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ABSTRACT

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Co-teaching in Secondary Schools: Teacher Reports of Developments in Australian and American Classrooms

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Abstract

Co-teaching approaches to support for students with disabilities in inclusive secondary classrooms were investigated through interviews and classroom observations of 17 teachers. Data collected in Queensland (Australia) and Pennsylvania (USA) public schools allowed comparisons of teacher roles and responsibilities under two education systems. The co-teaching partnerships in both countries were dominated by subject teachers with special educators being assigned "monitoring" or "helping" duties within the class. Teachers stressed the importance of school-wide commitment to inclusive principles for co-teaching to succeed. Professional and personal compatibility between co-teaching partners was also seen as critical for success by most respondents. Barriers to the introduction of co-teaching in secondary schools were reported to be entrenched attitudes rejecting inclusion and administrators' unwillingness to commit the required time and resources. Teachers believed that well implemented co-teaching results in academic and social gains for *all* students and should be regarded as an effective support option for inclusive secondary classrooms.

Co-teaching is one of several service delivery options that have been promoted to ensure that students with disabilities receive the support they need to optimally access instruction in the general education classroom. When adopted in secondary schools, co-teaching allows the inclusion of students with special needs who might otherwise be taught in segregated settings. Students with learning disabilities, for example, may remain in their general education classes instead of being withdrawn for separate instruction elsewhere.

Co-teaching, or co-operative teaching, is not synonymous with inclusion. It is just one of several support options that can be used to facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings (Cook & Friend, 1996). Co-teaching has been described as an instructional process which involves "a restructuring of teaching procedures in which two or more educators possessing distinct sets of skills work in a co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in integrated educational settings" (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995, p. 46). A decision to adopt a co-teaching approach is generally made when teachers decide that the learning and social needs of students with disabilities can be met in a general education classroom with appropriate supports provided. The decision also takes account of the educational wellbeing of other students in the class. Given the highly varied nature of today's classrooms, it is not surprising that several different collaborative structures have evolved, each aimed at improving instruction by allowing educators with complementary skills to work together in inclusive settings (Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997).

The co-teaching model is based on a number of propositions which provide a theoretical justification for its use. First, it is expected to make available to all students, including those with disabilities, a wider range of instructional alternatives than would be possible with just one teacher. Second, it is expected to enhance the participation of students with disabilities as full classroom members. Third, it is expected to improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities in the general education curriculum. Finally, co-teaching is expected to allow general and special educators ". . . to combine their expertise to meet the needs of all students." (Dieker & Barnett, 1996, p.5).

There have been several studies of co-teaching in elementary schools (e.g., Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997; Walther-Thomas, 1997). In one of the most comprehensive, Walther-Thomas (1997) investigated the implementation of co-teaching in 18 elementary and 7 middle schools. Based on interviews and classroom observations, she reported benefits for students with disabilities including enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, strong academic progress, and improved social adjustment. In addition, a number of her middle school teachers reported students' strengthened beliefs about themselves as learners. The teachers reported that their experiences of co-teaching were professionally satisfying in terms of student learning, their own professional growth, and the support each received from co-teaching partners.

The teachers also reported that they had encountered a number of problems while co-teaching. The students with disabilities often had difficulties adjusting to the higher expectations in their regular classrooms with regard to tests, homework, and standards for assignment grading. Teachers had difficulty finding the time they needed for planning

together, even in the middle schools where planning periods could be scheduled more regularly.

There were indications in the Walther-Thomas (1997) study that middle-school co-teaching and elementary school co-teaching called for some differences in approach. These differences may be accounted for by an older student population, instructional approaches adapted for more complex curricular material, variations in resource availability, and tighter school scheduling. This raised the question as to what further adaptations might be required for co-teaching to be successfully implemented in secondary schools, and whether the accounts of successful outcomes for co-teaching in elementary classes would be repeated there. We were aware of many anecdotal reports raising questions regarding the efficacy of co-teaching in secondary schools but there were virtually no studies to which we could turn for answers.

