

*This is a transcript of the T/TAC William and Mary podcast "Co-Teaching". Northampton Elementary School.*

**[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Intro]**

**FRITZ:** Today I'd like to welcome Nancy and Leslie. Co-teachers on the Eastern Shore in Northampton County. Good afternoon.

**NANCY AND LESLIE:** Hi.

**FRITZ:** And I thank you all so much for joining us, especially here on your summer break. We're getting close to school starting, so we'll get you start to think back around school and those sorts of things. You all are co-teaching pair at the elementary school and how long have y'all been co-teaching?

**NANCY AND LESLIE:** This I think will be our sixth year. Yes, six years.

**FRITZ:** And we were talking a little bit before, and I know you were saying "Well you know, I'm going to have a hard time breaking some of this down because it's gotten to where this is just what we do and if we could try to get into the just what we do part." I'll throw a pretty big question out there, but how does having the two of you in one classroom help you best meet the needs of all the students?

**NANCY:** Well, for one thing we have the special needs students and the regular education students all together in the same classroom. They're never pulled out and nobody knows who's who. So, it's just a team effort all day long with all the kids and it has really helped them to do well on the, not only on the standards of learning tasks, but just in general as far as learning is the regular socialization of second or third graders. It's been really nice to have them all together and to learn from each other and especially when we do, and we do a lot of small group work and so the groups are always mixed differently. We use many different ways to group in addition to the students choosing themselves, but they learn from each other. They, they learn best from each other and no one is viewed as different or special in our room. Everyone's got an equal footing.

**FRITZ:** It sounds like you just sort of a real community feeling in the classroom.

**NANCY:** Exactly. Always tease them and tell them where their mom's away from home, and these are your brothers and sisters.

**FRITZ:** So that's a great analogy for them and it's sort of that family setting. So, I guess moving from just the feel of the classroom, you know, that community feeling and that um, I guess expectation of treating... being the moms and the brothers and sisters looking..., moving down, not down, but moving into the next step of what sorts of things you do instructionally. I heard you say one thing about grouping, what are some, some of the reasons or activities or how would you look at, at making some of those groups?

**NANCY:** We're a very hands-on classroom. So, we do have a lot of activities where we don't stand up and lecture, um, where the kids are sitting at their desks were up and moving around a lot and whether it's science or social studies, any, any of the content areas, we always have hands-on activities with it. Um, and like I said before, the, you know, we will break up into small groups and then many times we will come back together as a large group and the kids may present what they have just done, or we may go over and, you know, make a connection to the whole main lesson that we've been doing. But um, we, we just do so many hands-on activities

**LESLIE:** For reading. We do stations and, so two of the stations are, we each have our own horse shoe shaped table, so we are each meeting with a group while the others are at their little stations. So, it's really, it helps a lot having to have the groups with a teacher.

**NANCY:** We have about 10 stations and every day they're moved. Um, but we have the listening station, we have word study, we have ABC order....

**LESLIE:** Word wall, overhead projector, just all your basic stations and they really liked them...

**NANCY:** They love them.

**LESLIE:** And there's a writing station.

**NANCY:** Yeah, there's a writing station and they do, they, they are occupied, um, and they're paired up differently also. So, it's just, you know, everyone is, has a partner, has a buddy while we're working with particular groups.

**FRITZ:** And you were saying that something that changes day to day or content area to content area or ...?

**NANCY:** The different stations change daily. So, they're not never at the same station, like for a week at a time or anything like that. And our reading groups change frequently, because we share literature related to our themes. They can be, they can change anywhere from every week to every other week.

**FRITZ:** Great. You mentioned the themes and I'm Leslie, you were talking a little bit earlier about the themes. Could you just share a little bit more about that? I thought it was just a really great way to, um, to get kids thinking in a realistic way about what was going on.

**LESLIE:** Well, it gives them a scaffold it and it brings all the subjects together. We do dinosaurs, ocean, desert, rain forest, and oh polar region, that is one that I forgot earlier. And from that all the books that we read have to do with that theme. We tie in the science and social studies, the SOLs with it and um, it takes place all day long. And they get really excited about it because when we change themes, the room changes. So, they'll come in, you know, like on a Monday and oh my gosh, it's all...

