



To check your comprehension on the content covered in chapter 3, go to the Book Resources in the MyEducationLab for your course, select your text, and complete the Study Plan. Here you will be able to take a chapter quiz, receive feedback on your answers, and then access review, practice, and enrichment activities to enhance your understanding of chapter content.

www.resources

<http://www.teachersnetwork.org/tnpi/research/growth/dillon.htm>

Are you interested in learning more about the history of collaboration in schools and contemporary factors that affect it? At Teachers Network you will find an article that briefly explains the differences in traditional and collaborative schools and summarizes some of the supports that contribute to collaboration.

In the past, becoming a teacher—whether in general education or in special education—meant entering a profession frequently characterized by isolation and sometimes loneliness (Little, 1993; Lortie, 1975). Teachers typically spent most of the day alone in a classroom with students. They learned that they were expected to have all the skills to manage student learning and discipline issues, and they rarely had opportunities to discuss their questions, concerns, and misgivings with anyone, especially their colleagues at school.

Over the past several years, that atmosphere of isolation has changed (Troen & Boles, 2010; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Elementary school teachers are meeting on grade-level teams to share ideas and problem solve, and middle school and high school teachers are creating interdisciplinary teams to redesign curriculum and share instructional responsibility for smaller groups of students. Response to intervention, the data-based approach to remediating students' skills when they are struggling, is premised on a collaborative problem-solving process. School reform efforts also are characterized by partnerships. For example, entire schools are stressing the need to build collaborative professional learning communities to meet the current expectations of accountability for student learning and address the challenges of twenty-first-century schooling (Maher, Burroughs, Dietz, & Karnbach, 2010).

As the scenes that open this chapter illustrate, these emerging partnerships extend to special educators and other support staff as well. Particularly as schools increase inclusive practices, the working relationships among all the adults involved in the education of students with disabilities become critical (for example, Meadan & Monda-Amaya, 2008; Paulsen, 2008). For example, as a general education teacher, you may find that your grade level or department team periodically meets to discuss the progress of students with disabilities. The goal is to share ideas and concerns in order to collectively ensure that these students are reaching their academic potential. Similarly, you might find that some of your students cannot complete the grade-level work you are accustomed to assigning. To assist you, a special education teacher might meet with you to design the necessary accommodations.

At first glance, these interactions seem like logical, straightforward approaches to optimizing education. And often they are. However, because of the strong education tradition of professionals working alone and the still-limited opportunities many teachers have had in preparing to work effectively with other adults, problems sometimes occur (Friend & Cook, 2010). In some instances, support personnel are reluctant to make suggestions for fear they will sound as if they are interfering with a general education teacher's instruction. In other cases, a general education teacher insists that no change in classroom activities is possible, even though a special educator is available for co-teaching. And when professionals in schools disagree, they may be uncomfortable discussing the issues directly and struggle to find shared solutions.

Professionals in inclusive schools usually assert that collaboration is the key to their success in meeting the needs of all students (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Friend & Cook, 2010; Kozik, Cooney, Vinciguerra, Gradel, & Black, 2009; Leach & Duffy, 2009). The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to the principles of collaboration and the school situations in which professionals are most likely to collaborate to meet the needs of students with disabilities. You also will learn how to develop strong working relationships with parents, an essential part of every teacher's responsibilities and an especially important one when educating students with special needs. The special partnerships that are formed when teachers work with paraprofessionals also are considered. Finally, you will find out how to respond when disagreements arise during collaboration.

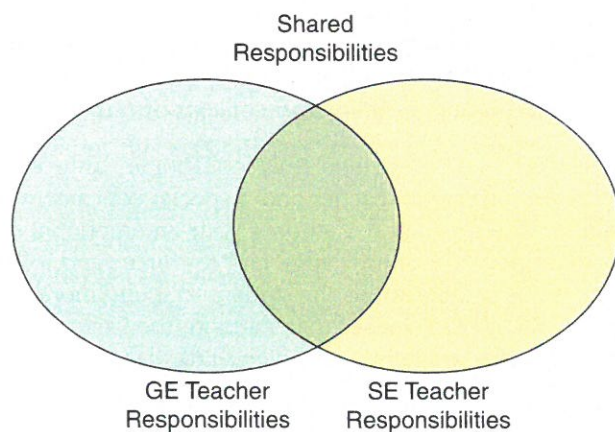
What Are the Basics of Collaboration?

As a teacher, you will hear colleagues refer to many of their activities as **collaboration**. Sometimes they are referring to a team meeting to propose ideas to help a student; sometimes they mean sharing a classroom to teach a particular

PROFESSIONAL EDGE**Thinking About Roles and Responsibilities in Collaboration**

This activity is designed to help you think about collaborating with special educators. Complete the activity by yourself, and then compare responses with classmates. If possible, ask individuals preparing to be special educators to complete the task as well. Then discuss areas of agreement and disagreement and the implications for working together, whether in the classroom or at other times.

First, review the list of responsibilities for general and special educators. Then decide which professional is responsible for each of them. List each responsibility in the appropriate section of the Venn diagram.

**TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES RELATED TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

1. Plan for instruction
2. Write the IEP
3. Complete student assessments
4. Communicate with parents
5. Provide report card grades
6. Evaluate student work (for example, assignments, tests)
7. Provide supervision for work of paraprofessionals
8. Implement the classroom supports needed by student (for example, provide calculators, allow students to work on a computer)
9. Provide specially designed instructions to students, that is, learning options not usually found in the general education setting
10. Reteach instruction that students do not understand
11. Gather data about student learning and behavior
12. Prepare materials that take student needs into account (for example, create a word bank; rearrange test items to be clearer)
13. Respond to student behavior issues
14. Raise concerns about student achievement or behavior
15. Place the student's achievement in the context of the curriculum standards
16. Facilitate social interactions between students with and without disabilities
17. Assist students to identify postschool goals and arrange instruction to help them achieve those goals.

subject; and sometimes they even use the term as a synonym for inclusive practices. How can all these things be collaboration? Actually, they are not. Collaboration is how people work together, not what they do. As Friend and Cook (2010) have stated, collaboration is a *style* professionals choose to accomplish a goal they share. Professionals often use the term *collaboration* to describe any activity in which they work with someone else. But the mere fact of working in the same room with another person does not ensure that collaboration occurs. For example, in some team meetings, one or two members tend to monopolize the conversation and subtly insist that others agree with their points of view. The team is seated together at a table, but being together is not sufficient to ensure collaboration.

True collaboration exists only when all participants in a team or another shared activity feel their contributions are valued and the goal is clear, when they share decision making, and when they sense they are respected (Conoley & Conoley, 2010). It is how individuals work with each other that defines whether collaboration is occurring. In the Professional Edge, you can complete an activity designed to help you reflect on your thinking about the responsibilities of special education teachers and general education teachers when they collaborate.

Characteristics of Collaboration

Collaboration in schools has a number of defining characteristics that clarify its requirements. Friend and Cook (2010) have outlined these key attributes.

fyi

Along with teachers, you will collaborate with related services professionals such as speech/language therapists, counselors, and social workers. These professionals sometimes work in more than one school, and so challenges can include scheduling meetings and being sure communication is clear.

Collaboration Is Voluntary Teachers may be assigned to work in close proximity, but they cannot be forced to collaborate. They must make a personal choice to use this style. For example, your principal may tell you and another teacher that you are expected to be part of a response to intervention team. You could choose to keep your ideas to yourself instead of readily participating. Or you could conclude that even though you did not plan on volunteering for this activity, as long as you are a team member, you will contribute. Your principal assigned the activity; you decided to collaborate. Because collaboration is voluntary, teachers often form close but informal collaborative partnerships with colleagues regardless of whether collaboration is a schoolwide ethic.

Collaboration Is Based on Parity Teachers who collaborate must believe that all individual contributions are equally valued. The number and nature of particular professionals' contributions may vary greatly, but all participants need to recognize that what they offer is integral to the collaborative effort. If you are at a meeting concerning a student's highly complex needs, you might feel you have nothing to offer. However, you have important information about how the student responds in your class and the progress he has made in developing peer relationships. The technical discussion of the student's disabilities is not your area of expertise, nor should it be; your ideas are valued because of your knowledge and skills related to teaching in your classroom. This is an illustration of the collaboration concept of *parity*.

Collaboration Requires a Shared Goal Teachers truly collaborate only when they share a goal. For example, if a fifth-grade teacher and a special educator want to design a behavior intervention to help support a student with an emotional disability, their goal is clear. They can pool their knowledge and resources and jointly plan the intervention. However, if one teacher wants the student to spend more time in a special education setting and the other opposes that solution, they are unlikely to work collaboratively on this issue. The teachers might even think at the outset that they share a goal—assisting the student—but that broad statement does not capture their differing views of how the student can best be assisted. They need to resolve this difference for collaboration to proceed.