In the elementary grades where the general education curriculum is dominated by the learning of basic skills in literacy and numeracy, there are numerous opportunities for the special education teacher to assume a substantive teaching role. In contrast, the secondary school curriculum is weighted by content, and secondary school teachers are predominantly subject area specialists. There are also tighter organizational constraints in secondary schools, compared with elementary schools, and much greater pressure placed on secondary teachers to prepare students to perform well in examinations. In this environment, the opportunities for professional collaboration to support students with special needs appear to be more limited.

The educational philosophy of inclusion of students with disabilities into regular education has currency in most western nations. How inclusion is worked out in practice is shaped in each country by traditions of support for people with disabilities, by social and educational service policies, and at a pragmatic level, by the resources allocated to retrain professional educators and persuade the community to accept change in how educational supports are delivered. In both Australia and the United States, the educational support services to students with disabilities are provided through inclusive policies and a range of support options that allow these students to be educated in general education classrooms. Because of this shared commitment to educational inclusion, we decided to compare teacher reports of co-teaching in both countries and to assess the utility of the approach under the two systems. We were also interested in the extent to which local adaptations, if any, had developed. This was a study in a relatively unexplored area, so a wide-ranging investigation based on interviews and observations was adopted, to lay the groundwork for more rigorous subsequent inquiry.

A comparative study was undertaken to explore models of co-teaching in secondary schools and the roles and responsibilities of general and special educators in co-taught secondary school subject classes. The roles of co-teaching partners were examined with particular attention to those of special education teachers. The investigation took place in two secondary schools in Pennsylvania, USA, and eight in Queensland, Australia. In Pennsylvania, secondary level special education teachers are rarely certified subject matter teachers but, instead, have received specialist training in working with students with special educational needs. Secondary special education teachers in Queensland are

usually elementary-trained teachers who have undertaken additional specialist study at postgraduate diploma or masters degree level and have then been recruited by secondary schools. As is the case in the United States, few Australian secondary level special educators have subject area expertise in addition to their special education training. In both countries, it is also rare for a secondary subject teacher to have undertaken further training in special education and to therefore have expertise in teaching students with disabilities.

Three research questions guided this inquiry: Are there unique features in the way co-teaching models are employed in Australian and American secondary schools? What roles and responsibilities do co-teachers in secondary schools respectively assume, and how are the skills of the special educator most commonly employed? What do the teachers themselves report as the influences shaping the co-teaching model in which they are involved?

Method

Participants and Settings

The study took place in 10 public secondary schools, 2 in a large urban school district in southwestern Pennsylvania (USA), and 8 in an urban area of southeast Queensland (Australia). Seventeen teachers were observed or interviewed, nine from Pennsylvania and eight from Queensland. The teachers in Queensland were selected because of their experience with co-teaching over a number of years. The Pennsylvania teachers all taught in schools where co-teaching had been adopted as a school-wide support option. The teachers' years of classroom experience, as well as their time in co-

teaching roles, varied considerably, although all were either currently involved in co-teaching or had co-taught within the previous 6 months. The classes in which the co-teaching had been undertaken all included students with learning disabilities and some also had students with physical disabilities, behavioral disorders, and mild mental retardation. The numbers of such students varied from three to eight in a class. With this background these teachers were able to provide a comprehensive view of the processes involved in establishing and maintaining co-teaching roles and relationships. All teachers volunteered to participate and made themselves available for interviews at times not otherwise committed to their teaching responsibilities.

Data sources

An aim of this study was to gather data from teachers in different secondary school co-teaching contexts. As this was our initial inquiry into co-teaching we decided to document current practice by collecting qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations. Each of the teachers was interviewed using a semi-structured protocol for approximately 90 minutes. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed for analysis. Through the interviews we sought to elicit information regarding the negotiation of respective co-teaching roles, the rationale for adopting a co-teaching approach, and evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of particular models of co-teaching. Where interviews were associated with classroom observations, they were also used to clarify incidents or processes observed. The interviews and observations were conducted by one or other of the two authors, or by a trained, experienced, and independent interviewer who followed the same interview protocol. All observations were unobtrusive and

conducted at mutually agreed-upon locations and times. Observers watched entire class periods and recorded narrative observation notes of the activities and interactions of the two teachers. All teachers were requested not to make alterations to their normal classroom practice during observation periods and, with assurance of anonymity, to be frank in their statements during interview. They were also offered the opportunity to review the findings relevant to their own data.

