Educating Students with Intellectual Disability & Autism Spectrum Disorder

Book 2
Foundational Concepts for Leadership and Collaboration

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Contents

Introduction

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Teaching students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and intellectual disability (ID) is a multifaceted job with many variable and intersecting roles that must be filled. This second book in the *Educating Students With Intellectual Disability and Autism Spectrum Disorder* series addresses the primary foundational concepts which steer the profession; the chapters that follow focus on teacher leadership and advocacy, collaborating with colleagues, working with paraprofessionals, collaborating with families, and working with diverse students.

Each of these chapters describes foundational concepts through relevant examples, provides an overview of current research-based practices, includes templates for self-assessment and program review, addresses teacher learning, and illustrates the content via case studies. In Chapter 1, "Teacher Leadership and Advocacy," Drogan, Perner, and Shurr discuss how the definition of *teacher leadership* aligns with the typical duties of teachers serving students with ASD and ID. Although the idea for teacher leadership has been around for quite some time, it is becoming more evident that this role generally reserved for veteran teachers is actually expected of many special education teachers on Day One. Recognizing the necessity of such leadership skills, the authors provide practical and research-based strategies for improving teacher leadership in the classroom, school, and community for the benefit of students, families, and the profession at large.

Chapter 2, "Collaborating With Colleagues," delves into this critical area. Special education teams work together on a daily basis for the benefits of students, and team members have varied backgrounds, training, and expertise. It is essential for teachers of students with ID and ASD not only to embrace collaboration as essential, but also to seek opportunities for continual growth and advancement. Courtade and Pennington provide numerous research-based tips for building and improving meaningful and productive partnerships with general education teachers, related service providers, administrators, and other colleagues.

In Chapter 3, Hollingshead and Barrio paint a picture of successful paraprofessional–teacher partnerships. It is essential for teachers of students with ASD and ID to gain the necessary skills to best utilize this powerful support system. In addition to presenting research-based practices for positive and effective supervision, the authors provide a variety of templates, tools, and examples for teachers to use in skill building and to further their effective practice.

In Chapter 4, Raley and Shogren focus on collaboration between teachers of students with ASD and ID and their families. The authors appropriately note the changing demographics of the contemporary family makeup and the need for a suitable framework for understanding and addressing relevant partnerships. In addition, they dive into the unique challenges and needs that families face and what teachers can do to benefit families and ultimately improve student outcomes.

Finally, Chapter 5 describes the essential concepts and activities related to working with students from diverse backgrounds, using broad frameworks such as culturally responsive teaching to further understanding of the elements of responsive practice as well as best practices for implementation. In "Working With Diverse Students," Carrero, Baker, and Fuller include assessments that can be used to identify strengths of individuals and programs, and identify topics for future attention in the area of teaching diverse students with ASD and ID.

Foundational Concepts for Leadership and Collaboration is intended to serve as a spring board for the following books in this collection, which are focused on instructional content. Whereas content could be thought of as the pathway or road in instruction, the foundational concepts presented here are the engine which makes the trip possible. Tips for effective, efficient, and most importantly engaging and compassionate service are provided for a smoother trip. Enjoy the ride.

Chapter 1

Teacher Leadership and Advocacy

Robin Drogan, Darlene E. Perner, and Jordan C. Shurr

A *leader* is someone who is able to bring people together to work toward a common cause or goal, exerting influence and expressing a vision that enables a group to move from one position or activity to another (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Halliman, 2014; Winston & Patterson, 2006). Teachers have been traditionally viewed merely as presenters of content; their daily duties include direct instruction, facilitating content understanding, and coaching students (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007). However, they also manage classroom environments, plan for instruction, assess student progress, and maintain professionalism in interactions both within and outside of school (Strange, 2007). The term *teacher leadership*, although defined in different ways, generally refers to a teacher who has a positive influence on the community, school, and or classroom (Barth, 2007; Wilson, 2016). Although not all teachers are leaders, those who are can have extraordinarily constructive influences on their students, schools, communities, and the profession at large.

