

Collaboration

Key: Collaboration in Inclusive Education

Nowadays collaboration is seen as an organizational solution to rapid change and the need for greater responsiveness of organizations, including schools, since collaborative decision-making and problem-solving is seen as “a cornerstone of postmodern organizations” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 1). In the education field, collaboration is also seen as a legal mandate, best practice in teacher’s practice, and necessary for the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) (Hernandez, 2013). In fact, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) stresses the importance of effective co-operation between class teachers, special education professionals and support staff, as well as the involvement of resource personnel such as advisory teachers, educational psychologists, speech and occupational therapists. It also states that the education of children with SEN is a shared task of parents and professionals, and thus recommends the development of a co-operative partnership between school administrators, teachers and parents, the last ones being regarded as active partners in decision-making.

Definition

The term collaboration is often considered ambiguous and dependent on the context it is used in, and it has been argued that few clear definitions of it have been presented despite its current discussion. Nevertheless, most authors seem to agree that collaboration includes working together in supportive and mutually beneficial relationships.

The models of collaboration between teachers, parents and other professionals in the schools, which have been implemented to meet diversity, are nowadays recognized as powerful and successful strategies to every educational context (Wood, 1998). In particular, the collaboration between professionals of Special and Regular Education has been seen as an alternative to meet the challenges of inclusive education, decrease the isolation traditionally associated with teachers work and enhance the return of children with special educational needs to the regular school which entails simultaneously the return of the special educators to the core professional life of the school.

Models of Collaboration

The way teachers, other professionals and parents collaboratively relate to one another in educational settings are commonly called models of collaboration and consist of the multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches (Briggs, 1991, 1997; Hernandez, 2013). Each model

presents different underlying principles and differences in the amount of communication and collaboration with other team members depend on the team approach being used.

Multidisciplinary Approach

In the multidisciplinary approach, services are delivered by a variety of different disciplines acting separately. Teachers and/or other professionals work independently, although they recognize and value contributions of other team members (Briggs, 1997). They provide separate evaluations, set goals for the child that are specific to their discipline, and implement individual intervention plans. In this approach, the role of each team member is strictly defined, since this model presumes that only those trained in the specific field are capable of assessing and serving the child in need of their expertise (Kritikos, LeDosquet, & Melton, 2012 as cited by Hernandez, 2013). The team members may communicate with each other on a less frequent and less formal basis than with other approaches and the level of active involvement by each discipline was found to be limited within the framework of the multidisciplinary approach, despite the presence of multiple disciplines (Hernandez, 2013).

Interdisciplinary Approach

This model involves a team of professionals that may conduct their own assessments and develop discipline-specific goals, but meet regularly to coordinate service planning. An interdisciplinary team requires interaction among the team members for the evaluation, assessment, and development of the intervention plan. Actual service delivery is still done by the professionals separately, but as part of an overall plan. Role definitions are relaxed and there is an emphasis on communication among team members, attempting to create an atmosphere of collaboration (Hernandez, 2013). This form of teamwork reduces some of the potential for providing families or even teachers with conflicting advice, but does not completely eliminate these problems. While this approach engenders an enhanced exchange of information, boundaries remain between team members that constrict the flow of information, dialogue, and effective implementation (Carpenter et al., 1998, Stepan et al., 2002 as cited in Hernandez, 2013).

Transdisciplinary Approach

In the transdisciplinary approach, team members provide joint evaluations and work together to carry out interventions, sharing their roles across disciplinary boundaries. In this approach professionals from two or more disciplines teach, learn and work together across traditional disciplinary or professional boundaries so that communication, interaction, and cooperation are maximized among team members (Briggs, 1997, Davies, 2007). Commonly in this approach one team member (often called the primary provider, case manager or lead professional) implements the intervention plan and receives consultation from other providers. Parents are viewed as their children's best advocate and key to the development of a mutual vision or "shared meaning" among the team (Davies, 2007).