Collaboration Includes Shared Responsibility for Key Decisions Although teachers may divide the work necessary to complete a collaborative teaching or teaming project, they should share as equal partners the fundamental decision making about the activities they are undertaking. This shared responsibility reinforces the sense of parity that exists among the teachers. In the behavior intervention example, the teachers together decide what the key problems are, what strategies might work, how long to try an intervention, and how the intervention may affect the student. However, if they assign many tasks to just one person, they are not collaborating. Instead, one may ask the school psychologists for ideas, review a book of behavior intervention ideas, and talk to last year's teacher. The other may call the parents to seek their input, interview the student, and prepare any needed materials, such as a behavior chart.

Collaboration Includes Shared Accountability for Outcomes This characteristic of collaboration follows directly from shared responsibility: That is, if teachers share key decisions, they also must share accountability for the results of the decisions, whether those results are positive or negative. If both teachers carry out their assigned tasks, the behavior intervention they design will have a high probability of success. If one teacher fails to carry out a responsibility, valuable time will be lost and their shared effort will be less successful. If something happens that is wonderful (for example, the student's behavior changes dramatically in a positive direction), the teachers will share the success. If something happens that is not so wonderful (for example, the intervention appears to have no impact on the behaviors of concern), they will share the need to change their plans.

Collaboration Is Based on Shared Resources Each teacher participating in a collaborative effort contributes some type of resource. This contribution increases commitment

RESEARCH NOTE

Using teacher perception and student achievement data from a southeastern urban school district and applying a specific statistical method, Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010) found that principal leadership significantly affects teacher instructional practices and student learning in English/language arts.

and reinforces each professional's sense of parity. Resources may include time, expertise, space, equipment, and other assets. The teachers working on the behavior intervention contribute the time needed to make necessary plans, but they also pool their knowledge of working with students with behavior difficulties, share information about other professionals who might assist them, and contribute student access to the computer and other rewards they design.

Collaboration Is Emergent Collaboration is based on a belief in the value of shared decision making, trust, and respect among participants. Yet, although these qualities are needed to some degree at the outset of collaborative activities, they are not well developed in a new collaborative relationship. As teachers become more experienced at collaboration, their interactions become characterized by the trust and respect that grow within successful professional relationships. If the teachers described throughout this section have worked together for several years, they may share freely, including offering constructive criticism to each other. If this is their first collaborative effort, they are much more likely to be a bit guarded and polite, because each is unsure how the other person will respond.



Some groups are collaborative while others are not. What would you say it takes to create and sustain collaboration? Getty Images, Inc.

Prerequisites for Collaboration

Creating collaborative relationships requires effort on everyone's part. Most professionals who have close collaborative working relationships note that it is hard work to collaborate—but worth every minute of the effort. They also emphasize that collaboration gets better with experience. When colleagues are novices at co-teaching or working on teams, their work seems to take longer and everyone has to be especially careful to respect others' points of view. However, with additional collaboration, everyone's comfort level increases, honesty and trust grow, and a sense of community develops. The following sections discuss some essential ingredients that foster the growth of collaboration.

Reflecting on Your Personal Belief System The first ingredient for collaboration is your personal beliefs. How much do you value sharing ideas with others? Would you prefer to work with someone to complete a project, even if it takes more time that way, or do you prefer to work alone? If your professor in this course offered the option of a small-group exam, would you be willing to receive a shared grade with your classmates? If your responses to these questions suggest that you prefer working with others, you probably will find professional collaboration exciting and rewarding. If your responses are just the opposite, you might find collaboration somewhat frustrating. For collaboration to occur, all the people participating need to feel that their shared effort will result in an outcome that is better than could be accomplished by any one participant, even if the outcome is somewhat different from what each person envisioned at the outset (Friend, 2000; Sayeski, 2009).

Part of examining your belief system also concerns your understanding of and respect for others' belief systems. This tolerance is especially important for your collaborative efforts with special educators in inclusive programs. For example, what are your beliefs about changing your teaching practices so that a student with disabilities can achieve the standards for your curriculum? At first, you might say that changing your teaching practices is no problem, but when you reflect on the consequences of that belief, you might have second thoughts. For example, changing your practices

may mean that you must give alternative assignments to students who need them, that you must deliberately change the way you present information and the way you expect students to learn that information, and that, if needed, you must grade students with disabilities differently from other students.

The special educators with whom you work are likely to believe strongly not only that alternative teaching practices are helpful in inclusive settings but that they are a requirement. How will you respond when you meet a colleague with this belief? If some general education teachers at your school oppose making accommodations for students with disabilities, will you feel pressured to compromise your beliefs and agree with them? As collaboration becomes more integral to public schools, in part because of inclusive practices, it becomes more and more essential to learn to value others' opinions and respectfully disagree while maintaining a positive working relationship.

dimensions of DIVERSITY

Remember that nonverbal communication varies among cultures. The meaning of eye contact (or lack of eye contact) and appropriate distance during interactions are just two examples of nonverbal factors to consider in working with parents from cultures other than your own.

Refining Your Interaction Skills The second ingredient you can contribute to school collaboration is effective skills for interacting (for example, Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010). In many ways, interaction skills are the fundamental building blocks on which collaboration is based, because collaboration occurs through interactions with others (Friend & Cook, 2004). There are two major types of interaction skills: communication skills, and steps to productive interactions. You already may have learned about the first type, communication skills, in a public speaking or communication course. These skills include listening, attending to nonverbal signals, and

PROFESSIONAL EDGE

Barriers to Effective Communication



Effective communication is essential for professional collaboration. Here are some barriers to communication that teachers and administrators must overcome (Mostert, 1998). Which might apply to you?

- **Advice:** When you offer unsolicited advice to a colleague or parent, that person may be confused by your intent, may reject the advice and form an unfavorable opinion of you, or may feel obligated to follow the advice even if it seems inappropriate. In general, you should offer advice only when it is sought.
- **False reassurances:** If you offer parents or colleagues false reassurances about student achievement, behavior issues, or social skills, you may damage your own credibility and set the stage for future issues. Being truthful—but constructive—is the best strategy, even if you are concerned that a difficult situation may result.
- **Wandering interactions:** When another person communicates with you, it is sometimes easy to drift to peripheral topics that waste valuable time. For example, discussing a student's participation in varsity athletics when the concern is academic performance is a distraction that may reflect avoidance of the key issues.
- **Interruptions:** When you interact with others, they are entitled to your full attention. Responding to a colleague who comes to your classroom door or asking another person to wait while you make a phone call harms the interaction. During an interaction, it also is important to avoid interrupting others. If the person speaking has a language pattern that is slower than yours, you may have to make an especially concerted effort to wait until the person finishes speaking before responding.
- **Being judgmental:** If you tend to speak in absolute (for example, "The only way to resolve this is to . . ." or "I don't see any way for him to complete the work . . ."), you may be perceived as a professional who sees only one right answer. This may lead others to conclude that attempting to collaborate with you is futile.
- **One-way communication:** Communication is most effective when it involves all participants. If one person monopolizes the interaction, the others' points of view are not represented and any decisions made will likely be questioned later.
- **Fatigue:** If you are so tired that you cannot accurately follow the thread of a conversation, your communication may be impaired and you may misspeak or misunderstand others' messages. In such a case, it may be best to request rescheduling the interaction.
- **"Hot" words and phrases:** In some communities and in some schools, certain words are "hot" and prompt emotional responses. For example, even the words *inclusion* sometimes is considered controversial as is *response to intervention*. To facilitate productive interactions, such words (or even suspected words and phrases) are best avoided.

Do any of these barriers sound familiar? What examples of each can you and your classmates provide relating to your own communication experiences in internships or field experiences? What can you do to decrease the likelihood that these barriers will occur in your interactions with colleagues and parents?

asking questions and making statements in clear and nonthreatening ways (DeVito, 2009). They also include paralanguage, such as your tone of voice and your use of comments like “uh-huh” and “ok.” Additional information about communication skills is included in the Professional Edge.

The other type of interaction skill comprises the steps that make interactions productive. Have you ever been in a meeting and thought the same topic was being discussed repeatedly? Perhaps you wished someone would say, “I think we’ve covered this; let’s move on.” Or have you ever tried to problem solve with classmates or friends, only to realize that every time someone generated an idea, someone else began explaining why the idea could not work? In both instances, the frustration occurred because of a problem in the interaction process, that is, the steps that characterize an interaction. The most needed interaction process for you as a teacher is shared problem solving (Knotek, 2003; Santangelo, 2009), a topic addressed later in this chapter. Other interaction process skills include conducting effective meetings, responding to resistance, resolving conflict, and persuading others.

You need both types of interaction skills to collaborate. If you are highly skilled in communicating effectively but cannot contribute to get an interaction from its beginning to its end, others may be frustrated. Likewise, even though you may know the steps in shared problem solving, if you speak to others carelessly or ineffectively, they may withdraw from the interaction.

