Understanding and Applying the Characteristics of Effective Teams for Success

Paraeducator and teachers understand and apply the characteristics of effective teams to improve the effectiveness of their team.

Key Method

Paraeducators and teachers collaboratively use a five-step inquiry learning cycle to understand and apply the characteristics of effective teams and create an action plan to improve team effectiveness.

Method Components

Guiding Principles

To enhance student outcomes, it is critical that paraeducators and teachers see themselves as partners in the educational process and continuously work to ensure they have effective working relationships. Effective paraeducator-teacher teams are built on good communication, trust, and mutual respect and provide a unique opportunity to model collaborative behavior to students. It is critical that paraeducators and teachers understand and put into practice the characteristics of effective teams to enhance team effectiveness.

Note: Paraeducators support certified/licensed educators, including teachers and other related service providers. Teams participating in the micro-credential process can also include related service providers, although the design of some of the micro-credentials and related artifacts are specific to the partnership between paraeducators and teachers. Related service providers might include speech-language pathologists, school nurses, transition specialists, school psychologists, school social workers, creative arts therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and school counselors. Most of these professions are currently defined as "providers of related services" in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and "specialized instructional support personnel" (SISP) in the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015). NEA and the National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (NASISP) both recognize and use the term SISP. See the Resource Section to learn more about SISP.

The Inquiry Learning Cycle

For this micro-credential, paraeducators and teachers will use a five-step inquiry learning cycle to demonstrate an understanding of the characteristics of effective teams and create an action plan to improve team effectiveness.

Paraeducators and teachers will assess their team using an effective team characteristics checklist, explore a need for growth or improvement, identify and target a goal for enhancing team performance, and develop and implement a team action plan. Lastly, paraeducators and teachers will reflect on the outcomes and process. See the **Resource section** to learn more about the inquiry learning cycle.

Step 1 – Know Yourself (Individual Checklist)

The first step in the inquiry cycle is to know yourself. In this step, you will use a checklist to assess (from your perspective) if each of the characteristics of effective teams applies to your team. You will also identify those characteristics that you think impact your team's effectiveness in meeting student outcomes.

Step 2 – Know Your Team (Team Process)

The second step in the inquiry cycle is to know your team. In this step, paraeducator-teacher teams will discuss their checklists in order to come to a consensus on which characteristics and related issues and challenges are impacting team effectiveness, in preparation for identifying a growth goal (Step 3) for the team action plan.

Since each team member will view issues and challenges from a unique perspective, it is important that each team member has a voice in this discussion.

When prioritizing issues and challenges related to the characteristics of effective teams, team members should consider the following questions:

- What is our current process for ensuring our team puts into practice the characteristics of effective teams?
- What is working in our current teaming situation? What is not working?
- What specific issues are we having? What factors may be contributing to these issues?
- Who is involved (e.g., students, other staff, families/guardians)?
- What supports/resources does our team need that we aren't currently getting? How can administrators or other staff help support our team?
- How are the issues and challenges affecting outcomes for students and our team?

Step 3 – Establish a Growth or Improvement Goal (Team Process)

The third step in the inquiry cycle is to establish a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) for the team action plan (Step 4). Teams should work together to identify at least one goal that is based on the findings from Step 2.

Before establishing the goal, teams should consider the following questions:

- What do we want to accomplish? What do we want to happen?
- Why do we want to accomplish this? What issues will the goal help to resolve?
- What is the overall desired outcome? How will we know if we were successful? How will we measure success?
- How will we meet our goal? What strategies will we implement to achieve success?
- When can we expect the goal to be completed? What is our timeline (e.g., start and end dates, key milestones,

check-ins on progress)?

Step 4 – Create and Implement a Team Action Plan (Team Process)

The fourth step in the inquiry cycle is to create a team action plan. This action plan will help ensure success in accomplishing the goal identified in Step 3. It provides a framework so that team members are clear on the goal, purpose, outcomes for success, strategies, implementation steps, timeline, and supports needed.

