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Teachers Attitudes Toward Co-teaching in Elementary Reading Classrooms

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Teachers Attitudes Toward Co-teaching in Elementary Reading Classrooms

A Research Paper

Submitted to the Special Education Faculty of the

Marshall University Graduate College

In Partial Fulfilment

Of the Requirements for the Degree Masters of Arts

By:

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Abstract

Co-teaching occurs when a special and general education teacher instructs a classroom of students with and without disabilities through modifications to the core curriculum. The author wrote this paper to evaluate teacher attitudes toward co-teaching in elementary reading classrooms. During co-teaching, educators face several disadvantages such as lack of professional development, absence of co-planning, disagreements among modifications within the curriculum, and confusion with co-teaching approaches. The research within this paper describes the attitudes, issues, and strategies that educators experience through inclusive, co-taught elementary classrooms within the reading curriculum.

Keywords: co-teaching, inclusion, special education, reading, elementary

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my mother and father for the non-stop support and encouragement during the difficult days. Also, thank you to my fiancé who still ate the burnt bacon and cooked many late nights. To my co-workers who constantly pushed me in the right direction. Lastly, to our puppy Minka, who gave me plenty of brain breaks during the end of this stressful, yet thrilling adventure.

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Teacher Attitudes Toward Co-teaching in Elementary Reading Classrooms

Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

One of the major concerns of a co-taught classroom is the effectiveness of two teachers instructing students with and without disabilities. “Some researchers have argued that the key to successful co-teaching for students with disabilities is each educator (i.e., the general education teacher and the special education teacher) playing an active role in planning, delivering, and assessing instruction” (Kloo & Zigmond, 2008, p. 14). However, other research has promoted that if the general education and special education teachers have positive outlooks on co-teaching, then the classroom environment and teaching strategies will be more effective for all students.

Research on co-taught, inclusive classrooms have shown that there are several factors that contribute to teachers’ negative attitudes and beliefs that contribute to an unsuccessful inclusive environment for the whole population. According to Brady & Woolfson (2008), they found that general classroom teachers were less likely to modify teaching strategies for students with learning disabilities than special education teachers. When this occurs, one can assume that team teaching and compromise toward classroom management is not successful or occurring within the classroom. In addition, the question arises if teachers have a full understanding of the requirements toward teaching students with disabilities. It is a frequent mistake for general education teachers to not deliver accommodations or modifications for students with disabilities within their classroom.

Teacher attitudes toward special education services can be a positive or negative outcome for not only the pupils, but the teachers who are in the situation of an inclusive, co-taught setting. Tait and Purdie (2000) presented that general mainstream teachers hold a negative attitude toward the idea of inclusive classrooms. This can cause a negative impact on all students, as well as put a hinder on their education. General and special educators who possess a positive attitude and high sense of teaching efficacy were more likely to be more understanding of taking the responsibility of meeting the needs of students with learning disabilities in inclusive, co-taught classrooms (Podell & Soodak, 1993).

Lack of planning and professional development is a current issue that makes educators feel like they are unprepared to teach in a co-taught classroom. Planning can be a way that the general education teacher and special education teacher can prepare specific assignments and grading rubrics modified around the students and their grade-level curriculum. By arranging collaboration meetings during planning periods, teachers can increase their knowledge on how to provide a meaningful instruction in an inclusive environment (Fenty, McDuffie-Landrum, & Fisher, 2012). Teachers who discuss their roles within their shared classroom, as well as the materials and texts being used during instructional time, can enhance their relationship to a positive level.

Professional development, on the other hand, is usually offered through the state and county departments for teachers to become more informed on several issues in the education world, such as co-teaching strategies. According to Idol (2006), teachers indicated that they need professional development to make better instructional modifications, as well as model cooperative teaching within the classroom. In addition, teachers would like to visit schools where co-teaching is practiced in an inclusive classroom and receive professional development about

complaisant, heterogeneous learning groups (Idol, 2006). As one can see, teachers are in dire need of more professional development in the area of co-teaching. Teachers can use their professional development opportunities to enhance their understanding of what is required and needed for their inclusive, co-taught classroom.

The problem that the author is perceiving is that teachers are having issues finding ways to cooperate and collaborate with their co-teacher to modify the curriculum to meet special education services within classroom, and to attend professional development opportunities to relay informative co-teaching classroom practices.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate elementary teachers' attitudes toward co-teaching in elementary reading classrooms. The use of the term 'elementary' in this research project is defined as pre-k to sixth-grade classrooms in a rural, low socioeconomic status (SES) school. It is important to the author to find the resources to help teachers become more fluent and effective in their relationships and practices towards special education and co-teaching.

Research Questions

The author has several questions regarding teacher attitudes toward co-teaching in the elementary reading classroom. These research questions will be answered through a survey that will be conducted in a low socio-economic school that employs 40 professional certified teachers. The teachers' years of experiences range between ranges of three to 34 years of experience in the classrooms. The three essential research questions that the author hopes to be successfully answered include: Do special education teachers favor co-teaching more than general education teachers or vice-versa? Does having a common planning time with a co-

teacher help make co-teaching more effective? Does professional development in the area of co-teaching and strategic planning help solve the issues of negative attitudes toward co-teaching?

Statement of the Hypothesis

Brady & Woolfson (2008) found that special education teachers, compared to general education teachers, are further motivated to teach and modify curriculum and lesson plans in the classroom for special education students. Therefore, this research is hypothesized that special education teachers in elementary favor co-teaching experiences more than general education teachers.

Chapter II

Review of Literature

Elementary reading classrooms are currently serving several different ability and achievement levels of students on a daily basis. “For decades, teams have made decisions about the most appropriate educational options for students with disabilities, and close working relationships with parents have been nurtured and strengthened” (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlin, & Shamberger, 2010, p. 10). Co-teaching began in the early 1980s when the philosophies of inclusive schooling became accepted with the view that special education and related services could occur in general education classrooms through trusts between professionals. Currently, co-teaching has magnified within the general education classes to ensure that all students have access to the general education curriculum, which is also known as least restrictive environment (LRE).

