

Teachers' Guides
to Inclusive Practices

Collaborative Teaming

Third Edition

by

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and

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King-Sears, Janney, and Snell

WHY IS COLLABORATION SO IMPORTANT IN SCHOOLS TODAY?

Quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment; it is the result of a collaborative culture that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any of them can achieve alone. The idea that a single teacher, working alone, can know and do everything to meet the diverse learning needs of 30 students every day throughout the school year has rarely worked, and it certainly won't meet the needs of learners in years to come. (Carroll, 2009, p. 13)

Today's classrooms are filled with students who are diverse in their skills and entry knowledge, their motivation to engage in schoolwork, their home life and past experiences, and their languages. An array of teachers and consultative professionals with complementary talents is needed to promote learning in these classrooms, thereby making collaboration among teachers and other school staff essential.

In addition to this logical rationale for collaboration in schools, special education laws and regulations require collaboration as part of the special education process. Beginning with the earliest version of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 (PL 108-446)—the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142)—the identification process and the development and implementation of IEPs have required teaming among general and special education teachers, administrators, related services providers, and parents. Reauthorizations and amendments to IDEA, along with the rulings in several significant, precedent-setting court cases (e.g., *Daniel R.R. v. State Board of Education*, 1989; *Greer v. Rome City School District*, 1992; *Oberti v. the Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon School District*, 1993; *Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Education v. Rachel H.*, 1994) have bolstered the presumption that the least restrictive environment (LRE) is the general education

class in a neighborhood school and more explicitly articulated the multiple supplementary aids and services that should be provided within that general education environment to enable students to progress toward their educational goals. The IDEA also has emphasized general education participation on IEP teams and added the requirement that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum. All these requirements necessitate additional collaborative teaming.

Collaboration Is Essential to Inclusive Education

Collaborative teaming is not used in schools that strive to practice inclusive education merely because education laws and regulations require it. Collaborative teaming is so central to inclusive schooling that it can be viewed as the glue that holds the school together. It is through collaboration that the educational programs and special education supports for individual students are planned and implemented. Students are not merely placed into

general education with collaborative planning, teaching, and consultation; they are actively involved and learning.

The material in this book (and others in the Teachers' Guides to Inclusive Practices series) is based on the assumption that inclusive education is far more than an effort to change the location in which special education services are provided. In fact, the IDEA itself defined *special education* as "specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability" (20 U.S.C. § 1400; IDEA § 1602[29]), a definition that makes no mention of the place where this instruction is to occur. Instead, inclusive education is part of a comprehensive effort to transform schools by making them more flexible, prevention oriented, and responsive to children and their families (Schnorr, 1997). The seven critical characteristics of inclusive education are listed in Table 1.1. Because it is also helpful to know which parameters guide inclusion, Table 1.2 displays what York, Doyle, and Kronberg called "what inclusion is and what inclusion is not" (1992, p. 1). Although inclusive education

Table 1.1. Seven critical characteristics of inclusive education

1. All students are welcome to attend the schools they would attend if they did not have a disability, where they and their families are valued members of the school community.
2. The school culture reflects shared values of equality, democracy, high expectations, diversity, collaboration, and the belief that all students are capable of learning and contributing.
3. Students are full members of age-appropriate classes where the number of students with and without disabilities is proportional to the local population (natural proportions). Students with disabilities are not clustered into particular schools or classes.
4. School teams use flexible decision making to determine students' individualized education programs (including their special services and supports, accommodations, and modifications) that are not based on disability categories.
5. A coherent service delivery model allows general education and special education teachers and other personnel to collaboratively incorporate any special services and supports into age-appropriate school contexts and to coordinate special services with ongoing instruction.
6. Students with varied needs and abilities take part in shared learning experiences while working toward individualized learning priorities with necessary supports and adaptations.
7. Administrators motivate and support school staff toward the achievement of a shared mission and foster shared leadership in a professional community.

From Janney, R., & Snell, M.E. (2013). *Teachers' guides to inclusive practices: Modifying schoolwork* (3rd ed., p. 5). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co; reprinted by permission.

