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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses key principles that should be addressed by general and special educators when instructing students jointly. Principles are drawn from the literature on educational consultation, from interviews with educators who have implemented collaborative instructional programs, and from personal experience with collaborative instruction. The following principles are delineated: (1) identify needs by assessing resources, not evaluating competence; (2) establish the range of the collaborative program by clearly defining goals and objectives; (3) incorporate program evaluation as part of the program content; (4) clearly define roles of participants; (5) when developing schedules, incorporate flexibility and time for planning/collaboration; (6) assure program ownership among participants; (7) modify program implementation based upon ongoing feedback about the program; and (8) redesign the program based on outcomes and long- and short-term goals. (24 references) (DB)

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Collaborative Instruction

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Collaborative Instruction in Schools:

Key Principles

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Abstract

This paper discusses key principles that should be addressed by general and special educators when instructing students jointly. These principles are based upon the literature in educational consultation, interviews with educators who have implemented collaborative instructional programs, and the author's own experiences with collaborative instruction. The principles are discussed within a problem-solving sequence for collaboration.

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Collaborative instruction in schools:

Key principles

There has been a growing interest in developing alternative service delivery options for students who experience learning problems in schools (e.g., Pugach & Johnson, 1988; Wang & Birch, 1984). Many educators believe that all students could be better served if general education and special education joined efforts (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984; Will, 1986). As a consequence, many schools and school districts are developing programs to serve students which unite the services of general and special education personnel (e.g., Comkowycz, Ehren, & Hayes, 1987; Harris, et al., 1987). This paper discusses key principles that should be addressed by general and special educators when combining their services to meet the needs of all students. The discussion is based upon the literature in educational consultation, interviews with educators who have implemented collaborative programs and the author's own experiences designing and implementing collaborative instruction in schools.

Theory and practice (cf., Conoley & Conoley, 1982; DeBoer, 1986; Gutkin & Curtis, 1982; Harris et al., 1987; Heron & Harris, 1987; Idol, Paolucci-Whitcomb, & Nevin, 1986; Idol-Maestas, 1983; Kurpius, 1978; Reisberg & Wolf, 1986, 1988; Rosenfield, 1987; Tombari & Bergan, 1978; West, Idol, & Cannon, 1989) suggest the

use of the following sequence of problem-solving strategies when developing and implementing collaborative instruction: assess the situation, establish objectives, establish program content, identify program participants, develop program schedules, articulate program, implement program, redesign program. Key principles to address within this sequence are presented in Table 1 and are discussed below.

 Insert Table 1 about here

Assess the Situation

Principle 1: Identify needs by assessing resources, not evaluating competence.

In developing any collaborative activity it is necessary to clearly determine the needs to be addressed (Kurpius, 1978; West, Idol, & Cannon, 1989) as well as the practicality of implementing proposed activities. However, in assessing needs and the resources to meet those needs, collaborators should clearly distinguish between assessing needs and resources and evaluating competence. If assessing needs is confused with evaluating competence, the trust and respect among general and special education collaborators may be compromised. Collaborators may feel threatened and reluctant to identify areas where pooling expertise would be advantageous to implement a

quality program. By clearly communicating the purpose of the assessment, i.e., the identification of needed support and collaboration, it is easier to clearly make the distinction between assessing needs and resources and evaluating competence.

Establish Objectives

Principle 2: Establish the range of the collaborative program by clearly defining goals and objectives.

Once the need and resources are identified, it is feasible to develop objectives. Establishing clearly defined goals and objectives not only helps to focus plans upon the purpose of the collaborative activity but also helps to define the extent to which the identified need can be addressed. For example, in a junior high school, science teachers wanted to teach the science curriculum to all students in the school. The goal for the first year of this program was to implement a science program for two seventh grade classes (special and general) that included team teaching. Team teaching addressed the science teacher's need for assistance modifying instructional materials and teaching students with differing abilities. A long-term goal was to review teacher schedules and make changes for the following year that would allow general and special education teachers and students to combine classes. Both short-term and long-term goals were needed to define the range and duration of the collaborative endeavor.

Establish Program Content

Principle 3: Incorporate program evaluation as part of the program content.

In addition to identifying instructional areas and instructional techniques, it is also necessary to decide how to measure the impact of the instruction. Therefore, the evaluation plan is an essential aspect of the program content. Evaluation information provides input for program change and documentation of program success. As suggested by Idol-Maestas, Nevin & Paolucci-Whitcomb (1984), it is one of the basic principles of collaborative consultation.

