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ABSTRACT

In collaborative schools, regular and special education teachers meet regularly to analyze and make decisions about instructional practices and services to meet the needs of all students. This paper explores the effectiveness of a school development model in helping small rural schools adopt three characteristics of collaborative schools: (1) a schoolwide team approach in which all school professionals engage in cooperative planning and problem solving; (2) ongoing individual professional development; and (3) inclusionary instructional practices. The school development model consists of an eight-step process: define the problem; analyze the problem; brainstorm solutions; select the best solution; develop an action plan; implement the action plan; develop teacher-leaders; and evaluate the action plan. This process was implemented over a 4-year period in four small elementary and secondary schools in northern rural Vermont. Annual surveys of teacher participants revealed that the model: (1) was effective in creating change in schools; (2) was adaptable to various settings; (3) increased teacher participation in instructional decision making; (4) was dependent on the principal's support; (5) increased teacher collaboration and team teaching; (6) fostered peer leadership skills; (7) increased the use of various inclusionary instructional practices; and (8) required a significant commitment of time and resources. This paper includes an outline of inclusionary educational strategies aimed at teachers and students. (SV)

DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE SCHOOLS: A MODEL FOR EDUCATING RURAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE REGULAR EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

by

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DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE SCHOOLS: A MODEL FOR EDUCATING RURAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION ENVIRONMENT

Abstract

This paper describes a model for school development which links school-wide teaming, individual professional development, and inclusionary instructional practices in order to increase the responsibility all teachers share in educating students with disabilities in general education settings. The model was implemented in four rural schools over a four-year period. The principal findings of this work suggest that the model increases the ability of teachers to collaborate to better meet the needs of all students.

Conceptual Framework

Vermont has a long history of educating students with mild, moderate, and severe disabilities in general education classrooms, with support from consulting teachers in diagnosis, instructional and behavioral procedures (McKenzie, Egner, Knight [Fitzgerald], Perelman, Schneider & Garvin, 1970), ([Fitzgerald] Knight, M., Meyers, H., Whitcomb, P., Hasazi, S. & Nevin, A., 1981.) With the passage of Act 230 in 1990 by the Vermont Legislature, however, the emphasis has shifted from individual classroom teachers integrating individual students with special needs, to whole schools designing and implementing comprehensive systems of educational services so that all students can succeed, to the maximum extent possible, in all general education classrooms.

The term "collaborative schools" describes those settings where teachers are working together to assist all students by defining needs, seeking solutions, implementing plans, and evaluating results. In collaborative schools, for instance, instructional support teams composed of general and special educators and administrators meet regularly to consider the needs of individual students and to recommend and support the best practices that would address these needs. In collaborative schools, the school community creates an inclusive vision, an expanded curriculum, partnerships for change, and a restructuring of instructional services to create a climate of equality and equity (Thousand & Villa, 1990). In collaborative schools, teachers are both learners and experts as they analyze and make decisions about how they can improve the practice of teaching and their schools to better serve all students (Smith & Scott, 1990).

This study explored the effectiveness of a school development model in helping four small and rural schools to adopt three characteristics of collaborative schools:

1) School-wide teaming. Planning for a collaborative school requires ongoing teaming in which all school professionals at a given site come together as a whole to engage in cooperative planning and problem-solving focused on curriculum and instructional matters (Maeroff, 1993; Fullan, 1991; Friend & Cook, 1992; Barth, 1988; Tickunoff, Ward & Lazar, 1980).
2) Individual professional development. Implementing collaborative practices requires ongoing attention and

responsiveness to the individual professional development needs of all school practitioners responsible for educating all students (Glickman, 1990; Levine, 1989; Belenkey, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

3) Inclusionary instructional practices. Educational success for students with disabilities in general education classrooms requires the use of inclusionary practices which research has shown to be effective, including strategies for assisting teachers (Friend & Cook, 1992; Chalfant, 1984; Joyce & Showers, 1980; McKenzie, et al., 1970), and strategies for assisting students (Gleason, 1988; Slavin, 1987; Deschler & Shumaker, 1986; Johnson & Johnson, 1986; Rosenshime & Berliner, 1978.)

