COLLABORATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CLASSROOMS

by

Michelle L Bergin

A Field Study Submitted
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of

Master of Science in Education
Special Education

at

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Oshkosh WI 54901-8621

July 2020

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

Advisor

8/7/2020 Date Approved

Member

8/7/2020 Date Approved
Abstract

Inclusion in the regular education setting can involve adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. Educators need to remember that some students with and without a disability will fall below expectations and require interventions, through the Response to Intervention process. Educators need to know what to do and how to support these students. One approach to achieve the notion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment is a collaborative teaching model with a regular education teacher and special education teacher. In this study, an investigation was conducted in the integrated 4K classrooms in one district in a north central state. The survey results showed the participants valued collaboration as consistent and frequent conversation. All of the participants noted how they gained development and training in a collaborative setting. The participants shared how they value each other in the classroom by including the strategies and supports they both have learned over the years. It was found that flexibility is one quality that is absolutely necessary for an effective teaching team. The survey results also showed how the participants work together to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. In fact, determining the best approaches and accommodations to help all of the students be successful.
# Table of Contents

Abstract 1
Table of Contents 2
Chapter 1 Introduction of Collaboration 4
  Definitions 5
  Overview of Study 6
Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature 8
  Inclusion in a Regular Education Setting 8
  Co-teaching Methods 11
  Teaching Role Clarification 13
  Preparation Stage: Teaching, Application, and Planning 14
  Challenges to Co-teaching 15
  Perceptions of Inclusion 16
  Universal Strategies and Services Provided 18
  Summary 19
Chapter 3 Methodology 20
  Setting and Participants 20
  Design 21
    Survey development. 22
    Procedure. 25
    Analysis of Data 25
Chapter 4 Results 28
  Participants 28
  Coding Process 29
  Collaboration 29
  Training and Background 30
  Roles and Responsibilities 31
  Universal Strategies 32
  Summary 33
Chapter 5 Analysis 34
  Findings 34
  Similarities 35
Differences
Strengths and Limitations
Future Practitioners
Future Research
References
Appendix A – Consent Document
Appendix B Qualtrics Survey
Chapter 1 Introduction of Collaboration

Education evolves over time and can result in changes and modifications to the classroom. These changes are to support the students better and promote all ways of learning. The U.S. Congress authorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to enforce the notion that students with disabilities should have access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment (Damore & Murray, 2009). Least restrictive environment means the student with a disability learns in an environment with peers, both with and without disabilities, spending as much time as possible with their peers who do not receive special education services. The regular education classroom looks different and continues to change from each school. In some classrooms, there is a regular education teacher and special education teacher teaching in a collaborative approach. The collaborative approach supports inclusion by using one of the six co-teaching methods.

Inclusion in the regular education setting can involve adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. The flow and design of a working classroom with two teachers can come in many variations. Shamberger and Friend (2013) define collaboration as a style of interpersonal interactions that prioritizes effective communication, active listening, problem solving, and teaming in order to strengthen and maintain dynamic professional relationships. Both teachers should establish open communication regarding their roles and responsibilities in the room (Solis, M., Vaughn, S., Swanson, E., Mcculley, L., Stormont, M., Thomas, C., & Van Garderen, D., 2012). The teachers might have to attend separate trainings and requirements depending on their teacher label. Similarly, general education teachers do not have enough expertise and training on inclusion models, special education, and differentiated instruction (Solis, M., Vaughn, S., Swanson, E., Mcculley, L., Stormont, M., Thomas, C., & Van
Garderen, D., 2012). See chapter two for more specific information regarding inclusive practice and co-teaching.

Definitions

There are several key terms relevant to this research. The key terms are related to keywords for special education as well as service delivery methods. The key terms are inclusion, mainstreaming, co-teaching, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). When the terms are used throughout the chapters, the abbreviations will be used. There are many definitions to the terms, however, the definitions listed here will be the term meaning in the research.

There are two different kinds of service delivery for special education. The first service delivery method is that all kinds of students receive academic curriculum in the same setting. Likewise, inclusion is defined as “students with disabilities receive their entire academic curriculum in the general education program” (Idol, 2006, p. 78). The second service delivery method is dependent on the student’s needs and services per outlined in the student’s Individualized Education Plan. Mainstreaming is defined as “when students with disabilities spend a portion of their school day in the general education classroom and a portion in a separate special education program” (Idol, 2006, p. 78).

Co-teaching is defined “as the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students” (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010, p. 11). The special education and regular education teachers work together in the same classroom to provide instruction and curriculum delivery for all students. Department of Instruction states “co-teaching is sharing equal responsibility for planning, delivering, evaluating instruction, and learning to meet the diverse needs of students in a shared space” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2019).
An Individualized Education Plan, IEP, “serves as a plan to support the student with a disability based on their needs and level of support” (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain & Shamberger, 2010, p. 13).

Least Restrictive Environment, LRE, means “students who receive special education services should learn in a least restrictive environment and spend as much time as possible with their regular education peers in the classroom” (Shamberger & Friend, 2013, p. 122).

Overview of Study

Inclusion in the regular education setting can involve adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. Educators need to remember that some students with and without a disability will fall below expectations and require interventions, through the Response to Intervention process. Educators need to know what to do and how to support these students. One approach to achieve the notion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment is a collaborative teaching model with a regular education teacher and special education teacher. In this study, an investigation will be conducted in the integrated 4K classrooms in one district in a north central state. The purpose was to find strategies and techniques for an effective collaboration and co-teaching approach in a regular education setting.

What teaching strategies and collaborative techniques are used to best support an inclusive early childhood classroom?

Research was conducted in two integrated 4K classrooms in one district in a north central state. The selected two integrated classrooms had both a regular and special education teacher full-time in the classroom. The design used a qualitative method by use of a survey. According to Landrum (2013), “as an education researcher, the survey method is a popular approach if one wants to know about the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or perceptions” (p. 125). With an online
survey, there is no possible way to skip a question. The online survey program, Qualtrics, will be used for collecting the data and assistance with analyzing the information. This program was chosen to assist the data as preferred to use with University graduate programs. Additionally, this program was user friendly and sent the participants a link to complete the survey. Please read chapter 3 for additional information regarding the setting and participants, design, survey, procedure, and analysis of data.