Data Analysis

The audiotapes of interviews and observation notes were transcribed immediately following each interview or school visit. All data were read independently by both authors and themes that emerged from each data set were noted, compared, and agreed upon. Counter-evidence for the findings that emerged was also sought, independently, by the two researchers within both data sets. Findings were referred back to the participating teachers for comment and verification and, where necessary, revisions were negotiated.

Results

Many forms of co-teaching have been described in the literature (e.g., (Cook & Friend, 1996; Dieker & Barnett, 1996; Nolet & Tindal, 1996; Stanovich, 1996; Vaughn et al., 1997; Walther-Thomas, 1997). For the purposes of this study, an inclusive support option had to satisfy three conditions for it to be accepted as co-teaching: 1) two qualified teachers shared the same classroom and students, one teacher being a subject specialist, the other a special education teacher; 2) both teachers shared responsibility for planning and instructing a diverse class, in which there were some students with disabilities that impacted on their capacity to learn; and 3) both teachers were engaged in delivering

substantive instruction. This description excluded arrangements in which a noncertified community volunteer or teacher aide was the second adult in the classroom. Co-planning or consultation, when not followed by the same teachers teaching together, was also not considered as co-teaching.

Several themes emerged from the Australian and American data sets. In the first of these, teachers attributed the success or failure of co-teaching to a school-wide commitment to inclusion and the extent of administrative and collegial support they received. The second theme concerned the benefits of co-teaching for *all* those involved: subject and special education teachers, as well as students with and without disabilities. In the third theme teachers spoke of the importance of personal and professional compatibility for the success of a co-teaching partnership. The fourth theme concerned the need for special education teachers to "prove themselves" to colleagues for the partnership work, and the fifth dealt with the equity of teaching roles within co-teaching partnerships. The final theme described the obstacles that needed to be overcome in establishing and maintaining successful partnerships.

Despite differences in the social and cultural contexts in which secondary schooling takes place in Australia and United States, similar results were found in both data sets. The themes described below related more to the philosophy driving co-teaching and its implementation than to the country in which the data were collected.

Theme 1. Effective implementation of co-teaching requires school-wide acceptance of inclusive policies and co-teaching as a viable support option.

All teachers interviewed stressed the importance of a what one called "a shared vision of inclusion" (Q1, 3.1.99) not only between co-teaching partners but also among other teachers and administrators in the school. They believed that co-teaching was impossible unless co-teaching partners had "matching philosophies regarding inclusion of students with disabilities" (Q4, 3.14.99) and "a determination to go in there with the attitude of making it [inclusion] work (Q8, 11.17.98). Many of the teachers said that without similar beliefs shaping school-wide policies, teachers who wanted to work collaboratively encountered barriers. The teachers believed that the reasons for this were that co-teaching required re-allocation of specialist resources and rescheduling of teachers' duties, and that these considerations prevailed over arguments to include students with disabilities in general education classes.

> The new principal doesn't understand inclusion. The former one was very enthusiastic and gave us whatever we needed [in terms of scheduling of teachers and students]. The new one doesn't understand even with explanations. We told him: "We want to work with this teacher, this teacher, this teacher. Please reserve places in those classes [for inclusion students]; set the [enrollment] cap lower and save us 6, 7, or 8 spaces." It didn't happen. So we had to pull other kids out to let our kids in . . . and some of our kids never did get into any inclusion classes. (PA1, 11.13.97)

School-wide support was also needed to ensure that specific times were allocated on the weekly schedule to permit co-teaching partners to plan together. When shared planning periods were officially scheduled, co-teaching appeared to be more satisfactory. "The person I do environmental science and biology with has the same planning period I do. We meet and review what we will be doing" (PA4, 3.31.97). In contrast, when co-planning was not possible, special education teachers in particular were less comfortable with their role. "We never talk about it [lesson planning]. I just come in and do it. He [the subject teacher] moves very sequentially so usually I can follow what he will be doing. Usually I just ask, 'Hey, what are we doing today?' as I walk in the door" (PA2, 11.13.97).

