Consult and Support Students With Special Needs in Inclusive Classrooms

Wendy Fetner Dover

As more students with special needs receive content area instruction in the general education classroom, special educators look for innovative ways to support student instruction and achievement, as well as monitor and direct services detailed in student Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Although collaboration between general and special education teachers is essential (Rainforth & England, 1997), special educators may be unsure of the appropriate collaborative roles and tasks. Special education services and teacher practices often offer isolated, direct instruction to students (Welch, 1998). Collaboration activities associated with successful inclusive settings by special education personnel include consultation and support to general education teachers and paraeducators, as well as a mixture of direct and indirect services to students (Wallace, Anderson, & Bartholomay, 2002). When given consultation time, special educators should not give in to the temptation to plan lessons, schedule meetings, or finish IEPs but rather engage in tasks and activities that promote communication and support for students in inclusive settings.

1. Develop written schedules. Record teacher planning times, lunch times, and even school arrival and departure times for all teachers and therapists with whom you work. This will serve as your “road map” when you set out in search of others. Include a schedule of paraeducators or instructional assistants as well as times they could be available or accessible.

2. Meet with others to review key student program information. Information may include IEP goals and objectives, present levels of performance, and explore accommodations and modifications. Be sure to check for understanding, answer any questions, and collect, as well as provide, any new and additional information regarding students and their progress.

3. Personalize key student information. Select and discuss student IEP goals and objectives, as
well as accommodations and modifications that specifically apply to a teacher’s class or subject. Also discuss how the teacher can help students progress toward meeting their goals and objectives or how to implement individual student accommodations and modifications.

**Ask specific rather than general questions.** Ask teachers and paraeducators how students are performing regarding classroom activities and class expectations (e.g., homework, routine, rules. Ask to see evidence of student progress. This will provide information that will help structure the nature of the special education support and keep students progressing through the general curriculum. Special educators must also provide periodic updates to parents regarding student progress on IEP goals and objectives. When asking about classroom performance and participation, also ask specifically about progress on the IEP goals and objectives.

**Listen to the experiences, needs, and concerns of teachers or paraeducators.** Collaboration and consultation is certainly not all talking. It is very important that all the teachers and staff providing direct instructional services to students with special needs be given the opportunity to celebrate, comment on, and question their participation in service delivery.

**Find out specifically what is happening instructionally.** Review upcoming lesson plans and instructional activities and projects with teachers and paraeducators. Offer suggestions for accommodations and modifications related to those specific lesson plans, as well as activities and projects for individual students or groups of students.

**Strengthen and support classroom teacher and paraeducator partnerships.** Offer suggestions regarding how a paraeducator can most effectively be used in a general education classroom or with a specific teacher or subject area. Placing a special education assistant in a general education classroom actually splits the management and supervisory duties between the special and general education teachers. Although problems may arise when neither the special educator nor the teacher is clear on who is directing and monitoring the tasks and performance of an assistant.

**Review student work together.** Look at examples of student work together, and offer explanations, rationales for performance, or specific item analysis. Make suggestions for additional support, instruction, or accommodations. Also, consider providing suggestions for learning strategies or interventions.

**Review classroom and instructional materials.** Offer suggestions, and even offer to make or provide modified materials or teaching aids. Flashcards, word banks, study guides, outlines, games, or written instructions or descriptions are just a few of the types of materials that may be offered. Assistive technology or adaptive equipment may need to be included, updated, or fine-tuned as students progress.

**Review test or assessment materials.** Offer ideas for modifications or other suggestions that will aid student review, completion, or instructional benefit. Offer to develop study aids or study guides that can be used by the student or even the entire class. Offer suggestions for accommodations or modifications for tests or the administration of tests, such as permitting extra time, having the test read aloud, and allowing oral answers. Plans may be necessary for the special education teacher to help, such as scheduling a time for the student to come to a resource room to have a test read aloud or answers written by a scribe.