There are two specific components to the emergent importance of co-teaching. The first component is the significance of No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which ensures all students have access to the general education classroom. The second component of co-teaching is through the most recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004, where there is an amplified emphasis on educating students in the LRE and to be taught by highly qualified teachers, and be included in professionals’ accountability for achievement outcomes (Friend et al., 2010).. Therefore, through legislative expectations, co-teaching appears to be a way that all students with or without disabilities needs can be met within a general education environment. This can be made possible through student assistant teams (SAT) and constant communication with parents.

Challenges with Professional Development and Planning with Co-teaching

The 1980's began the return of exceptional students returning to regular education classrooms. "Teachers became confused and overwhelmed about their changing roles and responsibilities" (Lupart, Whitley, Odishaw, & McDonald, 2008, p. 43). Co-teaching requires a common understanding among two teachers when applying their content to their students within the classroom. General education teachers feel the pressure to accommodate student needs in their classroom, as well as modifying the curriculum. In addition, educators feel the pressure to maintain collaboration skills that enable them to negotiate roles and responsibilities in a co-taught class. "Both teachers must provide the essential instructional supports for all students, including students with disabilities" (Friend et al., 2010, p. 19). Special education teachers understand and apply the special education laws within their school and state district; however, general education teachers need particular attention when it comes to this aspect of teaching. Therefore, it would be beneficial if both teachers receive professional development within delivering content knowledge between two teachers and the special education laws that must be implemented in the classroom.

There are several professional development opportunities available for teachers toward the idea of successful inclusion strategies. For instance, some professional developments include several different co-teaching approaches for the inclusive classroom so the general and special educator can create a successful environment for all students. Two teachers can employ six different co-teaching styles in an inclusive classroom for successful educational outcomes (Podell & Soodek, 1993). These six co-teaching styles include station teaching, one teach and one assist, one teach and one observe, parallel teaching, team teaching, and alternative teaching.

These six co-teaching approaches are mentioned in this paper under “the six co-teaching approaches”.

Other professional development meetings could offer co-teachers several ideas for their inclusive classroom. For example, there are professional developments on classroom management between co-teachers such as behavior management strategies, disciplinary actions, and shared classroom rules. In most cases, administrators will send teachers to professional development that covers what is needed in their schools. It is vital that both teachers enforce and agree on the same classroom managements skills for the fairness of the students and common routine patterns that students need within a successful inclusive classroom.

Staff collaboration is an important factor to discuss because teachers can learn and take note other opinions and ideas for their co-taught classroom. Staff collaboration could be used as a daily planning period, setting up meetings after school, or morning meetings before the school day begins. As a result, it would be valuable for educators who are co-teaching to use their planning with their co-teacher and plan activities that accommodate all students along with the required modifications. In addition, it would be beneficial if co-teachers could plan once a week or once a month with other teachers in their building who have experience in an inclusive setting (Tait & Purdie, 2000). Another way that co-teachers can be collaborate with each other is to complete field experiences that pertain to their setting, such as asking permission from administrators to observe co-teachers within the building are using their shared classroom and the six co-teaching styles. This could give co-teachers an idea of what to expect between setting up the classroom, preferential seating of students, location of teacher desks, and station teaching areas.

Modifying and Understanding the Reading Curriculum in Elementary Schools

The elementary curriculum for reading is as demanding as ever in the country. Forty-three states, the District of Columbia, and four territories have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy. These standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live.

In 2009, CCSS began to launch this mission with state leaders, such as governors, and state school chiefs. By 2010, several states adopted these new set of standards. Therefore, school districts across the country knew they had to offer professional development for teachers so they can be mentally and physically ready to set their classroom goals with the CCSS (Fenty et al., 2012). The question arises as to if two teachers can meet the expectations of CCSS, especially if only one teacher or neither have had training for these standards.

Since these standards are somewhat new to the school systems, the question that is being asked if teachers can now master the new state standards of their particular content knowledge. General education teachers may have a better understanding of their content area; however, special educators tend to switch areas of content from year to year and may lose sight of the standards that tie to their content area. Friend et al. (2010) found that the roles and responsibilities of teachers during co-teaching indicated that “special educators tended to take on the role of the helper rather than co-teacher, partly due to their lack of content knowledge” (p. 16). Therefore, it is essential that both teachers discuss their roles in their shared classroom, so content and services can be implemented to its full capacity.

The Six Co-teaching Approaches

Co-teaching in an inclusive classroom includes six different approaches and variations for delivering content to all students within their general education environment. These six co-teaching styles include station teaching, one teach and one assist, parallel teaching, team teaching, one teach and one observe, and alternative teaching. Figure 1 captures the co-teaching approach with make-believe teachers and students in an inclusive classroom.

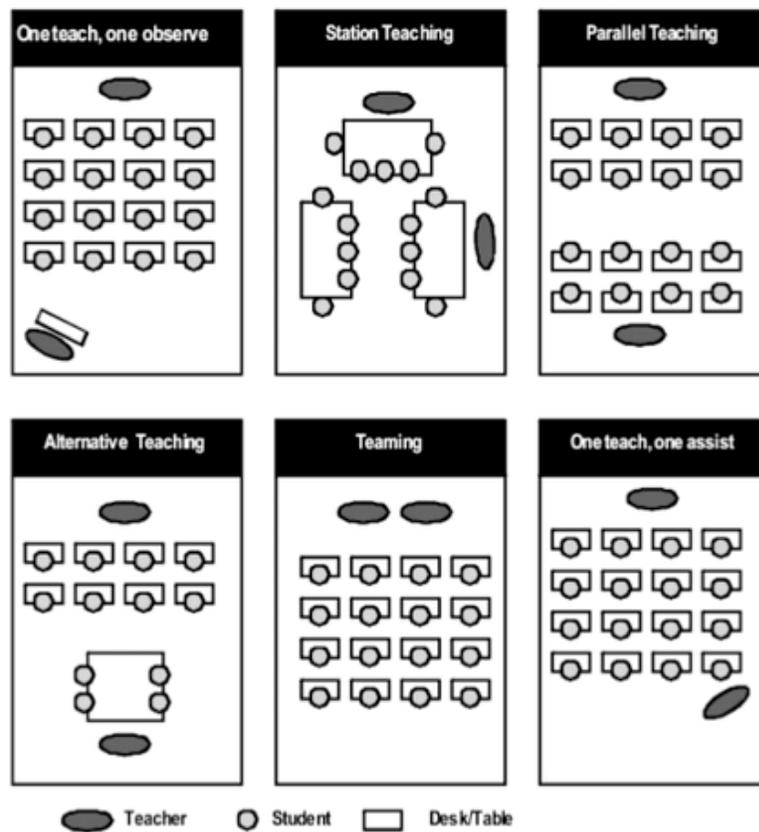


FIGURE 1 Co-Teaching Approaches. Adapted from M. Friend & W. D. Bursuck, 2009, *Including Students With Special Needs: A Practical Guide for Classroom Teachers* (5th ed., p. 92). Columbus, OH: Merrill. (Friend et al., 2010, p. 12).

