5) communicate information about that service to others. Central to all of these characteristics is that the subjects in the study identified communication as "the big thing." This emphasis on communication stressed two specific conditions. First, the team members need to be available to other members, and second, they have the ability to communicate appropriately. Specific communication skills identified were the abilities both to listen to others and also to express one's own perspective respectfully and assertively, if necessary. Ms. Liberatore, in the opening case, did not demonstrate this communication skill. She listened to her colleagues and to Nathan's parents; but instead of sharing her perspective, she remained silent. In that manner, she did not contribute to the group's effectiveness; and by not raising her concerns about Nathan's transition to middle school, she did not serve Nathan as well as she might have.

Rationale for and Benefits of Teams

The primary rationale for a team approach to decision making and service delivery lies in its efficiency and potential for high-quality outcomes. If you accept the premise that educating students with special needs requires the participation of professionals with diverse and specialized skills, the challenge of coordinating the information and intervention



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Managing Relationships During the Stages of Team Development

The developmental stages of teams describe what groups do when left to their own devices as they organize themselves. Kozlowski, Gully, Nason, and Smith (1999) have advanced a theory that suggests individuals should work at fitting into the team and understanding their role in its mission. By doing this, a socialization process evolves; and individuals develop interpersonal knowledge of their teammates, a team orientation, and a normative structure. Next, they develop task knowledge, mastery, and self-regulation. At that point, their roles become routine, and they can focus their energies on the team and its continuous improvement.

Basically, Kozlowski and his colleagues recommend that individuals manage their relationships during team development stages so that the teams may develop in the fashion described. Four suggestions for relationship management are useful to keep in mind.

Become the Model for Valuing the Other Point of View

Analyze your own personal strengths, and tell your team how you think these bring value to the group. Also acknowledge that you realize that each person's greatest weakness is the reverse side of his or her greatest strength. Get the group members to talk about how they depend on people with whom they work to have strengths that complement each other's strengths, as well as compensate for corresponding weaknesses. Encourage the team members to identify the work styles of each coworker.

Talk Frequently About the Organizational Value of Different Points of View

If examples are raised often enough, team members will begin to notice that they actually do depend on and benefit from each other's differences. In time, the members of a truly effective group will begin to celebrate differences.

Never Discuss a Process Problem Unless All of the People Involved Are Present

Involving all of the team members in developing the solution to an organizational or team problem is time consuming, but it is actually quite efficient. If people discuss a problem when a significant member is not in the room, the language often becomes harsh and judgmental. Only part of the story emerges, and it is nearly impossible to predict the effectiveness or consequences of a solution developed in the absence of everyone who will be affected by it. Trying to develop solutions in this way leads to many false "starts" and may require repeated interactions to try to adjust the course. These false starts waste both time and goodwill and can be avoided by ensuring that all members are involved in problem solving.

When All Team Members Are Present, Be Sure to Communicate Effectively

It is important to convene all members and encourage them to work together to be sure the description of the problem is objective and all of the contributing factors are addressed at the same time. There is a better chance that team members will leave the meeting with a shared understanding of what needs to be done and the likely consequences of the proposed solution. Ideally, each stakeholder will also leave with a sense that, together, the team can solve this and other problems.

It takes time, but within months team members will find that the time spent managing their working relationships has had a very big payoff. While the leader or even the full team has focused attention on how people work together, the team has also been getting a lot more work done and has been doing it well.

efforts of the individual members of the group becomes clear. Having all professionals meet to plan and discuss implementation of programs is far more efficient than any kind of individual reporting could be. Moreover, the process of group communication might lead to decisions and changes in perspectives that would not be possible in one-to-one communication. Implementing a coordinated and coherent program is more efficient and, happily, more effective when all professionals involved are in communication with each other.

Parthasarathy (2006) indicated that by working alone in the current system, individual contributors can improve system performance 5 to 15 percent of the time. A team approach may well be needed to achieve the other 85 to 95 percent of the needed improvements, as they require changing the system itself—a task that cannot be accomplished by an individual acting in isolation.

Given that teams are an application of collaboration, all the benefits and outcomes to be realized through collaboration also are possible through teamwork. Specifically, all the emergent characteristics of collaboration could become outcomes of effective teaming. Team members can be expected to develop a high level of interpersonal trust and, thus, more respect for one another. As trust grows, so, too, does the sense of community among team members.

Drawbacks of Teams

Reviewing the stages of team development, organizing a team meeting in your school, or having had unsuccessful group experiences in school or in other aspects of your life might lead you to recognize that, while powerful and responsible for “sensational outcomes,” teams are not always the best approach. Team approaches are time consuming, and time is a very precious commodity in schools and other service settings. In addition to not having enough time, team members might not have the same time available as a result of their complex and varied schedules.

The following questions are useful in deciding whether to use a team approach:

1. Is a single discipline or person sufficient to resolve a problem, or is the problem so complex as to require individuals with different expertise?
2. Are there experts available with the needed knowledge and skills to help develop a solution to the complex problem?
3. Are those who will be most affected by the decision part of the team so that they can buy into the solution and thus facilitate implementation?
4. Are the physical requirements of the task such that team implementation is required?
5. Is the problem or the focus of the solution so large as to require change in an entire process rather than just one element?
6. Is the issue so broad or new that several minds are needed?

Despite the challenges and identified drawbacks to using team approaches, the potential for positive results is too great to ignore. The enumeration of challenges is given only to help the reader identify those, hopefully limited, areas in which teaming may not be necessary.

Team Models

Many models for effective teaming have been articulated (Correa et al., 2005; Howard, Williams, & Lepper, 2010; Villa et al., 2008). In this section, you’ll learn about several models for student-centered teams that can be distinguished along two dimensions. The first distinguishing dimension is the team’s configuration, or disciplinary working relationship, which can be identified as multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary. The second dimension is the team’s purpose or function. Three types of student-centered teams are considered along this dimension:

- Special education teams that make decisions about students’ referral to, assessment for, and determination of eligibility for programs in special education

- Student-centered problem-solving teams that address issues related to students experiencing academic, behavioral, social, or emotional problems
- Service delivery teams of persons involved in the coordinated design, implementation, and evaluation of students' programs

Any given team may be classified along both the disciplinary or functional dimensions simultaneously. For example, a service delivery team may be multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary in its approach. A special education decision-making team or a problem-solving team may be similarly classified.

Disciplinary Relationships on Teams

The composition of student-centered teams varies according to the team's purposes and the student's needs. Team members may be direct service providers or support staff; students also may be team members (Mason, McGahee-Kovac, & Johnson, 2004; Walter & Petr, 2011). Direct service providers are parents and staff members who work directly with students on a regular basis. Support staff generally are professionals who provide indirect services such as teacher consultation, technical assistance, or staff development on a periodic basis. They may work directly with children or their families, but this is usually on a restricted or limited basis. Support staff members may include psychologists, occupational therapists, augmentative communication specialists, or other professionals whose services are not required on an intensive basis.

The nature of the working relationships among team members of different disciplines is essential for understanding teams. Three models have evolved over the years that occur along a continuum from little to great collaboration. These are multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary teams. The order in which these approaches developed in the field parallels their order on a collaboration continuum, as you can see by reviewing the summary in Putting Ideas into Practice.

Multidisciplinary Teams Although case-centered teams have a long history in special education and related fields, the passage of P.L. 94-142 in 1975 established as a federal requirement that multidisciplinary teams—including school professionals, parents, and sometimes the student—implement evaluation and placement procedures for students with disabilities. With this mandate and its reiteration in the IDEA, multidisciplinary assessment and group decision making regarding classification, placement, and the development of an individualized education program (IEP) became formal elements of special education procedures. The term *multidisciplinary* was applied to such teams to convey that a number of perspectives and disciplines were represented within them.

The rationale for multidisciplinary special education teams is that a group decision provides safeguards against individual errors in judgment and ensures greater adherence to the law's due process requirements. Research in behavioral sciences supports this use of teams to improve decision-making effectiveness and quality (Choi & Pak, 2007; Mueller, 2009b). Benefits include the following: (1) A group offers a greater amount and wider range of knowledge and experience; (2) a greater number of possible approaches to resolve a problem exists within a group; (3) participation in decision making increases acceptance of the decision and "buy in" needed for implementation; and (4) problem solving in a group involves greater communication and understanding of the decision.

Multidisciplinary teams that make decisions about eligibility and programs may well enjoy these benefits, but such teams operate under some limitations as well. The professionals from different disciplines who make up the team maintain independence from one another as they perform their related duties. Representatives of each discipline contribute



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Three Models of Team Interaction

Team models may be distinguished by the nature of the working relationships among professionals from different disciplines—a notion that applies in the medical, science, communications, entertainment, and untold other

fields as well as in education. As you review the following summary, think about how the goals, procedures, and outcomes for each type of team might differ. When might each team model be most appropriate in your work?

| Component | Multidisciplinary | Interdisciplinary | Transdisciplinary |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|
| Philosophy of team interaction | Members acknowledge importance of contributions from several disciplines; services remain independent. | Members share responsibility for services among disciplines; individuals are primarily responsible for specific disciplines. | Members commit to teach, learn, and work across disciplines in planning and providing integrated services. |
| Role of the family | Families typically meet with team members separately by discipline. | Families may meet with the team; individual team members report by discipline. | Families are members of the team and determine their own team roles. |
| Lines of communication | Members exchange information about independent work; may not see themselves as part of a team. | Teams meet regularly for case conferences and consultations. | Teams meet regularly for information sharing, learning across disciplines, consultation, and team building. |
| Assessment process | Members conduct assessments by discipline and in separate environments. | Members conduct assessments by discipline and share results. | Members participate in collaborative assessment, observing and recording across disciplines. |
| Service plan development | Members develop separate plans for intervention within their discipline. | Goals are developed by discipline and shared with the team to form a single service plan. | Staff and family members develop a plan together based on family concerns, resources, and priorities. |
| Service plan implementation | Members implement their plans separately by discipline. | Members implement the parts of the plan for which their discipline is responsible; coordinated services are an expectation. | Members share responsibility and accountability for how the plan is implemented by the team. |

unique information and perspectives, but their efforts are not deliberately coordinated or integrated. For example, members of multidisciplinary teams individually provide specialized and discrete services directly to students whose complex needs require intervention from professionals representing different disciplines. In this model, the professionals function independently, work toward their individual treatment goals, and do not consistently share or coordinate information. They communicate simply to exchange information about

their independent work; and their model might best be viewed as a patchwork quilt in which different—sometimes contrasting—pieces (of information) are placed together, but not necessarily with a blended, unified result. As this description illustrates, true collaboration in a multidisciplinary team model often is minimal, if it occurs at all. An example might be when the team decides that a student's placement is the general education classroom and the special education teacher delivers services there; but at the same time the speech/language therapist, occupational therapist, and counselor—without coordination of their individual intervention plans—pull the same student out of the classroom to deliver those services.

Interdisciplinary Teams Unlike the multidisciplinary teams, interdisciplinary teams coordinate the interventions they deliver to students. In fact, coordination of information and services is the primary goal shared by members of interdisciplinary teams (Havnes, 2009; Shapiro & Sayers, 2003). In this model, as in the multidisciplinary model, professionals from different disciplines perform related, specialized assessments and services independent of each other. However, they jointly develop goals for the student and communicate more regularly than do members of multidisciplinary teams. Their ongoing sharing of information is instrumental in their efforts to develop and work toward their collective intervention goals and shared service plan. By doing this, they are more likely to develop and pursue interventions that support and complement one another. This helps to ensure that the services they provide students are not duplicated and that gaps do not occur. The coordination of services is such a central feature of interdisciplinary models that a specific role for managing such a team (sometimes called a service coordinator) may be established (Cook, Klein, & Chen, 2012; Howard et al., 2010; Jung & Baird, 2003).

Transdisciplinary Teams Transdisciplinary approaches to teaming are the most recent to have evolved in special education and related services, and they also are the most collaborative of all the team models. In these teams, professionals perform their related tasks interactively and, through a process known as role release, individual team members may share or blend their roles, at least in part. One or two team members may be responsible for delivering all interventions to a student, while other team members remain available to assist and advise the primary interventionists through consultation, training, and feedback (Howard et al., 2010). Members with different disciplinary expertise share their skills and engage in mutual training and staff development in order to make this possible.

Early intervention and preschool programs for young children often are implemented by transdisciplinary teams (Cook et al., 2012). This is considered to be a holistic approach in which primary interventionists implement strategies common to their own disciplines as well as some that are derived from other disciplines. For example, a preschool teacher may implement specific language development interventions designed and modeled by the speech/language specialist. After receiving some training and technical assistance from the physical therapist, the teacher also may implement certain positioning routines. It is not uncommon for the teacher, who is a generalist in this situation, to feel insecure about his or her skills in the specialized language and physical therapy areas. The in-depth knowledge of the specialists is essential for designing interventions and assisting primary interventionists to implement them. However, the generalist orientation of the teacher actually may be best suited to providing services for the whole child.

The true integration of services and their delivery by a teacher has clear benefits, but it has challenges as well. The challenges may be overcome by appropriate supervision and support of the teacher by the interventionists from other disciplines. A matter that should remain in the forefront of your thinking, however, is the appropriate extent and limitations of your professional preparation and role. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) articulates the standards of practice for the profession, and a tenet of Professional and



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Successful Teamwork: Facilitators and Barriers

There are many descriptions of effective teams and successful teamwork, often derived from qualitative studies using team members' reports of satisfaction with the process. Yet, research has been lacking on the factors that promote collaboration that results in successful outcomes and on the factors that act as barriers to such collaboration and its resulting outcomes. Choi and Pak (2007) conducted an extensive review of the literature on teams composed of members representing multiple disciplines working in health care fields (reviewing multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary literature from 1982 to 2007). In examining the relationship between team processes and outcomes, they identified teamwork factors that promote successful outcomes and those that act as barriers to successful outcomes.

Facilitators of team success include:

- Good selection of members with diverse areas of expertise
- Members with willingness to participate and to assume different roles
- Members with maturity, flexibility, and personal commitment
- Physical proximity of team members
- Institutional support, changes in the workplace, and incentives
- Clarity of common goal and shared vision
- Effective communication, including the use of constructive comments among members
- The Internet and e-mail as a supporting platform

Barriers to team success include:

- Narrow range in areas of expertise among members
- Poor structure and ground rules for team functioning
- Lack of predetermined measures to evaluate success of outcomes
- Lack of guidelines for determining how successes are recognized
- Insufficient time or resources for implementing the task
- Institutional constraints and unequal power/influence among members
- Conflicts among members lacking skills to resolve them
- Lack of, or ineffective, communication

Ethical Practice is that “special educators practice within their professional knowledge and skills and seek appropriate external support and consultation whenever needed” (CEC, 2012). In concert with this principle, special educators should be vigilant in monitoring their practice to ensure that the interventions are appropriate to their level and area of professional preparation. In monitoring and managing your role, collaboration with other specialists on the team is critical.

Clearly the role relationships among members from different disciplines vary across multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary teams. Yet there are some elements that are seen in successful teams regardless of the model they represent. Specifically, research has demonstrated that certain factors facilitate while others impede team success. These factors are summarized in A Basis in Research.

Student-Centered Teams The second dimension in which teams can vary is their purpose or function. The teams that we address in this text are those that exist on behalf of students, or student-centered teams, and they are the focus of this discussion. In this section, we consider three types of student-centered teams that differ in their primary purpose. The first we refer to as *instructional teams*, as they focus on delivery of instruction or other interventions, and they are found in both general and special education.



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Using the Internet to Collaborate with Colleagues

Throughout the technology features of this text, you will find many ideas for sharing information and interacting with colleagues electronically. Blogs, wikis, electronic bulletin boards, and even chat rooms add new options to the traditional telephone and e-mail strategies. Among the options that can facilitate your communication and organization are several collaboration and project management tools. These are generally preferable to the often disorganized mailbox clutter we experience with e-mail messages flying back and forth.

Shared documents are a useful way to share ideas and work with others on the same document—whether it is a spreadsheet, narrative text, lesson plan, or planning timeline. Imagine that your team is planning a series of activities that will be conducted in different classrooms during an upcoming instructional unit. One person can create a spreadsheet or planning form, post it through one of the online tools, and then send invitations to the other team members to review and contribute to the document. Once they have been invited, all team members can access the same document and enter their information. As you are entering your plans for the activities to be used in your English class, you can view those planned by the science, social studies, and math teachers. You will see conflicts or “holes” in the plan, and you can then send an e-mail message or

a bulletin board posting to alert the others to the concern. Each teacher can then review the developing plan and make modifications or suggest changes for others. The same flexibility and idea sharing can enhance communication and planning in student-centered problem-solving and special education teams. There are untold and significant advantages of this approach over sending multiple copies of documents with tracked changes or messages embedded in colored fonts or capitalized letters. Variations of the shared documents also allow invitees to view material and use the site to coordinate activities. For example a calendar can be posted for joint use, and invitees can schedule their meetings or appointments on one document.

There are several free or low-cost options for this approach to organizing work and projects online. Key features to look for include the ability to have multiple people view and/or contribute to the document, limit access to only invited participants, and designate which users have viewing rights and which have editing rights. Among these free and low-cost services are the following:

| | | |
|-------------|----------|------------|
| Google Docs | Zoho | Socialtext |
| BlueTie | Basecamp | iTeamwork |

The second type, *student-centered problem-solving teams*, also focuses on students and addresses their educational needs, but these typically exist within general education. The third type, called *special education teams*, makes decisions about eligibility for and delivery of special education and related services. These teams differ from the others in their purpose, their basis in law, and their accountability. All three types are described and illustrated here.

As you consider these variations in teams, consider, too, the ideas presented in E-Partnerships and how they can enhance the sharing of information and ideas among team members.

Instructional Teams A number of team structures exist to plan and deliver education and related services to students. You may be familiar with examples such as teaching teams in middle school, grade-level teams in elementary school, and co-teaching teams at any level. These teams focus largely on planning for, implementing, and evaluating the ongoing, often daily, delivery of educational services to one or more students. They are used in

general education classrooms regardless of whether the class includes students with disabilities. These team approaches have all been found to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities; and co-teaching, as defined here, is most frequently associated with this goal (Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Spencer, 2005).

Co-Teaching Teams In special education, co-teaching is an increasingly common service delivery arrangement in which special education teachers and general education teachers share planning and classroom instructional responsibilities in inclusive settings (Cook & Friend, 2010). In this model, general education and special education teachers engage in team planning and in jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students.

Middle School Teams In many middle schools, interdisciplinary teams of teachers, each with an area of expertise in a core academic area, instruct the same group of students. This team model produces a wide range of benefits when there is strong team leadership, adequate planning time, and a commitment to the interdisciplinary team concept, demonstrated through team members' willingness to use planning time for team participation. Specifically, middle school teaching teams can increase the effectiveness of instruction, provide teachers with a much needed support system, help ensure that students' problems are recognized and solved, and improve students' work and attitudes.

Grade-Level Teams A grade-level team structure is very similar to that of the middle school teaching team, even though it has not received wide attention in the professional literature. Grade-level or departmental teams are constructed around members with highly similar interests and expertise (i.e., the grade level or subject matter they teach). The nature of the decisions these groups make may focus on curriculum, division of labor for instructional preparation, schedule, budget, or other matters of group interest or concern. If a special educator can regularly attend such meetings to facilitate discussions about student needs, these teams can serve a function similar to that of pre-referral teams.

Student-Centered Problem-Solving Teams These are building-level problem-solving teams designed to assist teachers in accommodating students with behavioral or learning difficulties in their general education classrooms. These teams evolved, in part, to augment the formal referral and evaluation processes in special education, although as advocates for collaborative work we would argue that they were greatly needed as supports for teachers and students. Generally known as pre-referral teams or pre-referral intervention teams, they were meant to provide pre-referral screening for special education services and immediate support for teachers trying to develop appropriate in-class interventions. Moreover, in many cases the support these teams provided eliminated the need for a formal referral. Over the past several years, the focus for such teams has shifted to preventive problem solving, collegial support for responding to challenging student needs, and opportunities for professionals to problem solve about students—whether or not they have IEPs (Lhospital & Gregory, 2009; Papalia-Berardi & Hall, 2007; Phillippo & Stone, 2006; Young & Gaughan, 2010). This shift is reflected in alternative names for pre-referral teams—for example, intervention assistance teams (IATs), student support teams, instructional consultation teams, and student assistance teams.

Some student-centered teams in these categories have been formed specifically to address the unique needs of students. For example, some teams may be created to address particular student behaviors (e.g., Mellin et al., 2010; Stormont, Lewis, Beckner, & Beckner, 2005). Yet others exist for the purpose of providing ongoing support for students who pose particular challenges to teachers. Although evidence supports the effectiveness

of intervention or prevention teams, limited comparative data have established the efficacy of specific team approaches (McNamara et al., 2008; Young & Gaughan, 2010).

In this section we briefly describe two well-known pre-referral team models—teacher assistance teams and intervention assistance teams—in order to illustrate the logic, philosophy, and practices reflected in these early models. We then reference several other models and discuss the more contemporary model, response to intervention (RTI). Although each of these models can be found in its “pure” form in some schools, from the beginning the models were implemented in very diverse and idiosyncratic ways as educators modified and adjusted them to accommodate the specific ecology of their schools and their own perspectives. As you consider these descriptions, you will no doubt think about the adjustments or simple “tweaks” you have made or would make to implement one of the models in your setting.

Teacher Assistance Teams Teacher assistance teams (TATs) served as one of the earliest examples of a pre-referral intervention assistance model. As originally developed by Chalfant, Pysh, and Moultrie (1979), this teacher support system or peer problem-solving group consists of three elected teachers and the referring teacher. Parents are invited to become members and, when appropriate, specialists also are invited; the latter, however, are not regular members. The team provides teachers with the support needed to accommodate students with learning and behavior disorders in their classrooms. The referring teacher defines the concern regarding the student, designs alternative interventions jointly with other TAT members, and then selects the preferred intervention. The TAT functions on the assumption that general education teachers have the knowledge and talent individually or jointly to resolve a great number of the challenges they encounter in teaching students with learning and behavior problems. Teacher assistance teams reflect a belief in the superiority of group decision making that underlies the multidisciplinary team structure, but they differ from these special education teams by not including specialists as team members unless a specialist’s unique expertise is needed for a particular situation. The TAT either provides direct assistance to the referring teacher or helps the teacher obtain follow-up from special education personnel. This model continues to have strong proponents and is appreciated by teachers who derive support from the process.

Intervention Assistance Teams Another variation of a student-centered problem-solving team is the intervention assistance team (IAT). This team is premised on the belief that solving problems about students experiencing behavioral and learning problems should enlist all of the resources available at a school, including those of special education and related service staff (Ortiz, Wilkinson, Robertson-Courtney, & Kushner, 2006; Whitten & Dieker, 1995). The IAT model uses procedures similar to those of the TAT: The classroom teacher refers a student, team members gather additional information, and they all meet to consider the information as they engage in a team problem-solving process. The primary difference between IATs and TATs is that the IAT approach goes beyond general education teachers and includes a special education teacher and often other specialists such as a speech/language therapist, counselor, school psychologist, and social worker.

Intervention assistance teams have been found to be effective in meeting student needs and providing support to teachers (Burns, 1999; Whitten & Dieker, 1995), especially when administrative support for the process is strong. Other authors report that IATs can produce successful results, but that success certainly is not guaranteed (e.g., McNamara et al., 2008; Papalia-Berardi & Hall, 2007).

Other Intervention Teams Teacher assistance teams and intervention assistance teams are just two of many models being used in schools to assist general education teachers

whose students are struggling academically or behaviorally. For example, instructional consultation teams (Gravois & Rosenfeld, 2006; Ortiz et al., 2006) rely on a team of specialists dividing the responsibility for meeting individually with teachers in order to gather data and attempt to resolve student concerns without the necessity and potentially intimidating process of convening the entire team. In instances in which this consultative service is not sufficient, a more traditional data-based team process is implemented. Similarly, pre-referral intervention teams (Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985) use a multidisciplinary, building-based team and combine teacher consultant and team formats in a six-stage process: (1) request for consultation, (2) consultation, (3) observation by the consultant, (4) conference to share information and decide whether to proceed to special education referral, (5) special education referral, and, as needed, (6) special education planning and placement.

Response to Intervention (RTI) Teams The 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) explicitly permits the use of information about students' response to the instruction they are provided to be used in the identification of students with learning disabilities. Statutory permission to use RTI was intended to decrease the dependence on the potential-achievement discrepancy in identification. As a result, states and school districts are moving from the various pre-referral models to some form of RTI. This initial purpose of RTI has expanded from screening and identification of students with learning disabilities to a broader emphasis on improving instructional decision making for all students (Sugai & Horner, 2009). It is noteworthy that the RTI models are as diverse and idiosyncratic as the pre-referral approaches they sometimes replace (Hoover & Love, 2011).

There are several approaches to RTI. The two most commonly promoted are the problem-solving approach (Heartland AREA Education Agency, 2003; Ikeda, Rahn-Blakeslee, Niebling, Gustafson, Allison, & Stumme, 2007) and the standard protocol (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Vaughn, 2008; Torgesen et al., 2001). The standard protocol approach is technical problem solving and is compared to general interpersonal problem solving. Whereas that comparison points to the greater breadth allowed by interpersonal problem solving, here we wish to call attention to several features of the standard protocol approach that have been summarized by Hoover and Love (2011) and characterize key principles of RTI.

Figure 2 contrasts traditional pre-referral problem solving with standard protocol RTI. But what about the second common form of RTI, problem solving? Because the use of the term *problem solving* may confound the issue, we refer to this as *RTI problem solving*. RTI problem solving incorporates many of the main elements of RTI, including an emphasis on monitoring the student's response to research-based instruction and intervention.

In all variations of RTI, collaboration and teamwork are critical (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Whether it is with a leadership team at the school level (Sugai & Horner, 2009), for integrating the Tier 1 and Tier 2 instruction (Hoover & Love, 2011), for a student-focused problem-solving team (Ikeda et al., 2007), or for planning implementation with administrators (Mahdavi & Beebe-Frankenberger, 2009), collaboration is an essential element.

Regardless of the specific approach taken, these student-centered teams are effective only to the extent that general education teachers perceive their value and seek from them support and ideas for addressing student concerns. When teachers perceive these teams negatively or when biases exist in their functioning, serious problems may occur. General educators' perceptions of pre-referral teams are addressed in A Basis in Research.

Special Education Teams Special education teams exist to make decisions about a student's eligibility for special education and the nature of the services to be provided

FIGURE 2

Comparison of elements in response to intervention model and pre-referral problem-solving approaches.

| Element | RTI Model | Pre-referral Approaches |
|------------------------|--|--|
| Screening | School-wide screening in academics as often as three times annually | No school-wide screening in academics or behavior |
| Student identification | Universal screening is conducted to identify early students who are struggling in school | Students are identified and the subject of pre-referral interventions after recognizable struggles |
| Core instruction | Core instruction in general education must be research based | General education instruction may not be research based |
| Tiers of instruction | Provides three tiers of instruction: core, supplemental, and intensive | Typically provides two types of instruction: pre-referral and special education (intensive) |
| Assessment decision | Focuses on quality of instruction and student response | Focuses on disorders in the student |

(Rothstein & Johnson, 2010; Yell 2012). Following appropriate systematic interventions and assessments, the team is convened for the purpose of determining a student's eligibility for special education and related services and, if appropriate, developing an individualized education program (IEP). The team also has responsibility for planning, monitoring, and evaluating the provision of the special services (Lewis & Doorlag, 2011). This type of team is often referred to as "the IEP team." The specific composition, structure, and procedures of such a team vary across states, but the team must operate in a manner consistent with the requirements put forth in IDEA and highlighted in Putting Ideas into Practice. Members of these teams usually include a parent, a representative of the school district who is knowledgeable about special and general education services, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, a psychologist, and other specialists whose expertise may be needed to evaluate the student and plan programs to meet his or her unique needs. Whenever appropriate, the student about whom the decisions are being made also should be included. These teams gather and review information about referred students and determine whether additional assessment is needed. If an assessment is carried out, the team reviews the results and determines (1) whether the student has a disability that interferes with his or her ability to progress in the general curriculum; (2) whether the student requires special education and related services; (3) what goals and, in some cases, objectives should be set to address the student's unique needs; and (4) which setting is most appropriate for the student's education. If problems arise in implementing the student's program, the team reconvenes to consider strategies for resolving them.

These teams reconvene annually to review the student's progress and make adjustments in the individualized program. The team meeting you read about at the beginning of this chapter represented the work of this type of team. In that case, Ms. Liberatore and probably others were uncomfortable with the team's decision, and so they established a follow-up date for another team meeting to consider Nathan's progress in his new placement.



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

General Education Teachers and Pre-referral Teaming

Pre-referral teams play a crucial role in addressing concerns of general education teachers regarding student academic achievement and behavior, and the effectiveness of these teams may have a profound influence on the effectiveness of special education referral procedures. Slonski-Fowler and Truscott (2004) examined the perceptions of 12 experienced elementary teachers (kindergarten through grade 4) as they brought a total of 27 students to the pre-referral intervention teams in their two suburban elementary schools. In this ethnographic study, the authors used interviews, observations at team meetings, and classroom observations, examining these data sets for patterns and themes. Eight of the teachers were strongly negative about the team process, and the researchers found three consistent themes among the teachers' perceptions that led to a withdrawal from the process:

1. Teachers sometimes perceived that their input was devalued or ignored by the team.
2. The intervention strategies suggested by team members tended to be limited and lacked clarity, and teachers believed it was just an exercise in documentation in preparation for referral for special education.
3. Teams demonstrated little accountability for strategy implementation or outcomes.

While acknowledging the limitations of this type of study—for example, lack of generalizability—Slonski-Fowler and Truscott concluded that many of the problems they found were related to collaboration: valuing team members' (i.e., general education teachers') input, effective communication among team members, and shared responsibility for the implementation of ideas and a sense of accountability for outcomes. What other collaboration factors do you think might have influenced these teams' functioning?

The rationale for special education teams, including the presumed superiority of decisions made by these teams, was discussed earlier in this chapter. However, even though multidisciplinary special education teams were envisioned as having the potential to enhance school-based services to students with disabilities, early research demonstrated many problems with such teams. For example, research conducted shortly after the passage of P.L. 94-142 revealed that team functioning was adversely affected by (1) use of nonsystematic approaches to collecting and analyzing diagnostic information, (2) minimal participation by parents or general educators on the teams, (3) use of a loosely constructed decision-making/planning process, (4) lack of interdisciplinary collaboration and trust, (5) territoriality, (6) ambiguous role definition and accountability, and (7) lack of experience and training for professionals to work together (Fenton, Yoshida, Maxwell, & Kaufman, 1979; Kaiser & Woodman, 1985; Pfeiffer, 1981).

As the field recognized the shortcomings of the multidisciplinary team concept, various analyses of its implementation were conducted, and proposals for improving team functioning were advanced. Among the problems most frequently addressed was the lack of preparation in effective collaboration and team participation skills (Havnes, 2009; Mueller, 2009b). Fortunately, professional preparation programs and materials this text have begun to respond to this professional need.

In the earlier discussion of team characteristics and in the previous considerations about team effectiveness, the importance of stable membership and regular interactions among team members is apparent. How does a team develop shared norms, shared service delivery goals, and a sense of interdependence among members if the membership varies and if meetings are infrequent? This is the case for IEP teams. Some members may



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

IDEA Guidelines for IEP Team Composition

IDEA (P.L. 108-446) provides guidelines for the composition of multidisciplinary teams. Public Law 108-446, 20 uses §1414(d)(B)(e). A provision that had not been part of earlier versions of this law outlines conditions under which certain team members may be excused from the team meeting. Considering the definition of a team and the characteristics presented thus far, what do you think the impact of excusing a team member might be?

Team Membership

The term *individualized education program team* or *IEP team* means a group of individuals composed of—

- i. the parents of a child with a disability;
- ii. not less than one regular education teacher of such child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment);
- iii. not less than one special education teacher, or where appropriate, not less than one special education provider of such child;
- iv. a representative of the local educational agency who—
 - a. is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities;
 - b. is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and
 - c. is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the local educational agency;

- v. an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results, who may be a member of the team described in clauses (ii) through (vi);
- vi. at the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate; and
- vii. whenever appropriate, the child with a disability.

Team Meeting Attendance

- i. Attendance not necessary.—A member of the IEP team shall not be required to attend an IEP meeting, in whole or in part, if the parent of a child with a disability and the local educational agency agree that the attendance of such member is not necessary because the member's area of the curriculum or related services is not being modified or discussed in the meeting.
- ii. Excusal.—A member of the IEP team may be excused from attending an IEP meeting, in whole or in part, when the meeting involves a modification to or discussion of the member's area of the curriculum or related services, if—
 - a. the parent and the local educational agency consent to the excusal; and
 - b. the member submits, in writing to the parent and the IEP team, input into the development of the IEP prior to the meeting.

participate in several IEP teams, but the general educator, parents, and student certainly change. It is also likely that other members may change based on the students under discussion. The instability of membership and infrequency of meetings challenge the concept of the IEP team as a true team as defined in this chapter.

Another serious barrier to effective special education teams may stem from the fact that they are mandatory. This characteristic has led to a narrow definition of the team's purpose and functioning, preventing such teams from appropriately clarifying and expanding their influence. Without a clearly understood foundation, teams lack the grounding on which to build a more integrated structure. The result is that many multidisciplinary teams serve mostly as gatekeepers of special education rather than as workgroups that provide optimal instructional program designs and support for all of the students they consider.

Effectiveness of Teams

The effectiveness of a team can be evaluated in terms of its goal attainment because, as noted earlier, the team's purpose for existence is to achieve this goal. That is, teams are only as effective as they are able to demonstrate by improving services and outcomes for students with disabilities and other special needs.

Another criterion for judging team effectiveness is output. Many consider that a team is effective when its productive output meets or exceeds the organization's standards of quality and quantity (Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Qin, Johnson, & Johnson, 1995). In schools, teams are considered effective when their output meets the standards of their profession and the expectations of the various constituencies, including administrators, parents, and peers. The output might be the number of interventions that prevent unnecessary referrals to special education, the number of students on whose behalf problem solving occurs, or the number of students for whom in-class, evidence-based intervention is successful.

However, most teams' effectiveness also is judged on other factors. Some scholars suggest that the ultimate effectiveness of a team depends on (1) the level of effort team members devote to the team's task, (2) the level of knowledge and skills within the team, and (3) the strategies the team uses to accomplish its work (Haythornthwaite, 2006; Qiu et al., 2009). Further, these factors are affected by the design of the task, the composition of the team, and the appropriateness of the strategies used by the team. Additional criteria for judging team effectiveness are derived from the studies of multidisciplinary teams mentioned earlier. In combination, these factors and design elements are critical in developing effective teams, and we include them in the characteristics of effective teams described next.

The Team's Goals Are Clear

The goals of an effective team are clearly understood by all team members. Mutual goals represent the team's primary purposes, but each activity the team pursues to achieve its purposes will also have goals. Members of effective teams clearly understand both the central goals and the activity or process goals, and their actions as a team reflect this understanding.

Members' Needs Are Met

In effective teams, the personal needs of team members are satisfied more than frustrated by the group experience. The interpersonal needs of being included, respected, and valued can be met through active participation in a team. Conversely, teams in schools are not likely to be effective in achieving their goals if the team prevents individuals from meeting these interpersonal needs or attaining their individual professional goals. Satisfying members' needs, however, does not mean that individuals always "get their way." When members' needs differ, resistance and conflict may occur.

Members Have Individual Accountability

Team members should clearly understand their roles as well as those of other members. Earlier, we identified role interdependence as a defining characteristic of teams because work teams are constructed with members who have complementary and interconnected parts to play, such as data gathering, recording, or record keeping. Each member has



Michael Newman/PhotoEdit

Effective teams have an agenda for their meetings, and they keep careful public notes in order to encourage clear communication and to build a sense of purpose.

responsibility for something the group needs in order to function. The structure of an effective team provides for individual accountability that increases the tendency of team members to devote adequate effort to meeting their team responsibilities.

Group Processes Maintain the Team

The group processes used in effective teams serve to increase, or at least maintain, the team's capacity to work collaboratively on future endeavors. Specifically, these group processes ensure that leadership and participation are distributed throughout the team. Leadership skills, such as initiating discussion, setting standards, encouraging, summarizing, and gaining consensus, can be used by different members of the team. A team that wants to make maximum use of the diverse experience, expertise, and information of its members distributes leadership roles. Team members recognize that leadership is necessarily a shared responsibility and assume that role when necessary to support the functioning of the group.

Team Members Have Leadership Skills

A considerable literature documents the need for effective team leadership (e.g., Chen & Rybak, 2004; Johnson & Johnson, 2009; Kauffeld, 2006). Most authorities agree that all team members need to have leadership skills, even when they are not assuming the formal role of team leader. Leadership skills are those that help the group function effectively and progress toward its goals. From that perspective, it should be clear that a group member other than the designated leader may take an active role in facilitating the team's progress.

By offering a summary of positions stated by others, asking clarifying questions, or simply helping to ensure that all team members have the opportunity to participate in discussion and decision making, a team member demonstrates leadership and helps the team progress.

Collaboration and Teams

The first part of this chapter examined variations in school teams, distinguishing among many models for teaming based on a continuum of collaboration among members from different disciplines or perspectives. You learned that multidisciplinary teams have the least collaboration, interdisciplinary teams function with more, and transdisciplinary teams have the most collaboration of the three models. Collaboration is not limited to these team structures; it can be applied broadly to all types of teams.

The distinctions between the elements of a collaborative style and those of a team structure are not always completely clear, nor do they necessarily need to be. This is partly because the defining characteristics of a team are those that define the relationship among team members, just as the defining characteristics of collaboration are those that define the relationship among participants in any collaborative activity. Moreover, the defining characteristics of a team are very similar to those of collaboration because it is the elements of collaboration that distinguish a team from a loosely constructed work group or committee.

Overall, all effective teams are characterized by strong collaborative relationships among members (Laframboise, Epanchin, Colucci, & Hocutt, 2004; Sargeant et al., 2008; White, Vanc, & Stafford, 2010). Team members share parity, a common goal, responsibility for decision making, and accountability for outcomes. Teams have common norms and shared beliefs and values, and team members trust one another. Collaboration's emergent characteristic of interdependence is a critical defining trait of a team. The relationship between teams and collaboration is simple: An effective team is a collaborative work group (Bang et al., 2010; Beebe & Masterson, 2012). However, when some members dominate interactions or insist on pursuing only their own agenda, or when members defer to someone perceived as having the greatest power, a group referred to as a "team" is not functioning in a collaborative way, regardless of its label.

SUMMARY

- An educational team is a set of interdependent individuals with unique skills and perspectives who interact directly to achieve their mutual goal of providing students with effective educational programs and services.
- The defining characteristics of educational teams include a shared goal of effective service delivery, awareness of team membership, shared norms, interdependence, and members with diverse skills and perspectives.
- Teams have cycles and progress through stages as they mature. Development begins with being polite and seeking direction and purpose; this is followed by interactions to establish leadership and purpose; purpose leads to establishing roles, procedures, and norms; and development culminates in performing the tasks needed to meet team goals.
- Teaming in schools is often described by the working relationship among people from different disciplines, including multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary team models.

- Three types of student-centered teams include (1) instructional teams that focus on the delivery of instruction or other interventions; (2) student-centered problem solving teams; and (3) special education teams that make decisions about student

referral, assessment, and eligibility for special education and related services

- Features of effective teams include clear goals, individual accountability, shared responsibility, functional group processes, and leadership.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. List the teams of which you are a member. Which of these teams are most effective? What are the characteristics of the effective and ineffective teams you have experienced?
2. Identify a team experience that you have had or observed that was not as successful as you would have liked it to be. Analyze the situation and describe how factors related to collaboration may have contributed to the problems.
3. Think about the differences among multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary teams. How might each type of team be the most effective in schools? Create the profile of a student with a disability or other special needs with your classmates, or find an already prepared case study. What might each type of team accomplish on behalf of this student? What is the rationale for your responses?
4. Recall a team meeting you recently attended. Prepare a description of member roles, and then outline behaviors that were helpful to the team's functioning and those that were not. What formal and informal roles did you observe team members assuming? If you were providing feedback to team members, what would be the three most important points you would make?
5. Imagine holding a team meeting with five of your colleagues, one of whom is not a particularly good listener or "team player." What ground rules would you want to establish to make the meeting productive? What steps would you take in advance to maximize the potential for success in this meeting?

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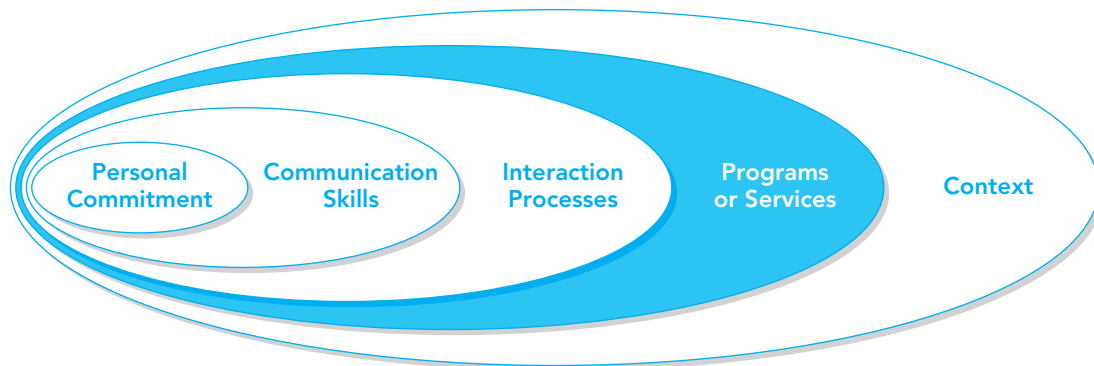
Co-Teaching

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Bob Daemmrich/Alamy

Co-Teaching



Connections

Teaming is a collaborative practice enhanced when professionals use effective interpersonal communication skills and problem solving. In this chapter, we discuss an example of collaboration in action—co-teaching. Co-teaching is a rapidly evolving approach for providing strategies as part of response to intervention, special education instruction for students with disabilities, speech/language services, and support for students who are English learners. It is a unique blending of professional expertise in which a general educator and a special educator, or another specialist, jointly instruct pupils in a single general education classroom. Co-teaching's growth can be attributed to the requirements of federal laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, formerly called No Child Left Behind or NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as well as other school reform initiatives that raise expectations for achievement for students with special needs and generally mandate their access to and success in the same curriculum as their peers. To introduce you to co-teaching, we outline basic concepts that characterize it, describe several specific ways to co-teach that take advantage of both professionals' skills, relate co-teaching to collaboration, raise topics that co-teachers should discuss, and present some pragmatic issues that can affect co-teaching effectiveness.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Define co-teaching and distinguish it from related concepts (for example, inclusion, team teaching).
2. Articulate a rationale for using co-teaching to effectively educate diverse groups of learners.
3. Identify six approaches for implementing co-teaching, describe examples and variations of each, and indicate when each might be instructionally appropriate.
4. Explain the relationship between co-teaching and collaboration.
5. Analyze professional dilemmas that may arise in co-teaching and strategies for addressing those dilemmas.
6. Discuss the most common administrative and logistical issues that can foster or constrain co-teaching.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

A Co-Teaching Quandary

Ms. Shea, the principal at Jefferson Middle School, is concerned about Rita Smithson and George Ruiz, two early career educators assigned to co-teach this year. Although they began slowly, Ms. Shea thought that they had worked out a way to make their instruction more intensive and responsive to student needs. Recently, though, Ms. Smithson reported that Mr. Ruiz will not let her take an active role during instruction. She said that she feels like a classroom assistant, and she is worried that's what students think, too. Mr. Ruiz, in a separate conversation, expressed frustration that Ms. Smithson does not know the math curriculum well enough to lead instruction, noting that he sometimes has to correct errors she makes that confuse students. Ms. Shea overheard him tell a colleague that co-teaching is like having a student teacher.

Co-teaching has become an important service option at Jefferson Middle School, and achievement data strongly support its use for diverse learners; so Ms. Shea is determined to address this situation. She has scheduled a meeting with both teachers for tomorrow. She believes they have all the skills to make their co-teaching successful, if they can just work on their relationship in the classroom. As she plans for the meeting, she is thinking about how to go about discussing this sensitive topic with them.

Introduction

Co-teaching has intuitive appeal. It makes tremendous sense to partner general education teachers with special educators, teachers of English learners, speech/language therapists, or other specialists in order to create instructional options that can effectively meet diverse student needs. Further, co-teaching has the potential to accomplish that positive result while at the same time avoiding several critical problems that accompany pullout or separate setting service models, including instruction by teachers who may not have academic background in some subject areas, the stigma of going to a special education or another special class, fragmentation of educational services delivered in multiple settings, and academic and social isolation (e.g., Basso & McCoy, 2009; Friend, 2008a).

In many instances, co-teaching is living up to its promise and is tremendously successful, improving student outcomes and resulting in strongly positive professional and parent perceptions. However, as noted in the case study highlighting Ms. Smithson and Mr. Ruiz, co-teaching—like many other aspects of collaborative practice—can be complicated. The purposes of this chapter are to outline critical concepts related to co-teaching, demonstrate exemplary co-teaching practice, and explore its logistics and complexities. The goal is to explore the potential of co-teaching while at the same time acknowledging the very real factors that may constrain its implementation.

Co-Teaching Concepts

As co-teaching has become a popular service delivery model, its use has encompassed students with a variety of needs. In some locales, co-teaching is an option only for students with mild or moderate disabilities (e.g., Conderman, Bresnahan, & Pedersen, 2009). In others, it is a means of supporting students with significant disabilities as well (Browder & Spooner, 2006). In addition, co-teaching is part of response to intervention, sometimes

used as a Tier 1 or Tier 2 intervention for reading or mathematics (e.g., Murawski & Hughes, 2009). It is being implemented to support English learners (e.g., Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010), to provide speech/language therapy (Cirrin et al., 2010), and even as a contemporary model for student teaching (e.g., Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008). Across all these applications there are similarities: *Co-teaching*, as we discuss it here, is a service delivery option for providing specialized services to students with disabilities or other special needs while they remain in their general education classes. Co-teaching occurs when two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, blended group of students, primarily in a single physical space (Friend, 2008a).

Defining Characteristics of Co-Teaching

Teacher teams have used various structures for joint instructional efforts for more than six decades at elementary, middle school, and high school levels (e.g., Chang & Lee, 2010; Crespin, 1971; Trump, 1966; Warwick, 1971). Most of those teams, however, consisted of two general education teachers who pooled their class groups and their instructional efforts in a model generally called *team teaching*. Only more recently has the use of teacher partnerships been seen as a mechanism for providing services to students with special needs by partnering teachers with different types of expertise (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Loiacono & Valenti, 2010; McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). In fact, research on co-teaching is still emerging, a topic discussed in A Basis in Research.

An appropriate starting point for learning about co-teaching is understanding its defining characteristics. It is these key traits that underscore co-teaching's uniqueness as a collaborative service delivery option.

Two or More Professionals with Different Primary Areas of Expertise Co-teaching involves at least two appropriately credentialed professionals—two teachers (e.g., a general education teacher and a special education teacher who may be highly qualified only in special education or in special education as well as in the academic content area); a teacher and a related services professional (e.g., a teacher and a speech/language therapist, or a teacher and an occupational therapist); or a teacher and another specialist (e.g., a teacher and a literacy coach, or a teacher and an ESL teacher). The importance of this defining characteristic comes first from the notion that co-teachers are peers—they have equivalent credentials and employment status and thus can truly be partners in their instructional endeavors on behalf of students. Second, it emphasizes that co-teaching is powerful because the professionals bring different types of expertise to their practice.

Notice that this co-teaching trait excludes paraeducators. Paraeducators and other adults who might work in classrooms (e.g., volunteers) generally should provide support rather than co-teaching. They typically have not had the professional preparation to co-teach, and the instructional partnership of co-teaching is not an appropriate role expectation for them (Fitzell, 2007). Even if a paraeducator has a teaching license, this individual is not employed to carry out the responsibilities of a teacher and usually has a job description to that effect. To underscore the differences in roles, classrooms in which paraeducators are delivering services sometimes are called *supported* or *assisted classrooms*, not *co-taught classrooms*. This distinction helps everyone involved to remember that, although paraprofessionals are valuable classroom personnel, they should not be asked to function in the same way as licensed or certificated staff; and it clarifies for general education teachers the nature of the services being provided. Of course, saying paraeducators generally should not co-teach does not in any way imply they do not have significant classroom responsibilities. They still work with individual students and groups, but under the direction of teachers or other specialists to reinforce or supplement instruction, not to routinely introduce it.



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Co-Teaching: Promise Versus Evidence

Hundreds of articles have been written about co-teaching, and many of them describe programs, offer suggestions for improving instruction, or relate anecdotes about co-teachers' experiences (e.g., Conderman et al., 2009; Friend, 2007; Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010). Although this literature is valuable, also essential is research demonstrating the impact of co-teaching on student outcomes and the perceptions of those implementing co-teaching.

One recent study examined both of these topics. Hang and Rabren (2009) studied 45 co-teachers and 58 students with disabilities. All participants were new to co-teaching at the time of the investigation. The researchers gathered data through surveys, classroom observations, and a review of relevant records. They found that students with disabilities in co-taught classes significantly increased in achievement on standardized tests from the year prior to co-teaching and that these students' achievement was not significantly different from the overall achievement of all students in their grade level. They also found that teachers expressed strongly positive perceptions of co-teaching.

McDuffie, Mastropieri, and Scruggs (2009) completed another recent study of co-teaching, examining the differential effects of a peer-tutoring program on the academic achievement of 203 students (typical learners and those

with disabilities) in co-taught versus solo-taught middle school classes. The findings from this study were mixed: Students in co-taught classes generally outperformed students in solo-taught classes on unit tests and the cumulative posttest, but additional analyses indicated that peer tutoring did not add value to co-teaching. That is, if peer tutoring were a positive intervention, it would be expected that peer tutoring plus co-teaching would lead to even better results, but this did not happen. Additionally, the researchers found that teachers perceived co-teaching as positive in terms of teacher enjoyment, student benefit, improved achievement, and increased assistance for students. These authors strongly recommended the need for additional co-teaching research.

The latter conclusion is common. Co-teaching is challenging to study because it can be so greatly affected by teachers' characteristics, relationships with co-teachers, and preparation for such partnerships as well as by the characteristics of the students and nature of the instructional strategies used. Research on co-teaching is likely to continue to evolve as a result of the growing trend to educate students with diverse needs in general education settings. What types of studies do you think are most needed? What type of data could you collect in your own classroom to evaluate both the practices and the outcomes of co-teaching?

Joint Delivery of Instruction In schools across the country, we have found a disturbing number of educators who call their arrangement "co-teaching" simply because it involves two educators in a classroom at the same time. In some situations, the general education teacher conducts lessons as though alone in the classroom. That teacher may even express gratitude for having in the classroom "an extra set of hands." The second teacher, usually a special educator or specialist, has the *de facto* role of instructional assistant for students with disabilities and possibly for other students with special needs. This individual hovers at the fringes of the class until the core instruction is delivered and then helps those who need it, monitors and addresses student behavior problems, or pulls individual students or a small group aside to deliver instruction completely separate from that being provided to the rest of the class. This type of situation is described in this chapter's opening case study.

Although such arrangements may occur occasionally in co-taught classes, particularly if a student (or students) in the class has significant disabilities, if these practices are routine, the arrangement—which quickly becomes frustrating for both teachers, as Ms. Smithson and Mr. Ruiz demonstrated—should not be referred to as co-teaching. Instead,

this situation is a woeful and inappropriate underuse of a qualified professional. It is a practice likely to stigmatize students at least as much as pullout strategies and to frustrate and possibly demean special services providers. It is also a situation in which any benefits derived from appropriate separate instruction are diminished by the increased noise and activity in the classroom. These considerations give rise to questions about why professionals consistently would use this arrangement for any length of time. A variation of this situation occurs when the educators decide to split teaching duties, each professional teaching on alternate days or possibly alternate weeks. Although not as obviously negative as the first example, it still represents a misunderstanding of co-teaching. To achieve positive outcomes in co-taught classes, both educators should be actively engaged in the teaching of each lesson.