Table 1.2. What inclusion is and is not

Inclusion is	Inclusion is not
Students with disabilities attending the same schools as siblings and neighbors	Requiring all students with any disability to spend every minute of the school day in general education classrooms
Students with disabilities being in general education classes with chronological age-appropriate classmates	Students with disabilities never receiving small-group or individualized instruction
Students with disabilities having individualized and relevant learning objectives	Students with disabilities being in general education to learn the core curriculum only
Students with disabilities being provided with the necessary supports to participate in learning activities and school routines with their classmates	Students with disabilities being left to “sink or swim” when outside of special education environments

Source: York, Doyle, and Kronberg (1992).

is a systemwide and schoolwide approach to schooling, each student with a disability still has an IEP team that defines the special education supports and services needed by that student. Defining those services and supports, and ensuring that they follow the student throughout the school day as needed, requires the collaboration of teachers, specialists, administrators, students, and family members. It is virtually impossible to imagine a school community that could be legitimately described as inclusive for all students yet did not value and practice collaboration.

Collaboration Is Essential to Schoolwide Systems for Student Support

Calls for improved collaboration in schools today do not come only from educators, parents, and others who seek more effective inclusion for students with disabilities. Many current school improvement initiatives focus on integrating available human and capital resources to address a single schoolwide goal—building school capacity to address student needs (Capper & Frattura, 2009; Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Bull, Cosier, & Dempt-Aldrich, 2011; Sailor & Roger, 2005; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Although reforms such as inclusive education, schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports (SW-PBIS), and response to intervention (RTI)

originated in special education, they have an effect on all students and teachers in a school. Furthermore, many general education reforms (e.g., differentiated instruction, UDL, Common Core State Standards) are essentially tools for assisting educators to achieve excellence and equity for all students. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (PL 107-110) also has contributed to the need for collaboration with its requirements that school accountability measures take all students' academic progress into account and that all students be taught by teachers who are highly qualified to teach the subject matter on which students are tested. Collaborative teaming among educators, other relevant professionals, and family members is essential to each of these initiatives.

Figure 1.1 depicts a framework for thinking about and organizing supports and interventions in schools that are committed to the success of all students. This three-tiered model for schoolwide prevention of academic and behavior problems builds on the logic behind the RTI model. It also is consistent with the framework used to organize the three tiers of interventions used in SW-PBIS (Copeland & Cosbey, 2008/2009; Sailor et al., 2006). This model, however, applies more broadly to sustained use of all supports and interventions available in a school and not only to the RTI process or the application of positive behavior supports. The

