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Benefits and Challenges of Support Facilitation in an Inclusive Classroom



We would like to thank Dr. David Hoppey for all of his help, support, and guidance throughout this process. He has believed in us since the beginning and has challenged us to be the best students and future educators we could possibly be.

Benefits and Challenges of Support Facilitation in an Inclusive Classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of this inquiry was to determine the benefits and challenges of support facilitation in an inclusive classroom. To answer our inquiry questions, we (UNF ESE teacher candidates) collected data on general education (GE) teachers and the varying exceptional (VE) teachers' perceptions of support facilitation at Coastal Middle School through surveys, observational walkthroughs, and teacher interviews. From the data, we discovered benefits and challenges in four overarching categories: teachers' perceptions, collaboration, instruction, and student engagement themes. As a result of the data, we recommended that Coastal Middle School outline clear and explicit roles for both the GE teacher and the special education teacher during the co-planning and co-teaching process, train the teachers on how to co-plan together, inform them of co-teaching methods they can use, and to create a schedule where the VE teacher only needs to focus on one class during each period.

Part 1: Context Background

Our inquiry project took place at Coastal Middle School in Jacksonville, Florida. At the time of the study, Coastal Middle School was made up of 1,336 students in grades 6 through 8. The student population was comprised of 54% male students and 46% female students. In addition, the student population's ethnicities were: 36% white, 35% African American, 12% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 1% Pacific Islander, and less than 1% American Indian. Also, out of the 1,336 students, 13% were exceptional student education (ESE) students. In addition, the ESE population included 7% speech impaired, 9% language impaired, 7% deaf or hard of hearing, 1% visually impaired, 4% classified with an emotional behavior disorder,

40% classified with a specific learning disability, 9% classified with an intellectual disability, and 20% classified as "other." Moreover, when looking at the teachers, there were 73. Of those, 12 were ESE or special education teachers. In addition, of those 12 ESE teachers, six were varying exceptionality (VE) teachers. VE teachers are special education teachers who supported students with a variety of disabilities in the general education (GE) classroom following each students' Individualized Education Plan (IEP). At Coastal Middle School, VE teachers are responsible for reviewing and developing IEPs and providing services to the ESE students on their caseload. These services can be delivered inside the general classroom or outside of the classroom as determined in the student's IEP. Furthermore, VE teachers at Coastal Middle School were not responsible for creating any type of lesson plans. Our group was placed with four of these VE

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teachers at Coastal Middle School, including Ms. Haley, Mrs. Becky, Mrs. Sarah, and Mrs. Daisy.

VE teachers each support either grade 6, grade 7, or grade 8, and each have anywhere between 45 to 47 students on their caseload. Additionally, the VE teachers supported anywhere between 3 to 6 GE teachers during a week. Our mentor teachers' days typically involved visiting three different classes in one period for approximately 30 minutes per class. While the VE teacher was in the classroom, they were only responsible for their ESE students in that class. During this time, the VE teacher typically observed the GE teacher while they were lecturing. After the GE teacher was done lecturing, the VE teacher circled around the room while the students were working independently to assist any of the students who needed help. While their main focus was the ESE kids on their caseload, they also helped all the students. This is a teaching model called support facilitation. Support facilitation is when two teachers provide instruction to a class. The GE teacher is responsible for teaching the course content, and the ESE teacher is responsible for providing direct services in the class for students with disabilities. The ESE teacher has a flexible schedule that allows them to support a class for a partial amount of a class period or only on certain days. The frequency and intensity of support varies based upon students' and/or GEs' need for assistance. In addition to supporting their ESE students in the GE class, our mentor teachers also taught their own learning strategies class in a resource classroom for students with disabilities for one period a day. For this class, our mentor teachers were given a curriculum guide that they followed for the first half of the period. During the second half of the period, they worked independently with students who used that time as a study hall class.

Part 2: Purpose and Wonderings

During our time at Coastal Middle School, the UNF ESE teacher candidates were each partnered with a VE mentor teacher. Our VE teachers supported ESE students inside the GE classroom. We observed them inside the classroom, supporting their ESE students and the GE teacher. From this observation, our group became interested in the process of support facilitation at Coastal Middle School.