Additionally, each professional in co-taught classes has an important contribution to make in coordinating and delivering substantive instruction (Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, & McGinley, 2011; Musanti & Pence, 2010). This does not mean that they always work with students in large groups, but it does mean that they share decision making about instruction and ensure that both have active roles in teaching (Wilson, 2008). Specifically, the two professionals plan and use unique and high-involvement instructional strategies to engage all students in ways that are not possible when only one teacher is present (Friend, Burrello, & Burrello, 2009). By doing so, they frequently can integrate specially designed instruction or other specialized strategies into the general education teaching/learning environment. The standard curriculum provides the instructional framework for the class, yet that curriculum is differentiated as necessary to foster student success and may be modified for students with the most significant needs (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Keep in mind that two qualified teachers or other professionals can arrange instruction in a number of creative ways to enhance learning options for all students. For example, all students can have more opportunities to participate actively in their learning, and thus instructional intensity is increased. Successful co-teachers should review their practices to ensure that their instructional strategies do in fact lead to more engaged time and participation for all their students while meeting the specially designed instructional requirements of students with disabilities or other special needs.

Diverse Group of Students Co-teachers provide instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students that includes students with disabilities and other special needs as well as other learners who are not so identified (Seglem & VanZant, 2010). In fact, this dimension is one of the major advantages of co-teaching. Teachers initially may resist the perceived increase in student diversity that accompanies co-teaching, but as they implement highly effective instructional interventions through their partnerships, they learn to value the arrangement. Co-teaching allows teachers to respond effectively to the varied needs of their students, lowers the teacher–student ratio, and expands the professional expertise that can be directed to those needs. The inclusion of one or several students who have IEPs or who are learning English sometimes increases the range of diversity in a classroom, but that change is accompanied by the addition of another teacher who brings an entire repertoire of instructional ideas.

Co-teachers need to ensure that the diversity in the classroom does not inadvertently result in an inappropriate seating arrangement. For example, some co-teachers try to seat students with special needs together, presumably so that they can more easily be helped with schoolwork. Other teachers seat students with disabilities or other special needs on the fringes of the classroom so that when they are receiving assistance, other students are not distracted. Although both these strategies are well intentioned, they may have the result of socially isolating students, often the very students who are most likely to need encouragement and instruction in social skills.

CO-TEACHING



Amie Fuller/Pearson Education

Especially in middle school and high school, co-teaching is based on blending the general educator's academic content knowledge with the strategy and learning process knowledge of the special educator or specialist.

Shared Classroom Space The definition of co-teaching notes that co-teachers operate in a single physical space or classroom. This characteristic of co-teaching is important as a contrast to earlier variations of teaching teams that commonly planned together, grouped students, and then taught them in separate classrooms (Geen, 1985; Trump, 1966). Although one teacher may occasionally take a small, heterogeneous group of students to a separate location for a specific instructional purpose and for a limited time period (for example, to the media center where the computers are located so students can complete web-based research), co-teaching generally should be considered an instructional approach that occurs in a single physical environment. This definitional element helps to distinguish co-teaching from the practice of regrouping students for different kinds of pullout programs. It also points out that the teacher relationship issues illustrated at the beginning of this chapter and discussed in a later section are far more significant when a physical location is shared than when teachers deliver instruction in separate locations.

Does co-teaching sound like an exciting but somewhat challenging service option for students with disabilities and other special needs? In *Putting Ideas into Practice*, you'll find some suggestions for getting a new co-teaching program off to a good start.

Rationale for Co-Teaching

Understanding the rationale for co-teaching provides a foundation on which professionals can ground the definition and consider co-teaching designs and structures for implementation in their schools. Co-teaching is first and foremost an approach for meeting the educational needs of students with diverse learning abilities (Friend, 2008a; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Thus, the driving force for creating co-teaching programs between general education teachers and special educators, related



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Starting Off for Success in Co-Teaching

Have you thought about what the first few days of co-teaching might be like? You can help ensure a successful start to co-teaching by addressing these topics:

1. Begin co-teaching on the first day of school in most cases. This practice establishes that co-teaching is an integral element of instruction, not an activity tacked on after the first few weeks of school have been completed. For students with disabilities, it also ensures required services are provided in a timely manner.
2. Prepare in detail for the first day of co-teaching: For example, imagine you and your co-teaching colleague are beginning a lesson. How will you introduce yourselves to students? If you ensure that both teachers speak approximately the same amount of time, perhaps each introducing the other teacher, you will communicate to students that you are instructional partners.
3. If you co-teach in middle school or high school, think about how you will explain co-teaching to your students. Many teachers base this discussion on the specialized skills teachers bring
4. Use detailed planning, even scripting, for the early days of co-teaching to help to establish parity while you and your co-teacher become accustomed to each other and shared teaching.
5. Plan to meet, at least for a few minutes, after the end of the first week of co-teaching. This interaction should give each teacher a chance to raise concerns or questions, to resolve differences before they become serious issues, and to celebrate their shared teaching.
6. Develop the habit of using “we” language—“our students,” “our classroom,” “the lessons we planned.” Even more than the other strategies listed, the words used will convey to both adults and students the belief that co-teaching is truly about partnership and parity in the instructional process.

services personnel, or other specialists is ensuring high-quality education for students who have disabilities or other unique needs; and co-teaching should result in direct instructional and social benefits for these students (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Friend, 2008a; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Sileo & van Garderen, 2010). For example, students who are academically gifted may have more opportunities in a co-taught class to complete alternative assignments and participate in enrichment activities (Gerber & Popp, 2000). Average students should receive more adult attention in co-taught classrooms and benefit from more teacher-led, small-group activities. Students at risk for learning failure but who do not qualify for special programs often receive the extra instructional boost they need to make better academic progress.

A second part of the rationale for co-teaching concerns curricular access and instruction (e.g., King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm, 2010). We have stressed that the goal of co-teaching is to bring intense and individualized instruction to students in a general education setting while working as much as possible within the framework of the curriculum used there. As such, co-teaching should lead to a less fragmented and more contextualized education for students with disabilities and other special needs as well as to greater instructional intensity and engaged time. For example, in elementary schools, co-teaching may eliminate for some students the need to leave their classrooms, often during crucial instruction, to go to a special education setting for developmental or remedial work or to a speech/language therapy session. In middle schools and high schools, co-teaching enables

students to learn curricular content from teachers who are specialists in those subjects while at the same time receiving the individualized support they need (Hunt, 2010; Kim, Woodruff, & Klein, 2006). Of course, an overriding consideration in co-teaching is that the students with special needs who are to participate in the co-taught classroom should be those whose unique educational needs can be met through the general education curriculum with appropriate accommodations, modifications, and supports (Friend & Pope, 2005).

In addition to instructional benefits for diverse groups of students, co-teaching may have other positive effects. For example, in elementary schools it often reduces the stigma associated with students leaving their general education classrooms and going to a separate place to receive special or remedial services. In secondary settings, it increases the opportunities students have to take electives and consider themselves truly part of their class groups, because they may not have class periods allocated for special education or other remedial or specialized services. Teachers also can use co-teaching as a vehicle for creating opportunities for positive social interactions between students with disabilities or other special needs and their typical peers.

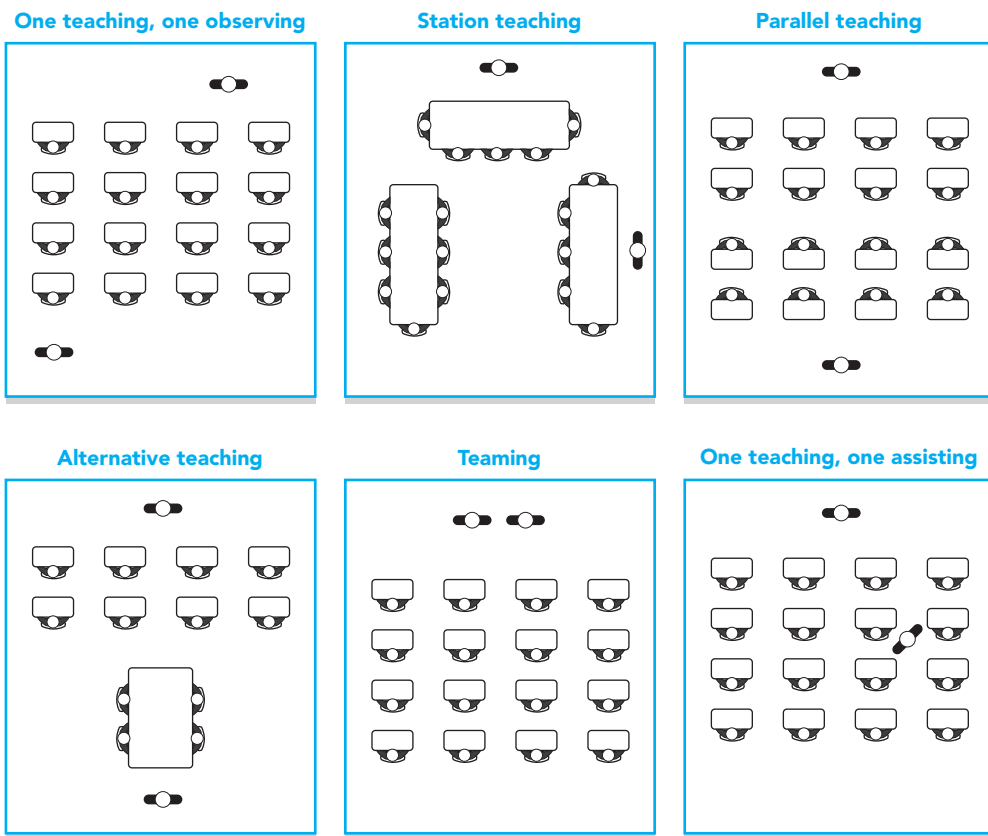
Finally, co-teachers often report that this approach to education provides them with a sense of collegial support (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). Co-teachers are not expected to master all of each other's expertise, but they learn from each other in ways that enhance their own skills. For example, consider these observations from an algebra classroom: A special educator noted that she had to work very hard to master the concepts for the course, but that her partner was always ready to answer her questions. The general educator commented that he had learned that even a high school algebra class benefited when students used manipulatives and accessed learning visually, auditorily, and kinesthetically. Co-teachers also receive emotional support from someone with whom they share both classroom successes and challenges. Notice how this approach to thinking about co-teaching could help Ms. Smithson and Mr. Ruiz, introduced at the beginning of the chapter.

Co-Teaching Approaches

The instructional potential of co-teaching makes it imperative that those involved collaborate effectively in designing and delivering instruction and interventions that will best meet the unique learning needs of the students. Co-teachers consider a large number of factors when deciding how to structure and deliver their instruction. They make decisions about what should occur during co-teaching based on student needs, the ecology of the class, demands of the curriculum and the requirement to use evidence-based practices, teachers' comfort level and skills for teaching and co-teaching, and the amount of time available for co-teaching. Working within these elements, they design many creative strategies that bring out the best in students and teachers. The following six co-teaching approaches depicted in Figure 1—(1) one teaching, one observing; (2) station teaching; (3) parallel teaching; (4) alternative teaching; (5) teaming; and (6) one teaching, one assisting—represent a core set of options used most frequently (Friend, 2008a). To keep co-teaching relationships and instructional arrangements fresh and effective, teachers should consider trying several of the approaches, periodically changing their co-teaching methods and experimenting with variations on the basic information provided here.

One Teaching, One Observing

Co-teachers often find that they have options unavailable to other teachers for carefully observing their students in order to gain a sophisticated understanding of their academic and social functioning. When one professional teaches while the other observes, the first

FIGURE 1 Co-teaching approaches.

has primary responsibility for designing and delivering specific instruction to the entire group, whether that is a large-group lesson, individual assignments that the teacher is monitoring, cooperative groups, or any other teaching/learning arrangement. The second professional has the goal of systematically collecting data related to a single student, a small group of students, or the entire class for behaviors the professionals have previously agreed should be noted. For example, as students work in cooperative groups in third-grade math, Ms. Jackson circulates among the students to be sure they understand their tasks while Ms. Phelps uses a data chart to analyze whether three students who are English learners are initiating conversation during the activity, responding to others who ask them questions, or remaining passive. Similarly, in the English class that Mr. St. James and Mrs. Goud co-teach, several students seem to be having difficulty getting started on individual assignments. The teachers agree to observe Michael, José, James, and Sarah to find out whether the problem is comprehension (the students do not begin the task and are looking around to see what others are doing) or a matter of delay (by the time the students find their pens and get headings on their papers, they forget the instructions and ask to have them repeated). In sixth-grade social studies, Ms. Rodriguez and Ms. Wilson decide to observe students to determine who attempts to participate in class discussion by raising his or her hand.

One teaching, one observing requires little joint planning and, if arranged appropriately, provides opportunities for both educators. For example, special services professionals can focus attention on a student with significant needs to learn how to better provide supports important for that student's success. General educators can scan the student group to learn more about the students' responses to instruction and possibly to gauge whether the behavior of a student perceived as having a problem really is different from that of other students, or just, for some reason, more noticed by the teachers. Early in the school year, both teachers can use this approach to deepen their shared understanding of students while learning about each other's teaching styles.

One teaching, one observing can have a serious drawback, however. If it is used indiscriminately or exclusively, it can result in one professional, most typically the special education teacher or specialist, being relegated to the role of assistant. For this approach to be beneficial, the educators should exchange roles periodically. This strategy has two positive effects: First, it ensures that general education teachers have the opportunity to step back from the intensity of being the classroom manager to focus completely on what is occurring with students. Second, it clarifies for students that their class is led by two teachers with equivalent responsibility and authority.

To make observations most valuable, co-teachers should jointly decide on specific students and specific behaviors to analyze. For example, a pair of co-teachers may agree that they have serious concerns about Gary, a student who does not seem to be making much progress in reading and who seems to be expressing his frustration by refusing to work and occasionally distracting other students, taking their papers or pencils or calling them names. They decide to observe him at least three times each week across two weeks to tally what he does when given independent work. By completing these observations, the co-teachers can be better prepared for a meeting they have scheduled with the response to intervention (RTI) team.

In addition to making decisions about whom to observe and for what purpose, co-teachers also should use a systematic method for recording their observations, whether they do so on class lists, seating charts, or more formal behavioral data forms. They also should be sure that both professionals have a copy of the information gathered. When co-teachers meet, they then can discuss their observations and make instructional decisions based on what they have learned.

Station Teaching

Station teaching actively involves both educators in instruction, and it enables them to make a clear division of labor during co-teaching. The co-teachers divide the instructional content, and each takes responsibility for planning and teaching part of it. In a classroom where station teaching is used, students move from one station to another according to a predetermined schedule. A third station may be used for students to complete independent work assignments, to participate in peer tutoring, or to work under supervision if a student teacher, paraeducator, or another adult is available in the classroom. For example, in a third-grade classroom, one group of students is reviewing the concept of cause and effect with one of the teachers. Another group is working with the other teacher on comprehension activities related to a story read the previous day. In the third group, students are working with partners to edit their writing assignments. During the 50-minute period of time for this instruction, each student participates in each of the groups. In a high school civics class during an 85-minute block, one teacher works with students using the textbook to review the structure of American government; the second teacher discusses with students issues in an upcoming local election; and in the third group, students work independently on web reports on their state's representatives and senators.

Although station teaching requires that the teachers share responsibility for planning sufficiently to divide the instructional content, it has the advantage that each professional has separate responsibility for delivering instruction. And so this technique can be effective even when teachers have significantly different teaching styles or do not know each other well. In addition, students generally benefit from the lower teacher–pupil ratio. Further, because in this approach each teacher instructs all of the students, albeit in different groups, the equal status of both the students and the teachers can be maximized, and so parity is clearly established.

Two common problems in using station teaching concern the amount of noise and movement that may occur during instruction. Some teachers may be bothered by having two teachers talking at the same time, particularly if one of the educators has a loud or distinctive voice. Co-teachers also may worry that having students move around the room seems disruptive.

In addition to the preceding factors, co-teachers may need to think carefully about how to divide instruction so that the order in which the curriculum is presented does not affect students' understanding. Material that is sequential cannot be presented using this approach. For example, in a social studies class, it would not work to have students in one group reading the chapter, students in a second group discussing the information, and students in a third group answering questions from the text: The group expected to write answers first, before reading or discussion, certainly would be at a disadvantage! Educators also need to estimate the amount of time required at each station; if one station takes much longer to complete than another, problems may arise.

To effectively address concerns about station teaching, co-teachers can take several actions. If a student tends to have attention problems, that student might best be seated next to the teacher. With elementary and middle school students, co-teachers can make available sound-muffling headphones for students to use in the independent group when an individual assignment is given. They also can provide desk carrels to help reduce visual distractions. Rearranging the classroom slightly—for example, by having the teachers back-to-back—also may help reduce the distracting sound of both teachers' voices. If transitions are time consuming, instead of having students move from station to station, perhaps the teachers could move. Alternatively, the teachers could reward students for moving efficiently from station to station; experienced co-teachers report that transition can be kept to approximately 30 seconds. Co-teachers also may want to develop a set of signals to monitor time. For example, they might agree to use a timer to signal the end of a station. Of course, teachers also should ask for feedback from their teaching partners and periodically discuss topics such as these as part of their ongoing monitoring of their co-taught instruction.

Parallel Teaching

The first purpose of parallel teaching is to lower the teacher–student ratio. In this type of co-teaching, the teachers jointly plan the instruction, but each delivers it to a heterogeneous group comprised of half of the students in the class. The teachers do not exchange groups as in station teaching. This approach requires both that the teachers coordinate their efforts so that all students receive essentially the same instruction and that grouping decisions are based on maintaining diversity within each group. For example, in Mr. Harris and Ms. Brisky's history class, students are preparing for a unit exam. Mr. Harris has half of the students, including two students with learning disabilities. Ms. Brisky has the other half of the group, which includes a student with Asperger syndrome. The teachers are discussing key concepts that they highlighted during their planning period and helping students go through a study guide. Their intent was to arrange the students so that each one had several opportunities to participate in discussion and to ask questions.

This type of parallel teaching often is appropriate for drill-and-practice activities, test reviews, topics needing a high level of student discussion, or projects needing close teacher supervision. It enables all students to participate more in instructional conversations and gives especially shy students a smaller audience. However, parallel teaching can even be used for more creative teaching activities: Each co-teacher might take a particular point of view in presenting a topic or issue, orient students to that viewpoint, and then bring the students together later for large-group discussion. For example, as part of the history class, the co-teachers address current events. One time, Mr. Harris took the position that the United States was making a mistake in its actions regarding international trade and discussed this with half the students. Ms. Brisky adopted the opposite point of view with her group. When the students came together for large-group follow-up, the teachers were able to integrate information about understanding fact and opinion, the influence of the media on people's beliefs, and other related topics, as well as debate the issue at hand.

In another type of example, parallel teaching facilitates tiering of instruction; that is, teaching all students the same core concepts, but differentiating practice. This strategy is common when co-teaching is part of response to intervention. For example, co-teachers of a language arts class review main idea and details, and all students participate. However, the teachers then divide the students into two groups to read passages and identify main ideas and details, with one group having more difficult reading material than the other.

Note that this approach cannot be used for initial instruction unless both professionals are qualified to teach the material and comfortable doing so. Although seldom a serious concern in the primary grades, this can be a significant matter in intermediate grades and secondary schools, and it is a topic co-teachers should directly discuss. In terms of pragmatic issues, noise and activity levels may need to be monitored, as in station teaching. Also, as in station teaching, teachers need to pace instruction similarly.

To implement parallel teaching, teachers should begin by checking that they are both prepared to teach the assigned content. Especially in new co-teaching partnerships, co-teachers might want to use outlines, study guides, or notes to foster teaching consistency. Remember that if one group of students has significantly different instruction from the other, it will be difficult to make judgments about student mastery. Students also may complain that the disparity leads to unfairness during assessments. To address the issues of noise and distraction, elementary and middle school teachers may find that it works well to have the two student groups on the floor in opposite corners of the classroom, with desks or tables used as a sight and sound barrier. Noise and distraction are not as likely to be significant issues in secondary classrooms using this approach, but if they are, co-teachers might arrange the class to group students on opposite sides of the room, and they should consider teaching while sitting instead of standing in order to reduce how much their voices carry across the classroom.

Alternative Teaching

In nearly every classroom, co-teachers sometimes decide to select a small group of students to receive instruction that is different from that in which the large group is participating. For example, some students with special learning needs require accommodations in the form of preteaching. Students who benefit from preteaching might include those with attention problems, those who need reassurance about their knowledge or skills, those learning English, and those for whom repetition is beneficial. Reteaching instructional content is appropriate for students who did not understand concepts taught, or for students who missed instruction because of absence. Sometimes an alternative group is

useful for conducting a skills assessment. One additional example concerns enrichment: Students who already have mastered concepts being taught might work in a small group to extend their learning. Thus, in alternative teaching, one teacher works with a small group of students while the other instructs the large group in some content or activity that the small group can afford to miss.

Alternative teaching is a strategy for providing highly intensive instruction within the general education classroom. Further, this approach can also be used to ensure that all students in a class receive opportunities to interact with a teacher in a small group. If one or two students have serious behavior disorders that cause classroom disruptions, sometimes having them work in a small group—one that includes positive class models—can help them and possibly alleviate classroom disruption.

The greatest risk in alternative teaching is that students with disabilities or other special needs may be stigmatized by being grouped repeatedly for preteaching or reteaching, even if other students are rotated through the small instructional group. A variation of this approach, in which one teacher is located at a table and announces that students seeking assistance may come to the table, also can cause problems. Particularly with older groups, the student most likely to come to work with the teacher is the one who is capable of doing the task but who craves adult attention or seeks reassurance. The student who possibly would not join the teacher is the student with a disability or who struggles academically who clearly needs assistance but is embarrassed to seek it in front of peers.

When co-teachers use alternative teaching, they first should be sure that each teacher sometimes takes responsibility for the small group. For example, sometimes reteaching is best accomplished by the general education teacher, not the special educator or specialist. In addition, co-teachers might keep a record of which students were assigned to which small groups so that they ensure all students participate and no student is stigmatized. Of course, group composition and group membership should be fluid, with both factors varying depending on student need and planned small-group activity.

Teaming

In teaming, both teachers are responsible for a lesson. They share the instruction of all students, whether that occurs in a large group, in monitoring students working independently, or in facilitating groups of students working on shared projects. For example, the teachers may lead a discussion by trading ideas with each other, or they may take on the roles of characters in a story as they act out a scene. One co-teacher may explain while the other demonstrates a concept or lab procedure; one may speak while the other models note taking on a Smartboard, and so on. Both teachers may circulate around the room as students work on dioramas that illustrate a piece of poetry, asking questions to stimulate student discussion or to check comprehension. Teachers may role-play, debate, simulate conflict, and model appropriate question asking or summarizing.

Co-teachers who team frequently report that it results in a synergy that enhances student participation and invigorates the professionals, sometimes even prompting teachers to try innovative techniques and activities that they would not have tried teaching alone. They discuss how well it works when the teachers “click” and are able to have instructional conversations with each other and students. Some co-teachers consider teaming the most rewarding approach. This co-teaching approach also clearly communicates to students that both educators truly have equal status.

However, of the six co-teaching approaches, teaming requires the greatest level of mutual trust and commitment. If professionals are not comfortable working together in a classroom, attempting to team is likely to communicate that discomfort to students.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Co-Teaching Dilemmas

Both novice and experienced co-teachers often have questions about the best ways to deal with dilemmas that occur during co-teaching. Here are a few common concerns and ideas for addressing them.

- My co-teacher is responsible for students with emotional disabilities. He is frequently called away from our co-teaching to deal with a student problem. What should we do?

In some schools, general education teachers genuinely believe that they cannot address student issues and that the special educator is the only one equipped to respond to students with emotional disabilities. Although it is prudent to call for the special educator if a student is having a crisis, it is sometimes helpful to talk with participating teachers about what constitutes a crisis and to explicitly outline how noncrisis problems should be handled (e.g., ignoring, asking for administrator help). Of course, administrators should also provide assistance in resolving this dilemma.

- When I enter the classroom as a specialist to co-teach, the general education teacher seems to think it is to release her for an extra preparation period. What should I do?

If a teacher repeatedly leaves the room or withdraws from instruction (e.g., grades papers) during co-teaching, the specialist should approach that person with words such as these: "I'm concerned that I've miscommunicated what co-teaching is about. It's very important for both

of us to be here, actively working with students, for it to be successful." If this does not resolve the issue, the specialist should then enlist the assistance of a supervisor or administrator to settle the matter.

- The specialist with whom I work is most comfortable sitting at the back of the room, occasionally asking a question when he thinks students don't understand a concept or working with individual students on his roster. So I do all the teaching. I also do all the planning, all the grading of assignments, and I'm the one accountable for testing outcomes. What should specialists do in a co-taught class? What are their responsibilities?

The best way to avoid this co-teaching problem is to discuss roles and responsibilities with your co-teacher—preferably before co-teaching ever begins. If expectations have been clarified before co-teaching is initiated, this issue is less likely to occur. Also, if co-teachers use the six approaches outlined in this chapter, along with the many variations of them, both teachers can and should have an active role in instruction. For some special educators and specialists, this response reflects discomfort with the curriculum content; for others it may signal uncertainty about the co-teacher's receptivity to classroom partnerships. Although straightforward conversation may help, it also may be necessary to enlist the assistance of an administrator in clarifying classroom expectations, with that professional perhaps observing and giving feedback to co-teachers.

Teaming also requires that co-teachers mesh their teaching styles. If co-teachers are significantly different in their use of humor, their pacing, or their instructional format, the flow of the teaming often is not successful. Teachers may use different styles, but they should take care to complement each other.

Novice co-teachers should not feel obligated to attempt teaming. Although some do and are successful, for many this approach is too fluid and relies too much on teacher compatibility and flexibility for use in a new relationship. Similarly, if a special educator or specialist is co-teaching with a teacher who seems uncomfortable with a shared classroom, perhaps experiencing some of the situations described in Putting Ideas into Practice, this approach is probably not one to emphasize, at least at the outset. When teaming is implemented, co-teachers should check frequently to ensure that both are satisfied with their use of it.

One Teaching, One Assisting

A final and relatively simple approach for co-teaching is to have one teacher teaching while the other supports the instructional process. That is, one teacher maintains the primary role for managing the classroom and leading instruction while the other walks around the room to assist students who need redirection or who have questions about their schoolwork. For example, as Ms. Ramirez explains to students the process for substituting variables in systems of equations, Mr. Siler monitors all the students to be sure that they are correctly completing the examples on their papers. The teachers' goal is to be sure that all students, including those who have disabilities or other special needs, are accurately solving the problems and to address any student confusion as soon as it is detected.

This approach to co-teaching requires little joint planning, and so it makes co-teaching possible even when shared planning time is scarce. It also gives a role to professionals in situations in which they may not feel competent to lead instruction (for example, a special education teacher with an elementary education background and a K–12 special education license co-teaching in a high school geometry class for the first time).

However, one teaching, one assisting also is fraught with problems and should be used only occasionally. First, it becomes the sole or primary co-teaching approach in too many classrooms, particularly when planning time is scarce. The general education teacher usually takes the lead role, and the other educator becomes an “assistant.” Unfortunately, this arrangement is a common one, particularly in secondary classrooms (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Not only does it deny an active teaching role to the special educator or specialist, but it also undermines that person's credibility, especially with older students. Second, a classroom in which one teacher continuously moves around the room during large-group instruction can be distracting to students. When professionals are walking around they can be a visual distraction, and when they whisper to individual students they may be an auditory distraction. Third, and most serious, this co-teaching approach includes the risk of encouraging students to become dependent learners. When one teacher is always available to help on student demand, students who crave adult attention but who should be capable of doing assigned work may develop a habit of saying “I can't” in order to get extra attention and assistance. Co-teachers need to be very alert to this possibility. If they have students needing adult attention, they should give it—but not at the cost of a student's independent learning skills.

Educators can take advantage of the positive aspects of one teaching, one assisting and avoid the negative aspects by limiting their use of this approach and ensuring that when it is used, each teacher leads instruction and each teacher takes the role of assisting. Further, co-teachers should use this approach only when it will not distract students from their learning and when no other co-teaching approach seems appropriate for the instructional situation (Wilson, 2008).

Understanding these six basic approaches for arranging teachers and students in a shared classroom is just a beginning. As you experiment with co-teaching and share ideas with classmates or colleagues, you will find that many variations of each approach exist and that approaches can be combined to even better address student needs. For example, as part of a Tier 2 intervention co-teachers might blend parallel and station teaching. They divide the class in half, with each person responsible for instruction. But then each teacher divides her half of the class into two groups, spending half of the available instructional time with each while the other half completes an activity with a peer partner. In another example, if a paraeducator is assigned to a classroom along with a special educator, co-teachers might decide to arrange four stations, directing the paraeducator to re-read the current literature with students at the fourth station. In a classroom with co-teachers and a student teacher, parallel teaching could occur with three groups instead of the usual two.



Top-Pics TBK/Alamy

Co-teaching often is referred to as a professional marriage. Why is this an apt metaphor? What traits of a strong marriage do you think are applicable to co-teaching?

Most important, the co-teaching approaches demonstrate the importance of collaboration in co-teaching. In the next section, pragmatic and conceptual issues related to the professional relationships in co-teaching are presented to increase your readiness to implement this service delivery option.

Co-Teaching and Collaboration

We have identified co-teaching as a specific service delivery option that is based on collaboration. As you can see, however, *co-teaching* is not a synonym for *collaboration* (Friend & Hurley-Chamberlain, 2007). Like teaming, co-teaching is an activity that teachers may choose to engage in using a collaborative style of interaction. Some would argue that collaboration is more critical to co-teaching than to applications such as teaming because it involves an ongoing and intense relationship between two or more professionals engaged in the essence of their responsibilities—teaching. We believe that co-teaching is optimized when a strong collaborative relationship exists, but we recognize that co-teaching also can exist, although in a significantly limited form, with nominal collaboration. In short, we agree with veteran co-teachers who tell us that in ideal situations, “Co-teaching is like a professional marriage.”

The Co-Teaching Relationship

The most sophisticated types of co-teaching and the collaboration they require are not for everyone. The type of co-teaching and the level of collaboration in the relationship depend on the situation (Cramer, 2006; Murray, 2004). But they also depend on both the personal characteristics of the co-teachers and their skills in communication and collaboration (Conderman, 2011; Cramer, Nevin, & Thousand, 2006), as well as the quality of the preservice or professional development they received prior to co-teaching (e.g., Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010; Zindler, 2009).

Many aspects of co-teaching can be challenging—sometimes even threatening—to potential co-teachers. This collaborative structure requires a willingness to change teaching styles and preferences, to work closely with another adult, to share responsibility, and to rely on another individual in order to perform tasks previously done alone. All of these factors can cause stress for teachers. Yet what causes some teachers stress can be a source of excitement and motivation for others (Gürür & Uzuner, 2010; Ploessl et al., 2010).

Specific skills and personal characteristics can be associated with successful co-teachers. The most essential requirement for a co-teacher is flexibility (Argüelles, Hughes, & Schumm, 2000). Commitment to co-teaching and to the co-teaching relationship also is needed (Murawski & Dieker, 2008; Tannock, 2009). In addition, professionals generally concur that

strong interpersonal skills—particularly problem-solving and decision-making skills—are essential for co-teachers (Friend, 2007; Gately & Gately, 2001).

Another consideration for co-teachers is their broader background and culture. Just as stereotypes or other misunderstandings can undermine teacher–student and teacher–parent/family interactions, they also can affect co-teachers (Snell & Janney, 2000). For example, co-teachers may wish to learn a little about each other’s own school experiences and how they affect their teaching styles and preferences. Similarly, co-teachers may find they need to discuss the basis for their beliefs about disabilities. Perhaps one teacher has a sibling with a disability and has been strongly affected by this experience. Perhaps the other teacher was raised in a culture in which disabilities are seen as a challenge given by God or as a punishment to parents for a wrongdoing. Such conversations lead co-teachers to a much deeper understanding of each other’s perceptions of students, expectations for them, and instructional approaches. To enhance collaboration, co-teachers should reflect on their own characteristics, experiences, and expectations and express a willingness to share those reflections with their co-teaching partners. The checklist in Figure 2 can provide a start for this type of discussion.

Diversity can directly affect co-teachers’ relationships in other ways as well. A veteran teacher from a culture in which young people are expected to defer to elders may be affronted by a novice educator’s direct and uninvited suggestions for changes in instruction. A male teacher from a culture in which women should defer to men’s judgment likewise may find co-teaching difficult if the assigned partner is a female teacher who does not defer as the male teacher expects. Other cultural differences, including those related to language, beliefs about discipline, and classroom management, may enrich a co-taught class, but they also can become sources of stress that need discussion so that the goal of better educating students can stay the focus of co-teaching.

Finally, co-teachers should recognize that their relationship will evolve over time. At the beginning, both partners may be somewhat tentative, worried about miscommunicating or causing a problem in the classroom. As they implement co-teaching, they may experiment with co-teaching approaches and also find ways to blend their teaching styles and personalities. For example, with assistance from the

FIGURE 2 Checking your readiness for co-teaching.

My co-teacher and I have

- _____ 1. Discussed our perceptions of how a classroom is shared, identifying both our similar beliefs and resolving differences in our understanding.
- _____ 2. Reviewed the instructional needs of our students and agreed on differentiation/accommodations likely to be needed.
- _____ 3. Identified how we will convey to students from the first day that we are partners with equal classroom authority.
- _____ 4. Conferred on day-to-day matters such as a location for the specialist’s belongings, expectations for classroom routines, and a time to debrief about the first week of co-teaching.
- _____ 5. Discussed our perceptions on how instruction and chores can be shared and made decision regarding this aspect of our co-teaching.
- _____ 6. Analyzed the potential strengths and liabilities each of us brings to co-teaching and planned how to maximize strengths and minimize liabilities.

principal, Ms. Shea, Ms. Smithson and Mr. Ruiz can discuss their different perspectives and negotiate their classroom practices. Their second year of partnership thus should be quite different from the first because the teachers have addressed many of the important issues that arose when they began co-teaching. By a third year with the same partner, co-teachers typically have a solid foundation of understanding of their work and a high degree of trust with each other.

Maintaining Collaborative Relationships in Co-Teaching

Because effective co-teaching relies on teaching pairs having positive, collaborative working relationships, the skills discussed throughout this text, including those for effective communication and the resolution of disagreements, clearly are essential for co-teachers. In addition, though, numerous specific topics routinely require discussion by teaching partners. These topics are summarized on the following pages, and questions related to each are included in Figure 3. Using these questions as a guide for scheduled discussions, both prior to co-teaching and routinely throughout it, has proven useful to many co-teachers (Friend, 2008a) by clarifying roles and responsibilities and strengthening partnerships.

Philosophy and Beliefs Understanding each other's general instructional beliefs, as well as those related to specific classroom matters, is essential to a strong co-teaching relationship. Examples of topics partners should explore include the following:

- The degree to which co-teachers agree on their expectations that all students learn the general curriculum
- Co-teachers' beliefs about the right of all students to experience success and how that occurs
- Teachers' roles in and responsibilities for student learning
- Alternative ways for students to demonstrate what they have learned (i.e., beyond traditional assignments or tests)
- Acceptable levels of noise and movement in the co-taught classroom
- Classroom practices each teacher finds particularly problematic (for example, repeating directions, students calling out answers)

Parity Signals The nature of co-teaching requires that teaching partners have parity and recognize it. To that end, co-teachers find that determining in advance how they will ensure that students and others recognize their equal status helps them to build and maintain their relationship. Examples of parity signals include the following:

- Both teachers' names on the board or in the printed course schedule
- Both teachers' signatures on correspondence to parents
- Desk or storage space for both in the classroom
- Shared participation in teaching (e.g., approximately equally divided instructional talk)
- Shared responsibility for grading assignments and assigning report card grades

Co-teachers should spend a few minutes generating additional ideas about how they can communicate to students and parents, as well as remind each other, that co-teaching is about true partnership.

Classroom Routines Experienced teachers have preferred classroom routines. These include instructional routines (such as how students are expected to seek help and follow rules about formats for papers) and organizational routines (such as how students

FIGURE 3**Questions for co-teachers: Building a collaborative relationship.**

| Topic | Questions |
|------------------------|---|
| Philosophy and beliefs | <p>What are our philosophies about the roles of teachers and teaching and about students and learning?</p> <p>How do our pedagogical beliefs affect our instructional practice?</p> <p>What do we believe about the potential for all students to find success in our classroom?</p> |
| Parity signals | <p>How will we convey to students and others (e.g., teachers, parents) that we are equals in the classroom?</p> <p>How can we ensure a sense of parity in the planning and delivery of instruction?</p> <p>What does each of us consider key signals of parity (e.g., two adult chairs, both names on syllabus)?</p> |
| Classroom routines | <p>What are the instructional routines for the classroom (e.g., how previous lessons are reviewed, what strategies are used to encourage student involvement)?</p> <p>What are the organizational routines for the classroom (e.g., are students allowed to go to their lockers during class; what should students do if they complete independent work before classmates)?</p> |
| Discipline | <p>What is acceptable and unacceptable student behavior?</p> <p>Who is to intervene at what point in students' behavior?</p> <p>What are the rewards and consequences used in the classroom?</p> |
| Feedback | <p>What is the best way to give each other feedback? When?</p> <p>How will we ensure that both positive and negative issues are raised?</p> |
| Noise | <p>What noise level are we comfortable with in the classroom?</p> |
| Pet peeves | <p>What aspects of teaching and classroom life does each of us feel strongly about?</p> <p>How can we identify our pet peeves so as to avoid them?</p> |

manage instructional materials and follow specific procedures at the beginning of the school day or class period). Teachers rarely are aware of how many routines they have established. When co-teachers make this discovery, they face the task of agreeing as to what routines they will employ in their shared classroom. It is not particularly important whose routines are adopted by the co-teachers, and in many instances the special educator or specialist defers to the preferences of the general educator, especially when co-teaching occurs only for a brief segment of time or single class period. However, both teachers should know what the routines are so that they can consistently communicate them to the students.

Discipline What each educator believes is acceptable behavior and what each views as appropriate responses to unacceptable student behavior should be discussed and, if necessary, negotiated early in the co-teaching relationship. Because professionals tend to have stronger reactions to behavior transgressions than to academic difficulties, it is particularly important that co-teachers agree on how they will respond to students who violate classroom behavior expectations. For example, how critical is it to each teacher that students keep their heads up off their desks during instruction? May students wear hats in the classroom? Snack during instruction? In an elementary school, what are the consequences for saying something disrespectful to a peer or teacher? What is each co-teacher's perception of who should intervene when misbehavior occurs?

Feedback Knowing your own preferred way to receive feedback from a colleague is a significant first step in determining how you and a co-teacher will give each other feedback about your activities in a shared classroom. Some teachers prefer to hear their co-teachers' reaction to a co-taught lesson immediately after its completion. Others are more receptive if they have a break before debriefing. As important as *when* teachers give each other feedback is *how* they do so. Note that an assumption is made regarding this topic—namely, that co-teachers need to review and discuss their shared efforts periodically in order to maintain their professional relationship. Feedback should include not only highlighting those aspects of instruction that are especially successful and satisfying but also planning alternatives to instructional dilemmas that occur.

Noise Teachers sometimes differ as significantly in their tolerance for classroom noise as they do in preferences for discipline strategies or classroom routines. Noise includes teacher talk as well as student-generated noise. Because three of the six co-teaching approaches have noise levels as potential drawbacks, co-teachers should reflect on and acknowledge their tolerance for noise and talk with one another about it. As part of their feedback, they may decide either to modify specific co-teaching approaches to reduce noise or to develop signals to indicate that noise is approaching an unacceptable level. Depending on students' needs, they also may need to monitor the impact of classroom noise on student attention.

Pet Peeves All teachers have a few items that are especially important to them in their professional activities or, more likely, that bother them a great deal. Pet peeves are specific triggers that could put relationships in jeopardy and negatively affect instruction. For some it may be interruptions during instruction; for others it may be the removal of supplies from their desks or failure to put materials away. Some co-teachers do not permit students to return to their lockers after they have come to class, and some are very particular in how assignments are graded. Pet peeves can be about student issues, classroom arrangements or materials, or professional preferences. The critical task for co-teachers is to identify their own and their co-teacher's pet peeves, discuss these openly, respect their differences, and negotiate responses to them.

By carefully considering what co-teaching is and how it is enhanced through collaboration, co-teachers can select approaches that enable them to begin their partnership safely and nurture it until it encompasses a wide array of shared teaching activities that optimize student learning (Huber, 2005). By initially discussing and periodically reviewing topics that can influence co-teaching success, teachers can strengthen their professional relationship and identify and resolve challenges or disagreements before they threaten classroom practice and student outcomes.

Administrative Matters Related to Co-Teaching

This chapter has emphasized the key concepts related to co-teaching, the ways that co-teachers can arrange students and themselves to take full advantage of their differing expertise, and the types of topics and issues that co-teachers should discuss in order to build their partnerships. However, for co-teaching to be more than an interesting option that professionals use when they like each other and when their schedules permit, strong administrative support also must be present (Boscardin, Mainzer, & Kealy, 2011; Friend, 2007). If co-teaching is to be a feasible service delivery option, administrators should address issues such as the following:

- The need for shared co-teacher planning time
- Scheduling of teachers (e.g., the number of co-taught sections and the range of their assignments)
- Scheduling of students (e.g., classes with a heterogeneous mix of students rather than primarily students with learning and behavior challenges)
- A mechanism for problem solving when difficulties arise
- Communication of a standard in the school that any teacher might be asked to co-teach, not just the individuals who initially volunteered
- Resolution of personnel issues when one or both co-teachers are reluctant or performing below expectations

Figure 4 outlines a number of other issues that administrators may need to address in order for co-teaching to be sustainable.



Marilyn Friend

In successful co-teaching programs, administrators support teachers by creating feasible master schedules and arranging for common planning time.

FIGURE 4 Practical issues in co-teaching.

| Issue | Impact |
|---|---|
| Caseloads/class sizes | When specialists have high caseloads, co-teaching becomes difficult because they may not be able to get to all classes where their students are learning, or they may have too many responsibilities that limit availability for co-teaching. When general education teachers have large class groups, it can be challenging to group students because of space issues and noise levels. |
| Distribution of students with special needs across classes/sections | If students with special needs are randomly placed in classes/sections, the special services provider will be unlikely to be able to co-teach in all the classrooms where it is needed. If too many students with special needs are assigned to one class/section, the co-teachers may not be able to establish or maintain instructional momentum. Additionally, few student models may be available and student behavior problems may occur. |
| Co-teaching within the context of other service models | If some services (e.g., special education) are largely delivered through co-teaching while others (e.g., remedial reading, speech/language therapy) are largely delivered using pullout models, scheduling may be difficult, and general educators may become frustrated. It is important for school leaders to make decisions about service delivery models in the context of overall school improvement planning so that all services are coordinated and represent a single set of beliefs and priorities. |
| Teacher and specialist schedules | If specialists are asked to provide services in two or even more classes during any single instructional period, they are more likely to consult than co-teach, especially in secondary schools with traditional (as opposed to block) schedules. When general education teachers are asked to co-teach with more than one specialist (e.g., the special educator and the reading specialist), it can become burdensome to juggle the planning and multiple classroom partnerships. |

Time for Planning

The most common concern among co-teachers is lack of common planning time (e.g., Johnston, Knight, & Miller, 2007; Khorsheed, 2007; Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). However, before offering ideas for finding this precious time, here are some ideas to consider related to the amount of time co-teachers need and the effective use of any time that is available.

First, time alone is seldom the problem in fostering co-teaching partnerships. Nearly all school professionals have a “relative yardstick” on the topic of time: No matter what their caseloads or other responsibilities, they find they need more time for collaboration. We hear nearly the same number of comments about time from special education teachers with caseloads of 8 students with high-incidence disabilities as from reading specialists with caseloads of 40 or more students; and we hear similar concerns from those with weekly shared planning time and those with virtually no shared planning time. Elementary teachers raise planning time issues as frequently as middle and high school teachers. This

similarity is due partly to a perception of time and partly to the priorities educators give to their various tasks that influence the time available for collaboration.

Second, experienced co-teachers have raised a time issue specific to that endeavor but applicable to all collaborative work. When time is available, it needs to be used to its fullest advantage. Because many educators still spend much of the day working in isolation, when they have the opportunity to interact with another adult outside the presence of students, they sometimes want to chat about the day's events, vent concerns about school district and school issues, and socialize. Although such conversations serve a purpose, they need to be limited to ensure that time is available for collaboration. As you can easily understand, if chatting takes one-third of a planning session, it is difficult to justify a request for additional shared time.

Third, co-teachers should pay careful attention to the procedures they use for planning (Friend, 2008a; Hawbaker, Balong, Buckwalter, & Runyon, 2001). It is helpful to think of planning as a three-part process. The general education teacher does the first part prior to the meeting by thinking about and outlining upcoming curricular content and typical related instructional activities. The second part of the planning occurs with both the general education teacher and the special educator or specialist. They jointly review the curricular material and decide how to arrange teachers and students in order to accomplish the learning goals. They also make judgments about topics or activities that are likely to be easily understood by students with special needs as well as those likely to be challenging. The special educator or specialist carries out the third part of the planning process after the joint meeting. This professional is responsible for preparing any significantly changed materials (e.g., simplified, shortened) or alternative materials that will be needed by students. This combination of shared planning and an appropriate division of the planning labor results in efficient and effective use of time; and it also can be applied to intervention assistance or response to intervention (RTI) meetings, consultation, and other collaborative services.

Finally, the time required for planning for co-teaching decreases as professionals develop collaborative work relationships, learn specific interaction skills, and refine their time management skills. Eventually, shared planning can be met partly through the use of monthly, quarterly, or even summer meetings supplemented by brief planning meetings on an as-needed basis. And no matter how much common planning time co-teachers need and have, they should be sure to use electronic tools to stay in touch, as described in e-Partnerships.

Options for Creating Shared Planning Time

The following three general ideas offer great promise for providing long-term solutions to creating planning time for co-teachers: using substitute teachers, arranging alternative types of class coverage, and employing instructional strategies that facilitate planning. These ideas also represent different points on a continuum of cost and need for administrative support. Additional planning time ideas are found in the Putting Ideas into Practice (Finding Common Planning Time).

Use of Substitutes One of the most common options for creating shared planning time is to employ substitute teachers to release professional staff members for collaboration. Many creative systems facilitate the maximum use of this type of resource. For example, in one district, a permanent substitute is employed and scheduled at each school one day every other week. If additional time is needed, a school administrator can request the time. In an elementary school in another district, a substitute is employed once each week. Specialists post a schedule of when they are available to meet with teachers. Teachers sign up to meet with the specialist with whom they work, and the substitute moves from class to class, releasing general education teachers as needed. In a high school, two substitutes are employed once a month. One substitute releases the special educator or specialist; the other releases general educators. Although funding for substitute teachers can be problematic, this is a relatively low-cost option for creating shared planning time.



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Using Wikis to Plan for Co-Teaching

You likely are familiar with Wikipedia, the world's largest encyclopedia, whose most distinguishing characteristic is the fact that anyone is allowed to add content or edit the content others have contributed. Wikipedia is the ultimate example of a *wiki*, software on a server that permits a user to create and save a web page that can then be accessed and changed by other users.

Wikis have tremendous potential for busy co-teachers. Here are a few of the tasks and activities they might complete using a wiki.

- Keep track of items for a planning agenda.
- Identify materials needed and tasks to complete related to a class project or field trip.
- Create and edit lesson plans.
- Create and edit assignment sheets, grading rubrics, or tests.

Teachers have a number of options for accessing a server to create a wiki. More and more school districts use software (e.g., Blackboard) that includes a wiki function. If you do not have access to such software, you can register without cost on other servers for wikis. Google Groups includes a wiki option (<http://groups.google.com>) as does Wikispaces (www.wikispaces.com). These and other sites generally permit you to create a document, save it, and then invite others (your co-teacher) to contribute. They include the option of limiting access to only those you specify, so that your work remains private.

If you would like additional information about the concept of wikis and how they operate, you can find a straightforward video explanation (as well as other sources for creating wikis) at this YouTube site: www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dnL00TdmlY (the clip is called "Wikis in Plain English").

Alternatives for Class Coverage If the challenges of finding funding for substitute teachers or recruiting qualified individuals for this type of role are insurmountable, you still may be able to arrange common planning time. You could suggest that one or more of the following ideas be tried:

- In some schools, principals and assistant principals cover classes to provide common planning time for co-teachers. Other licensed school staff members also could contribute a small amount of time for this purpose, including the counselor, occupational therapist, literacy coach, media specialist, and others.
- In schools that employ paraeducators, co-teachers might be able to occasionally arrange for students to work on a project or assignment supervised by the paraeducator while the teachers confer in a quiet part of the classroom. This avoids the problem of inappropriately leaving a paraeducator with students during instruction and can create an opportunity for shared planning.
- In a few schools, co-teachers cover for each other. That is, once per month one specialist misses co-teaching to cover the co-taught class of another specialist and his partner so that those teachers can plan. The following month the other specialist covers for the first pair of teachers. This type of strategy causes just a minor shift in services, but eliminates the need for external personnel.

Instructional Strategies That Facilitate Planning When release time is nonexistent, co-teachers can plan as part of instruction in a no-frills approach to creating time.

- In Ms. Mardell's English class, Ms. Lesson co-teaches four times each week. On these days, Ms. Mardell begins the class by explaining how each teacher will be working with students. This lets Ms. Lesson know how the class will operate and makes her feel more comfortable with co-teaching. It is not the same as having a shared



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Finding Common Planning Time

Although finding common planning time can be a significant barrier for co-teachers, here are several ways that principals and other administrators are creating such time:

- Teachers are scheduled for a shared lunch and preparation period. By scheduling these times back-to-back, teachers have a 90-minute block of common planning time, used once every other week for co-teaching planning.
- Teachers are paid once each month for two hours of planning outside the contract day. They are accountable for the time, submitting their common lesson plans.
- Co-teachers meet once or twice each month after school (sometimes with others from their school, sometimes with co-teaching colleagues from several schools). They are not paid for these sessions, but this planning time is applied toward required continuing professional development credit.
- On district professional development days, co-teachers are given a two-hour slot to use for planning.
- In an elementary school, students are dismissed 45 minutes early once each week so that teachers can jointly plan, and some of this time is reserved for co-teachers. The instructional time lost that day is added to the other school days.
- In a high school, once each week the school day begins 45 minutes late, providing time for teacher planning, including planning for co-teaching. This option eliminates problems related to teachers' after-school obligations, including coaching and club or activity sponsorship.
- In an elementary school, grade-level teams are required to meet for 90 minutes each week to coordinate instruction. Specialists working at the grade level are released to attend at least 45 minutes of this time for co-teaching planning.
- In a large high school, a homeroom period has become part of the master schedule. During this 40-minute time period, students receive tutoring or enrichment. Although the school has 100 teachers, only 75 sections of homeroom exist. Teachers without assigned homeroom groups release other teachers on a regular rotation for co-teaching planning.
- As a supplement to face-to-face time, teachers are encouraged to use e-mail to communicate about co-teaching and to post lesson plans on a district web site so that ideas can be shared and labor divided.

planning time each week, but because Ms. Lesson co-teaches in four classrooms, that would not be possible anyway.

- Mr. Elliott uses a similar approach in his fourth grade class. When Ms. Razmoski enters the room, he stops the instruction and asks students to review what they have covered so far. He then has the class explain what he had told them they would do when Ms. Razmoski arrived. This sound instructional practice—the mid-lesson review—helps students check their understanding and it also helps orient Ms. Razmoski.

When it comes to creating time for co-teaching planning, we endorse the idea that working together is a legitimate professional responsibility for educators. Equally important, though, is how time is used. You can find suggestions for the effective use of planning time in the Putting Ideas into Practice (Making the Most of Common Planning Time).

