Special Education Administrative Supervision of Integrated Co-Teaching

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Abstract

In the K-12 setting, integrated co-teaching has developed as a popular service for students with disabilities. This paper examines how administrators define the most effective model of integrated co-teaching. Additionally, this paper explores the extent to which administrators' supervisory expectations/practices are consistent with the model delineated in the foundational research of Cook and Friend (1995).

Co-Teaching Defined

In recent years, co-teaching has developed as a common instructional delivery model that meets the needs of all students, including those with disabilities, in K-12 public schools around the country. It is designed as a service delivery system for students with mild and moderate disabilities (Simpson, Thurston & James, 2014).

Murawski and Dieker (2004) described co-teaching as two or more teachers who are equal in status located in the classroom together, working together, and providing instruction. In another study, Fennick and Liddy (2001) established their definition of co-teaching "in collaborating teaching teams, general education teachers and special education teachers share responsibility for planning and teaching in a general education class" (p. 229). Co-teaching must unite the science of specially designed instruction and effective pedagogy with the art of reorganizing resources and schedules to provide students with disabilities better opportunities to be successful in learning what they need to learn. Co-teaching is a special education service-delivery model in which two certified teachers-one general educator and one special educator-share responsibility for planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction for a diverse group of students, some of whom are students with disabilities (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

Researchers and practitioners have made the case for co-teaching as a program that gives all students access to the general education curriculum and experience. Prior to its implementation, classified students were placed in a more restrictive program such as a special class with a small student-teacher ratio or in a less restrictive program such as a general education setting with related services.

Administrator's Role

Administrators play a key role in the successful implementation of co-teaching. Principals who have had a positive experience with students with disabilities were more likely to have a positive attitude toward co-teaching (Praisner, 2003). Kamens, Susko, and Elliot (2013) found that administrators were inconsistent with their knowledge base and practices and recommended professional development to address this issue. In studies that focused on the logistical issues of co-teaching implementation, researchers found that master scheduling, common planning time, time of day, and ratio of students with disabilities to general education students were problematic (Isherwood, Barger-Anderson, & Erickson 2012; Simmons, 2007). Administrators who empower their teachers often find that the teachers are more positive about the practices they are implementing (Hamill & Dever, 1998). The research suggests that forced partnership arrangements by school administrators do not promote best practice (Solis et al., 2007). Administrators have significant responsibility when it comes to co-teaching and their visible involvement is critical (Phillips & McCullough, 1990; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008). Wilson (2005) studied the observation and evaluation of co-teachers and made recommendations for such. The success of any co-teaching program is grounded in the common vision, dedication and support of the general education teacher, special education teacher and the administrators who supervise them.

The Standard

Current research on integrated co-teaching generally cites the foundational work offered by Marilyn Friend and Lynne Cook which served to define co-teaching by examining the past, the present, and recommendations for the future. Cook and Friend subsequently co-wrote several articles and studies which are frequently cited by researchers examining this topic. Cook and Friend (1995) outlined the six approaches to co-teaching that are the foundation for co-teaching instruction: one-teach-one assist, one teach-one observe, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching and team teaching.

The Cook and Friend model, including the various approaches, is the accepted standard. The approaches are universal in that they can be provided across all settings,

so long as there are two qualified adults, a single instructional space, and blended students with individualized education program (IEP) goals. An IEP is a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised that addresses the child's present levels of performance, annual goals, progress monitoring, special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, explanation of the child's participation with nondisabled peers, and dates relevant to implementation. An IEP identifies the program that should constitute the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the student. The LRE emphasizes that to that maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled peers (IDEA, 2004). The ICT model in particular promotes the delivery of specially designed instruction to students with disabilities in the general education environment. Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamerlain, and Shamerger (2010) revisited the model in their later research, as did Friend in 2016.

Most Effective Model of Integrated Co-Teaching

For the purpose of this case study, the most effective ICT model was defined by three characteristics, as outlined in the research of Friend and Cook.

- "Two or more professionals are delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single space" (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 20).
- These two professionals share instructional responsibility for a single group of students for specific content or objectives with mutual ownership, pooled resources and joint accountability (Cook & Friend, 1995).
- The teachers utilize all six approaches as noted below to address students' IEP goals over the course of the school year.

