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12-2021

Improving Inclusion: The Ongoing and Transformative Process of Improving Education Systems to Meet the Needs of all Students

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LS 400

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October 13, 2021

Abstract

For this Capstone Project the researcher will investigate how instructors view the environment of the classroom when there is a mix of special needs students incorporated into the general population classroom setting and what they think could be done to improve the environment. The inclusion of special needs is necessary for fair and equal treatment; further, by separating the general population from special needs students, brings about a culture of segregation that can have lifelong impacts. Through an evaluation of scholarly literature and interviews conducted with teachers at an elementary school the findings uncovered three emergent themes: collaboration with teachers in other districts that practice co-teaching, advocate to the local school board the need for more paraprofessionals to support inclusive classrooms, and co-teacher training and workshops to support future implementation. Based upon the findings of this research paper and interviews conducted, an action to provide co-teacher training and workshops, and advocate to the local school board the need for more paraprofessionals to support inclusive classrooms will provide the foundation of support our educators need to be successful.

Keywords: Full inclusion, inclusive education, collaborative teaching, co-teaching, special education, teacher characteristics, early childhood education

What do instructors have to say about incorporating special needs students into the classroom and improving the inclusion for all students?

Setting the Stage

"In 2019–20, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.3 million, or 14 percent of all public-school students. Among students receiving special education services, the most common category of disability (33 percent) was specific learning disabilities (Statistics, 2020)" Most of us have memories of what it was like when we first started school. Some of those moments gave us experiences that we will never forget. Sometimes those incidents helped us to realize at a young age of how unfair life could be for some. During my years in elementary school, I learned that sometimes you must be the voice for others and stand up for them. One of my most vivid memories was when I learned about a classmate in the 4th grade who had some learning disabilities that affected his memorization skills. This made it difficult for him to memorize his multiplication tables, historical figures and dates, and lines in a play. I remember my teacher asking him to meet her after school quite often and to the rest of the class it appeared that he was in trouble. One day he was asked to stand up in front of the class and recite a stanza from a poem in which he was very hesitant to do. He asked if he could go last, and the teacher forced him to the front of the class. When he stood up and tried his best to recite the poem, he began to stutter and some of the classmates began to laugh. The teacher became frustrated with the class, but she asked him to continue. He turned to her and said, "Why did you do this to me" and ran out of the class. I felt horrible for the student so I stood up and told the class, "You should be ashamed of yourselves for what you just did. How dare you make someone feel like they don't belong and that you're any better – because you're not." and I followed the student out of the classroom to make sure he was ok. The teacher eventually came out to talk with us and then she asked me to take him to the office so that he could call his parents to pick him up as he did not want to go back into the classroom. When I returned to the classroom the teacher was talking to the class about being respectful and having empathy for others and appreciating our differences. She recognized me for standing up for others and said she wished there were more kids like me. The student eventually transferred to another school and we never heard from him. This experience

helped me to understand how important it is for students to be empathetic, understanding, and accepting of their peers who may have disabilities.

Over the course of my elementary school years, I witnessed many incidents where students with learning disabilities were separated from their peers and were taken out of class. Most of these students eventually left the school. Years later, I volunteered to work in a local public elementary school for my high school volunteer/community service requirement. I chose this service to get the experience and perspective from the other side of the student. I was placed in a classroom with seventh graders who were considered "special ed" students. These students did not have physical disabilities. These students had some emotional disabilities that adversely affected their academic performance. The students were separated from their regular classes in their last period to focus on subjects that they were having difficulty in. I was there to help them with their assignments and to make sure they completed them. In working with these students, I found that they were intelligent individuals, but they could not focus and would become disruptive when they were unable to figure something out. The teacher would ask the student to calm down. She was there to teach them coping mechanisms and get them to refocus. This experience gave me the opportunity to hear from these students of how embarrassed they were when they had to report to this classroom and be separated from their peers. They understood the reason why, but it affected them in a negative way because they were made to feel different from their peers.   In fact, many of them said they were "troubled kids" and heard from their peers that their parents advised them to stay away from them. This is what made me realize how negative it was to label students as "special ed" and removing them from their peers made them different. I began to question why it was necessary to remove these students from their peers rather than having their peers support them through their crisis.

Through my years of volunteer experience in classrooms with labeled students, I began to observe the environment that I was in and how teachers and administrators dealt with students who needed extra attention and support. I understood from the teacher's perspective of how a disruptive student impacts the class and how much easier it was for them to send the student out of the classroom. This took less time than turning the situation to their peers to offer support to the student and learn to be compassionate and empathetic. Removing the student sent a negative message to their peers and labeled that student as a problem student with special needs. I realized that many

school systems did not empower students to support their peers with special needs. Rather, they taught them to label

them and stay away from them. From this experience, I understood why those students with disabilities who were

separated from their peers left school. They either went to another school, dropped out or found an environment that

supported them to succeed in school. In my senior year, I volunteered at a charter school where many of the students

who did not fit in the traditional high school environment chose to attend. These students struggled in their high school

but thrived in an environment that gave them independence and treated them like adults. Some students had some

emotional disabilities that they displayed occasionally, but the teachers took the time to connect. They encouraged the

other students to connect with their peers and work through their issues. Students were not punished or removed from

the classroom when they became disruptive. From my observations in this classroom setting, teachers were more

compassionate and patient with the students. The big difference is that they treated the students like adults and not

children and expected them to support one another. This was the opposite of what I experienced in the other school

settings where students were treated like problems and removed from their peer environment.

   My experience as a college student at CSU Monterey Bay, offered me the opportunity to work in an after-school

program with low-income and disadvantaged elementary school students. I gained so much knowledge from working

with these students and realized the importance of encouraging students to never give up regardless of their situation.

Most students just need positive reinforcement to help them realize their talents and skills. Many low-income students

see themselves different from other students and cannot see themselves as smart as their peers or ever having the

opportunities to further their education beyond high school. I concluded that this was no different than those students

who had learning or emotional disabilities who were labeled as different and problems. Both needed to be motivated

and encouraged by their teachers and peers. I learned that positive words and being supportive in times of crisis results

in children feeling accepted and worthy.   How do we expect students to respond to difficult situations when we teach

them to ignore them and keep moving forward? How do we teach students to become empathetic and compassionate

individuals when we teach them to have no patience? Students with special needs depend on their peers to support and

advocate for them. Students can learn from each other and find common ground when they learn more about the

individual. This leads to accepting their differences and not negatively labeling them. Therefore, it is critical to improve

inclusivity for all students in schools that lead to equal opportunities and create societies that show compassion and empathy for all, regardless of our differences. My goal is to research the different approaches used to teach all students, including special needs students, in a collaborative learning environment for both the educators and the students.

