

Supporting Student and Preservice Teacher Successes Through Co-teaching

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As increasing inclusion in schools has been emphasized with each reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act amendments, the implementation of co-teaching has increased. Co-teaching has emerged as a supportive framework that uses principles of social justice in building inclusive nurturing environments, yielding positive student outcomes in social as well as academic areas of education. The authors explored the use of co-teaching within a laboratory school setting by analyzing experiences between general education faculty and not only special education faculty but also preservice teachers. Research has found that co-teaching to support preservice and early-career teachers is a natural outgrowth of the special education and general education partnerships created in the co-taught classroom when an intern is placed in such a setting. When used with fidelity, co-teaching is an instructional option that plays an integral part in building effective and efficient ways to foster student learning while enhancing classroom community. Co-teaching can be a powerful mechanism that supports sharing of responsibility and accountability for student achievement, as well as social, emotional, and behavioral growth. A child-centered philosophy was perceived as important to both preservice and co-teachers because of the individual factors that guided practice. With strong leadership from school administrators, commitment and flexibility on the part of classroom teachers, and skills of colleagues, preservice teachers report outstanding growth. Co-teaching, carefully implemented, can foster a nurturing classroom culture and support preservice teachers as they apply knowledge and skills in a constant reflective process, which benefits all teachers and students.

Keywords: *co-teaching, teacher preparation, inclusion, special education, general education*

Co-teaching has existed in some form for several decades in both urban and rural school settings as a means of supporting students with disabilities (e.g., Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2019; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011) and has become a relatively common practice to support students with disabilities in other countries around the world (e.g., Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018; Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). Early work in co-teaching implementation encouraged interdisciplinary instruction and supported integration of content (Warwick, 1971).

Throughout the past several decades, legislation has catalyzed larger-scale school reform efforts that include all students, including those with disabilities, and have yielded positive outcomes for all students. Responding to the dual pressures of meeting student needs in special education within the context of more rigorous accountability for all students, educators are seeing the benefits of collaborative inclusive practices now more now than ever.

Although the amount of focus on inclusive practice continues to be determined by state and local rules and regulations, in many schools inclusion has become the preferred practice for educating students with disabilities. Co-teaching gained attention as it became recognized as supporting and engaging students with disabilities in the general-education classroom. As each reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has emphasized increasing the rate of inclusion in schools, the implementation of co-teaching increased (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Friend & Barron, 2018; Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993). Co-teaching has emerged as a supportive framework that uses principles of social justice in building inclusive and nurturing environments to produce positive student outcomes in social as well as academic areas of education (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Smoot, 2004).

Rural schools have worked to create inclusive environments and have shown highly effective practices despite unique challenges. For example, in a rural school examined in a case study by McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2014), success of students with disabilities was connected to the many ways the school used resources as efficiently as possible. Administration and faculty of the school shared decision making and exhibited a great deal of flexibility. The team made difficult decisions regarding assignment and reassignment of special education co-teachers through analysis of student data as they worked to put the success of students first. Much can be learned through examining the literature that describes how schools in rural settings allocate resources to implement co-teaching.

It is clear that implementation of co-teaching is often not systemic and that students with disabilities often continue to be served in separate and isolated settings. This practice of pulling students out not only impacts student outcomes but also creates a difficult challenge to institutions who want to expose preservice teachers to highly effective co-teaching models (McLeskey, Landers, Hoppey, & Williamson, 2011). Even so, the co-teaching initiative provided the basis for a paradigm shift in how students with disabilities could be served and, more recently, how preservice teachers can be

taught. Through continued exploration and development, co-teaching has been successfully implemented as a means to support preservice teacher candidates and beginning teachers in the induction process (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010; Roth & Tobin, 2005).

Co-teaching to support preservice and early-career teachers is a natural outgrowth of the special education and general education partnerships created in the co-taught classroom, where an intern is placed with a veteran teacher. It is important to have a deep understanding of the characteristics of co-teaching first as a service delivery model for students with disabilities and then to apply that understanding to the construct of preservice co-teaching to ensure not only that all students' needs are met but also that structures are in place to support preservice teachers' professional development.