Many of the teachers to whom we spoke had committed large amounts of their own time to implement co-teaching, and they believed that isolated efforts could not be sustained for long. The time and resources required for effective co-teaching impacted on resources available elsewhere in the school and thus a schoolwide commitment to inclusion, and particularly co-teaching, was necessary.

Theme 2. Co-teaching arrangements bring benefits to all teachers and students.

Although the motivation for implementing co-teaching always derived from the need to support more effectively students with disabilities in general education classrooms, the approach was reported to have beneficial effects for *all* students. General education teachers said that they too profitted from the collaborations. "We enhanced each other" said an English Literature teacher in Queensland (Q4, 14.3.99) Another added,

"We learn from each other, and that helps us grow and develop as teachers" (Q2, 3.1.99). A Pennsylvania special education teacher reported, "The English teacher was initially very resistant. By the end of the year, she said it was the best thing that ever happened to her. [She enjoyed having] someone to critique what she was doing [and] to bounce ideas off. She believed she had become a much more flexible teacher" (PA9, 3.24.97).

In Queensland, one pair used co-teaching over several weeks for professional development in behavior management and classroom organizational skills for a young subject teacher. The two teachers planned a unit of work collaboratively. Then the special education teacher, the more experienced partner, took the lead in instruction with the classroom teacher assuming an assistant role. This allowed the subject teacher time to observe and practice the specific techniques and skills being modelled for her. Then, over a period of 6 weeks (two lessons per week) there was a phased reversal of roles such that by the beginning of the 6th week the special education partner was assuming the assistant role, and providing feedback to the teacher on her progress.

Having two teachers in the room was also a benefit when students' behavior became difficult to manage. "There was a kid who was misbehaving, so I took her [out of the classroom] down to the vice-principal, and explained what happened. The teacher could keep teaching and didn't have to stop" (PA5, 3.17.97).

Co-teaching also brought benefits to the nondisabled students in the class.

> Like you always have some kids who finish the test in 10 minutes and some who take the whole period. [With two of us in the room] we can split the kids in half and have half the kids can take the test in my [the special education] room. Many

of them will be mainstream kids who just need more time or a quieter place. In many ways, we are serving many kids who do not have labels. (PA6, 3.17.97)

A Queensland teacher agreed: "All the kids really like it because it means they get help when they need it instead of having to swing from the fans and do all sorts of things before they get attention" (Q8, 11.17.98).

When it came to planning assessments, co-teaching arrangements helped to sensitize subject teachers to the need to design "multi-level" assessment tasks rather than using a single test or assignment that blocked some students from demonstrating what they knew. Test content and format were most commonly decided by the subject teacher with advice on adaptations and accommodations from the special education teacher. Testing accommodations designed for students with special needs, also tended to benefit many other at risk students in the classes. Examples given included allowing extra time, explaining instructions more explicitly, and reading instructions to students.

Theme 3. Teachers rate professional and personal compatibility highly in preferred co-teaching partners.

Teachers in both countries believed that co-teaching partners should be volunteers. "No one should be forced to do inclusion or co-teaching" (PA8, 3.19.97). When asked about the qualities needed in co-teaching partners, participants emphasized mutual respect, tolerance, and a capacity to persevere in overcoming difficulties. Co-teaching had no attraction if one partner acted as a "prima donna" or regarded him/herself as either a superior, or interestingly, inferior, teacher to the respondent (Q7, 3.24.99).

