

Induction Insights



Supporting Special Education Teachers–Teacher Educators [TEII-6]

Co-Teaching and Team Teaching

Promising Practices for Special Education Teacher Induction

Briefly...

Co-teaching and team teaching represent collaborative opportunities that can counteract the historic isolation of special education teachers. They also have the potential for supporting novice teacher socialization in the school setting. More knowledge is needed to realize the benefit of these approaches in the context of induction. This Brief outlines several areas of inquiry that teacher educators may pursue in advancing the knowledge base.

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. Although co-teaching and team teaching—both well recognized forms of teacher collaboration—are not typically thought of in relationship to 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 ben-

eficial, 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.

Although much has been written about co-teaching and team teaching, there is a need for inquiry into the potential of these approaches to support induction for novice special education teachers. Teacher educators are in a unique position to investigate these collaborative approaches as they help prepare pre-service special education teachers. Read on to learn more about the specific challenges related to engaging novice special education teachers in collaborative teaching partnerships.

Challenge: Assigning Novice Teachers to Teams

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.

However, in most cases, principals make decisions about novice special education teachers' assignments. The challenge for principals is to determine 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 of serving as natural mentors, they also may develop negative feelings about their role if they consistently are assigned to work with new teachers.

Challenge: Addressing Inclusion

Special education issues related to inclusion are likely to surface as sources of tension and conflict when schools develop professional learning communities for collaboration. Making the issue of educating all students, including those with disabilities, a 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.

◎◎ Consider This...

The induction experiences of novice special education teachers have not been a focal point for research on co-teaching or team teaching. Possibilities for future research that aligns co-teaching and team teaching with induction include:

- Comparisons of the experiences of novice special education teachers who volunteer and those who are assigned to co-teaching or team teaching settings.
- Comparisons of the experiences of novice special education teachers and team teachers in strong and weak collaborative school cultures.
- Studies of the various sources of support valued by novice special education teachers who are co-teaching or team teaching.
- Studies of how novices who are co-teaching or team teaching implement curricular and instructional innovations.
- Comparisons of student learning in co-teaching and team teaching settings.
- Descriptions and comparisons of the early experiences of novice special education teachers who co-teach compared with those who team teach.



Challenge: 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.

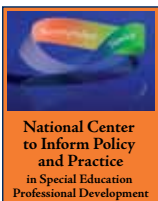
The potential of co-teaching and team teaching to enhance instructional innovation in the classroom is diminished when special education teachers are relegated to a subordinate role. When novice special education teachers lack content

expertise they tend to be assigned to subordinate roles. Special education teachers who have adequate content expertise tend to assume greater instructional responsibility.

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.



This Brief is part of a series designed to help special education teachers during their initial years in the profession. The National Center to Inform Policy and Practice in Special Education Professional Development (NCIPP) is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education (cooperative agreement # H325Q070002). Bonnie Jones is the OSEP Project Officer. Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Education. NCIPP aims to inform special education policy and practice by examining and recommending those policies and practices that improve the retention and quality of beginning special education teachers. There are no copyright restrictions on this document; however, please use proper citation. The Briefs were produced by Warger, Eavy and Associates.

© 2010 NCIPP. University of Florida, 360 Norman Hall, P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611 • (352) 273-4259 • ncipp@coe.ufl.edu