**Help the teacher prioritize instructional objectives.** Teachers may need support or advice when reducing the number of unit or lesson objectives or when arranging them in order of importance by subject area or individual student need. These types of decisions aid in the development of parallel or partial participation, as well as modifications and adaptations. Defining and/or prioritizing the major points to a lesson or unit allows teachers and teams to develop appropriate levels of instruction. Making curricular modifications or changes to instructional content is much more difficult than changes in time and format of materials.
12. **Pull target students.** Students receiving minimal special services support or minimal direct instruction may need to be pulled aside for individual conferencing or delivery of necessary messages. Keep these meetings short. Remind the students of the resource room and the services you provide. Make this a regular occurrence for each student (1 every 2 weeks) receiving minimal direct services.

13. **Make up a business card.** Give this card to students (and teachers) so they have a tangible reminder of who you are, where you can be found, or how you can be contacted.

14. **Increase or intensify student support time.** If a student is performing poorly or below expectations in the general education classroom, temporarily increase support for tests and assignments by setting appointments or requiring the student to check in periodically to the resource room.

15. **Conduct in-class observations.** Go into general education classrooms to simply observe student performance and behaviors. Document student actions and behaviors either in a narrative or anecdotal form. You could collect frequency, latency, duration, or timed-interval data. Use this information as discussion starters for teachers, assistants, students, and even parents. It also provides documentation of program monitoring.

16. **Analyze the classroom environment.** Complete an instructional inventory of classroom procedures and expectations as a means of documenting and understanding the classroom academic environment. Describe classroom features such as instructional groupings, classroom structure, informational sources (e.g., textbooks, demonstrations, computer, lecture, learning centers), student response activities (e.g., journal writing, reading aloud, discussions), homework expectations, assessment, test preparation, and classroom rules and routines. Compare this information with what you know about the students. This comparison will provide discussion points with the general classroom teacher regarding student participation and progress, as well as specific areas for needed support.

17. **Offer direct assistance.** If you are not regularly doing so, provide instructional support in a teacher’s classroom and be available to all students in the class, not just students being served by special education. Instead of simply observing, you can participate in a lesson or activity. Consider this limited or “drop-in” support. It’s a great way to catch up on what is happening with the curriculum and with the students. Be sure to check with the teacher ahead of time. Ask the teacher to notify you (but always double check on a regular basis) which classroom activities would provide the best opportunity for drop-in support.

18. **Take over paraeducator duties.** Choose a time to replace a paraeducator who is providing direct support to an inclusive classroom. This will help you gain direct information about the students and the class and will enable you to provide extra assistance and guidance to the instructional assistant.

19. **Observe paraeducators working with the students.** You can observe paraeducators in instructional and supervisory settings, such as the lunchroom or community. Offer commendations, comments, and recommendations to the paraeducators, or the teachers working with them, aimed at increasing paraeducator effectiveness and efficiency. Offer guidelines and suggestions appropriate for such specific settings as classrooms, playgrounds, bus lines and buses, hallways, lunchrooms, community, and job sites. Make recommendations about increasing or decreasing instructional assistant support and proximity to encourage helping, NOT hovering (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997).

20. **Conduct interviews to complete necessary forms.** When you visit with teachers and paraeducators, take forms and communication papers (such as progress check forms) with you instead...
of putting them in a box or sending them through school mail. Consultation is a face-to-face process, not a paperwork process. Have the teacher or assistant complete the form orally while you serve as scribe. It will only take a minute or two of your time. The personal contact is important.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendy Fetner Dover, EdD, is an assistant professor in special education in the Richard Riley College of Education at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Her current interests include initial teacher preparation in special education, inclusive practices in general education classrooms, and training and supervision of paraeducators. Address: Wendy Fetner Dover, Rm. 204 Withers/WTS, Rock Hill, SC 29733.

REFERENCES


Copyright of Intervention in School & Clinic is the property of PRO-ED. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.