**FRITZ:** What are we doing now?

**LESLIE:** Well, it's no doubt what we're doing.

**NANCY:** Everything is completely, you know, the, the walls and all the different manipulatives we use, everything is related to this specific theme.

**LESLIE:** Even the pointers we use on the word wall change. So, when we're doing dinosaurs they're pointing with dinosaurs.

**NANCY:** Snowflakes with the polar region.

**LESLIE:** But I have found over the years that has truly made them excited to read, because all the books change. So, during a free reading time or there's also a station during reading group where they can go get their own books and not only are their accelerated reader books, which is a different

stack, but there are either polar region books or dinosaur books and they get so excited to get those new books and they buddy up together and read them and it's, it's neat.

**FRITZ:** So, you've got their interest when coming in.

**LESLIE:** Exactly.

**FRITZ:** They want to know more.

**LESLIE:** They're excited.

**NANCY:** We have found too, with using these themes and connecting the non-fiction material that they need to know for science and social studies, for those struggling students who need that extra boost to that particular content area, it's very helpful. So, they don't just learn it during science or during social studies, they're exposed to it during language arts and even at math and we've had different activities. We've gone outside and measured how big whales are and the different ocean mammals.

**LESLIE:** On the sidewalk we measured it off and marked it was so cool, so they can actually walk it.

**NANCY:** So, you know, we do a lot of the different things with, like Leslie was mentioning all the areas connect to that particular thing and we're constantly looking for new things to do.

**LESLIE:** And that's one of the things we have such a variety of abilities in our classroom. The themes help us to not only meet the needs of the ones who need a whole lot of extra help, but also the ones who need to be challenged. That really, it really helps us to meet all those needs because this is just a vast...

**NANCY:** On any particular theme that we're using. We have level books. Like she was mentioning from kindergarten to fifth grade. If it's on the rain forest and there are different books with different levels, which yes we can meet the needs of pretty much where the student is at.

**LESLIE:** Because we've had children reading, you know, kindergarten level in some reading fifth, and we just do it all in the same room, which is neat.

**FRITZ:** That's great. So, you're able to meet all the needs of all the students?

**LESLIE:** And none of them are held back but yet the ones who need extra...

**NANCY:** It's not just through, for example, the books we do a lot of trying to access prior knowledge and, and here on the shore, not a lot of students have been elsewhere. So maybe they haven't gone and seeing things that maybe students across the bay have. So, we do a lot of power points and we bring in a lot of actual photographs. We don't use a lot of clip art or animation. We use real pictures. So, if we're doing, you know, the polar regions, we are looking at specific animals and with their, you know, their actual photographs to either bring up the prior knowledge that the student has or give them that knowledge that they may not already have, which is one of the things that we do, and it goes through science and social studies too.

**FRITZ:** That's really powerful for students to see it and be able to understand what it looks like. Are you were saying that you kick off the year with a book that relates to the eastern shore as well.

**LESLIE:** We're going to start this year with the hidden key. I can't think of the others name...

**NANCY:** Karen Tweedie.

**LESLIE:** Thank you, and she's actually lives here to part-time. Hopefully she's going to come in and meet the kids this year. But this, yeah, this book talks about the shore and it talks about, um, some of the history of the shore. Particularly car place in Accomack. So, we're going to read that together and every activity we do is going to spring from that.

**FRITZ:** That'll be great. I might have to come back. Well, as you all are talking about the stations and the groupings and the you're at one table you at another table and you're changing the room, I'm thinking planning. How does, how does planning go for y'all because it sounds like there's probably a lot of planning that goes into that or is that another one of those things that you just kinda the way you do things now?