The purpose of this article is to explore the defining characteristics of co-teaching as they relate to supporting not only students with disabilities and inclusive practices in a rural school but also the impact on growth of preservice teachers' skills and experience. The settings of both the researchers' university and the laboratory school, in this study, are rural, populated by families who work for a range of entities, including government institutions, small businesses, and local industries. The student population comes from surrounding K-8 schools in the county where mostly traditional models of serving those with disabilities in self-contained classes or resource settings have been employed. The laboratory school, on the other hand, has focused on innovative approaches to instruction with co-teaching as the main service delivery model used to build an inclusive school environment. In the following sections, we describe the use of the foundational models of co-teaching in a rural setting to support preservice teacher preparation and demonstrate how a supportive environment can be created to enhance classroom community for all.

The Co-teaching Model

The defining characteristics of co-teaching are clarified below to ensure fidelity of implementation. Researchers have identified important components necessary for successful co-teaching at the middle

school and high school level, including a focus on co-planning and co-assessing (Murawski & Lochner, 2011). One important analysis across studies of co-teaching is Dieker and Murawski's (2003) identification of three specific domains that can be used to analyze current and future research: content knowledge and delivery, the structure of the co-taught setting, and how diversity is perceived among professionals and students. Many studies have addressed one or more of these three domains. In all settings, research has found that co-teaching requires three essential components: co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Friend & Cook, 2013; Murawski & Lochner, 2011). Based on years of implementation and research, Friend (2019) further describes defining characteristics of co-teaching as traditionally including

- a partnership between a general education classroom teacher and a specialist that supports students with disabilities,
- a sharing of expertise and making different equally valued contributions in the classroom, and
- diverse classrooms where teachers share responsibility and accountability.

Roles and Skills of Co-teachers

The roles and responsibilities of each teacher are key in implementation of the co-teaching model. Partnerships between co-teachers can be difficult to establish, and yet co-teachers are more likely to be able to form strong relationships with students when they clearly respect, trust, and rely on one another. Lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities can occur when co-teacher partners lack understanding of the practice. Role confusion can be problematic because it interferes with true teaming and collaboration, creating barriers to effective implementation.

In a study by Brinkmann and Twiford (2012), 19 teachers from three school districts were interviewed to help determine the skills needed for effective co-teaching related to roles. General educators ranked communication (23% of those interviewed), knowledge of data collection and diagnostic testing (15%), differentiation (15%), and interpersonal skills (13%) as key competencies

needed to co-teach effectively. Similarly, special educators ranked communication (26%) and differentiation (13%) as key competencies, but they also included advocacy (19%) as important for special educators to effectively co-teach. Understanding both the similarities and the differences in competencies needed to co-teach helps us recognize the unique roles and responsibilities of each of the co-teaching partners.

Models of Co-teaching Practice

The following section summarizes the six primary models of co-teaching (see Figure 1) and how they are used to build partnerships in the laboratory school, between-general education faculty and not only special education faculty but also preservice teachers. Among the six models of co-teaching practice, three of these models should be used most frequently for maximum benefit to all students and to help develop preservice teachers: station teaching, parallel teaching, and alternative teaching (Friend, 2019).

Station Teaching. This is perhaps one of the most natural models of co-teaching that can be implemented with more than one teacher or preservice teacher in a room. It occurs when students are assigned to groups, either heterogeneously or based on their development of a particular skill or a learning need. Teachers and preservice teachers work with each of the groups, and one group of students may work independently. Students or teachers rotate from group to group, so all students work with both teachers and have a chance to also work independently.

For example, Liam is a sixth grader who has difficulty in math and often becomes distracted during instruction. The co-teachers have noticed Liam is often off task when he is supposed to be working on math problems. They suspect he avoids math because he is behind his classmates in his computational skills. The co-teachers work together to create four groups so that Liam (and several other students experiencing similar difficulties) can work with the two educators in small groups, focusing on word problems, while a third group engages in more challenging problems and a fourth group works independently. This allows the teachers to closely monitor Liam's work and to provide a smaller group