Literature Synthesis & Integration

Mainstreaming is defined as students who have special needs. These children are placed in the special education classroom where they join the general population classes for certain subjects or activities (Lynch, 2016. Ultimately the concept of full mainstreaming encompasses the physical location of a student, whereas inclusion, "is seen as a process of addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of all learners through increasing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion within and from education" (Stadler-Heer, 2019, p.1). When we think about inclusion as it pertains to the classroom setting, we need to consider being accommodating and making any necessary adjustments ensuring the special needs children have access to the same learning opportunities, activities, and interactions as other children in the classroom. According to the U.S. Office of Special Education (2021), their mission is to "improve early childhood, educational, and employment outcomes and raise expectations for all people with disabilities, their families, their communities, and the nation" (OSERS Mission). Evidence indicates inclusion of children with special needs into the traditional classroom while providing them equal learning opportunities to gain knowledge, grow as an individual, learn social and life skills, and participate in extracurricular activities is the primary purpose of inclusion in traditional school classroom settings (Education U. S., 2021).

What is the Issue?

The issue this paper will focus on is teachers and their position on full inclusion of special needs students into the general population classrooms and how to improve the inclusivity for all students. According

to Wiscarson & Coulter, the issues that surround full inclusion of special needs students are social

disadvantages, academic disadvantages, resentment, skill set of instructors, and classroom size. Social

disadvantages for example, may result when a child has behavioral issues needing to be addressed. If left

unaddressed the student can become disruptive to the learning environment and this can be embarrassing to

the student in front of peers (Wiscarson & Coulter, 2018). Oftentimes the individual lacks the social

component to process discipline and cannot understand or control outbursts and bad behavior, leading it to

escalate further and possibly trigger ridicule from peers. These disruptions can lead to academic disadvantages

to the general population and take away from their learning experiences. Additionally, the teacher may not be

a certified special education teacher and therefore is not an expert in navigating the various considerations

that need to be kept in mind while teaching individuals with special needs. Without resources, the teacher

may be left to navigate uncharted waters and it may become cumbersome. Another issue faced by the special

needs student is resentment in comparison to others in the classroom that do not struggle or face the same

roadblocks a special needs student does. For example, a traditional student may feel animosity towards a

special needs student who gets away with behavior the traditional student may not like speaking without

raising a hand or out of turn. It is the teacher's responsibility to help bridge that gap and create a safe space of

inclusivity for all students. This issue can also result in other students without special needs acting out when

they see their peers get away with something they could not. Lastly, another relevant issue is large,

understaffed classrooms and teachers being unable to provide quality attention to each student. This results

in less "hands-on" assistance for all students, difficulty handling outbursts or bad behaviors irrespective of

what child is misbehaving and takes time away from the class.

Why is it an Issue?

Per the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) enacted in 1975, the "The Federal Government has an ongoing obligation to support activities that contribute to positive results for children with disabilities, enabling those children to lead productive and independent adult lives'' (Education U. S., 2019, Sect.1450). This law was put in place to benefit all students (including special education and full inclusion), teachers, agencies, parents, and other invested parties to come up with strategies that will improve education for children with special needs (Education U. S., 2019). The inclusivity of all children in a classroom setting is so important because these interactions are meaningful and beneficial to all students, especially those with special needs (Pinto, Baines, & Bakopolou, 2019). Additionally, having friendships are important to an individual's developmental socialization because they pave the way to becoming confident, help in dealing with conflicts, and resolution, learning to get along with others, finding companionship and becoming more social (Pinto, Baines, & Bakopolou, 2019). Peers and teachers play a major role in child development and are a vital aspect to an individual's growth process. According to Boud (2002), children develop skills through peer learning in a variety of contexts. These skills range, but are not limited to, organizing and planning group activities, giving feedback to one another, working collaboratively on projects and assignments, and in turn help understanding each child's own learning path (Boud, 2002). This concept of socialization and inclusion is something that occurs in classrooms, recess, and school related activities. Additionally, Pinto, Baines, and Bakopolu (2019) suggest that "meaningful social contact may improve social involvement of, as well as enhance academic outcomes for, pupils with SEN [special education needs] educated in mainstream schools'' (p.818). When Covid-19 erupted and the schools shut down, many students, especially those with special needs, suffered tremendously (Flores, 2021). According to Flores, the lack of interaction with peers caused many students to suffer mentally and those with special needs even more so than others. Missing out on daily interaction, peer group settings, and shifting 100% homeschool with a guardian day after day resulted in many social, and developmental setbacks for children with special needs. This is a major reason why this issue of

inclusion is so crucial (Flores 2021). There are things that cannot be taught from an isolated or virtual learning setting, such as gaging the classroom energy, learning from one another, social acceptance, levels of support, defiant and prosocial behavior. These experiences help to shape and mold children's ideas about life throughout childhood and these are the reasons why schools need to improve inclusivity for all students.

What can be done about the Issue?

Much can be done on the path to improving inclusivity for all students. Inclusivity paves the way for youth with special needs (Marinelli, 2010), however, several factors play a role in successful social inclusion. These factors include opportunities, positive experiences, acceptance by peers, adaptation to the inclusion, advocacy, budgeting, committing to training of staff, and the use of relevant technology. There is a complexity to inclusion that pertains to more than just including a special needs student. It is key to make any necessary adjustments in the classroom such as the setting, the curriculum, allowing for additional breaks, having an aid to assist the teacher, but that is not all. In a study done on social inclusion Santomouro (2016) discusses how each of these factors and teaching strategies positively impact the students. According to Vyrastekova (2021), social inclusion encompasses more than just being physically included. It also requires the self-perception of being connected to others on a deeper level and having internal rewards (Vyrastekova, 2021) So, to combat this issue of whether one is a bystander or active participant, it is imperative for teachers to be trained to incorporate the two groups of students in a collaborative learning environment. Additionally, providing opportunities where each child can contribute can result in positive, challenging opportunities to support growth and a rich learning environment that being with peers encompasses (Vyrastekova, 2021). These are things that will require budget approval for funding from the district. Per Pillay & Di Terlizzi, it is also imperative that the classrooms have relevant technology to best support students with specific needs like text-to-speak software, and tablets to name a few (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009). The gap of dissimilarity among

full inclusion and special needs children can be bridged. The goal is to provide special needs children with

assistive technology and the least restrictive learning environment. This will result in the special needs

child/children empowered and able to participate more often.

Additionally, a teacher's role must ensure peers are being respectful, kind to one another, and staying

on task. When this occurs, the results will have more impact on the quality of education the children are

receiving through synergy and classroom dynamics. Teachers will be able to conduct more thoughtful

discussions and interactions with the students. Teachers need training and tools to navigate inclusive

education (Lee, Yeung, & Tracey, 2015), monthly or quarterly training modules, or placing a certified special

needs teacher in the classroom to train the teachers. This will eliminate teachers from feeling underprepared.

Further, with training and the support of a teacher's aide, the teacher will have more time to manage the

classroom dynamic. In one case study, the "school provided learners with intensive therapy and learning

support in a smaller classroom environment" (Pillay & Di Terlizzi, 2009, p.494), which allowed instructors to

focus and give each child equal attention. This can be accomplished in different ways, for example, ensuring

each teacher had a specialist in the classroom to assist with special needs students. Advocacy also needs to

take place with caregivers, who must stand up for their children's right to an education and be better

equipped with relevant resources available to children with special needs. Embracing inclusivity not only

supports the laws in place set by our government, but it brings about a culture of equality, togetherness, and

acceptance. This is important because so many parents of children without special needs are oblivious to the

culture and what good can come about when inclusion is considered (Kluth, 2010). Not every child with special

needs fits into a mold, one may have a strength in one subject like science or math but challenges in English or

reading. This will need to be addressed and modification of content or moving the child to a different class for

that subject will help the child to adjust better, be successful, and challenged. They also may have other

strengths or weaknesses that need to be evaluated to best suit or thoughtfully match them with peers that

can build on each other's skill set (Kluth, 2010). Although inclusion can be as thoughtless as placing a special needs child into the general population classrooms, special steps need to occur in fostering interaction, participation, and robust learning environments with other peers.