Contributing to a Supportive Environment The third ingredient for successful collaboration is a supportive environment (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). As a teacher, you will contribute to this atmosphere through your personal belief system and interaction skills, but this environment includes other items as well. For example, most professionals working in schools that value collaboration comment on the importance of administrative support. Principals play an important role in fostering collaboration (Hines, 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). They can raise staff awareness of collaboration by making it a school goal and distributing information about it to staff. They can reward teachers for their collaborative efforts. They can urge teachers who are uncomfortable with collaboration to learn more about it and experiment in small-scale collaborative projects, and they can include collaboration as part of staff evaluation procedures. When principals do not actively nurture collaboration among staff, collaborative activities are more limited, more informal, and less a part of the school culture.

Another component of a supportive environment is having time available for collaboration (Johnston, Knight, & Miller, 2007; Sever & Bowgren, 2007). It is not enough that each teacher has a preparation period; shared planning time also needs to be arranged. In many middle schools, shared planning occurs as part of the middle school team planning period. In other schools, substitute teachers are employed periodically so that general education teachers and special services staff can meet. In yet other schools, quarterly workdays are scheduled for teachers and part of this time is for collaborative planning.

As a teacher, you will find that time is an important issue (Khorsheed, 2007). The number of tasks you need to complete during available preparation time will be greater than the number of minutes available. The time before and after school will be filled with faculty meetings, conferences with parents, preparation, bus duty, and other assignments. You can help yourself maximize time for collaboration if you keep several things in mind. First, it may be tempting to spend the beginning of a shared planning time discussing the day’s events or comparing notes on some school activity. But if you engage in lengthy social conversation, you will be taking time away from your planning. A trick discovered by teachers in collaborative schools is to finish the business at hand first and then to chat about personal and school events if time is left. Second, because you never truly have enough time to accomplish all that you would like to as a teacher, you must learn to prioritize. You have to choose whether collaborating about a certain student or teaching a certain lesson is justified based on the needs of students and the time available. Not everything can be collaborative, but when collaboration seems appropriate, time should be allocated for it.

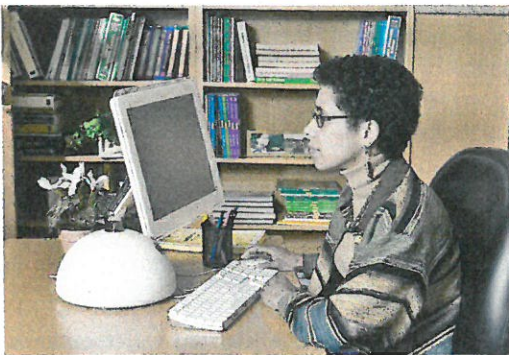
fyi

In our field work with thousands of experienced teachers each year, lack of time is consistently noted as the most serious obstacle to collaboration. Other professionals’ work supports this observation (for example, Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010).

Electronic Collaboration

Collaboration traditionally has been thought of as the way in which professionals interact when they are face to face or perhaps on the phone. However, more and more collaboration is occurring through electronic means. It cannot always adequately replace face-to-face interactions, but it can enhance your other collaborative efforts and provide opportunities for you to learn from and about other professionals you might never have met. Here are examples of electronic collaboration options:

- Would you like to get ideas for lessons for students with disabilities? At oercommons.org you can search for lessons across grade levels and subject matter. You can specifically search for ideas related to “special education” and “inclusion.” As you develop your own lessons, you can post them here to share with colleagues.
- Are you interested in finding out what your colleagues around the United States are saying about working with students with disabilities? At A to Z Teacher Stuff (<http://forums.atozteacherstuff.com>), you can join any of several discussion



Technology offers new ways to enhance collaboration with colleagues and parents.
Pearson Learning Photo Studio

forums concerning students with special needs or issues related to them. For example, recent postings include advice on managing time, working with special educators and co-teaching, and responding to the needs of students with autism. This website also includes a discussion forum for classroom discipline problems.

- Would you like to plan electronically with special educators or other colleagues? Wikis are webpages that you easily set up, which you can ask others to join and use to post lesson plans, assignments, or other materials. This enables you to work on shared items without waiting for them to be passed around through e-mail. You can establish a wiki in Google Groups (<http://groups.google.com>), or at Wikispaces (<http://www.wikispaces.com>).
- Are you thinking of blogging as a way of sharing with others with similar interests? This tool is being used to facilitate reflective teaching and as a means of sharing thoughts about teaching dilemmas. You can set up your own blog at blogger.com or <http://www.edublogs.org>.
- Do you sometimes wish that you could see how other teachers co-teach? How they conduct team meetings? How they find innovative ways to work with students with disabilities? Many examples are available at Teacher Tube (<http://teachertube.com>). This video site is searchable, and its content changes frequently.

If you explore the Internet, you undoubtedly will find other sites that focus on electronic collaboration. These sites can give you fresh ideas, basic knowledge, and a broader understanding of how you and others can make a profound difference in the lives of students with disabilities. These sites also can help you connect with colleagues from across the country and around the world who have similar interests and questions.

What Collaborative Services in Schools Foster Inclusion?

The basic principles of collaboration should be your guide to many types of partnerships in schools. These partnerships may involve other general education teachers, special education teachers, support staff such as speech therapists and counselors, paraprofessionals, parents, and others. Four of the most common collaborative activities concerning students with disabilities are shared problem solving, co-teaching, teaming, and consultation. As you read about these activities, keep in mind that the face-to-face interactions that characterize them can be extended with electronic collaboration using technology now readily available. This is the topic of the Technology Notes.

Shared Problem Solving

Shared problem solving is the basis for many of the collaborative activities that school professionals undertake on behalf of students with disabilities (Bahr & Kovaleski, 2006; Rubinson, 2002). Although shared problem solving sometimes

occurs informally when a general education teacher and a special education teacher meet to decide on appropriate accommodations or other interventions for a student, it also occurs in many other contexts. For example, as you read the applications that follow, you will find that some variation of shared problem solving exists in each. This happens because one way of thinking about co-teaching, teaming, and consultation is as specialized problem-solving approaches.

You might be wondering why problem solving is such a critical topic for professional partnerships. In fact, you may consider yourself already adept at problem solving, because it is an ongoing responsibility of educators. However, as many authors have noted (for example, Friend & Cook, 2010), when professionals share a problem-solving process, it is much more complex than when educators problem solve alone, because the needs, expectations, and ideas of all the participants must be blended into shared understandings and mutually agreed-on solutions. Successful shared problem solving requires skilled participants.

Discover a Shared Need The starting point for problem solving is discovering a shared need, which demonstrates the complexity of shared problem solving. If you face a problem that concerns only you, you try to resolve it by yourself. When you problem solve with colleagues and parents, all the participants need to perceive that a problem exists. Further, it is important that all participants believe they can have an impact on the problem, that they feel accountable for the results of problem solving, and that they can contribute constructively to resolving the problem. When these conditions exist, shared problem solving results in a high level of commitment. When these conditions do not exist, shared problem solving is not shared at all and may appear one sided, with some participants trying to convince others to contribute. For example, many teachers report they have been unable to enlist parents' help in resolving discipline problems. They then go on to describe meetings with parents in which school personnel describe the problem and the parents respond that they do not see such behavior occurring at home. Too often, instead of all parties working to come to a shared understanding of the problem behavior, this type of meeting ends with the parents superficially agreeing to assist in solving a problem they do not believe exists and the school professionals perceiving the parents as only marginally supportive. This dilemma can be avoided if more effort is made to identify a shared need to problem solve (Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010).

Identify the Problem The most critical step in the problem-solving process is problem identification. However, when educators meet to share problem solving, they often feel pressured because of time constraints, and they may rush through this essential stage. Problem identification includes gathering information, compiling it, analyzing it, and reaching consensus about the nature of a student's problem.

In a shared problem-solving situation, you can help emphasize the importance of problem identification by asking whether everyone has agreed on the problem, by asking someone else to restate the problem to check your understanding of it, and by encouraging participants who have not spoken to share their opinions.

Consider the following situation, which shows what can happen when problem identification is not done correctly: A teacher in a shared problem-solving session says to the parent of a student whose attendance is irregular and who consistently comes to school without assignments or basic supplies, "We really need your help in making sure Demitrious gets up when his alarm goes off so he can catch the bus. And we'd like to establish a system in which you sign off on his written assignments." The parent replies, "It's so hard. I work until midnight, and I don't get up when it's time for the kids to go to school. I don't think he sees any point in the homework he's getting—that's why he doesn't bring it back." In this situation, the educator has identified the problem before the meeting has even started: Demitrious needs to assume responsibility, and his parents need to provide more guidance for school activities. Further, the teacher is proposing a solution to the

www.resources

<http://cecp.air.org>

The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice is a federally funded organization designed to promote effective educational practices for students with emotional and behavior problems. This site includes links for parents, teachers, and other professionals on topics related to working together on behalf of these students.

problem and not exploring the problem itself. The parent's response suggests that she does not see the same problem; in fact, the parent is implying that perhaps the problem is not with Demitrious at all but with the school staff.

