Establishing Effective Consultant Teacher Model Relationships

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Establishing effective consultant teacher model relationships

by

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Abstract

This study explored how co-planning, shared workspace, and grade equivalent content knowledge impacted a co-teaching team (one special education teacher and one regular education teacher in the same room) working in the consultant teacher model (a special education teacher working in a classroom containing both regular and special education students). Participants for the study consisted of seven regular education teachers and three consultant (special education) teachers from a suburban, middle class, elementary school consisting of approximately four hundred students K-5. Data for the research study was collected over a period of seven weeks through pre-study questionnaires, journal entries, field notes gathered through peer mentoring sessions, and a post-study questionnaire. According to this study, participants cited opportunities to exchange ideas, organize materials, and define instructional roles as the key impacts of co-planning. Another conclusion of this study was that shared workspace provided increased opportunities for small group and differentiated instruction within consultant teacher model classrooms. In addition, this study identified grade specific content knowledge significantly impacted individual instructional roles. While this study focused on the impact of co-planning, shared workspace, and grade specific content knowledge on a co-teaching relationship, it also identified flexibility, communication, and defined roles as additional elements to consider for future research.
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Chapter I Introduction

Introduction

During the spring of the 2004-2005 school year my district’s special education department was audited and cited for non-compliance in several areas. This past fall a new director of special education vowed to correct all areas of non-compliance. According to our new director, the most significant citation was for having too many students with disabilities educated in self-contained settings (classrooms with only special education students). In an attempt to address this violation, my school district enacted a shift in our continuum of special education services to include more inclusive (special education and regular education students in the same classroom) educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

Purpose/Rational

As a teacher of a self-contained, special education classroom this change directly impacted my role as an educator. My principal informed me during an end-of-year meeting that our building would no longer house self-contained learning environments. Consequently, my position was changed to working as a consultant teacher (a special education teacher working in a classroom containing both regular and special education students) in two third grade classrooms. Another title for the consultant teacher model is “co-teaching” (one special education teacher and one regular education teacher in the same room).

My research on the topic of co-teaching identified three critical elements to establishing effective co-teaching relationships. Melody (2005) cited common planning time and shared work space as two essential components in helping teachers adjust to their new roles and responsibilities. Additional research performed by Bardizi, et. al.
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(2005) identified grade specific content knowledge by both co-teaching partners as a crucial element in the establishment of an effective co-teaching learning environment. The formation of my research question: *How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model* was based primarily on the works completed by these two groups of researchers (Bardizi, et al. 2005; Melody, 2005). The purpose of my research is to provide K-5 consultant-teacher model teams in my building with the tools necessary to create effective co-teaching relationships and learning environments. Working together, our ability to establish effective co-teaching relationships and learning environments is vital to the growth and development of all our students.
Chapter II Literature Review

Literature Review

A study conducted by the National Study on Inclusion in 1995 identified co-teaching (both a regular education teacher and special education teacher in the same room) as the most popular model for integrating regular and identified students within the same classroom. Co-teaching, also referred to as consultant, integrated, or blended teaching has continued to be a popular instructional model in schools today. However, there exists little evidence supporting its benefits on the instructional experiences of students with disabilities, compared to their experiences in a regular education setting without direct support. The purpose of the study conducted by Magjera and Zigmond (2005) was to determine if there was an additive effect on the instructional experiences of students with disabilities in a co-taught classroom, versus a class taught by only the general education teacher.

Magiera and Zigmond hypothesized that increased individual instructional experiences would be provided to students within a co-teaching classroom due to the lower student-teacher ratio. Information for this study was collected through classroom observations of a group of middle school students (grades 5-8) with disabilities in co-taught classrooms as well as classrooms taught by only the regular education teacher. Of the eight co-teaching “teams” that participated, four were in their first year of co-teaching, and no team had more than two years of co-teaching experience. During observations, the researchers gathered data related to thirteen variables, in ten-second intervals. The measured variables included students working alone, students working in small groups, students working as part of a whole class, students on task behavior, no teacher interaction, general education teacher interaction with students, interaction with
other students, content-related group instruction, content-related individual instruction, group instruction, group directions, individual directions, and student participation. At the conclusion of this study, significant differences were identified in the areas of one-to-one instructional interactions and interactions with general education teachers. Within the co-taught classrooms, students with disabilities received over twice the amount of individualized instructional time. Alarmingly, students with disabilities were observed to have no individualized instructional interactions in over half of the classes taught by only the regular education teacher. However, in the absence of the special education teacher, interactions with the regular education teacher increased significantly (62% vs. 45%).

The other categories for this study failed to yield any significant discrepancies between the two classroom models. A later study conducted by Bardizi, et. al. (2005) sought to identify factors that contributed to student success in co-taught classrooms.

The needs of students in regular education classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse through the inclusion of students with disabilities. One popular way schools are addressing this issue is through the use of co-teaching. Co-teaching is defined as having one special education teacher and one regular education teacher present in the same classroom. Research conducted by Naomi Zigmond and Kathy Magiera (2001), as cited in Bardizi, et. al. (2005) concluded the three major goals of co-teaching for students with disabilities were to: enhance their range of instructional options, increase their general education participation, and, improve their levels of performance. The purpose of this study was to identify factors that contribute to student success in a co-teaching learning environment.

Information for the students was gathered through observations of co-teaching classrooms, interviews with teachers and students, videotapes of classes, and field notes
over the course of two years. The research identified seven factors present in effective co-teaching classrooms. The first factor was an outstanding working relationship. The teachers in the study demonstrated a genuine respect for each other's positions and opinions. During classroom observations, teachers took turns leading instruction and interjecting comments. Another factor was the teachers' strength as motivators. In the co-taught classrooms, both teachers claimed responsibility for all the students and displayed enthusiastic attitudes when working with various groups of students. The third factor was that allocating time for co-planning provided teachers opportunities to discuss the curriculum and review their roles and responsibilities. Developing an appropriate curriculum was the fourth factor. The teams of teachers in this study all utilized a hands-on, activity based instructional approach to help minimize the presence of complex language for students with disabilities. The fifth factor was effective instructional skills, including classroom management.

The establishment of routines and procedures was an important component to creating a structured classroom learning environment. The ability to make disability-specific teaching adaptations was the sixth factor identified. During lesson planning, the special education teacher would work with the regular classroom teacher to modify tasks and assessments. In addition, teachers would collaborate to enable participation in various activities for students with disabilities. The final factor identified in effective co-teaching classrooms was a shared expertise of grade specific curriculum. Sharing the role of lead instructor is dependent on both teachers possessing an adequate grasp of the curriculum. This ability is a critical aspect of effective co-teaching classrooms because it demonstrates the teachers' shared responsibilities to the class.
The impact of paring a "content specialist" with elementary teachers lacking confidence in their ability to effectively teach science to their students was investigated as part of a study by Murphy, Beggs, Carlisle, and Greenwood (2004). Science is often the first subject skipped over by elementary teachers fighting to squeeze in required time allotments for reading and math. Another hindrance to science education at the elementary level is a lack of teacher confidence in his or her scientific capabilities. Teachers frequently cite insufficient content knowledge, experience, and resources as contributing factors to their lack confidence.