As Figure 1 indicates, the model was designed to help schools learn about, experience, and embrace these characteristics and to increase the sense of responsibility that both general and special educators share for the education of students with a diversity of needs.

Implementing the Model

The model for developing collaborative schools consists of an eight-step process (see Figure 2). The first five steps occur during a school year, giving participants time to develop trust in each other and the process itself. The last three steps take place in subsequent years.

1. Define problems. Participants identify an area of

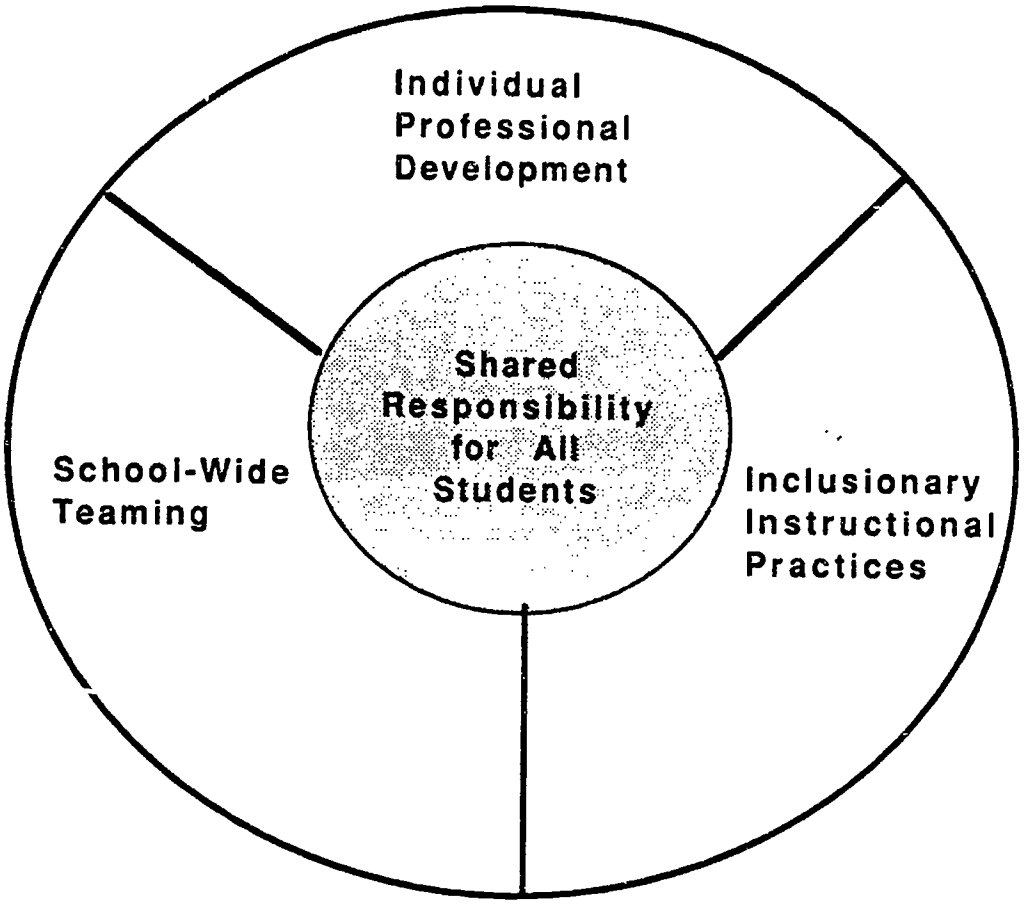

Figure 1. A model for developing collaborative schools.

