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The benefits of collaboration and co-teaching in the elementary grades

Abstract

Collaboration between educators is an older concept that has become popular again in recent years. Due to the recent federal and state mandates, schools are implementing new teaching methods to raise school achievement and benefit all students. When collaborating, special education students are generally included in the general education classroom with two teachers co-teaching to meet the needs of the students. This paper will explore the importance of collaboration between general education and special education teachers and the benefits to all learners in the classroom.

THE BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION
AND CO-TEACHING IN THE ELEMENTARY GRADES

A Literature Review
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts

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Abstract

Collaboration between educators is an older concept that has become more popular in recent years. Due to the recent federal and state mandates, schools are implementing new teaching methods to raise school achievement and benefit all students. When collaborating, special education students are generally included in the general education classroom with two teachers co-teaching to meet the needs of the students. To best serve all learners in a classroom some schools have found collaboration to be a very successful solution to keep special education students in the general education setting while learning with their peers. This paper will explore the importance of collaboration between general education and special education teachers and the benefits to all learners in the classroom.

Introduction

An e-mail was sent to the entire staff that read: All special education teachers and a selected few general education teachers will be participating in a staff development training this May and then throughout the next school year. The training will be on collaboration, and we will start to slowly implement a collaboration model for the next school year. Please bring Individual Education Plans (IEPs), Iowa Test of Basic Skills assessment scores (ITBS), and a class list. We will be deciding on which students would best fit the collaborative model and which teachers will be collaborating together.

Many thoughts came to mind as I read the email, especially being a special education teacher. I knew what the word collaboration meant, working with people, but wondered how would that look? What teacher would I be paired with to co-teach? Which students IEPs should I take to the meeting? How many days would I be pulled out of school to learn about the collaboration process? What if I did not get along with my co-teaching partner or my special education students were not successful in the general education setting? I decided to relax and just attend the first meeting with an open mind. I attended training toward the end of the year with fifteen of my co-workers. We discussed the importance of co-teaching, why we should implement a collaborative model in our school, which special education students could successfully be integrated into general education, and decided who our co-teaching partners were going to be. We accomplished a lot that day and many of us were excited for the new challenge. Dr. N.S. Moorhead, our principal, stated that “I have always liked the idea of collaboration and our school district was pushing for more collaboration, so I volunteered our school to participate” (personal communication, August 6, 2007).

Collaboration is one way to meet the variety of needs students have and I look forward to the new challenge and adventure that I have as a special education teacher. During this school year I will co-teach math in a 2nd grade general education classroom.

What is Collaboration and Co-Teaching?

Definition of Collaboration and Co-Teaching

What is collaboration? As stated from a staff development class, “Collaboration is a style for interaction between co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal” (Heartland 11 Area Education Agency workshop, May 2007). The co-teaching process is an educational approach in which general education and special education teachers jointly plan and teach students in an integrated setting. “Co-teaching is certainly one of the most often-cited forms of collaboration among teachers” (Peck & Scarpati, 2004, p. 7). Two professors referenced Woodward (1990) saying:

Co-teaching is not a matter of just putting two teachers together and expecting them to deliver content. Team teaching is a process, not an end result, one that involves teachers working together from the beginning planning stages to the end effort. (Davis-Wiley and Cozart, 1998, p. 4)

Today we call it co-teaching, but in the past co-teaching has been referred to as team teaching, cooperative teaching, and collaborative teaching. Co-teaching is a way to benefit all the students’ needs in a general education setting through two teachers planning, instructing, evaluating, and using a variety of teaching and learning techniques and styles to meet the needs of the all students (Davis-Wiley & Cozart, 1998).

History of Collaboration

“Co-teaching is not a new concept in public schools” (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Mimi, 1996, p. 2). During the 1950’s there was a high shortage of teachers and that presented the education establishment with many challenges. In order to find a way to manage this shortage

with the growing number of student populations, the Commission on Curriculum Planning and Development by the National Association of Secondary School Principals was established. The commission received funding to develop and implement techniques that would address this problem. Team teaching was one of the techniques proposed by the commission and was implemented by over 100 schools and investigated in schools across the nation (Davis-Wiley & Cozart, 1998). “The idea of co-teaching gained momentum” (Davis-Wiley & Cozart, 1998, p. 4).