The purpose of the study, referred to as *The Science Students in Primary Schools* (SSIPS) project, was to investigate the impact of co-teaching between student-teachers and general classroom teachers on the enjoyment and learning of science of elementary level students. In the study, student teachers shared the planning, teaching, and evaluation of science lessons with the classroom teacher. During the lesson planning, the student teacher served as a science specialist in an attempt to increase the classroom teacher's knowledge and confidence in the area of science. Information for this study was gathered from surveys completed before and after the placement of student teachers in the project schools. According to information from the surveys, students involved in the SSIPS project held significantly more positive attitudes towards science than students who didn't participate in the project. Students in the SSIPS project classrooms were fifteen percent more likely to view science lessons as fun and twenty percent more likely to view solving science problems as enjoyable. Teachers who participated in the SSIPS project were interviewed at the project's conclusion and indicated an overall increase in their confidence teaching science.
The researchers of this study concluded that the increased enjoyment and learning in science was the result of two components. First, the opportunity to work with a "science specialist" enhanced classroom teachers' confidence in science. Secondly, the investigative and practical methods incorporated into instruction sparked student interest.

In addition to teaching unfamiliar subjects, instructing students with disabilities such as Down's syndrome is another concern possessed by regular classroom teachers. Attempting to meet the educational needs of students with Down's syndrome within the regular education classroom is one of the most difficult challenges faced by teachers. Research conducted by Gloria Wolpert (2001) attempted to help teachers identify the most effective strategies for students with Down's syndrome learning in regular education classrooms.

Classrooms today are becoming increasingly diverse in their overall makeup, forcing school districts and teachers to change their educational perspectives and practices. When IDEA passed in 1997, federal legislation mandated an increase in inclusive education for students with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to inquire about the practices of regular education teachers who have students with Down's syndrome in their class, and determine which strategies provided the highest levels of success for these students. Gloria Wolpert limited her study to students with Down's syndrome because their diagnosis occurs early in infancy and they were among the first students with disabilities to be educated in an inclusive setting. This study was conducted with the full support of The National Down Syndrom Society.

The information in this study was provided by teachers of students with Down's syndrome in their regular education class. Teachers completed questionnaires, which focused on their background experiences with inclusion, previous preparation for
inclusion, classroom information on curriculum, and behavior management strategies. Statistics were calculated from the 120 returned questionnaires, and provided several interesting results. The average class size was twenty-five students, and 88% of the students with Down’s syndrome attended their home school. Over 80% of the teachers received some degree of support from a special education teacher, and 87% of the classes had an inclusion aide who worked with all the students. While 63% of the teachers reported receiving some special education training, over half of the teachers hadn’t received any training on inclusive education from their school district. Based on teacher responses provided in the questionnaires, individualized and small group instruction were the most effective learning environments for students with Down’s syndrome. Another finding from this study was students with Down’s syndrome learned more effectively when working at their desks and provided hands-on or concrete materials to work with. Teacher praise was determined to be the greatest motivation and behavior management strategy. The final conclusion of this study focused on teacher recommendations for improving instruction for students with Down’s syndrome. Increased individualized instructional time, planning time, and training on characteristics of students with Down’s syndrome were the top three recommendations for improvement made by teachers. A later study completed by Davis, Farrell, and Fox (2004) also looked to help teachers improve the success of students with Down’s syndrome in their classrooms.

Over the past ten years, students with disabilities in Great Britain, including those with Down’s syndrome have experienced increased educational opportunities within regular education classrooms. This change in practice is directly linked to the passage of the Green Paper (DfEE, 1997) and Programme for Action (DfEE, 1998) by the British government. These legislative changes mandated the adoption of an inclusion education
model by the British local education authorities (school districts). In 1998 only 20%-25% of students with Down’s syndrome would complete their secondary education (high school) in a mainstreamed (regular education students and special education students) setting, compared to an estimated 70%-80% of students with Down’s syndrome who began their education in a similar learning environment. The purpose of this study funded by the Nuffield Foundation was to identify contributing factors to the success of students with Down’s syndrome within a mainstreamed learning environment.

The research for this study focused on eighteen students with Down’s syndrome from ages five to eleven. Each of the students received various amounts of support from a teaching assistant (TA), and participated within the mainstreamed class setting on a full-time basis. The progress of each student was monitored over a two year period through classroom observations, interviews with the students, interviews with the teachers or peers who were associated with the student, and a parent focus group. At the end of their study, the researchers concluded there was no “one recipe for guaranteeing effective inclusion” (Davis, et. al. 2004). Instead, it was determined that the degree of success experienced by students was directly related to three key factors. One key factor observed was that the students were more successful in the classroom when the teacher took responsibility for the students’ learning experience and management of support provided by the TA. The relationship between the TA and the classroom teacher was another significant factor in the students’ overall success. When TAs were viewed as part of a team effort, included in daily lesson planning, and able to share and discuss ideas or problems, students with Down’s syndrome were more successful. The final factor impacting the overall success and quality of the mainstreaming experience is the accessibility of the curriculum and the extent of the student’s role in his/her learning
process. Another relevant factor to the success of any student with a disability, including those with Down's syndrome, is the teachers' attitude towards inclusion. In a separate study, Alsheikh and Elhoweris (2005) researched how teachers' attitudes towards inclusion compared between regular and special education teachers.

The term least restrictive environment, which originated with the passage of IDEA in 1997 stated that an individual with a disability had the right to receive an education in the least restrictive educational setting available. As a result, regular education teachers were seeing an increased number of students identified with disabilities in their regular education classrooms. Alsheikh and Elhoweris (2005) cited previous studies [Taylor, Richards, Goldstein, & Schilit (1997), Shade & Stewart (2001), Van Reusen, Shoho, & Barker (2001), and McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, and Loveland (2001)], which concluded the success of students with disabilities in the regular education setting is directly linked to the teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The focus of their study was to examine current regular education and special education teacher attitudes towards inclusion, and explore potential differences in their views.

The subjects for the study conducted by Alsheikh and Elhoweris in 2005 included ten teachers (five regular education teachers and five special education teachers) enrolled in a graduate class. Data was gathered using Q-methodology, which required each subject to rank thirty-nine statements regarding inclusive education from most like my view to most unlike my view. Although the Alsheikh and Elhoweris did not give the exact number, they did conclude the majority of teachers possessed a positive view of inclusive education. In addition, the study also concluded that the special education teachers were more supportive of inclusion. Each of the special education teachers identified inclusion from either the legalism standpoint (inclusion is a legal issue and beneficial to everyone),
or the *environmentalism* standpoint (the general education setting could meet all students’ needs). Regular educators tended to side with the *conservatism* standpoint (the needs of students with disabilities can not be met in a regular education class, and their impact has an adverse effect on the other students). The final conclusion of this study stated that regular education teachers held significant reservations about mainstreaming students identified with disabilities in the regular education setting, causing additional stress and anxiety to their job. As part of their study, Feigin, Reiter, and Talmor (2005) investigated related factors to the sense of burnout experienced by regular education teachers working in inclusive classrooms.

The term “burnout” is common in the world of education. According to Freudenberger (1974) “burnout” referred to being worn out physically or mentally. This feeling is not true for all educators, but in such a critical field for the development of children its presence is troublesome.

