

Co-Teaching in 7th Grade Reading

By Jennifer Foos, 5-8 Special Education Teacher for USD #303

We all know that a student with special needs has the right to a free and appropriate public education. This is mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 2004). This law also states that students should be educated in their least restrictive environment. Ideally, this would be the general education classroom. Research studies have shown that co-teaching can be very effective for students with special needs, especially those with milder disabilities such as learning disabilities. When implemented correctly, co-teaching can be a very successful way to teach all students in a classroom setting.

I have had the opportunity to co-teach with Lyn Bernbeck as part of the 7th Grade Reading Program. We are trying to encourage a love of reading for all students. We have discussed the importance of reading something that interests each individual student. There have also been days where we have just read comic books and looked up memes online. We have discussed how adults use reading in their everyday lives whether it is cooking, answering email, and reading for their jobs as well as reading for pleasure. We have also read news articles on NewsELA and taken quizzes and produced writing samples from what we read. When the Hays Daily News included an article about USD #303, we had our students pull up the online version to read it and discussed the different ways that adults today get their dose of daily news. On other days, we have worked

on building our vocabulary by playing a game of Apples to Apples or Scattegories; we want to make sure that the students see reading as something that is fun, so they develop a lifetime love of it.

We recently asked the students what other ways reading is used in the real world. They brought up how actors must read their scripts to be able to perform plays for their audiences. This discussion led to a request from the students that one way to utilize reading skills would be to research and perform plays for the Ness City Elementary Students. The students have researched and revised scripts to create a play in their small groups and are currently working on props and costumes for their play. They will video record their performances and publish them for the elementary students to watch as time allows. Be watching for the video links to be posted on the school twitter and facebook accounts as well.

Although I am in and out of many other classrooms in the school daily, my schedule has not been consistent enough in these rooms to start the co-teaching process with more teachers. I have only been able to help with a few lessons here; or a project there. I am hoping with the addition of of recent para-educator staff that I will be able to free up some consistent time daily where I can set up co-teaching opportunities in both fifth and sixth grades so that all students in these classrooms are able to see the benefits of differentiated and specialized instruction through co-teaching as well.



These pictures show the students in the 7th Grade Reading Class working on projects in their classroom.