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HOW TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL
TEAM TEACHING PARTNERSHIP

by
Travis Haskins

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Science in Teaching Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
July 1, 2005

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Travis Haskins
HOW TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL
TEAM TEACHING PARTNERSHIP
2004-2005

Dr. Marjorie Madden
Master in Science in Teaching in Collaborative Teaching

Studies have shown that there is a movement towards inclusion and team teaching in schools throughout the nation. This movement has not only affected the students who are being mainstreamed, but the teachers who are now co-teaching these classrooms. This study used questionnaires, teacher interviews, and a teacher research journal to sample a southern New Jersey elementary school. The participants' responses provided insights to answer the question "How do teachers create a successful team teaching partnership?" The study suggests criteria for successful teams and discusses possible barriers which may hinder effective teaching partnerships. The four main themes which emerged from the study as the most important are: communication, collaboration, time, and different teaching philosophies. Communication and collaboration are considered the two major criteria needed in every successful partnership. Time and different teaching philosophies are the two major barriers which stand in the way of success.

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Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction	1
General Background Information	1
Research Questions	2
Significance of Research	3
Organization of Thesis	3
 Chapter II: Review of the Literature	 5
Introduction	5
Criteria for Team Teaching	5
Barriers to Effective Teacher Partnerships	8
Overcoming Barriers to Create a Successful Teacher Partnership	10
 Chapter III: Context and Methodology of the Study	 12
Context and Setting	12
Methodology	13
Data Sources	13
Data Analysis	15

Chapter IV: Summary of the Findings	16
Introduction	16
Communication	16
Collaboration	18
Time	19
Different Philosophies	21
Conclusion	22
 Chapter V: Discussion of Results	 24
Conclusions	24
Implications for the Field of Education	25
Suggestions for Future Research	25
 References	 27

Chapter I: Introduction

Two weeks after my 16 week student teaching had ended, I went back to visit my students and teachers. While I was there I collected a few more of the questionnaires I had passed out as well. On my way out the door I asked one of my cooperating teachers one final question: "If there is one key to team teaching that you could give me what would it be?" She responded with "Wanting to do it. If you don't want to do it then you'll never be successful at it. And, not to do it for yourself or for anyone else, but for the students and the students only!"

Pena and Quinn (2003) agree with my teachers' idea by suggesting that collaboration must be undertaken voluntarily, with team members functioning as peers.

General Background Information

Friend and Cook (2000) define collaboration as "a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 3). In schools today, collaboration between teachers and the creation of "team taught" or "co-taught" classrooms has become increasingly frequent. Friend and Cook (1996) explain that co-teaching occurs when two or more teachers jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in one physical environment. Inclusion of special needs students into general

education classes, which was once just a thought, has now “motivated many educators to seek strategies and solutions to accommodate the wide delivery of these students’ academic and social needs” (Cross and Walker-Knight, 1997, p. 274). General education teachers and special education teachers are now paired up to teach a class, not as teacher and aide, but as team teachers. They are considered equal partners, share in planning and grading, and bring their expertise together as one to build a successful learning environment for all students. Partnerships are created to improve education for all students, reduce the stigma for exceptional students, increase instructional options, and increase support for teachers (Friend and Cook, 1996). This reality moves the question: “How do you create a successful team teaching partnership?” Pena and Quinn (2003) believe that one way is to emphasize the process. They argue that individuals who are implementing or developing collaborative teams must understand that the process is evolving. Having an appreciation for process will help team members be patient with it and focus on the outcomes. Friend and Bursuck (1996) suggest that as a teacher becomes more experienced with co-teaching, his or her comfort level increases, honesty and trust evolve, and a sense of community develops.

Research Questions

As stated earlier, this research is based around the question “How to create a successful team teaching partnership?” I looked at this from three main directions and as the following sub questions: First, what criteria are essential in becoming an effective team teacher? Secondly, what barriers may affect a partnership’s chance of creating a successful learning environment for the students and themselves? Finally, how do

teachers go about combining their knowledge or gaining new knowledge to become successful teaching partners?