The first hypothesis related to this study (Feigin, et. al. 2005) focused on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, stating that “The most positive the attitudes towards students with disabilities, the less will be the danger of burnout” (Feigin, et. al. 2005. p.221). Another hypothesis put forth by the researchers look at the work environment, claiming teacher burnout rates would increase as the number of students with special needs in the classroom increased. Of the 700 primary school teachers around the city of Haifa, Israel selected to participate in this study, less than half (330) returned completed questionnaires. The questionnaires were divided into three parts: (1) background information; (2) Friedman’s burnout scale; and, (3) environmental characteristics of the classroom and school. It is important to note that of the 330 respondents, all but one was female, with an average experience of fourteen years teaching, and an average age of
thirty-nine years. According to data compiled through the questionnaires, teachers possessing a positive attitude towards inclusion were the most likely to experience burnout. One possible explanation for this finding was that teachers possessing a positive outlook towards inclusion carried higher expectations of their identified students. Consequently, these teachers experienced increased levels of frustration and disappointment when the identified students were not as successful as the teachers hoped. The second hypothesis was supported. The researchers concluded that teachers experienced greater levels of de-personalization and burnout in classes when more than 20% of the population consisted of students with disabilities. Another conclusion from this study stated that teachers working in inclusive classrooms do not feel they are receiving the necessary support for their identified students to be successful, and as a result feel increased helplessness and an inability to meet their own teaching standards. All teachers, especially those working with identified students have room to develop and improve their teaching abilities. In an effort to improve the effectiveness of inclusive education classrooms in Turkey, a special education consultant training program was developed by Anadolu University. As part of their study, Kircaali-Iftar and Ozer (1994) researched the effectiveness of the program for both regular and special education teachers.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education classroom is not limited to schools in the United States. In Turkey, inclusion of students with disabilities within the regular education setting has increased since the 1990’s. Schools in Turkey have incorporated special education consultation as one way to provide students with disabilities support in the regular classroom environment. In the consultation position, the special education teacher’s role is to solve immediate problems
of students with disabilities and strengthen the classroom teacher's ability to work with identified students. The purpose of this study was to analyze the effectiveness of a Special Education Consultant Training Program (SEC-TP) offered to regular and special education teachers by Anadolu University located in Turkey.

Twenty-two teachers, fourteen regular education teachers and eight special education teachers completed the SEC-TP. Of the twenty-two teachers, eleven came from the Eskischir Counseling and Research Center. The other eleven teachers came from elementary schools in the city of Eskischir, Turkey. The average teaching experience for the group was fifteen years (ranging from 1-26 years experience). Eight of the teachers had no special education background. Individual teacher success in the SEC-TP program was determined through a test composed of two parts. The first part of the test included questions related to concepts and principles of special education consultation. The second part of the test presented teachers with hypothetical situations/problems. Teachers were then required to develop and apply modifications appropriate for each example. The data collected produced three results. One finding revealed that teachers from the Eskischir Counseling and Research Center performed better on the SEC-TP assessment than teachers from the elementary schools. However, these teachers were advantaged because counseling and research centers in Turkey are considered special education institutions. Therefore it is likely the content covered in the SEC-TP was more familiar to the teachers from the Eskischir Counseling and Research Center. Secondly, the data collected revealed success in the SEC-TP did not correlate with teachers possessing special education qualifications. The final discovery revealed that more experienced teachers were less successful in the SEC-TP. One possible reason for this finding was that teachers possessing more experience were stuck in their ways
and less open to changing their teaching practices. Based on their research, Kircaali-Iftar and Ozar (2005) concluded that work place and work experience had a direct influence on the success of teachers in special education consultant training programs. Experienced teachers as well as new teachers share the ability to benefit from training programs. The purpose of a study conducted by Gilber (2005) was to identify the most valued strategies for new teachers and teachers working in new positions.

School administrators often require new teachers to participate in orientation and training programs in preparation for their first year of teaching. Administrators in six school districts surveyed first and second year teachers to determine the most effective support structures for new teachers. The purpose Gilber’s study (2005) was to reveal the most valued support strategies for new teachers. The intention was that data collected from this survey would be used to establish an improved professional development program for new teachers.

Gilber gathered data for his study by conducting a survey of 362 first and second year teachers between 2003 and 2004. The survey asked teachers to rank various strategies for new teachers and then answer some open ended questions. According to responses collected from the survey, the opportunity for new teachers to observe other teachers was the top-ranked support strategy both years. Further analysis of the survey revealed that in both years opportunities to work collaboratively with other teachers (observing, mentoring, and co-planning time) represented four of the top five ranked strategies. The researchers concluded that providing new teachers with a variety of opportunities to collaborate with experienced teachers was extremely beneficial to their development. One surprise for the researchers was that mentoring failed to be viewed as the most effective support strategy in either year of the survey (#2 in 2003, #3 in 2004).
This surprise prompted researchers to collect additional data on mentoring and later conclude the effectiveness of mentoring programs varied greatly between individuals and school districts. In a related methodology article, Melody (2005) presented the benefits of common work space, planning time and curriculum for new teachers.

It is not uncommon for teachers to feel overwhelmed during their first year of teaching. Despite possessing the necessary training and prerequisites, this is the first time they are solely in charge of a classroom. The realization they do not have all the answers to problems that may arise is difficult for new teachers to digest. As a first year teacher, if you are not yet familiar with the names and personalities of your colleagues the thought of knocking on another teacher’s door for help is intimidating. With these concerns at heart, the administrators of a high school in Maine introduced an innovative new teacher introduction process. In an attempt to make professional development a natural, daily occurrence for teachers, Poland Regional High School (PRHS) provide each team of teachers with common space, time, and work. Rather than each teacher having his/her own classroom, the teachers shared classrooms. During planning and free periods, the team of teachers spent time in a shared workspace. The purpose of the design was to provide support for new teachers by providing an environment conducive to collaborative problem solving.

The principal designed the common work space for new teachers based on his experience that learning and professional development occurred most frequently during teacher-to-teacher interactions. The intent behind a shared, common work space was that new teachers would be provided increased opportunities to interact with their colleagues and develop valuable working relationships. One first year teacher at PRHS said spontaneous conversations between veteran teachers greatly benefited him because they
often answered questions he did not know how to ask. In this shared working environment both new teachers and experienced teachers had increased opportunities to exchange ideas. The common workspace would not prove as productive without significant shared planning time. Teachers at PRHS receive more than thirteen hours of planning time each week to use for individual and team planning. Time set aside for team planning is used to collaboratively plan curriculum, assess student performance, and problem solve. While jointly planning their curriculum, teachers openly share their work among their colleagues. The absence of competition between teachers serves as evidence that these innovative practices utilized by PRHS have fostered positive working relationships within the teams of teachers.
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Chapter III Methods and Procedures

Introduction

Each year teachers are presented the individual challenge of meeting the diverse needs of all their students. Last year, when my school district sought to provide more inclusive (special education and regular education students in the same classroom) educational opportunities for students with disabilities through implementation of the consultant teacher model (a special education teacher and a general education teacher working together in a classroom containing both regular and special education students), additional challenges were presented. At the elementary level, it had long been established that general education teachers and special education (consultant) teachers worked separately, within their own classrooms to meet the needs of their students. Now, general and special education teachers faced the challenge of learning how to work together in a shared classroom.

For many teachers, this new challenge created a heightened sense of uncertainty and awkwardness. How would roles and responsibilities be divided between the two teachers? Would the consultant teacher only be responsible for and work with the special education students? What would the student response be to having two teachers in their room? The most common reaction from teachers was feeling uncomfortable having someone else always in the room while they were teaching. Teachers didn’t want to feel observed or as if their every decision and action was judged by another professional on a daily basis.

A desire to enhance my personal understanding, as well as the understanding of my general education and special education peers, regarding how to establish effective co-teaching relationships lead to the formation of my research question: How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-
teaching team in the consultant teacher model? Through this study, my goal was to provide K-5 consultant-teacher model teams in my building the tools necessary to create effective co-teaching relationships. The ability of consultant-teacher model teams within my building to create effective co-teaching relationships is essential to the growth and development of both our general education and special education students.