The initial idea was not the need for inclusion of special education students, but the idea of co-teaching became more popular in the elementary grades. The idea of co-teaching resurfaced in 1980 and the need for mainstreaming students into the general education setting put a great stress on the general education teachers. “As professionals working within the field of special education search for increasingly effective ways to meet the needs of students with mild and moderate disabilities, service delivery options within the general education classroom have become more and more necessary” (Murawski & Swanson, 2001, p. 258). General education teachers were not trained to address the problems of the special needs students in their classrooms.

Since inclusion was becoming more of a trend, the special education students were being served in settings with nondisabled peers. “For inclusion to be possible, students must be provided with services and supports within the general education environment” (Murawski & Swanson, 2001, p. 258). Monahan, Marino, & Miller (1996) cited Schragg and Burnette (1993) and stated “Students in inclusive schools work in flexible learning environments with the implementation of teaching strategies such as cooperative learning, peer mediated learning, collaborative and team teaching” (p. 302). The special education teachers had to then make

themselves available to the general education teachers. A new kind of relationship had to develop and thus the new interest in co-teaching.

How Co-Teaching Works

The old saying “Two heads are better than one” is just what co-teaching is all about. When co-teaching, the special education teacher and general education teacher work very closely to create a balanced curriculum for their students. When co-teaching, both teachers are responsible for the teaching responsibilities in the classroom for students with or without disabilities. Regardless of how skilled the general education teachers may be in their ability to accommodate the diversity in the classroom, there is a limit to the diversity that one teacher can provide and be expected to manage on their own. Since two teachers are present and share the responsibly, co-teaching allows for students with more severe disabilities to benefit from the regular education program (Gately & Gately, 1993). The teachers learn, “to be more flexible, to focus on individual strengths, and to prioritize concepts and address only those that were perceived to be most important” (Duchardt, Marlow, Inman, Christensen, & Reeves, 1999, p. 187).

There are three levels of the co-teaching process. Co-teaching is a developmental process. This means that it develops over time and proceeds through three basic levels or stages (Gately & Gately, 1993). At the first level (beginning level) communication tends to be minimal. Both teachers are attempting to establish a relationship, but at this level there may be difficulty. As the relationship develops the communication becomes more open and interactive. A partnership starts to form and this in turn benefits the students. The teachers start to become more comfortable and share more responsibility. This level is called the developing level. During the third level, called the collaborative level, the educators become very open to

communication and interaction. They develop a mutual relationship and now have comfort in the classroom (Gately & Gately, 1993).

Within the three levels of the co-teaching process, there are eight components of the relationship. According to Gately and Gately (1993), there are eight components of the co-teaching relationship, they are:

1. Interpersonal communication
2. Physical arrangement
3. Familiarity with the curriculum
4. Curriculum goals and modifications
5. Instructional planning
6. Instructional presentation
7. Behavior management
8. Grading/evaluation (p. 6-10)

The goal for teachers is to move through the three levels of communication in each of the eight components of co-teaching.

During the third stage of the interpersonal level, the teachers are able to model effective communication skills and have developed the use of nonverbal signals to communicate. Keeping communication open is the key to making co-teaching work. The physical arrangement of the classroom addresses the physical space of the classroom. In the beginning, each teacher might have a separate space. But in the end, materials and space are shared. Students are intentionally interspersed in the classroom for group lessons, small group work, and cooperative learning activities.

At first, being familiar with the curriculum is hard for the special education teacher. In order for co-teaching to work, the special education teacher needs to be responsible for learning the curriculum, be familiar with materials and methods of teaching. Curriculum goals and modifications involve mutual planning to meet the needs of all students. Hopefully in the end, the special education teacher will develop a list of objectives and the general education teacher might key into the main goals. This helps everyone to understand that not all students need to be taught the same objectives for each lesson. For instructional planning to be successful, the teachers need provided common planning time. At the collaborative level, both teachers plan, openly communicate, share ideas, and the not-so-favorite job of paperwork. Planning is on-going and shared.

