

Chapter 5

Coteaching, Collaborating, and Differentiating Instruction: Working with Professionals and Families



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Learning Outcomes

- 5.1 Identify some of the challenges of working in inclusive settings.
- 5.2 Distinguish among the three major models for consultation and collaboration.
- 5.3 Describe effective practices for differentiating instruction.
- 5.4 Describe the principles of communication, and give examples of how teachers can communicate effectively with parents and professionals.
- 5.5 Analyze the special education teacher's role as a consultant to general education teachers.
- 5.6 Summarize the teacher's role in addressing the needs of the entire family.

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Mrs. Tupa works in a hospital emergency room, so she is accustomed to talking to people who are grieving. Mrs. Tupa states:

I often speak to parents about the recovery of their children. Fortunately, most of the children have injuries or illnesses from which they will recover completely. I've been trained in the importance of telling the parents as quickly and completely as possible all we know about their child's condition. The only reason I'm telling you this is that I want you to understand that I am accustomed to dealing with difficulties. But I was unprepared for the inconsistent information I would receive about our son.

When our third child, Chad, was born, my husband and I couldn't have been happier. Our first two children were girls, whom we enjoy immensely, but both of us were hoping for a boy. Chad walked and talked later than the girls, but I knew that boys are often developmentally slower than girls, so we were not concerned. When Chad was a preschooler, he often had difficulty thinking of the right word for an object and his language was often difficult to follow. When the girls told stories about events that happened to them, we could understand clearly what they were communicating. This was often not the case with Chad. When we spoke with his pediatrician, the doctor informed us that this was not uncommon.

When Chad entered kindergarten, he did not know all of his colors and showed little ability to remember the names of the letters in the alphabet. He was just not very interested in the school part of kindergarten though he enjoyed the playing part. His kindergarten teacher said that she had seen a number of students like Chad, often boys, and suggested that we keep Chad in kindergarten another year. Our neighbor, who is a teacher, thought this might not be a good idea, since Chad was already large for his age. We spoke with the principal, who seemed very busy and thought we should take the advice of the kindergarten teacher. We retained Chad. Spending another year in kindergarten seemed to do little good, however. Chad was still unable to identify letters, though he was very popular because of his size and knowledge of the kindergarten routine.

First grade was worse yet. Chad showed no signs of reading and was confusing letters. His writing resembled that of a much younger child. By now we were very concerned and made several appointments with his first-grade teacher. She was very responsive and suggested that we have Chad tutored during the summer. The tutor said that Chad had an attention problem and was having trouble with letter and word reversals. She suggested that we have him tested for learning disabilities. The school psychologist agreed to do the testing, and it was late in the fall before we were called and given the results.

Though both my husband and I are professionals, we felt somewhat intimidated by the number of school personnel at the meeting. On our way home, as we tried to reconstruct what we heard, we realized that we had misunderstood and missed a lot of information. I heard the school personnel say Chad's intelligence was normal, but my husband thought that it couldn't be normal because his verbal intelligence was low. We decided to make a list of questions to ask at our next meeting. We felt that we had made a major stride forward, since Chad would now be receiving special instruction for 1 hour each day from a learning disabilities specialist; however, we still felt we understood very little about his problems. I only wish we had been told more completely and quickly about Chad's problem.

Many parents have had similar experiences. They have noticed that their child is different in some areas from other children of the same age. These parents seek advice from friends, medical professionals, and school professionals and often feel confused and frustrated. When the child is identified as having learning disabilities or emotional disorders, many parents at first feel relieved, hoping that this identification will lead to solutions that will eliminate the child's learning or behavior problem. The difficult adjustments are that the child will probably always have learning or behavior problems and that the special education teacher will be unable to provide any magic cures, and certainly no quick solutions.

Learning disabilities and emotional disorders are complex phenomena, and knowledge of all the factors that they involve is incomplete. Special education teachers work effectively with parents when they are sensitive to parental concerns about identification and intervention, yet speak honestly about what they know and do not know. Families need educators to provide them with encouragement about what they can do at home and about an effective plan for providing instructional supports for their child. Families need to know about the educators' best knowledge of their child's learning and behavior problem and also need to be informed of what educators are less sure of.

This chapter focuses on the special education teacher as a coteacher who facilitates differentiated instruction in the classroom. One of the essential roles of special education teachers is coteaching and communicating effectively with other professionals (e.g., general education teacher, school psychologist), as well as communicating with family members and between special education teachers and other school-related professionals. This chapter deals with the issue of the special education teacher as a leader in differentiating instruction, communicating with professionals and parents, and collaborating with key stakeholders.

Successful Inclusion and Coteaching

What are some of the challenges and opportunities of working in an inclusive classroom and working with general education teachers? Considering the many complexities of teaching and the increasing demands for high performance and preparing students for postsecondary success, classroom teachers are required to provide instruction for increasingly diverse student populations and are still held accountable for covering the prescribed curriculum in a manner that ensures most students learn that content. Classroom teachers sometimes feel that they must choose between covering the content adequately and differentiating instruction appropriately for the range of special learners in their classroom. One of the significant roles of the special education teacher is to support general education teachers in meeting content goals and Common Core State Standards while also providing appropriate instruction for students with special needs.

Many special education students need more time to master new concepts and skills, and they master those concepts and skills only if instruction is presented to them in a manner that enables them to grasp the new material. Teachers must know and use a variety of instructional strategies to ensure that all students have an opportunity to learn. This takes time and planning.

In general, teachers at the middle and high school levels indicate that it is often not feasible for them to plan specifically for students with special needs (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2007; Schumm et al., 1995a, 1995b). Furthermore, when coteaching has been compared to other models such as resource-room settings, the findings for students are mixed (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012). This suggests that the model of service delivery may not be the issue; rather,

the quality of instruction provided to students is what makes the difference (Zigmond, 2003). General education teachers are willing to work with special education professionals to make accommodations for students with special needs as they teach—particularly when those accommodations are useful to other learners in the classroom. Special and general education teachers have many opportunities to align their knowledge and skills and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. One of the successful ways to improve transition planning is through developing interagency partnerships. See Apply the Concept 5.1 for pointers on establishing partnerships for promoting successful transition.

Challenges to Special Education Teachers

Two special education teachers at different schools had very different points of view about their experiences working as coteachers with general education teachers to improve learning for students with disabilities. One teacher said, “It was the best year of my teaching career. Ms. Walberg was terrific and taught me so much about what to expect from general education. I think all of the students benefited because we worked so well together and shared so much of the teaching.” Another teacher at a different school said, “This year was enough to get me to leave education. I never really felt like I was an equal partner in the classroom. I

MyLab Education

Video Example 5.1

In this video, a sixth-grade special education teacher shares his memories, experiences, and professional growth during his 11-year career. Based on his perspective, what are the benefits and challenges of his job?



5.1 Apply the Concept

Establishing Partnerships for Promoting Successful Transition

A critical role for special education teachers is to facilitate *transition* from the world of school to the world of adulthood. Establishing partnerships to promote transition includes the following tasks:

- Implement the transition plan for each student with a disability that is required by age 16.
- Consider ways to connect with appropriate postsecondary resources: postsecondary education, including junior colleges and vocational training; employment; and community participation.
- Organize transition services as a set of coordinated activities oriented toward producing results.
- Consider the student's preferred interests and goals and facilitate access to appropriate partnerships.
- Design activities aimed at easing the young person's movement into the postschool world.
- Consider that students are at the center of planning their transition and your role is to facilitate their success.
- Establish coordinated relationships with these four primary agencies: Vocational Rehabilitation, the Social Security Administration, state-level agencies, and independent living centers.

always felt like I was the teaching assistant. Furthermore, it was so painful to watch how practices were implemented for students who needed help and weren't getting it. Yet I never really felt anyone was listening to me."

Ms. Peres, a special education teacher, states it this way:

I am convinced that students with disabilities need to be in general education classrooms if at all possible. However, I have learned that we need to prepare them both socially and academically. Much of what we do in special education classrooms does not prepare them for general education. They are used to individual and small-group instruction, receiving lots of feedback and lots of reinforcement, and being relatively free to ask for and receive assistance. This does not reflect what happens in the general education classrooms in this school. Although the teachers are great, they have 28 to 32 students in each class. Large-group instruction and cooperative and independent learning are the most frequently used instructional arrangements.

The first key to making inclusion work is to cooperate with the general classroom teachers and to observe their classrooms to determine the learning and social demands.

The second key is to gain a commitment from the student. He or she has to want to work toward the goal. I always describe the classroom demands to the student, and sometimes he or she goes to observe. Then we plan how we're going to get ready for "going to Mrs. Ferreira's class for math."

The third key is to begin simulating those learning and social demands to assure the inclusion process is successful. I start gradually, typically focusing on the academic demands. I get the lessons and textbooks from the classroom teacher, and I begin to assign the lessons. At first, the rate of learning is matched to the student's learning rate. But once the student is succeeding with the assignments, I begin to increase the rate until it matches that of the general education classroom. As this procedure

continues, I gradually reduce the amount of reinforcement and feedback and work with the student to become a more independent learner.

The fourth key is to monitor the student and to continue to work with the classroom teacher to modify and adapt materials, methods, and the teaching-learning environment as needed.

I've been very successful with this strategy. I have all but 4 of my 14 students included for most of the school day.

Ms. Peres's discussion of how she provides effective instruction and behavioral support for her students in the general education classroom demonstrates that she values communication, collaboration, and consultation with the general education classroom teachers.

Web Resources

What you need to know about special education is described on the Office of Special Education Programs website <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/osep/index.html>.

Understanding the Challenges of General Education Classrooms

Special education teachers need to understand what students with special needs can reasonably expect in general education classrooms so that they can provide the support and skills necessary for success. Although teachers' expectations vary considerably, some common expectations can be noted:

- General education teachers report that they are willing to make adaptations and accommodations that do not require preplanning and can occur during the instructional process. If additional modifications are required (e.g., assignments or tests), then the special education teacher can provide them (see Apply the Concept 5.2).

5.2 Apply the Concept

Adaptations General Education Teachers Are Willing to Make

Teachers identified the following as *highly* feasible to implement:

1. Provide reinforcement and encouragement to assist students with learning.
2. Establish a personal relationship with included students.
3. Involve included students in whole-class activities.
4. Establish routines that are appropriate for included students.
5. Establish expectations for learning and behavior.

Teachers identified the following as not likely to be implemented:

1. Adapt long-range plans to meet the needs of included students.
2. Adjust the physical arrangement of the room to meet the needs of included students.
3. Use alternative materials or adapt current materials for students with special needs.
4. Adapt scoring and grading criteria for students with special needs.
5. Provide individualizing instruction to meet students' special needs.

- Teachers are not willing to provide significant modifications for students with disabilities, particularly at the middle and high school levels.
- Students with disabilities may not participate frequently during class and rarely respond to teachers' questions.
- Undifferentiated large-group instruction is representative of what occurs in general education classrooms, yet one-on-one or small-group instruction is better for students with learning difficulties.

