

'A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE EFFECTS OF CO-TEACHING ON
ACHIEVEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My literature review will focus on the effectiveness of co-teaching and the factors which impact its effectiveness. Co-teaching is an instructional method that is being employed by school districts across the country in hopes of bridging the achievement gap between special education students and their typically developing peers. Cook and Friend (1995) defined co-teaching as two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students.

Studies have been done to research the effectiveness of co-teaching. Recent research indicates that co-teaching does impact achievement when implemented correctly. However, Cohen (2012) states that there are specific factors that influence the success of co-teaching. Those factors include compatibility of the co-teachers, their degree of preparation and training, knowledge of content, adequate planning time, and administrative support. I hypothesize that co-teaching positively impacts student's achievement when the co-teachers are compatible, adequately prepared, and given the proper supports.

Statement of the Problem

A problem exists because special education students are currently being pulled out of regular education instruction to get individualized instruction in their special education classroom. This is creating a problem because these students are now missing out on being exposed to the same information as their grade-level peers; hence, widening the gap between special education students and their peers. By not being exposed to grade-level material, students are not prepared to perform on grade-level assessments provided by the district or state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to compare the academic achievement of students in co-taught classrooms versus those not in co-taught classrooms. Co-teaching is defined as two equally qualified individuals who may or may not have the same area of expertise jointly delivering instruction to a group of students (Cohen, 2012). This information will help determine if co-teaching is a meaningful way to help students with disabilities meet their goals, improve their academic skills, and lessen the gap between themselves and their peers.

Significance of the Study

Students with disabilities need to be given instruction that is individualized for their specific needs and still need to be exposed to grade-level content. The information gathered can help determine if co-teaching is a method in which special education students can still be instructed to meet their needs while being exposed to grade-level content in the same classroom as their peers.

Definition of Terms

There are several terms that need to be defined for clarity of understanding.

These are:

Intellectual Disabilities (ID): The Digest of Education Statistics (2012) defines an intellectual disability as “having significantly sub average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with defects in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, which adversely affects the child’s educational performance” (p. 757).

Collaboration: Collaboration takes place when members of an inclusive learning community work together as equals to assist students to succeed in the classroom. This may be in the form of

lesson planning with the special needs child in mind, or co-teaching a group or class. According to Friend and Cook (2000) the defining characteristics of successful collaboration are as follows:

1. Collaboration is voluntary;
2. Collaboration requires parity among participants;
3. Collaboration is based on mutual goals;
4. Collaboration depends on shared responsibility for participation and decision making;
5. Individuals who collaborate share their resources; and
6. Individuals who collaborate share accountability for outcomes (p. 6-28).

Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD): According to Nelson and Kauffman (2009) emotional or behavioral disorder is:

a disability that is characterized by behavioral or emotional responses in school programs so different from appropriate age, cultural, or ethnic norms that the responses adversely affect educational performance, including academic, social, vocational or personal skills; more than a temporary, expected response to stressful events in the environment; consistently exhibited in two different settings, at least one of which is school related; and unresponsive to direct intervention applied in general education, or the condition of a child is such that general education interventions would be insufficient. The term includes such a disability that co-exists with other disabilities. The term includes a schizophrenic disorder, affective disorder, anxiety disorder, or other sustained disorder of conduct or adjustment, affecting a child if the disorder affects educational performance.

(p. 39)

General Education Teacher: For the purposes of this paper it is defined as a teacher who is licensed to teach one or more subjects in the general education setting and is currently employed at the identified suburban school district.

Inclusion: Foreman (2005) defines inclusion as “the philosophy that schools should, without question, provide for the needs of all children in their communities, whatever the level of their ability or disability” (p. 12).

Inclusive Education: Florida State University (FSU) Center for Prevention & Early Intervention Policy (2002) defines inclusive education as “providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age appropriate classrooms in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society” (p. 1).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): The Pacer Center (2012) defines Individualized Education Program as a “written plan that guides a child’s special education services. The plan must:

- allow the child to advance appropriately toward meeting annual IEP goals
- allow the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum as much as is appropriate for the child
- guide the staff in providing services
- record the services the school district has committed to provide” (p. 34).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA): The Digest of Education Statistics (2012) defines Individuals with Disabilities Act 2004 as “a federal law requiring services to children with disabilities throughout the nation. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Infants and toddlers with disabilities (birth–age two) and their families receive early intervention services under IDEA, Part C. Children and youth (ages 3–21) receive special education and related services under IDEA, Part B” (p. 763).