The survey results showed the participants valued collaboration as consistent and frequent conversation. All of the participants noted how they gained the development and training in a collaborative setting. The participants shared how they value each other in the classroom by including the strategies and supports they both have learned over the years. Please read chapter 4 for additional information on the results regarding the participants, coding process, collaboration, training and background, roles and responsibilities, and universal strategies.

The field report had a primary focus on the early childhood level with inclusive 4K classrooms. In addition, the participants have worked alongside another teacher with plenty of expertise and advice for newer teachers. The participation was a strength as 75% of the participants completed the survey. For future practitioners, teachers should find ways to use effective communication in the collaboration classroom. This can be done by setting a specific time to communicate about lessons and instruction before and after class. Please refer to chapter 5 for more information regarding the discussion of findings, similarities and differences, strengths and limitations, recommendations for practitioners, and future research.
Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature

Special education has transformed over the years in terms of how students with disabilities are being educated. Students with disabilities are legally required to access and participate in the general education curriculum as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act in 2004 and No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 (Idol, 2006). Furthermore, “students with disabilities should have a specially designed education program planned to address their unique needs as described in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975” (Idol, 2006, p. 77).

After years of reform, students receiving special education services with their Individual Education Program have modifications and adaptations made to the general education curriculum. Indeed, these modifications and adaptations do allow access and participation to the general education curriculum regardless of their ability level. Instruction of the general education curriculum is the focus on how students learn, from either the regular education teacher or special education teacher or both, learning goals, and service delivery.

Service delivery methods come in a variety of forms as the student with a disability is in their least restrictive environment. Least restrictive environment means the student with a disability learns in an environment with peers, both with and without disabilities, spending as much time with their peers who do not receive special education services as possible. The regular education classroom looks different and continues to change from each school. In some classrooms, there is a regular education teacher and special education teacher teaching in a collaborative approach. The collaborative approach supports inclusion by using one, or more, of the six co-teaching methods (Shamberger & Friend, 2013).

Inclusion in a Regular Education Setting
Inclusion in the regular education setting can involve adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. The flow and design of a working classroom with two teachers can come in many variations. Shamberger and Friend (2013) define collaboration as a style of interpersonal interactions that prioritizes effective communication, active listening, problem solving, and teaming in order to strengthen and maintain dynamic professional relationships. "Co-teaching is the most effective when it is an integral component of a school’s efforts to provide all students with the education they are entitled to [sic.]" (Friend, 2007, p. 49). The U.S. Congress authorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to enforce the notion that students with disabilities should have access to the general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment (Damore & Murray, 2009).

In particular, there are two terms to understand first: inclusion and mainstreaming. Inclusion is defined as students with disabilities receiving their entire academic curriculum in the general education setting with their nondisabled peers (Idol, 2006). The other term, mainstreaming, is defined as students with disabilities spending a portion of their school day in the general education classroom and a portion in a separate special education program (Idol, 2006). Some schools are relying on resource and other models of instruction for special education services that provide support outside of the general education classroom. Special education support services can be classified as resource room or special education counseling (Gürtir & Uzuner, 2010). Both inclusion and mainstreaming have similar teaching methods of collaboration. The intent of the service delivery method is for staff to work collaboratively and to support students.

In 2009, the Common Core State Standards, CCSS, were launched in the United States (McHatton & Parker, 2013). The CCSS are a set of standards that students need in English
language arts and mathematics to be successful in college, career, and life (McHatton & Parker, 2013). These standards are listed for each grade level with progression and building skills at each year. Moreover, the shift to CCSS resulted in a push for increased student learning. As a result, education evolved to higher expectations in the classroom and student outcomes. School districts want to achieve high national and state averages on standardized testing and that resulted in an increase in the demands and pressures on teachers (Naraian & Oyler, 2014).

One approach to achieve the ideal of students with disabilities learning alongside their peers without disabilities, in the least restrictive environment is a collaborative teaching model. Co-teaching is defined as the special education teacher and regular education teacher working together in the same classroom to provide instruction and curriculum delivery for all students. In fact, “school administrators rate collaborative teaching as being a highly effective strategy for supporting students with disabilities in general education environments and teachers perceive this practice as positively contributing to the academic and social development of students” (Damore & Murray, 2009, p. 234).

Inclusion in the regular education setting can involve adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. However, not all educators feel they can adapt their teaching instruction to meet the needs of all students. In fact, “approximately 50% of educators indicated that they were only somewhat comfortable or not comfortable in adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with learning disabilities” (Damore & Murray, 2009, p. 235). This study was completed ten years ago; hopefully, more educators feel comfortable in adapting their teaching instruction from trainings and practice with inclusion. As teachers begin to have more practice with inclusion, their acceptance and tolerance of students with disabilities in their classrooms seems to improve (Idol, 2006). Educators become more skilled and confident
with their delivery of instruction to students on various levels. Educators need to remember that some students without a disability will fall below expectations and need additional interventions. Educators need to know what to do and how to support these students. Teachers should be encouraged to accept that not all students in a classroom will be working at exactly the same academic level, whether there are students with disabilities or not (Idol, 2006).

Co-teaching Methods

Co-teaching methods are dependent on school funds and teaching staff. According to Obiakor, F., Harris, M., Mutua, K., Rotatori, A., & Algozzine, B. (2012), “collaboration within inclusive settings are [sic.] described as co-teaching and there are five evidenced based models of co-teaching” (p. 483). The first model is called *one teach, one assist.* According to Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, (2010), “one teacher leads instruction while the other circulates among the students offering individual assistance” (p. 12). This model has one teacher providing instruction for all students and the other teacher providing assistance to students who need additional support. Both the regular education teacher and special education teacher can flip roles in providing instruction and assistance to the students. This model supports students with disabilities and students without disabilities who need additional support for understanding the material. This model benefits all students.

