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# Communication: The Key To Collaboration Between Special and General Education Teachers

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Communication:

The Key To Collaboration Between Special and General Education Teachers

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

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Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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## ABSTRACT

Teachers often do not communicate with one another when working to meet the needs of their students. The purpose of this study is to examine and analyze the need, nature and manner by which general and special education teachers communicate and collaborate to address the educational needs of their students.

A review of the educational literature reveals that a burden is placed on the educational community given the often conflicting statutory obligations to: fully include special needs students in the general classroom, comply with State mandated general education curriculum requirements and implement instructional guidelines required by Individual Educational Plans (IEP) for students with special needs. The literature further confirms that both general and special education teachers have difficulty securing the support they need to help special needs students meet their IEP goals in the context of the curriculum requirements of the general classroom.

The participants in the survey are twenty-five (25) teachers from a suburban elementary public school in Northern California. Interviews were also conducted with school administrators, general education and special education teachers from the school.

The research findings indicate that communication between general and special education teachers is the most important aspect of collaboration and the primary focus of communication is the coordination of IEP goals with the curriculum of the general classroom given the statutory obligations to integrate special needs students into the classroom. This information can be used to not only address behavior issues, but can serve as a basis for the informal progress monitoring of IEP goals.

## Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

### Personal Experience

Having grown up as a special education student who spent seventy-five (75%) of her academic time in a general education classroom, I learned that miscommunication occurs between special and general education teachers. Miscommunication led to difficult situations that resulted in frustration for both students and teachers. The source of such miscommunication often centered on issues involving the implementation of IEP goals in the general classroom. In my personal experience, miscommunication often left me confused as to how I could reconcile my IEP goals with the general instruction curriculum. The present study addresses the issue of communication and provides insight on this issue.

### Collaboration and Communication

The terms collaborate and communication will be used frequently in this thesis and a distinction should be made between these words, as they are not synonyms. The word collaborate is derived from the Latin word “*collaborare*” which means “labor together” and the English definition of the word is “to work with another person or group to achieve something”. The word communication is derived from the Latin word “*communicare*” which means, “to share” and the English definition of the word is “the conveying or transmittal of information” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2014). As such, communication, the sharing of information, is only one tool of collaboration. This study demonstrates that communication is an important tool in the collaborative labor that is the educational process.

### Statement of Problem

Special and general education teachers do not currently communicate in an effective way to ensure that special education students receive help and assistance in both the special education classroom and the general education classroom. Cornelius (2013) states that . . . “57% of students with disabilities have received over 80% of their instruction in the general education classroom” (p.2). Special education students spend the majority of their time in regular education classes, thereby emphasizing the need for collaboration between general and special education teachers.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the role teacher communication plays in fostering academic success for special education students by implementing of IEP goals. This study details the importance of communication and collaboration between special and general education teachers in achieving this success.

### Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

- a. What types of set systems are effective in creating a forum for teachers to communicate about the implementation of a student’s IEP goals and recommendations?
- b. What role does professional development play in the creation of a productive collaboration program?

c. What are the communication practices currently used between general and special education teachers to implement IEP goals?

d. How can these practices be improved?

### Theoretical Rationale

The theoretical rationale for this study is contained in the Individuals Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA act, 2004). The IDEA is a Federal law codified as 20 USC 1401 that expands upon prior legislation that includes Free and Appropriate Public Education (1997), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (1973) and Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) (1975).

IDEA and the legislation, from which it rose, have their roots in the civil rights movement and a line of Supreme Court cases that began with Plessy v Ferguson (1896), culminating in Brown v Board of Education (1954). This line of cases establish that “separate is not equal” and that the separation of one group of people from another based upon an immutable difference is inherently unfair. This principle has been expanded from issues of racial separation to issues of the inclusion of special needs students into the general classroom.

IDEA outlines, among other things, the rights of children with disabilities, relative to their educational needs and the obligation of educators to ensure that these rights are honored. To ensure that these rights are protected, general and special education teachers need to collaborate to ensure that student IEPs goals and recommendations are applied in the general education classroom. Collaboration is necessary as Federal legislation obligates educators to ensure that special needs students are moving toward their IEP goals in the least restrictive

environment (LRE) (Free and Appropriate Public Education, 1997). LRE has been consistently determined to be the general education classroom.

These statutory obligations place pressure on general and special education teachers who must adapt and coordinate the curriculum with the IEP goals of special education students in the context of the general education classroom. As such, implementation of IDEA in the classroom can only be accomplished through the collaboration of general and special education teachers (IDEA, 2004).

### Assumptions

This study assumes that in most circumstances, special and general education teachers do not communicate effectively in working with students with special needs to ensure compliance with IEP goals in the context of grade level curriculum. This study also assumes that general and special teachers need a forum or a detailed protocol to facilitate effective communication.

This study further assumes that general education teachers are not fully prepared to address the needs of all special education students in the classroom and may not be capable of implementing IEP goals. Finally, the study assumes that special needs students are not prepared for the consequences of communication errors between general and special education teachers including the inability to receive the accommodations they require or the full academic support to which they are entitled. Miscommunication between educators leaves students confused as to how to meet standards that may be unclear to them, or that do not make sense because of their learning style or disability.

## Background and Need

Selick (2014) explains why it is so important for special and general education teachers to collaborate. Her research reveals that when students struggle in the classroom they feel nervous and worried, which impacts the way they learn. This anxiety, in turn, affects not only the emotional atmosphere of the rest of the classroom but also the families of the students as well. If general and special teachers collaborate to create a fluid and safe experience for special needs students, other students in the general education classroom may also benefit.

Special and general education teachers are obligated to comply with the IDEA and Section 504. Working with special education students who either have an IEP or a 504 is a large job for educators because of all the laws and regulation that have to be followed (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). To ensure that all laws and legal requirements are satisfied, teachers need to communicate and collaborate in the general education classroom.

## Summary

This study examines the importance of communication and collaboration between general and special education teachers to ensure that special needs students are meeting their IEP goals in the context of the general education classroom. The educational rights of special needs students have developed from the body of case law and statutes that emerged from the civil rights movement. As the goal of these laws is the inclusion and fluid integration of special needs students in the general education classroom it is essential that general and special education teachers collaborate to ensure that IEP goals work effectively with the general education grade level curriculum.

## Chapter 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study is to analyze the need for communication between special and general education teachers, specifically in the implementation of student IEP goals. The review of the literature on the issue includes the historical background of the development of special education programs through judicial case law and subsequent statutes that developed from these cases. The literature also includes a discussion of the importance of teacher education and professional development. Additionally, the review examines the interaction between special and general education teachers and the impediments to their collaboration. Finally the review addresses constructive means of facilitating communication and collaboration between special and general education teachers.

### Historical Context

#### *Case Law*

Special education has its roots and basic philosophy in the American Civil Rights Movement (James, 2009, p.448). In 1896 African Americans were not allowed to ride in the same train cars as white passengers. When this policy was challenged, the Supreme Court in the case of Plessy v Ferguson stated that segregation was legal and did not violate the civil rights of African Americans as long as they were given “separate but equal” accommodations. This idea of “separate but equal” became a strong policy in America and was the basis of school segregation that prevented African American students from attending school with white students (Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896). This doctrine of separate but equal was finally declared illegal in

1954 when the Supreme Court decided the case of Brown v Board of Education. Brown was a consolidation of five (5) different cases from different states that challenged school districts that would not allow African American children to attend the same schools as white children (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). The Brown court stated;” We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (p.4). The court ruled that just the act of separating one group from another because of some trait or other immutable factor is, in itself, a violation of the separated people’s equal rights as it stigmatizes that separate group (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954).

After schools were integrated following the decision in Brown v Board in 1954 large populations of students were not being educated as many students with disabilities were not receiving a public education. “In 1970 more than 1 million students were excluded from public schools and another 3/5 million did not receive appropriate services” (West, 2000, p. 6). All of these students who were not being educated adequately had some special need that excluded them from public education at the time (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954).

In 1971 a lawsuit was filed by the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania based on a lack of public education for intellectually disabled students. Pennsylvania law stated that a child could not be enrolled in school if they had not attained “the mental age of five years” (PARC v. Commonwealth, 1972). PARC relied on the Brown case and argued that the Pennsylvania rule denied the special needs students’ equal protection and due process. The court agreed and thirteen (13) school districts were ordered by the court to provide “education which is viewed as a continuous process focused not only on academic but on individual learning their surroundings” (PARC v. Commonwealth, 1972). The court also stated “Placement in a regular school is preferable to placement in a



special school class and is preferable to placement in any other type of program of education and training” (PARC v. Commonwealth, 1972).

The PARC decision was expanded in the case of Mills v District of Columbia Board of Education (West, 2000, p.15). The Mills case was filed on behalf of seven (7) children. The named Plaintiff was 12 years old and banned from school because it was contended he had “behavior problems”. During the case it was revealed that 22,000 student in the DC District were not receiving adequate and appropriate services. The court ruled that the Board must provide “whatever specialized education will benefit the student”.

Under the ruling a student must be provided due process in the form of hearing and review before being placed outside the general classroom. This ruling ensured that all students and their families were provided with adequate reasons and explanations why their student would be separated from the general classroom (Mills v. Board of Education, 1972).

### *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 replaced the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which expanded Federal responsibility for training individuals with disabilities. The Act specially prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in any programs that receive Federal funding. As such, the Act is not specially directed to education. However Section 504 of the Act extended these rights to students with disabilities and gave them “reasonable accommodation “in employment and education” (The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973). The Act defines persons with disabilities as “persons with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities (The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973).

Under Section 504 of the Act students are to be given reasonable accommodations to make school activities more accessible. Finally, the Act introduces the idea of “free and

appropriate public education” (Free and Appropriate Public Education, 1997). Under Section 504 of the Act, FAPE is defined as “the provision of regular or special education and related aids and services that are designed to meet individual needs of handicapped persons as well as the needs of non-handicapped persons are met and based on adherence to procedural safeguards outlined in the law” (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 1973).

*Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA)*

The protections of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were expanded in 1975 when the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975) was passed as public law 94-142. EHA includes guidelines for special services tailored to address the needs of children with disabilities and other learning difficulties. As such, EHA designates these students as a suspect class under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment. EHA also obligates educators to ensure that special needs students receive individualized education plans (IEP) that allow these students to receive instruction in the least restrictive environment together with non-disabled peers.

EHA also contains a requirement that school districts create administrative review procedures so that parents of disabled students can receive an administrative review of decisions about their child’s education. At the end of the review process the parents can file a lawsuit to review the District’s decision. The Rehabilitation Act allowed parents to immediately file suit over any dispute. Therefore, EHA is important because it requires parents and school districts to go through administrative reviews before lawsuits are filed. The current administrative review programs in the schools that deal with decisions about disabled students are based on EHA requirements.

EHA led to the enactment of Section 300.101 of the Education Code (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975) otherwise known as Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), (1997). This law was re-authorized several times. In 1986 it was amended to become Public Law 99-457. One amendment to EHA requires all states to provide disability services from birth (EHA, 1975).

*Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA)*

In 1990 the law was amended again and renamed (PL 102-119) The Individual's with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004). In 1997 the law was amended to provide services for students leaving high school and transiting to adulthood. This amendment also requires that IEP's include short-term goals as well as long-term goals. The IDEA was re-authorized in 2004 that contained major changes being made that make it more difficult to become a special education teacher by increasing the educational and credentialing requirements for these teachers. (IDEA, 2004). Under the IDEA, FAPE (free and public education, 1997) is defined as "an educational program that is individualized to a specific child, designed to meet that child's unique needs, provides access to the general curriculum, meets the grade-level standards established by the state, and from which the child receives educational benefit" (IDEA, 2004).