The full extent of a teacher's knowledge and capabilities regarding the practice of teaching and their beliefs about education are often unrealized beyond the classroom (Helterbran, 2010). Although teaching primarily centers around student instruction, the skills, knowledge, and experience of a teacher can create systemic and meaningful change both within and outside of the classroom (Barth, 2007). Teachers can share their expertise to benefit school practice, the community at large, and public policy. When teachers use their professional knowledge and skills to exert influence beyond the classroom, either formally or informally, they exhibit teacher leadership. Traditional examples of teacher leadership include teachers serving in formal leadership positions such as department chairperson or an instructional coach. Yet, teacher leadership is not bound to a named title; it is inherent in the ability to recognize a need and work collaboratively to seek and enact a solution beyond the confines of one's own classroom (Helterbran, 2010).

Having teachers act in positions of leadership is not an entirely new concept, although administrators typically have been viewed as the ultimate authority within a school and therefore hold the primary responsibility for both designing and facilitating school reform (Lowery-Moore, Latimer, & Villate, 2016), as well as

Chapter 2

Collaborating With Colleagues

Ginevra R. Courtade and Robert C. Pennington

The planning and delivery of special education services under the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006) requires effective collaboration among parents, students, and a team of professionals across a range of disciplines. This team of stakeholders is often charged with planning assessments; identifying relevant goals; selecting appropriate accommodations or adaptations; and designing plans for intervention, transition, and the delivering related services (Cramer, 2006). Unfortunately, many beginning special educators may be unprepared to navigate the complexities of collaboration, especially in the context of working with professional colleagues (White & Mason, 2006). As a result, they may fail to capitalize on the diverse skills and perspectives that others bring to an education program.

Research has demonstrated that improvement in both teacher and student performance is related to successful collaborative opportunities (Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Positive collaboration experiences also can help special education staff overcome feelings of marginalization within their school or district and may lead to a higher rate of retention (Jones, Youngs, & Frank, 2013; Louis et al., 1996). In 2015, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) engaged in a collaborative process to update its special educator preparation standards. These standards include Initial Preparation Standards (2018) that define "what a candidate must know and be able to do to begin teaching" and are indicative of what high-quality teacher preparation programs should include in their teacher training, including resulting outcomes for graduates. Five of these seven standards address collaboration, either in the standard itself or within the supporting explanation (see Table 2.1). Accordingly, successful teacher candidates should be able to collaborate with general educators, related service providers, families, personnel from community agencies, and individuals with exceptionalities to engage, support, instruct, and assess their students.

Chapter 3

Working With Paraprofessionals

Aleksandra Hollingshead and Brenda L. Barrio

Special educators as well as students with disabilities rely on support from paraprofessionals throughout the school day. Paraprofessionals—also called instructional assistants, paraeducators, teacher assistants, or classroom aides—are tasked with supporting students in multiple areas, ranging from self-care to one-to-one instructional support (Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; Giangreco & Broer, 2005). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016), special education paraprofessionals outnumbered special education teachers by about 30,000, with a total of 400,000 paraprofessionals employed nationwide. This is an increase of over 150% since the year 2000, when only approximately 250,000 paraprofessionals worked in the United States (Carlson, Brauen, Kline, Schroll, & Willig, 2002). In the latest data, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), a little over 1 million paraprofessionals currently work in elementary and secondary schools, and this number is expected to increase by 8% in the next 10 years. Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, and Pelsue (2009) provided a snapshot of paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities. In their survey of 77 schools, roughly three quarters of paraprofessionals in special education worked with students with intellectual disability (ID) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In addition, the researchers found that 97% of the paraprofessionals provided one-to-one instruction on a daily or weekly basis (Carter et al., 2009). It is clear that paraprofessionals serve a critical role within the educational support system for students with ID and ASD. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the roles, responsibilities, and professional development needs of special education teachers in order to successfully collaborate with paraprofessionals in providing research-based supports.