Conclusion

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2019), once the proper steps are taken to support inclusion of special needs students into general population classrooms, changes that benefit the children will occur (Education U. S., Part B, Sect 1462, 2019). To facilitate inclusion a person needs to be connected and have that sense of belonging. It is imperative that children with special needs are not excluded from traditional class settings. Inclusion is imperative, and until that is done parents must hold the school districts accountable. They also need to advocate implementing inclusion and ensuring that equal general education is readily available to all students regardless of additional needs, after all it is the right thing to do, and it is the law (Education U. S., 2021).

Method

The best education for a child is one that includes them in a regular classroom with their peers. Although providing the best education for a child with special needs may differ from one student to another, educators and school administrators should look at every opportunity to advocate for full inclusion. This allows special education students the right to be in a regular classroom so that they can see if they are ready for the challenge. For this Capstone Project, the researcher examined the views and recommendations of public-school K-12 educators' inclusion of special education students into general population classrooms. The examination included parents of disabled students, and students to gain their perspective of keeping their children and peers in their classrooms and understanding the impacts of full inclusion. The researcher examined and analyzed the results of the data and applicable research literature to formulate an action to

inform K-12 administrators and educators of the findings and provide recommendations to improve the integration of special education students into regular classrooms.

Context

A K-8 elementary school and high school was chosen to investigate the differences in the treatment of special education students between the school levels. Both schools are Title 1 Schools receiving supplemental federal funds to ensure the high number of socioeconomically disadvantaged students have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to meet their educational goals.

Bedrock Elementary School is a K-8 public elementary school located in a suburb setting in West Sacramento, California. Bedrock is under the West Sac Unified School District with a total student population of 890 reported for the 2019-10 school year. The 2019-20 School Accountability Report Card published during the 2020-21 academic year indicates that 43.8 percent of the students are socioeconomically disadvantaged with 6.5 percent with disabilities. Bedrock has two resource specialist teachers, one special education teacher, six paraeducators, one psychologist, one speech language pathologist and two occupational therapists. West Sac Unified School District's mission is to meet the educational needs of the "exceptional child" which includes a planned program of instructional, psychological, social, and related services to help meet the needs of students and support the staff.

Sac River High School is the one high school grades 9-12 under the West Sac Unified School District with a total enrollment of 2,174 students based on the 2019-20 School Accountability Report Card. Of these students, 68.6 percent are socioeconomically disadvantaged and 9.1 percent with disabilities. Sac River HS has a full-time social worker, one school psychologist, seven special education teachers, several paraeducators, a workability coach and a part-time resource specialist to serve almost 200 students with special needs

(moderate to severe disabilities). Most special education students are working toward a diploma while some are working toward a certificate of achievement or completion.

Participants and Participant Selection

The participants interviewed are as follows:

Ms. Kinder: A 39-year-old white female teacher with ten years of teaching experience.

Mrs. Fifth: A 35-year-old Latina female teacher with eight years of teaching experience.

Ms. PE: A white 38-year-old female teacher with three years of teaching experience.

Mrs. Special: A 30-year-old white female teacher with seven years of special education teaching experience.

Mr. Sophomore: A 42-year-old white male high school history teacher with nine years of teaching experience.

Parent #1: A 52-year-old Latina female whose fifth-grade special education student attends the school.

Parent #2: A 65-year-old white female whose third-grade grandson with special needs attends the school.

Parent #3: A 41-year-old African American male whose first-grade daughter with special needs attends the school.

Student #1: A 13-year-old white male eighth grade student.

Student #2: A 12-year-old Latino male seventh grade student.

Student #3: A 14-year-old Asian female ninth grade student.

Researcher

Over the last few years, we have witnessed social inequalities brought to light right before our eyes. Lines have been divided and people of color have been pushed aside and treated inhumanely, separated from others. Inequities have existed over generations and they are based on the existence of unequal opportunities and rewards for different social statuses within a society. When societies are organized by hierarchies of unequal treatment, they manifest to differential treatment of others. The same can be said when we separate children with special needs from their peers. We teach our young children to draw lines based on their learning abilities when compared to others. They learn to exclude those not at their level. Therefore, I strongly feel that full inclusion of all students, regardless of their abilities, into regular classes can erase the lines separating them. Young children are very impressionable, and we need to structure their school environments to be inclusive of all children in their primary years, regardless of their special needs. When schools look at the general population classrooms, they must consider full inclusion. Separating children is no different than the hierarchies organized in society. I believe that breaking down these barriers gives children an opportunity to support their peers and see them as no different from them. When educators create inclusive environments and teach children to be empathetic to their peers, they empower children to build relationships and improve social skills leading to a more inclusive society.

As a father of four healthy children, I know the importance of teaching them to not judge and to stand up for others when they witness bullying, or someone being mistreated who cannot defend themselves. That is what I used to do and still do, today. As an individual who has witnessed family members and friends with

disabilities being excluded from activities and events, I have seen how detrimental it is to the individual. Unfortunately, these are memories that will affect that individual for a lifetime.   Therefore, the topic of full inclusion is personally meaningful to me because I believe everyone needs to be treated equally and labels need to be removed. Inclusion of special needs children into regular classrooms will reduce future inequalities and improve relationships amongst diverse student populations.

There may be educators who disagree with my recommendation to full inclusion of students based on their education and years of teaching experience. These differences may impact my perspectives on the issue; however, I will stay open-minded and analyze their responses taking into consideration their opinions. I know the importance of keeping my mind open to their feelings and experiences and staying neutral and without bias. My goal is to research the positive impacts of full inclusion and open minds to consider the opportunities that it brings to students and their future perspectives on equal opportunities.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

Three different participant groups were selected to participate in the interviews that included K-12 educators, parents, and students. Five educators were selected to be interviewed, including three parents with disabled students and three students. The students were selected to participate in the study to get their perspective on integrating their peers into the classroom.

