

Rockin' With Region 4

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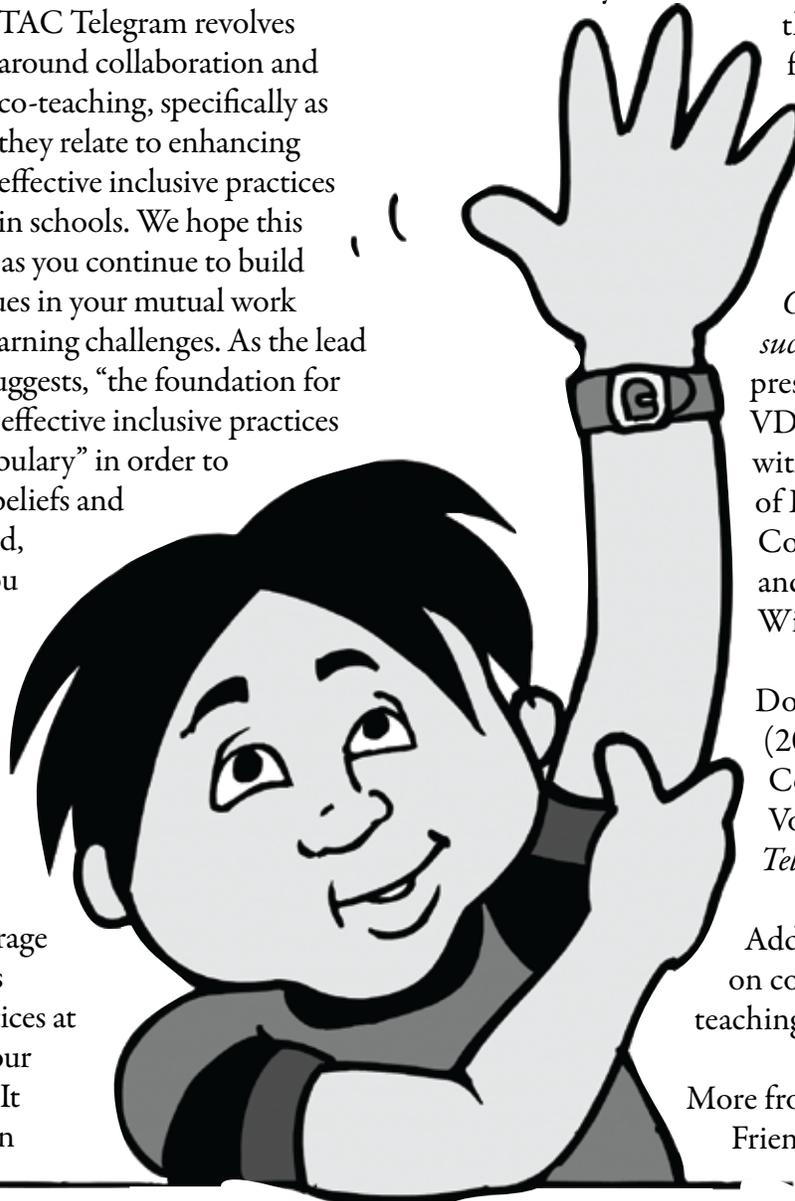
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Welcome to the beginning of another school year! This edition of the T/TAC Telegram revolves around collaboration and co-teaching, specifically as they relate to enhancing effective inclusive practices in schools. We hope this information will help you as you continue to build partnerships with colleagues in your mutual work with students who have learning challenges. As the lead article of this newsletter suggests, “the foundation for establishing a school with effective inclusive practices is to define common vocabulary” in order to clearly communicate our beliefs and practices (Doerries & Land, 2007). For example, do you think everyone on your school staff interprets the meanings of the terms collaboration and co-teaching in the same way? Do these interpretations match those offered by Marilyn Friend (2007)? We encourage you to reflect on the issues involved in inclusive practices at your school and discuss your thoughts with colleagues. It is a critical starting point in promoting effective teams focused on helping all students gain access to the general curriculum. Listed below are some resources to get you

started on taking a closer look at effective collaboration practices and valuable co-teaching strategies.

Best of luck as you start the new school year and thank you for all you do for the students of the Commonwealth of Virginia!



References:
Friend, M. (2007). *Collaborating for school success*. Training material presented at VASSP/VDEL in collaboration with Virginia Department of Education and the College of William and Mary workshop, Williamsburg, VA.

Doerries, D., & Land, S. (2007). *Collaboration Confusion: Clarifying Vocabulary*. *T/TAC Telegram*, 12(3), pp. 1 - 3.

Additional resources on collaboration and co-teaching:

More from Marilyn Friend
Friend, M. (Co-producer with L. Burrello & J. Burrello). (2004).

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The Power of Two: Including students through co-teaching (2nd ed.) [videotape]. Bloomington, IN: Elephant Rock Productions.

Friend, M., & Bursuck, W. (2006). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2007). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Web sites

The Power of Two web site focuses on collaboration and features articles, links, online training, and other resources to successfully include students with disabilities in the general education classroom.
<http://www.powerof2.org>

The Access Center, a technical assistance center funded by OSEP, is charged with the mission of improving educational outcomes for elementary and middle school students with disabilities. Among the many topics available at this site, a plethora of in-depth information can be found on co-teaching by clicking on the title in the left menu of The Access

Center home page.
<http://www.k8accesscenter.org>

Journal article
Murawski, W. (2004). Tips and Strategies for Co-Teaching at the Secondary Level. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36 (5), pp. 52 – 58.
Article can be accessed at: http://www.dldcec.org/pdf/teaching_how-tos/murawski_36-5.pdf



More Inclusive Environments Create Changes in Roles of Paraprofessionals

University

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As special education law has been revised over the years, the roles of special educators, general educators, and paraprofessionals who work together have changed. In an inclusive educational environment, paraprofessionals are responsible for providing services to a variety of students in general education classes and facilitating natural peer supports in those settings. This may raise some questions for paraprofessionals as they must adapt to their changing role.