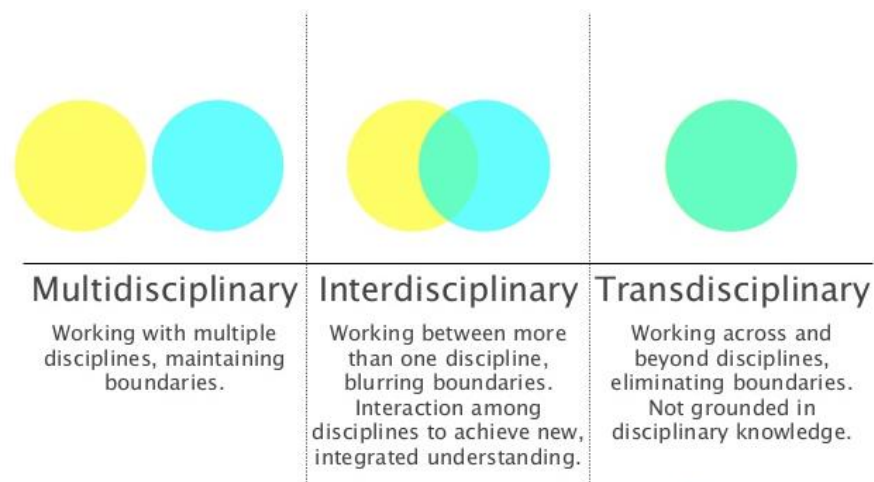


Figure 1 – Models of collaboration. **Source:** <http://www.slideshare.net/elenajurado/workshop-interdisciplinar-23oct4nov-2014-ciedi>

The transdisciplinary approach has been promoted as an example of outstanding collaborative practice (Hernandez, 20013). King et al. (2009), based on Foley’s work (1990), propose 3 essential features of the transdisciplinary approach.

The first is related with **assessment**, where professionals from multiple disciplines assess the child simultaneously, but only one or two assume the role of facilitator and interact with the child while members of other disciplines give support and where appropriate observe.

The second essential feature concerns the intensive, ongoing interaction among team members from different disciplines, enabling them to pool and exchange information, knowledge, and skills, and work together cooperatively. This feature clarifies the role of collaborative interprofessional teamwork and includes the notion of **role expansion** (Foley, 1990, Briggs, 1991), which relates with the increasing by each team member of knowledge and skills in his/her own area of expertise.

The third defining feature of transdisciplinary approach is **role release**, regarded as the most crucial and challenging component in transdisciplinary team development. “The team becomes truly transdisciplinary *in practice* when members give up or ‘release’ intervention strategies from their disciplines, under the supervision and support of team members whose disciplines are accountable for those practices” (King et al., 2009, p. 213). The role release process is thus considered a core element of transdisciplinary approach, entailing sharing of expertise, valuing the perspectives, knowledge, and skills of those from other disciplines; and trust–being able to ‘let go’ of one’s specific role when appropriate. Role release also occurs with respect to the family (eg, parents can be educated about appropriate activities to incorporate into daily routines). Intervention is viewed as a shared event and no individual is solely responsible for it. “To assure the collective store of knowledge, skill, and perspectives is tapped, every team member, including staff, pupils, and family members, assumes the role of teacher, learner, and implementer” (Rainforth & England, 1997, p. 91 as cited by Hernandez,

2013, p. 486), which requires interpersonal skills, professional collaboration and especially open and well-established ways of communication.

In comparison to the multi- and inter- disciplinary approaches, there is evidence about transdisciplinary approach better effectiveness, especially with regard to the creation of an integrated team structure and service delivery, deliberate and regular cross discipline communications, knowledge exchange across disciplines and its strong pupil focus (Downing & Baily, 1990, Carpenter et al., 1998, Stepan et al., 2002, York et al., 1990 as cited in Hernandez, 2013).