Instructional presentation is the component when the teachers are providing instruction, presenting lessons, monitoring practice and creating cooperative learning activities. In the beginning, the special education teacher might meet with small groups. Eventually, the level of involvement increases. Both teachers share the responsibility for presenting the lessons and the students perceive both teachers as competent lead teachers. Open communication during lessons is a must during this process.

Behavior management involves rules, classroom expectations, consequences for managing behavior, and transition times. At first, it may seem like two behavior management systems in the classroom, one for the special education kids from the special education teacher and then another set of expectations for the general education kids from the general education teacher. Eventually, the goal is for both teachers to develop one set of rules and expectations for student behavior in the classroom and individualize behavior plans in a consistent manner. Both teachers will also feel comfortable managing transition times with the students.

The final component of the co-teaching relationship is grading/evaluation. “The grading/evaluation component of co-teaching is the most difficult one to develop” (Gately & Gately, 1993, p. 10). In the beginning, the general education teacher might feel they need to take sole responsibility for the grading of students. To achieve the best co-teaching relationship, the special education teacher should help with the daily assignments, attendance, homework, and the grading/evaluating of classroom work. In order for co-teaching to work effectively the teachers need to focus on the co-teaching relationships and move quickly to develop collaborative relationships (Gately & Gately, 1993). Gately and Gately (1993) write, “When this occurs, all teachers in classrooms will be able to better meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population” (p. 12).

How to be an Effective Co-Teacher

To be an effective co-teacher, the first step is to have an open mind and be willing to learn new things daily. Co-teachers need to be flexible and must be willing to work as a team. Teachers need to remember, “both general education and special educators share the education of students with a diversity of needs” (Mellencamp, Fitzgerald, & Kay, 1993, p. 3). Teachers need to eliminate “my/your” thinking and instead refer to “our class” or “our students” (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Mimi, 1996). Teachers that have a good co-teaching relationship have outstanding working relationships with one another. Whether the teachers request to work together or become assigned by an administrator, having a working relationship is a priority. In a case study done on co-teaching, the teachers mentioned joking around together, having upbeat personalities, and they had respect for each others opinions (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005). “During class observations, it was common to see either co-teacher presenting to the class as a whole while the other co-teacher would interject with

elaborations or comments” (Mastropieri et al., 2005, p. 263). Another key characteristic of an effective co-teacher is the ability to motivate and claim ownership for all the students in the class, not just the special education students. Co-planning is a very important aspect to co-teaching. In order to effectively co-teach, teachers must be flexible and creative in finding common planning times.

Effective co-teachers are great at observing students’ needs in the classroom. The teachers understand the variety of learning styles and are able to create effective lessons to meet the needs of the various learners. When working as a co-teacher, the two teachers must constantly adapt lessons for the various needs. It can be as simple as grouping students or modifying worksheets and tests. As mentioned in the last section, to be an effective co-teacher, both teachers must be knowledgeable of the curriculum. This area may be challenging for the special education teacher due to less experience with all subject areas. The most important aspect to being a great co-teacher is the desire to work as a team, to collaborate, and to enrich the curriculum to benefit all the students and their various learning needs (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Should all Schools use Co-Teaching?

Due to the latest increase of pressure put on student achievement and the need to provide instruction in the least restrictive environment for special education students, the need for schools to move to a collaborative model is greater than ever. The Federal laws such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) are two of the reasons schools are trying to find the answer to student performance. Co-teaching is one way that special education students can receive instruction in the least restrictive environment with their peers. Their needs are met through the various learning styles created by having a general education and a special education teacher in the same classroom.

Methodology

Currently collaboration and co-teaching seem to be frequently discussed topics due to so many mandates from the Federal government. Schools try to find new ways to raise achievement, but yet make sure students are being served in the best way. There was a lot of research on this topic. Using the data bases EBSCO and ERIC through the Rod Library and doing a search for collaboration and co-teaching yielded the best results. I was able to narrow down the research to mainly elementary education articles and found journal articles along with case studies, surveys, and research literature reviews. I attended a workshop at Heartland 11 Area Education Agency (AEA) where I received many handouts and heard a great lecture on collaboration and co-teaching. In addition to these, I interviewed my building administer and talked with her about our school. She is trying to move our school to a more collaborative model.

