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The Effectiveness of the Co-Teaching Model

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Abstract

This literature review explores instructional strategies and cooperative teaching (co-teaching) strategies, based on information gathered from recent research. It is an analysis of various studies that address how co-teaching was implemented in classrooms of students with and without disabilities. Considered are both teacher and student perspectives on the effectiveness of co-taught classrooms. The results of this literature review observed positive perceptions from all parties involved. Collectively, the research emphasizes the importance of having full support of the administrative staff, and how all teachers involved need to have an open, honest line of communication between each other. However, the research also indicated that teachers found it difficult to meet in order to create lesson plans where accommodations and/or modifications are planned. This paper discusses the different forms of co-teaching, classroom layout of where to place seating, and the staff support needed to create an efficient co-teaching environment.

Keywords: co-teaching, cooperative teaching, collaborative teaching, team teaching, mainstreaming, inclusion, synthesis, and meta-analysis

The Effectiveness of the Co-Teaching Model

Many educators, at one time or another, have wanted to have a fellow teacher in their classroom to increase student engagement and support. Having more than one teacher in the classroom can be especially advantageous when students with disabilities are present. Students with physical disabilities (mobility, head, back and neck injuries) and learning disabilities (speech/language impairment, deafness/hard of hearing, blindness/visual impairment, reading, math), behavior disorders (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder), and emotional disorders (bipolar, depression) are being integrated into the regular education classroom to meet their educational needs. Special needs students started integrating into the general education classroom after the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was created and passed in 1975. IDEA was designed to ensure that all students with a disability receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). By law, their education must take place in the least restrictive environment (LRE) based on the learning goals, accommodations, and/or modifications on a student's Individual Educational Program (IEP). To help special education and general education teachers meet these changes in the classroom, cooperative teaching was born. Cooperative teaching (co-teaching) "exists as a means for providing the specialized instruction to which students with disabilities, those who are English language learners, or who have other special needs are entitled while ensuring access to general curriculum in the least restrictive environment with the provision of supplementary aids and services" (Friend, 2014, p. 4). Co-teaching happens when a general education and special education teacher work together to come up with a plan to reach all students' educational needs. The six co-teaching approaches teachers may utilize include One Teaching, One Observing; One Teaching, One Assisting; Parallel Teaching; Station Teaching; Alternative Teaching; and Team-Teaching. General

education and special education teachers work together to support student involvement and

progress in the general education curriculum for all students, with or without disabilities.

This literature review will investigate if co-teaching is an effective inclusive teaching

strategy for students with and without a disability by focusing on the type of co-teaching being

utilized and its effects on staff and student performances. Research for this paper was drawn

from the ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) database, the WorldCat discovery tool

through DeWitt Library, and Google Scholar. Articles used for this literature review were

published between 2011 and 2021. The research was not limited to one specific grade level or

location. Keywords include co-teaching, cooperative teaching, collaborative teaching, team

teaching, mainstreaming, inclusion, synthesis, and meta-analysis.

Research demonstrates that cooperative teachers need more planning time together, the

training was insufficient to effectively implement co-teaching, and not enough support was

received from their administrators. Cooperative teaching is being utilized across the globe and

has produced positive benefits for staff and student performances. All students in the classroom

benefit from having two certified teachers available. Classes are more enjoyable and interesting

for both teachers and students in co-taught classrooms. Students in co-taught classes exhibit

significantly higher levels of engagement than students in solo-taught classes. General education

and special education teachers need to work together for collaboration to be effective in co-

teaching classrooms. They must also partner to support student involvement and progress in the

general education curriculum for all students, with or without disabilities. Teachers are willing to

share the classroom by giving support to all students, not just those on an IEP.