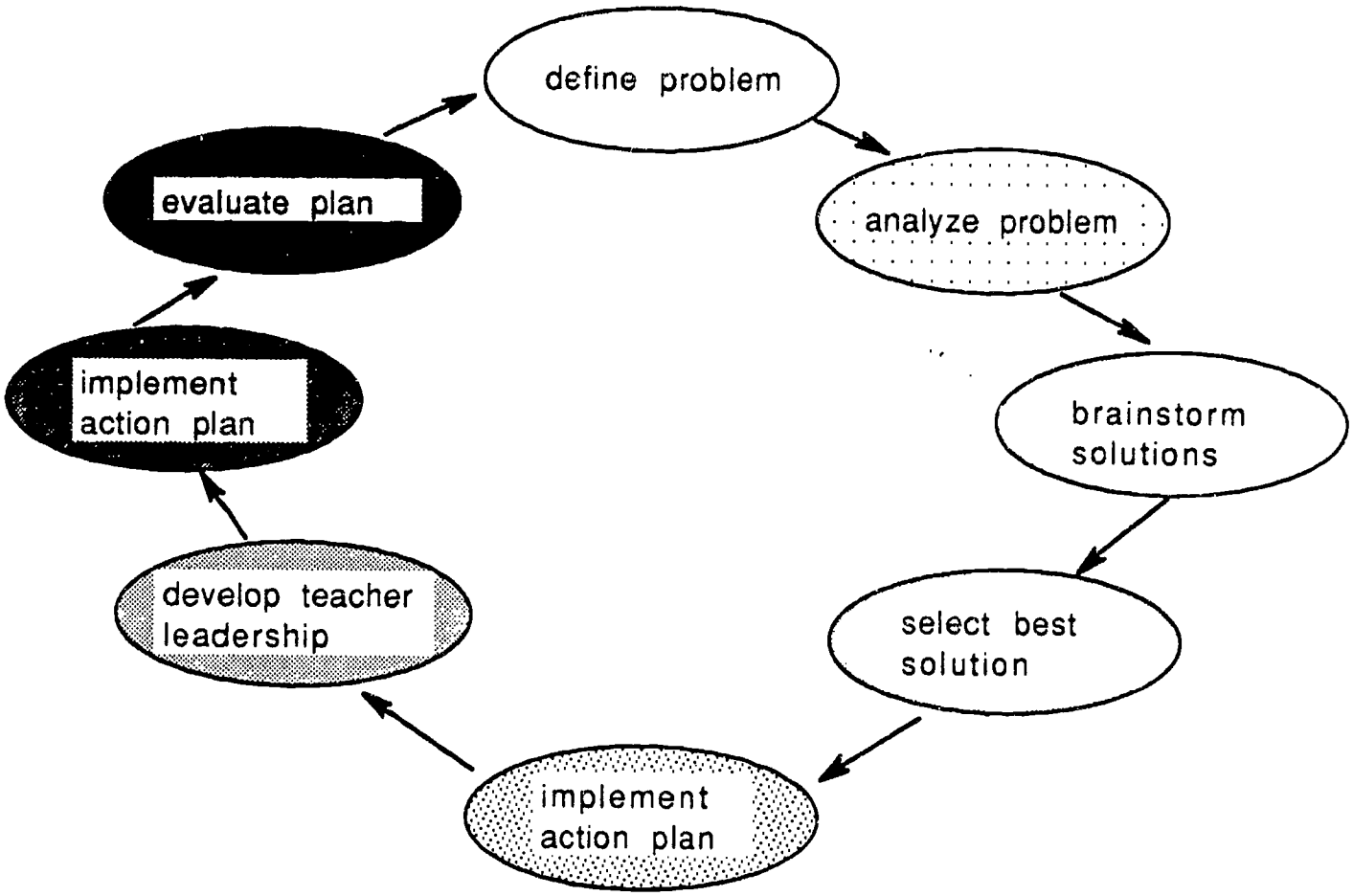

Figure 2. The process for developing collaborative schools.

concern and interest related to their schools that they would like to address and learn more about.

2. Analyze problems. Participants then explore conditions affecting the identified problem, consulting with educators from other schools in the region to understand how their schools have responded to similar problems.

3. Brainstorm solutions. Participants develop and evaluate potential solutions to the identified problem and select several based on their potential impact on the problem.

