

2007

## Full inclusion and collaborative teaching : the new wave in education

Mindy Underwood  
*University of Northern Iowa*

Copyright ©2007 Mindy Underwood

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp>



Part of the [Elementary Education Commons](#), and the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

*Let us know how access to this document benefits you*

---

### Recommended Citation

Underwood, Mindy, "Full inclusion and collaborative teaching : the new wave in education" (2007).  
*Graduate Research Papers*. 1638.  
<https://scholarworks.uni.edu/grp/1638>

This Open Access Graduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Research Papers by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@uni.edu](mailto:scholarworks@uni.edu).

---

## Full inclusion and collaborative teaching : the new wave in education

### Abstract

Throughout the history of education, the pendulum of best practice continuously swings. In the beginning, special education programs were practically nonexistent in schools, whereas now full inclusion and collaborative teaching are the new wave. This paper will explore the history of special education, full inclusion, collaborative teaching, and what it means for the regular education teacher in the general education classroom.

FULL INCLUSION AND COLLABORATIVE TEACHING:  
THE NEW WAVE IN EDUCATION

A Graduate Review

Submitted to the Division of Elementary Education

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

By

Mindy Underwood

July 2007



## Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	5
II.	Methodology	6
III.	Literature Review	6
	a. A Brief History of Full Inclusion	6
	b. Legislation	8
	c. Who Receives Special Education Services?	10
	d. What are Special Education Services?	11
	e. Mainstreaming	12
	f. Full Inclusion	12
	g. Is Full Inclusion the Right Choice?	17
	h. Collaborative Teaching	18
	i. Collaborative Teaming	20
	j. Teamwork and Responsibilities	21
	k. Parent Involvement in the Collaborative Classroom	23
	l. Effective Planning, Delivery, and Instruction of Lessons	23
	m. Behavior Management in the Collaborative Classroom	25
	n. Student Grouping the Collaborative Classroom	25
	o. Collaborative Teaching Assessment	26
IV.	Conclusions and Recommendations	27
V.	References	29

### Abstract

Throughout the history of education, the pendulum of best practice continuously swings. In the beginning, special education programs were practically nonexistent in schools, whereas now full inclusion and collaborative teaching are the new wave. This paper will explore the history of special education, full inclusion, collaborative teaching, and what it means for the regular education teacher in the general education classroom.

## Introduction

Imagine throwing a dinner party. Everyone who is anyone is going to be there! Ten people are invited, and the preparations are endless. From cooking to preparing the table, it is very busy occasion!

As the table is being set, thoughts are entering the mind. What is the best way to accommodate Marsha's wheelchair? Tom is a vegetarian and does not eat any products derived from animals. Elizabeth is extremely shy, yet super one-on-one. How will these guests all feel comfortable and welcome in the home? Should the party be canceled?

Of course not! The gracious host does everything to accommodate the needs of her guests. By moving furniture for Marsha's wheelchair, and setting a special place at the table for her, having vegan dishes prepared for Tom, and providing activities for Elizabeth to help with in order to bring the dinner together will make the party a success.

What a great host! The necessary accommodations are made, the guest all arrive hungry, and everything goes off without a hitch! None of the guests feel left out, and everyone is enjoying the night of great food and fun conversation.

Now think about a general education classroom setting with full inclusion. What is full inclusion? It's what our host just wonderfully did. It is taking into consideration all the individual needs of students, making them feel welcome and comfortable, and creating an environment in which all students can learn.

Full inclusion incorporates all students despite their learning abilities or disabilities, physical challenges, or behavioral issues. "I argue that an inclusive school is one which attends thoughtfully and well to all the differences that students bring with them to school" (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p. xiv). Full inclusion happens in the general education classroom with a general

education teacher and a collaborative teacher. Collaborative teaching usually takes place with a special needs teacher or a paraeducator for short periods of instruction. In this paper, the history of special education, mainstreaming, full inclusion, and collaborative teaching will be explored.

### Methodology

The Rod Library at the University of Northern Iowa was a wonderful source of information in researching this topic. From using their online databases such as EBSCO-ERIC and UNISTAR, I was able to locate a variety of relevant sources. Journals, books, and other articles proved to be wonderful sources of information in order to adequately complete this review of literature.

Researching the topic of full inclusion and collaborative teaching was fairly manageable. Although the amount of information on the subject is extremely abundant, I was able to narrow my search and find current information for this research paper. In order to narrow my search, I used numerous key terms. *Collaborative teaching, full inclusion, inclusive schools, special education, general education, and co-teaching* were terms I used in my searches. I scanned several journal articles, books, and other literature to find the most current and relevant information. I chose the most current information in order to give the reader the most up-to-date, accurate information on full inclusion and collaborative teaching.

