

The College at Brockport: State University of New York

## Digital Commons @Brockport

---

Education and Human Development Master's  
Theses

Education and Human Development

---

1-2010

### What Training do Rochester-Area Special Education Co-teachers Receive in Co-teaching?

Meghan Marie Alkire

*The College at Brockport*, meghan07d7@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd\\_theses](https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_theses)



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

To learn more about our programs visit: <http://www.brockport.edu/ehd/>

---

#### Repository Citation

Alkire, Meghan Marie, "What Training do Rochester-Area Special Education Co-teachers Receive in Co-teaching?" (2010). *Education and Human Development Master's Theses*. 37.

[https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd\\_theses/37](https://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/ehd_theses/37)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Education and Human Development at Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education and Human Development Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@brockport.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@brockport.edu).

What Training do Rochester-Area Special Education Co-teachers Receive in Co-teaching?

by

Meghan Marie Alkire

January 2010

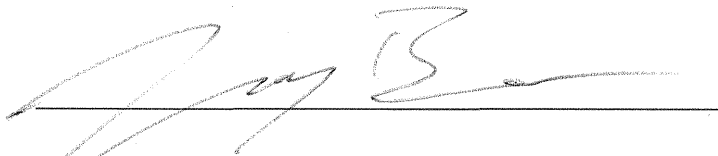
A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Education.

What Training do Rochester-Area Special Education Co-teachers Receive in Co-teaching?

by

Meghan Alkire

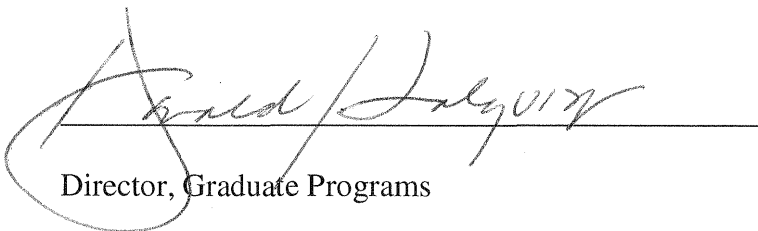
APPROVED BY:



Advisor

4/3/11

Date



Director, Graduate Programs

1/6/11

Date

## Table of Contents

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Table of Contents .....                          | i   |
| List of Tables .....                             | iii |
| List of Figures .....                            | iv  |
| Chapter 1 Introduction .....                     | 1   |
| Chapter 2: Review of Literature .....            | 4   |
| Introduction .....                               | 4   |
| Purpose .....                                    | 4   |
| Literature Review .....                          | 6   |
| Summary of Previous Co-teaching Research.....    | 6   |
| Research Methodology in the Literature .....     | 11  |
| Outcomes in the Literature .....                 | 12  |
| Limitations in the Literature.....               | 12  |
| Conclusion.....                                  | 13  |
| Chapter 4: Results .....                         | 17  |
| Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations ..... | 22  |
| Implications of Data.....                        | 22  |
| Solutions to Problems .....                      | 22  |
| Limitations of Study.....                        | 24  |

|                                    |    |
|------------------------------------|----|
| Future Direction for Study .....   | 25 |
| References .....                   | 27 |
| Appendix: Co-teaching Survey ..... | 29 |

## List of Tables

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Table 1 <i>Characteristics of Sample</i> .....                   | 15 |
| Table 2 <i>Characteristic of Sample</i> .....                    | 17 |
| Table 3 <i>Descriptive statistics for each survey item</i> ..... | 19 |

## List of Figures

*Figure 1.* Mean preparedness ratings with items ordered from least to greatest preparedness. ... 20

*Figure 2.* Survey items' standard deviation, ordered from greatest to least standard deviation... 21

## Chapter 1 Introduction

Many schools are changing their special education delivery methods to make them more inclusive. One model being used frequently in a special education classroom is co-teaching. Although co-teaching has been defined in many ways in research literature, in this thesis its meaning will be limited to the definition proposed by Gately & Gately (2001):

The collaboration between general and special education teachers for the entire teacher responsibly of all students assigned to a classroom. In a co-taught classroom, two teachers a general, and special educator, work together to develop a differentiated curriculum that meets the needs of a diverse population of students. In a co-taught classroom, teachers share the planning, presentation, evaluation, and classroom managements in an effort to enhance the learning environment for all students. (p.41)

Even with Gately & Gately's definition, co-teaching may be implemented in a variety of ways. Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie (2007) categorized ways schools use co-teaching as follows.

- One teach, one assist, where one teacher usually the general education teacher assumes responsibility of instruction, and the special education teacher provides individual support as needed.
- Station teaching, where various learning stations are created, and the co-teachers provide individual support at the different stations.
- Parallel teaching, where one teacher takes a smaller group of students to a different location for a limited period of time for specialized instruction.



