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SUCCESSFUL CO-TEACHING MODELS IN THE SECONDARY SETTING

A MASTER'S THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY  
OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY  
LEXIE HERMOZA

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

SUCCESSFUL CO-TEACHING MODELS IN THE SECONDARY SETTING

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APPROVED

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### Abstract

Co-teaching is an educational practice that emerged in the early 1970's with the creation of the IDEA act. In this inclusive teaching model, a special education and a general education teacher work together to share responsibilities of the classroom such as planning lessons, monitoring student progress, and managing student behaviors and learning. While some teachers are not able to implement this strategy successfully, other teachers and schools find great success in this inclusive practice. Studies indicate that teachers struggle with co-teaching when they do not communicate adequately or are not given the proper training or time to collaborate. Teachers who were successful in co-teaching were given adequate time and training to collaborate, used their planning time to discuss classroom norms and responsibilities, and communicated effectively. Students benefitted from a co-taught class through increased access to teacher feedback, the ability to group based on needs, and by working with other students in a collaborative model.

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

### **Research Rationale**

As a special education teacher, it is not uncommon to think outside of the box to support students and meet their unique needs. Co-teaching is one approach to creating inclusion and differentiation in the classroom that emerged in the early 1970s with the advent of Public Law 94-142, which is now referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA was created so students with disabilities could be provided with free, appropriate public education that is tailored to their individual needs (FAPE). Part of IDEA states that students with disabilities must be placed in the least restrictive setting, or LRE, being in an instructional setting among their general education peers, as much as possible.

### **What is Co-teaching?**

Co-teaching is a collaborative approach to instruction in which two or more instructors work together to plan and implement instruction for a class that is designed to meet the needs of all students and provide the least restrictive environment. Typically, the two instructors consist of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or English Language teacher. The general education teacher is the expert on content, and the Special Education or English Language teacher is the expert on differentiation, small-group support, and modifications of assignments. When the general and special education teachers are successful with their co-teaching model, they “partner to combine their unique skill sets toward enhanced teaching approaches and



instructional strategies for students with and without disabilities in ways not possible by one teacher working alone” (Johnson et al., 2022, p.1). When done incorrectly, it can cause confusion, apprehension, and resentment among the teachers, which can lead to a non-collaborative and negative classroom environment.

### **How are Students Impacted by Co-Teaching?**

Students in a co-taught class are directly impacted by whether or not co-teaching is successful. In a successful model, students can thrive academically, get the additional support they need, and gain confidence in their social and teamwork skills. Students with disabilities may demonstrate an increase in social skills with the increase of time with positive peer role models. They may also show a reduction in maladaptive behavior with the desire to “fit in” to the social norm of the positive classroom environment. Both students and teachers that have participated in co-taught classrooms have reported an increase in confidence and self-esteem as well as confidence in their peer relationships and social skills. Students without disabilities also can appreciate a co-taught classroom for the accessibility that it provides to different methods of learning. The access to more teacher help that is provided in a co-taught classroom allows all students to get questions answered, small-group support, and multiple methods of learning and explanation.

Co-Teaching can also have negative effects on students when it is not correctly executed. Students in a co-taught class can also feel unsupported, singled out by a teacher, overwhelmed, or frustrated by the lack of unison between the general

education teacher and the special education teacher. Teachers face difficulties to design a classroom curriculum that is appropriate for all students, especially those who are performing far below grade level in reading and math. A major barrier to this is providing a challenging yet appropriate curriculum for all students within the co-taught classroom.

### **How are Teachers Impacted by Co-Teaching?**

General education teachers are not typically trained in the same manner as special education teachers when it comes to providing differentiated instruction. They are typically the expert in their topic area and are trained more for larger-group-focused activities and lessons. For the special education teacher, co-teaching can become a frustrating process in which they feel reduced to the role of a paraprofessional. They may not have a depth of understanding in the content area that they co-teach, as it is not in their academic background (Keefe, 2004). The general education teacher may feel apprehensive about having another teacher in the room that may not want to lead instruction in the way that they have become accustomed to. Both teachers may feel confused and misdirected on how to spend their time in the co-taught classroom. They may have different teaching philosophies and styles that lead to tension and an overall disorganized classroom.