### Review of Literature

#### *A Brief History of Special Education*

Think back to the early years of education. Remember anything like *behavior disorders, multicategorical, least restrictive environment, or various leveling* of education? These are all words and categories related to current special education practice. Years ago there were few special education services for children in the regular school. “Until approximately 1800 in the

United States, most students with disabilities weren't deemed worthy of an education at all" (Villa & Thousand, p. 12, 2005). Students with disabilities were not educated, and there was little or no movement at the time to encourage the education of students with varying learning or physical disabilities.

Even as late as the early 1900's, special needs students were still not educated in the regular education setting. "By the early 1900's, nearly every state had built institutions for people considered blind, deaf, or "mentally retarded" (Stainback & Smith, 2005, p. 13). Institutions they were. Students generally were not educated in these institutions at this time. If students were to be taught, it would be by government or church supported institutions. It was thought these students with so many needs were a burden to society and could never make a positive contribution to the world.

In the earlier years, there were few resources to test students for learning disabilities. Think back to the one-room schoolhouse. "In 1919, there were 190,000 one-room school houses in the United States. Students with special needs were placed in general education classes because it was the only available placement. Older, more competent students helped the younger, less able ones" (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p. 68). Students of all ages were learning well collaboratively. While the teacher would individualize instruction for some students, the older students would aid the younger ones, individualizing their instruction as well. The older students were the resource to the younger children. There were no school psychologists to support or diagnose learning disabilities. Students helped each other out by being teachers in their own realm.

"In the 1950s and 1960s, special classes in public schools became the preferred educational delivery system for most students with identified disabilities" (Stainback & Smith,

2005, p. 14). This was not the preferred educational delivery system for most people. The stereotype combined with the uneducated public about people with disabilities was fatal. Some people believed that people with disabilities were criminals due to their genetic makeup. People were scared. Since sending children with disabilities was still not the social norm, many parents educated their children at home or they tragically became wards of the state placed in state ran institutions.

It wasn't until the late 1960's to the 1970's when the government became more actively in the involvement of special needs education in America's schools. Prior to these years, special education problems were not being ignored, but there was little time or funding to address these issues. "Litigation and legislation of the period resulted in such effects as a free, appropriate education for all children regardless of disability" (Choate, 2004, p. 5). This would be the turning point for special education in America's schools. *Brown vs. the Board of Education* in 1954 laid the groundwork for future lawsuits and accommodations in schools during these years. "In *Brown*, the court ruled that segregating students in schools based on race, even if other educational factors appear to be equivalent, is unconstitutional" (Choate, 2004, p. 5). This victory was a key element for parents of special needs students. They were able to take a successful lawsuit and use it as a base to fight for their children. Numerous parents began to fight for their children for the right to an appropriate education in a regular school. Now there are laws in place that allow all children an appropriate education and that ensure all rights of the children are being followed in accordance to the laws of special education.

### *Legislation*

Numerous laws and mandates have been put in place by the government to ensure an appropriate education for all students. In 1975, "Public Law (PL) 93-142, the Education for All

Handicapped Children Act guaranteed appropriate educational services to all school-aged students with” (Lewis & Doorlag, 2006, p. 9). Under this act students are also to be educated with general education students in the least restrictive environment (LRE). All students with special needs have the right to be educated in the general education setting with peers of their own age.

Under this law is the Individualized Education Program or IEP. An IEP is an individualized program that is created for students with special needs that emphasizes problem areas and creates goals for student achievement. “The general school reform agenda has been grafted to each IEP in an effort to ensure that each special education student receives at least a comparable education to his or her classmates” (Kauffman & Hannibal, 2005, p. 109). Goals are tracked and revisited throughout the course of the school year to monitor student progress. This plan is created by the parents or guardians, general education teacher, special needs teacher, guidance counselor, principal and school psychologist. A team of professionals is necessary to ensure an adequate academic plan is in place. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in the goal setting progress by attending regular meetings regarding their child’s progress and learning goals.

More and more legislation has occurred to make special education students a larger part of regular classroom routines. PL 105-17 is the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This act was amended in 1997 to serve younger children with developmental delays who are not quite school age by providing interventions in the home. In addition, the IEP was revisited and revised to make sure special education students were being provided activities with their peers in the least restrictive environment, the general education setting.