- Team teaching otherwise known as interactive teaching, where both co-teachers share teaching responsibilities equally and are equally involved in leading instructional activities. (p.393)

Co-teaching is a frequently used teaching method with many potential benefits, especially for students with special needs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), has required all school districts to ensure that all students with disabilities have access to the general education classroom and curriculum (Wischnowski, Salmon and Eaton, 2004). Since the passage of IDEA, many schools have changed their special education delivery models to make them more inclusive. This has resulted in an increase in co-taught classrooms, with one teacher certified in general childhood education and the other in special education.

Not all schools have willingly adapted their instruction to meet every child's needs. The changes were often the results of court cases; parents of students with disabilities have been forced to file law suits in order to receive a free appropriate education which is guaranteed by the IDEA (Isherwood and Barger-Anderson, 2008). As a result, the method of co-teaching has become popular with an increasing number of students with disabilities being taught in general education classroom (Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, and Blanks, 2010). Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld and Blanks said co-teaching can provide teachers with an opportunity to meet the academic and behavior needs of all students more efficiently.

Because of this rush to implement co-teaching, little attention has been paid to how well co-teachers are prepared. Many new teachers receive little to no training before teaching in a co-taught classroom. As a result, the students in co-taught classrooms may not be learning to the full potential. This lack of understanding about co-teaching is a significant problem.

Some schools are beginning to incorporate co-teaching more frequently in the classroom; using training for teachers will help make the co-teaching method more efficient. A literature review was developed on what techniques can be used to help strengthen co-teaching collaboration in Special Education. The literature review, contained in Chapter 2, gives a better understanding of co-teaching, co-teaching training and what further research is needed.

Many school administrators have created co-teaching classrooms, but the question is how well teachers are being prepared to co-teach. What co-teaching training do Rochester-area special education co-teachers receive in co-teaching? A study was completed asking teachers how well prepared they feel for several components of co-teaching.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

Co-teaching is a teaching model in which two educators collaborate to educate a group of students. Co-teaching was developed by Roth and Tobin as an alternative to typical teaching practice used in most k-12 teacher preparation programs (Henderson, Beach and Famiano, 2007). As a result of the IDEA, the method of co-teaching has become popular with teachers of students with disabilities being taught in general education classroom (Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, and Blanks, 2010).

### **Purpose**

The two purposes of this literature review was to examine what techniques could be used when co-teaching in special education, and how much research has already been done on techniques for co-teaching. In particular I searched the literature for teacher perspectives, students with disabilities perspectives, and student data. I investigated teacher and student perspectives because they are the individuals who are in the co-teaching setting, receiving the first hand experience, and can be affected by the co-teaching model. I especially sought techniques that could help strengthen the co-teaching method in a special education classroom.

To find peer-reviewed articles about co-teaching techniques to be used in a special education, classroom I searched different databases in the SUNY Brockport library. The databases I searched included Ebsco and WorldCat. Some of the sample terms I used were co-teaching, team teaching, collaboration, partner teaching and inclusion.

If I found an article that was interesting and useful for my literature review, I would look at the references mentioned in the article and search the database to find those specific articles. I decided if an article could be used for my literature review if it was interesting,

contained useful information, was related to my topic of co-teaching and included a study related to co-teaching techniques.

I analyzed each article individually and then synthesized the data I had received from the articles. While reading each article I would find the methods used, when the article was developed, the question being studied in the article, and the results of the article. I synthesized the articles methodologies, outcomes and limitations.

Co-teaching has been described in a variety of ways. The two definitions of co-teaching provided will be used for the purpose of this literature review.

Gately and Gately Jr (2001) described the co-teaching process as:

The collaboration between general and special education teachers for the entire teacher responsibly of all students assigned to a classroom. In a co-taught classroom, two teachers a general, and special educator, work together to develop a differentiated curriculum that meets the needs of a diverse population of students. In a co-taught classroom, teachers share the planning, presentation, evaluation, and classroom managements in an effort to enhance the learning environment for all students. (p.41)

Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie (2007) said a number of co-taught variations have been identified. These include:

- One teach, one assist, where one teacher usually the general education teacher assumes responsibilities, and the special education teacher provides individual support as needed.
- Station teaching, where various learning stations are created, and the co-teachers provide individual support at the different stations.

- Parallel teaching, where one teacher may take a smaller group of students to a different location for a limited period of time for specialized instruction.
- Team teaching otherwise known as interactive teaching, where both co-teachers share teaching responsibilities equally and are equally involved in leading instructional activities. (p.393)

Gately and Gately Jr's definition of co-teaching will be used in this literature review because it gives a concrete explanation of co-teaching. Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie's explain the different forms of co-teaching rather than the definition because every co-taught classroom may be structured differently.

## **Literature Review**

My search of the literature yielded 20 articles on the concept of co-teaching. After analyzing each article I determined 10 of them were related to my research question about what techniques can be used while co-teaching in the special education classroom. The ten articles that did not relate to the research question are listed in the appendix. These articles are either based on parent perspective, not related to special education, or were "how to" articles, which are all irrelevant for this study.