Web Resources

For more information about meeting the needs of all students in inclusive classrooms, see the IRIS website on inclusive education resources and collaboration <http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/>.

Consultation and Collaboration

What are three major models for consultation and collaboration? Although both terms—*consultation* and *collaboration*—are often used to describe the role of many special education teachers, teachers prefer the term *collaboration*. Why? Teachers indicate that they prefer collaborative modes of working on student problems rather than handing over problems to experts or working on them independently (Arguelles, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1996; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). Teachers perceive that the term *collaboration* more accurately describes the nature of their relationships. As one special education teacher noted, “We actually work together to solve problems. It’s not like I have all of the answers or she has all of the problems. We really help each other come up with ideas that work.” We have found that general education teachers feel much the same way.

What is collaboration? *Collaboration* refers to the interaction that occurs between two professionals, often between special education teachers and general education teachers, and to the roles that they play as equal partners in problem-solving endeavors. When teachers collaborate, they

- Work together to solve problems and generate feasible solutions that they implement and evaluate.
- Reflect on their own instructional practices and are eager to make changes that improve outcomes for students.
- Share lessons and instructional practices.
- Observe and provide feedback to each other.

What are some of the ways in which special education teachers might expect to collaborate with other professionals? A significant part of their role is to collaborate with parents and any other specialist who is associated with the teacher’s students with special needs. Whether working as a resource-room teacher, a self-contained special education teacher, or a coteacher, special education teachers also have considerable opportunities to collaborate with general education teachers. They may also work in a program in which most of the workday involves collaboration with other teachers.

One important way in which special education teachers collaborate with general education professionals is in developing ways to make curricula more accessible to students with special needs. Curriculum planning can address such important issues as identifying changes in curriculum that are forecast by national boards and professional groups, identifying the ways in which these new trends will affect the curriculum and students with special needs, examining the scope and sequence of the present curriculum and determining where changes best fit, identifying new goals and discussing the prerequisite skills needed for students with special needs, and identifying areas of mismatch or in which new curriculum is inappropriate for target students.

Additional ways in which special education teachers collaborate with general education teachers include:

- *Coteaching*—Working with classroom teachers to provide instruction together in general education classrooms. For example, a special education teacher might coteach with an English teacher at the secondary level who has several students with disabilities in his class. The goal would be for the special education teacher to provide access to the general education curriculum for the students with disabilities. The special education teacher might provide small-group instruction within the classroom, modify homework assignments, and assist with test preparation and other accommodations for students with disabilities, as needed.
- *Consultant teaching*—Working with classroom teachers to solve problems for students with disabilities who will be included in general education classrooms. For example, the special education teacher may be asked to observe the students with disabilities in the general education classroom as a means to identifying behavioral or instructional practices that might facilitate success for the target students. Another example may be that the special education teacher modifies particular tests or assignments to promote access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. Consultant teaching differs from coteaching in that the special education teacher observes, assesses, and helps plan for instruction but typically does not provide direct instruction in the general education classroom.

- *Coordination of paraprofessionals*—Working with classroom teachers to coordinate and support the activities of paraprofessionals who assist students with disabilities in the general education classroom. For example, the special education teacher may have a paraprofessional assigned to a student with severe behavior problems during science and math in the general education classroom. The student may have the knowledge and skills to benefit from the general education classroom but may not have the appropriate behaviors. The special education teacher could provide the paraprofessional with the guidelines for positive behavioral support to enhance the student's success in the classroom.
- *Teacher assistance teams (TATs)*—Participating in school-based teams of professionals, classroom teachers, and administrators that assist classroom teachers in meeting the instructional and behavior needs of individual students. For example, the special education teacher might organize grade-level meetings at the elementary level (e.g., all fourth-grade teachers meet at the same time) or content-area meetings at the middle school level (e.g., all social studies teachers meet at the same time) to discuss ways to promote successful learning and behavior for students with learning and behavior problems.
- Determine how to adjust instruction when students make minimal progress in interventions.
- Observe for evidence-based practices during classroom instruction and intervention and provide feedback and suggestions as needed.

In summary, the critical role for the special education teacher is to collaborate with all key stakeholders in the school, including school psychologists, speech and language specialists, general education teachers, and school leaders, to make critical decisions about (1) determining and implementing research-based practices, (2) collecting and using ongoing data to make effective decisions for students with learning and behavioral problems, (3) identifying appropriate practices for differentiating instruction within the classroom and interventions, and (4) communicating effectively with all key stakeholders so that appropriate instruction is provided to all students with learning and behavior problems. Check out the **National Association of State Directors of Special Education** website for interesting resources on collaboration and response to intervention.

Collaboration Within a Response to Intervention Framework

What is the role of the special education teacher within a response to intervention (RTI) framework? RTI has provided new opportunities and expectations for cooperation between special education teachers and general education teachers. Special education teachers may meet and plan with general education teachers about the Tier 2 interventions provided in math and reading and may also play a significant role in providing interventions for students in Tier 3. What are some of the collaborative activities that special education teachers may engage in within an RTI framework? A few considerations follow (Ciullo et al., 2016; Haager & Mahdavi, 2007; Hoover & Patton, 2008):

- Organize screening and progress-monitoring measures, and determine cut points for which students will be provided reading and math intervention.
- Determine how interventions should be implemented and organized.
- Develop a checklist for high-quality implementation of interventions.
- Develop training for teachers and paraprofessionals to provide high-quality intervention.
- Determine how to adjust interventions to meet the needs of students performing at a range of grade levels and with varying instructional needs.
- Administrators designate a common time for collaborating professionals (e.g., all fifth-grade team members) to work together.
- School boards pay professionals for one extra time period each week that can be used to collaborate or meet with families.
- School districts provide early dismissal for students one day a week so that team members have a common planning time.
- Teachers meet for brief but focused planning periods on a regularly scheduled basis.
- Resources such as administrators, families, volunteers, and university students are used to help cover classes.

Resources Needed for Collaboration

No resource impedes successful collaboration more than time. Special and general education teachers confirm the difficulties of finding adequate time to effectively collaborate during the workday (R. Goddard, Y. Goddard, Sook Kim, & Miller, 2015; Stivers, 2008). If time is not built into teachers' schedules, collaboration is unlikely to occur on a regular basis. Furthermore, if it is not part of the schedule, then teachers come to resent having to collaborate because it means taking time from their personal schedules. Another critical aspect of time management for special education teachers is finding mutually available time when they can collaborate with the many teachers with whom they work. Time management is especially challenging at the secondary level. Following are some ways in which collaborative time can be arranged (Vaughn, Bos, & Schumm, 2017):

For example, short planning sessions may be scheduled during recess when larger groups of students can be monitored by a teacher and a volunteer.

Space for meeting is another necessary resource. Special education teachers are often fortunate because they have an office or a small classroom for their materials. But finding a quiet place to meet is particularly challenging in schools where overcrowding is the norm.

Additionally, participants in collaborative models need to be familiar with procedures for successful collaboration. An orientation that addresses basic questions about their roles and responsibilities is helpful to all personnel who are involved in collaboration. Administrative support can be crucial to ensuring that teachers are given appropriate time, space, and knowledge of procedures to implement an effective collaborative model.

Like other educational approaches, consultation and collaboration models have the potential for benefit as well as misuse and misunderstanding. Apply the Concept 5.3 describes potential benefits and challenges.

Collaboration Issues and Dilemmas

All special education teachers work collaboratively with general education teachers, and many special education

teachers work with general education teachers at least 50% of the time. Consequently, special education teachers need to recognize several issues and dilemmas to perform their job effectively.

1. *Student ownership.* Traditionally, special education students have been the responsibility of the special education teacher, even if they were placed in a general education classroom for part of the day. This perspective is no longer feasible or desirable. The new perspective is one of shared ownership whereby all educators feel responsible for the success of the student with special needs.

2. *Individual versus class focus.* General education teachers have the responsibility for all students in their class. Particularly at the upper elementary and secondary grade levels, general education teachers focus on teaching the content and less on teaching individual students. This contrasts with the focus of special education teachers, whose planning and instruction aim at the needs of individual students. These differing perspectives may mean that general and special education teachers need to develop solutions that promote content support within a model that provides the necessary instructional support for students with special needs. Mrs. Vermillion put it this way, "I am a special education teacher, and so the direction of my interest is always with the individual student and how the educational setting

5.3 Apply the Concept

Benefits and Challenges of Consultation and Collaboration

Consultation and collaboration models have several potential benefits and challenges.

Potential Benefits

1. Coordinated academic and behavioral support provided to students with disabilities by special and general educators.
2. A better program for students resulting from better understanding across education disciplines.
3. On-the-job training for general and special education teachers, increasing knowledge and skills for effectively meeting the requirements of students with special needs.
4. Reduced mislabeling of students as disabled.
5. Suitability in meeting the needs of secondary school students.
6. Spillover benefits to general education students from working cooperatively with the special education teacher.

Potential Challenges

1. Excessive caseload management for special education teachers.

2. Unrealistic expectations from viewing the consulting model as a panacea and/or undertraining and overloading the special education teacher.
3. Inadequate support and cooperation from classroom teachers.
4. Converting the model to a tutoring model or perceiving the role of special education teachers as paraprofessional.
5. Providing inadequate funding to implement the model.
6. Faulty assumptions about cost savings or program effectiveness.
7. Unrealistic expectations for student changes in academic and/or behavioral outcomes.
8. Inadequate preparation for vocational experiences after school.
9. Inadequate time to plan, communicate, and effectively instruct target students.

Overall, the most important question to address is whether students with learning and behavior problems are having their needs met through a consultation and collaborative model. The model may be highly effective for some students and less so for others.

can be altered to meet his or her needs. During the last few years, I realize that I've needed to adjust my perspective if I am to work effectively with classroom teachers. When they think about planning for students, they think about the class as a whole." What are some of the changes Mrs. Vermillion has instituted so that she can have a more successful connection with the general education teacher?

- Develop materials, including assessments and homework, that are content appropriate, enhance learning for all students, and meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- Spend additional time learning the content so that she can provide appropriate accommodations for students.
- Look for resources for the general education teacher (e.g., books, charts, videos) that provide content instruction but also support learning of students with disabilities.

3. *Content versus accommodation.* When classroom teachers discuss their planning and instruction, one of the most consistent themes is content coverage (Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Solis et al., 2012). Classroom teachers recognize that state and national laws pressure them to cover more content. Jon Lau, a ninth-grade science teacher, says, "Waiting until the students understand would result in lack of adequate coverage of material. It is my responsibility to cover the content in the time I am allocated."

This notion of content coverage as the horse leading the instructional wagon is a consistent and pervasive problem in general education and now directly influences the instruction of students with special needs. The focus on content coverage is particularly heightened in light of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards in many states (<http://www.corestandards.org/>); states that have not adopted the Common Core State Standards have their own progressive state standards with similar requirements. There is some consensus that "less is more" and that a reduced focus on content coverage might enhance the quality of instruction for all learners.