**NANCY:** While there's no... I guess the way I would describe it, there's formal and there's informal planning. Because we do sit down, and we do specifically look at SOL objectives and, you know, if we have students who are doing the VAP or the VGLA, we're looking at those kinds of requirements. But yet, we also do a lot of informal planning and we do a lot of informal assessment. Last year we started where we basically had little books for every subject area and every day we were documenting things. We were taking pictures constantly, doing mini assessments as we went around the room. And it sort of became our scrapbook for the entire year. But yeah, they showed us at any given time, which students might be struggling with double digit addition or subtraction or you know, who didn't do as well, you know, when we were doing a science with social studies activity. And so that, we were constantly, constantly assessing and that again would drive our instruction and we would go back and look at it and say, well this is what we need to change here...

**LELSIE:** I need to pull somebody up here to the table for this lesson because they didn't get it yesterday.

**NANCY:** Or we need this lesson next week because we need to beef up a little bit more of the lesson we just did. So, we were constantly adjusting as we needed to.

**LESLIE:** But we had a daily record of how everybody did in each subject with pictures.

**FRITZ:** Wow, and you used that for planning the next day and the next week. So that you can make sure that everyone was getting what they needed to do. That is fantastic. Instructionally, you know, you were talking about differentiating some of the tasks from changing sort of the learning style or the method in which the mode in which students get the content up through making sure that it was challenging enough and if you'd be willing to share a little bit about that, what sorts of, I guess we'll say modifications not to the content, but to the task that you might make.

**NANCY:** Well, because we do have students who knew their abilities differ so much... when we're done with a lesson, for example, and we're looking at assessment, we may come up with a multiple-choice test for the basic group of students, and then for others, we're going to look at differentiating where we know that they can't take a multiple-choice test. You know they're not going to be able to demonstrate what they know. So, we will adjust it. It might be a fill in the blank, it might be a cut and paste with a graphics on it.

**LESLIE:** We do a lot of that

**NANCY:** Anything where it's the same content, it's just presented in a different format. So that particular student can show what they know, because we know not all students are going to do well with multiple choice tests.

**LESLIE:** Well, some students have even had to tell us orally, and they know it, it's in there, they just couldn't get it down on paper. So that's just another way to assess.

**NANCY:** And we do keep in mind like their running records that we keep so that the test isn't, you know, we know leading up to that task or that assessment where the student is, you know, ongoing. And we also do a lot of digital recordings where the fluency. Check fluency weekly and we've got these neat little digital recorders where we keep a running record of, of that type of thing.

**FRITZ:** A sort of digital portfolio for right, for students on their readings.

**NANCY:** They able to hear themselves read also, which is very powerful.

**LESLIE:** Another station we forgot to mention. The record themselves and hear themselves read station.

**FRITZ:** How do they like that?

**LESLIE:** They love it. They like to hear their voices.

**FRITZ:** As you were talking about changing some to the pictures and not necessarily doing as well on a multiple-choice format. So, you are talking about differentiating, not just... you're differentiating their output really of the way that they're giving the information to you. And you spoke a little bit too about differentiating some of how they would get the information as well. But then you mentioned having some students who were, I guess doing the VGLA last year and you had a really neat story about that.

**NANCY:** We had about five students actually that were identified who would be taking the VGLA. And so we collected the work and we were doing all the things you do with the VGLA. And then about mid-year, we were reassessing where the students were at. And the progress that three of the students had made... we were able to look at it and recognize it and say, these students really should be taking the SOL tests with accommodations. And so, after meeting with parents and everyone agreeing that's what they did. And out of the five who ended up switching over to the SOL with a combination, three of them did very well and passed the core areas and actually some science and social studies SOLs.

**FRITZ:** That is fantastic, congratulations. Fantastic. The portfolios and you're sort of running daily record of how every student is doing. Nothing's really ever a surprise. I'm really, I mean you have a good idea of what's coming and how everyone's doing. So, when you get to the end of the unit, you have a good idea.

**NANCY:** And I think that's one of the powerful things about having two of us in the classroom, because if one doesn't pick something up the other one will. And that comes out a lot when we go to plan. I'm either looking at what lesson we're going to present or how we're going to present it, or even how particular students may do with the lesson. One of us may say, oh well, so and so needs such and such and we'll go back and kind of regroup about it. But as you say, we assessed so much with two pair of eyes... we have so much more knowledge of the students.

