

How to Build an Effective Co-teaching Relationship between Teachers

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Signature Sheet

This thesis, written under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisor and approved by the Chair of the Master's program, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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Abstract

Collaborative teaching is an option worth exploring at the elementary school level.

The problem is many teachers lack the knowledge to effectively make these co-teaching relationships work.

The purpose of this study is to identify effective co-teaching strategies to enhance collaborative teaching relationships. The study documents 1st through 4th grade classroom teachers, as well as individuals hired to work alongside the core classroom teachers, under their lead as “co-teachers”; an effort driven by the school’s district to implement differentiated instruction and lower the teacher to student ratio.

Participants were asked to reflect on themes previously published authors explored when they examined strategies to promote effective co-teaching relationships. Findings indicate the recommendations previous research outlined directly correlates with participants’ feelings of dissatisfaction in their current co-teaching relationships in regards to collaboration through an equal partnership, communication which includes clarification of roles, responsibilities and expectations, an understanding of the six different co-teaching models, a secure common planning time, making the best use of a shared physical space, and sharing a similar teaching style/philosophy of teaching.

Chapter 1 Introduction

“Too often, administrators throw co-teachers into an arranged co-teaching relationship; and the co-teachers focus on their resentment that no one asked them for their opinion, that they were not trained, or that they do not know the content or the special needs of the students the way that the other educator does” (Murawski & Dieker, 2008, p. 47).

I showed up for my student teaching assignment to a room full of twenty-four struggling first grade students trying to learn English as a second language. Luckily, I landed into the arms of a kind, open, and flexible master teacher, who despite knowing I had little teaching expertise, trusted me and put me straight to work. The need was so urgent to get right down to teaching; there was no time for power struggles or conflicting ideas. Thus my collaborative relationship with this seasoned teacher quickly flourished, not necessarily because we instantly bonded as individuals, but because we fundamentally understood the immense power of two teachers and could see the growing need for this kind of collaborative relationship in our education system.

My master teacher and I became a well-oiled machine, often finishing each other’s sentences. She even offered me my first teaching position to cover her maternity leave and possibly become her job-share partner upon her return. With great sadness, I ultimately turned her down. For various reasons, it is a decision, from time to time, I still question.

Fast forward to what eventually became my first official teaching position: an Itinerant Differentiation Teacher. I became the first co-teacher in an affluent school as part of a two year pilot program meant to individualize student instruction. The school is composed of a completely different socio-economic demographic than where my student teaching placement took place. At this new school, I was thrown into working between two veteran teachers’ classrooms. I was so excited to explore the potential this wonderful model had to offer all of us: the core teachers,

especially myself, and most importantly the students. Unlike my student teaching placement, most of the students at my new job are accelerated learners. Of course struggling students are present, and like any educational setting an absolute need for differentiated instruction exists. However at times, I struggled to see where my place as the “co-teacher” fit in. Moreover, I could see the core teachers struggling with how to fit me in too. The problem was neither of us truly understood what co-teaching was.

Like anything in life, there is an art to making it work well. Collaborative teaching is no different and it has the power to change our nation’s educational crisis by meeting the individual needs of every student ... but only if done correctly. I am the co-teacher and this is my quest to understand how to build effective co-teaching relationships.

Statement of Problem

People do not know how to interact in a cooperative way that works in an educational setting. How can teachers effectively collaborate with each other when we have completely different personalities and views on education? How will two teachers successfully blend the physical space available to them, while effectively using resources and time wisely, in order to co-teach together in a way that yields the greatest return for their students?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine how to build effective co-teaching relationships at the elementary school level. Research conducted attempts to determine the specific methods of how individual classroom teachers and their respective co-teachers at an elementary school in Northern California are finding success through their own inter-personal relationships within the school’s co-teaching model.

Research Question

Collaborative teaching is an intricate process. It involves two people who are committed to working together in developing an approach to teaching children. What strategies promote effective co-teaching relationships?

Theoretical Rationale

Johnson and Johnson (2011) are the leading researchers who worked to make the concept of cooperative learning practical. Johnson and Johnsons' efforts to teach teachers strategies to promote cooperative learning among students, soon led them to realize that in order to be successful it was the teachers who must first learn how to be cooperative with each other. This realization leads to other research that supported a teacher-centric model of education (Dyson 2010). From this realization, the movement towards collaborative teaching was born.