Collaborative teaching approach

Co-teaching, cooperative teaching, or a collaborative teaching approach is seen as a more recent development in the evolution of the collaborative models described above (Hernandez, 2013). Identified as one of the most promising factors in favor of inclusion, the collaborative approach to teaching results in the teaming of regular and special educators in an inclusionary classroom setting but can also apply to teaming other professionals, such as speech/language therapists, occupational therapists, and counsellors (Rainforth & England, 1997 as cited in Hernandez, 2013). These authors noted that the multiple co-teaching models typically require joint academic intervention by at least two professionals in a classroom with pupils of typical ability as well as pupils with special needs. Many of the characteristics identified as necessary for successful implementation of a co-teaching model are similar to the key elements of the other collaborative models, especially the transdisciplinary approach, namely open communication, parity, role release, and consistent collaborative intervention (Sileo, 2011 as cited in Hernandez, 2013).

Co-teaching of regular education and special needs education teachers

Cooperative teaching of regular and special education teachers implies that they work together in the same classroom most of the day. To be an effective team they will work together as equal partners in interactive relationships, both being involved in all aspects of planning, teaching, and assessment. Areas for this collaboration will include curricula and instruction, assessment and evaluation, and classroom management and behavior. The primary responsibility of regular education teachers is usually to use their skills to instruct pupils in curricula dictated by the school system, whereas the primary responsibility of special education teachers is to provide instruction by adapting and developing materials to match the learning styles, strengths, and special needs of each of their pupils. Thus, both bring training and experience in teaching techniques and learning processes, but regular teachers mainly bring content specialization, while special education teachers bring assessment and adaptation specializations. "Their collaborative goal is that all pupils in their class are provided with appropriate classroom and homework assignments so that each is learning, is challenged, and is participating in the classroom process" (Ripley, 1997, para.9).

There are several established models of co-teaching that can be useful for the collaboration of regular and special needs teachers. Friend and Cook (1996) have developed six approaches to co-teaching that are widely used and have proven to be successful to guide teachers who work together in co-teaching partnerships. These approaches are also useful to collaborative practices in preschool settings, where they can be used as reference models and adapted to early childhood curriculum and pedagogies. These models have been synthesized as follows (adapted from <http://marylandlearninglinks.org>):

One Teaching, One Observing

One teacher leads instruction while the other teacher gathers data by observing. It is used when data needs to be collected.

Station Teaching

Pupils are broken into three or more heterogeneous or homogeneous groups. Teachers can provide direct instruction at a station or monitor multiple stations. The small groups rotate around the stations. Its purpose is to decrease pupil teacher ratio, present targeted instructional content and/or cooperative learning.

Parallel Teaching

Pupils are divided into two homogeneous groups and each group is led by a co-teacher, receiving the same content but through differentiated instruction. The purpose of parallel teaching is to decrease pupil teacher ratio and target pupils' instructional needs.

Alternative Teaching

Based on previous assessments, both teachers may decide which pupils are at-risk. One teacher works with the at-risk group while the other continues to provide accelerated instruction. The purpose of alternative teaching is to re-teach the at-risk pupils while providing accelerated content to the remaining pupils.

Teaming

While team teaching, co-teachers should act as "one brain in two bodies" (Friend, 2008, p. 75). For example, both teachers may facilitate a discussion while performing different roles such as writing on the board emphasizing key points. The purpose of teaming is to share the role of lead teacher in delivering instruction and providing pupil support.

One Teaching, One Assisting

As one teacher leads the whole class, the other teacher provides supports, answers questions, monitors pupil behavior, etc. The purpose of one teaching, one assisting is to deliver instruction and monitor pupil progress.

