

# Induction Insights



## Supporting Special Education Teachers-Administrators [AII-10]

### Co-Teaching and Team Teaching

Promising Opportunities for Supporting Novice Special Education Teachers Within the School Culture

#### *Briefly...*

*A collaborative school context can support novice special education teachers. Co-teaching and team teaching represent collaborative opportunities that can counteract the historic isolation of special education teachers. Co-teaching and team teaching—the focus of this Brief—also have the potential for supporting novice teacher socialization in the school setting.*

Novice special education teachers benefit by working in schools where distributed responsibility for their success is a natural outgrowth of an integrated, collaborative school culture. Principals play an essential role in determining how the human resources within a school building are dispersed, including how veteran general education teachers interact with novice special education teachers.

Although co-teaching and team teaching—both well recognized forms of teacher collaboration—are not typically thought of in terms of the induction of new teachers, they offer a promising support strategy. Co-teaching—defined here as shared responsibility for teaching within the same classroom by a general education teacher and a special education teacher—emerged in 1989 as part of the movement to build capacity for inclusive education. Although team teaching—a group of teachers sharing responsibility for a group of students—has a much longer history than co-teaching, it reemerged at about the same time as another strategy for supporting inclusion. Co-teaching and team teaching provide a means for special education teachers and general education teachers to work collaboratively and to support one another in

their common goal of providing a high quality-education to all students in general education classrooms.

Many special education teachers view co-teaching and team teaching as beneficial, especially in terms of personal and professional support. When novice special education teachers participate closely with their general education colleagues, they are more likely to view them as sources of support, and they are less likely to rely solely on special education teachers. They also tend to appreciate the opportunity to gain knowledge about the general education curriculum, which may widen their base of support and contribute to their socialization as members of the school community.

Administrators can foster positive relationships between novice special education teachers and their general education colleagues. Read on to learn more about how administrators can facilitate a successful experience for these novice teachers.

#### **Making Assignments**

Teachers who volunteer to co-teach or to serve on teams tend to be more satisfied and successful than teachers who are assigned. Teachers also express

more satisfaction with compatible teaching mates.

Principals make decisions about novice special education teachers' assignments. If a school practices co-teaching or team teaching, principals should consider which co-teachers or teams of teachers will be willing to support and work well with a novice special education teacher. The assignment of new teachers requires careful monitoring to achieve compatibility and to support their success in teaming situations. Although veteran team teachers might be in the position to serve as natural mentors, they also may develop negative feelings about their role if they consistently are assigned to work with new teachers.

## Addressing Inclusion

Special education issues related to inclusion are likely to surface as sources of tension and conflict when teachers initially engage in collaboration as members of professional learning communities. School leaders should anticipate this possibility and focus on developing a shared vision of inclusion a major focus for staff.

Making the issue of educating all students, including those with disabilities, a public, schoolwide issue may initially create conflict and tension. However, doing so may be necessary to assist teachers in accepting their responsibility for educating all students.

In schools that explicitly make the learning of students with disabilities a central value and a shared commitment, special education teachers may play a variety of

roles to support student learning. With the larger context of inclusive practices in place in a school, novice special education teachers may experience less ambiguity about their roles and more acceptance as full members of the school community.

## Encouraging Parity

In co-teaching and team teaching contexts, special education teachers often act in a subordinate role, serving as assistants rather than being fully engaged in instruction. Even when they do play a substantive instructional role—for example, leading small-group instruction, sharing responsibility for large-group instruction, managing peer tutoring, etc.—it is uncommon for them to provide specially designed instruction for students with disabilities.

The potential of co-teaching and team teaching to enhance instructional innovation in the classroom is diminished when special education teachers are relegated to a subordinate role. When the role of these novice teachers is only to assist, two things may happen. On the one hand, observing a general education teacher on a daily basis can be a useful form of professional development. This is especially the case in relation to learning academic content, which typically is limited in special education preservice programs. On the other hand, when novice special education teachers assist in the classrooms of teachers who are not high-quality role models for instruction, novice teachers do not gain knowledge

## ◎◎ Sightings

Adequate, joint planning time is essential to the success of co-teaching and team teaching. If veteran teachers are feeling constrained by insufficient time, novices may experience even greater constraints. The absence of sufficient planning time can result in one teacher—usually the novice—serving in a subordinate role.



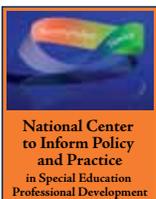
or develop a realistic sense of their teaching role.

When novice special education teachers lack content expertise they tend to be assigned to subordinate roles. Special education teachers who have adequate content expertise tend to assume greater instructional responsibility. Principals can support these novice teachers by providing them with professional development opportunities that help them to develop content expertise and to match them in contexts where they have demonstrated expertise.

**Learn More.** This Brief summarizes select findings from a comprehensive review of the literature:

Pugach, M. C., Blanton, L. P., Correa, V. I., McLeskey, J., & Langley, L. K. (2009). *The role of collaboration in supporting the induction and retention of new special education teachers.* (NCIPP Doc. No. RS-2). Gainesville, FL: University of Florida, National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP).

It is available on the NCIPP website at [www.ncipp.org](http://www.ncipp.org).



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