A Veteran Special Education Teacher and a General Education Social Studies Teacher Model Co-teaching: The CoPD Model

Karen A. Thomas-Brown, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Michigan-Dearborn

Peggy Sepetys
Special Education Teacher Consultant
University of Michigan-Dearborn

Abstract

This research explores using participant ethnography, the theoretical and practical underpinnings of the combination pedagogical approach of co-teaching and embedded professional development within the Co-teaching Professional Development Approach (CoPD). The structure of this approach is presented and the research findings examine the outcomes of this approach within the context of two general education social studies classrooms. The findings indicate that CoPD offers a suitable approach to accommodating with students with disabilities in a specific general educational setting while demonstrating the potential content knowledge benefits to special educators, the pedagogical benefits to the general educators and the academic and social benefits to students with disabilities.

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Teaching is a profession that requires dedication and commitment. Research shows that 40 to 50 percent of new teachers will leave the field within 5 years and this problem is more acute in special education (Cook & Boe, 1998; Kozleski, Mainzer, & Deshler, 2000). Often it is not the lack of commitment or skills that causes high rates of attrition among new teachers. Instead, many new teachers find that rather than teaching, they spend most of the school day attempting to resolve behavioral problems and issues they have not been appropriately trained to deal with, (Yell, 2009). According Pane (2010, p. 87) "classroom discipline is a major concern of American teachers and a primary reason many leave teaching" and often these behavioral problems are common among some students with disabilities. Unless the teacher is trained in special education (SPED) techniques, they feel unprepared to instruct those students with a variety of disabilities and requirements (Leko & Brownell, 2009). In a review of literature from 1958 to 1995 researchers found that 82 percent of general education teachers felt that having students with disabilities in their classrooms would require additional work and more than half of those surveyed felt that having students with disabilities in their classrooms required "significant changes in their classroom procedures" (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1995, p. 68).

Within this context of concerns for the preparedness of general education teachers to instruct students with disabilities, this paper proposes the Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) approach. Combining co-teaching with embedded professional development to create the CoPD model is a new terminology. Given this fact, the existing literature refers either to co-teaching or professional/embedded professional development independently. The CoPD approach presents the pedagogy of a veteran special education teacher (VSPED teacher) as she provides daily professional development training to a general education social studies teacher (GEdSS teacher). The primary aim of this paper is to present the practitioner based approach Co-teaching Professional Development and discuss how it allows for the effective delivery of social studies content to students with disabilities in a general education classroom. The CoPD approach advocates that the embedded professional development component of this approach, allows for this training on an ongoing basis.

This research presents a model for using the co-teaching professional development approach (CoPD) to both integrate students with disabilities into general education classrooms and provide needed skills to general education teachers to successfully instruct these students. Hence, the Co-teaching Professional Development approach will allow for an inclusive setting that supports the needs of students with disabilities and the general education teacher.

Background to Co-teaching Professional Development

Defining students with disabilities

Steele (2007) notes that the key points in defining students with learning disabilities are, "normal intelligence, discrepancies between intelligence and classroom performance, academic deficiencies in at least one subject area, the lack of other disabilities such as mental retardation, exhibiting inappropriate behaviors for students' age, academic failure, and unhappiness or depression" (p. 59). Students with learning disabilities often have one or more of the following; low-level reading skills and writing skills, processing problems, memory disorders, spoken language problems, organizational problems, and behavioral and social deficits, (Munk, Gibb & Caldarella, 2010; Steele, 2007).

Disabilities among populations 3 to 21 years that qualify for special education services include physical impairments such as deafness or blindness; mental impairments such as Down syndrome; autism; medical conditions such as brain injury; and learning deficits, such as dyslexia; and behavioral disorders. Throughout this paper specific disability categories will be referred to using acronyms adopted from Barry (1995), these are LD for learning disabilities, BD for behavioral disability and CD for cognitive disability. Similar to Barry (1995) these labels are used to identify how the students are provided the help that they need.

Contextualizing the need for co-teaching and embedded professional development (EPD)

Co-teaching according to Leko & Brownell (2009); Mastropieri et.al (2005); Ploessi et al. 2010) is (an educational approach in which general and special educators work in a coactive fashion, jointly teaching students who are academically and behaviorally diverse. According to Ploessi, Rock, Schoenfeld & Blanks (2010, p. 158) “over the past decade, co-teaching has become a popular approach to special education service provision in which two teachers work together to support diverse students”.

