

**NYC Task Force For Quality Inclusive Schooling**  
**“Creating an Inclusive Environment for All Students”**  
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Supporting General Educators Teaching Mathematics Inclusion

*Submitted by: Malka Adelman & Assata Ayana Lumumba*

**Presenter:** Janet R. DeSimone

**Affiliation:** Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership  
Department of Specialized Services in Education  
Lehman College, City University of New York

**Address:** 250 Bedford Park Boulevard West  
Carmen Hall, Room B01  
Bronx, NY 10468

**Phone Number:** 718-960-4993

**E-mail:** janet.desimone@lehman.cuny.edu

**Presenter’s Background:**

Prior to being an Assistant Professor in the Department of Specialized Services in Education at Lehman College, Dr. DeSimone has been a junior and high school English teacher. She has also worked as an adjunct faculty member at St. John’s University, Baruch College, SUNY New Paltz and Queensborough Community College. Dr. DeSimone was also an Assistant Vice President of Academic Affairs and Assistant Professor at Vaughn College. She will begin training principals, superintendents, and other educational leaders in Lehman College’s newly approved graduate programs in educational leadership.

Dr. DeSimone's current research looks at math inclusion and co-teaching relationships from the perspective of general education. It addresses the resources math inclusion co-teachers are lacking, which inhibit them from effectively teaching in inclusion classrooms. Dr. DeSimone recently received a fellowship to further her research in this area.

Dr. DeSimone is interested in school administrators' views regarding inclusion and their efforts to support teachers in inclusion classrooms. According to Dr. DeSimone, administrators do not have proper training in special education and inclusion models, thus they have difficulty understanding the needs of inclusion teachers. Dr. DeSimone believes that the responsibility ultimately lies with those who train professionals in educational leadership. Accordingly, Dr. DeSimone, who recently collaborated on the creation of new graduate programs in educational leadership at Lehman College, plans to make sure that Lehman's leadership students are heavily exposed to topics such as inclusion, differentiated instruction, diverse learning needs, etc. She believes that proper knowledge will help leaders appropriately support their inclusion teachers.

**Workshop Objectives:**

- To foster dialogue regarding middle school mathematics inclusive instruction.
- To gain insight into middle school mathematics general educators' beliefs about teaching mathematics to students with learning disabilities.
- To understand some of the challenges in establishing effective middle school mathematics inclusive programming.
- To explore strategies for negotiating instructional differences between general and special educators co-teaching in middle school mathematics classrooms.
- To examine ways in which classroom structures can be created to better promote shared ownership between general and special educators co-teaching in middle school mathematics

classrooms.

- To identify ways in which administrators can support middle school mathematics general educators and encourage effective co-teaching relationships.
- To identify ways in which teacher education programs can effectively prepare general educators to teach middle school mathematics inclusion.

### **Topical Outline**

Dr. DeSimone began her workshop by explaining what inclusion is and the common misconceptions associated with inclusion. In the second portion of the workshop, Dr. DeSimone discussed the three primary barriers of inclusion. She concluded the workshop by discussing the emerging themes that derived from her current research, and she explained her future recommendations for inclusion.

### **Content of Session:**

Dr. DeSimone stated that people frequently think that by putting two teachers in a classroom and telling them to teach makes it a co-taught class, but it is not that simple. According to Dr. DeSimone, a successful co-teaching relationship can only be fostered through cooperation and collaboration, which are both skills that must be taught. Unfortunately, many teacher educators and administrators do not teach these skills, and do not help strengthen teachers' abilities to be effective co-teachers. Dr. DeSimone believes that inclusion is 'here to stay,' thus teachers do not have a choice in the matter and must learn how to deal with the situation. She is an advocate of inclusion and believes it is a huge responsibility, and people need to devote more time – and resources – to determine the best methods for teaching students in inclusion classrooms.