As you can see, common planning time is one co-teaching barrier that can be overcome. However, for this and other logistical matters, co-teachers usually rely on the leadership of their principals. Without a strong commitment from administrators, individual professionals are likely to have success, but co-teaching is not likely to be a widely implemented service option for students with special needs.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Making the Most of Common Planning Time

Think about what may happen to teachers when they meet during planning time. Perhaps someone is late, caught in a conversation with a colleague on the way to the meeting. When together, professionals may find that they spend precious time chatting about school events and telling stories about student successes and challenges. Sometimes they struggle to find time for the instructional planning necessary for co-teaching. The following are tips for effective co-teaching planning time use:

- Always have an agenda. The agenda reminds co-teachers of the many topics they need to discuss.
- Before the meeting, the general education teacher should prepare a brief overview of the curricular concepts to be addressed during the time the planning covers. For instance, what are the chapters, stories, concepts, and projects to be addressed?
- After reviewing curricular content, co-teachers should decide how they will address the content using co-teaching approaches. They might find it most effective to use patterns in their co-teaching. For example, they might decide that every time a unit is introduced they will spend the first part of the lesson teaming and the second part of the lesson working with students in stations.
- The next topic of conversation should be challenges for students. For example, is the reading level of the upcoming novel so high that an audio version of it needs to be located? Is there a version with simplified language? During this part of planning, co-teachers should brainstorm ideas for addressing special instructional needs as well as differentiation.
- Co-teachers should discuss individual students after completing their overall instructional planning. However, if a student is having a serious problem, this may not be the appropriate meeting (or all the needed participants) for the discussion.
- The final topic the teachers should address, at least briefly, is their working relationship. Has anything occurred that troubles either teacher? What activities or strategies have been used that both teachers want to repeat? The goal is to celebrate their successes and resolve problems while they are minor.
- After the meeting, the special educator or specialist has the responsibility of finding or making the significant accommodations discussed during planning. Examples include producing audio study guides, picture icons to supplement print information, structured notes to guide student reading, work banks, and other specialized adjustments.

This type of planning process maximizes the strengths of each teacher, provides an equitable division of labor, and focuses attention on both instruction and accommodation. Used consistently, it can help co-teachers be efficient and effective planners.

SUMMARY

- Co-teaching occurs when two or more professionals deliver substantive instruction to a diverse and blended group of students in a single classroom. They do this to address a wide range of diverse student needs, including specialized instruction, in general education settings.
- Successful co-teaching helps avoid the instructional fragmentation that can occur in more traditional services and the stigmatization that may occur when students leave classrooms; it also addresses the requirements that virtually all students access the same curriculum as their peers and that all students are taught core academic content by highly qualified teachers.
- Six basic co-teaching approaches are these: one teaching, one observing; station teaching; parallel teaching; alternative teaching; teaming; and one teaching, one assisting.

- Although co-teaching and collaboration are not synonyms, the former is greatly enhanced with the latter.
- To foster collaboration in co-teaching, co-teachers should discuss critical issues such as their philosophies and beliefs, parity signals,

classroom routines, discipline, feedback, noise, and pet peeves.

- In order for co-teaching to become an integral part of the special education service delivery system, strong administrative support is needed, especially related to planning time, class composition, and scheduling.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Review the case presented at the beginning of this chapter. Based on what you have read about co-teaching, your class discussions, and your knowledge of collaboration characteristics and communication skills, what do you think might be the fundamental problem the teachers are experiencing? What advice would you give to Ms. Shea for talking to the teachers about their co-teaching? What suggestions would you make for Ms. Smithson and Mr. Ruiz to get their co-teaching back on track?
2. Discuss co-teaching with classmates whose schools use it as a service delivery option. How do their understanding of what co-teaching is, the students for whom it is a service delivery option (e.g., English language learners, students with disabilities, students receiving RTI interventions), the amount of co-teaching occurring, and the issues that are part of co-teaching compare with the information presented in this chapter? How might you reconcile any differences? Write a reflective essay on your own perspectives of co-teaching as a role responsibility for your professional group (e.g., special education teacher, middle school math or science teacher, speech/language therapist).
3. Planning time is the most commonly mentioned challenge to effective co-teaching. How much planning time do you think co-teachers should have? Why? What are the several strategies for getting the most out of any planning time that is arranged? What do you think co-teachers should do if they do not have any scheduled planning time?
4. With several classmates, prepare a chart that compares the group's views of one-teacher classrooms versus two-teacher classrooms on as many elements as you can identify. For example, in a one-teacher classroom, lessons are taught from a single perspective; but in a two-teacher classroom teachers may share the same perspective, need to blend their perspectives, or decide to use differing perspectives as part of instruction. What does this exercise tell you about aspects of co-teaching that might come easily for you? That might pose a difficulty for you?
5. Suppose you are co-teaching and a problem related to your collaborative relationship arises. Either you are dissatisfied with how a discipline matter is being addressed, or your partner believes that your standards for students are too flexible. What skills would you need to air the issue and work to resolve it? How might the problem-solving process assist you in this situation? Role-play with a classmate how such an interaction might proceed

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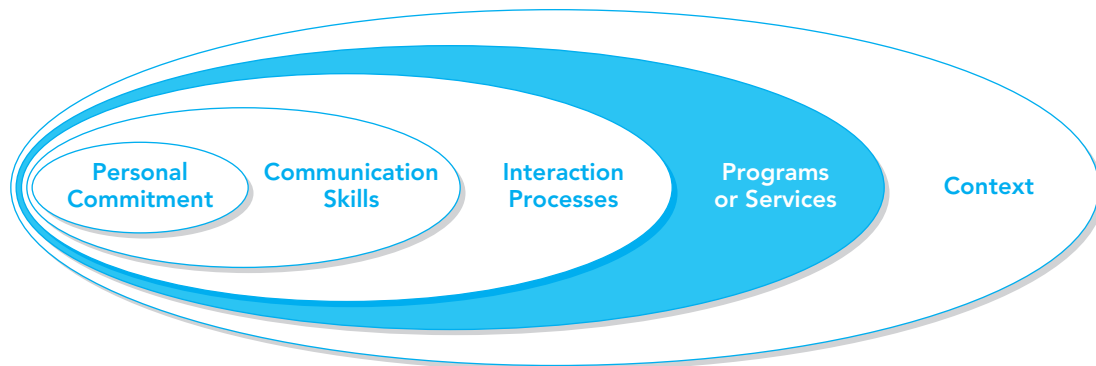
Consultation, Coaching, and Mentoring

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Consultation, Coaching, and Mentoring



Connections

This chapter explores specific approaches to providing student support that emphasize collaboration; examines the definition and characteristics of consultation, coaching, and mentoring; provides examples of each across a variety of school roles and contexts; and relates each of these approaches to collaboration. It also provides additional opportunities to apply the problem-solving process. Finally, consultation, coaching, and mentoring are applications in which the skills for addressing difficult interactions sometimes may be needed.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Define the term *consultation*, outline the characteristics of consulting in educational settings, and explain a rationale for consultation's use in schools.
2. Identify models of consultation that educators sometimes use, describe examples of each, and indicate when each might be appropriate for meeting diverse learners' needs.
3. Define the term *coaching*, outline the characteristics of coaching in educational settings, and explain a rationale for coaching's use in schools.
4. Identify models of coaching that educators sometimes use, describe examples of each, and indicate when each might be appropriate for meeting diverse learners' needs.
5. Define the term *mentoring*, outline the characteristics of mentoring in educational settings, and explain a rationale for mentoring's use in schools.
6. Describe examples of mentoring, and analyze the role of mentoring in the development of professional knowledge and skills.
7. Recognize how consultation, coaching, and mentoring can be affected by the cultural perspectives of consultants and consultees.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

An Instructional Coaching Experience

Jessica Svoboda is a second-year teacher and knows she still has a lot to learn about effectively meeting her seventh-grade students' learning needs. As part of her professional development plan for this year, her principal directed that she participate in instructional coaching and also, because her students include two with significant behavior problems, that she work with the behavior specialist. The coach, Ms. Delacruz, met with her to discuss her teaching. She asked Jessica how she wanted to refine her skills and how Jessica would know that her skills had increased. She also asked Ms. Svoboda to be thinking about the relationship between particular teaching skills and the potential for improved student outcomes. As part of this process, Jessica indicated that her greatest concern related to structuring her lessons, including transitioning from the previous day's work and proceeding in a logical manner so that students could easily follow along. Ms. Delacruz then observed in Jessica's second-period class, taking extensive notes on the structure of the lesson. During Jessica's preparation period, Ms. Delacruz met with her and shared the notes, helping her to analyze which parts of the lesson were clear and which could be improved. She offered to come to Ms. Svoboda's class the following week to model the beginning of a lesson.

Jessica's interactions with the behavior specialist, Mr. Huber, are a bit different. He offers consultation to Jessica concerning the students' behavior. For example, after Jessica described her perception of the behaviors, he completed a classroom observation and discussed the data with her. He then helped her to design a behavior plan for both students, and he will check with her on its impact after two weeks.

Introduction

Teachers used to have few supports. Once they completed their professional preparation programs and obtained licensure, they were expected to have the knowledge and skills to address nearly any situation that arose in their classrooms. A principal or other supervisor might provide feedback as part of an evaluation process, but if teachers had questions or concerns, they mostly collaborated informally, asking colleagues for assistance.

Today it is different. New teachers and teachers struggling in their jobs often are provided with a mentor to help guide their practice. When new knowledge and skills are expected of teachers, instructional coaching often is available, as Jessica learned. In addition, when teachers encounter difficulties related to specific students or situations, they may access a consultant to provide expertise in resolving the matter.

These supports—consultation, instructional coaching, and mentoring—are the focus of this chapter. All are implemented using elements of collaboration, and as a professional you may be either the recipient of such services or possibly the provider of them.

Consultation Concepts

Consultation has long been recognized as a way to provide support for students by working with teachers. For example, in the 1960s school psychologists acknowledged that they were too few in number to meet directly with all the students who should access their services; therefore, they began shifting their role responsibilities to consult with teachers, who then implemented in their classrooms the ideas that were generated during a structured

problem-solving process (Tractman, 1961). Similarly, as the idea of mainstreaming grew in the late 1960s and early 1970s, special education teachers also sometimes assumed consulting roles (McKenzie, 1972). Their purpose was to provide assistance to general education teachers whose class groups included students with disabilities. They met with teachers to problem solve about needed classroom interventions and to troubleshoot with teachers when challenges arose, but they generally did not directly teach students.

With the emphasis in today's schools on curriculum access and accountability for all students' learning, consultation continues to be a service option used by school psychologists, reading and math specialists, ESL teachers, speech/language therapists, counselors, occupational therapists, early childhood educators, special education teachers, and other professionals (e.g., Al Otaiba, Hosp, Smartt, & Dole, 2008; Baker, Robichaud, Dietrich, Well, & Schreck, 2009; Carlson, Dinkmeyer, & Johnson, 2008; Newell, 2010; Roach & Elliott, 2009). For many of these professionals, consultation is just one role of many they assume in providing support to students; for others, consultation is their primary job responsibility.

Because consultation has been used in schools for several decades, much has been written about it, and many definitions of the term have been offered. Some definitions have stressed that consultation is expertise offered by a counselor or psychologist to teachers to address student problems (Parker, 1975). Others have offered a more egalitarian view in which consultation occurs between any two professionals, one of whom has particular expertise to address the problem at hand (Caplan, 1970). Yet others have contributed the concepts that consultation is a voluntary and nonsupervisory interaction between individuals and that it is a specialized form of problem solving (Benn, Jones, & Rosenfield, 2008; Joshi, 2004).

From our perspective, key elements of these definitions, as well as those proposed by many others (e.g., Brown, Pryzwansky, & Schulte, 2011; Erchul & Martens, 2010; Kampwirth & Powers, 2012), contribute to a contemporary understanding of consultation. The definition of *consultation* can be summarized as follows:

School consultation is a voluntary process in which one professional assists another to address a problem concerning a third party.

Notice that this definition implies that at any point in time, a professional could be providing consultation or receiving it. It further uses the broad phrase "third party" to clarify that consultation often occurs regarding students, but that a principal, for example, might consult with an expert regarding a teacher. In this case, the third party would be the teacher.

Characteristics of Consultation

Of course, being familiar with a definition of consultation is only a beginning. In order to use consultation effectively, it also is important to know more about its nature. The characteristics of school consultation have been extensively described in the literature for school psychology, counseling psychology, special education, and other specialty areas in education (e.g., Brown et al., 2010; Kampwirth & Powers, 2012; Sabatino, 2009). Its most essential characteristics are discussed next.

Triadic and Indirect Relationship Although consultation in other disciplines (e.g., law, business, and medicine) may occur between two individuals and not relate immediately to a third party, in schools it typically is triadic, involving three parties and with an indirect relationship between the consultant and the client. The consultant (special services provider, specialist, or colleague) and the consultee (an individual teacher, special services provider, parent, administrator, or a group of professionals or parents) together design

services that the consultee provides to the client (most often a student but, as noted above, could be a teacher or another individual). Generally, the client is not a direct participant in the interaction but is the beneficiary of the process. For example, a reading specialist who acts as a consultant might meet with a teacher to plan how the teacher could use a set of specific strategies to improve students' reading comprehension. Because the reading specialist does not interact with students, her relationship with them is indirect. Similarly, a consultant supporting students through the use of assistive technology might meet with a special education teacher, a general education teacher, the speech/language therapist, and a parent to discuss the types of devices that might enhance students' participation in the classroom and the software that could be used to help them acquire critical academic skills. With the exception of observing and possibly demonstrating how to use a new piece of equipment, the consultant's interactions are entirely with adults, yet they occur for the benefit of students.

Voluntariness A consultee may be puzzled or troubled by a situation and seek the assistance of a consultant, or a consultant may notice some difficulty and offer insight to a consultee for remedying a problem. In each case, both the consultant and the consultee have the prerogative of entering or terminating the relationship at any time. This characteristic of voluntariness establishes the principle that consultation cannot be a coerced process (Brown et al., 2010). Both professionals agree to participate, but they retain the option of withdrawing if they choose. For example, Mr. Caldwell, a middle school social studies teacher, might ask Ms. Goldstein, a school counselor, to meet with him because he has concerns about Craig's sudden immature behavior in class, a problem that he thinks might be related to Craig's parents' recent divorce and family upheaval. Ms. Goldstein agrees to meet to problem solve about the issue, she follows up two weeks later to see whether the strategies they planned were effective, and she raises the option of offering to Craig that he chat with her. Conversely, Ms. Goldstein might have heard about Craig's family situation and approached Mr. Caldwell and the rest of his team about it; the team might have welcomed the conversation she initiated and felt relieved to discuss and address the problem. It is important to note, however, that the nature of consultation may change when the consultant rather than the consultee initiates the process; this form of consultation sometimes might feel to the consultee as though it were not truly voluntary.

Expert and Directional Relationship Most professionals who study consultation emphasize that consultants and consultees mutually influence each other and that consultants do not have authority over consultees. They also recommend that consultants be facilitative, empathic, and collegial (e.g., Erchul et al., 2007; Gravois, 2002). However, regardless of its democratic nature, the consulting relationship exists only because it is perceived that the consultee, not the consultant, has a work-related problem. Thus, the primary reason for the interaction is the consultee's perception of a problem that cannot be solved without another's expertise. In fact, it is difficult to imagine why consultees would participate in consultation unless they were relatively certain a consultant had expert knowledge and could provide insight on the matters they had been unable to improve themselves. In schools, even when both the consultant and the consultee have a significant interest in the student, the assumption for consultation is still that the general education teacher or whoever has primary daily teaching responsibility for the student (e.g., the special education teacher for a student who receives core instruction in a separate setting) is the direct beneficiary of consulting assistance.

Problem-Solving Process with Steps or Stages Much collaboration in education centers on shared problem solving. Consultation is an example of a specialized problem-solving

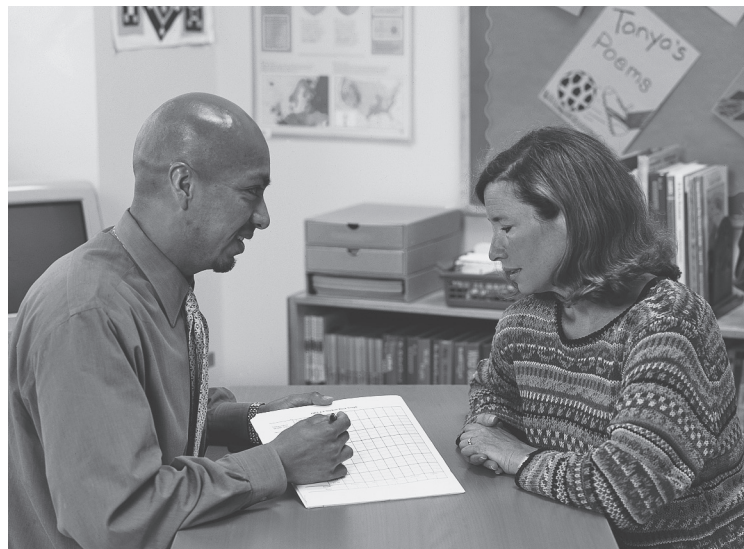
process (Newell, 2010), one that gives particular attention to the beginning and end of the process. The number of steps in the consultation process varies according to the author outlining them, but they typically include the following:

- *Entry*, the physical and psychological beginning of a series of interactions and the establishment of trust and respect
- *Problem identification*, the establishment of a goal for the consultative interactions
- *Planning*, the decisions about how to reach the intended goal
- *Implementation*, the carrying out of the planned interventions
- *Evaluation*, the determination of intervention success
- *Exit*, the termination of the consulting relationship as related to the problem at hand

Some evidence suggests that consultants do not follow these steps in a rigid manner; the specific sequence followed depends on the situation (Erchul & Martens, 1997). Thus, knowing the precise steps or stages is not as critical as recognizing that consultation is a process comprised of such steps.

The process of consulting might look like this: A school psychologist meets with a middle school team to discuss Ernie, an eighth grader who is often absent, who is refusing to attempt assignments, and who is becoming disruptive in class. At that first meeting, the psychologist asks a few questions (e.g., In what areas does Ernie excel? How have Ernie's behaviors and patterns of learning changed since the beginning of the year?), but he mostly listens to the teachers discuss the problems they are encountering concerning Ernie. The group also jokes about its need for sweets to cope with stress and arranges for someone to stop at the local doughnut shop prior to the next session. At the second meeting, the psychologist and teachers more specifically identify the problems they will address, and they generate alternative solutions for them, weighing the pros and cons of each. Ernie's teachers agree to try several interventions for the next three weeks. After that time, the entire group meets (and another volunteer provides breakfast) to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions. Some changes are made, and the psychologist clarifies that his role is essentially finished, but that he will check back with the group in approximately four weeks. The process, from entry to exit, has been carried out. If Ernie is receiving special education services through consultation, a series of problem-solving cycles would occur during the course of the school year. If the interventions for Ernie were not successful, the team might decide that he should be brought to the attention of the school's intervention team so that either a response to intervention (RTI) process could begin or the steps required for formal consideration of the need for possible special education could be undertaken.

Shared but Differentiated Responsibilities and Accountability Consultants and consultees do not share the same responsibility and accountability. If you are a consultant, your primary responsibility and areas of accountability are to ensure that the consulting process is appropriately followed and to offer specific and feasible assistance responsive



Consultation has a long tradition in school psychology and school counseling, but it also is a role responsibility that other specialists may carry out in contemporary schools.

David Mager/Pearson Learning Photo Studio



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Fidelity of Implementation: A Key to Consultation Effectiveness

A unique aspect of consultation is that the consultant generally cannot control whether the consultee implements the planned intervention. This concept is called *fidelity of implementation*, or *treatment integrity*. It has two parts: (1) accuracy, that is, correctly implementing the agreed-upon intervention; and (2) consistency, that is, implementing the intervention across time as planned. Fidelity of implementation directly affects the effectiveness of consultation. For example, Wood, Umbreit, Liaupsin, and Gresham (2007) were able to document that an intervention designed specifically to address disruptive behaviors of a third grader (e.g., yelling, slamming his desk into classmates' desks) was effective when it was implemented with fidelity, but that the teacher sometimes neglected to accurately use the intervention. Without checking for fidelity of implementation, the consultant might have concluded that the overall intervention was not effective because the data on the student's behavior varied significantly. Here are ways that fidelity of implementation can be monitored (Wilkinson, 2007):

- **Self-report.** You might list each part of the intervention you planned and then ask teachers to indicate on which days of the week each was implemented.
- **Permanent product.** If the intervention includes a concrete artifact (e.g., a data chart or student work), this information can help to establish fidelity.
- **Interview.** The consultant might discuss with the consultee the intervention and how it is being implemented.
- **Observation.** Depending on the consultant's role, she may be able to observe the teacher using the intervention and judge treatment integrity on that basis, discussing the observation with the teacher.

How might fidelity of implementation issues affect you as a consultant? What might be the impact related to the programs and services discussed elsewhere in this chapter, including coaching and mentoring?

to the consultee's needs. Because consultants do not control consultees' decisions about whether to accept and implement specific strategies, ultimately they cannot be accountable for the success or failure of the consultation outcomes if they have appropriately carried out their part of the process. On the other hand, if you are a consultee, you have the responsibility to participate in good faith in the consultation process and to seriously consider the assistance being offered. If you agree to use a strategy, you are responsible for doing so appropriately. This concept of *treatment integrity*, also referred to as *fidelity of implementation*—that is, the consistent implementation of strategies developed during the consultation process and carried out by a consultee—is essential (Cochrane & Laux, 2008; DiGennaro, Martens, & McIntyre, 2005), a point stressed in *Putting Ideas into Practice*. If consultees do not implement agreed-on interventions, the effectiveness of consultation cannot be assessed. Finally, a consultee's accountability includes gathering data and making judgments about whether the problem has been resolved, or whether another intervention is needed and desired.

The characteristics of consultation can be identified whether the professional in the consulting role is a school psychologist, a counselor, a speech/language therapist, a reading or other subject-matter specialist, or a special education teacher. If you look back at the case that opened this chapter, which of the characteristics can you find examples of in Jessica's work with Mr. Huber? How might the characteristics apply in a slightly different way to a reading specialist? To other professionals?

Rationale for and Benefits of Consultation

As with the other services discussed in this text, consultation is, first, a viable option for successfully educating students with disabilities or other special needs (Jitendra et al., 2007). Thus, when consultation is implemented, it should be designed to benefit such students. For example, some students with IEPs are entitled to supports, but they do not need the amount or intensity of service offered through co-teaching or instruction in a separate setting, or they need it in only certain domains (Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, & McGinley, 2011). In such cases, consultation may be an appropriate service or part of a package of services. Consultation also might represent a transition strategy: If a student has made tremendous progress during elementary school, so much so that the student's eligibility for special services is marginal at best, the team might decide to send the student to middle school with consultative services instead of direct services. Consultation is provided as a means of helping the student move from elementary to middle school. In this case, it might also be a strategy for assisting the student and family to transition out of special education programs and services. A third example of the use of consultation relates to a different type of transition, that from school to adult life (Michaels & Lopez, 2005). For example, a transition specialist may meet with a student and her family (and other team members) to discuss opportunities for post-school education or employment; the student and family decide which options to pursue. Taking these various applications of consultation together, then, you can see that the overall rationale for consultation is that it comprises a low-intensity service that can be used to support students in a variety of ways.

Consultation, however, has many other benefits. For example, it can be a low-cost and efficient means by which students with special needs who do not have disabilities (e.g., at-risk learners, students in need because of a life event such as a parent in the military being deployed overseas) can receive focused attention by professional staff. That is, a school psychologist may have time to arrange three meetings with a teacher who is concerned about a student, even though the psychologist could not justify working with that student directly over time. Similarly, Mr. Johns, an early career teacher, might seek help from the district literacy specialist for ideas on incorporating writing into his biology class.

In addition to providing a limited type of service to students at risk, consultation often plays a prevention role. If a general education teacher can work with a psychologist to assist a student who is having serious behavior issues, as a team they may be able to prevent the problems from becoming so serious that consideration for special education is needed, as might occur when positive behavior supports are put in place in a preschool program (Benedict, Homer, & Squires, 2007). Likewise, a speech/language therapist might assist a first-grade teacher in designing language development lessons to help several students, thus eliminating the need for them to be referred for formal services. Students who are entitled to special education or other services should receive them, but consultation can prevent some students from ever needing such high levels of support. One of the clearest uses of consultation as a preventive strategy can occur as part of response to intervention, the topic of Putting Ideas into Practice.

Yet another benefit of consultation concerns professional development. When teachers seek assistance from consultants, one incidental outcome often is an increase in their knowledge and skills. For example, when Ms. Vogt asks Ms. Denton to observe DeWayne, a student with significant attention problems, and to work with her to help him be more successful in the classroom, Ms. Denton introduces strategies for active student participation. Thus, Ms. Vogt learns how to implement "One Say, All Say"—that is, having all students repeat the answer given by one student. This technique benefits DeWayne, but it also helps other students to focus attention and participate in lessons. This professional development aspect of consultation can be enhanced when consultants



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Response to Intervention Through Consultation

In some RTI models, consultation is central. For example, in an approach called instructional consultation (e.g., Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006), a team is charged with designing and evaluating the effectiveness of interventions for struggling students. However, the teacher is not a direct member of the team. Instead, this general procedure is followed:

- A teacher who is concerned about a student communicates with the team leader.
- The leader assigns one team member to meet with the teacher to learn more about the problem.
- If the informal conversation did not resolve the matter or result in specific ideas for the teacher to implement, the person who communicated with the teacher assumes the role of consultant to that teacher, taking the teacher's concerns to the team,

participating with the team in understanding the concern and generating ideas for resolving it, transmitting those ideas to the teacher, monitoring their implementation, and evaluating their effectiveness.

- Other teachers with concerns about students are assigned to other team members, depending on the issue of concern and team members' expertise.

This model for implementing RTI provides a personalized liaison for the general education teacher, a relationship that exists for the duration of the process; and it distributes tasks among team members. It also eliminates the negative reactions that sometimes occur when teachers perceive other team approaches as a "them-against-me" arrangement. What other advantages might this approach have? Disadvantages?

specifically point out to consultees how to apply the ideas generated for one student to other students and situations.

When the benefits of consultation are considered along with its rationale, you can view consultation as an alternative for meeting a wide variety of student needs and enhancing the strategies in consultees' repertoires by efficiently deploying the professional resources in a school. In today's schools, with students with IEPs in general education settings and many students who are at risk for failure commanding educators' attention, the value of consultation is clear. For example, recall the earlier discussion of Ernie and how the psychologist met with the middle school team. By doing this, all the teachers benefited from his expertise and were able to coordinate their intervention efforts. The psychologist's time investment was fairly limited, but the positive impact was significant.

Consultation Models

Knowing the definition and characteristics of consultation, along with the rationale for its being part of your school's services, sets the stage for the next level of specificity—exploring models through which consultation may be practiced. Although there is little variation in the general consultation process, the practice of consultation is based on theoretical perspectives that have led to the development of several distinct consultation models (Gansle & Noell, 2008; Kampwirth & Powers, 2012; Strand & Badger, 2007). These models prescribe consultants' orientation and the assumptions that undergird their interactions with consultees. They also dictate the types of interventions consultants are likely to use. Two models that are particularly applicable to schools—behavioral consultation and clinical consultation—are explored in the following sections.



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Demonstrating the Effectiveness of Behavioral Consultation

Consultation has a long history of applications in education, and many professionals have studied specific aspects of it. These include the extent to which consultees implement the strategies they identify when working with consultants (e.g., Cautilli, Riley-Tillman, & Axelrod, 2006), the perceptions of consultants and consultees regarding their roles and consultation effectiveness (e.g., Wilson, Erchul, & Raven, 2008), and the characteristics of the communication that occurs during consultative interactions (e.g., Erchul et al., 2007). One area of particular interest is the use of behavioral consultation to address students' classroom behavior; an example of research on this was completed by Wilkinson (2003).

Using a case study method, Wilkinson worked with a classroom teacher to address concerns related to Ana, a first-grade student who was frequently off task, who argued and fought with peers, and who refused to follow school rules. After Ana's teacher gathered data on her behavior for five sessions, she and the consultant

developed a behavior contract that was presented to Ana as a game in which she could earn rewards such as stickers and classroom activities. Behaviors targeted included completing classroom assignments, interacting appropriately with peers and adults, and complying with teacher requests. Ana's teacher then implemented the contract while continuing to gather data on Ana's behavior. The intervention was successful in significantly reducing Ana's inappropriate behavior, and Ana's teacher rated both the intervention she and the consultant had designed and the consultant's effectiveness as highly effective.

Wilkinson concluded that his case study demonstrated that behavioral consultation can be used as a vehicle for positively affecting student behaviors and that it can be implemented so that it is acceptable to teachers. His work also illustrates that consultation about particular students might effectively be carried out by any number of professionals in a school—counselors, psychologists, or special education teachers.

Behavioral Consultation Behavioral consultation is the most frequently used type of consultation in schools, employed by special education teachers, school psychologists, occupational therapists, autism specialists, and others (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). Behavioral consultants rely on several assumptions to guide their practice (Luiselli, 2002). First, they themselves must have a thorough understanding of behavioral principles and practices and be able to apply them to their consultees. They also must ensure that consultees have either similar understanding or enough understanding of those principles to carry out behavioral interventions in a systematic way. Second, behavioral consultants presume that the consultee controls reinforcers that will be effective with the client or student. That is, teachers must have rewards or consequences that will affect student actions. Third, consultants using this model believe that data collection is not only important but also essential, and they stress data-based decision making. *A Basis in Research* presents an example of a study using behavioral consultation.

Procedure Of all the consultation models described in the professional literature, behavioral consultation has the most clearly defined steps or stages, which closely resemble both the general problem-solving process as well as the consultation process outlined at the beginning of this chapter. These are the steps:

1. *Problem identification.* This step involves obtaining a description of the problem and determining how to gather information to confirm its existence and character.
2. *Problem analysis.* This step is closely related to the first. The consultant directs the consultee on how to gather detailed and objective information about the problem so

that the gap between the current situation and an acceptable situation is identified and a strategy for addressing it can be devised.

3. *Intervention.* At this step, the consultant and the consultee plan a behavioral strategy to address the problem and positively affect the client, and they clarify each professional's responsibilities related to the intervention. For example, the teacher consultee might agree to provide a daily reward of 10 minutes of instructional computer time each day when the student has attempted all work without complaint during the class. The consultant might agree to write out the details of the agreement and to participate in introducing the plan to the student. During this step, the consultee carries out the plan with input as needed from the consultant.
4. *Evaluation.* Eventually, the final behavioral consultation step is reached. The consultant and the consultee use the data the consultee has been collecting to determine whether the strategy has had the desired impact. Based on what they find, they may choose to conclude the consultation, make changes in the strategy and continue, or begin again (Kampwirth & Powers, 2012).

Although the fundamental steps of behavioral consultation are very similar to the generic problem-solving steps that professionals carry out in team meetings, co-teaching planning, and informal interactions with colleagues, their uniqueness lies in their reliance on the principles of behaviorism—for example, describing problems in observable terms, using specific reinforcers applied to both the consultee and the client, using data to monitor progress, and employing a highly analytic approach to the entire process. Have you completed course work in behavior management? If so, you undoubtedly have learned the principles of behaviorism that would make it possible for you to offer this type of consultation assistance to general education teachers expressing concern about students with academic or social behavior problems.

Behavioral consultation sometimes occurs within special education as well. For example, if you teach a student with significant autism, you may work closely with an autism specialist or behavior specialist to find interventions that will help address student behaviors and social skills. Similarly, if you teach students with serious emotional disabilities, a consultant may assist you in designing therapeutic interventions. In what other types of situations—in special education or in general education—do you think behavior consultation would be most helpful?

Over the past several years, a new variation of behavioral consultation has emerged, and it represents a significant refinement of the model. In *conjoint behavioral consultation*, specialists, general education and special education teachers, and parents/families work closely together to design, implement, and evaluate interventions to improve student learning and behavior (Sheridan et al., 2009). More than traditional behavioral consultation, this variation strongly emphasizes a collaborative approach and views all participants as contributors as well as recipients. With this emphasis, the key adults in a child's life can coordinate their efforts to assist the child. Research suggests that this model is perceived as being acceptable and effective by teachers and parents, and it is particularly valuable for increasing parent involvement in the child's education and building positive school-home relationships (e.g., Sheridan, Eagle, & Doll, 2006).

Clinical Consultation Clinical consultation is a diagnostic model that traditionally has been used by school and counseling psychologists, diagnosticians, speech/language specialists, and, to a lesser degree, by social workers, occupational and physical therapists, and special educators. In clinical consultation, the consultant is concerned with accurately identifying or diagnosing a client's problem and prescribing strategies for resolving it (Strand & Badger, 2007). Clinical consultants' first consideration is that the source of

the problem is in the client, not the consultee. For example, if a teacher asked a behavior specialist for help in deciding how to respond to a student whose attention-getting behavior in the classroom was becoming a serious matter, the behavior specialist would assume that an intervention was needed for the student, not that the teacher's interactions with the student were rewarding the behavior. The consultant would try to help the classroom teacher see the problem clearly (perhaps the student's behavior was a means of avoiding difficult assignments) and to design a strategy to change the student's behavior (perhaps by giving the student only a small part of the assignment at one time). If this approach was not successful, the consultant might look at the environment, the teacher's actions in the classroom, and so on.

However, in this model the consultant is not actually involved in the ongoing implementation of the intervention or the monitoring of it. The consultant presumes that the dilemma for the consultee is the identification of the specific problem, not the implementation of strategies to resolve it. In the previous example, the behavior specialist would make suggestions about the intervention but would not stay involved in the situation unless the teacher asked for a follow-up.

Procedure The steps for clinical consultation are not as clearly prescribed as they are for behavioral consultation. Clinical consultants typically would meet with a consultee to learn about a student's apparent problem, and they would assess the specific problem. In this model, that assessment might include observing the student, interviewing the student, or even directly administering some type of diagnostic instrument. Clinical consultants would then analyze the problem the teacher reported by considering the diagnostic information they had gathered, including the student's strengths and needs. Next, they would suggest interventions for the consultee to try. Although clinical consultants would not implement the intervention, at a later date they might follow up to determine whether the outcome was successful.

Clinical consultation may be preferred when consultants have limited time in which to offer assistance to consultees or when a complex problem needs clarification that can be offered by an expert diagnostician. However, because this consultation model generally assumes that the problem exists primarily in the client, it is not particularly useful if the problem is one that involves not only the student but also the teacher, the environment, and other factors in combination. Also, this model is premised on the consultee's having the professional skills to act on the consultant's recommendations. If the consultee does not understand the consultant's conceptualization of the problem or does not have the skills to implement and monitor the intervention, the model has limited utility. How might this consultation model assist you whether you might be the consultant or the consultee? What are its strengths and drawbacks? If Mr. Huber followed a clinical consultation model in his work with Jessica Svoboda in the chapter-opening case, what might he do? What might Jessica's responsibilities be?

Consultation Models in Practice

As you were reading about behavioral and clinical consultation, you might have wondered whether consultation actually occurs in the distinct steps and following the theoretical perspective outlined, or whether you should just take ideas from these models as well as others and blend them into your own style. As with many concepts and procedures related to your profession, the answer is probably to use both approaches, thinking about and understanding consultation models but adapting them to your own experiences and job setting.

That is, consultation is seldom as "pure" as the models described in the preceding sections. All consultants tend to put their own signatures on their work by incorporating

their own personal styles, adapting procedures to fit contextual variables, and relating their consulting to their other role responsibilities, whether direct service to students, staff development, co-teaching, or others (e.g., Kennedy, Frederickson, & Monsen, 2008). This individualization of consultation models is certainly expected. The only caution to raise is that individualizing should not have the effect of altering the major assumptions and procedures of the model. If it does, it will undoubtedly compromise the likely effectiveness of the process.

Consultation and Collaboration

Relating collaboration and consultation can be traced to the early 1970s, particularly in the fields of school and counseling psychology (e.g., Kurpius & Brubaker, 1976; Pryzwansky, 1974). The viewpoint was expressed that consultative interactions were more likely to be successful if they were facilitative and supportive rather than prescriptive (e.g., Parker, 1975). By the end of the 1970s, it was clear that for psychologists and counselors in schools, a collaborative or facilitative approach to consultation was generally recommended over other approaches. As special educators became more likely to assume consulting roles beginning at about the same time (e.g., Christie, McKenzie, & Burdett, 1972; Friend, 1988), their roles likewise evolved to be collaborative. This was not surprising because many special educators in such roles were consulting with their general education teaching colleagues; and these professionals clearly believed that it was inappropriate for special education teachers to “fix” the practices of general education teachers through consultation. Further, because most special educators at this time worked exclusively in separate settings, they did not necessarily have a good understanding of the expectations and appropriate strategies for a general education setting. Instead, relationships based on parity and the other characteristics of collaboration evolved as most beneficial and satisfactory to all participants (Evans, 1980; Friend, 1984; Idol, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 1994).

It should be noted that today—with the continuing pressure for access to the general curriculum and the resulting increased enrollment of students with disabilities or other special needs in general education classrooms as well as the increasing use of response to intervention and other procedures designed to prevent the need for special education—the concept of collaboration and the notion of consultation often are framed as a discussion of voluntariness. In some instances, a special services provider as well as a general education teacher or another specialist have responsibility for a student’s education. This situation increases the likelihood that the general education teacher will initiate some consultation, but that the special educator or other specialist may initiate even more. For example, if a student with Asperger syndrome is included in an intermediate classroom, an inclusion facilitator might request a weekly meeting to determine the student’s progress and design interventions. The teacher may benefit from these meetings, but at the same time may feel unwanted pressure to participate in them, particularly during busy times of the school year. The teacher may not believe that the meetings are truly voluntary and may become resistant to the entire consultation process.

Despite these historical and contemporary issues related to collaboration in consultation, by using our definitions the distinction between these two terms can be clearly articulated so that professionals who consult as well as those who are consultees can base their interactions on an understanding of each. Because collaboration is a style or an approach to interaction, it can be attached to the consultation process, just as it can be attached to problem solving, assessing, and co-teaching. Moreover, a consultant may choose to use a collaborative approach at some consultation stages and not others, just as the consultant may choose to use it with some consultees and not with others.

However, ascribing collaboration to the consultation process does not make it a unique model (Dougherty, 2004) in the sense of the models presented earlier. Any model of consultation can be implemented collaboratively. For example, behavioral consultation has clear, theoretically based principles that prescribe its practice. Whether or not behavioral consultation is carried out collaboratively is an issue that is distinct from the model itself. Behavioral consultation can be conducted collaboratively within a relationship characterized by parity, mutual goals, shared decision making, and all the additional characteristics of collaboration. However, behavioral consultation also may be conducted by someone who, using a directive style, retains much of the decision-making responsibility, prescribes interventions, and offers expert advice and explanations to consultees. This same analogy could be made for clinical consultation: It could be implemented by a consultant who may or may not emphasize the use of a collaborative style of interaction.

Here is an example illustrating the varying styles of consulting relationships. Consider a consultation situation in which you and your colleague, Jane, have been working together collaboratively for several weeks to design and evaluate a systematic reward system for use with Henry, a student in her class. Increasing district demands, the inclusion of many students with disabilities, and concerns about upcoming high-stakes achievement testing have created significant and competing demands for Jane. Henry, the student whom you share, is no longer responding satisfactorily to your jointly planned intervention and has begun to display again his problematic and disruptive behaviors. You and Jane both recognize that you have a problem that must be addressed; but Jane does not currently have the emotional, physical, or logistical resources to participate in any significant way in a collaborative problem-solving effort. Consequently, you may need to solve this pressing problem independently (e.g., by making an immediate adjustment in the implementation of the intervention with Henry). Alternatively, depending on the situation and your assessment of it, you may decide that neither a directive nor a collaborative approach is appropriate. If Henry's lack of progress appears to be only temporary and Jane's stress seems to be the most salient issue, you may determine that a nondirective, supportive, or empathic style is most appropriate.

If you develop an understanding of how collaboration and consultation can be distinguished from one another and how they work in tandem, it will guide you in your own consulting interactions and help you communicate clearly with your colleagues and others. This is particularly important because much of what has been written about consultation has been written for school and counseling psychologists who provide this service, not for teachers or other specialists who could do the same. This situation is compounded by the fact that teachers and other specialists sometimes are assigned consultation responsibilities without attention being given to the knowledge and skills (i.e., consulting skills) they may need in order to effectively share their expertise (e.g., Correa, Jones, Thomas, & Morsink, 2005).

Coaching

A second indirect service option that has grown tremendously over the past decade is instructional coaching (Gallucci, Van Lare, Yoon, & Boatright, 2010). Coaching evolved because of dissatisfaction with traditional approaches to professional development. That is, until the 1980s much professional development consisted of stand-alone workshops, often scattered throughout a school year and lacking a central theme or any follow-up to ensure that what was presented led to implementation in the classroom and improved outcomes for students (Showers & Joyce, 1996). The original instructional coaching model (e.g., Joyce & Showers, 1980) emphasized teacher peers meeting with each other to study the



Michael Newman/PhotoEdit

When instructional coaches collaborate with the teacher, the ultimate goal is to improve student outcomes.

theory underlying the strategies they were learning to use, peer observation in classrooms, discussion of concerns related to using the strategies, and collegial support for everyone's implementation efforts. The goal was to create learning communities as a means of deepening teachers' knowledge and skills and ensuring a sense of support for them. Based on the evolution of coaching, it generally can be defined as follows:

Instructional coaching refers to a process in which an education professional with advanced knowledge and skills uses various strategies for job-embedded professional development to increase the capacity of teachers so that they can improve student outcomes.

Rationale for and Benefits of Coaching

Contemporary instructional coaching has different areas of emphasis, but it is still strongly based on collaboration and reciprocity. It is premised on the notion that teachers are more likely to remember and use with fidelity instructional techniques if they perceive they are learning them in a partnership, rather than being the passive recipient of information from an expert, as often is the case in other types of professional development (Ingersoll, 2007; Knight, 2007). Instructional coaching now is implemented to meet several needs in schools. First, it is a means to provide job-embedded professional development to teach educators skills, strategies, or techniques that will improve achievement outcomes for students (Brown, Reumann-Moore, Hugh, Christman, & Riffer, 2009; Knight, 2007). In addition, coaching is a vehicle for implementing school reform initiatives, such as an emphasis on data-driven decision making as a basis for designing and evaluating instruction (Marsh, McCombs, & Martorell, 2010). Finally, instructional coaching is a specific strategy associated with the Reading First (RF) initiative that was part of the No Child Left Behind legislation (Bean, Draper, Hall, Vandermolten, & Zigmond, 2010). Reading First was designed to help ensure that students in school in high-poverty areas learned to read through the use



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Being a Consumer of Consultation, Coaching, or Mentoring

Although you may or may not have a role to provide consultation, coaching, or mentoring, you are very likely to be a recipient of these indirect services. Here are some ideas to help ensure you get the most out of the experience:

- **Be proactive.** Prior to beginning consultation, coaching, or mentoring, think about the goals you have for the process. Outline those goals and share these with your collaboration partner.
- **Be prepared.** Depending on the situation, you may need to have your lesson plans, samples of student work, grades, records of correspondence with parents, or other materials. These items should be at your fingertips.
- **Be participative.** Consultation, coaching, and mentoring all rely on your active participation. As you offer information and insights, ask questions, and contribute to problem solving, you both increase the quality of the process and communicate to your collaboration partner that you are committed to making the process a success.
- **Be open.** It is likely that you will receive feedback during your interactions. It is essential that you learn to accept feedback without becoming defensive. Remember that the goal is to help you to improve outcomes for students, and without change on your part that goal is unlikely to be achieved.
- **Be persistent.** Consultation, coaching, and mentoring all are processes that occur over time. As you participate, you probably will be asked to try out a strategy, read materials, contact others, or gather data. Your good-faith efforts to carry out whatever tasks or activities you and your partner have agreed are necessary will help you move toward the goal.
- **Be reflective.** The more that you are willing to critically think about your practice, your teaching techniques, your interactions with students, and other areas related to the consultation, coaching, or mentoring in which you participate, the more effective the process will be. Your ability to recognize ways to change and grow as a professional can be a point of great pride for you; and it can establish a foundation for you to someday be in the role of consultant, coach, or mentor.

of evidence-based practices. Part of RF was professional development for teachers, and it specified coaching as a recommended model. Not surprisingly, the result of this federal initiative was the creation of many types of coaching roles and the extensive use of this model for increasing teachers' skills.

Depending on the grade level in which you work and your locale, you may find that instructional coaching is identified by several different names (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). In elementary schools, a reading coach or a math coach may be available, but in secondary schools there may be a literacy coach. Similarly, you may learn that you will work with an academic coach or a reform coach. In yet other school districts, the role is called instructional facilitator. And, as with consultation, you may find that you are the recipient of coaching or that you are expected to function in the role of instructional coach. If you receive coaching, you should prepare so that you receive maximum benefit from it; this is the topic of Putting Ideas into Practice. And whether you are a coaching recipient or provider, you will find that a single specific coaching process generally has not been widely accepted, but that various coaching models, addressed in the next section, have been identified.

Coaching Models

As with consultation, a number of coaching models have been developed. These models vary based on the purpose of the coaching approach, the role of the coach, and the types of activities or procedures employed (Denton & Hasbrouck, 2009). Two common models are technical coaching and reform coaching.

Technical Coaching Technical coaching has as its primary purposes introducing teachers to research-based practices, supporting them as they learn these practices, and facilitating problem solving as they encounter challenges in using the new practices. The most common example of this type of coaching across elementary, middle, and even high school levels is literacy coaching (Brady, 2007). In this approach, teachers with advanced professional preparation in the area of reading are charged with facilitating teachers' use of evidence-based strategies to improve reading outcomes (Taylor, Moxley, Chanter, & Boulware, 2007) or to incorporate reading strategies into other core content subjects.

A study by Vanderburg and Stevens (2010) represents an example of this coaching approach. In this initiative, teachers in kindergarten through fifth grade received support from literacy coaches who had been trained in specific reading strategies and who themselves worked with a regional coach. The literacy coaches held twice-monthly seminars with teachers; the goal of these sessions was to introduce new reading strategies and to facilitate discussion about those strategies, but the exact content of the sessions was left up to the discretion of the coaches and teachers. In addition, the coaches spent four days per week in teachers' classrooms, modeling the reading strategies and observing the teachers as they implemented the strategies. Interviews with the participating teachers revealed that they credited their coaches with motivating them to try new instructional practices, helping them to base their instruction on information from the professional literature, and creating more student-centered learning opportunities. Technical coaching is the type of coaching that Jessica, whom you met at the beginning of this chapter, is receiving. What do you see as positive aspects of this type of coaching? What concerns might you have about such coaching?

As you might imagine, technical coaching is used across grade levels and subject areas. A new twist in this type of coaching is the use of technology that allows real-time coaching, even if the coach is in a different location than the teacher. Called virtual coaching, this is the topic of e-Partnerships.

Reform Coaching If you work in a school where students are failing to reach the increasingly rigorous academic standards established through legislation and policy, you may work with a reform coach (Marsh et al., 2010). For example, at Crispus Attucks High School, only 23 percent of ninth graders are considered proficient in English and only 17 percent in algebra. These sobering data have led to a new principal being assigned to the school, and attention now is focused on improving outcomes in these two subject areas. Mr. Hamilton, the reform coach, has several key responsibilities. First, he is responsible for working with teachers to develop common formative assessments. That is, he ensures that all English 9 teachers and all Algebra I teachers participate in developing the instructional assessments given every four weeks in their subject areas. He also analyzes data as gathered and meets with teachers to help them understand what the data say about their instruction and how the data inform next steps for their teaching. In addition, Mr. Hamilton observes in classrooms and makes general suggestions about lesson clarity and pacing, student engagement, and classroom management. He is responsible for meeting on a regular basis with Ms. Cochrane, the principal, keeping her apprised of this work. One role that Mr. Hamilton specifically does not assume is that of evaluator. His role is to be supportive, and teacher evaluation is completed by Ms. Cochrane and an assistant principal.



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Virtual Coaching

Although the coaching strategies mentioned in this chapter focus, for the most part, on face-to-face interactions, that is not the only option. In fact, technology is creating new opportunities for electronic collaboration. One example is called virtual bug-in-ear (VBIE) (Rock, Gregg, Gable, & Zigmond, 2009). Here is how this coaching option works:

- In the classroom, there is a webcam connected to a computer, pointed to capture the instruction. Skype™ or a similar Internet-based service is used for transmitting video and voice communication.
- The teacher wears a Bluetooth® headset wirelessly synchronized with the computer equipment.
- The coach is located anywhere that another computer with Skype and an Internet connection are available. This could be an administrative office, a regional center, or a university setting.

- At prearranged times and following the principles of effective coaching, the coach and teacher connect via Skype. The coach observes the teacher, providing supportive feedback in real time as a lesson occurs. If desired, a recording of the classroom observation can be made and archived for later use.
- After the lesson, at a time convenient for both individuals, a follow-up session is held to discuss the observation and set goals for future practice.

One advantage of VBIE is that the coach is unobtrusive because of being off-site instead of in the classroom. In addition, the feedback is not only in real time but also private, thus enabling teachers to change practices on the spot without embarrassing them in front of students.

What advantages might this type of coaching have for you? What concerns would you have about it?

Notice that reform coaching has a broad-based goal of raising student outcomes. This type of coaching is likely to involve many groups of teachers, and the focus usually is on helping these groups improve their practices. The coach may carry out responsibilities that are similar to those of a technical coach, but this professional has additional responsibilities. The coach in this model often has duties that are administrative and typically serves as a liaison between teachers and principals and district administrators.

Coaching in Practice

Coaching and consultation share a number of similarities. First, coaching, like consultation, is rarely implemented in a pure form. Instead, models provide guidelines for effective practices, but individual situations, district policies, and local culture typically shape implementation. In addition, coaches engage in shared problem solving based on the identified needs of the partner, much like a consultant. Directionality also is present, especially in programs in which individuals are employed with coaching as the primary responsibility. Coaches are likely to employ behavioral techniques, reinforcing teachers for their efforts to improve teaching practices. In addition, the teacher being coached has the responsibility of deciding to seek input and implement recommended ideas, whereas the coach has the responsibility of observing the desired teaching behavior and basing suggestions on the teacher's preferences and skills. And finally, as is true in consultative relationships, trust and clear communication are essential (National Union of Teachers, 2004).

One aspect of coaching is somewhat different from consulting. Generally, coaching is premised on collaboration. Although discussions occasionally emerge about coaching that is not voluntary, as is the case with Jessica, introduced at the beginning of this chapter, the assumption is still that the coach and the recipient of coaching form a partnership

and generally meet the criteria for collaboration. Coaches may share expertise in order to improve teacher practices, but teachers make the choice to incorporate this expertise into their classroom practices.

Mentoring

Nearly half of teachers who begin a career in education leave within five years (Ingersoll, 2001; Keigher, 2010), and one key reason they depart is a perceived lack of support (e.g., Scherff, 2008). As a means of addressing this problem as well as offering a leadership opportunity for experienced teachers (Donaldson, 2007; Harrison & Killion, 2007), many general and special educators are asked to serve as mentors to preservice and novice educators (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Trautwein & Ammerman, 2010). In general, mentoring is defined as follows:

Mentoring is personal guidance, usually provided by experienced educators, delivered to first-year or early career teachers for the purpose of inducting them into the profession and improving their retention in the field.

Mentoring has these characteristics, similar to those of consultation:

- The goal of mentoring is to provide needed expertise to the novice through a strong and constructive professional relationship.
- The relationship is not evaluative. That responsibility generally stays with the principal or another supervisor.
- Although mentoring often is required of new teachers, depending on school district policy (Mullen, 2011), it is most effective when both mentors and mentees embrace and actively participate in the partnership.
- The mentor's responsibilities are to provide expertise by responding to the novice's questions, offering suggestions to address problems, and advising when problems arise.
- The novice teacher's responsibilities are to raise topics of concern, seriously consider and act on mentor ideas, and integrate new knowledge and skills into teaching and learning practices.
- Although the direct beneficiary of mentoring is the novice, the intent is to help early career educators become experts so that they are better able to address student needs (Gareis & Nusbaum-Beach, 2007).

Mentoring typically is part of teacher induction, that is, an entire array of activities, professional development, and supervision for beginning teachers (Wiebke & Bardin, 2009). An induction program, for example, might include six days of required professional development on student assessment, classroom management, and cultural responsiveness. In the same program, new teachers might be observed at least four times by an administrator or instructional coach and might be expected to participate in several small-group sessions that combine discussion of instructional issues with opportunities to socialize with teacher peers. An additional part of this induction program would be the assignment of a mentor, who is expected to contact the new teacher at least once per month and often does so far more often than that.