You can imagine the difficulty for classroom teachers who feel pressured to cover extensive amounts of content when special education teachers make suggestions that slow down the pace or require them to make adaptations for students' special learning needs. This issue is not insolvable. Teachers are willing to make adaptations and accommodations they believe will help students and do not require extensive amounts of preparation.

4. *New roles for special education teachers.* Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for teachers who are learning to work collaboratively with other teachers is that they assume different roles than those they previously had. These roles can include supporting special education students in the general education classroom; teaching with another teacher in a content area in which they have little or no background knowledge, particularly at the secondary level; helping

students with assignments; and engaging in disciplining and classroom management of a range of students. A veteran special education teacher tells of the changing roles and responsibilities of moving from her own classroom to coteaching with other teachers. She discusses this role shift with the kind of nostalgia that shows that she misses many of the comforts of her own classroom and routines, yet realizes that many students are benefiting from her engagement in the general education classroom (Klingner & Vaughn, 2002).

What are some of the activities of special education teachers who are working more collaboratively with general education teachers? They spend the majority of their time in general education classrooms either monitoring the learning and behavior of target students or teaching a large group of students (six or more but not the entire class) (Harbort et al., 2007). Less frequently occurring activities include responding to students' comments or questions, small-group instruction (fewer than six students), extended individual student interaction, and managing behavior.

5. *Real world versus the student's world.* Another dichotomy between general and special education teachers is the purpose of education. Classroom teachers feel they are preparing students for the "real world." From their perspective, people in the real world do not make accommodations for different learning styles. Fundamentally, they view the real world as expecting the same from everybody and therefore, to best prepare young people, their role as teachers is to expect the same from every student.

Ms. McDowell, a secondary special education teacher, handles the problem this way: "When classroom teachers talk to me about the real world, I'm prepared. First, I present them with the idea that students are never going to be successful in the real world if they do not have an opportunity to learn and experience success in their present world. Their present world is that teacher's classroom. Second, I present them with the fact that employers are required by law to make reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities. Also, I never ask general education teachers to make adaptations or accommodations that aren't useful to most students in the classroom." In fact, instructional interventions that are used to improve learning for students with disabilities are at least as effective—and sometimes more effective—for students without disabilities (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000; Vaughn et al., 2009).

Web Resources

See Student Progress <https://rti4success.org/essential-components-rti/progress-monitoring> for descriptions of screening and progress-monitoring measures.

Coteaching

Coteaching, or cooperative teaching, occurs when general and special education teachers work cooperatively to ensure that all students in the classroom, including those with disabilities, are provided appropriate instruction. Coteaching can be conducted in several ways but typically involves the general and special education teachers' sharing planning, presentation, assessment, and classroom management to promote successful outcomes. Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2008) also remind us what coteaching is not. Coteaching is not one person teaching while another prepares materials, not one person's views dominating instructional decision making, not tutoring, and not one person watching while another teaches.

What are some of the models for coteaching and collaborative instruction between general and special education teachers? Table 5.1 provides a description of several approaches and the roles of teachers in their implementation (Solis et al., 2012). It is important to note that it is likely that each of these approaches would be used while coteaching, depending on instructional goals and students' needs.

See Apply the Concept 5.4 for a description of questions to consider in preparing for a successful coteaching experience.

Although some debate has arisen over the effectiveness of coteaching as a way to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2007; Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016), limited data indicate that coteaching

Table 5.1 Coteaching Approaches

Type of Coteaching	Description	General Education Teacher's Role	Special Education Teacher's Role
Classroom Teacher Instructs	Classroom teacher is primarily responsible for instruction. Special education teacher monitors students' work and provides instruction individually and in small groups as needed, targeting students with disabilities.	Lead teacher	Support
General and Special Education Teacher Instructs	Both the general and special education teacher are responsible for teaching groups of students with an aim for providing more targeted instruction to heterogeneous groups of students.	Lead teacher	Lead teacher
Station Teaching	Students work in small groups and either move from learning activity to learning activity or stay in one place and teachers move to them.	Lead teacher	Lead teacher
Homogeneous Groups	Students who understand key ideas and concepts are provided extended instruction by classroom teacher, while students with additional learning needs are provided instruction by special education teacher.	Extends teaching	Addresses students' learning needs
Whole-Class Team Teaching	Teachers work together cooperatively to teach a whole-class lesson. One teacher may take the lead role, while the other interjects information or questions, makes clarifications, or restates information to increase understanding among all students.	Lead teacher	Lead teacher

5.4 Apply the Concept

Coteaching Perceptions

Consider asking and answering these questions with your coteacher as a means for determining areas of strength and potential areas to focus on within your coteaching setting:

1. We both have equal access to all information about general education students in the class?
2. We both have equal access to all information about special education students in the class?
3. We both are perceived by key administrators as appropriate contacts for issues about the class?
4. We both are perceived by parents as appropriate contacts for issues about the class?
5. If a problem with a student arises, we are both comfortable addressing it and communicating with each other about it?
6. We have adequate time to plan?
7. We both have access to materials in the classroom?
8. The desks and chairs for both teachers are equivalent?
9. Decisions about what to teach are shared?
10. Decisions about how to teach are discussed and agreed upon?
11. Decisions about adaptations to meet the special learning needs of students are discussed and agreed upon?
12. Decisions about adaptations to tests and other evaluations are discussed and agreed upon?
13. We provide each other with feedback that is useful and improves our instruction?
14. We coteach effectively and with few difficulties?
15. We respect the contributions of our coteacher?
16. We communicate and problem solve problems effectively?

can have a positive impact on student achievement (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Of course, the effectiveness of coteaching is related to what students need to learn and whether they can learn it well within a coteaching setting. Generally, teachers report that they benefited professionally from coteaching. They also report increased cooperation among students within their class and additional time and attention for students with disabilities. Teachers did consistently express concerns that many of the students with disabilities demonstrated significantly low academic skills with learning needs that were difficult to meet in the general education classroom (Scruggs et al., 2007).

One successful model for coteaching engaged the special and general education teacher in an embedded professional development within the coteaching situation so that both professionals have opportunities to “learn together” and improve their knowledge (Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015). This way each teacher acquires expertise and learns to appreciate both what she knows and what she can learn from her coteacher.

Villa and coworkers (2008) indicate that coteaching is likely to be beneficial when:

- Teachers’ use of collaborative skills increases teacher responsiveness. When teachers share ideas, work together, and promote each other’s successes in the classroom, all students are provided improved instruction. When collaboration is effective, a broader range of students has access to the curriculum.
- Teachers support and identify the use of research-based practices. In coteaching settings, teachers can structure classrooms to use various grouping practices, reducing the prevailing use of whole-class instruction and increasing small-group and peer teaching. Coteaching also provides opportunities for teachers to identify research-based practices and inform each other of ways to more effectively implement these practices.
- Teachers use problem solving to provide individualized learning and meet all students’ needs. Teachers who identify learning and behavior problems in their class and solve problems to more effectively meet the needs of students are likely to yield beneficial learning outcomes.
- Teachers empower each other through coteaching. Teachers who effectively coteach can empower each other through collaborative decision making, confirming effective practices, and sharing difficult situations.

How Coteaching Works

When coteaching, special and general education teachers plan broad, overall goals and desired outcomes for the class as a whole as well as for specific students in the class. Both special and general classroom teachers lead instruction during the same instructional period. Although one teacher may provide some instruction to the group as a whole, most of

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Video Example 5.2

In this video, a teacher describes the importance of collaboration with other professionals. She discusses coteaching and the process of learning and sharing ideas with an experienced teacher. From her perspective, what are the benefits and challenges of coteaching?



the instructional time involves both teachers working with small groups or with individual students. Because students are frequently grouped heterogeneously, the special education teacher works with many students, including those who are identified as benefiting from special education. Complementary instruction and supportive learning activities are part of the teachers’ coplanning and instruction.

Coteaching Models Coteaching involves much more than just putting a special and a general education teacher in the same classroom. For example, Weiss and Lloyd (2002, 2003) found that in coteaching situations it was often difficult for special education teachers to provide the type of focused, explicit instruction that they used in special education classrooms. Therefore, to be successful, both teachers must carefully plan what role each will take and the type of instruction they will each provide.

Teachers can implement a variety of coteaching models. Many teachers select a coteaching model based on both overall instructional goals and the individual needs of students in the classroom. Before choosing a coteaching model, the general and special education teachers need to decide what lesson or unit will be taught, being careful to consider general education curriculum requirements as well as the individual needs of students with disabilities specified on their individualized education program (IEP). Most teachers find that they use more than one model during a week and even during a day. Following are several coteaching models that teachers have found useful (Conderman, Bresnahan, & Pedersen, 2009; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997). For further information on coteaching, check out the website of the **National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities**.

Model A: One Group; One Lead Teacher, One Teacher “Teaching on Purpose” Many teachers in coteaching situations end up spending their time grazing, that is, going from student to student, to make sure they are following along, but without a specific plan or goal in mind. “Teaching on purpose” is a method of checking for understanding and providing short installments of explicit instruction that are related to key ideas, concepts, or vocabulary from the main lesson. When teaching on purpose, one of the teachers gives short lessons to individuals, pairs, or small groups of students during or as a follow-up to whole-group instruction. In 1 or 2 minutes, the teacher who is teaching on

purpose might approach a student after instruction by the lead teacher to follow up on key ideas and concepts, encourage participation, answer questions, or review directions. In about 5 minutes, the teacher can review concepts and vocabulary or check for understanding. If further instruction is needed, the teacher can take a bit longer to provide a mini lesson that is related to the main lesson (e.g., how to find the main idea). When coteaching is used effectively, the teacher has a specific objective in mind and targets particular students to ensure that they are learning specified material. Some examples of what coteachers can do when they teach on purpose include:

- Reinforce big ideas of the lesson to one or two students.
- Ask a student a question related to the overall instruction to see if the student is learning.
- Ask students to write the key word or words about what they are learning.
- Connect what students are currently learning to previous learning.
- Check written work, and provide specific feedback and suggestions.

Model B: Two Mixed-Ability Groups; Two Teachers Teach the Same Content In Model B, the class is divided into two mixed-ability groups, and each teacher instructs one group. The purpose of this coteaching model is to reduce the group size to increase the number of opportunities for students to participate and interact with one another and to have their responses and knowledge monitored by a teacher. This format is often used when difficult new content is introduced or when smaller groups are beneficial for certain instructional activities, such as discussion. For example, the coteachers may divide the class into two heterogeneous groups during the discussion of a book that has been read as a whole group. At the end of the lesson, the two groups come together to summarize what they learned and to integrate information between groups. Some other examples of when you might use this grouping format include:

- One teacher is doing a science lab experiment with half of the class while the other teacher is reviewing key ideas related to learning from the experiment.
- One teacher is teaching about a controversial issue in social studies (e.g., socialism versus capitalism), and the other teacher is teaching the same content, but the small groups allow students more opportunities for discussion.
- One teacher is reviewing key grammatical functions related to paragraph writing with half of the students who need the lesson, while the other teacher is working on composing five-paragraph essays.