The most current law is PL 108-446, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 or IDEA. “This law brings special education into closer conformity with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act by spelling out what makes special education teachers “highly qualified” (Lewis and Doorlag, 2005, p. 9). Under this law, special needs students are all required to take state mandated assessments, which may be modified in accordance with their IEP goals. IEP interventions must be research-based as well and include annual goals under this amendment.

Special education law continues to be a hot topic among legislators as well as teachers. There is constant discussion on best practice in regards to special education practice. What is best for one student is not necessarily the best for another because student learning styles differ in numerous ways, whether they are a special education student or not.

#### *Who Receives Special Education Services?*

Special education students may come from a variety of categories. Students may have learning disabilities, behavioral disorders or emotional problems, mental retardation, speech and language impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, or visual and hearing deficiencies. Depending on the diagnosis will depend on when students begin to receive services. For example, students with autism are usually diagnosed before they are school age and will receive special education services at the beginning of their school careers. On the other hand, a student with learning disabilities may not be diagnosed until later in his or her school years. Through careful teacher research and goal interventions, the teacher will present the problem to the parents to assess options for greater student achievement. With a team of professionals along with the parents, an IEP will be developed and special education services will begin to aid in

student learning and personal achievement of goals. “An IEP is prepared for each student who receives special education services” (Lewis and Doorlag, 2005, p. 13).

### *What are Special Education Services?*

Special education services vary from student to student, depending on the IEP goal. When the IEP is formulated, specific information is written about the goal, how the goal will be monitored and accomplished, and who is responsible for the goal. Currently, most students with IEP’s are pulled out of the general education classroom for direct instruction with the special needs teachers responsible for the goals. The time spent with the special needs teachers depends on the time written in the IEP. For example, if a student has a math goal, the student may be pulled out for of the general education classroom for one hour per day to work on specific strategies to accomplish the goal. The rest of the time will be spent in the general education classroom with his or her peers.

Some students require more time in the special education classroom in accordance with their IEP. Some students spend most of the day in the special needs classroom working towards their goals, only leaving for lunch, recess, and specialists such as music or art. This type of program is fairly restrictive, as the special education students spend no time in the regular classroom setting.

Special needs services may not necessarily be academically related. Students with speech impairments may be pulled out for several minutes each week to work with a speech pathologist. Students who receive speech must also have an IEP goal as well in their individual area, but they spend the majority of their academic time in the general education setting. The special education teacher is not generally involved in developing or monitoring this goal of the IEP.

### *Mainstreaming*

Before full inclusion is discussed, it is essential to thoroughly understand the difference between the terms mainstreaming and full inclusion. “Mainstreaming is participation in the general education environment when deemed academically/emotionally ready” (Bradley, King-Sears, and Tessier-Switlick, 1997, p. 4). Generally, the special education teacher decides when the student is ready to enter the regular education classroom. The teacher and student may work up an academic or behavior plan as a goal to enter the general education setting.

Mainstreaming aids in student involvement in the regular education classroom and promotes a sense of belonging to a classroom community. The curriculum is extremely authentic to the child, and the delivery of the lessons is directly modified by the general education teacher or the special needs teacher. The modifications are in accordance with the student IEP to gain better understanding of the material. The lessons learned in the general education setting may be taken back to the special needs classroom to gain a better understanding and clarification of the material. Although mainstreaming is similar to full inclusion, the student is not in the general education setting for the entire school day.

### *Full Inclusion*

Full inclusion and mainstreaming differ dramatically. In a full inclusion setting, students with special needs are in the regular education classroom all day with general education students, creating a least restrictive environment for the students. A special needs teacher or a paraeducator should be present at all times to ensure proper learning behaviors of the student. All students with special needs are welcomed into the classroom with no questions asked. “An inclusive school has what is known as a “zero reject philosophy,” that is, no one is turned away because of the presence of a disability” (Bradley, King-Sears, and Tessier-Switlick, 1997, p. 7).

To be in accordance with the laws of special education, the school and all of its teachers must be knowledgeable and understand the expectations and exceptions of the laws.

The term inclusion does not exist in IDEA. “However, the concept of inclusion is embodied in the law, which does call for children with disabilities to be educated to the fullest extent possible with children who are not disabled” (Miller, 2001, p. 820). Every child has the right to an appropriate education in general education setting and they cannot be denied that right.

