

**Personal Philosophy Statement**

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SPED 854: Family and Interprofessional Collaboration in Special Education

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Collaboration within special needs education is imperative. To best serve the needs of each child, and even more so, all of the children, it is vital to weave in the knowledge, skills, and points of view of a whole host of people. Without collaboration, the roadblocks would be exponentially higher. Following the definition of Friend and Cook (2010), "collaboration is the style professionals select to employ based on mutual goal; parity; shared responsibility for key decisions; shared accountability for outcomes; shared resources; and the development of trust, respect and a sense of community" (pg. 3) it is clear how appropriate and necessary this approach is. Allowing each voice in the group the authority and responsibility of enabling their part to ensure success.

Incorporating collaboration within the team is an important way to broaden the depth of knowledge, background, and experience within the conversation. Being open to others' opinions and points of view can give each member the ability to see things differently and to grow and develop as an individual; all the while, they are better able to address the needs of the child. IDEA states (Cook & Friend 2010) that the law demands that students with disabilities should be taught by highly qualified teachers both in general education and special needs in the least restrictive environment. Given that our current system trains special needs and general education teachers within different and discordant systems (Koleski 2013), it is understandable that one voice alone is not able to bring all of those requirements to the process. It is necessary to form a team of professionals with different perspectives and training who are able to work with, hear, and respect each other in order to have a well-rounded approach.

When building a team for collaboration within special needs, it is important to include the following voices: special needs teachers, general education teacher/s, administrators,

counselors, paraprofessionals, parents, and, when appropriate, the students themselves. It can be challenging to create an environment where all of the above aspects - respect, accountability, and trust are fostered. Different backgrounds in education, experience, ethnicity, and language can all play a role in creating misunderstandings or discordance within the team.

In order to facilitate collaboration, it is important to have clear expectations and a consistent vocabulary (Cooke and Friend 2010) for all of the members. It is also important to have a norm of “collegiality and continuous improvement” (Cook and Friend 2010) by creating space for each voice and fostering an environment of listening with an open mind. Colleagues need to feel comfortable and able to turn to each other as resources and partners. Additionally, each member needs to feel valued and recognized as an important voice in the conversation, even when faced with a member with more or less power or education within the program.

Collaboration is likely most successful within a co-teaching environment where both teachers bring their professional talents to an equal playing field. This approach allows the learner to get their general education and special needs met effectively. It is possible that a consultation process allows for a broader spread of resources (if the consultant is consulting with more than one class) but might not lead to a shared, equal responsibility, as is required for true collaboration. Furthermore, it does not allow for the process to address the joint needs of our learners as effectively.

The collaboration process should be continuous throughout the child’s learning. While some voices might be more occasional, such as psychologists and administrators, teachers should collaborate throughout the experience and include the voices of the student and family as often as possible. This allows for a more fluid learning environment.

## References

Cook, L., & Friend, M. (2010). The state of the art of collaboration on behalf of student with disabilities. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 20(1), 1-8.

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