These approaches enable teachers "to address the individualized education program (IEP) goals and objectives of students with disabilities while at the same time meeting the learning needs of other students in the class" (Friend et al., 2010, p. 12). Although research continues to provide variations of each model, those illuminated by Cook and Friend (1995) are the most popular. These instructional delivery approaches are meant to utilize the various members of the team to capitalize on their knowledge and understanding of content taught and instructional knowledge related to teaching students with disabilities (Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007).

Method

This study was a collective case study that focused on the administrator expectations and supervisory practices in connection with the integrated co-teaching model. The study focused on administrative supervision of co-teaching from grades kindergarten through 12. The case is how administrators within one suburban school district perceived the most effective ICT model and to what extent their supervisory expectations resembled the practices associated with the most effective model of integrated co-teaching as defined by Cook and Friend (1995). Three strategies were used to gather evidence: (1) administrator interviews, (2) an administrator focus group, (3) document review.

Field Setting

The setting for this case study took place in an elementary school (kindergarten through fifth grade) and a high school (ninth through twelfth grade) located within the same school district. The total student population is over 7,000 students from grades K-12. On the New York State Report Card, 10% of the student population is eligible for free or reduced lunch and 10% are SWDs. The elementary school enrollment was 608 students with 53 students with disabilities (9%). The high school enrollment was 1,657 with 202 students with disabilities (9%). As one of the largest towns in the county, this school district has ample resources in the area of special education. Administrators who participated in this study had K-12 responsibilities.

Participant Selection

The study's participants were selected based on purposeful sampling to recruit administrators who supervised co-teachers. Therefore participants were chairpeople of academic departments (math, science, English) or of special education. Eight administrators were interviewed for this study and four administrators participated in a focus group.

Procedures

Interviews

A total of eight (8) interviews were conducted with the following administrators: Director of English Language Arts, Director of Science, Elementary Principal, Elementary Assistant Principal, Elementary Special Education Supervisor, Secondary Special Education Supervisor, and two High School Assistant Principals.

Interview questions elicited information about the following:

- prior administrative positions and current responsibilities
- the number of teachers they observe/evaluate
- definition of the most effective model of ICT
- expectation of teacher practice
- supports for co-teachers
- observation protocols
- co-planning
- observed co-teaching approaches
- selection of co-teachers
- effectiveness of model for general education and special education students

Focus Groups

The administrative focus group consisted of an elementary assistant principal, a secondary special education supervisor, director of science, and director of English.

Focus group questions elicited information about the following:

- definition of the most effective model of ICT
- logistical steps involved in the implementation of a new co-teaching program (staffing, scheduling, training)
- beliefs regarding the responsibilities each co-teacher should have within a co-teach setting
- extent to which the actual model implemented is consistent with the most effective model of ICT
- observation/assessment and evaluation of ICT
- beliefs about the effectiveness of ICT for general education students and special education students

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with a thorough reading of all interview, focus group, and document review transcripts. First round primary codes were assigned to each research question to initiate the three-stage coding process (Miles et al., 2014). Following the initial coding, each piece of data was reread and several data reduction steps were taken. First, relevant data were highlighted and underlined. Second, each code with respective evidence were stored in a Microsoft Excel file. Third, after re-reading the data, codes were readjusted/organized to make them more specific to organize findings. *Dedoose* data management tool was used to create interactive visualizations and analytics.