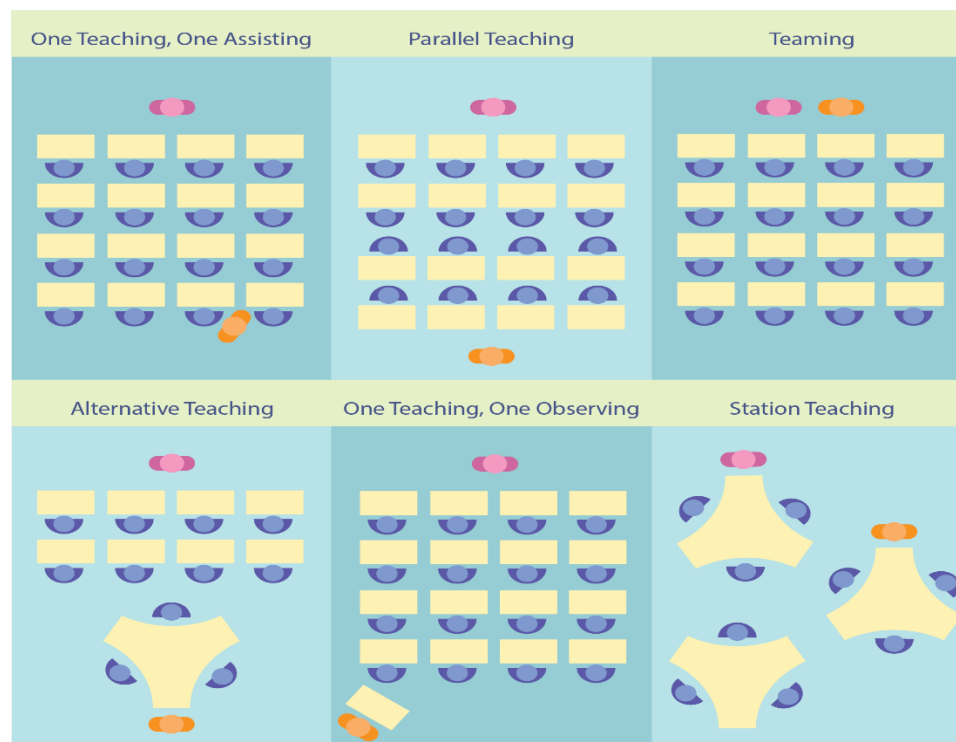


Figure 1. Co-teaching models. Adapted from the design by C. Barron in *Co-teaching: Creating community through teacher partnerships in the classroom* (vol. 1, p. 15), by M. Friend & T. L. Barron, 2018, Frederikshavn, Denmark: Dafolo.

smaller group so that avoidance is more difficult to achieve. As the students rotate the goals of the lesson are adjusted. When Liam moves to the independent station, he and his peers are given work tailored to their academic needs, so Liam is given work he can successfully complete.

Parallel Teaching. This co-teaching model can also be effective for student learning and highly impactful for preservice teachers. Parallel teaching consists of dividing the room of students in half, either heterogeneously or based on other factors such as the need to work on a particular skill or to represent the material in different ways. Each teacher works with half the group, teaching the same lesson while making adjustments based on student needs. Preservice teachers are able to work with either the general education teacher or the special education teacher to deliver instruction, by

either further breaking their student group into a smaller instructional units or by providing instruction during part of the parallel teaching while also learning from the instruction delivered by the general education or special education teacher in the moment. The students do not rotate but instead work with only one of the teachers, thus reducing the student-teacher ratio.

For example, Marla is a quiet student who often does not participate in whole-class discussions during reading. The co-teachers find when they divide students into two groups, using parallel teaching, that Marla is much more willing to share her ideas. The preservice teacher works with the teacher who has Marla in small group and is purposeful in using least intrusive prompting (Collins, 2012) during the lesson to engage Marla and all the other students in the group. The

preservice teacher agrees that she is developing a closer relationship with Marla, as well as with other learners, by having more opportunity to listen to them and understand their thinking.

Alternative Teaching. In this frequently utilized model, most students are in one group, but a few students are pulled out in a small group, working with the special education teacher or the general education teacher. Preservice teachers can also take a small group or work with one of the teachers as they work with their group. The small group is formed for a specific purpose, such as re-teaching a concept that a small group of students have not mastered, working on social skills, previewing information to be taught so students with attention disorders are more likely to understand the upcoming lesson, and enrichment for advanced students. Of course, the small group meets when students will not miss critical instruction.