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2006) defines *paraprofessionals* as support personnel who work "under the direction of a certified staff member to support and assist in providing instructional programs and services to children with disabilities or eligible young children" (20 U.S.C. § 6319[g][2]). In other words, paraprofessionals provide instructional, behavioral, and social supports for students with disabilities. These services are provided where the students is, be it in a general or in special education classroom, or other location as indicated in the student's IEP (IDEA, 2006).

Chapter 4

Collaborating With Families

Sheida K. Raley and Karrie A. Shogren

Families come in all shapes and sizes—and they look different today than they did in the past, necessitating updated approaches to building collaboration and family–professional partnerships. For example, in 2016, 68% of children under age 18 lived with two parents in the home, compared to 85% in 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). The demographic landscape in schools also has changed. In 2014, the percentage of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools who were White was less than 50%, a decrease from 58% in 2004. In contrast, the percentage of students who were Hispanic increased from 19% to 25% during the same time period (McFarland et al., 2017). However, the teaching workforce that supports these children is not nearly as diverse as the student population. In the 2011–2012 school year, 51% of public school students were White, 24% were Hispanic, and 16% were Black. In comparison, 82% of public school teachers were White, 8% were Hispanic, and 7% were Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). In addition to differences based on race or ethnicity, the composition of contemporary families can include parents, siblings, relatives (e.g., aunt, uncle, grandparents), and individuals who are not blood-related. Therefore, before discussing how to collaborate with families in today's diverse climate, it is important to establish the definition of *family*.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) defined a *family* as a group of two people or more related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together. However, this definition does not always accommodate current diversity in family structures. About 38% of opposite-sex unmarried couples have a child under age 18 living with them (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) and over 16% of same-sex unmarried couples have children under age 18 living in the household (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). There are many contemporary family structures that exist outside of the U.S. Census Bureau definition.

An alternative definition of *family*, and that adopted to guide this chapter, is two or more people who consider themselves a family and perform the typical functions of a family (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2015). This understanding of family emphasizes the functions people in families perform for one another, rather than a specific family structure. Families with nontraditional

Chapter 5

Working With Diverse Students

Kelly M. Carrero, Diana Baker, and Marcus C. Fuller

Educators working in public schools are increasingly likely to be working with students whose backgrounds (e.g., racial, ethnic, linguistic) differ from their own. Although today's educators are more racially and ethnically diverse than a few years ago, most are still White females from middle-class backgrounds (Snyder & Dillow, 2015). With the student population diversifying more quickly than the educator population in many schools, cultural dissonance is inevitable. This chapter examines the cultural considerations that special education teachers must make when implementing evidence-based practices and serving students identified with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or intellectual disability (ID).

Why Culture Matters

Most teachers and scholars agree that it is important to consider a student's home language. However, there is less agreement about the extent to which *other* student-level differences (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, the neighborhood where the family lives) should inform practices such as setting educational goals for students and delivering effective instruction. These questions may be particularly important in thinking about students with ASD, whose educational goals often address social skills and behavior norms—which vary considerably from one cultural context to the next (e.g., Tek & Landa, 2012). For students with ID, the instructional focus on adaptive skills may also resonate differently with families from different cultural backgrounds (e.g., Ly, 2008; Tassé et al., 2012).

Culture is complex and has been conceptualized in many ways (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher, & Ortiz, 2010). For the purposes of this chapter, *culture* is defined as a set of values, attitudes, beliefs, learning histories, and traditions that determine how people interact within and across groups. Race, ethnicity, and language are often used as proxies for culture; although they can provide perspective on issues such as power and privilege, they cannot capture a person's entire identity.

Much of the research exploring biases in education has investigated how negative stereotypes can adversely affect teachers' attitudes and students' achievement. In a recent report investigating biases held about students of color,