Dedoose is a cross-platform app for analyzing qualitative and mixed methods research with text, photos, audio, videos, and spreadsheet data. Finally, visual thematic representations were created which helped synthesize the emanating themes, research, findings, and implications for the research question.
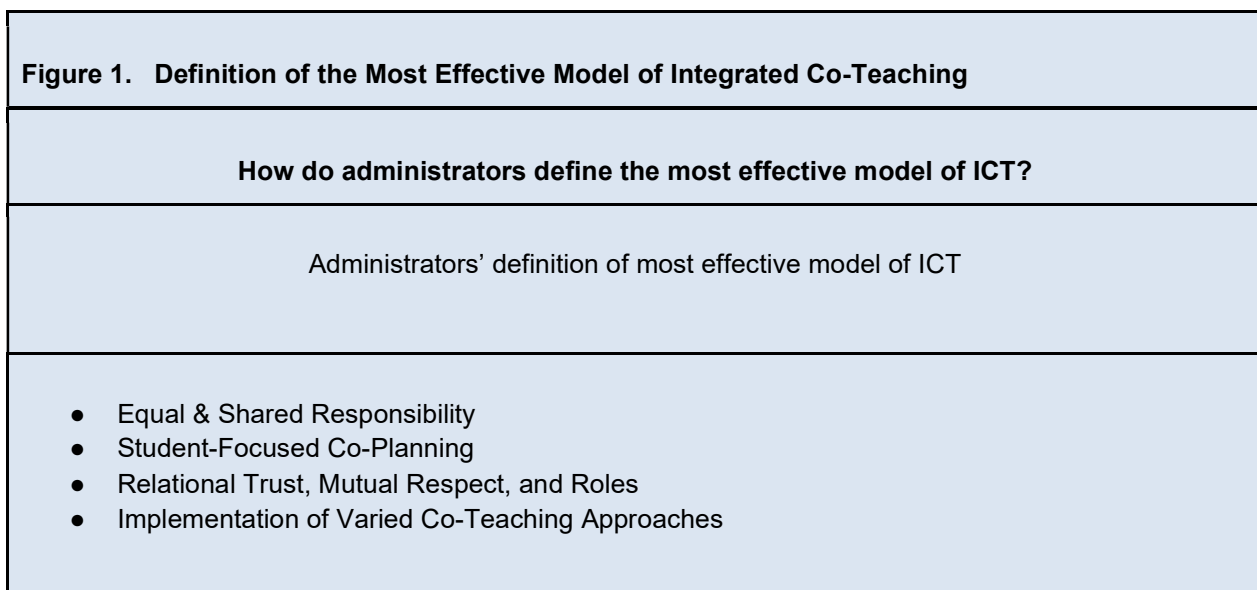
Findings

The findings' section illuminates key themes that emerged during the data analysis. The findings answered the two essential research questions: 1) How do administrators define the most effective model of ICT? 2) To what extent are the supervisory expectations/practices consistent with the Cook and Friend model (1995)?

Administrators' Definition

Administrators' definition of the most effective model of ICT was predicated on equal and shared responsibility, student-focused co-planning, relational trust/mutual respect, and implementation of varied co-teaching approaches. See **Figure 1.**

Equal and Shared Responsibility. The administrators expressed that responsibilities for teaching and learning should be shared between the general education teacher and special education teacher. Participants by and large reported that teaching responsibilities included common preparation time, lesson delivery, and assessment. One administrator shared, "Both co-teachers should literally be presenting the instruction, assisting students, and designing the lesson and checking for understanding." Similarly, another administrator expressed that one of the most important parts of a successful co-teaching program is "collaboration."

Figure 1.   Definition of the Most Effective Model of Integrated Co-Teaching

How do administrators define the most effective model of ICT?

Administrators' definition of most effective model of ICT

- Equal & Shared Responsibility
- Student-Focused Co-Planning
- Relational Trust, Mutual Respect, and Roles
- Implementation of Varied Co-Teaching Approaches

The director of mathematics explained that when she enters the room, "I should not be able to tell who the math teacher is and who the special education teacher is." Similarly, the director of English language arts agreed that students should view both teachers as equal and that, most importantly, both teachers should be working toward meeting students' IEP goals. Administrators during the focus group agreed, "It just looks simultaneous, like there's no distinguishing between each teacher's responsibilities." Moreover, the consensus of the focus group was the most effective model is when teachers work together in planning and in executing instruction to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom.

Administrators reported that the certification of teachers is a factor in selecting them for co-teaching. The director of science expressed, "It doesn't mean that the special educator in the room has to be certified in that subject area, but they have to be open to learning and open to putting themselves out there."

The elementary principal defined true co-teaching as being a partnership in which the special education teacher is not a "glorified teacher assistant." He reported that "good co-teaching teams are based on mutual effort." Additionally, a secondary supervisor of special education said, "The most effective model of co-teaching is when both teachers are invested, both teachers articulate and communicate effectively, starting with what the vision and the design for their classroom is."

Student-Focused Co-Planning. Co-Planning is an important element in the effective delivery of co-taught instruction. Administrators reported that co-planning went beyond curriculum. For example, an elementary administrator indicated that you are not only planning content but "you are really talking about students." Most of the participants indicated that collaboration is an integral part of co-teaching but it is the most difficult because not all teachers will plan during their personal time. Moreover, the reality of their schedule sometimes makes common planning time a challenge.