For example, Devon and Kevin both seem to have difficulty working with classmates. The teachers and preservice teacher decide that putting them in a small group with three other students who are good models will provide the opportunity for them to be guided in learning better how to have conversations and collaborate with their peers. This group occurs while other students are reading a story. The preservice teacher works with the general-education teacher to address behavioral concerns while also working on content. This especially helps preservice teachers develop behavior management skills because they can implement behavior strategies on a small scale and determine what methods work best for their students.

Friend (2019) suggests three additional models of co-teaching practice that should be used rarely but can be effective when used for specific purposes: one teaching, one assisting; one teaching, one observing; and teaming. These three models can support not only the learning of all students but also professional growth of preservice teachers.

One Teaching, One Assisting. In this model students are in a single group and teachers have time to interact individually and build rapport with specific students. For example, the co-teachers

have noticed many students in the class are having difficulty with independent work following whole-group instruction. Adding to this is Victor, who just joined the class in the middle of the school year. The co-teachers decide the quickest way to help Victor and also assist individual students in their independent work is to implement the one teaching, one assisting approach. The classroom teacher teaches the lesson, while the special education teacher or preservice teacher interacts quietly with Victor and other students by answering their questions and providing instructional scaffolding.

One Teaching, One Observing. This model is recommended only for seldom use and has the greatest potential for overuse, because teachers often fall into this common pattern of teaching. Obviously, the flaw in this model is that one teacher or preservice teacher can easily become a passive partner, and students do not have the benefit of teachers who each share their unique expertise and create an inclusive environment. Friend (2019) cautions against too much dependence on this model and recommends purposeful use of the model as a means of collecting data on individual students or groups of students for relatively brief periods of time to support increased instructional intensity. Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) similarly describe the dangers of overuse of this model because it does not utilize the expertise of both teachers—one teacher is focused on content delivery (usually the general educator or preservice teacher), while the other (usually the special educator or preservice teacher) is relegated to the role of observing or helping rather than teaching.

Teaming. Teaming occurs when two teachers jointly deliver instruction to the whole instructional group. For this strategy, students are also in a single group and the teachers share instruction, taking turns giving examples, debating, or demonstrating skills. For example, the class is having difficulty understanding the algebraic concept of balancing equations, so one teacher visually represents this process while another co-teacher also demonstrates solving the problem on the board. One teacher may use a scale with objects representing the equation, showing that in order to balance the equation the same thing must be done to both sides of the equal sign, while the other

teacher guides the students through the steps of solving the equation on the board.

Teaming should be used occasionally because it requires maturity in the co-teaching relationship, in which both teachers are comfortable and fully trust each other. Teaming also limits the amount of interaction with the students because it involves whole-group instruction instead of small groups. Furthermore, pacing can be problematic if teachers do not gauge their individual contributions to the content delivery.

All three of these co-teaching approaches can easily be used in deliberate ways to create an inclusive learning community (Friend & Barron, 2018, 2019) and support preservice teacher preparation (Friend & Barron, 2019).

Context of the Laboratory School

Our laboratory school is designed for academically at-risk middle-grade students (i.e., sixth, seventh, and eighth grades) in a rural area of the Southeast. The project combines master teachers with university faculty and preservice teacher candidates, as well as high school students and staff as additional supports for the students. The model incorporates five key components: (a) employing experienced teachers with advanced degrees; (b) cooperative partnerships among the laboratory school, the university, and the local school system; (c) innovative instructional practices; (d) student growth focused on the whole child; and (e) preservice teacher preparation.

The school vision is to be a learning community where all students are valued and care for themselves and others—one that promotes health and wellness and embraces a commitment to learning through experience in a caring, collaborative, and socially just environment. Recent state legislation required a number of universities to construct these schools in which students must meet certain qualifications to be enrolled: residency in the county, current or previous enrollment in a low-performing school, or not meeting proficiency or growth. Additional criteria beyond end-of-grade testing may be used to determine fit or student identification as not meeting proficiency or growth: poor grades, classification as academically at risk

due to adverse childhood experiences, identification as twice-exceptional (e.g., qualification for special education as well as gifted services), achievement motivation, extreme behavioral issues, lack of growth even when proficiency is met, experiences with social-emotional issues, or experiences with familial issues or trauma.