The second model is called *station teaching.* “Instruction is divided into three non-sequential parts and students, likewise divided into three groups, rotate from station to station, being taught by the teachers at two stations and working independently at the third” (Friend et. al., 2010, p. 12). Two groups work with a teacher as one group works independently and then rotate to another station after a specific amount of time (Obiakor et. al., 2012).
The third model is called parallel teaching. This model has both teachers plan lessons together, split the students into two groups, and then provide the same exact lesson within the small groups of students in the same classroom (Obiakor et. al., 2012). This model also benefits from small group instruction. It should be noted this model is praised because it encourages teachers to collaborate and learn from each other's expertise and grows in their own areas of development.

The fourth model is called alternative teaching. This model has “one teacher works with most students while the other works with a small group for remediation, enrichment, assessment, pre-teaching, or another purpose” (Friend et. al., 2010, p. 12).

The fifth model is called team teaching. This model encourages “both teachers [to] lead large-group instruction by both lecturing, representing opposing views in a debate, illustrating two ways to solve a problem” (Friend et. al., 2010, p. 12). One of the benefits of team teaching is that all students have the same access to each teacher at the same time in the general education classroom (Obiakor et. al., 2012).

Another approach is one teach, one observe co-teaching method. According to Friend et. al. (2010), “one teacher leads large-group instruction while the other gathers academic, behavioral, or social data on specific students or the class group” (p. 12). This is for gathering data and analyzing information together after the instruction is delivered.
Teaching Role Clarification

After teachers are placed in a co-teaching classroom, there are several specifics upon which both instructors must agree. The typical job description for each teacher is written out in the employee handbook. According to Gürür and Uzuner (2010), “classroom teachers have a tendency to retain primary responsibilities in the class” (p. 320). This tendency could cause the special education teacher to feel less welcome and be seen as a visitor in the classroom.

Shamberger and Friend (2013) define collaboration as a style of interpersonal interactions that prioritize effective communication, active listening, problem solving and teaming in order to strengthen and maintain dynamic professional relationships. Both teachers should establish an open communication line regarding their roles and responsibilities in the room (Solis, M., Vaughn, S., Swanson, E., McCulley, L., Stormont, M., Thomas, C., & Van Garderen, D., 2012). The teachers might have to attend separate trainings and requirements depending on their teacher label. Similarly, general education teachers do not have enough expertise and training on inclusion models, special education, and differentiated instruction (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012).

“Across the inclusion and co-teaching literature, teachers consistently reported the need for structured planning time for all personnel involved in instruction” (Solis, M., Vaughn, S., Swanson, E., McCulley, L., Stormont, M., Thomas, C., & Van Garderen, D. 2012, p. 505). Another key to teacher satisfaction and success in co-teaching is to set planning meetings weekly. “More time in the school day would allow teachers increased opportunities to talk with each other formally and informally to share ideas, goals, and responsibilities (Shamberger and Friend, 2010, p. 125). These planning meetings are designed for communicating lessons, delivery methods, data collecting, supporting specific students, consulting students, instructional
tools, assessment methods, and so on. The planning meetings needs to be set and rescheduled if cancelled. In fact, “planning meetings were stated to be important to clearly determine the roles and responsibilities of each teacher” (Gürür & Uzuner, 2010, p. 317).

In some classrooms, there could be more professionals such as related service providers and support staff working with the students. A paraprofessional might be in the classroom assisting one or more particular students with a disability. A speech and language pathologist could be delivering their services to another group of students in the classroom. Another group of professionals, occupational and physical therapists join the classroom at various times to work with their students on their caseloads. And finally interpreters could also be in the classroom assisting dual language learners. However, the focus is on the regular education teacher and special education teacher for this literature review.

**Preparation Stage: Teaching, Application, and Planning**

After the teacher role clarification process is complete, the next stage labeled *preparation* takes place. The *preparation stage* includes the teaching, application, and planning stages of a co-teaching classroom. It was found that special education teachers have more contact than regular education teachers with students with special needs (Gürür & Uzuner, 2010). Therefore, special education teachers need additional information regarding the general education program and more time for planning. The special education teacher writes the student’s goals on the IEP, which are aligned to the curriculum and Common Core State Standards.

The teaching role in the preparation stage is focused on both the regular education and special education teachers. Both teachers must receive training on topics such as inclusion, special education support services, and cooperative skills (Gürür & Uzuner, 2010). Again, these teachers in a co-teaching approach, must designate a time for both co-planning and reflection.
meetings. The classroom environment plays a crucial role to the success of the co-teaching team. The classroom must be arranged to support all students. The teachers must be willing to work with and learn from each other (McHatton & Parker, 2013). Furthermore, both teachers need to communicate their ideas and teaching strategies with accepting criticism from one another. Most importantly, the teachers must be willing to make changes to their teaching strategies in order to support all of the students in their classroom. When a lesson plan doesn’t work out, the teachers must brainstorm the reasons why it didn’t work and find an alternative way to re-teach the lesson.

Both regular and special educators must be adequately prepared to teach students with diverse needs and abilities (Hanson, M., Horn, E., Sandall, S., Beckman, P., Morgan, M., Marquart, J., Chou, H.Y., 2001). Regular educators need to know their students’ abilities, learning needs, and when and how to ask for assistance. Both teachers need to remember this task is a shared responsibility and includes all students. Universities are making changes to their teacher education program. In fact, the essential components needed to prepare future teachers include: constructing a positive image of inclusive practice, valuing a family-centered approach, and collaborating and developing relationships across the disciplines (Silver, Hong, & Trepanier-Street, 2010). Supporting inclusive classroom practices during the teacher preparation program will promote effective teachers needed in the education field and in our classrooms.