There are several factors that play into the successful implementation of a co-taught classroom. For co-teaching to be successful, both teachers must be fully trained and supported both through their educational background and their administration in the school setting where they teach. They must be provided adequate

time to become acquainted with each other, familiarize themselves with each other's teaching styles, and collaborate. Collaboration between co-teachers includes discussing and dividing classroom roles, co-planning, and grading.

### **Popular Co-Teaching Models**

Teachers who implement a co-taught classroom can pick from a variety of popular models that range from low levels of collaboration to high levels of collaboration, depending on the task they wish to accomplish within the class. Popular models can be varied to meet the needs of each group and student appropriately. Some of the most popular and successful co-teaching models include sequential teaching, parallel teaching, station teaching, and the teaming model. All models of inclusive teaching have been reported to have at least a significant level of success. Due to its simplicity, the most frequently used model is the one-teach-one-assist model. Teachers who have not been fully trained in co-teaching may rely on this model, which consists of one teacher providing instruction and the other teacher will assist students. This is the model that may create frustration between teachers. The goal is for co-teachers to become confident and triumphant in their use of other groupings of co-teaching to consistently provide adequate instruction and assistance to students.

### **The Role of Administration**

Administration plays a key role in whether or not co-teaching can be implemented victoriously. Without administrative support, co-teaching is likely to be unsuccessful (Friend, 2008). Teachers are extremely busy and are expected to execute

several tasks within a school day. Much of that school day is spent teaching, with the average prep time being forty-five minutes (Carty & Farrell, 2018). Within that forty-five minutes, teachers are expected to grade, communicate with families, analyze student data, plan for one to several different classes, communicate with other teachers and stakeholders, meet with students who need additional support or who are falling behind, and more. With the most frequent suggestion for successful co-teaching implementation being collaboration, teachers find themselves frustrated when forty-five minutes a day is simply not enough to do it all. Administrators must provide adequate time for co-teaching collaboration, as well as training for teachers who are placed in co-taught partnerships. Without this adequate time and preparation, teachers are doomed from the start.

### **Guiding Research Question**

The guiding research question for this thesis is: what co-teaching models and approaches are most effective in providing equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities? Upon researching this question, there are several factors to consider. First, the benefits and possible flaws of co-teaching must be evaluated. Second, it is crucial to determine effective strategies that school administrators can take to instruct and support teachers as they develop co-teaching skills. Finally, this thesis will review the literature on successful co-teaching models and what strategies are applied successfully to support the needs of all students in the secondary setting.

## **CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Literature Search Procedures**

Chapter two reviews the literature on co-teaching published from 1980-2022. To locate the literature for this thesis, searches of Educator's Reference Complete, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and Education Journals were conducted. This list was narrowed by only reviewing published empirical studies from peer-reviewed journals that focused on student and teacher perspectives of co-teaching, co-teaching models, team-teaching, and inclusion in the secondary setting. The keywords that were used in these searches included "co-teaching," "inclusion," "collaborative teaching," "team teaching," and "least restrictive setting." The structure of this chapter is to review the literature on co-teaching in this order: student and teacher benefits, student and teacher challenges, successful implementation models, and unsuccessful implementation models.

### **Literature Review**

Teachers' and students' opinions on co-teaching are invaluable when it comes to evaluating co-teaching success in a classroom because they are the individuals involved and affected. Analyzing student and teacher perspectives of student teaching is the starting point to understanding what works and does not work when it comes to co-teaching. There are several benefits and challenges associated with co-teaching when it comes to both student and teacher perspectives.

### **Student Benefits**

For students in a co-taught classroom, there is the potential for better learning outcomes which can be attributed to various factors. Harter and Jacobi (2018) conducted a study to survey the potential benefits and drawbacks that students in a co-taught classroom reported. They found four potential benefits to co-teaching. Benefits that students reported include increased instructor perspectives, access to a variety of teaching styles, improved communication skills, and fresh perspectives on learning. Students felt as though they had more support in a co-taught classroom because they had two teachers that assisted them with the academic tasks and learning targets. In moments of uncertainty between the two instructors, students reported that “it was good to have another teacher in the class” in order to get a fresh perspective that the other instructor might not have (Harter et al., 2018, p. 7).