As such, the IDEA expands the idea of FAPE beyond EHA and focuses on the need to provide access to all students to the general curriculum. In this way IDEA is based on the philosophy of Brown that any segregation whether it is race or disability is basically a denial of equal protection.

*No Child Left Behind Program (NCLB)*

The Bush Administration issued NCLB in 2001. NCLB requires the provision of FAPE, creates a plan and set academic targets for the students to meet. If school districts do not meet these Federal requirements and demonstrate “adequate yearly progress” (AYP) it will result in a loss of Federal funds (NCLB, 2001).

NCLB was the reissuance of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was originally part of President Johnson’s Great Society War on Poverty Program. NCLB is a program that supports standard-based education reform relying on state standards and measuring a schools success and student success through state mandated testing. As such, NCLB places increased pressure and scrutiny on special education programs. NCLB requires all schools to meet minimum standards set by the State. NCLB also decreased funding for gifted education and set difficult goals for special needs students. NCLB rewards schools for demonstrating progress for students with special needs and requires the inclusion of test scores in the IEP and 504 plans (NCLB, 2001).

There is a great deal of debate among educators about whether NCLB is in conflict with the IDEA on the subject of special needs students. The NCLB focuses on the test results of the entire school population and includes in those test scores, the scores of special needs students who have an IEP or 504 Plan. On the other hand the IDEA, especially with its individualized definition of FAPE, focuses on the unique requirements of special needs students. The individualized focus of IDEA may conflict with the NCLB requirement that each school must achieve uniform adequate yearly progress (NCLB, 2001).

*California Case Law*

The nature of the case law and statutes that protect special needs students develop from cases that state that separate is never equal (Brown v Board). As such, the policy of the law appears to favor the inclusion of special needs students in the general classroom as much as possible. This appears to be the policy of California as seen in Board v Rachel H 14F.3d 1398 (9<sup>th</sup> Circuit) 1994. In Rachel a Down's syndrome child was placed in a general classroom halftime and a special education class halftime. The student's parents objected to this decision. The trial court found in favor of the parents and the appellate court affirmed the finding of the trial court. The appellate court states that under the IDEA it is the policy of the law to include special needs students as much as possible in the general classroom (Board v Rachel H, 1994).

As all school districts now must provide FAPE (1997) in a LRE, the issue of "inclusion in education" has become a common circumstance for many special needs students (Free and Appropriate Public Education, 1997). Based on the ruling in Rachel and later cases it appears that this strong policy of inclusion is the interpretation of IDEA by the courts in California (Board v Rachel H, 1994).

*Inclusion and the Implementation of IDEA*

Educational inclusion under IDEA requires that special needs students be integrated into the general education classroom. Inclusion in the general education classroom is a key factor in meeting the LRE and FAPE needs of special education students. Educational inclusion can either be full or partial (FAPE, 1997). Partial inclusion is a situation wherein a student spends part of their day in the special education room being taught core content. Full inclusion is a situation wherein a special needs student spends all core subjects learning time in the general education classroom (FAPE, 1997).

Both of these models require collaboration and support from both the educational specialist or special education department and the general education teacher.

As special needs students are spending more of their time in a general education setting, a greater burden is placed on general teachers to ensure that student's needs are met and that special needs students are meeting their IEP goals. The support of special education teachers when general education teachers are planning lessons or developing a strategy to engage special needs students, ensures student success in the classroom.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### *Adult Learning*

As stated in the McGregor, Halverson, Fisher, Pumpian, Bhaerman, and Salisbury (1998) study inclusive school practices need to have a standard base for systematic reform. The article examines six (6) major policy areas. The first area of review is a study of the manner in which adults learn. Adults have to commit to goals that are realistic and achievable. This is important in the training of teaching professionals and professional development because teachers should feel that they could immediately apply whatever they learn to the classroom. Put simply, in order for a teacher to become more skilled in their profession they must first believe that what they are learning can be put into immediate practice. As stated by McGregor "Adult learning is 'ego involved' therefore, professional development should provide support from peers and reduce the fear of judgment during learning" (McGregor, et al., 1998, p. 5).

During professional development adults needs to see the results of their efforts, and be able to give and receive peer feedback on the task they are performing. Professional development time should also include a time for teachers to put into action what they have

learned and receive peer feedback on the practiced development. Educators need to have concrete practice and direct experience in applying what they have learned in professional development to a classroom setting (McGregor, et al., 1998).

Adults who work in small groups are more able to move their learning into application and then analyze and evaluate what they are doing. As such, professional development works best when it includes small mixed groups where teachers and administrators are able to talk and share experiences.

McGregor et al, (1998) makes a very practical point that adults “want to be the origin of their own learning and will resist learning situations that they believe as are an attack on their own competency” (p.5). This issue shows the importance of making teachers feel safe and open to working together as well as feeling in control of their learning and communication.

The authors also speak of essential questions that are asked during professional development such as:

“Is it based on research and best practices?”

“To what extent is it designed to address problems identified by the school staff?”

“To what extent is development connected to student standards and to the content and pedagogical skills that teachers need” (p. 7).

These are the issues that should be dealt with whenever new information is provided to teachers that must be used by them in their professional work and practice (McGregor, et al., 1998).

### *Observation and Peer Support*

According to Nguyen (2012) the observation of peers is a key element in the inspiration of teachers to pursue professional growth. The role of observation is particularly important in the

collaboration of teachers. Such professional growth and collaboration skills can be developed and refined by tasks like team building, grant writing, and team presentation. As stated by Nguyen, (2012) “all teachers ... novice or seasoned – can benefit from ongoing professional development training to continually reassess whether or not their skills are the most effective methods to maximize their students success”(Nguyen, 2012, p. 133). As such, Nguyen stresses the use of practical situations to improve teaching skills and effective collaboration (Nguyen, 2012).

### *Results of Professional Development*

According to Scott, Hauerwas, and Brown (2014) teachers who are provided with highly specific professional development are able to accomplish three important goals. They are able to use programs such as core reading and small group intervention more effectively. Moreover, they are better able to differentiate instruction and process monitoring. Finally, such teachers are able to support more forms of resource and evidence based inventions. As such, professional development allows teachers to master important programs, make distinctions between instruction and assessment and use empirical evidence to assist students with particular needs (Scott, et al., 2014).

### *Pre-Service and Service Education*

According Cook and Friend (1995) the professional development of teachers has two important parts. The first part is pre- service development and the second part is in- service development. Teachers should be provided with information and instruction about problems they face in a particular situation. Once they receive this information they should be provided with monitoring and coaching in their work. As cited by Cook and Friend (1995) “the most



important intensive professional development for co-teaching will occur when teachers and other specialists are in service and have the opportunity to implement what they have learned” (p. 5) The use of the terms “pre- service” and “in-service” education are very useful and clearly show the need and distinction that Scott makes about the two important parts of the teacher education process (Cook & Friend, 1995).

## NEED FOR COLLABORATION

### *Accommodation / Modification in the General Classroom*

According Blask (2011) classrooms are more integrated with students with disabilities and so general educators must look to special educators to accommodate students with disabilities in their classrooms. As stated by Blask “one of the ways teachers gain knowledge about their students is through collaboration with specialists . . .” (2011, p. 4). As such, Blask stresses the importance of having general and special education teachers collaborate on accommodations and modifications that can be made to instruction. These modifications create individualized education programs for special needs students, which is the goal of public education under case law and statute. Special needs students must be brought into the classroom to the largest extent possible and yet their unique needs have to be met to ensure they can understand the general curriculum. This seeming conflict of “mainstreaming” and “unique accommodation” can only be done with the close collaboration of general and special education teachers (Blask, 2011).

*Use of Expert Information*

In discussing the need for collaboration Blask (2011), points out that general education teachers cannot rely solely upon themselves to assist students, but must rely on the collaboration with special education teachers and with professionals such as speech pathologists. The information secured from these other professionals is often provided to the general education teacher by the special education teacher through the IEP, 504 Plan or by an ongoing dialogue between them. As such, the need for collaboration arises from the need to provide a general education classroom with expert medical and social information and this is usually provided through the special education teacher. The role of the special education teacher in providing and processing this expert information is set forth below (Blask, 2011).

*Continuity of Instruction*

Blask (2011) points out that another reason collaboration is needed are that students need consistency and continuity in their education. If a child is moved repeatedly there is a disruption in the student's learning. In the Rachel H case, the court pointed out that Rachel was moved eight (8) times each day between various programs (Board v Rachel H, 1994). While Rachel may be an extreme example it shows that there is a need for collaboration to create some continuity in a student's education. Blask (2011) states it simply, "what children are learning in each section of their day must be transferred consistently to other parts of their learning day" (2011, p. 9). Consistency can only be achieved through the collaboration between special and general education teachers.

## IMPEDIMENTS TO COLLABORATION

### *Different Teaching Responsibilities*

Ripley (1997) observes that the primary responsibilities of the general and special education teacher are inherently different. Ripley states that general education teachers use their skills to instruct students in curricula dictated by the school system, whereas for special education teachers the “individual learners’ needs often dictate the curricula” (Ripley, 1997, p. 3). Ripley further generalizes that “general educators bring content specialization, special education teachers bring assessment and adaptation specialization” (1997, p. 3). While these are general statements they do point out that there is a very basic difference in the philosophy, goals and skill sets of a general and special education teacher. These differences can result in conflict as to the use of time, resources and the accomplishment of curricula goals. As such, the blending of these different goals and skill sets can be an impediment to collaboration (Ripley, 1997).

### *Teacher Philosophy*

Blask (2011) makes an important and practical point about collaboration when he observes that there may be a natural tendency to dismiss or ignore the needs of special needs students. Blask states, “the philosophy a teacher holds about children with disabilities is a major factor of how teachers may react and impact their willing to participate with an inclusive classroom” (2011, p. 5). A general education teacher’s obligation to instruct an entire class on a set curriculum may inadvertently view a special needs student as an impediment to the quick instruction of the entire class. As such, it is important that all teachers be guided in and develops a philosophy that prompts inclusion. The lack of this philosophy can be an impediment to

collaboration and the promotion of this philosophy is necessary to facilitate cooperation (Blask, 2011)

This difference in teacher philosophy is also discussed in Brownell (2005). Brownell typifies the special education teacher as using a system of knowledge based on “constructivist epistemologies” which are programs based on various strategies including prior knowledge as well as the cultural and social knowledge of the student (Brownell, 2005, p.247). On the other hand, the standard curriculum and the role of the general education teacher tends toward a “positivistic epistemology” that characterizes knowledge as a single valid body of thought that teachers should acquire through training. While simple labels are not always appropriate Brownell and Ripley does point out that the underlying philosophies of general and special education teachers are often fundamentally different (Brownell, 2005).

### *Colleague Relations*

According to Sharpe and Hawes (1997) general education teachers tend to seek the advice and counseling of other general education teachers rather than special education teachers. As stated by Sharpe “ even though a number of effective collaboration strategies have been developed over the last decade, current research suggests that general educators are still more likely to interact with other general educators than with special ed (*sic*) staff“(Sharpe, 1997, p. 2). While Sharpe does not mention the reason for this lack of collaboration it would appear that this conclusion indicates that the impediments discussed in this section of this study are a valid concern and that collaboration should be developed and encouraged (Sharpe, 1997).