During one teach, one assist, the general education teacher assumes the teaching responsibilities, while the special education teacher provides individual support for her special education students as needed. “Station teaching is where various learning stations are created, and the co-teachers provide individual support at the different stations” (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007, p. 393). Parallel teaching occurs when teachers teach from the same or similar content, yet in different classroom groupings. Alternative teaching happens when one teacher takes a smaller group of students to a different location for a limited period for intervention instruction. Team teaching, also known as interactive teaching, is when both teachers share responsibilities and instructional activities equally. This co-teaching approach usually attempts to make students believe that both teachers are general education teachers. During the one teach, one observe approach, one teacher leads whole group instruction, while the other teacher collects behavioral, social, or academic data on the students within the classroom (Friend et al., 2010).

These six co-teaching approaches have been noted to be successful, especially if teachers that use these styles are confident with their co-worker in that classroom. It may take a specific time frame to find the right co-teaching approach, due to getting familiar within the classroom and having another teacher delivering the content. Co-teachers must be able to listen to their fellow co-worker for their wants and needs, while providing their own concerns and opinions (Lupart et al., 2008). This huge responsibility can turn a hopeful situation of successful learning outcomes into a doomed situation of wasted educational time with two teachers. Teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion can be sour because one teacher may have their set ways on how to handle classroom management. However, both teachers should put the students’ needs first, and make this experience a successful school term so all students can benefit from an inclusion classroom.

Chapter III

Research Design and Methodology

The researcher determined teacher attitudes toward co-teaching in elementary reading classrooms by conducting a survey with questions geared toward teacher experiences and attitudes toward co-teaching. The survey asked questions related to current teacher attitudes toward co-teaching and their perspectives of why co-teaching works or does not work. From the survey, the objective was to identify teacher attitudes about co-teaching situations in elementary classrooms. The goal was to determine if teacher attitudes affect the successful outcomes of co-teaching programs. The survey will question both regular and special education teachers. A further goal of this survey was to conclude if there were any differences in attitudes between special and general education teachers among co-teaching and differences in attitudes between a veteran teacher and a new teacher.

Subjects

Subjects selected for this study consisted of teachers from Sherman Elementary School in Boone County, West Virginia. Forty teachers were selected from kindergarten through 6th grade. In addition, teachers were asked to identify if they were primarily a regular or special educator in the classroom. Teachers could participate in the survey regardless of whether they had ever or were currently teaching in a co-taught classroom.

Procedures

The procedures for the study are as follows. First, the researcher reviewed several journal articles on the current research regarding special education laws, the philosophy of co-teaching, current co-teaching models, and teacher attitudes and beliefs about co-teaching. Permission was

granted from the school assistant principal where the co-investigator is employed to conduct the research project and survey. Next, permission for the research study was obtained from the International Review Board. Research participants span from kindergarten to sixth grade teachers, both regular and special educators, from Sherman Elementary in Boone County, West Virginia. An anonymous paper survey was created by the researcher to determine teacher attitudes about co-teaching. The anonymous survey was printed and passed out during the month of March 2015 to forty teachers in the school library. Along with the survey, the selected teachers were provided with an Anonymous Paper Survey Consent form. The teachers who chose to participate continued to write and fill out the paper survey. When teachers completed their survey, the researcher provided an envelope for teachers to secure their survey. Then, teachers will drop the envelopes in a box near the library exit that has a hole on the top of it. By providing this box and envelope in the library, teachers' confidentiality will be protected.

Instrumentation

The assessment tool for this study was an anonymous paper survey created by the principal and co-investigators. The survey consisted of 11 total questions. Teachers were asked to choose from a series of rating scales, yes/no, fill-in, multiple choice, and short answer questions. As previously mentioned, the first three questions of the survey focuses on the number of years' experience from teachers along with the identification of being a regular or special educator. Teachers could choose from the following to establish their years of experience in the profession: 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, or 21+ years. Teachers would write the specific number of years of experience for being a general educator, as well as a special educator. For instance, some teachers may have taught special education for 7 years and general education for 8 years. Next, teachers were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being "very

unsuccessful” and 5 being “successful”) how effective their co-taught classroom was during their experience. The next question asked the participant to explain what made them choose that rating toward their experiences in a co-taught classroom by writing a short answer. Then, the participants received a multiple choice question as to how often they receive collaborative planning time with their co-teacher. Option answers for this question included daily, 2-3 times per week, once a week, once every two months, once per month, or did not get common planning time.

Next on the survey, the co-investigator asks the participants if they receive professional development or other programs toward co-teaching that has helped their experience in co-teaching. This question is posed as a YES or NO answer. The next question referred back to if the participants answered yes to professional development, asking how many professional development sessions the participants have attended on co-teaching. The options for this question include 1-2 sessions, 3-5 sessions, or 6+ sessions. Lastly, the last three series of questions are short answer where participants responded freely with their opinion. These questions included “If you feel as if co-teaching has been a successful experience, could you explain what made it successful? What challenges have you faced as a co-teacher? What would you do or need to make co-teaching work in your class?” (For a copy of the anonymous paper survey, please see Appendix A).

Data Analysis

There are several factors that can impact teacher attitudes about co-teaching; therefore, the survey results will be analyzed from several angles. The co-investigator will compare teacher answers based on responses from general education teachers versus special education teachers. In addition, the co-investigator will compare and contrast answers based on years experienced,

planning time with co-teachers, and professional development experience. The short-answer questions at the end of the survey with the rating scale question of co-teaching being effective in the classroom will be used as the overall interpretation of teacher attitudes toward co-teaching because these questions asks the objective as to whether teachers felt co-teaching was successful or unsuccessful. The short answer questions will be analyzed for common themes.