After researching, locating, and reading many articles on collaboration, I began the process of narrowing down the selections to include as the main aspects mentioned in this paper. I tried to read and mention the most recent articles on the subject of collaboration.

Literature Review

Professional View of Collaboration

Collaboration and co-teaching have been implemented in schools to help meet the needs of all learners. V.L. Austin (2001) conducted a survey to one hundred thirty-nine collaborative teachers from nine districts in northern New Jersey. The teachers in the study taught kindergarten through 12th grade. He found that the co-teachers agreed that co-teaching was a worthwhile experience that contributed to the improvement of their teaching. It also revealed that most of the co-teachers found the experience to be positive. “Special education co-teachers

cited an increase in content knowledge, and general education co-teachers noted the benefits to their skill in classroom management and curriculum adaptations” (Austin, 2001, p. 250). In this study most of the teachers did not volunteer to co-teach, but yet most of them felt co-teaching was worthwhile. One of the most interesting things found in the survey was that general education teachers felt they did more than the special education teachers when in the inclusive classroom. The study suggests that is due in part because the special education teacher is typically the visitor in the classroom and is viewed as the expert on adaptations rather than curriculum instruction (Austin, 2001).

How Should Co-Teaching be Implemented?

Co-teaching should begin at the district level and district leadership ensures that local schools receive support (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Mimi, 1996). In addition “comprehensive planning helps reduce frustration, confusion, and competition between schools when representatives work together to design appropriate policies, programs, and implementation plans for all students and all schools” (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Mimi, 1996, p. 4).

According to Principal Dr. N. S. Moorhead, co-teaching should be implemented slowly. In order to ensure success and in order to move her school to a more collaborative model, she decided to have each special education teacher co-teach with one general education teacher in one subject area during the first year of implementation. Her plan is to expand in future years (personal communication, August 6, 2007). “When new ideas are introduced to teachers and principals, it is tempting to implement these strategies quickly while motivation and enthusiasm are high” (Walther-Thomas, et al., 1996, p. 3). It is suggested to plan a year in advance to allow proper planning and preparation time before new services are implemented in schools (Walther-

Thomas et al., 1996). When working on implementing a co-teaching model administrators must also take into consideration the following suggestions from Walther-Thomas et al. (1996):

1. Communicate administrative support and leadership
2. Select capable and willing participants
3. Provide ongoing staff development
4. Establish balanced classroom rosters
5. Provide weekly scheduled co-planning time
6. Develop appropriate IEPs
7. Pilot test classroom and school efforts (p. 4-6)

Surveys and reflective frameworks are other key parts of co-teaching relationships. Establishing and communicating key components such as roles, grading, and parent communication are a must before teachers step into a classroom. Davis-Riley and Cozart (1998) referenced Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land (1996) who suggest that “Co-teachers must become familiar with each other’s professional skills, including their instructional strengths, weaknesses, interests, and attitudes” (p. 9).

Models of Co-Teaching

During co-teaching, both the classroom and special education teacher provide all the students with instruction, discipline, and classroom support. Tobin (2005) states, “This collaborative approach helps co-teachers avoid unintentionally stigmatizing students with identified needs by meeting the needs of all students in a regular classroom” (p. 785). In order to make co-teaching work effectively, different models are used to help teachers structure their classroom. The co-teaching models are meant to be used for a variety of lessons and at different times during the unit. Teachers need to make sure they are not using one model to teach, but

using a variety. By using the co-teaching models, teachers are teaching to different learning styles and making sure students are challenged and successful. Tobin (2005) referenced Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles (1997) on the five basic models of co-teaching:

1. One teach-One Assist
2. Station Teaching
3. Parallel Teaching
4. Alternative Teaching
5. Team Teaching (p. 785-786)

Most co-teachers start by using the one teach-one assist model. In this model one teacher is the head teacher taking the lead in delivering instruction and the other teacher monitors or assists the students. This might also be called one teach-one drift. The teacher who is not leading the group is to drift around the room, assisting students individually and observing the students. Both teachers are present in the classroom for the entire lesson.