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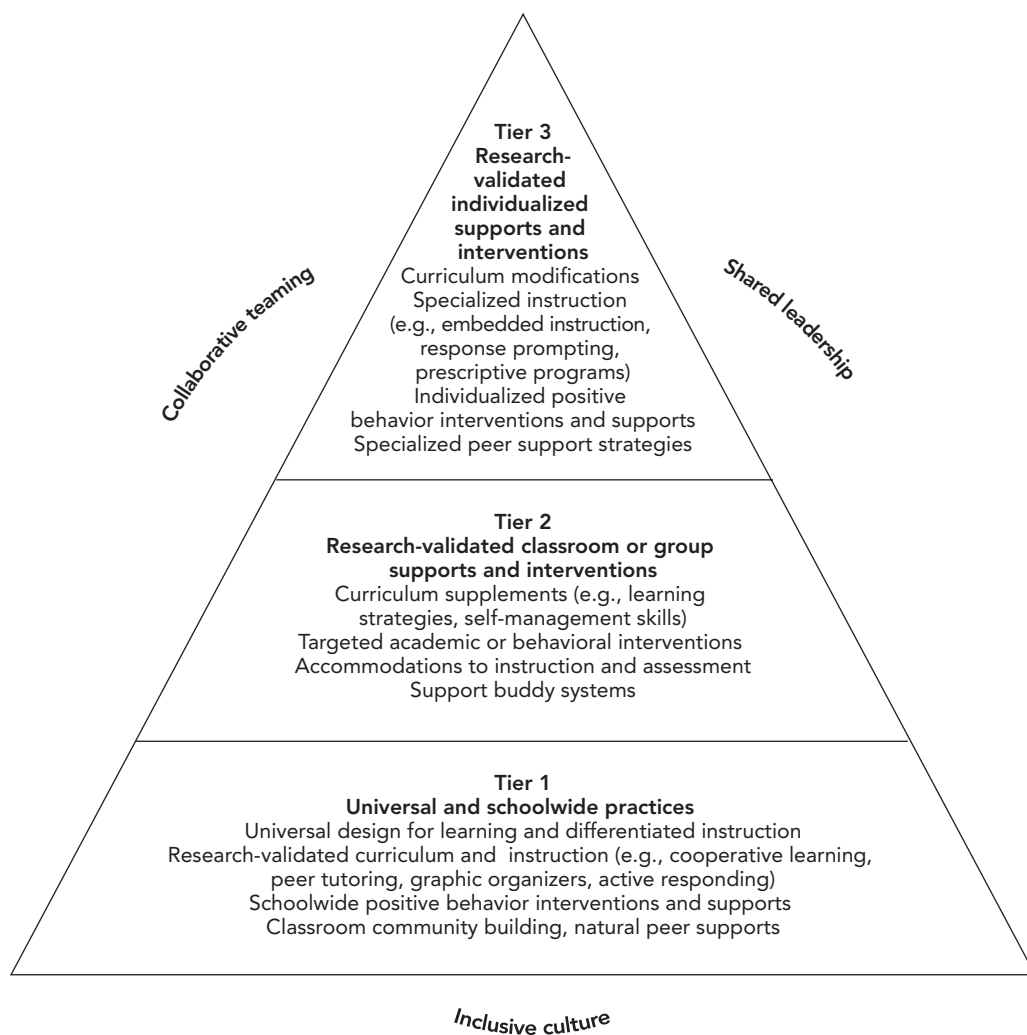


Figure 1.1. Three tiers surrounded by collaborative teaming, shared leadership, and an inclusive culture. (From Janney, R., & Snell, M.E. [2013]. *Teachers' guides to inclusive practices: Modifying schoolwork* [3rd ed., p. 9]. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.; adapted by permission.)

triangle in Figure 1.1 is divided into three tiers of educational practices, with 1) universal practices at the base or first tier, 2) supports targeted toward specific groups of students in the middle or second tier, and 3) more individualized supports in the upper or third tier.

Collaboration in Tier 1

Universal or whole-school practices focus on prevention of learning and behavior problems and include UDL (Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2010), research-validated instructional

practices (also called *evidence-based practices*), and schoolwide discipline programs. Collaboration comes into play as school teams make decisions about and participate together in professional development to ensure that all students receive high-quality instruction and effective behavior support. Teams jointly determine when students need additional supports. Keep in mind that some students with IEPs have accommodations, which are adjustments to the school program that do not substantially change the curriculum level or performance criteria, such as needing visuals

to accompany auditory information, using digital textbooks, or providing guided note-taking forms. These accommodating materials and techniques fit conceptually into Tier 1's universal practices when they are available to all students.

Collaboration in Tier 2

Tier 2's supports target the needs of students who exhibit risk factors and/or school performance that reflect less-than-expected gains. Students receive short-term, intensive instruction beyond the general curriculum based on performance data and team decision making. These interventions often target small groups of students with similar difficulties and include tutoring programs, prescriptive literacy interventions, and self-management support. General educators may team with specialists (e.g., reading, mathematics, or strategic instruction specialists) to deliver and coordinate Tier 2 supports. Teams that include administrators, general and special educators, specialists, and family members make decisions about students' intervention goals and time lines.

IEP accommodations that fit into Tier 2 supports enable a student to gain access to curriculum content, demonstrate learning, and lessen the effect of a disability on the student's school performance. Examples of these accommodations include self-management instruction to increase on-task behavior and accurate work completion during mathematics, booster sessions for learning vocabulary for content area units, and learning strategy instruction for skills to write essays for English. Note that these accommodations may involve supplementary learning goals for the student (e.g., attaining fluency in the use of a self-management technique, essay-writing strategy). Such accommodations might require a special educator's expertise to match them with student needs, but other team members also can deliver them. Classroom teachers sometimes find that many of their students without IEPs

also benefit from these learning and self-management skills; teachers may decide to provide general instruction in their use to the entire class. Some students may still concurrently receive additional support and time to acquire proficiency, so more intensive explicit instruction is necessary.