Chapter IV

Results

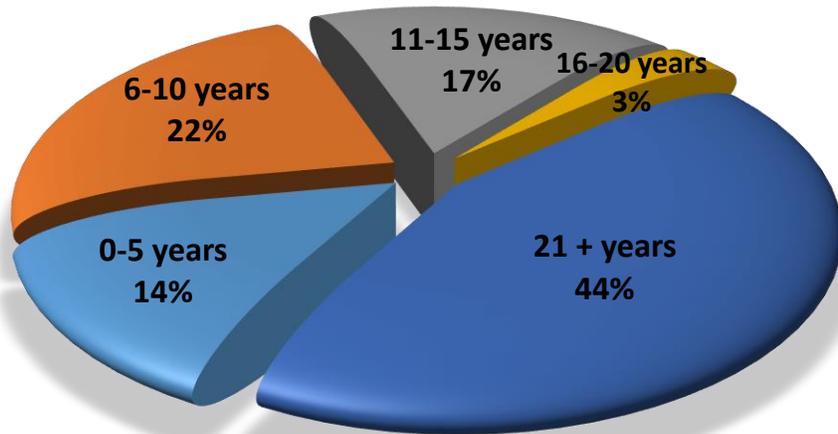
This study was designed to investigate teacher attitudes toward co-teaching in elementary reading classrooms. Surveys were distributed to 40 teachers and 36 were returned. The following section gives a detailed overview of the results obtained from the survey of teacher attitudes toward co-teaching completed by the teacher.

The pencil/paper survey had several types of questions that targeted different responses. The first portion of the survey contained demographics that required teachers to respond to short answer and scaled responses about years of experience in profession as a general education teacher, special education teacher, and co-teaching experience. The second portion of the survey contained questions that teachers answered co-teaching short answer and scaled responses. The last portion of the survey contained strictly short essay questions about the challenges and successful moments during co-teaching that the teachers have experienced.

Demographics: Questions 1-3

The demographics revealed that out of 36 teachers that completed the survey, 26 of them are currently general education teachers, while 10 of them are currently special education teachers. Out of 36 teachers, five of them have taught 0-5 years, eight have taught 6-10 years, six have taught 11-15 years, one has taught 16-20 years, and 16 have taught 21 years or more. As a whole group of responses, thirty out of thirty-six teachers have experience in co-teaching. Figure 2 is a pie graph representing the demographics and percentage among the teachers involved in this survey.

Demographics of Teacher Participation in Survey



Note: 36 teachers participated in this survey.

Figure 2: Demographics of Teacher Participation from Survey

Questions two and three within the survey asked teachers how many years they have taught in special education and general education, then asked if they have any years of experience in co-teaching. The five teachers who have 0-5 years of experience in the profession revealed that four have had experience in co-teaching, while only one of those five has taught in both a general education classroom and special education classroom. The eight teachers who have 6-10 years of experience in the profession revealed that five of these teachers are currently general educators, while three are special educators. Out of these eight teachers, six of them have experience in co-teaching and three have experience as both a general educator and special educator in their careers. The six teachers who identified their career as 11-15 years revealed that four teachers are currently teaching special education, while two are general educators. Out of these six teachers, all six have experience co-teaching, but only two have held positions in both

general and special education. Only one teacher identified themselves as having 16-20 years of experience, with experience in co-teaching and only held a job as a general educator.

Lastly, the 16 teachers who has 21 or more years of experience revealed two special educators and 14 general educators. Out of those 16 teachers, five of those teachers have experience as both general and special educators. Another statistic found by the researcher explains that 13 of the 16 teachers with more than 21 years in the field of education has had experiences in co-teaching. Figure 3 explains these statistics of years’ experience versus experience in co-teaching by general educators and special educators.

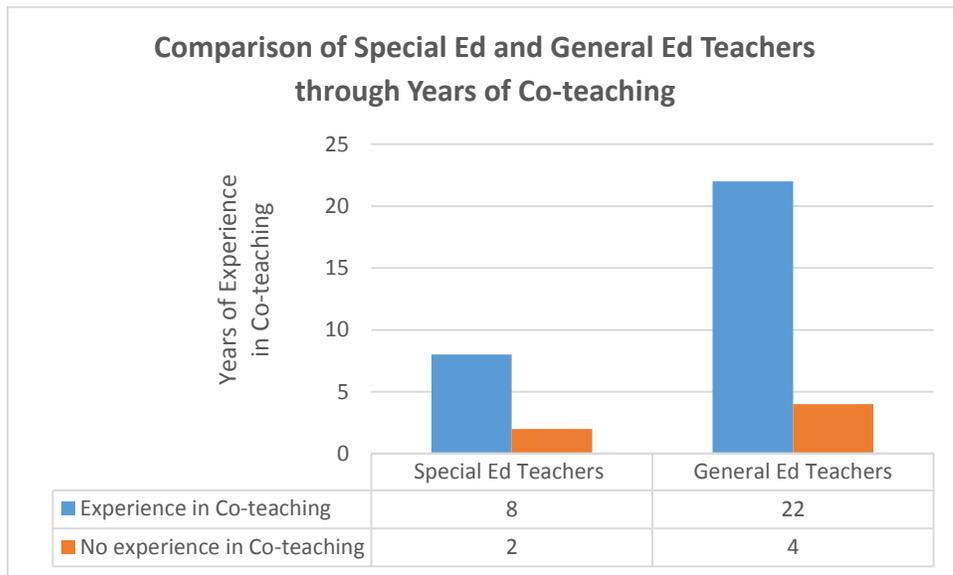


Figure 3: Comparisons between special educators and general educators and their years of experience in co-teaching.

Teacher Attitudes Toward Co-teaching: Questions 4-5

The second portion of the survey was designed to examine teacher attitudes toward co-teaching, and whether they felt that it was successful or non-successful along with an explanation

through short answer. Question number four was set up as a Likert scale with options such as very unsuccessful, somewhat unsuccessful, neutral, somewhat successful, and successful.

Question five was to be answered followed by question four for participants to explain what made them feel this way toward their experiences in a co-teaching classroom. The researcher examined the answers based on any differences of attitudes between the years of experience and all of the participants, and discover a common theme between all the participants who took the survey.