The purpose of this study is to examine how to effectively co-teach at the elementary school level. Specific methods of how individual co-teachers and classroom teachers are finding success through their own inter-personal relationships within the co-teaching model will be examined.

Assumptions

Despite the best co-teaching strategies for effective collaborative relationships, some personalities are unable to work collaboratively. Co-teaching strategies can be taught and practiced. Teachers should be open to looking at collaborative teaching as an approach to educating children.

Background and Need

Too often co-teaching relationships begin between two professional who have completely different views on how to define co-teaching. “One widely accepted definition of co-teaching from Friend and Cook is the following: Co-teaching occurs when two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, blended group of students in a single physical space” (Friend & Cook as cited in Conderman, Pedersen, & Bresnahan, 2009, p. 2).

Two professionals cannot jointly deliver instruction without an understanding and ability to work collaboratively with others. “Often the success or failure of co-teaching rests with the way logistics are handled—or not handled” (Conderman, Pedersen, & Bresnahan, 2009, p. 19).

Summary

The effectiveness co-teaching has on increased student outcomes are directly tied to the educators’ understanding of what it means to co-teach. Beyond a clear understanding, successful implementation is directly tied to the educators’ abilities to bring their understanding alive in a collaborative manner. Co-teachers need an awareness of the many tools available to them in order to strengthen their working relationship.

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

The literature review establishes a foundation from published authors who examined aspects of the research question. The review is organized in the following sections: historical context, collaboration through an equal partnership, communication which includes clarification of roles, responsibilities and expectations, an understanding of the six different co-teaching models, a secure common planning time, making the best use of a shared physical space, and sharing a similar teaching style/philosophy of teaching.

Historical Context

Schools increasingly require that teachers collaborate, many by some form of co-teaching, because of the changes in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 and changes related to the highly qualified component of No Child Left Behind (2002) (IDEA, 2004, & NCLB, 2002, as cited in Murawski & Dieker, 2008, p. 40).

With the ongoing move toward inclusive education (wherein educators teach students with special needs in the general education classroom), co-teaching is a service delivery option that educators increasingly use to meet the needs of both teachers and students (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie as cited in Murawski & Dieker, 2008, p. 40).

Equal Partnership

“A co-teaching partnership is based on a spirit of equality. Years of teaching experience, degree, or age do not place one teacher in a higher position of authority over the other” (Conderman, Pedersen, & Bresnahan, 2009, p. 3).

In order for a co-teaching relationship to be as effective as possible, both teachers must share equal power and view each other as equal professionals. A co-teacher should be able to teach while the other teacher may spontaneously step in with questions, comments, or something to add, yet without causing alarm to the his or her partner. This can only work if the co-teaching relationship is built on a foundation of mutual respect and trust (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, 2005).

Communication including Clarification of Roles, Responsibilities, and Expectations

“Make sure to communicate your pet peeves, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses with your co-teacher before the start of the semester. Talking about these preferences will help avoid personality conflicts and other miscommunications” (Murawski & Dieker, 2008, p. 42).

What will be taught? Who will teach what? When? Where? How? How will students be assessed? Who will do report cards? Who will write the weekly parent newsletter? How will behavioral issues be dealt with? When is the common planning time? These questions only scratch the surface of how the responsibilities and preparation of an operating classroom should be shared. These are questions that must be addressed prior to the start of the school year. When agreeing on solutions to these imperative questions, open communication in the co-teaching relationship is a must. In order to achieve effective open communication, co-teachers must first decide on what their primary communication mode between each other will be (Friend, 2013).

Understanding the Six Different Co-teaching Models

In order to have an effective co-teaching relationship one must truly understand what it means to co-teach. It is easy to understand what co-teaching is when we look at what it is not. Co-teaching is not when two teachers trade off teaching days. Co-teaching is not when one teacher teaches and the other teacher provides assistance (“an extra pair of helping hands”). Co-teaching is not one teacher leading the class while the other teacher grades papers, hangs artwork, or preps the next day’s lesson. Co-teaching is meant to simultaneously blend two teachers expertise in order to maximize student learning outcomes (Friend, 2013).

Co-teachers must establish which co-teaching model they will use most frequently and which co-teaching model they will use the least. There must be an understanding of which model or combination of models are most effective for the working co-teaching relationship, and most importantly an understanding of the model’s ability to maximize student learning outcomes.