As a result, we began to dive into the literature surrounding support facilitation. The first valuable source we discovered was Chapter 7 in the Handbook of Learning Disabilities. (Swanson, Harris, & Graham, 2014). This chapter discusses the different special education service delivery modules, including 'pullout' and 'co-teaching' models. The 'pull-out' method focuses on a special education teacher removing a student with disabilities outside of the GE classroom to provide any services that are specified in their IEP. On the other hand, the 'co-teaching' method emphasizes inclusion by allowing the special education teacher to work closely with all their students inside the GE classroom. The GE teacher and the special education teacher can work collaboratively to provide explicit and differentiated instruction to all students in an inclusive setting.

Support facilitators work in the GE classroom and collaborate with the GE teacher. However, they are only responsible for supporting students in that classroom who have disabilities. They also have a flexible schedule that allows them to provide support facilitation for a partial amount of a class period or only on certain days. However, co-teaching requires the GE and ESE teacher to share responsibilities for planning, delivering, and assessing the learning needs of all the students in a class, and for both teachers to work together for an entire class period. Research shows that the best practice for support facilitation is using co-teaching methods.

A multitude of different co-teaching models can be utilized by a GE teacher and a special education teacher in the classroom. Module 8 of *Supervision Modules to Support Educators in Collaborative Teaching* (Hoppey, Haley, & Robinson, 2019) outlines and discusses the different models of co-teaching. In all, this module provides an overview of the strategies to use while co-teaching, highlights why each strategy is important, and when to use these strategies. There are six specific models described. The first one is 'One teach, One observe.' This model involves one teacher instructing, while the other teacher assesses student learning through observation. The second method, 'One teach, One Assist' means that a teacher is instructing while the other teacher is walking around, monitoring student progress, and providing additional assistance if needed. The third method, 'Team teaching,' requires both teachers to teach instruction cooperatively and to share the duties in lesson planning. 'Station teaching' is the fourth method and highlights how each teacher is responsible for planning and instructing a different station of the class where the students will be rotating. The fifth method, 'Parallel teaching,' describes how the teachers divide the class in half, and then each takes half of the students. Both teachers in this situation teach the same material at the same time to half of the class. The last method, 'Alternative teaching,' is when one of the teachers takes a smaller group and teaches/provides instruction that is different from what is being taught to the other students.

There are multiple components that make a co-teaching relationship successful. The article, *Understanding Co-Teaching Components* (Gately & Gately Jr., 2001), discussed the eight critical components of a co-teaching relationship. The first component, 'Interpersonal Communication,' centers on how the teachers are communicating with each other about their plans and goals for the students. The next component, 'Physical Arrangement,' is the process of co-teachers agreeing upon how the classroom is arranged. This includes materials, students, desks, and the like. In the ideal co-teaching relationship, teachers would share materials and resources. Familiarity with the curriculum is another important component for a co-teaching relationship.

This means the GE teacher is knowledgeable about the curriculum, so they can teach the content. It is also important for special education teachers to be familiar with the curriculum so they can make suggestions on how to modify the content. This leads to the next component, 'Curriculum Goals and Modifications.' This component entails teachers co-developing goals and objectives for each of the students. In addition, both teachers need to discuss goals, accommodations, and modifications necessary for an individual to be successful. The next critical component is 'Instructional Planning.' This requires that both teachers plan together outside of the classroom on a daily/weekly basis. Another important component of co-teaching is 'Instructional Presentation,' where both teachers need to participate regularly during instruction. The next component, classroom management, emphasizes the importance of both teachers developing and agreeing on a classroom management system. Finally, the last component of co-teaching is assessment. This component requires teachers to create grading procedures and progress monitoring systems that they will implement in their classrooms. Each of these components helps create a positive and effective co-teaching relationship that benefits the teachers and students.

During our research process, we discovered two significant sources to help us collect data. The first source was the *Collaborative Teaching Walkthrough Tool* (Florida Inclusion Network, 2020). This walkthrough instrument synthesizes the evidence-based best co-teaching practices into a tool that observers can use while watching the classroom. The walkthrough tool focuses on identifying characteristics of effective co-teaching. Some of the indicators include both teachers directing activities, co-planning, classroom management, collaborative relationships, and student engagement. These are all indicators that we felt would help us determine if support facilitation was being utilized in the classroom. See Appendix A for a copy of the walkthrough tool.