Learning Disability (LD): The Digest of Education Statistics (2012) defines learning disability as “having a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage” (p. 757).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The Pacer Center (2012) defines least restrictive environment as “an educational setting for a child with disabilities that provides an appropriate program, including any necessary special supports, in as typical a school environment as possible” (p. 34).

Assumptions

It is assumed that the articles, studies, and research cited in this literature review have been completed with fidelity and that the information that is reported is true. It is also assumed

that the data displayed on special education students is a genuine representation of all special education students.

Limitations of the Study

This literature review is limited to my ability to access the research that others have completed. I have not personally completed any research on whether co-teaching impacts achievement for students with disabilities. My research was also limited to resources that could be access via the UW-Platteville Karmann Library Databases.

Methodology

The methodology used to research for this literature review was to research different articles, databases, websites, texts, etc. to find the most relevant information on whether co-teaching impacts achievement for students with disabilities.

Hypothesis

Co-teaching improves academic achievement for students with disabilities when the co-teachers are compatible, adequately prepared, and given the proper supports.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Research Question

Co-teaching is an instructional method that pairs a general and special education teacher in the same environment. Co-teaching is meant to provide the necessary specialized instruction and services special education students require while in the regular education classroom. Since the instruction and services are being provided in the regular education classroom, special education students benefit as they also have access to the same academic material as their typical developing peers. The main question addressed in my literature review is whether co-teaching improves academic achievement for students with disabilities, and what factors determine this improvement.

Literature Review

Co-teaching can be explained simply as a union of special education and general education. Bauwens et al. (1989) explained that co-teaching provides an alternative education approach in which general and special education educators share teaching responsibly and provide differentiated instruction for academically and behaviorally diverse students in the least restrictive setting of the general education classroom. This allows for students to benefit from access to highly qualified content teachers while receiving direct learning support and instructional differentiation for diverse learning styles (Walsh, 2012). Friend (2015) explained 6 approaches to co-teaching. The first approach is station teaching. For station teaching, students are divided into three (or more) groups. Each teacher delivers part of the lesson at a station, while independent work occurs at the other stations. Students rotate through all the stations so both teachers work with every student in the class. The second approach is parallel teaching, where students are divided into two groups and each teacher works with a group doing identical

activities. The third approach is alternative teaching, where one teacher instructs the majority of the students while the other teacher works with a small group of students for pre-teaching, re-teaching, assessment or any other purposes. The fourth approach is teaming, where students remain in a single group and the teacher's co-instruction. The fifth approach is one teach, one assist. In this approach students stay in a whole group while one teacher leads instruction and the other assists by redirecting students, answering questions, re-explaining, and so on. The final approach is one teach, one observe. For this method, one teacher leads instruction while the other gathers observational data on students. Although each of these models apply to different classroom situations, Cook and Friend (1995) suggested that the ideal model involves both teachers collaborating on all components of the educational process. It is important to note, however, that regardless of the approach chosen, when the special educator functions as the co-teacher they still have the responsibility to comply with a student's IEP and provide the required services and specialized instruction determined necessary by the IEP team.

In recent years, co-teaching has become an instructional model that almost all schools are using as a way to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. More than half of all students with disabilities in the United States are now being educated in the general education classroom for more than 80% of the academic school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This is because legislation, specifically the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), require the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) states that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to the general curriculum and be taught by highly qualified teachers and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

(IDEIA, 2004) emphasizes educating students in the least restrictive environment. Co-teaching seems to be a vehicle through which legislative expectations can be met while students with disabilities at the same time can receive specially designed instruction and other supports to which they are entitled (Friend, 2010). As a partnership between colleagues with different areas of expertise, co-teaching can be seen as a reasonable response to the increasing difficulty of a single professional keeping up with all the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the instructional needs of the diverse student population attending public schools and the complexity of the problems that they bring (Friend, 2010). However, there are many factors that must be considered when implementing co-teaching as a meaningful instructional practice.