This issue of colleague relations has also become an issue of public policy. The President’s Commission on Special Education 2002 states that it is important that “teachers in general education learn about special education”. While this statement of policy does not

include any implementation, it does acknowledge the gap in communication between general and special education teachers and the need to bridge that gap.

### *Lack of Parity*

According to Kritikos and Birnbaum (2003) it is essential to collaboration that there be a sharing of information and knowledge. However problems can arise within an evaluation team if there is a lack of “parity”. Parity has been defined as “functional equivalence”. The use of this term appears to be appropriate in the context of the sharing of information and insight by general and special education teachers. It is unlikely that there will be a complete sharing of information and suggestions unless all members of an evaluation team feel that they have parity or functional equivalence. In most cases an evaluation team for a student is composed of many different people that hold different roles in the education system. As such, there is a natural lack of parity among the members of any evaluation team. This natural lack of parity can serve as an impediment to collaboration.

Kritikos and Birnbaum (2003) state that this impediment can be overcome with the use of a positive attitude. While this is a rather vague solution it is valuable. While not every member of an evaluation team may be of the same degree of tenure or status in an education system the respect or deference that is provided to a member can create an equalizing force. As such, the respect afforded to other members of an evaluation team and the creation of parity can overcome a major obstacle to communication, the willingness to share information (Kritikos & Birnbaum, 2003).

### *Work Environment*

According to Robinson and Buly (2007) the movement to LRE and the implementation of the requirements of IDEA require the inclusion of special needs students in the general education classroom. Rather than the regular removal of a student to a special education classroom, the special education teacher is now required to become more involved in the general education teacher's classroom. As stated by Robinson, "no longer are special education teachers able to primarily provide one on one instruction in a pull out setting; instead, they are expected to work in the LRE possible, often within a general education classroom" (2007, p. 83). This change in program causes a natural friction between two professionals working in close proximity in a crowded environment.

## FACILITATING COLLABORATION

### *Co-Planning Themes*

In dealing with the issue of facilitating collaboration Ripley (1997,p.4) cites recommendations from Walther-Thomas (EJ 527 660) that stress five (5) themes that assist in collaborating and co-planning. These themes are:

- Confidence in partner skills
- Programs that include active involvement for student and educator
- Valuation of each person's contribution
- Develop routines for in-depth planning
- Increased productivity over time

These themes appear to reflect the educational philosophy set forth by McGregor et. al. (1998) because they stress not only a respect for the ego and integrity of the teacher but also deal with issues of immediate concern and practical use.

### *Curriculum Knowledge*

In addition to themes for the development of effective co-teaching, Ripley (1997) points out that the most important factor in collaboration is that both the general and special education teacher fully understand the curriculum. While assessment, evaluation and management are important, the joint understanding of curriculum is the most crucial factor. As Ripley points out “If you don’t know the curriculum you are not a co-teacher, you are just an assistant” (1997, p.2). As such, the common understanding of the curriculum by both the special and general education teachers is the first step to facilitating collaboration.

### *Collaboration Models*

In addressing the best means of facilitating collaboration for special needs students Nyguen, (2012) at page 132 puts forth a collaboration model. This model is based on six (6) principles.

- Working as a team to identify special needs students
- Recommending placement in the LRE
- Professional development workshops
- Co-planning lessons
- Observation of Peers Classrooms
- Critiquing and Providing Productive Feedback

Nyguen (2012) states that the model not only benefits the students that are the subject of review, but also provides important teacher education. She states that the way co planning lessons and team teaching are used can provide areas of improvement for both the student and teacher ( p. 138). This observation is important as any model for collaboration should focus not only on the benefits to the student but also on the continuing education of the teacher such that each student also becomes a learning experience for the teachers (Nyguen, 2012).

According to Janney (2006) in ideal planning is done through the collaboration of the special and general education teachers to ensure that all students are attaining student goals. This

planning is accomplished through factors that include open communication among members, divided responsibility and group problem solving. In this way both Janney (2006) and Nyugen (2012) believe that collaboration is based on a systematic agenda created between the special and general education teacher. In each model a central aspect appears to be the mutual respect of each teacher for the other. As stated above, the different skill sets of special and general education teachers must be blended and this is best done based upon regular communication and respect (Janney, 2006).

### *Technology as Tool*

It is the consensus of all experts that communication is the primary source of success in collaboration. The increase in technological tools has increased communication and, therefore, should be viewed as a valuable tool in the collaboration between general and special education teachers.

Web 2.0 is a series of applications developed to help teachers work together and collaborate. As stated by Charles and Dickins (2012) “sometimes called Web based “collaboro – ware” Web 2.0 adds new cooperative dimensions ... “(Charles & Dickens, 2012, p. 25). Some of the collaboration tools that Web 2 uses are “anytime meeting” that allow free web conferencing and “drop box” that allows the transfer of large documents from one user to another. The use of this application can allow interaction and collaboration from a distance and during the work day (2012).

### *Use of Paraprofessionals*

According to Stockall (2014) the use of teaching aides and paraprofessionals is of use in providing assistance to general education teachers in dealing with the needs of special education



students. These para-educators can provide immediate relief for a general education classroom because they can help the teacher focus on the class while allowing the aide to assist a particular special need student. While paraprofessionals can provide relief to a general education classroom their effectiveness is subject to debate. There is no measurable benefit to the use of paraprofessionals in the classroom. While the paraprofessional may provide some relief to the general education teacher the benefit they provide to the special needs student is open to debate (Stockall, 2014).

Despite the debate on the usefulness of paraprofessionals these persons can be of use in a well-crafted program of support for the students. While these paraprofessionals might not serve as a substitute for a special education teacher they may assist in a well detailed collaboration program if are given highly detailed guidance (Stockall, 2014).

## Summary

Special education in America arose from the civil rights movement and the statement of the Supreme Court in Brown v Board of Education that the separation of a person with a unique trait is always unfair and unequal (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). The decision in Brown was slowly expanded into the world of special education through the PARC and Mills decisions (Mills v. Board of Education, 1972). Ultimately these legal cases became laws enacted by Congress and from these came the EHA and later the IDEA. With each of these Acts the rights of the disabled became stronger. In the world of special education the definition of FAPE expanded from the EHA to the IDEA.

Under the IDEA the philosophy of integration and the inappropriate nature of segregation were reflected in FAPE which now encourages the inclusion of special needs students in the

general classroom to best extent possible (FAPE, 1997). In California the idea of inclusion has been strongly favored as seen in the Rachel H. case and those cases that followed it.

As a result of this history special education students are to be placed in the general education classroom and this inclusion has raised many challenges for the schools and its teachers. The obligation to address the needs of general education and special needs students in the same class require a close and effective means of collaboration between general education and special education teachers.

At this time there are several impediments to the collaboration between general and special education teachers. Among the impediments to collaboration is the very nature of the tasks that the teachers hold. The general education teacher must instruct consistent with a State mandated curriculum whereas the special education teacher must work to adapt the curriculum to the special needs of a student. Moreover, given the need for educational inclusion both professionals are frequently operating in the same classroom as the removal of students for special education is discouraged under IDEA (FAPE, 1997).

Collaboration is the manner in which the seemingly conflicting obligations of the special education and general education teachers are blended. In any analysis of collaboration it should be remembered that adult learning requires that the subject be treated with respect and that the information to be conveyed to them be relevant and of immediate use.

Therefore, as general and special education teachers collaborate the goal should be one of mutual respect and the creation of programs that are of immediate value and use. While several protocols are suggested by many experts all of the protocols incorporate two (2) central aspects of adult learning: respect and immediate relevance.

The second significant factor in the creation of effective collaboration is frequent and regular communication.

The needs of the students and the status of the curriculum in the general classroom are in constant flux and thus there must be a regular exchange of information between the general and special education teachers to ensure that both teachers are fully advised. As stated by one expert, where there is unequal information among teachers they are no longer co-teachers but rather “teacher and assistant”. The means of communication can be varied and the advent of technology offers great hope in allowing such communication.

Significant challenges, however, remain aside from those presented by larger class sizes and increasing demands from government. As pointed out by the Presidential Commission there is still a lack of understanding of the role of special education and many general education teachers will seek the advice and counseling of other general education teachers before that of a special education teacher. As inclusion becomes a stronger policy in education it is important that collaboration between the special education teacher and the general education teacher become an integral part of each class room and the mindset of each teacher.

## Chapter 3 METHOD

## Research Approach

This qualitative study explores the nature and extent communication and collaboration between general and special education teachers. It relies on voluntary participation from both special and general education teachers. The voluntary participants completed an anonymous survey designed to explore a teacher's need for communication as well as the current practices of collaboration. The survey also gathered information about the use of technology and curriculum-based forums used by teachers to communicate on lesson planning. The results of the survey were analyzed to determine the different forms of collaboration used by teachers. Anecdotal notes were taken and analyzed for this research.

*Interviews*

In addition to the survey, interviews were conducted with two (2) special education teachers, two (2) general education teachers and two (2) administrators to determine the role of collaboration and communication in the context of special and general education teachers. Interview notes from these participants were reviewed for themes related to communication and collaboration techniques.

The interviewees were located through personal contacts and both qualitative and anecdotal notes were taken and analyzed during the research process.

## Ethical Standards

This study adheres to the ethical standards for the protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally a research proposal was submitted and reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved and assigned number 10288

## Sample and Site

Participants for this study formed a sample of convenience. The target subjects for this study are general education teachers, special education teachers and administrators. The teachers interviewed and surveyed teach at an elementary school in an upper- middle class suburb in the San Francisco East Bay. The teachers have a wide range of experience as well as differing backgrounds in education. Twenty-five (25) teachers contribute to this voluntary, anonymous survey. It is important for this survey to be anonymous so that the teachers can feel free to share their thoughts without fear of retaliation from the administration. Moreover, the anonymity makes it impossible for the researcher to identify the race, ethnicity, and/or socio-economic status of the survey samples completed.

## Access and Permissions

Surveys and interviews were conducted during a staff meeting. The contact made with this school is one of personal communication. The survey was completed online using SurveyMonkey. The teachers involved in the interview process were introduced through personal connections and will be provided with a copy of this study for their review.

### Data Gathering Procedures

The survey results were analyzed for commonalities and differences in answers given by each teacher. The interview data was obtained through anecdotal note-taking.

Surveys from the participants were gathered anonymously throughout the week.

### Data Analysis Approach

The information was gathered using data from the interviews and surveys given during the staff meeting. Notes were taken during the interviews. Recurring themes from surveys and interviews were analyzed for common themes and differences.

## Chapter 4 FINDINGS

### Description of Site

The site selected for study is a moderately well-funded suburban elementary school in the San Francisco East Bay Area that is composed of a multi-cultural student population. The school uses a Push-in special education program as the primary means of addressing the needs of special education students. The location of the school, the nature of its student body and the manner in which it is addressing the needs of its students were the reasons it was selected as a basis for the present study.

### Individuals and Data Obtained

The study involves in depth interviews with two (2) special education teachers and two (2) general education teachers on the issue of the collaboration of general and special education teachers. In addition, in depth interviews were conducted with the principal of the school and the Head of Curriculum on the same issues. Finally a general survey was conducted as to the entire school facility on the issue of communication. The details of the interviews are set forth below as are the statistical results of the survey.