An additional source used to help collect data was the Co-Teaching Survey: What Works Best & the Biggest Challenges (State Education Resource Center, 2016). We adapted questions from this survey to determine the co-teaching modules the teachers were using in addition to questions about what Coastal Middle School teachers think is challenging, beneficial, and what they want to improve about co-teaching. We picked these questions for the survey so that we could understand the GE teacher and the special education teachers' thoughts and opinions about co-teaching.

Therefore, the purpose of this inquiry was to determine the benefits and challenges of coteaching in an inclusive classroom. As a result of our observations and research, our guiding inquiry question was "How does Coastal Middle School implement co-teaching in their VE classrooms?" Other sub-questions that helped us unpack the attitudes and beliefs of the Coastal Middle School teachers are:

- What are the perceptions of Coastal Middle School teachers about support facilitation?
- What are the teachers at Coastal Middle School's opinions on trying new support facilitation strategies?

Part 3: Research Plan

To answer the inquiry questions, we collected data on GE teachers and the VE teachers at Coastal Middle School. We chose to collect data on both types of teachers because we wanted to understand support facilitation from both viewpoints. The VE teachers might feel differently than the GE teachers about support facilitation. Therefore, we thought it would be beneficial to survey both types of teachers at the school. We first surveyed the GE teachers who use support facilitation with VE teachers. Second, we surveyed the VE teachers. This survey contained questions about the teachers' thoughts

and beliefs regarding support facilitation. The ESE lead teacher, Mrs. Gauttie, sent the survey to ten teachers, including GE and special education teachers at Coastal Middle School. There was a 90% response rate to the survey. Of those nine teachers, four were VE teachers, and five were GE teachers.

Our next set of data collection came from conducting walkthrough observations of our mentor teachers inside the GE classroom. The checklist included nine characteristics that are prominent for support facilitation to occur inside the classroom. Some of the characteristics include topics about collaboration, instruction, and student engagement (see Appendix A). We completed the walkthrough checklist with a simple yes and no and then wrote any other comments and questions we acquired through observing our mentor teachers. Finally, after we completed our walkthrough observations, we each sat down with our mentor teacher and interviewed them about the lesson we observed. This provided us with the opportunity to unpack their attitudes and beliefs about support facilitation after we observed it in practice. During the interview, we asked questions about why they completed specific actions when we observed them, in addition to in-depth questions about their beliefs on support facilitation.

Part 4: Data Analysis

To analyze the data from the teacher surveys, we created graphic references representing the results of the survey's multiple-choice questions. We used graphic references like pie charts and bar graphs to display the data trends. In addition, to analyze the open-ended questions from the surveys and the walkthrough observations, each group member read through all the interview data. We then grouped the data into four different categories: teachers' perceptions, collaboration, instruction, and student engagement themes, by finding commonalities and differences across the teachers' responses. In addition, we also categorized the overarching themes into

different benefits and challenges we found in the data. Finally, we discussed the findings with everyone in our group to determine if we all agreed or noticed any additional themes in the data.

Part 5: Results Teacher Responses Concerning Support Facilitation

The first data were the results of the survey, which included preferred co-teaching methods as well as the teachers' perceptions of support facilitation.

This included the benefits and challenges of support facilitation that the teachers identified in the study.

We developed a list of claims to help us organize the data into cohesive units

In response to the survey question asking, 'Which co-teaching method do you use at least once a week in your class?' 88% of the teachers answered that they used 'One teach, One Assist' (Figure 1). This was something that we also saw throughout our walkthrough observations. In our 18 walkthrough observations, we observed the 'One teach, One assist' co-teaching method 100% of the time. In addition, 62% said they used 'Station teaching,' 37% said they used 'One teach, One observe,' 25% said they used 'Team teaching,' and 12% said they used 'Parallel teaching' (Figure 1). However, we did not see these other co-teaching methods used at any point during our walkthroughs.

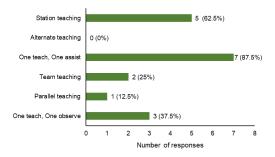


Figure 1. Teacher responses to survey questions regarding co-teaching methods. Responses from eight teachers were recorded and plotted. The number of responses and percent of the whole data set is shown.

Teacher Perceptions of Support Facilitation

These are some of the findings we discovered about the teachers' perception of support facilitation.

Claim #1: VE teachers are seen as 'assistants' in the GE classroom.