Consider how this interaction could have been handled differently: The teacher says to the parent, "Ms. Trenton, thanks so much for taking time off work to meet with us. We appreciate your concern for Demitrious. Lately, we've seen a problem with his attendance. We asked you to come to school so we can learn about your perspective on this situation and to let Demitrious know that we're working together to help him." When the parent replies with the comment about her working hours and Demitrious's perception of the homework, the teacher replies, "That's important information for us. We're hoping we can find ways to motivate Demitrious to come to school—and that includes assigning homework that he sees as valuable." In this situation, the school professionals are working with the parent to identify the problem, not presenting the problem to her.

RESEARCH NOTE

A study of parents' perceptions found that parents valued both the quantity and quality of communication from educators; a sense of educators' commitment to the welfare of their children as students; and a feeling of equality in power, trust, and respect (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Propose Solutions Once a problem has been clearly identified, the next step is to create a wide range of options for solving the problem. One of the most common ways to come up with solutions is to brainstorm.

Brainstorming is based on two important principles. First, judgment is deferred; that is, to free the mind to be creative, people must suspend their predisposition to judge ideas. Second, quantity leads to quality; the more ideas that are generated for solving a problem, the more likely it is that novel and effective solutions can be found. Brainstorming requires openness and creativity. When implemented effectively, it often leads to several ideas that are highly likely to resolve the problem being addressed.

Evaluate Ideas With a list of ideas, the next step in shared problem solving is to evaluate the ideas by considering whether they seem likely to resolve the problem and are feasible. One way to evaluate ideas is to use a decision sheet like that illustrated in Figure 3.1. On this decision sheet, the participants stated the problem—to find ways of encouraging Angela to work independently on classroom tasks—and generated ideas for achieving this goal. They then selected criteria by which to judge the merits of each idea. They considered the following:

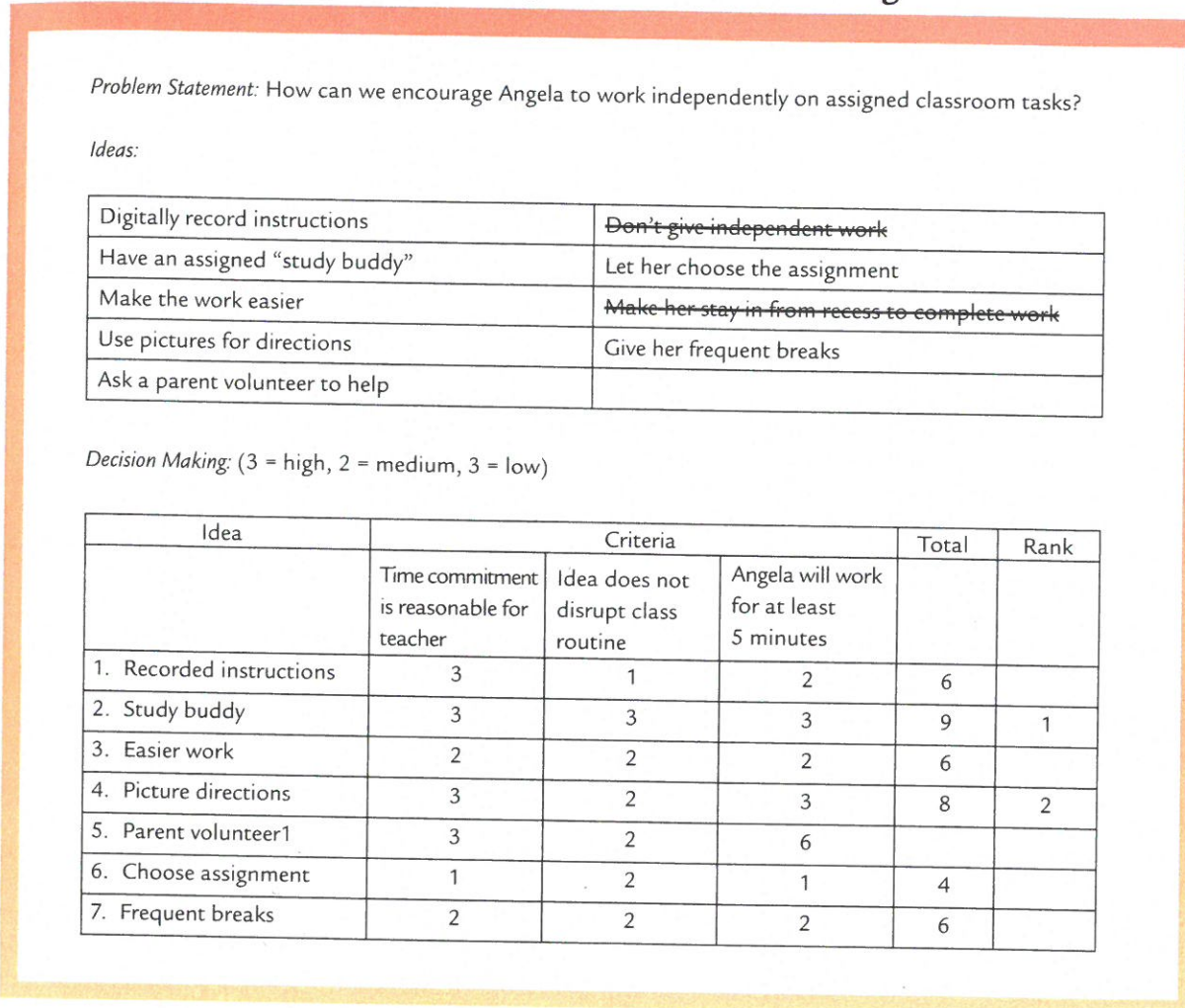
- how well the idea would work for increasing the amount of time Angela spends on her independent assignments
- the extent to which the idea has a reasonable time cost
- the extent to which the idea preserves classroom routines

Ideas that were not seriously considered were crossed out, and the criteria for decision making were applied to those remaining, with each idea being rated against each criterion. In Figure 3.1, the two ideas with the highest ratings were assigning a study buddy and using picture directions.

Plan Specifics Once one or two ideas have been chosen using a process such as the one just described, more detailed planning needs to occur. For example, suppose you and others have decided you would like to try having a high school service club provide volunteer tutoring in an after-school program. Some of the tasks to assign include asking club members about their interest in the project, arranging a place for the program, ensuring that needed supplies are available, obtaining permission to operate the program, establishing a schedule for students, determining who will provide adult supervision and scheduling it, advertising the program, and creating and conducting training sessions for the tutors.

Typically, at this step of shared problem solving, not only do participants list the major tasks that need to be completed to implement the solution, but they also decide who will take responsibility for each task. In addition, they specify a timeline for completing all the tasks and usually decide how long to implement the solution before meeting to evaluate its effectiveness.

FIGURE 3.1 A Sample Decision-Making Sheet for Problem Solving



Implement the Solution If all the steps in the shared problem-solving process have been carefully followed, then implementing the selected idea(s) may be the most straightforward part of the process. When problem solving occurs concerning a student with a disability in an inclusive school, each team member may have some responsibility for implementing the solution. Occasionally, you will have much of the immediate responsibility. In other cases, parents will have a major role to play. Each person involved must do his part for the solution to have a high probability of success. During implementation, it is helpful to keep some type of record documenting your efforts and how the intervention affects the student.

Evaluate Outcomes After a period of time—anywhere from just a few days to two or more weeks—the professionals who are implementing the solution meet to evaluate its effectiveness. At this time, three possibilities exist:

1. If the solution has been especially effective, it may be judged a success. It then will be continued to maintain the results, discontinued if no longer needed, or gradually phased out.
2. If the solution seems to be having a positive effect but is not ideal for some other reason, it may be modified. For example, suppose a behavior management plan is helping a student attend class rather than skip it, but the general education teacher notes that the system is too time consuming. The problem-solving group may then try to streamline the plan to make it more feasible.

dimensions of DIVERSITY

At least some evidence indicates that gender differences exist among school psychologists in terms of the strategies they use in consulting with teachers (Getty & Erchul, 2009), with men relying more than women on expert power to influence teachers.

3. Even when the steps in problem solving are carefully completed, a solution occasionally is judged ineffective. The team then must decide what to do next: select a different solution, find additional solutions, or possibly reconsider whether the problem has been accurately identified. The team needs to consider all these possibilities before proceeding with additional problem solving.

Professionals who regularly employ the strategies of shared problem solving are quick to acknowledge that the steps do not automatically lead to a simple solution that always works. However, they report that when they problem solve in this fashion, they perceive that their professional time is well spent and that the problem-solving process is truly a collaborative endeavor.

Co-Teaching

Co-teaching occurs when two or more educators—a general education teacher and a special education teacher or other specialist—share the instruction for a single group of students, typically in a single classroom setting (Friend, 2008; McDuffie, Mastropieri, & Scruggs, 2009). Although any two teachers can teach together (and this sometimes occurs at elementary, middle, and high schools), we focus here on the unique arrangement of two professionals with potentially very different points of view and areas of expertise working together on behalf of all the students in a class, the type of arrangement that Ms. Randelman and Ms. Pickett, introduced at the beginning of the chapter, have in their classroom.

