Collaborate with Professionals to Increase Student Success

The educator demonstrates behaviors for effective collaboration with other professionals to positively impact student outcomes.

Key Method

The educator demonstrates collaborative behaviors through effective communication with teachers, paraprofessionals, supervisors, and/or other related service providers while implementing the steps of shared problem solving to improve instructional outcomes for students.

Method Components

Collaboration

"In order to ensure all students learn at high levels, educators must work collaboratively and take collective responsibility for the success of each student" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016).

Collaborate comes from "co-labor," meaning two or more people working together as equals to achieve a common goal. Integral to being an educator, collaboration begins with strong personal commitment, that is, a deeply held belief that the unified efforts of professionals are exponentially more impactful than those carried out in isolation. However, a commitment to collaboration is not sufficient. It must be accompanied by (a) skills for communicating with others and (b) the ability to effectively and efficiently use collaborative processes to address problems.

Effective collaboration requires

- maintaining a strong commitment to shared work,
- communicating and planning together regularly,
- sharing resources, decision-making, and accountability, and
- establishing and agreeing to clearly defined norms, roles, and responsibilities.

Collaborative Communication

To be collaborative, educators must be able to skillfully communicate with other professionals. Effective communication elements include the following components:

- Verbal active listening: Skillful listening is an active process that is essential to constructive collaboration and communication. The listener engages by asking

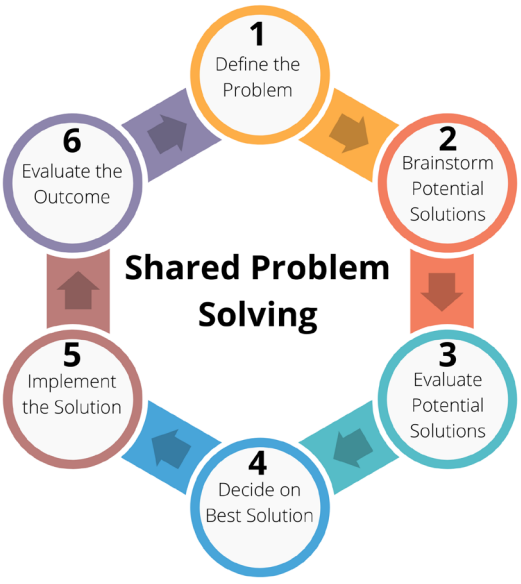
clarifying questions, paraphrasing, and/or summarizing his or her understanding at the end of the speaker's communication. This provides the person speaking with an opportunity to affirm or correct what the listener understood.

- Non-verbal active listening: Non-verbal communication is strongly influenced by factors that often suggest attitude and emotion. Facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures and body language all have the ability to add or detract from verbal communication. Nodding, smiling, and maintaining appropriate posture for the situation support verbal communication and demonstrate engagement in the collaboration process. In collaborative interactions, educators should be mindful of their nonverbal communication to ensure they are conveying openness, respect, and understanding.
- Questions and statements: Accurate, descriptive statements and open-ended questions contribute to effective collaboration. Successful collaborators make statements that can be supported with evidence and data, and avoid the use of vague generalities (e.g., Vague: Tyler is always late; Specific: Tyler was tardy 3 out of 5 days last week). They also ask questions that encourage active participation and elaboration from the responder. The use of skillful questioning and accurate, descriptive statements leads to productive collaboration focused on the identified problem and potential solutions.

It is important to note that the communication skills just described should not be used in isolation. Instead, when put to action, they should be carefully blended to foster partnerships among professionals that result in positive outcomes for students. Additionally, successful collaborators consistently consider culture within the context of their communication.

Shared Problem Solving through Effective Communication

Effective collaboration strongly relies on the power of shared problem solving. While collaborating, using skillful communication allows educators to combine their knowledge, skills, and efforts around solving a shared problem using the following 6-step approach. Each step should be completed before moving clockwise to the next step; however, at any time in the process, the team may decide to go back and repeat an earlier step.