### Review of Findings

#### *Interview Questions*

One aspect of the study involves the interview of special education teachers about their concerns, opinions and recommendations on the issue of communication between general and

special education teachers. Two special education teachers were selected for interview from the San Francisco Bay area. The following is a summary of the questions, responses and discussions obtained from the interview with the special and education teachers:

### Special Education Teachers

*How would you describe your opportunities to work with your students outside of the main classroom?*

Both teachers states that they spend 60% or more of their time outside of the general education classroom. During this time they either teach special day classes such as math or language arts or work with small groups of students on content areas of need as set out in their IEP. These time allotments are dictated and controlled by the IEP requirements of their students. One of the other main tasks they undertake is testing IEP goals through, among other things, the progress monitoring of students. During these progress monitoring sessions these students are tested one- on -one through informal assessments. The time periods that the special education teachers are working with the students that are being “pulled out” range from 15 minutes to an hour.

The teachers also use iPads in their classrooms to play academic games. When the teachers are working with the students on their IEP goals they are, most of the time, using their own special education curriculum, which is either phonics, based or touch math. One of the two teachers sent a note to all of the general education teachers saying that she would be happy to work with the students sent to her on all assignments and projects that were being worked on in the general education classroom. However the other teacher states that the only time she works on general education assignments is when there is a test or quiz that needs to be finished.



*Describe situations in which you need to communicate effectively with general education teachers when discussing special education students.*

Both teachers state that they need to effectively communicate with general education teachers when the issues of accommodation and student needs in the classroom arise. Both teachers state that they feel they are primarily contacted by general education teachers only when there is a problem with one of the special education students. Both teachers express frustration with this situation because it places them in a “crisis- like state”. They are often placed in a position where they must deal with an immediate problem rather than having the ability to anticipate and prevent the problem by employing preventative measures.

Both teachers state that ineffective collaboration results from the lack of time available for them to spend with the general education teachers as general and special education teachers only communicate in depth immediately prior to the completion of the statutorily mandated IEP or progress reports. As progress reports are only conducted every two or three month’s behavior and academic issues can remain unresolved for long periods of time. This delay causes problems to erupt that are difficult to control, but that could be anticipated and resolved by well thought out progressive monitoring that would result from regular meetings.

Teacher B states that she tries to have daily meetings before her daily “Push in” but says that this is not enough time to fully work with any pending issues and instead this meeting becomes a simple discussion of the instructions for that day’s Push- in session.

*How much of your time do you spend working with students in the general education classroom?*

Teacher A spends about ten (10) hours a week in the general education classroom. All of this time is “Push- in” time. She describes this as being a time when she can go into the general education classroom and work with the special needs students on the lessons at hand. She has

ten (10) students that are the subject of her “Push- in” sessions. She has two (2) Push- ins each day wherein she works with her special education students “one on one” or with groups as large as three (3) . Six (6) of the Push-in sessions center on math instructions and four (4) address language arts issues.

Teacher A states that the Push- in system is very beneficial for her students because they are still being taught the same lessons as their peers except that the lessons are scaled down or adapted to the needs of the individual student.

Teacher B also uses a Push-in system and checks with the general education teacher about the curriculum issues that will be addressed on the day of the Push-in. During this time she likes to assist the general education teacher by, among other things, reviewing homework from the night before and adding students to her group who are struggling on a particular subject whether they are part of her special education group or not. As Teacher B has six (6) students with behavioral intervention plans she has to spend time in the general education classroom in addition to time spent at physical education and recess. While dealing with the students with intervention plans the special education teacher cannot interact with the general education teacher and instead must sit quietly and observe her students.

*How often are you communicating and collaborating with general education teachers?*

Both teachers state that they do not communicate or collaborate frequently enough with general education teachers. Both state that the only time they can discuss student needs is when there is an immediate issue or during the progress report or IEP process. As such, the teachers are rarely given the opportunity to have in depth and thoughtful communications with their general education colleagues about their students.

Both teachers state that there is no set forum in which they are able to collaborate or work with their general education colleagues in a non-time- sensitive setting. The teachers state, given the opportunity, they can give advice to general education teachers that will allow them to adapt lessons to better address the needs of special education students. Both teachers state that they want a more fluid learning environment between their classrooms and those of the general education teachers. Both teachers state that they wish they had time to go over the IEP goals and accommodations with the general education teachers in depth for each student.

Teacher B also expresses frustration with the difficulty in scheduling that results in part from the inability to know student schedules. Teacher B states that many times Push- in sessions have been cancelled due to field trips or assemblies about which she was unaware. Teacher B states that having a schedule that all teachers could work from and update might help to solve this.

*What are the forms of communication that you need to facilitate a productive working environment between you and your colleagues?*

Both teachers state that there is no set form or procedure in which general education and special education teachers can communicate. Teacher A states that the weekly staff meeting is a “missed opportunity” for interaction between special and general education Grade Teams. Teacher A states that special education teachers are asked to meet in a team rather getting to check in with Grade Team levels.

Teacher B states that technology is a very important on the issue of collaboration. The special education Grade Team uses IPADs to communicate with one another through “i-message” as well as Google calendars. Teacher B states that all general and special teachers should be provided with an IPAD so that they can i-message one another about issues or

preventative measures during the day. In addition, the joint use of an ongoing updated Google calendar would keep everyone advised about daily plans and schedules. This joint calendar would allow special education teachers to be more aware of field trips and so allow them to adjust their Push- in schedules to accommodate these events.

*How many days a week do you spend in the general education classroom in either a “Push in” or Co-Teaching manner?*

Teacher A spends five (5) days a week in the general education classroom for two (2) hours each day. During this time the teacher works with ten (10) special education students. Teacher B spends three (3) days in the general education classroom: Monday, Wednesday and Friday. The teacher spends two (2) hours on Monday and one (1) hour on Wednesday and on Friday. Teacher B comments that this schedule is often interrupted by unannounced field trips and other issues thus requiring her schedule to be adjusted. These needs and issues are addressed above

*What information do you provide to general education teachers to help you facilitate IEP goals?*

Both teachers state that at the beginning of the school year they give the general education teachers a copy of the IEP goals and review these goals with them. The teachers also state that they have provided articles to general education teachers that provide helpful tips, but feel that many of these articles are ignored. They also give the general education teachers a two (2) week warning before the due date for progress reports so that the general education teachers will have a better opportunity to prepare responses and contribute to the creation and satisfaction of IEP goals.

*Describe the ways in which you foster a working relationship with general education teachers.*

Both teachers mention that they are working hard to create an open and honest dialogue with general education teachers. They have made it clear their doors are open to discuss the needs and goals of the special education students. Both teachers state that they want to be team players and hopefully create a stronger bond with the general education teachers.

#### General Education Teachers

*How often do you communicate and collaborate with special-education teachers?*

Both teachers discuss the fact that they communicate mostly through e mail with special education teachers; however there has been a recent development wherein they have begun to use Google “Hang Out”. Both teachers have discussed having trouble finding time to collaborate with special education teachers. Both state that they have trouble finding time to meet with general education teachers let alone special education teachers. While they both they both feel that collaboration is a priority they both state they have not been able to find time for it of late.

Teacher C states that on the issues of communication and collaboration with special education teachers it is an “uphill battle”.

Teacher C also discusses the frustration that comes from trying to adapt and accommodate certain lessons for special education students without the help of the special education teacher. She feels “special education teachers start off very helpful by giving tips on how to accommodate students, but when it comes to day in day out planning these tips do not fit every lesson or every student”.

Teacher D states that during Push- in sessions her special education students perform and behave at a higher level; however once that support is no longer present the progress and behavior of the students begins to decline. Therefore, Teacher D wants the opportunity to

collaborate more often and possibly transition into a Co- Teaching program with special education teachers so the students' academic progress can be fluid throughout the day.

*What forms of technology and communication do you use to contact and speak with special-education teachers?*

Teacher C states that she has trouble learning new technology and feels that she is much more likely to discuss a student's issues face- to- face with the special education teacher. As such, she also e-mails with special education teachers regarding her students but feels that she does not get a timely response; whereas in a face to face meeting she secures an immediate response. This is why all general education teachers are being training in Google Hangout. In this way special and general education teachers can communicate both face to face over video chat and send written messages with attachments to one another.

Teacher D, when addressing the issues of communication and collaboration, states that she has started to use Google Hang Out in the hope of having a new line of communication with special education teachers. She is also willing to explore new areas of technology. She also states that she enjoys e-mailing special education teachers because she does not have to use her break time to meet with these teachers face to face. In this way she can e- mail the teachers at her leisure and wait for a response on the issue.

*In what ways are you equipped to deal with the needs of special education students that are in your classroom?*

Both Teachers C and D state that the school has given many professional development seminars on determining the needs and goals of special education students. In these seminars teachers learn the skills of how to effectively communicate lessons to special education students

as well as modify or adapt lessons to meet their specific needs. Both teachers state that this has been a very helpful system of training that can be used in the classroom

Both teachers state that they have a very active parent base that is useful in securing parent volunteers for the classroom. Both state that they have regular volunteers who are happy to work with special education students thus transforming these volunteers into “one on one” aides.

Both teachers have Push- in sessions wherein special teachers join general education classrooms and help facilitate the lessons being taught.

Teacher C states that she is also well equipped in this regard by having in place a student intervention plan that can help her manage behavior for the special education students. This Plan is based on a reward system. She also makes use of the” leveled library” thus ensuring that students are able to access books at an appropriate reading level. Teacher C further states that she tries to use IEP goals as a starting point for her students’ needs in teaching and learning.

Teacher D states that her biggest ally is technology. She has an I PAD in the classroom that she can use to answer many questions the special education students might have and to assist her to differentiate the lesson plan to the needs of a particular student. She also shows many videos to illustrate her lessons and keep the interest of many of her special education students. She is also equipped with the ability to be situated close to the bathroom and the PE track so students can run the track to help with focus and bathroom breaks are shorter due to proximity.

*In what ways are you equipped to test for IEP goals and take anecdotal notes on special education students?*

Both teachers state that they are not equipped to test for IEP goals and feel that it is not their job to test for IEP goals. They are happy to take and share anecdotal notes during progress

reporting time; however do not feel that they have the time or space to test the students on their goals.

Teacher C states she has one- on- one check in with all students during which she takes anecdotal notes that she provides to special education teachers during the progress report periods.

Teacher D also has a system of anecdotal notes in which she carries a notebook wherein she takes notes on all students at all times. Using the I Pad she creates evidence of students' progress and work. She also performs progress monitoring for her classroom but not does not monitor them for IEP goals; instead she monitors their progress toward grade goals.

*Do you feel you are able to approach your special-education colleagues and ask for help or guidance as to the needs of a particular student?*

Both teachers state that they have a difficult time approaching special education colleagues primarily because they have trouble finding the time for such meetings and conferences given the different lunch and recess schedules. Both teachers state that when an in-person meeting does occur the teachers feel that their questions are answered and they are given help and guidance as to a particular student.

Teacher C states that this lack of in- person meetings results in a situation wherein the needs of many of her students are not addressed until a point of crisis is reached. She states that her students have to be at a certain level of concern before she can reach out to her special education colleagues for an in person meeting. As stated earlier, Teacher C also feels that e mail communication does not give a response that is complete enough to fully address her concerns regarding a particular student. She is also reluctant to take time to work at her computer while class is in session.



She does however still e mail her colleagues with questions about her students and hopes that the video chat on Google Hang Out will be able to replace the imperfect e-mail protocol. She states that she has trouble finding the time to meet with special education teachers as she is not fully aware of their schedules (or changes therein) and thus she must wait until the end of school to communicate with the special education colleagues which in many cases is too late to resolve the issues raised.

