

Collaborative Planning: Cooking Up an Inclusive Service-Learning Project

Michelle L. Bonati, PhD

University of Sydney

Abstract

Collaborative planning between special education teachers and general education teachers that focuses on curriculum, instruction, and assessment can improve learning outcomes for students with and without disabilities. Service-learning is a teaching practice that can provide a flexible approach for teachers to collaboratively plan to meet the diverse learning needs of students, including students with severe disabilities who are also addressing individualized learning goals focused on life skills. This article presents a service-learning project, co-led by the author, in which students in a media arts class and students with severe disabilities in a life skills special education class created a photographic cookbook. The Cookbook Project illustrates the collaborative planning process for a special education teacher and general education teacher at one high school engaged in service-learning.

Keywords: collaboration, service-learning, severe disabilities, curriculum, assessment

Collaborative planning between general educators and special educators can ensure learning needs of students with and without disabilities are met (Pratt, Imbody, Wolf, & Patterson, 2016) and improve learning outcomes (Ronfeldt, Owens Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). Collaborative planning involves a general education teacher and a special education teacher making decisions regarding curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006). The challenge of addressing diverse learning needs grows as students enter high school (Dymond, Renzaglia, & Slagor, 2011; Frey, Andres, McKeeman, & Lane, 2012). Teachers have an even greater challenge of addressing the needs of students with severe disabilities whose educational programs may include a focus on both academic skills and life skills (Dymond, Chun, Kim, & Renzaglia, 2013). Service-learning (SL) is a teaching practice that can offer general education and special education teachers a flexible means to collaboratively plan for the academic success of all students (Carter, Swedeen, & Moss, 2012; Miller, 2013).

Address correspondence to: Michelle L. Bonati, Sydney School of Education and Social Work, The University of Sydney, Sydney, NSW, 2006. E-mail: michelle.bonati@sydney.edu.au.

SL involves connecting the curriculum with service that benefits the community (Billig, 2011). SL is typically described as having six main components, including investigation, preparation/planning, action, reflection, demonstration, and celebration (Dymond et al., 2013; Gent, 2009). During SL, students investigate a community need that addresses their curriculum goals and work with a community partner to select a service to perform. The students plan and prepare for the project by acquiring needed skills to perform the service and by addressing feasibility issues to implement the project. Students perform the service, engage in evaluation of the project's outcomes, and celebrate achievements with their community partner. Students are also expected to demonstrate learning through assessment, evaluate the impact of their service, and engage in reflection throughout the process (Billig, 2011). Student voice is emphasized in SL, which means teachers who collaborate to implement SL should consider how they will guide students in making decisions during each component (National Youth Leadership Council, 2008). Figure 1 provides a snapshot of how students participated during each component of an SL project called the Cookbook Project.

The Cookbook Project was an inclusive SL project that illustrates how general education teachers and special education teachers can engage in collaborative planning focused on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The Cookbook Project involved two high school classes: a media arts class and a special education class. The media arts class comprised 19 students from tenth to twelfth grades, including one student with severe disabilities who had cerebral palsy. Fourteen students from the media arts class chose to participate in the project. The special education class included eight students with severe disabilities, including the same student with severe disabilities in the media arts class. Students in the special education class had moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. One student had an additional diagnosis of autism and another had Down syndrome.

Before engaging the students in SL, the special education teacher approached the media arts teacher with the idea of having their two classes collaborate on an SL project. The media arts teacher was selected because one of the students with severe disabilities was enrolled in his course, and he seemed interested in finding new ways for his students to learn and apply skills and to support the inclusion of this student. The two groups of students worked together across a school year to develop and create a cookbook that used photographs to illustrate each recipe step. Over 100 copies of the cookbook were provided to other high school life skills programs and care facilities for adults with dementia.

Investigation	Planning/Preparation	Action	Reflection	Demonstration	Celebration
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students explore community needs Students identify a lack of resources to support people with disabilities to follow recipes independently Students decide through consensus that they will create a photo cookbook to provide to schools and care facilities for adults with dementia Students identify media arts learning goals and IEP goals that could be addressed by meeting this need 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students contact potential community partners to confirm participation Students design t-shirt to wear on Service Club meeting days Students research recipes and cookbook designs Students create a budget for cookbook Students vote on recipe selections for cookbook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media arts class students take photos for the project, edit photographs, design the layout of the cookbook, and create a DVD to accompany the cookbook Students in the special education class grocery shop for recipes, model each step of recipes, assemble cookbooks Students present cookbooks to community partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group discussions Journaling (writing and symbol supported text) DVD video creation and viewing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment Rubrics related to media arts learning goals Progress monitoring of related IEP goals IEP digital portfolios School board meeting presentation Evaluation Informal interviews with community partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breakfast celebration with parents Student certificates School newsletter announcement Cooking activity and demonstration at community partner school

Figure 1. Cookbook service-learning project. This figure provides a description of the activities that occurred during each component of the Cookbook Project. Reflection occurred throughout the project.

