# M5: Collaborative Problem Solving

## Course

Special Education

## Location

Module 5

## Alignments

### Course Outcomes

CLO V: Describe the utility of important collaborative relationships: school, district, and family members/guardians.

### Module Outcomes

MLO 5.2: Apply evidence-based and equitable practices in communication and collaboration with partners in the special education process.

MLO 5.3: Incorporate legal, ethical, and procedural requirements into IEP-related communications and development.

### Specific InTASC Standards

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **InTASC** | **Type** | **Specific Standard** |
| 7e | Performance | The teacher plans collaboratively with professionals who have specialized expertise (e.g., special educators, related service providers, language learning specialists, librarians, media specialists) to design and jointly deliver as appropriate learning experiences to meet unique learning needs. |
| 10q | Disposition | The teacher respects families’ beliefs, norms, and expectations and seeks to work collaboratively with learners and families in setting and meeting challenging goals. |

## Activity Instructions

Components of this Activity were created by Microsoft Copilot (2024).

### Purpose

Collaboration is a necessary skill for educators to have, as they are expected to collaborate with teachers, parents/guardians, students, and administrators to ensure students are successful. It can be challenging to collaborate with a team with diverse needs and perspectives. Since each participant has a different piece of the puzzle, it can be difficult to see other perspectives; however, it is necessary for all participants to have their perspectives represented because of their uniqueness.

This activity invites you to consider the perspectives of others as you work to determine the factors to consider in creating a collaborative goal-setting experience. Working with your classmates (either in a small group or as a class), you will have the opportunity to explore how to effectively collaborate with others to develop goals that are attainable.

### Task

#### Instructor Preparation for Activity

##### Step 1: Prepare collaborative space

Prepare a collaborative space for each of the activity’s scenarios (see [Scenarios](#_Scenarios) section below). Depending on your class’s modality and what tools you and your class are comfortable using, here are a few collaboration options.

* **Electronic**
  + Create a shared document (Word or Google document, slide deck, etc.). Place written instructions for the activity at the beginning of the document. List each scenario on its own page(s) or slide(s). Create a heading for each role and a heading for IEP goals.
  + Set up a way for the rest of the class to offer comments on the page/slide for each scenario. For example, if your class uses Hypothes.is or another social annotation tool, ensure it is enabled correctly for the document. You might also consider using a “comment” function or creating a heading for feedback. Provide some specific prompts to ensure useful feedback (Were there methods used to gain perspective that seemed particularly effective? How, if at all, would you approach the scenario differently?).
  + Share the link to the document with your students.
* **Physical** 
  + Create instructions for the students regarding how to successfully complete the activity. Plan to offer them verbally and in writing (for reference during the activity).
  + Divide students into groups of 4-5 using whatever method you prefer.
  + Place posters or large pieces of paper around the room, labeling each one with a different scenario. Provide a spot for each role to describe their perspective, then provide a spot for their IEP goals.
  + Devise a way for other students to offer feedback. For example, you might distribute Post-It notes for them to stick to the poster, or you might designate an area on the poster to write feedback. Offer some specific prompts to help the feedback be useful (Were there methods used to gain perspective that seemed particularly effective? How, if at all, would you approach the scenario differently?).
* **Verbal/Discussion**
  + Create instructions for the students regarding how to successfully complete the activity. Plan to offer them verbally and in writing (for reference during the activity).
  + Divide students into groups of 4-5 using whatever method you prefer.
  + Set the expectation that each person in the group will verbally share their role’s perspective, and then the group will describe the IEP goals they developed.
  + Prepare the class to provide feedback, listing in writing some specific prompts to help the feedback be useful (Were there methods used to gain perspective that seemed particularly effective? How, if at all, would you approach the scenario differently?).

NOTE: while there may be benefits to a “low tech” approach like the physical and verbal options above, they are not fully accessible. Practice a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach by offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. As part of this, be sure to proactively consider the needs of students who may use assistive technologies or have learning disabilities (such as ADHD) that could make processing verbal information with time limitations challenging, etc.