First, the researcher looked at the five teachers who had 0-5 years of experience in teaching. Four of the five teachers have experience with co-teaching, while one has experience as a general and special educator. In a consensus, there was mixed feelings between the four teachers who have experience with co-teaching. Three of the teachers felt that their co-teaching experience was somewhat successful or successful, but one teacher felt that it was somewhat unsuccessful. The teachers who felt that their co-teaching experience was successful expressed a theme of having a good relationship with their co-teaching and their students had better attention and focus with two teachers. The teacher who felt that their co-teaching experience was unsuccessful explained that their students were not engaged due to the material being too difficult, which led to inappropriate behavior or frustration.

Next, the researcher examined how the eight teachers who have 6-10 years of experience felt about co-teaching. Out of these eight teachers, six of them have experience in co-teaching, while three has been both a general and special educator. Therefore, two teachers have no experience in co-teaching, so they commented with not applicable in their short answer response. There was mixed feelings between the six teachers by their several different responses. Two teachers expressed that their experiences in co-teaching was successful because there was a good

bond between the co-teachers and a good amount of planning. One teacher felt neutral because at times it was good, but at times it could be bad due to not agreeing on classroom management and discipline. Three teachers felt their co-teaching experiences were somewhat unsuccessful and very unsuccessful due to being treated more like an aid and some students succeeded while other got farther behind in the curriculum.

In comparing the teachers who taught between 11-15 years, these four out of six teachers are currently special educators, while two teachers are general educators. One teacher rated that their co-teaching experience was neutral due to their feeling of not being accepted. However, there is a mutual agreement between five teachers that co-teaching has been successful because they were in a good classroom setting with a cooperative teacher and felt accepted. The single participant who taught 16-20 years did not have any experience in co-teaching; therefore, they marked their short answer with not applicable.

Lastly, there was a wide span of mixed scaled answers when comparing participants that have 21 or more years or experience. Out of 16 teachers who have 21 or more years of experience in education, seven responded that their experience was successful in co-teaching. There was a common theme to their responses and it included that there was two qualified teachers who brought respect to the classroom, which built a strong relationship. There was two teachers who responded with a neutral feeling toward co-teaching because there had little time in that setting and veteran teachers acted too territorial in their classroom. There was four teachers who responded to feeling that their experience was unsuccessful toward co-teaching. They felt this way because their expertise with the co-teacher clashed at times and there was not enough planning to get everything accomplished.

In summary, the researcher found that out of 10 special educators who took this survey, eight of them responded that their experience in co-teaching was successful. However, one special educator responded that their co-teaching experience was neutral, while one special educator responded as not applicable. Next, the researcher examined the attitudes that general educators felt toward co-teaching. Out of 26 general educators that completed the survey, 11 of them felt that their co-teaching experience was successful. Two general educators responded that their co-teaching experience was neutral, while seven general educators felt that their co-teaching experience was unsuccessful. Lastly, six general educators responded with not applicable due to not having any experience in co-teaching. Refer to figure 4 for results on questions four and five.

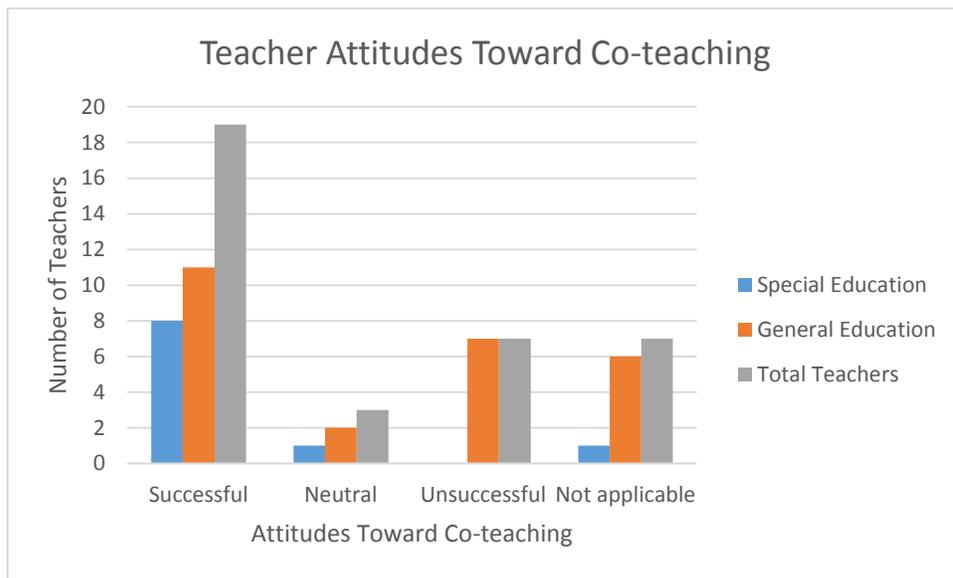


Figure 4: Contrasting teacher attitudes toward co-teaching among general and special educators.

The researcher found a common theme between all teachers about what makes co-teaching successful, neutral, or unsuccessful. Out of 36 teachers, 17 teachers believed that their

co-teaching experience was successful or somewhat successful because they had good relationships with their co-teacher and felt acceptance in the classroom. Then, four teachers expressed that their co-teaching experience was neutral because lack of classroom management and little time in classroom. Eight teachers explained that their co-teaching experience was somewhat unsuccessful or unsuccessful due to being treated like an aide and not enough planning with co-teacher. However, seven teachers did not answer these question because it did not apply to them due to having no experience in co-teaching.

Planning with Co-teacher: Question 6

The researcher wanted to investigate collaborative planning times between co-teachers to discover if it was a contributor between successful or unsuccessful attitudes. For question number six, the researcher asked teachers how much collaborative planning they received with their co-teacher during their co-teaching experience. The options for answering this question included daily, 2-3 times per week, once a week, once every two weeks, once per month, and did not get common planning time. Out of 5 teachers who have taught 0-5 years, one general educator responded with not applicable due to no experience in co-teaching. However, the three other general education responses included with not having a common planning, once a week, and 2-3 times per week. Lastly, the only special educator that has experience in co-teaching with 0-5 years of experience answered with 2-3 times per week of planning with their co-teacher.