## **Summary of Previous Co-teaching Research**

Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008) completed qualitative research to examine the factors affecting implementing and adjusting to co-teaching in the classroom between both general and special education faculty. The study included 15 general education teachers and 5 special education teachers, who were all interviewed and observed for a period of one year. Implementing co-teaching has been shown by Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008) to be a hard process, but can be successful. For co-teaching to be successful it needs to include

“interpersonal communication skills, administrative support, familiarity with curriculum, involvement in the planning of the initiative on behalf of the teachers, a common philosophy on classroom instruction and management, and identification of roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching relationship” (Isherwood & Bager-Anderson, 2008, p.126). The results from the study suggested that there needs to be “interpersonal relationship among co-teachers, clearly defined roles, and responsibilities, and administrative support and validation are factors that may affect the successful development of co-teaching relationships” (Isherwood & Bager-Anderson, 2008, p.121).

Bouck (2007) investigated the development of co-teaching collaboration between both the general education teacher and the special education teacher using a qualitative research method. The results of the study showed that there needs to be communication between co-teaching partners. This communication is “beneficial when addressing issues of roles, providing instruction, and handling classroom management and discipline, as well as issues such as loss of professional autonomy (Bouck, 2007, p.46). Bouck suggests that further research should be done to explore how co-taught classrooms affect student achievement and outcomes.

Walther-Thomas (1997) described a qualitative study that involved implementing a new building program that supported students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. All of the teams involved in the study used the co-teaching method. The study indentified in many benefits and problems that were appeared in their model for both studies with disabilities and general education students. Some benefits for students with disabilities were; improved self-esteem, increased academic performance, demonstrated appropriate social skills, and positive peer relationships (Walter-Thomas, 1997). On the other hand, common problems included: finding time to have scheduled planning time for co-teachers, student scheduling, case load concerns,

administrative support and staff development (Walter-Thomas, 1997). With the positive outcomes and problems associated with the new program, the study showed that most of the participants reported higher levels of understanding in co-teaching, professional collaboration, and support services explained.

Austin (2001) focused primarily on important factors affecting collaborative *teaching*, including effective strategies that were both valued and used, important teacher preparations, and valued school-based supports. A surprising outcome from this article was that the teachers in a co-taught classroom did not volunteer to co-teach. Also the data showed strong evidence that the general-education co-teacher did more work than special education co-teacher. The majority of *co-teachers* interviewed however in this study stated that they believed *co-teaching* contributed positively to the academic development of all their students.

Wilson and Michaels (2006) explained a study about students and their perceptions of co-teaching. The study was quantitative and qualitative: General and special education students were given a survey about their own perceptions of co-taught classrooms. Students indicated their responses on a Likert scale. The responses revealed the students' preferences and perceptions of co-teaching. The study showed significant differences between the general and special education students, but both groups were strongly in favor of co-taught classrooms (Wilson, & Michaels, 2006, p. 205). The students were also asked to respond to open ended questions. Some of the benefits of co-teaching were mentioned in these open-ended responses, availability of help, structural support, multiple perspectives and teaching styles and better grades. The students also mentioned drawbacks of co-teaching including that it was difficult to with anything, learners get confused with different guidance, there was more work, and higher grading standards. General education and special education students both enjoyed being in a co-

taught classroom. The major benefit of a co-taught class was the availability of help and individual assistance that is provided.

Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie (2007) studied thirty-two co-teaching inclusive classrooms using a qualitative meta-synthesis investigation. This type of investigation uses individual qualitative research to gather data. The study wanted to answer the following questions;

- What are perceptions of teachers in co-teaching classroom?
- What problems are encountered in co-teaching?
- What are the benefits perceived to be of co-teaching?
- What factors are needed to ensure success of co-teaching?

Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie searched many databases to find articles, and then coded the results from each. They found that most of the administrators, teachers, and students believed the co-teaching method to be beneficial to general education students and some students with disabilities.

Weiss and Lloyd (2002) examined co-teaching through qualitative research and data analysis. The following questions were trying to be addressed;

- What are the roles of special educators in a co-taught classroom?
- How do the instructional actions of a special educator differ in a co-taught and non co-taught classroom?

By interviewing and observing special education teachers in a co-taught classroom they “identified salient, recurrent patterns that suggested a description of co-taught definitions, roles and instructional actions and then compared this description to roles and actions in the special education classroom” (p.58). Weiss and Lloyd found that special educators using co-teaching



taught in different ways based on their own personal definitions of co-teaching. Weiss and Lloyd also concluded that not all teachers have common planning time, consistency in training and few of the teachers change their instructional roles based on the different instructional tasks. The most important conclusion was that the co-teaching participants were unable to engage in instructional actions that focused on the small, specific components of instruction that were normally part of the special education. Weiss and Lloyd believe that the “difficulty of providing ‘special education’ in a co-taught classroom begs for further research on the practicality and efficacy of the model and its various forms, particularly because of its wide spread use” (p. 67). Overall the study showed a difference in the description and use of co-teaching by the six teachers studied. The teachers had little opportunity to plan with their co-teachers, little training, and too many content areas to cover. Weiss and Lloyd say “there was also a clear lack of understanding on both the special educator’s and the administration’s part on how co-teaching was to be used and delivered” (p.67).

Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, and Blanks (2010) studied peer reviewed articles to collect data to develop practical techniques on how to enhance co-teachers interactions. Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, and Blanks (2010) said “the greatest obstacle to successful co-teaching is often the lack of preparedness of the educators involved” (p.158). Co-teaching requires a set of skills that are not always used when teaching alone. Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, and Blanks (2010) found that there needs to be clear and open communication, thoughtful planning, shared schedules, and compromise with the co-teaching partner. Many of these techniques are hard for individuals because it requires deliberate cooperation and compromise. If co-teachers are unable to compromise on the set up of classroom, delivery of instruction, and classroom rules, it will be hard for co-teachings to make an impact on the students. In conclusion Ploessl, Rock,

Schoenfeld and Blanks said co-teaching provides teachers with an opportunity to meet their students' academic and behavioral needs.

Wishnowski, Salmon, and Eaton (2004) described the effort for implanting and evaluating co-teaching, as a way of successfully including most students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Wishnowski, Salmon and Eaton "collected data for two years from elementary schools related to student achievement, application of classroom and test modifications, behavior referrals, student self-concept, and teacher and parent satisfaction" (2004, p.3). Results of the study show that co-teaching provided for students with disabilities an access to the general education classroom and to peers without disabilities.

Finally, Hang and Rabren (2009) were interested in identifying teachers' and students' perspective of co-teaching through quantitative and qualitative research. Hang and Rabren (2009) concluded that there was a significant difference in student academic performance and behavior between the year before co-teaching and the year of co-teaching. Students with disabilities and teachers both reported positive perspectives about co-teaching (Hang and Rabren, 2009, p. 259).

### **Research Methodology in the Literature**

About 75% of the articles (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Wilson & Michaels, 2006; Austin, 2001; Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks; 2010) used qualitative research to study co-teaching. Most of the qualitative articles used observation in their study. Only one of the articles used formal interviews with the teachers to receive teacher perspective about co-teaching (Bouck, 2007). Almost all of the articles used either interviews or surveys to collect data on co-teaching. Hang and Rabren (2009) and Wilson and Michaels (2006) used both qualitative and quantitative

research combined in the study. Austin, (2001) and Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, and Blanks (2010) used a meta-analysis approach, which is considered quantitative.

### **Outcomes in the Literature**

Outcomes from the studies on what techniques could be used in a co-taught special education classroom are, “interpersonal communication skills, administrative support, familiarity with curriculum, involvement in the planning of the initiative on behalf of the teachers, a common philosophy on classroom instruction and management, and identification of roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching relationship” (Isherwood & Bager-Anderson, 2008, p.126). Weiss and Lloyd (2002) agreed with Isherwood and Bager-Anderson (2002) ideas for techniques in a co-teaching classroom. Weiss and Lloyd (2002) said that “there was a clear lack of understanding on both the special educators and the administrations part on how co-teaching was to be used and delivered”. Many teachers and administrators have little training in co-teaching which results in lack of understanding (Weiss and Lloyd, 2002). If there is lack of understanding on co-teaching then it will not have a positive effect on the students. Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld and Blanks (2010) said co-teaching can provide teachers with an opportunity to meet the academic and behavior needs more efficiently. However there needs to be understanding and commitment between two teachers for this collaboration to reach its full potential.

### **Limitations in the Literature**

After reviewing the literature, one limitation I found is that most research regarding co-teaching is quantitative. It was difficult to find an article on solely co-teaching that was quantitative. I believe qualitative research is useful, but I also think quantitative is important because it gives statistical data and results.

One common limitation I noticed throughout the articles was that about 80 percent of the studies included only one type of student. Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008) only had 15 general education teachers and 5 special education teachers. However, small sample sizes are common in qualitative research. One article involved students with special needs, but didn't study general education students (Hang and Rabren, 2009). Research should include a larger sample size with different control groups. When a study includes large sampling it is more reliable and gives better outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

Overall co-teaching seems to have a positive effect on students with disabilities. If co-teaching is done correctly, it will have a positive outcome on the students. In order for co-teaching to be done correctly though, teachers should be trained in proper techniques. However, co-teaching is not easy, and if not done well, co-teaching will have little positive effect on the students with disabilities and also general education students (Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld and Blanks, 2010). In order for co-teaching to be successful teachers and administrations need to be able to support one another and collaborate (Weiss and Lloyd, 2002). Studies have stated there needs to be training, collaboration and determination between two teachers in a co-teaching classroom.