This literature review explores instructional strategies and information about cooperative

teaching, based on information gathered from recent research. The research was gathered from

peer-reviewed case studies that collected research data through interviews, observations, conversations, journals, surveys, questionnaires, weekly meetings, checklists, and student work, studying the effectiveness and complications of cooperative teaching in the general education classroom.
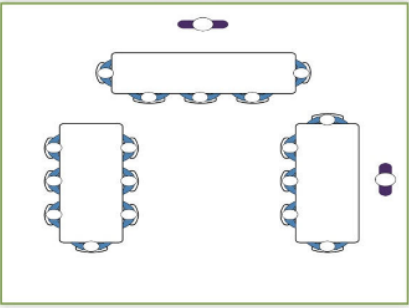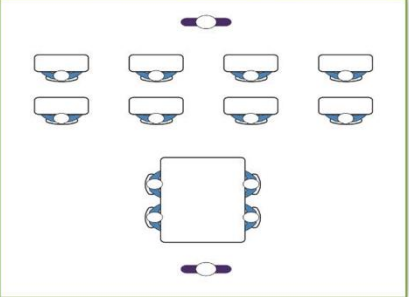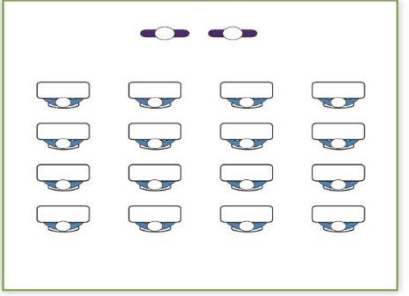
Review of the Literature

Researchers have been studying the benefits of cooperative teaching since 1975 when students with disabilities started to integrate into the general education classroom. It became law for students with disabilities to receive the same education and be in the same learning environment as their peers. This was the beginning of cooperative teaching. Cooperative teaching, or co-teaching, is when two certified teachers, one general education and one special education, work together to increase opportunities for students to be successful in the classroom. Planning is an important part of the cooperative teaching process. This team of teachers shares the workload and responsibility by working together to create, plan, and implement lessons. The special education teacher works with the general education teacher to modify lesson plans to incorporate accommodations and/or modifications for students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs).

There are six cooperative teaching strategies for teachers to use in their districts. (See Table # 1) Table 1 provides a description of how each strategy is used along with a classroom layout of where to place seating. According to Pitts (2021), the strategy that seems to be implemented most often is One Teaching, One Assisting. In this strategy, the general education teacher takes the lead, and the special education teacher provides support to all students with and without an IEP. Pitts (2021) claims that the strategy implemented most often is One Teaching, One Observing. In this strategy, the general education teacher takes the lead, and the special

education teacher collects data on how well the students understand the material. The teachers

analyze this data to ensure all students are understanding the material and to make any necessary

in future lessons.

Table 1: The Six-Strategies of Co-Teaching

Overview of the six strategies of co-teaching		
Strategy	**Description**	**Classroom layout**
1. One Teaching, One Observing	One teacher delivers instruction while the other observes student learning. The observer collects data on student understanding so the co-teaching team can better plan future instruction. Sometimes specific students are watched closely so their teachers can determine new strategies to use with them.	One teaching, one observing
2. One Teaching, One Assisting	One teacher takes the lead in providing instruction while the other moves around the classroom assisting struggling students. This help is not limited to students with special needs; the assisting professional is there to serve those who need support.	One teaching, one assisting
3. Parallel Teaching	The class is divided into two groups and the same material is presented simultaneously by both teachers. The teachers plan the two groups deliberately to maximize the success of all students; this is not simply a "pull-out" or intervention group sitting in the same room.	Parallel teaching

4. Station Teaching	Both teachers are actively involved in instruction as students are divided into groups and rotate from one station to the next. There may be stations where students work independently or with a paraprofessional in addition to the two stations, the co-teachers facilitate.	
5. Alternative Teaching	One teacher takes a small group of students and provides them with more intensive or specialized instruction that is different from what the large group receives from the other teacher.	
6. Team Teaching	Both teachers teach the content at the same time in tandem or "tag-team" fashion.	

