

Introduction to Research Project

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IN630 WA-C Methods of Professional Inquiry

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November 8, 2021

It has only been in the last 50 years that students with disabilities have been given the right and supports needed to succeed in education. Before the 1970s, students with disabilities were primarily educated in self-contained classrooms to relieve stress on the general education teacher (Rothstein & Johnson, 2021). Most of their school day was spent with their teacher in a classroom isolated from the school's daily activities (Gargiulo & Bouck, 2021). The passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1997 required high expectations for students with disabilities along with access to the general curriculum (Rothstein & Johnson, 2021). The new law created a problem in the public school system because students with disabilities needed to be educated with their peers in the general education classroom. The co-teaching model became the instructional delivery system to provide instruction to diverse students in an inclusive general education setting (Brendle et al., 2017).

Co-teaching is defined as a general education teacher and special education teacher providing instruction to general and special education students in a general education classroom

(Friend, 2008). It allows students with disabilities access to the general curriculum through the general education teacher and specialized instruction and modifications from the special education teacher.

However, for co-teaching to work effectively, the general and special education teachers must create a partnership that enables them to work together. Co-teaching requires careful attention in the development and the fostering of the collaborative relationship and a commitment on the part of the co-teachers to design and facilitate robust learning experiences for students (Lock et al., 2016). Often, the co-teaching partnership is compared to a marriage between the general education and special education teacher (Friend & Cook, 2007). However, often co-teaching partnerships are not created out of choice but rather made at the administrative level. To make the partnership work, both general and special education teachers need to know the co-teaching model, how to implement it in the classroom, and strategies for best practices for working together.

Three practices are necessary for successful co-teaching partners: co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing (Murawski & Lochner, 2011). Co-teaching partners also need to know their roles in the classroom, how to collaborate, communicate, reflect, and deal with disagreements.

Even though there are many co-teaching inclusive classrooms, there is evidence that both general and special education teachers are having difficulties implementing the co-teaching model. While teachers report an awareness of research-based models for co-teaching, they lack expertise in implementing the models (Brendle et al., 2017). Chitiyo & Brinda (2018) report that several problems may arise when teachers are unprepared to implement co-teaching in the classroom. The chances of achieving desired outcomes are diminished because teachers may not

be fully committed to implementing the practice. The “marriage” between the two professionals is also of great importance. The relationship between the co-teachers appeared to be the most crucial determinant in how successful the teachers viewed co-teaching and how likely they would be to continue co-teaching (Keefe & Moore, 2004).

Even though co-teaching has become the instructional strategy to use in the inclusive classroom, there is little research on best practices. I hope to look through the research and find solutions to these challenges. The research question in this professional project is, “What does the inclusive co-teaching classroom need for real collaboration between the general and special education teachers?”

Related questions for the project will include:

1. What are the general and special education teachers’ roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching classroom?
2. What are the best practices for effective communication?
3. What are the best practices for successful collaboration?
4. What are the best practices for co-instructing?
5. What are the best practices for co-assessing?
6. What are the best practices for reflection?
7. What are the best practices for disagreements?
8. What do co-teachers need to make the partnership work in the inclusive classroom?

I propose to analyze the research and literature that has been completed on co-teaching in inclusive classrooms. During this project, I will research co-teaching models, studies of co-teaching implementation, and reviews from teachers to create a comprehensive database of strategies. After a literature review, I will create a product that could be given to teachers to help

implement co-teaching practices in their classrooms or for future professional development in co-teaching best practices.

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