Special needs students who are being educated in the general education setting should feel welcome at all times, as they are a true member of the class as well. “Children must become genuine members of the class. They should be fully engaged and accepted by their peers, not just treated politely and professionally by their peers” (Miller, 2001, p.820). Accommodations should be made in the classroom in order to create the most effective learning environment. Furniture may need to be arranged appropriately, space set aside for special equipment, and preferred seating should be put in place. General education students should be prepared for their new classmate as well.

If students begin kindergarten with full inclusion in place at their school they will better understand the needs of special needs students. As the students get older they won't even think twice about why the students with special needs are in their classroom. Hopefully, they will see the students as one of them and maintain a great relationship with them throughout their school years.

But it's not always that easy. Some students are extremely apprehensive about someone different in their classroom if they are not used to them or taught about their peer's special needs. They need to be prepared and taught about empathy before the changes take place in their

classroom. “Students exhibit various reactions to changes going on around them, especially when groups of new students, teachers, and assistants are placed in their classes” (Bradley, King-Sears, & Tessier-Switlick, 1997, p. 12). Students need to be assured their needs will continue to be met as well. It is good practice to include students in the conversation about what inclusion means to them and get ideas from them on how they can make the classroom a welcoming environment for their new classmate(s). With the permission of the parents, it would also be appropriate to discuss the diagnosis of their special needs classmate for further understanding of their student’s individual needs.

It is also extremely important that all parents are informed what is happening in their full inclusion school. It is not ethical to release any personal information or names, but parents can be assured through newsletters, meetings with the teacher or principal, or classroom observation that the needs of their students are continuously being met. “Offering families information about inclusion and the ways in which it will be implemented in their child’s educational environment can help make a smooth transition to inclusive practices” (Bradley, King-Sears, & Tessier-Switlick, 1997, p. 12). Parents also need to be supportive of full inclusion in their child’s school. Negative behavior on the part of the parents will be reflected on that of their child. “It is important for parents to realize that after students leave school, they will all be intermingling in the community. The school program helps prepare them for this environment” (Lewis and Doorlag, 2006, p. 140).

Parents of students with special needs need to be prepared for changes as well. If their child is entering a full inclusion classroom for the first time, it is essential that the parents and child are informed of the change. Some students are not socially ready to enter the general education classroom. “In most cases, students with disabilities should be provided with specific

training in the social skills needed to function successfully in school and the community” (Lewis & Doorlag, 2006, p. 139). Parents can reinforce good social skills at home and in the community by providing positive examples of good behavior. Coaching and practicing by the child will also aid in learning better social skills.

As special needs students enter the general education classroom, they too bring with them a variety of life experiences that can be shared with class. It is essential to create a positive classroom community by sharing all types of experiences from all types of students to ensure all students feel welcome. “Community building, like inclusion, is intentional and requires ongoing focus and commitment” (Sapon-Shevin, 2007, p. 146). Students in a classroom spend much time together, and they must learn to accept each other for who they are and accept their differences.

Not only should the inclusive classroom community be welcoming, it should also be a safe environment for all who enter. “A nurturing community is a place where is sage to be yourself. Most significantly, with reference to inclusion, it is safe to be yourself as you are *right now*” (Sapon -Shevin, 2007, p. 147). All students have the right to feel safe in their classrooms at school, without fear of ridicule from their peers or their teacher. By creating a positive classroom community, the safety and integrity of all students will be maintained.

In order to maintain the integrity and trust of all students, it is essential that students understand how assessments will be administered. Not all students will be assessed the exact same in a fully inclusive classroom. Special needs students may have modifications done according to their individual IEP. For example, special needs students may need the test read aloud, or they may take a multiple choice test versus a short answer test. The individual needs of the students will be met through these simple modifications. If a positive classroom community

is established, all students should understand why individuals need modifications in order to be successful and know they are being assessed over the same material, just in a different manner.

There are numerous advantages to full inclusion. Special needs students receive direct instruction in content areas at all times, while modifications are continuously being made by the teachers involved. Less time is spent by the special needs teacher attending meetings, testing, and transition time from class to class is minimized. “Students placed in heterogeneously grouped programs who showed significantly more improvement than students grouped by ability levels,” (Bradley, King-Sears, & Tessier-Switlick, 1997, p. 13). Students educated in a full inclusive setting possess better adaptation skills and can handle change with more ease. Special education students may also possess higher self-esteem.

