**Collaboration to Implement Teaching Methods**

**(Focus on Co-Teaching)**

Collaboration is a process through which student learning needs are identified, assessed and addressed by two or more educators working together to share resources and expertise.

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**Activity #1: *Collaboration in Action -- Vignette***

* *Background*: The link below provides an illustration of collaboration in action in which several educators work together to implement a peer observation (i.e., activity where several teachers observe each other to improve their own skills). This video illustrates the multiple topics and issues of collaboration explored throughout the Unit.
* *Task*: View the video [5:41] (click on link below). As you view the video, attend to how the teachers interact, communicate, and in general work together as they plan and complete a peer classroom observation.

[http://mediaplayer.pearsoncmg.com/\_bluetop\_640x360\_ccv2/ab/streaming/myeducationlab/edleadership\_supervision/Mer\_401\_v4\_iPad.mp4](http://mediaplayer.pearsoncmg.com/_blue-top_640x360_ccv2/ab/streaming/myeducationlab/edleadership_supervision/Mer_401_v4_iPad.mp4)

* *Response***:**

 (a) In what ways do the educators collaborate?

 (b) How do they interact with others?

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 **1. Foundations of Collaboration**

For several decades, the idea has existed that educators working together, rather than in isolation, is essential to helping all learners fully realize their potentials (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). **Collaboration**assumes a variety of forms for different educators based on student, teacher and/or school needs. Collaboration may be shaped and implemented in many unique ways, with the long-term goal being to improve teaching and learning for all students, especially those who struggle in school. Skrtic, Harris and Shriner (2005) discussed several school-wide aspects that are highly conducive to effective collaboration. All teachers should be aware of how each of these are found in their schools or districts as they form a foundation for effective collaboration in any educational setting:

* Shared leadership – Collaborators share in the decision-making process with many assuming leadership roles to facilitate communication and **advocacy**.
* Coherent Vision – Collaborators share a collective vision to make certain a clear direction is established to maintain effective and efficient use of time and resources.
* Adequate Resources – Collaborators seek to locate and use necessary materials, time, support and personnel to successfully work together.
* Comprehensive Plan – Collaborators value each idea shared in the planning and implementation of classroom collaboration procedures.
* Sustainability – Collaborators establish a process to sustain efforts and action items to make certain that working together continues.
* Evaluation – Collaborators establish a simple process to periodically evaluate the collaboration work among teachers and other educators.

As seen in the above items, several over-arching elements are found in successful collaboration among classroom teachers, instructional coaches, and other educators. Further discussion about effective collaboration is provided in the next section summarizing the research basis for effective collaboration to implementing instructional methods to struggling learners.

**2. Collaboration Skill Sets**

Several skills are important to creating and implementing collaboration with other professionals, parents, and community members: Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, and Advocacy.

**Communication**

At its basic level, collaboration is about effective **communication** which refers to the exchange of ideas and experiences to convey a belief or meaning about specific topics of concern (Kampwirth, 2006). The Table 1 below summarizes several key aspects of effective communication.

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**Table 1**

**Essentials for Effective Communication**

 **Key Item Description**

Attending to Speaker Practice of listening to person speaking including paying attention to body language, tone, and intended meaning

Reflection Practice of providing the speaker with feedback, both

 verbal and non-verbal, demonstrating interpretation of the

 conversation by reflecting on what has been heard and seen

Empathy Practice of demonstrating genuine concern and interest in

 the collaborative conversation

Effective Questioning Practice of asking relevant and meaningful questions to

 further explore the information discussed during the collaborative conversation

Conversation Recording Practice of documenting what is discussed, agreed upon,

 action items, and future needs to maintain a record of the

 current and subsequent collaborative conversations

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Through implementation of these essentials for collaboration, educators develop relationships with colleagues, parents and community members thereby empowering collaborators to engage in meaningful conversation and subsequent decision-making.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

As suggested above, effective communication occurs as interpersonal relationships are developed, cultivated and maintained. This includes several skill sets such as:

* Positive Relationship – Engage with colleagues through participation on various school teams (e.g., RTI team, Data analysis team, Grade-level team, etc.). Engaging with colleagues in professional ways in professional situations goes far to learning about others, sharing one’s own particular interests, and in general builds rapport.
* Convey Confidence – Become knowledgeable about key issues challenging students, families and colleagues in the school and district to be able to discuss topics and generate meaningful solutions.
* Maintain Positive Attitude – Be optimistic that, even though some tasks appear daunting and overly challenging, solutions can be found through persistent collaboration.
* Become Part of the Solution – In addition to maintaining a positive perspective toward the efforts of collaboration volunteer to assist in gathering information, generating possible solutions and otherwise attempt to emphasize solutions to explore to address specific needs.