Furthermore, students enjoyed the fact that the two instructors both came equipped with different information, diverse backgrounds, and various ideas. Students also noted that they were appreciative of their access to a variety of learning styles in the co-taught classroom. One student said, “you get to learn from different teachers and therefore you learn different techniques” (Harter et al., 2018, p. 8). Another common theme that students appreciated in a co-taught class was increased communication skills. Co-teaching models typically involve a collaborative learning process between students with a variety of needs and backgrounds, which increases participation and

communication among students. Specifically, students reported the benefits of small-group communication which made them feel as though their voices were heard. The increase of collaboration between peers was reported as one of the most favorable aspects of the co-taught classroom.

Harter and Jacobi's survey assessed the perspectives of students without disabilities in a co-taught class and focused more closely on the benefits of having two teachers rather than being in the same classroom environment as students with disabilities. Students without disabilities were appreciative of the more collaborative approach to co-teaching. They also noted appreciation for the accessibility to different learning styles. A study by Walther-Thomas (1997) concentrated more on the overall classroom environment that emerges in a co-taught classroom as well as perspectives from students with disabilities as well as without.

The social and emotional well-being of students with disabilities can be impacted when they are restricted access from positive peer role models. Kloo (2008) found that students in resource rooms can exhibit unwanted behavior due to feeling stigmatized and unwanted in the general education classroom. They may mimic peer behavior in the segregated setting. A three-year qualitative study by Walther-Thomas (1997) interviewed both students and teachers and found that co-teaching increased self-confidence and self-esteem, academic performance, peer relationships, and social skills among students with disabilities. Students with disabilities had greater faith in

their abilities to succeed in school when they were in a more supported general education classroom. They developed better attitudes about themselves and their classmates. Due to the higher expectations of a mainstream classroom setting, students with disabilities were given a challenge that when met, increased their confidence and academic abilities. Teachers in this study also reported that students with disabilities learned “appropriate classroom behaviors” from their same-aged peers and performed more appropriately in mainstream settings than they did in the special education classroom (Walther-Thomas, 1997, p. 399).

When integrated into a classroom with students with disabilities, students without disabilities also showed increased cooperation and social-emotional skills. They reported being satisfied that they learned more about their classmates with disabilities and had a better understanding of people with disabilities (Hang, 2009). Another study conducted by D’Alonzo (1997) is harmonious in its findings and reported that high school students reported that their connections with students with disabilities in the general education classroom setting resulted in more positive attitudes, an increased response to the needs of others, and an increased appreciation for diversity. Austin (2001) described this inclusive approach as a way to promote tolerance for differences and a general sense of acceptance of others.

The push for inclusion in a co-taught classroom has demonstrated several positive benefits noted both by students with disabilities and by students without



disabilities. Hang (2009) and D'Alonzo (1997) both found it to be confirmed by students that when a classroom includes individuals of all abilities, there is a deeper understanding and appreciation for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Students with disabilities feel more integrated as a part of the school and are benefitted both academically and socially according to Kloo (2008), and Walther-Thomas (1997).

### **Teacher Benefits**

Teachers are correspondingly involved in the co-teaching model and therefore are also subject to the possible benefits and consequences of co-teaching. Although co-teaching has mixed reviews from teachers depending on their individual experiences, the literature finds that there are several noteworthy benefits. Scruggs et al. (2007), concluded teachers generally reported that they had benefitted professionally from their co-teaching experiences. Special education teachers cited “an increase in content knowledge,” while the general education co-teachers noted, “benefits to their skills in classroom management and curriculum adaptation” (Scruggs et al., 2007, p. 401).

The professional growth that comes with working alongside another professional consequentially can lead to professional satisfaction. According to Walther-Thomas (1997), teachers who were interviewed about their experiences of co-teaching consistently reported high levels of professional satisfaction. Due to a more collaborative approach, teachers and students also reported an overall positive classroom community.

With two teachers being able to attend to a classroom in a co-taught setting, teachers report being pleased with the increased amount of attention each student can receive. Magiera et al. (2005) conducted a study in which they interviewed secondary special education and general education math teachers on their perspectives on co-teaching. A general education math teacher explained that he is not “spread so thin” because there are two instructors present and available to answer student questions (Magiera et al., 2005, p.3). The reduced pupil-teacher ratios in a co-taught classroom provide all students with more teacher time and attention which increases the teacher opportunities for monitoring student progress, individually assisting students as they worked, conducting student conferences, re-teaching, and leading guided practice activities (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Scruggs (2007) and Walther-Thomas (1997) found that when paired with a co-teacher, most teachers reported higher levels of overall job satisfaction. Higher levels of job satisfaction are correlated with a more collaborative and open work environment both for students and teachers. These studies shed light on the correlation between a successful co-teaching placement and job satisfaction and positive classroom and school communities. Magiera (2005) noted the student-centered benefit of co-teaching as teachers were able to manage the classroom easier as well as individually assist students and monitor progress.