Significance of Research

Murphy (1996) suggests that the American educational system is in the midst of a major reform movement-the inclusion of all students with special needs into regular education classrooms-that has significant implications for the entire education community. This reform movement is what has started the push towards collaboration and team teaching. McCartney (1999) indicates that successful collaboration can be threatened by a number of barriers, including individual assumptions concerning the model of collaboration to be used, whether a “strong” or “weak” definition of equal planning and relationship is the goal, social or job barriers, and structural barriers.

Further, there exist barriers between special education teachers and general education students as well as between general education teachers and special needs students. Hines (2001) states that in many cases, general educators do not feel that they have received the necessary training for working with students with special needs. Conversely, special educators may be at a disadvantage in classrooms, particularly middle school, if they are not content area experts.

Organization of Thesis

This first chapter introduces the reader to the topic and provides background information as to why I feel this topic is important to research. In chapter two I review related research and map out and connect the various literatures to my questions and topic. Chapter three describes the context and setting of the study and the methodology, including data sources and data analysis. Chapter four presents and analyzes the findings

of the study. Finally, in Chapter five, after analyzing all of the data, I suggest conclusions to my question, “How to create a successful team teaching partnership?” This chapter also suggests possible limitations to the study and implications for further research.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the related literature on team teaching, collaboration, and inclusion. The research shows similar and contrasting studies on how to teach effectively in a collaborative setting. I discuss my findings around three topics: criteria for team teaching, barriers for team teaching, and how to put the previous two together to create a successful team partnership.

Criteria for Team Teaching

I have broken down the criteria into five different parts; commitment, communication, shared strengths and expertise, equality and support, and finally mutual planning and grading. Cross and Walker-Night (1997) believe that the first step for most co-teachers is to examine their own readiness to collaborate. Without this readiness and commitment to co-teaching, lies a strong possibility for failure within the classroom. Both teachers need to want to be there and strive towards working together to create the best possible classroom for all students. The commitment towards co-teaching doesn't just fall into the hands of the co-teachers; Key (2000) acknowledges that collaboration involves commitments by the teachers who work together, by their school administration, by the school system, and by the community. Without the support of all these other people not only for their individual team teaching partnership, but for a school wide

collaboration among all teachers, the inclusion of students and successful team partnerships would become a huge burden for the individual teachers.

Gately and Gately (1993) suggest that interpersonal communication is the cornerstone of the co-teaching effort. They believe that communication is the first step towards creating that successful team partnership. They also suggest that there exist three levels of communication within a team teaching pair. The first level is filled with stifled or minimal communication. This is when the teachers are just meeting one another or for the first time discussing their different styles or plans for the school year. The second level begins when there is a sense of more openness and interaction between the two. When this second level begins will be different for most new team teachers, because it's when the two feel more comfortable with one another and have started to see the others views as an asset to the partnership. The third and final level occurs when the teachers openly communicate and interact with a sense of mutuality and collaboration within their team relationship. Briggs (1993) combines the three levels and suggested that open discussion leads to an appreciation of each individual's unique contribution and to efficient, effective decision making, which leads me into my next criteria: shared expertise and strengths.

Friend and Cook (2000) believe that the "hallmarks" of effective team teaching include creating a shared purpose, clear definitions of roles, and shared leadership. The shared purpose links back with the commitment to want to be part of a team partnership and for both teachers to be there with their students' best interests in mind. Clear definitions and delineation of roles allows the teachers to use each others' strengths individually and collaboratively to meet the needs of all students within their classroom.

Shared leadership between the partners is the basis in many of the criteria including equality and support.

An effective team of teachers working together as equal partners in interactive relationships need to both be involved in all aspects of planning, teaching, and assessment, Crosby (1993). To even have a sense of an effective team, you must see each other as equals and share the responsibilities inside and outside of the classroom. As soon as one begins to take over as the leader or begins to push more work on the other, the idea of a team starts to dwindle. A large factor in building this equality is for the teachers to support the others decisions and ideas.