The continuing, close cooperation which co-teaching involves was given as the reason by several respondents for identifying both professional and personal compatibility as critical. Many of the teachers described the personality traits they preferred - and for some required - in co-teaching partners. The elements of professional compatibility reported by the teachers included:

a. Shared views with regard to academic and behavioral standards expected of students. Without agreement on acceptable standards students became confused and frustrated.

b. A willingness and ability to communicate honestly and openly. The importance of open, frank, but tactful communication was frequently mentioned. The teachers expressed concern that small problems and annoyances could escalate if not dealt with expeditiously.

c. The ability to objectify rather than personalize problems. Being able to "stand apart" from a problem was seen as necessary to facilitate reaching a resolution and to avoid clouding the issue with "ego protection". One teacher's view was that " it helps if you are a visionary, creative person, with an ability to see the big picture" (Q6, 3.18.99) in order to rise above petty personal issues.

d. Equivalence in knowledge and ability. Teachers expected their co-teaching partners to be at least their equals in pedagogical knowledge and instructional skill. This was to ensure that the partner "could hold their own and not be a passenger" (Q6, 3.18.99).

e. Self-confidence, self-esteem, and a willingness to take risks.

In the initial stages of establishing co-teaching programs, some teachers had been self-conscious about "having to perform in front of colleagues" and that this demanded "a high level of self-confidence and self-esteem." (Q5, 3.17.99). The same teacher stressed that one must be prepared to risk frank self-examination, evaluation by a close colleague, and constructive criticism. She likened the partnership to "invading and working in another teacher's territory" and to "breaking the shells of teachers in egg-crate classrooms and letting others in" (Q5, 3.17.99).

A measure of the self-confidence required for the task of co-teaching was, "being prepared to ask the difficult questions and stand up for yourself, but also to know when to be diplomatic and sensitive to the needs of others" (Q4, 3.14.99). One special education teacher was "determined *not* to be a teacher's aide. I had to have enough faith in my own ability to link and team with the subject teacher" (Q5, 3.17.99).

Several of the teachers interviewed in this study rated personal compatibility between partners as the most critical variable for co-teaching success. They expressed this in terms of the qualities they would look for in a co-teaching partner:

a. Tolerance and patience. "As a special education teacher going in I found I needed a lot of patience with the class [subject] teacher and kids equally" (Q3, 3.2.99).

b. Sense of humor. "They must have a sense of humor to alleviate stress and get by awkward moments (Q7, 3.24.99).

c. Flexibility and willingness to adapt one's practice to work with a colleague.

d. Excellent communication skills. "It is like working with someone I live with, and therefore there has to be a close level of communication" (Q2, 3.1.99).

Previous research reports have likened the co-teaching partnership to a marriage (e.g., Cook & Friend, 1996). The teachers in this study also described co-teaching as an unusually close partnership or, what one termed, "a professional marriage", which, "like [a normal] marriage, you have to work at " (Q1, 3.1.99). Several of the teachers spoke of the adjustments required when starting to work collaboratively. All had been trained to be independent practitioners, solely responsible for all that happened in their own classes. With co-teaching, however, new roles and responsibilities were assigned and each had to be negotiated with someone else - who was also used to working independently. This was regarded in all cases as an enjoyable challenge rather than a barrier or problem.

Special education teachers who had co-taught with compatible partners expressed high levels of satisfaction and enjoyment, even in cases where their efforts were not strongly supported by colleagues.

Two of the Australian teachers had a different perspective on the importance of personal compatibility in co-teaching . For them, compatibility of personalities was of less concern than the professionalism of the co-teaching partners. "Personalities shouldn't be that much of an issue if a professional approach is taken" (Q3, 3.2.99). "You don't have to be friends to work with people, it might help, but it isn't necessary" (Q8, 11.17.98). "You're in the classroom for the kids so being friends with the people you work with should not be important. If it's just a person thing, and that person leaves, you're back to square one" (Q3, 3.2.99).

Theme 4. Special education teachers are seldom given equal status in co-teaching partnerships.

A recurrent theme regarded the status of the special education teachers in co-teaching partnerships as reflected in the roles that they were assigned. In Pennsylvania co-taught classrooms, special education teachers were observed taking on a variety of roles. Sometimes, the special education teacher performed *clerical* duties, taking attendance, receiving and giving out passes to students who were excused from class, doing record-keeping on homework assignments, and grading multiple-choice quizzes or tests. On other occasions, the special education teacher assumed a *helper* role. While the subject matter teacher taught the lesson, the special education co-teacher circulated around the classroom, encouraging students who were having difficulty, redirecting students who were off task ("You should be working on the solution, guys!" PA observation, 11.13.97), or serving as an extra pair of hands during a science laboratory.