Teacher Interview Questions

1.   What do you know about inclusion of special needs students in a regular education classroom?

2.   Is it possible to meet the needs of special needs students in the regular education (inclusion) classroom?

3. What do you think about co-teaching for students with disabilities who can benefit from general education curriculum?

4. What are some ways regular educators and special education educators can work together effectively?

5. What are equitable grading methods that can be used for students with disabilities in inclusive settings?

6. What do you see as benefits to full inclusion of students?

7. What strategies can be used to assist students with severe disabilities in inclusive settings?

8. What are your concerns about inclusive settings?

9. What are the challenges of establishing inclusive settings?

10. What do say about long-term effects of inclusion?

11. What are effective methods for accommodating students with disabilities in inclusive settings?

12. What is currently being done to support the inclusion of special needs students? What is working/not working?

Parent Interview Questions

1. How do you feel about including special needs students in a regular classroom?

2. What are the pros/cons for full inclusion?

3. How would your student feel about being in a regular classroom with their peers?

4.   How do you feel the school is handling your child's needs?

5.   What can you do to support full inclusion of all students in a regular classroom?

Student Interview Questions

1.   What do you know about special education students and classes?

2.   What does special education mean to you?

3.   How do you feel about including all students in regular classes?

4.   How can students help their peers with needs in a regular class setting?

5.   What are the benefits of having all students, regardless of abilities, in a regular class setting?

6.   What changes can be made to support full inclusion?

Procedure

Due to COVID-19 restrictions on school campuses, all participants were given a paper copy of the survey with their specific questions, which were distributed by Ms. Kinder. Ms. Kinder also provided a copy of the parent survey to the parents and to the students. My email was provided to the participants so that they could ask any questions or schedule a Zoom meeting if they preferred. Ms. Kinder asked the participants to return the paper surveys to her so that she could deliver them to me when I picked up my kids from school. I created an Excel spreadsheet to document the responses.

Data Analysis

After collecting the responses of the 13 survey questions from the five K-12 education professionals, the data was analyzed to identify similarities and differences from each interview. The responses included important insights and suggestions to include all students in general population classrooms, rather than separating them out into separate special education classes. The results from the survey and both primary and scholarly resources highlighted three emerging themes for potential solutions to the issue. The results of the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for the three emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, five teachers were interviewed to understand their views on full inclusion classrooms and what they suggest could be done to implement full inclusion of special education students into general population classrooms with their peers. This is important because teachers can promote change and provide input in managing a diverse group of students with the appropriate resources to build peer relationships and improve social involvement.

Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time required, cost and effectiveness. Each criterion listed is equally important because teachers do not make the final decisions on proposed changes to the school's curriculum and programs. School boards control the funding and educational programs which will impact how quickly new changes and policies can be assessed, approved, and implemented. Time required is critical as teachers plan their curriculum in advance, aligned with the district's programs. In addition, they are very busy managing their classrooms, students and all the

responsibilities that come with teaching. It also takes time to build a new teaching program or modify an existing one. If an additional cost to the implementation is identified, there is a process to get additional funding for required resources and it must be approved through the district's budget process. Therefore, cost is another factor that a school district considers when implementing any new programs or equipment. If the cost is not built into the school budget, it may be very difficult to find the funds in a timely manner to hire the resources. However, the effectiveness of the actions taken to improve full inclusion for all students is the key in garnering support from school boards and administrators. The combination of all these evaluation criteria is critical in determining the reality of implementing new proposed actions and attaining the necessary support from decision makers. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

Options	Time Required	Cost	Sustainability
1. Collaborate with teachers in other districts that practice co-teaching.	High	High	Medium
2. Advocate to the local school board the need for more paraprofessionals to support inclusive classrooms.	Low	High	Medium

3. Co-Teacher training and workshops to support implementation.	Medium	Medium	High

Option 1: Collaborate with teachers in other districts that practice co-teaching.

The responses to the interviews showed a recurring concern from the teachers about not having enough time to develop or test other options for them to fully teach in an inclusive environment. Although these teachers support diversity and would like to put less focus on separate approaches, they find it difficult to practice something new. One form of teaching that helps to promote inclusive classrooms is known as collaborative teaching, also known as co-teaching. Co-teaching allows for a general education teacher and a special education teacher to partner and teach, instruct, and mentor the same group of students together in a classroom. One way to explore that option is to collaborate with teachers in other districts that practice co-teaching. Based on the experiences of the five K-12 teachers interviewed, they all indicated not having enough time to implement a co-teaching program to support full-inclusion which makes it difficult to develop. "Having a special education teacher in the classroom with me would benefit inclusion and be a great model for students to witness teacher collaboration." (Ms. Kinder, personal communication, October 2021). Five of the female K-5 teachers fully supported the idea of full inclusion if they could collaborate with experienced co-teachers. However, the male high school teacher was not fully supportive and stated "Collaborating with other teachers means more of my time outside of the classroom to accommodate more students. It would be difficult." (Mr. Sophomore, personal communication, October 2021). Allowing experienced co-teachers from other districts to collaborate with other schools provides the school an opportunity to test the co-teaching waters to determine whether it is a solution for inclusiveness.

Getting support for cross-district collaborative co-teaching programs could take time to implement. A co-teaching model might require additional special education teachers to partner with general education teachers to improve inclusiveness. The time needed to establish a co-teaching program with teachers from other districts can be high, based on how it gets integrated into the school culture and program. Although co-teaching is not a specified service in the federal special education law these teaching activities are taking place in schools for educating students with learning and behavior disabilities to address new mandates for education reform initiatives (Friend & Barron, 2016). Co-teaching would address the intent of IDEA to allow open access to the general population classroom for most students and limit restrictive programs. (Alquraini, 2013). However, more time may be needed to establish a co-teaching cross-district model because the effectiveness of co-teaching has not been recognized nor clearly established. There are also many regulations and laws that are specific to who is qualified to teach special education students and the process of determining the best approach. Teachers would be required to set aside time to collaborate with experienced co-teachers to implement a co-teaching program. All these professional educators had positive attitudes which is necessary to make full inclusion classrooms work successfully. Teachers who have positive attitudes and views about inclusion are able to motivate children to learn and benefit from an adaptive environment (Lee, 2016). Teachers in a co-teaching classroom must be flexible to meet the needs of their students. Communication is key for the teachers to be open, creative, honest, and transparent for a co-teaching program to be successful. As the number of students with special needs continues to grow, challenges arise to modify existing curriculums which may mean more demands for the teachers and the students (Blaszczak, 2019). It is also critical for parents to be part of their student's education and advocate for their needs and support innovative programs to benefit their child (Zazueta-Ruiz, 2018).

Option 2: Advocate to the local school board the need for more paraprofessionals to support inclusive classrooms.

School boards have control of how a school district and its schools are administered from the curriculum, books, schedules, and teaching methods and programs. To address new policies, issues and proposed changes, school board meetings are held for the public to make comments and for the board members to vote on specific policy items. Teachers can advocate for new programs and funding, but they are not the decision makers. If teachers need more support and funding to implement a new teaching program, they can propose to the school board with the support of all the school administrators. Teachers, parents, and students should advocate to their local school board their needs to support inclusive classrooms. If more paraprofessionals are needed to integrate special education students into general education classrooms, their voice needs to be heard and considered. Advocating to the local school board is a vehicle to gaining support for changes. We all know that classroom size determines how well a student will get the attention they need to be successful in their education. The more students in a classroom, the more difficult it becomes for students with needs to get the assistance needed.   The five teachers interviewed in this report indicated that additional resources are critical and needed to manage a full inclusion classroom. Mrs. Special, the special education teacher responded to question #3 related to challenges of full inclusion by stating "Most of my peers are willing to teach in an inclusive classroom with support from the special education department, paraprofessionals and parents." (Mrs. Special, personal communication, October 2021). Although Mr. Sophomore did not support teaching an inclusive classroom he stated, "It would be impossible to meet the needs of all students with just one educator in the classroom. These teachers would need more paraprofessionals to support them!" (Mr. Sophomore, personal communication, October 2021). When new educational programs and teaching models are implemented, it may take additional resources to ensure

expectations can be managed. When resources such as paraprofessionals are made available to teachers,

they can plan better and allow them to handle special education students without interrupting the classroom.

