Evaluating the effectiveness of team-teaching involving general and special education teachers in early childhood programs

Lesley Janelle Ehlers

University of Northern Iowa

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Evaluating the Effectiveness of Team-Teaching Involving General and Special Education Teachers in Early Childhood Programs

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

Lesley Janelle Ehlers

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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

Charles R. May
Date Approved
Director of Research Paper

Jill M. Uhlenberg
Date Approved
Graduate Faculty Reader

Rick Traw
Date Approved
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Background

The education establishment was presented with many challenges during the 1950s. Two crucial challenges were the American baby boom and a high shortage of teachers. In order to meet the demands of a growing student population with only a small number of teachers in the 1960s, the Commission on Curriculum Planning and Development by the National Association of Secondary School Principals was established. The Commission was led by J. Lloyd Trump. The Commission submitted, *A Proposal Designed to Demonstrate How Improved Teacher-Utilization Can Help to Solve the Problem of Teacher Shortage in the High Schools of the United States to the Fund for the Advancement of Education.* The Commission was awarded funding to create and implement teaching techniques that will deal with the problems facing the country’s schools. One of the techniques proposed by the Commission was team-teaching. It was then implemented and investigated by over 100 schools across the country (Trump & Baynham, 1961). Trump hoped team-teaching would allow teachers shared responsibility for large-group presentations, follow-up sessions for groups of 12-15 students, and individualized study (Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993). As was noted then (Bair & Woodward, 1964), diagnostic, planning, and evaluative procedures developed by a team of teachers are generally superior to those developed by a single teacher.

The heart of the concept of team teaching lies not in details of structure and organization but more in the essential spirit of cooperative planning, constant collaboration, close unity, unrestrained communication, and sincere sharing. It is reflected not in a group of individuals articulating together, but rather in a group
which is a single, unified team. Inherent in the plan is an increased degree of flexibility, grouping policies and practices, and size of groups, and an invigorating spirit of freedom and opportunity to revamp programs to meet...educational needs. (Bair & Woodward, 1964, p. 22)

As more emphasis was put on co-teaching by Trump’s Commission, it gained more momentum. In the 1960s, different varieties of team-teaching evolved. In England, a team-teaching model comprised two components, a lecture to a large group of students followed by additional instruction in traditional class settings (Friend et al., 1993). Another variation involved joint planning by teachers on units, but individual instruction to students (Geen, 1985).

Geen (1985) found that team-teaching occurred in both elementary and secondary schools. It was observed in teaching many subjects and in different countries by the 1970s.

However, because so many different approaches were called team teaching and because most reports on team teaching were simply descriptions of situation-specific programs, it is difficult to analyze whether team teaching was successful in terms of improving educational opportunities for students. (Friend et al., 1993, p. 7)

In the 1980s when mainstreaming children with disabilities was strongly encouraged, it was discovered that general education teachers had not received adequate training to meet the demands of special needs children. This resulted in special education teachers developing closer working relationships with general education teachers, which led to an increased interest in co-teaching (Reinhiller, 1996). Stainback and Stainback (1984) found that the merged relationship between general and special education would create a shared responsibility for educational programming for all students, regardless of specific individual student characteristics. A variety of terms were used to describe the
teaming relationship between general education and special education teachers. However, “team-teaching was not a commonly acknowledged role for special education and general education teachers” (Friend et al., 1993, p. 7).

The recent popularity in team-teaching has occurred among general education teachers. According to Friend et al., “the rationale for team-teaching is to provide students an individualized learning experience and to allow teachers the opportunity to complement each other’s expertise in a professional support system” (1993, p. 7). As educators have distinguished different types of instruction used in meeting the needs of general education students, team-teaching has received more notice. Team-teaching has also been labeled as cooperative teaching or co-teaching in order to distinguish itself from teams of general education teachers that share responsibilities in instruction (Friend et al., 1993).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of general and special education teachers in team-teaching situations on students and teachers at the early childhood level. To accomplish this purpose, this paper will address the following questions:

1. What are the variations of team-teaching?
2. What are the benefits of team-teaching for students and teachers?
3. What are the disadvantages of team-teaching for students and teachers?
4. What are the necessary elements required for successful team-teaching?