Teacher D states that technology is her greatest aide when she needs information or assistance from special education colleagues. She states that since finding a time to meet in person (outside of IEP's and scheduled staff meetings) can be difficult the sending of e-mails or chat requests can be of great assistance. This form of communication allows her to communicate with her colleagues while still conducting her class room work as she awaits a response. She states that she wishes there was a more immediate way of contacting special education teachers as the latter are not always in their special education rooms and thus calling the special education room does not always result in an immediate response. Unfortunately this means many of her special education students are sent to the office during tantrums and melt downs instead of being resolved in person with special education teachers.

*Describe situations where you have reached out for suggestions or assistance relative to behavior or accommodation needs of special-education students in your classroom?*

Teacher C states the issues of problematic behavior are best addressed through a "behavior intervention plan" through the special education teacher because this allows the behavior to be dealt with and teaches the student to control the behavior. This also allows the special education teacher to collaborate on the issue as soon as it becomes a problem. She also reaches out for suggestions when accommodating the needs of special education students. The

teacher reaches out for help on issues of accommodating lessons that she knows will be difficult for some of her special education students. She does this by saving these lessons for Push- in sessions. In this way the special education teacher is in the classroom and so can make in class modifications to the lesson.

Teacher D states that behavior is a big problem in the classroom as she has two special education students who throw tantrums. To help solve this problem she has placed both students in a behavior intervention plan. She also makes an effort to meet with special education teachers to discuss the plan and eliminate triggers for these students. She also makes sure that she tries to alert special education teachers when there is an emotional “meltdown” of a student so that the student can meet with the special education colleague.

In this way, the underlying cause can be discussed and dealt with rather than sending the student to the office. The teacher further states that she has been trained to use the iPad by special education teachers, which results in a situation where she can check in with special education teachers on a frequent basis . The teacher also reaches out once a week to discuss lessons she feels may be difficult or filled with behavior triggers for her students. While she candidly admits she does not always implement their suggestions she puts a lot of time and effort into working to discuss these lessons with her special education colleagues.

*What are the areas that you feel need improvement in communication and collaboration between you and your special-education colleagues?*

Both teachers state that they need to check in weekly with special education teachers. During this time they can discuss issues with their students, collaborate on lesson plans and learn how to progress monitor their students more efficiently.

Teacher C states that there should be a weekly in person check in during grade level meetings wherein teachers can give oral progress reports of student work and discuss lessons that will be taught in the upcoming week. She states that in this manner she will not have to check in with teachers during progress reporting time, which also happens to be report card preparation time for her. She further states that this weekly check in should lead to more Push- in sessions and more in- class help for her special education students. She also states that there should be more team building exercises between general and special education teachers so that fluidity can be achieved.

Teacher D states that more general education teachers should be equipped with IPADS and technology and should be given training in the use of technology to better help their special education students. She also states that there should be more professional development in the issues of differentiation and the preparation of behavior plans so that general education does not have to be so reliant on special education. She also states that there should be some ways to contact special education teachers at all times during the day or that a special education teacher or paraprofessional should be present at all times in the special education classrooms to assist students that need to leave the general education classroom.

*Describe situations in which you need to communicate effectively with general education teachers when discussing special education students.*

Both teachers state that when they work with special education teachers many times they have actually consulted with general education colleagues before contacting special education colleagues. General education teachers discuss special education students during recess and lunch as they are all present at the same time. At these time they all “brain storm” as a group.

Teacher C states that throughout the years she has always gone to general education peers first because she feels they understand the needs and demands of a general education classroom more than do special education teachers. This unique understanding is based on large class size (i.e. 30 +/-) and the manner in which special needs students fit into the larger class. She states that speaking with general education teachers is a good way to “vent” without feeling guilty. She states them because the general education teachers are all teaching the same curriculum they are able to give feedback about what needs to be changed or edited about a lesson to meet the needs of the students.

Teacher D states that early in her career she did not want to bother the special education teachers with her concerns. From this she learned she could obtain quick and easy feedback from general education peers. Much of the time she goes to the general education teachers for advice on how to approach special education teachers on a particular issue.

Head of curriculum

*When picking the curriculum for the general education setting in what ways do you try to connect it to the curriculum picked for special education?*

The teacher states that when choosing curriculum for the special education setting she always makes sure that it connects to general education. When selecting curriculum for general education it is important that State standards are followed. This means that it is crucial to pick special education that conforms to State standards. This results in a system wherein the curricula of general and special education result from the same standards. She selects programs such as Houghlin Mifflin that have both general and special education curricula so that all programs tie together and integrate under one publisher. However in special education programs many of the

teachers have to use more than one program to fit the needs of the special education students. This results in the need of additional phonic, writing and readings programs that do not always coordinate with the general education curriculum provided in the Houghlin program. As a result, when selecting a general education curriculum it is important to select a program that covers phonic, handwriting, and many other areas covered by the requirements of special education so that both classes are working on the same skills. While the texts may not be linked, the underlying skills are linked which results in a situation where the IEP goals are being properly addressed. Many general education teachers also have personal preferences that they bring in to supplement regular texts: i.e. learning how ice cream is made during a unit on farming and agriculture. This use of supplemental texts is key to allowing the student to develop their passions about a particular unit. As such, these supplemental texts can actually create gaps between the general and special education curricula because these supplemental texts are not being used by both classes. Often the class period wherein the supplemental text is used is a period wherein the special *education students are pulled out to work on areas of special needs.*

*Why is it important for special education teachers to be trained in the programs being taught in the general education setting?*

This issue is crucial because many special needs students are struggling in many general education programs. If special education teachers are trained in this program they are able to continue working on this program in they're special education room to help further the students' learning. In addition, as many of these special education teachers have Push- in sessions in the general education classroom it would make sense for them to be trained in programs being taught in the general education classroom. In this way, teachers are able to be more independent and

understand the program they are helping to teach and the lesson plans of which they are a part. This leads to team teaching, which is the ultimate goal of full inclusion.

*Describe how general education teachers can work with special education teachers to adjust curriculum.*

When selecting curricula both special and general education teachers should meet to work together to discuss the best means of adapting or modifying curricula to accommodate the special education students. The head of curriculum has, however, noticed a disconnect between special and general education teachers as to the planning and adaption of lessons. This is the case even when there is adequate time for the teachers to meet and discuss the necessary adjustments. Many schools do not give adequate opportunity for special and general education teachers to meet to discuss daily lessons or text books. Moreover adequate time is not given for changing lessons so that they are better suited to the needs of the special education students. Giving general and special education teacher's adequate time to work together is important because it gives time for special education teachers to share their knowledge about the best means to adapt or modify the curriculum to meet the needs of the special education students. The role of the general education teacher in the process is also crucial as this teacher can provide unique insight as the nature and personality of the general classroom, which can influence the manner in which the curriculum can be modified. Also the general education teacher's observations of the growth and development of students in the general classroom are valuable and can eliminate some of the need for progress monitoring by the special education teacher.

*In what ways do teacher collaboration and team teaching effect the way you choose classroom curriculum?*

Teachers collaborate in many different ways that range from the nature of IEP's to the placement of students in classes. However, there is little collaboration as to what lessons are being taught in the classroom and how lessons are being modified for students. This lack of collaboration may be the result of the lack of opportunities for the teachers to team teach. Team teaching or co-teaching is one of the most effective ways of creating collaboration between general and special education teachers in the classroom. While some districts have failed to make the "leap" to team teaching it appears to be the "wave of the future" and the best way to ensure the effective collaboration of general and special education teachers.

*What kinds of curriculum programs are there that focus on team teaching?*

Any curriculum can be turned into a co-teaching or collaborative teaching curriculum because the point of co-teaching is the selection of material and approaching it from both general and special education angles. Therefore, providing a curriculum that is of interest to both general and special education teachers is the most important element in the creation of a co-teaching environment. The second crucial aspect of the co-teaching experience is time. This second element includes time to collaborate on how to teach the lessons and how to modify lessons. The term "time" is included as an element of the program because such collaboration is not easily achieved and does require a great deal of patience and work between the teachers and this requires time and effort.

*How often do you communicate with general education and special education teachers when picking curriculum?*

This is one of the areas that needs improvement. Curriculum programs rarely receive feedback unless some portion of the curriculum is "horrendously" wrong. The teacher

humorously states that curriculum is like an “oil change” and that it should not be noticed unless something is wrong.

The teacher states that she is given very little time to work with special and general education teachers in the creation and implementation of curricula. As a result, the teacher picks most of the curricula without detailed information as to the specific nature and needs of classrooms and thus with little information as to how it will affect teachers and students.

*When choosing curriculum, how large a role do special needs students play?*

Special education students play a large role in the selection of curricula because the curricula chosen must have either embedded differentiation or be easily differentiated by general education teachers. In this way, it will affect how their classroom functions by giving the special education students the opportunity to learn and grow as students in the general education setting.

Principal

*Describe how general education and special education teachers collaborate in the classroom.*

The Principal states that she tries to create a collaborative environment for both her general and special education teachers by establishing a Push- in structured special education program so special education teachers can spend adequate time in the general education classroom. This Push- in program works better in some general education settings than in others. The reason for this variance is that not every special and general education teacher has the same ideas as to the best means of helping their students. In most cases observed by the Principal teachers have requested to move to a co-teaching model. While not yet implemented, the Principal is looking into such a model and is currently evaluating the merits of this model.

*How does the professional development in your school promote collaboration between teachers?*



At school there are professional development seminars once a month. While these seminars cross many content areas and disciplines the Principal, in determining a course of study, takes into account the extent to which collaboration is involved and facilitated. The Principal tries to select professional development that requires team planning and team building. This process involves primary team building in Grade Level Teams. The teams are composed of general education teachers. Especial education teachers have a single team. This creates a great deal of communication and collaboration between grade levels teams (i.e. general education teachers among themselves) such that general education teachers develop strong lines of communication with each other and special education teachers develop similar bonds. However the Principal has recently come to realize that while this team building creates bonds among teams there is a loss communication between special and general education teachers as the team system encourages teachers to seek advice and support from their general education and special education peers, respectively, rather than encouraging special education teachers to communicate with general education teachers and vice versa.

*How much of your professional development focuses on collaboration between teachers?*

The Principal's priority has been the creation and monitoring of the system of Grade Level Teams. However recently, it has come to her attention that there has been a deficiency in the team building between general and special education teachers in the context of this team program. As a result of this concern starting in the New Year, the Principal has planned two professional developments programs that are designed to facilitate collaboration and examine IEP goals. This program is under review and development.

*What kinds of forums have you set up for your teachers to communicate through?*

Technology has become an essential part of everyday school interaction. The Principal encourages the teachers to create their own class web site as well as training in the use of such programs as Google Hand Out and Calendar. These programs are designed to help all teachers communicate and work together without having to necessarily leave the comfort of their classrooms. The special education team recently won a grant that gives them IPAD's. This has been a great benefit to the team and has allowed special education teachers to develop more meaningful communication systems with each other

*In what ways do you foster a collaborative environment for teachers?*

The Principal states that the use of professional development to create collaboration between grade level teams is very important. She has weekly staff meetings in which there is a safe and candid forum for the discussion of major issues and the implementation of changes and modifications. These staff meetings are mostly used as a forum for Grade Level Teams to meet and work on issues like common core, reading buddies and programs for the development of student goals and curricula for the coming year.