##### Step 2: Purpose, context, and modeling

* Describe the purpose of the activity, specifically in terms of what skills they will practice. Evoke prior learning (you might point them back to course material that applies to the activity, for example), and point to how this activity prepares them for later assessments, future coursework, or professional requirements.
* Keeping the one-way communication to a minimum (recommended 2-5 minutes), explain both *why* collaboration is so important and *how* considering others’ perspectives can improve collaborative efforts. You can pull key themes from the course materials, draw from recent publications or videos, or offer stories from your own experience.
* Provide 1-2 examples of the challenges and benefits of considering perspective in collaboration, then invite students to brainstorm other challenges and benefits.
* Provide 1-2 examples of methods from the course materials for considering others’ perspectives, then invite students to suggest their own.

##### Step 3: Practice, feedback, and reflection

* Divide the class into groups of 4-5 students per group, and assign each group a scenario.
* Ensure before you start the activity that everyone can access the instructions and collaborative spaces.
* Verbally go over the instructions, including how long they will have to complete each step. Invite questions and provide clarity as needed.
* Float between groups. Start by listening to the current conversation; choose one contribution to affirm, connecting it back to the course material. Ask a question that challenges students to think critically or reconsider their positions. If there are factual errors, misunderstandings, or discussions displaying (likely unconscious) bias, provide friendly correction and thank them for being open to hearing it.
* Call out time checks. Help groups know if they need to adjust their pace.
* Be sure to leave sufficient time for each group to report back and for the other groups to offer feedback.
* Conclude by asking students to use one sentence to respond to one or more of the following:
  + What’s one practice you’ll take with you?
  + What’s one lingering question or muddy point?
  + How, if at all, did this activity change your thinking about collaboration?

#### Student Directions

For this activity, you will work as a group.

1. Ensure that you can access the collaboration spaces, instructions, and scenarios your instructor has prepared.
2. Choose an IEP team member role for each group member.
   1. Special education teacher/IEP case manager
   2. Classroom teacher
   3. Parent/guardian
   4. Student
   5. Administrator/LEA (Local Educational Agency)
3. Read the scenario and perspectives provided by your instructor. Share with the group
   1. What questions or concerns might your role have?
   2. What needs might your role have in order to collaborate effectively?
   3. How can your role support effective collaboration on the team?
   4. What would be one IEP goal that your role might suggest and/or value?
4. Capture each role’s thoughts, needs, and contributions, along with their suggested IEP goal.
5. Use collaboration techniques to develop 1-3 IEP goals based on each role’s suggestion.
6. Share your IEP goals with the class, explaining how each role’s perspective influenced them and what collaboration practices your used.
7. Offer feedback to other groups, using the prompts provided by your instructor.
8. Share your reflections on the exercise as guided by your instructor.

## Scenarios

### Scenario 1

John is a white 10-year-old student from Kansas who has been diagnosed with a specific learning disability in reading comprehension. The IEP team needs to set goals that will help improve John’s reading comprehension skills while also ensuring that John can keep up with other subjects. Here is what we know.

* John (Student): “When I read, I understand the words, but sometimes I get confused about what the story is saying. It’s like I can see the trees, but not the forest. I get stuck behind everybody else, and then I get embarrassed.”
* John’s Parent(s)/guardian(s): “At home, we’ve noticed that John often re-reads the same passages, trying to understand them. He also has difficulty summarizing stories after he’s read them. We tell him to try harder and spend more time on schoolwork, but we’re not sure if that helps. We’re not sure how to help him.”
* Classroom teacher: “In class, John is enthusiastic and contributes thoughtfully and creatively in discussions. However, when it comes to reading comprehension tasks, he struggles. He can read the text aloud fluently, but when asked questions about the content, he often gives vague or off-topic answers. He also has difficulty making predictions or inferences based on the text. I can see John getting flustered when he is corrected, and this only makes his reading comprehension worse.”
* IEP case manager: “John is new to receiving special education services. I’ve communicated with his parents a few times during the assessment process, but I don’t have a clear picture of the best ways to partner with the family just yet. John seems to enjoy reading graphic novels and shows interest in creative narratives, but he isn’t transferring that interest to curricular reading comprehension. I want to find a way to make reading comprehension less stressful for him.”
* Administrator: “As an administrator, I see John’s struggle with reading comprehension as a challenge that we need to address collectively. We have resources available, such as reading specialists and special education teachers, who can provide additional support. We also need to ensure that John’s learning environment is supportive and inclusive. It’s important that we communicate effectively with John and his parents/guardians, keeping them informed about his progress and the strategies we’re using to help him improve. Remember, our goal is not just to help John catch up, but to equip him with the skills he needs to thrive.”

