

# *Team Leadership: Evolving Role for the Special Educator*

*Courage to Risk Conference  
January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011*

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# Service Delivery Changes

- Increased emphasis on access for students with disabilities to core curriculum, (IDEA)
- Increased emphasis on achievement of high academic standards for all students (NCLB; IDEA)
- Need for differentiated staffing patterns resulting in more personnel to serve students with disabilities
- Increased employment of lesser-trained personnel, known as paraeducators or instructional assistants

# The Corresponding Shift in Teacher Role

*“The inclusive special educator is responsible for coordinating a complex system of adults and students—often including paraeducators, related service specialists, classroom teachers, and peer assistants. This contemporary role is analogous to that of an executive in business settings and requires comparable leadership, collaboration, and communication skills.” (French & Chopra, 2006)*

# Who says this?

## Data Sources

- PSA - Problems and promising practices
- a study about the paraeducator role in inclusion
- a study of the relationships among the adults in inclusive programs
- Other research on roles of modern day special educators (Chopra, 2002, French, 1998, 2003; French & Chopra, 2006; French & Pickett, 1997; Frey, Fisher & Thousand, 2003)

# Stories: Jamie and Dan

- Form groups of 3-4
- Read both stories individually
- Discuss in pairs:  
Who is more effective as a teacher- Jamie or Dan  
and why?
- Share with the group

# Jamie's Story

Jamie's definition for successful inclusion:

Successful inclusion is when children with special needs in a regular education classroom, are getting the same opportunities as everybody else, where they have a learning outcome for every single part of their day. It may be the same learning or a modified learning outcome or a totally different learning outcome.



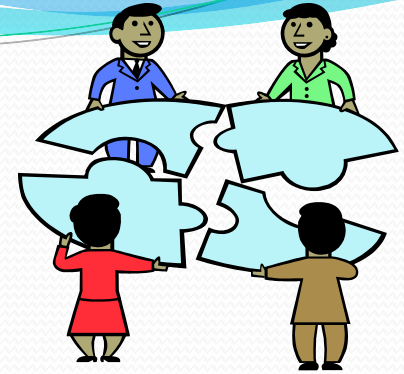
# Jamie's story

## Jamie's Motto:

We think as a team. We make decisions as a team and we all implement as a team. Inclusion would not be possible without teamwork.

## Jamie's Belief:

Communication is vital to teamwork. ...Ongoing communication builds trust for teamwork.



# Jamie's story continued

The ultimate result of her leadership

Every team member felt respected, had a clear understanding of their roles; and students were fully included and well-served!



The existing team is like a well-run team in the medical field. You have the doctor and the PT and the OT and the nurse and everybody's in sync. You talk about a patient and every discipline gives their input, and when you have a well-run team like that there's nothing better. When every piece of the puzzle is doing what they're supposed to... the patient is getting the best possible care. I feel like that's what we've got right here right now. Everybody's doing what they're supposed to do in their role. - Parent



# Dan's Story

Dan's definition for successful inclusion:

Successful inclusion would be having the student included in the culture of the school, to the maximum what they're capable of, having them in their classroom as much as possible, participating in both social and academic activities.



# Dan's Story - continued

## Dan's beliefs:

... To make inclusion happen ....having the teacher {regular education}, the paraeducator, and myself in a joint collaboration, so that all three of those people are involved in both the planning as well as implementing the goals for the student.



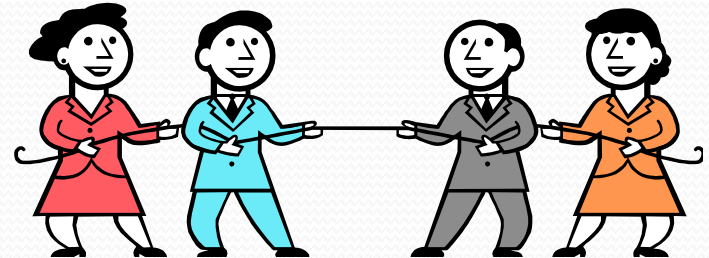
It is important to be open to input and willing to hear the other person to come to a mutual agreement.

# Dan's Story - continued

Fragmented approach to inclusion - a number of well-meaning people who worked more or less in isolation.

**Students spent more time out of the classroom**

It's almost like you have too many people involved. Everyone has their piece and some people don't do their piece... There is a need for one person to coordinate the work of the team so everyone does their part and everything gets done. I often have to call Dan to remind him, to get things done. - parent



# Executive functions performed by special ed. teachers

- Planning
- **Assessment**
- Instruction
- **Collaboration/Consultation with other school professionals**
- Paraeducator supervision

# Function #1: Planning



- Gather information from classroom teachers
- consider students' IEP goals in light of the curriculum
- 'prescribe' appropriate adaptations
- provide written direction and guidance to paraeducators who carry out the adaptations.

# Function #2 Assessment

- *Dynamic instruction is based on good planning and good planning is based on accurate assessment information (French, 2002)*
- Design data collection systems -clearly define what data to collect to monitor student progress toward an IEP goal -
- Charge paraeducator with collecting the prescribed data and giving it back daily.
- Use the data to compare goals and objectives for the student
- Use data to plan adaptations for upcoming classroom activities.
- Use data as the basis for parent communications - helping parents stay up to date on their child's progress.

# Function #3: Instruction

*Be immersed in the classroom even when you can not be physically present there all the time*

- Meet regularly with classroom teachers & service providers to know what is happening in the classroom
- Collaboratively devise appropriate adaptations
- Guide paraeducators in implementation of written plans with adaptations
- Use your classroom time to work directly with students and assessing how they are doing.
- Use your classroom time to observe paraeducators - note areas needing skill development /commendation and provide feedback

# Function #4: Collaboration with Other team members

- Ensure effective and organized communication with team members
- Ensure everyone has sufficient information about individualized plans
- Provide adapted and modified materials and techniques to address IEP goals.
- Provide accurate and timely information to parents - exchange ideas about collaborative support for the child's education.

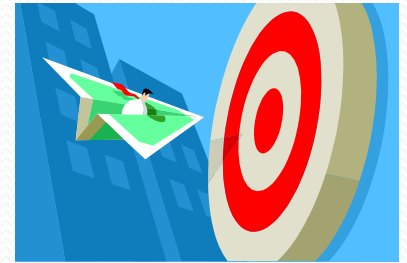


# Function #5: Paraeducator Supervision

- Clarify roles and assign tasks based on legal, ethical, and liability considerations
- Hold planning meetings
- Provide written instructional plans -
  - type of activity or lesson,
  - purpose,
  - IEP goals and objectives to be addressed,
  - adapted materials or directions for creating them
  - use of cues, prompts and a data structure for documenting student performance
- direct and monitor the paraeducators' work - frequent observations and provide timely, specific feedback
- Provide coaching and on the job training on-the-job training, and provide written plans.



# FINAL NOTE



The special educator is the leader, the central figure and the determining factor in the success of inclusion.

# Final note continued..... What needs to happen?

- Teacher preparation programs need to prepare teachers for their new role
- Districts need to provide in-service training to teacher for their new role
- District and building administrators - their roles must shift too - coordinating, coaching and guiding the work of multiple teachers
  - Focus on collaboration, provide supports for teacher to collaborate, collaborative school culture, transformational collaborative leadership
  - TIME to collaborate