However, it takes time and money to increase the number of paraeducators for all teachers to manage their

classrooms effectively.

Hiring additional resources to support teacher's needs requires a lengthy process that involves not only

the school but the district and the school board. School budgets are appropriated according to the priorities

of the district which may not be the same priorities and wants of the teachers. To implement a full inclusion

program is not just about bringing the students with special needs into a general population classroom and

ignoring them, it is about providing them the necessary support. (Wiscarson & Coulter, 2018). Four of the five

teachers interviewed believed they could manage an inclusive classroom with the appropriate support of

paraprofessionals to meet all their student's needs. The cost of hiring additional paraprofessionals may not be

supported by the district or school administrators which can result in not being able to meet the expectations

of a full inclusion classroom. Therefore, the cost could be significant and difficult to secure which would make

it highly unlikely to meet the teacher's needs. Advocating to the school board on how critical it is to have the

additional resources to manage inclusive classrooms is necessary to get support. Placing students with special

needs into the general population classroom with their peers allows them to interact in ways that keeping

them in separate classrooms does not allow (Education, Bright Hub, 2010). If the school board supports

allocating funds to provide the necessary resources for full inclusion classrooms there are opportunities for

continued funding in future years. It is important to measure the outcomes of having paraprofessionals in a

classroom to prove whether funding should be sustained in future years. Teachers, parents, and students

must advocate for their needs in a unified voice for change to be made and support to be garnered.

Option 3: Co-Teacher training and workshops to support future implementation.

The literature reviews and interview data led to an action option of providing co-teacher training and workshops to support the implementation of a future co-teaching program. A similar concern that resulted from the teacher survey responses identified the issue that multiple and single subject credentialed teachers do not have the education, experience, expertise, skills, and training to confidently manage certain special education students in a general population classroom setting. Mrs. Fifth indicated that educators must continue learning and stated, "We teachers teach but we don't know it all. We must be willing to learn new skills and methods to teach our kids, otherwise we will lose them." (Mrs. Fifth, personal communication, October 2021). All five K-12 teachers interviewed recommended getting co-teacher training to understand the methods and learn skills and techniques to be successful in teaching an inclusive classroom with a special education teacher. The Special Education teacher recommended "There is a need to provide general education teachers with special education training so that they can help manage the needs of special education students in a fully inclusive classroom. They cannot do it alone." (Mrs. Special, personal communication, October 2021). Studies have found that educators with experience in teaching children with disabilities are more supportive than those without any experience (Lee, Yeung, & Tracey, 2015). When teachers are aware of the student's specific needs along with the techniques used to support them, they are better prepared to design a teaching strategy for those students. Mrs. Special commented that "with special education needs in a general population classroom. Many teacher trainings and workshops with the focus on co-teaching are made available through in person workshops, conferences, and several online resources. Teachers can receive the training they need to learn new techniques and practices to become skilled in co-teaching to ultimately develop a program in collaboration with other teachers. Schools should support continuing education for their teachers. Unfortunately, most school districts conduct inclusive practice training that end up with the same assumption about cost and staffing requirements (Stetson, 2013). School

districts need to support those teachers who are willing to learn and develop new skills and become experts in new teaching methods.

Supporting co-teacher training and workshops will require some out of the classroom time or extra time for the teachers. Some training workshops can be provided by teachers who have learned and practiced the skills of co-teaching. Some barriers related to establishing training programs amongst peers include lack of time allocated to provide the training and lack of communications between the special education and general education teachers (Goibg, Diaz, & Carillo, 2018). If teachers are unprepared and not trained to take on students with special needs in a general education classroom, they are not equipped to support them and the plan for an inclusive classroom will fail. This will lead to maintaining a separation of classrooms for students with special needs. Teachers who collaborate with other teachers and are willing to teach often find opportunities to learn from each other, regardless of their special credentials. All teachers and administrators should be trained in co-teaching so that the school community understands its purpose to serve all students equally. It is important for all adults involved in the learning community to learn the techniques and skills necessary to help students and support their needs. Teachers can teach one another what they learn from training programs and workshops so that they connect and share best practices to support their students.   When teachers can see the impacts of sharing and transferring their knowledge to other teachers, they will meet the goal of providing the best well-being for their students (Vyrastekova, 2021). As Ms. Kinder stated, "We teach our students to share and work together. We should practice what we preach with our peers." (Ms. Kinder, personal communication, October 2021).

Recommendation

A review of the three potential action options leads me to recommending two that can be implemented without significant system changes and still allow for an opportunity to begin taking steps

leading to full inclusion classrooms. Based on the need to implement an inclusive program for all students, the

first recommended action is to have teachers receive co-teacher training and attend workshops to help learn

the steps needed to promote successful inclusive classrooms. By learning the different co-teaching methods

and understanding what is needed to support inclusive classrooms, teachers will become more knowledgeable

on the best methods used and become experts at co-teaching. In addition, the second recommendation of

advocating to their school board the hiring of paraprofessionals to support them in their endeavor will help

them get assistance needed to support an inclusive classroom. Teachers and administrators could take the

required steps to work with their administration to garner support and propose a budget for the additional

paraprofessional funding. Starting with co-teacher training and workshops to focus on co-teaching classrooms

will give them the first steps to develop a co-teaching program for their school. Based on the results of the

survey, four out of the five teachers interviewed were fully supportive of co-teaching in inclusive

classrooms. The results showed that the teachers need more training and support to manage full inclusion

classrooms. With the appropriate training, collaboration, and resources, I am confident that these two

options can lead to a successful transition to full inclusion in classrooms for all students.

Concessions

Although the option to collaborate with teachers in other districts that practice co-teaching would be

the action to help advance improving inclusion in classrooms more quickly, it is not recommended as the lead

action. Implementing a co-teaching model could provide more support to share responsibilities in the

classroom and to help teachers develop the curriculum for the students with special needs. Collaborating with

experienced teachers who co-teach would mean that inclusion classrooms could start right away. This action

brings the opportunity to establish relationships between the general and special education teachers and

starts building the foundation for implementing a co-teaching program while learning the methods and skills

at the same time. If schools can dedicate funding to establish a program to partner with teachers from other

districts, this would be a strong action to implement. This action has strengths that could open the co-

teaching model for the other schools in the district.

Limitations

While the recommended actions of co-teacher training and advocating for paraprofessionals appear to

be the best options to improving inclusion in the classroom, there are some limitations to identify about each

of these options. As any change with educational programs takes time and money to develop and implement,

the teachers do not make the final decisions. School districts allow for teachers to participate and receive

training, the co-teaching training and workshops will require time outside of the classroom. Some teachers

may have to invest their own time and money to get trained and attend workshops. If the school district does

not provide the teacher additional funds for this type of training, the teacher may not be able to afford the

training and workshops and decide not to attend. Therefore, the teacher would not receive the co-teacher

training needed to support an inclusive classroom. The issues with teachers advocating for additional

resources such as the paraprofessionals, they would need to propose this early in the year for the next year's

budget. This also takes time for a school district to determine whether they have the funds to support the

proposal or there are other priorities that are more critical to fund than investing in a new teaching

model. The co-teacher training and workshops may allow for some teachers to gain knowledge and expertise,

but it does not provide opportunity for the other teacher in the classroom to share the responsibilities. This

training program may require more hands-on training from the special education teacher and may have to

take place outside of regular instructional time.