Classroom layout diagrams are taken from Friend & Cook (2020, p.166)

Benefits of Co-Teaching

Among these studies, positive results are found on co-teaching from both teachers and students. Brendle et al (2017) observed teachers had a positive relationship that extended beyond the classroom, by learning from each other in both the co-planning and co-instruction strategies, they maintained their individual roles as the traditional general and special education teachers. The general education teacher has the grade-level content knowledge, and the special education teacher has the content knowledge needed to meet the supportive needs of students with a disability. Both teachers are beneficial to students in meeting and supporting their diverse needs

during classroom instruction. Any co-teaching strategy requires the teachers to work as a team; the general education teacher should create lesson plans based on the input provided by the special education teacher. When using co-teaching in the classroom, it is imperative for both teachers to be comfortable with one another's viewpoint on education, content skills, and knowledge. As these teachers continue to work together, they will become more comfortable with each other and things will run more naturally. Ferguson & Wilson (2011) observed that when the teachers worked as a team, their lessons were more creative and effective because of the different perspectives and experiences they were able to draw from. By increasing teacher knowledge on the six strategies of co-teaching, they were able to balance the multiple roles and responsibilities related to working in a co-teaching classroom. Teachers were able to build their communication skills, give support to all their students, and gain the confidence needed to apply these strategies in their classrooms.

Co-teaching allows special education teachers to incorporate accommodations and/or modifications into lesson plans. Students with any type of identified disability have an IEP or 504 plan in place with a special education teacher. These students have a specific list of accommodations and/or modifications that must be followed in all student settings. An accommodation is like wearing sunglasses. Sunglasses do not change the sun; they merely change how we see the sun. Expectations are the same. Modifications make or change the expectations. A modification would be like prescription sunglasses, changing the way in which the sun is accessed or viewed. In a classroom setting an accommodation would be having students listen to an audiobook instead of reading the book. An example of a modification would be limiting the number of responses; instead of the student having to choose between four items, they choose between three.

Whether incorporating accommodations or modifications, when teachers used a co-teaching strategy, the students were more cognitively and actively engaged during class, asking questions, working with a partner, and getting assignments completed. Students exhibit significantly higher levels of engagement and higher efficiency in co-taught classes as compared to those students in a solo-taught classroom. Gokbulut et al. (2020) stated how parents noticed an increase in their child's willingness to read, causing reading comprehension skills to improve, leading to a greater number of correct answers about the passages they were reading, as well as a mass improvement in their writing skills and homework completion.

Support from the administration team is key to a successful co-teaching environment. Examples of administrative support include providing teams with a shared planning time and training to understand and use cooperative teaching in the classroom. The administration should receive training on cooperative teaching, as well as how to observe in the co-taught classroom setting. Administrators tried to find a common planning period for the teacher teams to meet and create their lesson plans. When observing, administrators look at student achievement and whether the co-teaching framework is being followed. Administrators must be able to identify when a co-teaching partnership is not successful and be prepared to intervene or reassign teamed teachers. Sipe (2019) reported that at the middle school level, students with an IEP were scheduled in a team classroom where the special education teacher was able to provide support. Students with disabilities may be in classrooms that incorporate co-teaching and participate in the pull-out method of special education, often referred to as specially designed instruction (SDI). Special needs students receiving SDI go to the resource room to receive individualized instruction in a smaller class setting with smaller-sized groups, minimized distractions, and more

one-on-one support to help them reach the goals set on their IEP. Specially Designed Instruction

classes meet for 30 to 90 minutes, depending on the school district.

Disadvantages of Co-Teaching

Strieker et al. (2013) stated the "increased pressure to prepare a workforce of educators

with the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the needs of a diverse population of students

who historically have underperformed in schools" (p. 173). The biggest disadvantage was not

having enough time to plan, as the special education teachers needed access to the general

education curriculum to be able to collaborate and plan, making the needed accommodations

and/or modifications for each lesson. Ferguson & Wilson (2011) reported that teamwork

between the teachers was critical to the success of the co-teaching method. Early on the teams

experienced a power struggle between the general education and special education teachers, yet

it was never discussed during their planning time. Once teachers were comfortable with each

other those feelings subsided. Turan & Bayar (2017) compared the findings on single teacher

and co-teacher models (p. 92). (See Table #2)

Table 2: Opinions of Classroom Teachers Regarding Comparison of Single Teacher and Co-Teacher Models	
Single Teacher Model	**Co-Teacher Model**
The workload and responsibilities of the teacher are high.	The workload of the teacher is low, responsibility is shared.
It is difficult to include all students in the teaching process.	All students in the classroom are easily accessible.
Classroom management is difficult.	Classroom management becomes easier
Personal or group teaching planning is difficult.	Used effectively in personal or group teaching.
It is difficult to use different teaching methods and techniques.	Different teaching methods and techniques can be used.
It's more economical.	It is not economical.