Model C: Two Same-Ability Groups; Teachers Teach Different Content Students are divided into two groups on the

basis of their skill level in the topic area. One teacher reteaches, while the other teacher provides alternative information or extension activities to the second group. For example, during a unit on fractions, one teacher can lead a reteaching activity on dividing the parts of a whole, while the other teacher facilitates an activity on creating story problems using fractions. In effective coteaching, the general education teacher does not always assume the role of lead teacher, nor does the special education teacher always reteach. Teachers share responsibilities and alter roles from one lesson to the next.

Model D: Multiple Groups; Teachers Monitor/Teach Model D is often used during cooperative learning activities and in reading groups and learning centers. One option for Model D is to have several heterogeneous groups and one or two homogeneous groups based on skill level. One or both teachers work with groups for the entire period. For example, during reading in Ms. Chamber's fifth-grade class, the special education teacher, Mrs. Scholar, provides reading instruction to a group of students with low reading ability that includes several students with disabilities. The classroom teacher has two other groups who rotate between working in centers and working with her in a group. Another example is Mr. Young's third-grade math class in which Mrs. Scholar and he arrange for four groups of students to rotate between them and two centers during a 50-minute period. This allows each teacher to work with a relatively small group of students (approximate five to seven) for 25 minutes every day. Another possibility during social studies or science is to have students move in small groups through four or five centers. Two centers are teacher assisted, and the remaining centers have activities that can be done independently by groups. Students might also work in cooperative groups or pairs while both teachers provide mini lessons and monitor progress.

Model E: Whole Class; Two Teachers Teach Together In this model, teachers work cooperatively to teach a lesson. One teacher may lead the whole-class lesson, while the other teacher interjects to clarify the material. Often the general education teacher provides curriculum material, and the special education teacher adds strategies to help students with disabilities remember key ideas and organize information. For example, teachers might spend 10 minutes modeling problem-solving techniques and explaining directions for a science lesson on observation in which students will work cooperatively to record observations and make predictions about a "mystery matter." One teacher lists the steps of the activity, while the other points to a flowchart indicating the correct sequence to follow. The next section on coteaching with secondary students contains a description of activities that Mr. Prudhi (a special education teacher) might use to support instruction. These examples are very relevant for the model of two teachers teaching together.

What do we know about which of these models are most frequently used for coteaching between special and general education teachers? Pancsofar and Petroff (2016) report that teachers most frequently indicated that they implemented a coteaching approach in which one of the teachers designs and delivers a lesson and the other teacher provides individualized support to specific students with disabilities. The model that teachers indicated was used least frequently was one in which the general and special education teacher coplanned and co-instructed instructional lessons. Consider the frequently large number of student cases for which special education teachers are responsible; it may be that time limits their coplanning and instructing, and thus assuming roles in which one teaches and the other provides individualized support to the student(s) with disabilities is the most efficient.

Web Resources

To learn more about coteaching, look for the **www.youtube** presentation: *Successful Co-Teaching: Keys to Team Development* for great coteaching ideas.

Coteaching with Secondary Students Coteaching varies necessarily between elementary and secondary levels. At the elementary level, it is not uncommon for coteaching to occur for as much as half of the day. In these settings, the special education teacher may have as many as six to eight students in two target classrooms for most or all of the day. The special education teacher could then spend several hours a day in each of those classrooms coteaching with the general education teacher. For example, the special education teacher, Ms. Gentry, coteaches with the fourth-grade teacher, Mr. Marcus, and the fifth-grade teacher, Ms. Lau. She teaches reading and math in the morning with Mr. Marcus and then again with Ms. Lau in the afternoon. The special education teacher coplans reading and math activities with the general education teacher, and both decide how to target and support the learning of the students with disabilities.

At the secondary level, coteaching is different for the special education teacher, Mr. Prudhi. He would describe his role as more of a supportive teacher (Villa et al., 2008), meaning that the content-area teachers for math, social studies, and science take primary responsibility for designing and delivering the lesson, and his role is to support instruction for students with disabilities. What are some of the activities that Mr. Prudhi might perform within the supportive teaching role?

He might

- Determine the big idea of the instructional unit that week, and make it clear to the students with special needs.

- Identify the key academic vocabulary and concepts related to learning the unit, and teach those to students with special needs to ensure that they can learn the content.
- Identify resources that would facilitate learning for students with special needs, such as supportive texts written at levels the student can read, technology that would provide access to visual images or other information to promote learning, and/or a video that would make some of the key concepts more accessible.
- Conduct a pretest on the material to be taught that week to determine what students know and what they need to know to successfully master the information that week.
- Provide modifications to assignments, homework, or assessments so that they are accessible to students with disabilities.
- Communicate with key personnel at the school to facilitate learning for target students.
- Communicate with parents to facilitate learning for target students.
- Develop resources, such as overheads, PowerPoint slides, graphs, and other learning devices, to facilitate learning for all students.
- Provide 60-second lessons to key students to reinforce ideas taught and ensure learning.
- Provide small-group lessons to key students as needed.
- Follow up with students to ensure learning is sustained and connected to previous learning.

Apply the Concept 5.5 provides guidelines for effective coteaching in elementary school classes for students with learning and behavior problems.

Coplanning Special education teachers often coplan with general education teachers for the students with special needs who are in their classrooms. Sometimes special education teachers also coteach in those classrooms; at other times, they assist the teacher in planning and making adaptations for students with special needs to lessons that will be taught without their assistance or facilitate development of appropriate evaluations or homework assignments.

In long-range coplanning, special education and general education teachers plan broad overall goals and outcomes for a class and the specific students with disabilities who are in that class. This coplanning of broad goals occurs quarterly or more frequently, as needed, and accommodates the IEPs of students with disabilities.

Special education and general education teachers may also coplan specific lessons and outcomes for a unit of study or for a designated period (e.g., weekly). The planning pyramid (Schumm, 2006; Schumm, Vaughn, & Harris, 1997)

5.5 Apply the Concept

Guidelines for Effective Coteaching

Effective coteaching involves the following:

1. Voluntary participants. Teachers choose to work together and do not perceive that they are forced into a collaborative teaching situation (Scruggs et al., 2007). Ms. Andrews is a special education teacher who has been coteaching in three fourth-grade classrooms for several years to assist children with learning and behavior problems. She began collaborating after attending a workshop on coteaching with the fourth-grade team from her school. She says the reason she and her team are successful is because "we enjoy working together, have compatible teaching styles, and feel comfortable discussing differences."

2. Shared responsibility. Teachers combine their knowledge and resources to plan instruction. Therefore, they also share the accountability for the outcomes of those decisions.

3. Reciprocity of ideas. While the amount and nature of input will vary by teacher, both teachers must accept each other's contributions as integral to the collaborative process.

4. Problem solving. Not only must teachers collaborate to identify and find solutions to meet student needs, they also must accept that problems will arise when two professionals work together to coordinate instruction. Dealing with problems that arise during collaboration is not so different from finding solutions to student problems. To solve a problem, it is helpful to identify concerns, share information regarding the problem, brainstorm possible solutions, evaluate the ideas, create a solution plan, try the solution, and evaluate its success (Villa et al., 2008).

5. Interactive communication. Effective communication occurs when teachers trust each other and are not afraid to voice either their agreement or their disagreement, when they communicate accurately and directly, and when they remain sensitive to differences (Villa et al., 2008).

6. Conflict resolution. Disagreements and even arguments are inevitable in any collaborative process. Implementing a plan to resolve conflicts can lead to better solutions than if the problem is ignored (Idol, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 2000).

provides a process for coplanning by special and general education teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. As can be seen in Figure 5.1, a form for unit planning, and in Figures 5.2 and 5.3, forms for lesson planning, forms can be used to facilitate the process. Working together, teachers complete

the forms to identify their objectives, materials needed, and their roles and responsibilities in delivering the instruction. While planning, the special education teacher can provide ideas for adaptations, clarification, scaffolding, and use of materials to facilitate learning. Essential to the success of the planning pyramid is the identification of core ideas,

Figure 5.1 Unit-planning Form

	Date: _____	Class Period: _____
	Unit Title: _____	
<div style="text-align: center;"> </div>	Materials/Resources:	
What some students will learn.	_____	
What most students will learn.	_____	
What all students should learn.	_____	
	Instructional Strategies/Adaptations:	

	Evaluation/Products:	

Figure 5

Time F
Goals:

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Figure 5.2 Weekly Coplanning Form

Time Period: _____	Week Of: _____	Content Area: _____
Goals:	General Education (GE)	Special Education (SE)
Activities:	GE	SE
Monday	_____	_____
Tuesday	_____	_____
Wednesday	_____	_____
Thursday	_____	_____
Friday	_____	_____
Material(s):	GE	SE
Monday	_____	_____
Tuesday	_____	_____
Wednesday	_____	_____
Thursday	_____	_____
Friday	_____	_____
Groups/Students:	GE	SE
Monday	_____	_____
Tuesday	_____	_____
Wednesday	_____	_____
Thursday	_____	_____
Friday	_____	_____
Evaluation:	_____	Other: _____
	_____	_____

concepts, vocabulary, and/or principles that the teachers determine to be essential for all students to learn. This information is entered at the base of the pyramid. Information that the teacher deems important for most students to learn is written in the middle of the pyramid. Information for a few students to learn is written at the top of the pyramid. Teachers who implement the planning pyramid find that it not only facilitates the organization of the material they intend to teach, but also provides guidelines for instruction.

Successful Coteaching Joyce Duryea is an elementary special education teacher who has worked as a resource-room teacher for 9 years (Klingner & Vaughn, 2002, provide a case study of Joyce if you would like to read more about her). She was asked to work collaboratively with three general education teachers who had approximately five students with disabilities in each of their classrooms. Joyce said, "When I was preparing to be a special education teacher, it never occurred to me that I would need to know how to coteach in a general education classroom. I always thought I would have my group of students with special needs and that is the way it would be." However, she has found her new role exciting and challenging. Joyce puts it

this way: "I think I'm a better teacher now, and I definitely have a much better understanding of what goes on in the general education classroom and what kinds of expectations I need to have for my students."

Several core issues must be addressed if coteaching partnerships are likely to succeed (Pugach & Winn, 2011; Scruggs et al., 2007):

- *Who gives grades, and how do we grade?* Perhaps the issue that warrants the most discussion before coteaching is grading. Special education teachers are accustomed to grading based on the effort, motivation, and abilities of their students. General education teachers consider grades from the perspective of a uniform set of expectations. Communicating about grading procedures for in-class assignments, tests, and homework will reduce the friction that is frequently associated with grading students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Grading can be particularly challenging at the secondary level, where grades can be used to make high-stakes decisions about access to postsecondary education, rank in class, and graduation. Review Apply the Concept 5.6 for information on questions to consider about grading when coteaching.