Potential negative outcomes

All options recommended have some potential negative outcomes that should be considered when planning to implement. The action items all can succeed however, identifying the risks of the potential negative outcomes should be thought through to prepare alternative solutions. A potentially negative outcome of co-teaching could be the different teaching styles of the two teachers. Teachers learn different methods of teaching and have their own unique style. This is especially true for teachers who have been in their careers for many years. If teachers are unable to collaborate and communicate with one another to deal with issues, they will not be able to successfully co-teach. Another potentially negative outcome may be that teachers are not willing to take additional training courses to learn how to best co-teach. Some teachers are finished with their educational goals and are happy with what they have earned to become a teacher. This makes it difficult for these teachers to become experts at co-teaching and ultimately lose the opportunity for inclusive classrooms. The negative outcome for teachers advocating for more resources like paraprofessionals is that if they do not get the support from other teachers, they will not advocate for themselves. Some teachers may also want to stay silent on supporting any changes so that they are not seen as a troublemaker or not supporting the administration. These potentially negative outcomes could result in no support for co-teaching programs and no inclusive classrooms.

Conclusion

Every change in a society or educational system needed strong, brave leaders to start the new path and break down barriers. Although my action recommendations have the risk of potential negative outcomes and limitations, they will help teachers get the support they need to co-teach and improve inclusive classrooms. These actions will start the conversations needed to help teachers support special needs students in their general education classrooms. They will also educate teachers and administrators of the resources available to them to increase their knowledge about co-teaching. They can learn more about the benefits of

co-teaching and start sharing information with other teachers and administrators. They can reach out to other

districts who practice co-teaching to get firsthand knowledge on how it works and all the benefits. Knowledge

is power and with training and workshops, steps can be taken to develop co-teaching programs. The action of

advocating for teacher's needs is critical to gaining support from the decision makers. Parents, students, and

others should understand the importance of being involved and helping teachers make changes to improve

the educational process that takes place in the classroom. When parents and students learn their rights, they

become empowered to speak up and support initiatives that benefit their children and the school

environment. This also teaches children that their voice matters in those decisions. Learning to advocate for

others is the first step for them to understand the importance of a democratic society and how changes can be

made in a community of supporters.

A child's foundation of who they become as a person is not solely influenced by their parents. Children

learn to develop their social skills, collaborate, and build relationships in school. Many communities are

exclusive and when all those children are placed in the same environment it brings opportunities for educators

and administrators to set the tone of inclusivity and build real life skills. While every action has its limitations,

small steps need to be taken to fully integrate students with special needs into general population classrooms

to co-exist.   As one teacher stated in her survey response, "We all need to learn to co-exist and full inclusion is

co-existing" (Mrs. Fifth, 2021).

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

The focus issue being addressed in this Capstone Project is how can teachers improve their school's

inclusive practice of integrating all special needs students in general education classrooms. Both federal and

state special education policies direct California schools to increase access to the general education setting for

students with disabilities. Schools and districts are held accountable for student achievement, including students

with disabilities. It is critical that teachers take the steps to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and move towards an integrated system of education to meet the goals of classroom inclusion.   School districts that are failing to implement student-centered changes and reform practices to increase participation of students with special needs in general education programs are failing these students and impeding the positive impacts for them. Inclusion in general education helps to build social, communication and life learning skills that are essential for these students to advocate for themselves and become independent for real world experiences. After researching the literature and reviewing the survey response from five K-12 teachers that included one, kindergarten teacher, one fifth grade teacher, one physical education teacher, one special education teacher, and one high school sophomore teacher there were three actions that emerged. The first action is to collaborate with teachers in other districts that practice co-teaching. The second action is to advocate to the local school board the need for more paraprofessionals to support inclusive classrooms. The third and final action is to allow for co-teacher training and workshops to support implementation.   Based on the research and literature review and to start with a short-term solution, advocating to the local school board for more paraprofessionals to support inclusive classrooms along with supporting co-teacher training and workshops were the two recommended actions. These two actions would be the more immediate and effective actions at taking the first steps to building and implementing a sustainable co-teaching program. Both general education and special education teachers would become trained knowledgeable and work collaboratively to become confident co-teachers. In addition to skilled co-teachers, students in the inclusive classroom would have two teachers to support them while setting a collaborative environment for their students. This collaborative teaching environment gives teachers opportunities to work together and learn from one another in challenging situations. Students with special needs can experience learning in a general education classroom with their peers while receiving the support they need to succeed.

Action Research Project Documentation

There were several actions that were conducted for this Capstone Project that included communications with various levels of the K-12 community. The actions included researching various non-profit organizations and online websites that focus on learning how to co-teach. Several organizations offer training, conferences and workshops to educators interested in learning how to co-teach and the different methods of co-teaching. The Bureau of Education & Research offered several live online events, recorded events, on-demand courses, and in person professional development training for educators. These events can also be brought to the schools and districts through their on-site professional development program. School districts can bring training programs and workshops to their school campuses for their teachers to learn practical strategies and techniques that can be immediately implemented. A co-teaching training workshop was scheduled in a near-by city on December 15, 2021 for teachers to learn powerful strategies to accelerate student success with co-teaching. There was also a recorded event that teachers could take at their own convenience if they were unable to attend an in person event. As I researched the various co-teaching training events and workshops, I designed a brochure (Appendix A, Image 1) with information about co-teaching and resources on where they could find more information and links to upcoming training and workshops. I emailed (Appendix B, Image 2) the brochure to the five teachers I interviewed to get feedback. They responded indicating that the brochure contained valuable information for them to connect with to learn more about co-teaching. Three of the teachers said they appreciated having the links on the brochure that made it easy for them to click directly and find the information they needed to learn more about co-teaching and the available resources they can use at their own convenience.

In order for teachers to get training for programs outside of what they need, they have to pay out of pocket. If the school district is not supportive of a co-teaching program, they may not invest in paying for a workshop to be held on their school site. It is important for administrators to be aware of the resources available to them and they may not have time to look into the professional development and co-teaching training events that take place near their city. Learning about the numerous resources and opportunities to bring

the training to their campus, it was important to share the information with the vice-principal who is responsible for many administrative functions. If the vice-principal became aware of the information and learned about free training opportunities, this brochure could be given to all the teachers. Therefore, I sent an email (Appendix C, Image 3) to the vice-principal of the school informing them of these training opportunities and attached the brochure. The letter included information about my project and the results of my research and teacher interviews. I included information about the upcoming in-person co-teacher training event and hoped that it could be an opportunity that their teachers might want to attend. I also stated that I would be interested in attending an upcoming school board meeting to learn how the agenda gets set and if there was an opportunity to talk about co-teaching and how to advocate for support for more paraprofessionals in the classroom.   I received a response back thanking me for the information and that she would bring it to the principal's attention. This was the first step in making contact and providing information on what is available for teachers who are interested in learning to co-teach. As I conducted more research on the various websites and organizations who focus on co-teaching events and resources, I was surprised to learn how many resources are available for teachers to learn new teaching methods. I realized that if teachers had the time to be trained, the information and experts are all available at the tips of their fingers on the website. Teachers can learn from watching videos and listening to recorded seminars or events. It used to be that you had to go to a conference to get trained but there is really no excuse nowadays to learn something because everything is online. However, it takes time and teachers are limited on time to learn new things. Therefore, information has to be brought to them and they should be given extra time to learn new teaching techniques and methods. Teachers are always willing to learn new things, but they need support from the administration to learn new teaching programs that benefit all students.