Co-teaching is becoming a very popular service delivery option in inclusive schools (Friend, 2008; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). In a classroom with several students with disabilities, combining the strengths of the general education teacher and a special educator can create options for all students (Friend & Cook, 2010; Stivers, 2008). Co-teaching typically occurs for a set period of time either every day (for example, every morning from 9:30 until 10:15 or during second period seventh-grade math) or on certain days of the week (for example, on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays during third period or second block). Other options for scheduling may be used, depending on student needs and the availability of special education teachers.

As effective as co-teaching is when carefully implemented, it is not the answer for every student with a disability or for every classroom in an inclusive school. Co-teaching is only one option for meeting the needs of students. It should be implemented when the number of students with disabilities in a class and the nature of their needs justify the presence of two teachers, or the class is one in which all students with disabilities must enroll (for example, a high school U.S. history class).

Many approaches are available to teachers who decide to co-teach. Friend (2008) has outlined some of the common ones, and they are depicted in Figure 3.2.

One Teach, One Observe In this approach, one teacher, leads the lesson and the other gathers data on students to understand them better and make instructional decisions. For example, while Ms. Tran, the general education teacher, leads a lesson in which students work in cooperative groups to answer questions about a map, Ms. Firestone, the special education teacher, systematically observes three students who are known to struggle with social skills. Ms. Firestone notes on a chart the number of times those students initiate interactions with peers, as well as how often other students direct comments

www.resources

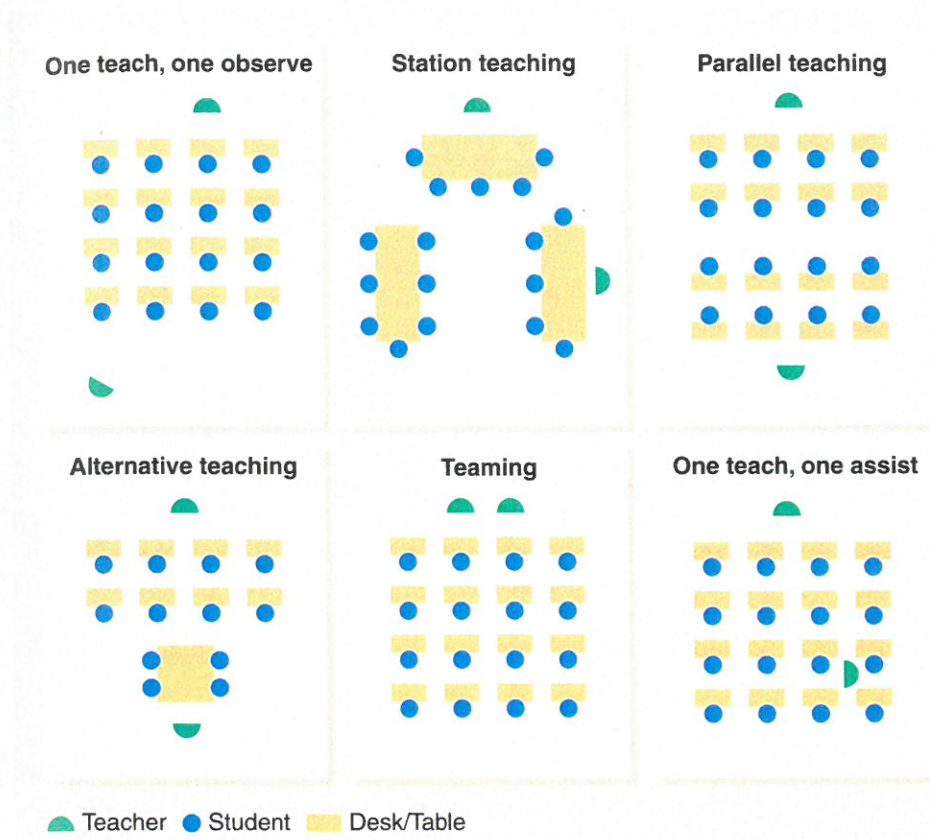
<http://coteach.com>

At this website, you can find resources related to co-teaching and answers to common questions concerning this increasingly popular service delivery option for students with disabilities and other special needs.



Co-teaching, when two teachers share instruction in the general education setting, provides true curriculum access for students with disabilities.

© Bob Daemrich/Alamy

FIGURE 3.2 Co-Teaching Approaches

or questions to them. How can this information be helpful to the teachers? Teachers can observe students' ability to pay attention, work independently, participate during instruction, and seek assistance when they have questions. However this approach is used, it is essential that each educator sometimes take the primary teaching role in the class while the other observes. In this way, both teachers have the opportunity to watch the class in action, and both have credibility with students as a result of leading instruction.

Station Teaching In *station teaching*, three groups of students are arranged. Two stations include teacher-facilitated instruction; in the third station, students, alone or with a partner, complete a review activity or a project. If students cannot work independently, the last group can be eliminated. During the lesson, students move to each station. In an elementary school, an entire lesson based on stations may be completed in a single day; in a secondary school, a single station may take an entire class period or more. For example, in a ninth-grade math class, some of the students are working with the general education teacher to learn one method for solving quadratic equations. A second group is meeting with the special education teacher to learn an alternative method. A third group of students is working in pairs on an assignment. Each station lasts an entire class period.

Parallel Teaching Sometimes when two teachers are present, they find it advantageous simply to divide a heterogeneous class group and have each teacher instruct half the class. In this format, called *parallel teaching*, every student has twice as many opportunities to participate in a discussion or respond to teacher questions. A teacher particularly skilled in presenting information through pictures can use this approach while the other teacher emphasizes learning through listening. Students who prefer one method to the other can be placed with the appropriate teacher. In an elementary classroom, this approach may be used to enable students to read different books based on their interests or skill levels. In a secondary classroom, this approach may

RESEARCH NOTE

Co-teaching has been found to contribute significantly to raising the achievement scores of students with disabilities on mandated high-stakes achievement tests (Samuels, 2007).

give students more opportunities to respond during a discussion of a current events topic or enable teachers to present different points of view on a topic, which students then can present to each other when the large group comes back together.

Alternative Teaching In many classrooms, having one teacher work with most of the class while the other teacher focuses attention on a small group is sometimes appropriate. This co-teaching option is referred to as *alternative teaching*. Traditionally, the small group has been used for remediation, but many other options are recommended. For example, some students may benefit from *preteaching*, in which one teacher works with a small group of students who may struggle to learn (whether or not they have IEPs), who are shy, or who are just learning to speak English. Information to be presented the next day or later in the same day or class is taught to these students to give them a jump start on learning (Munk, Gibb, & Caldarella, 2010).

Enrichment also works well in small groups. For example, as a unit of instruction on global warming is concluding, several students may have a strong interest in the topic. As the other students review and complete assigned tasks, this group may meet to discuss career opportunities related to environmental issues, write letters to obtain more information about research on global warming, or explore websites on related topics. The members in this group could include high-achieving students, students who have average academic achievement but strong interest in this topic, a student with a behavior disorder who would benefit more from this activity than from the assigned work, and a student with a moderate intellectual disability for whom the written task is not appropriate.

Grouping students for remediation is appropriate, but only when it is one of many grouping options and is used only occasionally. Otherwise, such an arrangement becomes the equivalent of running a special education program in the back of a general education classroom—an arrangement that completely undermines the purpose and principles of inclusive schooling.

Teaming In the co-teaching option of *teaming*, the teachers share leadership in the classroom; both are equally engaged in the instructional activities. For example, one teacher may begin a lesson by introducing vocabulary while the other provides examples as a way to place the words in context. Two teachers may role-play an important event from history or demonstrate how to complete a lab activity. Two teachers may model how to address conflict by staging a debate about a current event. You reach the limits of teaming only when you run out of exciting ideas for creating instruction with two teachers instead of one. Co-teachers who use this approach find it the most energizing of all the co-teaching options, but you should also be aware that you and a co-teacher might not be compatible enough in terms of teaching style to use it. If that is the case, using several of the other approaches might be more effective.

One Teach, One Assist Occasionally during instruction, one teacher is appropriately leading the lesson while the other is quietly assisting individual students. For example, while the special education teacher leads a lesson on a test review, the general education teacher helps students individually as they have questions about the vocabulary. Alternatively, while the general education teacher leads a lesson on the causes of World War II, the special education teacher helps keep students on task and responds quietly to student questions. The key to implementing this approach successfully is to use it sparingly. With overuse, one of the teachers, often the special educator, may perceive that she has no legitimate role in the class and is mostly like a teaching assistant (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). In addition, if this approach to co-teaching is used too frequently, students may become overly dependent on the extra help that always seems to be available.

