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The Preparedness of General Education and Special Education Teachers in an Inclusive
Classroom

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Abstract

Inclusion is a type of co-teaching model used in elementary and secondary classrooms. Inclusion involves two teachers, one general education teacher and one special education, to teach special needs students in the general education setting. Special education and general education teachers are required to teach special needs students collaboratively, however, some do not feel they have help, support, and enough time or resources to teach these students effectively. Therefore, this study was conducted to determine the level of preparedness general education and special education teachers have to work collaboratively to improve the learning environment of all students in an inclusion setting.

In order to conduct this study various methodologies were used. Data collection included a Likert scale survey, an open ended questionnaire, and interviews. The data collected throughout this study suggested that most teachers felt somewhat prepared to teach special needs students in an inclusion environment. Also, the data suggested that teachers could benefit from administrative support, more common planning time, professional development workshops, and clearly defined rules and roles for both teachers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Inclusion refers to integrating special education students into a general education classroom setting (Mitchell, 2014). An inclusive classroom is often co-taught between a general education teacher and a special education teacher. Co-teaching is an approach whereby two or more educators share the same responsibility for educating all students in a general education classroom (Cramer, Liston, Nevin, & Thousand, 2010). To be prepared to teach in an inclusive setting, general education teachers and special education teachers must share the same responsibilities for determining and implementing effective strategies to meet the needs of all students (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2012).

General education teachers should attain expertise to instruct and accommodate, refer for evaluations, communicate with parents, and collaborate with staff members to create the best learning environment for students with special needs (Hallahan, et.al.). Special education teachers should attain expertise in instruction, modifications and accommodations, evaluations, and the IEP process in order to be prepared to teach special needs students in an inclusive classroom setting (Hallahan, et.al.). It is also recommended that special education teachers to train general education teachers in ways of accommodation to effectively teach all students in an inclusive learning environment (Hallhan, et.al).

Background

The school in which this study occurred was a middle school setting. This middle school was located in a suburban area of northern New Jersey, and the school district was a Title 1 school. Title 1 refers to providing financial funding to schools with high percentages or numbers

of low income families (US Department of Education, 2014) The district had one high school, two middle schools, and four elementary schools. The total student population and teaching staff in the middle school was 576 and 46 respectively. The number of other staff members including paraprofessionals, secretaries, administration, special services, and counseling staff was 54 (Movoto, 2014). The student demographics were 51% African American, 26% Hispanic, 13% White, and 11% Asian (CitiData, 2014).

Statement of the Problem

The roles of general and special education teachers and the collaboration and planning between them needs to be addressed and improved as they are the key components in creating a successful inclusive classroom (Hallahan, et.al, 2012). In addition, co-teachers need to share the responsibility of co-planning, co-assessing, and co-instructing to create an effective inclusive classroom setting (Murawski & Lochner, 2011) and be effective communicators with each other (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). However, for this collaboration to occur in an inclusive classroom setting, general education and special education teachers need to be provided with appropriate training, administrative support, and efficient time to share effective strategies, workload, and accountability (Murawski & Dieker). Therefore, the purpose of the study was to determine the level of preparedness general education and special education teachers had that enabled them to effectively teach in an inclusive middle school classroom.

Research Question

To what extent did general education and special education teachers feel prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom?

Definition of Terms

Co-Teaching refers to a teamwork experience between a general education teacher and a special education teacher. Both educators are responsible for teaching all students in a general education classroom.

Inclusion refers to a placement of students with special needs in a general education setting with students without disabilities.

Special Education is instruction that is designed to meet individual needs of a student that requires modified materials, specific accommodations, and appropriate placement in order for students to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally.

Conclusion

The goal of an inclusive classroom is to educate special needs students along with nondisabled classmates (Hallahan, et. al., 2012). Students with mild to moderate disabilities are often placed in general education classrooms where they learn with students without disabilities (Scanlon, 2012). Thus, co-teaching is implemented to create curriculum accommodations and modifications in order to teach these students in the general setting (Scanlon). Therefore, these teachers need to be prepared to be effective in the classroom to make this process successful for all students.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Inclusion refers to educating special education students in a general education classroom (Mitchell, 2014). An inclusive classroom incorporates a modified curriculum, differentiated instruction, modifications, and accommodation techniques that teachers provide to create the best learning environment for students with special needs (Mitchell). One primary purpose of inclusion is to place students with special needs in the same setting as their general education peers (Hallahan, et al., 2012).