4. Select a best solution. Using a consensual form of group decision-making, participants select one solution that group members agreed to commit their time and energies to realizing.

5. Develop an action plan. Participants develop a plan for implementing the solution by identifying specific actions, a timeline, persons responsible, resources needed, and evaluation activities.

6. Implement the action plan. Participants begin implementing the action plan, making modifications as needed.

7. Develop teacher-leaders. Participants volunteer or nominate colleagues to provide on-site leadership and direction as outside facilitators project staff or administrators who initiated the planning process reduce their role. These teacher-leaders gradually assume responsibility for obtaining resources and training and reaching specific objectives outlined in the action plan.

8. Evaluate the action plan. Participants engage in group meetings, personal interviews and written surveys in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the action plan in creating a collaborative school environment.

Research Approach

The project used a case study, pre-test/post-test design to observe the impact of the model on four schools. Among the teacher measures collected during the first year of the project (1988-89) were the Teacher Involvement in School Decision-Making Survey (adapted from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988), semi-structured teacher interviews, and participant observations. These measures were repeated and analyzed during the three following years, using statistical analyses and a constant comparative method of content analysis.

Sample. The model was implemented separately in the elementary school (K-6) and the secondary school (7-12) of a small and rural community in northern Vermont during the first year of the project. A total of 19 out of 22 (86%) elementary general and special educators and 12 out of 21 (57%) secondary general and special educators participated. The model was implemented with a combined set of elementary (K-6) and secondary (7-12) teachers in a neighboring community during the fourth year of the project. In this town, a total of 35 out of 52 elementary and secondary general and special education teachers participated (67%).

The four schools were similar in many regards. During the

years of the project, for instance, each school experienced a turnover in principals, a lack of community support for the funding of school budgets, and rising numbers of students eligible for special education services. By the fourth year of the project the total number of students on Individual Education Plans (IEP's) in the four schools was 217 out of a total population of 1,171 (18.5%).

General Findings

The general findings that emerged from the experiences of the four schools in implementing the model for developing collaborative schools (the detailed case studies are available in Mellencamp, Fitzgerald & Kay, 1992) included:

1. The model was effective in creating change in schools. The eight-step process for implementing the model enabled participants to systematically and collaboratively explore alternatives for better addressing the needs of all students. Teachers became more reflective about their teaching and supported student learning in new ways.

> I love the way your training was organized. I liked the open forum discussion. It's amazing that I've worked as long as I have with these teachers and I did not really come to know these people until the training. I didn't know their views and how they felt. They helped me realize some of the views I was holding on to were archaic. And some of my concepts were good things worth retaining (a secondary teacher).

> It's [the seminars] really drawn us together in that we've been forced to talk and now we're taking the initiative to meet and exchange ideas. We'll never have total agreement on everything, we never will. It's like a bell curve. There are always some at one end and some at the other, and as long as the bulk of us are at the middle and working toward the goals, I now think we're okay (a secondary teacher).

> I don't feel as structured as I once was. I don't feel the need to be, I guess. I feel more comfortable being flexible. Children need that...to know that if there's change and something happens, you don't panic over it....I use a more independent style now and we do a lot of things like learning centers that we didn't do before. I saw those things in other classrooms and they seemed to work better (an elementary teacher).

2. The model was adaptable to a variety of settings. The process proved equally effective in an elementary, secondary or combined elementary-secondary setting. We detected no differences in the ways elementary and secondary participants reacted to the process; they found opportunities to learn from each other and then collaboratively plan to put in practice what they have learned to be beneficial. Participants also adapted the process for use in other school situations, for instance in faculty and instructional support team meetings, in order to develop more collaborative decision-making in their schools.

> I like the process because the way the school is set up, we don't have a lot of staff meetings, and people generally need to communicate with each other. I like to know how other teachers are feeling and I like other people to know how I'm feeling without having to go around to fifteen different people and saying, 'I'm angry about this.' And that was what was happening. A lot of people were upset about things and had no way to express them, communicate them with someone else, but now we have a way (an elementary teacher).