### **Chapter 3: Applications and Evaluation**

The specific research question in this study is: What training do co-teachers in Rochester City School District have in specific co-teaching techniques?

The goal for this study was to create a list of techniques for co-teachers based on the components of co-teaching for which the co-teachers feel least prepared for. In order to do this, teachers completed a survey to determine how prepared they feel to teach in a co-teaching classroom. The data was collected from special education teachers who are co-teaching currently in a Rochester City School. The techniques for co-teachers would address what training is needed for co-teaching to help strength co-teaching in the classroom.

#### **Participants**

This study targeted special education teachers who were currently co-teaching in a Rochester City School. Twenty-two teachers who met this inclusion criteria responded to the survey. A demographics section in the beginning of the survey asked the participants completing the survey their gender, if they were teaching in a special education co-teaching classroom and how many years they have worked in a co-taught classroom. The survey began with these questions so I know the survey was given to accurate participants and to also get an idea of what type of participants were completing the survey.

Several steps assured the anonymity of the teachers who responded to the survey. First, I contacted the principal of many Rochester City schools. The principals that gave permission were emailed the survey. The principal gave the survey to the co-teaching teachers. The teachers filled out the survey and returned them to the secretary in the main office. The completed surveys were placed in a envelope, which I personally picked up from the secretary after the deadline.

Table 1

*Characteristics of Sample*

|                              |         | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|
| Gender                       | Male    | 6        | 27       |
|                              | Female  | 10       | 45       |
|                              | Unknown | 6        | 27       |
| Years of teaching experience | 0-1     | 8        | 36       |
|                              | 2-3     | 9        | 41       |
|                              | 4+      | 5        | 23       |

**Data Collection Methods**

For this study, a survey was used to gain knowledge of teachers' preparation to meet various co-teaching challenges. Furthermore, the survey targeted teachers' current beliefs of how prepared they were for teaching in a co-teaching classroom. Using a survey method to collect data provided a precise description from the teachers, which helped develop an overall idea of what components of co-teaching teacher felt they were lacking.

The procedure for implementing the survey was simple. The principal gave the survey to the co-teaching teachers. The teachers filled out the survey and return it to the secretary in the main office. The survey was completed by a certain deadline chosen by myself; this gave the teachers about two weeks to complete the survey. I personally picked up the sealed envelope from the secretary after the deadline.

**Instruments of the Study**

The survey used in this study consisted of 3 multiple-choice items and 15 Likert-scale items. I developed the survey with the help of Dr. Jeremy Browne because I was unable to find a

survey that addressed the areas of interest in this study. Many of the surveys I found were on rating co-teachers, which was irrelevant to this study.

The 3 multiple choice items were in the demographics section of the survey. The 15 Likert-scale items asked the participants how prepared they felt for several different important components of co-teaching. The Likert-scale was a four-point scale that ranged from *completely unprepared* to *completely prepared*. I chose a four-point scale rather than a five-point scale to avoid the *sometimes* choice being offered to the participants.

### **Data Analysis Methods**

For this study, the results were placed into the software program Excel. The mean and standard deviation was calculated for each survey item. These statistics placed into a table for comparison and line graphs were created to show the preparedness ratings with items ordered from least to greatest preparedness. A second line graph was created to show the standard deviation with items ordered from greatest to least standard deviation.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter reports the results of a survey administered to 22 special education co-teachers in Rochester City Schools. See Table 2 for complete characteristics of the sample.

Table 2

*Characteristic of Sample*

|                              |         | <i>n</i> | <i>%</i> |
|------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|
| Gender                       | Male    | 6        | 27       |
|                              | Female  | 10       | 45       |
|                              | Unknown | 6        | 27       |
| Years of teaching experience | 0-1     | 8        | 36       |
|                              | 2-3     | 9        | 41       |
|                              | 4+      | 5        | 23       |

As shown in Table 2, more females responded to the survey than males. It was not a concern that more women responded than men because that was the representative of the teacher population; in general there are more women teachers than men. On the other hand the co-teachers represented a wide range of co-teaching experience. The range of experience in teaching is encouraging because the opinions shared in the survey represent both new and experienced co-teachers.

The research question for the current study was: What training did Rochester-area special education co-teachers receive in co-teaching? The survey items were designed to collect background information regarding their teaching experience, as well as to explore teachers' levels of preparation in important components of co-teaching. Within these components, the



teacher's responses revealed patterns that were discovered by comparing data found in the survey. These patterns then formed a model to help explain which types of challenges co-teachers feel best (and least) prepared to face.

The each Likert-scale item (Items 4 through 18) presented a statement about an important component of co-teaching. Co-teachers rated their preparation on each component. The scale ranged from *completely unprepared*, *somewhat unprepared*, *somewhat prepared*, to *completely prepared*. When the data were analyzed, the co-teachers' responses were coded from 0 (*incompletely prepared*) to 4 (*completely prepared*). Table 3 displays the summary statistics for each item.