With the recent policy initiatives at the state and federal level, there is a new urgency to employ collaboration and co-teaching, but districts nationwide are still dramatically different when it comes to effective co-teaching. While some educators are tussling over the finer details of effective instruction, others are still working to get buy-in from teachers and principals. Co-teaching will not work unless a commitment to collaboration and inclusion is already in place (Samuels, 2015). Commitment to collaboration is not the only factor that influences the success of co-teaching. Other factors of successful co-teaching include, dispositions that lead to "chemistry" between the cooperating teacher and the student teacher, willingness to share and learn with and from each other, compatible or complementary teaching philosophies, communication and interpersonal skills, similar energy level and enthusiasm for teaching, content being taught (e.g., Are both teachers prepared to teach all content areas?), time during the day for partners to co-plan and co-reflect on lessons and finally, administrative support on all system-levels (Cohen, 2012). These system level supports are crucial in the implementation co-teaching. For example, in one study over six years of seventy schools within Howard County, it

was found that there was a positive correlation between co-teaching and the improved performance of students with disabilities on state reading and mathematics assessments. The reason for the correlation of co-teaching and student improvement was because Howard County chose to commit to providing systematic and continuous professional development as a system wide strategy throughout the six years focusing specifically on co-teaching and collaboration. This demonstrates that teacher preparedness and meaningful professional development is truly an essential element to the continuous improvement of teachers and students (Killion & Harrison, 2006). In a survey of 77 teachers, all 77 had learned about co-teaching. 44% of teachers indicated they learned about co-teaching through university course work, 17% through district provides training programs, and 22% through a presentation or a conference. The remaining participants indicated they had learned about co-teaching through other means. However, in the same survey of those 77 teachers, 88% indicated that they were either not confident or not sure if they were confident in using co-teaching. This survey demonstrated that while the majority of teachers knew what co-teaching was, most require additional training. These findings suggest that teachers in this district are not adequately prepared to co-teach (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). Marilyn Friend, a co-teaching guru who has studied collaboration for decades and provided professional development to schools and districts around the country has stated that when teachers are not adequately prepared or trained to co-teach “You might as well keep pulling kids out of the classroom, because they are not going to get what they need” (Samuels, 2015). This statement is a testament to how crucial appropriate training and preparedness is to the success of students in co-taught classrooms.

When teachers are adequately prepared and trained, as well as appropriately supported in their co-teaching roles, there is a direct correlation to student achievement and benefit. Howard

County schools demonstrated this when they compared student performance by students with disabilities between 2003 and 2009 on state assessments. The results shown that students with disabilities increased proficiency in reading at twice the rate in comparison to student growth over all. The achievement acceleration demonstrated over this time period represents a true closing of the achievement gap for students with disabilities in Howard county. This is largely attributed to the implementation and support co-teaching as a school system strategy for continuous improvement (Walsh, 2012). Walsh (2012) stated that quantitative and qualitative data of the past two years has consistently determined that students in co-taught classrooms learn more and perform better on academic assessments than students in more restrictive service delivery models. Rea, McLaughlin, and Walter-Thomas (2002) found that students with learning disabilities in co-taught classrooms performed better on measures such as report card grades and attendance than students in single teacher classes. Rea, McLaughlin, and Walter-Thomas (2001) also compared students in co-taught classrooms to those in pull out classrooms and found that the outcomes of the students in the co-taught class were superior to those in the pull out classroom, in all academic, social and behavioral areas tested. When students with disabilities are in co-taught classrooms, they also benefit from access to the general education curriculum setting while still receiving specialized instruction, as well as a great connection to their peers while also reducing the negative stigma associated with pull out programs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As a result of recent legislation, co-teaching has become one of the fastest growing inclusive teaching practices, but despite the increase in co-teaching in our schools, it is an option that is often poorly implemented (Cohen, 2012). The intent of co-teaching is to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same curriculum as their peers while still receiving the specialized instruction to which they are entitled (Friend, 2010). However, as discussed earlier, if teachers are not adequately prepared in the use of co-teaching they might not use the practice, therefore limiting their chances of meeting the needs of all students (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). There are also adjustments that need to be made at a systems level to ensure co-teaching is successful. This includes comprehensive administrative support as well as a strong organization structure. It is also recommended that administrators complete co-teaching training, as the success of co-teaching in a school depends largely on the effective administrative support and their ability to facilitate effective means for collaboration (Hanover Research, 2012). Moving forward, it is evident that co-teaching and collaboration are a tool in which professionals can use to be more responsive to the diversity of today's learners.

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