Some students may possess higher self-esteem, while other students may not. If the proper classroom community has not been set up appropriately, teasing and bullying may occur. Special needs students may feel totally inferior and constantly compare themselves to the rest of their peers without special needs. Parents may also wonder if the full inclusion setting is meeting the diverse needs of their students. Most students who enter the general education classrooms are used to small group work and one-on-one activities. “Some parents who have become accustomed to their children receiving their education in small groups with much individual attention are wondering if programming in general education settings is adequate to meet the needs of their student with disabilities” (Bradley, King-Sears, & Tessier-Switlick, 1997, p. 15). It can be a difficult situation for both the parents and the teachers alike. Change can be extremely difficult if ill-prepared.

All people handle change in different ways, and it may not be as easy for the general education teacher. “Because few teachers have received adequate specialized training at the

preservice level, their ability to work with special needs students has been seriously tested” (Choate, 2004, p. 15). General education teachers who did not go to school to teach special needs students may wonder if full inclusion into their classroom is in the best interest of the children. Due to the least restrictive environment movement, the general education teacher does not have a choice to deny any student an education in his or her classroom, nor would it be an ethical decision.

### *Is Full Inclusion the Right Choice?*

Full inclusion is a big change from a traditional school setting. Researchers, parents, and teachers alike wonder if full inclusion is the correct choice in educating students. They may question whether students will receive proper instruction and the right amount of individualized attention for their students, whether they are special needs students or not. “Students are alike in their basic humanity, but they are also different in what they have learned, can learn, and need to learn” (Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005, p. 284). Some people who are against full inclusion wonder its efficacy in the classroom, especially if no collaborative teacher is present due to budget or staffing restraints.

With proper training, an inclusive school can be a highly functional institution.

Characteristics of an inclusive school are but not limited to as characterized by the following:

- All students attend their home school.
- There is a philosophy of “zero reject.”
- Students with disabilities are proportionate to those in the general community.
- There is one building administrator who is responsible for all programs in that school.
- Students with and without disabilities have frequent contact with each other.

- Students are placed in age-appropriate classes.
- All students receive the benefit of the grade level curriculum. Grouping is heterogeneous.
- Individualized instruction, cooperative learning, and peer tutoring are evident.
- Related services are provided in the natural instructional environment.
- Expertise and materials are shared.
- Collaboration among the school staff is evident.
- Natural support systems are used.
- Teachers and students are encouraged to develop an appreciation for diversity.
- The rules reflect fairness and equality, and the acquisition of social skills are valued as much as the acquisition of academic skills.

(Bradley, Kings-Sears, and Tessier-Switlick, 1997, p. 17)

This list can sound overwhelming to a teacher who is not prepared to deal with his or her new students. It is essential that adequate training and collaboration is available to all teachers teaching in a full inclusion setting. Without adequate support, a successful classroom with full inclusion is not possible. All teachers teaching in a full inclusion classroom must be in collaboration with the special education teacher at all times, hopefully in the form of collaborative teaching.

### *Collaborative Teaching*

Imagine being a regular classroom teacher for 15 years. Rules and routines have been set, curriculum is in place, and everything that has been done for some many years is finally working well. All of the sudden things are going to change dramatically for the next school year. Full inclusion and collaborative teaching (co-teaching) is coming to your school, into your

classroom! After all of these years of independent teaching, you are going to have special needs students in your classroom all day with a special needs teacher or paraeducator. It can be extremely overwhelming without proper training by all members of the school staff.

Proper training in collaborative teaching begins with the building principal. The principal must have a vision and understanding of how collaborative teaching is supposed to operate. They must be familiar with various collaborative teaching models, as well as understand the roles of the adults in the classroom at all times. In addition, they must be committed to collaborative teaching and be ready to assess collaboration in the classroom. “The foundation of a successful transformation from typical to co-taught classrooms is an acknowledgment of certain circumstances and a commitment to certain beliefs” (Rea & Connell, 2005, p. 38). By knowing and understanding collaborative teaching techniques, the principal will also serve as a wonderful resource for the building staff.

In order to establish a successful inclusive school or classroom, adequate training must be provided before the inclusion takes place. “In the early preparation phase, before inclusive programs and collaborative teams are implemented, the building administrator’s leadership is crucial in getting staff to examine their values, understand inclusion, and learn how collaborative teaming aids inclusion of students with disabilities in general education” (Snell & Janney, 2005, p. 19). Professional development through inservices, classes, professional literature, or guest speakers are just some options of introducing collaborative teaching for staff members. After information is given to staff, several brainstorming sessions take place about how inclusion and collaborative teaching should look in their school. Parents and other community members interested in the inclusion and collaborative teaching processes may also voice their opinion about their inclusive school in the community.