As shown in Table 3, teachers tended to answer similarly for each item. The results showed an overall trend that the majority of the teachers felt at least somewhat prepared to accomplish each of the characteristics regarding co-teaching. Furthermore, the standard deviation ranged between .710 and .899, which indicated that the results were not extremely spread out; that is, most teachers' responses clustered tightly around the mean.

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics for each survey item*

| Item # | Item Text   | n   | Mean | St. Dev. |
|--------|---|-----|------|----------|
| 4      | Seek support from your school's administration                  | 22  | 2.77 | .813     |
| 5      | Organize support services provided by the school                | 22  | 2.73 | .883     |
| 6      | Become and remain familiar with the education curriculum        | 22  | 2.80 | .899     |
| 7      | Plan weekly lessons with your co-teacher                        | 22  | 2.80 | .785     |
| 8      | Communicate instructional ideas to your co-teacher              | 22  | 3.00 | .756     |
| 9      | Compromise with your co-teacher on student daily schedule       | 22  | 3.05 | .722     |
| 10     | Share equally your case loads among both co-teachers            | 22  | 2.96 | .722     |
| 11     | Constantly improve your interpersonal communication skills      | 22  | 2.96 | .785     |
| 12     | Address issues of co-teachers' roles in the classroom           | 22  | 2.96 | .844     |
| 13     | Determine who will be teaching which Curricula                  | 22  | 3.14 | .710     |
| 14     | Compromise with your co-teacher on classroom management         | 22  | 2.86 | .834     |
| 15     | Cooperatively handle classroom discipline with your co-teacher  | 22  | 2.91 | .750     |
| 16     | Generally share classroom responsibilities with your co-teacher | 22  | 3.00 | .816     |
| 17     | Use teaching strategies that are valued by both co-teachers     | 22  | 3.00 | .756     |
| 18     | Accept co-teacher feedback to improve classroom performance     | 22  | 3.05 | .785     |
| Total  |   | 330 | 2.95 | .782     |

When ordering the items in the survey by the mean response, the items can be divided into two groups showing which issues the co-teachers were most or least prepared to face.

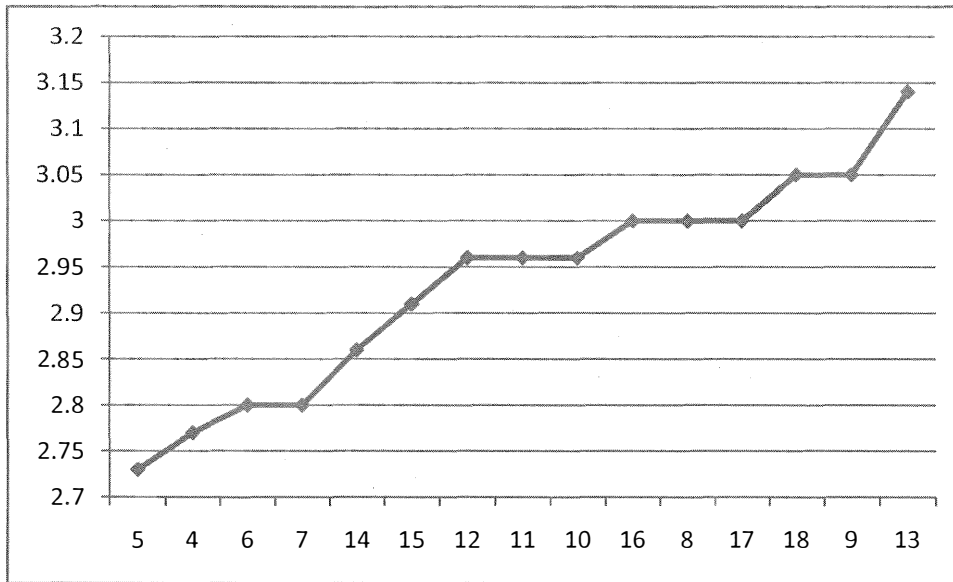


Figure 1. Mean preparedness ratings with items ordered from least to greatest preparedness.

Items 4, 5, 6, 7, 14, and 15 described the facets of co-teaching that the participants felt less prepared for. Considering the content of these items, Items 7, 14 and 15 were related to the component of collaboration among the co-teachers in the classroom. The participants felt less prepared for collaborating with their co-teacher in classroom management, enforcing discipline and lesson planning. Items 4 and 6 related to the component of receiving support from the school district where they were employed. The data seemed to show that these participants did not feel as though they receive adequate support when needing help with certain issues in the classroom. The data showed that the main components that co-teachers feel less prepared for are collaboration among co-teachers and support from their school district.

The participants felt more prepared for the issues described in Items 8, 9, 13, 16, 17, and 18. These items as a whole focused on the components of communication, compromise, and teaching performance feedback. Items 8 and 13 both show that the teachers had positive communication between one another regarding issues in the classroom. Items 9, 13, 16 and 17 are components that showed strong compromise and agreement between co-teachers. Analyzing

the mean of these items shows that the co-teachers feel prepared for compromising, communication, and receiving feedback.