Need for the Study

Meeting the needs of all children in a classroom is a difficult endeavor. Regular classroom teachers have expressed their anxiousness that they need support personnel to be physically present to help in instructional activities (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993). Special education teachers have voiced their concern on how they will meet the needs of students with disabilities who no longer qualify for pull-out programs (Baker & Zigmond, 1990). As the number of at-risk and special needs children continues to grow, alternative forms of delivering instruction must be developed and evaluated (Morsink, Thomas, & Correa, 1991). Team-teaching, or co-teaching, is one service delivery model that can help teachers meet the varied needs of their students. This type of teaching “... makes it more likely that all students receive appropriate educational programs, regardless of whether they meet certain preconditions of artificially derived and empirically questionable diagnostic categories” (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989, p. 21). Teachers need to be aware of this service delivery model and be educated on how to incorporate this model into their classrooms.

Limitations

The majority of the research examined for this study investigated the effects of the general education teacher teaming with the special education teacher. These studies are incredibly crucial for understanding the impact of team-teaching. However, many of the
studies do not report on teaming between the general education teacher and speech pathologist or English as a Second Language teacher. According to the *Encyclopedia of Education*, "team teaching is any form of teaching in which two or more teachers regularly and purposefully share responsibility for planning, presentation and evaluation of lessons prepared for the same groups of students" (1971, p. 89). This study is limited to literature that provides information on team-teaching between the general education teacher and special education teacher. Another limitation to this study is that some of the literature studies on team-teaching that could have provided additional information were not accessible. Also, the literature is limited to the number of articles on the variations of team-teaching. Vaughn, Schumm, and Arguelles (1997) is the primary source in that area.

**Definitions**

In the literature reviewed for this study, researchers used the term team-teaching synonymously with cooperative teaching, co-teaching, and collaborative teaching. In this paper, team-teaching will be used to include all of these terms. For the purposes of clarity and understanding, the following terms will be defined:

**Cooperative teaching:** "An educational approach in which general and special educators work in a coactive and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings (i.e., general classrooms)” (Bauwens et al., 1989, p. 18).

**Collaboration:** General education teachers and special education teachers plan lessons to meet the varying needs of students. This includes students with disabilities,
talented or gifted students, students with limited English proficiency, and students who do
not qualify for special services (Schumm, Vaughn, & Harris, 1997). Collaboration also
involves “collegiality, shared decision making and responsibility, common goals, and
accountability” (Reinhiller, 1996, p. 34).

**Grazing:** A form of team-teaching when “one teacher stands in front of the room
providing an explanation or instruction, and the other teacher moves from student to
student checking to see if they are paying attention or following along.” It is suggested
that grazing be replaced with *teaching on purpose* (Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997,
p. 5).

**Tag-Team-Teaching:** A method of team-teaching when one teacher stands in
front of the classroom delivering instruction to all students while the other teacher is in
the back of the room involved in another activity. When the first teacher is finished with
his or her share of instruction, the second teacher takes over. This approach is not an
effective method of co-teaching (Vaughn et al., 1997).

**Teaching on Purpose:** A method of team-teaching in which one teacher leads the
instruction while the second teacher goes to individual students, pairs of students, or
small groups of students and reviews the material that is currently being taught or had
been taught in the previous lesson (Vaughn et al., 1997).

**Team-teaching:** “A method in which a group of two or more teachers cooperate
in the teaching of the same set of students. Implicit within this cooperation are both the
sharing of plans and objectives for the students, and the pooling of knowledge of all sorts
about the student” (Hanslovsky, Moyer, & Wagner, 1969, p. 3).
Variations of team-teaching

There are several ways to team-teach. Two practices that need adaptations are called grazing and tag-team-teaching. In grazing, one teacher gives the instruction to the class while the other teacher checks to see if each student is following along and paying attention. Another form of team-teaching is to have one teacher presenting the information to the entire class while the other teacher stands in the back of the room or is involved in another activity. When the first teacher has finished the lesson, the second teacher takes over. Vaughn et al. (1997) have labeled this approach as tag-team-teaching.