School administrators tended to view co-teaching through a different lens. The special education administrators acknowledged the various approaches to co-teaching. The high school supervisor explained that co-teaching is not just one approach but rather, it should be rotational. She reflected on recent classroom observations. Specifically she referenced "on the fly teaching" or she'll see the "general education teacher do the planning and the special education teacher push-in and do a role of a teaching assistant." In defining the model, she said, "I think small group instruction, whether through centers or rotating is very effective." She underscored, however, that the needs of the students should dictate the approach that is utilized.

Collaboration is not just theoretical. In fact, the district's special education plan, as required by the New York State Education department, explicitly notes, "An important component of this program is the ongoing collaboration between the general education and special education teacher." It further explains that modifications in curriculum, method, assessments, and environment are assessed and individualized according to each student's IEP.

Relational Trust, Mutual Respect, and Roles. Relational trust is necessary in the development of any professional partnership. Four of the administrators interviewed analogized that a co-teaching partnership was tantamount to a marriage. The participants agreed that the team members must have professional and personal respect and feel comfortable relinquishing control over their classroom. The administrators felt that a positive partnership translates into a more welcoming classroom. For example, an administrator said that students should feel that both of the teachers are theirs and that in an effective model of ICT, the strengths of both teachers are maximized.

Not all participants framed their responses in the positive. For example, an elementary special education administrator commented that the dynamic of pairing friends may be problematic. She noted that pairing friends is a common practice with which she disagrees. She said, "When you have friends, you can kind of lean back, and maybe your planning may not be as effective."

Trust is not just predicated on the co-teachers' dedication and commitment to collaboration. A math administrator explained that among math educators, certification in mathematics earns immediate respect. She said that math teachers are more likely to trust special education co-teachers who have dual content certification. She reported that her department staff is fortunate to work with a special education department who all have dual certification. Both she and her teachers trust that the certification enables them to understand the content. In contrast, the director of science explained that content certification was not a necessary factor in establishing relational trust. Rather, an openness to learning was more important.

Administrators reported that challenges within a co-teaching partnership are often linked to a misunderstanding of teachers' roles. To illustrate this, administrators referenced when a special education teacher "acts a little bit more like a teaching assistant than a specialized instructor. High school administrators described how when certain teachers take the lead, the other teacher often functions in a subordinate role. They reported, however, that there should be a "fluid back and forth." Secondary administrators agreed that in higher level, content rich classes, the general education would more often than not take the lead.

Not all administrators were comfortable with this dynamic. The elementary principal, for example, said, "When I walk into a classroom and I see basically one of the teachers serving a role as a teacher assistant, it's ineffective to me."

Co-Teaching Approaches. Administrators consistently reported that co-teaching approaches should be varied based

on students' levels of need. When speaking about the most effective model of integrated co-teaching, an administrator noted that highly effective instruction goes beyond the one teach-one assist approach. Rather, "It is effective using multiple models based on students' needs."

Administrators globally expressed that co-teaching approaches should vary as a function of students' needs. Specifically, they reported that the various approaches allow for a smaller student-teacher ratio which translates into meeting the needs of more students. Factors affecting the selection of each approach include the students' needs and the dynamics of the classroom. The elementary administrators reported that the current elementary model of integrated co-teaching replicates a "push-in service." They described the model as including a general education teacher for the full day and a 90 minute push-in by a special educator.

All participants emphasized the importance of putting the classroom into different configurations where both teachers take the lead and engage in the various approaches of integrated co-teaching.

Effectiveness

Most administrators, except one, reported that co-teaching was an effective model for general education students. For example, a secondary administrator said, "If it [co-teaching] is done the right way, it could be a big advantage for both general education students and students with disabilities, especially if you are breaking up into small groups, and differentiation is going on."

A secondary special education administrator expressed that while she has no data to support, she believes the district should explore data collection to analyze the effectiveness of the co-teaching program by comparing performance scores in co-taught classes versus non-co-taught classes. When describing the effectiveness of the model, an administrator said, "My favorite moment is when a student or parent indicates that they don't know who the special educator is or who the content area teacher is."

The special education administrators explained how the success of the co-teaching model for special education students is based on the partnership and the delivery of instruction. A challenge to the program is when two teachers are both talking excessively, which can be distracting to students with auditory processing and executive functioning deficits.

In order to increase the effectiveness of the co-teaching model, some administrators raised the issue of enrichment for general education students. Specifically, one participant stated, "Very little time goes into how we can enhance or enrich a lesson to reach those higher level kids." Moreover, a secondary administrator indicated the program is "not as beneficial as it could be." He said, " I guess my belief is that you're an average to above average

regular-education teacher, you could probably do the job and get through the same material and content in a way that special education students would understand as having a special education teacher in the room, too."