3. The model increased the voice teachers had in determining how students would learn in their schools. At the beginning of the project, many teachers said they had more influence in their classrooms than in their schools. They wanted to change that by gaining a greater voice in deciding school-wide change and by being listened to and respected as experts who know the needs of the students they serve (Mellencamp, 1992).

> We've had enough things shoved down our throats...like that rote learning program...the principal came in with a stopwatch and told me I hadn't taught enough words in X minutes and having Irish blood, that really got my dander up....Teachers seem pretty independent. You can lead a horse to water but don't shove him in (an elementary teacher).

Table 1 describes the teachers perceptions of their increased ability to make decisions and influence the climate of their schools as a result of the model (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1987). Teachers in several schools, however, indicated that the lack of administrative support limited the degree to which they felt their voices were heard or valued.

4. The model was affected by the support of the school principal. The type of leadership exhibited by school principals impacted the degree to which teachers wanted to or were able to implement their action plans. For instance, when one principal in the study became terminally ill, many teachers used the words "let's put change on hold for now" when speaking about implementing the collaborative schools model.

> Well, I'm not going to hide the fact, we're pretty much in a crisis here. And it's not been a pleasant situation. The staff is tired. The school has an air of being tired about it and everything seems up in the air....The year has developed more or less on its own, and it's just not been a good year....People have seemed to pocket off in their departments and pulled the covers up over the heads, I think, hoping for the best but realizing that this is just not a good situation (a secondary teacher).

Numerous transitions in leadership also lessen teacher commitment to change. "I've had six or seven principals in fifteen years, and I feel sometimes like I'm an island floating around" (an elementary teacher). Yet, support from a principal

Table 1 TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING				
Characteristics	**Year I**		**Year IV**	
	Involved	**Not Involved**	**Involved**	**Not Involved**
1. Selecting New Teachers				
Raleigh Elementary	5.6%(18)	94.4%	30.0%(20)	70.0%
Emerson Elementary	5.9%(18)	94.1%	87.0%(23)	13.0%
Raleigh Secondary	4.0%(25)	96.0%	82.4%(18)	17.6%
Emerson Secondary	22.9%(35)	77.1%	30.4%(24)	69.6%
2. Setting Standards for Student Behavior				
Raleigh Elementary	83.3%	16.7%	60.0%	40.0%
Emerson Elementary	35.3%	64.7%	69.6%	30.4%
Raleigh Secondary	52.0%	48.0%	83.3%	16.7%
Emerson Secondary	52.9%	47.1%	79.2%	20.8%
3. Deciding School Budgets				
Raleigh Elementary	38.9%	61.1%	35.0%	65.0%
Emerson Elementary	17.6%	82.4%	42.9%	57.1%
Raleigh Secondary	32.0%	68.0%	41.2%	58.8%
Emerson Secondary	40.0%	60.0%	29.2%	70.8%
4. Choosing Textbooks and Instructional Materials				
Raleigh Elementary	66.7%	33.3%	90.5%	9.5%
Emerson Elementary	82.4%	17.6%	91.3%	8.7%
Raleigh Secondary	88.0%	12.0%	100.0%	0%
Emerson Secondary	91.2%	8.8%	95.7%	4.3%
5. Shaping the Curriculum				
Raleigh Elementary	83.3%	16.7%	85.7%	14.3%
Emerson Elementary	52.9%	47.1%	86.4%	13.6%
Raleigh Secondary	54.2%	45.8%	82.4%	17.6%
Emerson Secondary	100.0%	0.0%	91.3%	8.7%