**Challenges to Co-teaching**

Teachers face many challenges. However, there are even more challenges to address in a co-teaching situation. Even if there are funds to pay two educators for a co-teaching classroom, it goes beyond just the pay scale. Additional training is needed for both educators as well as administrators. Researchers have observed that structural and procedural challenges related to
scheduled teacher planning time, high caseloads for special educators, and poor administrative support are persistent problems (Damore & Murray, 2009). These persistent problems can have negative effects on collaborative teaching and the co-teaching pair. Another challenge is the misunderstanding of role. Damore and Murray (2009) reported that secondary general educators have a limited understanding on the roles and how to setup a co-teaching atmosphere. Teachers may feel they are the primary people responsible for a successful inclusive classroom.

Another key piece to a successful classroom is the relationship between the co-teaching pair. This is crucial in all of the co-teaching methods. One reason for failure stems from teachers who still cannot work harmoniously with one another. Teachers may have different personalities and cultural backgrounds that make it difficult to come to unity and blend their ideas together. Teachers must see and understand the way each of them teaches and respect their teaching beliefs and strategies.

Perceptions of Inclusion

Special education has reformed into a new approach. Unfortunately, “parents and guardians could have had negative school experiences” (Shamberger & Friend, 2010, p. 126). Special education has received many negative labels in our society. Parents of a child with a disability might be wary of inclusion and what that might look like for their child. This has continued to have a negative effect and attitudes on new and experienced teachers (Shamberger & Friend, 2010). Regular education teachers might struggle with how to handle a student who is displaying negative behaviors, difficulty in completing classroom tasks, or self-regulating. The regular education teacher might quickly call another adult for assistance instead of handling the situation himself or herself. In addition, some teachers prefer self-contained special education classes over inclusion for service delivery (Idol, 2006). On the other hand, administrators who
favor inclusion may feel it would be best implemented if extra staff were available to with any student needing assistance, with and without disabilities (McHatton & Parker, 2013). After training, consultation, collaboration, and problem solving, teachers may lower their anxiety level and facilitate positive shifts towards inclusion.

Parents have a role in determining their child’s placement for school. During the IEP meeting, the team discusses the placement options they offer within the school district. Students should be placed in the least restrictive placement. With inclusion, families may place more emphasis on issues related to the children’s academic skills and fitting into the classroom (Hanson et. al., 2001). A student may need time away from the general education classroom due to noise level. As the nation’s population becomes more diverse, educational services must be modified and adapted to ensure that all students and families have access to information and culturally responsive practices in order to allow their full participation (Hanson et. al., 2001).

Teachers have varied views about inclusion. Studies date back to 1996 that document teacher resistance and cite a lack of skills necessary to teach students with disabilities (Minke & Bear, 1996). Some educators may feel they are unprepared to teach students with disabilities. In addition to lack of preparation, low self-evaluations and teaching efficacy among the regular education teachers displayed inappropriateness of placing students with learning and behavior problems into regular classroom (Minke & Bear, 1996). In another article, the research reported teachers lack the necessary skills for adapting and modifying the curriculum to meet the special educational and social emotional needs of students with disabilities while providing a quality education program for non-disabled students (Silverman, Hong, & Trepanier-Street, 2010). Teachers understood the benefits of an inclusive classroom, but struggled to take the necessary steps to fully implement the appropriate modifications in the environment. In numerous reports,
teachers and school administrators reported that they support the idea of inclusion (Damore & Murray, 2009). The teachers faced challenges due to their inability to individualize instruction and facilitate positive interactions within the classroom (Silverman, Hong, & Trepanier-Street, 2010). It is critical that future teachers have courses designated to build their knowledge base, skills, and strategies to meet the needs of all students.

Universal Strategies and Services Provided

Educators already use many universal strategies aimed to benefit all students. As educators and administers move towards using more inclusive classrooms, they often discover these strategies work with students who are at risk, have disabilities, and do not have disabilities. According to Idol, “it is important to monitor how many other students in their classroom are benefiting from the strategies that the special education consulting teachers and the classroom teachers developed for students with disabilities” (2006, p. 92). The special education teacher or professional as described in the student’s IEP delivers the services provided. As the student with the IEP receives the services, the professional might use peer models for assistance in achieving the student’s social or play goal.

Teachers should continue to hold students to high expectations. Effective leaders must create inclusive cultures of success that encourage teachers and service providers to be effective (Obiakor et. al., 2012). Effective teachers should believe all students are capable of academic success and involve students in decisions about their progress made in class. This holds true for students with disabilities when determining progress made on IEP goals. Realistically, younger students might not communicate the progress made. Parents of younger students can advocate and communicate improvements they have seen at home. Older students can communicate their progress and reflect with a portfolio.
Summary

Co-teaching is defined as the special education teacher and regular education teacher working together in the same classroom to provide instruction and curriculum delivery for all students. Inclusion in the regular education setting is adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. Co-teaching methods are dependent on school funds and teaching staff. The co-teaching method, *one teach, one assist*, is commonly used in integrated 4K classrooms. This model has one teacher providing instruction for all students and the other teacher providing assistance to students who need additional support. Both the regular education teacher and special education teacher can flip roles in providing instruction and assistance to the students. This model supports students with disabilities and students without disabilities who need additional support for understanding the material. This model benefits all students. As this study moves forward, it is important to look at the key aspects to a successful co-teaching environment.

Given the literature reviewed relating to co-teaching and collaboration, there is a need for a closer look at early childhood programs with inclusive settings. In addition, there have been many studies focused on rural and urban school districts as a whole. Many studies have focused on perceptions of inclusion and challenges to collaboration and inclusion. There have not been many studies for specialized classroom settings such as an integrated 4K classroom with both a regular education and special education teacher. More specifically, a study has not been completed in a classroom with two teachers who spend 100% in the same classroom. This study is focused on the co-teaching and effectiveness of collaboration rather than inclusion. What teaching strategies and collaborative techniques are used to best support an inclusive early childhood classroom?
Chapter 3 Methodology

This study focused on co-teaching and the effectiveness of collaboration. The specific question that was investigated, “What teaching strategies and collaborative techniques are used to support an inclusive early childhood classroom?” There was a need for a closer look at inclusive early childhood programs. Many studies focused on rural and urban school districts as a whole. Often, these studies focused on perceptions of inclusion and challenges to collaboration and inclusion (Damore & Murray, 2009). There have not been many studies for specialized classroom settings such as an integrated 4K classroom with both a regular education and special education teacher. More specifically, there was a lack of studies for classrooms with two teachers who spend 100% of their teaching time in the same classroom.