Mentoring programs generally have these four components (Waterman & He, 2011):

- Mentors are matched to the novice teachers with whom they work based on subject area or grade level
- Mentors are prepared through ongoing professional development activities to be effective in their roles
- Administrative structures support mentoring, including release time for mentors and mentees; stipends for educators functioning as mentors; and the development of school structures that foster collaboration, for example, professional learning communities
- An expectation is set for frequent contact between mentors and mentees, although novice teachers generally report opposing mandatory meetings



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Electronic Mentoring

When professionals think about mentoring or other specialized forms of consultation, they typically envision face-to-face meetings. But what if an appropriate mentor works in another school? What if the distance between schools makes it difficult for face-to-face interactions? One solution is electronic mentoring, either in groups or in a one-to-one format (Gentry, Denton, & Kurz, 2008). Gareis and Nussbaum-Beach (2007, pp. 236–237) have studied electronic mentoring and offer the following insights.

Content (topics mentors and mentees discussed)

- Planning for instruction
- Instructional delivery
- Assessment of learning

- Classroom management
- Professionalism

Function (types of supports mentors offered)

- Support/confirmation
- Guided advice
- Modeling
- Seeking clarification/direct questioning
- Prompting reflection
- Professional growth

What might be the opportunities or dilemmas of electronic mentoring as opposed to mentoring that occurs in person? How could the advantages of this approach be maximized and the disadvantages minimized?

The Impact of Mentoring

The idea of mentoring for new teachers is intuitively appealing (Johnson, 2011). If you are preparing to be a teacher, you might find it comforting to know that someone would be there to answer your questions and assist you to navigate through the beginning stage of your career. If you are an experienced educator, you might find the opportunity to serve as a mentor one that is attractive, a means to demonstrate your leadership skills. However, research on the impact of mentoring is, at best, mixed. For example, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (2009) found that a formal, structured mentoring program did not significantly change new teachers' practices, did not positively affect student achievement, and did not increase teacher retention. In contrast, Moir (2009) reported that well-designed programs can help new teachers to learn effective teaching strategies and create positive school change. Others (e.g., Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Waterman & He, 2011) have found mixed results from mentoring. These differences may in part be due to the fact that mentoring programs vary tremendously in terms of their requirements and procedures, and they also may reflect the fact that clear standards for effective mentoring have not been established. If you were to participate in mentoring—as either a provider or a recipient—what components would make it an effective program for you?

Whether you function as a mentor or are assigned a mentor as you begin your career, keep in mind that mentoring is highly collaborative. Mentors typically base their input on the needs expressed by the mentee, and a critical component of mentors' success is the sense of parity and trust they establish in the partnership. The characteristics of collaboration apply directly to the notion of mentoring, even when mentoring is a required district program for all new teachers.

As you think about mentoring and its potential impact, you also should be aware that technology is beginning to play a role in such programs. The e-Partnerships describes how mentors can provide real-time support even without being present in the classroom.

Issues Related to Indirect Services

As professionals in the field of education increase their collaborative activities, a number of issues are increasingly critical. For the indirect services of consultation, instructional coaching, and mentoring, these include the following areas of concern as well as those included in Figure 1.

Understanding of the Professional Relationships

Consultation, coaching, and mentoring are effective only if both parties are active participants. The providers of such services must strive to avoid being seen as academic and behavioral magicians; recipients must contribute significant information about their classrooms and students for consultants, coaches, and mentors to offer meaningful assistance. A dilemma occurs in some schools, however. Some providers feel pressure to have solutions ready to dispense to recipients. In others, teachers expect consultants, coaches, or mentors to have answers and are disappointed when such on-the-spot advice does not improve the problem or concern at hand. The challenge for schools as they implement indirect services is to educate all participants about their roles in the processes and to discourage professionals from making inaccurate assumptions about others' roles and responsibilities. For example, consultants should resist the urge to offer advice without an adequate understanding of the classroom environment and teacher expectations. Teachers must reciprocate with patience, recognizing that high-quality results are only likely with considerable effort. It is in this type of mutual understanding of the possibilities and constraints of consultation, coaching, and mentoring that skills for collaboration might be most necessary for all participants.

FIGURE 1 Unresolved issues in the delivery of indirect services.

Although consultation, coaching, and mentoring are increasingly part of school practices, a number of issues related to these indirect services remain to be addressed. In addition to those described elsewhere in this chapter, here are several that could affect their future use:

- The lack of data comparing specific models or approaches to indirect services in order to determine those that are most effective and those that are most well received by professionals
- The lack of data on whether the perceived status of the professional delivering indirect services affects the outcomes of the progress (i.e., whether a school psychologist consulting with a teacher leads to better student outcomes than a special education teacher consulting with that same teacher)
- The need for information on whether indirect services can be as effective as direct services (e.g., co-teaching) for improving student outcomes
- Appropriate strategies for proceeding when the recipient of indirect services declines to participate, even if directed to do so
- Strategies for bridging cultural differences among participants in indirect services
- Differences in consulting when parents, rather than professionals, are the consultees
- Administrative and school culture factors that may influence the outcomes of indirect services

Time Allocation for Professional Collaboration

Co-teaching is an important factor for indirect services. For all educators, both those that provide consultation, coaching, or mentoring as well as those who participate in these services, problems often arise regarding the time available to collaborate (e.g., Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). Understandably, time for working directly with students often is arranged first, and too often indirect services become an informal, sometimes unstructured, and occasionally unsystematic add-on to professional schedules. Educators participating in consultation, coaching, or mentoring should have time allocated in their schedules for these important activities. If these services are seen as a luxury instead of as a necessity, the demands of direct instruction, testing, report preparation, and meetings may preclude their meaningful use.

Cultural Differences

Over the past several years, increased attention has been paid to issues that arise when professionals interacting with each other are from different cultures, or when professionals are from different cultures than the families with whom they work (Clare, 2009; Li & Vazquez-Nuttall, 2009; Sheridan et al., 2006). Concerns relate to language differences, views about status and power, and the subtle communication issues that may arise. They also pertain to professionals' appreciation of how their own culture may influence their practice (Ouyang & Conoley, 2007). For example, a coach whose own culture highly values students being formal in their interactions with teachers may perceive informality as disrespect and a signal of poor classroom management. In general, consultants, coaches, and mentors should ensure that they acquire and use appropriate cultural competence in the development of interpersonal relationships, in their awareness of their collaborative partners' receptivity to various interaction processes and communication styles, and in the appropriateness of various strategies and interventions suggested (e.g., Erchul et al., 2009; Ramirez & Smith, 2007).

Confidentiality

When consultants, coaches, and mentors build trusting relationships with teachers and problem solve with them, information that should be held in confidence will likely be shared. For example, a teacher might mention that she is so frustrated with the acting-out behavior of a student that she finds herself negatively responding to nearly everything he does. This honest admission must not be shared with other colleagues. And although that might seem obvious, in the rush of completing many professional responsibilities and with the pressure that now comes with working in schools, professionals in consulting, coaching, or mentoring roles sometimes need to be reminded that they are obligated to keep confidences, even relatively small ones, in order to preserve the benefits of these services and to convey respect for their colleagues. Ultimately, confidentiality is an ethical issue, one that merits serious and continued attention in schools.

When considered as a whole, indirect services have an important niche in the array of services that ultimately help students to achieve. However, for them to be effective, the service providers must select an approach carefully, monitor the impact of their suggestions on their recipients and students, and constantly evaluate the quality of their practice. Some professionals, such as psychologists or those for whom indirect services are their sole or primary job responsibility, may find their roles comfortable and clear. For others, such as special education teachers and other professionals for whom indirect services are a new or secondary job responsibility, the skills for effective practice may have to be mindfully nurtured.

SUMMARY

- Consultation, as part of providing support to students at risk or those with disabilities, is one of the activities that special services providers often associate with collaboration in schools. It is a voluntary process in which one professional assists another to address a problem concerning a third party, typically a student.
- The characteristics of consultation are that it is triadic and indirect as well as voluntary. It is also an expert and directional relationship, a problem-solving process, and a process that involves shared but differentiated responsibilities for decisions and accountability for outcomes.
- Consultation can be based on several different theoretical orientations, including behavioral and clinical models. Each model makes specific assumptions, uses similar procedures articulated in varying degrees of specificity, and includes both advantages and disadvantages. Although consultants seldom use “pure” versions of consultation models, these provide a framework and alternatives for practice.
- Consultation often is collaborative, but consultants sometimes decide that a more directive style is better suited to achieving the goals of the consulting process.
- Instructional coaching is a process in which a highly skilled professional works with teachers in order to increase their capacity to improve student achievement.
- Two common coaching models are technical coaching, designed primarily to introduce new skills to teachers through job-embedded professional development, and reform coaching, intended to help the professional in a struggling school to improve student outcomes.
- Coaching generally is a collaborative practice focused on mutual goals and parity in the relationship.
- Mentoring is a strategy to help new teachers learn important skills and to improve the likelihood that they will stay in the field.
- Experts generally agree that mentoring programs rely on skilled mentors matched to mentees, administrative support, and frequent mentor–mentee interactions.
- Like coaching, mentoring is premised on collaborative relationships.
- A number of issues exist regarding the indirect services described in this chapter, including participants’ understanding of the process and their roles and responsibilities in it, time allocations for these services, participants’ awareness of and responses to their cultural differences, and confidentiality.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Think about Jessica, the second-year teacher you met at the beginning of this chapter. She has been directed to work with both an instructional coach and a behavior consultant. What do you think are Jessica’s responsibilities for maximizing the benefit of both of these indirect services? If you were in Jessica’s situation, what would be your concerns about working with the coach and consultant?
2. Consultation often is recommended as an approach for working with parents and families. What might be the role of a teacher in providing this type of service? For what types of situations or student problems might a teacher serve in this consulting capacity? What are the opportunities and risks of this application of consultation? What strategies could you take in your consulting work with parents and families to ensure that your status as an education professional and your possible cultural differences would not limit your effectiveness?
3. If you were to be the recipient of instructional coaching—either technical or reform—what would be included on your list of do’s and don’ts for the coach? Provide a rationale for each item you include, and then compare your list with those of your classmates.
4. If you are an experienced educator, think about your first year of teaching. What were your

concerns and questions? Did you have a mentor? How did this experience help or interfere with your induction into teaching; or, if you did not have a mentor, how could it have helped or interfered? If you are a preservice educator, what types of supports do you think would help you the most as

you begin your teaching career? What concerns do you have about working with a mentor?

5. What similarities and differences do you find among consultation, coaching, mentoring, and interpersonal problems-solving? Try to capture your thinking in a graphic organizer such as a Venn diagram or a chart.

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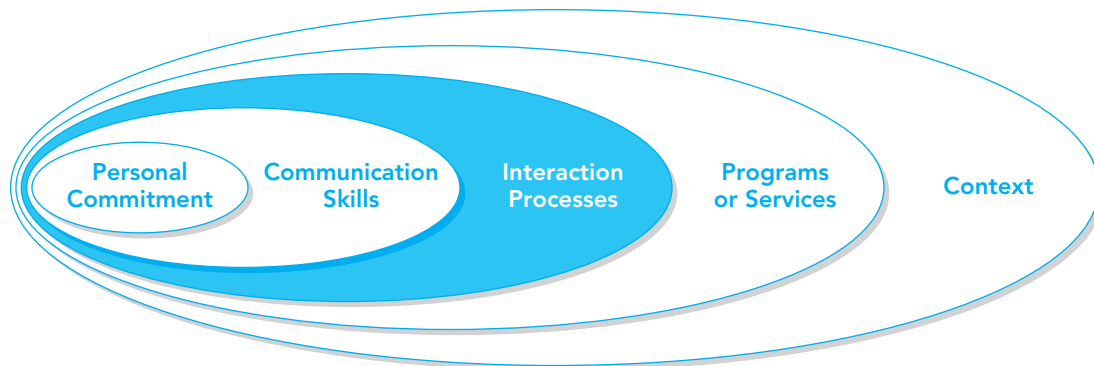
Difficult Interactions

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Difficult Interactions



Connections

In this chapter, you have the opportunity to integrate your knowledge and skills for implementing collaborative practices because this chapter—about difficult interactions—explores the situations in which you most need those skills. When you find yourself interacting with an angry parent or a colleague who does not seem to share your priorities for working with students, you have a critical opportunity to demonstrate your expertise as a collaborator.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Define *conflict* and *resistance*.
2. Explain why conflict and resistance should be expected by professionals in today's schools and the benefits that can occur when they are addressed in a respectful and constructive manner.
3. Describe four major causes of conflict and five response styles professionals typically use during interactions in which conflict occurs.
4. Outline the principles of negotiation as a strategy for addressing conflict.
5. Describe the causes of resistance and indicators that resistance is occurring.
6. Outline persuasion strategies that can be used to respond to resistance.
7. Apply strategies for addressing conflict and resistance to situations you may encounter in your professional role.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

Sometimes No One Is Happy

Kelley is sitting in a staff meeting wishing she was anywhere else. It seems that all the concerns about the school's planned implementation of a response to intervention (RTI) model are surfacing at one time, and the atmosphere at the meeting is contentious, to say the least. As she sits quietly hoping her principal, Ms. Bartkiewicz, will change the tone of the session, she hears these comments from her colleagues:

- "I thought we already had a pretty good process in place to address student needs. I don't really see how this is an improvement—it's just change for the sake of change."
- "Did I understand that nothing will happen unless data are collected about the student's academics and behavior? Who has time to do that? Are we going to get extra assistants who will be trained to collect data?"
- "We already have enough going on, Ms. Bartkiewicz. Now you've volunteered our school for this. Are you going to take away something else we have to do?"
- "This sounds like a way to keep us from referring students who need special education. The parents are going to object."
- "I know what the law says, and this is encouraged but not required. What's the point?"
- "These interventions that have to be implemented—who's responsible for that? I hope it's the special education teachers. There is no one else to do them; it's not fair asking teachers to take time away from other students for this."

Kelley decides that many of her colleagues have not understood what RTI is about. As the meeting continues, she silently applauds as Ms. Bartkiewicz calmly lists everyone's questions and promises to address them all. She does not indicate that the concerns inferred in the questions will delay implementing RTI.

Introduction

Have you ever experienced a situation similar to the one just described? Although few interactions with others at school have this air of tension, you should be prepared for those that do. Here are a few examples of situations that may be difficult or awkward to address:

- You call the technology coordinator to ask for a copy of a new program to be put on your computer. The coordinator explains that you are welcome to have a copy, but that the district's policy is that you must first attend a one-hour after-school workshop on its use. You reply that you are very adept at using the computer, have used the trial version of the software on your personal computer, and undoubtedly can figure out how to operate the full software package without having to take the workshop. The technology coordinator is sympathetic, but says that the program will be installed only after you attend the after-school session.
- The parents of a student refuse to give permission for an assessment, despite the apparent failure of a series of increasingly intense instructional interventions being implemented by teachers, teaching assistants, and specialists and the student's persistent failing grades. You are a member of the team that agrees the student should be considered for possible eligibility for special education services.
- You have a bilingual teaching assistant who serves as an interpreter for several of your students. Your impression is that she is coddling the students, helping them

too much, and suggesting to students that they should listen to her rather than you. When you raised the topic with her, she cried, accused you of being biased against her, and promised to do better. She then complained to the assistant principal, and you have been asked to explain yourself. The problem is compounded by the fact that the paraeducator's brother-in-law is a member of the school board, which has led you to be concerned about the security of your job if the situation is not amicably resolved.

- You arrange a twice-monthly series of meetings with your co-teacher to plan, wishing for more but grateful for these opportunities. The first meeting goes well, but at the last minute before the next meeting, the other teacher cancels. Over the next four scheduled meetings, she cancels two, shows up for just a moment at one to explain that she has other work she must get completed, and spends the other meeting complaining about students and colleagues, blaming the principal for how students have been assigned to co-taught classes and for the limited amount of planning time arranged for co-teachers. You privately conclude that students would do a lot better if this scheduled time were used wisely and instructional planning focused on meeting diverse student needs.

Some incidents such as these are relatively trivial and mostly annoying, and you may be able to easily resolve them (e.g., by attending the workshop on the software). Others concern the fundamental decisions made about students' educational needs (e.g., planning for co-teaching). The first two scenarios as well as the one that opened this chapter are examples of conflict. The latter two are examples of resistance. In this chapter, you will learn more about both types of difficult interactions and how to respond to them. Conflict and resistance are natural occurrences in collaboration, but depending on your response to them, they can either enhance your work or impede it.

Understanding Conflict

Conflict has been defined by numerous individuals (e.g., Barsky, 2007; Jeong, 2010; Polsky & Gerschel, 2010), and their definitions have tended to vary based on the theoretical perspective of the author. For example, some view conflict as a situation that occurs when one party perceives that his or her status is no longer equitable to that of another party; that is, it is viewed as a matter of perceived power inequity within a relationship (e.g., Coleman, Kugler, Mitchinson, Chung, & Musallam, 2010). Others see it as the result of attributions that some individuals assign to others, as when teachers consider parents "too demanding" or when school staff members perceive some of their colleagues as "inflexible." For our discussion, we provide this definition of conflict:

Conflict is a struggle that occurs when individuals, interdependent with others, perceive that those others are interfering with their goal attainment.

You can apply this definition to the scenario that opened the chapter. What might have been the needs of Kelley? Other teachers at the meeting? The principal, Ms. Bartkiewicz? What were the perceived types of interference?

Traditionally, school professionals have been uncomfortable addressing conflict. In fact, Barsky (2007) notes that when compared to other professions such as business, law, and psychology, education has neither evolved a systematic means of considering conflict as part of the work environment nor developed models for resolving it. Educators were particularly successful at avoiding conflict when school culture emphasized isolation, as was true until the past two decades. Now, however, it is unlikely that conflict can be avoided, and understandings of conflict from a business perspective can be applied to traditional

school elements to explain why this is so (e.g., Tjosvold, Wong, & Wan, 2010). First, each individual in traditional schools had clearly delineated tasks to accomplish and did these without relying to any great extent on others. In today's schools, this isolation and delineation of individuals' tasks is outdated and rapidly changing. Increasingly, staff members are expected to work together, share data, create common assessments, and so on; and they are therefore more likely to experience conflict just because they are in closer proximity (Barth, 2006; Kellermanns, Floyd, Pearson, & Spencer, 2008). An example of this happens on teams: When professionals from several disciplines with different frames of reference are making decisions about student needs, they are likely to differ occasionally about desired outcomes (Behfar, Peterson, Mannix, & Trochin, 2008).

Second, the traditional value system of schools tended to downplay emotions and keep school somewhat impersonal. Emerging trends, however, support all workplaces—including schools—as being nurturing and psychologically safe environments (Harlos, 2001) that give voice to teachers' preferences and opinions and ensure they are valued (e.g., Bond, Tuckey, & Dollard, 2010). As more needs are expressed, conflict is likely to emerge, because meeting some individuals' needs can interfere with meeting the needs of others. For example, this may occur as professionals request smaller caseloads or lighter teaching or service assignments in order to implement innovative programs or to assume alternative responsibilities. Such requests imply that others should have larger class sizes or more responsibilities, or that more personnel should be hired, both likely to be problematic options.

A third reason conflict is increasingly common in schools is that leadership approaches have changed (Baron, 2008; Reeves, 2007). In traditional schools, principals were considered effective when they were strongly directive in school decision making. Now, however, participatory management approaches are preferred (e.g., Rourke & Boone, 2009). The resulting increased staff involvement in decision making also increases opportunities for conflicts. For example, when school professionals are meeting to discuss the district's proposed pay-for-performance system, through which teacher bonuses will be tied to student achievement, conflict may occur. Similarly, when a grade-level team is deciding how to address curriculum goals and the administrative expectation is for a consistent approach to instruction across team members, disagreements are to be expected.

Because you are likely to experience at least some conflict in your professional role, you should also understand how it can be beneficial (e.g., Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, & Brown, 2011). By itself, conflict is neither good nor bad (De Dreu, 2008). You determine whether it will have positive or negative outcomes. Consider these potentially positive results from conflict:

1. Decisions made after addressing a conflict often are of high quality because of the intense effort invested in discussing perspectives and generating alternatives.
2. Professionals implementing decisions emerging from conflict are likely to have a strong sense of ownership for the decisions and for the commitment to carry them out.
3. Conflict typically causes professionals to sharpen their thinking about their points of view so that they can clearly communicate them. The result is a more carefully reasoned discussion, which may include a wider range of ideas and options.
4. Often, professionals who successfully manage conflict develop more open, trusting relationships with one another. This facilitates their subsequent interactions.
5. Practice in effectively communicating during conflict can make it easier to address future conflict situations.

Notice that we are not saying that interactions with conflict are simple or enjoyable; in fact, they are complex and often stressful (Fitzpatrick, 2007; Hayashi, 2011). But conflict does not have to be viewed as exclusively negative. If you look at it as an opportunity, it will be

one. Expanding your understanding of why conflict occurs and how it can be managed will help you view it this way.

Causes of Conflict

Think about your school or a school with which you are familiar. What types of conflicts have occurred there? Who has been involved in these conflicts? When you review these professional conflicts, you might identify different reasons why they occurred. We categorize these as related to interests, rights, and power (Masters & Albright, 2002; Wilmot & Hocker, 2011).

Conflict Between Individuals with Different Goals One major cause of conflict occurs when two individuals want different outcomes but must settle for the same outcome. For example, in a suburban school district, team members and parents disagree about the mission of a proposed program to increase opportunities for students with moderate disabilities to access the general education setting. Some school professionals believe that few students will be able to be integrated because they cannot meet academic and social expectations and that this is not even an appropriate goal (Kauffman, 2007), especially given the current mandates and resulting pressures on teachers to ensure that students reach rigorous achievement standards. Others believe that the program's primary goal should be whatever is necessary in order to make access possible for all students for most of each school day. Some parents are not in favor of any change in their children's programs and services; they prefer the current service delivery system with the traditional opportunities for interacting with peers at lunch and during art, music, and physical education. Others want their children with typical peers all day.

Each of the groups in this example wants a different outcome concerning the inclusive program; they have different goals. However, when a decision is made about the program, all the groups must abide by those guidelines. Although students may spend varying amounts of the day in general education settings, where staff is deployed and how schedules are developed will rely on the mission statement adopted. A common example of conflict between individuals with different goals includes disagreements between parents and school professionals about whether a student should participate in the school's gifted program. Another example concerns the roles for specialists when they co-teach in general education classes: Are they there to teach all students as appropriate or to provide support just for those with disabilities, language differences, reading difficulties, or other special needs? A third example of conflicting goals often occurs in the field of special education, the topic of A Basis in Research. What additional examples of conflicts occurring for this reason have you observed in your professional role?

Conflict Between Individuals with the Same Goals A second major cause of conflict occurs when professionals all have the same goal, but not all of them can access it (e.g., Rispen, Greer, & Jehn, 2007). The master school schedule offers an example of this cause of conflict. In a local high school, the master schedule is created by first blocking in the academic courses; then the vocational and special subjects; and finally the remedial, co-taught, and separate special education classes. However, with more diverse students enrolled in core academic classes, educators encounter problems arranging services. They request that the scheduling of separate special education classes, co-taught classes, and remedial classes occur immediately after the academic classes and before others. The special subject teachers argue that far more students are affected by art, music, and physical education classes and that those classes should have a higher priority. The teachers of the honors classes ask that other classes be arranged so that students who take courses at the local university in the afternoons are not penalized.



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Conflict in Special Education: Advocates and Due Process

No matter your role in schools, you may hear about or experience controversy that occurs in special education. You may attend an IEP meeting at which an advocate insists on certain services that school professionals do not think are appropriate, and conflict may be the result. You also may find that the parents of a student with a disability with whom you work have filed a complaint with the appropriate state office concerning their child's education, and you are required to contribute information and/or testify at a due process hearing. Such situations can be very stressful.

Advocates

Nespor and Hicks (2010) interviewed parents of children with significant disabilities, administrators, and special education consultants. They found that advocates played the following key roles for families:

- Translating between parents' hopes for their child and the technical and mandated procedures of special education
- Leveling the balance of power during meetings and in discussions of types and amounts of services
- Creating "paper trails" related to special education procedures, agreements, and IEP issues
- Prompting parents to write letters and otherwise contact school professionals, as necessary
- Fostering systemic change; that is, change that would positively affect students with disabilities in addition to the child for whom they are advocating

This study presented a constructive and problem-solving viewpoint of the work of advocates. What might be the perspectives of school psychologists, special education directors, principals, and teachers? How could you use strategies from this chapter in an interaction with an advocate?

Due Process

Zirkel and Scala (2010) provided important information related to the number and locations of due process hearings. They reported the following:

- Nationwide, there were 2,033 adjudicated hearings across the states and the District of Columbia.
- The jurisdictions with the highest numbers of adjudicated hearings were the District of Columbia ($N = 880$), New York ($N = 550$), California ($N = 119$), New Jersey ($N = 89$), and Pennsylvania ($N = 84$). These represented 85 percent of all hearings.
- Comparing these data to previously gathered data, the number of hearings across the country has decreased significantly over the past several years ($N =$ approximately 2,800 hearings in 2005).

These data should give you a sense of the likelihood that you may be involved in or affected by a due process hearing (i.e., there are far more hearings in certain locations on the East Coast and West Coast, and far fewer in the middle of the country). More important, the data indicated that resolutions increasingly are found prior to the action of convening a formal due process hearing.

In this example, the various parties have the same goal: receiving priority treatment in the scheduling process. However, when one group is given priority, the others cannot have it. One group is likely to be dissatisfied with the resolution of this conflict. You have probably witnessed or participated in many similar conflicts, such as when only two individuals can go to a professional conference and several more requested to attend, when a position in a preferred school opened and several individuals requested a transfer, and so on. Scarce resources often result in competing goal conflicts (Martinez, 2004).

Conflict About Power In some cases, conflict is not about goals at all. Instead, it may be about each person's perceived sense of power (Coleman et al., 2010). If a principal, for instance, mandates that certain professionals are to be members of the school's response to intervention team, conflict may result. It is not a matter of whether the educators want to participate or want to assist students—it is the fact that they were told to accept this

responsibility instead of being given a choice. Another example sometimes occurs in co-teaching. One teacher may contradict the other during instruction or change the directions given, and these difficult interactions may result in conflict. A careful analysis shows, though, that a common reason for these issues is one teacher's perception of needing to establish power and status in the classroom. What are other examples of conflicts about power that occur in schools?

Conflict Within Individuals One additional cause of conflict is an internal discrepancy that you perceive within your own goals. We mention this cause of conflict for completeness: Intrapersonal conflict does not necessarily affect others, but it can pose a very serious job stressor for professionals (Martinez, 2004). For example, suppose you are responsible for a group of students, and their diverse needs seem too numerous to meet. You can easily identify ways that you could differentiate instruction and otherwise support all the students, but you simply cannot implement all your ideas. You are in conflict with yourself about which strategies to implement, which students to focus your efforts on, and whether you are favoring some students over others, an ethical dilemma. Similarly, a specialist might encounter intrapersonal conflict in scheduling services for a student: More services might lead to an improved outcome, but this also could take services away from other students. Internal causes of conflict such as these are extremely common in schools where professional roles are changing and where expectations for student achievement are increasing rapidly.

Intrapersonal conflict may cause unclear communication, which negatively affects professional interactions. When you discuss a situation such as those just described, you may say one thing but imply another. You may also argue for one perspective one day, but support a different approach the next day. That is, your interpersonal conflict may lead you to communicate contradictory perceptions or preferences.

The Influence of Organizational Variables

Understanding the causes of conflict provides a framework for identifying and managing it. However, other factors interact with these causes to affect the frequency and intensity of conflicts in your school setting. One factor particularly important for school professionals concerns organizational variables.

School Administration and Organization The conflict you encounter is influenced significantly by the organization and administration of your school (Barth, 2006; Shipps & White, 2009; Tjosvold, 2007). For example, your principal's leadership style affects conflict. If the principal tends to use a hands-off style, you and your colleagues may find yourselves in conflict with one another for scarce resources. Without leadership to set guidelines on the distribution of resources, you may disagree with their allocation and compete with one another for them.

Another cause of conflict in schools is lack of clarity in procedures (Isenhardt & Spangle, 2000). For example, some professionals believe that permission to attend a staff development conference is to be given by the principal. Others know that the director of curriculum is responsible for paying the registration fees, and so they believe that the director must give permission. Various staff members contact one of these two individuals. In the confusion, more people initially receive approval to attend than funds exist to support their attendance. Some professionals express anger when they are later told that they cannot attend, and they question how attendees were selected from those who applied to attend.

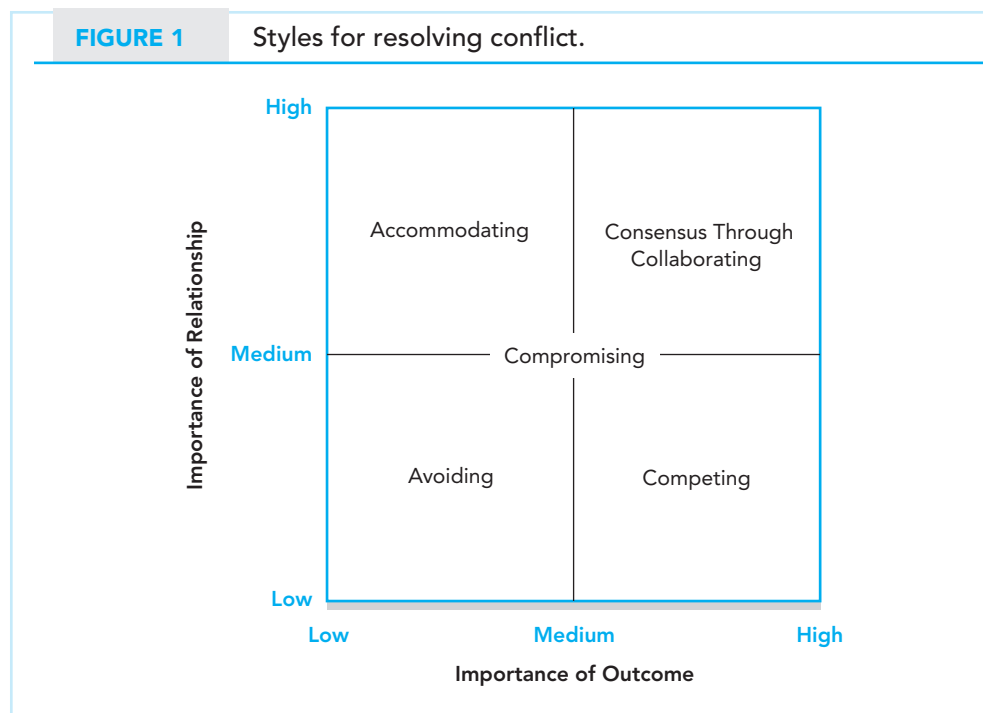
Communication Patterns Another critical organizational variable that affects conflict is the pattern of communication among the individuals in various parts of the organization

(Hines, 2008; Polsky & Gerschel, 2010). Many different types of dysfunctional communication can create conflict situations. One type occurs when similar information is not available to all individuals. For example, the school psychologists and social workers are informed that the procedures for RTI are changing, but the teachers do not receive this notice. At a subsequent meeting, the teachers challenge the change in procedures initiated by the school psychologists and question whether the change is mandatory or optional. Because the communication was dysfunctional, a conflict was caused.

Another dysfunctional communication pattern that affects the likelihood of conflict occurs when information is conveyed differently by the individuals who communicate with the same staff members. Specialists experience this when they attend a meeting with all the other members of their discipline and learn a new piece of information about data collection expectations. A week later, they attend a meeting for all school personnel, and a different set of instructions is given about the same topic. Shortly after these meetings, several staff members experience conflict about the expectations. Their differences are attributable to the conflicting information they received about the change.

Conflict Response Styles

The next component in learning to understand and respond to conflict concerns the style you are likely to use when participating in a conflict interaction. Figure 1 visually represents common conflict response styles, and the e-Partnerships feature provides you with additional resources for learning about responding to conflict. Notice that the styles vary along two dimensions: the importance of the relationship and the importance of the outcome. Avoidance has the least amount of both these characteristics, consensus built



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E-PARTNERSHIPS

Skills for Difficult Interactions

You can find many Internet sites that provide valuable information for understanding conflict and resistance and that can help you to refine your skills for responding to difficult situations. Here are examples of resources you might want to access.

Conflict Resolution Network

(www.crnhq.org/pages.php?pID=10)

The Conflict Resolution Network is dedicated to creating a conflict-resolving community across all types of professional and personal situations. On this page of the CRN web site, you can find practical information on 12 specific skills related to conflict resolution. Topics addressed include the following:

- A win-win approach
- Appropriateness assertiveness
- Management of emotions
- Development of options

Video About Difficult Interactions

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=NgnAY_eXYbI)

In this four-part PBS program that has been posted on YouTube, psychologist Dr. Bill Crawford discusses interactions with difficult people. The video clips explore sources of conflict and strategies for constructively and satisfactorily responding during such challenging interactions.

Dealing with Difficult People

(www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cq2u2ieORhw&feature=related)

In this YouTube video, speaker Colleen Kettenhofen explains how to respond to difficult people. The video includes role-plays and uses humor to help you understand the strategies presented. She includes strategies for interacting with people who tend to gripe as well as with people who subtly criticize others and offers practical, use-tomorrow types of advice.

through collaboration has the greatest amount of each, and compromise has roughly equal, moderate amounts of both types of concern (Shell, 2001). You can assess your style using the Conflict Management Style Survey included in the appendix at the end of this chapter.

Most people have a preferred style for responding to conflict (Aritzeta, Ayestaran, & Swales, 2005; Tatum & Eberlin, 2006). As each style is explained on the following pages, keep in mind that no style is entirely positive or negative. Depending on the situations in which a style is used, it has both merits and drawbacks. Remember, too, that your response to conflict may depend partly on the specific situation in which the conflict occurs. For example, you may respond somewhat differently to conflict in a personal relationship than to conflict in a professional setting.

Competitive Style Some individuals address conflict using a competitive style, which is sometimes associated with the use of power, as people who use it might attempt to overpower others. Their goal tends to be winning, regardless of the potential negative repercussions of their strategy.

A competitive conflict management style might be desirable when ethical issues are at stake or when you are certain that you are right, and that your perspective on the issue at hand is critical to student success. Occasionally, you may use this style when a decision must be made for which group input is sought but for which you alone have responsibility. The disadvantages of this style relate to its inappropriate use: If you frequently compete during conflict, others may stop interacting with you in a meaningful way. Too much use of a competitive style can seriously damage collaborative relationships. Also, few issues in schools have an absolute “right” solution; most are a matter of interpretation. If you often compete because you are certain you are right, you may be perceived by others as rigid and directive.

Avoidance Style Individuals who prefer avoidance usually try to ignore the discrepancy between their own goals and those of others. They deal with conflict by turning away from it. If you have ever participated in a meeting in which an issue needed to be brought to the surface but everyone appeared to have tacitly agreed not to discuss it, you were experiencing avoidance. Notice that in this situation the conflict is not being resolved and may continue to trouble the group.

In particular circumstances, avoidance is advisable. If a conflict is extremely serious and emotion laden, temporary avoidance may enable the individuals involved to think about their positions and participate more constructively. Similarly, if there is not enough time to adequately address a conflict or if the issue is relatively inconsequential, avoidance may be the preferred strategy. However, using avoidance may create difficulties in your collaborative relationships. For example, if you and a colleague disagree on a teaching technique or the amount of support needed by an English learner participating in a general education class, avoiding discussion of the topic can exacerbate the conflict. Avoidance is a seductive strategy because it gives the appearance that all is well; its hidden danger is that a situation may become more difficult or awkward because of inaction.

Accommodative Style Individuals who use an accommodative style set aside their own needs in order to ensure that others' needs are met. Their characteristic response to conflict is to give in. Occasionally, special educators and other specialists use this style because they believe it may help to initiate or preserve positive relationships with colleagues, particularly in highly collaborative situations such as co-teaching.

An accommodative style can be beneficial when the issue is relatively unimportant or when you cannot alter the situation. Accommodating has a distinct advantage in that it brings conflict to a quick close, enabling you to turn your attention to other matters. The drawbacks of accommodating include the risk of feeling as though others are taking advantage of you, the potential that the issue is one for which you have the best answer and yet you do not insist that it be selected, and the possible devaluing of your ideas when you quickly accommodate on an important matter. Generally, accommodating can be especially appropriate for professionals who need to overcome the tendency to try to win every disagreement; it is often inappropriate for those who feel powerless in their professional relationships.

Compromising Style Many school professionals use a compromising style in responding to conflict. They give up some of their ideas related to an issue and insist that others do the same. They keep some of their ideas and go along with some of the ideas others have proposed. The result typically is an outcome that may not exactly meet everyone's needs, but is acceptable to all.

Because compromising is a style whose strength is expedience, it is often appropriate when limited time is available to manage a conflict. It is also useful when the issue at hand is not especially problematic and when two competitive individuals have a conflict. Although compromise seems to be an ideal style because it implies that part of each individual's goal is achieved, it, too, has drawbacks. For example, sometimes typically competitive professionals who decide to compromise feel that they have partly "lost" and so may be somewhat dissatisfied. As a result, additional conflict may occur later. The compromised resolution of an issue can be a bit like the agreement reached for a seaside vacation planned by two friends, one of whom wanted to go to the East Coast while the other wanted to go to the West Coast. They ended up in Kansas, and neither person was truly happy.

Consensus Through Collaboration Style Although some level of collaboration is required for most conflict resolution, it is particularly important when the goal is to reach consensus.



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Constructive Conflict and Psychological Safety

Whenever you work in a group, including on teams, conflict may occur. But the type of conflict and the context in which it occurs can either help teams become more productive or interfere with their work. Bradley, Postlethwaite, Klotz, Hamdani, and Brown (2011) studied conflict on teams with a large sample of undergraduate students. These teams ($N = 117$) completed team-building activities to establish interpersonal relationships and then were assigned specific tasks to complete. After the teaming experience, the participants completed three instruments designed to rate the level of conflict experienced on the team related to the assigned tasks, the level of psychological safety on the team, and the quality of the team's performance. Some of the findings included the following:

- Team performance ratings were correlated with participants' ratings of psychological safety on the

team. That is, when ratings of psychological safety were lower, team members' ratings of their team's performance were lower.

- When psychological safety was rated as high, higher task conflict was positively correlated with ratings of team performance. That is, if team members felt psychologically safe, more conflict led them to perceive that their team had performed at a higher level.

The authors of this study concluded that team members should work diligently to make all members feel safe as a means of improving team functioning. How could you apply these interesting findings about conflict on teams to the teams on which you might serve as an educator?

Consensus generally is the most satisfying approach to resolving conflict (Feder & Merget, 2008). Use of a consensual style requires commitment to the defining elements of collaboration we described as a foundation to this text, as well as to the emergent characteristics of collaboration. It often includes developing a completely new alternative to resolve the conflict situation. For example, a collaborative response to the vacation example might be for the friends to decide that the vacation was not the issue at all. Because both were looking for a relaxing experience near water, they could decide to spend a week in a lakeside retreat only 50 miles from their hometown. Unlike compromise, which means taking some of each person's ideas and rejecting some of each person's ideas, consensus is premised on creating options that all participants completely endorse. When consensus is achieved, each participant fully approves of the resolution.

Although consensus has many positive aspects, in conflict situations it cannot always be achieved: It is time consuming, it requires that certain defining elements be in place, and it can be undertaken only as professionals learn about and come to trust one another. Thus, achieving consensus through collaboration is sometimes not even an option for addressing conflict. In such cases, a much more likely and still appropriate option is compromise.

By learning to monitor the style you use to respond to conflict in your professional interactions, you will grow in your knowledge about how you handle such situations. Further, by knowing what causes conflict, understanding conflict response styles, and learning specific strategies such as those described next and in *A Basis in Research*, you will be more successful in managing difficult interactions.

Resolving Conflict Through Negotiation

Negotiation is a conflict management technique that has a long history of success in business settings (Pruitt, 2011; Putnam, 2010) that can also help you resolve school conflict.



Photodisc/Getty Images

Negotiation and mediation are two strategies school professionals use to foster collaborative rather than adversarial approaches to addressing differences.

Negotiation can be used in many types of conflict. Here are examples of conflicts in school settings that could be addressed through negotiation:

- The number of planning sessions a pair of co-teachers will get for the school year (between principals and co-teachers)
- Who will take responsibility for which parts of the shared planning tasks on the grade-level or department team (among teachers)
- The dates the counselor will come to the class to work with students on a unit on friendship (teacher and specialist)
- The type of communication system that will be implemented among the ESL teacher, the general educator, and the parent (teachers and parent)
- The amount of service that will adequately address a student's assessed needs for special education and related services (teachers, parents, administrator)

Notice that negotiation sometimes occurs on small, day-to-day matters, and sometimes it occurs on significant issues. The strategies for negotiation across all types of conflicts are the same.

The key to successful negotiation, whether it is formal or informal, is to keep in mind that the object of the interaction is not for one person to win while the other loses. In their extensive work on this topic, Ury and his colleagues (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1997; Ury, 1991; Ury, Brett, & Goldberg, 2005) have derived the following principles, employed in many professions, for successful negotiation:

1. Focus on issues, not people, whenever you experience conflict. Instead of saying, "You don't understand how changing the intervention will affect the entire class," you might say, "The strategy we're discussing now could cause problems. I think it might negatively affect classroom routine." The former makes the disagreement an adversarial situation based on people; the latter acknowledges disagreement but anchors it on the proposed intervention instead of on the person who proposed it.
2. To the greatest extent possible, keep the conflict focused on issues that have the potential to be agreed on. This reminds you as well as the others that you have a common ground from which to work to manage the conflict. For example, it is often more constructive to suggest a specific remedial intervention for a student than to discuss a colleague's disagreement that the student can be successful in the teacher's class. The former can be addressed; in most cases, the latter cannot.
3. Reduce the emotional component of the conflict. If the issue in conflict has raised strong emotional responses, you may find that it is not possible to proceed and temporary avoidance is needed. However, you can also sometimes defuse emotions by responding positively to others' negative comments, by not responding to comments that might cause you to become angry, and by acknowledging others' feelings (Jordan & Troth, 2004; Scott, 2008).
4. We would be remiss if we did not include a final strategy: the option for you to adapt to the issue or, if possible, to exit the situation. At some point, it becomes self-defeating to continue to try to address a conflict if the other person does not view the matter as an issue or if you cannot influence the conflict situation. Resolving the matter within

yourself so that you no longer fret about it may be extraordinarily difficult, especially if you feel strongly about it. However, “letting go” also may be the most viable option. If that is not possible and the issue is critical, you may choose to leave the situation or even the school setting. For example, a student with a moderate cognitive disability is moving to first grade. The first-year special education teacher believes strongly that the child should spend most of the day with peers without disabilities. The first-grade teachers are adamant that they do not know how to meet the child’s needs. The principal does not want to anger the first-grade teachers, and so she is tending to agree with their point of view unless the district is willing to provide a one-to-one assistant for the student. The parent is not strongly advocating for any arrangement but does like the idea of the assistant. In spite of repeated efforts using superb communication skills and in light of so many factors constraining placement in a typical classroom, including the fact that no assistant will be assigned, the special educator might decide that she should simply keep quiet about her beliefs. If this pattern of making decisions about children were common, she might decide that she would prefer to work in another school or another district. Sometimes the decision to keep quiet or leave relates to a combination of factors, including the importance of the conflict, the school culture, and a person’s status (e.g., nontenured). Many professionals find options related to accepting or leaving a situation extraordinarily difficult because of their commitment to their students and profession, but a discussion of conflict resolution would not be complete without mentioning this choice as an alternative.

Consider how each of the forgoing ideas can be applied to the exchange between the teacher and the principal at the beginning of this section. If you use these principles for effective negotiation and think of negotiation as specialized problem solving, you can use steps such as those in Putting Ideas into Practice to respond to conflict positively and constructively. For additional practice, you might consider using the case that opened this chapter as a basis for discussing how such conflicts might be addressed by school professionals.

Resolving Conflict Through Mediation

You probably have experienced formal negotiation if you have been involved in the discussion of teacher contracts through your local professional association. Perhaps you have informally negotiated with colleagues concerning team planning time, the clarification of roles in a co-taught class, or the arrangement of a single classroom shared among you and two other reading specialists. However, what should you do if negotiation fails to resolve the conflict? What strategies remain when you cannot simply retreat from the situation and are not satisfied with the current situation? A specialized form of negotiation—mediation—is a process in which a third party who is neutral in regard to the issue at hand guides the individuals in conflict through a voluntary discussion with the goal of settling the dispute (Kidder, 2007; Pruitt, 2011). Like negotiation, mediation is used in many disciplines, including education (e.g., Bernardin, Richey, & Castro, 2011; Charkoudian, 2010; Malm, 2009; Otis, 2011).

Consider the situation previously mentioned about the appropriate role for each professional in a co-taught class. The general education teacher is not comfortable with another adult contributing during large-group instruction and prefers that you remain seated and quiet during such times. You maintain that you are highly qualified and experienced and that, with less large-group instruction and more use of small groups, you can actively participate in instruction and better provide a range of supports and services to students in the classroom. At an impasse, perhaps you ask your assistant principal or your school’s



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Effective Negotiation

In addition to understanding the principles on which successful negotiation is based, you can use the following steps to guide your negotiation to a positive conclusion:

- *Understand your own motivation and that of others.* What are the motivations of those involved in the conflict? Is the basis of the conflict a value difference? Is it an issue of limited resources and the stress caused by the situation? Is it a matter of differing opinions about interventions?
- *Clarify the issues.* If you and the other person(s) involved in a conflict do not have a mutual understanding of the issues, you are unlikely to resolve them.
- *Set your expectations.* This requires examining your ideal solution to the conflict and then tempering it with your understanding of motivations as well as other factors influencing the situation. This step is called *goal setting*.
- *Discuss each issue involved in the conflict.* Sometimes it is tempting to have a general discussion in which all the issues related to the conflict are raised. The result can be unclear communication and, sometimes, additional conflict.
- *Make and respond to offers.* This is the part of negotiation includes give-and-take among participants. Remember that if you will not consider other options, you are not negotiating in good faith.
- *Monitor for ethics and integrity.* Negotiation in conflict situations can be successful only if you work in good faith. If you withhold information or manipulate others' words, you may worsen the situation instead of improving it. At the same time, you should be aware of the ethical issues involved in serving the needs of students with disabilities. Your goal for concluding a negotiation should be to enable everyone to "save face," while at the same time resolving the dilemma in a professional manner.

literacy coach to meet with both of you to discuss possible solutions. Alternatively, perhaps your school district employs a nonsupervisory staff member who has the responsibility of fostering collaboration and ensuring that students with special needs receive an appropriate education. This individual also might serve in the role of mediator.

You also might be involved in mediation in a more formal context. As you know, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) includes the provision that mediation must be offered to parents who are in conflict with schools concerning their children's special education (Nowell & Salem, 2007). Further, it establishes an informal resolution session as part of the due process procedure (Mueller, 2009a), and this session can function as a type of informal mediation. Although mediation may not be a successful strategy when the disputed issues concern a legal interpretation of the law or personnel changes, it has several advantages over due process hearings. For example, mediation is considered a much less formal approach, which may prevent an adversarial climate from developing. Further, it is focused on the future, emphasizes clear and direct communication, keeps control of the process in the hands of the parties directly involved, and is far less expensive than a due process hearing. Of course, if parents do not wish to engage in informal or formal mediation—including a resolution session—or if school professionals have a negative disposition toward the conflict situation and the potential of mediation, it is not the preferred option (Nowell & Salem, 2007).

Many sources of information exist regarding how to successfully mediate during conflict. Some of the most helpful suggestions include the following (Barsky, 2007; Mercer & Davis, 2011):

1. In any type of mediation, preparation is essential. Whether this involves understanding the context in which a conflict is occurring, the perspectives of participants, or the impact of the outcome on each individual, an effective mediator has a solid basis of understanding from the very start.
2. Mediation begins with an orientation—that is, an explanation to all participants of the ground rules. Often, mediators emphasize the importance of clear communication, the priority given to making the situation feel “safe” to everyone, and the optimistic intent to resolve the conflict. A focus on establishing a positive climate of collaboration is particularly helpful.
3. Early in mediation, each party explains his or her perspective, and the specific issues that comprise the conflict are articulated. The rationale for this process is that each person has a unique perspective regarding the conflict and that sharing perspectives sometimes helps to generate solutions.
4. The most critical step of mediation occurs when needs and interests are explored; each party looks for areas of *shared* needs and interests that might be elements of resolution. If this stage of mediation is not successful, the process is likely to founder.
5. Once interests are identified, the strategies of negotiation and problem solving are used. An effective mediator will at this point subtly remind participants of the costs of failing to reach an agreement.
6. When some type of agreement is reached, it should be clearly articulated, either in writing or through an oral, point-by-point summary completed during the meeting. This helps prevent miscommunication and the potential for new conflict.
7. Finally, it is often beneficial in mediation for a follow-up meeting to be scheduled so that progress can be reviewed, the current situation assessed, and feedback obtained from the involved parties.

If you think about your roles and responsibilities in schools, you may have numerous opportunities to function informally as a mediator. You might first think of taking this role in assisting students to resolve disagreements. However, you might also serve as a mediator in a conflict among members of a grade-level or department team. You could mediate when parents of a student have a conflict with another teacher or specialist. Finally, you can use the thinking of mediation in your own interactions with your colleagues and the parents and families of the students with whom you work.

Conflict and Diversity

A discussion about conflict would not be complete without mentioning diversity. If you review the information contained throughout this section, you should realize that a key underlying principle for successfully resolving conflict is to analyze it and base your response on that analysis. As part of this process, you should consider culture (Charkoudian & Wayne, 2010). That is, you should look beyond race, nationality, or ethnicity to understand more clearly the beliefs, perceptions, and preferences that each person in a conflict holds. Even more so than in day-to-day interactions, when you participate in a difficult interaction with professionals, paraeducators, parents, or others from a background different from your own, it is essential first that you recognize your own point of view and how it is influenced by your culture—your need to preserve harmony, your comfort level with confrontation, the nonverbal cues that you most respond to, your need for formality or informality, and so on (Nan, 2011). Then you can juxtapose your culture against the cultures of others in order to deliberately communicate and use procedures likely to lead to resolution. Specific suggestions for doing this are included in Putting Ideas into Practice.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Addressing Difficult Interactions in Diverse Groups

Throughout your professional preparation and practice, you have learned and remained aware of cultural differences in child-rearing practices, importance placed on education, perspectives on time, and many other factors. It is just as important to understand that individuals from various cultures may respond differently when disagreements occur (Ayub & Jehn, 2006; Broadfoot & Mushi, 2007; Harry, 2008). Here are a few suggestions to consider when faced with such situations.

- Most conflict resolution experts advise using strategies that rely heavily on talk. However, in some cases, alternatives such as these may be better:
 - Suggest a few moments of silence for participants to think about their needs.
 - Create options for using visual presentations of the points of view being expressed.
- Identify a shared emotion a bit removed from the situation at hand to help diffuse the tension and

open options for a constructive resolution (Von Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004).

- The sense of urgency for resolution of a conflict may vary by culture (Brew & Cairns, 2004). If you sense that others are feeling pressured to resolve a dispute before they are ready, you might suggest adjourning the meeting and reconvening it at a point in the near future.
- Across many cultures, a perceived threat to “face”—that is, a person’s social image—can become a significant roadblock to discussion and resolution (White, Tynan, Galinsky, & Thompson, 2004). The implication is that all ideas shared when an interaction is difficult should be thought of in terms of how others will perceive them. For example, some family members may sense they lose face if they follow “orders” from school professionals on how to address their child’s behavior.

Understanding Resistance

Resistance has been a topic of concern in many fields, including business and the helping professions as well as education (e.g., Burke, 2011; Choi & Ruona, 2011; Craine, 2007; Murray, 2007). It most typically occurs as a response to an interpersonal change or an organizational change that has a personal impact. One apt characterization of resistance defines it as the ability to *not get what is not wanted from the environment*. The use of two negatives in this definition is critical: Resistance occurs only in response to a perceived impending change. If no change exists, resistance vanishes.

The use of negatives in the definition, however, should not lead you to conclude that resistance itself is undesirable. In fact, the opposite is true. Resistance is a defense mechanism that prevents individuals from undertaking change that is too risky for their sense of safety (Schultz, 2007). In addition, resistance sometimes leads to an appropriate decision not to participate in an activity or change (Barrow, 2007). The concern in professional relationships arises when resistance becomes a barrier to effective interactions and needed innovation. Think about the issues that contribute to resistance in the following two examples:

The school improvement committee is meeting to finalize all staff members’ assignments for the upcoming school year. The group reviewing the school’s positive behavior support system is established, as is the data team. Now the team responsible for creating three professional learning communities on the topics of inclusion, students with autism, and students who are English language learners must be identified.