Next, the researcher analyzed data from the eight teachers who have taught 6-10 years and their responses about collaborative planning with their co-teacher. Out of the five general educators, two responded with 2-3 times planning per week, two responded with daily planning, and one responded with not applicable due to no experience in co-teaching. However, out of the

three special educators who have taught 6-10 years, one responded as being provided with a daily planning, one responded as not having a common planning, and the last special educator responded as not applicable due to having no experience in co-teaching.

Out of the six teachers who have taught 11-15 years, two general educators responded by being provided with a daily planning and once a week planning. However, out of four special educators, two of them received 2-3 times per week of planning and the other two received daily planning with their co-teachers. The one teacher who has taught 16-20 years replied as not applicable due to having no experience in co-teaching. Lastly, out of 16 teachers who have taught 21 or more years, two of the special educators responded differently as one having a daily planning and the other having 2-3 times per week of planning with their co-teachers. Therefore, the 14 general educators had several different responses. Seven general educators received daily planning with their co-teacher, while three general educators received planning once a week with their co-teacher. One general educator responded as not having a common planning with their co-teaching. Lastly, the remaining three general education teachers responded with not applicable due to having no experience in co-teaching.

After looking at the total numbers of question six, out of 36 teachers who completed this question, 14 teachers received a daily planning period with their co-teachers. Five teachers responded with having a planning period once a week with their co-teachers. Seven teachers responded with having a planning period 2-3 times per week with their co-teachers. Three teachers responded with not having a common planning period with their co-teachers. Lastly, seven teachers responded that the question was not applicable due to having no experience in co-teaching. Figure 5 shows the data among this question of collaborative planning answered by the participants.

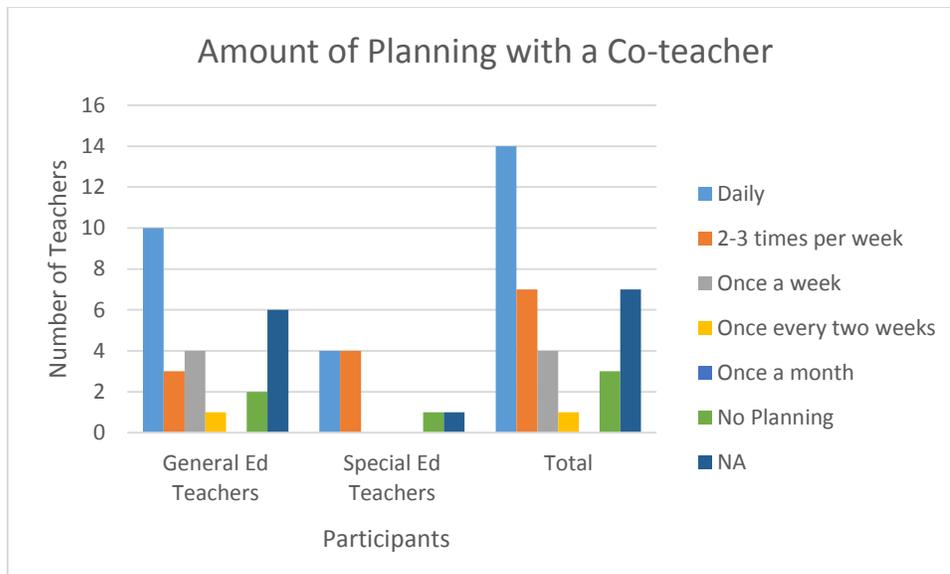


Figure 5: Comparing experiences of planning periods with co-teacher.

Professional Development toward Co-teaching: Question 7 and 8

In this section of data analysis, the researcher wanted to investigate the amount of professional development or other programs that may have made co-teaching beneficial toward teachers' experiences. Therefore, for question seven, the researcher asked a "yes" or "no" question about if they have ever received professional development or other programs toward co-teaching. Then, if the participant responded to question seven with a "yes", then they needed to complete question eight. Question eight asked the participants the number of sessions of professional development in co-teaching that they have partaken during their teaching careers.

Out of 36 total teachers that took the survey, 20 teachers have not received any professional development in co-teaching, while 16 teachers have received professional development in co-teaching. The researcher decomposed the data of these two questions by sifting through the years of experience of the participants. Out of five teachers who have taught 0-5 years, three have not received professional development in co-teaching, while two has

received professional development in co-teaching. Out of eight teachers who have taught 6-10 years of experience, five of those teachers have not received professional development in co-teaching. However, three teachers have received professional development in co-teaching.

Out of the six teachers who have taught 11-15 years, the data revealed that three teachers have received professional development in co-teaching, while the other three teachers have not received professional development. There was only one teacher who has taught 16-20 years and they have not received professional development in co-teaching. Lastly, out of the 16 teachers that have taught 21 or more years, the results came out equal as eight teachers have not received professional development in co-teaching, while the other eight has received professional development in co-teaching. Figure 6 reveals the professional development opportunities on co-teaching through the survey's participants responses

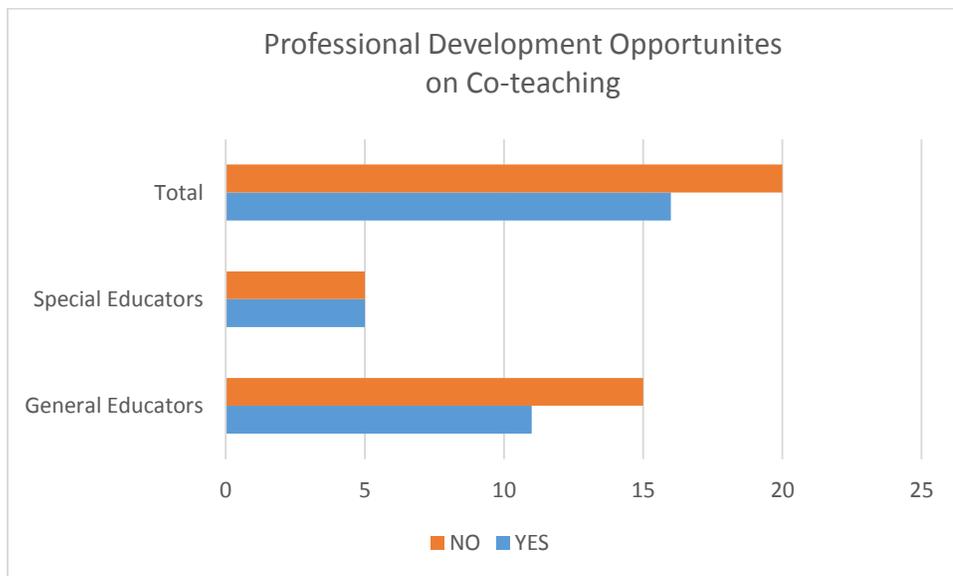


Figure 6: Participants responses on professional development opportunities in co-teaching by special educators and general educators.