Another issue related to the effectiveness of the integrated co-teaching model is appropriate placement. Administrators reported that when students are inappropriately placed into the setting, that could be problematic. Some participants verbalized that when parents want their child in a general education class, co-teaching is a solution; however, when this decision is made, it impacts all of the students in the setting.

Are Supervisory Expectations and Instructional Practices Consistent with the Cook & Friend model of ICT?

> **To what extent are the supervisor expectations/ instructional practices consistent with the Cook and Friend model (1995)?**
>
> - Selection and training of co-teachers
> - Support for practice of co-teaching
> - Observation of co-teachers
> - Expectation regarding co-planning
> - Observed co-teaching approaches

Administrative and Supervisory Practice.

The study found that the following themes were noteworthy: selection of co-teachers, training of co-teachers, support for practice of co-teaching, observation of co-teachers, observed co-teaching approaches, and co-planning expectations.

Selection. When discussing the selection of co-teachers, two high school assistant principals had different points of view. One indicated she looks for someone who enjoys teaching, loves kids and is collaborative. By contrast, the other assistant principal indicated that selection is based on who is available to do it and who has shown an interest. When describing how special educators are selected, an elementary principal indicated that it was a matter of who is assigned to the building. A department administrator for mathematics commented that she looks for someone who is strong with content, instruction, and flexibility. Several administrators indicated that the selection of co-teachers is predicated on who works well together. At the elementary level, they indicated that they look for individuals who work well together and who have experience in that assignment.

Training. Based on interviews and a focus group discussion, it appeared that the training of co-teachers was more of a priority when co-teaching was a new district initiative; however, as the program gained popularity, the need for additional training was not emphasized. Moreover, administrators reported that they support their teachers by familiarizing them with the six Cook and Friend recommended co-teaching approaches and the methodologies of co-teaching. An elementary principal indicated that he encourages his teachers to visit the classroom of other teachers to demonstrate effective practice. Further, he encourages them to co-plan with these teachers. By contrast, a high school administrator said, "We've fallen short of the mark because I don't see a consistent message as to what the co-teaching model should be necessarily."

Observation Practices. Administrators reported a range of responses regarding co-teacher observations. Specifically, several participants indicated that they conduct formal observations of both co-teachers simultaneously and then follow up with a post observation conference that includes both team members; however, the majority of participants reported that they observe each teacher separately and only the teacher being formally observed attends the post observation conference. The high school special education administrator and the director of mathematics, for example, reported that they observe both the general education and special education teacher during each lesson. Further, they invite both teachers to the pre-observation conference and the post observation conference. The elementary principal, by contrast, observes one co-teacher at a time. His assistant principal similarly reported, "Sometimes I'm looking simply just for possibly a special education teacher's ability to modify, differentiate, and in that sense, I'd want to really hone in on just that teacher."

Co-Planning. Co-planning is a critical component to effective co-teaching. In a co-teach situation, co-planning should be utilized to prepare for instruction. Administrators reported their expectation and practices in this area. One high school assistant principal noted that she works with the building administration to make sure that co-planning time is built into the master schedule. She also suggested that co-planning does not always have to involve face-to-face conversation. She explained her expectation that technology has the potential to enhance co-planning in the sense that teachers can use google docs or other web-based programs to plan with their colleagues without being physically together. An elementary principal indicated that he "trusts that they understand the challenges that are associated with working with another teacher and they will plan accordingly." Another administrator stated, "My expectation regarding co-planning is simply that both teachers know what is going on at the very moment that that co-teacher is expected to come into that classroom." One administrator articulated that co-teaching at the secondary level is more effective than the secondary level because the secondary teachers have planning time built into their schedules.

Discussion

The study explored administrator definitions of the most effective model of integrated co-teaching, as well as their expectations and practices. Qualitative case study methodology - including interviews, focus groups, and document reviews - was utilized. As a collective case study, the research was bounded by setting. The research investigated two schools within a suburban school district. Eight administrators participated in individual interviews and four administrators participated in a focus group discussion. Additionally, various documents from the East Park Public Schools, as well as documents from the state regulations, were reviewed and provided information on the integrated co-teaching program.