Co-Teaching Pragmatics As you consider these co-teaching approaches, you might notice that several other factors need to be taken into account in addition to how the teachers arrange themselves and the students (Damore & Murray, 2009;

Friend, 2008; Tannock, 2009). First, in a co-taught class, students are grouped so that those with disabilities are integrated appropriately with their peers without disabilities. Thus, in a station teaching arrangement, students with special needs are likely to be in each of the three groups although at times they may be placed together to meet a specific instructional need. When alternative teaching occurs, the smaller group may or may not contain students with disabilities. Second, both teachers take on teaching and supportive roles. Otherwise, the special education teacher may end up being seen as a helper who does not have teacher status. Third, the best approaches to use depend on student needs, the subject being taught, the teachers' experience, and practical considerations such as space and time for planning. Novice co-teachers may prefer station teaching or parallel teaching over teaming, especially in a class that includes several students with attention problems who would benefit from a smaller group structure. We make this recommendation because the former approaches require less minute-to-minute coordination with another teacher. Finally, the type of curriculum sometimes dictates the approach. For example, a topic that is sequential obviously cannot be taught in stations; it may be presented best through teaming followed by parallel-taught study groups.



Team effectiveness often can be demonstrated when members together are able to do more together than any single member could do alone. Stone/Getty Images

Working on a Team

You learned that you have responsibility as a member of an intervention assistance team or response to intervention (RTI) team to problem solve about students before they are considered for special education (Bahr & Kovaleski, 2006; Duhon, Mesmer, Gregerson, & Witt, 2009; Lee-Tarver, 2006). You also learned you may be a member of the multidisciplinary team (MDT) that determines whether a student is eligible to receive special education services and then writes the student's IEP (Lytle & Bordin, 2001). These teams rely on collaboration among members, and it is important that you understand the concepts and procedures they and other school teams have that make them effective. The Case in Practice captures a few moments of a response to intervention team meeting illustrating this point.

When you think about highly successful teams, what comes to mind? Your favorite athletic team? A surgical team? An orchestra? What is it about these teams that makes them successful? **Teams** are formal work groups that have certain characteristics. They have clear goals, active and committed members, and leaders; they practice to achieve their results; and they do not let personal issues interfere with accomplishment of their goals. What are other characteristics of effective teams?

The teams you will be part of at school have many of the same characteristics as other kinds of teams (Fleming & Monda-Amaya, 2001). Their success depends on the commitment of every member and the clarity of their goals (Etscheidt & Knesting, 2007; Fratture & Capper, 2007). On effective school teams, members keep in mind why they are a team, setting aside personal differences to reach a goal that often is to design the best educational strategies possible for students with disabilities or other special needs.

Team Participant Roles As a team member, you must assume multiple roles. First, in your professional role as a general education teacher, you bring a particular perspective to a team interaction, as do the special education teacher, counselor, adaptive physical educator, principal, and other team members (Shapiro & Sayers, 2003). You contribute an understanding of what students without disabilities are accomplishing in your grade or course, knowledge of the curriculum and its pace, and a sense of the prerequisites of what you are teaching and the expectations for students likely to follow the next segment of instruction.

CASE IN PRACTICE

An Rtl Problem-Solving Meeting

At Triton Middle School, response to intervention is the responsibility of each team. Today, a sixth-grade team is meeting to review data on student progress. Present are the four core content area teachers (Mr. Land, science; Mr. Graf, math; Ms. Buchanan, English; Ms. Lincoln, social studies); Mr. Lashley, the assistant principal who helps the team analyze their data; Ms. Gardner, the reading specialist; and Ms. Dunn, the special educator assigned to the team. One student the team is discussing is Scott.

Ms. Gardner: Scott has been participating in the Tigers Reading Club during intervention time for the past twelve weeks. His attendance is nearly perfect, and he is completing all the reading activities. I think our Tier 2 intervention is really working well for many students, but Scott still is not making enough progress in comprehension—it's still right at a mid-fourth-grade level, and our criteria indicate he should be approaching an early fifth-grade-level by now.

Ms. Dunn: I did some checking with Scott's fifth-grade teacher. She told me that Scott had gone back and forth between Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions last year, but that their team decided he was making adequate progress. His records do not indicate he has ever been referred for special education services.

Ms. Buchanan: I see the comprehension problems in English. Scott tries, and he's a nice kid, but he misses a lot because he hasn't understood what he has read.

Mr. Land: I can say that exact thing about science. I try to discuss almost everything—not have the students just read in their books—partly because I know Scott has difficulty with the reading, even with a highlighted text and shortened assignments.

Ms. Lincoln: Same thing happens in social studies. I brought several samples of his work and his weekly quiz scores since the beginning of the year.

Mr. Graf: In math, he's doing well—his average on tests and assignments is slightly above the class average.

[Additional data on Scott's comprehension skills are discussed by team members.]

Mr. Lashley: Based on the data we have from progress monitoring and the information all of you have contributed, it seems like we're saying he needs a more intensive intervention. Does everyone agree?

[Head nods from everyone.]

Ms. Gardner: I think our best option is to have him enroll in the reading class for the next grading quarter. That would give him a daily computer-based, highly structured reading program with me as the teacher, and it would provide twice as much intervention time as he receives now.

The meeting continues...

REFLECTION

What collaborative roles do general education teachers play during response to intervention meetings? Why is it important that each teacher bring data to such a meeting and share it with colleagues? What parts of a problem-solving process did this meeting include? What role do you think parents should have in such a process? How is this type of collaboration an improvement over past practices for addressing student learning problems?

The second contribution you make is through your personal role, that is, the characteristics that define you as a person. For example, are you a person who sees the positive aspects of almost any situation? If so, you will probably be the person who keeps up the team's morale. Are you a detail-oriented person who is skilled at organizing? If so, you will probably be the team member who ensures that all the tasks get completed and all the paperwork is filed.

Third, you have a team role to fulfill as well. You may be the individual who makes sure the agenda is being followed or who watches the time so team meetings do not last too long. Or you may have the role of summarizing and clarifying others' comments or suggesting ways to combine what seem to be contradictory points of view into integrated solutions to student problems. As an effective member, you will recognize your strengths and use them to enhance the team; you also will be vigilant so your weaknesses do not interfere with the team's accomplishing its tasks. Common

formal team roles include team facilitator, recorder, and timekeeper. These roles might rotate so that every team member has the opportunity to experience each one. Informal team roles include being a compromiser, information seeker, and reality checker. These informal roles are not usually assigned, but team members ensure that they are fulfilled as the need arises.

Team Goals One of the keys to effective teams is attention to goals (Friend & Cook, 2010). Being clear and explicit about goals is particularly important in educational settings because team goals often are assumed or too limited. For example, on some response to intervention teams, teachers perceive the team goal to be to document interventions so that the special education identification procedures can begin. Others believe the team functions to help teachers address student learning problems so that any consideration of special education can be avoided, if at all possible. Note how crucial this difference in perception of team purpose is. Without clear and specific goals, teams often flounder.

Another aspect of team goals is especially important. The goals just discussed are commonly referred to as *task goals*; that is, they are the business of the team. But teams have another set of goals as well called *maintenance goals*. Maintenance goals refer to the team's status and functioning as a team. Maintenance goals may include beginning and ending meetings on time, finishing all agenda items during a single meeting, taking time to check on team members' perceptions of team effectiveness, and improving team communication both during meetings and outside them. These and other maintenance goals enable effective teams to accomplish the task goals they set.

Consultation

In some cases, you may not have direct support for a student in your classroom. Perhaps the student does not have an identified disability, or perhaps the student's needs can be met with occasional supports. For example, you might have an outgoing student who suddenly begins acting very withdrawn. Or you may learn that for the next school year, you will have a student who has a significant physical disability; you would like to know how to assist the student and whether you should seek special training. As illustrated in the chapter-opening story about Brittany, if you have a student with autism in your class, you might find that both you and the special education teacher need assistance from someone else to help the student learn the best ways to transition from activity to activity. These are examples of situations in which you might seek support through consultation.

Consultation is a specialized problem-solving process in which one professional who has particular expertise assists another professional (or parent) who needs the benefit of that expertise (Erchul & Martens, 2010). For example, you may contact a behavior consultant for assistance when a student in your class is aggressive. You might meet with a vision or hearing consultant when a student with one of those disabilities is included in your class. If you have a student who has received medical or other services outside school, you may consult with someone from the agency that has been providing those services.

Consultation is most effective when it is based on the principles of collaboration already presented, but its purpose is not reciprocal. That is, in consultation, the goal is for someone with specific expertise to assist you (or another professional); the other person may learn from you, but that is not the goal. The process of consulting generally begins when you as the teacher complete a request form or otherwise indicate you have a concern about a student (Dettmer, Thurston, Knackendoffel, & Dyck, 2009). The consultant then contacts you to arrange an initial meeting. At that meeting, the problem is further clarified, your expectations are discussed, and often arrangements are made for the consultant to observe in your room. Once the observation phase has been completed, the consultant and you meet again to finalize your understanding of

RESEARCH NOTE

Each team member plays a crucial role. Knotek (2003) found that decisions about students referred to intervention assistance teams were influenced by the social status of team members, the comments made about students by high-status members, and the way they stated their comments.

fyi

Although special education teachers sometimes act as consultants, this role is more often filled by school psychologists, counselors, and specialists for concerns such as student behavior.