## Challenges for Teachers

Although there are many benefits to students and teachers with the implementation of a co-teaching model, the literature has also outlined some challenges that should be addressed. Challenges include co-teaching compatibility, co-planning time, and lack of proper training or education around co-teaching.

A major challenge that seemed to come up in the literature frequently was co-teacher relationships and compatibility. Often, co-teachers do not agree or volunteer to work together in a co-teaching team. They can be thrown together, often with little or no training in successful co-teaching methods. Co-teaching teams can quickly deteriorate and distort from their intended design when special educators are no longer perceived as an instructor and more like a paraprofessional teacher aide, according to Hackett (2021).

Mastropieri et al. (2005) conducted a case study to examine co-teaching between two female teachers in a high school chemistry class. The teachers were observed for more than two years, and both were experienced and comfortable in their roles. One challenge noted in this study was co-teacher compatibility. The relationship between the two teachers was found to be a major critical component that influenced the success or failure of the inclusion of students with disabilities. When co-teachers are compatible in teaching styles, methods, approaches, and mentality, students with disabilities are more likely to be successful in the co-taught classroom. Conversely, when the co-teachers experience conflict in their co-teaching relationship for various reasons,

the experience for students with disabilities is more challenging. Conflicting beliefs on how to plan for co-teaching, managing behavior, and the approach to interacting with students were found to seriously inhibit positive classroom environments in this study.

Monteblanco (2021) deduced several factors that contribute to poor co-teaching compatibility which include competitive martyrdom, feeling like a student, constant performance, and biting one's own tongue. Based on different ages, experiences, or academic backgrounds, co-teachers can find themselves in mentor-mentee, competitive, or disorganized dynamics. One teacher may feel more responsible and "in charge" of the course due to their experience or knowledge of the content, which can create a competitive hierarchy or awkward dynamic between the two teachers.

Pesonen et al. (2021) conducted a study that observed and interviewed co-teaching teams and found mutual relationship discomfort and lack of respect between co-teachers to hinder their overall classroom success. The most negative stories between co-teaching teams highlighted poor communication, lack of effort to cooperate due to frustration, time constraints, nervousness, or fear of failure. Some co-teaching relationships in this study became so hostile that the co-teaching pairs would not even greet or acknowledge each other when sharing the classroom. This hostility would clearly impact the climate of the classroom and be detrimental to the academic success of the students.

Beyond the many factors that contribute to co-teacher compatibility, a large contributing factor to co-teaching success is something that is often overlooked:

providing enough time for co-planning. Time is a resource that is often slim in school districts. Teachers are usually given only one period for planning at the secondary level, and more often than not, scheduling issues make it nearly impossible for teachers to have similar planning times. Cannaday et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study that interviewed secondary teachers on their views on co-teaching. Although the teachers had numerous positive things to say about their co-teaching experience, an overwhelming majority shared that the immaterial resource of time was one of the largest barriers. Time was discussed in connection to planning time, grading, getting to know their co-teacher, getting to know their students, communicating with their co-teacher and colleagues, and co-planning the course that they teach.

Alnasser (2020) noticed a common theme in their interviews of co-teachers that a lack of official planning time and overwhelmingly large caseloads made it challenging to find the time to plan. One special education teacher shared their frustration with their administration because there was not enough time planned into the schedule for co-teachers to collaborate. Due to scheduling issues, it was also found that far too many students with IEPs were placed in one co-taught class, meaning teachers found there was not enough time to address all of the student's needs, accommodations, modifications, and questions.

### **Challenges for Students**

The most common discovery when researching the challenges for students in a co-taught classroom is the appropriateness of the curriculum. A major barrier is

providing a challenging yet appropriate curriculum for students with varying abilities and disabilities. For students with intellectual disabilities, accessing the general education curriculum is extremely difficult despite the accommodations and modifications that are provided. Carter and Hughes (2006) found that all stakeholders rated academic course content to be a barrier to the success of disabled students in co-taught classrooms. Special education teachers noted that the general education curriculum included insufficient opportunities for students with severe disabilities to address their IEP goals and needs.