The community from which our students come is unique. In a very rural county in the western region of the state, most students are economically disadvantaged. Major employers include the university, a community college, public schools, a paper mill, a hospital, and a casino in a neighboring Native American community. Because of the unique components of the region, several students come from non-economically disadvantaged families associated with these organizations. Of the current school population, 20% qualify for special education services, well above the national and local average.

The culture of the laboratory school reflects the collaboration with the local university and the high school within which it is located. By accessing resources and personnel at the university, students have access to daily health and physical education; music, arts, and other enrichment activities; clubs and electives; leadership experiences; and mentorship from experts in a variety of academic fields. Some of the university academic programs that support these activities reach beyond our educator preparation program and include parks and recreation management, music, theater and studio arts, engineering, business, and leadership programs. Time is dedicated each day for interests outside of traditional academics. These enrichment activities encourage students to learn more about themselves and others, as well as contribute to the school community. Many departments that serve preservice teachers are involved in the laboratory school, and several include placement of their preservice teachers to complete their intern I and intern II experience. In this article we focus on the experiences of a preservice teacher from the inclusive education degree program and another from the middle-grades degree program. We describe in detail how the traditional models for co-teaching described by Friend (2019) can be used as part of teacher preparation.

In both our middle-grades and inclusive education programs of study at the university, we emphasize the importance of co-teaching. A dedicated class for middle-grades majors analyzes the co-teaching models and places responsibility on the interns to implement co-teaching with their clinical educators during their first internship. The inclusive education interns work toward proficiency in two areas of study, special education and general education, with inclusive education interwoven in all aspects of their coursework. Preservice teachers have historically experienced varying degrees of success with co-teaching in rural, clinical experiences, as many clinical educators in this region are not familiar or comfortable with the co-teaching model and struggle to navigate the roles and implementation. At the laboratory school, where co-teaching is an expectation of all clinical educators, we have been fortunate to experience a more seamless implementation process and therefore a more comprehensive experience for our preservice teachers.

The structures needed for co-teaching implementation are evident in the laboratory school because of not only the leadership teams' understanding of the practice itself but also the style of leadership. The characteristics of the principal's actions, which support effective implementation of inclusion, mirror those found in research. Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) found that school leaders who focus their attention on developing solid relationships with their staff have more success in implementation of inclusion and offer supportive structures. Collins (2012) warned against a narrow focus on the importance of principals and the assumption that powerful, charismatic leaders are all that is required for change. As the studies show, all stakeholders in the school must work together to create lasting change. The implementation of an inclusive program should not be based on one person's identity or beliefs; rather, a paradigm shift among all shareholders is imperative.

The principal at our laboratory school provides a variety of avenues to develop teachers' knowledge for effective implementation, such as training activities on and off campus and use of distributive leadership. Both bottom-up and top-down actions are required for implementation of an

initiative like co-teaching (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2014). The principal, who has worked in many rural settings, was able to create an environment that supports such actions. Together the laboratory school principal and university leadership team have been successful in creating a supportive environment where a clear vision of how to support students, preservice teachers, and special and general education teachers in rural settings is apparent.

Reflections on Preservice Teachers' Co-teaching Experiences

To study intern perspectives on the co-teaching process at the laboratory school, we analyzed journal reflections of two preservice teachers: Ashley (pseudonym), a middle school preservice teacher, and Alex (pseudonym), an inclusive education preservice teacher. Two of the authors were field supervisor (T.L.B.) and clinical educator (H.H.P.) of the preservice teachers.

Data include Ashley's written reflections throughout the first semester of the internship, as well as the journal reflection of her clinical educator and feedback of the field supervisor. Ashley's field supervisor commented to the clinical educator,

From reading her journal entries this semester, it seems to me that you and she have a unique relationship, one very few teacher educators and candidates ever have. My sense of the journal is that it is very nearly a "dialogue journal" in which you two have a conversation that extends your day-to-day conversations. It seems that you are thinking together about ways to address mutual issues. This highly collaborative relationship transcends our usual dialogue with student teachers in which we are coaches and they are novices. You and Ashley are truly collaborating—not equals but not far from it.