Within collaborative planning, teachers need to clarify their roles, responsibilities, and expectations (Thousand et al., 2006). SL presents additional complexity to collaborative planning because teachers need to consider class schedules, interdisciplinary curricular goals, and collaboration with community partners (Dymond et al., 2013). Before beginning the Cookbook Project, the special education teacher developed a form (see Table 1) to use during collaborative planning to make explicit the roles and responsibilities of each teacher. The collaborative planning form, which was continually updated, provided an efficient means for the teachers to organize and communicate throughout the project (Friend & Cook, 2013; Pratt et al., 2016). The teachers agreed upon the learning goals that would be met through the SL project, the plan for instruction, and clear guidelines for assessment for all students.

The special education teacher and the general education teacher needed to determine how to fund the Cookbook Project as part of the collaborative planning process. Teachers may need to approach their school principal to request funding for SL as an alternate means to deliver curriculum, rather than as an added-on activity (Melchior, 2000). The special education teacher was able to allocate funds used for community-based instruction for part of the Cookbook Project budget. All of the students worked within the set budget when selecting each recipe. Students in the special education class would regularly grocery shop during community-based instruction and purchased ingredients for the cookbook recipes. The media arts teacher was able to allocate funds for the DVDs that accompanied the cookbooks. Teachers may need to explore other avenues for additional funding, such as applying for small teacher grants (Gent, 2009), using online fundraising tools, such as www.donorschoose.org, or by having students engage in fundraising as part of the SL planning process. The students in the Cookbook Project conducted bake sales and a car wash to purchase the Service Club t-shirts.

The teachers also established their expectations for appropriate behavior during the project and made a plan for communicating these to the students. As the SL project involved students with and without disabilities collaborating, the teachers emphasized that all students were providing a service and that each student's contribution was valued. Students with disabilities are commonly in the role of receiving support, such as through peer tutoring (Carter et al., 2012). Rarely are students with disabilities expected to provide service to others. The special education teacher viewed the SL project as an opportunity for students with disabilities to assume the role of service providers alongside their typically developing peers.

Table 1
Example service-learning project collaborative planning form

Component of project	Dates	Curriculum addressed (Standards/IEP)	Teacher responsible for instruction	Instructional strategies	Accommodations	Assessment procedures and resources	Teacher responsible for assessment
Investigation							
Planning/Preparation							
Action							
Reflection							
Demonstration							
Celebration							

Collaborative Planning: Curriculum

Collaborative planning begins with the curriculum to be addressed. Curriculum integration, one of the eight standards for quality SL programs described by the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC, 2008), refers to intentionally selecting and planning SL activities with particular learning goals in mind. For teachers collaborating to implement SL, the general education teacher and the special education teacher must collaboratively decide the curricular goals that should be addressed within the inclusive SL project. Teachers use the standards adopted by their state to guide decisions regarding the curriculum to teach. Students with disabilities may also have individualized learning goals, such as increasing communication skills, social skills, and independent living skills. The expectations regarding learning goals that need to be addressed should be communicated clearly to the participating students to help guide them in selecting an appropriate project. Although SL can increase the complexity of curriculum planning, this teaching method also provides greater flexibility for addressing diverse curricular goals because a variety of knowledge and skills may be acquired within a single SL project (Dymond et al., 2013; O'Connor, 2009).

Within the Cookbook Project, a main goal for the teachers was to ensure that the SL project would be able to meet the needs of their diverse group of students by addressing the priority curriculum and individual goals selected. The students in the media arts class were responsible for identifying how students in both the special education class and the media arts class would meet learning goals by participating in the project. To make explicit how the learning goals would be met, the media arts students created a table listing all of the group learning goals and individual learning objectives with descriptions of how various aspects of the project would provide opportunities to address each learning objective. Permissions were provided to share information with peers about Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals and objectives. The following are examples of media arts learning goals that aligned with the SL project:

- Use a digital camera to photograph objects or people using principles of photographic composition.
- Demonstrate the ability to compose/edit digital photography for commercial purposes.
- Create a media presentation that tells a story and includes digital photography and video.
- Demonstrate effective public speaking and use of visual aids.