Working TOGETHER

Consultation with a Behavior Specialist

When teachers cannot find solutions for student issues, they sometimes call on the expertise of a consultant. Consultants usually have specialized knowledge and skills in a particular area (e.g., autism, behavior, reading), and they are employed to help teachers and other professionals find strategies to help students. Here is an example of what might occur in a consultation session regarding a student with increasingly serious behavior problems.

Mr. Davidson is meeting with Ms. Marks, the district behavior specialist, concerning Luis, a student identified as having an emotional/behavioral disability. Ms. Risik, the special educator, also is present. Mr. Davidson asked for assistance because of his concern that Luis is becoming increasingly aggressive when he is frustrated. The parent of another third-grader called Mr. Davidson to report that Luis is pushing students on the bus and bullying them with threats that he'll have his older brother beat them up.

Mr. Davidson: Thanks for meeting with me. I've been trying to do everything Ms. Risik has suggested to address Luis's behavior, but I'm not seeing any improvement. If anything, things are worse. Ms. Risik, you asked me to keep some data about what's occurring, and I did that. In the past week, I've intervened when Luis was threatening another student or trying to hit someone an average of three times each day. I've had two reports from playground supervisors of other incidents. What worries me most is that yesterday, Luis made a fist at me, used a word that is not allowed in our classroom, and would not apologize when I escorted him from the room. This is getting too serious for me to address.

Ms. Marks: Ms. Risik, what are you seeing?

Ms. Risik: Mr. Davidson really has implemented the behavior plan for Luis very carefully, and I really appreciate that, Mr. Davidson.

I'm also observing increasing frustration and aggression. When Luis was working with me in the resource room, he was struggling with work I have seen him do easily before, and he suddenly tore the paper in half, wadded it up, and threw it across the room. There have been several other incidents as well.


Ms. Marks: Listening to both of you, I agree that it sounds like Luis's aggression is increasing. Our first step is to figure out what might be triggering his behavior. Mr. Davidson, I know we need to do something fairly quickly, but would you be comfortable if I came to your room a couple of times this week to observe Luis? Sometimes an outside observer can pick up on patterns of what is happening. I'll also arrange to observe him in the lunchroom and on the playground and will check with the art and music teachers to see if they have noticed behavior changes. Then, if you're willing, we could meet next Monday to see if we can identify what is occurring and design a new plan to address the problem. If we decide a change is needed in the behavior plan that is part of Luis's IEP, we'll need to ask for a team meeting.

Mr. Davidson: That sounds fine with me. I'd prefer you observe during language arts—that seems to be a time of day that is particularly difficult for Luis.

Ms. Risik: If you'd like to observe Luis working in the resource room, please do. We really need some new solutions. I would not like to see the behaviors escalate any further—he had been having such a great year until recently.

Ms. Marks: I'm confident we'll come up with some new ideas. I just want to be sure that we address the real problem and not just a symptom of it—the behavior you're observing.

After a few minutes, the meeting breaks up, to be continued the following Monday.



the problem, generate and select options for addressing it, and plan how to implement whatever strategies seem needed. A timeline for putting the strategies into effect is also established. Typically, you then carry out the strategies. Following this phase, the consultant and you meet once again to determine whether the problem has been resolved. If it has, the strategy is either continued to maintain the success or eliminated as no longer needed. If the problem continues to exist, the consultant may suggest that you begin a new consulting process, or together you may decide that some other action is needed. When appropriate, the consultant closes the case. In the Working Together, you can learn more about what it's like to work with a consultant.

For consulting to be effective, both the consultant and the consultee (that is, you as the teacher) need to participate responsibly. Your role includes preparing for meetings, being open to the consultant's suggestions, using the agreed upon strategies systematically, and documenting the effectiveness of ideas you try. The consultant's role includes listening carefully to your concerns; analyzing data that can inform decision making; and working with you to design, implement, and evaluate

feasible strategy. Together, your partnership can provide supports for many students whose needs do not require direct specialized services.

The Complexity of Professional Collaboration

As you have read the information about collaborative services for students with disabilities, you probably have realized that they are based on caring and committed professionals who believe in the power of shared efforts and are open to the ideas of colleagues. However, even when all the conditions essential for collaboration are in place, disagreements can occur. And occasionally, you may find yourself working with a colleague or group of colleagues with whom you have deep disagreements. What happens then? Is collaboration possible?

Although most professionals would prefer that all interactions be pleasant and based on agreements, that, of course, is not a real-world expectation. You may find that you believe that the special educator who reads tests to the students with disabilities in your class is providing so much assistance that they are getting higher scores than you think accurately represent their learning. Perhaps your principal has said that she expects you to co-teach next year, and you are not sure you want to participate—but you have not been given a choice. Or perhaps you and one team member tend to have different points of view on everything from making changes in grading policies for students with disabilities to classroom behavior expectations for them.

Disagreement is an inevitable by-product of collaboration. Disagreements can be minor or major, and the people involved can be committed to resolving them or maintaining their own viewpoints. Regardless, here are a few ideas for responding to disagreements:

- Try to view the situation from the perspective of the other person, using the concept of **frame of reference**—that is, the totality of the other person's viewpoint that is based on her background, experiences, education, and even work history in schools. Using a frame of reference can help you see things as the other individual sees them, a valuable first step in resolving a disagreement.
- See if you can get agreement by trying a solution that can be reevaluated at a later time. For example, if you think the special educator is providing too much assistance to students, perhaps the test could be read by a paraprofessional, or perhaps you could read the test while the special educator supervised the other students taking it. After trying one of these (or other) options two or three times, you and your colleague should review them for effectiveness. Sometimes a solution can be reached if everyone knows it can be changed later as needed.
- Examine your own part in the disagreement. If you tend to be a person for whom every issue is a big issue, a straightforward way to address disagreement is to work diligently to reflect on your behavior. If you tend to insist on your solution, you might want to deliberately work to sometimes acquiesce to others' preferences. For honest input on this difficult possibility, you might want to seek input from a colleague, mentor, or administrator.

In the *Instructional Edge* you will find examples of topics that sometimes are sources of disagreements between general and special educators. How could you use the strategies just outlined to find ways to resolve differences regarding them?

Perhaps the most important message related to disagreements with colleagues is this: Disagreements provide opportunities to create new and better options for students. Disagreements may be stressful, but you can turn them into solutions by thinking carefully about your views and the basis for them, engaging in constructive conversations with other professionals, and keeping in mind that any resolution ultimately has as its goal helping students with disabilities.

www.resources

<http://www.newconversations.net/>
New Conversations is a website dedicated to fostering collaboration by providing free materials to those interested. If you'd like to enhance your communication skills, the posted *Seven Challenges Workbook* has many practical ideas.

How Can You Work Effectively with Paraprofessionals?

Throughout this chapter, the assumption has been made that all the individuals involved in forming school partnerships have equal status; that is, a general education teacher has approximately the same level of authority and equivalent responsibilities as a special education teacher, speech/language therapist, school psychologist, reading teacher, and so on. In many school districts, individuals in these types of positions are referred to as *certified staff* or *professional staff*.

One other partnership you may form involves another type of staff. **Paraprofessionals**, or paraeducators, are school personnel employed to assist certified staff in carrying out educational programs and otherwise helping in the instruction of students with disabilities. Although some school districts also employ other types of paraprofessionals, for this discussion, we refer only to paraprofessionals who are part of special education services. Paraprofessionals usually have completed two years of college or have passed an examination related to their responsibilities, but they generally are not required to have a four-year college degree. When students with disabilities are members of your class, a special educator may not have adequate time or opportunity to assist them frequently, or the students might not need the direct services of that professional. Instead, a paraprofessional might be assigned to you for a class period or subject or, depending on the intensity of student needs, for much of the school day (Giangreco, Suter, & Doyle, 2010; Devlin, 2008).

dimensions of DIVERSITY

Rueda and Genzuk (2007) found that in both general education and special education classrooms, Latino paraprofessionals often were given low-level tasks to complete. They proposed that these valuable school employees instead should be considered “cultural brokers.”

Understanding Your Working Relationship with Paraprofessionals

The partnerships you form with paraprofessionals are slightly different from those you form with certified staff because you have some supervisory responsibility for a paraprofessional’s work, a situation that would not exist in your work with other colleagues (Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke, & Sorensen, 2009). For example, you may be expected to prepare materials for the paraprofessional to use in working with a group of students, you may have the responsibility of assigning tasks to this person on a daily basis, and you may need to provide informal training to the paraprofessional regarding your classroom expectations.