Vaughn et al. (1997) have identified five alternative models for team-teaching to use in place of grazing or tag-team-teaching. The first method is called teaching on purpose. As one teacher presents instruction to the whole class, the other teacher gives short lessons to individuals, pairs of students, or small groups. The lesson involves a review and follow-up on a previous lesson or the lesson that is currently being taught. The teachers using teaching on purpose keep a log of information for each special education child that needs follow-up attention.

The second variation of team-teaching is to have two groups with both teachers teaching the same content. The small groups would allow the students to have greater opportunities to interact with peers and teacher. Their answers to questions would also be more closely monitored by the teacher. Vaughn et al. (1997) suggested that teachers may
want to bring the two groups together at the end of a lesson for a *wrap-up*, a chance to summarize the key points in the lesson.

The next variation of team-teaching is when teachers assign students to one of two groups based on their skill level on the subject being taught. One teacher will re-teach the information that was taught while the second teacher teaches alternative information. Vaughn et al. (1997) wrote that the special education teacher does not always teach the group that needs re-teaching. They have found that teachers find this method most effective when they alternate groups.

The fourth method of team-teaching is similar to cooperative learning groups. As groups of students work in designated centers, teachers are able to monitor students’ progress, provide mini-lessons to individual students or small groups, or work with one student for the entire instructional period while the other teacher monitors the students working in the learning centers (Vaughn et al., 1997).

The final variation of team-teaching is described as being “the most difficult to implement and certainly extremely challenging for teachers who are first learning to co-teach” (Vaughn et al., 1997, p. 9). In this plan, both teachers instruct the entire class and teach the same lesson at the same time. Vaughn et al. suggest that when these five methods of team-teaching are refined, “they will allow for more effective and efficient use of teacher’s time and skills” (1997, p. 5).

Benefits of team-teaching for students and teachers

According to Friend et al. (1993), “Teachers report that students in their co-taught classes perceive that someone is always available to assist them and that everyone
receives special help” (p.10). Team-teaching also provides students with the opportunity
to observe teachers working together as a cohesive team although they might have
differing views and perspectives. According to Schailble and Robinson (1995), the
students are given a model for positive behavior. Hanslovsky et al. (1969) observed that
students in a team-teaching classroom have the opportunity to improve their discussion
skills by participating in varying group sizes. Buckley (2000) suggested that active
participation is also more possible as the students are able to be divided into two smaller
groups for discussion. Buckley also noted that team-teaching allows teachers to model
critical thinking for the students which can encourage more active participation and
independent thinking from students.

Walther-Thomas (1997) conducted a study to investigate the benefits and
problems that 23 schools found while implementing inclusive special education models,
primarily using co-teaching as their instructional model. The changes were recorded over
a 3-year period through a series of classroom observations and individual interviews.
Five major benefits were identified for most students in the co-taught classroom:
improved academic performance, more time with and attention from the teacher,
increased emphasis on cognitive strategies and study skills, increased emphasis on social
skills, and improved classroom communities. Walther-Thomas found that students in
team-teaching settings reported their classrooms and schools felt more like an inclusive
community which fostered collaboration and communication among students, teachers,
parents, and staff (1997, p. 402). Students also benefited from a variety of teaching styles
and strategies that two teachers brought to one classroom.

Walther-Thomas (1997) reported benefits of team-teaching for students with
special needs. Four major benefits were identified for special education students: positive feelings about themselves as capable learners, improved academic performance, better social skills, and stronger relationships with peers. Teachers reported that the special education students developed better attitudes about themselves and peers, were less critical of themselves, had more motivation to learn, and were more capable of looking at their strengths and weaknesses objectively. According to Reinhiller (1996), another psychological benefit to special education students is their increased self-concept in working successfully at grade-level in the regular education classroom.

Hadley, Simmerman, and Long (2000) studied the effectiveness of a collaborative, classroom-based model in enhancing the vocabulary and phonological development in kindergarten and first-grade students. The collaborative model was implemented in only two of the classrooms. One certified speech-language pathologist taught in the collaborative classrooms 2 ½ days per week. The regular education teachers and the speech-language pathologist engaged in joint curriculum planning on a weekly basis. After six months of co-teaching, the students in the team-teaching arrangements showed large gains in vocabulary development and phonemic awareness as compared to the children in the classrooms without team-teaching.