The field supervisor also noted that Ashley spoke clearly about the use of co-teaching in the laboratory classroom.

One of Ashley's reflections emphasized how grateful she was for common planning time together with the team every day, and that at least once a week there was additional common planning with

the exceptional children (EC) intervention teacher. This co-planning time gave the team an important opportunity to think collaboratively about the needs of students while treating one another as professionals who were trusted to know content and pedagogy that would best suit students.

As this middle school is set in a rural setting, the students have diverse experiences in terms of the value of education and the resources families can provide to support schooling. Many families in this setting have limited experience with school success; therefore, some students enter the classroom still developing an internal motivation for success in school and often have competing factors that disrupt the focus on school achievement. With the co-teaching model in place, there was extra emphasis on cultivating strong relationships with students and finding ways, often in small-group settings, to motivate these students who were not internally motivated or oriented by the family toward achievement in school. Ashley and her clinical educator spoke specifically of one student in particular who had always hated school. This student remarked that he had a reputation for sleeping in class and wasn't sure he liked it at this school since there was always someone keeping a close eye on him. Alex, the inclusive education preservice teacher, reported to her field supervisor that the same student spoke to her in great detail about his plans to work in the logging industry like other members of his family, and she was able to discuss the need to gain math skills to be successful in what he feels is his destined career. A strong co-teaching model encourages students to stay more consistently engaged in instruction.

In another reflection the field supervisor spoke to the effectiveness of using parallel teaching.

This week, Ashley, and the EC teacher, and myself each chose a lesson to plan for each grade level, and then we met together in our co-planning time to share the lesson plan and script our goals and implementation plan. This method cut down on the work for all of us outside of the school day and also helped us give more time to the one lesson than we usually are allotted.

The team felt those particular lessons had a greater impact on students, and they attributed that to the depth of time given to co-planning the lessons but without the burnout rate that would occur if one person took on that entire workload herself. Ashley's journals also spoke to strengths of using the parallel teaching model. She enjoyed the confidence boost of co-planning lessons and feeling supported in her planning process paired with the ability to work with a smaller group as she was phasing into her full-time student teaching. This model has strong potential for offering a scaffolded experience for interns as they develop their instructional tool kit and slowly take on more primary responsibilities.

Alex's field supervisor found similar benefits in the reflections written by Alex, in which she shared the rewards and challenges of her experiences as an inclusive education intern. Alex felt all of the staff members had a positive perception of co-teaching and discussed the respect they had from their colleagues, students, and parents. The importance of being flexible with each other, with expectations, and with students was repeatedly mentioned especially since this team co-taught across content areas. Alex expressed how strong trusting relationships helped her feel supported in various situations and the experience of learning how to co-teach from an experienced teacher gave her an "edge compared to her peers," who often learned from nonexamples. A strong relationship was necessary not only with the co-teachers but also with the administrator in order to support the needs of the co-taught classrooms.

Planning emerged as a strong theme in Alex's journal. She expressed a need for co-planning in order for everyone to understand their roles. She learned the complexity of the interrelationship of the general education teacher planning first and the special educator implementing specially designed instruction given the framework of the general education teacher's plan. Co-planning times were based on the master schedule, and all the teachers having input on the master schedule allowed for problem solving as everyone in the school worked to have protected co-planning time. Although this was not always possible because of the changing environment in schools, it was nice to know

everyone was working as hard as they could toward the goal. The fact that teachers desired such time with their co-teachers and preservice teacher sent the message to Alex that the practice of co-teaching was valued. Alex knew she could “trust her administrator to support her in discussions with other faculty and parents,” and this “made co-teaching a positive experience.”

Alex’s field supervisor noted that she was constantly supported and never left alone to manage the classroom, and Alex was able to find her teacher voice and develop in amazing ways. The other teachers noted that they learned strategies from the preservice teacher as well, especially noting her positive demeanor and ability to handle difficult behaviors in ways that they did not always implement. The impact on the greater school community was also felt, and Alex shared that everyone worked “to create a cohesive group” so effective teaching could be practiced in the co-taught classroom. Such mutual trust was evident in the discussions with co-teachers and other preservice teachers as they were comfortable sharing concerns regarding student outcomes or changes in groups, schedules, or instructional methods with each other.