Table 1 TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION MAKING					
Characteristics		Year I		Year IV	
		Involved	Not Involved	Involved	Not Involved
6. Selecting New Administration					
Raleigh Elementary		0.0%	100%	0.0%	100%
Emerson Elementary		5.9%	94.1%	76.2%	23.8%
Raleigh Secondary		0.0%	100%	23.5%	76.5%
Emerson Secondary		11.4%	88.6%	21.7%	78.3%
7. Evaluating Teacher Performance					
Raleigh Elementary		5.6%	94.4%	0.0%	100%
Emerson Elementary		5.9%	94.1%	33.3%	66.7%
Raleigh Secondary		0.0%	100%	12.5%	87.5%
Emerson Secondary		8.6%	91.4%	100%	0.0%
8. Designing In-Service and Staff Development Programs					
Raleigh Elementary		55.6%	44.4%	70.0%	30.0%
Emerson Elementary		29.4%	70.6%	63.6%	36.4%
Raleigh Secondary		16.8%	84.0%	47.1%	52.9%
Emerson Secondary		40.0%	60.0%	39.1%	60.9%
9. Setting Student Promotion & Retention Policies					
Raleigh Elementary		70.6%	29.4%	66.7%	33.3%
Emerson Elementary		64.7%	35.3%	59.1%	40.9%
Raleigh Secondary		29.2%	70.8%	76.5%	23.5%
Emerson Secondary		34.3%	65.7%	26.1%	73.9%
10. Determining Whether Students are Tracked by Ability Into Special Classes					
Raleigh Elementary		52.9%	47.1%	66.7%	33.3%
Emerson Elementary		37.5%	62.5%	68.2%	31.8%
Raleigh Secondary		44.0%	56.0%	52.9%	47.1%
Emerson Secondary		45.7%	54.3%	47.8%	52.2%

for a change enables teachers to at least consider implementing the change. "His support is definitely encouraging for me. I can generate a lot of motivation internally. But if it's not supported externally, I reach a point where I can't or I don't want to change any more" (an elementary teacher).

5. The model led to increased sharing of professional expertise and teaming in instruction. Teachers in all the project schools were given the opportunity to see each other as experts. They observed colleagues providing instruction in their classrooms, collaborated in planning and teaching lessons, used instructional support teams to address the problems of students, and engaged in long-term planning for addressing other instructional issues. They created cross-grade peer tutoring programs, coordinated reading groups to bring more scope and depth to language arts instruction, and began to regularly co-teach with special educators and Chapter I teachers.

> I'm more involved with those who work in my room, aides and special educators....and in the [teacher assistance team] meetings, we've been discovering, for instance, that four of us who all were having problems with different children, that the behaviors were similiar, that all of them had lost a parent...and we were shocked to discover this [commonality] and talk it out together (an elementary teacher).

"What I like about being in this building right now is that there really are teams and I'm not necessarily standing alone" (an elementary teacher.) "I'm teaming with a lot of teachers that I hadn't with in the past....Working on teaching that sentence strategy was scary for me and I think scary for her...doing it together has made it so much better" (an elementary teacher).

6. The model developed partnerships among special and

general educators and fostered peer leadership skills. As teachers, the special and general educators brought different skills, areas of knowledge, and interests, to support each other in the process of change. Each was seen as a valued member of the school community; each had a voice in shaping school-wide change. As members of teacher-leader teams, the special and general educators became closely associated with realizing the schools' action goals, which positively affected the interest of all teachers in adopting inclusionary practices (Kay, Sherrer & Fitzgerald, 1992).

"There really is more interaction now and we are coming up with strategies to deal with kids instead of just sitting around talking which is what I felt like we did last year....I think there is a real effort to get along and work together" (an elementary teacher). "I'm having such a good year that it's my job to help some of these people who aren't. I've worked with all these kids [with behavioral problems] in the past, and so I have a rapport with them and now can help other teachers" (an elementary teacher).

7. The model led to the increased use of a variety of inclusionary instructional practices. Teachers learned and practiced new instructional strategies (see Table 2) for teaching students with a variety of learning needs. "Some of the strategies are helpful for all students and some are not needed by some of the students...but the students who have those needs should be able to work with someone and practice the appropriate strategies" (an elementary teacher).