### Scenario 2

Meet Mohammad, a 14-year-old student from Oregon. Mohammad has been diagnosed with an intellectual disability. The IEP team needs to set goals that will help improve Mohammad’s overall learning skills while also ensuring that Mohammad can keep up with other subjects. Here is what we know.

* Mohammad (Student): “When I learn, I understand the concepts, but sometimes I get confused about how they connect. It’s like I can see the pieces, but not the whole picture. Sometimes I just give up and draw pictures or think about other stuff. I pretend like I get it so I don’t slow everybody down.”
* Mohammad’s Parent(s)/guardian(s): “At home, we’ve noticed that Mohammad often revisits the same topics, trying to understand them. He also has difficulty summarizing what he has learned. When he struggles, he withdraws, which can be frustrating for us. We make sure he knows that he’s not in trouble when he doesn’t understand something—that we want to help him when he needs help.”
* Classroom teacher: “In class, Mohammad starts the day with enthusiasm and always follows directions cheerfully. However, when it comes to tasks that require connecting different concepts, he struggles. He can understand individual concepts, but when asked questions about how they relate, he often gives vague or off-topic answers. He also has difficulty making predictions or inferences based on the information. Mohammad is always friendly and thoughtful and never disruptive, but sometimes he seems to just check out.”
* IEP case manager: “Mohammad is such a friendly and kind person, and he displays a lot of empathy with others. Sometimes Mohammad’s desire to please people causes him to pretend to understand lessons. In a classroom with a few dozen other students, it can be easy to miss signs that Mohammad hasn’t really learned, and the results on summative assessments are often below what we anticipated for him. I’d like to find ways to help him stay engaged and ask for help when he needs it. We also need to catch it earlier when Mohammad is struggling.”
* Administrator: “As an administrator, I can understand how Mohammad’s learning needs may not always be on our radar despite our best efforts. We have resources available beyond the classroom teacher and materials, such as paraprofessionals and learning specialists, to provide additional support. We also need to ensure that Mohammad feels secure enough in his learning environment that he doesn’t feel compelled to hide his learning struggles. We can learn from Mohammad’s family if we establish strong communication channels, as they can provide insights into what motivates Mohammad to ask for help. Remember, our goal is not just to help Mohammad catch up, but to equip him with the skills he needs to thrive.”

### Scenario 3

Meet Cynthia, a 7-year-old student from California. Cynthia has been diagnosed with an emotional disturbance. The IEP team needs to set goals that will help Cynthia be able to stay in her general education classroom without causing disruptions that prevent her learning and affect her social relationships with other students. Here is what we know.

* Cynthia (Student): “Sometimes, I feel really sad or really angry and I don’t know why. Everything else leaves my head, and I just want to run away so I can get the bad feelings out. It ruins my whole day! I can’t do school stuff when I feel like this.”
* Cynthia’s Parent(s)/guardian(s): “At home, we’ve noticed that Cynthia has intense emotional reactions to situations. She also has difficulty calming down after these episodes. We have a safe place that is just hers, and that helps, but she can’t go to her safe place at school.”
* Classroom teacher: “In class, Cynthia is creative and has a vivid imagination. However, she struggles with sudden emotional outbursts that seem to come out of nowhere at times. These emotional outbursts can disrupt her focus and learning. It affects the whole class and how they interact with her; this can snowball into a cycle where her classmates’ lingering frustrations trigger more emotions in Cynthia. I can see Cynthia trying to manage her emotions, and I want to find ways to help her with that.”
* Administrator: “As an administrator, Cynthia’s emotional disturbances affect her whole learning environment. We have personnel and resources available, such as school psychologists and assistive technologies, and we can think creatively about ways to adjust Cynthia’s learning environment to fit her needs. Establishing a trusting and communicative relationship with Cynthia and her parents/guardians can help us learn what works for Cynthia and establish consistent support across home and school environments. Our goal is not simply to reduce classroom disruptions, but to empower Cynthia with skills and support so that her emotions don’t prevent her learning.”

## Reference

Microsoft. (2024). *Copilot.* [www.bing.com/chat.](http://www.bing.com/chat)