Inclusion practices involve mainstreaming special needs children in general education classes assisted by teachers who are certified to provide instruction to all students (Pierangelo, 2009). An increasing population of students identified with special needs had also created a growth of inclusive classrooms (Ncube, 2011) providing all students with access to the curriculum in the general education setting (Ncube). An inclusion setting requires co-teaching, co-planning, and co-assessing between the special education teacher and the general education teacher, thus, creating an effective teaching and learning environment (Murawski & Lochner, 2011).

Co-teaching refers to two teachers, one special education and one general education, working closely together in a general education classroom with each having pedagogical expertise (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, co-teachers need to balance their roles in order to provide appropriate content of the curriculum and delivery of instruction (Wilson). These two instructional teachers must collaborate (Sileo, 2011) to educate students with or without disabilities in the least restrictive environment (Murawski & Lochner, 2011). The goal of the co-

teaching model is to provide differentiated instruction to students with special needs, increase their class participation, and improve their overall performance in the general education classroom (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). However, in this model, both teachers should be held accountable for instructing all students (Nichols, et.al).

History of Special Education

The 1954 court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, is seen as a landmark case for the civil rights movement (Yell, 2006), which over time included students with disabilities (Yell). In addition, *Mills v. Board of Education* and *PARC v. Pennsylvania*, both in 1972 (Yell), provided students with disabilities the right to public education. *PARC v. Pennsylvania* required that all children ages 6 through 21 with mental retardation be given the services of a free and appropriate education (Yell). *Mills v. Board of Education* resulted in students with disabilities being provided with a public education and due process (Yell).

In 1974, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), otherwise called P.L. 94-142, required participating states to provide a free appropriate public education to all qualified special needs students (Yell). Some of the major highlights under that law were as follows: parental consent must be obtained before any testing, evaluations, and placement can occur; all students with special needs must be placed in the least restrictive environment, all special needs students must have an individualized education program (IEP), assessments need to relate to student's disability, and parents are entitled to due process (Pierangelo, 2009).

In 1990, the American Disabilities Act became a law prohibiting discrimination against people with disabilities (Yell, 2006). The ADA law provided a free appropriate public education

to students (Yell) and required all school buildings to be accessible to students with disabilities (Pierangelo, 2009). IDEA of 1997 stated that students with disabilities should be included in general education classrooms with nondisabled peers where they could perform to their best ability (Nichols, 2010). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act stated that students with disabilities must have an opportunity to instructional practices and general education curriculum by highly qualified staff (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). The NCLB act allowed more federal funding for education and held schools accountable for maintaining student academic gains (Yell, 2006). This act also required special education teachers to meet requirements of highly qualified status (Yell).

In 2004, the federal law IDEA was reauthorized to help students with special needs meet high standards by encouraging parent/ teacher communication, holding teachers accountable, and using specific techniques and tools to educate students with disabilities (Pierangelo, 2009). IDEA also required that students with special needs have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) (Pierangelo). The IEP serves two purposes. One, it is a written plan that explains specific goals and objectives for that student, and, two, it is a tool used for an assessment between the student and teaching that the student needs to succeed (Pierangelo).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) applies to including special education learners with the best educational practices according to their individual needs (Pierangelo). LRE does not imply that every child with a disability should be receiving services in a general education setting but be placed in a setting that will be best suitable for individual needs (Pierangelo).

Preparedness for Co-teaching Model

The preparedness and training of general education and special education teachers in a co-teaching model is reflected in the content and delivery of instruction to students (Wilson, 2008). Special education and general education teachers need appropriate training in order to serve the common purpose of teaching special education students and meeting the needs of all students in an inclusive classroom (Hallahan, et al., 2012). General education teachers are usually considered the content specialists (Hallahan et.al.) and should be trained to identify and address the needs of all students including special needs students; however, they should not replace the special education teacher. Special education teachers should be trained in individualized curricula, which students should be given special services, and who should be performing these services (Hallahan, et al.).

With the help of the special education teacher, general education teachers should provide accommodations to include the needs of individual students, assess student academic abilities, refer for evaluation students who might be at risk, participate in the IEP process, communicate with parents regarding student progress, and collaborate with other staff members to identify strengths and weaknesses of student abilities (Hallahan, et al.) Special education teachers should be trained to instruct all students in the specific content they are teaching, manage behaviors, incorporate technology, and be knowledgeable of special education laws (Hallahan, et al).

The preparedness of both teachers for the inclusion setting should be equal; however, general education teachers are portrayed as the content masters and main teachers during instructional time, whereas special education teachers are seen as assistants and discipline managers to the general education teachers (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). Even though a

special education teacher may have a less prominent role, he or she provides a variety of instructional strategies and techniques that make the co-teaching unique to students (Wilson, 2008). In order for the special education teacher to have an equal role with the general education teacher, communication and collaboration throughout the process are necessary (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). Both teachers must be actively engaged when teaching students to make sure they are on task and engaged in the learning process (Murawsk & Dieker).