Figure 5.3 Example Elementary Coteaching Lesson Plan

General Educator: <u>Ms. Marco</u>		Special Educator: <u>Ms. Sanders</u>		Grade: <u>5</u>	
Date	Coteaching Technique	Specific Teacher Tasks	Materials	Evaluation	Individual Student Needs
2/8	Model B: Two mixed-ability groups	Literary Discussion: Both teachers lead discussions on the class reading of <i>The Cay</i> . In each group, teacher and students write comprehension questions. Students call on volunteers to respond to their questions. Teacher interjects throughout the discussion, making sure all students have a chance to ask and answer questions.	Student copies of <i>The Cay</i> Discussion journals	Evaluate discussion journals Monitor participation	Assist Roger in formulating a response to share with class; remind Sam to pause first to organize thoughts before responding; Joe completes journal on computer
2/9	Model D: Five same-ability groups	Literacy Groups: Teachers each work with one of the two lower groups to provide explicit instruction in word analysis. The other three student groups work independently to complete reading and literacy assignments.	Student books Reading log	Chart number of words decoded correctly Evaluate reading logs	Ms. M: Mini lesson on <i>r</i> -controlled vowels Ms. S: Reteach syllabication strategy for decoding
2/10	Model D: Six mixed-ability groups	Survival Centers: Ms. S works at the Vocabulary center with Roger's group. She then follows his group to the Survival Word Game station and provides a word-building mini lesson. Ms. S remains at the Word Building station and provides a building words mini lesson to Sandy's group. Ms. M monitors the remaining groups.	Center activities	Monitor group work Evaluate student work in word building	Roger works in a pair instead of in a foursome; Sandy brings behavior contract to stations
2/11	Model A: One group: Teaching on purpose	Research Reports: Ms. S gives directions for research report. Ms. M monitors work while Ms. S sees three small skill-level groups (10–12 minutes each) to work on fluency/decoding.	Step-by-step research planners	Record fluency progress on student charts Evaluate planners	Roger uses modified research planner; Joe and Pedro complete work on computer
2/12	Model C: Two groups: One reteach	Research Reports: Ms. S works with students who are ready to begin research while Ms. M reteaches students who need assistance to develop a plan for their individual research projects.	Step-by-step research planners Research materials	Evaluate planners	Julie and Sam paraphrase steps before writing; Joe and Pedro complete work on computer

- *Whose classroom management rules do we use, and who enforces them?* Most general and special education teachers know the types of academic and social behaviors they find acceptable and unacceptable. Rarely is there disagreement between teachers about the more extreme behaviors; however, the subtle classroom

management issues that are part of the ongoing routines of running a classroom can cause concerns for teachers. It is beneficial for teachers to discuss their classroom management styles and their expectations for each other in maintaining a smoothly running classroom. Critical to success is determining when and with

5.6 Apply the Concept

Considerations About Students' Grades When Coteaching

When coteaching, it is important to determine the role each teacher will have in determining grades for students.

- Are both teachers involved in determining grades for all students? Are students assigned to a particular teacher for a grade?
- What is the classroom grading policy? How is that communicated to students?
- For specific assignments, what criteria will be applied for grading and who will do the grading?
- How do we consider modification and accommodations for students with disabilities in our grading policy?
- How do we determine final grades for the class?
- Who communicates grades to family members and discusses grades if there are issues?

whom the special education teacher should intervene for discipline purposes.

- *What space do I get?* When a special education teacher spends part of his day instructing in another teacher's classroom, it is extremely useful to have a designated area for the special education teacher to keep materials. Special education teachers who coteach for part of the school day in another teacher's classroom feel more at home and are better accepted by the students when they have a legitimate claim on space, including a designated desk and chair.
- *What do we tell the students?* Teachers often wonder whether students should be told that they have two teachers or whether they should reveal that one of the teachers is a special education teacher. We think that it is a good idea to inform the students that they will be having two teachers and to introduce the special teacher as a "learning abilities" specialist. Students both accept and like the idea of having two teachers. In interviews with elementary students who had two teachers (special education and general education), the students revealed that they very much liked having two teachers in the classroom (Klingner, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998). Similarly, early in the school year, the teachers should inform parents that their child will have two teachers and that both will be responsible for their child's learning.
- *How can we find time to coplan and coordinate?* The most pervasive concern of both general and special education teachers who coteach is finding enough time during the school day to plan and discuss their instruction and the learning of their students. This is of particular concern for special education teachers who are working with more than one general education teacher. Teachers need a minimum of 45 minutes of uninterrupted planning time each week if they are to have a successful coteaching experience. One suggestion that has been made by several of the teacher teams with whom we have worked is to designate a day or a half-day every 6 to 8 weeks when teachers meet exclusively to plan and discuss the progress of students as well as changes in their instructional practices.
- *How do we ensure parity between teachers?* Teachers consistently report that having equal footing in the classroom is the preferred working arrangement for successful coteaching. There may be occasional examples of a teacher having considerably more knowledge and expertise and thus serving as the mentor for the coteacher, but typically when teachers view themselves and each other as having skills and knowledge to benefit the coteaching situation, success is more likely. Neither teacher wants to think of himself as a paraprofessional working alongside the "real" teacher.
- *How do we know if it's working?* Many teachers work so hard to make coteaching work that they overlook the most important goal: ensuring that students learn. Teachers must collect and evaluate student data to determine whether instruction is effective. A general rule to follow if students are not making adequate progress is to increase the intensity of instruction and decrease the teacher-student ratio. In addition to student learning, it is important that coteachers take time to evaluate the coteaching process. Dieker (2001) found that effective coteachers discussed their roles and responsibilities on an ongoing basis and made adjustments as needed.

Differentiating Instruction with Collaborative and Coteaching Approaches

Classrooms have students demonstrating a range of academic and behavioral needs. Students who are gifted and students with significant cognitive challenges are often in the same classroom, requiring instruction that is appropriate to facilitate their progress. It is essential that teachers are

able to apply principles of *differentiated instruction*, which can be defined as (Schumm & Avalos, 2009):

- Aligning instructional practices to the special needs of the learner.
- Determining the learning interests of students and refining instruction and assignment to meet learning goals and also reflect their learning interests.
- Generating many options for responding to the instructional and behavioral needs of the range of learners without requiring a fixed approach or response for everyone.
- Considering curriculum enhancement and modification (Alquraini & Gut, 2012).
- Developing fluency with skills and concepts already learned.
- Applying what students have learned to new situations.
- Reviewing previously learned skills and concepts.
- Extending what students know through research and other project-based activities.

Learning stations or centers provide a way to facilitate differentiated instruction. For example, Jana Smithers uses literacy stations during her reading/language arts block. While Jana works with one of her four guided reading groups, the other three groups move through one of three stations with resources and materials. Apply the Concept 5.7 provides guidance for how to use learning stations.

When differentiating instruction for students, consider what they can do well, the ways in which they demonstrate learning, and any behavior challenges they may have.

Consider adjusting “where” they work, “with whom” they work, “how they work,” and the materials and resources they need to work successfully. Adjusting with whom they work can be as simple as providing them a partner who can facilitate their learning and behavior success or keeping them in learning settings that exclude individuals who seem to instigate their learning or behavior problems.

Working with Other Professionals

What is the role of the special education teacher as a consultant to general education teachers, and what are the considerations and barriers for successful inclusion? Consulting and communicating with professionals is an important task for teachers of students with learning and behavior problems. Teachers need to develop and maintain contact with the school psychologist, counselor, speech-language therapist, physical therapist, occupational therapist, principal, and other related professionals. Because 90% of all students with learning and behavior disorders are included for all or part of the day in the general classroom, a positive, cooperative working relationship with general classroom teachers may be most important of all.

Communication with General Education Teachers

When a student with a learning or behavior problem is placed in the general education classroom, the special

5.7 Apply the Concept

Using Learning Stations to Differentiate Instruction

Consider the following guidelines for establishing learning stations or centers that differentiate instruction for the range of learners in your classroom:

- Are students in groups that maximize the likelihood for success for all students? For example, if the task at the center has some challenging aspects, ensure that the groups are heterogeneous, representing a range of learning abilities. If the tasks at the center are reviewing previously learned materials representing a range of abilities, arrange same-ability groups.
- Provide directions that are clear and contain icons or pictures as well as written directions to ensure that all learners will know what to do. It is often helpful to demonstrate expectations at each center prior to releasing students to work in the group centers.
- Specify the expected outcome for each center and whether there is an expected product for each student or one group product.
- Ensure that the task at the center is reasonable to complete in the time specified, typically 15 to 30 minutes. It is often helpful to differentiate expectations so that some students may be expected to complete more during the center time than other students.
- Provide opportunities for feedback and support so that students know whether they are completing the center activities correctly prior to the end of center time.
- Provide adaptations for how the task can be completed to differentiate learning needs; for example, some students may complete the task in writing, others may tell their response to other students, or others may illustrate with a diagram or drawing.

education teacher can take several steps to communicate effectively with the general education teacher:

1. Describe the type of learning or behavior problem the child has and some general guidelines for how to deal with it in the general classroom.
2. Provide a copy of the child's IEP to the classroom teacher, and discuss the goals, objectives, special materials, and procedures needed.
3. Describe the progress reports you will be providing to the home and putting in your files.
4. Develop a schedule for regular meetings, and discuss other times that both the classroom teacher and special teacher are available for meetings.
5. Ask the classroom teacher how you can help, and describe the special accommodations that are needed.

Even when special education teachers develop and maintain an effective communication program with general education teachers, a number of potential barriers to successful inclusion still remain:

1. *The general education teacher may feel unable to meet the needs of the included student with disabilities.* Ms. Huang has been teaching second grade for 2 years. When she was informed that Omar, a student who has been identified as having an emotional disorder, was going to be included in her general education classroom for several hours each morning, she panicked. She explained to the principal that she had not taken any coursework in special education and did not feel able to meet the needs of the new student. The special education teacher met with Ms. Huang to describe Omar's behavior and explain the progress he was making. She assured Ms. Huang that Omar would be carefully monitored and that she would check with Omar and Ms. Huang daily at first and then less frequently as he adapted to the new setting and schedule. She asked Ms. Huang to explain what types of activities usually occurred during the time Omar would be in her room, and she identified ways for Ms. Huang to succeed with Omar. The special education teacher took careful notes and asked many questions about Ms. Huang's expectations so that she could prepare Omar before his transition to the general education classroom. In this situation, communication that provided specific information about the student's learning problems and what the classroom teacher could do to ensure a successful learning environment proved most helpful. In addition, the special education teacher obtained expectations about the general education classroom so that she could best prepare the student for the transition.

2. *The general education classroom teacher may not want to work with the included student with disabilities.* Mr. Caruffe, a seventh-grade science teacher, expected all students to perform the same work at the same time, with no exceptions. He was particularly opposed to having special education students in his classroom because he felt that they required

modifications to his core program. His philosophy was, "If students need modifications, they don't belong in the general education classroom; they belong in special education." Dealing with teachers like Mr. Caruffe can be particularly challenging for special education teachers. Despite continuous attempts to work out a collaborative effort, educational philosophies can be sufficiently different that special education teachers feel it is hopeless to attempt inclusion in certain classrooms. Problems arise when alternative classrooms are not available without reducing the content areas available to special students. If multiple teachers are available for each content area, students may be included into classes where teachers are more accepting. Principals can help by setting a school policy that rewards teachers for working appropriately with pupils who have learning and behavior problems.