The researcher also compared the difference between the “yes” responses to question eight. Out of the 16 teachers that responded “yes” to the opportunities of professional development in co-teaching, 12 of them circled that they received at least 1-2 sessions. The remaining four teachers that circled “yes” responded that they received at least 3-4 sessions of professional development in co-teaching. Then, the researcher wanted to see the comparisons between “yes” and “no” responses from question 8 among general and special education teachers. Between general educators that responded, 11 of them responded with a “yes” with eight teachers who has 1-2 sessions and three teachers with 3-5 sessions of professional development in co-teaching. Then, the remaining 15 general educators responded that they have not had any opportunities of professional development in co-teaching. Between the special educators that responded to the opportunity of professional development, five of them responded with a “yes” with four attending 1-2 sessions, while one attending 3-4 sessions of professional development in co-teaching. Figure 7 represents a bar graph of the amount of sessions teachers attended for professional development on co-teaching through data from the survey.

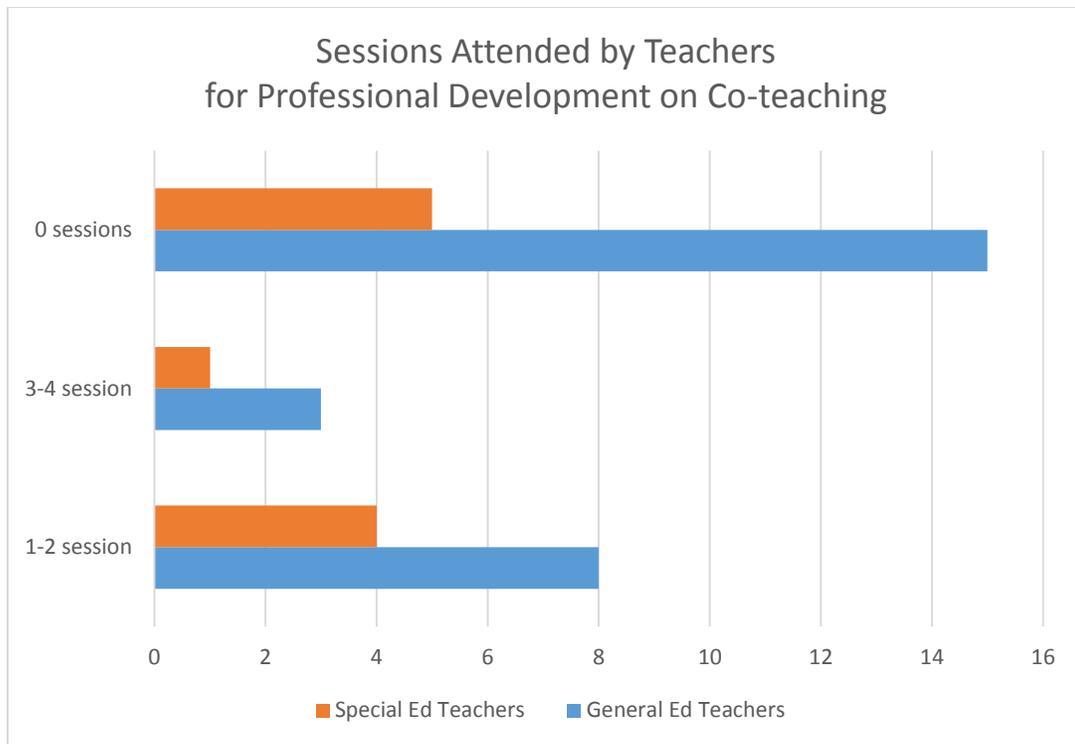


Figure 7: Survey results from teacher experiences of professional development sessions on co-teaching.

Successes, Challenges, and Co-teaching Suggestions: Questions 9-11

The last portion of the survey asked the participants three short answer questions about the successes, challenges, and any further suggestions toward their co-teaching experiences and opinions. On question 9, the researcher asked the participants what made their co-teaching successful. The themes among these answers was evident through several comparisons. Teachers who have taught 0-5 years and 6-10 both answered that having good relationships with their co-teacher made it a successful experience. Teachers who have taught 11-15 years answered that they felt welcomed in a cooperative setting. The teacher who taught 16-20 years responded with not applicable due to having no experience in co-teaching. Teachers who taught

21 or more years answered that having two qualified teachers helped to build respect and a good environment among the classroom in co-teaching.

Then, on question ten, the researcher asked the participants what challenges they have faced as a co-teacher in a short answer. Teachers who taught 0-5 years felt that co-teaching was challenging due to students being not engaged and the rising of behavior issues. Teachers who taught 6-10 years felt that co-teaching was challenging due to having uncontrolled classroom management and feeling like an aide rather than a professional teacher. Teachers who taught 11-15 years felt that co-teaching was challenging due to not feeling accepted by co-teacher and students. The teacher who taught 16-20 years responded with not applicable due to having no experience in co-teaching. Teachers who taught 21 or more years felt that co-teaching was challenging due to not enough planning and clashing of teaching expertise.

Lastly, question eleven asked the participants what they would need to do in order to make co-teaching work within their classroom. There was several themes across the teachers' responses to this question. Teachers who taught 0-5 years of experience suggested that they would need more planning and training/professional development. Teachers who taught 6-10 years need same philosophies, work ethic, and planning time with co-teachers. Teachers who taught 11-15 years need professional development, planning, and be paired with the right co-teacher. The teacher who taught 16-20 years provided a not applicable answer due to having no experience in co-teaching. Teachers who have taught 21 or more years suggested two different themes, such as more planning and respect, but some would not change anything about their experiences.