To prepare general education teachers and special education teachers for an inclusive classroom, school administrators need to encourage them to use classroom activities that are evidence-based (Murawski & Dieker). Co-teachers can work together to focus on kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and processing skills of individual students. Differentiating instruction also may help co-teachers prepare for inclusive classrooms by addressing the range of needs in a classroom (Murawski & Dieker). As co-teachers, strengths and weaknesses of both need to be identified and addressed in order to create a positive classroom environment. Administrators and other observers could provide feedback on the co-teaching model to both teachers with professional development provided to improve the roles and responsibilities of each (Murawski & Dieker).

Types of Co-teaching

There are six types of co-teaching models. They are as follows: one teach one observe, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, team teaching, and one teach one assist (Friend, et al., 2010).

One teach, one observe is a model of co-teaching where one teacher leads the group instruction, and the other teacher focuses on the behavioral and academic aspect of the lesson (Friend, et al.). This teaching model of the inclusive classroom allows both teachers to collect information about their students (Sileo, 2011). This model is useful in the beginning of the school year when identifying student strengths and weaknesses (Sileo). It allows the teachers to gather information on specific students, examine their contributions to class discussions, monitor student behavior, and identify individual student objectives when preparing for the IEP process (Sileo).

Next, station teaching involves dividing the class into three stations and students rotate from one to the next where two sections are being instructed by teachers and one is independent work (Friend, et al., 2010). Station teaching provides all students with learning through cooperative grouping by dividing the content of the lesson and allowing a specific amount of time at each station (Nichols, et al., 2010). Station teaching allows students to actively interact with both teachers and peers while learning the content (Sileo, 2011).

Parallel teaching, another co-teaching model, includes dividing the class into two groups and teaching the same concept and curriculum at the same time to each group (Friend, et al., 2010). This type of co-teaching allows students to interact with each other and focuses on differentiated instruction (Sileo, 2011). Parallel teaching allows teachers to work with a smaller group of students and focus on individual needs of students (Sileo) possibly increasing student class participation (Friend, et al., 2010).

Alternative teaching incorporates one teacher working with a larger group of students, while the other teacher works with a smaller group re-teaching specific concepts or providing

enrichment (Friend, et al., 2010). Grouping of students for this type of co-teaching depends on student individual needs (Sileo, 2011). Alternative teaching provides more intense and individualized instruction while one teacher works on re-teaching the concept to the smaller group of students, the other teacher instructs the remaining students (Sileo).

With teaming, both teachers are active participants during the lecture and presentation of materials providing two different viewpoints (Friend, et al., 2010). This teaching model is useful when teaching a new concept and helping students who might struggle with understating the new information (Sileo, 2011). Team teaching provides the opportunity for co-teachers to present the new material in an understanding way (Sileo) and allows both teachers to actively engage in the instructional and planning process (Gaytan, 2010). Therefore, the purpose of team teaching is for both teachers to be involved in the collaborative process in order to implement differentiated tools, strategies, and materials into an inclusive classroom (Gaytan). Students in the team teaching model obtain feedback from both teachers (Gaytan) and are provided with the opportunity to ask questions and receive clarification from both teachers (Sileo, 2011).

One teach, one assist occurs when one teacher takes the lead and teaches the group, while the other teachers circulates and monitors for comprehension, behavior, and offers assistance to individual students (Friend, et al, 2010). This is the most common co-teaching style (Hallahan, et al., 2012) as teachers find it very easy to implement (Hallahan, et al.). Most often special education teachers take on the role of overseeing student performance and managing the behaviors because it provides an efficient and effective way of leading the classroom (Wilson, 2008). This teaching model is found to be efficient and effective because it allows the assisting

teacher to provide individual instruction to students who may need one on one attention and re-teaching of the content (Sileo, 2011).

Advantages and Disadvantages of Co-teaching

Benefits to co-teaching models include collaboration of ideas and instructional tools, shared responsibility for teaching all learners, and less stress and tiredness among the teachers (Murawski & Lochner, 2011). Both teachers utilize their educational expertise to all students in order to assist in one setting (Nichols, et al., 2010). Special education and general education students benefit from supplemental resources and enriched curriculum that would not be available without the co-teacher (Nichols, et al.). In an inclusion setting, students with disabilities tend to lose being “labeled” as special education and tend to be more engaged in class activities performing at higher level of achievements (Nichols, et al.). In addition when placed in an inclusive setting, students with disabilities learn academic and social skills from their typical peers whereas their typical classmates learn tolerance (Ncube, 2011). Therefore, special education student self-esteem is positively impacted in a co-teaching setting (Ncube).