During station teaching each teacher takes part of the content and delivers the instruction to small groups at each station. The two teachers are teaching different lessons at each station and the students rotate stations. When the teachers want to break into three groups, two groups will be working with teachers at stations and the third group will be at a center, cooperative activity, or practice area. The groups have a set amount of time per station and rotate so the students reach all three stations in one class.

During parallel teaching, the teachers plan instruction together. However, teachers divide the students into two groups and deliver the same instruction to each smaller group within the same classroom. This model is great to meet the various learning styles of the students. If a group of students needs enrichment/challenge or another group needs more

accommodations/modifications, this would be the model to choose for that lesson. The teachers are teaching the same skill, but they can teach it differently. For example, one teacher might direct teach the skill and the other might have the kids explore to come up with the solution. The fourth model of co-teaching is alternative teaching. In this model one teacher works with a small group of students to preteach, reteach, or supplement the large group instruction. It could be the special education teacher, but does not have to be.

The final co-teaching model is team teaching. This approach means that both teachers share the whole group instruction of all the students at the same time. This is a great model to show how the teachers work as a team and bounce ideas off of each other. It can demonstrate different ways to arrive at an answer because the two teachers probably have different ways of looking at the problem (Tobin, 2005).

According to Calhoun and Childers during a Heartland AEA workshop, one teach-one assist occurs 5-10% of the time, station and parallel teaching happens 30-40% of the time, alternative teaching is used 20-30% of the time, and team teaching takes place 20-30% of the time when co-teaching (Heartland 11 Area Education Agency workshop, May 2007).

In addition to the co-teaching models mentioned, there are other similar models. Tag team teaching would look similar to one teach-one assist. One teacher starts the lesson and the other teacher follows up and finishes the lesson. In this case, one teacher is teaching while the other teacher assists students by observing and working independently with them. Another co-teaching model is called speak and add. This is when one teacher is the lead and the other teacher adds information when they see the need. As a co-teaching relationship grows, this model could be used on a daily basis. This would show team work and when teachers work together on a lesson and add to each other it demonstrates wonderful social skills and

cooperation to the students. Speak and chart is another model not mentioned yet. One teacher teaches while the other teacher records the responses on the overhead, board, or easel. Another co-teaching model is duet teaching. This is when teachers work in unison and even finish each other's sentences and ideas. This model would be used only once a relationship was very well-established. No matter what model is used the teachers and students gain from co-teaching. Teachers do need to be aware of the models and try to vary the way they deliver a lesson in order to teach to the different learning styles.

Benefits of Co-Teaching

Increased student achievement is every school's goal. When considering to co-teach, which would be better for the students: a classroom where one teacher teaches the whole group or a classroom where students are in three small groups rotating between the two teachers and a cooperative center? The latter would be the best situation to raise student engagement and hopefully achievement. Research has taken both sides of this issue. "Many principals and teachers find that after a single year of implementation, student achievement may be improved, but not rapidly enough to change the scores on high stakes tests. For that reason, they should also use curriculum-based and other detailed measures of learning" (Friend, 2005, p. 51).

Apposing that are Walsh and Jones who referenced Walsh and Synder (1994) by saying, "Students in a co-taught classroom perform significantly better on state minimum competency tests as compared to students in similar general education classes without co-teaching" (Walsh & Jones, 2004, p. 15). Even though the co-teaching model may or may not show drastic improvement on test scores, student engagement is higher when students are in a co-taught general education classroom.

Some teachers might think that co-teaching is achieved when two teachers bring their classrooms together for a lesson. This is not co-teaching because the ratio of student to teacher is the same as before. Two teachers for 50 kids is the same ratio as one teacher for 25 students. With true co-teaching, one main benefit is the student to teacher ratio. When using an additional teacher the ratio is cut in half. Instead of one teacher to 25 students, the ratio is now two teachers to 25 students. In addition to the ratio, “Students with disabilities in Anne Arundel County Public Schools preferred co-taught classrooms to self contained classroom placements, indicating that they enjoyed school more, learned more, and felt better about themselves in the general education classroom setting” (Walsh & Jones, 2004, p. 15).