Setting and Participants

Research was conducted in two integrated 4K classrooms in one district in a north-central state. The selected two integrated classrooms have both a regular and special education teacher full-time in the classroom. Additionally, both teachers are certified with their teaching licensure through the State Department of Education. The regular education teachers have licensure in early childhood. The special education teachers have licensure in early childhood special education. All of the participants have completed their bachelor’s program and some have continued with their master’s program. Furthermore, the teachers spend 100% of their time in the classroom as their teaching assignment.

The classrooms have a morning and afternoon session. Each session was setup with twenty-two students in total. There are eight students with IEPs and the remaining fourteen are regular education students. The integrated 4K classrooms followed the district’s curriculum and used Teaching Strategies Gold for assessments throughout the school year. The 4K curriculum
was aligned with the State Early Learning Standards and the Common Core State Standards for Kindergarten. In order to gather consent from the participants, a formal letter was provided with an explanation of the research. In addition to the formal letter, the first question in the survey asked for permission from the participants to give consent for their role in the research. See appendix A for the Consent to Participate and appendix B for the Qualtrics Survey.

Each classroom was given a letter to determine their group name as well as the teachers will have the same letter after their title of profession. For example, Group A had a regular education teacher with a label as RET-A to show the regular education teacher is associated with Group A. This was used for tracking and coding the participants to keep their information and identity confidential.

Group A:
- Regular Education Teacher (RET-A) and Special Education Teacher (SET-A)

Group B:
- Regular Education Teacher (RET-B) and Special Education Teacher (SET-B)

**Design**

The design was a qualitative method by use of a survey. According to Landrum (2013), "the survey method is a popular approach if one wants to know about the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or perceptions" (p. 125). The online survey offered easy and inexpensive distribution to individuals via email and guides the participant through the survey by filling out a form (Landrum, 2013). With an online survey and settings, the participants were not able to skip a question. The online survey program, Qualtrics, was used for collecting the data and assisting with analysis of the information. Additionally, this program was user friendly, sending the
participants a link to complete the survey. Qualtrics notified the researcher of the completed surveys at which point the analysis began.

**Survey development.**

Additional studies pointed to particular questions regarding other important topics for inclusion such as allocated time for collaboration, teaching strategies, communication, challenges, and strengths, and weaknesses. *A Meta-Analysis of Co-Teaching Research* by Wendy Weichel Murawski and H. Lee Swanson (2001) questioned the amount of time for collaboration per week. This study indicated that my research project needed to ask teachers about collaboration time per week and how often. Question #2 ---in this survey, addressed collaboration time. Another survey by Sharon J. Damore and Christopher Murray (2009), researched the perceptions of collaboration, teachers' views on collaboration, and what is needed to ensure effective collaborative teaching in the classroom. Damore and Murray’s (2009) research informed the development of questions 3 and 4. Damore and Murray’s survey also contained question #2 that asked how to ensure an effective collaborative teaching style that the teacher used. This field report focused on the teachers in the classroom with primary focus on how the teachers interact and communicate with one another. Another field report on collaboration could have a focus on family-centered approaches, however, this survey did not have questions on family-centered approaches.

The survey questions were written first to have the participants give consent for participating in the study. The following three questions were written to gather information about the teacher for their role and length of time they have worked with their colleague. These questions were asked not only to gather information, but to find out continuity and longevity of the teams.
Question 5 was geared towards teaching strategies the teacher uses to accommodate and support all learners. This question focuses on inclusion based on actions and strategies from the teacher. Most importantly, the teachers must be willing to make changes to their teaching strategies in order to support all of the students in their classroom. When a lesson plan doesn’t work out, the teachers must brainstorm the reasons why it didn’t work and find an alternative way to re-teach the lesson. Both regular and special educators must be adequately prepared to teach students with diverse needs and abilities (Hanson et. al., 2001). Both teachers must receive training on topics such as inclusion, special education support services, and cooperative skills (Gürür & Uzuner, 2010).

Question 6 gathered more information on the team and collaborative approaches. “Across the inclusion and co-teaching literature, teachers consistently reported the need for structured planning time for all personnel involved in instruction” (Solis, Waugh, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012, p. 505). Regular educators need to know their students’ abilities, learning needs, and when and how to ask for assistance from the team approach. Likewise, both teachers need to remember this task is a shared responsibility and includes all students from collaborative approaches to the classroom. Supporting inclusive classroom practices and collaborative approaches during the teacher preparation program promote effective teachers needed in the education field and in our classrooms. This is crucial to find out the successes of a co-teaching team in an integrated 4K classroom.

Question 7 and 8 are focused on classroom management as challenges and conflicts arise in the classroom. The goal of these questions was to find out techniques the teachers use in their inclusive classrooms. “More time in the school day would allow teachers increased opportunities to talk with each other formally and informally to share ideas, goals, and responsibilities
(Shamberger and Friend, 2010, p. 125). Studies date back to 1996 that document teacher
resistance and cite a lack of skills necessary to teach students with disabilities (Minke & Bear, 1996). Some educators may feel they are unprepared to teach students with disabilities. In
addition to lack of preparation, low self-evaluations and teaching efficacy among the regular
education teachers displayed inappropriateness of placing students with learning and behavior
problems into regular classroom (Minke & Bear, 1996). In another article, the research reported
teachers lack the necessary skills for adapting and modifying the curriculum to meet the special
educational and social emotional needs of students with disabilities while providing a quality
education program for non-disabled students (Silverman, Hong, & Trepanier-Street, 2010).