Context

The study took place in a suburban, middle class, school district consisting of approximately five-thousand students grades K-12. The total student population stems from five elementary school buildings (K-5), one middle school (6-8), and one high school (9-12). All potential participants in the study currently worked as general education teachers, special education teachers, or classroom aides at one elementary (K-5) school. The elementary building consisted of approximately four-hundred students, eighteen general education teachers, three special education (consultant) teachers, and three classroom aides.

Out of the eighteen general education classrooms grades K-5, six classrooms included a total of twenty-two students receiving special education services in the form of the consultant teacher model. Responsibility for the twenty-two students identified with special needs was divided among the three consultant teachers. Each consultant teacher worked in a maximum of two general education classrooms, servicing between six and eight students.

Subjects

The focus group for the study consisted of general education teachers, special education (consultant) teachers, and teacher aides currently serving as educators in consultant teacher model classrooms. Data was collected from individuals for whom
consent was received (Appendix E). No fees, gifts, extra credit, or other incentives was awarded for participation. To ensure subject confidentiality, each participant was given a pseudonym, or fictitious name, prior to the start of data collection. No participants’ name was used when data was collected and shared. All data collected was kept in a locked filing cabinet.

Methodology

Data for the study was collected over a period of seven weeks through a pre-study survey, journal responses, and a post-study survey. Due to the focus of the research question on the opinions, behaviors, and experiences of individuals working on co-teaching teams, qualitative data was gathered for the study. In the pre-study survey, participants were asked to complete two surveys. Pre-Study Questionnaire #1 (Appendix A) provided data on the participants’ background and experience related to special education. In Pre-Study Questionnaire #2 (Appendix B) participants identified potential benefits and drawbacks of co-planning, shared workspace, and grade specific content knowledge to a co-teaching team. All questions required a hand-written or typed response. Research conducted by Alsheikh and Elhoweris (2005) concluded that teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion does impact the performance of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Subsequently, in the first questionnaire, teachers were surveyed concerning their background and beliefs toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in a regular education classroom setting. Teachers were also be asked to identify essential elements to establishing a positive co-teaching relationship and share how they envision a co-teaching relationship working within their classroom. In the second questionnaire teachers shared potential benefits and drawbacks related to the elements of co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific content knowledge, as outlined in the
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research question: How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model?

After all pre-study surveys were completed and collected, participants were provided an overview of the journal component to the study. On a weekly basis, for a total of six weeks, participants were required to respond to a provided prompt (Appendix C). Again, participants had the opportunity to either write-out or type their journal responses. Journal prompts for weeks one to three related directly to the research question (How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model?), as teachers were asked to elaborate on how a shared teaching environment, co-planning, and personal content background knowledge impacted classroom instruction for that week. Responses over weeks four and five enabled participants to reflect on their co-teaching relationship and identify an area of strength as well as an area to improve. In the final journal prompt (week six), participants explained how at least one reflection from previous journal prompts impacted their perception of co-teaching, as well as their ability to establish an effective co-teaching relationship.

During the six-week journal component to the study, peer mentoring opportunities were provided by a district special education coach. Gilbert (2005) identified mentoring opportunities as one of the most effective strategies for both new teachers, as well as teachers taking on new roles and responsibilities. The opportunity to meet on a weekly basis provided participants feedback to questions, as well as suggestions on ways improve “team” chemistry and student learning within consultant teacher model classrooms.
A brief, post-study survey (Appendix D) consisting of three questions provided final data for the study. The purpose of the post-study survey was to identify areas where participants' beliefs and attitudes towards co-teaching were supported and/or changed by their co-teaching experiences. In the post-study survey, participants reflected on how the components of co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific content knowledge impacted their ability to establish an effective co-teaching relationship. Furthermore, participants also identified additional essential elements to establishing effective co-teaching relationships for future study.

Pilot Study

In spring 2006 an assessment pilot was conducted within the same school district as the study to evaluate potential areas of improvement for the pre-study survey. Participants for the assessment pilot included three regular education teachers, two special education teachers, and one teacher aide. All potential participants in the assessment pilot were informed that information gathered would be used as part of a graduate level study and their identities would remain anonymous. After receiving verbal consent to participate in the research pilot, a copy of the survey questions was distributed to all participants, who later would complete the survey in an interview format with the researcher. The decision to provide a copy of the survey questions before conducting the interview was made with the intent of increasing the comfort level and amount of information shared during the interviews. Interviews lasted between 15-20 minutes and were conducted with the participant and researcher sitting side by side at a table. The researcher typed responses provided by each participant on a word processor. At the conclusion of the interview, each participant was asked to read over his/her recorded responses to ensure their responses were accurately recorded and reflected. All
participants were thankful for the opportunity to preview the survey before completing the interview. In their opinion, the ability to preview the questions enabled them to formulate more organized and complete responses.

Participants appeared to provide genuine, honest responses during the interview process. The assessment pilot proved to be extremely beneficial, as it identified several areas of the pre-study survey that needed to be revised. On the original survey, the first question asked *Do you have any background or experience do you have in special education?* As a closed-ended question, participants provided simple “yes” or “no” responses without any details. For the actual research study, the question was changed to provide more elaborate, detailed responses: *What background or experience do you have in special education?* Furthermore, examples of special education experiences were provided (ex. Having one IEP student in a regular education classroom) for participants who weren’t sure what experiences of their own were related to special education. The question *How do you feel about sharing your classroom?* needed to be changed after the special education teachers and teacher-aide interview during the pilot interview don’t always have a room of their own. Subsequently, the question was changed to *How do you feel about working with multiple teachers in the same classroom?* The final question on the original survey asked participants to identify elements they perceived to be critical in establishing an effective co-teaching relationship. As an open-ended question, several participants provided a laundry list of elements they viewed as critical. Limiting participants’ responses to three elements, ranked in order of importance would allow for an easier comparison to the elements outlined in the research question *How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model?*
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The need to develop an additional set of questions designed more specifically around the research question became evident after the pilot study. As a result, the revised second pre-study survey (Appendix B) asked participants to identify potential benefits and drawbacks of co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge. Participants were also be asked how a shared workspace will influence students' perceptions of individual teacher responsibilities. Another question will ask participants to identify how individual content knowledge may impact the roles of each member of the co-teaching team. Despite the failure of the original set of survey questions to directly address the research question, the opportunity to pilot the survey provided valuable information that improved the quality of the research study.

In addition to strengthening the quality of the research study, the pilot study identified one variable which may affect the purity of the investigation. While all participants appeared relaxed and comfortable during the pilot interview, the potential existed that during the research study participants may be reluctant to share certain information. For example, participants may have only disclosed what they thought or felt the researcher was looking for in a response. Participants may also have sought to "check-in" with each other regarding their journal entry responses before submitting them to the researcher. Furthermore, some participants may have withheld some frustrations they experienced with the consultant-teacher model due to the fear of hurting a teammate's feelings. The researcher incorporated a few strategies in an attempt to overcome this potential limitation. First, the confidentiality of participants' names and responses was ensured and stressed from the beginning of the research study. Secondly, the researcher reinforced that the purpose of the study was not to evaluate individual or consultant-teacher model team performance, but rather the study was part of a graduate
Establishing effective consultant teacher model relationships

level study. Finally, all participants were reminded that their participation in the research study was optional. Participants were free to discontinue their involvement in the study at any time at their own discretion.