The final criteria in becoming an effective team teacher that I discuss is the idea of mutual planning and grading. Walther-Thomas (1996) suggests five planning themes to be an effective team: 1. Having confidence in your partner's skills and ideas; 2. Designing a learning environment for both educators and students that require active involvement; 3. Creating learning and teaching environments in which each person's contributions is valued; 4. Developing effective routines to facilitate in-depth planning; and 5. Increasing productivity, creativity, and collaboration over time. The first four themes become the stepping-stones towards the final theme. Each one builds more on the previous one to create that final step of effective team planning and collaboration. Cross and Walker-Knight (1997) suggest that the idea of mutual grading might be the most difficult step in a team partnership especially when both are experienced teachers. They believe this because each teacher usually has their own unique style of evaluating students. They also suggest that adjusting standards and expectations is more difficult for the regular education teacher because they may have to decrease them.

Barriers to Effective Teacher Partnerships

Grading could possibly lead to disagreements within the team teaching partnership, but it is not the only problem that could arise. McCartney (1999) declare that a successful collaboration can be threatened by a number of barriers, including individual assumptions concerning the model of collaboration to be used, whether a “strong” or “weak” definition of equal planning and relationships is the goal, social or job barriers (partners role), and structural barriers. The following studies look more closely at the barriers that might arise around three topics; comfort level, shared responsibility and planning, and time.

Friend and Cook (1996) acknowledge that not all teachers are comfortable in a co-teaching arrangement. They suggest that the idea of sharing responsibility, modifying teaching styles and preferences, and working closely with another adult offering serious challenges for some educators. This refers back to the first criteria for effective team teaching, commitment. If a teacher is not committed to the role of a team teacher then they shouldn't be in a partnership. The main point here is that this takes nothing away from that person as a teacher. They just feel more comfortable teaching on their own as opposed to with a partner. To go along with the comfort level are the possible barriers in knowledge. Hines (2001) suggests that both general educators and special educators feel that knowledge barriers exist in inclusive classrooms. In many cases, general educators do not feel that they have received the necessary training for working with special needs students. Conversely, special educators may be at a disadvantage in middle school or high school level classes if they are not content area experts. Special educators must also

become confident with the curriculum of a regular education program, Cross and Walker-Knight (1997).

Hines (2001) suggests that collaboration calls for a shift in control and the sharing of a learning environment rather than having individual space, both concepts foreign to the traditionally trained teacher. The sharing of all responsibilities in the classroom, which to some may sound like a great idea, could end up being a large step to take towards creating an effective team. Hines (2001) also suggests that experienced teachers are not used to the idea of another person in the classroom with them all day long, with their own points of view and ideas on planning, classroom management, and grading. Sometimes these different views could be vastly different because of the fact one comes from a general education background and the other special education. Vaughn, Bos, and Schumm (1996) conclude that the focus for the regular education teachers tend to be, of necessity, planning for the whole. While the special education teachers plan to meet the individual needs of each student. They suggest that for this barrier to be crossed, both co-teachers must consider all of the students as members of their group. Within the idea of shared responsibility there is also the concept of shared planning. To be able to have a shared planning approach co-teachers need ample time to meet together. My final barrier to discuss is time

Hines (2001) suggests that scheduling the amount of time needed for collaborative planning, especially at the middle schools and secondary schools where a co-teacher may be working with as many as six different teachers during the course of a school day, is another difficulty. To go further into this idea I read a case study, titled Developing Effective Collaboration Teams in Speech-Language Pathology by Elizabeth

Pena and Rosemary Quinn (2003). They find that teachers frequently claim they do not have time to meet to discuss and plan collaboratively. Expectations that teachers would meet before the children arrived or during scheduled breaks or lunch times are unrealistic and unwittingly increase mounting tensions and emotional reactions to the collaborative process.

Overcoming Barriers to Create a Successful Teacher Partnership

After reviewing literature addressing criteria to build a team teaching partnership and barriers that might hold such partnerships back, I look at studies that discuss the implementation of a successful teaching partnership. Lowe and Herranen (1978, 1982) suggest six steps to creating a successful team:

1. Becoming Acquainted
2. Trial and Error
3. Collective Indecision
4. Crisis
5. Resolution
6. Team Maintenance

Each of these steps taken one by one, over time, contributes towards creating a successful team. Further, the study argues that each step is reached and overcome before a team can be considered truly successful. These steps are used to not only understand each individual's role on the team, but to help the team find their common goal of meeting the needs of the students within their classroom.