Team-teaching provides teachers a sense of shared responsibility and collegial support from someone with whom they share successes and frustrations. Luckner (1999) investigated the effectiveness of team-teaching as an approach to provide educational services to students with hearing disabilities. Data were collected from two team-teaching elementary classrooms that consisted of hearing and deaf or hard of hearing students for one academic year. The classes were co-taught by general education teachers
and a teacher of students with hearing difficulties. One teacher in this study noted that the collegiality, while highly beneficial to teachers, also benefited students because they saw healthy adult working relationships and also healthy adult friendships.

Team-teaching can allow teachers to learn new perspectives and insights from other teachers as they teach. The team members may invigorate each other, which could result in more effective teaching. It allows for opportunities to share their knowledge bases and professional skills with each other. Risko and Bromley (2001) used the following examples to show how general education teachers felt they had broadened their instructional repertoire by learning more about instructional strategies from their co-teacher:

I have learned many skills from my special education co-teacher which help me meet the needs of my students better. I have learned so much from having the gifted teacher come into my classroom. Now I use those strategies with all of my students. (p. 58)

Team-teaching can also prevent boredom and burn-out as the team teaches different material in different ways and the class is grouped in a variety of small and large groups (Buckley, 2000). Giangreco, Baumgart, and Doyle (1995) reported that collegial efforts made teaching more enjoyable and stimulating, and allowed teachers to experiment with new teaching methodologies. Walther-Thomas (1997) found that teachers in team-teaching situations reported an increased level of professional satisfaction as a result of their students’ success in these classrooms. It was also noted by Walther-Thomas that teachers in team-teaching settings found it very rewarding to have another adult in the classroom “to share the good times and the bad times” (1997, p. 403).
Welch (2000) reported the results of a descriptive analysis of team-teaching in two classrooms using formative experiments. These experiments were used to conduct formative and summative evaluation procedures. Student outcomes, teaching procedures, and teacher impressions were assessed with quantitative and qualitative analyses. Welch (2000) found that teachers involved in team-teaching reported several advantages. Teachers reported that it was easier to deal with interruptions and transitions with another adult present in the classroom. The special education teachers that were involved in the teaming situation noted that they were able to form relationships with all of the students, not just the ones with Individual Education Plans. This helped give them a better understanding of the demands and needs of all the children in the classroom. If a specialist was involved in the teaming arrangement, the students did not discern a difference in the teachers’ roles or professional discipline. The teachers reported that the students perceived the teaming situation as simply having two teachers in the classroom instead of one teacher working with a specific group.

Disadvantages of team-teaching for students and teachers

Team-teaching can also have some disadvantages for students and teachers. Buckley (2000) contended the amount of variety in the classrooms may hinder students’ habit formation. Some students perform better in classrooms that are highly structured and repetitious. The variation in a team-teaching classroom may overwhelm those particular individuals. Students might also be confused by having teachers with conflicting opinions. Also, class participation in team-teaching classrooms requires active involvement, rather than passive presence.
Welch (2000) noted in his study that one special education teacher who was teaming with a regular classroom teacher wondered if team-teaching alone was enough support for students who received resource room service. This teacher felt that some of these students still needed additional support in a pull-out setting. Some students may still require additional individual help from the resource teacher.

One of the disadvantages for teachers in a team-teaching classroom is incompatible teammates. In order for team-teaching to be effective, teachers must be considered as equals in the classroom; if this does not occur, one teacher might take the role of a paraprofessional and allow the other teacher to make all the decisions on instruction and implementation (Friend et al., 1993). According to Thomas (1992), there may also be clashes in educational ideology among the teachers that are teaming together. Hatcher (1996) noted that this type of situation could be uncomfortable for team-teachers and counterproductive to the learning process. Students might perceive the difference in ideas as a lack of cohesiveness.