Through my review of the interview responses, I was surprised to learn that even though teachers have the common goal of teaching students, many of them do not collaborate or communicate amongst each other to share ideas and promote changes. The teachers I interviewed all commented that building stronger relationships

with special education teachers was needed to support inclusive classrooms. This was key for them to be united

when presenting a co-teaching model to the administration, but they were not all on the same page. If they

could not get the support of the special education teacher, they would never get the support from the

administration.

Based on my initial plan to send emails to the superintendent and school board president, I decided to

modify that plan and start with the school vice-principal. I felt it was better to start with the administrator who

is close to the teachers and understands the issues they face day to day. Although the communication to the

superintendent would have been a way to reach a higher-level administrator, I knew that the email would get

buried in the hundreds of emails they receive on a daily basis. I also knew it would be forwarded to the

secretary or even the school principal to deal with or respond to eventually. What I learned is that teachers

report to the vice-principal and sometimes the principal depending on the issue. One thing that I learned from

the teachers and the research is that teachers need to support one another, and all agree to advocate for change

together. If there are teachers who do not agree, it is difficult to get momentum for change. Teachers also have

a union that supports them, but they also have to be united in what they want so that the union can help them

achieve their goals. Teachers can make changes especially when it comes to helping serve students better. It is

also important for parents and students to get behind an initiative for change to benefit them. Had I known how

much power the teacher's union holds, I would have done more research on what they can do and how much

can teachers do with or without them. Also, what are the steps they need to take to advocate for change and to

garner support from them.

The next important steps include continuing to find the training resources for teachers that are not

expensive and can be provided within their school hours or an hour a couple days of week to not impact their

schedules and keep a work-life balance. Parents should find ways to support teachers including researching

information for them to help them find the resources they need. Parents should continue to show support for

their children's teachers and advocate for them at school board meetings and city council meetings. Many

parents are not aware that they can attend these meetings and support the needs of the teachers. Parents need to get involved and be vocal to see change happen, especially leading to equity for all students and inclusive classrooms. During the pandemic, teachers had to quickly transition to a virtual teaching environment. This required them to adapt quickly and so did the administration. But we had no choice but to adapt. Some schools took longer than others and requirements and rules had to be modified to teach the students from beyond the classroom. This helped prove that changes can be made and testing new environments and practicing new methods should continue to follow for the best interest of the students. What we learned through the pandemic environment is that change can happen overnight, and we are forced to be creative to survive. Therefore, for students to thrive in their school environments, change must take place especially where one teacher is not enough to bring all students together in one classroom. It's time for co-teaching and collaborating to encourage a level playing field for all students.

Critical Reflection (Individual)

What I learned about myself while working on this project is that I have a passion for helping those with special needs in a school setting. I want to be able to help them to be the best version of themselves and protect them from feeling like an outcast. I also learned that a teacher wears many hats in the school setting and needs support from parents and students. Teachers must think outside of the box when working with different learning styles and obstacles of their students. Teachers have many roadblocks when it comes to what they can do to make significant changes due to having limited resources and lack of support from the school districts. Teachers have to be united with other teachers to make changes happen and they have to be persistent even when they see no light at the end of the tunnel.

In working towards changes in the school setting there are many things that we must consider. Teaching is a difficult yet rewarding job, and perceptions of teaching versus the reality of teaching can be misleading. Schools are often tied up in bureaucracy and financial strain and do not have what they need to support students. Teachers must be leaders if they want to bring about change. Using these educators to lead that change will

pave a way to make that change be a part of the culture. Teachers should expect pushback and be ready to tackle it with data. Also, when there is pushback, they must use it to their advantage and see where they need to elaborate and fill gaps on the plan.

This project helped me to realize the importance that parents play in supporting teachers. We follow the same routine without children to drop them off at school, pick them up, say good-bye to the teachers standing in the front of the school and then two times a year we spend 1 hour with them in the classroom going over our children's academic progress. They watch, teach, and protect our children daily during the school year, and how many times do we stop to ask, what do you need from me to support your ideas or needs?" Never, because many of us do not know we can support them by attending school board meetings, city council meetings and other public meetings that take place where we can make public comments to their proposals. It is important for parents and their children to get involved in having teacher's backs and pushing for change and improvements to the teaching and learning environments. I never realized how important a role we play in helping them to make changes and reform education programs. We parents play a huge role in keeping the momentum going.

Synthesis and Integration (Individual)

The framework outlined in MLO 1 has prepared and strengthened my knowledge surrounding education and my role in the school as well as the community. Through this semester and Capstone course, I have learned how to fine tune my research methods and writing skills. I feel my success derives from leaning upon the coursework I have completed over the many years of education with the focus on liberal arts and practical foundations of education. This has resulted in becoming familiar with the requirements I have to uphold in a classroom setting as an educator. For example, the mandate to report anything concerning child welfare to authorities. This was done through many channels over the course of my education, however this semester brought it all together.

I attribute what I have learned to many experiences and influences. In these classroom settings I have been a part of literature studies, group projects and discussions, peer reviews and observations, collaboration

with individuals in class as well as the teachers I have worked closely with in fine-tuning projects and assignments (MLO 2). Additionally, the courses I took gave me more insight into the world, socioeconomic groups, and cultures that exist. These were so beneficial to my perception and led to paradigm shifts throughout the years. We live in such a diverse world and being able to have history, education, and insight is so crucial in a holistic and inclusive approach of education.

I also attribute technological advancements (MLO 3) that have helped me to get to where I am today in respect to my graduation at CSUMB. When I first began this journey (2004) things were so much different, and we did not have the platforms and information to share and collaborate at our fingertips. Technology was just ramping up, in fact, textbooks were not online, Canvas did not exist and the best way I found my research was at the library in an archaic book. There are now so many more ways to find information on what you are looking for, and ways to communicate with classmates and instructors compared to exchanging phone numbers on a flip phone and visiting the teacher on campus during office hours. Also being able to create meaningful presentations is much richer now, which is an exciting component to be able to bring into the classroom. As an educator you can easily collaborate with students, share your feedback, post grades, assign videos to watch and content to share, the possibilities are endless.