Friend and Cook (1996) suggest that team teachers must discuss the following before their relationship begins: instructional beliefs, planning, parity signals,

confidentiality, noise, routines, discipline, feedback, and pet peeves. They feel that parity signals include signs of “equality” for their students and parents. Simple ideas like having both names on the door, two teacher desks in the classroom, and having both teachers signing notes and reports which go home fall under this category. They also suggest that both teachers clarify what they hope to accomplish for the students as team teachers. They conclude that discussing topics prior to co-teaching and periodically throughout the relationship helps facilitate the open communication so essential in co-teaching.

This chapter discusses research relating to the “do’s and don’ts” in creating an effective team partnership. The next chapter explains my study and how I hope to add further to the literature. I believe that other barriers exist which could prevent an effective teaching partnership; I would like to find out what they are and explore them in-depth.

Chapter III: Context and Methodology of the Study

Context and Setting

My research was completed at an elementary school in Blank Township. The school consisted of Pre-Kindergarten through 6th grade classrooms. My main focus was on the classroom where I was completing my student teaching, a 4th grade inclusion classroom. Along with myself, there were two other teachers in the classroom at all times, a special education teacher and a general education teacher. There were 27 students in the classroom with a wide range of abilities. There were 4 special needs students, 4 basic skills students, 3 enrichment students, 1 student who received speech therapy, 1 student who received physical therapy, and 14 general education students.

Along with the classroom I was in, there were two other inclusion classrooms with a very similar grouping of students. These two classrooms both had a special education and general education teacher in them at all times. I conducted some of my research in both of these classes as well.

I chose to focus on these three classrooms, because of the fact that they had team teachers working in them all throughout the day. These three sets of teachers had all worked with each other for different lengths of time. The teachers all taught different grade levels and had many different experiences as team teachers. Although I did focus on these three classrooms, I was also able to branch out within the school and conduct

research with other teachers, including some who had never experienced a team teaching situation.

Methodology

The type of research design that was best for my topic was a qualitative design. “Qualitative research takes place in a natural setting. The qualitative researcher often goes to the site (home, office) of the participant to conduct the research,” (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). Creswell (2003) also adds that qualitative research is interpretive, which means, “the researcher makes an interpretation of the data” (p. 182).

The qualitative design I chose to follow which best fit the nature of my research was a phenomenological study. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) define a phenomenological study as “a study that attempts to understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understanding of a particular situation” (p. 139). Creswell (2003) suggests that the methods of data collection are traditionally based on open-ended observations, interviews, and other written documents. I used three types of data sources throughout my research: questionnaires, teacher interviews, and a teacher research journal that contains day-by-day observations of my selected classrooms.

Data Sources

The questionnaires were handed out to the three teams of teachers, other teachers in the school, present and past team teachers from school district, and student teachers that were currently or once before in a team taught classroom. I handed out a total of 45 voluntary questionnaires and received 22 of them back. Each questionnaire consisted of four questions and space for any additional comments:

- 1) Are you currently, or have you ever, been involved in a team teaching partnership? If yes, for how long? If no, skip to question 3.
- 2) How was the experience for you as a teacher? What were some difficult issues or moments? What were some beneficial moments? (Between you and your partner)
- 3) What do you believe are keys to having a successful team partnership?
- 4) What do you feel are some issues that can lead to a negative team partnership?

My teacher interviews were conducted on an individual basis with the three sets of team teachers. I interviewed each teacher for 10-15 minutes, asking each the same set of questions. My questions all dealt with their experiences as a team teacher, what they thought were the keys to creating a successful team partnership, and what some of the issues were that could affect a team teaching partnership. These interviews were voluntary, but each of the team teachers participated.