On the other hand, disadvantages to co-teaching include insufficient training for both general and special education teachers and lack of administrative support (Murawski & Lochner, 2011). According to Murawski and Lochner, administration needs to provide both teachers with sufficient time to plan lessons and discuss ways to improve the co-teaching model. Common planning time is needed to make the inclusive classroom effective so both teachers can be proactive in educating all students. By allowing allotted time for co-planning, teachers can create more opportunities for students to learn and access the curriculum that is being presented in the classroom (Murawski & Lochner). In addition, for the co-teaching model to be effective and

efficient, both teachers need to be actively involved in the instructional part of the lesson (Murawski & Lochner).

Related Studies

Nichols, Dowdy, and Nichols (2010) created a study comparing and identifying the co-teaching model and how many districts had been implementing this in inclusive classrooms. The study had shown that the districts had provided teachers a basic training on how to incorporate differentiated instruction to all students in the general education setting. Staff development had been provided to address the importance of the inclusion classroom and the roles of both teachers in the class. Twenty-four districts completed a survey to identify their use of the co-teaching model and the level of preparation districts had before implementing co-teaching into their classrooms. Only 3 districts out of 24 indicated they provided staff professional development prior to starting the co-teaching model. Three districts identified staff development as knowledgeable and effective. One school district stated that school administration was present at the workshop. Eight districts with 1,000 or less students expressed that some co-teaching had been implemented; however, none of those districts provided staff development to their staff members. Based on the results of the study, co-teaching models were being implemented to meet the needs of NCLB. However, most co-teaching models were implemented without appropriate staff development workshops.

Santoli, Sachs, Romey, and McClurg (2008) reported the results in a study completed on inclusive classrooms in a middle school setting in the southeast. The study included all staff member such as administrators, general education faculty, special education faculty, and paraprofessionals. The results of the attitudinal survey revealed that more than half of the staff

members thought that students with special needs did not benefit from education in the general education setting. About 44 % stated that the inclusive classroom was ideal for general education students and about 57% stated that inclusion might be ideal for special education students. All participants of the study indicated that time was a big issue for them when they had to consult with other staff members regarding special education students. The attitudinal survey indicated that they lacked time to go to meetings regarding special education students and lacked time to responsibly teach those students. The overall conclusion of this study was that a positive attitude towards special needs students is very important for inclusion to be successful. Participants of the study stated that they were willing to make accommodations for students with disabilities and they had necessary skills to make those accommodations; however, they expressed concern that these students might not have basic knowledge skills to be successful in general education classroom.

Conclusion

Co-teaching is a type of teaching model between general education teachers and special education teachers to address the needs of students in an inclusive setting (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). True co-teaching happens when educators co-teach, co-plan, and co-assess all students in a general education classroom (Murawski & Dieker). In co-teaching, the key to success is compromise and collaboration (Sileo, 2011). In order to benefit from the co-teaching experience, general education and special education teachers working in an inclusive setting need to be flexible in order to communicate and collaborate to ensure student academic growth (Sileo).

Chapter 3

Methodology

To understand the roles of general education and special education teachers in co-teaching model, teachers need to conduct action research to make recommendations and improve this process for all students (Hendricks, 2013). Educational research is necessary to understand change and improve teaching strategies when working with special needs students. In this process teacher researchers use multiple data methods to identify problems (Hendricks). The three data collection methods used to complete this study were a Likert scale survey, an open ended questionnaire, and interviews.

Participants

This study was conducted in a middle school setting. Participants were middle school teachers and were randomly chosen from a special education and general education teacher faculty list. They were approached by this researcher directly and asked to participate in the study. The participants were teaching all different grade levels ranging from 5th through 8th grade and also taught different subject areas. There were 19 participants involved in this study. Fourteen of the 19 participants were female and 5 of the 19 were male. Eleven of the participants were general education teachers, and 8 were special education teachers. Participants who taught grades 5 and 6 taught all core subjects and participants who taught grades 7 and 8 taught social studies, language arts, science, or math. The participants had been teaching from 2 to 25 years.

This teacher researcher was the participant observer who taught sixth grade replacement language arts and math and eighth grade science and social studies in an inclusion setting in this middle school. This teacher researcher had been teaching special education for 3 years.

Materials

This teacher researcher received permission from the principal of this school (see Appendix A). The participants were asked directly to participate in the study and were explained the benefits and risks that might occur. A consent form followed to confirm the anonymity and confidentiality of all participants and a signature was required.