Lieber et al. (1997) studied sixteen inclusive preschool programs nation-wide and noted relationship difficulties among team-teachers. These authors concluded that philosophical differences and a lack of skills for effective negotiation are serious issues in team-teaching arrangements. Their study indicated that successful team-teaching programs were dependent upon “a philosophy that was jointly agreed upon by major participants” and “a sense of well-being” (p. 79). A possible solution to this problem would be to allow the teachers to choose their partner rather than be mandated to work with a certain individual.
Buckley (2000) wrote that “team-teaching makes more demands on time and energy” (p. 13). Welch (2000) also noted that the main problem to team-teaching was the amount of time needed to plan for it. According to Hatcher (1996) and Bauwens et al. (1989), team-teaching will need an expansion of the traditional roles of general education and special education teachers so there might be an increase in class preparation time due to planning and evaluation meetings.

Team-teaching must be carefully implemented. A successful team of teachers should be confident, composed, and competent participants. A teacher should not be paired up with another teacher if they are missing one of these qualities. The teacher might feel threatened by the competencies of the other team member or his or her own lack of them. As a result, the teaming partnership would not be as effective.
CHAPTER 3
GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL TEAM-TEACHING

Team teaching can be an important learning experience for both teachers and students, but in order for it to be effective, several important issues need to be addressed. The following guidelines will aid in the successful development of team-teaching.

1. Teachers Should be Willing to Work Hard and Give Time and Energy to the Team.

Teachers that are working together as a team should share responsibility with what happens in the classroom. Effective co-teachers share all major responsibilities for planning, delivering, evaluating, and redesigning classroom instruction during the instructional periods they teach together. As a team, they will manage the classroom, teach new concepts, monitor individual and group work, provide individual assistance, and communicate progress to students and others. All of these components of team-teaching will require time and energy (Buckley, 2000).

Many of the studies reported that one of the qualities that enhanced the successful implementation of team-teaching was common planning time (Bauwens et al., 1989; Friend & Cook, 1992). Arranging a common planning time would allow the teachers to discuss views on teaching and learning as well as for instructional planning. Bauwens et al. (1989) noted that when cooperative arrangements are developed, implemented, and adapted to grade level and content, the need for a lengthy planning time is less.
2. Teachers Should be Willing to Share with Colleagues.

   Effective co-teachers must share classroom status, power, and authority. Both teachers must feel comfortable and supported by each other when making necessary judgment calls. Teachers should also share responsibility with what happens in the classroom. Team-teaching will not be effective if one teacher always assumes the tough role while the other teacher gets the easier role.

   Team-teaching also requires the sharing of ideas between colleagues. Everyone’s teaching can be improved by sharing ideas and listening to other ideas. It is especially critical that they convey to themselves and others that they are a team that values and respects each other’s contributions (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000).

   Effective co-teachers share their resources with one another and combine resources to meet the needs of their students. This includes student books, teachers’ manuals, computers, paper, duplication privileges, and paraeducator support. Also, both teachers need to feel at home in their classroom, so it is important to have a dedicated space in the classroom that signifies their respect for each other. This might include a desk, bulletin boards, access to a whiteboard/blackboard, grade book usage, and storage (Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). To avoid issues related to territory, Bauwens et al. (1995) recommends that both teachers should move into a different classroom rather than one teacher moving into another’s space.

3. Teachers Should be Willing to Give, Receive, and Use Constructive Criticism.

   An atmosphere must be created in the team-teaching classroom that allows for questioning, disagreements, and shared enthusiasm. Teachers need to have a strong sense
of personal security to allow for this type of atmosphere. Effective team-teaching relationships provide opportunities for partners to share their expertise, refine existing skills, and develop new ones. A mutual respect between the teachers that are working together must be established. If respect exists for each other, honest discussions that share fears along with joys and excitement will occur. This can lead to the development of the teachers’ skills (Buckley, 2000).

4. Teachers Should be Willing to Cooperate and Solve Problems Together.

Decision making in team-teaching is a group process. The partners that are teaming together must be committed to this type of decision making. The decision making process requires creativeness and resiliency. During decision making, teammates need to collaborate, compromise, be open-minded, and remain flexible. Friend and Cook (1996) have defined collaboration as a style of direct interaction that is based on the participation of two or more individuals who are committed to a common goal. Typically, different skills and contributions are made when collaborating which will strengthen and maintain the teaming relationships.