King (2003) surveyed students with disabilities who attended a co-taught classroom on their perceptions of teacher practices. In this survey, students with and without special needs were generally in agreement that teachers “almost never” to “sometimes” accounted for their individual differences. This relates to the teacher getting to know the relevant student background, appropriately changing and modifying assignments, or discussing and addressing students’ unique learning styles. Furthermore, special education students reported that they did not feel as challenged as their peers did in the co-taught classroom. This relates to the difficulty on the teachers’ end of gauging what level of challenge is appropriate to give to students with IEPs. Teachers in the general education classroom have been found to have lower expectations for students with disabilities, which may contribute to a lack of confidence or motivation from the students.

Beyond the curriculum, the push-in model is challenging because of the discrepancies between students with severe disabilities and students in the general education classroom. Students with disabilities can and should be included and welcomed into the general education classroom, but 68% of students in the general education classroom reported not knowing how to interact with students with severe disabilities, according to Hendrickson (1996). Although this is not a justification for not including students with disabilities in the general education classroom, stakeholders report concerns about bullying or teasing that students with disabilities might endure when combined with their general education peers. Hendrickson argues that the way to reduce this hesitation or discomfort that general education students feel around students with disabilities is to provide more opportunities for inclusive education and more exposure between general education students and their disabled peers.

### **Successful Practices of Co-Teaching**

The literature highlighted numerous factors that contributed to the successful co-teaching of students with disabilities in the secondary setting. Factors that contribute to successful co-teaching models include providing adequate time for collaborating and building a relationship, providing accommodations and modifications, balanced curriculums, frequent communication about the curriculum and structure, and increasing collaboration in teacher preparation programs.

Crow (2000) found that teaming teachers who spend more time collaborating and discussing curriculum has a greater knowledge of curricular and instructional

matters. These teaming teachers also have greater discretion in grouping students for instructional purposes. Similarly, more time spent collaborating with co-teachers was reported to be beneficial in addressing student behavioral or learning problems within the co-taught classroom. Ultimately, more time spent collaborating, in general, was found to be a large indicator of success within the co-teaching teams in this study. Fully functioning teams were reported to take at least three years to form, going through several stages, moving from an emphasis on getting to know each other and implementing task management to cooperative teaching and curriculum integration.

In addition to collaborating and discussing curriculum, Bouck (2007) suggests that teachers must discuss the spaces in service delivery. Successful co-teachers consider how they share and divide the physical, instructional, management, and discipline spaces within classes.

The teachers need to consider how to divide the physical space in a manner that is beneficial to all students, instead of the general education teacher providing instruction for a large group of students and the special education teacher supporting a smaller group of students.

Krammer (2018) found that when teachers were allowed to select their co-teaching partner, there were higher levels of satisfaction among teaming teachers. Professional teachers know what teaching style they are most familiar with. When given the freedom to select their co-teacher, partners were likely to select one with similar teaching philosophies and styles. Similarities in the conception of teaching made it much



easier for the pairs to share responsibilities when working together in a classroom. Teachers who were able to select their team teaching partner mentioned they felt more effective and more satisfied with their jobs than teachers who were paired with another teacher by the administration. This satisfaction in team composition, however, does not ensure that the self-selected team has the specific skills necessary to provide quality joint teaching.

Content knowledge emerged as an indicator of success both from the perspective of the general education teacher and the special education teacher in a study conducted by Da Fonte et al. (2017). A strategy that was found to be helpful was for the special education teacher to create a fact sheet, IEP snapshot, or student fact sheet to provide information about the students with IEPs to the general education teacher. The general education teacher can also create academic fact sheets to help the special education teacher understand the content material that they will be teaching. This provides both the general and special education teachers with information in areas that are not necessarily their expertise.

Deiker (2003) provided an exhaustive list of successful teaching strategies, listing some that have already been mentioned and diving deeper into proactive strategies that set up co-teachers for success. One proactive strategy is to start collaboration much earlier in teacher preparation courses. In most colleges, special and general education teachers receive the majority of their education separately and are taught different approaches and content. Deiker (2003) suggests that faculty in teacher preparation

programs need to model inclusive practices and include aspiring special and general education teachers in the same courses so that collaboration begins far before they are thrown together in a school setting.