These and similar qualities form a solid foundation for initiating and maintaining lasting interpersonal relationships with collaborators and should be actively developed by all educators.

**Advocacy**

 A third important skill in the set of skills necessary for effective collaboration is to make certain that the learner and family best interests be advocated and supported by all collaborators. That is, once collaborators agree upon specific needs or issues that are to be addressed, each member of the collaboration team should be an advocate for the student and families. This ensures common vision, focused discussions and targeted solutions. Therefore, it is essential the collaboration teams initially identify specific need areas to consider, which guides discussion and solutions generation.

**Activity #2: Collaboration Skill Sets**

* *Background*: The video depicts four educators discussing how they collaborate in the education of a student with an emotional disability.
* *Task:* Watch the following video [11:19] (see link below) and attend to how it illustrates collaboration among the educators demonstrating one or more of the following qualities: effective listening, respect toward others, willingness on part of team members to give and receive feedback, different members share information or thoughts on topic, members supporting each other with praise/questioning/positive feedback.

<http://mediaplayer.pearsoncmg.com/_blue-top_640x360_ccv2/ab/streaming/myeducationlab/heward/8.IncludingEBD_iPad.mp4>

* *Response:* Provide an example or task illustrated in the video for ...

 (a) one of the effective communication items; and

 (b) one of the interpersonal relationship items described above.

**3. Minimizing Barriers for Success**

Though collaboration is considered an essential part of teaching and learning its process and implementation often pose challenges to educators that may limit its effectiveness. Additionally, the best-developed plans for collaboration may be difficult to implement if a few potential barriers ignored in that planning process.

**Barriers**

A variety of educational situations, personal preferences, and instructional perspectives may initially create barriers to collaboration; however if recognized and addressed their effects are minimized as illustrated in Table 2, which was developed from Kampwirth, (2006) and Skrtic et al (2005).

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**Table 2**

 **Potential Barriers to Effective Collaboration**

 **Barrier Description/Suggested Solution**

Administrative Support Support from building principals is essential for most collaboration

 to succeed and lack of this support creates a barrier for teachers.

 An important aspect in the early stages of developing a

 collaborative partnership among staff is to cooperatively plan the

 purpose, vision and structure of the collaboration. Ensuring that all

 educators specific to the collaboration efforts, including building

 principals, is critical to long term support and success thereby

 minimizing this barrier

Lack of Skills Another potential barrier to effective collaboration is perceived

 lack of skills to collaborate among various team members.

 Referring to the different skill sets discussed above qualities

 related to effective communication, interpersonal relationship

 building, and adhering to established vision may require some

 level of training or professional development. Specific skill levels

 in these and related collaborative skills should initially be self-

 examined with results used to identify professional development

 needs followed by delivery of that development. The importance of

 administrative support as discussed is seen in overall plans to

 provide necessary development thereby minimizing this barrier.

Staff Commitment As discussed above, change is one of the most visible outcomes of

 much of the collaboration that educators engage in to meet learner

 and family needs. Staff commitment is a function of interest,

 motivation, acceptance to change and perceived instructional need.

 If these aspects are not address sufficiently as a collaborative

 process is established they become barriers to success. Directly

 addressing commitment levels of collaborators early in the

 development process, especially adhering to the change process,

 assists school teams to minimize this barrier by developing and

 cultivating staff interests in needed collaborative change.

Common Planning Perhaps the most significant potential barrier to effective

 collaboration is finding common planning time among

 collaborators for meeting. Oftentimes, educators wish to

 collaborate yet are limited by their abilities to jointly meet. The

 most obvious solution to this potential barrier is to plan a common

 planning time such as one hour the same day each week. However,

 this is not always possible so creative planning needs to occur such

 as getting together during lunch, strategically creating common

 grade level planning times so collaboration meetings may

 periodically occur, utilization of technology such as

 Google+Hangout in situations where collaborators are free to meet

 yet not in the same location. Keeping in mind the effects that

 collaboration may have on the sharing of expertise the time to

 collaborate should be given a priority.