The findings from this collective case study reveal that administrators have a range of opinions regarding the implementation of an effective integrated co-teaching model. The findings related to administrative supervisory expectations reveal that administrator expectations are more or less consistent with the model of Cook and Friend; however, their actions were not always consistent with the Cook and Friend practices. Inconsistency of actions and practices results in diminished and/or unclear administrator expectations which impacts teachers ability to follow best practices as noted in the research of Cook and Friend.

Findings indicate that integrated co-teaching is a valued district instructional program that has widespread support by administrators. Administrators are charged with establishing expectations regarding co-teaching practices (e.g. selection, supervision, and training of staff). Effective co-teaching practice is predicated on administrative understanding and support (Cook & Friend, 1995; Walther-Thomas, 1997.) The findings indicate that although not all practices were consistent with those outlined in the research of Cook and Friend, all administrators involved in this study, except for one at the secondary level, understood the model and supported it. Effective co-teaching is predicated on constant direction and support from administrators who would be willing and able to listen and learn, and help deal with challenges (Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm, 2000). Teachers are given many of the resources they need in order to meet with success (e.g. common planning time). Administrators must ensure that co-taught instruction is substantially different from instruction offered in other classes (Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993).

There were several noteworthy findings related to administrative supervision. An overarching finding is teacher dominance/influence. The administrator participants framed their responses to a greater or lesser degree based on a power dynamic between teachers. According to Scruggs et al. (2007), the "one teach, one assist" model was used most frequently and resulted in the special education teacher being placed in the less dominant role. Several administrative participants expressed in relevant part that the most effective integrated co-teaching model is one in which the observer is unable to discern who the general education

teacher is and who the special education teacher is. In the Cook and Friend (1995) model, both professionals share responsibility for students in a manner that is equitable. The administrative expectation that co-teaching be different from the instruction in general education classes is consistent with the research. Specifically, Cook and Friend note, "When one teacher assists, especially if this is the role of the special educator, he or she may feel like a glorified teaching assistant and students might question that teacher's authority in the classroom" (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Another finding is expectation versus implementation. According to Cook and Friend (1995),

Administrators can support co-teachers by modeling desirable traits that promote collaboration. Administrators can support co-teaching by (a) helping co-teachers plan and schedule their programs (b) provide incentives and resources that allow co-teachers to design and reflect about desirable changes in the way they provide services (c) assist teachers in setting priorities that protect their limited time.

Observation protocols were focused on one co-teacher and not both co-teachers. A critical factor in the success of any program is the extent to which the program is evaluated and supported (Wilson, 2005). As noted in Cook and Friend (1995), "Evaluation is a vital component of any innovation in school-based services. Co-teaching is no exception. Both formative and summative evaluation are needed to develop and implement an effective co-teaching program adequately" (p. 17). Although administrative observation is not explicitly identified, Cook and Friend emphasize the importance of using multiple data sources to examine the effectiveness of an integrated co-teaching program. It appears based on administrator interviews that administrative observations, an important source of data, were conducted in a manner that evaluated individual teacher performance and not programmatic effectiveness.

Another distinctive finding is that in elementary school, co-teaching was offered in a manner that replicated a push-in service. For example, special education teachers pushed into the co-teaching classroom for 90 minutes per day. By contrast, at the secondary level, all co-teaching classes have a general education teacher and a special education teacher for the duration of the period, as per students' IEPs. The administrators felt that the elementary model should more closely resemble the secondary model with respect to co-planning time and length of time that both teachers are in the classroom. According to Friend and Barron (2016),

It is anticipated that co-teachers spend the majority of their shared time (whether it is a time block, a class period, or an entire school day) working with students in various grouping arrangements. This is one of the primary strategies for increasing instructional intensity (p. 3).

In order for this model to be implemented, teachers must have ample planning time to discuss daily lessons and relevant co-teaching approaches based on students' IEPs and emergent needs.

Friend et al. (1993) defined co-teaching as a model in which "two or more professionals are delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single space" (p .1). Second, these two professionals share instructional responsibility for a single group of students for specific content or objectives with mutual ownership, pooled resources and joint accountability (Friend, 2016). Third, the teachers utilize all six approaches to address individuals I.E.P. goals over the course of the school year (Friend et al., 2010, p. 12).