Of seven responses on one of the survey questions, four mentioned VE teachers being seen as assistants while being in the GE classrooms. One of the special education teachers said that when they are in the classroom, "the gen ed teacher doesn't want you to work with the students." This quote emphasized how VE teachers feel like they are treated as assistants while providing support facilitation in the GE classroom. In addition, one of the GE teachers also said that support facilitation was challenging because "the ESE teacher would talk during a lesson." This answer does not illustrate the parity that the research suggested (Gately & Gately, 2011; Hoppey et al, 2019) and confirms that the GE teachers also view VE teachers as assistants in their classrooms.

Claim #2: VE teachers feel like they are being pulled in multiple directions during one period.

In a different survey question, 4 out of 8 of the survey responses from teachers mentioned they needed more VE teachers because they are required to be in multiple places (classrooms) during the same period. One of the teachers said that they would appreciate "more evenly distributed students for their schedule." Another VE teacher said that they felt like they were "spread out to the point that I am pulled in 3 or 4 different directions during one period." These responses from teachers amplify that VE teachers feel like they cannot complete their job to the full extent because they must visit too many classes during one period.

Collaboration Themes in Support Facilitation

Detailed below are some overarching themes we discovered about the challenges of collaboration in co-teaching.

Claim #3: The GE teacher and the special education teacher do not regularly co-plan lessons with each other. We discovered this overarching theme based on our walkthrough data. In the 18 walkthroughs we completed, there was no evident collaborative planning between the teachers. Often the GE teacher created their own lesson plans without any input from the VE teacher. During most of the walkthroughs, the VE teachers were unsure of what content was being taught in the classroom that day. On one of our walkthroughs, a teacher commented when she got in the classroom "I'm not sure what they are learning right now." In another walkthrough observation, we noted that our mentor teacher was unsure what the students were supposed to be doing. In addition, one of us noted when "helping her student she was unsure how to solve the problem because she did not know what they were learning." This evidence illustrates that the VE teachers do not co-plan with the GE teachers because they are unaware of the content the GE covers each day.

However, it is interesting to note that our walkthrough data contradicts what the GE and VE teachers said on the survey (Figure 2). Of the eight responses on the survey, three of the teachers responded that they spend over an hour co-planning every week. One teacher said they spent 45 to 60 minutes co-planning. In addition, 3 teachers spent 30 to 45 minutes co-planning each week.

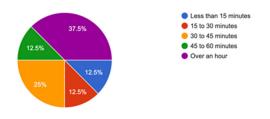


Figure 2. Teacher responses to survey questions regarding the amount of time spent co-planning in a week. Responses from eight teachers were recorded and plotted. The percentage of each response is indicated.

Claim #4: There is not a collaborative relationship between the GE and VE teachers.

We discovered this overarching theme based on our walkthrough data. During the 18 walkthroughs, 44% of the time there was no collaborative relationship between the teachers. While completing one of the walkthroughs, one of us noted that "there is little to no interaction between the teachers during our time in the classroom." Another walkthrough comment explains that while they were observing their mentor VE teacher in the general classroom, the "teachers did not talk to each other at all." The data clearly illustrates that the VE teacher and the GE teacher typically don't communicate with each other. The teachers cannot have a truly collaborative relationship unless they communicate with each other.

Instructional Themes in Support Facilitation

Outlined below are some overarching themes we discovered about the benefits and challenges of instruction in support facilitation.

Claim #5: There is respect between teachers and students. During the data collection process, we discovered the overarching theme that there is respect between teachers and students. In the 18 walkthroughs, there was visible respect between the adults and the students 83% of the time. One comment recorded during the walkthroughs was, "students and teachers appear to have respect for one another and listen to each other." One thing we noticed during a walkthrough was that "the students seemed to get excited when they saw their teacher, Mrs. Becky, enter the room and had lots of questions for her about the content." Respect was evident between both of the teachers as well as the students. Although respect was evident most of the time, it was not something that happened all the time.

The teachers also identified many challenges associated with the instructional methods used in the co-taught classrooms.

Claim #6: Both teachers are not heard during the instruction/activities.