### **Popular Co-Teaching Instructional Delivery Models**

Baeten (2014) observed co-teachers providing instruction through several modes ranging from low levels of collaboration to high levels of collaboration. The following co-teaching models are some of the most popular and widely used methods for co-teaching. Baeten categorizes these into four collaborative models, but it should be noted that in practice, there are several ways that variation could be added to these models.

#### *Sequential Teaching*

In sequential teaching, teachers divide the learning contents or activities. One teacher may teach one full lesson, and the other teacher may teach the next full lesson. One teacher may deliver the first half of the course's instruction, and the other teacher takes the second half. They may alternate, and when one teacher is delivering instruction, the other teacher may not even be present in the room. The issue with this model of teaching according to Vaughn (1997) is that teachers often resort to this style of teaching because they are unsure of how else they can deliver instruction, especially if the special education teacher is not extremely familiar with the content of the course.

#### *Parallel Teaching*

In parallel teaching, the teachers divide the larger class into smaller groups and deliver the same lesson to a smaller group of students. The teachers will plan this lesson together and may rotate between subgroups. Alternative teaching is very similar to parallel teaching, where one group may receive a differentiated or modified version of the lesson to meet their learning needs. Smaller group instruction allows for more direct instruction and re-teaching of concepts.

#### *Station Teaching*

In station teaching, teachers will divide the larger class into smaller groups, and the teachers will lead two different activities related to the learning target. Students will move through interactive stations, exploring the learning target through, ideally, multiple modes of learning styles. One station may be more in-depth and hands-on, while other stations may be more abstract and probe deeper thinking. All stations are designed to align with one common theme or learning target.

#### *Teaming Model*

In the teaming model, teachers have equal status in the classroom and will both stand at the front of the classroom, providing instruction synchronously. They may exchange ideas or discuss ideas in front of the learners, take turns leading discussions, and speak while the other may demonstrate or model something. This model is often one of the final models or stages that can occur when teachers are team-teaching for a while. This takes time because the teachers need to learn about each others' teaching

styles and build a collaborative relationship. This model is the most collaborative model of team teaching as it demands the greatest amount of shared responsibility.

All models of inclusive teaching have been reported to have at least a significant level of success. These inclusive programs have been found over and over to be effective for most students with disabilities. However, In a study conducted by Scruggs (2007), the most frequently used model by co-teachers was reported to be the one teach, one assist model, with the special education teacher assuming the role of the assisting teacher. The subordinate role of an assistant being assigned to the special education teacher was consistently reported across different grade levels. Administrators need to support teachers in the successful implementation of all models of collaborative teaching.

### **Role of Administrators**

Administrators play a crucial role in the successful implementation of co-teaching partnerships. Friend (2008) claims that without administrative support, co-teaching can exist but is likely to be limited in scope. Without the buy-in from principals and other administrators, the efforts of co-teachers may not be sufficient for long-term success.

According to Carty and Farrell (2018), it appears that the greater the depth of knowledge about co-teaching models possessed by the cooperating teachers, the more effective implementation occurs within the co-taught classroom. Those who hold leadership positions in schools that place co-teachers together should consider this as an area of education or professional development for the teachers who are placed together. Instead of co-teachers being thrown together with no formal training on co-teaching,

team teaching, or the effective models of co-teaching, administrators should provide a guideline for how to be successful in the co-teaching partnership.

Furthermore, with the rising demand for teachers to co-teach in addition to their many other roles and responsibilities, teachers consistently report the need for training to effectively implement inclusion and co-teaching models (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Without proper training, teachers reported feeling overwhelmed, confused, and frustrated with the process.

Friend et. al, (2010) argues that school administrators should make co-teaching a priority of their own learning because principals and other administrators cannot be expected to lead staff members to be successful in co-teaching without increasing their own understanding of it. The responsibility to partner teachers, arrange schedules, and create common planning time lies fully with administrators. They must also know how to resolve dilemmas and disagreements that may arise between teacher partnerships. Principals and administrators must also be able to explain co-teaching to parents, community members, and other stakeholders to ensure that programs are accountable and sustainable.