The other approach discussed in this paper focuses on embedded professional development (EPD) because the classroom practices explored focuses on how a VSPED teacher and a GEdSS teacher work together with SPED students while simultaneously training the GEdSS teacher in techniques that work for all students, especially those with disabilities. According to West (2002) EPD is formal and informal learning that occurs as educators engage in their daily work activities. EPD according to this writer may be facilitated through a range of conversations and activities that includes peer coaching, mentoring and study groups. In the Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) model, EPD is facilitated through a process on co-teaching which allows the VSPED teacher to train the general education teacher in the hows of accommodating students with disabilities independent of the VSPED teacher (career skill). This CoPD model may occur over one or multiple years through daily teaching, planning, interactions and observations. The benefits of this are confirmed by Ploessi, et al. (2010) who notes that “combining the strengths of general and special educators in the classroom can be deeply beneficial to students and teachers alike” (p. 158).

According to Leko & Brownell (2009) many teachers acknowledge that “they need to improve their practice for students with disabilities, but they often believe that school-wide professional development (PD) efforts have failed to meet their specific needs” (pg. 64). Professional development is often delivered in a half-day meeting covering a targeted strategy or particular teaching strategy with no opportunities for follow up or questions regarding implementation (Garet et.al, 2001). This model of professional development in teaching according to Little (1993) “is not adequate to the ambitious visions of teaching and schooling” (p. 229). However, many administrators perceive embedded PD as an expensive endeavor because it involves two teachers in these EPD classrooms. In the short term EPD is expensive but in the long term it provides training to the general education teacher that would be otherwise difficult to come by, leaving them more competent to instruct all students in their classrooms. Therefore, combining co-teaching and EPD creates the Co-teaching Professional Development classrooms (CoPD) model.

Students with disabilities and the legal framework

The Co-teaching Professional Development classroom is influenced by the special education law ‘Individuals with Disabilities Education Act’ (IDEA). The 2004 IDEA law mandates that students have involvement in the general education curriculum. It also regulates the implementation of a free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

However, IDEA does not specify how school districts should interpret the phrases *involvement with the general education curriculum* and the *least restrictive environment*. This lack of specific direction has led to confusion and conflict among educators and parents (Yell, 1995). School districts across the country have interpreted these phrases in a variety of ways. Some schools have implemented full inclusion, in which all students with disabilities are placed in general education classrooms with support of some type from the special education department, while other school districts carry out a modified version of full inclusion. Educators generally agree that schools need to effectively integrate students with disabilities into classrooms. When referring to access within the context of general education curriculum, Soukup, Wehmeyer, Bashinki & Bovaid (2007, p. 102) stated that "frequently this is interpreted simply as synonymous with student placement in the general education classroom".

According to Steele (2007) the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act amendments in 1994 and 2004 and the No Child Left Behind NCLB Act 2002 increased the numbers of students with mild disabilities that are served in general education classrooms rather than in special education settings. In 2008 the National Center for Educational Statistics found that 95 percent of all students with disabilities were enrolled in public schools in the United States. They also found on average the typical general education academic class is composed of nineteen general education students and five students who receive special education services (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). The implication is, as much as 21 percent of students in the average classroom may require some type of differentiated instruction. In 2002 students with disabilities were enrolled in academic general education courses at a rate of 10 percent higher as compared to the rate in 1987 (U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences, 2008). The changes observed means that general education teachers are increasingly asked to accommodate these students, often in the absence of appropriate training and support.

Social studies and students with disabilities

While presenting a practitioners model, this research also attempts to fill a gap which exist on the use of special education adjustments in the teaching of social studies in an inclusive general education classroom. Therefore, this research empirically investigates the Co-teaching Professional Development model in an inclusive social studies classroom. According to Steele (2007), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 has allowed more students with disabilities to enroll in history, political science, geography and economics (social studies) classes, creating many challenges for social studies teachers who must teach disabled students these content materials.