Similar roles were reported in Queensland classrooms, where, in most cases the subject teacher took primary responsibility for instruction and management of the class, while the co-teaching special educator moved around the room providing assistance to any student who needed it - not only those designated as having special needs. The actual teaching required of the special education teacher in these cases was limited to explaining requirements, interpreting text, or reteaching main ideas to individuals or small groups.

In both countries, special education teachers were also assigned to *monitoring* tasks, for example, supervising students working on cooperative learning or small group assignments, students assigned a task to complete in the computer laboratory, or students

taking an examination in a separate room. One special education teacher even saw her role as *modeling appropriate behavior* for the special needs students assigned to the inclusion class. "The first year I was a model for the students. Often, if he's [the subject teacher] is lecturing, I would do the notes on the overhead [projector] to model note-taking" (PA1, 11.13.97). Special education teachers also located supplemental materials for use by the subject teacher, designed instructional materials for individuals or groups, and adapted tests.

In Pennsylvania, special education teachers were seldom observed actively teaching whole classes or even small groups. In Queensland there was more evidence of the special education teacher in a teaching role, but even here, the role was usually a subordinate one. In one instance, two teachers, one a special education teacher, the other an English teacher, had co-planned a 6-week unit of work on writing a book review. The subject teacher taught the whole class in the orientation phase of the lesson. In the enhancement phase, the class was grouped by ability and the special education teacher led the smaller group which included several students with learning disabilities while the English subject teacher led the rest of the class. The conclusion, or synthesising phase of the lesson, was again taken by the subject teacher with the special education teacher moving through the class and assisting any students having difficulties. The two teachers described their practice as "an enmeshing of our abilities" (Q5, 3.17.99) but they were clearly not *equal* partners in the instruction. In most cases, this disparity in roles was explained as necessary because the special education teacher lacked content knowledge.

Theme 5. Special education teachers must often prove themselves capable of making a unique and substantive contribution.

While special education teachers were often praised by their general education colleagues for their "patience" with difficult students, or their "devotion" to students with special needs, they were also viewed as different kinds of teachers and often given low status in the secondary school hierarchy. Co-teaching can change that status: One Pennsylvania teacher confessed that "having contact with other kids and teachers sort of reinforces that you are a *real* teacher" (PA7, 3.18.97) and this tended to be reflected in the attitude of other teachers.

When entering into co-teaching partnerships, special education teachers said they needed to be able to withstand skepticism and "stand up to people" (Q3, 3.2.99). As co-teaching was implemented, special education teachers often had to "prove themselves" capable of teaching in a secondary subject class and of making a unique and important contribution. The problem for many was in a lack of subject content knowledge. "It is difficult to teach what you were not trained to teach," (PA8, 3.19.97) admitted a Pennsylvania special education teacher. These difficulties were made very clear to him when he and his co-teaching partner negotiated responsibilities for grading English examination papers. "He checks the multiple choice and the matching items. I [the English teacher] check all the essays and bigger projects" (PA9, 3.24.97). To help overcome these types of difficulties one Australian teacher trained herself to become an "expert" in her school in metacognitive strategy instruction, offering workshops in the school, and taking responsibility for teaching thinking skills in the classes of many of her colleagues. She

thus "proved" herself and was gradually accepted into other rooms to work in more substantive roles (Q4, 14.3.99).

Others had tried to work with subject teachers but had encountered responses that ranged from passive resistance to open hostility when collaboration (and in particular sharing a classroom) had been suggested. One special education teacher had unsuccessfully sought the cooperation of a teacher to work in his class to support a student with learning disabilities. She expressed sadness and incomprehension that "some teachers choose to continue to be in conflict with LD students rather than to change what they [the teachers] do" (Q1, 3.1.99).

Theme 6. Implementing co-teaching in secondary schools often involves overcoming entrenched attitudes and administrative barriers.