The final data source I used was my teacher research journal. Within this journal were my day-to-day observations of the team taught classrooms. Most of my journal is filled with observations of the classroom I was student teaching in, because this is where I spent much of my time. I spent 16 total weeks in this classroom. I created entries in my journal for many different situations. Some of these situations included observing the two teachers in a successful team teaching situation, an unsuccessful situation, a new way or technique to team teaching, or a situation where team teaching would have been beneficial but it wasn't taking place. I also have entries detailing observations from the other team taught classes at the school.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data that I collected, I broke down the three sources into common themes. I looked at the questionnaires, interviews, and my research journal to identify similar ideas throughout them, as well as discrepancies. To do this I attempted to “triangulate different data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2003, p 196).

Chapter IV: Summary of the Findings

Introduction

“The keys to a successful partnership are respect, understanding, flexibility, open-mindedness, compromise, and just having an overall sense that both people are equals in the partnership with the students’ best interest in mind” (Teacher, March 2005). This chapter includes my analysis of the three data sources used: questionnaires, teacher interviews, and teacher research journal. I triangulate the data into four main themes that remain consistent throughout all of my sources. The first two themes, communication and collaboration, are discussed as criteria for becoming an effective team teacher. The final two themes, time and teacher philosophy, are suggested as being the main barriers which may hold back an effective team.

Communication

After analyzing the data I recorded from my interviews with the six team teachers I came across two similar quotes about communication:

Communication is key. If you are unaware of what your partner truly thinks or you feelings and ideas aren't expressed, it will be difficult to have a positive relationship. The key to being an effective team is having open communication. Both teachers must be open minded and willing to share ideas and be flexible.

The idea of communication being a strong criterion needed for a team of teachers to be effective is found throughout the questionnaires and teacher interviews as well as my teacher research journal. In my observations of the team taught classrooms I saw the value of communication between the coteachers. Each pair possessed strong communication skills, not only between themselves, but with the students as well. One of the responses to my questionnaire states, "One truly needs to be open-minded to any personality and able to discuss any situation or problem which may be thrown at them within the classroom. Without this trait, one can be considered a negative team partner."

The communication between the teachers went beyond them discussing what needed to be done inside the classroom. I witnessed the teams as more than just teachers; they were friends. Each Monday, my teachers discussed their weekends with each other. And each Friday, they discussed their plans for the weekend. In an interview one of the teachers commented, "It's nice to have someone to discuss things with, swap ideas, and gets someone else's opinions on things in the classroom. But, we both feel comfortable to discuss anything with each other that doesn't concern our classroom or school at all."

During my study there wasn't a topic discussed more than communication. Many participants used the word "key" to describe it as the most important factor in becoming an effective team. I frequently observed the importance of communication between the teachers and the effects it had on them. They seemed comfortable with one another while they were teaching a lesson; they were comfortable helping the other out and even making jokes about the other in front of the students. I asked all of my participants how they became so comfortable around one another and the one response that stuck with me throughout my research was:

To have an effective partnership you need a balance of teamwork and collaboration and this requires good communication from day one. On the first day we met, I told her everything about myself and she did the same to me. Since that day we've been able to say anything to each other good or bad. And because of this we have made a great team.

My study suggests that communication is clearly the most important criteria for creating an effective team partnership

Collaboration

“Team teaching is not when one teacher sits up in front of the class and teaches a lesson while the other sits at their desk and grades papers. In my eyes, team teaching is when both teachers are up teaching, helping students, and collaborating with the whole class” (Teacher, April 2005). The idea of collaboration is discussed as the second most important criteria for team teachers. In an observation of a 5th grade class I was able to see collaboration at its best. Students were at lunch; I entered the classroom to find the two team teachers at their desks talking. They said hello, but continued with their discussion. As the students entered the classroom, they both stood up and walked to the front of the room. The students took their seats and the teaching began. The two teachers began talking one at a time, but for no more than a few sentences each. As one would stop the other would begin. This lasted for almost twenty minutes. During those twenty minutes of a social studies lesson, that some students may not have even realized they were receiving, the two teachers worked off each others' comments and answered one another's questions.