## CHAPTER III: DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

### Summary of Literature

The inclusive approach to supporting students who receive special education services called co-teaching or team teaching is overwhelmingly promoted by most teachers, administrators, and school districts. This push-in model is practiced worldwide to support not only students who receive special education services but also those who are multi-language learners and students who are not reached by tier 1 support. Co-teaching has been found to have several benefits for all students, both special and general education. Teachers reported several areas in which co-teaching has helped them professionally, as well as several areas that make their job more demanding and challenging. Several suggestions for the successful implementation of co-teaching were found in the research, with an emphasis on collaboration, increasing content knowledge, and being proactive in teacher training and preparation.

#### **Benefits**

Benefits of coteaching as expressed by students who participated in co-teaching models include increased access to a variety of teaching and learning styles, increased collaboration between disabled and non-disabled peers, increased access to teacher support, and increased social-emotional and behavioral regulation (Harter et al., 2018; Kloo, 2008; Walther-Thoams, 1997). Peer relationships developed between disabled and non-disabled students that may not have been able to bloom had the students been segregated in their learning environments (D'Alonzo, 1997). Consequentially, students

found more self-confidence, academic success, and peer relationships as well as a general growth in appreciation for diversity and inclusivity (Austin 2021; Hang 2009).

Teachers expressed mixed reviews about co-teaching depending on their individual experiences, however, the literature mentioned several noteworthy benefits for teachers who co-teach. Teachers reported an increase in content knowledge and curriculum adaptation, increased collaboration skills, and considerable professional satisfaction and growth (Magiera et al., 2005; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walther-Thomas 1997).

### **Challenges**

The challenge that arose most frequently in the literature in regard to co-teaching impacts on students was the appropriateness of the curriculum used to address all students (Carter & Hughes, 2006). In a co-taught classroom, disabled students may not have as many opportunities to be addressing their IEP goals and needs as the curriculum may not be adapted appropriately. When teachers are addressing such a wide range of student skill levels, it may become challenging to appropriately challenge and modify assignments to meet every student's unique learning style. Furthermore, although this challenge did not appear in the literature frequently, it is important to consider that stakeholders also expressed concern about bullying when disabled students are included in the general education classroom (Hendrickson, 1996; King, 2003).

When compatible, teachers reported collaboration to be one of the most rewarding parts of co-teaching. However, when co-teachers are paired up involuntarily into a partnership with a teacher with whom they do not see eye to eye, collaboration rapidly becomes one of the most discouraging challenges of the job. Co-teaching teams can quickly distort from their intended design when teachers are not compatible with their vision for the co-teaching partnership, whether that be how they address behaviors, how student success is measured, or how content is delivered (Hackett 2021; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Montebianco, 2021). Mutual relationship discomfort and lack of respect between co-teachers were found to hinder overall classroom success (Pesonen et al., 2021).

Furthermore, a large contributing factor to stress in co-teaching partnerships is the lack of co-planning time (Alnasser, 2020; Cannaday et al., 202). Teachers became quickly frustrated when there was little to no time to discuss curriculum, grade assignments, get to know each other, or communicate with colleagues. Far too many teachers felt there was simply not enough time to address all student needs, appropriately modify and adapt the curriculum, and address student questions.

### **Successful Co-Teaching Practices**

Numerous successful practices of co-teaching of students with disabilities in the secondary were noted in the research. Effective practices that teachers were implementing included building relationships with their co-teaching partners, carving time out for collaboration, and prior discussion about service delivery, space sharing,



and responsibility sharing. (Bouck, 2007; Crow 2000). Da Fonte et al., (2017), Deiker (2003) and Krammer (2018) shared more unique approaches that were found to be successful such as allowing teachers to select their co-teaching partner, creating fact sheets to share experiences, and being more proactive with collaboration; starting the collaboration process in teacher education training.

There are several popular co-teaching models that were The most popular co-teaching model, according to Baeten (2014), Sruggs (2007), and Vaughn (1997) was the sequential teaching model in which teachers divide up learning activities. Another name for this model is one teach one assist. This model can be successful, but can also be over-relied on when the partnership is not completely sure how to deliver instruction in any other way. The special education teacher's role in this model may be reduced to that of a paraprofessional, which is not the intended goal of most co-teaching partnerships.

### **Role of Administrators**

Without administrative support, co-teaching is likely not to be successful over a long-term period according to Friend (2008) and Carty and Farrell (2018). Furthermore, if teachers are to be paired in a co-teaching partnership, the literature heavily argues that administrators have the responsibility of providing training to the co-teachers so they can properly and effectively implement inclusion and co-teaching models (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Friend et. al, 2010).