When everyone involved is well-informed about the inclusive school, time is needed to make a plan. Planning in the early stages is essential for knowing the expectations for the team and who will be responsible for what. The building principal should be readily available during the planning stages for any questions or clarifications. During this time teams (co-teachers, support personnel, paraeducators, etc.) are not necessarily being formed, but responsibilities of the future team members are being established and volunteers for co-teachers being sought. During this implementation phase, positive communication is essential for laying the groundwork for a positive environment for all people involved.

### *Collaborative Teaming*

Once everyone is aware of the responsibilities of an inclusive school, teams are formed with the general education teacher. Teams may consist of special needs teachers, school psychologists, or the building principal. All persons serving on the team must be aware of the individual needs of the students. “For students who have IEP’s, team members should be those service providers listed on the plan who work with the student” (Snell & Janney, 2005, p. 29). Generally, it is the special education teacher listed on the IEP who will have the largest role and responsibility of making sure the child’s needs are met. Depending on what the IEP goals are for the student will depend on the amount of time the special needs teacher may spend in the classroom as they may have several students to serve.

Integrating collaborative teaching can be a difficult transition for students and staff members alike, and it should be a slow process. “During the transition away from pull-out services, it is suggested that special education teachers initially design their schedules to use pull-in services one-third of the time or more, collaborative teaching one-third of the time or more, and pull-out with collaboration one-third of the time or less” (Janney and Snell, 2005, p.

107). This way will offer time for students and teachers in the setting become accustomed to routines, expectations, and personal goals.

In a collaborative teaching setting, it is important that all team members have an adequate sense of their responsibilities both to the students and their contributions to the classroom. If the collaborative teaching setting includes the general education teacher and special needs teacher, they must develop an excellent rapport. Time to work together before beginning the co-teaching experience is an essential element to a successful relationship. Observing each other while teaching can help facilitate this rapport. "Observations during the first week led to discussion about philosophies and beliefs related to teaching and learning, and expectations related to behavior management, teaching methods, role and responsibilities" (Trent, Driver, Wood, Parrott, Martin, & Smith, 2003, p. 208). Some teachers may feel totally uncomfortable with collaborative teaching, and respectfully so. It is a huge undertaking. It is recommended for administrators to ask for volunteers to be in the collaborative teaching setting to promote the best relationships. "When teachers are forced into collaborative roles, it undermines the collaborative relationships of the teachers impartial" (Gerber & Popp, 2000, p. 232). It is also an excellent idea while interviewing prospective teachers to get their personal view on collaborative teaching, as it may be a requirement.

### *Teamwork and Responsibilities*

Working together cohesively as team is essential to making collaborative teaching successful. Those involved on the team must listen to each and interact well all times, especially in front of the children, as everyone on the team is responsible for the success of the children. In order to effectively communicate, everyone on the team must be committed to the process. "Collaborative teaming requires that team members learn how to communicate, plan, and deliver

coordinated services jointly” (Snell & Janney, 2005, p. 43). Everyone on the team must know what is to be happening in the classroom at all times.

Beginning collaborative teaching can be a difficult task for inexperienced teachers as well as veterans. General education teachers must envision that all students in the classroom can learn, as they will be serving as the child’s primary teacher. The special needs teacher may not be in the classroom at all times due to amount of special needs students they need to serve. “Because special education teachers often support students in several general education classrooms, they work with multiple classrooms and teachers; this often makes it necessary to limit the co-teaching arrangement with any given teacher to part of the day” (Snell and Janney, 2005, p. 106). With the assistance of the special needs teachers, modifications and adaptations to lessons must be made to enhance independent student learning when the special needs teacher is out the classroom. A paraeducator may also be assigned to the classroom during this time as well to assist the teacher with the special needs students. The special needs teacher must always effectively communicate any pertinent information on the child(ren) to the classroom and teacher and/or paraeducator that may affect their learning. Communication can be held at team meetings where reflection and modifications to lesson may also be made.

Team meetings are an excellent time to discuss what is happening with the team in the general education setting. “What occurs during meetings is closely related to team roles and responsibilities and students’ status as class/school members and their progress as learners” (Snell & Janney, 2005, p. 47). During these meetings academics are discussed, upcoming curriculum and lessons may be developed, and successes and failures are discussed. Team meetings are a time of reflection to improve practice.