*Why do you feel it is important for teachers to collaborate?*

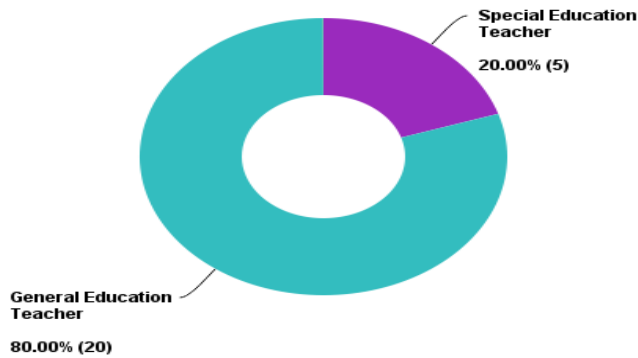
The Principal states that it is essential for general and special education teachers to communicate so that they are able to work together to implement IEP goals and comply with the curriculum requirements of the State. In doing so it is important that the implementation of these goals be done in such a manner that there is a safe and fluid learning environment for the special education students. This is accomplished by having general and special education teacher's work together through Push- in sessions. At this time the Principal is re-evaluating and reorganizing the team system so that more effective collaboration between general and special education teachers is achieved.

Survey

Twenty Five (25) teachers were surveyed to determine the following data. The teachers were asked nine (9) questions and provided a space to make comments. Eighteen (18) of the teachers provided comments, twelve (12) of which address the issue of co-teaching and the informal nature of this teaching. The comments further indicate that it is the desire of commenting teachers that co-teaching become a formal aspect of the curriculum. The balance of the comments address the issue of progress monitoring.

Q1: I am a

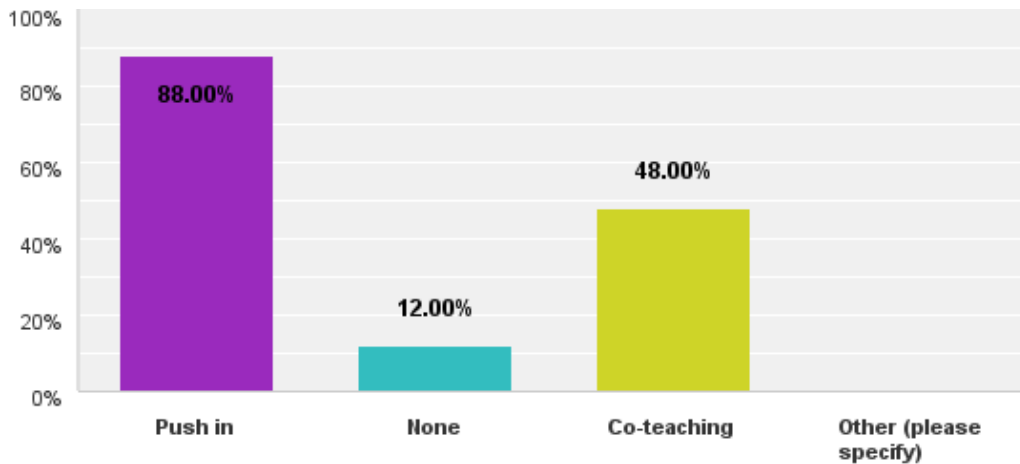
- Special Education Teacher
- General Education Teacher
- Other



Answer Choices	Responses
Special Education Teacher	20.00% 5
General Education Teacher	80.00% 20
Other	0.00% 0
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

Question 1 addresses the identity and role of the teachers participating in the study. The results indicate that of the twenty five (25) teachers surveyed five (5) were special education teachers, and twenty (20) were special education teachers.

Q2: I have a collaboration model in my school?

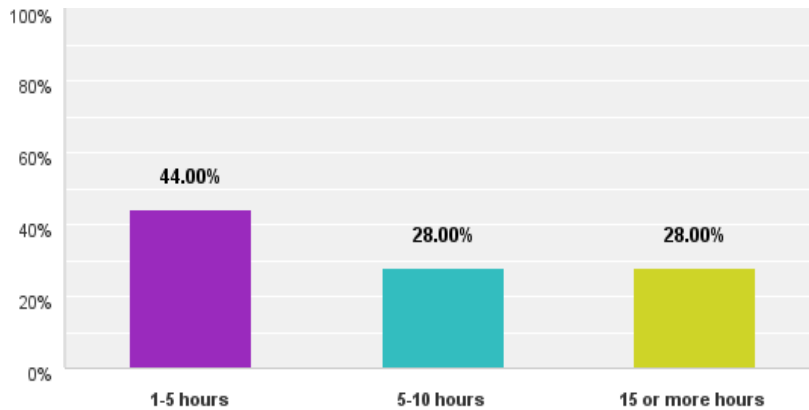


Answer Choices	Responses
Push in	88.00% 22
None	12.00% 3
Co-teaching	48.00% 12
Other (please specify)	0.00% 0
<b>Total Respondents: 25</b>	

Question 2 addresses the issue collaboration protocols in the classroom. Eighty eight percent (88%) of those surveyed use a Push-in model that helps bring special education teachers into the general education classroom. Forty eight percent (48%) of those surveyed state they have a co-teaching model. Given the overlap in percentage it appears a portion of the teachers

allow a very broad role for the special education teacher in the Push-in programs. Based on the comments provided and the statistical data it appears that forty two percent (42 %) of the teachers allow the special education teacher to actively participate in the preparation of daily curricula.

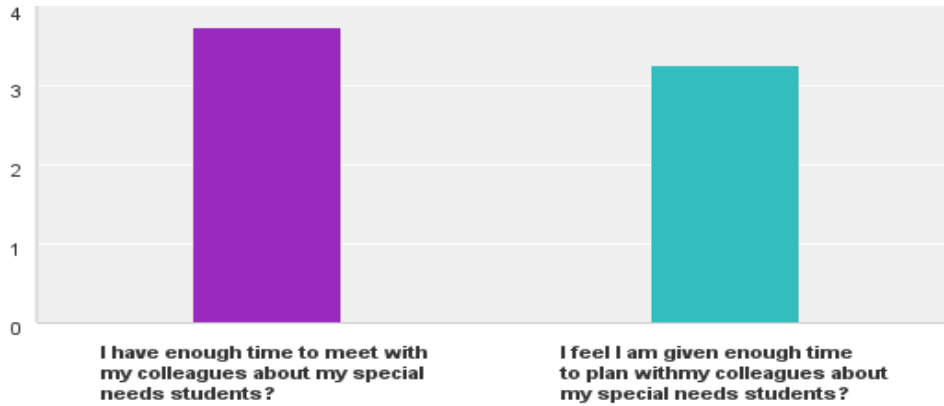
Q3: How many hours of professional development have you had that focus on communication and the promotion of collaboration between colleagues?



Answer Choices	Responses
1-5 hours	44.00% 11
5-10 hours	28.00% 7
15 or more hours	28.00% 7
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

Question 3 indicates that forty four percent (44%) of the teachers have received between 1-5 hours of professional development and that twenty eight (28%) have received over 15 hours of professional development. The response reflects professional development over the career of the teachers surveyed. As such, the varying lengths of the teaching careers of the surveyed teachers should be considered in analyzing the data.

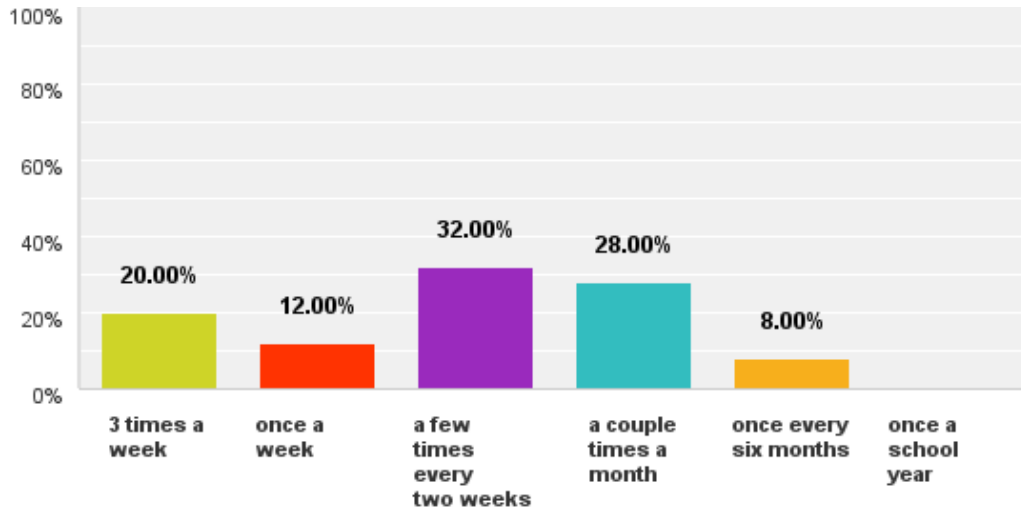
Q4: I feel I am given enough time to plan and meet with my colleagues about my special needs students?



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Average Rating
I have enough time to meet with my colleagues about my special needs students?	4.35% 1.00	13.04% 3.00	0.00% 0.00	69.57% 16.00	13.04% 3.00	23	3.74
I feel I am given enough time to plan with my colleagues about my special needs students?	17.39% 4.00	17.39% 4.00	8.70% 2.00	34.78% 8.00	21.74% 5.00	23	3.26

Question 4 indicates the teachers surveyed had strong opinions on the issue of the adequacy of time provided.

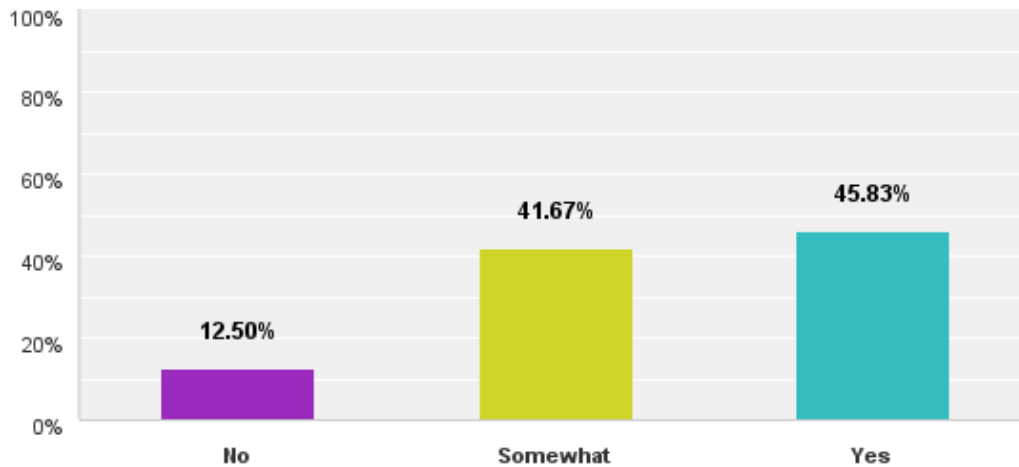
Q5: How often would you say you reach out to a colleague to collaborate on a lesson or test?



Answer Choices	Responses	
3 times a week	20.00%	5
once a week	12.00%	3
a few times every two weeks	32.00%	8
a couple times a month	28.00%	7
once every six months	8.00%	2
once a school year	0.00%	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>25</b>

Question 5 addresses the issue of the frequency of collaboration. The largest percent of the teachers surveyed (32%) state that they meet only a few times every two (2) week for collaboration.

Q6: Does technology play a big role in how you communicate with your colleagues?

