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Important Dates

- **December 6, 2005:** Advisory Board 4:30-6:00.
- **February 7, 2006:** Partner Connection, 4:00-4:50.
- **February 9, 2006:** Informational Open House for new applicants 5:00 - 7:00; EPASW Bldg, 3rd floor, Harrison and Morgan Streets.
- **March 7, 2006:** Field Advisory, 4:00-4:50.
- **March 15, 2006:** Application Deadline for Fall, 2006 Cohort.
- **April 4, 2006:** Field Advisory, 4:00-4:50.

STEP=UP Co-Directors
Michelle Parker-Katz
Marie Tejero Hughes

STEP=UP Staff
Maria Earman Stetter
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Special Teachers and Exceptional Pupils = Urban Promise

Collaborative Teaching Part 2: Voices from the Field

As policies increasingly mandate inclusion of students with disabilities and access to general curriculum, more special education teachers will find themselves doing collaborative teaching in the general classroom. We pooled several special educators to learn about how they see their work, how they shape their roles, and most importantly, how they serve students for optimal learning.

One of the central issues we found, not surprisingly, is the dilemma of preparing instruction. Most often, the school administrator in charge of inclusion programming decides how planning time will be assigned. Often s/he can open funds for additional time before or after school. A junior high special educator, Maria Nava, is lucky in her school in that "This year.. we were able to

set money aside (LRE funds) for two substitutes to relieve the general education teachers, as well as myself, to meet once every two weeks to plan together." Perhaps extra funds are available in your school or future school; keep it in mind to ask. In lieu of common planning time, educators use their creativity. Aaron Brown, a high school math special educator, meets with teachers before school. Before the year begins, he reports he "takes the schedules for all students (high school) on my caseload, and I type a list of who teaches the student in what subject areas. Then I can talk with each teacher and student with clarity about what they need, what my role might be, etc."

There is a wide range of ways to implement lessons while co-teaching. Another high school teacher, Amy Folta, finds that "For the most part, my co-teacher plans most of the lessons. I give some input/suggestions on ways to make accommodations, such as reducing the number of vocabulary words, having print-outs available, etc. When we do group work, I collaborate with my co-teacher on organizing groups (and related logistics, e.g., materials)" Other teachers, such as Maria Nava, use different models. She said last year they used the one teacher-one drift model. Says Nava, "It worked great with those teachers who were more on the hesitant side of planning. I also have worked with some teachers where we have split the whole class in two groups (not focusing on levels or special ed needs)...I have also done and continue to do pull-out/resource time with those students who need more one on one assistance. This year, however, due to the high number in minutes that I must provide for three of my 7th graders, I provide these students with half day resource and half day inclusion services. This is also not possible without the help of my wonderful colleagues (aides)."

Aaron Brown told of a recent experience planning a broad range of strategic activities for a student. During consultation time, the general educator indicated that one student with a learning disability had serious difficulty reading and writing. "She wanted answers," Brown said. "In addition, this teacher was willing to listen and use strategies that were available. I in-

formed her that WE could work together and create a learning situation for this student. As a result, we came up with two strategies: the student will be allowed to use the reading program on the computer. (With another strategy), he could highlight only the information in text that was essential for general understanding. The student can take those sentences, usually about four to five sentences, and have the computer program read them."

Commonly, another issue is the nature of collaboration itself—negotiating ideas, strategies, styles, assessment. Amy Folta felt that "Being flexible, organized, and hard-working are good qualities to bring to a co-teaching relationship." Maria Nava has found the co-

teaching experience to be more personal."

This position has pushed me to look at my colleagues through different lenses. This has really forced me to be more of a people watcher first, and then a teacher. I must admit that this was very hard for me to do at first, nonetheless, the love, care, and belief that I have for the students I teach has led me to stick to what I do and work on developing a stronger bond with the teachers I work with." Aaron Brown has had positive "drama-free relationships with general education teachers...My advice for special education teachers is to go to an administrator if there are any problems."

The educators we interviewed, in their own early years of teaching students with disabilities, offered several

pieces of advice that might be helpful to new teachers. Maria Nava suggests "we (special educators as well as general educator teachers) need (very much) conflict resolution strategies, as well as collaborative team working skills and strategies." Aaron Brown feels that "when working with general education teachers, be patient, very patient. Some teachers are willing, and unfortunately other teachers will be reluctant and unwilling to cooperate. Those teachers may feel that all students are at the same level. Just be patient."

To us, it seems that our interviewees all agree that co-teaching is a process to be learned. Patient negotiation, seeing the world through general educators' eyes and their needs, good listening, good organization, carefully placed suggestions; all these ideas can help you build a professional relationship in which special and general educators can make increasing time for planning and communication. That's what will ultimately help your joint responsibility: the student and her/his learning.

Understanding Coteaching Components

Susan E. Gately & Frank J. Gately,
From *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 40-47.

This is a very rich article with clear strategies for negotiating the work and seeing a process of change. It even includes self-surveys for teachers to recognize their practices and beliefs about co-teaching. Through over ten years of collaborative work and research, the authors report that teachers discuss the "increased feelings of worth, renewal, partnership, and creativity" that come from collegial work. The process of shaping the co-teaching is key, they argue, and they lay out a developmental continuum: 1) beginning stage ("guarded, careful communication"), 2) compromising stage ("give and take communication, with a sense of having to 'give up' to 'get'"), and 3) collaborating stage ("open communication... mutual admiration.") Operationalizing this process comes through attention to eight components they suggest are part of successful co-teaching relationships: interpersonal communication, physical environment, curriculum familiarity, curriculum goals and modifications, planning, actual teaching, management, and assessment. For example, consider carefully the arrangement of materials, students and teachers. Often at the beginning of co-teaching, it seems like there is a 'classroom within a classroom' -- the space seems divided as to where students of disabilities work, and where others work. As the process continues, however, more sharing of materials and territory can be observed.

With respect to teaching curriculum, at the beginning stages "programs tend to be driven by textbooks and standards, and goals tend to be 'text-driven.' Modifications are limited mostly to IEPs. At the next stage, modifications are likely seen as 'watering down the curriculum' but at the same time, special and general educators begin to identify 'big ideas' and mark 'essential knowledge.'" For full article, go to this web address: http://journals.sped.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=TEC_archive_toc&ID=13

Digital Corner

There are many tools to help teachers manage grading in team teaching in the general classroom. One that is often used is an online grading system that allows both teachers to grade the students' work and place the grades online. Another perk is that students and parents can create their own accounts and have constant access to students' grades. Possible sites that offer this are www.thinkwave.com and www.snapgrades.net. For a small yearly fee, both allow teachers to input and examine grades from any computer connected to the Internet

Grades are offered both in percentage and point system. Teachers can label the type of assignment and keep track of attendance.