When the two teachers finished their lesson they had a writing activity for the students to complete individually. At this time they came back to me to talk. I had so

many questions about what they had just done. Do you do this all the time? How long did you have to plan? Whose idea was it? And the list goes on and on. The teachers told me that it is something they like to do when both teachers really enjoy the topic; this time it happened to be Native Americans. They said it is a good way to introduce topics for the first time to the students to lead into their new unit. The one teacher said, "I feel as if team teaching is a great way to really give students the ability to learn from all angles of teaching."

We then went on to discuss the planning time that goes into their lessons. They told me that it's a lot easier now since they've been working together, and in the same grade, for four years. They said that planning is more productive because each gives her own ideas and suggestions to each lesson and then they choose how to combine them. They also said, "a huge benefit was having that second person who was prepared with the same material just in case something came up and one of them had to leave the room. The other was able to take control of the lesson and teach in alone if that situation ever arose."

The one requirement for effective collaboration is adequate time. One participant commented, "Teachers need to be given ample time to discuss with each other what techniques will work in their classroom, and which ones they both feel comfortable with. But, sometimes time is just not available." This idea of time and its necessity becomes a third theme and a potential barrier to successful team teaching.

Time

On one of the questionnaires, a participant remarks, "You would think having two teachers in a classroom that planning would be so easy. But there is almost no time to sit

down and discuss what needs to be done once the school year is underway.” Other teachers reiterated how time affected their collaboration. Sample responses include the following:

The only difficulty I faced at times was finding time to plan together. With hectic days and busy schedules it is sometimes hard to sit down with your partner and plan things out.

The most difficult moments happened when the kids weren't there in trying to find time to schedule and plan.

It was often hard to get together to collaborate on assignments and various things that had to be done for class that day.

Throughout my observations I witnessed many instances of the teachers pressing to get things done in the mornings before the students got there. This wasn't a sign of them being lazy or having time management skills; it was just the fact that their days are so full. Before and after school are really their only times to meet. The teachers I observed did an excellent job scheduling when they would meet throughout the day to discuss their plans. It didn't matter if it was just a free ten minutes while the students worked independently; they needed to schedule that time to meet because they knew how important it was for providing the best for the students.

All of the teachers described time as the most difficult barrier to overcome in having a successful team teaching partnership. One teacher stated, “At the beginning of a partnership, lack of time to meet cause a lot of stress between the two of us. We had moments when we got down on each other because we were so stressed out and didn't even have time to talk things through.” Another teacher added, “You have no idea how

short a school day is until you teach. With all of the issues that come out of nowhere you have no time to take a breath, let alone sit down with your partner to plan the next day's lessons."

Time to adjust to the other teacher's ideas and beliefs was also discussed; as explained by one teacher:

Time to adjust to the other person is very important. For instance, learning one another's strengths, weaknesses, personalities and teaching philosophies, and collaborating to make a classroom management system that included both of our beliefs.

Time to know one another becomes seen as critical to a successful partnership, and a possible barrier to overcome.

Different Philosophies

During my teacher interviews, one partner said, "Realistically some teachers really enjoy teaching on their own. If they are put into a team situation and it is against their teaching philosophy it can be an extremely long and rough year for both teachers. And students can tell if there is animosity between teachers, even if the teachers try not to make it obvious." Most people have different beliefs when it comes to many things and teaching philosophies are no different. According to some teachers this could be a huge barrier in forming an effective team. Some teachers may "not be open to new and different thoughts and ideas" (Teacher, April 2005). One teacher stated, "Another possible problem is if someone is not willing to consider the other persons point of view, opinions, or teaching styles." In my observations I was able to view many different

teaching philosophies and styles, but the one thing I did not observe was a teacher who was not receptive to their partner's different ideas.

Besides being respectful of different philosophies, many of the participants talked about stubbornness and lack of flexibility. One participant said, "Coteaching will never work if one or both partners lack respect of each others views, opinions, and recommendations." Teachers argued that a partnership would be incapable of being successful if one or both partners cannot or will not compromise some of their own styles or ideas. One teacher explained, "We are very tolerant of each others new ideas and even our quirks (I'm a little messy; she washes her hands a lot!)."