It causes a waste of time in crowded and inclusive student-containing classrooms and full learning cannot be achieved.	It decreases waste of time in crowded and inclusive student-containing classrooms and full learning can be achieved.
Individual differences may be overlooked.	Individual differences are emphasized.
Time management is difficult.	Time management is easier.
There is a monotone learning environment.	It creates an effective and fun learning environment.
It is difficult to ensure equality of opportunity.	Equality of opportunity is ensured.

Another disadvantage to co-teaching is when special education teachers must handle an emergency situation with a special needs student who is creating a disruption in the classroom during the lesson. This causes the lesson to be put on hold, interrupting the whole group learning until the situation has been resolved. Depending on the situation, if a student is going through a crisis where they are a danger to themselves or others, the general education teacher will move all of the students out of the room for their safety, until the crisis has been averted. As stated earlier, support from the administration is essential for teachers using a co-teaching strategy. One study by Solis et al. (2012) reported that teachers needed more support from their administration. The administration was not providing the necessary resources to support students in co-teaching and inclusion classrooms.

While studying the One Teaching, One Observing model, Strieker et al. (2013) observed that special education teachers were generally considered to be an assistant to the general education teacher, rather than being equal. They observed the general education teacher taking the lead and the special education teacher walking around the room observing behavior.

In regard to the One Teaching, One Assisting model, Striker et al. (2013) observed how the special education teacher did not focus only on the special needs students but helped the classroom students as a whole. Students were comfortable asking questions from both teachers and did not distinguish between the general or special education teacher. Because both teachers

were knowledgeable of the content being taught, they were able to work with students in small groups to provide extra support. Brendle et al. (2017) observed how the general education teacher led the classroom lesson and the special education teacher provided support to all students in the classroom. However, the teachers reported they were unable to meet as a team to plan and implement instruction for lesson plans.

In regard to the parallel teaching model, Pappamihiel (2012) suggested that an advantage of using this model is a lower student-teacher ratio. The teachers are able to plan as a team but teach their individual groups independently. However, for some teachers, this strategy can produce a louder classroom atmosphere.

The station teaching model requires more planning and prepping for the teachers due to the content being split into various lessons staged around the classroom (Pappamihiel, 2012). The extra time comes from having to decide how long to make each station and basing the content of the lessons on that time frame. One disadvantage comes from teachers having to group students into high and low-achieving groups. It was noted that the noise level would increase due to the nature of the station learning strategy. On the other hand, the advantage of this strategy is that students are broken into smaller groups where they have the option of working independently and with each of the teachers.

The Alternative Teaching model has proven to be more beneficial for English Learners because it allows them extra time to develop their language skills. The downside was that these students will miss out on socializing with their peers by being placed into smaller group settings (Pappamihiel, 2012).

When people think of co-teaching, team teaching is usually the first thing that comes to mind. Pappamihiel (2012) believes the Team-Teaching strategy is the most difficult because both teachers involved must have a mutual trust and commitment to work with each other by teaching in the same room at the same time, covering the same content.

Guise et al. (2017) observed a district in the early stages of implementing co-teaching. The district compared solo teaching to three of the six strategies: One Teaching, One Observing; One Teaching, One Assisting; and Team Teaching. It was reported that teachers did their planning and instruction on their own and met with their teammates to merge the lessons together. Once teachers were comfortable with each other, they became more open to sharing new ideas and were able to plan the lessons together.

Pesonen et al. (2021) believe that teachers need a sense of belonging in order to maintain a positive co-teaching environment. These researchers created a pyramid to show how this goal can be achieved, by placing a sense of belonging in the middle and supports on the top and bottom corners. (See Figure #1) This foundation was supported and encouraged throughout the school community.

A study done in Finland by Sundqvist et al. (2021) reported that teachers found planning and implementation to be creative and enjoyable by using information based on their knowledge and ideas about the content being taught in class. However, the disadvantage was not having enough time to create their lessons and ensuring they were incorporating accommodations and/or modifications into those lesson plans.

Yeganehpour & Zarfsaz (2020) conducted a study in Iran, observed that the English as a Foreign Language students who were in a co-taught classroom had an overall improvement in

their writing skills as compared to their peers being taught in a single-teacher classroom.