Step 1: Identify the problem

Using effective communication skills, collectively define the problem. The team should identify and discuss the symptoms and scope of the problem. The real problem

is further clarified as more symptoms are found. Often teams conflate the symptoms of the problem with the problem itself so be careful to identify the root cause of the issue. In addition to defining the problem, this step also includes establishing a clear goal. Having a shared understanding of the problem and the intended goal is critical to the process as well as recognizing each team member's interest in and motivation for solving the problem.

Step 2: Brainstorm potential solutions

Working together, generate several possible solutions to the problem that merit further discussion and exploration. As ideas are shared, teams should keep an open mind as this step is about creating a variety of solutions, not just one.

Step 3: Evaluate potential solutions

The perfect solution seldom exists, so the team should discuss the feasibility of the potential solutions as you debate the pros and cons for each. During this collaborative step, try to build on the ideas of your teammates rather than rejecting them. Additionally, assess how each solution relates to the root cause or symptoms of the problem.

Step 4: Decide on best solution

After carefully exploring the options, reach a group consensus to determine the solution you will pursue. By this step in the process, all team members should have a vested interest in solving the problem and be willing to negotiate for the best possible outcome. The selected solution should be a viable way to resolve the problem and be acceptable to those who will implement it.

Step 5: Implement the solution

In this step, team members agree on action steps for implementation, assign tasks, and utilize a timeline for completion. The team should also agree on the type of data that will be used to determine success and impact on the identified problem.

Step 6: Evaluate the outcome

Reconvene to provide collaborative feedback on the solution's effectiveness based on the collected data. Reflecting on the results helps the team identify next steps and brings the problem-solving process full circle. It is important to note that if the selected solution does not produce the desired outcome, the team should repeat Step 4 to collaboratively select a different solution for implementation or start the process over at Step 1.

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Supporting Rationale and Research

The Supporting Rationale and Research includes resources for learning more about effective communication and the importance of collaboration. As you interact with these learning materials, take time to reflect on your professional practice.

Supporting Research

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., Many, T. W., & Mattos, M. (2016). Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work. Solution Tree Press.

Chapter 1: A Guide to Action for Professional Learning Communities at Work

Why Should We Collaborate?

Why Should We Create Norms?

Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2014). Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals (7th edition). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Chapter 1: Foundations and Perspectives

Chapter 3: Interpersonal Problem Solving

Chapter 10: Issues Related to Education Collaboration

Hargreaves, A., & O'Connor, M. T. (2018). Solidarity with solidity: The case for collaborative professionalism. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *100*(1), 20–24.

McLeskey, J., Maheady, L., Billingsley, B., Brownell, M., & Lewis, T. (Ed.) (2019). High-leverage practices for inclusive classrooms. New York: Routledge. [Chapter 1]

HLP 1: Collaborate with Colleagues to Improve Student Success (Video)

Qureshi, Z. (2008). Six-Step Problem Solving Model. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/8229711/Problem_Solving_Overview_SIX_STEP_PROBLEM_SOLVING_MODEL.

Rivers, D. (2015). *The seven challenges workbook: A guide to cooperative communication skills for success at home and at work*. (9th ed.). Human Development Books.

Ronfeldt, M., Farmer, S. O., McQueen, K., & Grissom, J. A. (2015). Teacher collaboration in instructional teams and student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*, *52*(3), 475–514.

Schleifer, D., Rinehart, C., & Yanisch, T. (2017). Teacher collaboration in perspective: A guide to research. In Perspective. Retrieved from http://www.in-perspective.org/files/PublicAgenda_TeacherCollaborationInPerspective_AGuideToResearch_2017.pdf

Shamberger, C. T., & Friend, M. (2012, November 30). Working Together for Learning together: Supporting students and teachers with collaborative instruction. Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals. Retrieved January 5, 2022, from https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1135492.

Supporting Resources

How Much of Communication is Really Nonverbal? This article explores communication and the impact of body language and other nonverbal signals.

The Six Step Problem-Solving Model. This resource outlines the six steps used in a collaborative problem-solving model as well as suggested tools and critical questions to support each step.

Collaborative Problem Solvers are Made Not Born – Here's What You Need to Know. This article explains the skills team members need to collaboratively work together.

