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ABSTRACT

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This phenomenological study was conducted to shed light on the lived communication experiences of the special education teachers at Miller County Schools. The qualitative approach used unstructured interviews to give a voice to the five respondents. The question prompts were based on the observation of self-contained and inclusive classes, IEP meetings, and parent conferences. Making sense of the lived communicative experiences of the special education teachers, the concept of cognizant-sensitive communication emerged. My inquiry revealed that cognizant-sensitive communication in special education allows for improving students' achievement in case it constitutes the essential basis of all teaching, learning and communication processes. Cognizant-sensitive communication strategies allow appropriate approaches and emphasize the value of equality as conditions necessary to create a full-fledged process of communication, teaching and learning with students with special needs. Teacher-parent communication highlighted the need of understanding, building relationships, and truthful feedback. On the other hand, the inside and outside the classroom communication challenges revealed five themes, namely: misunderstanding; behavioral issues; lack of response; unclear understanding of the children's special needs, and struggle to adapt to the changes. Recommendations and solutions to the communication challenges outlined the last two themes consisting of awareness and sensitivity and prioritizing students' interests. Hence, cognizant-sensitive communication was theorized. It refers to the process where the messenger delves deeper into the abilities, thoughts, interests, and even limitations of the receiver to formulate, select, structure, and relay the message. This phenomenon is common among the lived communication experiences of the special education teachers.

Keywords: *Cognizant-sensitive communication, special education, inclusive education, awareness, lived communication experiences, Miller County School*