Another benefit of co-teaching happens when bringing a general education teacher and a special education teacher together. “I like the idea of having two teachers in the classroom and both being seen as teachers to the kids” (Dr. N.S. Moorhead, personal communication, August 6, 2007). In addition to both teachers being seen as equal teachers the special education teacher and general education teacher bring unique strengths. “The classroom teacher focuses on content and the curriculum. The special educator or specialist focuses on the learning process, helping students acquire, remember, and demonstrate knowledge and skills” (Friend, 2007, p. 49). Students can only benefit when these two unique teachers work together.

When two teachers come together to co-teach, they are more likely to provide instruction reflecting the general education than teachers in a self-contained classroom (Walsh & Jones, 2004). In a co-taught classroom about 95 percent of the time the instruction reflects the general education curriculum as opposed to seven percent of self-contained classrooms taught general education curriculum (Walsh & Jones, 2004). Two studies were done and the results were given at a Heartland AEA workshop (May 2007). One of the studies indicated that nine percent of the

tasks given in the general education environment were tasks linked to standards where 50 percent of tasks in the special education classroom were linked to standards (Heartland 11 Area Education Agency workshop, May 2007). When students are in the general education classroom teachers can be confident that they are given instruction in the correct standards and benchmarks.

Social skills are modeled daily when co-teaching. “The constant social interaction and modeling of co-teachers, as they share, cooperate, make jokes, solve problems, and make decisions, is an effective technique for teaching the kinds of social skills that are imperative for the full integration of students with disabilities in the mainstream” (Gately & Gately, 1993, p. 4). Such social interaction also increases worth, partnership, and collaboration on the part of both teachers who participate in co-teaching. When students see teachers as role models, this will translate back to how students treat each other. This modeling will help build a positive classroom environment.

When two teachers co-teach, they equally share the responsibilities of the classroom and work with all the students. Co-teaching is beneficial and helpful to break down any barriers built up between general and special education teachers. Co-teaching might help teachers to realize new ways of teaching. It can help teachers learn more ways of managing a diverse student population.

Co-teaching can be very positive for students. In a co-taught classroom, students feel that they always have someone available to assist them if needed. Students feel that they can receive special help. In addition to receiving help from a teacher when needed, students benefit from having the opportunity to observe teachers with different perspectives and teaching styles. Every teacher brings a different personality to the classroom. Having a different knowledge base creates variety for instruction.

Teachers also benefit from the co-teaching model. This comes from greater opportunities for planning, instructing, and evaluating. Co-teachers seem to have more time for reflection. When working with another teacher, both teachers reflect back on their teaching and are more likely to make improvements and changes. They also celebrate what went well during the lessons. “Not only do students learn different perspectives and content knowledge, so do the co-teachers as well” (Davis-Wiley, 1998, p. 7). This will help enhance both teachers and help them see alternative ways to teaching and learning.

The benefits of co-teaching seem endless. Some of the benefits can be seen right away when two teachers decide to co-teach. Others will develop as the co-teaching relationship grows stronger with time.

Students and teachers will only benefit from co-teaching when it is implemented appropriately. Choosing the appropriate students is only one piece. Dr. N.S. Moorhead affirms that by stating, “Collaboration is not for all students, only certain students benefit from co-teaching” (personal communication, August 6, 2007). Certain special education students benefit from a co-taught classroom more than others. Special education students who benefit from co-teaching typically score significantly below peers on district-wide assessments. These students will need a high amount of direct instruction to fill in the pieces and make progress. Along with test scores, special education students who are not working at grade level, require more skill building, additional modeling and guided practice, and more teacher cueing would benefit from co-teaching. From a curriculum standpoint, special education students who require modifications and accommodations in order to be successful would be best in a co-teaching classroom. The type of special education student who would best fit the co-teaching model would be the ones served in a pull out situation in the past. But if the co-teaching models were

used correctly, the special education students could benefit greatly from the co-taught classroom along with many other students who might need the same supports (Heartland Area Education Agency workshop, May 2007).