Step 5 – Reflect (Individual Reflection)

The final step in the inquiry cycle is to reflect on the outcomes and identify next steps. Paraeducators and teachers will individually examine what worked and what didn't work, and identify next steps for continued professional growth. Reflecting on what you have learned about yourself, your partner, your team, and the characteristics of effective teams will cement learning, further improve team effectiveness, and encourage continued professional growth.

Supporting Research

Effective Paraeducator-Teacher Teams

Flowers, Nancy & Mertens, Steven & Mulhall, Peter. (2000). How Teaming Influences Classroom Practices. Middle School Journal. 32. 52-59.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254164177_How_Teaming_Influences_Classroom_Practices

Sharon Mickan and Sylvia Rodger. (2000). Characteristics of Effective Teams: A Literature Review. Australian Health Review. Vol 23. No 3.
http://tlmerrill.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/85213915/Mickan%2520and%2520Rodger%2520-%2520Characteristics%2520of%2520Effective%2520Teams.pdf

Sparks, Dennis. (2013). Strong Teams, Strong Schools. Vol. 34 No 2.
https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/strong-teams-strong-schools.pdf

Berdi Safford, MD, and Cynthia A. Manning, MA. (2012). Six Characteristics of Effective Practice Teams. Family Practice Management. 2012 May-June; 19(3):26-30.
https://www.aafp.org/fpm/2012/0500/p26.html

Ruedel, K., Diamond, M., Zaidi, A., Aboud, A. (2002) The Inclusive Environment: Paraeducators and Teachers Working Together. Wed. May 11, 2018
http://www.academia.edu/922366/The_Inclusive_Environment_Paraeducators_and_Teachers_Working_Together
(scroll down to read paper or provide email to download)

Inquiry Learning Cycle

Abraham, M. "Research Matters - to the Science Teachers" NARST. National Association for Research in Science Teaching. January 2, 1997. Web. December 10, 2018.
https://www.narst.org/publications/research/cycle.cfm

Barron, B. and Darling-Hammond, L. "Teaching for Meaningful Learning: A Review of Research on Inquiry-Based and Cooperative Learning." Edutopia. The George Lucas Educational Foundation. 2008. Web. December 10, 2018.
https://backend.edutopia.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/edutopia-teaching-for-meaningful-learning.pdf

Resources

NEA Building Winning Teams: Effective Paraeducator-Teacher Teams Training Resources

Teaming and Characteristics of Effective Paraeducator-Teacher Teams
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1n_X1x1DzC0qVa9eMmUtIZ4h2-oil6C6_

Roles and Responsibilities of Paraeducators, Teachers and Administrators
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1sThOxYiYAdR1BTziWFWzUvj-vsf64MMa

The Five "Knows" of Collaborative Teaming
https://drive.google.com/open?id=169LxOaBy0oiFmt1RxA6t7eQmjPNjrfWA

Effective Communication
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1RyzvYt_ESKan52iT3tFvfsDF2atRzag_

Generational Differences: Impact on Teaming and Communication
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1qCPGNqFny6jTY85pts3efTBAgH0vxgoS

Conflict Management and Resolution Strategies
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hdjgyeDRKmBJzu15JM4niopoogeQ0luG/view?usp=sharing

Problem Solving and Action Planning
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1mZ9t1Psio9jv_SqC5wkjbz6gC8_-4pBg

Effective Paraeducator-Teacher Teams

Let's Team Up: What Every Paraprofessional Needs for Student Success and Effective Teamwork
https://www.nprinc.com/content/free-resources/Lets-Team-Up-Gerlach-Nov-2016.pdf

Classroom Partners: How Paraprofessionals Can Support All Students to Meet New Standards
https://www.nysut.org/~/media/files/nysut/resources/2013/june/educators-voice-6/edvoice06_03_paraprofessionals.pdf?la=en

To Teachers: What Paraeducators Want You to Know
https://dsagsl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/what-paras-want-teachers-to-know.pdf

Teacher and Paraeducator Team Perfects the Art of Collaboration
http://neatoday.org/2017/08/02/teacher-and-paraeducator-team-perfects-art-of-collaboration/

What Makes Effective Teaching Teams Tick?https://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin408_a.shtml

Building Effective PLC Teams
http://plcexpansionproject.weebly.com/mod-3---effective-teams-part-2.html