Learning goals from IEPs addressed during the SL project included the following:

- Wash hands before preparing food.
- Make a request or comment to a peer appropriate to the conversation.
- Gather all items necessary to prepare a recipe and return all items after use to their appropriate locations (e.g., refrigerator, shelf, trash, etc.).
- Demonstrate safe and correct use of kitchen appliances.

Collaborative Planning: Instruction

The second element of collaborative planning centers on instruction. Collaborative planning for instruction requires that the general education teacher and the special education teacher determine how the learning goals will be addressed within an SL project, what teaching strategies will be used to support the diversity of learner needs, and who will be responsible for teaching specific skills. Within SL, teachers typically adopt a more facilitative role, but this does not necessarily preclude the need for direct instruction of specific skills (Miller, Hinterlong, & Greene, 2010). General education teachers and special education teachers can choose the format of their teaching that will best support the aims of the SL project and align with their expertise (Thousand et al., 2006). This format might include a co-teaching arrangement, such as team teaching (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010) or may involve each teacher providing instruction separately to prepare the students for their collaborative SL activities. During SL activities, teachers can also implement systematic instruction to address individual learning goals and provide accommodations as needed (Miller et al., 2010). Engaging students in reflection activities during SL is considered a critical element for addressing learning goals (Gent, 2009). Reflection can take many forms including written, verbal, and artistic products. The purpose of reflection is to deepen the understanding of what students learn during SL and challenge students to generalize skills to novel situations (NYLC, 2008). Using a collaborative planning form can assist teachers in delineating who will be responsible for teaching specific knowledge and skills to ensure that the curriculum and individual goals are addressed, and accommodations are provided.

The general education and special education teachers used the collaborative planning form when deciding how and when instruction would occur for the Cookbook Project. The teachers considered

how to design the SL project to ensure that all students could participate, including planning for accommodations to meet the individual needs of students with severe disabilities. One logistical hurdle was that the two classes were scheduled at different times during the school day. The special education teacher decided to sponsor a service club that met once per week before school to ensure the students would have a consistently available time to work together. Student participation in the SL project was voluntary, with students having the choice to meet course requirements through the SL project or other traditional means. Additionally, the Service Club was open to any students at the high school, but only those in the media arts class and the special education class were working to meet course requirements. The meetings were held in the special education classroom that had a kitchen attached for instruction. A typical Service Club meeting entailed the students selecting the recipe to create for the next week, followed by the students preparing the current week's recipe while photographing each step of that process.

Solo teacher instruction on specific skills needed for the SL project occurred during each respective class and during reflection activities when the students worked together during SL activities. The teachers planned for reflection to occur throughout the process in both classes and during the SL activities at the Service Club meetings. Reflections consisted of group discussions, journaling, digital portfolios, creation of a DVD that was included with each cookbook, and preparation to present at a school board meeting. During the Service Club meetings, the primary responsibility of the students in the special education class was to model each step of the recipe, which addressed individualized life skills learning goals. The media arts students took turns using their digital cameras to take photos of each step of the recipe, which focused on their curricular goals. The media arts students also received instruction on editing and layout design during their class, which included work on the cookbook. A media arts student designed a logo for the Service Club that was used on the cookbook cover and for club member t-shirts (see Figure 2). The students with severe disabilities, at times, needed accommodations to be able to participate in the activities. Some of the accommodations were high tech, such as an adapted digital camera. The student with severe disabilities in the media arts class used this camera to take recipe photos by pressing on a switch attached to the camera. Other accommodations were simple to implement. For example, the media arts students learned to wait longer for a response from some of the students with severe disabilities.



Figure 2. Service club logo. A media arts student created the Service Club logo. The logo was printed on t-shirts that the Service Club members wore on meeting days and was used on the cover of the cookbook. Permission was provided for publication of this modified figure in association with this manuscript.