### *Parent Involvement in the Collaborative Classroom*

Parent involvement is a huge initiative in America's schools. School districts are constantly finding ways to invite parents into the school to better promote the education of their child(ren). Full inclusion and collaborative teaching are wonderful ways to bring the parents into the school and ask for their ideas and thoughts on the programs. They should always be kept up-to-date and informed of what is happening in their child's classroom. The collaborative classroom is no exception. "Printed materials should be available that explains the goals and objectives of the program and other pertinent information about the collaborative teaching system" (Gerber & Popp, 2000, p. 233). It doesn't stop with printed literature over the subject. Workshops on the subject are an excellent way to invite parents into the school to voice concerns or celebrations through an informational forum.

### *Effective Planning, Delivery, and Instruction of Lessons*

In order for the collaborating teachers to execute a lesson, they must have enough time during the day to effectively plan. "It is important that administrators consider freeing collaborative teachers various schoolwide duties (i.e. bus, lunchroom) in order to ensure sufficient planning time" (Gerber & Popp, 2000, p. 232). An important aspect of lesson preparation to discuss is materials. Make sure each person on the team knows who is responsible for making copies, gathering laboratory materials, or contacting guest speakers. It is important that responsibilities are equally delegated, so no one feels overwhelmed. Not only should there be sufficient time to plan lessons and collaboration, there must be adequate time for goal setting and reviewing of individual IEP goals.

All teachers deliver instruction in a variety of ways. Since roles and responsibilities have been discussed, it is now time to discuss lesson delivery. Both teachers are essential in the

delivery of the lesson to all of the students. “The general education content teachers conducted more of the instruction while the special educators provided more individualized assistance. However, both engaged in the full range of instructional activities including assessing learner characteristics” (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007, p. 64). It is important for all students in the classroom to see both teachers as equals. They should not discriminate between them. They are both teachers, teaching the same content in the same classroom, and are there to meet the needs of all of the students in the classroom.

Delivery for lessons may vary from teaching team to teaching team. During planning sessions, the teachers involved my lay out plan of how the lesson is going to look. Teachers may choose to constantly and consistently switch roles. One teacher described the process:

“We make sure that by the end of our planning sessions, we know the order in which things are going to take place. We number them. For example, we write that we are going to begin with Michelle modeling. Then I will model. Then we are going to do oral reading. Then we will break into groups. So we know what the sequence is.” (Trent et al, 2003, p. 208)

These teachers have created a routine they are both comfortable with in their classroom. They both know what they are responsible for and when. This is important for successful delivery of the material. If done consistently, the method of delivery is predictable for the teachers and the students, many of whom like constant routine in their classroom.

It essential while planning and reviewing the lessons that all required and necessary accommodations are made, especially in regards to student IEP's and curriculum content. Both teachers need to be reflective in the planning process by reviewing IEP goals and making necessary changes to enhance student involvement and achievement. “From a reflective standpoint, then, Barbara and Michelle concluded that their ongoing planning and communication created “a very positive give and take” that allowed them to be flexible as they

refined roles, responsibilities, outlined activities and time schedules, and dealt with unexpected interruptions” (Trent et al, 2003, p. 209). Flexibility and understanding of the other collaborative teacher is a key component in success.

### *Behavior Management in the Collaborative Classroom*

Before implementing the collaborative teaching method into the classroom, it is essential to explain to the students and parents beforehand what is going to happen in their classroom. Student rules, expectations, and routines must be in place before co-teaching takes place. As previously stated with full inclusion, parents must know that two teachers may be instructing students in the classroom as well. Students must feel comfortable in their classroom community and must also be flexible and behave respectfully at all times in the collaborative classroom. As previously stated, students must understand that both of the teachers in the collaborative setting are to be treated with equal respect, as both teachers should be seen as equal disciplinarians in the classroom. Both teachers are responsible for the behaviors of all students. It is important that behavior modifications and discipline is done accordance to classroom rules and IEP’s and done consistently. “Management duties are distributed between teachers; adults model desired behaviors; teachers support one another in management decisions and dignity is always maintained” (Rea & Connell, 2005, p. 35). If the teachers are respectful of each other and of the students, the core is set for an excellent, respectable learning environment.

### *Student Grouping in the Collaborative Classroom*

Every classroom teacher designs lessons that require students to work in groups. Heterogeneous and homogeneous groups are great ways to incorporate all students in the full inclusion, collaborative teaching classroom. In heterogeneous groups, various students are placed in a small group to accomplish a common task together. Each group member is assigned

a role in accomplishing the task; therefore all students in the group are active participants. In homogeneous groups, students are grouped according to academic need. For example, if a group of students need extra help in multiplication strategies in math, they would be grouped as a small homogeneous group working on that strategy. “Depending on the activity and individual student need, planning for group membership is obvious and made based on student need” (Rea & Connell, 2005, p. 35). All students need to see themselves a part of the whole class as well as group, and collaborative teaching can help facilitate that need.