Mr. Powers, the principal, says to Ms. Bennett, the counselor, “I’d like you to lead this work because the topics all relate to struggling learners. Ms. Nelson, Mr. Jordan, and Ms. Hartman are my recommendations for the other committee members.” Ms. Bennett conveys nonverbally her dissatisfaction with this assignment, and Mr. Powers observes, “You don’t seem comfortable with this assignment. I thought it would be exactly what you’d prefer.”

Ms. Bennett replies, “Last year I worked on a committee with Ms. Nelson and Mr. Jordan. I don’t know how to say this politely, but I ended up doing all the work. They always had reasons to decline helping get things finished. I’d rather work with other people.”

Ms. Hill, the school psychologist, is meeting with Mr. Neal, the fifth-grade teacher, shortly before the holidays about a behavioral contract for Reggie, a student with behavior disorders who is inattentive and has been swearing at the teacher and other students. As Ms. Hill explains the contract as a possible intervention, Mr. Neal comments, “You know, I don’t mind having Reggie in my class. But I don’t know about this contract idea. It’s not fair to the other kids to give Reggie special treatment. I predict I’ll get parent phone calls about this.” After more discussion, Mr. Neal reluctantly agrees to try the intervention.

A week later, Ms. Hill stops by Mr. Neal’s classroom to check on Reggie. “How’s the contract working for Reggie?”

“Well . . .”

“What’s going on?”

“Actually,” says Mr. Neal, “I tried it for two days and it just wasn’t fitting into my classroom routine. Besides, Reggie probably didn’t like being singled out. We need to change it, but for now, with the holidays coming, I just don’t have the time to attend to this. Let’s talk after the beginning of the year.”

In the first example, the resistance to working with colleagues who in the past did not do their share of the work is fairly straightforward: The counselor appears to be concerned about her actual experience working with the other teachers. She is protecting herself from anticipated uneven work distribution. In the second example, the resistance is more difficult to discern clearly, but it is still related to protection: Mr. Neal’s response might be interpreted as meaning that he is concerned with his psychological safety. Perhaps he is unfamiliar with the contracting approach Ms. Hill proposed, and he does not want to let her know this. Perhaps he is overwhelmed by the pressures of his job (which might include a new math curriculum, an overcrowded room, or several students with extraordinary needs), and he simply cannot manage one more demand. The knowledge you have gained about individuals’ perspectives can help you to consider a wide range of meanings.

Given the amount and pace of change currently taking place in schools, it is not surprising to find resistance common. And when you reflect on the changes occurring in the education of students with special needs, you should conclude that resistance is likely among specialists as well as between specialists and other staff. The fact that many school changes result in increased adult–adult interactions only compounds the issue because such interactions increase the likelihood that each individual’s resistance will be known and will affect others.

Causes of Resistance

Although many causes of resistance have been described in the professional literature (e.g., Kampwirth & Powers, 2012; van Dijk & van Dick, 2009), they can be summarized as addressing just one critical concept: Resistance is an emotional response based on a rational or irrational fear or concern related to whatever change is proposed or occurring. These fears may pertain to (1) the by change itself; (2) the impact of the change on the

resistant person; (3) other persons initiating, participating in, or affected by the change; and (4) homeostasis.

Concerns About the Proposed Change One common source of resistance is professionals' and parents' perceptions of the anticipated outcomes associated with a change. For example, parents of typical learners as well as parents of students with special needs may be resistant to their children participating in a co-taught class; they may believe that the risks to their children's education outweigh the potential gains.

Another example of fear related to the change itself may be the philosophy or value system associated with the change (Barsky, 2008). If you are an ESL teacher who believes strongly in the value of instruction offered in a separate classroom, then the plan to have you work with students primarily in general education classes may cause you to be resistant. Alternatively, if you are a speech/language therapist and believe that integrative therapy should be the standard in your field, you are likely to be resistant to a plan in which you will provide primarily articulation therapy in a separate clinical setting. For general education teachers, this type of resistance may arise when considering using an instructional approach (e.g., writing across the curriculum) that they perceive will dilute or interfere with their core instructional program. In each example, resistance is attached to a belief system that is associated with a specific change. This form of resistance is particularly likely to occur when change is not clearly explained.

Concerns About the Personal Impact of the Change Fear about the personal impact of change is the category into which most professional resistance falls (Jackson, 2010). It generally includes the following issues:

1. Some individuals faced with changing their professional functioning are afraid of failing. They may anticipate that they do not have the skills to participate in the change, and they may perceive that they cannot acquire them.
2. Some professionals fear the frustration that may occur while learning new skills and practices. Whenever changes are undertaken in activities, programs, or services, professionals require time to adjust their practices. However, because time is a luxury that simply cannot be afforded in many schools, they often are expected to assimilate change rapidly and to immediately function effectively, sometimes beyond the point of reasonable expectations.
3. Personal fear about change also relates to losing autonomy. Many school professionals are accustomed to completing their job responsibilities with little input from others. When a change is proposed, particularly one that appears to threaten this autonomy, fear sometimes results. Resistance is an expected outcome.

Concerns About Others Involved in the Change The third category of concerns that may lead to resistance focuses on other individuals involved. First, concern may be directed at the person initiating the change (Oreg & Sverdlik, 2010; Szabla, 2007). Have you ever decided before hearing about a new strategy, service, or program that you probably did not want to participate just because you had a negative perception of the person whose idea it was? Perhaps you did not respect that individual, experienced a great deal of miscommunication with the person, or had discrepant personal styles. It should be noted that this is another example of resistance that, in some cases, has a strongly rational basis; in others, it is emotional.

The second major type of concern included in this category is the threat of change in your relationships with others. If you participate in a change, it may affect how other staff members view you and your status with them. For example, a newly hired English teacher at the high school is asked by the curriculum director to lead the school's professional

learning community (PLC) on teacher leadership. Other teachers are opposed to the PLC idea, and they have openly expressed reluctance to participating in it. If you were the English teacher, how would you respond? One approach would be to develop the program alone, hoping to positively influence colleagues in the process. Another would be to let the other teachers know about the responsibility you have and then to collaborate with them to avoid meeting it. Even if this were inappropriate, the latter option might appeal to the English teacher if she felt excluded by the other teachers and had concerns about how they would respond if the PLC were developed. This type of situation clearly has many alternative solutions. The point here is that the relationship issue may supersede others and lead to resistance.

Homeostasis The tendency of some individuals and systems to prefer sameness to change is referred to as *homeostasis*. Some individuals, once they become accustomed to a particular way of carrying out responsibilities, working with students, and otherwise fulfilling their professional obligations, may struggle to consider alternative ways to do those tasks. The degree to which homeostasis plays a part in resistance varies greatly from person to person and with the nature of the change that is at issue.

Organizations also seek to maintain some level of homeostasis and in doing so may encourage resistance (Zins & Illback, 2008). In some school settings, it is considered the norm to resist any change, regardless of its source. We have worked in school settings in which the professionals quickly stated that their schools were difficult places to initiate new programs because staff members simply did not like change. Although this situation relates to individual homeostasis, it is distinguished from it because of its pervasiveness in the school's culture. Several staff members in the school may be risk takers or change agents, but their individual characteristics sometimes are overshadowed by the norm.

Homeostasis may result from another dilemma referred to as *change fatigue* (Beaudan, 2006). That is, in schools where change has been constant, professionals may become very reluctant to participate. A fairly complex example illustrates this concept: An urban high school has had three principals in the past four years. In addition, the school district has changed the high-stakes testing requirements twice during that time. There has been relatively high staff turnover, and no special educator or ESL teacher at the school has more than three years of teaching experience. The school attempted to place more students with special needs in general education settings about four years ago but encountered serious problems related to teacher acceptance, scheduling, parent concerns, and student behavior. When the new principal announces at a meeting for all staff members that her top priority is to improve general education access, teachers roll their eyes and look at each other skeptically. Their reaction, without even hearing about the proposal, is negative. Given the situation, however, it is understandable—they have difficulty comprehending how they can manage yet one more change, one that does not seem feasible.

Indicators of Resistance

Resistance often is indicated through subtle behaviors and can be difficult to clearly recognize. Most behaviors that signal resistance have alternative, legitimate interpretations, but when examined closely, they actually function as means of avoiding change. Thus, in order to address resistance, you should have a clear picture of how resistance is likely to be manifested. The most common ways include the following:

- Refusing to participate
- Supporting a change with words but not actions
- Displacing responsibility

- Deferring change to a future time
- Relying on past practice.

Each of these signals of resistance is presented with examples in Figure 2.

In considering signals of resistance, it is particularly important to look for patterns of behavior. Anyone can encounter a crisis that leads to the cancellation of a meeting. However, repeated cancellations may indicate resistance. Similarly, anyone can have a straightforward reason for delaying a change. However, repeated excuses may indicate resistance. Your role in working with others is to distinguish between legitimate problems and resistance and to base your actions on such distinctions.

FIGURE 2 Indicators of resistance.

| Indicator | Explanation |
|------------------------------|---|
| Refusing to participate | <p>Response to change is "No, thank you." Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "I figure this is just a fad. By next year it'll be gone. I'd rather not waste my time on this." ■ "I just can't deal with doing that right now. I have too many other responsibilities." ■ "I don't want to get involved with this issue. Please ask someone else." |
| Supporting without substance | <p>Response to change is "puppies-on-the-dashboard" head-nodding without meaning. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "Yeah—that's great." ■ "Okay—I see." ■ "That makes sense—uh-huh." |
| Displacing responsibility | <p>Response to change is claiming others will not permit it. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "The other parents are going to complain." ■ "I understand that the state has said this is not legal." ■ "The principal doesn't allow it." |
| Deferring to a future time | <p>Response to change is putting it off. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ [in September] "Everything is so hectic with the start of the year. Let's give it a little time and then try it." ■ [in November] "The holidays are almost here and you know how disrupted the schedule gets." |
| Relying on past practice | <p>Response to change is to call on tradition as a reason to retain the status quo. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ "We've always done it this way." ■ "If it's not broken, don't fix it." ■ "This way has always been good enough for us." ■ "We can't just rush into this type of intervention. It's too different from what we're used to." |

Assessing Whether to Address Resistance

The next consideration when you perceive resistance is to decide whether it should be addressed. Your deliberations should examine the following:

- The appropriateness of the resistance
- Whether addressing it is warranted
- Others' commitment to change

Determine Whether Resistance Is an Appropriate Response The concept that resistance is sometimes appropriate has already been mentioned (Ford & Ford, 2010), and overall you may have noticed that this chapter on resistance does not necessarily focus on making it go away. Instead, as you approach resistant interactions, you should first consider the situation from the other individual's point of view, drawing on your understanding of perspective. If the change will place too great a burden on the person resisting, resistance may be a positive reaction and should not be addressed. In general, if you remember that addressing resistance should have as a goal respecting it, exploring it, and potentially (but not invariably) responding to it, you will be more effective in your professional relationships. Although our examples tend to make others the resistant parties, also keep in mind a point made at the beginning of this chapter: We all resist—including you—given the right circumstances.

Assess Whether Addressing Resistance Is Warranted Another consideration when deciding whether to respond to a resistant situation is the appropriateness of attempting to address it. In some instances, the best response to resistance, even if it is not rational, may be no response at all. For example, if a colleague is planning to leave her job at the end of the year, your efforts to address her resistance to a new learning strategy may not be worth the effort. The same could be said for those who are transferring to other schools or retiring. Other situations that may not warrant addressing resistance are those in which administrative support is lacking or contextual variables (such as a lack of resources) make the proposed strategy or intervention unrealistic.

Consider the Extent of Others' Commitment to Change Understanding the likelihood that others will change can assist you in gauging your own commitment to change. Individuals are more likely to participate in a change if they feel they have a moderate or low level of positive or negative feeling about the nature of the change (Fiedler, 2000; Harvey, 2010). They are less likely to change if they have strong negative feelings about it. The implication is that change is less likely to be successful if offered when emotions are intense. A more constructive alternative would be to wait, if possible, until feelings are less intense.

Persuasion as a Strategy for Responding to Resistance

One critical strategy for addressing resistant situations is persuasion. Persuasion is your ability to convince another person to agree to your perception or plan regarding an issue or idea (Simons & Jones, 2011). For example, you may be faced with the task of convincing a resistant colleague that a different way to teach equations in remedial algebra has an evidence base and will foster student learning. Similarly, you may attempt



How could you use the principles of persuasion used in advertising to assist you in your interactions as a professional educator with colleagues and parents?

to convince a parent that the educational services proposed by the team are in the best interests of the child.

Persuasion Approaches Approaches for persuading are heavily influenced by theories that describe how individuals respond when faced with an idea or activity to which they are resistant (Mason, 2001; Pfau et al., 2001). For example, in a *behavioral approach* to persuasion, the goal is to provide positive reinforcement to resistant individuals in order to convince them to change. This would occur if a teacher were offered a preferred classroom assignment in return for participating in a pilot co-teaching project. Another example would be recruiting new co-teachers by arranging for them to attend professional development on this topic with their teaching partners.

A second theoretical orientation to persuasion is a *consistency approach*, which is based on the notion that individuals are more likely to change if they have a sense of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). For example, by suggesting to Ms. Boesche that she has already been successful with a student very much like the one she is currently expressing resistance about having in her class, you might plant a seed that eventually prompts her to be more accepting of the new student.

A *perceptual approach* also is considered a means for persuading others. Individuals applying this model recognize that people have a certain tolerance for change. If the proposed change is somewhat close to an activity a person is already comfortable doing, that person is more likely to accept the new activity than if it is perceived as radically different. For example, in discussing a new school initiative related to mentoring, a principal might explain that teachers in the school are already informally implementing many of the strategies that the mentoring program formalizes and that the initiative is simply an extension of the work they are already doing.

Finally, a *functional approach* to persuasion suggests that the process of convincing someone to change must take into account adult learning characteristics. For example, if Ms. Schwartz complained that she dislikes the way students are constantly leaving the room to receive special education, ESL, speech/language, and remedial reading

services, you might suggest that she would prefer to have students stay in the room. This could acknowledge her desire for control over student movement and the sense of classroom community as well as create an opportunity to discuss integrated in-class instruction.

Persuasion Strategies The knowledge base on theoretical approaches to persuasion leads to a number of suggestions for you to use in encouraging colleagues and others to change. Consider how the following ideas might apply to the resistance demonstrated by the teachers in the case presented at the beginning of this chapter:

1. *Seek ways to provide incentives.* Incentives could include a trade-off or reduction of workloads, assistance with classroom chores, provision of special materials, or opportunities to participate in professional development activities. If you think of any situation in which you need to persuade others, you probably can identify incentives that could be offered to positively affect the outcome.
2. *Relate the proposed change issue to a positive image.* To many teachers, the word *change* is a negative stimulus; they immediately associate it with anxiety, stress, more work, and more meetings. One strategy for persuading others is to relate the change to a reduction of anxiety, work, and meetings while also associating it with improved student achievement and personal and professional satisfaction and acclaim. Obviously, this strategy is effective only to the extent that a workload reduction and student improvement can, in fact, be implemented. The complement to this is to avoid saying anything negative about the change; such messages tend to be remembered and gain strength with time (Kumkale & Albarracin, 2004). However tempting it is to complain, these comments make change even more difficult.
3. *Provide opportunities for others to become familiar with the change through observation.* If a professional observes others successfully carrying out a change, he or she may sense it is feasible after all. For some educators, this could include visiting neighboring school districts where similar activities or services are offered. For others, it may be just an observation period in a nearby colleague's classroom or therapeutic setting. The information about peer coaching may be useful in thinking about how observations could be arranged.
4. *Create discrepancies that can be brought to the attention of resistant individuals.* Imagine a history teacher who fears that a student with a disability will require too much of the teacher's attention. One strategy would be to arrange an informal meeting between the history teacher and another subject-area teacher who has worked with the student and who can share the positive experiences the student had in a general education class. Knowing about the student's success creates a discrepancy and makes resistance less likely.
5. *Link the proposed change with the resolution of the discrepancy.* Persuasion involves more than simply creating dissonance; it also involves efforts to influence how the dissonance will be resolved. In the example just presented, the dissonance exists because of the history teacher's belief that the student cannot be successful and the other teacher's perspective that the student can be successful. To influence the history teacher to resolve the dissonance by agreeing the student could succeed, you might comment on the teacher's ability to work with other difficult students, the fact that he or she would be on the "cutting edge" for the district integration program and in compliance with emerging policy, and the satisfaction experienced by working with the student.

6. *Relate the change to others' knowledge and experience.* Keeping both the nature and the description of the proposed change within a framework of familiarity for others is a basic strategy of persuasion. A simple illustration of this point concerns the use of technical vocabulary. If you have a strong background in behavioral approaches, you might tend to speak to others about a school-wide positive behavior support (PBS) system using psychological terms such as *reinforcers*, *extinction*, and *punishers*. If you change your language so that your terminology sounds more familiar to your colleagues—*rewards*, *ignoring*, and *consequences*—you may find that less resistance occurs.
7. *Propose changes within the value system of others.* This strategy is a powerful extension of the preceding strategy. Proponents of change should examine participants' value systems and tailor ideas to stay within those parameters.
8. *Gain public commitment.* One strategy for ensuring that a proposed change falls within individuals' tolerance levels is to obtain their overt commitment to the change. Once they have made such a commitment, they are more likely to try to expand their own levels of tolerance for the change. Public commitment raises significantly the probability of implementation.
9. *Involve others early in the planning stages.* Whether you are discussing a single intervention, a change for a classroom, a program change, or change that could affect an entire grade level, team, department, or school, the change will be more readily accomplished if you include others in planning. Doing so enables you to be more responsive to others' needs. Change thus becomes less threatening, and the potential for resistance is decreased. This is especially true regarding those who are most resistant; their participation may mitigate their resistance.
10. *Be sensitive to adult learning preferences.* Certain conditions may make change for adults easier. In fact, knowledge about adult learning is important when planning for change. Examples of adult learning preferences include incorporating ideas based on the life experiences of participants, using novelty to introduce an idea, and engaging participants in meaningful activities related to accomplishing the change. Although none of these techniques seems strongly persuasive, each has the potential to add enough appeal to the proposed change to make it attractive to the individuals affected by it.
11. *Clarify ownership of the task or activity.* Whenever people are working together toward a goal, they should specify how ownership will be assigned. If change is the issue, the more individuals feel like they have contributed to designing and implementing the change, the more likely it is they will participate in it.
12. *Obtain and use feedback from participants.* Feedback is one type of information that participants can contribute to change. The obligation of professionals fostering change is to use this information in a meaningful way. For example, suppose you were part of the team that was developing the RTI process introduced in the case at the beginning of this chapter. Before implementing the process, you and your teammates might want to share an outline of the process, with a timeline, to obtain others' reaction to it. You also might provide information about the interventions being planned for Tiers 1, 2, and 3 and seek input from colleagues about the alignment with core instructional programs. Such discussions are valuable in designing an RTI approach likely to succeed and be perceived as feasible. Counterproductive would be simply announcing a completed plan and explaining the procedures to be followed and interventions to be used, without inviting input from teachers and others.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Using Communication Skills During Difficult Interactions

When you are faced with responding to conflict or resistance, you have the opportunity to use the communication skills you have learned to good advantage. Consider this example: A behavior specialist and a teacher have been working to implement a self-monitoring strategy for Alex, a student who is experiencing ongoing behavior problems. He is to keep an index card taped to his desk, and when he begins a requested task without making a comment out loud in class, he is to make a check on the card. In the discussion, it becomes clear that the teacher is not encouraging Alex to use the strategy and sometimes seems to be going back to a pattern of confronting Alex about call outs. At the same time, it is apparent that the teacher thinks the strategy is too time consuming and not particularly effective in a class with several students who need frequent special attention. He comments that Alex will not follow directions or accept guidance.

How might each of the following aspects of positive communication help these professionals to have a constructive conversation that leads to a better outcome for the student?

Perspective

- When the teacher says, “I’ve been really careful about using the strategy and it’s not working,” what might the teacher mean? What response might the behavior specialist make?

Feedback and Indirect Question

- The specialist points out to the teacher, “During the period when I had dropped by your class to observe Alex using the strategy, I noticed that you asked him not to call out four times. I did not notice you direct him to the index card. I wonder whether there is something about using the index card strategy that doesn’t fit into your classroom routine.”

Presupposition

- The specialist asks the teacher, “In the two weeks that we’ve been trying this strategy in your class, what about it has been most effective?” (After a reply) “How does using the strategy break down?”

Open Question

- The specialist asks the teacher, “What do you think we should do to make this strategy—or some other one that will accomplish the same purpose—more effective for Alex and more workable for you?”

What other communication skills might help these professionals to have a productive meeting? To create an opportunity to practice your skills, design a role-play to demonstrate the use of the skills mentioned here as well as others you identify.

Putting the Pieces Together

Difficult interactions provide opportunities to learn and apply the skills that have been presented in this text. Whether conflict or resistance emerges as part of teams, consultation, or co-teaching, or whether either occurs in interactions with paraeducators or family members, your knowledge of problem-solving strategies and communication skills are the tools that enable you to address such situations confidently (Putnam, 2010). Examples of applying your knowledge and skills are provided in Putting Ideas into Practice.

SUMMARY

- Conflict, more common among education professionals as collaboration becomes a norm, is any situation in which people perceive that others are interfering with their ability to meet their goals. Although school professionals, including special services providers, traditionally have tended to avoid conflict, it can be constructive and helpful.
- Conflict generally is caused when two individuals want different outcomes but must settle for the same one, when they want the same outcome but it cannot be available to both, when there is a difference in perceptions of personal power, or when one individual internally experiences conflicting reactions to a situation. These causes are influenced by a wide variety of personal and organizational variables.
- Most individuals have a preferred style for responding to conflict—either competitive, avoidance, accommodative, compromising, or consensus through collaboration. Each of these response styles has advantages and drawbacks. You should learn to use each style as appropriate in combination with specific negotiation and mediation strategies that will assist you in creating constructive outcomes in conflict situations.
- Resistance is the ability to avoid what is not wanted from the environment. It can be a rational response based on previous experiences, but most often it is an emotional response to change based on a variety of professional fears related to the change.
- Resistance may be demonstrated with many indicators, including refusal to participate, support without substance, displacement of responsibility, deferral to a future time, and reliance on past experience. However, resistance is subtle and should be looked for through patterns of behavior. Persuasion—using behavioral, consistency, perceptual, and functional approaches—offers many strategies for addressing resistance.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Think about the comments made by the teachers in the chapter-opening case study. What elements of conflict and resistance can you identify? If you were a novice (and untenured) faculty member at this school, what would you do? If you were advising Kelley's principal, what advice would you offer her based on the information you've learned in this chapter?
2. Many schools and school districts are continuing to make progress toward becoming more inclusive, and these efforts include implementing co-teaching and using indirect services such as consultation. As you think about the concerns that often are raised in regard to inclusive practices, consider how they might lead to conflict. Categorize the conflicts that might arise using the four-part analysis of causes of conflict presented in this chapter. What conclusions does this activity lead you to regarding your school's move toward inclusive practices?
3. The following are some examples of conflict that might occur in schools. Using your knowledge of principles of collaboration, communication skills, and strategies for responding to conflict, role-play how each situation could be addressed.
 - As a high school science teacher, your analysis indicates that you have most of the students with language, learning, and behavior problems; and you are concerned about the impact of so many struggling learners on your test scores.
 - You are discussing grading with a colleague. He notes that he understands the need to make changes in the term paper assignment for some students, but he does not think they should be able to earn an A when such changes are made. He states that it is not fair to the other students.
 - A parent has asked for a meeting with you. At the meeting, she accuses you of unfairly picking on her son. She is referring to her son's interpretation of your reaction to his classroom misbehavior. However, the parent is not interested in hearing your perspective on what occurred.

DIFFICULT INTERACTIONS

4. Why is it more common to find resistance among school professionals than conflict? What symptoms of resistance do you find are most common in schools? What are examples of each? On what topics are you resistant to change?
5. Think about the topics addressed in this chapter. Write a critical analysis of how effective communication

and problem-solving skills affect conflict, resistance, negotiation, and persuasion. Then apply your thinking to teaming, co-teaching, and consultation. What types of conflicts or resistance might occur in each of these service delivery models? How might negotiation and persuasion be effectively used for each?

Appendix 1

Conflict Management Style Survey

This Conflict Management Style Survey has been designed to help you become more aware of your characteristic approach, or style, in responding to conflict. In completing this survey, you are invited to respond by making choices that correspond with your typical behavior or attitudes in conflict situations.

Date _____

Instructions: Choose a single frame of reference for answering all 15 items; in this case, use work-related conflicts.

Allocate 10 points among the four alternative answers given for each of the 15 items below.

Example: When the people I work with become involved in a personal conflict, I usually:

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------|
| Intervene to settle the dispute. | Call a meeting to talk over the problem. | Offer to help if I can. | Ignore the problem. |
| 3 | 6 | 1 | 0 |

Be certain that your answers add up to 10 points.

1. When someone *I care about* is actively hostile toward me (i.e., yelling, threatening, abusive, etc.), I tend to:

| Column 1 | Column 2 | Column 3 | Column 4 |
|------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Respond in a hostile manner. | Try to persuade the person to give up his/her actively hostile behavior. | Stay and listen as long as possible. | Walk away. |
| | | | |

2. When someone *who is relatively unimportant to me* is actively hostile toward me (i.e., yelling, threatening, abusive, etc.), I tend to:

| | | | |
|------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|------------|
| Respond in a hostile manner. | Try to persuade the person to give up his/her actively hostile behavior. | Stay and listen as long as possible. | Walk away. |
| | | | |

3. When I observe people in conflicts in which anger, threats, hostility, and strong opinions are present, I tend to:

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Become involved and take a position. | Attempt to mediate. | Observe to see what happens. | Leave as quickly as possible. |
| | | | |

DIFFICULT INTERACTIONS

4. When I perceive another person as meeting his/her needs at my expense, I am apt to:

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Work to do anything I can to change that person. | Rely on persuasion and "facts" when attempting to have that person change. | Work hard at changing how I relate to that person. | Accept the situation as it is. |
| | | | |

5. When involved in an interpersonal dispute, my general pattern is to:

| | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| Draw the other person into seeing the problem as I do. | Examine the issues between us as logically as possible. | Look hard for a workable compromise. | Let time take its course and let the problem work itself out. |
| | | | |

6. The quality that I value the most in dealing with conflict would be:

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-----------|
| Emotional strength and security. | Intelligence. | Love and openness. | Patience. |
| | | | |

7. Following a serious altercation with someone I care for deeply, I:

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Strongly desire to go back and settle things my way. | Want to go back and work it out—whatever give-and-take is necessary. | Worry about it a lot but not plan to initiate further contact. | Let it lie and not plan to initiate further contact. |
| | | | |

8. When I see a serious conflict developing between two people *I care about*, I tend to:

| | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Express my disappointment that this had to happen. | Attempt to persuade them to resolve their differences. | Watch to see what develops. | Leave the scene. |
| | | | |

9. When I see a serious conflict developing between two people *who are relatively unimportant to me*, I tend to:

| | | | |
|--|--|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Express my disappointment that this had to happen. | Attempt to persuade them to resolve their differences. | Watch to see what develops. | Leave the scene. |
| | | | |

10. The feedback that I receive from most people about how I behave when faced with conflict and opposition indicates that I:

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|
| Try hard to get my way. | Try to work out differences cooperatively. | Am easy going and take a soft or conciliatory position. | Usually avoid the conflict. |
| | | | |

DIFFICULT INTERACTIONS

11. When communicating with someone with whom I am having a serious conflict, I:

| | | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Try to overpower the other person with my speech. | Talk a little bit more than I listen. | Am an active listener (feeding back words and feelings). | Am a passive listener (agreeing and apologizing). |
| | | | |

12. When involved in an unpleasant conflict, I:

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Use humor with the other party | Make an occasional quip or joke about the situation or the relationship. | Relate humor only to myself. | Suppress all attempts at humor. |
| | | | |

13. When someone does something that irritates me (e.g., smokes in a nonsmoking area or crowds in line in front of me), my tendency in communicating with the offending person is to:

| | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Insist that the person look me in the eye. | Look the person directly in the eye and maintain eye contact. | Maintain intermittent eye contact. | Avoid looking directly at the person. |
| | | | |

14. (Same situation as #13)

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| Stand close and make physical contact. | Use my hands and body to illustrate my points. | Stand close to the person without touching him or her. | Stand back and keep my hands to myself. |
| | | | |

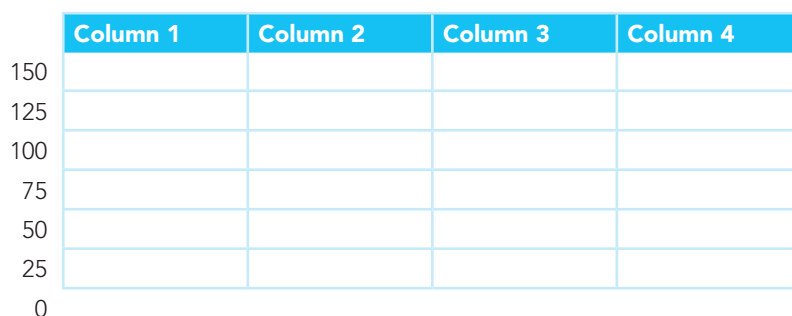
15. (Same situation as #13)

| | | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Use strong, direct language and tell the person to stop. | Try to persuade the person to stop. | Talk gently and tell the person what my feelings are. | Say and do nothing. |
| | | | |

Scoring Instructions

| Step | Action |
|------|---|
| 1 | Add your scores vertically, resulting in 4 column totals. Fill in the column totals in the chart below. |
| 2 | Total your scores for column 1 and 2 and fill in total for Score A. Total your scores for column 3 and 4 and fill in total for Score B. |
| 3 | Darken in the bar graph to reflect your totals for each column. |

| Total Column 1 | Total Column 2 | Total Column 3 | Total Column 4 |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | | | |
| Score A | | Score B | |

Bar Graph of Total Scores for Each Column**Interpretation**

| Column | Description |
|--------|---|
| 1 | Aggressive/Confrontive (Competing) High scores indicate a tendency toward “taking the bull by the horns” and a strong need to control situations and people. Those who use this style are often directive and judgmental. The opposite of accommodating: One uses whatever seems appropriate to win one’s own position. |
| 2 | Assertive/Persuasive (Collaborating) High scores indicate a tendency to stand up for oneself without being pushy, a proactive approach to conflict, and a willingness to collaborate. People who use this style depend heavily on their verbal skills. The opposite of avoiding: One works with the other person to find a solution that fully satisfies both one’s own concerns and those of the other. |
| 3 | Observant/Introspective (Accommodating) High scores indicate a tendency to observe others and examine oneself analytically in response to conflict situations as well as a need to adopt counseling and listening modes of behavior. Those who use this style are likely to be cooperative, even conciliatory. One seeks to satisfy the other person’s concerns at the expense of one’s own. |
| 4 | Avoiding/Reactive (Avoiding) High scores indicate a tendency toward passivity or withdrawal in conflict situations and a need to avoid confrontation. Those who use this style are usually accepting and patient, often suppressing their strong feelings. A person neglects his or her own concerns as well as those of the other person by not raising or addressing the conflict issue. |
| | Compromising (intermediate in cooperativeness and assertiveness) One seeks an expedient middle-ground position that provides partial satisfaction for both parties. |

| Score | Description |
|-------|--|
| A | If significantly higher than Score B (25 points or more), may indicate a tendency toward aggressive/assertive conflict management. |
| B | If significantly higher than Score A (25 points or more), may indicate a more conciliatory approach. |

Source: Conflict-Management Style Survey. Pfeffer and Company Instrumentation Software (PCIS): Using Instruments in Human Resources Development (HRD). Reprinted with permission from John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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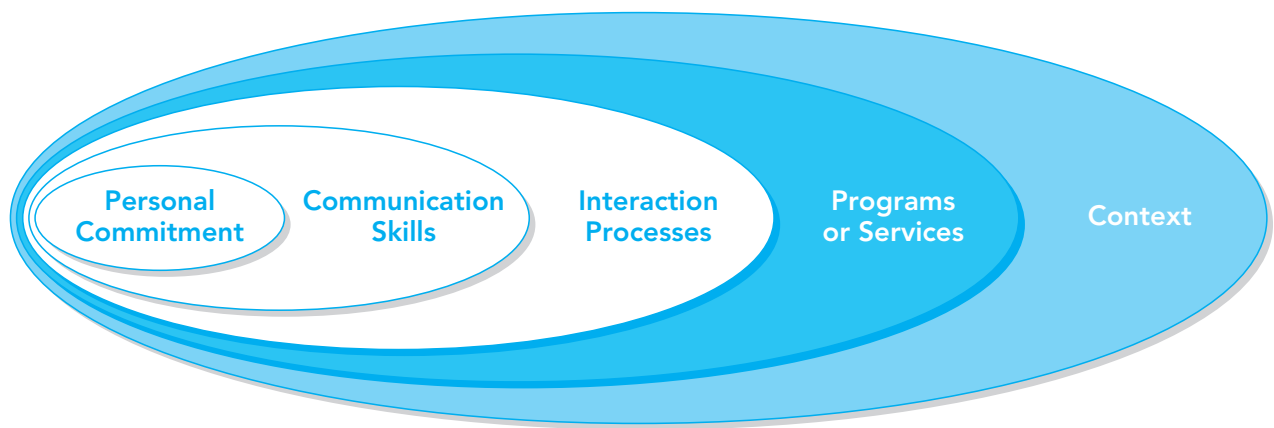
Paraeducators

From Chapter 10 of *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, Seventh Edition. Marilyn Friend, Lynne Cook.
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Paraeducators



Connections

This chapter addresses the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, or paraeducators—staff members who often spend a significant amount of time working with students with disabilities or other special needs. In this chapter, you will explore paraeducators' participation in the educational process—in general education and special education classrooms and other settings—and the nature of your working relationship and interactions with them. You also will learn about several considerations for collaborating with paraeducators, factors that are somewhat different from those involved in your collaboration with other teachers, administrators, specialists, and related services professionals.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Describe how the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators in public schools have grown and changed over the past several decades.
2. Explain instructional and noninstructional responsibilities of paraeducators, and clarify activities that should and should not be assigned to paraeducators.
3. Identify strategies for effectively working with paraeducators as you assist them in understanding the scope of their responsibilities, plan with them, maintain clear communication with them, and supervise their work with students.
4. Describe how collaboration pertains to the interactions between paraeducators and professionals.
5. Balance your professional obligation to value paraeducators as individuals who contribute to the educational process while recognizing their licensure and employment status and the parameters that are placed on the expectations that should be set for them.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

Help or Hindrance?

Barely four weeks into the school year, Emily is concerned. She has a number of students with special needs in her class: four students who have learning or behavioral disabilities and five who are English learners. An additional student has a section 504 plan based on his diagnosis as ADHD, and he also is an English learner. But the diversity of her students is not the issue; instead, it is the paraeducator assigned to work with her. Viviana has worked at this school for 22 years and has two grandchildren who attend this school. On the first day of school, she informed Emily that she could explain all the procedures, including when the students with disabilities should leave the classroom to receive special instruction. Viviana cares deeply about all the students, perhaps a bit too deeply. She is eager to work with them and they clearly respond well to her. She also provides Spanish language support, but Emily is concerned that Viviana helps students when they are capable of working independently, both those with special needs as well as others. She tends to hover around certain students and explains that she does so because she knows they need help. She has also on at least three occasions explained to Emily that what Emily asked her to do with students was not needed or not appropriate. Emily wants to have a strong partnership with Viviana, but right now she is seeing emerging tension and possible conflict.

Introduction

Whether you are a novice or an experienced teacher, you may find that not only do you need to interact effectively with other teachers, administrators, specialists, other special services providers, as well as parents and families, but you also are assigned to work with one or more paraeducators. Consider these situations:

- As a resource teacher in a local high school, your caseload has crept up from the locally allowed 25 students to 32. Given student numbers and types of needs, administrators have decided that it is not necessary to employ another special education teacher, but they have notified you that they are seeking a paraeducator to assist you with your workload.
- In your job as a kindergarten teacher, you learn that the four kindergarten teachers share a paraeducator. It is up to the teachers to decide how to divide the paraeducator's time among them and what tasks she will complete.
- You work in an elementary school in a large, urban district. Your district has contracted with a private company to provide a paraeducator to support one of your students who has extraordinary needs for behavior supports. You have many questions about your role in providing information to this person, directing his work, and communicating about student progress and needs.
- In your highly inclusive school, you are responsible as the special educator for guiding the work of three paraeducators who are assigned to work one-to-one with students with significant needs in general education and special education classrooms. You also share a fourth paraeducator with the other special education teacher.

Have you encountered a situation similar to any of these? Do you know teachers who have? Collectively, these scenarios illustrate that paraeducators can be a tremendous benefit to

students and professionals, can be helpful yet somewhat problematic, or can be needed but time consuming to supervise. In all instances, the use of paraeducators is a dimension of the adult–adult interactions in schools that has grown in importance and that requires careful consideration by the professionals responsible for working with them and directing their activities on a day-to-day basis.

Paraeducators in Public Schools

Paraeducators are individuals who provide direct or indirect instructional and other services to students and who are supervised by licensed professionals who are responsible for student outcomes (French, 2003; Shyman, 2010). They also may be known as paraprofessionals, instructional assistants, classroom assistants, job coaches, therapy assistants, transition trainers, teacher aides, or teacher assistants. Paraeducators may provide interventions in response to intervention (RTI) programs, or they may work in remedial reading or math, English as a second language (ESL), and special education programs. They may also serve—especially in large elementary schools—in a more general capacity to assist teachers in their classrooms, particularly in primary grade classrooms or when class sizes are large. Most paraeducators are women who have lived in their communities for a long time (e.g., Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009), and some of them may be the parent or grandparent of a child in the school, as is true for Viviana, introduced at the beginning of this chapter. Although various types of paraeducators will be mentioned in the following sections, the emphasis is on paraeducators who are employed for the purpose of assisting in the delivery of services to students who have disabilities across a variety of settings.

Paraeducator Qualifications

The matter of paraeducator qualifications used to be simple: States and local school districts simply decided on the education and skills expected of these school personnel—whether a high school diploma, some type of specialized training, or a certain number of college credits. Now, though, the expectations for paraeducator credentials are more likely to be carefully prescribed. The qualifications required of paraeducators still can vary widely, but federal law has established some parameters. Paraeducators who work in schools that receive Title I funds (that is, schools whose students have high levels of poverty) must have appropriate preparation for their roles—an associate's degree or the equivalent, or training such that they can pass a test demonstrating their skills for assisting in the areas of reading, writing, math, and school readiness. In such schools, this requirement applies to paraeducators who work with students with disabilities as well as to other instructional paraprofessionals. In some school districts, these requirements are being applied to all paraprofessionals who provide instruction, regardless of the specific schools in which they work. Across all school districts, the most common employment criterion is holding a high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). Although some paraeducators have much more education and a few may even have teaching credentials, this minimal educational expectation should alert professionals that they may need to provide significant guidance to paraeducators, avoiding assumptions that these individuals will know what is expected of them and how they should work effectively with students (Giles, 2010).

Note that the standards just discussed may not have to be met by paraeducators who do not have classroom instructional responsibilities. Examples of staff members in these

PARAEDUCATORS



Jim West/Alamy

Paraeducators have varied roles, including reinforcing instruction, helping address behavior problems, providing personal assistance, and supporting students as they access general education settings.

roles include paraprofessionals whose jobs consist of increasing parent involvement in schools, providing personal care to students, acting as translators, working in the cafeteria or on a bus, or serving as a clerical assistant. As you might expect, though, many paraeducators have both instructional and noninstructional responsibilities, and these individuals are required to meet the higher standard of qualifications.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides a small amount of additional information about paraeducator qualifications. It specifies that these individuals must be “appropriately trained” (20 U.S.C. §1412 (a)(14)(B)(iii)). That is, paraeducators must have the knowledge and skills necessary to appropriately work with students with disabilities; for example, learning how to safely lift a student, communicate clearly with a student, or respond appropriately to a student’s behaviors.

One additional facet of paraeducator qualifications should be mentioned. You may find that the paraeducator with whom you work is in the process of becoming a teacher (e.g., Burbank, Bates, & Schrum, 2009). Some paraeducators make this decision because they find that they enjoy their work with children; others have become paraeducators because they see the role as a means of entering the teaching profession once they complete their studies. In some districts, especially those with high rates of poverty or high numbers of students from diverse cultures, paraeducators who live in the community are encouraged to prepare as teachers because of the tremendous

value they bring in terms of their understanding of students and their cultures. What is important to keep in mind is that paraeducators becoming teachers are acquiring the knowledge and skills that you have; they may request to have additional responsibilities as they progress through their preparation or to apply what they are learning in their studies to classroom practice. In many ways, teachers can serve as informal mentors for these paraeducators.

The Number of Paraeducators in Today's Schools

The importance of working effectively with paraeducators can perhaps best be illustrated by examining their prevalence in schools. The most recent estimate of the number of paraeducators working in all capacities in public schools is approximately 1.3 million (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009). Of those, approximately 323,422 are employed to provide support for students with disabilities ages 3 through 21 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). When you realize that there are 445,843 special education teachers nationwide for this group of students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), you can see that paraeducators are very likely to be involved in these students' education, either to instruct them or to provide other supports (Giangreco, Hurley, & Suter, 2009). In fact, in 23 states, there is more paraeducator time (full-time equivalencies, or FTEs) allocated for special education than special education teacher time (U.S. Department of Education, 2006a).

The number of paraeducators in schools is likely to increase. In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor (2009) indicates that 135,000 paraeducator jobs will become available between 2008 and 2018, a growth rate of approximately 10 percent. These data imply that it is very likely that you will work in a school in which paraeducators are key members of the staff and that you will be expected, in some capacity, to direct their work.

The increasing number of paraeducators in schools is not particularly surprising. The rising emphasis on early childhood programs has undoubtedly contributed (Deardorff, Glasenapp, Schalock, & Udell, 2007), as has the growth in programs to assist students in transitioning from school to work or community settings and the growing number of students and their families for whom English is not their first language (Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Valenciana, Weisman, & Flores, 2006). The expectation that all students will reach higher academic standards also contributes to this trend (e.g., Carter, O'Rourke, et al., 2009), especially when paraeducators are employed to provide supplemental remedial instruction in RTI programs. In some instances, often related to services for students with disabilities, paraeducators are employed to supplement the services of teachers as an understandable but sometimes questionable means of saving money; that is, the cost of employing a paraeducator is significantly less than the cost of employing an additional special education teacher (U.S. Department of Labor, 2009).

In some parts of the country, the trend toward inclusive practices also is an influence on the number of paraeducators being employed (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010). When students with complex special needs are assigned to general education classrooms, their teachers report that paraeducator support is not only helpful but essential (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Giangreco et al., 2010). However, even for students with mild needs who typically are distributed among many classrooms in inclusive schools, paraeducators have become critical in supplementing the services of special educators who cannot themselves provide adequate services to every student every day (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Suter & Giangreco, 2009).

Paraeducator Roles and Responsibilities

Historically, paraeducators were expected to assume largely clerical duties (French, 1999). They graded papers, took attendance, and collected lunch money, acting mostly to free teachers from routine tasks so the teachers could spend more time instructing their students. Now, however, most paraeducators are expected to spend the majority of their time working with individual students or small groups of students. Generally, today's paraeducators work in one of three ways: First, some paraeducators provide general support to teachers and classrooms, either because of the number of students in a class, the need for language support (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007), or the implementation of supplemental instructional programs, for example, in the area of reading (e.g., Vadasy & Sanders, 2008). These paraeducators may work with students with disabilities, but they are not employed specifically for that purpose.

Second, some paraeducators are assigned as one-to-one assistants for students whose disabilities present extraordinary needs. These individuals typically spend most of the day with the particular student, whether in a general education or a special education classroom (Causton-Theoharis, 2009; Stivers, Francis-Cropper, & Straus, 2008); they sometimes are referred to as one-to-one paraeducators (Giangreco, 2010). Students who may need such intense support may include those with autism, those with significant intellectual disabilities, and those with complex physical needs (Bingham, Spooner, & Browder, 2007; Rossetti & Goessling, 2010). For example, Robert, a paraeducator, may be responsible for meeting Josh, a student with multiple disabilities, when he arrives at school on the bus. Robert makes sure that Josh has his school supplies and changes Josh's diaper when needed. Josh participates in a general education art class, and Robert is responsible for getting Josh's art supplies and helping him to use them, attaching charcoal pencils and paintbrushes to the special adapted holder that Josh uses. Robert also accompanies Josh when he goes to his vocational exploratory class each afternoon—job experiences that are designed to help Josh decide on the type of work he would like to do after he graduates from high school.

Third, some paraeducators support special education programs but are not assigned to specific students (Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke, & Sorenson, 2009), as is true for Viviana, whom you met at the beginning of this chapter. For example, in a high school program for students with learning disabilities, a paraeducator may be available to read tests to students who need such service, to assist students in organizing their assignments and materials, and to take notes for a student in history class. In elementary schools, paraeducators working in this way may be assigned to a single grade level, or they may work across several grade levels, based on the needs of students.

Although you might assume that the specific roles and responsibilities for paraeducators would be found in their job descriptions, you may find that most descriptions focus on the number of hours the individual is to work, qualifications for the job, and general expectations about working in schools (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Some school districts, particularly large ones, have clear and detailed job descriptions and may even distinguish among types of paraeducators (e.g., those providing supplemental instruction in reading or math, those addressing student behavior, those providing personal care, those assisting with instruction for students with disabilities), but in many cases, you will not have specific guidelines to help you assign tasks to a paraeducator (Carter, O'Rourke, et al., 2009). Generally, paraeducator responsibilities can be divided into those that directly relate to instruction and those that are noninstructional.

Instructional Responsibilities

Whether working with an individual student or to support teachers and programs so that any number of students can be successful, the most common tasks for today's paraprofessionals relate to instruction (e.g., Bingham, Hall-Kenyon, & Culatta, 2010; Devlin, 2008; Vadasy, Sanders, & Tudor, 2007), especially for students with disabilities. These tasks may include delivery of instruction, but they may also involve preparation for or follow-up to instruction.

Instructional Delivery The number of examples of instructional delivery appropriate for paraeducators is almost infinite (e.g., Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Suter & Giangreco, 2009; Vadasy & Sanders, 2008). Here are some examples of paraeducator instructional activities:

- Provide a specific intervention for fourth- and fifth-grade students who read below grade level; the teacher taught the paraeducator how to correctly carry out the intervention.
- Review instructions given earlier to ensure student understanding.
- Lead some students through the steps for completing an in-class assignment, monitoring to be sure that they complete each step correctly before introducing the next.
- Read tests to students.
- Help students find appropriate resources for an assigned project or paper.
- Assist students in keeping books, materials, and papers organized.
- Facilitate student friendship by arranging a group of students with and without disabilities to work together on an assigned task (e.g., Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickham, & Al-Khabbaz, 2008).
- As other students work on multiplication, support a student with a significant disability to identify numbers 1 through 5 or otherwise help to implement an aligned curriculum for the student.
- Observe student behavior, recording it as explained and giving the student rewards as directed by the teacher.

This list of potential paraeducator instructional activities demonstrates the value that paraeducators bring to classrooms. However, it also illustrates the importance of teachers' roles in deciding which tasks are appropriate for paraeducators to do and in directing their work.

Other Instructional Responsibilities Like delivery-of-instruction responsibilities, the preparation and follow-up activities of paraeducators vary greatly. They may prepare flash cards for students, use a computer program to create a picture-based version of a story to be read, scan print material so that the student can "read" it using a computer, and adjust classroom materials (e.g., shorten, make larger, rearrange) (e.g., Lewis & McKenzie, 2010). They may also prepare materials to facilitate students' participation in school activities, including writing social stories for students with autism (Quilty, 2007). After instruction, the paraeducator might grade student work, record information about student performance on particular tasks, and prepare routine correspondence for parents about a student's activities that day.

One issue should be raised regarding the instructional responsibilities of paraeducators. Despite all the anecdotal information about the instructional assistance paraeducators provide to students, studies clearly establishing that student achievement improves as a result of interventions by paraeducators remain limited (Giangreco et al., 2010). A few isolated studies indicate that when paraeducators receive specific training to carry out interventions, students with whom they work benefit (e.g., Bolton & Mayer, 2008; Hall,

Grundon, Pope, & Romero, 2010), particularly young children (French, 2003). In general, though, current practices on the instructional tasks paraeducators complete, the amount of time they spend in inclusive general education classes, the intensity of their contacts with students, and the impact of their preparation for their responsibilities are based largely on intuition and experience, not data-based knowledge. This situation should remind you of the importance of gathering your own data about paraeducators' work so that you can create your own knowledge base on the most effective use of their services for the students for whom you are responsible.

Noninstructional Responsibilities

Even though instruction often is a paraeducator's primary responsibility, many paraeducators also have noninstructional duties (Carter, O'Rourke, et al., 2009; Doyle, 2002). These responsibilities, often assigned to paraeducators who work with students with disabilities, may involve support for students, clerical work, or other activities that support students in an indirect way.

Support for Students Some students can receive instruction in public schools only because paraeducators provide for their personal care. This may involve feeding a student, moving the student from place to place, carrying out procedures such as catheterization, changing diapers, or assisting a student in using the toilet. Paraeducators who carry out these types of responsibilities often develop close relationships with their students, and they may even babysit for students on weekends and during holidays. Mary Ellen, for example, works as a one-to-one assistant for Lisa, an elementary student with autism. Mary Ellen is very knowledgeable concerning Lisa's personality and special needs, especially what to do if Lisa becomes upset because of a change in routine. Mary Ellen usually leaves school with Lisa on Wednesday afternoons, spending two or three hours with her at Lisa's home so that Lisa's mom can complete errands. If a paraeducator has this type of responsibility, usually clear plans need to be in place in case the paraeducator is absent.

Many paraeducators assist educators in student supervision. Some accompany students to class, recess, lunch, or assemblies to provide behavior support (e.g., Hall et al., 2010; Maggin, Wehby, Moore-Partin, Robertson, & Oliver, 2009). Others assist in getting students safely off buses and into the school building. Yet others are assigned a limited amount of lunchroom supervision, time-out monitoring, or playground duty. If a student is unable to self-ambulate, or if a student has serious behavior problems likely to be demonstrated during unstructured time such as during passing periods between classes, a paraeducator may accompany such a student from class to class for safety and efficiency.

Clerical Responsibilities Both general and special education include a significant amount of paperwork. Paraeducators sometimes assist in getting this work completed. They may record scores on assessments onto a master record, update progress notes regarding student learning, or enter data on a behavior intervention plan. They also may assist in the day-to-day clerical work of teachers, duplicating materials for class, gathering money for field trips, or laminating materials that will be used several times. In addition, they may draft general correspondence being sent to all parents (about upcoming conferences, for example) and assist in obtaining information from or relaying information to outside agencies.

It may be tempting to assign a paraeducator many clerical responsibilities in order to free teacher time to work with students. However, you should keep in mind that paraeducators, like teachers, have student instruction and support as a primary responsibility. In particular, unless specific to their assignments, they should not be asked to assist in the school office for extended time periods, to cover responsibilities for clerical assistants who are absent, or to carry out clerical chores during the time that they have been assigned to



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Paraeducators Supporting Students from Diverse Backgrounds

For all students from minority cultures, but especially for students with special needs, learning is assisted when students can interact with adults who understand their language, culture, and communities. Studies of paraeducators who share the cultural background of the students with whom they work suggest these important benefits (e.g., Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Monzó & Rueda, 2000):

1. *Using motherhood as a basis for interacting with students.* Paraeducators sometimes find that their own experiences as mothers within their cultures guide the expectations they set and ways of interacting with students.
2. *Demonstrating cariño.* Paraeducators may use cultural terms of endearment, touch, and softened facial expressions, particularly when correcting student behavior or academic work.
3. *Using a relaxed instructional style.* The paraeducators may allow students to chat with peers while they work and to speak spontaneously during instruction. The relaxed style enables paraeducators to learn about students' lives outside school.
4. *Accepting students' styles.* Paraeducators may respond to student misbehaviors in a way congruent with their cultural background. They may be more likely to talk with students about behaviors than to remove privileges.
5. *Incorporating student language and knowledge into instruction.* Paraeducators may use both English and their primary language to facilitate instruction. For example, they may use the primary language to direct students about getting out materials or following other directions while using English for the discussion of the vocabulary. They also may relate concepts being taught in school to students' homes and communities, thus fostering student participation.
6. *Employing wait time.* Paraeducators may wait longer for student responses than would typically be expected. This often relates to understanding the language-processing problems of students for whom English is a second language.
7. *Sharing experiences.* Noninstructional interactions between paraeducators and students often occur in the student's native language. Paraeducators indicate this approach helps them to connect to the students.