Both co-teaching partners must be knowledgeable of all 6 six different co-teaching models:

1. **One teaches, one observes.** Specific observation goals are established between teachers prior to instruction.
2. **One teach, one assist.** In this model one teacher delivers instruction and the other circulates to assist students.
3. **Station Teaching.** The class is divided into 3 or 4 groups and students rotate through learning stations. One or two of the stations are for independent student activities and the other two stations are teacher lead by both teachers (1 teacher per station).
4. **Parallel Teaching.** The class is divided in half. Each teacher instructs one group. The same exact content is delivered. However, the student to teacher relationship has been greatly reduced.
5. **Alternative Teaching.** One teacher teaches a small group of students while the other teacher teaches the rest of the class. This model can be used when students require front-loading, extra scaffolding, or remediation.

6. Team Teaching. Both teachers are actively involved in jointly delivering instruction at the same time.

(Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011, p. 21-26).

Secure Common Planning Time

In a study titled “Teachers Beliefs about Co-Teaching” one hundred thirty-nine kindergarten through 12th grade collaborative teachers from nine school districts in northern New Jersey were administered a survey developed by the study’s author. Over eighty percent of teachers reported scheduled planning time as very important (Austin, 2001).

The truth is that “time,” regardless of what it is used for, is hard to come by in an elementary school setting. Therefore it is important to use common planning time wisely. Co-teachers should establish a structure around their planning time together, for example an “agenda” to consistently abide by. Beyond this “agenda,” there should also be outlined pre and post planning roles divided between the co-teachers to further maximize the actual face-to-face planning protocol time (Friend, 2013).

Making the Best of Shared Physical Space

Although on occasion, one teacher may remove a student or small group from the main instructional area for a specific purpose, such as remediation or assessment, both teachers and all students typically share a common physical space for the majority of instruction. Consistently separating or removing the same students from their peers, even if their instruction is different, is inconsistent with the co-teaching model. Further, both teachers should have equal opportunities to plan and provide instruction to all students within the same space (Conderman, Pedersen, & Bresnahan, 2009, p. 3).

When students spend time preparing to leave the classroom for instruction, looking for materials, packing up and walking to another room, unfortunately valuable instruction time is lost. The relocating of students can also cause a stigma among peers (Friend, 2013). Classrooms need to be arranged in ways so that all six different co-teaching models can be taught within the same four walls. Plenty of community tables are needed. At the least two large tables-one table where one teacher could teach a small group of students, separate from other students working individually at desks. As well as a second table, also separate from individual desks; so that both co-teachers can teach two different small groups of students at the same time while a portion of individual students still work independently at their desks. Individual desk should be arranged so the class can be divided into two smaller halves; so that one teacher could teach one half of the class while the other teacher teaches the other half. The physical space is set up in such a way so that both teachers and students can transition to diverse working models with ease.

Sharing a Similar Teaching Style/Philosophy of Teaching

Recognize the importance of trying things in a new way. Beninghof states that one of the most common mistakes of co-teaching is that neither educator is willing to "loosen the corset" and be more flexible in this new relationship. Both teachers need to approach this new relationship with willingness to let go of control a bit and try new things (Beninghof as cited in Murawski & Dieker, 2008, p. 41).

It is important for co-teachers to be familiar with each other's preferred teaching styles and fundamental teaching philosophies. However, it is ok if partners do not share common fundamental values, as long as the partners can still relate to each other with open honesty and flexibility (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996).

Summary

The concept of co-teaching emerged by necessity; an urgency to meet the needs of a diverse, growing student population through differentiated instruction. Unfortunately the concept of co-teaching is easier said than done. People don't know how to interact in a cooperative way that works in an educational setting. However, there are strategies that exist to promote effective co-teaching relationships. Various published authors have sought out and examined these strategies. Common strategies include: a co-teaching relationship built on a foundation of equality through equal active participation by both parties, an open, consistent line of communication before, during, and after the start of a school year, and a solid, shared understanding between partners of what the meaning of co-teaching actually entails. A secure planning time is essential to a working co-teaching relationship and like effective communication strategies, co-teachers should delineate goals for before, during, and after the collaborative meeting time to further maximize the planning effort. Use of shared physical space so that both teachers and students can transition to diverse working models with ease is another strategy essential to the co-teaching relationship. Lastly, regardless if two co-teachers share similar teaching styles and fundamental values regarding their philosophies on teaching or not, the success of their collaborative relationships lies within these teachers' ability to be flexible when working together.