Lessons Learned: Suggestions for Successful Co-teaching

Co-teaching holds tremendous promise for creating a collaborative classroom culture and supporting preservice teacher development, but it is a complex shift from the traditional student-teaching approach, with just a single clinical teacher who gradually releases full responsibility to the preservice teacher. As co-teaching has evolved, those who have implemented it in the context of special education services have experienced both successes and failures (Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012; Friend & Barron, 2018). Often success is achieved through meticulous co-planning and supportive implementation, and failure occurs when the style of interaction is not collaborative. In co-teaching literature, teachers often detail specific ideas for ensuring a positive outcome for students and growth for educators (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010), which can be easily applied in a collaborative and innovative

school to support preservice teachers. The lessons learned through one year of implementation of co-teaching relate to the importance of (a) relationship building and (b) prioritizing co-planning in our rural middle school to serve students with disabilities and supporting preservice teachers.

Co-teachers Build Connectedness and Extend It to Students

The potential for co-teaching has just begun to be explored as a means to support preservice teachers. What we know from the field of special education is that the collaboration it nurtures between educators can lead to a welcoming environment for all students but that it is a complex endeavor. The complex nature of co-teaching for middle school educators suggests success depends on many factors, one of which is planning. Shared planning time or use of alternative methods (i.e., electronic planning formats) and professional development aid teachers in forming co-teaching roles and collaborations. For example, in a study by Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010) co-teachers reported they spent more than half their time allotted for instruction in a supportive role. Time was spent often engaging in remediation activities with students rather than delivering the primary academic instruction. A study by Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found special education teachers did not use their professional knowledge to engage students in co-taught classrooms.

Teachers and preservice teachers can benefit professionally from co-teaching through sharing teaching strategies for new content while embedding specially designed instruction and monitoring students’ understanding more effectively (Adams & Cessna, 1993; Giangreco, Baumgart, & Doyle, 1995). Teachers find they often learn new content and strategies from one another (Friend & Cook, 2013; Hohenbrink, Johnston, & Westhoven, 1997; Hughes & Murawski, 2001; Salend et al., 1997). Shared accountability and responsibility in a strong co-teaching partnership creates a supportive environment (Bauwens et al., 1989; Gately & Gately, 2001; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Co-teachers, including preservice teachers, should be careful not to become a passive participant in classes, especially in middle and secondary

education. Power can be balanced by operating in a collaborative manner when working with everyone in the school.

Collaboration is key in the way co-teachers interact. Co-teachers must find effective and efficient ways to manage and blend expertise in a two-teacher classroom, and they are obliged to think about how their teaching can best reach their learners. Using models of co-teaching can help them form partnerships that are essential for co-teaching success and preservice teacher professional growth.

Co-teachers Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

Before a co-teaching program is established, the goals of for the program should be established. For students with special needs, co-teaching may be needed on a regular schedule throughout a school year between the content teacher and the special education teacher. Consider how the preservice teacher works into this relationship. The additional goal of utilizing co-teaching to support preservice teachers should be explored and articulated early in the arrangement. As with any new practice, a clear direction is important.

Co-teachers and preservice teachers must work on boundaries and finding the best ways to collaborate. Classroom teachers are accustomed to working mostly alone; they are master problem solvers, and they often find it challenging to negotiate with a partner in new ways to group and teach students. The power of co-teaching for creating connectedness lies largely in teachers' understanding of their roles. It is critical that co-teachers openly discuss how they will ensure both professionals have an active classroom role rather than the classroom teacher leading all instructional activities while the partner quietly stands at the back of the classroom or engages with individual students. In fact, the literature cites this unfortunate arrangement as one of the major shortcomings of co-teaching (Friend, 2019), but it is a problem that can readily be solved with clear and respectful conversation about the goals of the co-teaching program.

Find Realistic Options for Co-planning

The most common complaint among co-teachers is that they do not have regularly scheduled shared planning time (Friend, 2019). For co-teachers to carefully think about diverse students' needs and plan activities to help them learn and develop other skills, the opportunity to meet face to face is essential. However, realistic solutions for co-planning time must be implemented. For example, some co-teachers have time to plan once every two or three weeks, but they continue their planning conversation electronically, which can directly address the dilemma of shared planning. Especially when co-teaching is a new instructional arrangement, professionals should reserve time to explicitly analyze their practice. In the absence of formal structures, co-teachers need professional development to create expectations of their work and understand roles and responsibilities of their co-teaching practice. Co-teaching and creating teacher expectations based on what they believe is good for students takes time to plan together.