### **Limitations of the Research**

To locate the literature for this thesis, searches of Educator's Reference Complete, ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and Education Journals were conducted. The searches were narrowed by selecting a date range of 19 1980-2022. This list was narrowed further by only reviewing published empirical studies from peer-reviewed journals that focused on student and teacher perspectives of co-teaching, co-teaching models, team-teaching, and inclusion in the secondary setting. The keywords that were used in these searches included "co-teaching," "inclusion," "collaborative teaching," "team teaching," and "least restrictive setting."

The content was then selected by its relevance to the topic that I was researching. Namely, I was looking for literature that reviewed the benefits and challenges that teachers and students who participated in co-taught classrooms disclosed. In the research that I found, there was extensive information provided on teacher perspectives and experiences, but not as much information on student experiences. In many of the studies found, there was little to no information on student opinions of co-taught classrooms, especially those of students who received special education services. When student perspectives were taken into account, a lot of the time it was through a survey and not any sort of formal interview process, which may have been helpful to gather more information on how they felt about the inclusive teaching model.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Because students are the target audience for co-teaching, future study on the topic needs to take their viewpoints into account more. When businesses undertake research, they are interested in customer feedback rather than that of salespeople or content creators. The student and their family are the school's clients, thus future studies should incorporate more student and family views. The model of inclusion was created to serve these students; so it would only be logical if more studies were conducted to focus on how students with disabilities wanted to learn and be taught.

Additionally, more studies should be conducted to determine how professional training and development of co-teachers might enhance their co-teaching practices. Research on teachers' attitudes about co-teaching both before and after getting professional development and training on the subject would be useful.

### **Implications for Professional Application**

All teachers can benefit from collecting and summarizing information that is relevant to their practice. Through investigation of current best practices in co-teaching, special education teachers are actively improving their ability to modify and adapt curriculum while holding high expectations for otherwise low-expectancy students. Special education teachers may also become more knowledgeable about specific content areas they were not taught how to teach. General education teachers can learn how to conduct smaller grouping, collect data in new ways to support all learners, and differentiate instruction to tailor the curriculum to each student and their needs.

There is a great deal of professional development that occurs when teachers collaborate and commit to learning from each other. Through providing their experiences, the teachers who participated in these studies give other teachers the gift of understanding a new or foreign concept such as co-teaching, and how it will apply to them and their profession. Learning about common successes and pitfalls of a new strategy before trying the strategy can reduce struggles and failure when others try that strategy. These teachers have paved the way for more research and more learning around co-teaching to bloom.

Due to the strenuous and overwhelming schedules that many teachers have, there is not much room for outside education and professional development. Teachers can easily become frustrated when new approaches are forced upon them by administration or organizations that do not practice or understand what teaching looks like day-to-day in the classroom. This frustration can lead to close-mindedness, job dissatisfaction, and teacher burnout. Information that can be provided about these topics that are practiced and refined within real classrooms by real teachers is crucial.

Ultimately, when it comes to applying any new strategy in a classroom, the teacher must first consider the group of students they are teaching. Each teacher, group of students, school, curriculum, community, and culture is unique, and therefore there will never be a one-size fits all approach to teaching and learning. Learning about new strategies for teaching does nothing if it is not also combined with the teacher's knowledge of the group they are supporting. Gathering feedback from students,

collecting data, keeping open communication between teachers and stakeholders, and continuously trialing and editing approaches with the students in mind is the most effective teaching strategy.

### **Conclusion**

The research question for this thesis is: what co-teaching models are most effective in providing equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities? Although it may have its flaws, co-teaching is generally found to be successful in most situations and is favored by most teachers and students. Although determining the most successful model is hard due to differences in student populations, teachers, and schools, there are several popular models that are favored among teachers. The most popular models of co-teaching include sequential teaching, parallel teaching, station teaching, and the teaming model.

Some of the most effective strategies that provide equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities are included within a co-taught classroom. Teachers who are partnered in a co-teacher collaborative model can increase their ability to meet the needs of all students by carefully planning and collaborating with each other. Administrators have the responsibility to create time in the schedule of teachers who co-teach to collaborate with each other. This includes co-planning, grading, discussing how learning should be assessed, and sharing pertinent information with each other about individual student IEP needs and goals.

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