Steele (2007) notes that teachers of social studies have to first be aware of the range of disabilities present in their classroom and then teach social studies using several modifications that may foster success in this discipline. Some of these modifications include making text book and writing modifications, memory and organizational strategies and encouraging active participation. To effectively use these modifications the social studies teacher needs to decide how he/she will integrate and include the students with disabilities into the classroom. For Kunc (1992) integration allows the teacher to fit the student into existing programs with the necessary support. This writer also notes that inclusion of students with special needs in the general program of study often implies a restructuring of the curriculum, pedagogy and modifications to foster a sense of belonging in the students. According to Paulsen (2008) the 26th Annual Report to Congress indicates that "64 percent of students with disabilities at the secondary level receive their social studies instruction in the general education classroom" (p. 313**).** This figure is also high among language arts (49 percent), math (53 percent), and science (66 percent). Additionally, sixty-five percent of the teachers interviewed by Paulsen (2008) reported making at minimum moderate modifications or used a special curriculum for their students with disabilities in social studies classrooms. The critical question is, to what extent are social studies classes inclusive; therefore this paper presents a working practitioner based approach.

For De La Paz, Morales & Watson (2007, p.134) "reform in social studies education is changing the way in which students learn history and providing new reasons for learning history". Social studies is aimed at producing the 'good citizen' through the study of people in their temporal, spatial and socio-economic locals. It is therefore appropriate that social studies classrooms are the venue for evaluating the extent to which inclusion facilitates academic success of students with disabilities.

In special education classrooms students are isolated for parts of the school day. This isolation according to Suter & Giangreco (2009, p. 82) creates numerous problems including the unnecessary dependence of students with disabilities, interference with peer interactions and relationships and increased likelihood of being a target of bullying. Therefore the Co-teaching Professional Development model addresses these issues by training the general education teachers, while the special education teacher acquires some content knowledge. The CoPD approach suggests that the special educator should spend more time providing specialized instruction in a general education setting that provides training and models pedagogy for the general education teacher who over time will be able implement some of these strategies. It is important to note that it has been persuasively argued that because of their complex learning challenges, students with disabilities need access to the most highly qualified, competent, and creative teachers, special educators, and related service providers (Brown et. al., 1999; Suter & Giangreco, 2009).

Methodology

The research seeks to answer the following questions: What impact does Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) have upon a general education teacher and a special education teacher? What pedagogical changes occur after time spent working together? What does an example of implementing CoPD in a general education social studies classroom look like and what are the outcomes? These research questions are contextualized by the notion that an expanded continuum of services may increase students' access to a free general education. Effective alternatives, such as co-teaching, and embedded professional development need to be explored and purported.

The research is sited in an affluent suburban community of a declining rust belt city in the Midwest. The school hosts approximately 250 students more than 90% of who are Caucasian. The students in this school are mainly from middle and upper middle class homes, with less than 3 percent of the students in the school qualifying for free and reduced lunch. To answer the research questions the researchers held informal and unstructured, structured and electronic interviews with the veteran special education teacher (VSPED), Hannah and 2 general education social studies teachers (GEdSS), Ned and Sally. Hannah has taught for seventeen years in both elementary and secondary settings. She is qualified as a VSPED teacher because she holds both a masters and a bachelor degree in special education. She holds a license to teach kindergarten through twelfth grade in all subjects in special education and all subjects in general education kindergarten through eighth grade. Ned participated in a CoPD social studies classroom from September 2009 through June 2010. Ned has been teaching social studies for 4 years and he was selected for this study because he was interested in improving his teaching through the proposed CoPD approach. Sally participated in the CoPD social studies classroom from September 2010-January 2011; she has been teaching for over 30 years. She was included in this study to compare a veteran general education teacher in the co-teaching role to a less experienced teacher in the same role (Ned). Both co-teaching teams were placed in a 9th grade social studies classroom for the respective academic years.

The social studies class of coteachers Hannah and Ned included 29 students, 31 percent (N= 9) of these students were students that had disabilities which required differentiated instruction. The social studies class of co-teachers Sally and Hannah included 19 students, 6 of whom are females and 13 males. Fifty-five percent of this class had disabilities that require differentiated instruction and modifications. The disabilities in both social studies classes included cognitive, behavior, learning impairments and autism. Ned and Sally's primary pedagogies included lectures, note taking, map work, worksheets, reading, discussions and tests.