Challenges to Co-Teaching

Although co-teaching has become extremely popular, it must be carefully implemented and a successful team must be composed of confident, professional, and competent participants. A teacher who does not have one or any of these qualities will not necessarily improve by merely being paired to work with someone else (Davis-Wiley & Cozart, 1998). Rea and Connell (2005) state that “Co-teaching can be difficult even for competent, veteran teachers” (p. 30). In order to not turn a co-teaching experience into a teacher and associate role, co-teachers need to plan and tackle issues before heading in the classroom to teach. They need to resolve these problems so that they can be “Equals in the classroom” (Davis-Wiley & Cozart, 1998, p. 8). Knowing how to work together as a team is not innate and does not come naturally. When a team is formed or re-formed, it takes a certain amount of time to develop the team. Principals need to be careful in assuming that a co-teaching situation will be successful if they provide professional development when the team is first formed. Ongoing training is needed to establish a working relationship (Mansberger, 2005).

Some concerns from principals and teachers are the quality and quantity of work done by co-teams. Teachers who have been together longer will produce more effective work. During the initial year, a good portion of the year and the majority of the energy is spent on building working relationships and trust among members. They also spend a lot of time sharing student information and talking about behavior and other management concerns (Mansberger, 2005).

Once teams move past the initial issues they start to produce more and spend time on instruction, team-building. They accomplish more work.

When co-teaching occurs, the teachers need to have open communication. In some cases that does not occur and the teachers are not equally focused. Davis-Wiley and Cozart referenced Watson (1996) and “When she co-taught with another professor, both instructors were not focused on the same issues, which meant that they perceived the importance of their two subject areas differently” (Davis-Wiley & Cozart, 1998, p. 9). Open communication and the discussion on lesson objectives should solve this challenge.

Planning is another challenge of co-teaching. Friend (2007) mentions that, “When I ask teachers to list their concerns related to co-teaching, the first item is almost always shared planning time” (p. 50). Most teachers would like daily planning time, but that is not always available. It is up to teachers and administrators to find creative ways to make planning a reality. Some administrators allow time for teachers to receive continuing credits or teachers receive a stipend that acknowledges the extra planning done by co-teachers. Substitute teachers could also be used for teachers to plan during the school day as well (Friend, 2007). On-going communication and planning is essential to making co-teaching a success. An increase of classroom preparation comes with co-teaching. So knowing this challenge ahead of time is beneficial. Teachers and administrators can be proactive in making sure proper planning time is given. As discussed at a Heartland AEA workshop (May 2007), ideas from Villa, Thousand, & Nevin (2004) were mentioned for establishing planning time. Some ideas mentioned were simple to implement, while others would take more preparation and planning; they are:

1. Redesigning the schedule for common planning time
2. Take away other duties such as lunch, door monitor, etc

3. Finding funding for substitute teachers
4. Build into the school schedule at least one co-teacher planning day per marking period or month
5. Begin class with independent work time
6. Use videos or other programs
7. Use part of professional development time
8. Late arrival/early dismissal
9. Stay late after school with compensation
10. Treat collaboration as a committee responsibility
11. Reserve time in daily schedule (Heartland 11 Area Education Agency workshop, May 2007)

Planning time is something easy to fix if teachers have the support of their administrator. At Jordan Creek, Dr. N.S. Moorhead's plan is to first schedule common planning times. She also plans to utilize time before school, especially on Wednesday mornings because the teachers arrive early. This is the first year for Jordan Creek and the co-teaching model so her hope is to continue co-teaching in future years using the same teaching pairs. Thus, planning may become easier in future years (personal communication, August 6, 2007).

If a co-teaching situation is new to teachers, it is also probably a new thing for the students as well. Wiley-Davis and Cozart (1998) referenced Hatcher (1995) by saying students are "Concerned about having to "please" more than one instructor" (p. 8). It will be a learning experience for the teachers and students alike. It will take time to build acceptance by the students. They will become more comfortable with experience and start to understand the expectations in the co-taught classroom.