Collaboration in Tier 3

Students who obtain Tier 3 supports are those who have not yet experienced the level of success targeted at Tiers 1 or 2. The team decides what other supports need to be used, based on the student's unique needs. Consider the Classroom Snapshot for Brad at the beginning of this chapter. The co-teachers had strong Tier 1 classroom management and instructional interventions in place. The teachers decided to provide self-management instruction during several study periods when Brad's disruptive behavior was not responsive to those research-based techniques. A Tier 3 intervention was not considered because Brad learned the self-management system and was successful using it in science class, but if his disruptive behavior persisted or was more dangerous to himself or others, then involvement by other team members such as administrators, psychologists, counselors, and other teachers would be appropriate. Tier 3 interventions go beyond adding intensive, short-term supports and/or providing reasonable accommodations. Specialized teaching methods with a confirmed track record (e.g., visual strategies, task analysis and chaining, systematic prompting and reinforcement) and individualized behavior interventions and supports fall into this category, as do curriculum modifications, which alter curriculum goals and performance criteria. Special educators may be the team members who are most familiar with these more unique interventions, but other team members may be instrumental in delivering them when the collaborative teaming practices described in this book are consistently applied.

Best Practices for Schoolwide Systems of Support

Integrated, responsive schoolwide systems for student support are associated with achievement gains, reduced rates of special education referral and placement, and higher passing rates on state tests (Burns, Appleton, & Stehouwer, 2005). The framework for schoolwide student support is consistent with the philosophy and practice of inclusive education and emphasizes 1) a unified system of supports to enhance achievement, rather than separate systems for special and general education; 2) use of least intrusive supports so that teachers turn to more specialized practices only when generally effective practices are inadequate to meet a student's needs; 3) use of student performance data—not disability classifications—to judge learning and the need for more specialized methods; and 4) services and supports that are viewed as portable and not available in only one special education location (Snell & Brown, 2011). It also is important to understand that a tier is not a place or placement, and students may be provided supports and interventions from various tiers at different points in time and for different aspects of their educational programming. For example, a student might need Tier 3 supports for behavioral issues and Tier 2 supports for literacy, yet participate in mathematics with the benefit of whole-class Tier 1 practices. Furthermore, the Tier 2 literacy intervention may be reduced or faded over time as the student progresses toward a more typical range of literacy skills.

Teachers and other school staff must have the skills and dispositions to implement evidence-based practices at each tier of the central triangle or pyramid of support in Figure 1.1 in order for schoolwide systems for student support and inclusive education to work. (These practices are the subject of companion books in this series: *Behavior Support* [Bambara, Janney, & Snell, 2015], *Modifying Schoolwork* [Janney & Snell, 2013], *Social Relationships and*

Peer Support [Janney & Snell, 2006].) Surrounding the central pyramid of support are three additional features of a school's culture and structure that affect successful implementation of the integrated system of student support: 1) an inclusive culture, 2) shared leadership, and 3) collaborative teaming. An essential piece of the foundation for inclusive education and schoolwide systems of support is missing without effective collaboration among the various teams of educators, administrators, and family members. Administrators must provide strong leadership and support to facilitate these collaborative efforts and foster a school culture that values all students and their families (Ratcliffe & Harts, 2011; Thousand & Villa, 2005).

It is not difficult to make a convincing case for the need for improved collaboration in schools. Piercey summed it up well: "Teacher collaboration is a prime determinant of school improvement" (2010, p. 54). Research on efforts to make schools more inclusive and collaborative repeatedly has found that major barriers include 1) finding time to collaborate, 2) negative teacher attitudes about variations in ability and the feasibility of addressing them in general education contexts (as well as the influence of those attitudes on school climate), and 3) lack of a shared philosophy and understanding of inclusive education (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009; Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Frattura & Capper, 2007). Overcoming these obstacles requires focused, systematic planning along with reconfiguring the school's existing resources and supports. Appendix B provides helpful resources on the topic of successful adoption and sustained implementation of school improvement efforts.