Figure 2. Survey items' standard deviation with items ordered from greatest to least standard deviation.

When analyzing standard deviation rather than mean in Figure 2, Items 4, 5, 6, 12, 14 and 16 showed less consensus (as indicated by a higher standard deviation) than there was on Items 8, 9, 10, 13, 15 and 17. This data is interesting because the items that showed less consensus were generally the same items as the ones that the respondents felt less prepared for, as shown by the mean. The items that showed more consensus were also generally the same as the items the participants felt most prepared to face.

Overall the data showed that the participants felt most comfortable with items regarding communication, compromise and performance feedback. The participants however felt less comfortable with the items about collaboration and district support.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Implications of Data**

As a whole, co-teachers felt somewhat prepared to be teaching in a co-taught classroom. This is a great overall result; however they didn't feel equally well prepared to meet all the challenges of co-teaching. The challenges that the teachers are feeling less prepared for need to be brought to the attention of school administration. These should be the areas that are worked on for improvement to help strength the co-teaching team. Teachers need to be able to strengthen the areas they are not feeling equally prepared for because this can have an effect on the education the students are receiving.

The data indicated that co-teachers felt the most prepared for the challenge in determining which teacher will teach which curricula in the classroom. On the other hand, considering these co-teachers were special educators whose partner teacher was a general educator, there should have been a clear division of teaching responsibilities.

The effect of not receiving a good amount of administrative support (i.e., seeking support from the school's administration, organizing support services provided by the school) could be a large problem for co-teachers. The co-teachers need to have a support system when co-teaching to help strength their relationship and work environment.

### **Solutions to Problems**

The challenges faced by co-teachers are not insurmountable and many districts are making efforts to address them. Professional development, however, is not enough to help strengthen the preparation co-teachers need to succeed in the classroom. Professional development is a great training method to help teachers learn new ideas, but co-teaching needs a system that is more consistent.

Before beginning to co-teach, school districts should provide a form of training to prepare teachers for the co-teaching method. This should be a training that should be done yearly before the start of school to help refresh teachers who have been teaching in the classroom for many years, and educate new teachers.

Administrators should also provide some form of meeting with co-teachers to discuss which challenges of co-teaching they are struggling with. These meetings should happen regularly, at least once a month. The communication between the administration and teacher is important to help improve the performance in the classroom. The administration should also observe the classroom to discover how the co-teachers teach on a regular basis. This is not to observe on “how” they teach individually, but how well they provide the material to the students as a team. Without observation and communication, the teachers, whether they are co-teachers or not will not have the feedback and support they need to become better as a co-teacher or educator.

Preparing teachers for co-teaching could begin before the teachers enter their profession. Another training that may be helpful would be a college course required by universities for students receiving their initial teaching certification. Most classrooms are becoming inclusive, which means a special education teacher and general education are teamed together to co-teach effectively. Teaching candidates need to be prepared and taught on co-teaching before receiving a co-teaching position without any prior knowledge. Though pre-service training is out of the control of the school districts, but they could put pressure on teacher education programs to include co-teaching in their curriculum.

## **Limitations of Study**

Some limitations of the study could have affected the results in the research. There was a limited number of schools and districts used in this study. The schools selected for this study were only schools in the Rochester City School District. Other districts in Monroe County were not contacted to help be part of the study and these schools represented a narrow demographic. Including other districts that represent various demographics could provide more information on co-teaching.

Each school may have different views on co-teaching which may be reflected in the way the co-teachings are trained in co-teaching. These different views were hard to discover when only looking at a two schools in a single district. Considering the limited number of schools included in the study, the number of responses from teachers was limited also. Twenty-two surveys were completed and returned for the study; more responses would increase our confidence in the results.

Another limitation of the study was that more females responded to the survey than males. This may have affected the results of the study. However in the field of education there are more females than males. This is a hard factor to control because the majority of teachers are female, so we may assume that the majority of co-teachers are female as well. However if more school districts were part of the study than there would be an increase in the male representation in the sample. Of course, diversifying the sample to include more males is only important if the males' responses differ significantly from the females'. The data gathered for this study are not conclusive, but seem to indicate that there is little difference between the responses of the two genders.

Finally another factor that is hard to control with a small sample size is the experience of each co-teacher. I would have liked to see a larger variety experience levels, but again their needs to be a large sample size to have this limitation be eliminated. Improving these limitations would help strength the results from the study.

### **Future Direction for Study**

In the future I or another researcher would benefit from changing some components of the study which would help strengthen the research. Overall the study needs to include more schools districts that represent a wider variety of demographics. I focused on only one district – a district that gave me great information – but I personally believe the results would have been more significant if I used a variety of school districts throughout the Rochester Area. Each school district has different methods and ideas on co-teaching for their schools. Using many schools in the study would bring all of these differences together to help compare a large sample size.