Another challenge for everyone in the co-taught classrooms is the possibility of students with social and behavioral disabilities modeling inappropriate behavior for the other students. In one study co-teachers stated that “They had observed some students without disabilities emulating the undesirable behaviors of some students with disabilities” (Austin, 2001, p. 253). Several other teachers expressed concern that students with disabilities were disrupting the learning environment in the classroom (Austin, 2001). In situations such as these, teachers would need to have a consistent management system in place and work as a team to avoid negative effects.

Conclusions and Recommendations

After researching and experiencing collaboration and co-teaching, I believe co-teaching is a valid way to increase student achievement and to meet the various needs of the students in the classroom. When using the different co-teaching models the teachers are ensuring that every student is learning and improving. Certain special education students should receive instruction in the general education setting with a special education teacher co-teaching with a general education teacher. Students need to be carefully chosen to participate in co-taught classrooms as well as the teachers. A critical aspect of co-teaching is the personality match of the general education and special education teacher. Many times this is a relationship that needs time to build. However, if two teachers already know each other’s teaching style and enjoy working together, their co-teaching experience will be more successful.

A challenge to overcome when moving to a collaborative model is gaining common planning time for the teachers. Common planning time seemed to be the most challenging to co-teachers along with staff development training. In order for this these to occur an administrator needs to help the teachers with creative ways to increase common planning time and organize

co-teaching training. One training in-service is not enough to help teachers to be successful with co-teaching. On-going training is needed.

I believe that schools that implement a co-teaching philosophy will see happier students and the students will receive more individual attention that was not previously provided. The special education students will gain knowledge in the curriculum along with observing peer models for social skills. The student to teacher ratio is a great way to make sure every student is benefiting from the lesson and it ensures that students will not slip through the cracks. When co-teaching is implemented properly, every involved will win. The students' needs are met because the teachers are able to differentiate and meet all the needs of the classroom.

During the 2007-2008 school year, my assignment is to co-teach in a second grade math classroom. My journey as a co-teacher has already begun. It has been enjoyable so far. In the spring of 2007, there was a staff development training to present the idea of co-teaching. Monthly trainings continued this school year to introduce various models of co-teaching and help with additional support as our school moved toward a more collaborative model. This summer our special education director paid us for class time to fill out a reflective framework and our first math unit. The reflective framework helped us to get to know each other personally and professionally. Also, it was great knowing the first day of school that our first unit was ready to go. Our principal and special education director plan to find creative ways to continue our common planning, which will be a necessity. The special education students in the co-taught classroom are level II students who are close to grade level, but still needing additional support in math. With the co-teaching model, the special education students will probably succeed this school year in math, along with the entire class. All the students will benefit from working in a

co-taught math classroom. The administration and co-teachers in my building are very excited and ready for this new challenge.

The main thing I have discovered through this research and my personal experience is that it takes a team approach to help students succeed. With willing and positive teachers, a co-teaching situation can be a wonderful venture as long as the school has the resources. An inspiration for me was a quote by Duchardt et al. (1999) that read, "No longer can a teacher in a classroom of diverse learners meet all the educational, social, and emotional needs of his or her students. It takes collaboration among all professionals in a school system to educate all students" (p. 189). In order to meet all the needs of the diverse student population, a co-teaching model is necessary to continue to meet the needs of the students. With the proper resources, personnel, planning time, staff development trainings, desire, and positive outlook a co-teaching model is the perfect way to increase student achievement in a way that also meets the needs of the diverse learners in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Co-teaching reflective framework questions to be discussed by general education and special education teacher prior to co-teaching:

- 1) What do we see as our roles in the classroom?
- 2) What do we see as our individual strengths in what we will contribute to all learners?
- 3) Who will contact parents and how will we share and maintain communication throughout the year?
- 4) Are there accommodations that students will be allowed to use in local and state assessments that we need to incorporate into our daily planning?
- 5) What is the classroom teacher's responsibility for meeting the needs of special needs children in the general education classroom through differentiation of instruction?
- 6) How will we deal with grading?
- 7) How will we deal with any behavioral issues that arise?
- 8) How do we plan to introduce ourselves the first day of class?
- 9) What is the best thing we anticipate will result from our work together this year?