Developing Norms. This guide supports the development of team norms which are used to ensure the collaborative meeting(s) are efficient and focused.

All Together Now: Special and Regular Educators Prosper in PLCs. This article highlights the benefits of general and special educators collaboratively working together.

How to Adopt a Collaborative Problem-Solving Approach Through 'Yes, and' Thinking. This post reviews the attitudes, benefits, and techniques outlined in the collaborative problem-solving approach by Alexander Hancock.

Group Problem Solving Process. This fact sheet outlines the group problem solving process and provides a questioning approach used to help guide the process.

Teacher Collaboration: Spreading Best Practices School-Wide. This video highlights the best practices of teacher collaboration to foster a supportive professional school-wide culture.

The 7 Keys to Creative Collaboration. This video briefly explores the seven key characteristics for successful and creative collaboration: ownership, dependability, trust, structure, a shared vision, fun environment, and candor.

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

This section is divided into three areas: Overview, Artifacts and Evidence, and Reflection. To earn this micro-credential, you must receive "Passing" on Parts One and Three, and "Yes" on all criteria in Part Two. **For this micro-credential, submit the Overview and Task 1 when completed. When you receive a 'Yes' for the Overview and Task 1, you may begin Task 2 and Task 3. Task 2, Task 3, and the Reflection will be submitted together when completed.**

Part One. Overview

Read the Overview criteria carefully to ensure a thorough understanding of the expectations for a "passing" submission.

Prompt: Describe your role within your school or district and your current class assignments (courses, grade levels, number of students, etc.) Identify any colleagues, administrators, or outside service providers with whom you collaborate on a regular basis for the purpose of improving student outcomes. In what ways does this collaboration impact learning outcomes? Identify one or more additional individuals with whom you **do not** currently collaborate, but adding them as a collaboration partner might have a positive impact on student learning outcomes.

This submission is scored either "passing" or "not passing."

Passing: *Earner includes a response to each part of the prompt; total response should be a minimum of 300-words and provide adequate detail to help the scorer understand the context for your submission and how you currently collaborate with colleagues.*

Part Two. Artifacts and Evidence

Read the Artifacts and Evidence Submission requirements carefully to ensure a thorough understanding of the expectations for a "Yes" on each task.

Task 1: Collaboration Partners and Defined Problem

Identify a problem related to your professional practice that you feel could be better addressed through collaborative efforts. What specific data indicates this problem as an area for growth or improvement? Select two or more collaboration partners whose knowledge and expertise will contribute to finding a solution to the problem or improving learning outcomes. Invite your collaboration partners to a meeting in which you use data to identify and define the problem you plan to solve or improve.

As evidence of this task, you will submit a written response that

- identifies the collaboration team members and their roles.

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- describes the particular knowledge and skill of each team member related to the problem of practice.
- describes the data that you used to help identify the problem.
- states one mutually defined problem that will be the focus of the team's collaborative efforts. Be sure to isolate and identify **one** problem, not merely symptoms of the problem.
- states the mutually defined problem in the form of a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound). The goal may be a step toward a larger goal, but you should be able to show measurable progress before submitting the micro-credential.

Please submit the written response with the title "Task 1 Written Response " as evidence for Task 1. The total response should be at least 350-words.

Task 2: Shared Problem Solving

(Begin this section after submitting and receiving a "Yes" for the Overview and Task 1. Submit Task 2, Task 3, and the Reflection together when complete.)

Schedule a meeting with the collaboration team you identified in Task 1. During this meeting, you will complete Steps 1-4 of the Shared Problem Solving outlined in the Method Components section of this micro-credential.

As evidence of this task, you will submit a video that clearly demonstrates each step of shared problem solving. Indicate the video markers at which each of the following steps occur:

- Restating the mutually defined problem from Task 1. (Step 1)
- Brainstorming ideas to solve or improve the problem. A team member must capture ideas on a flip chart or a dry erase board so the ideas are visible to the team and the assessor. (Step 2)
- Evaluating the ideas from Step 2; eliminate the ideas that don't seem like viable solutions for the problem of practice you have identified. (Step 3)
- Deciding on the best course of action and the specific action steps each team member will need to take to solve or improve the problem. (Step 4)

In addition to the video, you will complete the Video Analysis Template. In your analysis, discuss specific ways the problem solving collaboration was effective and ways in which the process might need improvement in future collaboration.