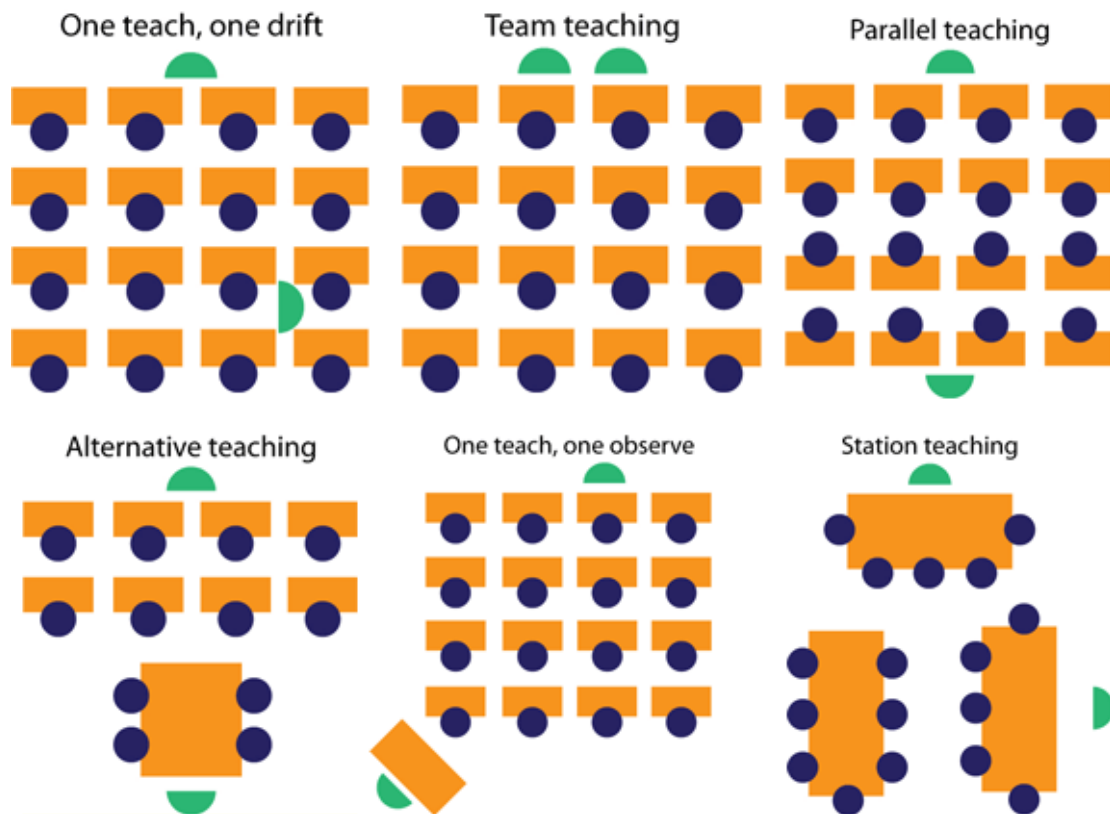


Figure 2 – Models of co-teaching

Figure 2 – Models of co-teaching **Source:** Friend, M. & Cook, L. (2010). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (6th ed.). Boston: Pearson.

Collaborative learning

Finally, collaboration must also be acknowledged from a pedagogical perspective, namely in terms of collaboration among children. Collaborative (or cooperative) learning allows pupils to scaffold each other in order to find solutions to problems, either academics or for instance behavioural. This type of learning allows pupils of varying ability levels to contribute to the group as a whole, encouraging different approaches and diverse ideas to problem solving (Ncube, 2011). Although teachers are generally positive about cooperative learning's efficacy for pupils with special needs, research shows that they acknowledge that it works better for some pupils than others (Jenkins, Antil, Wayne & Vadasy, 2003).

Nevertheless, it has been argued that cooperative classrooms represent a shift from traditional lecture-style classrooms to more brain-friendly environments that benefit all learners (Emerson, 2003). According to Stevens and Slavin (1995 as cited in Emerson, 2003), pupils with disabilities are more likely to be at instructional level and have positive learning outcomes when explanations and models are provided by their peers. In inclusive classes that use cooperative learning, pupils articulate their

thoughts more freely, receive confirming and constructive feedback, engage in questioning techniques, receive additional practice on skills, and have increased opportunities to respond. Further, when pupils are thinking aloud while discussing, teachers are better able to assess pupil and group needs and intervene if needed, redirect groups toward learning tasks, achieving a level of dialogue that accelerates the comprehension process (Bucalos & Lingo, 2005 as cited in Emerson, 2003).