Chapter 3 Method

Research Approach

The research approach is qualitative. Previous literature was closely examined with the intent to gain an in-depth understanding of how individual co-teachers are collaborating successfully within their inter-personal teaching relationships.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to the ethical standards for protection of human subjects of the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally a research proposal was submitted and reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved and assigned number 10259.

Sample and Site

The sample consists of first through fourth grade classroom teachers and their respective co-teachers (Itinerant Differentiation Teachers), as well as the school's special education teacher. Participants of this study are non-patient volunteers. There is a dual relationship between the researcher and participants: the author of the present study is a teacher of record at the elementary school. The site is an affluent public elementary school in Northern California.

Access and Permissions

The author of the present study is a credentialed teacher of record at the school site. She was hired as an Itinerant Differentiation Teacher, more commonly known as a "co-teacher," who works back and forth between two different classrooms at the same grade level within the same elementary school. The author was granted permission from both the school's principal and

district superintendent to gather information from fellow credentialed colleagues at the school site.

Data Gathering Procedures

Teachers were asked to anonymously complete a confidential twenty-one question survey created by the author of the present study using Google Documents. Survey questions were as follows:

1. Which co-teaching model do you and your partner use most frequently?
2. Which model do you and your partner use the least?
3. Which model or combination of models are most effective for you and your partner's working relationship/maximizing student learning outcomes?
4. Prior to initiating this survey, were you aware of all 6 co-teaching models?
5. Do you think you understand how and why each model is beneficial for specific learning needs?
6. Do students often leave the room for instruction with either yourself or your partner? If yes, approximately how often?
7. Prior to entering your working relationship as a co-teacher or with a co-teacher, did you have a clear understanding of what co-teaching means?
8. Did you and your partner establish roles and expectations for each other prior to initiating your working relationship with students present?
9. Did you and your partner share classroom management protocol and procedures with each other prior to initiating your working relationship with students present?
10. Do you think you and your partner are communicating effectively? Why or why not?

11. On a scale from 1 to 10, how important is daily, intentional goal oriented communication vital to the success of your working relationship together in the same classroom?
12. Have you and your partner established a common co-teaching planning time that is separate from curriculum planning time?
13. Do you and your partner share a similar teaching style? Whether yes or no, are your similarities or differences complimenting or hindering the working relationship?
14. What, if anything, is most significantly hindering your working relationship with your partner, and/or the effectiveness of the partnership in ensuring student success?
15. Do you and your partner share a similar perspective on best teaching practices?
16. Do you know what is essential to your partner's philosophy of teaching? Explain.
17. Do you see you and your partner as equals? Is labor divided equally?
18. Do you and your partner give each other feedback? Is it one-sided?
19. Do you feel you and your partner are inter-changeable? One of the purposes of co-teaching is to meet diverse student needs-do you think one or both co-teaching partners should have some special education training-or some kind of specific diverse specialty?
20. If co-teaching is not to be defined as collaboration, but rather collaboration is the foundation of a strong co-teaching relationship, how are you and your partner ensuring your abilities to work together?
21. In terms of professional/personal enjoyment, professional growth, effective implementation, and effectiveness for ensuring student success, overall how would you rate your experience working in a co-teaching relationship?
22. Follow up to question #21 - Please explain why you rated your experience the way you did.

23. What can you, your co-teaching partner, and principal do to help strengthen your co-teaching relationship? If you could make one change to your current co-teaching relationship, what would it be?

Data Analysis Approach

Once survey question answers were collected, the aim of the author's data analysis approach was to discern strategies that are conducive to building an effective co-teaching relationship.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

This study was conducted at an affluent, Kindergarten through 8th grade public school nestled in a small residential community in Northern California. Individuals who participated in the study consist of 1st through 4th grade core classroom teachers (also referred to as “lead” teachers) with classroom experience ranging from two to twenty-five years. Additional participants include teachers with one to five years classroom experience hired as the “Itinerant Differentiation Teachers” (IDTs). The IDTs were hired to provide students with different avenues to acquire content. The IDT position is part of a two year pilot program for differentiated instruction. The research conducted took place towards the end of the pilot program’s 1st year.

The original IDT job description called for a “flexible approach to accommodating diverse students’ learning needs”. IDTs are required to “develop teaching materials and assessment measures”. Beyond this description, additional duties and responsibilities for the IDT teacher were left to the core classroom teacher’s discretion.