However, it was found that parallel teaching did not show any significant change when
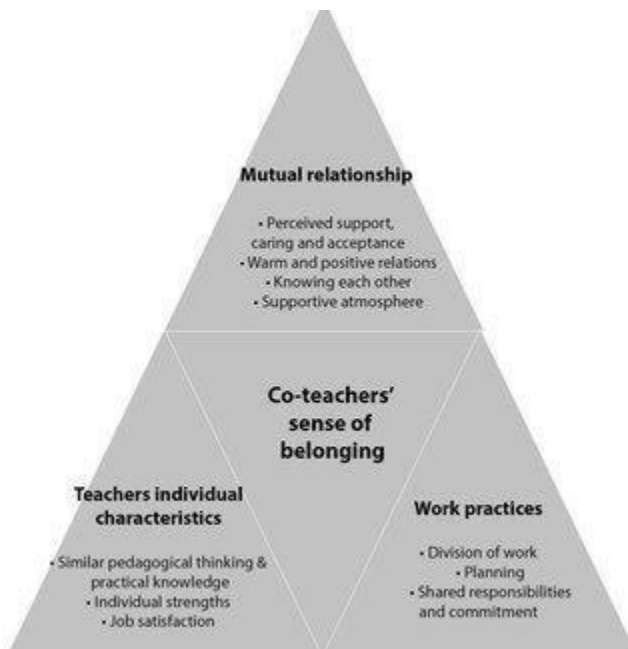
compared to the single-teacher classroom.

Figure 1: Chart taken from: Pesonen et al. (2021, p. 9)

Limitations of Co-Teaching

　　　　Several limitations exist in these studies. The small number of participants is a limitation

that applies to both the number of students and the number of co-teaching teams. The length of

the study, the number of teachers and administrators properly trained on the use of the six co-

teaching strategies, the expertise of trained teachers, and administrators using a co-teaching

program are also limitations.

　　　　Students not seeing both teachers as authoritative figures can lead to inequalities in the

roles and responsibilities the teachers have worked hard on building together. The teacher

candidates may not have had sufficient time to get to know their students before the studies were

conducted or concluded. Lack of interaction between the general and special education teachers

may lead to one teacher taking control of the classroom and fellow staff may not recognize the need for team teachers to sufficiently prepare to meet the needs of students.

Studies have also mainly looked at the secondary level of education. The credibility of data collected was based on what staff and students were able to recall for interviews and questionnaires. The geographic location of each study could also be limiting. Due to small sample sizes, not enough data was collected to determine if surrounding school districts would have reached the same conclusions. A small number of teams were interviewed or observed and classroom observers and interviewers could have influenced what was seen or said.

Future Suggestions

Ferguson & Wilson (2011) stated that by continuing to do research on co-teaching at the collegiate level, collaboration can be improved, empowered, and modeled for beginning teachers in their instructional practices. Expanding research across other subject areas would be beneficial to explore how well co-teaching is implemented and analyzed to increase the effectiveness for students with or without a disability. Future research could include follow-up studies on students who have moved across grade levels to see if they are continuing to show improvement in classes where co-teaching is being implemented, and with teachers who were in the early stages of co-teaching to see what strategy worked best for their classroom setting.

Future research is also needed to determine if administrators and staff need additional training to ensure they are implementing effective co-teaching strategies for the co-teaching classrooms. Follow-up data is also needed to determine if administrators are continuing to give co-teaching teams their full support or if support has decreased over time. Research is needed to determine if English as a Second Language (ESL) learners benefit from co-teaching versus

specially designed instruction only. The effectiveness of co-teaching in other countries should also continue to be explored.

Conclusion

Co-teaching is an effective inclusive teaching strategy for students with and without a disability. Research studies have shown that students greatly benefited from having two teachers in the classroom to provide extra support. The advantages outweigh the disadvantages of using a co-teaching strategy in both an inclusive and general education classroom. For co-teaching to be effective, all teachers involved must have an open, honest line of communication with each other. To overcome the problem of joint planning time, schools should prioritize teachers' access to this time or provide other solutions. Co-teachers can implement technological strategies such as communicating via email or using a shared Word document. Overall, this was found to be beneficial to all parties involved.

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