The research is paradigm as qualitative participant ethnography, the veteran special education teacher (VSPED) teacher/researcher reported on her use of Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) in and with the general education social studies classroom and teachers. Through informal conversations and unstructured interviews thick descriptions about the structure, implementations and results of CoPD were gathered. Data was also gathered on the successes, failures and adjustments made of CoPD over 2 academic years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 through structured and unstructured interviews with the veteran special education teacher (VSPED). The interviews with the general education social studies teachers (GEdSS) spanned 2 years and 6 interviews. The interviews with the 2009/2010 GEdSS teacher (Ned) occurred from mid-September 2010 until January 2011. Interviews with the 2010-2011 GEdSS teacher (Sally) occurred from August 2010 until January 2011. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed or recorded as field notes, in combination they were manually coded and the emerging themes identified and analyzed within the context of the research questions. Existing research on co-teaching and professional development was then used to assess the validity of the thick descriptions and themes that were the outcomes of the data collection.

Structure of Co-teaching Professional Development model

Meet before the school year begins

This is the initial discussion about expectations of each other and their students. Later the VSPED and GEdSS teachers need to have more in depth discussions about the 'nuts and bolts' of running a CoPD classroom. It is important to have both teachers open and enthusiastic about working together (Mastropieri et.al., 2005). According to Ploessi, et al. (2010) "to effectively provide special education services, co-teachers must work closely together, combining techniques, goals and curricula". Hence this initial meeting is vital to establishing the co-teaching relationship. At the first meeting, both teachers should establish an overview of the year or period over which they will implement the CoPD approach. If this is a secondary classroom, the teachers should discuss the general objectives to be covered over the period. Bring textbooks, computers and other materials necessary to put together a preliminary outline (skeleton) for the month/semester, finalize assignments and schedules. This type of planning is supported by Ploessi, et al. (2010) who adds that thoughtful planning is an important part of designing effective instructions.

Discuss the "big" issues: Expectations and roles of each teacher

During the subsequent meetings the two teachers should discuss expectations for classroom behavior. Who will handle what? Discuss how daily instruction will occur. How will day to day planning occur? When will there be time to discuss how the day went? Who will be grading? Will it be shared? Are both teachers speaking to the class as a whole or is it only the general education teacher? Discuss vocabulary to be used by teachers. This may sound trivial but it is important to the perception that students have of the class/teachers. Discuss how the special education teacher will be initially presented to the class. Are both teachers speaking to the class as a whole or is it only the general education teacher. For example if the content teacher says, 'I decided to skip the test today' compared to 'We decided to skip the test today', this communicates a different message to students. Is there a place to put personal items (such as keys, glasses, etc.) for the teacher entering the room each day? Is the general education teacher open to having his/her desk shared during the class? What is mine, what is yours? For Ploessi, et al. (2010) "focusing on seemingly simple skills such as effective speaking and listening builds a solid foundation for improving co-teaching interactions" (p. 159).

Divide up responsibilities to prepare for the first day/week of school

The content area or general education teacher is the expert in content; the special education teacher is the expert in pedagogy and differentiating instruction. This corresponds with the discourse put forward by Mastropieri et.al. (2005). Merging these skills requires patience and some trial and error:

- Discuss how to handle the inevitable issues that arise between the two. During the initial conversations finalize plans for the first day of classes.
- Have a great first day planned and be prepared to model how the co-teaching will go throughout the year.
- Be sure to explain to students why they have two teachers.
- Meet at the end of the first day to debrief and ascertain each person's perspective/s and possible modifications that may be deemed necessary. It is important that the special education and the general education teachers meet briefly each day during the first couple of weeks of classes to continue to debrief, plan and modify as the year begins to unfold.

For Ploessi, et al. (2010) designing and planning lessons together allows for more effective co-teaching, hence the necessity of these debriefing sessions.
The fundaments of the CoPD approach are supported by Mastropieri et al. (2005) who after observing several co-teaching classrooms found that their strengths are subsumed in the co-teachers' ability to forge strong working relationships, motivate themselves, each other and their students, allocate time to co-planning, show appreciation for the curriculum, foster effective instructional skills, employ disability-specific adoptions and show expertise in the content area.

Findings

For the school being studied it was found that the consequences of NCLB have resulted in increased pressure for students to perform well on standardized tests. Therefore, many teachers are inclined to move quickly through the curriculum as they are cognizant of the impending test. Such a scenario results in reduced opportunities to follow 'teachable moments', because the focus is more on the outcome/s of learning and less on the process of learning which is a the critical component for students with disabilities. This problem was acute in social studies and history cases that required the students to interact with large volumes of abstract information, which is not always easily understood by students with disabilities. This finding necessitated the Co-teaching Professional development Model, since it offers the social studies teachers the opportunity to meet some of the needs of students with disabilities while improving on their pedagogy.