We discovered this overarching theme based on our walkthrough data. During the 18 walkthroughs we completed, 73% of the time the voices of both the GE teacher and the VE teacher were not heard during instructional time. In addition, both teachers did not direct activities 62% of the time. In most of the classes we observed, only the GE teacher was heard during instruction and while directing activities. On some of the walkthroughs, it was even pointed out that "neither of the teachers' voices was heard during the instruction or the activities." These data illustrate that usually the only dominant voice heard during the lessons, or while directing activities, was that of the GE teacher.

Claim #7: Both teachers do not participate in using classroom management strategies.

We discovered this overarching theme based on our walkthrough, survey, and interview data. During the 18 walkthroughs we completed, 54% of the time we observed both teachers not enforcing the class rules and using classroom management techniques. In an interview where a VE teacher was asked to share their opinion on classroom management, the teacher said, "I am not responsible for classroom management because it is not my classroom." In addition, when completing another walkthrough observation, we noted that "the classroom was out of control and neither of the teachers were trying to fix it." When asked about classroom management, the same VE teacher said that "classroom management is not part of my job." Finally, on one of the survey questions, a VE teacher stated that "when a teacher's classroom management is poor, it is hard to help out I am not there to manage the classroom." These data emphasize that VE teachers do not use classroom management strategies while in the

GE classroom.

Claim #8: The VE teachers' roles in the support facilitation classrooms are unclear.

We discovered this overarching theme based on the survey responses. Out of seven responses to a survey question, four of the teachers highlighted that the roles of VE teachers inside the GE classrooms are unclear. Furthermore, one VE teacher responded that the "general education teacher doesn't want you to work with students and doesn't want me to have any input." Another VE teacher responded to the survey by saying they wish the GE teacher would "allow the VE teachers the opportunity to do their jobs properly." These data illustrate that the GE teachers and the VE teachers do not understand the roles and responsibilities needed to successfully co-teach inside the GE classroom.

Student Engagement Themes in Support Facilitation

These are some overarching themes we discovered about the benefits of student engagement in support facilitation.

Claim # 9: Students seek out help from both the GE teacher and the special education teacher.

We discovered this overarching theme based on our walkthrough data. During the 18 walkthroughs we completed, 67% of the time students sought out and accepted help from both teachers. While completing a walkthrough observation, one of us noted that "all of the students including the general education students and the ESE students asked for help from both of the teachers while completing an activity." In addition, another observation mentioned that the "students ask for help from both teachers." These data illustrate that all the students in the classroom typically seek out help from both the GE teacher and

the VE teacher. This is beneficial because the teachers can share the responsibility of providing scaffolding and help twice the number of students during the same amount of time.

On the other hand, the teachers identified many challenges associated with student engagement in the co-taught classrooms.

Claim 10: Students are not actively engaged in instruction.

We discovered the overarching theme that students were not actively engaged in instruction based on our walkthrough data. During the 18 walkthroughs we completed, 44% of the time students were not actively engaged in the instruction. While conducting a walkthrough observation, some of us commented that students "are not engaged during independent time" and that "none of the students were paying attention to the instruction. The students were screaming, cursing, play fighting, and throwing things at each other." These data emphasize that while we were observing support facilitation, the students were not engaged in the instruction or activities. It is crucial for students to be engaged throughout the class to learn.

Recommendations

According to Hoppey et al., in Chapter Eight of Supervisions Modules to Support Educators in Collaborative Teaching (2019), to collaborate in the classroom productively, GE and special education teachers must plan collaboratively, utilize many teaching styles, analyze data, share responsibility, reflect on the process, and communicate. However, we did not see these characteristics during our time at Coastal Middle School. As a result, one of our recommendations for Coastal Middle School is to outline clear and explicit roles for both the GE teacher and the special education teacher during the co-planning and co-teaching or support facilitation process. No true benefits of support facilitation can exist without outlining and understanding the roles and responsibilities of collaboration. Teachers who

collaborate should set aside the time to determine clear and defined roles on what each teacher is responsible during the planning and teaching process.

Additionally, another recommendation we have is training the teachers on how to co-plan together. In the article *Understanding Co-Teaching Components* (Gately & Gately Jr., 2001), the authors emphasize the importance of co-planning in a successful collaborative support facilitation classroom. They explained both teachers need to plan together outside of the classroom on a daily/weekly basis to be successful. As a result, we recommend that teachers at Coastal Middle School dedicate time each week to collaborate and co-plan together. This time should include teachers collaborating on instruction, goals, grading, accommodations, and any modifications required.