The first method of data collection was a Likert scale survey (see Appendix B). This Likert scale survey used a 4 point rating scale ranging from 4 meaning strongly agree to 1 meaning strongly disagree. This survey was to help determine the preparedness of general education and special education teachers in a co-teaching situation. In addition, this type of survey allows the participants to answer questions anonymously (Hendricks, 2013). The Likert scale survey was created with 12 positive and negative statements to ensure the authenticity of this study (Hendricks).

The next data collection method was an open ended questionnaire (see Appendix B) which corresponded with the questions on the Likert scale survey. Questionnaires allow participants to provide more detailed responses to questions and are helpful when given to a larger number of participants (Hendricks, 2013). Because it makes it easier on the researcher and participants, questionnaires are often implemented as they can be completed in a few minutes. The purpose of the open ended questionnaire is to supplement the interview process (Hendricks).

The final data collection was a structured interview (see Appendix B). Specific questions allow a researcher to collect data and find out participant feedback regarding their opinions on specific interventions (Hendricks, 2013). Five participants were chosen randomly for the interview. Three teachers were general education teachers and two were special education

teachers. The interviews were conducted in the middle school building during their time of availability. Each interview was approximately 30 minutes.

Triangulation is a process in which multiple sources of data collection are collected and analyzed by the researcher (Hendricks, 2013). Three forms of data collection, a survey, an open ended questionnaire, and an interview, were used to ensure the validity and credibility of this study. The credibility of a study tends to be higher when multiple data methods are being used (Hendricks).

Names of all participants were not used in this study and the identification of the participants, school, and district were confidential and anonymous throughout the study and in the written report. The teachers were assigned a number ranging from 1 through 19 in order to keep data collection organized and help the researcher gather the results.

Procedure

This study began on Tuesday, January 27, 2015. On that day this teacher researcher distributed the questionnaires and survey questions to randomly selected teachers. As the questionnaires and survey questions were distributed, participants were asked to complete the forms. After closely reviewing the questions, they were asked if they would like to withdraw from the study. Participants were given the due date, Friday, February 13, 2015, to complete the forms and place them in this researcher's mailbox.

Once the forms were returned, this teacher researcher randomly picked the names of five teachers to collect interview data. General education teacher names were separated from special education teacher names and placed in two different piles. Next, their names were placed in two

different bags and picked randomly. Two names were selected from special education group and three names from general education group.

The participants agreed to complete the interview based on their availability during school hours. Interviews were conducted during the time period from Thursday, February 19, 2015, through Monday, February 26, 2015. As participants provided answers during the interview, this teacher researcher recorded manually their answers.

Conclusion

Three different types of data collection were used to complete this study, a Likert scale survey, an open ended questionnaire, and interviews. Educational research results are more valid and help expand the knowledge about teaching students with special needs when using different data collection methods (Hendricks, 2013). Therefore, collecting data in this study allowed this teacher researcher to identify the extent to which general education teachers and special education teachers were prepared to work together in a co-teaching environment.

Chapter 4

Data Analysis

This study was conducted to understand the roles of general education and special education teachers in a co-teaching model and to make recommendations to improve collaboration and planning between these persons in the general education setting. Three different measures of data were analyzed in the form of a Likert scale survey, an open ended questionnaire, and interviews to examine whether general education teachers and special education teachers were prepared to teach special needs students in an inclusive classroom.

Results of Data

The first method of data collection was a 4 point scale Likert scale survey which measured the preparedness of general education teachers and special education teachers working together in an inclusive classroom (see Table 1).

Table 1 – Preparedness of Teachers

N = 19	Mean	Standard Deviation
Feel prepared to teach special needs students	3.21	0.70
Feel they have enough common planning	1.92	0.99
Feel they have administrative support	1.97	0.72
Feel they have enough professional development	2.13	0.81
Feel co-teaching roles are clearly defined	2.05	0.84
Feel teaching strategies are discussed prior to lesson	2.37	0.79

With a mean of 3.21, many teachers felt prepared to teach special needs students in an inclusive classroom. However, with a standard deviation of 0.70 some may have not felt prepared. Next, with a low mean of 1.92 and a high standard deviation of 0.99, only some teachers felt they had enough common planning time to collaborate with other staff members regarding special needs students. In addition, with a low mean of 1.97 and a somewhat low standard deviation of 0.72, most teachers felt they did not have administrative support in their school to successfully teach in a co-teaching environment. Once again with somewhat low means of 2.13 and 2.05 respectively and high standard deviations of 0.81 and 0.84 respectively, most teachers did not feel they had ample staff development time to prepare for the co-teaching relationships or had clearly defined roles. Finally, many teachers did not believe that teaching strategies were discussed prior to each lesson as indicated with the low mean of 2.37 and somewhat high standard deviation of 0.79.