A second finding of the study indicates that team work between the coteachers is critical to the success of the Co-teaching Professional development model. The study also found that fundamental to this team work is the acknowledgement of the roles each teacher plays in this model. To demonstrate this finding, Hannah recalls her initial work with Ned, "*when I first joined the class I observed Ned, the social studies teacher, for a week or so as he taught a unit on ancient China. As he discussed events taking place in the 1200's I noticed many of the students (both with disabilities and without) did not seem engaged or interested in what he (Ned) was discussing. I remember thinking that the ideas he was teaching about were quite abstract to the students living in 2009*".

At the end of the initial observation, Hannah and Ned discussed her impressions of his lessons. During these discussions Hannah suggested that they could create interest and involvement with an activity that allowed the students to discover what other events were happening globally during that time period (1200s) to give students perspective on the times and places they were studying both then and in the future. "*Ned was receptive. We had the students create a timeline chart that eventually spread around the entire classroom. This chart allowed the students to visibly compare a variety of historical events in the timeline that ultimately covered from the early 1000's to the current day.*" This example of successful teamwork in CoPD model demonstrates that the general education social studies teacher (GEdSS) has content knowledge and the veteran special education teacher (VSPED) has expertise in pedagogy, and by combining the two, the model was able to accommodate all the students as Ned presented this and other abstract social studies topics. Boon, Fore & Spencer (2007) used technology within co-teaching social studies classrooms and had similar findings with teachers involved expressing that it was a positive learning experience as students found new ways of interacting with social studies information.

The study also found that within the Co-teaching Professional Development model (CoPD), Hannah is able to define the requirements for students with disabilities to ensure that they make progress in the general education curriculum as dictated by IDEA. By being an active participant in the social studies classroom this veteran special education teacher (VSPED) is able to modify the curriculum and assignments in real time, allowing for adaptations to the needs of the students as they occur.

The study found that the successes of Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) are to a large degree dependent on the personalities and receptiveness of all participants. Hence the model is compelled to accommodate personality differences. The experience of the 2010/2011 Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) social studies classroom which involved Hannah and the general education social studies teacher (GEdSS) (Sally) yielded initial results that are different from Hannah's experiences in Ned's classroom during the previous academic year. At the beginning of the school year Sally stressed to the social studies students that correct spelling on all assignments was required. If a student misspelled anything they received half credit for the correct answer. As a result of Sally's approach, the students were receiving low grades and many were not passing social studies because they struggled with spelling. This discouraged a number of the students, especially those who are challenged by their disabilities. During their CoPD planning time Hannah suggested that they reconsider the spelling requirement for this social studies class. Several discussions occurred in which Hannah discussed the students' objectives along with the required state benchmarks that were being targeted. After several weeks of dialogue, Sally agreed to this suggestion and for those students with a disability correct spelling was no longer a requirement.

Sally is not as receptive as Ned, hence, while Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) works, Hannah believes it would be more effective if both teachers are able to embrace their roles within this classroom. Having implemented and refined the CoPD model over the several years, Hannah the veteran special education teacher (VSPED) notes that "*the success of CoPD in social studies or any classroom for that matter is dependent on the receptiveness of the content area teacher*".

The previous finding indicates that the general education social studies teacher's (GEdSS) reactions to this model have been mixed. The 2010/2011 Sally stated early in the semester, "*I feel that this is one more prep that I have to do on top of six already! I really don't have the time or energy to fit in more conference time to plan for this one hour.*" This kind of reaction is not uncommon, according to Ploessi, et al. (2010) "co-teaching may be popular but it does not come naturally… the greatest obstacle to co-teaching is the lack of preparedness of the educators involved… because it requires an additional set of skills that are rarely used when teaching alone" (p. 158). Alternatively in 2009/2010 Ned stated that "*I have really enjoyed teaching together. I feel like I've learned a lot and it has helped me look at my teaching ideas in different ways. I would like to co-teach again with someone*." This finding corresponds with those of Mastropieri et.al. (2005) who indicates that volunteer coteachers report more positive perceptions than teachers who are assigned co-teaching classrooms. Given this fact "co-teaching partners can be trained to increase their efficiency" particularly as it pertains to establishing their roles and interacting with students (p. 261).