Conclusion

The data obtained from this study describe the "keys" to becoming a successful team teacher and some of the barriers that could possibly restrict an effective team. Within the questionnaires, teacher interviews, and teacher research journal there are four clear themes touched upon all throughout: communication, collaboration, time, and different teaching philosophies. Communication and collaboration are the two main criterions that each participant believed is needed to begin and continue a successful team. Without these, the participants believed the team would not be able to work and the teachers would have a "long and rough year." Time and different teaching philosophies were thought to be the two biggest barriers that team teachers face. Time to meet, collaborate, and even adjust to your new partner was very hard to find. With the lack of time to meet, some participants suggested that it brings stress to the team's relationship that can clearly be seen by the students. Most people have different philosophies and styles on how to teach and run a classroom. The participants felt that if

each partner isn't open-minded and willing to try out the other person's ideas then the partnership is doomed to fail.

During my review of the literature, in Chapter two, I discuss many criteria and barriers that can affect a team partnership. The four discussed in this chapter are clearly evident in chapter two as well. This leads me to believe, after looking through many literatures on team teaching and conducting my research, that these four main themes of communication, collaboration, time, and different teaching philosophies are the "keys" to creating a successful team teacher partnership.

Chapter V: Discussion of Results

Conclusions

Our classroom is much more energetic and fun with two teachers.

I believe the best team teaching situations stem from matching teachers appropriately who want to be a part of the team. If one teacher is resistant the match does not work.

Always keep in mind that you're doing it for the good of the students.

(Teachers, April 2005)

From the beginning I set out to answer the question “How to create a successful team teaching partnership?” I found that there are four themes that are “keys” to creating and maintaining a successful team teaching partnership communication, collaboration, time, and different teaching philosophies. Throughout this study I was able to learn a lot on how to create a successful team teaching partnership. I feel that I learned the most during my observations and interviews of the six successful team teachers.

The most important criterion is communication between the team. The participants discussed the importance of communication and how without successful communication the team will fail. Communication is what leads to acquiring the other criteria and staying away from the possible barriers. You can't have successful collaboration, equality, or share in planning without communication within the team.

I also learned that time is the major barrier that stands between a successful team teachers and an unsuccessful team. Time is a barrier that has many different components: time management, time to adjust to the others teacher's views and beliefs, and time to grow into a successful team. Based on my finding, I believe that communication and time are clearly the two most influential factors in creating a successful team teaching partnership.

Implications for the Field of Education

I hope that my research benefits all teachers, experienced and new teacher candidates alike. Murphy (1996) suggests that the American educational system is in the midst of a major reform movement-the inclusion of all students with special needs into regular education classrooms-that has significant implications for the entire education community. The movement not only impacts teachers who already have classrooms but all of the potential teachers looking for positions. I feel that my study suggests possible criteria needed to create a successful team partnership along with the barriers that may hold back that success.

Suggestions for Future Research

After completing my research, I found two limitations to my data. The first limitation was the number of questionnaires that were returned. I believe that they needed to be voluntary, but was disappointed to receive only 22 of 45 distributed. Perhaps if I had sent out 75-100 questionnaires I would receive more information that would have provided deeper insights into effective team teaching.

The second limitation was the fact that each of the three team teaching partnerships had been partners for 4 or more years. It would have been useful to observe

at least one partnership in its early stages. This may have shown better balance of what team teaching really is. The three pairs I interviewed worked quite well with one another; however, there were probably times at the beginning of their relationships where everything didn't go as smoothly. Perhaps they were hesitant to talk about it. If I had interviewed a newer pair, I could have learned more about potential barriers or hardships.

There is much that deals with team teaching, as Pena and Quinn (2003) argue that individuals who are implementing or developing collaborative teams must understand that the process is evolving. Each team will come across their individual strengths and weaknesses. Interviewing and observing more teams will lead to a larger knowledge base of the do's and don't of team teaching. Additional research may provide teachers with new strategies for becoming a successful team teacher as the process of team teaching continues to evolve.

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