Question 9 asked about communication used between the team members. The planning
meetings need to be set and rescheduled if cancelled. In fact, “planning meetings were stated to
be important to clearly determine the roles and responsibilities of each teacher” (Gürür &
Uzuner, 2010, p. 317). The teachers must be willing to work with and learn from each other
(McHatton & Parker, 2013). Furthermore, both teachers need to communicate their ideas and
teaching strategies with accepting criticism from one another. Most importantly, the teachers
must be willing to make changes to their teaching strategies in order to support all of the students
in their classroom.

Lastly, the final question was open-ended for the participant to include any information
they would like to add. It was crucial to use a variety of questions to address the research
question. The State Department of Education website for co-teaching contains an implementation
checklist for co-teaching teams. On the checklist, various questions were asked about planning
for instruction, instruction to support student learning and achievement, and assessment of
student learning. Responses were given on a rating scale of never, rarely, sometimes, often
and collaborative approaches. Likewise, the analysis by the researcher identified any patterns that exist in the verbal responses (Landrum, 2013).

Delamont (1992) recommends to index your data as you go and to generate themes and categories as you collect the data. “Read the methodological literature properly and think about how it can inform your work” (Delamont, 1992, p. 151). A colleague from the University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh assisted in analyzing the surveys. This supported and provided inter-rater reliability in the analysis. Coding was done by using a shared word document. There were no other computer programs that assisted with analyzing the open-ended questions. Delamont (1992) recommends using multiple codings to the data with colored pens or highlighters, make several copies of the answers to the surveys, and to index the data. For large surveys, Delamont (1992) advises researchers to sort the data into files. However, this survey and participants are on a smaller scale and filing was not necessary. Coding the data showed the similarities of the answers from the surveys. On the other hand, Stake (1995) points out that you should rely on the coded data and interpretation directly from observation. In fact, “most case study reports present both coded data and direct interpretation but one or the other usually bears the conceptual load” (Stake, 1995, p. 29).

After the initial coding of participants’ answers by the researcher and a second coder, a meeting was held to discuss the similarities and differences. The themes were discussed and narrowed down into four themes for this field study. The common themes were collaboration, training and background, roles and responsibilities, and universal strategies. The responses from the questions didn’t just answer the question. The responses provided insight of the classroom with characteristics and descriptions of the themes. The researcher and colleague went back to recode the answers a second time. After completing the coding process, a second meeting was
held to discuss the similarities and differences from coding with a full agreement on the results.

The results from the themes follow in chapter 4.
Chapter 4 Results

Inclusion in the regular education setting can involve adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. Educators need to remember that some students with and without a disability will fall below expectations and require interventions, through the Response to Intervention process. Educators need to know what to do and how to support these students. One approach to achieve the notion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment is a collaborative teaching model with a regular education teacher and special education teacher. The purpose of this study was to find strategies and techniques for effective collaboration and co-teaching approaches in a regular education setting. What teaching strategies and collaborative techniques are used to support an inclusive early childhood classroom?

Research was conducted in two integrated 4K classrooms in one district in a north central state. The selected two integrated classrooms have both a regular and special education teacher full-time in the classroom. The design was a qualitative method by use of a survey. According to Landrum (2013), “as an education researcher, the survey method is a popular approach if one wants to know about the attitudes, beliefs, opinions, or perceptions” (p. 125). With the online survey, there was no possible way to skip a question. The online survey program, Qualtrics, collected the data and assisted with analyzing the information. This program was chosen because it is approved for use by our University graduate programs. Additionally, this program was user friendly and sent the participants a link to complete the survey. Please read chapter 3 for additional information regarding the setting and participants, design, survey, procedure, and analysis of data.

Participants
Each classroom was given a letter to determine their group name and the teachers have the same letter after their title of profession. For example, Group A has a regular education teacher with a label as RET-A to show the regular education teacher is associated with Group A. This was used for tracking and coding the participants to keep their information and identity confidential. RET-B did not complete the survey and was not included in this field report.

Group A:
Regular Education Teacher (RET-A) and Special Education Teacher (SET-A)

Group B:
Special Education Teacher (SET-B)

Coding Process

After the initial coding of participants' answers by the researcher and a second coder, a meeting was held to discuss the similarities and differences. The themes were discussed and narrowed down into four themes for this field study. The common themes were collaboration, training and background, roles and responsibilities, and universal strategies. The responses from the questions didn't just answer the question. The responses provided insight of the classroom with characteristics and descriptions of the themes. The researcher and colleague went back to recode the answers a second time. After completing the coding process, a second meeting was held to discuss the similarities and differences from coding. The results from the themes follow in this chapter.

Collaboration

After the participants completed the survey, collaboration was a key term in their answers. It was noted by the researcher and second coder that the participants often shared their views on collaboration and the occurrence. The researcher and second coder found the
participants included information regarding collaboration in seven responses to questions.
Collaboration was found in all four of the open-ended questions. Collaboration can be defined as
the verbal interactions between the regular education and special education teachers to share
thoughts, ideas, strategies, and supports throughout their school day. Likewise, collaboration
should occur frequently.

The participants valued collaboration as consistent and frequent conversation. All of the
participants noted there isn’t a specific day or time set aside for collaboration and planning.
Collaboration occurred frequently, whether it was in between classes or before and after classes.
Participant SET-A shared that “the regular education and special education teacher might not
always agree, but they respect each other’s decisions with children in the moment and speak with
each other at a later time that is more appropriate.” This is done when students and other
colleagues are not present. Another participant, RET-A shared “the regular education and special
education teachers have worked hard to be open and honest with each other, respect each other’s
opinions, and have each other’s backs.” Lastly, another participant, SET-B, shared that “they are
part of a highly effective teaching team in their collaborative work environment.” And the
participant believes how beneficial it is to have someone else with whom to share ideas and
combine teaching strategies.

Training and Background

Another key term was training and background found by the researcher and second coder.
Training and background was found in two of the open-ended questions. The researcher and
second coder discussed the importance of the training and background knowledge of the
participants. Training and background knowledge can be defined as professional development
training as well as courses taken in their undergraduate and graduate programs. It was important
to note that the questions focused on the background knowledge with working in a co-teaching model.