Summary

The research question *How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model?* focused on the opinions, behaviors, and experiences of individuals participating in the study. Therefore, qualitative data was gathered, analyzed, and interpreted for the research study. Data collected through the pre and post study surveys was compiled and explored for trends. Specifically, the researcher searched for similar opinions and experiences regarding co-teaching within the consultant teacher model shared by the participants. Responses to each question were organized and represented in a combination of comparison bar graphs. The graphs display the complete range of responses to each question and identify the participants’ most popular answer(s) to each question. Data provided through the journal entry responses was tallied and displayed in charts. The charts were organized to represent participants’ responses in order from least to most popular and include examples for each category.

During the research study, all participants had the opportunity to meet, share, and discuss their journal responses through weekly peer mentoring sessions. Notes recorded and suggestions made during these sessions were maintained by the researcher in a personal journal for both ongoing and post-study analysis and interpretation. Participants’ replies to the six journal entry prompts were tallied and displayed in a graph to convey how the elements of shared work space, co-planning, and equivalent content knowledge impacted instruction and their co-teaching relationships. Once collected, all
the data gathered through the pre and post study surveys, journal entries, and field notes was analyzed to identify both benefits and drawbacks experienced by the participants in the areas of common planning time, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge. Furthermore, the conclusions of this study will be used to help equip all teachers within the school district with the tools necessary to create effective co-teaching relationships.
Chapter IV Findings

Introduction

Last year my school district enacted a shift in our continuum of special education services to include more inclusive (special education and regular education students in the same classroom) educational opportunities for students with disabilities. Traditional 15:1 classrooms (1 special education teacher with a maximum of 15 identified students with IEP's) were replaced by the consultant teacher model (a special education teacher working in a classroom containing both regular and special education students). The consultant teacher model is also commonly referred to as “co-teaching” (one special education teacher and one regular education teacher in the same room). As a result of the district’s shift special education services, a heightened sense of uncertainty rose among both regular and special education teachers concerning their new roles and responsibilities.

My research on the topic of co-teaching identified three critical elements to establishing effective co-teaching relationships. A study conducted in 2005 by Melody recognized common planning time and shared work space as two essential components in helping teachers adjust to new roles and responsibilities. In the same year, Bardizi, et. al. (2005) cited grade specific content knowledge by both co-teaching partners as a crucial element in the establishment of an effective co-teaching learning environment. The formation of my research question: How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model was based primarily on the works completed by these two groups of researchers (Bardizi, et. al. 2005; Melody, 2005). The purpose of this study was to
provide K-5 consultant-teacher model teams in my district with the tools necessary to create effective co-teaching relationships and learning environments.

Context
The research study was conducted in a suburban elementary school (K-5) consisting of approximately four hundred students grades K-5. The instructional staff for the entire building consisted of eighteen general education teachers, three special education (consultant) teachers, and three classroom aides. During the research study period, the focus group consisted of seven general education teachers and three special education (consultant) teachers currently serving as educators in consultant teacher model classrooms. Data was collected only from individuals for whom consent was received (Appendix E).

Results

Pre-Study Questionnaire #1

Question #1 What background or experience do you have in special education?

Summary
The pre-study questionnaire identified that nine of the ten participants in the research study possessed prior experience in the field of special education. A regular education teacher with fifteen years experience represented the lone participant without any previous experience in the field of special education. Participants with experience
working in an inclusive classroom and who had received in-service or professional
development training signified the two most common fields of experience. During the
weekly peer mentoring sessions, participants expressed the district’s new emphasis on
meeting the needs of its special education students as the motivator behind taking in-
service and professional development courses directly pertaining to special education.
The eight participants, who took special education courses at either the undergraduate or
graduate level, shared that the classes were required in each of their respected programs
of study. While only three participants knew of family members who received special
education services, all ten participants expressed the belief that learning disabilities and
other areas of student need are more in commonly identified in schools today.

Question #2  What does inclusion mean to you?

Summary

All ten participants referenced the combination of regular education and special
education students in their definition of inclusion. More specifically, five participants
included support from a special education teacher to help provide differentiated
instruction in their definitions. The degree or amount of participation for special
education students in the regular classroom ranged from with one or two specific classes
to full day inclusion.
Question #3  *What questions or concerns do you have about teaching in an inclusive classroom?*

![Diagram showing concerns teaching in an inclusive classroom]

**Summary**

In answering this question, five of the participants provided more than one response. Meeting the needs of both the regular and special education students was the greatest concern expressed by the participants. During the mentoring sessions, teachers sought out ideas on how to provide instruction that challenged their higher level students, but at the same time didn’t overwhelm students who needed materials broken down into smaller pieces. Exactly half of the participants voiced developing and maintaining a positive relationship with their co-teaching teammate as their greatest concern working in an inclusive classroom. While the teachers were hopeful in developing a positive relationship with their partner(s), at the same time they were also apprehensive about how issues pertaining to personality differences, flexibility, and communication would impact the dynamics of their relationship. The fear of overloading an inclusion classroom with regular education students performing below grade level and students receiving special education services was shared by two teachers as the result of previous experiences in an inclusive environment. One teacher questioned who would take responsibility for grading and evaluating student performance in an inclusive classroom. In addition, the teacher also expressed concern over assigning grades to tasks that were either modified or completed with assistance.
Question #4  *How do you feel about working with multiple teachers in the same classroom?*

![Reactions to Working with Multiple Teachers in the Same Room](image)

### Summary

The majority (8/10) of participants reacted positively to the concept of sharing a classroom with multiple teachers. Discussions during mentoring sessions revealed the teachers believed multiple teachers in the same room would provide fresh ideas during lesson planning and instruction. In addition, having another teacher in the room would provide smaller student to teacher ratios and assist with monitoring student behavior and understanding during lessons. Teachers who possessed mixed feelings sharing a classroom agreed with the positive reactions of their peers, but also pointed out areas of uncertainty. They admitted the presence of another, potentially more experienced peer would provide an added sense of pressure and less flexibility in the daily schedule.
Establishing effective consultant teacher model relationships

Questions #5  What potential benefits do you foresee for all students in an inclusive classroom?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Benefits to All Students in an Inclusive Classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers More Able to Meet the Needs of All Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Acceptance of Individual Differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Role Modeling for IEP Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Tutoring to Reinforce Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

Four potential benefits were identified by the participants. In answering the question, all of the participants gave at least two answers. The two potential benefits most commonly named were teachers’ ability to meet the needs of all students (both regular and special education) and overall student acceptance of individual differences. Participants believed that having a smaller student-teacher ratio would allow for more small group, differentiated instruction to meet individual student needs. In group discussions, teachers felt when students with special needs received instruction in an isolated environment, they were more recognized by their peers as being different. However with an inclusive learning environment, the teachers believed that students were more accepting of individual differences because they were in the same classroom throughout the day. Positive role modeling and opportunities for peer tutoring to help reinforce student learning were the two other potential benefits cited by participants. The regular and special education teachers voiced agreement that opportunities for students with special needs to learn appropriate social behavior and academic concepts from their regular education peers reinforced skills the teachers were already addressing.
Question #6  *What should co-teaching look like to you?*

Summary

The participants identified two different models of how instruction could appear within the co-teaching model. Seven participants viewed instruction taking place with both teachers leading the lesson simultaneously. Teachers would both move around the room, interject ideas and engage in shared think-a-louds. In the one lead teacher, one support teacher model, the three participants viewed the special education teacher working with individuals or a small group during a lesson to breakdown and reinforce the material being taught.

