EFFECTS OF ELEMENTARY GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS, SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS, AND MATH INTERVENTIONISTS COLLABORATING IN A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

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This qualitative research study examined how math interventionists and special education teachers collaborated with general education teachers. I focused on improving access to the core general education mathematics curriculum for elementary students with mathematics difficulty. Differing educational perspectives, divergent learning theories, and instructional approaches, as well as various curriculum materials, make collaboration between multiple teachers complex work. To foster collaboration and attend to the instructional needs of students with mathematics difficulty, I provided an eight-week professional development series. The series included the following topics: developing co-teaching roles and responsibilities, understanding principles of Cognitively Guided Instruction, understanding the Five Practices, creating rich math tasks, and using a multi-tiered system of support so students with mathematics difficulty could improve understandings. Data collected included interviews and observations before and after the professional development, as well as audio recordings during collaboration meetings and during professional learning community meetings. I found that for the teachers in this study, teachers' perception of student need and teachers' ability to create a learning trajectory affected the co-teaching relationship. I found that when participating teachers co-designed instruction by reframing math tasks and planned using the Five Practices, they focused on instruction to help students with mathematics difficulty attend to gaps in understandings. I also found that professional development supported math instruction through lesson summary enactment and lesson summary discourse patterns. Providing focused and intentional instruction, so students address and resolve mathematics difficulty is a worthy and important goal. This study endeavored to highlight ways mathematics educators and teacher leaders can support teachers and students who have mathematical difficulties.