As a social justice collaborator (MLO 4), I have learned that changes come about with an idea or call to action as a result of some sort of social injustice. I feel this is so imperative now more than ever. When equals are treated unequally, injustice arises. Being familiar and educated on discrimination, ageism, gender, and sexuality is so important in today's day and age. As an educator my role is to ensure that no child feels excluded, stereotyped, and discriminated against, it is my role to protect them while they are in my care. In my Capstone project I looked at special needs students who are often left out and discriminated against. As an instructor and a parent it is my role to advocate for them and make sure they have the same (equal) learning opportunities as other students, and why I felt this project was so near to my core values. No student should be left out of a general education classroom and if they are it leads them to being left behind.

Wrapping up this semester and my combined coursework has helped me to be a well-rounded subject matter generalist (MLO 5) that I would not be without a college education. The courses that went much further into depth than basic general education classes in high school gave me a deeper understanding of all subject foundations, including examining literature and data to understand gaps and needs. I am so proud of where I am today, and of all the work and many long hours that have gone into this degree. After I get my degree, I plan to use it to further my career in Government being a public servant. I am not sure where I will land, but I would like to envision working in some capacity of advocacy or assistance for those who are in low socioeconomic standings. I want to be able to help those who do not have the support of an educator and break the cycle of generational poverty and give them a voice. Just as I did during my school years, I want to advocate for those who cannot or do not speak up for themselves. There are many of those individuals out there and we see them every day but do not hear them. I want to be a catalyst for change wherever my career may take me. This degree will also speak a thousand words on my behalf, and I am looking forward to the opportunities it will bring me. Whether I end up in the front of a class or in a cubicle, I know that I can be a teacher and a leader for change.

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Appendix

What is co-teaching?

Co-teaching involves at least two credentialed professionals that are peers in the instructional effort. The classroom teacher and special education teacher have a shared responsibility for planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction to a group of general education and special education students.

What are the benefits of co-teaching?

Provides both teachers with an active instructional role and lowers the student-teacher ratio and reduces the load of teaching a large inclusive classroom.

How do students benefit?

Co-teaching gives students the chance to ask more questions during lesson time and it allows for students with special needs to learn with their peers in a general education classroom. Co-teaching is a very successful way to teach all students in a classroom setting. Both teachers develop new instructional techniques while teaching and sharing.

Co-teaching is an effective modeling for students to learn collaborative skills. When students help each other in the classroom, they gain confidence and independence, and you get to keep on teaching.

Co-Teaching

This brochure is designed to provide educators with information and resources about co-teaching. Helpful links are included to allow an easy click to learn more about co-teaching and upcoming trainings and workshops in your area.

Appendix A

Image 1: Brochure sent via email to teachers and vice-principal.

Building Inclusive Classrooms with Co-Teaching

Appendix A, Image 1: Brochure (Side 2)

**What are the steps to take to promote co-teaching at my school?**

- Identify teachers who will partner with you on co-teaching.
- Meet with principal to explore co-teaching opportunities.
- Create successful co-teaching process.
- Develop a plan to pilot first and phase in co-teaching.
- Identify training programs focusing on co-teaching.
- Identify resources to support co-teaching.
- Create systems and structures that will support co-teaching partners.
- Build capacity and grow co-teaching practices.
- Implement co-teaching model.
- Assess and modify where needed.

Are there different types of co-teaching?

There are six types of co-teaching which include: 1) One teach: One observe, 2) One teach: One assist, 3) Station Teaching, 4) Parallel Teaching, 5) Alternative Teaching, and 6) Team Teaching.

How do I approach co-teaching the right way?

Talk to a co-teacher beforehand to understand what style would work best for you. Find teacher partners who support co-teaching and talk with the administrators to support you.
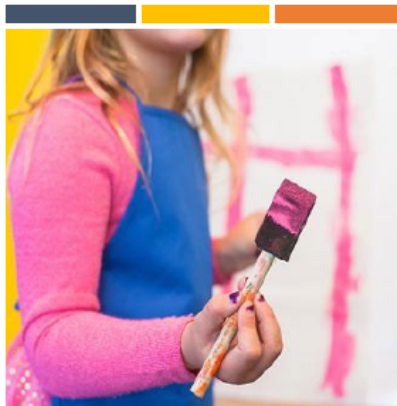
"All students belong together in a learning environment"

Where can I get more information about co-teaching?

Bureau of Education & Research | Search Events by Location | K-12 Professional Staff Development (ber.org)

Products – Marilyn Friend, Inc | The Co-Teaching Connection (coteach.com)

Co teaching-what-is-it-and-what-is-it-not (slideshare.net)

collaborative teaching (slideshare.net)

Videos | Edutopia

Collaborative Teaching: What is it & How to Do it the Right Way? - Bit Blog

*California Statewide Individualized Education Program (IEP) Workgroup Report (scoe.net)

Appendix B, Image 2: Email to teacher

Hello Teacher XXXXXXX:

I would like to thank you for taking the time to answer the survey questions about inclusive classrooms and co-teaching. I learned a lot from your responses that led me to identify some actions that improve inclusion in classrooms. It is important for teachers to learn more about co-teaching so that they can take the steps to implement a co-teaching model for their school.

To help inform teachers and administrators about co-teaching, I created a brochure that will provide some information as well as web links to the various sites on co-teaching training events, tools, blogs and other materials. I know how busy teachers are and I felt a brochure with quick points and websites would be an easy read to start the discussion and conversations about co-teaching.

Please give me your feedback and any suggestions to add or remove from the brochure. I plan on sending the brochure to the vice-principal to offer this information with the hopes of it being sent to all teachers. I hope that the administration supports those teachers who would like to invest in co-teaching to support inclusion for all students.

Again, thank you for your time and feedback.

Sincerely,

Robert Mistler

Appendix C, Image 3: Email to vice-principal

Dear Vice Principal XXXXXXX:

I would like to introduce myself and give you some background on some research that I have done to identify actions to improve inclusive classrooms. My name is Robert Mistler, and I am an undergraduate student at CSU Monterey Bay. For my Senior Capstone Project, I choose to research the topic of improving inclusion in classrooms. This was important to me because I believe all students should have the opportunity to learn in a general classroom together. There are so many advantages for students with disabilities to grow and learn alongside their peers. Therefore, this research project gave me the opportunity to see what options are available to encourage schools to improve their classrooms by including all students.

I would like to thank the teachers from your school who volunteered to respond to my survey. This survey allowed me to identify and understand some personal points of view and opinions of full classroom inclusion and co-teaching. The responses identified some emerging themes that led me to identify some actions that can be taken to begin looking at co-teaching opportunities.

As you know, teachers are very busy and have full plates and limited time to take on new projects. However, they are willing to do whatever is best for their students if they have the resources and the support. To help them learn more about co-teaching and how it supports improving inclusion in the classroom, I created a brochure with some quick points. This brochure provides information about co-teaching and available resources such as events, tools, blogs and other materials. I felt a brochure with quick points and websites would be an easy read to start the discussion and begin conversations about co-teaching. They will find that there are many benefits not only for the students but for them.

I know that you are also very busy, and I thank you in advance for sharing this brochure with your administrators and your teachers. I hope this will give them an opportunity to consider co-teaching and to begin looking at all the benefits, especially for all students.
Please let me know if you have any questions or would like to meet to discuss further.

Sincerely,

Robert Mistler
Attachment: Brochure