Question #7  *Identify the three important elements in establishing a positive co-teaching relationship.*
Establishing effective consultant teacher model relationships

Summary

Communication, teachers learning to work together, and flexibility were the three most important elements in eyes of the ten participants in establishing a positive co-teaching relationship. During the mentoring sessions, participants expressed open and honest communication regarding areas of frustration and concern would help keep all teachers on the same page and clear up any issues before they ballooned into an unwanted problem. Teachers working together for the first time would need to clearly establish roles and responsibilities to help them learn to work together and foster a positive relationship. In addition, flexibility regarding the sharing of ideas, lesson planning, instruction, and daily schedule changes were identified by seven participants.

Pre-Study Questionnaire #2

Question #1 What potential benefits and drawbacks does co-planning provide a co-teaching team?

Summary

The initial question of the second pre-study questionnaire asked participants to identify benefits and drawbacks to co-planning. While three participants provided more than one benefit to co-planning, nine participants offered only one drawback. Increased ideas (6 participants) and organization (5 participants) were the benefits most frequently
named by the participants. As mentioned in question #3 from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1, the participants felt that multiple teachers working together, including co-planning would spark the development and sharing of new ideas between teachers. The ability to co-plan instruction also lead teachers to believe that "on the fly" co-teaching would be replaced with more organized and focused instruction. The final benefit for teachers in co-planning was the ability to assign specific roles during instruction based on individual strengths. For example, the teacher with the stronger background knowledge or strategies to teach a skill would take on more of a lead role during instruction. Disagreement over the content and method of instruction was the top drawback identified by six participants to co-planning. During the mentoring sessions, teachers expressed difficulty planning with peers who were "set in their ways" and believed one teacher should lead the majority of whole group instruction. Ineffective use of planning time was mentioned by three participants who have experienced frustration over the socializing and other off task behaviors that presented themselves during their structured co-planning time. One participant expressed no drawbacks to common co-planning time.

Question #2  What potential benefits and drawbacks does a shared work space provide a co-teaching team?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Shared Work Space Benefits</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased Small Group Instruction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Communication Between Teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates Teacher Unity and Shared Roles</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Potential Shared Work Space Drawbacks</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Classroom Space</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Territorial Issues and Personality Conflicts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Drawbacks Identified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Improved quality of instruction and increased communication were each identified by four participants as a benefit of shared workspace to a co-teaching team. With multiple teachers in the same room, the ability to break up students and provide instruction in smaller groups based on specific areas of need would benefit all students according to teachers’ testimony in the mentoring sessions. The participants also believed that sharing a classroom would help increase the communication between co-teaching teammates because they would have to search for their teammate to express ideas, observations, and concerns. Two of the special education teachers identified that sharing a classroom would communicate a strong sense of teacher unity and equal balance in teacher roles and responsibilities to the students. A concern over a limited amount of classroom space and accommodating the workspace (desk) and materials of multiple teachers in a single room was recognized by five participants as the top drawback to a shared workspace. A close second, territorial and personality issues were expressed by four participants who felt a shared workspace with someone you’ve experienced difficulty interacting with would create an uncomfortable work environment. One participant identified no drawbacks to sharing workspace.
Question #3  What potential benefits and drawbacks does grade specific content knowledge provide a co-teaching team?

Summary

In answering this question, 60% of participants cited more balanced instructional roles and responsibilities if both teachers possess adequate content knowledge because each teacher is capable of leading instruction and answering students’ questions. Four participants also believed that planning would be more effective if both teachers were able to contribute ideas and strategies. An unbalance in the level of content knowledge between the regular and special education teacher was the by far the most common potential drawback identified by the participants. In our weekly mentoring sessions, regular and special education teachers shared discomfort with the special education teacher leading instruction when he/she has less experience and knowledge relating to the topic. As a result, the potential frustration of one teacher having to take the time to teacher his/her teammate the topic arose. The drawback of teachers becoming too comfortable with their content knowledge in some areas and reusing the same materials year after year was expressed by two participants.
Question #4 How does the content knowledge of each teacher impact his/her role in the co-teaching relationship?

Summary

Only two responses were provided by participants concerning the impact of content knowledge on individual roles in the co-teaching relationship. During the weekly mentoring periods, six participants agreed that the teacher with the stronger background knowledge on a specific topic should lead instruction. The remaining four participants expressed the belief that the varying content knowledge of each teacher would result in more effective planning and delivery of instruction because the teacher possessing the stronger background or strategies for a skill could share what they know with their teammate. As a result, both teachers would share a more similar understanding of the concept being taught.

Question #5 What impact will a shared work environment have on students' perceptions of individual teacher responsibilities?
Summary

All participants identified that a shared workspace would result in students viewing a more balanced distribution of roles and responsibilities among the teachers in the room. Teachers who previously worked in a shared, inclusion classroom noticed that all students felt more comfortable interacting and working with the special education teacher when he/she physically shared the classroom. On the other hand, when the special education teacher had to travel to the regular education room it was observed that the students with special needs accounted for the majority of special education teacher’s interactions. Coincidentally, the three special education teachers expressed they feel more of a shared sense of student responsibility when sharing a room. Based on previous experiences, the special education teachers voiced the notion of feeling like a visitor when walking into a regular education classroom to service students with special needs because they had to transport their own materials.
Journal Entry Prompts

Week #1  What impact(s) did a shared teaching environment have on inclusion this week?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impacts of Shared Teaching Environment on Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students more on task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wider variety of ideas presented to students during whole group instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller groups during instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased opportunities for differentiated instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several participants provided more than 1 response to this question.

Summary

Several impacts of a shared teaching environment were identified at the conclusion of the first week of the research study. Over half (60%) of the participants recognized students working and learning in smaller groups, as well as increased opportunities for differentiated instruction within their shared teaching environment. Meanwhile, 40% of the regular education teachers noticed a wider variety of ideas presented to the class during whole group instruction as the result of another teacher in the room with a fresh perspective on the topic. These impacts expressed are consistent with the potential benefits of shared workspace participants identified in response to question two What potential benefits and drawbacks does a shared work space provide a
co-teaching team from Pre-Study Questionnaire #2. One impact not predicted or previously discussed was that students appeared more on task as the result of an extra set of eyes to monitor and assist them.

Week #2  *How effective was co-planning in preparing for the implementation of instruction this week?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness of Co-Planning on Instruction</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
|                                            | Highly Effective   | 7                      | • teachers had defined roles & responsibilities  
• more ideas, 2 heads were better than 1  
• students demonstrated increased understanding of materials covered |
|                                            | Moderately Effective | 3                    | • lack of sufficient common planning time  
• only general-topics were discussed, each teacher left to make specific plans  
• too much time spent off task |
|                                            | Negatively Effective | 0                     |                                                           |

Summary

The majority of participants (70%) felt highly effective in their ability to co-plan instruction for the upcoming week. During their shared planning, participants spent their time sharing ideas and defining individual roles and responsibilities for specific lessons. The use of common planning time by the seven participants who viewed their co-planning as highly effective aligns with the potential co-planning benefits identified in question one *What potential benefits and drawbacks does co-planning provide a co-teaching team* from Pre-Study Questionnaire #2. A lack of sufficient time and ineffective use of their shared planning time were the two negative aspects of co-planning for the three participants who felt their co-planning was moderately effective in
preparation for upcoming instruction. Responses to this journal entry once again align with the potential drawbacks named by participants in question one. What potential benefits and drawbacks does co-planning provide a co-teaching team from Pre-Study Questionnaire #2.