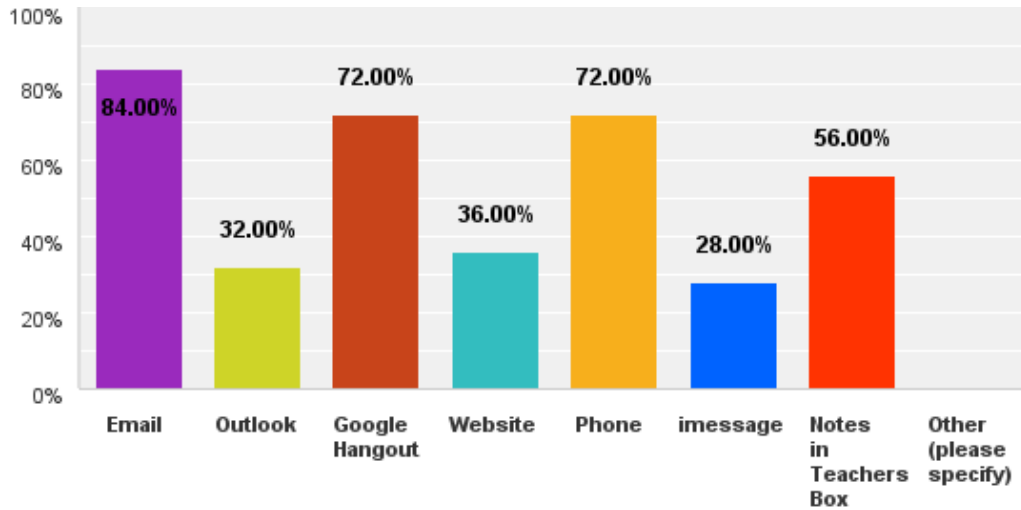


Answer Choices	Responses	
No	12.50%	3
Somewhat	41.67%	10
Yes	45.83%	11
<b>Total</b>		<b>24</b>

Question 6 addresses the use of technology in the process of collaboration. The majority (87%) of the teachers surveyed indicate that technology plays a significant role in the collaboration process.

Q7: What forms of communication do you use between you and your colleagues?

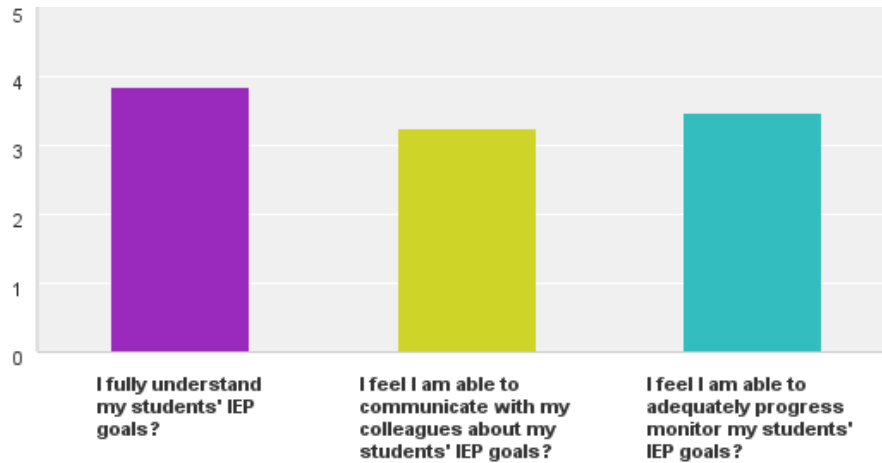




Answer Choices	Responses	Count
Email	84.00%	21
Outlook	32.00%	8
Google Hangout	72.00%	18
Website	36.00%	9
Phone	72.00%	18
imessage	28.00%	7
Notes in Teachers Box	56.00%	14
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
<b>Total Respondents: 25</b>		

Question 7 addresses the issue of the forms of communication used by the teachers surveyed on the issue of collaboration. The teachers surveyed were allowed to select more than one medium of communication. The primary form of communication is e-mail (84%). It is of interest that the teachers indicate that they regularly use both telephones and Google Hangout.

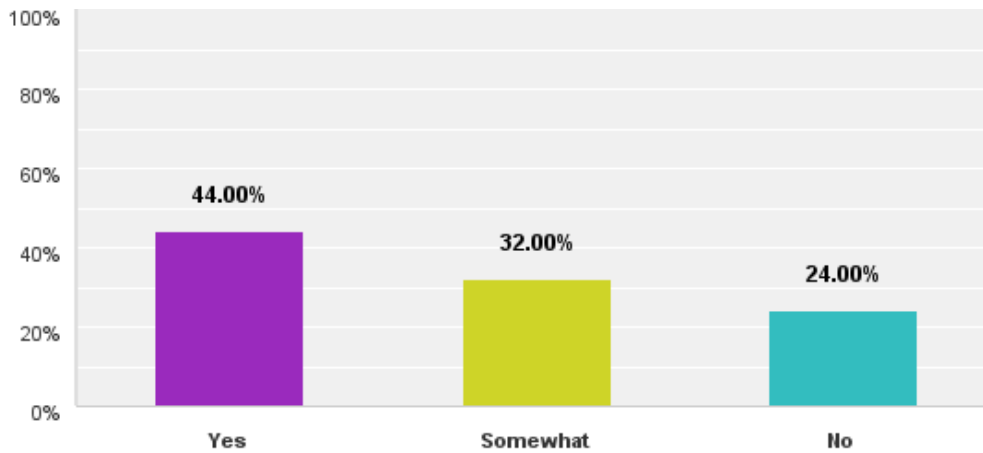
Q8: I feel I have the tools to help the special needs students in my classroom?



	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Average Rating
I fully understand my students' IEP goals?	0.00% 0	12.00% 3	12.00% 3	56.00% 14	20.00% 5	25	3.84
I feel I am able to communicate with my colleagues about my students' IEP goals?	12.00% 3	20.00% 5	16.00% 4	36.00% 9	16.00% 4	25	3.24
I feel I am able to adequately progress monitor my students' IEP goals?	12.00% 3	20.00% 5	0.00% 0	44.00% 11	24.00% 6	25	3.48

Question 8 addresses the issue of the tools available to teachers to address the needs of special education students. The responses provided indicate that on the issue of IEP's teachers have a basic understanding of the IEP and are able to discuss them with their colleagues.

Q9: I feel there is open communication between special education and general education teachers.



Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	44.00%	11
Somewhat	32.00%	8
No	24.00%	6
<b>Total</b>		<b>25</b>

Question 9 addresses the issue of the opinions of the teachers as to the existence of open communication between general and special education teachers. Approximately half of those surveyed indicate that the communication is poor or marginally acceptable. It should also be noted that the majority of the teachers surveyed are general education teachers.

### Themes

#### *Technology*

The interviews and the survey both indicate that technology is an important part of the collaboration process. Teachers are increasingly making use of a variety of technological devices and systems to communicate. In both the interviews and survey the participants state that Google Hang Out (“Hang Out”) is an effective form of communication. Hang Out allows

teachers to exchange files, chat and video conference with one another. As noted by the Principal, the Hang Out technology is useful because it allows teachers to communicate without leaving the classroom.

IPADS have been provided to the special education teams by the District. This has become an important means of allowing special education colleagues to communicate with each other.

IPAD technology provides communication through messaging, the use of linked calendars and file sharing so that progress reports and accommodations can be regularly monitored.

All teachers involved in the survey and interview regularly use the school e-mail system to communicate. At this time the school e-mail system is the form of technology most often used by teachers and administrators for collaboration and communication among colleagues.

#### *Grade Level Teams and Collaboration Challenges*

Grade Level Teams (“Teams”) are becoming an essential element of the teaching process. . The system of Grade Level Teams is one wherein general education teachers in each grade meet regularly to discuss, among other things, issues of curriculum and student need. Special education teachers for each grade participate in separate Grade Level Teams that address the same issues. Grade Teams help ensure that all colleagues in the same grade work as a team, teach the same material and enjoy a forum for support and the discussion of challenges facing their students. However the interviews indicate that Teams can lead to an overreliance on immediate peers in addressing classroom issues. General education teachers tend to seek primary advice from other general education teachers and special education teachers tend to seek primary advice from their special education peers. As such, Teams while highly effective can, in certain aspects, act as an impediment to collaboration between special and general education teachers.

### *Professional Development*

The survey indicates that forty eight percent (48%) of the teachers have undertaken one to five (1-5) hours of professional development training on the issue of teacher collaboration. In each of the interviews the issue of teacher collaboration was raised as an item of concern and the interviewees state a desire for more opportunity for professional development in this area. The Principal states that there has been a great deal of professional development among members within each Grade Teams; however there has not been as much development between general education and special education Grade Teams. Based on the interviews and survey the Principal and staff indicate a strong desire to access more professional development in the area of collaboration between special and general education teachers.

Professional development and training in technology is an important part of the communication and collaboration process. While every teacher has been trained in the use of there district e mail system not every teacher has received training in Google Hang Out and IPAD applications. As the use of technology can be a generational issue most of the development and training in this area results from informal peer consultation and sharing. In order to make technology a more useful tool in the collaboration process it will probably be necessary to implement of a more formal and systematic means of professional development in this area. Such development could include seminars,” hands on” training and on line webinars.

#### a. Collaboration Through Push-ins / Co-Teaching

The system of Push-in sessions is one wherein a special education teacher participates in the general classroom on a regular but limited basis so that they can meet with and assist special needs students in the context of the general classroom. The Push-in system is distinguished from the “Pull Out” system that involves the removal of the special needs student from the general

classroom so that the student can receive the needed assistance. Co-Teaching is a system wherein the special education teacher operates as a full participant in the general classroom, the duties of which involve the joint preparation of class curriculum.

Push-ins sessions are used by eighty eight percent (88%) of the teachers surveyed and is mentioned in all six (6) interviews. Push-in sessions are an essential part of inclusion as they create an open line of communication between general and special education teachers on issues of curriculum and the special needs of the individual students. Given the foregoing, Push-in sessions are an essential part of a collaborative classroom that ensures that the requirements of the curriculum are met as well as the needs of the individual students.

Co-Teaching has been used by forty eight ( 48%) of the teaching staff; however as mentioned in the comments on the survey this forty eight ( 48 ) percentile group uses Co-Teaching in an informal manner as part of the designated Push-in time. The Head of Curriculum states that Co-Teaching is the most effective way to create productive collaboration between general and special education students. The Principal also mentions that co-teaching has been raised by both general and special education teachers as a model and goal that they would like to see implemented and used in their school.

#### *Achieving and Monitoring IEP Goals*

Several general education teachers in the survey state that they are unable to fully understand their students' IEP Goals ("Goals"). IEP Goals are an ongoing issue of contention between special and general education teachers. Special education teachers state that they work hard to review and work with general teachers on IEP Goals so that general teachers can help in the facilitation of IEP Goals. Many general teachers however state that it is not their place to progress monitor IEP Goals or work to implement these Goals in the context of the curriculum

being taught to the general education classroom. Special education teacher's state that movement toward IEP Goals is necessary in the general education classroom and therefore general education teachers needs to monitor the IEP Goals so that the special education teachers can determine the effectiveness of these Goals and the extent to which the students are meeting these Goals. Progress monitoring of IEP Goals by the general education teacher can be as simple as the use of anecdotal notes or informal comments provided to the special education teachers. The provision of this progress monitoring information by the general education teacher allows the special education teacher to have the information necessary to provide the progress reports and analysis required by law to affect the statutory purpose of IEP Goals.

## Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

## Summary of Major Findings

The primary finding of the study is that communication between special and general education teachers is an issue of primary concern to school administrators as well as the teachers themselves. The impediments to communication center upon the ability of the general and special education teachers to adapt curriculum to the needs of the students. These impediments include the complex and technical nature of the IEP process and the demands of the general classroom in meeting the demands of the state mandated curriculum. Often general education teachers do not have the time to fully monitor the details of the IEP goals of each special needs student and thus have difficulty determining the extent to which these goals are being met. This lack of communication by the general education teacher causes difficulty for the special education teacher as the latter cannot implement and monitor the IEP goals without regular progress monitoring by the general education teacher. Such professional monitoring is often an added burden which the general education teacher has difficulty meeting.

In an effort to address the need to implement IEP goals and address the concerns of the special needs students there is a movement toward the use of Push In sessions by special education teachers. The school that is the subject of this study is one wherein Push-in sessions are in the process of being implemented and thus this school was selected for study based thereon.

The goal of California law and much of the literature on the subject is the creation of a co-teaching program within each classroom. The difference between a Push- in program and a co-teaching program is that in the latter situation the special education teacher not only



participates in the general classroom, but also participates in the preparation of curriculum for the general education classroom. This co-teaching protocol if properly implemented creates a high level of communication and satisfaction among colleagues. As stated above, the joint planning of curriculum gives general and special education teachers a sense of parity and equal worth. Without such parity there is a natural tendency for the less participating teacher to feel that they are an “aide” rather than a peer.

In order to move toward a program of co-teaching and joint participation in curriculum the use of Push In’ sessions is productive. Such a Push-in model requires detailed communication between teachers.

The study indicates that the best means of effecting communication rests in the recent developments in technology. The use of a Push In program requires detailed timing between teachers during a busy school day. As such, the use of technology programs such a Hang Out, IPAD and joint calendars allow all teachers to remain in immediate contact and thus adapt to changes in school calendars. Such technology allows real time communication without the need of the general education teacher leaving the classroom. This real time communication is an issue that e-mail (the current form of technology most used) cannot address. The use of technology allows general and special education teachers to communicate in real time as to crises and issues that may arise with a special needs student. As such, these issues of behavior can be promptly addressed and hopefully remedied.

An additional impediment to communication is the natural reliance of teachers upon their immediate peers. General education teachers tend to seek primary counsel from other general education teachers as special education teachers seek counsel from special educator teachers.

This tendency and impediment is often exacerbated by the use of Grade Teams that create separate teams of general and special education teachers.

Finally the issue of the complex nature of IEP goals, modifications and accommodations is an impediment to collaboration. The mastery of the details of each IEP by the general education teacher is often a task that is seen as overly burdensome by the general education teacher. It is for this reason that a co-teaching program would be the best resolution of the issue as the special education teacher would be made a part of curriculum preparation for each class and thus IEP requirements could be immediately integrated into the class program. This participation in curriculum by the special education teacher would also reduce behavior issues by possibly eliminating emotional “trigger” issues for certain students. Unfortunately, financial and time constraints make a co-teaching situation difficult to implement. As such, the blending of curriculum and individual IEP’s must be addressed through regular communication.

Again the issue of technology appears to be one of the best remedies in this regard as such technology can provide prompt and informal progress monitoring by the general education teacher to the special education teacher. Such progress monitoring can, while not a substitute for the joint preparation of curriculum, create an ongoing line of communication that allows the special education teacher to use their expertise to keep close track of IEP goal progress and so make Push-in sessions more productive.

#### Comparison of Findings to the Literature

The rights of special needs students arose from the civil rights movement and the case law and statutes. The principle of these laws is that there is a natural tendency to stigmatize and separate people with an immutable trait and that this tendency must be avoided. The literature

confirms the rationale for the law as demonstrated by Blask (2011) when he speaks of the natural tendency of a general education teacher to be dismissive of a special needs student as an impediment to the fluidity of instruction in a general education class room. This is not to suggest the general education teacher is biased, rather they are often too busy to deal with the special needs of a special education student and thus the student tends to be treated dismissively which stigmatizes the student.

The interviews conducted by the researcher also confirm this tendency based on comments from general education teachers that dealing with IEP goals was “not their job”. As such, the findings of this study confirm the existence of a certain degree of stigmatization of special needs students and the need to overcome this stigma through fluidity in curriculum. This study also indicates that the use of a Push -in system is a productive step toward fluidity.

An impediment to communication between special and general education teachers is the natural tendency of general education teachers to seek counsel from other general education teachers before consulting special education teachers. The same tendency is found among special education teacher. This tendency of peer consultation is noted by Sharpe and Hawes (1997). The results of the present study confirm the existence of this impediment and the findings of Sharpe and Hawes (1997).

The interviews of the general education teachers conducted by the researcher indicate that they often seek counsel from one another before consulting a special education teacher. The present study does provide insight on this issue by indicating that such reluctance is often based upon convenience as the general education teachers often have the same schedules and thus it is natural for them to discuss issues during recess and other periods of mutual association. It should be noted that the present study does reveal that there may be a certain degree of

intimidation that is presented by a special education teacher such that general education teachers consult with one another on the best means of approaching a special education teacher as to the needs of a particular student. This finding supports and confirms the findings and determinations of Blask (2011) that the role of the special education teacher is that of person who funnels or transmits expert information to the general education teacher. It also confirms the research of Ripley (1997) that the skills sets and educational focus of special and general education teachers are inherently different. This difference appears to contribute to the natural reticence of a general education to candidly address their concerns with a special education teacher.

The present study also indicates that while the current system of Grade Level Teams used by the subject school is effective in teaching general curriculum it does perpetuate the impediment to collaboration that comes from first choice peer consultation. The principal in the present study states that the issue of Grade Level Teams is under review and a modification of the system should probably involve the inclusion of a special education teacher in each general education Grade Level Team and a general education teacher in each special education Grade Level Team.

The issue of the difference in teaching skill sets between general and special education teachers is addressed by Kritikos(2003) and Hawes (1997) as one of parity or functional equivalence. Kritikos and Hawes point out that as a practical matter collaboration will always involve the interaction of professionals of different levels of experience, tenure, talent and qualification. As such, true parity can never be achieved. The solution is that each of the professional treat the others with respect. While this issue of respect appears to be rather vague it is consistently mentioned in the literature. Ripley (1997), in his outline of collaboration,

indicates that an essential element of such collaboration is the valuation of the contribution of one's colleagues.

The present study does establish a significant element of respect another the teachers interviewed and surveyed. The Push In system used in this study does not rise to the level of co-teaching due to time involvement and the lack of parity on the issue of curriculum planning. However, both the survey and interviews reveal a level of respect between the special and general education teachers as both refer to the Push In system as a movement toward co-teaching and thus functional equivalence. The current impediment to such parity is not based on competence or skills, but lack of time and funding.

The issue of colleague respect is also of importance in the context of the manner in which adults learn and the manner in which professional development takes place. As indicated in the research of McGregor et. al.(1998) , adult education is essentially “ego” based. In order for an adult to learn they must feel they are being empowered and are not being “talked down to”. This analysis is essentially one of respect.

Many researchers have agree that one of the most important aspects of adult education is that the information provided be immediately relevant and of practical use. In regard to this element of professional development the issue of technology is very relevant.

The present study indicates that technology is being rapidly incorporated into the context of daily school activities as it often provides real time information without the need of the teacher leaving the classroom. Some the teachers interviewed however indicate that they have trouble mastering new technology. The use of the principles of adult education are relevant to the use and understand of technology by educators. Technology is a challenging field of learning that has immediate and relevant application. Moreover, technological knowledge is

often learned through peer interaction. As stated by Cook (1995), the observation of peers and the communication of skills by them is an essential element of adult education and this too is part of technological professional development.

Robinson (2007) addresses the issue of the use of technology in facilitating collaboration. The role of technology is established in the present study. Both general and special education teachers speak of the lack of time available for collaboration and the progressive monitoring of IEP goals. Progressive monitoring can, however, be as simple as the exchange of anecdotal comments. Such information can be quickly provided by texting and other real time communication. In this way, a special education teacher can progress monitor IEP goals with comments provided by a general education teacher without the latter's need to leave the classroom.

The findings of the present study confirm and elaborate upon the literature previously generated in this field. The present study confirms the ongoing stigmatization of special education students and the ability to mitigate this problem through a fluid curriculum. The present study confirms that there is a natural tendency for general education teachers to consult with other general education teachers before seeking the counsel of special education teachers. The present study indicates that this tendency is based upon simple expediency as well as the inherent difference in the skills sets possessed by general and special education teachers. The present study confirms the importance of parity and functional equivalence between general and special education teachers and that the respect that is the nature of parity is essential for professional development. Finally the present study confirms that technological developments are creating new opportunities for collaboration by allowing real time communication without the need to leave the classroom. The mastery of the quickly changing field of technology

requires an understanding of the manner in which adults learn and professional development takes place. As such, adult education as to technological advances, or any other field of professional development, requires instruction that is practical and of immediate use.

#### Limitations/Gaps in the Research

This is a small group study and a wider scope of study may reveal more information. In addition there is only one school that is the subject of the study and interview. This school has a Push-ins program. As such, co-teaching emerges as a goal that has not been achieved in the school of study. This leaves very little data as to the best means of implementing co-teaching and its resulting effects on the students.

There are gaps in the literature on the nature of communication that must be undertaken between teachers. Most studies stress the need for communication, however no specific protocols are provided save for regular ongoing communication.

There appears to be a lack of detailed information as to the issue of general education teachers and their ability progress monitor and implement IEP goals.

#### Implications for Future Research

The study has implications for further research on issues such as the use of technology and other communication programs to allow instant communication between teachers on issues of not only curriculum planning but also immediate details as to the status of a particular class on a particular day.

Further research would be productive on the issue of professional development and open communication between special and general education teachers. There should also be forum available to discuss and resolve grievances between special and general education teachers.

Further research would also be productive relative to studies on the credentialing process. Such research could involve the existence of stigma or prejudice on the issue. As such, it would be advisable to include classes and studies at the credentialing programs on issues such as collaboration between special and general education programs, special education foundation principles for general education teachers and multiple subject classes for special education teachers. Such a credentialing curriculum would allow the issue of collaboration to be addressed at the initial levels of the teaching profession.

#### Overall Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study is its effort to obtain an objective and broad based review and understanding of the need for collaboration between general and special education teachers. This is accomplished through in depth interviews with special education and general education teachers. In addition, in depth interviews were performed with administrators including a Principal and the Head of Curriculum. In this way, the study obtains empirical evidence from participating teachers on the issues of collaboration as well as an over view of the practical benefits and limitations that exist based on the demands of school administration and the use of a State mandated curricula. Hopefully, this three pronged approach to the investigation provides an effective empirical analysis of the subject despite the relatively limited scope of the study.



In addition to the in depth interviews a general survey has been conducted of all of the teachers in the subject school so as to obtain an overview and a general consensus on the issues of collaboration. The result of this survey is set forth in the graphs and analysis charts contained within this study. This analysis is consistent with the results of the in depth interviews and so further supports and substantiates the concerns, opinions and criticism obtained in the interview process.

The school selected as the subject of the study is a moderately well-funded school in the San Francisco Bay Area that enjoys a highly diverse student body. In this regard the study provides a microcosm of the issues that are experienced in whole or in part by all schools in California.

#### About the Author

Alexandra George Slatoff received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Liberal Studies at Dominican University of California in 2013. Ms. Slatoff was the first student at the University to receive a “Dual/ Dual” degree. This degree is composed of credentials in Special Education and Multiple Subjects as well as a Master’s of Science in Curriculum.

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