Research participants were administered a twenty-three question survey created by the author. The author based questions from the six sections previously highlighted in chapter 2: collaboration through an equal partnership, communication which includes, clarification of roles, responsibilities, and expectations, an understanding of the six different co-teaching models, a secure common planning time, making the best use of a shared physical space, and sharing a similar teaching style/philosophy of teaching.

Out of the ten teachers who responded, six are current core classroom teachers, three are IDTs, and one is the school Resource Teacher. Participants answered most questions, but

participants were not required to answer all twenty-three questions, but rather solely questions they chose to answer.

Themes

Equal Partnership

The majority of participants did not view their partnership as equal, nor is labor divided equally between them. Seven out of the eight participants who responded to whether they felt their partner is inter-changeable answered yes. The same seven out of the eight participants felt one partners should have some special education training or some kind of specific diverse specialty.

Communication including Clarification of Roles, Responsibilities, and Expectations

The majority of participants did not establish roles and expectations for each other prior to initiating their working relationship. Overall participants did not feel they were communicating effectively with their partners. With “1” as the least important and “10” as the most important, the majority of participants rated daily intentional goal oriented communication vital to the success of the relationship. These ratings ranged from “7” through “10”. Only one participant answered “yes” to the presence of two-sided feedback in their partnership. The rest of the participants admitted giving feedback to each other happens either occasionally, rarely, or never, and it is usually one sided.

Understanding the Six Different Co-teaching Models

The majority of participants identified “One Teach, One Assist” as the co-teaching model most frequently used. Participants identified “One Teach, One Observes” and “Parallel” teaching as the co-teaching model used least and “Alternative” teaching and “Station” teaching as the models perceived to be most effective. The majority of participants admitted to not possessing

knowledge of all six co-teaching models prior to taking the survey. There were mixed responses as to whether participants understood how and why each model is beneficial for specific learning needs. Out of seven participants, four responded “yes” and three “no” when prompted with possessing a solid understanding on what co-teaching means.

Secure Common Planning Time

Out of eight responses, all but one participant established a common co-teaching planning time separate from curriculum planning time. The majority of participants identified lack of time as significantly hindering the working relationship and the effectiveness of the partnership in ensuring student success.

Making the Best of Shared Physical Space

All eight participants answered yes to whether students often leave the room for instruction.

Sharing a Similar Teaching Style/Philosophy of Teaching

The majority of participants identified they share with their partner similar and different teaching styles. The majority of participants communicated differences were actually an asset to the relationship because most times these differences complimented each other. All but one participant said yes they do share a similar perspective on best teaching practices with their partner. The majority of participants did not know what is essential to their partner’s philosophy of teaching.

Chapter 5 Discussion/Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

Equal Partnership

One participant who willingly identified themselves as a “lead teacher”; felt they did more than their IDT. Two participants said they view themselves and their partner as equals, but do not feel labor was divided equally. An alternate participant said they trust their IDT to plan and conduct good lessons independently, but essentially they feel it is their class. One participant clearly states, “No. She [the lead teacher] is the boss and I am not”. Another participant states, “I feel that we should be [equal], however her job description includes duties that take her out of the classroom so our meeting, planning etc. doesn't always happen [so] we just keep rolling!” Another participant expressed an unwillingness to turn over more responsibility to their partner because of a lack of confidence in the other person’s abilities. Whereas another participant was more optimistic and felt that with time and further communication, the partnership could become equal.

Often times co-teaching partners are inter-changeable. However, one of the purposes of co-teaching is to meet diverse student needs by having one or both co-teaching partners hold some special education training, or some kind of specific diverse specialty. One participant expressed similar feelings by saying, “I think have an older person, and a younger person of different genders provides diversity naturally. I think this is very helpful for students. Specific specialized training is also an excellent addition to the classroom dynamic.” Another participant states, “I really appreciate that my co-teacher has experience working with struggling readers, which I do not have, so I am not sure we are interchangeable.” Diversely, another participant consider themselves and their partners as inter-changeable because their partner is able to help out in many ways with small groups of students who need more support. This particular

participant expressed a desire for their partner to be more prepared in order to do more of the “main teaching” so that in turn they could pull a small group. However, the participant feels their partner needs a lot of support and guidance when taking the whole group. Other participant who felt they are interchangeable with their partner also thought it would be best for both teachers to be trained for all learners and that special education training or a “diverse specialty” could be great in an inclusion classroom. Additionally one participant states, “Teachers should take an exceptionality class to have more perspective of the diverse needs of students.”