3. *Finding time to meet regularly with all classroom teachers is difficult.* At the elementary level, special education teachers meet regularly with all classroom teachers who have students included for all or part of the day. This consultation includes discussing students' progress, planning students' programs, adapting instruction in the general classroom, and solving immediate academic and social problems with students. It is better to meet weekly with classroom teachers for a short period (10 to 15 minutes) than to meet less often for longer periods.

At the secondary level, continued involvement with all classroom teachers is a challenge. In large schools, the exceptional students' general education classroom teachers vary within content area and by year. It is possible for special education teachers to have over 25 teachers with whom they consult. Special education teachers manage this by meeting with teachers in small groups. Sometimes they organize these groups by content area to discuss successful adaptations made within a common content. Sometimes meetings are organized to focus on the needs of a particular student, and all teachers who work with this student meet at the same time. Finding time and maintaining contact with general education teachers requires creativity and persistence.

4. *Students may not be accepted socially by peers in the general education classroom.* This problem occurs not just with students who have behavior problems, but also with students who have learning disabilities. Following is a list of behaviors that are considered important by both general education and special educators for success in general education classrooms:

- Follows directions
- Asks for help when appropriate
- Begins an assignment after the teacher gives the assignment to the class
- Demonstrates adequate attention
- Obeys class rules
- Tries to complete a task before giving up
- Doesn't speak when others are talking
- Works well with others
- Respects the feelings of others
- Refrains from cursing and swearing

- Avoids getting in fights with other students
- Interacts cooperatively with others
- Respects the property of others
- Shares materials and property with others
- Refrains from stealing the property of others
- Tells the truth

Special education teachers may want to focus on teaching these behaviors before and during a student's transition to inclusion.

Collaboration with Paraprofessionals and Families

In addition to working closely with general educators, special education teachers must also collaborate frequently with paraprofessionals and families. While some of the same principles for collaborating with general educators apply when collaborating with paraprofessionals and families, it is important to keep in mind that the differences in roles and expertise between you and the paraprofessionals and families will influence how you communicate and collaborate. However, you all should share a common goal: student success. Check

out **Reading Rockets** for excellent information about working with parents and other educational professionals:

Collaborating with Paraprofessionals Schools often rely on paraprofessionals to provide support to general and special education teachers and students. Often, the special education teacher is in charge of supervising paraprofessionals. Many exceptional education specialists work closely with paraprofessional teaching assistants. Although teaching assistants never have complete responsibility for planning, implementing, or evaluating a student's program, they often participate in all of these areas. It is important that paraprofessionals not be assigned to students whom the teacher then spends little time seeing. Paraprofessionals need to have their teaching responsibilities rotated among many students so that the teacher spends frequent intervals teaching and evaluating all students. Because paraprofessionals are often responsible for implementing class rules, they need to be completely familiar with class and school rules and their consequences. Many paraprofessionals comment that they are successful in their roles when they have confidence that they understand what is expected of them. Suggestions for working with paraprofessionals are provided in Apply the Concept 5.8.

5.8 Apply the Concept

Working with Paraprofessionals

Jamie DeFraités is a first-grade teacher in New Orleans. Her multicultural classroom of 22 students includes 11 Vietnamese children and 2 Hispanic students who are English language learners. Jamie explains, "I love my class and was actually asked to loop to second grade—so I'll have the same students next year!"

Jamie is fortunate enough to work with two paraprofessionals, who join her classroom at different times during the day. Here are Jamie's tips for working with paraprofessionals:

1. It's important to have mutual respect and trust. I let the paraprofessionals know how fortunate I feel to have additional adults in the classroom and how important their job is in helping all students learn. I also thank them every chance I get—in the presence of the principal, parents, and students.
2. At the beginning of the year, I talk with the paraprofessionals individually about their interests and skills and try to match their duties with their strengths. Both paraprofessionals are bilingual (one in Vietnamese and one in Spanish), so assisting me with parent communication is very important. One of the paraprofessionals is very creative and helps me design learning centers. The other is very interested in math and helps me with review and extra practice for students with challenges in that area.
3. Each of the paraprofessionals is eager to learn new skills and strategies. It is worth my time to explain instructional strategies to them so that they can do more than grade papers—they can actually interact with children in small

groups or individually. It took me a long time to learn to teach—I'm still learning. I don't assume that the paraprofessionals automatically know how to teach. If I can share some of my training, the payoff is big for my students.

4. At the beginning of the year, we also clarify roles, responsibilities, classroom routines, and expectations for student learning and behavior. Spending that time in planning and communicating is time well spent. We're on the same page.
5. The paraprofessionals both work with several other teachers, so their time in my class is very limited. We have to make each minute count. Their tasks have to be well defined. I also plan a backup—what to do when there is nothing to do.
6. Finally, I encourage the paraprofessionals to get additional professional training. I let them know about workshops and other opportunities to learn. The more they learn, the more my students benefit!

Jamie admits that she would like to have a regular planning time with the paraprofessionals. As she says, "Often, we have to plan on the run." Also, her school district does not require periodic feedback or performance review sessions. This is something Jamie definitely recommends. "Fortunately, I have not run into problems with either paraprofessional, but if I did, it would be a good idea to have a system for giving feedback in a systematic way."

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What skills are important in working with paraprofessionals? Competencies that administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals identified as important for teachers to have when working with paraprofessionals (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2005; Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010) include:

- *Open communication.* Teachers share student-related information and explain the role of the paraprofessional to the paraprofessional and to all other personnel.
- *Planning and scheduling.* Coordinating the paraprofessionals' schedules is the responsibility of the special education teacher at most schools. It may be helpful to have a written schedule that is evaluated and revised based on students' needs and observation of effective practices.
- *Instructional support.* Teachers provide regular feedback to paraprofessionals about their instruction. Schedule time frequently initially, and then less often as paraprofessionals' skills are established, to observe instruction, provide feedback, and then model the instructional practices that you need the paraprofessional to implement.
- *Modeling for paraprofessionals.* Modeling instructional strategies and a professional manner of interacting with students are part of a teacher's responsibility when supervising paraprofessionals.
- *Training.* Special education teachers are often responsible for providing on-the-job training for paraprofessionals. This includes expectations about communicating with others, communicating with students, managing student behavior, and completing appropriate paperwork.
- *Providing support for RTI.* Many paraprofessionals are asked to serve key roles in the implementation of RTI models. These roles include screening students, scoring screening and progress-monitoring measures, and providing interventions to individual students or small groups. Paraprofessionals work much more successfully when they are fully and adequately prepared for these roles and are provided ongoing support and feedback from the special education teacher.
- *Responding to students, teachers, and families in ethically responsible ways.* One of the critical roles of the special education teacher is to adequately prepare paraprofessionals for their ethical responsibilities related to confidential student and family information as well as grades and student behavior. The **Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)** provides guidelines for paraprofessionals on ethical practices). Ethical practice skills recommended by CEC for paraprofessionals include their ability to (1) respond to professionals, students, and family members in ways that are consistent with laws and policies; (2) demonstrate problem solving, flexible thinking, conflict management techniques, and analysis of personal strengths and preference; (3) act as a role model for students with disabilities; (4) demonstrate a commitment to

supporting learners in achieving their potential; (5) demonstrate that they can separate personal and professional issues as a paraeducator; (6) maintain a high level of competence and integrity; (7) use prudent judgment; (8) demonstrate proficiency in oral and written communication as well as other academic skills as needed; (9) engage in activities to increase their own knowledge and skills; (10) engage in self-assessment; and (11) accept and use constructive feedback.

- *Management.* Teachers need to maintain regular and positive interactions with paraprofessionals and support their skill improvements. Consider providing ways to support both academic and behavioral practices with paraprofessionals.

Collaborating with Families Family involvement and collaboration are fundamental to student success. Perhaps the most essential element of a strong and productive partnership with families is trust (Grant & Ray, 2018). How do you establish a trusting relationship with families? You establish it the same way you establish trust with friends or coworkers. You consistently behave in ways that assure them that you have their best interest in mind and that you are committed to developing a partnership that will yield the best academic and behavioral outcomes for their child. This requires ongoing collaboration.

"There is no program and no policy that can substitute for a parent who is involved in their child's education from day one."

—Barack Obama, 2010

What can you do to help increase family and school collaboration? Dettmer, Thurston, and Selberg (2004) provide some key ideas:

- Place the focus of discussions and goal setting on the needs of the family and the students, not on their values.
- Accept the family and the student as they are. Stop wishing that they were different.
- Remember that most family members are not trying to provide poor parenting. Rather, they are often doing the best they can in their given circumstances.
- Respect the family's right to have different values than you do.

MyLab Education

Video Example 5.3

In this video, a parent meets with her son John's high school teachers to discuss her concerns about John's academic and behavior issues.

How does this kind of collaboration benefit the student?



In addition, remember that family members are often experts on their child. In most circumstances, they know their child much better than you do. Approach them with this knowledge in mind. Do your best not to talk down to parents; treat them as you would like to be treated if your roles were reversed. By establishing a collaborative relationship with parents, you may obtain insights about your students that you would not be able to get in any other manner. Furthermore, you will increase the likelihood that you establish a trusting relationship with family members, which is the foundation to a successful partnership likely to benefit the child.

When working with families from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it is important to learn as much as you can about your students' backgrounds. A minimal but important step is to learn the correct pronunciation of the family's name and a few words in their native language. Enlist the support of a translator, if possible. Ideally, the translator should be trained in special education. Families can bring a rich set of cultural and personal experiences to the educational process that can be integrated into your work with the child but also integrated into your teaching (Moll, 2010; Protacio & Edwards, 2015).

Matuszny, Banda, and Coleman (2007) developed a four-step plan for collaborating with culturally and linguistically diverse families. The plan is designed to aid teachers in better understanding a particular family's needs as well as to strengthen the trust between the family and the teacher. The steps are as follows:

1. The first phase is *initiation*. During this phase, which preferably occurs before the school year begins, the family members and teacher get to know each other. This contact should be informal and fun. True collaboration is difficult if the relationship between a family and teacher remains impersonal and/or uncomfortable.

2. During *building the foundation*, the second phase, teachers establish trust with families by providing them with choices (e.g., how they would like to be involved in the classroom or how they would like to receive information from the teacher) and asking for input on certain classroom routines or behavioral procedures.
3. The third phase, *maintenance and support*, involves positive communication, which is delivered according to the families' preferences for how they would like to be contacted.
4. *Wrap-up and reflection* is the last phase of collaboration. The teacher and the family reflect on what worked and did not work in terms of their collaboration. This information can be used to plan for the next year or passed on to the next teacher.

See Apply the Concept 5.9 for more information on communication with the families.