The next form of data collection was an open ended questionnaire. When asked if prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom, many teachers stated they were prepared to teach students with special needs in this setting. In addition, a few participants responded they did not always understand the needs of special education students. Therefore, they had researched their own information about special education or used their personal experiences with their own children to prepare themselves for an inclusion setting. Next, when asked if the participants thought they had enough common planning time, almost all teachers expressed they did not have common planning time because it was not provided by the district nor was it incorporated into their schedules. One participant mentioned it was difficult to find common planning time because of other expectations of teachers such as “duties after school.” A few answered they had

common planning time only because they shared the same preparation and lunch periods as the rest of their grade level.

Almost all teachers felt they did not have administrative support in their school to successfully teach in a co-teaching classroom. A few said they had the support and help from a consultant, but some participants were unclear of the role of the consultant since they had never encountered her. Consequently, some mentioned that they had been provided support by the district but only if they asked for it. Finally, a couple expressed they were unsure about the administrative support because they just started teaching in the district or had previously asked for support but nothing had been done.

Next, when asked if they preferred teaching in a co-teaching setting, some teachers were unsure due to many factors such as different learning styles of both teachers, content they taught, or the sharing of responsibility. Many stated they liked working in the co-teaching setting because they appreciated the insight of the co-teacher and preferred this setting because it provided a double set of eyes to monitor students and share ideas. Of these teachers some would prefer it if they taught in an inclusion setting all day with the same co-teacher. A few expressed they would rather teach on their own because they did not get the support from the co-teacher and the co-teacher changed every year. Only one person stated that as a professional every teacher “needs to be exposed to co-teaching style in order for the students to experience different teaching approaches.”

Many teachers answered they understood the roles of general education teachers and special education teachers in the classroom. A few stated that special education teachers should be mainly responsible for special needs students. Some answered that roles depended on the

environment, styles of teaching, and what needed to be addressed to help the students. A couple were very unclear and unsure of the roles of both teachers in the classroom.

When asked about creating the teaching pairs, many expressed they would like input on this due to the content knowledge of the co-teacher, personalities, and interpersonal skills. Only one felt confident on the pairings because she trusted the co-teacher would be effective. A few left the answers blank. After pairings were complete, many said co-teaching roles were not clearly defined for each teacher due to the fact that there was not enough common planning time, administration had different viewpoints on the roles, and it was the responsibility of the teachers to decide how they interacted with each other. Only a few answered that roles were clearly explained. One participant answered she and her co-teacher were “lucky enough” to share roles equally.

Next, when asked if the teaching strategies were discussed prior to the lesson, many felt they did not have time or a place to meet prior to the lessons to discuss teaching strategies. A few expressed they had prior to the class. Some answered that they had time to discuss teaching strategies through lesson plans and communicated with each other as much as possible whether before class or via email.

Professional development was another issue in which many said they did not feel they had enough particularly for such situations as SGOs and PARCC. According to participants, the district did not have enough resources. One respondent mentioned there was one at the beginning of the year; however, it was the first one in numerous years.

Finally, when asked how can co-teaching classrooms be improved, many answered that the district needed to provide more common planning time, professional development with real life experiences, roles of both teachers should be clearly defined, and administrative support. One respondent mentioned to improve co-teaching classrooms, entire district programming would need to be changed because currently too many students were placed inappropriately and there were not enough classes to place students with similar abilities.

The next data collection method was interviews. Five teachers were picked randomly and interviewed by this researcher. Interviews revealed that four of the five teachers felt prepared to teach special needs students in their classroom due to years of experience, college education, and expertise. Whereas, one mentioned that preparation was due to resources such as internet and professionals in the family; however, she felt unprepared to instruct special needs students for the PARCC exam. Next, three teachers responded they did not have common planning time built into their schedules while only 2 felt they had common planning time because of a shared lunch and common preparation time.

When asked if they had administrative support in their school to successfully teach in a co-teaching classroom, four participants stated that they did not; whereas, one expressed she felt supported because of a consultant hired by the district which provided feedback on how to facilitate their schedules and share the teaching load. One stated even though she did not have administrative support in regards to common planning, she felt that administration would be receptive if she asked for it.

Next, when asked if they preferred to teach in co-teaching setting, four stated it depended on the relationship they developed and if the work load was equally shared. One respondent

answered she enjoyed teaching in this setting; however, she felt that general education teachers were not willing to give up the control of the classroom most of the time. As one commented she did not “have much support from the co-teacher as she would like, but might change her mind if ever experienced good co-teaching.”