Why are students with disabilities included in the current accountability system?

An accurate picture of education must include this group of students. The current accountability system under which our schools operate has impacted how services are delivered to students with disabilities. The inclusive environments that most schools strive to create require that students with disabilities receive instruction in the general education classroom, with any pull-out services being temporary. All students are expected to participate in the general education curriculum and assessments, dismissing the opportunity for loopholes that previously removed some students from state testing. Historically, paraprofessionals have been assistants in self-contained special education classrooms or have been assigned to assist individual or small groups of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 ensured greater access to the general education curriculum; and in 2004, the focus became improving performance and aligning services with national efforts. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 identifies students with disabilities as a subgroup of all students and calls for adequate yearly progress on state assessments for this group. In order for students with disabilities to benefit from changes in educational policies and practices, their performance on assessments must be reported.

What is my role on a collaborative team?

When schools decide that paraprofessionals are needed to support students with IEPs, they must be clear about the expectations of the position. Some ways to communicate these expectations include:

- Develop clear job descriptions that provide guidelines for hiring, evaluating performance, and providing in-service training;
- Create a schedule and guidelines for supervision;
- Provide daily work schedules and guidelines in writing; and
- Support active involvement of paraprofessionals on collaborative teams.

(Adapted from Snell & Janney, 2005)

These practices will help schools meet the federal requirements of highly qualified paraprofessionals and provide clarification of their role. On the other hand, Gerlach (2003) outlined some suggestions for paraprofessionals when working with teachers and other supervisors.

- Recognize the role of the principal as the building leader,
- Recognize that your supervising teacher has the ultimate responsibility for instruction and classroom management,
- Follow the directions given to you by your principal and your supervising teacher,
- Ask questions whenever you feel the directions are not clear,
- Understand the distinctions in the roles of paraeducators and teachers, and
- Ask if there is a time set aside for meeting with your supervisors, including the principal (p. 16).

What is my part in co-teaching?

Friend (2007) described co-teaching as two or more licensed professionals sharing instructional responsibility for a single group of students. Sharing ownership,

resources, and accountability does not mean that either professional needs to give up her identity as a special or general educator. The paraprofessional also shares some responsibilities, but does not have sole responsibility for any aspect of a student's educational program. The paraprofessional provides support to curriculum and instruction. The following list specifies some ways this might be done.

1. Assist with implementation of lesson plans and instructional strategies that are teacher designed.
2. Assist in preparation of learning materials.
3. Understand the rationale, mission, philosophy, and goals that have been determined and how this influences curriculum and instruction.
4. Be aware of the different methods used by teachers to accommodate a learner's needs and assist with modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities.
5. Clarify your role in the use of technology in the classroom.
6. Learn educational jargon by asking questions if you are unfamiliar with terminology.
7. Be aware of individual learning styles of students.
8. Be aware of typical developmental patterns of children at different ages.
9. Understand the requirements of the accountability system.
10. Clarify your role in monitoring student performance and recording student progress.
(Adapted from Gerlach, 2003)

How can I be sure I'm doing the right thing for all students and not just doing things right?

One element that is vital to the change process is a shared vision. To change the way service is delivered to students with disabilities to a more effective model requires a shared vision of a school that embraces inclusive practices - a school that makes decisions to benefit all students. Administrators and teachers must spend time reflecting on their values and beliefs about teaching and learning and providing optimal opportunities for all students. Paraprofessionals must be part of that discussion to understand why things are done a certain way. Consider this list of beliefs that may be critical to the success of all students.

- All students can think and learn.
- All students have value and unique gifts to offer their school.
- Diversity within a school community should be embraced and celebrated.
- All students differ in the ways they most effectively learn and express their understandings.

- All students learn best when they are actively and collaboratively building knowledge with their classmates and their teacher.
- All students learn best when studying interesting and challenging topics that they find personally meaningful.
- Effective teaching for students with disabilities is substantively the same as effective teaching for all students (Castagnera, Fisher, Rodifer, & Sax, p. 15).

Educators who make decisions based on what's best for all students, individually and collectively, realize that the roles of the general educator, special educator, and paraprofessional must work in concert and be grounded in shared values and beliefs. After all, what we believe determines our actions; and the high level of accountability for educators and for students demands that our actions support student achievement.

References & Resources:

Capper, A.C., Frattura, E., & Keyes, M.W. (2000). Meeting the needs of students of ALL abilities: How leaders go beyond inclusion. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Castagnera, E., Fisher, D., Rodifer, K, & Sax, C. (1998). Deciding what to teach and how to teach it: Connecting students through curriculum and instruction. Colorado Springs, CO: PEAK Parent Center.

Friend, M. (2007, January). A teacher training and evaluation workshop for middle and high school principals collaborating for school success. Workshop presented for Virginia Association for Secondary Principals and the Virginia Foundation for Educational Leadership collaboratively with the Virginia Department of Education and the College of William and Mary, Fredericksburg, VA.

Gerlach, K. (2003). Let's team up! A checklist for paraeducators, teachers, and principals. Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Snell, M. E., & Janney, R. (2005). Teachers' guides to inclusive practices: Collaborative teaming. Baltimore: Brookes.