Teachers' Desk Reference: The Shared Responsibility of Educational Team Members

Inquiry Learning Cycle

Inquiry-Based Learning
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inquiry-based learning

Inquiry Learning Cycle Graphic
https://drive.google.com/open?id=1lPQZtjKFoEMPT4zhLZpRA9703A6-gxy4

SMART Goals
SMART Goals
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm

Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (SISP)

Specialized Instructional Support Personnel – NEA webpage
http://www.nea.org/sisp

National Alliance of Specialized Instructional Support Personnel (NASISP)
http://nasisp.org/aboutus2/

Artifact Templates

Characteristics of Effective Paraeducator-Teacher Teams Checklist (Artifact 1)
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hVNQr-R_Jv5zXY8NV4jVePfUJg8q30eHDeqMO5VzXgM/edit?
usp=sharing

Team Action Plan (Artifact 2)
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BQw3sCg_RoLhdVvMczT3tB3YSssDTGcGxXOT26mLTJY/edit?
usp=sharing

Implementation Evidence (Artifact 3)
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1g4tlsYfPbj82lRexkzh1C8ltxIJ8ffMow8T1fspSEMo/edit?usp=sharing

Submission Guidelines & Evaluation Criteria

*To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3, and receive a proficient for all
components in Part 2.*

Part 1. Overview Questions

250 - 350 words

Please answer the following contextual questions to help our assessor understand your current situation. Please do not
include any information that will make you, your partner, or your students identifiable to your reviewers.

1. Describe the context of the classroom or setting in which you work (e.g., general ed classroom, resource room, community-based setting). Include grade level, subject area, any relevant cultural/demographic information, and special considerations regarding student characteristics.

2. Describe the makeup of your team (with whom you work with regularly to directly support students). Include who is on your team (i.e., teachers, paraeducators, related service providers/SISP), each team member's roles/responsibilities, and how long you have worked together.

3. What did you know about the characteristics of effective paraeducator-teacher teams before any information or resources were made available to you?

4. What current process or strategies do you use to determine if your team is effective?

5. Explain why you chose to complete this micro-credential.

- **Passing:** Responses should completely answer each question, cite specific examples from personal experience, and justify the reason for choosing this micro-credential to address the specific needs of both the paraeducator-teacher team and students. Writing is organized and easy to understand.

Part 2. Work Examples / Artifacts

To earn this micro-credential, please submit the following **three artifacts** as evidence of your learning. Please do not include any information that will make you, your partner, or your students identifiable to your reviewers. **Templates can be found in the Resource section.**

Artifact 1: Checklist

Using the template provided, submit the checklist to assess and reflect on:

● Whether each of the characteristics of effective teams applies to your team

● The current process or strategies your team uses to ensure it puts into practice the characteristics of effective teams

● The characteristics that you think impact your team's effectiveness in meeting student outcomes and the issues and challenges contributing to the situation

Note: Paraeducators and teachers must complete this artifact independently.

Artifact 2: Team Action Plan

Using the template provided, submit a team action plan around <u>at least one</u> SMART goal identified. The goal and strategies should relate to the characteristics of effective teams.

Note: Paraeducators and teachers should complete this artifact together. They can submit the same action plan.

Artifact 3: Implementation Evidence

Complete the following two parts and submit as one document. If the evidence is a video or audio file, you may submit them separately. Artifact should include an indication of your role on your team (i.e., paraeducator, teacher, related service provider/SISP).

<u>Part 1</u>

Submit one piece of evidence that demonstrates the implementation of at least one strategy identified in your team action plan.

Examples of evidence may include, but are not limited to:

- the team mission statement
- the team "why" statement
- team goals and/or norms
- roles and responsibilities agreements
- expectation agreements
- five "knows" inventories
- meeting schedules/logs
- meeting agendas
- meeting minutes
- recordings/transcripts of meetings
- pictures of communication boards
- daily communication calendars
- classroom schedules
- professional learning certificates of completion
- problem-solving forms
- planning forms
- work style preference inventories

Part 2

Using the template provided, reflect on and describe how the evidence and strategy implemented supports the characteristics of effective teams and how they have impacted team effectiveness and students.