All of the participants noted how they gained the development and training in a collaborative setting. It was unanimous that the experience working with another teacher is how they gained the development and training. Participant SET-A noted “I like working collaboratively with another adult and have always been with a co-teacher in the ten years of teaching.” Another participant, RET-A shared they “have attended various professional development training relating to collaborative classrooms and co-teaching.” The other participant, SET-B shared “there was no formal training and it was based on experience working with another teacher.”

The participants shared how they value each other in the classroom. Participant, RET-A explained “I have learned a great amount from co-teaching. In fact, every day I learn from my colleagues and take that knowledge or strategies and put them in my ‘teaching toolbox.’” Another participant, SET-A shared that “the co-teachers have grown together and independently.” The other participant, SET-B stated “the importance of a relationship is with that colleague in the classroom.”

Roles and Responsibilities

The researcher and second coder discussed how the participants often talked about their role in the classroom. In addition to their role, the participants often explained their responsibilities in the classroom. The planning and instruction were two key terms from the participants’ responses. The roles and responsibilities describe the individual role in the classroom as well as the collaboration piece of planning and instruction from the co-teachers. The planning times vary from each of the participants. Participant, SET-A described the
planning occurring in small increments of time before school, during lunch, and after school.” Another participant, RET-A described a similar planning routine in the same time frames and as needed. The participant SET-B did not elaborate on the as needed nor the specific amount of time during those time frames. Participant, SET-A shared that “if one of the teachers needs more time for planning, the co-teachers set up a time that works for both of them to go deeper in the discussion of instruction.”

The planning and instruction was different from each of the participants. One participant, RET-A, stated “I create the lesson plans and the special education teacher helps execute them.” In addition, the special education teacher modifies the activities for the students with an Individualized Education Plan. Another participant, SET-A, talked about “the modifications for the students with special needs and for all students. Their role is assisting with creating a positive environment with successful peer role models.” In addition, the participant is present in the teaching setting for the good of the group. The participant finished their answer that flexibility is one quality that is absolutely necessary for an effective teaching team. The other participant, SET-B, did not go into discussion on the planning and delivery of instruction in their co-teaching classroom.

Universal Strategies

Lastly, the final theme was focused on the students and using universal strategies. The responses went into great detail about their role in the classroom to support all of the students and meeting their needs. Universal strategies can be defined as supports teachers use to accommodate all learners in the classroom as well as using differentiation in their teaching.

A couple of the participants shared the statement of working together to meet the needs of all students of the classroom. One of the participants, SET-A continued with “determining the
best approaches and accommodations to help all of the students be successful." Likewise, a participant shared it is just as important to differentiate and meet the needs of regular education students prior to meeting the needs of students with special needs. Lastly, a participant, RET-A stated "my teaching practices are constantly changing ever since they began co-teaching. They have learned that there are various ways to meet the diverse needs of students." In continuation, RET-A said "I am a better teacher and more equip [sic] to meet the students where they are."

Summary
The survey results showed the participants valued collaboration as consistent and frequent conversation. Collaboration occurred frequently, whether it was in between classes or before and after classes. All of the participants noted how they gained the development and training in a collaborative setting. It was unanimous that the experience working with another teacher is how they gained the development and training. The participants shared how they value each other in the classroom by including the strategies and supports they both have learned over the years. The roles and responsibilities describe the individual role in the classroom as well as the collaboration piece of planning and instruction from the co-teachers. The planning times vary from each of the participants. It was found that flexibility is one quality that is absolutely necessary for an effective teaching team. The survey results also showed how the participants work together to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. In fact, determining the best approaches and accommodations to help all of the students be successful.
Chapter 5 Analysis

The purpose of this study was to find strategies and techniques for effective collaboration and co-teaching approaches in a regular education setting. The research question was: What teaching strategies and collaborative techniques are used to support an inclusive early childhood classroom? Research was conducted in two integrated 4K classrooms in one district in a north central state. The selected two integrated classrooms have both a regular and special education teacher full-time in the classroom. The design was a qualitative method by use of a survey. The online survey program, Qualtrics, collected the data and assisted with analyzing the information. This program was chosen to assist the data as preferred to use with University graduate programs. Additionally, this program was user friendly and sent the participants a link to complete the survey.

Findings

The survey results showed the participants valued collaboration as consistent and frequent conversation. Collaboration occurred frequently, whether it was between classes or before and after classes. All of the participants noted how they gained the development and training in a collaborative setting. It was unanimous that the experience working with another teacher is how they gained the development and training. The participants shared how they value each other in the classroom by including the strategies and supports they both have learned over the years. The roles and responsibilities describe the individual role in the classroom as well as the collaboration piece of planning and instruction from the co-teachers. The planning times vary from each of the participants. It was found that flexibility is one quality that is absolutely necessary for an effective teaching team. The survey results also showed how the participants work together to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. In fact, the participants valued
best approaches and accommodations to help all of the students to be successful in the classroom.

**Similarities**

The findings from the survey were consistent with the studies reviewed. The flow and design of a working classroom with two teachers can come in many variations. Shamberger and Friend (2013) define collaboration as a style of interpersonal interactions that prioritizes effective communication, active listening, problem solving, and teaming in order to strengthen and maintain dynamic professional relationships. Likewise, the participants’ responses within this study on collaboration are consistent with Shamberger and Friend’s findings.

Furthermore, it was consistent with the roles and responsibilities theme. “More time in the school day would allow teachers increased opportunities to talk with each other formally and informally to share ideas, goals, and responsibilities (Shamberger and Friend, 2010, p. 125).

These planning meetings are designed for communicating lessons, delivery methods, data collecting, supporting specific students, consulting students, instructional tools, assessment methods, and so on. The data showed roles and responsibilities describe the individual role in the classroom as well as the collaborative planning and instruction from the co-teachers. The planning times vary from each of the participants.