These findings offer important insights into informal contributions that paraeducators can make in the instructional process. For example, if the teacher is from a culture different from that of students, a paraeducator may help to serve as a cultural liaison between student and professional, especially when that individual is a member of the community. Likewise, because professionals often are balancing the needs of many students and a wide range of setting factors, the paraeducators may be more able than the professionals to build a relationship with a reticent student.

work with students. When paraeducators are expected to complete such work, it detracts from the services students should be receiving.

Other Noninstructional Responsibilities Paraeducators may have other responsibilities that facilitate student success and support the educational process. For example, in schools where a significant number of students or family members are not native English speakers, some paraeducators provide translation (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007). Whether assisting a special education or a general education teacher during a routine phone call, communicating with parents who come to school to meet with professionals, or clarifying technical terms during any interaction, translation may be an essential paraeducator responsibility (Rueda & DeNeve, 1999). An indirect benefit may result as well: Family members may be more comfortable when a paraeducator who shares their culture and language is present, and better communication often results. Other positive results of paraeducators bringing their culture to their responsibilities—both instructional and noninstructional—are addressed in A Basis in Research.

Paraeducators also can function as members of the instructional team. When they work with students on a daily basis, they may have valuable insights about student learning or behavior that can help shape decisions being made. Similarly, they may notice small problems students are encountering that professionals have missed (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Hauge & Babkie, 2006). Of course, this responsibility requires their attendance at meetings to discuss students—sometimes a problem if those meetings typically are held after school hours, time outside most paraeducators' contracted workday.

Ethical Considerations

Because the use of paraeducators is not clearly articulated in federal law and their roles continue to evolve in this era of higher student achievement standards, you may find that some of the roles we have described are common for paraeducators in your locale, but others are unusual or specifically prohibited. In addition, any of several ethical issues may arise concerning their work. Your responsibility is to make decisions concerning paraeducator assignments, keeping in mind local policies as well as factors such as those that follow.

Paraeducators Supplement Instruction

Although paraeducators provide valuable instructional support to students, it is clear that they are to supplement instruction that is delivered by professionals; they may not supplant it (Carter, O'Rourke, et al., 2009; Darrow, 2010; French, 2003). This fact affects accountability: Even if a paraeducator delivers a specific intervention or service to a student, the professional staff member—that is, the person who gave the directions to the paraeducator—is ultimately accountable for the outcome of that intervention or service. For example, in Mr. Baker and Ms. Wright's co-taught classroom, three days each week Ms. Scott, the paraeducator, also is present. The three educators usually establish stations for these lessons. Mr. Baker and Ms. Wright provide instruction on specific skills while Ms. Scott either reviews skills taught earlier or rereads a story or set of poems the students are studying. This arrangement is appropriate: The professionals are delivering the initial instruction, and the paraeducator supplements it through review. In another example, Mr. Wiley is a paraeducator in a self-contained class for high school students with significant disabilities. He works with students individually on verbal or technology-assisted communication, following plans prepared by Ms. Reid, the special educator.

Paraeducators themselves have raised issues related to instruction. They report that they feel a strong sense of ownership of and commitment to their work with the students to whom they are assigned, but that they sometimes are asked to take responsibility for making instructional decisions they do not feel qualified to make (Carter, O'Rourke, et al., 2009; Shyman, 2010). For example, Downing and her colleagues (2000) interviewed paraeducators working with students with severe disabilities. The paraeducators reported that they were primarily responsible for making curricular modifications and other decisions that could have a significant impact on students' education—decisions that they believed should have been made by the teachers.

Others have added a sobering sociocultural perspective on this issue of paraeducators' work. They note that in too many situations paraeducators may become *de facto* teachers, especially for students with significant disabilities (e.g., Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Suter & Giangreco, 2009). In fact, some professionals are concerned that paraeducators' attention to students may interfere with some teachers' sense of responsibility for providing instruction (Giangreco et al., 2010). They raise questions about the potential negative

impact on the general education teachers' and typical learners' perceptions when the group of staff members generally considered least powerful in schools provides most services for the students who are likely perceived as least powerful (that is, those with disabilities).

A discussion of ethics and paraeducators' instructional roles also raises questions about co-teaching. Although some professionals refer to paraeducators as co-teachers (e.g., Nevin, Villa, & Thousand, 2009), this implies that teachers and paraeducators have instructional parity, and clearly this is not the case. Co-teaching approaches can be used by that teachers and paraeducators appropriately—but with clear understanding that the teacher makes the decisions about the paraeducator's appropriate assignment. For example, students could be assigned to three groups, with the teacher providing new instruction while the paraeducator reviews vocabulary, and students work on a project. Likewise, a paraeducator could work to reread a chapter with a small group of students while the teacher worked with other students on a writing assignment. In both cases, the structures are those used in co-teaching, but the paraeducator is providing appropriate instructional support, not new instruction. This is different from the partnerships of co-teaching.

An unpleasant but realistic sidebar to this discussion of the ethical responsibilities for paraeducators concerns the unfortunate administrative rationale for employing them. In a few locales, paraeducators are seen as an inexpensive alternative to hiring professional staff, particularly if the intent is to get “an extra set of hands” into classrooms with struggling learners or those with disabilities. This approach reflects a gross underestimation of professional staff members' contributions, and it is a highly questionable means of delivering student services.

Ultimately, a few matters related to what paraeducators instructionally should *not* do are clear and include the following:

- Write IEP goals and/or objectives for students with disabilities.
- Interpret data gathered in order to plan appropriate educational goals for students or to plan instruction.
- Make decisions about what instructional, behavioral, or other interventions or programs are needed by students.
- Decide that particular programs or interventions are no longer needed by students and stop providing them.
- Design and deliver initial core instruction without teacher supervision.
- Make other critical decisions concerning student education or safety.

Ultimately, paraeducators should not bear sole responsibility for any part of a student's education. Rather, they should assist professionals in related tasks and carry out their work with ongoing and high-quality professional involvement. Can you think of any additional issues related to instruction that should be added to this list?

Parent Communication and Input

Another ethical issue can arise in the work of paraeducators. Concerning what topics and under which circumstances should paraeducators communicate with parents? This seemingly simple matter can become complex. Many special educators ask paraeducators to record in a notebook two or three highlights of the day for students with significant disabilities who cannot communicate what they have experienced at school. Other teachers may request that paraeducators call parents to alert them that a form needing parent signature or an announcement of an upcoming school event is being sent home. However, if a discussion is needed about a behavior problem a student is experiencing or a concern related to a student's education, the teacher should be responsible for this communication. Complexity

may arise when a paraeducator knows family members well. In such cases, a paraeducator may inadvertently or deliberately share information beyond the scope of what is appropriate. For example, Terry, a paraeducator, told Tony's mother that Tony had had a terrible day at school. Tony's mother called the teacher, who was surprised at the mother's concern. The teacher's perception was that Tony's behavior was the result of a changed schedule because of a special program and not a cause for alarm. The paraeducator's comments caused a miscommunication and could have had more serious consequences.

The Problem of Proximity

One other issue can arise related to paraeducators and their work. When a team decides that part of a student's instruction can be provided by a paraeducator, parents and families are entitled to understand the qualifications of the individual delivering services and the scope of that person's responsibilities (Blacher, 2007; Chopra, 2009; Malmgren & Causton-Theoharis, 2006). Often, professionals and parents alike are faced with an ethical dilemma: How much support from a paraeducator is optimal? Is more always better? What is the rationale that should be employed for deciding on the right blend of professional and paraeducator services?

Paraeducators report that they believe they are crucial for helping students succeed, and educators generally report that paraeducators are highly valuable staff members (e.g., Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2007; Giangreco et al., 2010), even though scant research exists to support these perceptions (e.g., McGrath, Johns, & Mathur, 2010). Sometimes, however, these laudable characteristics can lead to a dilemma. Particularly for those paraeducators assigned to a specific student with a disability in an inclusive setting, a risk exists that by remaining in close physical proximity to the student, negative outcomes can occur (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Giangreco & Broer, 2007). Among these are losing opportunities for the student to have typical social interactions with other students, inadvertently encouraging dependent instead of independent student behaviors, and unintentionally communicating to the general education teacher that he or she is not the primary teacher of the student. In addition, some concern also exists that assistants in close proximity may place students at greater risk for sexual abuse because the students do not learn appropriate social distance (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997).

Generally, paraeducators should be taught that the goal of their work with an individual student with a disability is to gradually move away from directly and intrusively interacting with that student, except as absolutely needed (e.g., helping the student move from place to place). Although no one would want to deprive a student of needed supports, what also is important is that the student learn to interact with classmates in a natural way, to seek assistance from them without adult intervention, and to experience school in a way that adult mediation cannot replicate. If you are a special education teacher or a general education teacher, you may find it necessary to guide paraeducators in this responsibility, helping them to find the best balance between providing individual assistance and nurturing independence.

Working with Paraeducators

Thus far, this chapter has addressed the scope of a paraeducator's roles and responsibilities. The essential complement to that discussion is one about your roles and responsibilities as a professional working with paraeducators (Carnahan et al., 2009; Devlin, 2008; French, 2004). You may find that you need to be competent and feel confident to address these five areas: teaching paraeducators to perform expected duties, planning with paraeducators, effectively assigning specific responsibilities to paraeducators, communicating



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Delegating Responsibilities to Paraeducators

Delegating responsibility, that is, making decisions about what a teacher should do and what a paraeducator should do, can be difficult. Some special education teachers, general education teachers, and other specialists (e.g., speech/language therapists) struggle with the notion of directing the work of paraeducators by assigning tasks to them and holding them accountable for completing those tasks. Here are a few of the reasons why professionals say delegating is challenging (French, 2003).

- I am a perfectionist and the paraeducator is unlikely to complete the task in the way that I want it done.
- To do this activity, the paraeducator should be trained and there is no time for training in the schedule. Someone besides me should be responsible for training paraeducators.
- I like to do this activity, even though it might be more appropriately completed by the paraeducator.
- I am not confident about the quality of the work that the paraeducator does.
- I can do it faster myself.
- When I direct the paraeducator to do a task, I feel bossy and I'm worried that the paraeducator won't like me.

- Paraeducators are paid too little to expect them to do many of the tasks that need attention.

How do you think each of these issues should be addressed, especially those that consider paraeducator skills and training?

Here are some reasons why delegation is so important.

- Delegation makes the most of all the time available to provide services to students—that of both paraeducators and professionals.
- Delegation provides clear direction to paraeducators, eliminating confusion and responsibilities.
- Delegation creates teams in which everyone feels a sense of commitment.
- Delegation challenges paraeducators to learn new skills and stretch their expertise.
- Delegation empowers paraeducators, communicating to them that you trust and respect them.
- Delegation means that you don't have to do everything yourself, permitting you to better manage all your responsibilities.

with paraeducators, and supervising these personnel. You also may learn that you have to think carefully about the subject of delegating responsibilities to paraeducators, which is the topic of Putting Ideas into Practice.

Teaching Paraeducators About Their Roles and Responsibilities

Although federal law clearly states that paraeducators should be prepared for the responsibilities they have in their jobs, the way in which this is accomplished varies by state and school district (Giles, 2010). Some school districts offer general staff development to paraeducators through workshops or videotapes in order to prepare them to succeed on the required assessment of their skills. In other locales, completion of a community college program or a specific number of college credits is a condition of employment. However, the initial general preparation that paraeducators receive seldom can provide enough preparation for the specific roles and responsibilities they assume. This more specific training often is the responsibility of professional staff (Carter, O'Rourke, et al., 2009; Davis, Kotecki, Harvey, & Oliver, 2007). That is, professionals need to provide student-specific and context-based information in order for paraeducators to do their jobs effectively. The sample needs assessment in Figure 1 illustrates this need for specific training for paraeducators across academic,

FIGURE 1 Paraeducator needs assessment

5—highly proficient/knowledgeable
 3—somewhat proficient/knowledgeable
 1—not at all proficient/knowledgeable

| Paraeducator Self-Rating | Domains of Responsibility | Teacher Rating |
|---|--|----------------|
| Knowledge of core academic content | | |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Reading | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Language Arts | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Math | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Science | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Social Studies | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| Knowledge of strategies to teach core academic content | | |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Reading | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Language Arts | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Math | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Science | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Social Studies | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| Knowledge of strategies to respond to student behavior | | |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Gathering and recording student behavior data | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Principles of behavior modification, including rewards | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Appropriately explaining rules, procedures, and routines to students | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Using natural consequences to respond to student behavior | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Motivating students | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| Knowledge of communication strategies | | |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | With teachers and/or supervisor | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | With students | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | With parents | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| Knowledge of other strategies | | |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Organizing and managing assigned work | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Managing time | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Following directions | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Dealing with work stress | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Managing differences with staff and/or students | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Using computers and other technology | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 5 4 3 2 1 | Using office equipment | 5 4 3 2 1 |



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Paraeducators on the Web

Many electronic resources are available to increase your knowledge about working with paraeducators and to enhance paraeducators' skills. The following web sites contain a wealth of information.

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=321752

The Connecticut State Department of Education offers this web site to assist paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators in ensuring that students receive optimum benefit from paraeducators. The site includes links to valuable information, including an instrument for assessing paraeducator job performance, strategies for communicating with paraeducators, and guidelines for paraeducator communication with parents.

www.nrcpara.org

The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals contains a wealth of information about paraeducators, their responsibilities, and best practices for their use in public schools. The site includes links to many other useful resources, including paraeducator handbooks from Utah, Iowa, and Kansas. Each of these handbooks contains valuable information about effectively working with paraeducators.

www.monarchcenter.org/quick-links/resources/working-paraprofessionals

The Monarch Center web site includes a compilation of information about working with paraeducators. You can

directly link to recent articles and other resources related to the responsibilities of special educators in directing paraeducators' work.

www.nectac.org/topics/personnel/paraprof.asp

The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) offers many resources related to paraeducators, including organizations that support paraeducators and projects in various state and universities addressing a wide range of issues and concerns related to paraeducators in special education.

www.paracenter.org/PARACenter

The Paraprofessional Resource and Research Center (PAR²A Center) at the University of Colorado at Denver has a wealth of information related to the roles, responsibilities, preparation, supervision, and employment of paraeducators. Its mission is to contribute research related to paraeducators so that they are most effectively used to support students. One recent article addresses the collaboration between parents and paraeducators in inclusive classrooms.

www.uvm.edu/~cdci/prlc

The Paraeducator Resource and Learning Center (PRLC) might assist you in helping a paraeducator understand his or her responsibilities. It includes six educational modules for paraeducators about topics such as working as a member of a team, families and cultural sensitivity, and inclusive education.

behavior, and general areas. A similar list could be generated for additional domains in which paraeducators might have responsibility, including understanding of unique student characteristics, personal care, use of assistive technology, and others.

You should discuss with your administrator and other colleagues how paraeducators in your school receive this focused preparation. If no planned program is available, you might wish to look for a detailed needs assessment or create one tailored to the responsibilities you understand paraeducators in your school/classroom should have, perhaps collaborating with colleagues to create a year-long plan for staff development for all the paraeducators in your school. As you work on this project, you should take into consideration the practical matter of finding brief periods of time during the school day during which this activity can occur. Exploring the use of online resources, such as those listed in e-Partnerships, can greatly facilitate this effort.

What is not acceptable, even for novice educators, is to presume that helping paraeducators to develop needed skills should be someone else's responsibility. Although it is helpful if staff development is available through other means, paraeducators work at the direction of teachers or other professional staff, and so these individuals ultimately have the responsibility for ensuring that work can be completed efficiently and effectively. This often means teaching paraeducators how to carry out assigned tasks as well as directing them on matters related to parent communication, appropriate language for interacting with students, strategies for speaking with others about students with disabilities, and all the other topics that might need attention.

Planning with Paraeducators

Clearly, paraeducators are supposed to work under the direction of a teacher or other professional. This implies that a need exists for professionals and paraeducators to meet so that plans can be discussed, dilemmas raised and resolved, and student progress monitored. However, the limited data available suggest that such interactions are the exception rather than the rule.

Not surprisingly, the biggest reported obstacle to professional–paraeducator planning is time to meet (French, 2001). For example, in many school districts paraeducators have the same work hours as the school day for students, and so they are not available before or after school hours. Similarly, paraeducators typically are not paid on teacher workdays when students are not present or for preparation days prior to the start of the school year. Without administrative commitment to professional–paraeducator planning, no simple solution to this problem exists. You can be sure that the schedule you create for paraeducators working with you includes at least one planning period per week.

Assigning Responsibilities to Paraeducators

Perhaps the most important responsibility you have related to paraeducators is assigning particular tasks or responsibilities to them. Although the range of these responsibilities is almost endless, some points to keep in mind follow.

- If you are a special educator working in an inclusive school, consider assigning paraeducators to work in general education classrooms where student needs are minimal and teacher support is not warranted. Examples might be science or social studies classes or lessons in which students use many manipulatives.
- If the need for a second adult in a general education classroom pertains to a student who has a behavior intervention plan, consider training a paraeducator on the plan and assigning her to that classroom. Keep in mind, though, that if a student's behavior is unpredictable and problems are occurring with the plan, a teacher's presence may be necessary.
- In some classrooms, teachers need someone to help them implement the instruction that they have designed. This can be particularly true in early elementary grades. If paraeducator assistance is assigned, the teacher should identify review and supplemental tasks the paraprofessional can complete under the teacher's direction.
- When paraeducators have received specific training to deliver remedial reading or math instruction, they may be assigned to this responsibility for part or all of

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the day (Granger & Greek, 2005). For example, as schools implement response to intervention (RTI) procedures, paraeducators may play a key role in assisting in the delivery of Tier 2 instruction. You should check local policies regarding the use of paraeducators for such instruction.

- In some inclusive schools, paraeducators are assigned based on schedules rather than specific student and classroom needs. Although the difficulty of scheduling is clear, keep in mind that schedules alone should not dictate how paraeducators are assigned.
- If paraeducators are working in special education classrooms, they often review specific skills with students while the special educator provides initial instruction with other students. This model is common in both resource classes as well as self-contained classes. The caution about paraeducators not offering ongoing initial instruction holds in the special education setting as well as in the general education setting. Initial instruction must be delivered by teachers.
- Another common assignment for paraeducators working with students with significant needs is accompanying one or several students to related arts classes such as art, music, physical education, or computer lab (e.g., Darrow, 2010). In such cases, any specialized tasks the paraeducator must perform should be clarified, and unique issues (e.g., those related to safety) should be addressed directly.

Remember that the examples just noted are intended to give you a sense of the types of assignments paraeducators may have and your role in maximizing the positive impact of paraeducators on student achievement, but there are many other possibilities. In addition, it is imperative that you monitor paraeducators' work to ensure that their time is well used on behalf of students and that their interactions with other professionals are appropriate.



Felicia Martinez/PhotoEdit

Paraeducators and teachers often collaborate in planning and delivering instruction, but teachers ultimately are responsible for directing paraeducators' work.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Communicating with Your Paraeducator

In most schools, professionals and paraeducators have little, if any, time to formally meet, and they must become creative to maintain effective communication. Here are a few informal strategies for communicating about student academic and behavior programs with your paraeducator.

- Create for each of you a planning agenda that is laminated and can be used repeatedly. For example, the agenda might include sections for instructional issues, assistive technology matters, student behaviors, and/or team concerns. You and your paraeducator note items as you become aware of them, using a water-based marker. When you do have time to meet, you have a ready agenda to ensure your time is used wisely. After the meeting, agendas can be wiped clean and used again.
- Use a clipboard agenda. Hang or place a clipboard with a pad of paper in a location easily accessible to the paraeducator, general education teacher, and/or special educator, but away from students (e.g., a teacher mailbox, in a teacher's desk drawer). Anyone lists agenda items on the paper, and when the meeting occurs, copies of the list are distributed and form the agenda.
- E-mail communication can also help professionals keep in touch with paraeducators. If you establish a routine—say, spending 5 or 10 minutes each morning or afternoon providing e-mailed directions to your assistant—you can be certain that you are documenting the assigned work. If the paraeducator also e-mails with notes about implementing the directions, a detailed record exists and communication is assured.
- If the paraeducator uses teacher's manuals or other materials in his or her work with students, you can use self-stick removable notes to provide directions and comments. Select one color to use for this purpose, and attach the note on the page where input is needed. The paraeducator could reply with notes in another color. Although this strategy is not shared planning, it can be an efficient and direct means of communication.

Communicating with Paraeducators

Even if you have regularly scheduled planning periods with paraeducators, you still will need to use effective and efficient communication strategies to keep in touch with your paraeducators and to monitor their work and student progress (Calder & Grieve, 2004). Communication skills are essential, as they are for all your professional interactions, but several other strategies also can be used. These are briefly described in Putting Ideas into Practice.

Communication entails more than interactions about instruction and student concerns, however. One initial form of communication is the paraeducator's job description. This is the instrument through which you can discuss with paraeducators key job expectations. You might want to check about the availability of a job description because, as noted earlier, not all school districts have them, and some that do have not updated them in many years. You also should provide the following: orientation at the beginning of the school year for paraeducators, including basic school policies and procedures about everything from parking to mailboxes to dress codes; your expectations for paraeducator interactions with students and other school staff; information about the school's philosophy (e.g., inclusive, problem-based learning); and steps to take if a problem arises either with a student or with a staff member. The more information that you formally communicate to paraeducators, the less they will have to learn incidentally and the less likely it is that miscommunication will occur (Dalla, Gupta, Lopez, & Jones, 2006).

Supervising Paraeducators

It has been implied throughout this chapter, but at this point it needs to be stated directly: Special education teachers, general education teachers, and other professionals have the responsibility of supervising paraeducators and the work they do with students (Steckelberg et al., 2007). This may not be a formal responsibility; in many school districts, principals are assigned the task of evaluating paraeducators. However, even when this is the case, those administrators rely heavily on input from the day-to-day supervision experiences of professionals in providing feedback to paraeducators.

What have you learned in your other course work about supervising paraeducators? Paraeducators report that teachers are not proficient in guiding their work (Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Special Education News, 2000). Further, teachers sometimes indicate that they are reluctant to think of themselves as supervisors or to function in that capacity; they believe that it interferes with their working relationship with paraeducators (French, 1998). Whether you share these perceptions or not, in today's schools educators should assume that they will have supervisory responsibilities related to paraeducators such as the following:

- Monitoring whether paraeducators are carrying out the specific tasks that have been assigned to them
- Providing feedback to paraeducators on their work with students, pointing out strategies or techniques they are using appropriately, and redirecting them when the strategies they are using are not effective or are detrimental to the student
- Modeling effective ways to interact with students and instructional techniques to use with them
- Problem solving with paraeducators when disagreements arise about paraeducator roles in the general education or special education settings
- Ensuring that paraeducators adhere to school policies
- Ensuring that paraeducators follow a code of ethics, particularly on matters such as confidentiality (Fleury, 2000)
- Supporting paraeducators by answering their questions regarding students, classroom practices, instructional strategies, legal issues, and other related topics
- Arranging for some type of public acknowledgment of the work that paraeducators do (e.g., holding an appreciation day, having students make cards, conveying positive parent comments)
- Bringing to the attention of administrators or other supervisors chronic issues related to paraeducators that have not been resolved through discussion and redirection

The Matter of Conflict One aspect of supervision that may be inevitable is conflict. Although you might think that conflict with paraeducators is rare, you should be prepared for the occasional situation in which it occurs. One common example concerns veteran paraeducators working with novice educators (McGrath et al., 2010). The paraeducator may inappropriately try to decide how the classroom may be run, how students should complete their work, or what information should be shared with parents. For example, think about the case study at the beginning of this chapter. Emily has the responsibility to direct Viviana's work, but Viviana seems to perceive that she knows what students should do and should inform Emily about school policies and practices. What types of conflict could this raise? The strategies used for addressing conflict sometimes are a critical element of your work with paraeducators.

Instances of conflict require that you use all the skills that you learn text. Your paraeducator truly may have valuable insights to share about students and their programs and progress, but you ultimately are accountable for students' education. Your goals should be to listen carefully to paraeducator input, consider it in your own planning and problem solving, and make decisions based on that input as well as your own knowledge and skills.

Of course, unless you are the formally identified supervisor for paraeducators, if significant issues arise related to paraeducator performance, you should alert the appropriate administrator so that more formal procedures can be implemented if conflict occurs and persists. It also is important to keep in mind that addressing small conflicts is far easier than avoiding a problem that has the potential to become more serious.

Paraeducators and Collaboration

Perhaps you have been wondering whether all the information in this chapter is supposed to give a particular message about collaboration and working with paraeducators. The primary intent is to articulate the fact that your relationship with paraeducators is perhaps at this time the least understood and most complex of all the professional relationships you will have in your job.

Is it possible to collaborate with a paraeducator? Of course! Remember that collaboration is a style, and you may use the style when interacting with a paraeducator just as you use it with other professionals and parents/families. What is less clear, however, is the extent to which collaboration with paraeducators is appropriate and how special education professionals can balance their preference for collaborative interactions with paraeducators with their responsibility to supervise them (Gilrane, Russell, & Roberts, 2008).

This is an area in which clear guidelines simply do not exist, and the available data are worrisome. In some cases, teachers want to treat paraeducators just like other teachers, to ask them to take over a class, to be peers. Even some administrative literature suggests that this is acceptable practice (Daniels & McBride, 2001). At the same time, most paraeducators do not have professional credentials, they do not have a professional array of responsibilities in their job descriptions, and they do not make a professional salary. Taken together, these factors suggest that in some interactions, all the conditions for collaboration can be met, but in others, they cannot (Giangreco et al., 2010; Hammeken, 2003).

SUMMARY

- With the increasing number of paraeducators employed to assist students with disabilities and other special needs, you are likely to be responsible for working with and guiding the activities of paraeducators.
- Although in the past the primary activities for paraeducators were clerical tasks, now they more typically spend the majority of their time completing direct and indirect instructional responsibilities, as well as noninstructional responsibilities related to personal care (for students with significant disabilities), and supervision.
- However assigned, the scope of a paraeducator's work should be clearly delineated and distinguished from that of individuals employed in a professionally licensed capacity.
- To work effectively with paraeducators, professionals need a wide range of skills: They may arrange for necessary training for their paraeducators, they should ensure that systematic planning meetings occur, they should assign paraeducator responsibilities based on student needs, they should foster clear day-to-day communication, and they should provide immediate if often informal supervision for these personnel.
- Collaboration between professionals and paraeducators is recommended, but it must be tempered with an understanding of the difference in status between the individuals participating and the context in which the interactions occur.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Review the case study at the beginning of this chapter. Based on what you have read and your class discussions, if you were in the teacher's situation, what would you say to Viviana to let her know your concerns? What would you do if, after you began to speak with her, she became angry? She became sullen? She started crying?
2. Suppose you accept a position to be a special education teacher in an inclusive middle school. Your students with mild to moderate learning and behavior disabilities are on two teams, but you are assigned a teaching assistant to ensure that all students receive appropriate services. What factors would you consider in deciding how to assign tasks to your paraeducator? How would you ensure that you retained appropriate accountability for the progress of students served primarily by the paraeducator?
3. Although most paraeducators are wonderful, committed individuals who truly make a significant contribution to student success, problems also can occur. How would you respond to the following situations?
 - The paraeducator, who is supposed to be in your classroom all morning, seems to disappear frequently for 15 to 20 minutes at a time.
 - The paraeducator, who is nearly finished with a teaching credential, comments about today's lesson: "I don't think this information is appropriate for Joe. It's too difficult. I'll just pull him to the side and do something different. I hope you're okay with that."
 - In your opinion, the paraeducator seems to be doing too much to assist several students, and you believe the students should have more responsibility for beginning and completing assignments independently, turning them in, and behaving appropriately.
4. If you were asked to provide a one-hour staff development session to school staff members on the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators, what topics would you prioritize? How would you address the topic of collaboration between professionals and paraeducators? What topics do you think would be of particular interest to general education teachers? Special education teachers? Other professionals?
5. Imagine that it is the first day of school, and you have just met the newly hired paraeducator who is to assist you. What would you do to ensure that the paraeducator feels comfortable in his new job and school? That you and the paraeducator develop a strong and positive working relationship right from the beginning? That the paraeducator understands the scope of his responsibilities? Compare your responses to those of your classmates so that you can develop your own master checklist for getting started.
6. Many educators note that paraeducators have valuable information about students, but that they often are not provided with planning time with teachers and are not usually included in meetings and interactions with parents. What should be the role of the paraeducator on a teaching team? What would you say to convince your administrator to make time available for paraeducators to participate in these collaborative opportunities?

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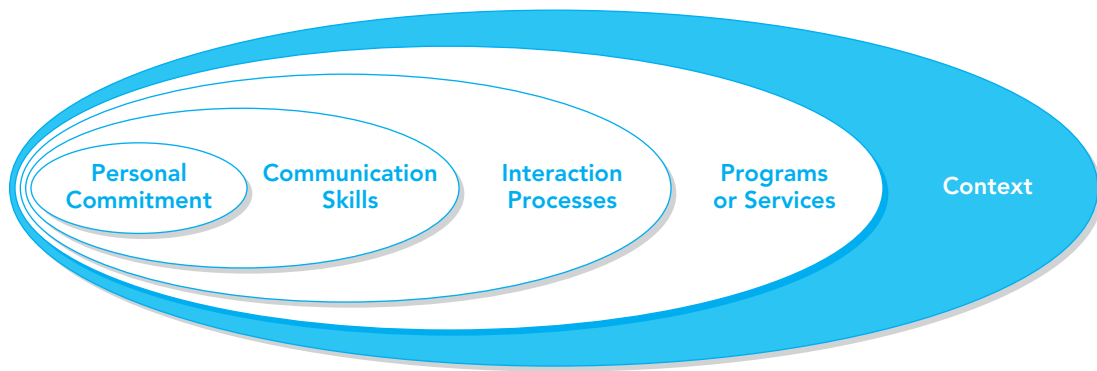
Families

From Chapter 11 of *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, Seventh Edition. Marilyn Friend, Lynne Cook.
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Families



Connections

In this chapter, we consider special issues related to understanding families, your work with them, and their participation in educational decision making and program implementation. The ways in which culture influences families and cultural implications for your work are also addressed. We examine professional responsibilities in working with families and suggest strategies for supporting and for collaborating with families.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Describe the historical and current roles of parents and families in the education of children and youth with disabilities.
2. Describe family systems theory and significant characteristics of the four life stages of families.
3. Identify special considerations and challenges for families of children with disabilities at each of the four life stages of families.
4. Identify cultural influences on families and discuss characteristics of culturally responsive services.
5. Outline major professional roles and responsibilities when working with families.
6. Identify strategies for promoting family participation in educational decision making.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

How Much Is Enough?

Returning from overseas duty with the military, Mr. Johnson, William's father, has rejoined his family. He is a devoted father and is very concerned about his fifth-grade son's recently identified learning disability. Mr. Johnson has had a one-hour meeting with you for each of the last three Mondays to learn more about learning disabilities and what he can do to help William at home. He has read all of the handouts you have given him and done research on the Internet. Not surprisingly, he has found some relevant and solid information, but he has also found several unsubstantiated "studies" with results that suggest using highly questionable strategies at home and school to "cure" William's learning disability. Mr. Johnson has now suggested that you start meeting with him twice a week. Despite your commitment to working with parents, you are unable to schedule this much time for him because you have nearly 20 annual reviews and several eligibility meetings to schedule and complete in the next few weeks.

You know your responsibility to parents, and you no doubt want to collaborate with families on behalf of their children. Mr. Johnson is a caring and involved parent who is somewhat anxious about his son's school performance. He has not yet found work since he returned from the service and so has extra time to devote to William. His interest in his son is good, but his anxiety is exacerbated by the wide range of information and myths he is discovering on the Internet. You can help him make better judgments about the material he is reading, and you can give him more instructive information to read. You don't have the time to meet with him as often as he would like, even though you recognize that his fears could be allayed and he could come to understand and accept William's disability if he had more support and information.

Introduction

You are likely to have a different working relationship with each of the families with which you interact. Your relationships with parents and families will depend on the needs of the student; the interests, resources, and needs of the families; as well as your skills, resources, and attitude. Consider two other situations:

- Susan's parents are both professionals working high-pressure jobs. They did not attend Back-to-School Night and never come in for conferences. When you call one of them, you receive a return call from a secretary or the nanny offering to convey your message to the parent. You have offered several dates for Susan's annual review meeting, but neither parent can schedule the time.
- Drew's mother has scheduled two conferences with you and has canceled both of them. She typically cancels meetings at the last minute because another child is ill, her car breaks down, or she is unable to get away from work. She regularly calls you apologetically and wants to discuss matters on the phone rather than come to school. Yesterday she attended Drew's annual review meeting with her infant and a preschool child, whose presence was disruptive to the meeting.

Every school professional can relate to the range of relationships these examples represent. Mr. Johnson's investment in William's progress is requiring more time than you can give and may not be helpful to William. Susan's parents seem disinterested and unwilling to commit to participating in their daughter's program. You have little information about their relationship with or their support for Susan. Drew's mother is committed to Drew; but the other children, her work, and related demands for her time make it exceptionally difficult

for her to attend meetings at school. Nevertheless, she wants to know how he is doing and what she can do to support him at home.

Collaboration is a worthy goal and is something to aim for with all families, although the intensity of your collaboration will vary based on the needs of the family. When you consider the range of situations faced by families, you will realize that you need to adjust your expectations to match the capacity of an individual family to engage in different levels of collaboration. For some families, active participation in school activities is not an appropriate goal. If you are only going to talk with Susan's nanny or her mother's secretary, it may not be possible for you to engage the family in school activities or for you and the parents to have sufficient interaction for collaboration to occur. Some parents may have so many obligations and demands that active collaboration is difficult. For others, such as Drew's mother, who have difficult schedules and competing demands but are able to maintain contact by telephone or e-mail or who can arrange early morning or early evening meetings, active collaboration is appropriate and recommended. You may find that, with work, this could be the case with Susan's parents, too. Collaboration with Mr. Johnson is appropriate, but the restrictions on your schedule simply will not permit it at the level he wishes. In this case, you will have to communicate your situation to him, maintain the level of collaboration you can, and refer him to another professional, such as the school counselor, or to an information and referral resource.

Despite the strength of your collaboration, your primary responsibilities in working with families are to understand the family needs and to facilitate family participation in decision making about the education of the family member with a disability. Each of these responsibilities is discussed here. Throughout this chapter, we emphasize the importance of providing supportive, family-centered services. This is a goal that will be more easily attained as your understanding of families develops.

Understanding Families

A number of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provisions provide for parental representation and participation in developing and implementing educational programs for their children. For example, IDEA mandates that parents will be part of the team that makes eligibility, placement, and services decisions; that parents will be regularly informed of their child's progress; that parents will be given copies of evaluation reports and have a right to ask for reviews of individualized education programs (IEPs); and that states will be required to offer no-cost mediation to parents to resolve disputes. Part C of the law mandates family-based early intervention services that may include parent education, support, and counseling as delineated in the individualized family service plan (IFSP). Parent training and information centers (PTIs) in each state and territory are also required by law to provide assistance so that parents and families may participate meaningfully in meeting the needs of their family member with a disability. With each reauthorization of IDEA since it was originally passed in 1975, the role of parents and families in the education of their family member with a disability has become increasingly more significant (Bernheimer & Weisner, 2007; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011; Yell, 2012). The professional literature has also called for increased collaboration between families and schools (Fraenkel, 2006; Harry, 2008; Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010).

Professionals must understand families and their perspectives in order to know what supports they need as well as when and how to engage them in collaboration. Although each family is unique and it is necessary to learn about them individually, there are some special considerations that apply when you seek to understand any family.

Prerequisites to effective interactions involve your self-awareness and your ability to understand others. These concepts—frame of reference, cultural self-awareness, and selective perception—accompanied by nonverbal communication, listening, and responding skills, are important foundations for understanding others, including families. Here we provide a context within which to apply that foundational information by (1) discussing a family systems framework that offers insights into functions and tasks of families at various life stages, and (2) considering cultural influences on families.

Professionals have long focused on the parental roles and functions in the care and education of children with disabilities. Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) described parents' major roles over the years, including being considered the source of their child's disability, organization members, service developers, recipients of professionals' decisions, teachers, political advocates, and educational decision makers. They added an eighth role—families as collaborators—as having emerged in the 1990s, and stressed that the emphasis on families signals a recognition that all family members, not just parents, are important to the care and education of children.

The shift in emphasis from parents to families occurred following the period from 1981 to 1989, when cultural diversity in the United States was expanded by the almost 6 million Asian, African, European, and Latin American people who became U.S. citizens. Entwisle (1994) observed that increased cultural diversity and economic and social pressures led to considerable structural diversity among these families and led to different concepts of what constitutes family.

Family is defined in many ways. Traditionally, the narrow, nuclear view of mother, father, and children has been the normative view, sometimes expanded to include others who live in the home. Yet children of single-parent families, stepfamilies, extended families, families with same-sex parents, families with grandparents acting as parents, and families with adopted or foster children are all represented in today's schools. People from some ethnic groups view the concept of family quite narrowly, whereas others conceive of families in a much broader way and include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and even neighbors or community elders. One definition of family that is consistent with our thinking is the following:

two or more people who regard themselves as a family and who perform some of the functions that families typically perform. These people may or may not be related by blood or marriage and may or may not usually live together. (Turnbull et al., 2011, p. 6)

We encourage you to define family in the broadest manner and accept the definition used by the parents and caregivers with whom you interact. For instance, if a mother suggests that her sister or aunt will be attending a parent conference in her place, it would be appropriate to accept that decision while continuing to encourage the mother's participation. Of course, legal matters such as accessing confidential information or taking a child from school require written permission from the child's parent or legal guardian.

Family Systems Theory

Although its influence has been recognized in related fields since the 1960s (Lambie, 2008), systems theory has become a major influence in how we view and respond to families of children with disabilities only over the last three decades. In systems theory, the family is seen as a complex and interactive social system in which all members' needs and experiences affect the others. Murray Bowen (1978), the “father” of family systems theory, theorized eight interlocking concepts that characterize families; as one element is affected, so, too, are the others. Turnbull et al. (2011) use Satir's (1972)

metaphor of a mobile to describe these interactions within the family system: The pieces of a mobile can be grouped and balanced by lengthening or shortening strings, but the repositioning of one piece causes a reaction or imbalance that affects the others. So it is with families.

The return of William's father from active duty, as described in the opening case, has caused the metaphoric mobile to lose its balance. The balance is even further disturbed because Mr. Johnson has not been able to find employment, and he is spending great amounts of time focused on William. This constitutes a significant departure from the last few months when he was absent and William had some independence in getting his homework completed and managing his household chores. Such an imbalance is likely to manifest in school and the teacher needs to be sensitive to it.

We need to view the family as a whole made up of parts that seek balance. The theory and its principles can help professionals to better understand a student's behavior, strengths, and challenges. Let's consider three key principles of systems theory.

Principle 1: No individual can be understood without recognizing how he or she fits within the entire family This is the central principle in systems theory. Each family member is a part of the whole, and it is important to understand how the members interact with one another and how their individual and collective histories have developed. Specifically, we need to see how each family member affects and is affected by the others and their situations. For example, when a parent loses a job, the financial assets of the family change. Depending on the reason for and the length of the unemployment period, the parent's attitudes, affect, and behavior may also change and have significant impact on the other family members. A teacher or counselor might view a behavioral or academic change in a student differently if he knew that the student's only parent had been laid off from her job, was unable to find work for several weeks, and was beginning to look for an alternative place to live. Thus, recognizing the nature of a student's academic or behavioral change is not adequate for understanding the family or how these changes affect the family members. Similarly, understanding a child's disability is not sufficient to provide you with understanding of the family. Nor is understanding the child's sibling a sufficient condition for understanding the family. The family consists of many parts, and professionals need to know all of the parts and understand their influence on the child if they are to understand the child.

Principle 2: Families need rules for structure and for change Rules for structure guide the family and its behavior in day-to-day events. For example, a single working mother with two children may have a clear work schedule, specific household chores for the children or babysitter, a routine with a sister for sharing transportation to events, and arrangements with a neighbor or friend to share child-care responsibilities. If a mother's work schedule changes, or if she becomes unemployed and needs to seek a new job, many or all of the rules and arrangements must be renegotiated. If she is not able to renegotiate these matters, tensions will build and affect the other members of the family as well. Children might seem disoriented at school, be tired from sleep missed due to schedule changes, and even display anxiety or other changes in affect if they sense and respond to these feelings from their parent.

Principle 3: Family interaction with the school, community, extended family, and friends is essential to the life of the family For families to be healthy and function well, members must have their external social and affiliation needs met. That is, although a family exists to meet the needs of its members, it is unlikely to be able to meet all of the needs of each family member. There are real benefits to be derived through relations with persons outside of the nuclear family, and family members need such interactions.



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Parents often have difficulty understanding the disabilities of their children and the accompanying limitations and assets. It is important to provide opportunities for them to observe their children's performance and learn strategies professionals use to facilitate their growth.

Children need peer relationships, and adults need to interact with other adults. The importance of parents interacting with and deriving support from other parents is discussed later in this chapter. Here, let us just point out that families that isolate themselves are likely to become lonely, possibly hostile, and often dysfunctional; and they may then view their child in a less-than-positive way.

Positive psychology has provided new insights into the value of social networking for the child and other members of the family. People who have others they can trust and rely on are healthier, happier, and more productive (Guralnick, Hammond, Neville, & Connor, 2008; Meadan, Halle, & Ebata, 2010). These positive relationships and the associated emotions provide the individuals with stronger interpersonal relationships. Participation in mutually supportive networks results in increased skill at asking for help, appreciation of the help received, recognition of and response to others' needs, and a general sense of feeling happier (Adler, Rodman, & Cropley, 2012; DeVito, 2009b).

Family Life Cycles

Much like human development, family systems theory views the family as undergoing a series of developmental tasks that vary along several life stages. Nichols (1996) described the family cycle as "being concerned with the developmental tasks of the family itself as it deals with the needs of the adult members and the developmental needs of the offspring" (p. 57). Family life stages help describe how families change over time. The theory suggests that each family experiences these predictable stages of development and that each stage represents changes the family undergoes (Lambie, 2008). As a family progresses from one stage to the next, family members' responsibilities shift, and the family is said to undergo transition. Transitions are the periods between stages when family members are readjusting their roles and interactions in order to meet the next set of expectations and tasks. These transitions are usually shorter in duration than are the stages, but they are characterized by confusion and often by increased stress. By attending to and being sensitive to the life stages of the families with which you collaborate and by assisting them in taking appropriate steps to support their child with a disability, you can be especially effective in your collaboration with them.

As children grow older and transition from early intervention, to early childhood programs, to elementary school, to secondary school, and so on, there is less presumption of family-centered services at each level (Dempsey & Keen, 2008; Dunst, 2002). This is particularly disappointing when one considers the dynamics of family systems. Families that receive less support often become lonely, isolated, and may even become dysfunctional. Under these conditions, they may view their child in a less-than-positive way, and the metaphoric mobile is likely to become unbalanced. Providing the extra support families need during transitions to new or different services that are likely to be less family centered is an important professional responsibility and one that families need across all life stages.



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Tasks and Functions at Four Family Life Stages

This brief description of tasks and functions families face at different stages can help you to anticipate the experiences and needs of your students' families and how to respond to them.

Birth and Early Childhood

With the introduction of a child through birth or adoption, the primary family functions become nurturing and caring for the infant or young child and providing culturally appropriate behavioral limits. Tasks are to realign family relationships as well as relationships with friends and extended families to accommodate the presence of the young child and the duties of parenthood.

Childhood

The primary themes for families with children in their elementary school years are affiliation and allowing others to be brought within the family boundaries. The family functions are demonstrating sensitivity to the child's developmental needs and enjoying the child's experiences. In Western cultures, families typically encourage the child's independence, but this is not the case in all cultures. Tasks to be accomplished are af-

filiating with a peer network and establishing family responsibilities and sibling roles.

Adolescence

This stage is characterized by themes of decentralization and the relaxing of boundaries. Parents' essential functions are to accept the efforts their child makes to "distance" them and to provide the adolescent with support needed to establish his or her identity, a matter especially important for young people with disabilities (Riley, De Anda, & Blackaller, 2007). The tasks that parents face include managing the adolescent's increasing independence, refocusing on their own careers and marriage, and developing more flexible roles.

Adulthood

Adulthood is characterized by themes of detachment, dissolving ties, and letting go. Family functions focus on supporting and facilitating independence while encouraging the young adult to accept more responsibility. Some families need to turn their attention to arrangements for providing care for their adult child as the parents age and can no longer serve that function.

Many theorists have proposed family life stages and advanced models that typically delineate from four to over 20 stages. In *Putting Ideas into Practice*, we summarize the typical functions and tasks advanced by several theorists (e.g., Carter & McGoldrick, 2005; Lambie, 2008; McGoldrick, Carter, & Garcia-Preto, 2011) and place them within a four-stage framework posited by Turnbull et al. (2011). In the following section, we identify special issues arising at each stage for families of children with disabilities and suggest actions that professionals can take to support families.

Birth and Early Childhood For parents whose children's disabilities were identified at birth or during early childhood, the emphasis is on understanding the disability and working through their feelings about the diagnosis. Adjusting to a typically developing child is an important task for families, and a child with a disability makes the task more complex.

A primary task for families at this stage is receiving and accepting their child's disability diagnosis. Kübler-Ross (1969) proposed a grief cycle model to describe the stages a person goes through when dealing with the death of a loved one. Some authors use this model to describe the stages that many parents experience as they learn of and grow to accept their child's disability. Not all parents go through the same process, and the stages may not be sequential or of equal duration; but in this model the stages

generally include shock and denial, guilt and anger, shame and depression, and acceptance. There is little empirical evidence for this process in families of children with disabilities, yet the model is frequently referenced in professional literature and, thus, warrants consideration.

A word about the grief cycle is required here. We wish to stress that grief is a stage in a *cycle*, not a static state, and the end result is acceptance of the child's disability and commitment to making the adjustments necessary for the child and family to live productive lives. Some families may stay focused on the grief and not make the adjustments needed to help their children grow into emotionally healthy individuals. Sensitive professionals who make extra efforts to support the families may inadvertently encourage them to remain in the grief stage or in another undesirable stage. The challenge for professionals is to respond with empathy as families transition through the various stages but continually support and reinforce their progress to the next stages.

Traditional interventions or supports that were thought to be helpful to families as they came to terms with their child's disability included patience, listening with acceptance, and providing resource and referral information (Cook, Tessier, & Klein, 1992). More contemporary family systems approaches also advocate "re-storying," or assisting families to externalize and separate from a "problem" orientation in order to construct a new story that will allow them to focus on possibilities and their ability to work actively to realize new possibilities for their child (Ivey, Ivey, Zalaquett, & Quirk, 2012). Professionals should provide a supportive and accepting environment for families and accept their feelings while also helping them to re-story and begin to see their family life in a new way. It is also incumbent upon professionals to facilitate family awareness of support groups or parent-to-parent groups. As families accept their child's disabilities, needs, and strengths, they will also need assistance in setting realistic goals for the child.

A second major task for the family of a young child with disabilities is accessing and participating in early intervention or early childhood services. The system into which a child and family enter is largely determined by the child's age upon entry. Based on Part C of IDEA, children with disabilities from birth through two years of age are eligible for early intervention services. Although culturally and linguistically diverse families tend to be somewhat less satisfied, more than two-thirds of the families in a 2001 U.S. Department of Education study perceived that early intervention programs had a significant impact on the developmental gains of their children (Bailey, Hebbler, Scarborough, Spiker, & Malik, 2004). At age three, children and their families face a significant transition as they exit early intervention and enter preschool programs, consistent with provisions of IDEA Part B. This is more than a transition to a new service. It generally involves movement from one coordinating agency to another (e.g., from the state's health and human services department to its department of education). With this transition, come different regulations, rights, and services. Researchers have found that although both early intervention and preschool services are family centered and collaborative, the emphasis is somewhat less at the preschool level than it was during early intervention services (Dunst, 2002). Professionals need to be sensitive to this and work toward increasing the support they provide families as they transition from one service to another and from one agency to another. We consider the dynamics of interagency services and transitions, but it is important to develop awareness of the challenges in the current context.

Childhood The typical functions and tasks required of the childhood stage are more complex for the family of a child who is identified with a disability. For children with disabilities who are not diagnosed at birth, the most common period for diagnosis is during the elementary school years. Regardless of when the diagnosis occurs, the family is likely to experience the grief cycle or some variation of it. Major activities for families of



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Enhancing Successful Transitions

Are you wondering what you can do in your professional role to assist families in making successful transitions as their children grow and reach new developmental milestones? Here are some suggestions for these age-related transitions.

From Early Intervention to Early Childhood

- Suggest that parents begin preparing for the separation of preschool children by periodically leaving the child with others.
- Encourage parents to gather information and visit preschools in the community.
- Encourage participation in Parent to Parent programs. (Veteran parents are matched in one-to-one relationships with parents who are just beginning the transition process.) Familiarize parents with possible school (elementary and secondary) programs, career options, or adult programs so they have an idea of future opportunities.

From Early Childhood to Early School Age

- Provide parents with an overview of curricular options.
- Ensure that IEP meetings provide an empowering context for family collaboration.

- Encourage participation in Parent to Parent matches, workshops, or family support groups to discuss transitions with others.

From Early School Age to Adolescence

- Assist families and adolescents to identify community leisure-time activities.
- Incorporate into the IEP skills that will be needed in future career and vocational programs.
- Visit or become familiar with a variety of career and living options.
- Develop a mentor relationship with an adult with a similar exceptionality and an individual who has a career that matches the student's strengths and preferences.

From Adolescence to Adulthood

- Provide preferred information to families about guardianship, estate planning, wills, and trusts.
- Assist family members in transferring responsibilities to the individual with an exceptionality, other family members, or service providers as appropriate.
- Assist the young adult and family members with career or vocational choices.
- Address the issues and responsibilities of marriage and family for the young adult.

Source: Turnbull, Ann, Turnbull, H. Rutherford, Erwin, Elizabeth J., Soodak, Leslie C., & Shogren, Karrie A. *Families, Professionals, and Exceptionality: Positive Outcomes through Partnerships and Trust* (6th ed.), p. 90, copyright © 2011. Reprinted and electronically reproduced by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

elementary school-age children are clarifying family goals for the child, deciding on appropriate services, and deciding on placement in self-contained, resource, or general education classrooms. Many issues associated with making decisions about educational placement for a child weigh heavily on families during this stage. Brief references to these concerns are seen in Putting Ideas into Practice. Parents may have opinions, and certainly they have had advice from friends and other professionals, but they are likely to feel ill equipped to make decisions about this important topic. Many parents are reluctant to challenge or disagree with educators for cultural reasons or for fear that their disagreement may result in bias against their child. Families particularly value professionals who are accessible, available, and supportive to them at this stage. Parents appreciate professionals who are willing to assume responsibilities that may seem to be beyond the strict scope of their positions



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Some Parental Concerns About Inclusion

Many families have understandable concerns about the impact of inclusion on themselves and their family members with a disability. They may believe that inclusion benefits everyone and society in general. Or they may fear that inclusion is a means of saving money by “dumping” children with disabilities in general education classrooms or other settings with typically developing peers. Parents may have little information about the characteristics and benefits of services provided in separate versus inclusive settings. The questions that follow are among those for which parents seek answers.

- Will my child be safe in this setting?
- What are the benefits of inclusion?
- Where can my child’s IFSP or IEP goals best be met?
- In which setting will his academic skills most develop?
- Will inclusion negatively impact the time and attention available to my child?
- Will my child receive the specialized instruction he needs?
- Will my child be able to manage his behavior in a group of 25?
- What will the teachers expect of me?
- Where will my child’s potential best be developed?
- Where will my child receive the most appropriate services?

(Nelson, Summers, & Turnbull, 2004). They also value professionals who support them through listening with empathy to their concerns and by sharing objective information in response to their questions (Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Lord-Nelson, & Beegle, 2004). It is also often helpful to assist families in connecting with other families who may provide information or take them to visit different programs that will contribute to their understanding and decision making.