Implications for Practice

Integrated co-teaching is a highly effective research-based instructional delivery system for students with mild and moderate disabilities. Students in this program can thrive academically, behaviorally, and socially. Cook and Friend (1995) articulate the rationale for co-teaching, identifying five elements: increase instructional opportunities for all students, improve program intensity and continuity, reduce stigma for students with special needs, increase support for teachers and related service specialists, and increase instructional options. It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide administrators with valuable insight regarding how to successfully implement and maintain a co-teaching program. The findings indicate that this district's co-teaching program has most of the ingredients necessary for staff to meet the needs of students: dedicated instructional personnel, a variety of administrators with diverse skill sets and knowledge to conduct training, and positive, trusting employer-employee relationships that are necessary to effectuate positive change. There is definitely a need for more large-scale quantitative studies to determine teacher and administrator dispositions toward the ICT model. Consistent with the recommendations of Cook and Friend, co-teaching programs should be frequently evaluated using multiple data sources.

Cook and Friend (1995) emphasize that administrators play a key role in supporting co-teachers. Specifically, the researchers underscore that committing resources to enhancing preparation of co-teaching partners, participating with them in training activities, and scheduling additional planning time are sources of administrative support that teachers appreciate.

The findings indicate that there is room for growth in the area of developing more consistent supervisory practices. Observation of co-teaching should include both of the involved teachers and they should both be invited to the pre- and post-observation conferences. Additionally, the focal point of the observation should be the extent to which the practice of co-teaching is delivered. Next, defined intervals of common planning time should be universal for all co-teachers and teachers should be actively developed through co-teach-

ing professional development opportunities offered by the school district. Finally, teachers should be selected based on mutual interest and they should be trained together (Simmons & Magiera, 2007).

It is also recommended that school districts revisit the length of time that elementary special education teachers are present in the class. If the goal is to create a true co-teaching environment, both professionals should be delivering substantive instruction to the same group of elementary students throughout the school day. Cook and Friend state that "ultimately the decision regarding the amount of co-teaching that is possible and desirable must be made at the local district and school levels" (p. 11). The district may consider the collection of data to support the need for such a change. Although in New York co-teaching is not a mandatory service that districts must include in their continuum of services, this district has vast co-teaching offerings - multiple levels of math, English, social studies, science and world language. It should be further noted that although the state cap of special education students who are legally permitted to be placed in a co-teaching class is 12, the district guideline is 8 and most classes have fewer than eight students with disabilities in each of their co-teaching classes.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that the co-teaching program within this school district was consistent with the philosophy and practices of the Cook and Friend model; however, the participants identified areas in which the district was not following the model with fidelity. This research can guide future research on integrated co-teaching as a service delivery model in the areas of evaluation, training, and scheduling.

As educators, we must constantly evaluate the effectiveness of our programs and attend to areas in need of attention. School districts considering implementing an integrated co-teaching program should take the appropriate steps in selecting, training, and supervising teachers and administrators. Any school district looking to refine its integrated co-teaching program should consider aligning its observation/evaluation system with research-based, peer reviewed standards. Although the Cook and Friend model does not specifically identify the frequency and nature of teacher observation/evaluation, the model emphasizes the importance of ongoing reflection and evaluation based on data collection.

The results of this study suggest that, ultimately, the integrated co-teaching program is a powerful instructional model to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Administrators agreed that training was important, but it seemed that in recent years, there were fewer trainings to support effective co-teaching partnerships. The research of Cook and Friend consistently highlights the importance of training to prepare teachers for this rich model.

Next, the observation/evaluation instruments utilized by the school district should include both teachers, not just one. Observing both teachers simultaneously - inviting them to the pre-observation, post observation and giving them both a written analysis of their co-teaching - conveys a powerful message: Specifically, it is not the work of one co-teacher within a co-teach setting that accomplishes the goal of the program - rather, it is the work of both. When teachers' collaborative work is recognized and validated, they are more likely to function as a team.

The Cook and Friend model underscores the importance of two teachers being present in the classroom; however, the researchers also express that the model should be designed based on student goals. Therefore, an effective model can be developed that does not involve full day instruction. Toward this end, in order for co-teachers to realize their true potential, school districts should evaluate the length of time special educators are assigned to co-taught classes. Most importantly, they should ensure that students' IEP goals can be met. Although any programmatic change in this regard would need to be substantiated by evidence, co-teachers who "push-in" are at a programmatic disadvantage. If school districts are truly promoting shared responsibility and a collaborative approach, both teachers must have ample opportunity to co-plan and to work with their students in an integrated fashion.

The findings of this study convey that an effective integrated co-teaching program must include cooperation and collaboration and must involve ongoing administrative supervision and support for all teachers involved.

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