Answers varied among all five participants when asked about respective roles. Three expressed that special education teachers should understand the needs of various students and provide support to the general education teacher and the entire class. Whereas, it was believed that general education teachers should be responsible for the content and to meet the outcomes of the lesson. One explained that roles were not defined by the administration and another stated that roles depended on the strengths and weaknesses of both teachers.

When asked if the participants would like to provide input on the pairings of teachers, three respondents stated yes. One expressed that the input was not important because she never experienced “an inappropriate co-teaching setting before.” One mentioned that all pairings were different and sometimes it might seem like an “arranged marriage.”

Professional development was a topic that four teachers believed was insufficient. One respondent mentioned there was one at the beginning of the year and it was just an overview of the approaches. The same person expressed that the consultant was provided as a result of that meeting however, the consultant worked between two schools and had limited availability. Finally, in order to improve co-teaching classrooms, these teachers stated common planning time, more professional development with more frequent meetings with the consultant, peer observations, and literature on best co-teaching practices. One said there were multiple reasons

for improving co-teaching classrooms such as: pairings of teachers, hiring qualified teachers, and roles of both teachers need to be clearly stated.

Analysis of Data

Data revealed that most teachers felt they were prepared to teach special needs students with a mean of 3.21 and the standard deviation of 0.70. In addition, the open ended questionnaire and interview responses revealed that many teachers felt prepared to teach special needs students due to their expertise and experience.

Second, based on the survey responses, with a mean of 1.92 and a standard deviation of 0.99, only some teachers felt they had enough common planning time to collaborate with other staff members regarding special needs students. In addition, open ended and interview responses showed that almost all participants stated they did not have common planning time because it was not provided by the district nor was it incorporated into their schedules.

Third, with a mean of 1.97 and standard deviation of 0.72 most teachers felt they did not have administrative support in their school to successfully teach in a co-teaching environment. Based on the open ended responses and interviews, participants clearly stated they did not feel they had administrative support due to the fact they had previously asked for support but nothing had been done.

Fourth, survey results with means of 2.13 and 2.05 and standard deviations of 0.81 and 0.84 respectively, revealed that most respondents did not feel they had enough staff development time to prepare for the co-teaching relationships nor were their roles clearly defined. Open ended

questionnaire and interview responses also showed that many did not feel they had enough professional development and co-teaching roles were not clearly defined.

Limitations

There were some limitations experienced during this study. One limitation was the small sample size of participants. There were only 19 participants and they all worked in the same district, thus, limiting conclusions to one situation. Second, participants did not answer all the questions on the questionnaire completely, therefore limiting data.

Discussions

The open ended questionnaire and interview responses indicated that most participants felt they did not have enough common planning time to collaborate with other staff members regarding special needs students. In order for the special education teacher to have an equal role with the general education teacher, communication and collaboration throughout the process are necessary (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). According to Murawski & Dieker, administration needs to provide both teachers with sufficient time to plan lessons and discuss ways to improve the co-teaching model. Participants expressed in both open ended questionnaire and interview responses they did not feel they had enough support from their administrators due to the fact that administration did not provide appropriate feedback nor encourage active engagement with staff. Common planning time is needed to make the inclusive classroom effective so both teachers can be proactive in educating all students. By allowing allotted time for co-planning, teachers can create more opportunities for students to learn and access the curriculum that is being presented in the classroom (Murawski).

According to Hallahan, Kuffman, and Pullen (2012), special education and general education teachers need appropriate training in order to serve the common purpose of teaching special education students and meeting the needs of all students in an inclusive classroom. In addition, for the co-teaching model to be effective and efficient, both teachers need to be actively involved in the instructional part of the lesson (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). Consequently, data results from open ended questionnaire and interview responses showed that teachers did not feel they had enough professional development and co-teaching roles were not clearly defined for each teacher.

Furthermore, to prepare general education teachers and special education teachers for an inclusive classroom, school administrators need to encourage them to use classroom activities that are evidence-based (Murawski & Dieker). Administrators and other observers could provide feedback on the co-teaching model to both teachers and professional development can be provided to improve the roles and responsibilities of both co-teachers (Murawski & Dieker).

Implications for Teaching

Many teachers feel they are ready to teach special needs students. However, there is much room for improvement. All teachers need to be offered more professional development time that encompasses more than an overview of special education. Teachers who teach in an inclusion classroom should be able to attend workshops that relate to modifying and adapting instruction to instructional strategies in the content areas. Some teachers also felt they would benefit from the expertise of a consultant. This consultant should work in the school full time and provide immediate feedback to pairings who needed support.