The surveys helped get a general idea on how comfortable teachers feel in co-teaching, which reflects how well they are trained. However for the future I would complete interviews with teachers and principals of schools to get a more in-depth response from both the co-teacher and the principal. I would be able to then ask more questions depending on the responses given by the participants, the participants would have a chance to explain and elaborate on their responses. I would include the principal of each school in the study also because they are the ones implementing co-teaching in the school. It would be interesting to see how their feelings about co-teaching would differ from the co-teachers perspective.

A study on how effective the co-teachers are in the classroom would be an interesting study to complete. The study would include the same participants as this study, but would show



how well they actually co-teach with the other teacher. This would provide interesting data to analyze. I would be interested in seeing the difference between how well prepared they feel and how well they are actually reaching out to the students using the co-teaching approach. Feeling prepared is one thing, but teaching using the co-teaching method and making a positive difference for the students is another. Many studies could be developed to help co-teachers become “better” co-teachers, which in the end are helping the students receive the education they deserve.

## References

- Austin, L. V. (2001). Teachers' beliefs about co-teaching. *Remedial and Special Education, 22*, 245-255.
- Bouck, E.C. (2007). Co-teaching...not just a textbook term: implications for practice. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(2), 46-51.
- Gately, S. E., & Gately, F. J. (2001). Understanding co-teaching components. *Teaching exceptional Children, 33*, 40-47
- Hang, Q., & Rabren, K. (2008). An examination of co-teaching perspectives and efficacy indicators. *Remedial and Special Education, 30*(5), 259-268.
- Henderson, C., Beach, A., & Famiano, M. (2007). Diffusions of education innovations via co-teaching. *Physics Education Research Conference, 117-120*.
- Isherwood, R. S., & Barger-Anderson, R. (2008). Factors affecting the adoption of co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms: One school's journey from mainstreaming to inclusion. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research, 2*(2), 121-128.
- Ploessi, D. M., Rock, M. L., Schoenfeld, N., & Blanks, B. (2010). Practice techniques to enhance co-teaching interactions. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 45*(3), 158-168.
- Scruggs, T.E., Mastropieri, M. A., & McDuffie, K. A. (2007). Co-teaching in inclusive classrooms: A metasynthesis of qualitative research. *Exceptional Children, 73*(4), 392-416.
- Walther-Thomas, C.S. (1997). Co-teaching experiences: the benefits and problems that teachers and principals report over time. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 30*(4), 395-407.

- Weiss, M. P., & Lloyd, J. W. ( 2002). Congruence between roles and actions of secondary special educators in co-taught and special education settings. *The Journal of Special Education, 36*, 58-68.
- Wilson, G. L., & Michaels, C. A.(2006). General and special education students' perceptions of co-teaching: Implications for secondary-level literacy instruction. *Students Perceptions of Co-Teaching*, 205-225. doi:10.1080/10573560500455695
- Wischnowski, W. M., Salmon, S. J., & Eaton, K. (2004). Evaluating co-teaching as a means for successful inclusion of students with disabilities in a rural district. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 23*(3), 3-4.

## Appendix: Co-teaching Survey

Please circle one:

1. Gender: Male    Female
  
2. Years of co-teaching experience:    none    1 or fewer    2-3 years    4 or more
  
3. Teaching position:    Special Education    General Education

Instructions: How well has your training prepared you for your co-teaching responsibilities?

Listed below are several tasks co-teachers may have to complete. **Rate the degree to which your training has prepared you to accomplish each task.**

|                       |                     |                   |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Completely unprepared | Somewhat unprepared | Somewhat prepared | Completely prepared |
| 1                     | 2                   | 3                 | 4                   |

4. Seek support from your school's administration

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

5. Organize support services provided by the school

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

6. Become and remain familiar with the education curriculum

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

7. Plan weekly lessons with your co-teacher

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

8. Communicate instructional ideas to your co-teacher

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

9. Compromise with your co-teacher on student daily schedule

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

Instructions (repeated for your convenience): How well has your training prepared you for your co-teaching responsibilities? Listed below are several tasks co-teachers may have to complete.

**Rate the degree to which your training has prepared you to accomplish each task.**

|                       |                     |                   |                     |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Completely unprepared | Somewhat unprepared | Somewhat prepared | Completely prepared |
| 1                     | 2                   | 3                 | 4                   |

10. Share equally your case loads among both co-teachers

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

11. Constantly improve your interpersonal communication skills

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

12. Address issues of co-teachers' roles in the classroom

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

13. Determine who will be teach which curricula

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

14. Compromise with your co-teacher on classroom management

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

15. Cooperatively handle classroom discipline with your co-teacher

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

16. Generally share classroom responsibilities with your co-teacher.

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

17. Use teaching strategies that are valued by both co-teachers.

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

18. Accept co-teacher feedback to improve classroom performance

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|

Thank you for your time. Please return this survey to the school secretary.