Discussions

Co-teaching Professional Development strategies and their effectiveness

Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) has several broad pedagogies that are seen as important to the successful implementation of the approach. These broad strategies represent the general framework for the teachers to operate in the classroom and within these~~;,~~ smaller strategies are used to ensure effective teaching and learning. Here the focus is on four specific pedagogical approaches discussed by Cook & Friend (1995); Ploessi, et al. (2010), one teach-one assist, team teaching, parallel teaching and station teaching. In *One teach-one assist*, one educator takes the educational lead in the classroom, the other teacher moves through the room supporting students as needed. In *Parallel teaching*, both teachers jointly plan and instruct simultaneously to half of the students. The third strategy in CoPD is *Team teaching*. Here, both teachers plan and instruct, alternating the role of primary instructor within individual lessons. The fourth and final CoPD strategy is *Station teaching*; here the instructional content and physical space of the classroom are divided into two or more zones where each teacher is responsible for instructing at specific stations.

The sub-strategies used with these four broad frameworks are often viewed as the modifications made to accommodate the students with disabilities. According to Hannah, "*there are disruptive students who are not students with disabilities too! It does add to the workload of teachers, but these strategies actually work for all the students*". Within this context, it is important to note that students with disabilities do have reading levels that vary, hence the four strategies mentioned allow for variations to their learning systems that are often beneficial. On the matter of reading levels Hannah noted that "*the* *majority of students identified with a learning disability do read below grade level, most struggle with reading comprehension, understanding what they read; their word identification skills are adequate but understanding what they've read is difficult especially text books*". This veteran special education teacher went on to note that text books have improved over the twenty years she has been working as a special educator. Some of the improvements noted are the addition of more pictures, graphs and reading cues such as bolded words, subject headings, and some books and aspects of books on CD among other changes. These according to the teacher are a good basis for the implementation of the four fundamental approaches in Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD).

The four broad pedagogy frameworks that are at the core of the CoPD model allow the veteran special education teacher (VSPED) and the gerenal education social studies teachers (GEdSS) to modify their smaller strategies to meet the needs of all the students in the class. Often teachers encounter problems when teaching social studies to students with disabilities because of several factors, including complex chapter tasks that require an evaluation of causal relationships. For Allington (2007) working with select texts on various social studies topics at the appropriate level may assist those students with disabilities who struggle with reading. History and social studies readings are complex, often the text includes words and terms that have meaning that vary in historical, contemporary and literal settings. This, according to Boon, Fore & Spencer (2007) may impact reading comprehension which is "a major challenge for many students with learning disabilities" (p. 166).

According to Hannah, "*in 2009/2010 Ned and I did not use the text book often. There was only one room set which was used about 3 times. In contrast the 2010/2011 social studies teacher, Sally, assigns the students a book for the year and on an average of three times a week she requires them to answer questions from a worksheet she created. The worksheet is tailored to the chapter in a sequential order so that students may follow along with the book and fill in the answers. There is some time to work during class but any remaining work needs to be done at home*". In this instance, the CoPD model allows for modifications to suit the content area teacher's approach to teaching social studies. Hannah was able to implement more creative modifications in Ned's social studies class, where as in Sally's classroom, Hannah was less creative and her role was more supportive. She made accommodations for the needs for students with learning disabilities, cognitive disabilities, and autism on a more individualized scale, hence providing the students with "the distinctiveness and intensity considered to be important features of special education" Mastropieri et.al. (2005, p. 261). According to Hannah "*I personally like to have students find a way to interact with the text, which is what Sally does. For students with disabilities this kind of text book interaction might include the use of sticky notes to highlight certain subjects, or I have the special education department buy the students their own copy of the text so they can write in the book*".

Irrespective of the strategies that have been used, many students with disabilities experience difficulties comprehending social studies materials related to abstract events that might impact the world. These students also encounter difficulties critically thinking through common themes in history and social studies. Discussions of countries that are far away are in the realm of abstract for many students with disabilities. According to the Hannah "*I try to make the subject as relevant to them as possible, providing lots of pictures, videos, and projects to make the subject come alive*". This veteran special education teacher stated that the main strategy in the Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) model is to modify the work load or offer one-to-one assistance while the class is in progress for LD and CD students. "*In general we sometimes reduce the amount of work required for each of the following areas for example have them write two paragraphs instead of five… with reading I might quietly read to the student or read the highlights if all the other students are reading silently*". In the CoPD classroom it is common for the teachers to create reading assignments that pair stronger with weaker readers, thus creating positive interdependence among the students. Although one student in the pair may be a weaker reader, he or she is still given the opportunity to be exposed to the materials, to verbally participate in the activity and make contributions. One of the CoPD teachers may also work with the students with LD and CD after class to ensure that these students have the opportunity to keep pace with the rest of the class.