Many classroom teachers have never been supervisors, and they worry about what types of tasks to assign to a paraprofessional and how to set expectations (Devlin, 2008). Adding to the complexity of the situation is the fact that some paraprofessionals have extensive professional preparation, a teaching license, and years of classroom experience, which makes them prepared to do nearly everything you do; others meet only the minimum requirements and have little experience working with students. If you will be working with a paraprofessional, you should receive a written description of that person’s job responsibilities, specifying the types of activities that individual is to complete. Also you can arrange to meet with the special education teacher or another professional who has overall responsibility for the paraprofessional’s job performance.

Two general guidelines for working effectively with paraprofessionals are these: First, paraprofessionals generally enjoy working with students and want to participate actively in that process, and they should have the opportunity to do so. However, they also are expected to help teachers accomplish some of the chores of teaching, such as record keeping and instructional preparation tasks. Second, paraprofessionals complete their instructional assignments under the direction of a teacher who either has already taught the information or has decided what basic work needs to be completed; that is, paraprofessionals should not engage in initial teaching, nor should they make instructional decisions without input from a certified staff member.

www.resources

<http://www.nrcpara.org>

The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (NRCPP) was founded in 1979 to support paraprofessionals who work in schools. This site includes several discussion boards, including one for teachers and administrators who have questions about working with paraprofessionals.

You have a key role in setting expectations for a paraprofessional who may work in your classroom, for ensuring that you and the paraprofessional are satisfied with your working relationship, and for resolving any problems that arise. At the beginning of the school year, you can orient the paraprofessional to your classroom by providing a place for him to keep personal belongings and instructional materials, explaining essential rules and policies for your classroom, clarifying where in the classroom you want him to work, and asking him to voice questions and concerns (French, 2003). It is particularly important to touch base with the paraprofessional frequently early in the school year to be certain that expectations are clear. The paraprofessional may be working in several classrooms and trying to remember several sets of directions from different teachers, all with their own styles. You might even find that discussing these topics is best accomplished in a meeting that includes the special education teacher, you, any other general education teachers involved, and the paraprofessional. Figure 3.4 outlines some questions you might want to ask concerning your work with paraprofessionals to ensure your experience is positive for you and your students as well as the paraprofessional.

To continue nurturing the working relationship you have with a paraprofessional, you should communicate clearly and directly all activities you would like him to complete. Some paraprofessionals report that they enter a classroom only to find that the teacher is already working with students and expects the paraprofessional to know what to do with the students with special needs, assuming that the special education teacher has provided this direction. Meanwhile, the special educator is assuming that the general education teacher is guiding the paraprofessional. Unfortunately, in this situation the paraprofessional may be left frustrated and wondering how to proceed.

Collaborating with Paraprofessionals

An often-asked teacher question regarding paraprofessionals is this: Given the supervisory nature of teacher–paraprofessional work, is it possible to collaborate with this group of staff members? The answer is yes. Paraprofessionals can collaboratively participate in shared problem solving about student needs, planning field trip and class activity details, and making decisions regarding how best to adapt information for a specific student (Giangreco et al., 2010). Your responsibility as a teacher is to encourage this type of collaboration. At the same time, you should clearly inform the paraprofessional when a matter being discussed is not one in which the principles

FIGURE 3.4 General Educator's Questions for Working with Paraprofessionals

- Is the paraprofessional in my class provided as a general support for students with disabilities, or is she assigned on behalf of a particular student?
- What range of activities should I expect the paraprofessional to complete related to academic instruction? Behavior? Student social interactions? Physical assistance?
- Are there specific activities the paraprofessional must carry out? Should not carry out?
- To what extent am I responsible for assigning the paraprofessional specific tasks and activities in the classroom?
- What strategies will be used to ensure that communication among the special education teacher, paraprofessional, and me is clear and consistent? How will we meet on a regular basis to discuss student progress, problems, and paraprofessional responsibilities in the classroom?
- Should the paraprofessional communicate directly with the parents?
- Should we discuss any issues related to confidentiality?
- What training has the paraprofessional had for working in my classroom? For working with students with disabilities? What preparation has the paraprofessional had related to the curriculum for which I am responsible?
- What should I do if I am uncomfortable with something the paraprofessional is doing or reporting or if other problems occur?
- What should I do on days on which I don't have anything in particular for the paraprofessional to do?

fyi

Vocabulary related to paraprofessionals can be confusing. Accepted terms for these school staff members include *paraeducator* and *teaching assistant*. In large districts, specially trained paraprofessionals might have a title related to their training, such as *behavior technician* or *personal or one-to-one assistant*. The term *aide* is considered out of date for these individuals.

of collaboration are appropriate. It also is important that you tell paraprofessionals when they are meeting your expectations and that you promptly address any issues of concern as soon as you become aware of them. For example, Ms. Fulton is a paraprofessional in the seventh-grade math class. At a recent brief meeting, the math teacher thanked her for quietly answering students' questions about directions and providing assistance in reading items in the textbook. However, he also directed Ms. Fulton to avoid assisting students in answering the problems being worked. His judgment is that her help is approaching the level of providing students with answers. He illustrated his point by talking through with her an example of how to respond to a student who asks for assistance. His directions to Ms. Fulton were direct and clear but also respectful of her many years of experience in working with students with disabilities.

The Complexity of Collaborating with Paraprofessionals

Most of your interactions with paraprofessionals will be positive, and you will realize how valuable these school personnel are in inclusive classrooms. Although most paraprofessionals work diligently, have a tremendous commitment to working with students with disabilities, and manage their roles superbly, problems occasionally arise. If you teach older students, you might find that the paraprofessional does not have enough knowledge of the content being presented to reinforce student learning. A few paraprofessionals violate principles of confidentiality by discussing classroom or student matters away from school. Some paraprofessionals are disruptive in classrooms—for example, their speech is too loud or their interactions with students are too casual. If problems such as these occur and cannot be resolved directly between you and the paraprofessional, you should ask the special educator with whom you work to meet with you and the paraprofessional to problem solve. If further action is needed, an administrator such as a principal or special education coordinator can assist. Ultimately, you are directing the day-to-day work of the paraprofessionals in your class. If problems arise, it is your responsibility to follow up until they are resolved and students' support is being provided appropriately.

An entirely different type of problem can occur, but it is equally serious. Some paraprofessionals tend to hover over students with disabilities, preventing them from establishing social relationships with peers and fostering dependence instead of independence (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). You should discuss this well-intentioned but inappropriate activity with such paraprofessionals and give clear, alternative directions for their interactions with students. By offering encouragement and addressing concerns, you can establish an environment that will make your collaboration with paraprofessionals invaluable.



WRAPPING IT UP

BACK TO THE CASES

This section provides opportunities for you to apply the knowledge gained in this chapter to the cases described at the beginning of this chapter. The questions and activities that follow demonstrate how the concepts that you have learned about in this chapter connect to the everyday activities of all teachers.

MS. RANDELMAN and Ms. Pickett ask for your advice on co-teaching. Briefly outline or describe two styles of co-teaching you might recommend to them. Assume that you have chosen to teach this grade level and subject area. For each of these two co-teaching styles, answer the following questions:

- Why would you select this style to teach this particular content?
- How does this style meet the needs of each student with special needs in the class?

MS. SWANSON and Ms. O'Brien began their professional relationship to consult about Brittany's difficulty transitioning to the

media center. However, they discovered other areas where they wanted to work together to improve Brittany's learning experiences as well. They agreed to become more collaborative in their working arrangement. Where do you think they might encounter some difficulty as they make a shift in the relationship? What suggestions would you give them so that in the end their partnership is successful?

MS. MACDOUGAL listens to the exchange between the Werners and Mr. Sanders. As they discuss concerns, she determines that the meeting is not going to come to a productive end. She quickly decides to suggest that the participants enter into a shared problem-solving activity. Is this an appropriate strategy for this meeting? Provide reasons for your thinking. What type of problem solving activity might be beneficial in this type of situation? As a general education teacher, how can you help to resolve situations such as this one?

SUMMARY

- Collaboration has become an important job responsibility for all educators and is especially important in educating students with special needs.
- Collaboration is a style professionals use in interacting with others, and it involves key characteristics such as voluntary participation, parity, shared goals, shared responsibility for key decisions, shared accountability for outcomes, shared resources, and the emergence of trust, respect, and a collaborative belief system.
- You can help make your school's collaborative efforts more successful by identifying and clarifying your personal beliefs about collaboration, refining your interaction skills, and contributing to a supportive environment.
- Collaboration can occur in many programs and services, including shared problem solving, co-teaching, working in teams, and consulting.
- When working with parents, you should use *family-centered practices*, including striving to understand parents' perspectives on having a child with a disability; collaborating with them based on your respect for their perspective; communicating effectively with them in conferences and in other ways; and responding professionally to them in team meetings, annual reviews, and other interactions at which you and they are present.
- You may occasionally experience difficult interactions with parents; in these instances, using principles for effective communication and asking for assistance are essential.
- Understanding your roles and responsibilities as well as those of a paraprofessional is essential. Basing your collaboration on this understanding leads to positive working relationships, particularly if you directly and respectfully address problems that occur as paraprofessionals work with you on behalf of the students with disabilities.