**LESLIE:** We have a really good idea of what their learning style is. So, we try to hit all the different ones with every lesson and that's really not hard. It. Well, if you do a lot of hands-on, um, there, there's, they're going to get it.

**FRITZ:** Right. And I heard you all talking about things from your visual learners with the pictures to your kinesthetic learners to, you know, a lot of hands on activities. Even the auditory digital recordings of things.

**LESLIE:** We have a program called Read Please for our students who don't read as well as others, but they need the material. So, we do a study guides for, let's say we're doing a science test. The study guide will be read to them on the laptop.

**NANCY:** It can be used in conjunction with the PowerPoint we came up with and then they can either do it in a small group because we've got, we have a learning station that will, that'll several students can use or individually. And that works also in case a student misses a day. They can go catch up on that material, you know, either with assistance or own their own. We also have students create their own PowerPoints and that's sometimes is their hands-on activity after a particular lesson or unit.

**LESLIE:** The laptops were talking about came from us. We, they're ones that we don't have used any more at home.

**NANCY:** So, we've gone to the newer models, so older models...

**LESLIE:** They still work.

**NANCY:** Several times actually, the students have put together PowerPoints and we've had parents come in and done presentations for the parents. Little shows for them. And we've done a lot of actually videotaping over the years and we've actually shared some of the videotaping at a staff development. The students put together a video tape of why they like stations.

**LESLIE:** So, they, they explained the stations instead of us explaining that. Yeah. And it was really very, very good.

**FRITZ:** That's great.

**NANCY:** They did it much better than we could.

**FRITZ:** That is great. Now I'm kind of chuckling watching you all get to finish each other's sentences and looking back and I can only imagine how, what a great dynamic that is in the classroom, you know, and adding to that that when I asked you all about how you got started before we started taping, you were like, I really don't remember that, but if you all wouldn't mind just sharing a couple of things about sort of your growth as a co-teaching pair. If there were differences sort of when you started between now and, and what sorts of things have a, it's sort of a growth process because it is sort of a growth process when you bring two people together to, to teach and, and do that in a classroom.

**LESLIE:** When we first started, Nancy came in to the classroom just for reading and then it kind of went into math. And then she would go back over to her room for the afternoon. Well then we ended up saying, okay, let's just dive in. So now we're in the same room together all day. So that's, that's one way we, we've grown.

**NANCY:** And parents were so positive about that. I don't think that they would ever be happy if we went back to the way that it had been really liked the fact that their student, that their children, are in the classroom and they're not pulled out for any, any services. One of the things that I've found in, because I hadn't had a special ed room of my own going in and combining the classrooms, I had to sort of take down maybe the wall that I had put up thinking, oh well, so and so can't do that for so and so's not able to do that. So, and so needs more assistance in that. It actually, it was letting them take those risks and be just like any other student. I couldn't replicate the general ed classroom in my special ed room. So, once they were actually in there all day long, I was able to see what they can do it and they want to do it in a very motivated to work just like all the other students. So maybe it was me putting up some, you know, invisible barriers thinking that they couldn't when actually, they learn best from each other and that's exactly what's what's been happening.

**LESLIE:** And one of the things that I can truly say, none of the higher functioning or thinking kids have been held back at all and it has only helped everybody. Very positive thing for all concerned.

**NANCY:** No, no one in the classroom. And the students, I thought it was special or different. Everyone is just a classmate as the others. And when it comes to grouping, nobody has any issue with, oh I don't want to be with so and so or you know, that sort of thing. Everyone's very comfortable around each other.

**LESLIE:** Well that isn't tolerated in our room. We don't do it all.

**FRITZ:** Back to the community expectation why we sort of started...

**LESLIE:** And we will have class meetings if there's a problem and handle it together...

**FRITZ:** Like a family.

**LESLIE:** Like a family.

**FRITZ:** It sounds like a great classroom and I really appreciate you all taking the time to share some of that with us this afternoon. And I'm talk some about how your instruction and your setup and all of that, and a thank you.

**NANCY and Leslie:** You're welcome.

**[MUSIC: T/TAC William and Mary Podcast Outro]**