This survey discussed several themes of successful and unsuccessful experiences in co-teaching through 36 participants in a rural county in West Virginia. According to Mastropieri and Scruggs (2014), it is important to clarify roles and responsibilities, as well as communicate effectively with other professionals in the classroom. In this study, 83% of the participants are co-teachers; however, only 56% of these teachers have attended professional developments for co-teaching readiness. In addition, the data analysis of this survey showed that out of the 83% of co-teachers, only 46% of them have daily planning with their co-teachers. The theme throughout the study showed that the participants needed more planning and professional development in co-teaching to be successful with their co-teacher.

Chapter V

Discussion

Co-teaching in the field of education is becoming more prominent and expected within classrooms in this generation. Special education services has evolved to including students with disabilities within the general education environment due to least restrictive environment (LRE) regulations. There can be challenges, as well as successes, that can be experienced through co-teaching in a general education classroom. Two teachers must work together as a team with communication for maximum engagement of both teachers and students within the classroom co-teaching setting.

The purpose of this study was to determine the themes and attitudes that teachers perceived among co-teaching in an elementary education classroom.

Discussion of Results

The results of this study support that teachers have common themes among their attitudes about co-teaching in an elementary general education classroom. As a whole, the participants felt that co-teaching was challenging due to having an uncommon agreement to classroom management and not feeling accepted by co-teaching. Another response that ranked high in the survey of challenging experiences among co-teaching was the lack of planning between co-teachers. Participants felt that in order to have a successful experience in co-teaching, teachers must be given the opportunity to plan with their co-teacher so proper classroom management and lessons geared toward all students can be met in the classroom. There were six participants out of 36 participants that had no experience in co-teaching.

Next, there were several different responses that answered the questions that related to the experiences that made co-teaching successful. Participants responded that more planning

time with co-teaching and opportunities of professional development would help them prepare to become better co-teachers. The experiences that did make co-teaching successful was having that common bond between the co-teacher and having the same mind set to teaching all students. Overall, however, 53% of the teachers who completed this survey felt that co-teaching was successful or somewhat successful. Then, 8% of teachers felt neutral toward co-teaching, while 39% of teachers felt that it was unsuccessful.

The hypothesis of this research was that special education teachers in elementary favor co-teaching practices more than general education teachers. Out of 36 teachers who participated in this survey, 30 teachers answered their opinion on if their co-teaching experience was successful, neutral, or unsuccessful. Out of those 30 teachers, 20 of them was general educators and 10 of them was special educators. Out of 20 general education teachers, 55% responded with having successful experiences in their co-teaching environment. Out of the 10 special educators that have experience in co-teaching, 80% responded that their co-teaching experience was successful. Therefore, the data of this survey supports the hypothesis that special educators favor co-teaching more than general educators as described in the survey.

Limitations

The researcher experienced limitations throughout this study. First, the researcher had time restraints due to having the participants to complete a paper/pencil survey. The majority of the researchers' time was spent entering the data from the 36 participants into an Excel sheet for each individual survey that was completed. In addition, the researcher had to find common themes through each participants short answer, which each survey had four short answer; therefore, the researcher spent quality time categorizing the short answer into themes of successful or unsuccessful answers.

Another limitation that the researcher experienced in this study was the low amount of participants that was selected. The researcher's results would be different in the sample size was larger. For instance, a good sample size for this project would give better results if the sample size was around 90-100 participants, which would be an additional two or three schools to be involved within this study. In the area that the researcher completed the methods, there are three other elementary schools that may have been a good idea to include within the study. Even though the sample size of this study had a 90% participation rate, the results would be more convincing if there were more participants to compare from different schools with different areas of expertise or student population.

Implications for Future Research

This study can be further analyzed from several angles by having participants complete the survey from middle and high schools. By doing this, a researcher could discover if there is a common theme among elementary, middle, and secondary schools. This discovery could also indicate a major issue or even a successful theme as to how co-teaching operates in the selected areas. If this study was to happen in all three levels of education, the researcher could

Another implication for future research involving teacher attitudes toward co-teaching would be to survey administrators. This would be an interesting point of view due to the fact that these administrators may or may not have any experience in co-teaching. Another view of surveying administrators would be to ask what they are seeing in the co-taught, inclusive classrooms when they are observing teachers. It would remain confidential with no names of teachers or classrooms; however, administrators would be able to identify what strategies they are seeing within those classroom and what they are not seeing that could give substantial data for future professional development trainings.

Conclusion

According to the findings of the anonymous paper survey, teachers felt that more opportunities of professional development and given a common planning with their co-teaching would make their co-teaching experience more favorable. Due to the increase of special education services that are being implemented in the general education classroom, all teachers must have a grasp of working collaboratively with another teacher in order for inclusive, co-teaching practices to be successful. Co-teaching is a way for students to experience the expertise of two teachers from their respective fields of education. It should be an interactive classroom that involves opportunities for all students to learn the desired curriculum that is established from the two teachers that understands their students best. The findings within this research can be utilized for further studies on the topic of co-teaching.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Complete Teacher Attitudes about Co-teaching Survey

Teacher Attitudes Toward Co-teaching
in Elementary Reading Classrooms

By: India Stone

1. How many years have you been a professional teacher? (please check)

0-5 years 6-10 years 11-15 years 16-20 years 21+ years

2. How many years have you been a general education teacher or special education teacher? Please write a specific number.

Years as general education teacher _____

Years as special education teacher _____

3. Of the years you have been teaching, how many years have you worked in a co-taught class either as a general education or special education teacher? (please write specific number)

_____ year(s)

4. On a scale from 1-5, how effective was your co-taught classroom during your experience?

1 - Very Unsuccessful

2 - Somewhat Successful

3 - Neutral

4 - Somewhat Successful

5 - Successful

5. According to your answer to question #4, what made you feel this way toward your experiences of a co-taught classroom?

6. How often did you get collaborative planning time with your co-teacher?

- Daily
- 2-3 times per week
- Once a week
- Once every two weeks
- Once per month
- Did not get common planning time

7. Did you receive professional development or other programs toward co-teaching that helped your experience in co-teaching? (please circle) YES NO

8. If you answered yes to question #7, about how many professional development sessions did you attend on co-teaching? (please circle)

- 1-2 sessions
- 3-5 sessions
- 6+ sessions

9. If you feel as if co-teaching has been a successful experience, could you explain what made it successful?

10. What challenges have you faced as a co-teacher? Please explain.

11. What would you do or need to make co-teaching work in your class?

Thank you for participating in this anonymous survey.