As evidence of this task, upload artifacts titled "Task 2 Video," and "Task 2_Video Analysis Template."

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Task 3: Elements of Effective Communication

Using the video from Task 2, identify at least one place in the collaboration meeting where you demonstrated each of the elements of effective communication presented in the Method Components section of the micro-credential. Use the Effective Communication Template to complete this task. If you cannot find an example for one of the elements, explain where in the video you see a missed opportunity and how the element might have improved the collaboration. Examples should include each of the following:

- engaging with the speaker by asking clarifying questions, paraphrasing, and/or summarizing.
- using facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language to add to the verbal communication.
- asking skillful questions and making accurate, descriptive statements to focus on the identified problem and potential solutions.

Please submit the completed template with the title "Task 3 Effective Communication Template" as evidence for Task 3.

Artifacts and Evidence Scoring Guide

Tasks	Not Yet	Almost	Yes
Task 1: Collaboration Partners and Defined Problem	The written response is less than the 250-word requirement or the response is not submitted.	The written response is at least 300-words and partially • identifies the collaboration team members (two or more collaboration partners). • describes the particular knowledge and skill of each team member related to the problem of practice. • describes the data used to identify the problem. • states the mutually defined problem.	The written response is at least 350-words and thoroughly • identifies two or more collaboration partners. • describes the knowledge and skills each team member contributes to solving the problem of practice. • describes the specific data used to identify the problem. • states the mutually defined problem of practice as a SMART goal.

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Task 2: Shared Problem Solving	The video recording is not submitted. **OR** The Video Analysis Template is not submitted.	The video recording partially demonstrates steps 1-4 of the Shared Problem Solving or does not include one or more steps. **AND** The Video Analysis Template is only partially completed or includes superficial analysis.	The video recording clearly demonstrates steps 1-4 of the Shared Problem Solving: • restatement of the mutually defined problem from Task 1. (Step 1) • brainstorming ideas to solve or improve the problem. The ideas are captured on a flip chart or dry erase board and are visible to the team and the assessor. (Step 2) • collaboration to evaluate the ideas from Step 2 and eliminate the ideas that do not seem viable. (Step 3) • deciding the best course of action and specific action steps each team member will take to solve or improve the problem. (Step 4) **AND** The completed Video Analysis Template provides thoughtful reflection and critique of the ways the collaborative problem solving was effective and ways it might be improved using specific time markers.
Task 3: Elements of Effective Communication	The Effective Communication Template is not submitted or does not identify elements of effective communication from the video.	The submitted Effective Communication Template clearly identifies places in the collaboration meeting where the pursuer demonstrates some of the elements of effective communication. The Effective Communication Template does not address missed opportunities and how the element, if included, might have improved collaboration.	The submitted Effective Communication Template clearly identifies at least one place in the collaboration meeting video where the pursuer thoroughly demonstrates ***each of the elements*** of effective communication. If one of the elements is missing, the pursuer identifies where a missed opportunity occurs and how the element might have improved the collaboration.

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Part Three. Reflection

Read the Reflection criteria carefully to ensure a thorough understanding of the expectations for a "passing" submission.

Prompt: Step 6 of Shared Problem Solving is to evaluate the outcome. In a written response, reflect on the following questions:

- Based on data from Task 1, what progress have you and your colleagues made toward the SMART goal criteria established in Task 1? What will your next steps be in maintaining or fulfilling your SMART goal criteria?
- In what ways did the collaboration with other professionals result in better outcomes for your students or colleagues than your individual effort?
- If you were to collaborate with this team of professionals again, what are some ways you might improve the shared problem-solving process?

This submission is scored either "passing" or "not passing."

Passing: *Earner includes a response for each part of the prompt; total response should be at least 300-words. The responses should explain the results of the data and success criteria and how working collaboratively impacted your professional practice and student outcomes.*

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