Collaborative learning groups work well for in the collaborative teaching classroom. Two teachers are able to facilitate, monitor, and assist numerous students in various ways. In collaborative groups, many students offer many ideas in problem-solving and task completion. The active participation of all students aid in making the best learning environment possible for all students.

#### *Collaborative Teaching Assessment*

Throughout the collaborative teaching process, it is important to discuss assessment and grading techniques. Communication with the collaborative teacher is essential in this area. Each teacher needs to have the same expectations for each assignment to be assessed, so every student is assessed fairly. Discuss any problems or questions that may arise in the assessment process together. In this case, assessment is not limited to just tests and assignments given in the classroom. “Teachers must assign grades collaboratively; grading accommodations and adaptations are made when appropriate; IEP grading requirements are implemented” (Rea & Connell, 2005, p. 36). This type of grading is accomplished through discussion of the collaborating teachers of all students, not just the special needs students in the full inclusion classroom.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

With the continuance of new legislation in the area of education, full inclusion and collaborative teaching are going to be the new wave and hot topics. Educators must adapt to these new changes and familiarize themselves with special needs legislation, and they must keep an open mind and be ready for changes in their schools. In addition, educators in the full inclusion and collaborative teaching settings must be vocal. They must let decision-makers know what works, problems, and celebrations in the classroom.

Being vocal is essential in the inclusive school and collaborative teaching setting. Good communication and flexibility are essential for successful relationships among teachers in the collaborative setting. The collaborating teachers must talk with each other about discipline issues, assessments, lesson planning, and teaching duties and routines. If these types of things are not communicated, the classroom environment will not be one in which the students thrive.

Educators need to be prepared for parent involvement, whether it is positive or negative. Many parents either don't know or understand how full inclusion and special needs works in the classroom. It is important that educators inform their parents at the beginning of the school year of what is going to be happening in their child's classroom and provide adequate literature and informational meetings on the topic.

Full inclusion and collaborative teaching can be an overwhelming experience if the classroom teacher is ill-prepared. Teachers how have special needs students placed in their classrooms should check your local area education agency for seminars in full inclusion and collaborative teaching. Sometimes the agencies offer classes on current topics in education. Teachers should stay abreast of special education legislation by attending such a meeting, but by also communicating with the building principal, special education teachers, and reading

professional literature on this topic. Classroom teachers should be willing to change teaching their current practices in order implement new teaching strategies that accommodate all types of learners. Change and transition are difficult, but the benefits to the children are immense. Teaching has but one purpose; to develop the academic, social, and emotional lives of all students. There is no better way to teach all students than to include all students.

## References

- Bradley, D.F., King-Sears, M.E., & Tessier-Switlick, D.M. (1997). *Teaching students in inclusive settings: From theory to practice*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Choate, J.S. (Ed.). (2004). *Successful inclusive teaching: Proven ways to detect and correct special needs*. USA: Pearson.
- Gerber, Author P.J., & Popp, P.A. (2000). Making collaborative teaching more effective academically able students: Recommendations for implementation and training. *Learning Disability Quarterly*. 23, 229-236.
- Kauffman, J.M., & Hallahan, D.P. (2005). *The illusion of full inclusion: A comprehensive critique of a current special education bandwagon*. Austin, TX: PRO-ED.
- Lewis, R.B., & Doolag, D.H. (2006). *Teaching special needs students in general education classrooms*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Miller, H.M. (2001). Teaching and learning about cultural diversity: Including the "included." *The Reading Teacher*. 54, 820-821.
- Rea, Author P.J., & Connell, J. (2005). Minding the fine points of co-teaching. *Principal Leadership*. 5, 36-41.
- Snell, M.E., & Janney, R. (2005). *Collaborative teaming*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks Publishing.
- Thousand, J.S., Villa, R.A., & Nevin, A.I. (2007). *Differentiating instruction: Collaboratively planning and teaching for universally designed learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press
- Trent, S.C., Driver, B.L., Wood, M.H., Parrott, P.S., Martin, T.F., & Smith, W.G. (2003).

Creating and sustaining a special education/general education partnership: A story of change and uncertainty. *Teacher and Teacher Education*, 19, 203-219.

Sapon-Shevin, M (2007). *Widening the circle: The power of inclusive classrooms*.

Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Villa, R.B. & Thousand, J.B. (Ed.). (2005). *Creating an inclusive school*. Alexandria,

VA: ASCD.