According to the existing literature, which Dr. DeSimone summarized, there are three barriers to inclusion:

1. Organizational
2. Attitudinal
3. Knowledge

She believes that planning time must be built into teachers' schedules, and a clear structure of the specific type of inclusion model should be established. Often co-teachers are not provided joint planning time, which is a necessity to create effective inclusion classes and lessons. Many teachers suffer from the "my class" syndrome. The attitude among general education teachers can be very territorial, resulting in a resistance to having other teachers in the class. Additionally, if a teacher is not knowledgeable about the content or the needs of her/his students, it can be a major barrier to successful inclusion.

Dr. DeSimone explained that often special education teachers are forced into two roles within the classroom: 1) the general education teacher's aide, since the special educator may lack content knowledge, s/he feels inferior and stays in the background, giving out papers, checking homework, etc.; or 2) the special education teacher tends to only work with the included students, since they "know how to handle them better," and considering that many general education teachers are not knowledgeable regarding the specific learning needs of included students or appropriate instructional strategies, the special education teachers are forced to take sole responsibility for teaching the included students.

Special education and general education teachers can have philosophical differences based on their educational background and/or job-related experiences. For example, general education teachers often allow students more room to problem solve, whereas special education

teachers generally have a more structured nature to their instruction. Dr. DeSimone raised the idea of co-teachers negotiating their philosophical differences in the area of instruction, curriculum and grading. General educators and special educators must find some sort of common ground because their philosophical differences can, indeed, affect instruction and student learning.

In her past research on inclusion with another colleague, Dr. DeSimone found that general education math inclusion teachers felt ill prepared to teach students with disabilities in their general education math classrooms. The general educators said that they were not exposed enough to classes and workshops about the specific learning needs of students with disabilities and how best to teach a diverse group of students. Further, many of the general educators said that one of the most important and valuable resource to them was their co-teacher, but they often felt that they did not have enough common preparation time to plan for their co-taught classes.

Dr. DeSimone made several recommendations regarding inclusion. She stated that teacher education programs should have both general education and special education professors co-teaching classes and modeling collaboration, so that future teachers can see how team teaching works and can have something to model. Teacher educators should also have their students observe a variety of co-teaching models and foster in-depth discussions of “what works.” Lastly, teacher educators should require general and special education program students to work on joint assignments, which will foster collaborative skills and a co-teaching philosophy before these teachers even enter the classroom.

Administrators should have frequent professional development workshops that focus on specific mathematics topics and instructional strategies with specific follow-up in classrooms. Inclusion teachers also need to be provided with adequate planning and common preparation

periods. In addition, administrators should provide extra time for co-teaching teams to observe other team-teaching models (both internal/external). Lastly, setting aside time at faculty meetings for teacher teams to present collaborative “best practices” will send the message that administration values co-teaching.

General education teachers should familiarize themselves with the various unique learning needs of the included students, should make sure to read their students’ IEPs, and should never forget that *every* student in the class is their responsibility! Special education teachers should become part of the team by attending department meetings and familiarizing themselves with the standards and curriculum guidelines. Additionally, Dr. DeSimone recommended that those belonging to a co-teaching team should have mutual respect and a common understanding of the classroom goals/procedures, consistently enforce all the classroom rules, and create shared ownership of the classroom, which will help send the message of a united front to students; something that is vital when working with children.

**Relevance to Inclusion:**

This workshop was relevant to inclusion because inclusion integrates children with special needs into a general education class, as well as mixes special and general educators in one class. The inclusion process does not happen overnight, and with inclusion comes problems. This workshop addressed some of the issues that may occur with co-teaching among math teachers. Although Dr. DeSimone focused on math, the issues were relevant to all inclusion classes, as were her recommendations for moving forward, which made this workshop extremely beneficial.

### **Goals, Concerns and Issues for Future Work:**

There seems to be a lack of research linking co-teaching with student academic success. Dr. DeSimone would like to try and explore this issue more in her future research. She wants to know if a student in a class with an effective co-teaching relationship and/or model will achieve higher academic success than a student in a class without effective co-teaching. Overall, Dr. DeSimone was elated to take part in this type of conference. She believed that this conference facilitated dialogue about inclusion, which, ultimately, is the first step towards improving inclusive instruction for all students. According to Dr. DeSimone, “If one person learned something from this workshop, then that is good enough for me!”