Communication including Clarification of Roles, Responsibilities, and Expectations

When asked if partners establish roles and expectations for each other prior to initiating their working relationship, the majority of participants said no. One participant came into the classroom after the school year started so they just follow the classroom management protocol already set in place by the lead teacher. Two participants stated, “We try to.” Another states, “Sometimes the other teachers decide at the last minute that they want to change something which affects my plans.”

When asked if partners shared classroom management protocol and procedures with each other prior to initiating the working relationship, the majority of participants said no. One participant finds their differing styles an issue and feels because they arrived at the job after the start of the school year, “things were already in place”. Another participant, whose partner’s assignment also began after the start of the school year, felt that they tried but the late arrival had an impact on their efforts. “We could do better on that, I would say,” states a different participant. Whereas another participant states, “our management strategies are already pretty similar so it wasn't that difficult to follow the protocol. However, we never actually discussed it...but as we evolve we

find common ground”. “I think I just told the co-teacher about my management protocol and she observed and followed the same expectations”, answered another participant.

Most participants did not feel they communicate effectively with their partner. One participant expressed that although they communicate well, sometimes their partner tends to "over" communicate which can be hard when the participant feels busy or pressured for time. A different participant who feels the communication is effective states, “We plan for a week, divide responsibilities, and carry on to work. We brainstorm together as needed but allow time for independent planning time as well. Also, I can tell the co-teacher a topic to cover either whole class or small group and she will plan and implement.” Similarly another participant states, “Yes, but we only discuss upcoming lessons and the effectiveness of past ones. We also discuss student performance and challenges.” Whereas another participant feels their communication is a “work in progress” stating, “I would say we are close to communicating effectively, but not quite there yet.” This same participant feels their partner doesn’t completely understand how many things are pulling them in different directions: curriculum and planning, prepping, parent communication, professional development, implementation of new curriculum, classroom management, social/emotional issues, monitoring student data and making decisions to remediate/enrich, etc. The participant adds that they and their partner diverge on measuring importance of certain issues, thus impeding their communication. Other participants had mixed feelings stating, “Yes, because we do our best to share our plans and concerns. No, because we rarely have time to meet in person to talk about plans, students, personal issues, anything!”

When asked if partners give each other feedback, one participant states, “We plan together and so discuss ideas openly. However, she has never given feedback on my teaching, and I have only

given her suggestions when she has expressed dismay about something and seems to want input.” Another participant states, “I don't feel like I can give my teacher feedback.”

Understanding the Six Different Co-teaching Models

When asked which co-teaching model partners used most frequently, some participants listed more than one choice. Four out of eight listed the One Teach, One Assist model. Three out of eight listed Station Teaching. Two out of eight listed Parallel Teaching and two out of eight listed Alternative Teaching.

When asked which co-teaching model partners used least, some participants listed more than one choice. Five out of eight participants listed the One Teach, One Observe model. Five out of eight listed Parallel Teaching. One out of eight listed One Teach, One Assist and one out of eight listed Team Teaching.

Participants felt “Alternative” teaching and “Station” teaching are most effective for partners’ working relationships and maximizing student learning outcomes. One participant states, “Alternative work best for us because one teacher teaches the majority of the class while another can pull a smaller group who needs more assistance and explanation.” Similarly, a participant states, “Alternative Teaching to address special education issues. Team teaching is effective to be seen as an equal in the classroom”. Another participant states, “Stations Teaching has been very effective for our reading groups and word study groups and during math lessons, we use Alternative Teaching and One Teaches One Assists with great results”. Similarly a participant states, “Alternative Teaching to address special education issues. Team teaching is effective to be seen as an equal in the classroom”.

Prior to initiating the survey the majority of participants identifying whether or not they possessed prior knowledge of the six co-teaching models said they did not. One participant states, "I understood co-teaching but wasn't sure how I would best utilize a shared co-teacher. I still think we could do a better job of maximizing the co-teacher resource both in teacher training and in serving student needs." Whereas another participant answered by saying, "Somewhat [they possess prior knowledge of the 6 co-teaching models] I think it really depends on how the relationship is initiated. We have traditionally had a classroom aid, and that influences the working relationship. Starting with enough time before students arrive to discuss and build a reciprocal relationship is important for setting the balance." Similarly another participant states, "I was not sure exactly what it would look like in practice, though I was quite excited about the idea of having another credentialed teacher available. In the past, having an aid was great, but it really depended on the person whether you could treat them as a co-teacher or not." Other participants who expressed not having prior knowledge of all six co-teaching models made the following statements: "It would have been good to have reflected on it beforehand", "I felt like I had a pretty good idea, but I quickly realized that everyone who had a thought, had a different thought."