Locke and Latham (2002) make the case that clear and challenging goals are a powerful incentive to high performance, and co-teachers are no different. Performance control is less successful when goals are ambiguous, hard to measure, or do not relate to the needs of the co-taught classroom. Preservice teachers tend to develop goals that revolve around individual student growth as an alternative to using proficiency levels of their class as a whole, but within a co-teaching model they find the general education teacher and special education teacher can help them understand the big picture as they attempt to connect personal effectiveness in the co-teaching classroom to standardized objectives for students.

Co-teachers Experiment With the Six Approaches

The six approaches presented earlier (see Figure 1) are the core of co-teaching practice. Having co-planning time to select the appropriate co-teaching approaches for specific lessons is essential. Educators have found these approaches are just a beginning and can be adapted to best meet the needs of their students. For instance,

when using the alternative teaching approach to support preservice teacher development, the classroom and inclusion teacher might both confer with students (which gives each student the individual attention and builds teacher-student relationships) while the preservice teacher leads the lesson. Or, they might use the station approach to create three groups: each educator works with a group and then the students or teachers switch, giving students individual attention and support. An independent group is eliminated in this modified station teaching approach. Many other variations of the six co-teaching approaches have been used—these approaches serve as models to provide a foundation on which creative co-teachers build their classroom cultures and practices (Friend & Barron, 2019).

Additionally, during co-planning time, preservice teachers and co-teachers should discuss what they have tried that has been successful and what has not worked as planned. They should identify ways their shared work is better reaching students and encouraging their success, and they should draw on their problem-solving skills to address any concerns that arise. In other words, preservice teachers and co-teachers should regularly communicate so they recognize how they are accomplishing their goals and prevent small challenges from becoming serious issues.

Conclusion and Implications

Regardless of the specific application of co-teaching implemented, the extent to which it is carefully designed and planned will largely determine its success. When used with fidelity, co-teaching is an instructional option that plays an integral part in building effective and efficient ways to foster student learning while at the same time enhancing classroom community. It can be a powerful mechanism that supports the sharing of responsibility and accountability for student achievement and social, emotional, and behavior growth. However, this can occur only if co-teachers share expertise, establish parity, and share instruction of all students in the co-taught classroom.

It is noteworthy that the lessons learned through this experience mirror much of the research of

highly effective inclusive environments in rural settings. The laboratory school context is unique in some ways, in that it is tasked to develop innovative ways of teaching and supporting preservice teachers, but in other ways there is nothing particularly unusual about this school in the rural setting. What school does not strive to meet the needs of all students and provide high-quality instruction by using resources as efficiently as possible? The characteristic that sets this laboratory school apart is the availability of experts in the field of teacher preparation and inclusion to work closely as part of the leadership team and with teachers, preservice teachers, and the middle-school students on a daily basis.

In this particular case, expectations, professional knowledge, and culture are themes found as co-teachers discussed their shared beliefs, cultural understandings, and professional roles. Teachers prioritized these elements to create structure and operate effectively within the co-teaching classroom. A child-centered philosophy was seen as important to preservice teachers and co-teachers because of the individual nature they felt guided the practice. More often than not, teachers relied on their professional understandings and beliefs about how students learn best to guide their co-teaching work and sought out insight from middle-grades and inclusive education faculty when challenges arose. To mitigate challenges related to teacher knowledge, institutions of higher education should expand co-teaching and collaborative coursework to better prepare teachers, both novice and experienced, to assume their co-teaching roles. From the preservice teachers' perspective, knowledge of the model of co-teaching, a supportive culture, and strong relationships were keys to success.

When experiencing strong leadership from school administrators and university faculty, and with commitment, skills, and flexibility on the part of classroom teachers, preservice teachers reported outstanding growth. Co-teaching, carefully implemented, can foster a nurturing classroom culture among all and support preservice teachers as they apply knowledge and skills in a constant reflective process in which all teachers and students benefit.

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