While improving teacher effectiveness, effective inclusion of students with disabilities is facilitated, according to Ploessi, et al. (2010) teacher effectiveness is one of the most important factors affecting school achievement and to optimize students' learning of cotaught content, educators should teach together, monitor student progress and reflect on lessons that have been co-taught.

The availability of two teachers within the classroom increases the opportunities for one-to-one work with students. This is important and according to Zigmond (2006) "students whose disabilities are manifested in reading and writing problems are likely to find these content-rich and text-rich classes particularly difficult" (p. 250). This according to Salend (2005) is common among CD and LD students. To accommodate these students the VSPED and the GEdSS teachers in the CoPD classroom practice scaffolding through structured assignments that the students with disabilities may complete in smaller sections. While doing this the LD and CD students are assisted in developing outlines or notes and then they are encouraged to work independently. According to Allington (2007) this type of multi-sourced, multi-level curriculum plan facilitates effective teaching and learning.

The Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) model also accommodates learning disabled (LD) and cogitatively disabled (CD) students by addressing learning issues such as processing problems. This is done by ensuring that most of the information the students need are available in written form, for example writing the assignments on the board instead of just stating what the assignment is. Processing problems are also accommodated through the use of guided notes activities. According to Konrad, Joseph & Eveleigh (2009), guided notes are useful because they encourage engagement during lectures. Many of the students with disabilities found in the CoPD classrooms under study are encouraged to "*write everything down!*" (Hannah). This is done through emphasis placed on the use of daily planners. Often the use of daily planners and developing the habit of writing everything down is quite helpful to those students who have organizational problems (Bryan & Burstein, 2004). It is important to note that this strategy is not always successful especially with students who have memory disorders. Therefore, the CoPD teachers encourage students to adopt the strategies they have been introduced to, that work best for them, this for Allington (2006) focuses on matching the students with the most appropriate curriculum materials. The strategy of writing everything down also extends to the use of study guides which the CoPD teachers create for those students who need to have the material streamlined. According to the veteran special education teacher, "*when I provide the students with the study guide, I use the opportunity to discuss with the student how I made the guide, how to use it and most importantly how they can make their own in the future*".

Sub-strategies within Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) also include the use of visual organizers "*in the 2009/2010 classroom we had students create story maps of a historical event we were studying*" (Hannah). This allows for visualization of where events occurred in relation to each other and how previous events impact current ones. "Visual organizers such as time lines, Venn Diagrams, inductive towers, concept maps, causal chains, force fields, and flow charts help students recognize and take control of the intellectual processes which bring meaning to the study of academic content" (Clarke, 1991, p. 526). This approach allows the students to develop and practice writing and vocabulary skills. This also helps them with not only keeping pace with the rest of the class but also with essay writing and test taking, thereby allowing the general education social studies lessons to be responsive to struggling readers and other students with disabilities (Allington, 2007). This approach is good because in the 2009/2010 classroom there was "*no major emphasis on the memorization of dates; instead, it placed emphasis on a more global understanding of the subject or at least the most important facts, this proved effective for the students with disabilities*" (Ned).

Students with behavioral and social deficits are not excluded in the CoPD classroom "*we try to create situations where we can work on social skills on a regular basis. One of my jobs is to encourage all students, particularly BD individuals. Every day the goal is for all students to participate and connect during the entire class; does it happen? No. But we try to come up with activities that challenge the students' to be cognitively engaged"* (Hannah).

The successes of the Co-teaching Professional Development model

In a January 2011 interview with the general education social studies teacher (GEdSS) from 2009/2010 (Ned), some of the benefits of the CoPD begin to emerge. Ned is not currently co-teaching and he now teaches 8^{th} grade social studies. As he reflected on his co-teaching experience from the previous academic year, he noted that "*I find myself using a lot of the same activities and strategies that Hannah suggested and modeled for me last year. The year is going very well and I am having a great deal of success because of my experiences with the CoPD approach. I am also having a lot of fun with the kids and they all seem to be learning! I think I am reaching more kids*".