Many variations of a basic co-teaching model were described by the teachers interviewed for this study. Even in cases where substantial progress had been made toward achieving a co-teaching model in which the partners shared close to full responsibility for teaching an inclusive class, many difficulties had been encountered. The most frequent concern of the interviewees was that many secondary teachers held entrenched negative views about inclusion, were jealous of their professional autonomy, and were scornful of suggestions that they or their students would benefit from in-class support provided by a special education teacher. In both countries respondents found that younger subject teachers, and especially those in the social sciences, tended to be more receptive to negotiation and less territorial than more experienced colleagues. Only where strong leadership was demonstrated by principals and vice-principals on the value

of collaborative support for students with disabilities, was there softening of these positions, especially among senior teachers.

Other attitudes with which the special education teachers had to contend included a belief that a good class is a quiet class, that working with a specialist was tacit acknowledgment of incompetence, and that teaching and learning were separate phenomena - the first being the task of the teacher and the second the responsibility of the student. In one instance, a subject teacher had rejected having students with disabilities in his class because, "when [they] are included it has the effect of lowering standards of achievement in the class" (PA6, 3.17.97). In Australia, one teacher commented that she had found teachers were "uncomfortable with multi-level outcomes" and considered students with learning disabilities a burden (Q4, 3.14.99).

The lack of opportunities to train in collaborative consultation skills was also cited as a difficulty to be overcome. Even willing teachers sometimes hesitated to enter into co-teaching arrangements without some opportunity to develop skills in role negotiation, collaborative planning, organizing for co-teaching, and interpersonal communication. Schools seldom had the resources to provide their own professional development or there were strong competing demands on the limited funds set aside for this purpose.

Several of the special education teachers encountered difficulties persuading school administrators that co-teaching was a cost-beneficial approach to supporting students with disabilities. Some administrators took the view that it was a more efficient use of specialist time to group large numbers of students needing assistance into separate

classes, or more commonly, to concentrate students with disabilities in a few general education classes. Special education teachers recognized, however, the delicate balancing act required: "Too much above eight [converts the general education class into] a special education class. Lower than six and we can't justify a special education teacher there every day" (PA1, 11.13.97).

Discussion

Instituting a co-teaching approach to the support of students with disabilities in regular secondary schools is a complex, sensitive, and professionally demanding exercise. Even the most enthusiastic and enterprising teacher finds that the pragmatics of operationalizing collaborative efforts with fellow professionals involves careful thought, detailed planning, a sympathetic work environment, and perseverance often in the face of open resistance, entrenched attitudes, and criticism.

In designing this study, we anticipated that there would be differences in the characteristics of co-teaching models in Queensland and Pennsylvania. The schools systems in both states were reputed to be conservative, both had track records of exercising responsible stewardship over resources under their control, and both had shown a willingness to embrace innovations with potential advantage for students. Nevertheless, they functioned in different cultural environments and had different traditions with regard to the delivery of special educational support services in schools.

Somewhat surprisingly, no major differences emerged between the manifestations of co-teaching in both sets of schools. The similarities across the two data sets were most striking in descriptions of roles and responsibilities generally assigned to special education

teachers, obstacles to implementing co-teaching in secondary schools, and the tendency to externalize responsibility for making co-teaching work.

Whatever differences did appear, for example, the emphasis of the Australian teachers placed on finding co-teaching partners with whom they were personally and professionally compatible, can be explained by sampling rather than cultural differences. The Australian sample was drawn from individual *teachers* who had initiated their own involvement in co-teaching, while the US sample was drawn from two *school*s that were implementing co-teaching schoolwide.

In all of our interviews and classroom observations we did not find a model of co-teaching that *fully* met the criteria we set: a shared teaching space with a diverse student group; shared responsibility for planning and for instruction; and substantive teaching by *both* co-teaching partners. This could be a result of the relatively short time that co-teaching has been in secondary schools, or the lack of professional preparedness to work in nontraditional ways. We could also have set up unrealistic criteria for co-teaching in secondary schools where different conditions call for distinct approaches to collaboration.