Secure Common Planning Time

Out of eight responses, all but one participant identified they did not established common co-teaching planning time separate from the curriculum planning time. Explanations varied with responses such as, "No, they overlap. We also plan in smaller chunks throughout the week", "No...I am ON DUTY with kids my entire...block", "No, we meet as a grade level team and talk about the coming week (curriculum issues, projects, needs, etc.)"

Making the Best of Shared Physical Space

All eight participants answered students often leave the room for instruction. There wasn't enough significant data as to the best use of shared physical space.

Sharing a Similar Teaching Style/Philosophy of Teaching

“We have some things in common, but I don't think it has been hindering our relationship. I think we are similar in student behavior expectations. I think I am more demanding of the students independent work having certain elements (i.e., writing is clear and complete),” states one participant. Another states, “Similar to one teacher and very different from the other teacher. Complimenting because the kids like to have time with the different teachers since we are all so different. Hindering because some things could be confusing to the kids. Hindering to the teachers because we all like things done differently”. “We do share a similar teaching style, but I think that my personality compliments my co-teacher because I am more mellow, and she is more obsessive...I have a higher tolerance for mess, she does not, but I think that makes me more sensitive to not leaving things around as much,” says another participant. Whereas another participant states, “Fairly similar. She sometimes follows what the other grade level teacher has laid out. That's OK with me. We are all working together very smoothly and effectively.” Lastly, a participant states yes adding “we have a similar sense of humor which always help”.

When responding to whether or not the participant knows what is essential to your partner's philosophy of teaching, one participant explains, “No we haven't had this conversation. I have some assumptions based on educational discussions and observation but we haven't had any explicit discussion.” Another participant states, “We discuss differences when it comes to accommodations or modifications that need to happen for students. Their beliefs, my beliefs, but ultimately, the conversation of what supports the student and is best for the student (within reason)!”

When asked if the partners share a similar perspective on best teaching practices, one participant responds yes, but states, “[the other teacher’s] lengthy experience makes my input less valuable.”

Another participant states, “I would say I know how to have more fun with the students...”

When asked if anything is most significantly hindering the working relationship or how effective the partnership is to ensure student success, one participant answers “The pace of the ongoing year. I find it hard to change things up a lot once the bus gets rolling.” Another participant says, “Not knowing the lesson in advance or communicating what needs to be done for supports. We could use more time to communicate and plan, but there's never enough to do all that we have to do.” Similarly another participant comments, “Lack of teacher time together to plan short term and long term and discuss/evaluate students' progress, evaluate assessment reports together.”

Lack of communication is a problem for another participant who elaborates by expressing, “The difference in the magnitude of student needs, achievements, deficits, and successes is very different between us”.

Summary

Participants rated their overall experience in a collaborative relationship with “1” as the most negative experience and “10” as the most positive experience. One out of nine participants rated their experience as a “5”. Two out of nine participants rated their experience as a “6”. One out of nine participants rated their experience as a “7”. Three out of nine participants rated their experience as an “8” and two out of nine participants rated their experience with a “9”.

When explaining why they rated the experience the way they did, one participant answers by saying, “I would say that co-teaching is quite hard and I don't feel like we are doing it as effectively as we could be, but there are great positives to having a credentialed teacher in the classroom with me”. Another participant states, “I think I am flexible, adaptive and have

experience in many grades and age groups. I find it very easy to work collaboratively with my co-teacher. We have similar working styles and temperaments.” Similarly another participant states, “It is great for the students. They get a lot more benefit than they would if there was not a co-teacher ... As for the co-teaching relationship, we need to have more time for the three of us to meet in person. Even every day after school would be good ... Another negative is that many parents don't seem to know who I am. On field trips they think I am another parent.” “I feel differentiation has never been better in my classroom, thanks to the presence of the IDT. I didn't give it a 10 because having an IDT also means more compromise, complications, and time for communication”, states another participant. Diversely, one participant feels “...it has not made my life any easier. I feel like it has taken a lot more time out of my day to train another teacher.” However, this participant also feels “...students have benefitted by the experience.” Lastly, one participant shares, “I find it super helpful having a competent person to share ideas and take over if I need to be out is GREAT. Making time to build a collaborative relationship is the tricky part. I say 5 because I don't have that much work, but also 5 because I don't feel like I have too much of a say”.

