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–Thinking Outside the Special Education Box–

In many general education classrooms, special educators and classroom teachers are planning together, co-teaching, and sharing the task of evaluating student progress. Is this happening with all the students in the class, or just students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs)? Often the focus of this collaboration is on students who have been identified with a disability.

What about other students with diverse strengths and needs? Could they also benefit from a collaborative teaching approach? Could these collaborative teams benefit from parental input? Yes!

When I was a second grade teacher, one of my students was a darling little girl who wore hearing aids. Her mom said they used closed captioning at home, so I activated the captioning on the classroom TV so the student could read along when the class watched a video. And then I had one of those "duh" moments: why hadn't I used closed captioning all the time? *Every student* in my class could have benefited from the extra reading practice! From then on, I realized the importance of examining the instructional strategies used for students with disabilities to determine when they could help ensure the success of *any* student. It also affirmed a belief that parents are critical partners.

We need to expand out collaborative teaching teams to include parents. We also need to increase our efforts to ensure *all* learners with diverse strengths and needs experience *real achievement* in general education classrooms. This can be accomplished when all stakeholders—educators, parents, and students—share what's working well, identify challenges, and brainstorm solutions.

Identify your vision: How can educators and families collaborate so all students are successful in general education classrooms?

Use your voice: Speak up at school meetings. Join "typical" school organizations. "Special" groups hinder our efforts to finding common ground.

Work together: Check out www.specialconnections.ku.edu for ways to create powerful collaborative teams.

Please let me know if you're interested in one of my presentations and/or customized consulting and coaching.

What we anticipate, determines what we find!
Charmaine Thaner