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ABSTRACT

This issue brief discusses three key strategies for providing special education and related service support to all students with disabilities in general education settings: (1) interdisciplinary instruction, (2) team teaching, and (3) block scheduling. Interdisciplinary instruction in the special education context is extended to include speech and language, motor, and social-emotional development as part of "embedded skills instruction" in an integrated curriculum. It requires that related service personnel and teachers coordinate curriculum planning and share instructional strategies and teaching responsibilities. Team teaching involves related service personnel sharing both planning and teaching responsibilities for small groups, including students whose Individualized Education Programs call for specific services, in the general education classroom. Block scheduling in the special education context refers to the way related services are scheduled so students can be supported during longer periods of time in general classroom activities. Related service personnel add up the hours allocated for a given student and multiply them by the number of special education students being served in that classroom to get the block of time to be spent in a given classroom. (DB)

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Related Services Supporting Inclusion: Congruence of Best Practices in Special Education and School Reform

Beverly Rainforth, Ph.D.

Educating all students with disabilities in general education requires a supportive framework for collaboration between general and special educators. Such a framework is found in the education reform and restructuring literature, which advocates practices such as team teaching, interdisciplinary curriculum, and block scheduling. A complementary framework is found in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires "supplementary aides and services" (including special education and related services, team meeting time, staff development, and adapted materials and equipment), so children with disabilities can be educated with children without disabilities. Applying these similar frameworks across general and special education can lead to a unified approach to education and greater inclusion of students with disabilities.

Special education has traditionally been provided in separate classrooms, as have related services such as speech and language, physical therapy, occupational therapy, and counseling from social workers and psychologists. The isolated nature of these services has limited collaboration among the various professionals working with a student, and has left the burden of coordinating and integrating multiple approaches to the students with disabilities and their families.

Many strategies to provide special education and related service support within the context of general education have evolved during the past two decades. These strategies parallel the best practices in general education reform and restructuring. Three key strategies are described below, with specific applications to related services.

Interdisciplinary Instruction

In general education, interdisciplinary instruction refers to the practice of blending subjects such as math and science, or social studies and language arts into an integrated curriculum. In special education, this concept is extended to include speech and language, motor, and social-emotional development as part of the curriculum (often referred to as "integrated therapy" or "embedded skills instruction"). For example, a counselor and classroom teacher plan social studies units dealing with conflicts, ranging from labor strikes to wars, and incorporate instruction on conflict resolution. The

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counselor still may work directly with a student who has particular difficulty with conflict, as required by her IEP, but strategies and expectations about handling conflict are developed with all students as part of the general education curriculum. The context is created for related service personnel to provide frequent, direct instruction on specific skills that some students need, as they participate in meaningful activities in the inclusive setting. Interdisciplinary instruction of this type does not distort or water down the general education curriculum, but enhances it for all students.

To meet the needs of students with disabilities, interdisciplinary instruction requires several types of team action. First, related service personnel need to participate in the planning of units and activities. Second, teachers and related service personnel need to teach each other strategies to meet the needs of individual students, in order to use a more consistent, coordinated, and comprehensive set of strategies. Finally, related service providers need to share teaching responsibilities with teachers and paraeducators, so members of the classroom team have a shared understanding of the general education curriculum and classroom routine, the demands and opportunities for individual students, and needs of team members related to role release.

Team Teaching

Team teaching, one form of co-teaching, provides opportunities for education and related servicepersonnel to share planning and teaching responsibilities. For example, a classroom teacher, special education teacher, and speech therapist could plan language arts units together. When the speech therapist is scheduled to be with the class, she teaches with the classroom teacher, introducing a lesson and teaching small groups that include students whose IEP call for speech and language services. Rather than permanently assign some students to a "speech and language group," however, group composition remains flexible and classroom team members all learn strategies found effective to address students' speech and language difficulties.

In another form of co-teaching, team members provide complementary instruction. For example, an occupational therapist working with the class above might notice that some "disruptive" students can channel their "fidgeting" when activities have more sensory or movement features. The occupational therapist could help plan small group language arts activities to meet these needs (e.g., retell stories in murals) and lead these activities during the block of therapy time with the class, also working directly with students with coordination problems. In these examples, related service personnel provide instruction that helps meet curriculum goals, IEP goals, and the needs of students who may not be identified as disabled.

Block Scheduling

Block scheduling in general education refers to the large blocks of time created to teach one or more areas of the curriculum to a group of students. In special education, block scheduling refers to the way related services are scheduled so they can support students during longer periods of time in whatever activities the class is engaged. In elementary schools, the traditional schedules for related services (e.g., physical therapy twice a week for 30 minutes) have not coincided well with classroom activities, and the relatively short episodes have prevented therapists and counselors from seeing how students respond to the range of demands placed on them during the day. With block scheduling, a therapist or counselor adds up the time allocated for a student's related service during a week, two weeks, or even a month. If two or more students in the class receive the service, their time is added together to get the block of time the therapist or counselor is available to work with these students within classroom activities (e.g., physical therapist for 4 hours per week). The team decides how the block of time can be used most effectively, given the needs of the students and the activities planned by the

classroom teacher. The expectation, however, is that planned, interdisciplinary instruction will enable therapists and counselors to provide appropriate services in class rather pull students out. At the secondary level, block schedules also allow related services personnel to participate in community based instruction.

As an example of block scheduling, a physical therapist might spend 4 hours with a class every Wednesday, dividing time among four main roles: working directly (but in classroom activities) with two students whose IEPs call for physical therapy, working with the teacher and the paraeducator who supports the students during the remainder of the week, team teaching some activities with the classroom teacher, and participating in team planning for the following week. This kind of schedule enables the physical therapist to assess and work with the two students during typical activities, including normal transitions in the classroom and school, influence the way activities are planned to maximize opportunities for the students to improve their motor skills, and teach both staff and classmates about how to assist students with physical disabilities. The physical therapist must still account for the use of "therapy time" but now delineates the educationally-related activities performed, rather than just student attendance. Although the physical therapist will not return to the class for a week, the team approach increases the carryover and likely benefit for the students.

Interdisciplinary instruction, team teaching, and block scheduling are complementary strategies that offer special education teams more options for supporting students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Recognizing the similarities between how these strategies are already used in special education and general education promotes a unified approach to school reform and restructuring that benefits all students.

This Issue Brief was produced by Beverly Rainforth, Ph.D., for the Consortium on Inclusive Schooling Practices. Dr. Rainforth is an Associate Professor of Special Education in the School of Education and Human Development at the State University of New York, Binghamton.

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