In conclusion participants were asked what they, their co-teaching partner, and principal can do to help strengthen the co-teaching relationship. Additionally they were asked if they could make one change to their current co-teaching relationship what would change. One participant offered, “It would help to work with this teacher before school starts and possibly do some sort of team building workshop together. It would also help to hear from the other co-teacher partners at school to find out what everyone else is doing that is working. The one change I would make to my relationship would be: we would really benefit from understanding more completely what the other's roles and responsibilities are in order to better understand where they are coming from

and to be able to communicate with them more effectively”. Whereas another participant suggests, “I think there needs to be more training about how to most effectively use a co-teaching model. I also feel like the personality of the two teachers is EXTREMELY important!” Another participant states a need for increase time for which the co-teacher is dedicated to one classroom. This participant expresses their feelings by adding, “I think it is difficult when a new teacher enters the classroom of a teacher that has been teaching the same grade for 12 years. It isn't "equal" for the new teacher. It would be better if both teachers were starting off together in a new grade level. Also clearly explaining the roles and expectations to both teachers simultaneously to clarify any misunderstandings”. Lastly one participant states that the co-teaching relationship can be strengthened by having a “recurring meeting time for planning group / works ideas. I think we work well together and it will continue to evolve and strengthen with time. I know we could plan together more so that the co-teacher was more deeply connected to the content and the implementation”.

Comparison of Findings to the Literature

The elements of dissatisfaction among the participant’s responses directly align to the areas of recommendations outlined in the literature review. Interestingly, Marilyn Friend, Ph.D., author and co-author of three widely used special education, inclusion, and collaboration college text books, recommends using the co-teaching model One Teaching, One Assisting “seldom (or less)” (Friend, 2013), whereas participants in the study actually indicated using this model most frequently. Study participants also felt Alternative Teaching is most effective, whereas Friend recommended the use of this particular model as “occasional” (Friend, 2013). Participants revealed using the model One Teach, One Observes and Parallel Teaching the least, where Friend recommends using One Teach, One Observe “Frequent, but usually for relatively brief

periods” and for Parallel Teaching recommends for “frequent” use as well (Friend, 2013). Due to the fact Dr. Friend’s research is based upon a plethora of prior knowledge, experience, and data, the discrepancies between her recommendations and the study’s findings which indicates a lack of risk taking by core teachers and preparedness for both core and co-teachers. The discrepancy also highlights a gap in knowledge among participants in terms of the importance of each different co-teaching model and its frequency and best use of application.

Limitations/Gaps in the Research

This study was limited by the small sample size and the participants’ individual choices to answer only some of the survey questions as opposed to all questions. The uniqueness of the participant’s school site also creates a gap in the research because the IDTs were hired with the understanding they would work under the “lead” of the core teachers, therefore the collaborative relationships were never truly of a “co-teaching” nature from the start (assuming one possess a correct understanding of the term co-teach).

Implications for Future Research

In order for the collaborative relationship to be effective, the following elements must be present: the co-teacher and the core teacher must have the same definition of what “co-teaching” means, an official job description needs to be offered, an opportunity to be trained in effective co-teaching models, and allow teachers to be part of the hiring process to see their future partner’s compatibility. Sufficient collaborative planning opportunities prior to commencement of the school year together with on-going dedicated collaborative time must be scheduled. There should be an equitable and deliberate division of tasks aligned to each teacher’s area of interest and strength. When delivering a lesson where a teacher feels less experienced, the partnership

needs to provide for safe critical evaluation. These recommendations can be achieved only if the partners are committed to being open and honest with each other.

Overall Significance of the Study

The study reaffirmed the notion that professionals do not always know how to interact cooperatively in an educational setting. Like anything in life, there is an art to making it work well and co-teaching is no different. The art to making it work well includes knowledge of effective co-teaching skills built upon the commitment to integrate them.

About the Author

The author earned a Bachelor of Arts in Italian Language and Literature with a minor in Hospitality Management from San Francisco State University in 2010. She graduated from Dominican University of California Teacher Preparation Program in 2013, earning a Multiple Subject teaching credential. She returned to Dominican University shortly after completing a Master's Degree in Education in 2014. She currently works as an Itinerant Differentiation Teacher, more commonly known as a "Co-Teacher."

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