It was noticeable that even in schools where there was a commitment to co-teaching as a support option from the principal down, the roles in which the special educators found themselves were invariably subordinate ones: Planning was dictated by subject teachers' decisions about pacing through the curriculum; Co-teaching took place in classrooms which were still the designated "territory" of the subject teachers; Assessment was usually designed by the subject teachers and adapted by the special education

partner; And teaching assignments for special education teachers were overwhelmingly limited.

There are several possible explanations for this situation. Secondary teachers in both countries traditionally have had sole responsibility for their classes and many resist any threats to this autonomy. At the same time, these teachers work under tight professional and administrative constraints, especially in terms of scheduling, classroom space, and progress through the curriculum. They are understandably cautious about further complicating their professional lives by involvement in co-teaching. What we discovered however, was that senior teachers in particular were meeting the challenge of increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities in subject classes by exerting "huge pressure for a return to streaming (tracking) into ability groups" (Q6, 18.3.99). Since this pressure was coming mainly from senior teachers, the teachers in this study warned against underestimating its influence in school policy-making. Ideally, co-teaching would be seen as one means to meet the new challenge, but often it is not.

A further explanation for our findings may lie in the fact that co-teaching, as an instructional approach, has yet to attract a substantial body of evaluative research. It may be reasonable and responsible for school administrators to wait and inspect research evidence of the efficacy of co-teaching in secondary schools before committing scarce and expensive specialist resources. For many people co-teaching is still experimental and unproven. Respondents reported many teachers and principals embracing *inclusion* as a philosophy, but hey were still evolving educationally and economically sustainable ways in which it could be put into practice.

Further evidence that the acceptance of co-teaching as a viable intervention has yet to reach maturity also emerged from this data. The common emphasis placed by teachers on finding volunteer partners who were compatible contrasted sharply with the views of two teachers that a decision to co-teach should be based first on student need, and that competent professional educators should be willing to collaborate with almost any colleagues in the interests of students.

It was also noticeable, and understandable, that in most cases the special education teachers looked outside themselves for explanations of incomplete or nonexistent implementation of co-teaching. Their rationales comprised influences which, in the main, were beyond their control: Entrenched attitudes in secondary subject teachers who rejected inclusion, mixed ability classes, and any form of in-class support to students; Senior school personnel unconvinced that co-teaching was as effective as traditional pullout approaches to support; Administrators who would not allocate time or resources.

The results of this study are limited in two respects: first, they are based on a small sample of individuals most of whom were known to be in favor of co-teaching, and second, the perspective was that of teachers rather than students. When teachers comment on their experiences of co-teaching we only have access to part of the story. Their perceptions are, of course, of great significance since it is they who are responsible for the hard work of implementing co-teaching. But any claims for the effectiveness of the approach must also consider the perceptions of the students together with objective indicators of academic progress, and behavioral and social adjustment. In this study we focused only on professionals' experiences of co-teaching and therefore we cannot

endorse or reject co-teaching as a support model for inclusive classrooms. Our reasons were clear: Without widespread professional endorsement, without established viability and credibility, and without clear and pragmatic paths on which to proceed, collaborative teaching in support of students with disabilities in secondary school classrooms could not exist.

More research is needed to further clarify models of secondary co-teaching and the conditions under which they are likely to succeed. This research, in our view, should be conducted in typical classrooms, rather than university-based or specialized settings in which student ratios and class compositions may be unusually favorable. Further research is also needed into the efficacy of co-teaching for different disability groups; in this study we concentrated on teachers of students with learning disabilities only, and many of those children would not have been in segregated setting for more than short periods. The more substantial support needs of students with moderate and severe disabilities or students with more disruptive behaviors raise further questions regarding, co-teaching, the quality of support that can be provided, and the effects on other students in the class.

We also became aware of factors which future researchers might find helpful. There are no universally agreed upon definitions of co-teaching, so communicating with participants requires caution. Different interpretations also lead to quite disparate co-teaching models and are associated with inconsistencies between stated beliefs about inclusion and actions taken by some teachers and administrators toward students with disabilities. Finally, teachers tend to focus intensely, if not exclusively, on what is happening inside their own classes. Co-teaching research which is similarly focussed

ignores the reality that successful inclusion is the result of many influences, inside and outside the classroom, which emanate from a wider, inclusive community.

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