Common planning time to discuss students, content, and instructional methods is also necessary for an effective inclusion classroom. School administrators need to create this time in teacher schedules to enable the sharing of ideas, resources, and materials along with peer observations for the best practices to share with colleagues. Administration should also provide clearly defined roles in order for the co-teaching pairings to work best to their abilities. This administrative support will offer teachers the opportunity to create the best learning atmosphere for students with special needs.

Conclusion

This study assessed whether general education teachers and special education teachers felt prepared to teach special needs students in the inclusion classroom. According to the data collected, most teachers felt somewhat prepared to teach special needs students; however, they all needed more professional development, common planning time, administrative support, and rules and roles for both teachers to be clearly defined.

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Appendix A

Professional Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in the preparedness of general education and special education teachers in an inclusive classroom research project, being carried out by Elzbieta Biernacka. I have been informed by the researcher of the general nature of the project and of any foreseeable risks. I understand the following:

1. I may withdraw from this project at any time.
2. I have the right to withhold permission from the researcher to use any of my data.
3. Upon my request, the researcher will provide me with a written summary of the project's findings.

(Signature of professional)

Appendix A

To Whom It May Concern,

As an administrator of the school district where the study is being conducted, I was informed by Elzbieta Biernacka of the general nature of the project and of any foreseeable potential risks. I also understand the benefits that may result from this study. All of the questions that I had have been answered.

(Printed Name)

(Title)

(Signature)

Appendix B

Survey

Please check off/ fill in the following information:

I AM:

_____ GENERAL ED. TEACHER _____ SPECIAL ED. TEACHER
 _____ FEMALE _____ MALE
 _____ TENURED _____ NON-TENURED

I HAVE:

_____ YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL.

WHAT SUBJECT DO YOU TEACH? _____

PLEASE CIRCLE THE ANSWER YOU MOST AGREE WITH:

1. I am prepared to teach special needs students in my classroom.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

2. I have enough common planning time to collaborate with other staff members regarding special needs students.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

3. I am not prepared to teach special needs students in my classroom.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

4. I have administrative support in my school to successfully teach in a co-teaching classroom.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

5. I do not have enough common planning time to collaborate with other staff members regarding special needs students.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

6. I do not have administrative support in my school to successfully teach in a co-teaching classroom.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

7. Staff development to prepare for the co-teaching relationships is not offered.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

8. Co-teaching roles are clearly defined for each teacher.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

9. Teaching strategies are discussed prior to the lessons.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

10. Teaching strategies are not discussed prior to the lessons.

4	3	2	1
Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

11. Co-teaching roles are not clearly defined for each teacher.

4	3	2	1
---	---	---	---

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

12. Staff development to prepare for the co-teaching relationship is offered.

4

3

2

1

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Appendix B

Questionnaire

I AM:

_____ GENERAL ED. TEACHER _____ SPECIAL ED. TEACHER
_____ FEMALE _____ MALE
_____ TENURED _____ NON-TENURED

I HAVE:

_____ YEARS OF TEACHING EXPERIENCE AT THE SECONDARY
LEVEL.

WHAT SUBJECT DO YOU TEACH? _____

Please answer the following questions:

1. Do you feel prepared to teach special needs students in the general education classroom?
Why? Why not?
2. Do you think you have enough common planning to collaborate with other staff members
regarding special needs students? Why? Why not?
3. Do you feel you have administrative support in your school to successfully teach in a co-
teaching classroom? Why? Why not?
4. Do you prefer teaching in a co-teaching setting? Why or Why not?

5. What are the roles of special and general education teachers?

6. Would you like input on the pairing of teachers in a co-teaching classroom? Explain.

7. Do you think the co-teaching roles are clearly defined for each teacher? Why? Why not?

8. Do you feel teaching strategies are discussed prior to the lesson? Why? Why not?

9. Do you have enough staff development to prepare for the co-teaching relationship? Why? Why not?

10. How can co-teaching classrooms be improved?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Do you feel prepared to teach special needs students in your classroom? Why? Why not?
2. Do you think you have enough common planning to collaborate with other staff members regarding special needs students? Why? Why not?
3. Do you feel you have administrative support in your school to successfully teach in a co-teaching classroom? Why? Why not?
4. What are the roles of special and general education teachers?
5. Do you prefer teaching in a co-teaching setting? Why or Why not?
6. Would you like input on the pairing of teachers in a co-teaching classroom? Explain.
7. Do you think the co-teaching roles are clearly defined for each teacher? Why? Why not?
8. Do you feel teaching strategies are discussed prior to the lesson? Why? Why not?
9. Do you have enough staff development to prepare for the co-teaching relationship? Why? Why not?
10. How can co-teaching classrooms be improved?