Teachers should not hold back their ideas when brainstorming for fear they will be criticized. Both partners need to be willing to take risks and learn from the mistakes that will be made. Having respect for each other’s unique skills, perspectives, and knowledge is crucial to an effective teaming relationship.

Teaching teams will undoubtedly have to solve problems and make decisions about their program, a student, or another situation. Buckley (2000) has identified a workable problem-solving system for a teaching team. The system involves eight
separate steps. The first step is to identify the problem and its causes. Once the problem has been identified, the teaching team needs to gather pertinent information related to the problem. The next step for the team is to brainstorm possible solutions and then to weigh the solutions, foreseeing possible consequences. Then the team needs to jointly select the solution that will be most likely to lead to the integration of the desired values. An action plan needs to be developed and then implemented. Once the plan has been implemented for a specified period of time, it should be evaluated and redesigned if necessary by the team.
CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of team-teaching in early childhood and to present guidelines for using team-teaching as an instructional strategy. The paper addressed four questions to accomplish this purpose:

1. What are the variations of team-teaching?

Five variations of team-teaching have been identified by Vaughn et. al (1997). The first variation is teaching on purpose in which one teacher presents information to the entire class while the other teacher gives short lessons to small groups or individuals. The second method involves two groups of students with both teachers teaching the same material to them. The third method is when students are placed in one of two groups based on their ability level on the skill being taught. The next method involves one teacher monitoring students working in centers while the other teacher provides mini-lessons to small groups or individual students. The final variation of team-teaching involves both teachers teaching the same lesson to the entire class at the same time.

2. What are the benefits of team-teaching for students and teachers?

The benefits of team-teaching to students and teachers have been recognized by research. The studies of Walther-Thomas (1997) and Hadley et al. (2000) have shown that team-teaching can lead to improved student academic performance. In addition to improved academic performance, Walther-Thomas found that team-teaching can lead to
an increased emphasis on cognitive strategies, study skills, and social skills. Giangreco, Baumgart, and Doyle (1985) and Risko and Bromley (2001) revealed that teachers involved in team-teaching broaden their knowledge on instructional strategies as they experiment with new teaching methodologies.

3. What are the disadvantages of team-teaching for students and teachers?

Although researchers have identified many benefits of team-teaching, students and teachers may experience challenging obstacles with team-teaching. Students may feel overwhelmed by the variation that exists in team-teaching classrooms. Team-teachers that have conflicting opinions on materials may frustrate their students. If the teachers that are teaming clash in educational ideology and lack effective negotiation skills, the teaming partnership will not be effective.

4. What are the necessary elements required for successful team-teaching?

This study determined that teachers need a set of guidelines to follow to develop effective team-teaching programs. The first guideline is that teachers need to be willing to put time and energy into the teaming relationship. Next, teachers need to be willing to share classroom status, ideas, and resources. Teachers in the team-teaching classroom also need to be willing to give, receive, and use constructive criticism in order to develop their teaching skills (Buckley, 2000). Finally, teachers should cooperate and solve problems together. Decision making should be a group process.
Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn from this study:

1. Team-teaching is a valuable instructional approach to utilize in early childhood classrooms.

2. Team-teaching has the potential to deliver quality instruction with two different perspectives and teaching styles that would not be possible with just one teacher.

3. Team-teaching demands a broad knowledge base of student learning styles.

4. Collaboration in team-teaching requires both teachers to be open-minded and flexible.

5. Early childhood educators involved in team-teaching should schedule a common planning time on a daily basis.

Recommendations

Based on a review of the literature, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Additional research is necessary to continue to gauge the effectiveness of team-teaching in early childhood education.

2. Early childhood educators involved in team-teaching must be flexible with their instructional style and classroom management.

3. Early childhood educators involved in team-teaching must collaborate with their partners to improve their teaching and actively work to include all students.

4. Early childhood educators involved in team-teaching must have proficient communication skills in order to create a successful partnership with their team members.
5. Support from school administrators is necessary before and during the implementation of team-teaching programs.
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professionals in inclusive programs for young children. Early Education and Development, 8, 67-82.