Status Quo The reality in any school is that some educators are resistant to

 collaboration due to lack of desire to put in some additional effort,

 change the status quo with existing practices that have been used

 for extended periods of time, concern that changes will be imposed

 upon them even if what is currently done is found to be effective,

 or in general feel threatened by the collaborative process. In many

 situations these potential barriers are justified and require direct

 support and consideration. The human quality of wishing to

 maintain the status quo is a reality in most of us; improving that

 status quo requires growth and change. Therefore by: 1) adhering

 to the change process described above, 2) valuing and listening to

 educator concerns, 3) generating realistic collaborative outcomes

 and plans, and 4) providing ongoing support assist to minimize this

 barrier while simultaneously embarking on a path of acceptable

 and sustained instructional growth.

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**Collaboration Success**

 Success is a likely outcome as potential barriers are addressed through a structured process of collaborative development and implementation as illustrated in the following two videos. These demonstrate factors such as mutual respect, equality in the decision-making process, mutual goals, and shared leadership and accountability.

**4.** **Instructional Collaboration: Co-Teaching**

*Co-teaching* provides its own structures for delivering action items developed by collaborators. Co-teaching is a practice through which educators work collaboratively to address learner needs (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, (2007). According to Thousand, Villa and Nevin (2007), when educators “co-teach to differentiate instruction, you can increase your effectiveness in teaching students with a variety of instructional needs” (p. 121). Co-teaching is a practice that any educator in a role in which the delivery of instruction occurs (e.g., general class teacher, special educator, instructional coach). At least four different approaches exist to delivery co-teaching, each of which is appropriate depending on specific teaching and learning collaborative situations (Thousand et al, 2007):

* *Supportive Teaching* – During a lesson or activity, one co-teacher leads the delivery of the instruction while the other rotates among the students attending to their interactions and questions, providing support as needed. Students are provided support from the second teacher during the delivery of the instruction to maintain a co-teaching process.
* *Parallel Teaching* – Delivery of instruction frequently includes grouping of students and co-teaching requires one teacher to work with one group and the other with another group. However, both teachers are responsible for all students in both groups rotating between groups, working with both groups in centers or sharing the delivery of specific material to each group by the same teacher to maintain a co-teaching process.
* *Complementary Teaching* – In some teaching situations, one teacher may have greater expertise on a particular topic and therefore takes the lead in the delivery of that aspect of the instruction. In these situations, the second co-teacher complements the instruction by enhancing the material for the entire group such as paraphrasing, modeling, or documenting key points. In these situations the second teacher uses his/her areas of expertise to complement the specific topic being presented to maintain a co-teaching process.
* *Team Teaching* – Through a team teaching format, co-teachers simultaneously deliver the lesson or activity, dividing it in ways that provides each teacher opportunities to share own strengths related to the topic (e.g., one teacher explains a specific historical event while the other explains its perspective on current issues in science).

Though co-teaching assumes a variety of forms and structures, there are some clear distinctions between what co-teaching is and is not as summarized in Table 3. The table was developed from content found in Murawski (2002).

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**Table 3**

 **Essentials of Co-Teaching**

 ***Co-Teaching Principles Clarification***

Educators teaching together in a co-working Co-teaching involves more than one

climate teacher and an assistant or paraprofessional

 working at the same time in the same room

 with different students

Implementation occurs in the classroom at same Co-teaching requires all students to be

 time with all students educated together rather than a small group

 being pulled out and taught in one section of

 the classroom while others are taught by the

 classroom teacher

Instructional planning and implementation Co-teaching involves more than the one

 occurs collaboratively with both teachers actively class teacher completing all the planning and

 engaged simultaneously then having a second educator come into the

 classroom and teach what he/she is told to

 teach by the classroom teacher; Co-teachers

engage students in combined interactions

Assessment of student learning is conducted by Each teacher assists in the monitoring of

 both co-teachers learner progress to maximize the benefits

 and strengths of both co-teachers (i.e., one

teacher does not conduct all the monitoring

and then ‘report’ to the other)

Co-teachers provide each other constructive Co-teaching facilitates educators

 feedback, support and decide about future cooperatively examining results and

 adjustments collaboratively making instructional

adjustments, rather than one teacher making

changes and then ‘telling’ the other what

should occur

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**Activity #3: Co-Teaching**

* *Background*: The following video demonstrates an example of co-teaching -- highlighting essential skills described above. The video shows two teachers co-teaching a mathematics lesson along with their impressions about the experiences.
* *Task:* Watch the following video [3:09] and attend to how it illustrates the interactions between the two teachers and how each is engaged in the delivery of the lesson and interact with the students.

**<http://mediaplayer.pearsoncmg.com/_blue-top_640x360_ccv2/ab/streaming/myeducationlab/inclusion/Team_Teaching_Model_Part_2_iPad.mp4>**

* *Response***:** Briefly describe how this video exemplifies the principles of co-teaching described above.