Chapter 6
Collaboration Constructs for Inclusive Settings

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ABSTRACT

Inclusion is built on the idea that all students are valuable and significant members of their community and should be accepted in general education settings. Inclusion is a term that can define classroom practices, but it is also a valued system where all students have a sense of belonging. Collaboration between teachers can effectively support students with special needs (SSN) in inclusion, offering insight into student needs and providing valuable information for supporting students. Research has identified the effective collaborative constructs of (1) shared planning, (2) frequent communication, (3) shared vision, (4) mutual respect, and (5) joint trust. This chapter will investigate the real-life issue of collaboration needs and define the established collaborative constructs for practice.

INTRODUCTION

A growing body of research on collaborative teaching practices shows collaboration as an approach that effectively supports students with special needs (SSN) in the inclusion environment (Kolbe, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2016). For the purposes of this chapter, the authors use the following to define collaboration. Collaboration

is a method of teaching in partnership where all members work toward a common goal, allowing for the knowledge of each partner to bridge the gaps of the other. Collaboration is grounded in the idea that each partner has unique expertise to bring to the situation. Collaboration among teachers can offer understanding about student issues and needs, providing teachers important information on how to set and meet purposeful objectives in the general education setting (Adams et al., 2016; Fisher et al., 2020). The positive collaborative relationship also has a profound effect on teachers through an increase in professional knowledge and an increase in job satisfaction (Sheppard, 2019). This chapter will review the collaboration constructs, provide questions to guide educators in building collaborative practices, and offer strategies for using the constructs in practice.

Educators have stated that teaching styles, personality, and policies all contribute to how collaborative partnerships are formed (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). Educators have found they gain improved instructional skills, increased knowledge, and generally became better teachers for students in inclusion as a result of collaboration (Solone et al., 2020). Continued exploration is needed concerning the theory and practice of collaboration for students in inclusion and its impact on outcomes for students with special needs (Adams et al., 2016; Cook & Friend, 2010; Fisher et al., 2020).

There has been a rise in the use of collaborative teaching methods and the documented positive results, and interventions via collaboration through the outlined collaborative constructs can offer students in inclusion more opportunities to experience success in school (Bruno et al., 2018; Cook & Friend, 2010; Morgan, 2016; Solone et al., 2020; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). This chapter intends for readers to develop a clear understanding of established collaborative constructs of (a) shared planning, (b) frequent communication, (c) shared vision, (d) mutual respect, and (e) joint trust (Cook & Friend, 2010; Solone et al., 2020; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2019). Readers will also benefit from asking questions about how the constructs are used to build strong collaborative relationships and inclusive environments, and explore strategies to put collaboration constructs into practices we want to see in the inclusive classroom.

COLLABORATION CONSTRUCTS

The term inclusion has been used since the early 1990s, although it is not actually stated in IDEIA, and is often misunderstood by educators (Alesech & Nayar, 2020; Francisco et al., 2020; Portelli & Koneeny, 2018). Inclusive education is designed to offer all students the chance to learn in the same setting without discrimination (Gregory, 2018; Francisco et al., 2020). For example, simply placing a student with disabilities in the general education environment alone does not meet the purpose of

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