**Differences**

The responses from this set of participants was inconsistent with the training and background addressed within the literature review. In this district, the teachers have to attend separate training and requirements depending on their teacher label. Similarly, general education teachers do not have enough expertise and training on inclusion models, special education, and differentiated instruction (Solis, Waughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012). In addition, the
education and special education experience in their professional development and education background. In addition, another limitation was the size of the field study. There were only three participants in the study and one participant did not complete the survey. There was a lack of information related to collaboration approaches and strategies. Another limitation was the level of support needed for students with disabilities. The special education teachers were able to accommodate and assist with more than their caseload if the services needed are low.

**Future Practitioners**

For future practitioners, teachers should find ways to use effective communication in the collaboration classroom. This can be done by setting a specific time to communicate about lessons and instruction before and after class. This will create ample opportunities to communicate. These planning meetings are designed for communicating lessons, delivery methods, data collecting, supporting specific students, consulting students, instructional tools, assessment methods, and so on. Collaboration included many parts with both of the teachers with effective communication. Collaboration was evident from the participants' answers and played an important role in the inclusive classroom. The planning theme had similar answers from the participants.

Regular educators need to know their students' abilities, learning needs, and when and how to ask for assistance. This was evident from the responses from the participants. The participants shared information based on the learning needs of all students with and without an IEP. Teachers may have different personalities and cultural backgrounds that make it difficult to come to unity and blend their ideas together. Teachers must see and understand the way each of them teaches and respect their teaching beliefs and strategies which was also present from the responses of the participants.
Future Research

Future research should expand to more early childhood programs. It would be interesting to find out similarities and differences from all kinds of teachers, not just the long-term teachers. This survey was conducted by teachers who have taught with one another for more than five years. The bond was already created and easy for the participants to communicate. The participants did not go into detail about conflicts amongst the team or any kinds of disagreements.

Another research study could examine the challenges the teachers are faced with on the collaboration approaches and to the classroom. There was no discussion about the real challenges in the inclusive classroom. The participants did not reflect on high needs students in their classroom. The participants did not go into detail about the early challenges of working as a team and co-teachers.

Additionally, there was no discussion about the feelings on inclusion and possible issues such as case load of students, high needs students, training, from the school district. Many reports of the literature review showed discontent and negative thoughts on inclusion. There have not been many case studies to reflect the attitudes of teachers in the inclusive classrooms. It is unclear if the attitudes remain the same. It is also unclear if there are other potential problems that have occurred in the inclusive setting.
References


special education reform. *Journal of Special Education*, 30(2), 152.


Appendix A – Consent Document

Collaboration in Early Childhood Classrooms

Consent to Participate in Research

Purpose of the research: Michelle Bergin from the Special Education is conducting a research project on collaboration and co-teaching in early childhood classrooms. Inclusion in the regular education setting can involve adapting instruction to meet the needs of students with and without disabilities. Educators need to remember that some students with and without a disability will fall below expectations and need response to intervention. Educators need to know what to do and how to support these students. One approach to achieve the notion of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment is a collaborative teaching model with a regular education teacher and special education teacher. In this study, an investigation will be conducted in the integrated 4K classrooms at [insert school name]. The purpose is to find strategies and techniques for an effective collaboration and co-teaching approach in a regular education setting. By conducting this research, we hope to learn how to effectively teach and collaborate in early childhood classrooms. You are being asked to participate because you teach in an integrated 4K classroom. This consent form contains important information about this project and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

Procedures: Your participation will involve completing a survey from the Qualtrics program. You will receive an invitation via email. You can follow the link to the website and complete the survey. The survey questions include your teaching strategies and collaboration techniques you use with your co-teacher in the classroom.

Time Involvement: Your participation will take approximately 20 minutes.

Risks & Benefits: The risks associated with this study are finding out your tendencies and possible weaknesses in your co-teaching and loss of time to complete the survey. The benefits of participation include analyzing teaching strategies and co-teaching methods. Another benefit is that completing the survey will allow you to critically think about ways to promote collaboration using your strengths. The outcomes of this study may also support other collaborative and co-teaching classrooms with approaches and strategies for effective classrooms at the 4K level. The findings from this project will provide information on collaboration and co-teaching in an inclusive setting at the school district. Further discussion from the results of the field report will occur during the PLC in September of 2020.

Privacy & Confidentiality of your Information: The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. Research will be conducted in a private room to protect privacy. The sensitive data will be locked in storage and encrypted with online information. Participants will be identified with codes. The confidential data will only be shared with those who need access to it. The Principal Investigator and Co-Principal Investigator of the Project will have access to the results if they ask for it. The data shared among researchers will only be with the codes. No names or email will be associated with the responses of participants during the data analysis phase of the research.

Use of your information for future research: Private identifiable information collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

Right to Withdraw from the Research: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any time without loss of any service, benefits, or rights to which you would normally be entitled.
Questions about Research Study:
The person in charge of this study is put your name and contact information here. If you have questions, suggestions, or concerns regarding this study or you want to withdraw from the study please use the following contact information is:

---

Participant. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

Participant Signature: I agree to participate in this research.

Researcher Signature

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of their questions. I believe that they understand the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

---

Date

---

Name of Participant

Name of Researcher
Appendix B Qualtrics Survey

Q1: We are interested in understanding collaboration and co-teaching. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential. The study should take you around 10 minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail Michelle Bergin at

[Email Address]

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason. Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

- I consent, begin the study
- I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Q2: What is your role in the classroom?

- Regular Education Teacher
- Special Education Teacher

Q3: How long have you taught in this inclusive classroom?

- Less than 1 year
- More than 1 year but less than 4 years
- More than 4 years

Q4: How long have you taught with the other teacher?

- Less than 1 year
- More than 1 year but less than 4 years
More than 4 years

Q5: How do you work together to meet the diverse needs of your students?

Q6: How much planning time do you have with your co-teacher each week and how is this time structured?

Q7: What training and skills do you have in collaborative planning and teaching? What background do you have in differentiating and meeting the needs of all of the learners that could appear in your co-taught classroom?

Q8: How much have you learned from your co-teacher? Please explain. And, how much change have you made in your teaching practices since you began co-teaching?

Q9: Is there anything you want to know regarding what is required for an effective teaching team?