Collaborative Planning: Assessment

The third key element of collaborative planning is assessment of student learning. Collaborative planning for assessment involves teachers analyzing student data related to learning goals and adjusting instruction accordingly; this process is linked to improved student learning outcomes (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). When implementing SL, one of the indicators of quality is progress monitoring, which involves a broader approach to assessment. Within SL, the demonstration component involves the process of data collection not only to assess student learning but also to evaluate the outcomes of service for the community partners (NYLC, 2008). Analysis of data collected should guide changes for continual improvement of SL practice. Several methods can be used to monitor progress during and after SL, including observations, analysis of work performance or written reflections, criterion-referenced assessments, rubrics, and surveys (Gent, 2009). Collaborating teachers during SL need to decide who will be responsible for collecting assessment data and how that information will be shared to make changes to instruction or the supports provided to students.

During collaborative assessment planning for the Cookbook Project, the teachers decided to be responsible for monitoring progress and providing grades for students in their respective classes. The me-

media arts teacher created rubrics to use in the assessment of his students that included consideration of both curricular learning goals and objectives related to being a good team member. The media arts students provided written descriptions with their digital portfolios of work, highlighting how they contributed to the project and reflective commentary on the skills they had acquired by participating. For the special education class, the special education teacher and a paraprofessional regularly collected assessment data during the SL project to monitor individual student progress on IEP goals. The students with disabilities also demonstrated their learning by creating digital portfolios for their IEP meetings that included photos and video clips of their favorite parts of the project and newly acquired skills.

Positive interdependence is a critical feature of collaborative planning (Thousand et al., 2006). Although the special education teacher and the general education teacher each assessed the learning outcomes for the students from their respective courses, the teachers relied on each other to support formative and summative assessment. The general education teacher assessed student work early in the project to provide students with feedback to improve their skills used within the project and to support instructional decision-making. This teacher relied on confirmation from the special education teacher regarding the extent of participation of students in the media arts class for summative assessment. This was accomplished through both face-to-face meetings, as recommended for collaborative planning practice (Thousand et al., 2006) and via the collaborative planning form shared electronically (Friend & Cook, 2013; Pratt et al., 2016). The special education teacher provided support to the general education teacher for the development of appropriate assessment measures for the student with severe disabilities enrolled in the media arts class. For example, instead of having the student write a report describing how media arts learning goals were achieved, this student created a narrated PowerPoint presentation with photographs that were included in the Cookbook Project.

Collaborative planning benefits students with and without disabilities when special educators and general educators incorporate more authentic means of instruction and assessment (Lawrence-Brown, 2004) to ensure the curriculum is accessible to a diverse range of learners (Katz, 2015). Collaborative planning between special education teachers and general education teachers has been found to promote positive academic and social outcomes for students with severe disabilities (Burnstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Hunt, Soto, Maier, & Doering, 2003). All students in the special education

class demonstrated progress or achievement of project-related individual learning objectives. The media arts students met learning objectives on par with the students who chose to engage in traditional individual learning and assessment activities. Overwhelmingly, the media arts students discussed in their reflections that they were motivated to learn media arts skills in the Cookbook Project because they were helping others in the community. The students from both groups described how much they enjoyed working together. Carter et al. (2012) suggest that SL can provide a means for students with and without disabilities to develop positive social relationships. Parents of the students in the special education class commented that the project was a positive experience for their children. The parents could see the social benefits by observing the students from both classes interact during the celebration event.

The students had greater involvement in selecting how the Cookbook Project would be evaluated for impact and community partner satisfaction. The students requested feedback from the high school life skills programs and care facilities for adults with dementia that received a cookbook. The students asked the community partners about the usefulness of the cookbook and their satisfaction with the partnership. Feedback from the community partners was positive, with teachers at partner schools commenting that the cookbook met an authentic need in their life skills programs to support student learning. Staff members from care facilities told the students their residents enjoyed preparing recipes from the cookbook.

SL provides an opportunity to engage in collaborative planning and meet the diversity of learning needs of students with and without disabilities. The flexibility of the SL approach provides options whether students are within the same class or, as in the case of the Cookbook Project, are enrolled in separate classes. Successful collaborative planning within SL involves general education teachers and special education teachers meaningfully engaged in on-going communication and decision-making for each component of the project. During the Cookbook Project, the teachers purposefully and collaboratively planned to integrate the curriculum with the SL activities to ensure students from both classes would learn new skills while ignoring a *one size fits all* approach to instruction and assessment. A collaborative planning form that is updated and shared between educators can support the process of collaboration (Pratt et al., 2016). SL represents one means for meeting the challenge of providing high school students with severe disabilities access to both the general curriculum and individualized goals.

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