Week #3 Was your content background knowledge adequate to teach the lessons this week? Please explain with examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comfort Level with Knowledge of Content Prior to Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Felt personal knowledge was sufficient | 5 | • had taught same grade level and content for multiple years  
• collaborated with grade level peers to share and discuss ideas |
| Felt personal knowledge was sufficient but co-teaching teammate had stronger grasp of specific targeted skills | 3 | • 1 teacher had more experience teaching grade level and with specific unit of study  
• 1 teacher had more strategies for learning the skills that would benefit all students |
| Did not feel comfortable teaching content due to lack of familiarity of material and grade level | 2 | • spent time self-teaching material to increase comfort level and grasp of concepts  
• researched ideas and information related to the topic |

Summary

After lesson planning, 50% of the participants felt their content background knowledge was sufficient for instruction due to teaching the same grade level and curriculum for several years. According to question three, What potential benefits and drawbacks does grade specific content knowledge provide a co-teaching team from Pre-Study Questionnaire #2, recycled ideas and materials (reusing same lessons and materials from year to year) was identified as a potential drawback for teachers who with multiple, consecutive years teaching the same grade level and curriculum. Of the remaining
participants, 30% expressed feeling their content background knowledge was adequate, but deferred the role of lead instructor to their co-teaching teammate who possessed a stronger grasp of the targeted skills and concepts. The 20% of participants who felt uncomfortable teaching content due to a lack of familiarity with the material and grade level was represented by two special education teachers working in their first year at a new grade level.

Week #4  *Describe one area you would feel is a personal strength in your co-teaching relationship.*

**Areas of Personal Strength in Co-Teaching Relationship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• make a point to touch base with teammate every morning to discuss any changes in routine or plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• increased modeling of behavioral expectations • shared expectations of student behavior and quality of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiated Instruction</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>• ability to modify instruction and tasks to meet specific student needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>• openness and willingness to share and listen to ideas • ability to compromise when possessing different views</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

Despite communication being identified by 90% of participants in question seven *Identify the three most critical elements in establishing an positive co-teaching relationship* from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1 as a critical element to establishing a positive co-teaching relationship, only 10%, or 1 participant recognized it as an area of strength in their own co-teaching relationship. Classroom management and differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students were each recognized by 20% of participants as an area of strength. Exactly half (50%) of the participants cited
personal flexibility within the co-teaching relationship as their number one area of strength. That statistic is consistent with results of question seven Identify the three most critical elements in establishing an positive co-teaching relationship from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1, in which seven participants identified flexibility as a critical characteristic in establishing a positive co-teaching relationship.

Week #5 Identify and describe one area you would like to see personal improvement to enhance your co-teaching relationship.

**Personal Area of Desired Improvement to Enhance Co-Teaching Relationship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• organization of shared materials and workspace between both teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>• increase patience and understanding for students with special needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>• Increased communication on a daily basis concerning student progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Expressing personal and student areas of concern within the co-teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>relationship/classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing Responsibility &amp; Control</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>• be more open to other teachers’ ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• relinquishing sole control over instruction and management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

Distribution of responsibility and control within a shared workspace represented the desired area of improvement for 50% of participants, and subsequently was the area of most common desired improvement. Concern regarding the relationship between teachers in an inclusive classroom was also identified by 50% of the participants when answering question three What questions or concerns do you have about teaching in an inclusive classroom on Pre-Study Questionnaire #1. Similarly, teachers learning how to
work together was included in 80% of the responses provided by participants to question seven *Identify the three most critical elements in establishing a positive co-teaching relationship* from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1. Improved communication between co-teaching teammates (30%) was the only other area of identified by multiple participants.

Week #6 *Identify and explain how one of the prompts impacted your perception of co-teaching and your role in building effective co-teaching relationships.*

**Most Influential Prompt in Perception and Development of Co-Teaching Relationship**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Prompt #1- Shared Work Space      | 2                      | • reiterated the importance of making special education teacher feel welcomed in the room  
|                                   |                        | • creating space for both teachers' materials to give students perception room is shared equally |
| Prompt #2- Co-Planning            | 2                      | • improved the use of co-planning time and were able to raise the level of student expectations |
| Prompt #4- Area of Personal Strength | 2             | • Stressed the importance of both teachers being flexible and having the ability to work well together |
| Prompt #5- Area of Personal Growth | 4                      | • identified areas to work on and consider to strengthen current and future co-teaching relationships |

**Summary**

Identified by 40% of the participants, the opportunity to reflect on a desired area for personal growth within their co-teaching relationship was the most influential journal prompt according to the research study. Based on discussions during mentoring sessions, participants believed identifying an area for personal improvement as part of the research study not only strengthened their current co-teaching relationship, but would improve the
development of new co-teaching relationships in the future. The journal prompts regarding the impact of shared work space, co-planning, and identifying an area of personal strength each were each acknowledged by 20% of the participants as the most influential journal prompt.

Post-Study Survey

Question #1 How did the opportunity to reflect on elements of your co-teaching relationship(s) change your attitude towards providing instruction within the consultant teacher model?

![Change in Attitude Towards Co-Teaching](image)

Summary

An overwhelming 90% of participants expressed the opportunity to reflect on elements of their co-teaching relationship as part of the research study positively influenced their attitude towards co-teaching. The participants' responses to the first post-study question aligned similarly to their answers from question four What is your reaction to working with multiple teachers in the same classroom from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1. In the pre-study question, 80% of participants reacted positively to the prospect of co-teaching in a shared room. The one participant who claimed to have experienced no change in their attitude towards co-teaching stated they entered and exited the research study with the same positive outlook regarding co-teaching.
Question #2  *Based on your personal experience and work completed in this research study, what two additional elements do you feel are critical to establishing positive co-teaching relationships?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defined Roles and Responsibilities</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open and Honest Communication</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Summary

In the final post-study question, participants named two critical elements to the establishment of a positive co-teaching relationship based on their experience and work completed as part of the research study. Consistent with their responses to a previous similar question (question seven, *Identify the three most critical elements to establishing a positive co-teaching relationship* from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1) the majority (90%) of participants identified communication as the most commonly identified element. According to the data collected, defined roles and responsibilities was named a critical element by 60% of participants. The importance of this element was also expressed by participants who identified defined roles and responsibilities as a common benefit of co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific content knowledge when they answered questions one, two, and three from Pre-Study Questionnaire #2. At the end of the study, individual teacher flexibility remained a critical element to establishing a positive co-teaching relationship in the eyes of 50% of participants. In question seven from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1, flexibility was identified as a critical element by 70% of participants.
Chapter V Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Conclusions

The research study was conducted over a period of seven weeks and produced several significant findings related to the question *How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model.* When provided sufficient time, co-planning was identified by 70% of participants as a highly effective method of planning for instruction within a co-teaching team. Participants cited opportunities to exchange ideas, organize materials, and define instructional roles as the key benefits of co-planning. During the weekly mentoring sessions, participants also expressed the opportunity to co-plan clarified curriculum related questions for teachers working in a new grade level. In Pre-Study Questionnaire #2, 60% of participants believed disagreements between teachers over content and instruction would be the largest potential drawback of co-planning. However, according to the 30% of participants who viewed co-planning as moderately effective, a lack of sufficient time and ineffective time management (i.e. off task behaviors) were the most significant drawbacks of co-planning identified during the research study.

In the pre-study questionnaires, 100% of participants believed that a shared work environment would result in the students viewing both teachers equally sharing classroom roles and responsibilities. Although this viewpoint was not supported by data gathered through journal prompts and the post-study questionnaire, it was supported during the weekly mentoring sessions. Participants noted that with both teachers consistently in the room together, they were more balanced in their instructional roles and students appeared more comfortable working with either teacher. Additional positive
impacts of shared workspace including increased opportunities for small group and
differentiated instruction were identified by 60% of participants according to Journal
Entry Prompt Week #1 and supported in the mentoring sessions. The potential shared
workspace drawbacks of insufficient classroom space, as well as territorial and
personality conflicts between teachers mentioned in Pre-Study Questionnaire #2, failed to
present themselves during the research study period.