The evaluation plan should be simple, monitor program implementation as well as program outcomes and use data collection activities that are as unobtrusive as possible (Gersten & Hauser, 1984; Heron & Harris, 1987). The author has found it useful to be familiar with data that are already collected in the school and use that data whenever possible to answer evaluation questions. For example, in the previously discussed science collaboration, program monitoring occurred during weekly planning meetings and student performance was measured through an inspection of student work and an examination of criterion referenced tests administered at the end of each science unit.

Identify Program Participants

Principle 4: Clearly define roles of participants.

When talking with educators who have implemented

collaborative programs, it has often been said that much discussion needs to occur to clarify and confirm the roles participants assume. This is particularly true for collaborative programs, involving special and general educators, which are new at a school. In many instances, the special educator traditionally pulled students out of general education classrooms to teach them. As a consequence, many general educators and administrators have the expectation that children labeled in need of special education will be served outside the general education setting. They have no experience providing direct instruction to exceptional students in collaboration with special educators. Therefore, when collaboration is a new role for a special educator, it is often necessary to, not only, explain the collaborative relationship but, also, realize that this clarification will need to frequently occur among all participants until the expectations of general and special educators are aligned with a collaborative approach to instruction.

Develop Program Schedules

Principle 5: When developing schedules, incorporate flexibility and time for planning/collaboration.

Schedules should meet the needs of the participants and should also be flexible as they may need to be modified depending upon the ongoing feedback received about the program. In addition to flexibility, time for planning/consultation should be

incorporated within the schedule (Idol, 1988; Speece & Mandell, 1980). If planning/consultation does not occur, it is possible for intentions to become obscured and problems to develop and fester. Without time to plan/consult in their schedules, educators often find themselves planning during lunch or at other times when other activities are scheduled to occur. When this happens, the conditions to plan and/or deal with problems are not ideal and, often, the planning and/or problem solving cannot be completed successfully. Therefore, incorporating planning/consulting time in the schedule is essential.

Articulate Program

Principle 6: Assure program ownership among participants.

Program content and schedules are usually not developed in committee. However, participants in a program should have the opportunity to examine the initial draft of the program, provide input for program changes, and agree upon the program to be implemented. Team ownership is essential for a program to be implemented as designed (Idol-Maestas, et al., 1984; West, Idol, & Cannon, 1989). During the discussion concerning program design and implementation, it is essential that effective communication skills be used by participants so that the collaborative program is clearly described and understood by all participants, potential problems are identified, and agreeable

resolutions are formulated.

Implement Program

Principle 7: Modify program implementation based upon ongoing feedback about the program.

Collaborators should be willing to modify the program based on feedback received about the program during implementation. Discussions with educators implementing collaborative programs revealed the need to be flexible and receptive to program change but not to change programs capriciously. Change should be implemented in the program design when it is clear that problems are resulting from program implementation or that some aspect of the program could be implemented more efficiently if modified.

For example, in the case of the previously discussed science program, it was discovered that the special education paraprofessional could assist in the implementation of follow-up science activities. Therefore, the special education teacher team taught with the science teacher on Monday and Wednesday and the special education paraprofessional assisted the science teacher on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

Redesign Program

Principle 8: Redesign program based on outcomes and long- and short-term goals.

In discussions with educators who implemented collaborative programs, it was found that, often, a collaborative program was conducted which met only some

of the goals originally identified. Therefore, the redesign of the program should incorporate what was learned about the collaborative program through evaluation activities as well as the original short- and long-term goals.

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed key principles that should be addressed by general and special educators when providing instruction collaboratively. These principles were based on a combination of theory and practice.

The author has found collaborative programs to be a "never-ending activity", i.e. collaboration is dynamic and the possibilities for the improvement and expansion of programs are identified as an ongoing process of the collaborative activity. Readers who participate in collaborative programs are encouraged to proceed slowly and deliberately and to disseminate the process as well as the outcomes of their efforts so that others can learn from their experiences.

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Table 1

Key Principles in Problem Solving Sequence

Key Principle	Problem-Solving Sequence
Identify needs by assessing resources, not by evaluating competence.	Assess the situation
Establish range by clearly defining goals/objectives.	Establish objectives
Incorporate program evaluation in program content.	Establish program content
Clearly define roles of program participants.	Identify program participants
Incorporate flexibility and planning/consultation time in program schedules.	Develop program schedules
Assure program ownership among participants.	Articulate program
Modify program implementation based on ongoing feedback.	Implement program
Redesign program based on outcomes and long- and short-term goals.	Redesign program