Additional tasks that families with elementary school-age children face include handling the reactions of the child’s peer groups and siblings to his or her disability. At this life cycle stage, in which affiliation is a primary theme, potential ostracism by peers is especially worrisome. Professionals can help the child and his or her family to understand the disability and find appropriate and effective ways to talk with others about it. Affiliation is also a theme for other family members. This is a good time to encourage families to join support groups if they have not already done so. Information about such groups is presented later in this chapter. Parents who are engaged in parent support groups or receive other sorts of social support report the highest levels of enjoyment in parenting (Turnbull et al., 2011).

Adolescence Adolescence is a tumultuous time. It is a period during which young people experience rapid growth, hormonal changes, a newfound sexuality, and typically a need to challenge authority. Rebellion in one form or another is to be expected. Surely you are familiar with this. Perhaps you work or live with adolescents, or you may remember some challenges you posed for your own parents during that period of your life. Regardless, there are few people who would not agree that being an adolescent or having one in your home or classroom can be daunting.

Dwairy and Achoui (2010) suggest that adolescence is more influenced by cultural context than any other life cycle stage. European Americans typically view adulthood as beginning at age 18, whereas various ethnic or religious groups believe that adulthood commences earlier. As an example, consider the Jewish bar and bat mitzvahs. In these rituals,

13-year-old adolescents become adult members of their organizations. Other, less familiar, examples exist in other world religions and in different ethnic and cultural groups in which adolescents are perceived to be adults. Professionals are well advised to learn about the traditions and beliefs of a family toward adolescents and their roles and to respect those traditions in their interactions with the family.

Some exigent issues arise for adolescents with disabilities. One of the tasks of adolescence is to develop a sense of self or personal identity. According to Bowen (1978), this is the most critical of the tasks of this stage. All adolescents begin to compare themselves with others during this stage, and they start to develop a sense of their own strengths and weaknesses. The presence of a chronic illness, physical impairment, behavior disorder, or other disability may negatively influence the adolescent's self-esteem and identity. Typical adolescent resistance to authority may exhibit itself for adolescents with disabilities as noncompliance with medical treatments, such as refusal to monitor blood sugar or take insulin by an adolescent with diabetes or refusal to take prescribed medication by an adolescent with seizure disorder. The struggle between dependence and independence that characterizes many adolescent relationships is intensified for families of adolescents with disabilities. While developing independence is a primary task at this stage, there are often very real physical, cognitive, and emotional needs that make the struggle more precarious for adolescents with disabilities.

Families have a profound impact on their adolescent family members with disabilities. Riley et al. (2007) summarized recent research, demonstrating that social and family support played significant roles in adolescents' adjustment to their disabilities. In their own research, they identified family variables to which successful adults with disabilities attributed their success and adjustment. Specifically, they found the most salient factors to be family support and the family's perception of the adolescent's abilities and potential. The individuals studied were articulate in describing the impact of family views of their abilities and talents throughout their childhood and especially during their adolescence; and they even identified specific family members and their positive contributions. These findings have implications for professionals: In addition to communicating your own belief in the capacity and potential of the adolescent with disabilities, you may need to help families see the strengths and talents of their children and encourage them to express those positive perceptions to the adolescent.

Several educational issues gain significance as families and professionals collaborate in designing programs and activities for adolescents with disabilities, including planning for post-school career, vocational outcomes, and social outcomes. This is the stage at which planning for vocational development, community participation, and post-school transition becomes particularly important (Downing, 2008). As the adolescent is assessing her strengths and needs and developing her personal identity, consideration should be given to future goals and vocational options. For example: How limiting is her disability? What are her individual assets and needs? What dreams and expectations for the future do she and her family have? The family and school need to collaborate to help the student set appropriate and realistic goals consistent with her potential and interests. But we caution professionals and families to keep in mind the student's struggle for autonomy and independence at this stage. The range and number of options should not be reduced prematurely, and efforts should be made to enhance the student's self-determination skills (Kochhar-Bryant, 2008; Snell & Brown, 2011).

It is also at this time that the adolescent becomes more involved in the decision making at her annual review and IEP meetings in preparation for assuming, at age 18, the role

that has heretofore been held by the parents. This is a move toward independence that may require the professional to provide support and guidance to the adolescent as well as to the other family members.

Adolescents' changes associated with puberty and sexual development create a need for sexuality education (Gougeon, 2009; Snell & Brown, 2011). Sexuality curriculum should include general development, sexually transmitted diseases, birth control, responsibility, same- and opposite-sex relationships, avoidance of sexual abuse, and marriage and family relationships and responsibilities (Hatton & Tector, 2010; Mahoney & Poling, 2011). Turnbull et al. (2011) stress that sexuality issues may also present educational needs for families. They note that parents are often unaware of their adolescent's sexual needs and interests. This suggests that professionals may also need to assist families to develop a better understanding of the sexuality issues commencing in adolescence.

Adulthood Adulthood is the final stage we will consider. Here we wish to call attention only to the significant educational and life decisions that occur at this stage. Together, families and professionals must identify and access appropriate enabling services to prepare these young adults for postsecondary educational and employment options. Depending on his or her goals, abilities, and limitations, the individual might need assistance selecting and preparing for postsecondary education, vocational training, or supported employment. Some individuals also may need to access supported living arrangements.

A special concern becomes salient at this point: What will happen to the individual with a disability when aging parents are no longer able to provide care for or guidance to the individual? Who will care for this person? How will he or she fare as an adult without parents? This is generally a more significant concern for families of individuals with severe disabilities who will always need some care and support, but it is a real concern for most parents. The tasks in this family life stage include renegotiating relationships among parents and other family members; redefining roles with adult children; realigning relationships to include the adult child's housemate, assistant, spouse, and/or in-laws; and dealing with the death of family members.

Cultural Influences

The United States is one of the world's most culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse nations, and few professionals practice in school environments in which families of diverse cultures are not represented. The vast majority of professionals interact with families from many different backgrounds and so must be culturally competent (Hanson & Lynch, 2004) and able to offer culturally sensitive and relevant services (Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, & Garcia, 2009). Throughout this text, you have learned about cultural patterns and the impact these may have on various collaborative activities, from problem solving, teaming, and co-teaching, to home-school communication patterns and conflict resolution. We bring attention to this topic one last time as a reminder to you of the importance of becoming culturally competent in order to be successful in your collaborative endeavors.

As we examine cultural contexts, three points offered by Lynch (2011a) are particularly relevant.

- Culture is dynamic—always changing and evolving; it is not static. What individuals remember from a culture in which they were raised is probably not the way the culture is practiced in the same place today.

- Culture, language, ethnicity, and race are powerful influences on an individual's values, beliefs, and behaviors, but they are not the sole influences. One's socioeconomic status, education, socialization, and life experiences greatly influence one's identity and frame of reference. These, in turn, influence how a family functions.
- No cultural, ethnic, linguistic, or racial group is homogeneous. Great diversity exists in the attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors within groups of people who share a common culture.

Understanding the culture of a student's family is fundamental to understanding and effectively serving the student because a family's culture contributes significantly to its structure, values, and beliefs—all critical influences on the student. But how do you go about gaining such knowledge and developing intercultural competence? The first step in frame of reference and perspective is gaining cultural self-awareness. The second step in the journey toward cultural competence is learning specific information about other cultures (Chan, 1990; Lynch, 2011b). This learning can be achieved through reading, travel, and interactions with representatives of specific cultural groups. Although many useful resources are available for this purpose, the most enjoyable learning will come from direct interaction and experience. Learning firsthand about the art, music, dance, foods, values, and traditions of a culture different from your own is an exciting and stimulating experience. Learning the language of another cultural group is a very powerful, but not sufficient, tool in learning about that culture because many traditions and values are conveyed through language. Although interesting and useful, language learning is not always feasible, and it is not necessary to learn another language for one to become culturally competent.

Developing a culture-generic awareness is the step that follows understanding your own and others' cultures. Many values are shared across cultures and variations in values exist within cultural groups (Harry, 2008; Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, & Garcia, 2009). This recognition will help you understand that although some values may be more characteristic of one cultural group than another, no culture is monolithic. For example, much is currently written about African American, Asian American, and Mexican American families. These terms do not give you an accurate picture of a specific family because they do not take into account the geographic area in which the family lives, and family members' religious preferences, lifestyles, or economic status. Cultural variations are best viewed as continuous, rather than dichotomous, perspectives (Lynch, 2011b). This implies that you should recognize that individuals' and family members' positions along the continuum are not static. They may vary at any given time based on such factors as age, education, life experiences, vocation, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, to best understand the culture of your students and their families, you will need to consider their perspectives along several different dimensions as illustrated in Putting Ideas into Practice.

The final step toward cultural competence is the acquisition of specific information about cultural practices relative to children, child rearing, health, disability, and help seeking (Banks, 2008; Hooper & Umansky, 2004). The views that family members hold toward disability and their beliefs about its causes are likely to affect how they respond to the child's disability and to the interventions that are recommended. You should also expect that families will differ notably in their preferred levels of involvement and collaboration with professionals based on their values regarding help seeking and self-sufficiency as well as privacy.

The increasing diversity in the U.S. population has an impact on the use of collaborative strategies for educating students with disabilities. At the same time that you work to base your collaboration on understanding your colleagues or your students and their families as



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Cultural Continua

Rather than contrasting lists of values and beliefs to understand cultural differences, Lynch (2011b) proposes that educators acknowledge that certain value sets are common across all cultures and are best understood if each is viewed as a continuum.

Family Constellation Continuum

Some families are large and have extended kinship networks that are intimately involved with nearly every aspect of the family's daily life. Others are smaller units with responsibility for all decisions and activities, and they operate independently of an extended family.

Interdependence/Independence Continuum

Interdependence is the primary value in some families and cultures. Contributions to the whole are more highly valued than expressing one's individuality, which could be seen as selfish and rejecting of the family. For other families, individuality—the expression of one's uniqueness—is the greatest value.

Nurturance/Independence Continuum

Although most people nurture young children, the behaviors viewed to be nurturing vary significantly from one individual or group to another. What one group sees as nurturing, another group may see as coddling or overindulgent.

Time Continuum

On one end of the continuum, the amount of time needed for a task or interaction is given to it. At the other end, the task or interaction is given only the amount of time that has been scheduled for it.

Tradition/Technology Continuum

From one perspective, respect for age, tradition, and ritual provides a solid base for contemporary life. The divergent perspective is one that places greater value on the future, innovation, technology, and youth.

Ownership Continuum

This reflects whether things are individually owned or are shared broadly.

Rights and Responsibilities Continuum

The concept of equality is the fundamental concern. In some groups, equal and non-differentiated roles are ascribed to both men and women. In others, women are the caretakers and men the providers and intermediaries between the family and the community.

Harmony/Control Continuum

Some groups primarily value living in harmony and synchrony with their environments; others believe it is more important to control their environments and the events in their lives.

individuals, you also need to be aware that culture influences individuals' interactions in many ways that can positively or negatively influence collaborative activities (Banks, 2008). For example, the directness of your conversations and the topics they address might be influenced by cultural expectations. Some cultural groups turn to their extended families in times of need and may be reluctant to share information with school professionals (Correa & Tulbert, 1993). This could be viewed by school professionals as resistance.

Another example is based on individuals' perceptions of themselves in relation to the rest of society. If colleagues or family members see themselves primarily as part of a disenfranchised group, they may interact in a way that conveys powerlessness, thus undermining the essential collaborative characteristic of parity. Conversely, the same individuals may interact so assertively that others feel powerless; this may be an attempt to override their own sense of not having control. Professionals may experience this in interactions with a family member who begins by making many accusatory statements and extraordinary demands. This can occur because of the family member's sense of powerlessness.

A final consideration about collaboration involving ethnically or culturally diverse groups concerns understanding, respecting, and valuing. Every individual who participates in a collaborative activity should begin with the understanding that the only culture one understands is one's own. This critical awareness can lead all involved to strive for better understanding and more patience if miscommunication does occur.

The contexts in which you are likely to experience the greatest diversity are in interacting with families and in communities where students live. Many of the challenges or dilemmas you encounter as you collaborate in multicultural settings will reflect your frame of reference and the cultural perspectives you hold and how they differ from those held by the people with whom you interact. Although we encourage you to develop awareness and knowledge of the cultures of families with whom you work and the community in which your school is located, it is not necessary for you to know everything about a particular culture in order to provide culturally sensitive and responsive services. If professionals value and are respectful of differences, open to learning, and committed to self-examination and change, they can develop culturally responsive and productive relationships with diverse families.

Several authors have made suggestions for providing culturally responsive services (Harry, 2008; Olivos, 2009) and family-centered programs (Allen, 2007; Dempsey & Keen, 2008; Knopf & Swick, 2007). Many of these are summarized here.

1. Focus on the family as the unit of attention.
2. Enhance your self-awareness.
3. Respect the uniqueness of each family system.
4. Develop a personalized, informal helping relationship.
5. Organize assistance and support in ways requested by the family.
6. Learn about other cultures and how they view disability.
7. Gather and provide information in culturally responsive ways.
8. Seek to focus on family strengths and holistic family needs.
9. Give families complete and accurate information in a supportive manner.
10. Create alliances with community leaders and allies.
11. Develop a shared vision.
12. Provide families with choices of services that meet their needs.
13. Ensure accessibility of services with minimal disruption to the family.
14. Obtain family evaluation of the process followed and the results.

Unique Factors and Barriers to Collaboration

In providing a framework for understanding families, we have considered specific needs based on the family's life stage and unique needs that may arise from differences in cultural backgrounds. Now we look at the basic functions of families and how they may be affected by having a family member with a disability.

Families perform a number of functions that benefit their members. Successful families emphasize the importance of sharing affection with one another through the exchange of physical or verbal affection. Their interactions assist each member to establish a self-identity and sense of worth or self-esteem. They transmit cultural and personal spiritual beliefs across generations. Families also perform an economic function; they must earn income to provide for their basic needs. Families function to meet the day-to-day physical and health needs of their members. Social activity and affiliations as well as leisure and recreational activities are important functions for the health of individuals and their families.

Consider what the impact of a moderate disability might be on these functions. First, certainly some families report that there is greater affection in their families as a result of

having a child with a disability (Poller & Fabe, 2009), but some families, when first learning of their child's disability, may have difficulty feeling or expressing affection. And, although the affection is likely to develop later, that initial response may cause a disruption in the bonding process. The family may have a difficult time helping the child with a disability to develop a positive self-identity. In fact, cultural and peer relations may also intervene, and the self-esteem of the parent or siblings may also be affected. Families also must earn and decide how to spend income. They report that they spend more money on a child with a disability, especially if he or she has health care needs or requires special equipment or clothing. Moreover, providing for the other daily care needs such as transportation, medical procedures, or behavioral management is often so demanding that parents may not perform as well at work as they would otherwise; and they may lose economic or career opportunities. The same physical and emotional demands that sometimes lead to lost career opportunities may also interfere with family members' recreation and leisure activities.

We do not wish to imply that having a child with a disability is an overwhelming burden. In fact, in spite of the challenges, many families believe that a child with a disability strengthens their families and increases the enjoyment they get from seeing their child succeed. Research on the positive contributions of having a child with a disability consistently finds that the child is a catalyst for increased spirituality of family members (Stainton & Besser, 1998; Turnbull et al., 2011). Nevertheless, a child with a disability requires more of a family's physical, emotional, temporal, and fiscal resources than do other children.

The life conditions of some families may pose challenges for them and make school participation and collaborative family–professional interactions difficult. Consider some of the following situations identified by Howard, Williams, and Lepper (2010) and how they impact a family's ability to participate in school activities and meetings.

- Single parents often have less income, increased need for respite care, resource and time management challenges, and possibly transportation difficulties, which conflict with work and family responsibilities.
- Nontraditional families that rely on the broad view of families that includes such variations as extended family, same-sex parents, and foster families may surface some prejudice or judgmental responses from service providers.
- Child-care needs may strain families with lack of resources for child care for infants, toddlers, and young children with disabilities.
- Poverty may result in lack of transportation to and from services, limited phone services, or as in the case of homeless families, the lack of a permanent address.

Two additional barriers to family participation in children's educational programs have been identified (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007; Keen, 2007; Kochhar-Bryant, 2008; Xu, 2007). First, many parents of children with disabilities lack the knowledge and skills needed to contribute substantially to the education of their children. For example, parents of students with special needs may have limiting disabilities themselves. Similarly, they may lack the knowledge of programs and service options that are being discussed.

A second barrier is attitudinal, such as lack of confidence or assertiveness that prevents parents from active participation in the educational programs of their children. When such barriers are present, professionals must support families and help them feel valued and comfortable participating at whatever level possible in their child's education program. Given the range of parental abilities and preferences for involvement in interactions with school professionals, it is appropriate to ask to what extent collaboration is a reasonable expectation with particular parents. Knowing how to foster effective communication with and provide supports to parents is important, whether or not collaboration is the goal.

Educators need to be mindful of the many demands on families and consider them when they assess family strengths and set expectations for their work with families. Throughout this chapter and in most textbooks for teachers, you will read about the importance of

parent participation and collaboration. We concur. But we also encourage you to recognize the very real demands on families as well as the challenges to family–professional interaction and gauge your expectations accordingly.

Facilitating Family Participation in Decision Making

It is the professional's role to provide families with information they need to support their family member with a disability and to be effective participants in educational decision making. This includes communicating effectively, providing information about disabilities and educational concerns, and reporting evaluation results and student progress. You should practice basic communication skills and employ them as you provide families with information.

Providing Information to Families

Families should have information about their child's educational needs, available services, resources, and procedural information about their rights and responsibilities if they are to participate effectively in their child's education. Their information needs are different at different life stages, as discussed earlier. Those needs and how educators respond to them influence the feelings families have about special education services. A Basis in Research summarizes a study of parent satisfaction with special education services and points to several variables that influence how families view the information and services they and their children receive. Awareness of these influences should help you to recognize and respond appropriately to the needs of families.

When they learn of their child's disability, families need to understand the nature and consequences of the disability. They may need to learn about medical treatments or other related services as well as other physical matters. When the child enters school, they will need information about various programs and options. As the child matures, they will need information about social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development. Families need to have clear and accurate information in these areas in order to adjust their expectations and goals for their child. Realistic expectations are central to setting appropriate educational goals.

In addition to basic information about the child's disability and its characteristics, families require procedural information regarding due process, placement, parent rights and responsibilities, and other legal provisions that affect their child. They further require information about educational and related services that may be appropriate for their child. In early years, the decisions may be focused on whether the toddler or young child receives services in a center or in a home-based program. During elementary and middle school years, choices of specific instructional approaches or different inclusionary practices become more focal. By adolescence, families need information about post-secondary employment and education options so that they can begin planning for them.

Professionals have additional responsibilities for providing families with the results of diagnostic evaluations. This can be a highly sensitive matter, and you are advised to take care in communicating about evaluation results with parents. This is an especially delicate matter when first communicating about the possible presence of a disability, but it remains a potentially emotional issue throughout the child's educational career. Thomas, Correa, and Morsink (2001) offer the following suggestions for providing diagnostic feedback:

- Provide feedback in a private, safe, and comfortable environment.
- Keep the number of professionals to a minimum.
- Begin by asking parents their feelings about the child's strengths as well as weaknesses.



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Family Involvement in and Satisfaction with Special Education Processes

Hernandez, Harry, and Newman (2009) reported on a recent, large-scale study of 1,417 parents (72 percent response rate) regarding their involvement in and satisfaction with services for their children receiving special education in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). These researchers identified five characteristics that influence the nature of the family–school relationship. As they note, the findings may seem intuitive, but a large-scale study such as this serves a purpose in documenting these results. It also uncovers and raises some unanticipated questions and need for further study. Central aspects of their findings are presented here.

Socioeconomic status (SES), specifically income, has the most pronounced effect on family engagement. The most difficulties with the special education system were experienced by families with the lowest incomes (i.e., less than \$25,000 annually). The lowest income families had lower attendance at IEP meetings, were less likely to report that they received information guides or information about their rights, and were more likely to report that their children received sufficient services even though often the services were fewer than indicated in the IEP.

Race/ethnicity and primary language influence family–school relations; but because the categories often overlap, it is often difficult to discern the relative

importance of each. In this study, race/ethnicity had a greater impact than primary language. Latino parents reported the least awareness of available resources and their rights related to IDEA, although they also were the most likely to indicate that their children were receiving enough services. Primary language, though difficult to isolate from race and ethnicity, was also found to have impact. English-speaking parents more often reported awareness of special education rights and resources, receipt of district information regarding rights and procedures, and ability to secure services for their children. They also were the most likely to indicate that their children were not getting enough service.

Student's age/grade level, as described elsewhere in this chapter, was found to be a significant factor. Greater involvement in special education processes and programs was reported by parents of preschool and elementary school children. They also tended to have more positive evaluations of the services than did parents of older students.

Nature and severity of disability was one of the strongest differentiating variables. Parents of children with low-incidence disabilities were more likely to have received district information and attended IEP meetings. Yet these same parents tended to report less satisfaction with the amount of services or ease in accessing services.

- Provide evaluation results in a jargon-free manner, using examples of test items and behavioral observations throughout.
- Provide parents with results from a variety of assessment activities, including standardized tests, criterion-referenced tests, direct behavioral observations, play-based or community-based assessment, and judgment-based approaches.
- Be sensitive to viewing the child as an individual and a “whole” child when reporting various evaluation results.
- Allow the parent time to digest the results before educational planning begins.
- Be sensitive to linguistically different families and the use of interpreters.
- Prepare for the session with the other team members, clarifying any possible conflicts before the meeting.
- Use conflict resolution strategies to clarify any possible conflicts with families.

Language Matters Professionals must recognize these information needs, answer questions, and provide clear, useful information and referrals, when needed. There is one additional communication strategy that we wish to point out here. Whenever possible, communication with families should be in a language in which they are fluent and preferably in their primary language. The written forms and materials used to communicate or

plan programs, announcements from school, and fact sheets for information resources should all be translated into the family's primary language. Many of the web site resources in this chapter offer materials in languages other than English or provide links to appropriate resources. If a family uses a language other than that of the professionals, generally interpreters should be used. However, sometimes they may not be needed, particularly for informal communication, if the family or professional has some proficiency in the primary language. In informal communication with limited-English-proficient families, it may be sufficient to speak slowly and clearly and provide the family with written information.

There are a number of matters to consider when selecting and using an interpreter. One of the most important recommendations we make is that you avoid using the student or a sibling as the interpreter. This is an inappropriate role for either youngster, and it removes him or her from the appropriate role of participant. We also caution you to be sensitive to confidentiality issues. Although professional interpreters have a code of ethics that honors confidentiality, parents may not fully understand this and may be uncomfortable sharing sensitive information. In these cases, you will need to explain the interpreter's role and responsibility to maintain confidentiality. Listed here are several additional recommendations for the use of interpreters that have been offered by Tribe (2007) and others.

- Encourage the family to choose a preferred interpreter.
- Have interpreters introduce their role to you and to the family in their language.
- Provide the interpreter with a glossary or list of key terms in advance.
- Discuss the agenda of the meeting and basis of any documents.
- Schedule extra time; the meeting will take longer than when an interpreter is not needed.
- Provide a break every 30 minutes.
- Pause frequently to allow the interpreter to render all the information.
- Be aware of nonverbal communication.
- Recognize that anything you say will be interpreted.
- Encourage the interpreter to be a cultural broker and to advise you if you communicate with the family in a culturally inappropriate manner.
- Avoid idiomatic words, slang, and metaphors that are difficult to translate.
- Avoid complex sentences and technical vocabulary or jargon.
- Speak clearly and at a moderate pace directly to the family member, not to the interpreter.
- Be sure your eye contact is mainly with the family.

Let us look at the Aguilar family's experience as they sought information about program offerings for their son.

This was the third site that Mr. and Mrs. Aguilar had visited as they sought a program for their son. Guillermo had a language disability, and they wanted to find an educational program that would provide him with appropriate language models. The principal greeted them with a wide smile. Mr. Aguilar nodded and smiled slightly and Mrs. Aguilar praised the lobby decor. As the principal walked them to the meeting room, they passed one of the classrooms where the children played happily with age-appropriate toys. What stood out to the Aguilars was that the children were not talking with one another or with the adults. Mr. and Mrs. Aguilar and the principal entered the meeting room where five program support personnel were waiting at a large oval-shaped table. As the Aguilars joined the group, everyone introduced themselves, and the principal addressed Mr. Aguilar slowly in English, "I'm so sorry that we were not able to get an interpreter today. I hope you will understand what is going to be said." Mr. and Mrs. Aguilar exchanged glances and their faces became flushed. Mrs. Aguilar replied quietly, "We will understand." The meeting commenced with an explanation of the benefits of

their school and the type of services that would be provided in English. All comments were addressed to Mrs. Aguilar, who asked some questions while her husband remained stoic. At the end of the exchange, the principal commented that he was certain that Guillermo would benefit from their excellent program, stood up, and extended his hand. Mr. Aguilar ignored the gesture and stood up as well. He looked at each member present and in perfect English said, “Based on your accounts, we feel that this is not the setting we are seeking for our son. And to address the comment you made at the beginning, no translation was needed.” They walked out, leaving the room in silence.

This is an example of poor preparation and poor interpersonal skills on the part of the principal. He seemed to be following a district guideline about securing interpreters for families whose home language may be other than English. But he did so blindly with no apparent interest in or regard for the family. Failure to provide an interpreter conveys lack of concern for the family. But assuming any parent with an ethnic surname requires an interpreter also conveys lack of concern for the family. Common sense and deliberate effort to determine the family’s need should take precedence over standard procedures.

Communication Structures Language consideration and communication skills will be useful in your interactions with families, but planning the appropriate structure and mechanism for addressing family information needs can be almost as important. For example, it is worth your time to consider which information needs of families might best be met through such mechanisms as one-way information reporting, informal conferences, structured meetings, parent education or workshop sessions, or parent-to-parent groups.

One-way information sharing is often useful to keep the school and home aware of the child’s experiences and performance in both settings. Typically, families and professionals use notes, progress reports, or school–home journals to share information about school assignments, schedule changes, homework, and behavior. With advances in technology, some schools have established web sites for posting school and classroom information, and more families have and are comfortable with electronic mail. Voice mail offers another asynchronous method of communication. One-way communication is often necessary for efficient information sharing, but two-way structures such as those discussed next are essential for effective communication and productive relationships with families.

Informal meetings are often spontaneous and may be more relaxed than meetings that are planned in advance. These meetings are sometimes characterized as informal “chats” or “visits.” They may take place at school, in a parking lot, or during an accidental meeting in the community. Informal or casual meetings can be useful for sharing general information, clarifying a point of concern, and generally building rapport. This can help to prepare participants for successful interactions in subsequent formal meetings. Another advantage of the casual conference or meeting is that it not only allows the educator to assess the child’s interests and abilities but also affords opportunities to learn about the family’s culture and how it is transmitted to family members (Graham-Clay, 2005; Harry, 2008).

Structured meetings, or purposeful conferences, are events scheduled to discuss a particular topic or agenda. Meetings with an agenda that is focused on one student and one family are discussed in the following section. The focus here is on structured or purposeful meetings that involve members from several families, such as parent information workshops or family support groups.

Several topics have been identified in the previous discussions that represent typical information needs of families at various stages. Most or all families need basic information about disability and appropriate interventions as their child is identified and as the child transitions from one stage to another. Workshops represent an efficient way of providing information about topics of interest to many families. This strategy is frequently



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Every effort should be made to communicate effectively with family members whose primary language is not English. Written documents and interpreters are helpful.

used in preschool programs and during the preparation for a student's transition to vocational and employment services. School professionals often offer these workshops or information seminars, but such training activities are also available from parent training and information centers as well as from other community and nonprofit groups.

Parent or family support groups are another type of purposeful meeting. Similar to informational groups, these are usually organized around some common element or family need such as groups with early childhood interests, groups for families of students with the same disability, or groups composed of persons with the same roles, such as fathers or siblings. Various structures exist for support groups as well. Some are groups of family members with a professional leader or facilitator, others are led by family members themselves, and still others provide one-to-one support. Research conducted by the Beach Center on Disability (1999) documented the effectiveness of one-to-one support in a program titled Parent to Parent Support. This program, which matches parents with other parent support providers, was used in five states and was rated by nearly 400 parents. The findings indicated that the program increases parents' acceptance of their situation and their coping strategies, and also helps parents to make progress on the need or problem that was their reason for participating in the program. Fifty-five percent of the respondents reported that they were satisfied with the companionship they derived from the program, and 18 percent reported that they received meaningful information services through the program. More contemporary studies have also identified the benefits of parent-to-parent groups (Todd et al., 2010). Parent to Parent programs exist in 29 states. Similar efforts to support siblings are conducted through the national Sibling Support Project. Many additional support groups can be identified through local and regional informational and referral services.

There are a number of valuable resources for families and education professionals on the Internet and several of them are included in e-Partnerships. Having access to resources such as these would have been useful in responding to Mr. Johnson in the opening case. These are resources that families can use independent of the service providers, and it is often helpful for teachers to have such a list as a guide for families.



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Families on the Web

Many resources for families of individuals with disabilities and for the professionals who work with them may be accessed on the Internet. The web sites listed here have been found useful, and they provide links to other valuable sites.

Beach Center on Disability: www.beachcenter.org

This web site provides research briefs and fact sheets on topics of interest to families and professionals. The information briefs are particularly useful for addressing the needs of families for educational, vocational, or adult living decisions. Additional resources include information and first-person stories that support families and professionals.

The Fathers Network: www.fathersnetwork.org

FN provides resources and support to men who have children with special needs through development of national and statewide databases of fathers from diverse ethnic, racial, and geographic backgrounds; provision of father support and mentoring programs; and provision of varied educational and technical assistance services.

The HEATH Resource Center: www.heath.gwu.edu

HEATH provides online, web-based resources on post-secondary education for individuals with disabilities. HEATH has information for students with disabilities on educational disability support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, accessing college or university campuses, career-technical schools, and other postsecondary training entities. It also provides information on financial assistance, scholarships, and materials that help students with disabilities transition into college, university, career-technical schools, or other postsecondary programs.

Kids Together, Inc.: www.kidstogether.org

This information is intended to be helpful to families, professionals, educators, advocates, self-advocates, and the community. The mission of Kids Together is "to promote inclusive communities where all people belong." The various postings on the site include many topics of interest to families and professionals.

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY): www.nichcy.org

NICHCY offers a wealth of information on disabilities. NICHCY is a federally funded national information and referral center that provides information on disabilities and disability-related issues to families, educators, and other professionals. The web site features its excellent fact sheets, resource guides, and other publications about specific disabilities and disability-related issues with a focus on children and youth from birth to age 22. Many features and publications are available in Spanish at www.nichcy.org/espanol.

OSEP Ideas That Work: www.osepideasthatwork.org

This web site is designed to provide easy access to information from research to practice initiatives funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) that address the provisions of IDEA and No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This web site includes resources, links, and other important information resulting from OSEP's research to practice efforts.

Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER): www.pacer.org

PACER's mission is to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families, based on the concept of parents helping parents. PACER provides assistance to individual families, workshops, materials for parents and professionals, and leadership in securing a free and appropriate public education for all children. Material is available in Hmong, Somali, and Spanish.

Parents Helping Parents:
www.parentshelpingparents.org

This is a comprehensive resource and information center run for and by parents. Its web site provides useful links to information about support groups for family members and information resources for families and professionals.

Sibling Support Project: www.siblingsupport.org

The mission of the Sibling Support Project is accomplished by training local service providers to create community-based peer support programs for young siblings; hosting workshops, listservs, and web sites for young and adult siblings; and increasing parents' and providers' awareness of siblings' unique, lifelong, and ever-changing concerns through workshops, web sites, and written materials.

Social Security Benefits for Children with Disabilities: www.ssa.gov/pubs/10026.html

This electronic booklet is for the parents, caregivers, or representatives of children under age 18 who have disabilities that might make them eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments. It is also for adults who became disabled in childhood and who might be entitled to Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits.

Assisting Families to Participate in Student-Centered Meetings

We noted earlier that one of your primary responsibilities in working with families is to facilitate their effective participation in educational decision making, a sometimes difficult goal (Keen, 2007). Most of your interactions with families probably focus on understanding, planning for, and making decisions about their family member with a disability. Many of those interactions occur in meetings that are structured to focus on the child and family and discuss matters such as student progress, behavior, school-home program, or evaluation results. These meetings are often parent conferences, IEP meetings, or annual review meetings.

There are many examples of the failure on the part of school professionals to ensure that family participation occurs. In some settings, for example, students' IEPs are written prior to conferring with families, with the excuse that it takes too much time to discuss everything and write goals and objectives at a meeting. Sometimes this approach is used in order to have a draft document as an efficient starting point for a full discussion in which all participants will contribute to writing new material or modifying the draft. School professionals using this strategy risk communicating that they know what the student needs better than the family does. In the worst case of this practice, someone at the meeting says to the parent, after all the prewritten information has been reviewed, "Do you have anything else you would like to add?" At best, such a comment severely limits participating for most family members. When using draft material, it is necessary to explain that it is truly a draft that all participants may elaborate or modify. It is equally important to then structure the interaction so that family members share their ideas, concerns, and goals.

A second, more indirect, example of limiting family participation also needs to be considered. School professionals may touch base to identify and resolve potential conflicts before meeting with a family. This can be perceived as creating a united front without family participation and it can create an adversarial climate in the interaction. What is even more unfortunate is that this effort could unintentionally indicate that controversy and alternative perspectives are not part of decision making when families are involved. Professionals need to structure preplanning activities in ways that promote efficiency while still ensuring meaningful and honest family participation.

You should carefully reflect on how the formal and informal procedures for working with families in schools might constrain family participation, especially in interactions at IEP and other group meetings (Esquivel, Ryan, & Bonner, 2008; Goepel, 2009). If you can foster participation and collaboration, your interactions with families are more likely to be in the best interest of students.

We offer a few simple ideas for fostering family participation.

1. In group meetings, create an environment that is welcoming and supportive. You can accomplish this in several ways. For example, prepare parents for meetings by sending home in advance a summary of the topics to be addressed and a list of possible questions they might want to ask. Suggest that they bring to school examples of their child's work that they would like to discuss, information about their child's friends and responsibilities at home, and other information that parents have (and school professionals do not) that can contribute to an understanding of the child. At the meeting, have professionals stay in the vicinity of the meeting room, chatting informally, until the parent arrives, and have all participants be seated at the same time, rather than having parents enter a room where everyone else has already been seated. A variation is to be sure that the professional the parents know best accompanies and sits next to them.

2. At meetings, have a file folder with samples of the student's work, copies of forms being discussed, and blank paper and pen for the parents. The reason for this is straightforward: If you think about most meetings, all the school professionals arrive with folders, binders, reports, schedules, plan books, and a plethora of other paperwork. Many parents arrive carrying nothing and thus are at a subtle but immediate disadvantage. Unobtrusively providing materials at least helps resolve this inequity.

3. Structure meetings so that parents have opportunities to provide input throughout. It is still too common in interactions with families for the professionals to share their information or make their requests and only then to seek family input. For example, at IEP meetings, each professional often shares the results of his or her assessment, suggests goals, and then asks family members whether the goals are acceptable. An alternative strategy is to discuss issues related to students by domains. To do this, first address the student's academic strengths and needs, soliciting input from any team members who have pertinent information, including family members. Then address social and emotional areas, using the same procedure, and so on through the domains that need to be addressed. This approach to a meeting can help ensure that a dialogue occurs rather than a series of report readings followed by an expectation for parental approval.

4. Maximize opportunities for families to make informed decisions. Have a variety of choices for parents and students to make (for example, alternatives for elective classes, communication or self-help priorities, or social skill training options), and actively engage them in decision making. To the extent possible, make sure they understand the choices and how they will affect the student's program and future opportunities. When you are considering new program options for a student, such as a community-based instructional component or involvement in an after-school recreational program, ensure that family members are well informed and knowledgeable about the options. You can do this by arranging for them to tour a new setting, observe a program, or meet with other family members who are involved in the alternative setting. If they are unable to adjust their schedules for such meetings or observations, prepare written and visual materials to inform them about the alternatives. Photographs or videotapes are most useful for these purposes. Family members are more likely to invest in joint decision making and collaborate with you to set realistic goals and make future plans for their children when they have adequate information.

SUMMARY

- Parent participation has long been a key feature of education for individuals with disabilities, and it is guaranteed in IDEA. Parents have historically played many roles including being considered the source of their child's disability, organization members, service developers, recipients of professionals' decisions, teachers, political advocates, educational decision makers, and most recently as collaborators. Over the years, the emphasis has moved from parent to family participation, and a broad definition of family has become accepted.
- Systems theory has been applied to the understanding of four family life stages—birth and early childhood, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, each with its own priority tasks.
- The importance of culture and its influence on family structure and values has been recognized, and the profession has emphasized the development of cultural competence and family-centered programs.
- Professional responsibilities include understanding families and their needs as well as facilitating family participation in making decisions about the educational program for the family member with a disability.
- A variety of strategies are used to facilitate a family's meaningful engagement in planning and decision making about educational programs, including creating a welcoming environment, soliciting and using information from families, and ensuring that families have the knowledge and information needed to make informed decisions.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Conduct an informational interview with the family members of a student with a disability. Ask them about their experiences related to the eligibility, placement, and IEP processes, as well as their experiences working with school professionals. What have been the positive elements of their experiences? What have been the negative elements? What suggestions would they make for improving collaboration between home and school?
2. Create an information packet to give to family members during IEP meetings. Include in the packet a clarification of educational jargon; information about their rights; an explanation of the IEP process; contact information for school personnel; and any additional information about expectations in your program such as a homework schedule, material about maintaining notebooks or study schedules, and more.
3. Review culture-specific information resources provided on the web sites suggested in this chapter. Consider the cultural groups represented among the students with whom you work. Identify what school-based or classroom-based practices you could institute that would make your environment more culturally appropriate for students and families.
4. Think of a recent meeting with a family of a child with a disability. Did you include more than one family member in the discussion or meeting? Even if only one parent attended the meeting, what explicit actions did you take to ensure that the roles and concerns of other family members were considered? List specific actions you will take at the next meeting to include other family members and/or to address their information needs and concerns.
5. Review the opening case and consider Mr. Johnson's situation and behavior. His situation illustrates our earlier point that families progress through different life stages at different rates and often in a different sequence of stages. Describe the family life stage you think Mr. Johnson is experiencing and describe the dynamics.

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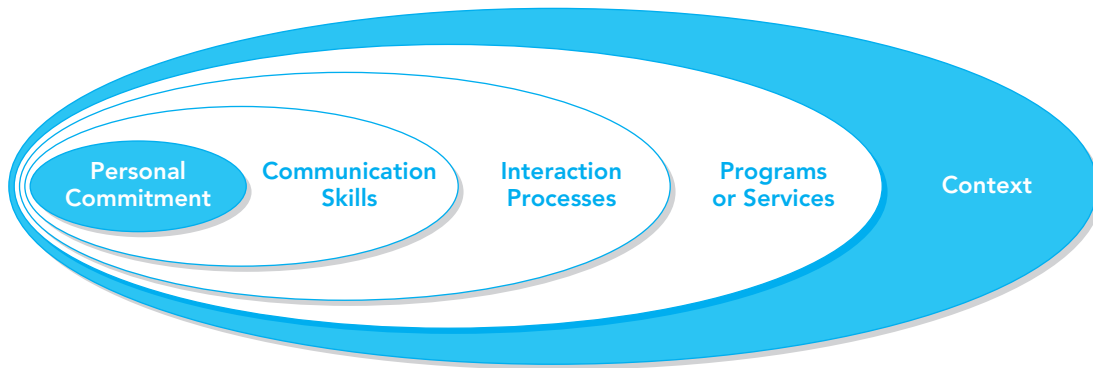
Issues Related to Education Collaboration

From Chapter 13 of *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, Seventh Edition. Marilyn Friend, Lynne Cook.
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Issues Related to Education Collaboration



Connections

Analyzing what collaboration is and practicing the communication skills foster collaboration in educational settings. These include specific issues related to the complexities of collaboration, collaboration in an electronic age, student collaboration, and our best thinking about the current status and future of education collaboration, including ethical dilemmas related to educators' shared efforts.

Learner Objectives

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

1. Assess how professional roles and responsibilities may affect school collaboration.
2. Analyze factors that make school-based collaboration a complex endeavor, including systemic barriers to collaboration such as scheduling and service coordination.
3. Examine electronic options that are contemporary applications of collaboration for educators.
4. Relate the concepts of collaboration addressed in this chapter to interactions among students and between students and professionals.
5. Analyze the current practice of education collaboration as a basis for considering its future, including issues related to professional ethics.



A CASE FOR COLLABORATION

Sometimes It's Ideal . . . and Sometimes Not

School has been in session for more than a month, and Rosalee and Jonathan, both first-year teachers at Northwest Regional High School, have become good friends. However, they have agreed that they do not feel like they have all the facets of their jobs under control. As a special educator, Rosalee is assigned to teach one section of a study skills class for ninth-grade students and one section of Algebra I for ninth-grade students who struggle most to understand math. Rosalee also co-teaches two sections of Algebra I and one section of Geometry. With Mr. Myers in Algebra I, everything is great, and student test scores are demonstrating the effectiveness of their partnership. With Ms. Pierce in Geometry, the situation is not as positive, and Rosalee feels like a glorified paraprofessional. Jonathan's assignments are likewise mixed. He is teaching three sections of World History, and two of those sections are co-taught, one with a special educator and one with an English as a second language (ESL) teacher. He is finding that trying to juggle their preferences and teaching approaches with his own emerging style is quite stressful; he didn't learn in his teacher preparation program that he would be expected to co-teach. And he feels uncomfortable saying too much because the other teachers are both veterans. Jonathan also was assigned to serve on the school's response to intervention (RTI) committee, but he is still unsure of his role and uncertain about how he can discuss struggling students when he is just learning about the realities of being a teacher. Rosalee and Jonathan wish they had been partnered for co-teaching. Though their areas of expertise are different, they think they would be a fabulous team.

Introduction

We recognize that collaboration is a multifaceted endeavor, in terms of both the subtleties that can make it effective or ineffective and the number of school activities and applications that benefit from it. Because of this, it is often impossible to attend to all the significant factors that can influence collaborative practice, particularly in the typically frenetic daily lives of school professionals, as Rosalee and Jonathan are finding out.

This chapter is intended to help you integrate what you have learned about collaboration—conceptually and technically—by highlighting five topics that require a clear and sophisticated understanding of it. The first topic concerns the multi-faceted roles of the various professionals who are most likely to participate in collaborative efforts. The second topic pertains to the complexities of collaboration, including the challenges of scheduling and the coordination of services. The third topic comprises the challenges and opportunities of electronic collaboration. The fourth topic is student collaboration, an application that has some similarities to collaboration among adults but some key differences, too. The final topic concerns the current status and likely future of education collaboration, including several ethical issues.

The rationale for discussing these topics is to highlight them, providing an opportunity for you to reflect on how the knowledge and skills you will learn in this chapter are applicable across whatever situations you encounter and whatever career path you follow. It also is intended to focus your attention on the intricacy of collaboration, to leave you excited about the potential of collaboration for improving outcomes for students but sensitive to its sometimes fragile and evolving nature.

Professional Roles and Responsibilities

Although the ideas and skills detailed in this chapter relate to all your collaborative efforts, their application varies somewhat depending on the roles of those with whom you collaborate (e.g., Bauer, Iyer, Boon, & Fore, 2010; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007; Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011). As you learn about some of the factors that might influence your interactions with administrators, specialists such as literacy coaches and speech/language therapists, and others, keep in mind that the information is not intended to form a prescription for your actions. Rather, it should assist you in understanding why you need to make subtle changes in how you respond to different individuals in order to collaborate successfully.

Working with Administrators

Administrators face unique challenges when they are participants in the collaborative efforts at their schools because they have a dual role. They are colleagues and peers in collaboration, but they are also supervisors responsible for evaluating job performance and making personnel decisions (Hammersley-Fletcher & Brundrett, 2008; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Keeping these two roles separate is often challenging.

Is It Collaborative or Not? Sometimes school professionals find it difficult to nurture a collaborative relationship with their administrator because the administrator does not clearly indicate whether the decision making at hand is intended to be collaborative. Consider the meeting Ms. Fox called to discuss the next steps for Julio, a student with emotional disabilities who, during lunch, had knocked over a table displaying school shirts for sale. The special education and general education teachers, counselor, psychologist, and Ms. Fox spent almost an hour discussing Julio's needs and the lack of follow-through at home on recommendations. They considered various options—in-school suspension, a supervised lunch arrangement, and behavior contracts, among others. Both teachers supported the supervision option. Toward the end of the meeting, Ms. Fox said, "Thank you for all your input. I have decided that Julio has to be suspended from school—an out-of-school suspension—because of this incident. Nothing you have said has made me change my mind. I'll arrange the necessary procedures, contact the district office because Julio receives special education, and call the parents." Needless to say, the professionals who had attended the meeting felt their time had been wasted. Ms. Fox had not communicated to the others that she wanted to hear what they had to say, but that she alone would be making the decision about what would happen with Julio.



Administrators are supporters and participants in collaboration, but in some situations they are appropriately directive or supervisory.

St. Petersburg Times/ZUMApres.com/Newscom

When teachers and other professionals work with school administrators, it is important to clearly specify whether the shared interaction is intended to be collaborative, whether participants are functioning in an advisory (but not a decision-making) capacity, or whether they are really just being informed about a decision that has already been made. All of these options are sometimes appropriate. That is, principals do need information and sometimes seek advice, even when they have to make decisions based on additional factors unknown by others. They also sometimes inform staff about decisions that have already been reached, and sometimes they collaborate (Cosner, 2011; Little, 2007). Your responsibility is to recognize the place and impact of each type of situation and gauge your communication accordingly. To do this, you might have to ask directly whether an interaction is collaborative or advisory, or you might need to ask your administrator to clarify the purpose of a meeting in which you are to participate; taking these steps can be essential for effective collaboration. In fact, we are sometimes surprised when professionals are frustrated about not having their input used by an administrator, even though the administrator had clearly stated that the input would be considered but not necessarily used as the primary factor in decision making.

Overreliance on Administrative Authority Another dilemma that sometimes arises when administrators are participants in collaboration—especially at team meetings, RTI meetings, IEP meetings, or conferences attended by several individuals—is inappropriate reliance by professionals on administrative authority (Del Favero, 2004). For example, consider this team meeting:

Ms. Payne, the literacy coach, is insistent that students who are English learners (ELs) receive ESL services and so should not be accessing the services of the reading specialist. She says that is a duplication of service and takes away support from other students who need it. The speech/language therapist tries to disagree, as does Mr. Reisen, the ESL teacher. However, Ms. Payne raises her voice and repeats her point of view until the others stop trying to change her mind; Ms. Smythe, a general educator, supports her view. As a result, the team decides that ELs will receive reading support only from the ESL teacher and not the reading teachers. The principal remains silent during the interaction, explaining later that he thought the group had to reach its own decision. Following the meeting, though, the other team members complain to the principal that Ms. Payne had exerted too much influence over the decision and that the result will be duplication of services and a lack of coordination.

This is an example of a team abdicating responsibility for a group decision and hoping that the administrator would use his authority to “control” the situation—even though this matter would have been handled more appropriately through collaborative decision making.

Administrator Knowledge and Support An additional issue related to administrators and collaboration concerns administrators’ understanding of topics related to it. For more than two decades, administrators have been moving toward greater use of collaborative models (Barth, 1991; Smith & Scott, 1990). It would be difficult to find a contemporary leadership text, article, or conference that does not emphasize collaboration as a key element in school success (e.g., Thomas, 2007; Weathers, 2011). This includes general understanding of the importance of collaboration, the role of the administrator in fostering a school climate supportive of collaboration, and enough knowledge about collaborative activities to help make them a reality (e.g., Fullan, 2010; Rourke & Boone, 2008). However, professionals across the country often note that although administrators may be accomplished collaborative leaders in some areas, too many of them do not have adequate



PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Strategies for Developing Administrative Support

Principals have many responsibilities that demand their attention. Here are some strategies to help your principal learn about and develop a commitment to collaboration.

- Ask your administrator to participate in initial planning for any collaborative initiative in the school, including planning for communicating about the program to colleagues, parents, and students.
- Discuss with your principal the elements of collaboration you have included or wish to include in your program. Decide with your principal what support and resources you can expect for the program.
- Invite your principal or assistant principal to visit another school with you to observe a particularly good program emphasizing collaboration.
- Share journal articles on pertinent topics. You might have as a goal to provide at least one article or clipping each month.
- Alert your administrator to professional development activities related to collaboration. Request permission to attend with a general education teacher, and ask your principal or assistant principal to accompany you.
- Share with your principal handouts about collaboration received at professional conferences. You might even suggest that particularly relevant ones be distributed to the entire staff for discussion at a faculty, team, or department meeting.
- As you find web sites with information that could foster collaboration at your school, share those sites with your principal and others.
- Take a few moments on a regular basis to chat about the opportunities and challenges of your collaborative activities. This type of face-to-face interaction is sometimes more effective than written communication. Further, it can provide your administrator with enough information that he or she can make better decisions and be more supportive of your collaborative efforts.
- Maintain an ongoing log or list of topics relative to your collaborative efforts that you wish to discuss with your administrator. Determine the priority of each topic, and discuss one or two at each meeting.
- Invite your principal to join you in making presentations about your school's collaborative work to colleagues in other schools or districts.

specific knowledge regarding collaborative approaches for educating students with disabilities or other special needs, or they do not actively address the collaborative practices needed to support all students.

Perhaps the clearest example of this issue occurs in schools that are beginning co-teaching programs as part of their service delivery system for ESL, gifted, or special education. It is essential that principals understand the program philosophy and design, and they also need to know that co-teaching involves far more than specialists popping into classrooms to support students with special needs. Principals must recognize the importance of fostering a sense of partnership between teaching pairs, arranging shared planning time and feasible scheduling, and avoiding assigning too many students with special needs to classrooms just because co-teaching is available there. In establishing goals and structures for collaborative efforts, teachers rely on their principals to ensure the feasibility and desirability of potential activities.

Recognizing that collaboration with its related activities is only one of many items competing for an administrator's attention, one strategy you can use to facilitate your interactions with your administrator is to help provide as much relevant information as you can. Some strategies for providing such information are given in Putting Ideas into Practice.

Working with Specialists from Other Disciplines

Although this chapter is intended to address a wide range of professionals, collaboration with specialists who are not teachers often presents several unique issues that need to be considered. These issues may directly and profoundly influence these professionals' interactions (Howard, Williams, & Lepper, 2010) with general education and special education teachers, administrators, family members, and others. Specialists include related services personnel—psychologists, social workers, speech/language therapists, counselors, occupational and physical therapists, itinerant specialists (e.g., orientation and mobility specialists or inclusion facilitators), media specialists or librarians, literacy or math coaches, technology specialists, adaptive physical educators, nurses, and others. Each of these groups is important: Most students with special needs could not reach their potential without the direct or indirect services of several of these specialists. In addition, these professionals have the knowledge and talents to help you fulfill your responsibilities far better than you could independently accomplish them. When beginning careers in schools, many of our students tell us how helpful these professionals are and how reassuring it is to know that “We are not in this alone.”

Yet, your colleagues in these disciplines do face unique challenges. These have to do with professional preparation and orientation, the limited amount of time that they may be available to spend at a single school or with a particular teacher, and other role-specific constraints they may experience (Callaghan, 2005; Leach & Duffy, 2009).

Professional Orientation Some specialists, particularly related services professionals, do not have teaching credentials, nor may they have experience in working with large groups of students in a classroom environment. Further, some of them have professional preparation that is primarily clinical or medical in its focus. They may have had considerable experience with adults and limited course work or internship experience with school-age children or in education settings. Other specialists, such as technology experts, may have come to a school setting from a business environment. The result is that some specialists have orientations significantly different from those of general education, ESL, or special education teachers and other staff members.

During collaborative activities, the difference in preparation and orientation can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication and sometimes to conflict and resistance. For example, an occupational therapist may propose working with a student on grasping and other fine motor skills in a pullout model. The general education teacher may argue that grasping and related skills can be addressed through writing, cutting, eating, playing with clay, and an entire array of other school activities and do not need to be taught through isolated tasks. Although the occupational therapist might see the value in those practice activities, she maintains that only an occupational therapist can really provide the instruction and that this needs to occur in a separate location. In another example, some speech/language therapists assert that most of their services should be delivered in small, quiet settings away from other students. In contrast, many teachers (and many speech/language therapists, it should be stressed) note that the classroom, home, and community are the best locations for students to learn most speech and language skills.