Table 2 Inclusionary Instructional Practices:

A. Strategies for Assisting Teachers

Development of collaborative teaming to assist teachers in identifying and addressing student needs in instructional support teams.

Adoption of a stronger teacher consultation model to deliver special education services. Increased teaming of all teachers in the school.

Staff development opportunities including training in: cooperative discipline; crisis management; learning strategies; and learning styles.

Development of collaborative teaming skills for instructional support teams, subject-area departments, and curriculum writing. Increased team-teaching in the school.

Professional development training in effective use of teacher time in the classroom.

B. Strategies for Assisting Students

Social skills training for all students through the Skillstreaming model.

Inclusion of special needs students in heterogeneous reading groups.

Increased thematic teaching, i.e. the week-long, school-wide circus unit for all students.

Adoption of the TAI (Team Accelerated Instruction) model and CIRC (Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition) in 5th and 6th grades (Slavin, Karweit & Madden, 1989).

Increased peer tutoring and cross-age instruction.

Adoption of the Higher Order Thinking Skills (Pogrow & Buchanan, 1985) program for Chapter I reading services.

Heterogeneously assigning all students to student advisories with the same teacher for seventh through ninth grade years.

Peer mediation and conflict resolution training for use with all students.

Increased use of higher order thinking skills for all students.

Expanded use of peer tutoring and collaborative grouping in the classroom to support the learning of all students. Increased use of hands-on materials.

Adoption of multi-age instruction in grades 2-4 in one school.

8. The model needed a significant commitment of time and resources to be effective. Even though teachers said that one of the greatest benefits of the model was the time they were given to know one another and collaborate on new teaching practices, they complained "there will never be enough time."

> I've got all these great ideas, but I never can put them into place. It's like moving into an old house and having all these dreams, but having no money. You're lucky if you can paint the outside of the house. That's where we're at right now. Time is a real problem in our schools, it's more so than I ever imagined. Today, kids don't stay after school to do things like they used to....Teachers don't stay after school because they've got to go home and do things with their kids....So it's rushed and you feel like you're moving along real quick and you barely have time to eat lunch let alone talk about the real problems that there are around here (a secondary teacher).

> That's the main part that holds a lot of changes and our work up, budgets. I mean, we have been just cut so much on budgets, it's ridiculous.... You have a limited amount of materials, so you can't do all the programming that you need to do. You don't have an aide, so you can't give the services you need to give. You have to make the decision do I do the paperwork or do I do the services? Which is the priority? If you don't do the paperwork, the district doesn't get their money....If you don't do the services, the teachers get upset, the children get frustrated, the parents get upset and frustrated....So you are stuck in the middle, depending on who feels like screaming at you on that particular day (an elementary teacher).

Conclusion

These general findings suggest that the model for developing a collaborative school can be effective, particularly when the school principal is supportive of the process and a significant commitment of time and resources is made available. The development of teacher-leaders also helps a school to continue implementing and evaluating their collaborative school plans

beyond the completion of a project. Two elements, however, appear central to the overall development of a collaborative school: valuing and bringing together the expertise and experiences of special educators and general educators to benefit all children, and allowing collaboration to develop from "the bottom-up," grounded in the beliefs and needs of all teachers.

> To reach a professional and even an emotional level where you can try things in the classroom, you have to have support first....If that came first, and out of that arose a need to make changes, and people could express their discomfort and you wouldn't feel that you were such an oddball for doing so, maybe [change] would bubble up from that kind of interaction among staff. Because collaboration doesn't just happen. It has to be created from the personalities of the people involved. It's created from professional expertise and there are all kinds of levels. It's not just somebody who's a good teacher who knows what they're doing. You've got to bond on other levels before you get to the point [of teachers using their knowledge to support each other]. I think that's a pretty sophisticated level of collaboration (an elementary teacher).

This study was drawn from the "Final Report: School Building Models for Educating Students with Disabilities in the Regular Education Environment," Grant No. H023F80027, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education. The views presented in the study are those of the authors alone. For copies of the full report please contact Martha Fitzgerald, College of Education and Social Services, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405.

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