Communication with Other Professionals

What are the principles of communication, and how can teachers communicate with parents and professionals? In addition to assessment, intervention, curriculum development, and classroom management, a major role for the teacher of students with learning and behavior problems is communication. Effective special education teachers communicate regularly with general education and other special education teachers, school administrators, and other educational and psychological professionals, such as the school psychologist, speech-language therapist, and so on. Ability to communicate

5.9 Apply the Concept

Working Toward Effective Parent Communication

- *Ask parents and family members what they think about problems you identify and listen until they are finished.* Difficult as it might be to listen until parents and family members are finished, particularly if they say things that do not align with your classroom experiences with the target child, this listening is likely to provide you with their perspective as well as give you valuable information.
- *Take notes.* Write down key phrases that parents say, summarize key ideas, and jot down what you want to remember. Do this in a manner that shows you are listening and continue to make as much eye contact as possible.
- *Summarize their concerns or interpretations of the problem.* Before providing your suggestions or ideas, summarize their ideas and do your best to reflect and integrate them into your comments.
- *State your observations calmly.* State your position calmly and succinctly and clarify any observations you have that align with those of the parents as well as those that contradict their comments. Ask parents if they understand your point of view.
- *Resolve any issues and develop a plan.* Summarize the issue and propose potential solutions with consideration of the comments parents have made. Ask whether any of the solutions seem more reasonable to them. Here is an example: "I appreciate that you do not find it acceptable that Jessie stays after school to complete work he did not finish at school; let's see if one of the following might be a better match for you. Would you prefer that he took the work home and did it as homework, or would you prefer that he miss lunch or recess to complete his work?"

effectively is a skill that significantly affects an educator's job success. Despite the importance of this skill, most teachers finish school with no formal training in communication.

Principles of Communication

Successful communication with parents, teachers, and other professionals is built on certain principles. Particularly within inclusion models and frameworks that emphasize RTI, teachers' success with communication influences positively their success as professionals and the learning outcomes of their students.

MyLab Education

Video Example 5.4

The reading specialist in this video discusses student concerns with a guidance counselor. These professionals exhibit respect and trust in their efforts to help students succeed.



Mutual Respect and Trust Building mutual respect and trust is essential for successful communication. As a special education teacher, you are likely to work cooperatively with the school psychologist in several important ways, including screening students and evaluating students who are referred for special education or who have been placed in special education for several years and require another evaluation. You may also work with the speech and language specialist, because many of the students with disabilities also demonstrate speech or language problems currently, or have done so previously. It is very likely you will be coteaching, coplanning, or cooperating on an ongoing basis with several general education teachers. All of these individuals will have more confidence in you and be more willing to work with you to benefit students with disabilities if you establish a relationship of respect and trust with them.

Acceptance People know if you do not accept them or do not value what they have to say. Parents or guardians are aware when teachers do not really want to see them during conferences but are merely fulfilling a responsibility. Acceptance is communicated by how you listen, look, respond, and interact with others.

Pointers for communicating acceptance include the following:

- Demonstrate respect for the knowledge and needs of each of the professionals with whom you work. Often special education teachers assume that general education teachers do not "understand" the needs of the target student with disabilities.
- Demonstrate respect for the diverse languages and cultures that families and their children represent.
- Introduce professionals to other members of the education team in a way that sets the tone for acceptance.

- Give each professional working with the student an opportunity to speak and be heard.
- Ensure that a language of acceptance is used by all professionals and families.

Listening Effective listening is more than waiting politely for the person to finish. It requires hearing the message the person is sending. Effective listeners listen for the real content of the message as well as for the feelings in the message. Often this requires restating the message to ensure understanding.

Mrs. Garcia, the mother of 12-year-old Felipe, telephoned his special education resource-room teacher, Mr. Sanchez.

Mrs. Garcia: Felipe has been complaining for the past couple of weeks that he has too much work to do in his biology and math classes and that he is falling behind. He says he is flunking biology.

Mr. Sanchez: How much would you say he is studying each night?

Mrs. Garcia: It's hard to say. He stays out with his friends until dinner, and then after dinner, he starts talking about all his homework. Sometimes he sits in front of the TV with his books, and sometimes he goes to his room.

Mr. Sanchez: He has mentioned in my class how much work he has to do. I wonder if he is feeling a lot of pressure from different teachers, including me?

Mrs. Garcia: Well, he has said he thinks you are working him too hard. I know sometimes he is lazy, but maybe you could talk to him.

Mr. Sanchez: Felipe works very hard in my class, and I expect a great deal from him. I will talk with him after school and arrange a meeting with his other teachers as well.

Mrs. Garcia: Thank you, and please do not tell Felipe I called. He would be very upset with me.

Questioning Knowing what type of questions to ask can help individuals to obtain the information they need. Questions can be open or closed. An *open question* is a question that allows the respondent a full range of responses and discourages short yes-or-no answers. Open questions begin with *how, what, tell me about,* and similar phrases.

Mrs. Lishenko suspected that Matt, one of her students, was staying up very late at night, because he was coming to school very tired and seemed to drag all day. He was also resting his head on his desk in the afternoon. She decided to call Matt's father to discuss the problem. She started the conversation by giving Matt's father some information about a meeting of family members that was going to be held in the school district that she thought would be of particular interest to him. She then proceeded to describe Matt's behavior in class. Finally, Mrs. Lishenko asked, "What do you think might be happening?" Matt's father began to confide that he was not paying much attention to Matt's bedtime and that Matt was staying up late watching movies on the new DVD player. Mrs. Lishenko's question gave Matt's father the opportunity to

explain what he thought was happening. Rather than posing several possibilities or telling Matt's father that Matt was staying up too late at night, Mrs. Lishenko asked an open question, which allowed Matt's father to interpret the situation. Matt's father suggested that he would establish a firm bedtime. In this situation, asking an open question allowed Matt's father both to indicate how he felt and to offer a solution.

Involving people in identifying problems increases the likelihood that they will not feel threatened and that they will be willing to make necessary changes.

Staying Directed Follow the lead of professionals, paraprofessionals, and parents whenever they are talking about a student. A skillful consultant can respond to others and still keep the discussion focused. It is not uncommon for families to mention other related home factors that may be influencing their child's progress in school, such as marital difficulties, financial problems, or other personal problems. When professionals or parents discuss serious problems that are beyond our reach as educators, we need to assist them in finding other resources to help them with their problems. Ms. Lopez, a special education teacher at the middle school, keeps the name and telephone number of the school counselor as well as other community outreach resources near her telephone. She is ready to refer parents and other professionals for assistance when needed.

Apply the Concept 5.10 provides a list of tips for effective communication with professionals and families.

Developing Interviewing Skills

Interviews are the key to open communication and effective intervention. Special education teachers often work as consultants to paraprofessionals, general education classroom teachers, other educational and psychological specialists, and families. These interviewing skills help to meet the need to ask questions that inform and to follow up appropriately on information provided. Good interviewing consists of five steps:

1. *Ask open questions.* Open questions permit respondents a full range of answers, allowing them to bring up a topic or problem they have on their mind. Open questions are generally followed by questions that require more specificity. Mr. Schwab, the special education resource-room teacher, began his interview with Mrs. Francosa, the fourth-grade teacher, by asking an open question: "How is Yusuf's behavior lately?"

2. *Obtain specificity.* This requires asking questions or making restatements that identify or document the problem. After Mrs. Francosa describes Yusuf's behavior in the general education classroom, Mr. Schwab attempts to identify key points and to obtain specificity in describing the behavior: "You said Yusuf's behavior is better in the classroom but worse on the playground. Can you identify

5.10 Apply the Concept

Facilitating Effective Communication with Professionals and Families

1. Indicate respect for their knowledge and understanding of the child.
2. Demonstrate respect for the diverse languages and cultures families and their children represent.
3. Introduce them to other members of the education team in a way that sets the tone for acceptance.
4. Give each person an opportunity to speak and be heard.
5. Ensure that a language of acceptance is used by all professionals and family members.
6. Even when you are busy, take the time to let professionals and family members know that you value them, and that you are just unable to meet with them at this time.
7. Avoid giving advice unless it is requested. This does not mean that you can never give suggestions; however, the suggestions should be given with the expectation that the person may or may not choose to implement them.
8. Avoid providing false reassurances to colleagues or families. False reassurances may make them and you feel better in the short run but in the long run are harmful. When things

do not work out as you predicted, everyone can become disappointed and potentially lose trust.

9. Ask specific questions. Using unfocused questions makes it difficult to conduct a consistent, purposeful conversation.
10. Avoid changing topics too often; this requires that you monitor the topic and direct others to return to the topic.
11. Avoid interrupting others or being interrupted, which disturbs the conversation and makes effective collaboration difficult.
12. Avoid using clichés. A cliché as a response to a problem situation makes the other person feel as though you are trivializing the problem.
13. Respond to colleagues and family members in ways that attend to both the content of their message and their feelings.
14. Avoid jumping too quickly to a solution. Listening carefully and fully to the message will help you get at the root of the problem.

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which behaviors in the classroom are better and which behaviors on the playground are worse?" Without drilling the interviewee, an attempt is made to identify the problem and provide documentation for its occurrence so that an appropriate intervention can be constructed.

3. *Identify the problem.* Problem identification can be based on information obtained, or problems can be identified by the person being interviewed, often in the process of answering questions: "It seems like there is good progress in terms of completing classroom work. Let's figure out a way of reinforcing that behavior. There's a problem with Yusuf's responding to teasing on the playground. His response has been to fight, which is getting him in more trouble. Any thoughts about how we might change that behavior?"

After listening to suggestions from the teacher, Mr. Schwab might add, "Let me provide some suggestions that have been effective in the past with other students."

4. *Solve problems.* Suggestions for solving identified problems and implementing the solutions are generated. Both the professional being interviewed and the consultant contribute suggestions to solving the problem. Often, other professionals are included in the suggestions: "Perhaps we could discuss Yusuf's problem with his counselor and ask her to teach him some strategies for coping with teasing. We could also identify the students who are teasing him and reinforce them for not teasing."

The tone for problem solving should be one of flexibility. There are often many possible solutions but only a few that will work with a particular student. The goal is to find a solution the teacher is willing to implement that is effective for the student.

5. *Summarize and give feedback.* Summarize the problem and the plan of action. Be sure to indicate who is responsible for what. Whenever possible, establish a timeline for completing the tasks: "You will send home notes to Yusuf's parents, informing them of his progress in seatwork in the classroom. I will meet with the counselor about his problem on the playground, and you will talk with his peers and arrange a system for reinforcing them for not teasing. I'll check back with you during lunch this week to see how things are going. I'm very pleased with this progress, and I am sure much of it is due to your hard work and follow-up."

Collaboration in an RTI Model

Collaboration among the various personnel involved in a school's RTI model is essential for a number of reasons. First, remember that using an RTI framework can help a school identify what supplemental instruction or intervention students may need to "catch up" to their grade-level peers. To ensure that a student is receiving appropriate intervention, communication among the classroom teacher, intervention provider, and other school personnel (e.g., the reading coach, special education teacher, or school psychologist) needs to

be consistent and frequent. Many schools implementing RTI set aside regular weekly or monthly meeting times and space for teachers and specialists to discuss student data and make instructional changes, if necessary.