The success of Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) depends on the crucial rhetoric; do both teachers want to do this? How comfortable is their relationship? Have they invested time in the practice? According to the Hannah "*it seems to work well, but at our school this is antidotal. Our principal is currently in favor of providing service in this manner, so I anticipate more CoPD classrooms in the future*. Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) strategies used in the general education social studies classrooms allowed the subject materials to be modified when appropriate and accessible to those students (such as cognitively impaired individuals) who would ordinarily not function well within this classroom setting. The strategies critical to the success of CoPD also assist those students who are at risk for failure and dropout. This is because the presence of an additional teacher provides them with more support. Mastropieri, et.al. (2005) supports this point when he added that in co-teaching classrooms receive high quality instructions.

The CoPD model advocates that students with disabilities should take the subjects they need in order to prepare for the future they are interested in pursuing. If they are uncertain about the future they want to pursue, they should have the option of trying a variety of classes and disciplines. A student with cognitive impairments might experience difficulties with the academic expectations of a general education classroom. However, with the modifications from CoPD, they might make appropriate educational gains.

Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) is cognizant of the social isolation students with disabilities face in inclusive school and classroom settings. According to the veteran special education teacher "*many students with disabilities do not pick up social skills by observation as compared to their general education peers*" (Hannah). This inability to learn at the same rate reduces the students with disabilities' capacities and opportunities to form significant relationships with their peers. This makes developing real friendships or even class friends difficult. Often students with disabilities are perceived by other students as different and this adds to the turmoil of adolescent development and the result is social isolation (Vaughn, 1996). According to Hannah, social isolation is "*true for students with attention deficit disorder and those with cognitive impairments. It does not help when teachers are not sensitive to this. Two of my students with cognitive impairments are in another social studies class. The teacher has grouped these two students by themselves in an ongoing work group, this isolates them as the rest of the class is in groups of four. My two students are sitting alone with each other in a room of thirty kids*". The result of this is, these students are likely to rate lower than their peers on sociometric scales.

Mary, a sixteen year old girl with cognitive impairments and numerous friends, is one of the many examples of the positive impacts of the Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) model. Mary admits that she comes to school because she wants to be with her friends, whom she would like to spend more time while at school. Mary's reading comprehension level is at the 3rd grade level. Over her school career attempts to remediate and assist her in making academic progress have led her to have the majority of her classes in special education classrooms. In 2009/2010 she was placed in the CoPD social studies classroom. She participated in project work with her peers, who were supportive, and the social studies tests and classroom activities were modified for Mary's needs. This allowed her to end the year with a *C* in social studies. During conversations with both Mary and her parents there was a definite sense of satisfaction with her progress. "*Mary is one example of a student, who has been positively impacted by the CoPD model, it is apparent that it contributes to the quality of life of many students with disabilities in my school*" (Hannah).

Conclusion

Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) provides educators with a multiplicity of opportunities to improve on how they meet the academic and behavioral needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The benefits to the participating teachers in CoPD are plentiful. As Ned stated, "*I think when there are two teachers we see more possibilities in instruction. It took a while to define our roles, the different expertise, but once we did that, it all clicked together. This was my fourth time teaching 9th grade social studies, but it was the most fun I've had*!"

From the veteran special education teacher's perspective CoPD offers a variety of possibilities. First it allows for observation of students on a daily basis. There is reduced chance that students will be confused or lost for any length of time. It provides the opportunity to remediate problems, from social skills to outlining a text book chapter to understanding abstract content materials. Co-teaching Professional Development (CoPD) also allows the special education teacher to increase his/her knowledge of the content, in this case social studies while building the pedagogy skills of the content area teacher. After time spent working day-to-day with the special education teacher, the various techniques and strategies to improve instruction for all students can become more readily accessed in their daily repertoire; thus creating rooms throughout the school that are appropriate placements for all students. CoPD enables the participating teachers to have real learning opportunities.

While these are real successes from the implementation of this model, they are anecdotal and are limited to this one school and group of teachers who have combined existing knowledge on co-teaching and embedded professional development to enhance the accommodations of students with disabilities in general education social studies classes. The implication of this for future research is expanding the use of this model into other social studies classrooms, other disciplines and other schools to determine the extent to which the outcomes chronicled in this study are replicated. Further research would also require an evaluation of the outcomes of this model in other settings in aid of making modifications to the model's structure and implementation to increase its effectiveness in accommodating students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

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