Note: Paraeducators and teachers can submit the same piece of evidence (Part 1), but they must complete the reflection component (Part 2) independently.

	Proficient	Basic	Developing
Artifact 1: Checklist	All elements of the checklist are completed. Reflection clearly describes 1) the current process/strategies used by the team to ensure they put into practice the characteristics of effective teams, and 2) the characteristics impacting team effectiveness, including the issues/challenges contributing to the situation. Specific examples are cited. Issues/challenges are relevant to the characteristics of effective teams.	Some elements of the checklist are completed. Reflection partially describes 1) the current process/strategies used by the team to ensure they put into practice the characteristics of effective teams, and 2) the characteristics impacting team effectiveness, including the issues/challenges contributing to the situation. Specific examples are cited. Issues/challenges are relevant to the characteristics of effective teams.	Some elements of the checklist are completed. Reflection minimally describes 1) the current process/strategies used by the team to ensure they put into practice the characteristics of effective teams, and 2) the characteristics impacting team effectiveness, including the issues/challenges contributing to the situation. Specific examples are not cited. Issues/challenges are not relevant to the characteristics of effective teams.

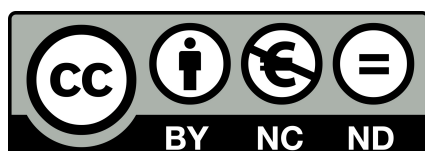|			
Artifact 2: Team Action Plan	The action plan contains all of the following components: -at least one goal -purpose/rationale -desired outcome(s) -1-3 strategies for achieving goal -steps to implement strategies -timeline -supports needed The goal is SMART and aligns to each element of the SMART framework (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant to the characteristics of effective teams, and time-bound). Strategies are relevant to the goal and are achievable. The plan has clearly defined action steps.	The action plan is missing one or two of the following components: -at least one goal -purpose/rationale -desired outcome(s) -1-3 strategies for achieving goal -steps to implement strategies -timeline -supports needed The goal is missing one or two elements of the SMART framework (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant to the characteristics of effective teams, and time-bound). Strategies are relevant to the goal or are achievable, but not both. Action steps are broad.	The action plan is missing more than two of the following components: -at least one goal -purpose/rationale -desired outcome(s) -1-3 strategies for achieving goal -steps to implement strategies -timeline -supports needed The goal is missing more than two elements of the SMART framework (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant to the characteristics of effective teams, and time-bound). Strategies aren't relevant to the goal and they aren't achievable. Action steps are not evident.
Artifact 3: Implementation Evidence	Evidence clearly demonstrates implementation of at least one strategy outlined in the action plan. Reflection clearly describes how the evidence and strategy implemented supports the characteristics of effective teams. Specific examples are cited. Reflection clearly describes how implementing the strategy has impacted team effectiveness and students. Specific examples are cited.	Evidence partially demonstrates implementation of at least one strategy outlined in the action plan. Reflection partially describes how the evidence and strategy implemented supports the characteristics of effective teams. Specific examples are cited. Reflection partially describes how implementing the strategy has impacted team effectiveness and students. Specific examples are cited.	Evidence minimally demonstrates implementation of at least one strategy outlined in the action plan. Reflection minimally describes how the evidence and strategy implemented supports the characteristics of effective teams. Specific examples are not cited. Reflection minimally describes how implementing the strategy has impacted team effectiveness and students. Specific examples are not cited.

Part 3. Reflection

250 - 350 words

Please answer the following reflective questions Please do not include any information that will make you, your partner, or your students identifiable to your reviewers.

1. What was the impact of your action plan? Did you meet your goal(s)? Why or why not? What changes would you make to your plan? Note any successes or challenges that you encountered.
2. How did the process of understanding and applying the characteristics of effective teams impact team effectiveness? How did it impact students?
3. How has this experience affected you in your role as a paraeducator or teacher?
4. How do you envision using this process with existing or new team members in the future?

- **Passing:** Responses should completely answer each question, cite specific examples from personal experience, and describe how the process and learnings have impacted the paraeducator-teacher team as well as students. Specific actionable steps that demonstrate how the new learnings will be integrated into future practices are also cited. Writing is organized and easy to understand.