Collaboration between professionals also helps schools address what several administrators have identified as the number-one challenge to successful implementation of RTI: scheduling. By having teachers work collaboratively in creating schedules conducive to providing interventions, schools are better able to offer interventions on a consistent basis. Mrs. Middlestock, an elementary special education teacher, works with teachers at each grade level before the beginning of the school year to help teachers identify a common time across grade levels when students can be pulled out for interventions. By working collaboratively with her colleagues to identify intervention times, Mrs. Middlestock feels that she achieves greater teacher buy-in in terms of support for RTI and that teachers are more likely not to forget to send their students to her for Tier 2 interventions.

In some schools, particularly at the middle school level, Tier 2 interventions are used to preteach or reteach concepts from the general education curriculum. Therefore, it is crucial that classroom teachers and intervention teachers collaborate on pacing and content so that students are pretaught vocabulary and concepts and/or given additional practice on concepts or skills in a timely and appropriate manner. In addition, collaboration can be used to ensure that intervention teachers are delivering interventions with fidelity. In schools using RTI to identify students with learning disabilities, it is necessary to ensure that the interventions the students receive are delivered as they were designed to be taught. Mrs. Middlestock collaborates frequently with the other intervention providers and when possible observes them to make certain that all of the interventions are being delivered with fidelity.

Many explanations can be offered for lack of family involvement in educational planning. One is that school personnel do not have adequate time to meet with families and fully explain the child's program or do not know how to take advantage of family members' knowledge and preferences (Harry, 2008). In a review of research on parent involvement for students with disabilities from different cultural groups, Harry (2008) concludes that several barriers preclude widespread use of ideal practices, including a deficit view of families, cross-cultural misunderstandings related to the meanings of disability, and culturally different views of the roles of parents and caregivers.

Often families can attend meetings only early in the morning before going to work or in the evening on their way home. These times usually conflict with the schedules of school personnel and require them to meet with families outside their required work time. Because of their dedication and interest in children, professionals are often willing to meet at these times, but they are not motivated to meet for extended periods.

Families may perceive the professionals as responsible for appropriate decisions in their child's best interest and do not want to be coparticipants in the educational program. Rather than a lack of interest in the child's program, this may actually indicate less confidence in their own ability to participate effectively.

It could be that families would like to be more involved but feel intimidated by the number of professionals and the uncommon terminology. Many parents are not comfortable in a setting in which numerous professionals, such as teachers, the principal, psychologist, counselor, or speech and language therapist, are providing views on the parent's child. These parents may feel these professionals have information

to offer, but worry that it isn't the right information for the decision making that is happening. Parents may be unfamiliar with new terminology and may not be comfortable asking questions.

During conferences, special education teachers need to be sensitive to family members' feelings and needs. They can serve as advocates for the parents, asking questions of the classroom teacher or other professionals they feel the family member may have wanted to ask but did not.

The Spotlight on Diversity feature provides considerations for working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Apply the Concept 5.11 addresses involvement of all families in the special education process.

Spotlight on Diversity

Considerations for Families Who Are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

1. Assume that families want to help their children.
2. Consider your language when talking with parents, and be thoughtful about not using language that suggests a deficit model of considering the child.
3. Provide materials in a range of formats, including orally, in writing (family's language), through video, and through formal and informal presentations.
4. For parents who are interested, provide opportunities for families to learn the skills and activities the students are learning so they can reinforce them in the home.
5. Provide opportunities for families to influence their child's educational program.
6. Provide workshops that include role-playing and rehearsing situations between families and school personnel to increase families' confidence in working with school personnel.
7. Involve families from the community who are familiar with the culture and speak the home language of the children's families in work at the school.
8. Provide an informal meeting with families so they can exchange experiences and learn tips from each other.
9. Invite families to school, and ask them to share their backgrounds or activities with other students and families.
10. Provide ongoing professional development for teachers and other educators so that they are familiar with linguistic and cultural practices and respond sensitively with this knowledge to parents and other family members.

The law provides for early intervention services that meet the developmental needs of children from birth to the age of 3 and their families, including physical development, cognition, language, social, and self-help skills. Parents and families play an important role, and an individualized program plan must be designed to meet their needs. This program plan, called

the individualized family service plan (IFSP), should provide a coordinated array of services, including the following:

- Screening and assessment
- Psychological assessment and intervention
- Occupational and physical therapy
- Speech, language, and audiology
- Family involvement, training, and home visits
- Specialized instruction for parents and the target student
- Case management
- Health services that may be needed to allow the student to benefit from the intervention service

See Apply the Concept 5.11 for an overview of family involvement in special education.

Criteria for Establishing an IFSP

The IFSP is a family-oriented approach to designing an effective management plan for infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth to age 3). The IFSP must be developed by a multidisciplinary team and should include the following elements:

- A description of the child's level of functioning across the developmental areas: physical, cognitive, communication, social or emotional, and adaptive
- An assessment of the family, including a description of the family's strengths and needs as they relate to enhancing the development of the child with disabilities
- A description of the major goals or outcomes expected for the child with disabilities and the family (as they relate to providing opportunities for the student)
- Procedures for measuring progress, including a timeline, objectives, and evaluation procedures
- A description of natural environments in which the early intervention services will be provided

- A description of the early intervention services needed to provide appropriate help for the child and family
- Specifically when the specialized intervention will begin and how long it will last
- A designated case manager
- A specific transition plan from the birth-to-3 program into the preschool program

Response to Intervention and Family Involvement

Families have an important role to play when schools implement response to intervention (RTI). This model provides new challenges and opportunities for engaging

and communicating with families about their children's progress. Technically, most of what occurs within an RTI model occurs within general education, so questions can arise about when and how to communicate effectively with families.

First, many families may neither know what RTI is nor understand why their child is being screened for learning difficulties. Second, families value knowing if their child is receiving secondary or tertiary interventions and having access to the findings from progress monitoring. Third, teachers can assist families by providing them with a list of sample questions they might want to ask about RTI. An excellent source of information about RTI for parents is the National Center for Learning Disabilities.

5.11 Apply the Concept

Family Involvement in the Special Education Process

Response to Intervention: Ten Questions Parents Should Ask

As states and school districts work to implement an RTI process that provides early help to struggling students, families need to understand the components essential to the appropriate implementation of RTI. Here are 10 questions to ask about RTI to help guide you through the process:

1. Is the school district currently using an RTI process to provide additional support to struggling students? If not, do they plan to?
2. What screening procedures are used to identify students in need of intervention?
3. What interventions and instructional programs are being used? What research supports their effectiveness?
4. What process is used to determine the intervention that will be provided?
5. What length of time is allowed for an intervention before determining if the student is making adequate progress?
6. What strategy is being used to monitor student progress? What are the types of data that will be collected, and how will student progress be conveyed to parents?
7. Is a written intervention plan provided to parents as part of the RTI process?
8. Is the teacher or other person responsible for providing the interventions trained in using them?
9. When and how will information about a student's performance and progress be provided?
10. At what point in the RTI process are students who are suspected of having a learning disability referred for formal evaluation?

Conferences with Family Members: Planned and Unplanned Planned conferences with family members occur frequently and include multidisciplinary team meetings, annual parent-student meetings, or regularly scheduled meetings to report on academic and behavioral progress. Conferences provide teachers with the opportunity to do the following:

- Review the student's materials, grades, and work progress.
- Meet with other professionals to provide an overall review and report on student progress.
- Review the student's portfolio, assessment information, and progress reports.
- Provide samples of the student's most recent work.
- Establish and review goals and criteria for academic and behavioral work.

Sometimes conferences with families are unplanned. Family members may phone, stop by the school, or schedule a conference with little notice. When this occurs, remember these procedures: Listen carefully until the family members have expressed the purpose of their visit, paraphrase what you understand to be their question or issues, and respond to the question and issue as completely as possible. Often family members stop by with a simple question or concern that is a disguise for a larger issue; that is why it is important to listen carefully and wait until family members are finished speaking.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Family Involvement

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was passed in 1990 and amended in 2004. This law

ensures that all students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education, which emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs. All students between the ages of 3 and 21 are eligible for a program of special education and related

services under Part B of the IDEA; children with disabilities from birth to age 3 are eligible for special education and related services under Part C. Part C, which is a subchapter of the IDEA, concerns infants and toddlers with disabilities.

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MyLab Education Application Exercise 5.3: Conferences
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Summary

- Successful inclusion requires cooperation among professionals, particularly the general and special education teachers. Inclusion also requires willingness to adapt and accommodate instruction and materials to meet the learning and behavior needs of students. General education teachers have different levels of experience in working with other teachers and students with learning and behavioral problems. Furthermore, many students are not prepared for general education classrooms. Potential problems can be avoided if special education teachers work cooperatively with general education teachers to exchange knowledge and instructional practices representing their particular expertise. This effort takes time and planning, and it can result in less content coverage within a given time frame. Special education teachers can facilitate inclusion by working closely with general education teachers; observing general education classrooms; simulating the academic and social demands of general education classrooms in the special education classroom; and assisting classroom teachers in adapting materials, instruction, and the instructional environment.
- Special education teachers work with other professionals to develop systems that meet the needs of students with learning and behavioral problems within an individual school setting. Coteaching occurs when special education and classroom teachers provide instruction together in the general education classroom. Consultant teaching occurs when the special educator works with the classroom teacher to solve problems for students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Special education teachers also coordinate paraprofessionals who assist students with disabilities in the general education classroom.
- Teachers are effective when they take the time to build mutual trust, to accept others' points of view, to really listen to what families and other professionals say, to provide encouragement to family members and personnel who work with students with special needs, and to use straightforward language to explain information. In addition, teachers can learn more from personal communication by asking open-ended questions that solicit thorough responses. Balancing listening and responding to family members provides teachers with a

mechanism of ensuring they are meeting parents' goals while also communicating relevant school-related information. In this way, teachers develop a working alliance in which all members of the group have a common goal of developing an appropriate program for the student.

- Consultants who provide special education services must work with the general education teachers. Communication and collaboration are key to successful inclusion, and finding time to work with the general education teacher is a challenge and a necessity. It is also important that the special education teacher work within the RTI framework.
- Families have different issues and concerns, so the first step is to listen carefully to parents to ensure that you know their questions, challenges, and goals for their child. Identifying and addressing the needs of the entire

family are essential to assisting a student. Teachers can also assist families by addressing their issues, providing appropriate and accurate information about their child's performance, and providing resources such as information about summer activities, guidelines for assisting students with homework or academic skills, and accessing support systems with other parents or organizations. By valuing the parents' role in their child's education and by using the parents' knowledge about their child, teachers and families can work together to develop an appropriate educational program. RTI practices provide a unique opportunity for schools and families to communicate and collaborate before referral, during screening and assessment, when secondary interventions are provided, and through examining the collected data.