Another recommendation we have for Coastal Middle School is to train the teachers on the different co-teaching methods they can use. It is crucial that the teachers who collaborate are knowledgeable of the eight different types of co-teaching models. In *Supervisions Modules to Support Educators in Collaborative Teaching* (Hoppey et al., 2019), the authors explain the importance of using many collaborative teaching models. Therefore, the teachers at Coastal Middle School need to select a model of teaching for each lesson and apply or change those teaching models based on the students' needs.

Finally, our last recommendation for Coastal Middle School is to create a schedule where the VE teacher only needs to focus on one class during each period. This would involve the VE teacher providing services in a class throughout the entire class period. Our recommendation would allow the teachers time to utilize the different collaborative teaching styles, implement assessment, analyze data, and share the responsibilities of teaching.

Part 6: Collaboration

Throughout this inquiry process, our group repeatedly participated in collaborations. First, we collaborated

within our group. We all worked together to complete this inquiry project. Guillermo worked with Mrs. Gauttie to gather all the demographics and background information that we needed on Coastal Middle School. Lily began writing parts one, three, and four of the inquiry projects while Sydney, Hannah, and Guillermo all began to dive into the literature. In addition, after they found some literature that connected to our project, they each wrote a section in part two about the sources they had found. Then, everyone in the group worked together to gather data needed to answer our inquiry question. Each of the group members asked our mentor teacher to complete the survey, we all collected walkthrough data, and we all interviewed our teachers. After collecting the data, we split the data into sections for everyone to analyze. Lily analyzed the perceptions teachers have about support facilitation and some recommendations for Coastal Middle School. Sydney worked on analyzing the data about the themes in support facilitation instruction. Guillermo was responsible for analyzing the themes in student engagement. Finally, Hannah worked on analyzing the data about the themes in collaboration at Coastal Middle School. Furthermore, we all worked together to create a PowerPoint presentation. Each group member was responsible for creating a slide based on the data they analyzed. Overall, we worked together throughout the entire inquiry project by bouncing ideas off each other and giving each other feedback on our different parts.

Then, we each collaborated with our mentor teacher at Coastal Middle School, with whom we worked closely over a three-month time span. Our mentor teacher provided a vast amount of valuable information throughout this project. They answered our survey questions and allowed us to complete our

walkthrough observations while they were in the GE classroom. In addition, they also answered multiple questions we had about co-teaching at Coastal Middle School and their beliefs about co-teaching.

Next, we collaborated as a group with the ESE lead teacher at Coastal Middle School, Mrs. Gauttie, on support facilitation and presented our project to her. We explained to her what we wanted to do and what we wanted to get from this inquiry project. As a result, she provided us with a multitude of information that we used in this project. She gave us all the demographics and background information we needed on Coastal Middle School. In addition, she also sent our survey to all the VE teachers and the GE teachers that co-teach with the VE teachers. Throughout this project, she was just an email away for any questions we had about Coastal Middle School.

Finally, we collaborated with one of our professors Dr. Hoppey, who played an important role in our inquiry project. He was our support throughout the entire process and did many things to help, including guiding us through this, our first inquiry process. Dr. Hoppey constantly answered any questions we had about the inquiry project during class and over email. He also helped us make important decisions for the project. For example, he helped us decide what kind of data would be best to collect. In addition, he also helped us figure out our next steps when we got stuck. Furthermore, Dr. Hoppey provided us with ongoing feedback on our project that we were able to use for professional development. He read through the paper and gave critical feedback, which we used to refine the paper. In addition, Dr. Hoppey gave us feedback during class, which we used to improve the project and grow on a professional level.

Appendix A

Walk Through Observation Tool

Observation Date		
Observer Name		
Teachers Observed		
Content Area/Grade		
Support Facilitation ApproachObserved		
Total number of students in the classroom		
Number of students withdisabilities in the classroom		
Look Fors	Evident Y/N	Comments
 Both teachers are directing student actions and activities. 		
Both teachers are using classroom management techniques.		
 A collaborative relationship is evident among both teachers. 		
 Students are actively engaged in the instruction. 		
 Tea chers collaborate to developlessons. 		
 Teachers are using supports, modifications, and accommodations. 		
Students appear to accept and seekout both teachers' help in the learning process		
Respect between adults and students is evident		
The voice of both teachers are heardduring the teaching process		

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