

Using Action Based Research to Examine the Effects of Co-Teaching on Middle School and High School Student Achievement in Math and Language Arts

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Abstract : Students with special needs are expected to achieve the same academic standards as their general education peers, yet many students with special needs are pulled-out of general content instruction. Because of this, many students with special needs are denied content knowledge from a content expert and instead receive content instruction in a more restrictive setting. Collaborative teaching, where a general education and special education teacher work alongside each other in the same classroom, has become increasingly popular as a means to meet the diverse needs of students in America's public schools. The idea behind co-teaching is noble; to ensure students with special needs receive content area instruction from a content expert while also receiving the necessary supports to be successful. However, in spite of this noble effort, the effects of co-teaching are not always positive. The reasons why have produced several hypotheses, one of which has to do with lack of proper training and implementation of effective evidence-based co-teaching practices. In order to examine the effects of co-teacher training, eleven teaching pairs from a small mid-western school district in the United States participated in a study. The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of co-teacher training on middle and high school student achievement in Math and Language Arts. A local university instructor provided teachers with training in co-teaching via a three-day workshop. In addition, co-teaching pairs were given the opportunity for direct observation and feedback using the Co-teaching Core Competencies Observation Checklist throughout the academic year. Data are in the process of being collected on both the students enrolled in the co-taught classes as well as on the teachers themselves. Student data compared achievement on standardized assessments and classroom performance across three domains: 1. General education students compared to students with special needs in co-taught classrooms, 2. Students with special needs in classrooms with and without co-teaching, 3. Students in classrooms where teachers were given observation and feedback compared to teachers who refused the observation and feedback. Teacher data compared the perceptions of the co-teaching initiative between teacher pairs who received direct observation and feedback from those who did not. The findings from the study will be shared with the school district and used for program improvement.

Keywords : collaborative teaching, collaboration, co-teaching, professional development

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