Time on Site A second dilemma for collaboration involving many specialists as well as itinerant teachers is their limited time at a single school site. This factor alone suggests that collaboration will be difficult and sometimes simply not possible. These professionals frequently comment that they never quite know what is happening at any of their schools because they are never there long enough to become part of the school community. This leads to innumerable problems. For example, sometimes they arrive at a school to provide services only to find that all the students are at a special assembly. Or

they are available to meet with a team only on Thursday mornings, and if the team meets at another time, they cannot be present and they miss the discussion. Even when they do attend meetings, they may be late because they have to drive from another location and may be delayed. Conversely, school-based professionals sometimes express frustration with such personnel because of their scarce presence at the school, their rigid scheduling requirements, and their occasional tardiness (e.g., late to a meeting because of being caught in traffic). For example, a novice teacher may find that when something happens in the classroom and she needs advice, her instructional coach is not available until the beginning of the following week, too late for meaningful assistance.

Competing Professional Obligations A third set of issues for specialists, also related to time, concerns their other professional obligations. Many individuals in these professional groups have extremely large caseloads or several school assignments and, as a result, have extraordinary numbers of meetings and conferences to attend. Some also may be obligated to preserve a significant amount of time in their schedules for completing assessments, writing reports, and attending discipline-specific meetings. Some of these professionals may be assigned to help with other school programs and have extensive responsibilities for working with families and community agencies. In addition to creating scheduling difficulties, such responsibilities can fragment the attention of these professionals and limit the depth of their involvement in any particular school-based activity.

These factors often limit the extent to which specialists are able and willing to undertake collaborative endeavors. It may be necessary for these professionals and special and general education teachers to prioritize situations in which active participation on the part of the specialist is needed. The personnel in a single school also should stay aware of the constraints under which these professionals work and take that into account in scheduling meetings and professional development activities. Finally, if you hear dissatisfaction from other colleagues about these professionals, you might want to find out the nature and extent of the issues and either participate in resolving them or assist others in understanding the challenges involved.

Working with Other Teachers

Administrators and specialists are not the only ones with roles and responsibilities that may facilitate or constrain collaboration. Even teachers working with one another may find that they have to be aware of and respond to issues related to their professional duties, the topic of A Basis in Research.

Role-Specific Pressures Teachers sometimes experience challenges to collaboration when it is perceived as possibly in conflict with other professional responsibilities. For example, general education teachers often are very concerned about how the scores of students with special needs may reflect—too often, poorly—on their teaching performance. This concern is understandable: In some school districts, teacher pay or bonuses are directly related to student achievement, and students with disabilities or other special needs often (although not always) struggle to achieve. This factor may make some general education teachers reluctant to share control in a co-taught class; they may note that their names are on the class rosters and achievement results, and so their preferences and priorities should dominate in the classroom (Friend, 2013).

Pressure related to student achievement also may prompt teachers to dismiss as ineffective interventions developed collaboratively on an RTI team. They may urge referral for special education assessment, anticipating that a determination of eligibility will reduce their accountability for student outcomes. They likewise may resist co-teaching with an



A BASIS IN RESEARCH

Roles and Responsibilities of Novice General and Special Educators

Many educators struggle to understand and balance their many roles and responsibilities in today's rapidly changing world, but none as much as those who are new to the profession. Youngs et al. (2011) studied the differences in role expectations for beginning elementary general and special education teachers, and they also looked at how the novices addressed those expectations.

The researchers focused on four teachers in a mid-size Midwestern school district in which 40 percent of the students were eligible for free or reduced cost lunches, interviewing them and asking them to complete surveys about their roles, responsibilities, and experiences. The teachers were also queried about mentoring, collegial support, administrative support, and professional development opportunities.

Among many interesting findings, Youngs and his colleagues found the following:

- Although the curriculum for the general education teachers was clearly articulated and could easily be followed, the special educators were expected to either create supplemental curriculum or make significant changes to existing curriculum.
- The general educators had assigned class groups. The special education teachers had caseloads, but they were consistently asked to provide assistance to students in addition to those for whom they were formally responsible.
- The general educators, of course, taught in their assigned classrooms. The special educators split their time between teaching in their resource rooms and working with general education teachers in their classrooms.
- The special educators had to establish ongoing relationships with many more professionals than their general education colleagues, and they were less likely to have an on-site mentor to support them. As a result, principal support was especially critical for them.

This study demonstrates that the early experiences of school professionals are not identical. If you are a novice educator, what factors might affect your early career? What types of supports would be helpful to you? If you're an experienced educator, how might you provide support to novice educators?

ESL teacher because they would rather transfer responsibility for English language learners' achievement outcomes to those professionals.

Special educators and ESL teachers, too, may raise concerns about their roles and responsibilities as they relate to collaboration, not because they do not care or do not wish for collaborative practice, but because of the context in which they sometimes work. For example, ESL teachers sometimes report that they have so many students at so many levels of language learning that they do not believe they should be expected to attend meetings and consult with general education teachers, much less deliver services through co-teaching. Special education teachers may raise similar concerns. In addition, the latter group may experience role stress because of the expectation that they participate in delivering RTI services. That is, some special educators are assigned to provide Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions as well as to meet the IEP goals and objectives of the students on their caseloads; feeling overwhelmed, they may withdraw from collaborative interactions. As is the case for general educators, the pressures on ESL and special educators and the resulting difficulties created for collaboration are understandable and must be respected and addressed.

Control and Ownership One additional area of concern for teachers working together relates to their perception of control and ownership for groups of students. Many examples of this potential source of concern can be identified. In some cases, general education teachers say "my class," and the result may be that the other teacher or specialist is relegated to the

role of helper. Similarly, “my class” may refer to the physical location, and other professionals receive the message that furniture is not to be moved or that materials are not for joint use. In some schools, general educators are given a choice of whether they work with students with special needs, and so they may conclude that this should always be their choice.

Similar issues communicated by special education and ESL teachers likewise may constrain collaboration. For example, at a meeting to discuss the schedule for the following school year, Ms. Bryan repeatedly referred to the students on her special education case-load as “my kids,” and before the meeting was over other teachers were referring to that group of students as “your kids.” Instead of using the language of “our kids,” which can foster collaboration, students had been divided based on their special needs. In another example, Ms. Guerra is on her school’s committee to shift some ESL services to general education classrooms. For every option explored, she had an explanation of why it would be best for ESL services to continue to be offered in a separate setting.

It is important to realize that many professionals do not experience these constraints on collaboration related to roles and responsibilities. Sadly, though, they are still common enough that they must be acknowledged. When viewed as a whole, professionals should come to an understanding that they not only share their commitment to student success but also share the stress of a variety of pressures related to their roles and responsibilities. When dilemmas occur, such as the co-teaching problems Rosalee is experiencing and the uncertainty Jonathan is feeling, working together for resolution can produce far better results than working alone.

Systemic Barriers to Collaboration

Schools are not particularly well designed to foster collaboration. This is true in terms of physical space, which often is inflexible and offers few locations for professionals to pursue shared work. It also includes the structures and systemic practices that may offer scant opportunities for collaboration, whether in elementary, middle, or high school.

Scheduling for Collaboration

Issues related to scheduling can be significant in schools that have a collaborative culture. Finding feasible scheduling options and creating services that complement rather than compete with other programs (e.g., reading or math remedial programs, enrichment programs, ESL services, special education, transition services that involve agencies outside of the school) often requires setting aside assumptions about how students receive these services and what professional responsibilities should be related to delivering them (e.g., Barnard-Brak & Lechtenberger, 2010; Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010). It also requires taking into account the hectic schedules of professionals such as Rosalee and Jonathan, from the chapter-opening case.

Although scheduling is an administrative matter, when professionals understand the issues related to it from a variety of perspectives, they can assist principals and other administrators in finding the best solutions for teachers and other professionals leading to maximum benefit for students. These are several scheduling issues for special educators and ESL specialists, as well as those for general educators.

Scheduling Issues for Special Education and ESL Teachers Many scheduling issues arise when school professionals move to increased collaborative practice. Just two scheduling issues common for special education and ESL staff members will be addressed here: (1) arranging co-teaching schedules on a daily or less-than-daily basis, and (2) creating flexibility in the specialist’s daily schedule in order to accommodate all the required responsibilities.

Daily or Periodic Scheduling of Services One critical scheduling matter concerns co-teaching. Many special education and ESL teachers plan for co-teaching to be a daily service delivery option, but then they encounter difficulties meeting all the competing demands for their time. The schedule created by the special education staff of one middle school illustrates the dilemmas daily services can pose: The special education teachers had managed to ensure that co-teaching was occurring in each classroom as needed based on students' IEPs, and they also were managing to offer a small number of sections of a study skills class as well as just a single section each of core academic English and math for several students with intellectual and behavior disabilities. To make the schedule work, it was decided co-teaching would occur for only half of the 46-minute class period. Not surprisingly, both the special education teachers and the general education teachers sensed that students were not getting effective individualized instruction.

ESL teachers encounter similar difficulties. They may decide that they can split their time approximately equally between co-teaching and instructing students in a separate setting, but when several students move in late in the fall, the teachers may find that the only way to carve out time for these students is to reduce the amount of co-teaching. This can be especially likely to happen when co-teaching is considered a luxury for the ESL program rather than an essential component for fostering student success.

When resources and staff are readily available, daily co-teaching permits both teachers to have a higher sense of ownership in the co-taught class and assists in maintaining the continuity of instruction. Other options can be more viable, however. For example, in the middle school just described, the program was modified so that co-teaching occurred only in English and math classes, but for an entire class period. Thus, teachers reduced the number of classrooms in which they co-taught daily. For the ESL teacher, co-teaching was prioritized in two classes with a high number of English learners who required the presence of the ESL teacher to succeed. In a high school, a special education teacher addressed the problem in this way: With support from his principal, he identified two fourth-period classes in which co-teaching was appropriate, and then he co-taught in each class twice each week, with the fifth day left open for flexible scheduling. Keeping less-than-daily co-teaching as a program option is one specific strategy for reaching more students and increasing service intensity. It can be particularly viable at the secondary level. Of course, the extent to which this can occur depends on the nature and extent of students' needs and the requirements for services.

Schedule Flexibility A second scheduling issue for special education and ESL teachers concerns retaining some flexibility in the daily schedule. Many educators have every minute of each day tightly scheduled, and when an emergency meeting is called, a new student requires attention, or an assessment has to be completed, some service is canceled, often to the understanding but annoyance of general education and other specialist colleagues. ESL and special educators should keep a bit of flexibility so that if they have to cancel a service, another option might be available. For example, in some elementary schools, these educators schedule their lunch and preparation periods back-to-back so that they can flip-flop them as the need to meet with colleagues arises. Yet others keep two blocks of time (for a total of 45 minutes to one hour, or two class periods) reserved each week for flexible use. The time is used for student observation, additional consultation, team meetings, accommodations of instructional materials, or makeup sessions if a regularly scheduled in-class service has to be canceled during the week.

Many appropriate strategies exist for creating a professional schedule that both meets the needs of students and promotes professional collaboration. One sample teaching schedule is shown in Figure 1. Yet it must also be acknowledged that in schools that value collaboration as a strategy for meeting diverse student needs, professional schedules typically are periodically revised to reflect shifting priorities, especially during the first few months of the school year.

FIGURE 1**Sample teaching schedule for Edward, a 3-5 special educator.**

| Time | Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|---|
| 8:00–8:30 | | Hall duty | Bus duty | | |
| 8:30–9:00 | Reading skills pullout (groups change monthly) | Reading skills pullout (groups change monthly) | Reading skills pullout (groups change monthly) | Reading skills pullout (groups change monthly) | Reading skills pullout (groups change monthly) |
| 9:00–9:45 | Literacy (co-taught with Granger—4th) | Literacy (co-taught with Johnson—3rd) | Literacy (co-taught with Granger—4th) | Literacy (co-taught with Granger—4th) | Literacy pullout (4th, flexible) |
| 9:45–10:30 | Literacy (co-taught with Holt—5th) | Literacy (co-taught with Holt—5th) | Literacy (co-taught with Holt—5th) | Literacy (co-taught with Holt—5th) | Literacy pullout (5th, flexible) |
| 10:30–11:15 | Literacy (co-taught with Brownstein—3rd) | Literacy (co-taught with Brownstein—3rd) | Literacy (co-taught with Brownstein—3rd) | Literacy (co-taught with Brownstein—3rd) | Literacy pullout (5th, flexible) |
| 11:15–12:15 | Math (co-taught with Fairchild—5th) | Math (co-taught with Fairchild—5th) | Math (co-taught with Fairchild—5th) | Math (co-taught with Fairchild—5th) | Math (co-taught with Fairchild—5th) |
| 12:15–1:15 | Lunch/planning | Lunch/special education team meeting | Lunch/planning | Lunch/planning | Lunch/planning |
| 1:15–2:00 | Math (co-taught with Scott—3rd) | Math (co-taught with Scott—3rd) | Math (co-taught with Scott—3rd) | Math pullout (as needed) | Planning for co-teaching (rotated among teachers) |
| 2:00–2:45 | Math (co-taught with Tucker—4th) | Math (co-taught with Tucker—4th) | Math (co-taught with Tucker—4th) | Math (co-taught with Tucker—4th) | Math (co-taught with Tucker—4th) |
| 2:45–3:15 | Planning | Planning | Duty | Duty | Planning |

Scheduling Issues for General Education Teachers General education teachers also contend with scheduling issues in collaborative schools. Two that are common are (1) being scheduled to work with several different specialists; and (2) being assigned to so many collaborative activities that it seems other responsibilities are neglected.

Scheduled with Multiple Specialists Many general educators are strongly supportive of collaborative service models for students with special needs, but they occasionally are asked to work with so many different professionals that they grow concerned. For example, in an elementary school Mr. Lambert co-teaches with Ms. Suarez, the ESL teacher. However, he also co-teaches with Mr. Lord, the special educator. Twice each week, Ms. Collins joins him to deliver in-class speech/language therapy. He also is scheduled to co-teach for a four-week period with Ms. Raymond, the literacy coach. Although he is trying to keep up with all the different expectations of the specialists and knows everyone is focused on improving student outcomes, he sometimes thinks that too many different professionals are entering the classroom.

A comparable dilemma sometimes occurs in high school co-teaching. Mr. Russell teaches five sections of Algebra I. Because of scheduling, though, in the three co-taught sections he has three different teaching partners. He wonders why the schedule couldn't have been developed so that he worked with the same special educator for each class period. The notion of coordinating schedules so that situations such as these do not occur is addressed more fully later in this section as part of whole-school scheduling issues.

Many Scheduled Collaborative Activities In some schools, the challenge is not a lack of collaboration. Instead, it is that many collaborative activities are scheduled and mandatory, and teachers sometimes believe that their other necessary work is neglected. For example, at Carter Middle School, students have an early release each Wednesday, and the one-and-a-half-hour period is for teacher collaboration. However, on the first Wednesday of each month, collaboration is defined as a school staff meeting. On the second Wednesday, the time is for job-alike meetings (e.g., all the math teachers meet, all the specialists meet). The third Wednesday is for professional learning communities (PLCs) based on books teachers are reading about various instructional practices. The fourth Wednesday is for individual planning, but co-teachers are supposed to use this block of time for their collaboration. When teachers work with several partners, they are responsible for meeting with all their colleagues in this single time block.

As you might suspect, general education teachers who work in this type of environment may strongly support collaboration, but they are likely to be frustrated because of the many demands on their time. They appropriately point out that collaboration should be a priority but that they should have a voice in allocating the time designated for it.

School Scheduling Issues Yet another type of scheduling problem concerns the overall schedule on which the school operates. Although informal collaboration often occurs in spite of a difficult school schedule, if collaboration is a valued professional activity and an expectation for teachers and other staff members, the school schedule might need to be modified to make it feasible (Spencer, 2005; Von Frank, 2008).

One common scheduling matter in elementary schools concerns the time of day when language arts is taught. Most collaborative specialized services (e.g., special education ESL, speech/language therapy) are most easily delivered through co-teaching during language arts instruction; but all the general education teachers may be teaching language arts at the same time, thus making it impossible to deliver services in a timely manner in every classroom where they are needed. However, if the schedule for teaching language arts is staggered across teachers or grade levels, in-class services are far more likely to be a feasible option. Alternatively, in some schools, grade-level teachers plan to offer core academics at the same time so that the specialists can move among classrooms, or students can move across classrooms so as to be grouped for skills-based instruction.

Another scheduling matter for some elementary schools concerns art, music, physical education, media, and technology classes. In some districts, principals are working with central office administrators to arrange these classes simultaneously at one grade level. This creates an opportunity for team planning, and it allows for specialists to meet with grade-level teams. In very large schools—for example, those with 8 to 12 sections in a single grade level—this scheduling strategy can at least allow for half the grade level to be released at one time.

In high school, scheduling issues often concern the number of priorities that must be considered. Courses that have single sections (e.g., an advanced language course), courses that serve students across grade levels (e.g., chorus, band), and the need to distribute core courses throughout the day may make it difficult to schedule common planning time or give consideration to co-teachers' schedules. One solution for this problem, especially for special educators and in schools with several ESL teachers, is to assign specialists to specific departments. In addition to solving a scheduling problem, doing this has the advantage of

ensuring that any general education teacher needs to contact only one person regarding a student concern, rather than try to figure out who the responsible specialist happens to be.

A final school scheduling issue relates to block scheduling versus traditional class periods (e.g., Biesinger, Crippen, & Muis, 2008; Zelkowski, 2010). Although the merits of longer or shorter instructional periods on student achievement continue to be debated, this aspect of scheduling also affects collaboration. For example, if co-teaching is a service delivery option, should specialists stay in one class for the entire 90 minutes of a block? Or would their time be better spent divided between two classes? Would the answer be different depending on the specialist (e.g., special educator, literacy coach, ESL teacher), the subject being taught, the type of block (i.e., classes that meet every day for a single semester versus classes that meet every other day for the entire school year), or the specific characteristics of the students? Questions such as these should be carefully considered, and in many cases, more than a single solution should be implemented. For example, in ninth-grade English, it might be valuable for the two teachers to work together for the entire block; in twelfth-grade government, this intensity of service may not be justified. How might these factors affect the co-teaching of Rosalee and Jonathan, introduced in the case study at the beginning of this chapter?

Coordinating Services for Collaboration

In many cases, arranging a schedule that encourages collaboration is not sufficient. As hinted at earlier in this section, another dimension of scheduling also important to consider concerns its impact on the schedules of other service providers in a school and the programs and services they are operating (Brownell & Walther-Thomas, 2002). This matter of service coordination becomes especially important in elementary and middle schools in which most individualized services for students are delivered in the general education classroom. Consider this list of individuals who could be going into a classroom to work with general education teachers and students:

- Special education teachers (could be more than one, depending on school size, student needs, and service delivery patterns)
- Speech/language therapists
- Instructional coaches
- Counselors
- Social workers
- Psychologists
- Paraeducators (special education or from other programs)
- Title I math or reading teachers or specialists with similar roles
- Paid tutors
- Parent volunteers
- Interns or student teachers
- Members of Future Teachers of America
- ESL teachers

Imagine yourself as a teacher with several of these individuals assigned to your class. One teacher we know found herself in this exact situation. After a particularly grueling day, she told her principal to get everyone out, that she wanted just her classroom and her students by herself. She had had too much of a good thing.

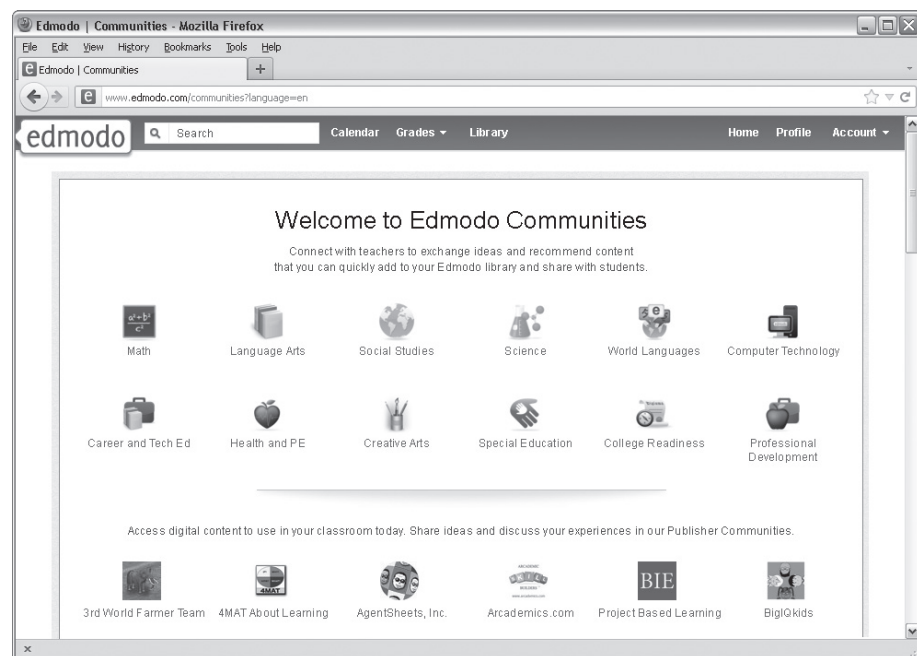
Professionals delivering in-class services may need to coordinate their efforts, assist each other in meeting student needs, and carefully coordinate their efforts with the priorities and schedules of general education teachers. For example, if a speech/language therapist is co-teaching in a first-grade classroom and one student in the class has a learning disability, the therapist may be able to meet that student's needs instead of the special educator going into the classroom. This also eliminates the need for the first-grade teacher to manage co-teaching

with two professionals. Similarly, if a literacy coach or ESL teacher is spending an hour each day in a fourth-grade class, this specialist may be able to address the instructional needs of students with disabilities who need reading instruction. In other words, care must be taken to prevent individual classrooms from being overrun by many service providers coming and going or otherwise disrupting instruction. This is especially true if the classroom already has a paraeducator assigned to it because of either large class size or identified student needs. At the same time, high-quality services often can be delivered and personnel resources used more efficiently if the professionals are flexible in their approaches and in their willingness to share their responsibilities for service delivery with each other as appropriate. Of course, all these ideas are applicable only if the needs of students with disabilities or those needing other specialized services are being met and if local and state policies permit such sharing.

One other coordination issue should be raised. In some schools, collaboration is a priority, but its implementation relates only to certain programs but not others. Most commonly, special education services may be delivered in general education classrooms, but other service providers pull students out. The result can be fragmentation of instruction. Two teachers may be in the room teaching math, but four students leave during that time for ESL services. As they return, another three depart to work with the teacher for students who are gifted. The message to keep in mind is this: As more collaborative service models emerge, particularly in elementary schools, they have the potential to reach many students or to disrupt their education. Finding the best ways to coordinate services is a task that truly is worth the collaborative time it consumes.

Collaboration in the Electronic Age

The topic of technology has become a significant factor in the evolving understanding of collaboration (Byington, 2011; Garcia & Rose, 2007). In business, collaboration using electronic means is enabling corporations to create worldwide work teams (e.g., Attfield & Blandford,



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Electronic collaboration is still a relatively new endeavor, one that needs additional research and clear guidelines to foster effective practice.



E-PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration 2.0? Twitter!

You probably use Twitter to stay in touch with classmates and friends, but are you tapping into its power for professionals? A quick look and you will find out that educators from around the world are sharing ideas, encouraging each other, and identifying valuable classroom resources. Twitter has even been praised as one of the best places for twenty-first-century teacher collaboration. Here are a few Twitter conversations you might find helpful:

- **#edchat**
One recent post was from a principal sharing a site to help teachers teach students about responsible digital citizenship.
- **#elemchat**
A recent discussion concerned strategies for helping students take ownership of their learning.
- **#spedchat**
Participants had a recent discussion of inclusive practices and co-teaching.

- **#ellchat**
Resources recently shared included a listening site for English language learners and a discussion of bilingual education.
- **#slpchat**
One participant was sharing her experiences in creating social stories for students with autism.

Of course, these are just a few of thousands and thousands of conversations to follow and participate in by tweeting. If you just want to keep up with what is happening in your field, you can do that, too. For example, @usedgov is the Twitter page for the U.S. Department of Education. Interested in your professional organization? It's probably on Twitter, too, such as @CECMembership, the Twitter page of the Council for Exceptional Children.

2011; Clark & Stewart, 2010) without the time and expense of travel for face-to-face interactions. With readily available software and relatively inexpensive hardware, professionals can share materials as well as see and hear each other in real time. Although the number of schools taking advantage of this technology may be somewhat limited now, it is rapidly growing and likely will continue to do so, especially as tools for electronic collaboration become more sophisticated and less expensive (Nussbaum-Beach & Hall, 2012). One way to take advantage of the many electronic resources available while not becoming overwhelmed is the topic of e-Partnerships.

Emerging Knowledge About Technology

The knowledge base on technology-based collaboration is accompanying its growing use. For example, Yoon and Johnson (2008) looked at the development of virtual learning teams. They found that a clear progression occurs, from orientation, scheduling, and exploration through work and decision to progress checking, evaluation, refinement, and termination. This type of progression sounds very similar to what is known about the evolution of school teams, and it may provide helpful information as school teams take advantage of electronic options. In another study, McComb, Kennedy, Perryman, Warner, and Letsky (2010) explored the processes and model development of face-to-face teams versus teams that functioned via electronic collaboration. They found distinct differences in the processes used and the development of their work, and they concluded that strategies for fostering productivity on electronic teams may be different from those effective for face-to-face teams.

In a third example, Ryymin, Palonen, and Hakkarainen (2008) studied teachers and how they networked based on their use of technology. They found clear patterns among the educators, including those who preferred media use to face-to-face contacts and those educators whose expertise in technology use made them central to the electronic

collaboration. This work suggests that technology-based communication does not eliminate the individuality or different types of contributions participants make. And again, this information could help educators as they consider increasing their electronic interactions.

Electronic Collaboration Tools

Among educators, knowledge of and comfort with technology-based collaboration tools vary widely. Some teachers are familiar with and use blogs, wikis, and social networking sites. Others are barely aware of the potential of these options for interacting with colleagues and others, and they find nearly any use of technology to be a source of stress (Al-Fudail & Mellar, 2008). What is your own level of understanding and use of technology? How are you employing the technology that you can readily access in order to foster collaboration?

In addition to the technology ideas included in the e-Partnership features, these are a few tools that are likely to be attractive to a growing number of teachers over the next several years:

- Skype in the Classroom (<http://education.skype.com>) is a network developed specifically for teachers and opens opportunities for worldwide collaboration. Teachers create a class profile and then connect with other teachers. The teachers may problem solve related to similar student concerns, but they also may help their students learn about different cultures by connecting their classrooms from two different countries. Likewise, they may collaborate for a language exchange, with all students learning a language by practicing it with native speakers from that country.
- Second Life (<http://secondlife.com>) is a virtual world with many facets and a wide variety of communities. To join Second Life, individuals sign up for an account, download the software, and create an avatar to represent them. They can then explore this world, which includes discussion groups, blogs, and other collaborative activities. One of the fastest growing dimensions of Second Life is the Education Community. For example, Second Life is being accessed by colleges and universities as a means of offering courses and other professional training; participants sign in and go to the designated location for the training (e.g., some universities have purchased “real estate” in Second Life and established campuses there). Because Second Life can be accessed worldwide, many opportunities exist for reaching out to other educators and sharing learning experiences.
- Edmodo (<http://edmodo.com>) is a secure social networking site that is designed for use by teachers and students. It enables teachers to engage their students in interactions with each other (no private posts are allowed), and it helps teachers collaborate with one another. It also has an entire suite of tools, including a calendar, a grade book, and a mechanism for students to upload their assignments, as well as a teacher-to-teacher network. Edmodo is a relatively new option, but it has attracted more than 4 million participants in kindergarten through higher education. For co-teachers, it is designed to allow two teachers to have administrative access, a benefit that fosters parity.

Clearly, electronic tools will play an increasing role in professional collaboration for educators, the topic of the e-Partnerships feature. With new options emerging almost daily, the greatest concern sometimes is keeping up with recent developments.

As technology-based collaboration becomes more common in schools, though, contextual issues will increase. For example, you probably already have had the experience of sending or receiving an e-mail that was too curt in its tone, too telegraphic in content, or too detailed for an asynchronous situation. The result might have been a misunderstanding or miscommunication. School districts are setting policy for professionals’ access to and use of other electronic



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RSS: Sorting Through the Avalanche of Internet Information

Have you ever felt just a bit overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of information available on the Internet? You decide to look for information about school teams, type that term into a search engine, and it returns with 53,400,000 hits. You know that certain web sites usually include relevant and high-quality information, but you just don't have the time to keep checking them to see what is being uploaded.

A solution to such information overload is to set up and use RSS, or rich site summary (Richardson, 2009). Many weblogs and other web sites now are including in their content special computer code (called *feed*) that makes it possible for you to "subscribe" to content. As a result, when content you decide you want is published, it is sent to you. In the school team example above, you would identify sites that tend to have team information you want to keep up on, add them to your list of desired feeds, and then as team content is published, it is collected for you using aggregator software designed for that purpose. You then check your aggregator whenever you like, and just the information you want to learn about is available to you.

Interested? The easiest way to get started is to set up your aggregator using a no-cost option. The most readily available is Google Reader (an alternative, if you prefer, is www.bloglines.com). To use this intuitive software, all you need is a Google e-mail account. You then go to the Reader tab and follow the simple instructions to identify topics that you want to follow. Early career teachers? Co-teaching in high schools? Interventions for students who are English learners? You can list any topic you like. A list of potential feeds will appear, and you choose the ones you wish to receive.

The potential of this technology for collaboration is enormous. Not only can you track particular topics, but you also can receive feeds from other educators who share interests similar to yours. As you receive information, you can organize it and then share it with others by following additional simple instructions on the aggregator web site.

If you would like to learn more about RSS and how you can use it to enhance your collaboration, try these web sites:

www.whatisrss.com

www.youtube.com/watch?v=0klgLSxGsU

communication platforms. In some school districts, concerns about privacy are limiting the use of wikis and other tools for instructional planning because student information might be shared. In yet others, teachers are not allowed to use their school e-mail accounts to sign up for many of the tools available on the Internet. This limits their opportunities for electronic collaboration. As school professionals use technology in more ways (e.g., sharing and making accommodations to lesson plans; planning for meetings; engaging in professional development with colleagues from around the region, country, or world), it will be important for them to have access while at the same time maintaining an appropriate standard of practice. This is a topic that will undoubtedly be discussed extensively over the next several years.

Collaboration and Students

When professionals are discussing collaboration, they usually mention its importance for students, too. Certainly, teaching students to interact appropriately with each other is critical; and for all students, and especially those with disabilities or other special needs, learning peer social skills, including those that foster friendships, can enhance their success in inclusive settings (Aguirre-Munoz & Amabisca, 2010; Hart & Whalon, 2008; Moughamian, Rivera, & Francis, 2009). Further, when students can apply those skills to their interactions with professionals and other adults, they are preparing to succeed in their post-school lives.

Before considering examples of student collaboration, though, it is important to clarify how such interactions usually are different from the other applications of collaboration. For example, student–student interactions often are very supportive but not necessarily collaborative in the technical sense. Cooperative learning, addressed in this section, is a highly structured set of interactions—positive and effective, but not necessarily collaborative. Similarly, the social acceptance and friendship outcomes of such interactions that are valuable to students—especially those with disabilities and other special needs—still are not synonymous with collaboration. Another example concerns student interactions with professionals. Although teachers and other adults at school may engage in activities with students that have some of the characteristics of collaboration, it must be kept in mind that there is a power difference among the participants. Collaboration relies on approximately equal power. When adults and children work together in school settings, the adults typically hold greater power.

These limitations to student collaboration do not undermine its value. We raise them to help you avoid making assumptions about student collaboration that may not be true when thinking about the concepts of collaboration among professionals and with parents or family members. With that caution in mind, three examples of student collaboration are included here: (1) peer-mediated instruction, (2) technology-centered student collaboration, and (3) student–professional collaboration, including student-led IEP meetings.

Peer-Mediated Instruction

Examples of student–student interactive learning approaches are numerous, often related to cooperative learning or peer tutoring, and collectively referred to as *peer-mediated instruction*. These instructional approaches have been widely implemented for more than five decades, and evidence demonstrates their effectiveness in these domains:

- Increasing academic engagement (Galbraith & Winterbottom, 2011; Hart & Whalon, 2008)
- Improving language arts–related outcomes (Mackiewicz, Wood, Cooke, & Mazzotti, 2011; Moughamian Rivera, & Francis, 2009; Slavin, Cheung, Groff, & Lake, 2008)
- Improving math outcomes (Strebe, 2010)
- Demonstrating more complex thinking and problem solving during science instruction (Gillies, 2008; Lin, 2006)
- Reducing the achievement gap for African American students (Slavin & Madden, 2006)
- Increasing learning and motivation in social studies (Chick, 2006)
- Promoting multicultural understanding (Curry, De Amicis, Gilligan, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2011; Oortwijn, Boekaerts, Vedder, & Fortuin, 2008)
- Building conflict resolution skills (Walker, 2006)
- Developing students' social skills (Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008)

In fact, a long and robust research history indicates that cooperative learning and peer tutoring are valuable and effective instructional approaches for many types of students of varying ages, abilities, and cultural backgrounds.

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide details on establishing effective classroom peer-mediated instructional programs, what is important to remember in considering these approaches is that they are successful when implemented following the guidelines established through research, including these:

- Students need to be taught what is expected of them. This includes not only the steps to be followed in cooperative learning or peer tutoring but also the ways students should interact with each other (e.g., giving supportive comments and praise, avoiding criticism, other social and interaction skills).

- Students working together should share in rewards for appropriately interacting with one another and for completing their work (sometimes called positive interdependence), but they should have some individual accountability to ensure that each student is learning.
- Student pairings or groups generally should be heterogeneous, but in some cases other options are appropriate. For example, in peer tutoring, students who are very high achievers sometimes should be paired and given an alternative assignment to that being completed by other students.
- Students should receive feedback from peers and teachers about their participation in peer-mediated activities.

Technology-Centered Student Collaboration

Over the past several years, a new type of student–student learning activity has been receiving increased attention: the use of technology as a vehicle for fostering shared student work. Although sometimes embedded within the clear structures of cooperative learning (e.g., Madden, Slavin, Logan, & Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness, 2011), in many instances the technology itself becomes the catalyst for interactions (e.g., Austin, Smyth, Rickard, Quirk-Bolt, & Metcalfe, 2010).

Many examples of this type of student shared learning experience can be found. For example, researchers in England were interested in the possibility of interactive whiteboards being used to promote student interactions and learning, moving the use of these devices away from the more common teacher-led lessons (Kershner, Mercer, Warwick, & Kleine Staarman, 2010). They noted that whiteboards are significantly different from computers and similar devices (e.g., they are vertical, they are large and use a touch screen, they permit students to see as a group and to move around) and that their characteristics could foster learning. Analyzing video recordings of small groups of students using the whiteboard in their lessons, the authors described an interestingly complex picture. They noted that the whiteboard enhanced opportunities for student interactions, but that teacher guidance also was integral to the instruction. The researchers also contrasted two groups of students whose interactions differed—two groups became more engaged and their interactions more specific as their experience grew, whereas another group seemed to remain in a simple turn-taking pattern of interaction. What this study demonstrates more than anything is that evidence establishing the value of electronic collaboration using these media still is sorely needed, even while their potential for classroom use seems significant.

Another electronic catalyst for student shared work is a wiki (e.g., Gibbons, 2010). On a wiki, for example, students can share in the development of a report or writing assignment. Typically, group members would first learn peer-mediated skills similar to those outlined already in the section on peer-mediated learning. They brainstorm ideas, outline their project, assign sections to each member, and prepare material to be included on the wiki. They also work together to plan what their wiki will look like, finding visual and graphic materials to make it interesting. They also share in the responsibility for tasks such as inserting hyperlinks, proofreading their posted work, and ensuring that each part of the wiki flows smoothly and connects to the other parts. They also can provide specific and constructive feedback to group members so that revision and refinements can be made. As you might imagine, a great deal of student interaction is required for this type of assignment. Teachers maintain responsibility for establishing classroom procedures and project guidelines that ensure equivalent participation among students and for closely monitoring student interactions. They likewise must group students so that those with disabilities or other special needs can be successful.

Student–Professional Collaboration

A third type of interaction occurs when students work with professionals. Some of the options for electronic collaboration already outlined in this chapter incorporate student–professional collaboration (e.g., electronic collaboration sites such as Edmodo). One specific application that is somewhat unique is student participation in IEP meetings. To provide a context, professionals in the field of special education have for many years studied how to increase self-determination for students with disabilities; that is, to teach students how to make choices representing their own interests so that they can reach goals they have set (Branding, Bates, & Miner, 2009; Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Self-determination becomes especially important as students reach age 14, the point in their school careers at which federal law mandates that planning commence for their post-school lives (e.g., employment, technical school, university). One key element of self-determination, then, can be student participation in their transition IEP meetings, but such participation may begin even during the elementary school years (Martin, VanDycke, Christensen, Greene, Gardner, & Lovett, 2006).

For example, in the third grade, Melissa, a student with a learning disability, attended her IEP meeting. Her role was to introduce herself and to talk about what she liked about school, what she could do well at school, and what she found difficult. Her teachers helped to prepare her for her role in the meeting. As she entered middle school, Melissa's participation increased. She learned what the agenda for this meeting would be, and she helped to facilitate the meeting. Her additional role was to discuss her goals for the next school year, to share some samples of work that she thought best showcased her strengths, and to participate in a discussion of the types of classroom supports that would help her succeed (e.g., permission to ask other students for help with difficult words, use of an iPad). In high school, Melissa became an even more central participant in the IEP meeting. She outlined her postgraduation goals (attend the local community college for two years, and then transfer to the local university to pursue a degree in management information systems). She also shared how she was beginning to prepare to reach her goals, and she discussed with teachers and others at the meeting what she thought she would need in terms of accommodations so that she could graduate on time and be prepared to achieve her career goal.

Although not all students may be able to play a role this active, research strongly supports the benefit of participation. For example, Williams-Diehm, Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, and Garner (2008) conducted a multistate study and found that students more involved in their IEP transition planning were more self-determined. Similarly, Barnard-Brak and Lechtenberger (2010) analyzed a national education database of students with disabilities. They found that a strong positive relationship existed between student participation in IEP meetings and academic achievement. That is, IEP participation does not just provide students with a sense of controlling their own lives; it seems to be associated with stronger student outcomes.

Whatever your professional role, you should recognize the importance of this type of student–professional collaboration and help ensure that it occurs. Your responsibilities may involve speaking with parents about this type of student participation, coaching students to participate in IEP meetings, asking students clear questions during the meeting to facilitate their participation, and informally discussing with students their goals and progress toward achieving them.

Ethics in Collaborative Practice

As an educator you will face many ethical issues concerning your students, your interactions with families, the decisions made in your school district, and the views and actions of your colleagues (e.g., Doddington, 2007; MacDonald, 2011). However, even though

the National Education Association, the Council for Exceptional Children, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the National Association of School Psychologists, the American School Counselor Association, and other professional organizations have codes of ethics and standards of practice, in schools the topic too often is ignored.

When collaboration is added to the other ethical issues professionals face and given its likely continued importance and expansion in education, it becomes critical to recognize potential ethical dilemmas and to consider how you will address them. Three of several possible ethical issues are confidentiality, feasibility, and accountability.

Common Ethical Issues

One of the most frequent and basic ethical considerations in collaborative practice concerns *confidentiality* (e.g., Williams & Wehrman, 2010). Educators have been cautioned for many years about preserving confidentiality related to student and family information, but collaboration brings an entirely new dimension to this ethical issue. For example, suppose that two teachers are co-teaching, and the general education teacher shares his favorite teaching idea with the special educator. The latter individual sees that the idea has tremendous potential in several classrooms and enthusiastically but naively shares it with several other teachers. The second teacher is startled when the teacher confronts her about giving away “trade secrets.” This example of a breach of confidentiality is not so much about teaching or learning as it is about developing and maintaining trusting relationships with colleagues.

A second ethical dilemma concerns *feasibility*. We work in many schools in which professionals express belief in the power of collaboration yet have virtually no time or other supports for collaborative practice. Whether a collaborative effort involves a grade-level or department team planning interventions for struggling students or English learners, a transdisciplinary team preparing for the inclusion of a student with multiple disabilities, or a school leadership team responsible for implementing reforms to improve student achievement, if time does not exist to meet, the effort is unlikely to be successful. Logically, if the program design, no matter how popular, is not feasible or does not have the support necessary to meet the needs of the student, it may be unethical to create assumptions about positive outcomes of working collaboratively until feasibility issues are addressed.

A third ethical dilemma can occur regarding *accountability*, and this topic is receiving increased attention as models of differentiated compensation based on student achievement evolve (Giangreco, Prelock, & Turnbull, 2010; McCaffrey et al., 2011). These questions arise: Who is accountable for ensuring that students with special needs are held to the highest expectations and that their unique learning needs are addressed? And how should accountability for these students’ achievement be divided among general educators, special educators, ESL teachers, and other specialists?

Other ethical issues related to accountability exist as well. All ethical standards in school and child welfare fields include responsibilities to students or clients as central elements. In addition, special educators are responsible for ensuring that the needs of students receiving special education and related services are met. Together, these ethical guidelines assign responsibility to the professionals for promoting the total development of each student/client, including academic, vocational, personal, and social development (Schmidt, 2003). In collaboration, disagreement may occur concerning the nature of a student’s needs and the strategies necessary to address them (Frick & Faircloth, 2007). A general education teacher may perceive a student as needing services in a separate setting, whereas an ESL teacher believes the language-rich general education setting will foster a student’s language learning. In another example, a speech/language therapist may see that a language-based program in an inclusive setting would best address a student’s needs, but the special educator may identify the priority as offering the student a highly structured,

small-group environment such as that found in a special education classroom. What other ethical dilemmas related to accountability might occur?

Finally, the ethical standards in special education and related fields require that a professional work collaboratively with other professionals in the school and the community and promote qualities of fairness, cooperation, respect, and objectivity. In the case of special education, the standards of the Council for Exceptional Children (2003) require that special educators “work cooperatively with and encourage other professionals to improve the provision of special education and related services to persons with exceptionalities” (p. 3).

Responding to Ethical Issues

Professionals need to reflect on and clarify their own ethical standards regarding students with disabilities and their own professional behaviors. By doing this before entering into collaborative interactions and continuing during those interactions, you can recognize practices that you might not be comfortable with but can live with versus those that you cannot justify. By continuing the conversation about ethics as it relates to collaboration, you can balance your commitment to collaboration with your responsibilities to meet the needs of the students you serve. Shapiro and Stefkovich (2005) offer a framework for ethical reasoning that can help your thinking about the real-life ethical dilemmas you face, a framework that is especially relevant for the field of special education (Lashley, 2007). It includes the following elements:

- *The ethic of justice.* This component relates to the legislative, policy, and legal basis for decision making. It is probably the clearest part of the ethical framework: You have the responsibility to ensure that in all situations the requirements of IDEA or other pertinent federal laws as well as state and local policy concerning students with disabilities, students who are English learners, or other students with special needs, are followed. However, this component also goes beyond the law. It implies that professionals must make sure that individuals who may not perceive themselves as having power (for example, parents whose first language is not English) are respected and heard.
- *The ethic of critique.* This component of the ethical framework concerns the inequities that may exist in the entire system of specialized services and your responsibility for responding to such inequities. Perhaps the clearest example in this area concerns the disproportionate representation of African American males and English learners in special education (Skiba, Poloni-Staudinger, Gallini, Simmons, & Feggins-Azziz, 2006; Sullivan, 2011). How might conversations among team members increase the likelihood that some students will be identified, possibly inappropriately, as having disabilities (Knotek, 2003)?
- *The ethic of care.* This component of the ethical framework concerns the outcomes of the decision making in which you participate. That is, when faced with a complex situation, you should ask yourself, “What is the likely impact of this decision for this student and her family, both now and for the future? Am I certain that the decision being made will truly help this student and his family or may it have the potential to hurt them?”
- *The ethic of the profession.* This final component of an ethical framework relates to the broad ethical standards—those that are formal and those that are informal—of one’s profession. For example, in your interactions with colleagues and community members, an informal ethical standard exists that you not tolerate insensitive or derogatory remarks about individuals with disabilities or other special needs (e.g., a friend who refers to someone’s actions as “retarded,” a colleague who makes a disparaging racial remark). At the most general level, professional educators

should use as the basis for their day-to-day work an understanding that all students are capable of learning and that diversity should be celebrated; they should communicate this belief as they work with others.

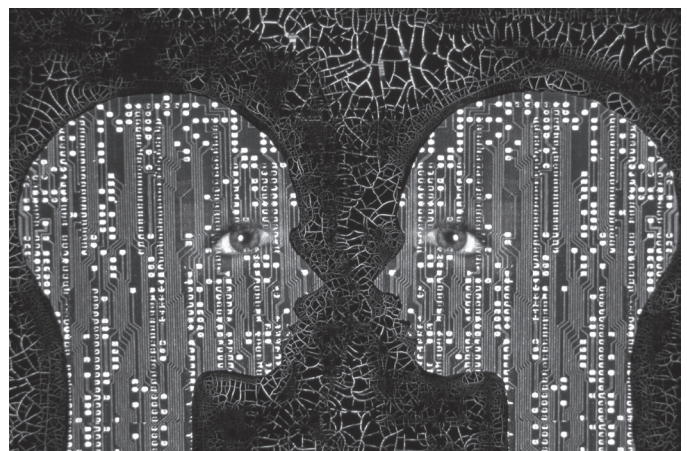
Ethical issues will always exist regarding students with special needs. As collaboration increasingly defines the roles and responsibilities of professional educators, these ethical issues will become more important and sometimes more complex because the views of all participants must be considered. Your knowledge and skills for interacting effectively with others can provide you with the tools you will need to confidently face these perplexing situations.

Final Thoughts About Professional Collaboration

Education collaboration was still more of a concept than a practice. Although there was a history of informal collaboration among special education professionals (for example, teachers in separate schools working together, mental health professionals working with special educators), most authors were still writing about the physical and psychological isolation of educators (e.g., Little, 1982; Sarason, 1982), especially related to their professional roles and responsibilities. A few professionals, such as school psychologists, employed consultation to support teachers in their work with students (e.g., Brown, Przywansky, & Schulte, 1987), but most such applications were based on an expert model; that is, the consultant's responsibility being to provide guidance to the teacher.

So much has changed in the past two decades. Educators have moved from communicating via slow, unreliable, and simplistic e-mail systems to utilizing the highly interactive and collaborative-friendly tools of Web 2.0. Professional development has changed from periodic workshops, often unrelated to each other and sometimes with a purpose unclear to participants, to professional learning communities and other job-embedded options that rely on high-quality teacher collaboration. Administrators discuss the importance of distributed leadership (e.g., Heck & Hallinger, 2010) and establish teams to address school reform (Davis, Krasnoff, Ishimaru, & Sage, 2010). Teachers seek advice from colleagues in their schools and across the region, country, and world to find more effective ways to reach their diverse learners. Further, professionals across disciplines work together, when in classrooms through co-teaching or in various types of teams, to ensure that the highest standards are in place for all students and that all students have the opportunity to achieve those standards. University faculty members are stressing collaboration as an essential skill in professional preparation programs (Lesley, Hamman, Olivarez, Button, & Griffith, 2009), and both professional standards and emerging new-generation teacher evaluation systems stress the importance of collaborative work (e.g., Killion, 2011).

Taken together, the current attention to collaboration, the ways that it is being embedded in professional preparation and practice, its growing importance in the day-to-day operation of schools, and its increasingly demonstrable benefit for students and educators (e.g., Silverman, Hazelwood, &



NOVASTOCK/PhotoEdit

Although the future is difficult to predict, it undoubtedly will include a significant role for collaboration among education professionals.

Cronin, 2009) suggest that collaboration will continue to grow in importance for school professionals. This statement is bolstered by a review of collaboration's significance in the larger context, across business, social services, economics, medicine, and other professions. Collaboration has become a foundational element in twenty-first-century society, and so as schools reflect the larger society, collaboration will become even more integral to their effectiveness. You can read an example of highlighting the skills that might be needed for this world in Figure 2.

That is not to say that the path will be straight or smooth. It is likely that, especially in tough economic times, the infrastructure needed for education collaboration—adequate staffing, feasible schedules, common planning time, appropriate professional development—will be challenging to create and maintain. Likewise, building understanding among parents, school board members, and the community of the importance of such infrastructures in education is likely to be difficult. At the same time, although many professional preparation programs embrace the concept of collaboration, the large majority do not demonstrate its importance by offering courses co-taught by faculty members from different departments or courses about collaboration that are required for all education-related majors. The result is that some professionals will still enter the field inadequately prepared for their collaborative responsibilities, much like Jonathan from the chapter-opening case.

And so the future of collaboration is likely to be a combination of optimism and excitement tempered by realization of the complexities of building and sustaining high-quality practice. A positive point is that you have learned a great deal about collaboration, and thus you can be a contributing voice in fostering school collaboration. Doing so will be both rewarding and challenging, and is likely to be especially pertinent to your own collaborative work.

FIGURE 2**Do you have these collaboration superpowers?**

These superpowers have been proposed for gamers, but they are applicable to educators looking to the future as well!

- Mobbability: The ability to do real-time work in groups and to coordinate simultaneously with others
- Cooperation radar: The ability to intuitively identify strong potential collaboration partners
- Ping quotient: Your responsiveness to others' requests and willingness to reach out to others
- Influency: Your ability to be persuasive in electronic environments and to recognize the need for different approaches in different types of interactions
- Multi-capitalism: Fluency working with different "capitals"—natural, intellectual, social, financial
- Protovation: Capability for fearless innovation in rapid and iterative cycles
- Open authorship: Willingness to create content to share with others
- Longbroadening: Your ability to think in terms of the big picture, with a longer and broader view
- Emergensight: Your readiness to prepare for and manage surprises and unexpected complexity
- Signal-noise management: Your capacity for filtering input and deciding what is most important

Source: From McGonigal, J. (2007). *10 collaboration superpowers*. Retrieved November 10, 2011, from www.slideshare.net/avantgame/10-collaboration-superpowers

SUMMARY

- Professional roles and responsibilities help to shape the nature of school collaboration. When teachers work with administrators, specialists such as speech/language therapists, or each other, they should take into account how the requirements of each professional's role may contribute to or detract from collaboration.
- Systemic matters likewise may profoundly influence collaboration in schools. Issues such as scheduling problems for special education and ESL teachers, for general education teachers, and for the school as a whole, as well as challenges in coordinating services, can be barriers to collaboration that must be overcome.
- Electronic collaboration is a rapidly evolving field, and one that will continue to grow. Educators vary widely in their knowledge of technology and the electronic collaboration tools available to them.
- Student collaboration, although not exactly meeting the criteria of the definition used in this text, is an important topic. Peer-mediated instruction (including cooperative learning and peer tutoring), technology-centered collaboration, and student-professional collaboration (for example, student-led IEP meetings) are examples of student interactions through which they can learn important social and interaction skills.
- Collaboration will continue to be central in the work of schools and is likely to increase and become more complex, even as its specific character evolves. Educators should know and follow fundamental ethical principles in their collaborative efforts.

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES

1. Make a chart of the roles of individuals who typically participate in collaboration in your setting, whether that is your school, your field placement, or an activity on campus. For each, list the factors that foster their participation and those that constrain it. What does your analysis suggest about the potential for expanding collaboration in your setting?
2. Think about Rosalee and Jonathan and their wish that they could work together. Do you think this is a reasonable wish? What might be the advantages and disadvantages? How would their working together possibly affect their roles and responsibilities? What ethical issues might arise? Justify your responses.
3. Analyze the opportunities and problems of electronic collaboration. Which forms are most effective? Least effective? Why? How do the topics of electronic collaboration and ethics intersect?
4. This chapter briefly considered the topic of student collaboration. Think about your experiences with student-student collaboration. How is such collaboration similar to and different from the technical understanding of collaboration you have learned?
5. What are the ethical issues that you are most concerned about facing in your job? With classmates, discuss what guidance is offered by the elements of the ethical framework presented in this chapter. For each dilemma you discuss, propose at least three actions that a professional educator could take to address it.

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