The most significant impact of grade specific content knowledge was on the
defining of instructional roles and appearance of co-teaching within the classroom.
When both teachers shared relatively equal levels of grade specific content knowledge,
they experienced more balanced instructional roles. However, in most cases the regular
education teacher had more experience working at the grade level and therefore
possessed greater specific content knowledge. In response to Journal Prompt #3 Was
your content knowledge adequate to teach the lessons this week, both participants who
replied they felt uncomfortable leading instruction were special education teachers. This
trend was predicted in question three from Pre-Study Questionnaire #2, where 80% of
participants identified unbalanced content knowledge between teachers as the top
drawback to this element of a co-teaching relationship. Participants openly admitted that
each teacher's grade specific content knowledge determined instructional roles during the
weekly mentoring sessions. Instructional roles in the content areas were shared equally
in both situations where the special education and regular education teacher had worked
in the same grade level for multiple years.
Recommendations

The pre-study questionnaires provided the researcher with the background knowledge and experience of the ten participants related to special education, while the post-study questionnaire identified changes in attitude and additional elements for future study related to establishing positive co-teaching relationships. Providing potential participants with a copy of the pre-study questions was significant in obtaining their consent to take part in the research study and is recommended to future researchers. Participants unanimously agreed that the opportunity to preview the research study questions enabled them to make a more informed decision regarding their participation in the research study. In addition, participants felt the chance to preview the questions allowed them to more clearly organize and express their thoughts. Another key component to the research study was the weekly peer mentoring sessions. The opportunity to collectively meet as a group provided a forum for participants to share and discuss their experiences working as part of a co-teaching team. From the mentoring sessions, participants learned new ideas related to providing instruction, co-planning, classroom arrangement, and defining roles from each other. Most importantly, the peer mentoring sessions enabled participants to identify elements that both positively and adversely impacted co-teaching relationships. Participants were then able to apply what they learned to the development of their own positive co-teaching relationships. The researcher also benefited from the peer mentoring sessions because participants often elaborated further on the weekly journal prompt, providing more specific details and insights to their written journal responses.
At the completion of the research study, two recommended areas of improvement would be made for future researchers. The first recommendation is to narrow the number of questions from the two pre-study questionnaires to form a single questionnaire. Adequate background knowledge of each participant related to special education could have been achieved from questions one, two, and seven from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1. Questions three, five, and six from Pre-Study Questionnaire #1 could be eliminated because they do not directly relate to the research question *How does co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model?* Reducing the number of questions to create a single pre-study questionnaire would provide future researchers more targeted responses to address the research question. According to responses gathered from question two on Post-Study Questionnaire #2, participants overwhelmingly identified flexibility, defined roles, and communication as critical elements to establishing positive co-teaching relationships based on their personal experiences. Hence, it is also recommended that future research explore how these elements of flexibility, defined roles, and communication impact the development of positive co-teaching relationships.

**Implications of Findings for Teachers**

The findings of this research study offer direct implications to current and future teachers. In 1995, a study conducted by the National Study on Inclusion identified co-teaching (both a regular education teacher and special education teacher in the same room) as the most popular model for integrating regular and identified students within the same classroom. Establishing a positive co-teaching relationship is critical not only for the teachers involved, but essential to fostering growth and development for all students.
While this study focused on the impact of co-planning, shared workspace, and grade specific content knowledge on a co-teaching relationship, it also identified flexibility, communication, and defined roles as additional elements to establishing a positive co-teaching relationship. The ability of two or more teachers to establish positive co-teaching relationships is a continuous work in progress, requiring full dedication from all persons involved.
Establishing effective consultant teacher model relationships

References:


Establishing effective consultant teacher model relationships


Attachment A: Pre-Study Questionnaire #1

Pre-Study Questionnaire #1

1. What background or experience do you have in special education?
   - Have any family members ever received special education services? yes/no
   - Have you taken any in-service or professional development courses pertaining to special education services? yes/no
   - Have you completed any undergraduate/graduate courses pertaining to special education? yes/no
   - Do you have any previous experience working in an inclusive classroom? yes/no

2. What does inclusion mean to you?

3. What questions or concerns do you have about teaming in an inclusive classroom?

4. How do you feel about working with multiple teachers in the same classroom?

5. What potential benefits do you foresee for all students in an inclusive classroom?

6. What should co-teaching look like to you?

7. Identify three important elements you feel are critical in establishing a positive co-teaching relationship.
Appendix B: Pre-Study Questionnaire #2

Pre-Study Questionnaire #2

1. What potential benefits and drawbacks does co-planning provide a co-teaching team?

2. What potential benefits and drawbacks does a shared workspace provide a co-teaching team?

3. What potential benefits and drawbacks does grade specific content knowledge provide a co-teaching team?

4. How does the content knowledge of each teacher impact his/her role in the co-teaching relationship?

5. What impact will a shared workspace have on students’ perceptions of individual teacher roles and responsibilities?
Appendix C: Journal Entry Prompts

Journal Entry Prompts

Week #1: What impact(s) did a shared workspace have on instruction this week?

Week #2: How effective (highly effective, moderately effective, completely ineffective) was co-planning for the implementation of instruction this week?

Week #3: Was your content background knowledge adequate to teach the lessons this week or did you have to research content knowledge on the topic? Please provide examples to support your answer.

Week #4: Describe one area you feel is a personal strength in your co-teaching relationship(s).

Week #5: Describe one area you would like to see personal improvement to enhance your co-teaching relationship(s).

Week #6: Identify and explain how one of the prompts impacted your perception of co-teaching and your role in building effective co-teaching relationships.
Appendix D: Post-Study Questionnaire

Post-Study Questionnaire

1. How did the opportunity to reflect on elements of your co-teaching relationship(s) change your attitude towards providing instruction within the consultant teacher model?

2. Based on your personal experiences, what two additional elements do you feel are critical to establishing positive co-teaching relationships?
Appendix E: Participant Consent Form

Dear Colleague:

As part of my research project for my level of study program at college's or university's name this year, I will be looking at how co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model. Within the location of study, we are experiencing the transition of providing services to our students with special needs in more inclusive settings. I will be collecting data to identify how co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model. The data collected in this study will be used to enhance my understanding of establishing effective co-teaching relationships. I will only collect data from teachers whom have provided informed consent.

Each participant will be given a pseudonym, or fictitious name, prior to the start of data collection. No participants’ name will be used when I collect data or share this information. To maintain confidentiality, all data collected will be kept in a locked filing cabinet.

You are being asked whether or not you agree to participate in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. There are no rewards or penalties for being or not being a part of the study. You are free to change your mind or stop your involvement in the study at any time during the study and there will be no penalty. If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below in the space provided. Remember, you may change your mind at any point and will no longer be included in the study. Please return the bottom portion of this form if you agree to let me use the results of your work in my research. I greatly appreciate your support.

My contact information, as well as my advisor’s contact information, is included below if you would like to talk to me further about the study.

Sincerely,

Name: ___________________________ Advisor’s Name: ______________
Level of Study and Department: ___________________________ Department Title: ______________
College or University Attended: ___________________________ College or University’ Name: ______________
Phone Number: ________________ Phone Number: ________________

I have read this letter and I agree to allow researcher’s name to information that I provide for his study on establishing effective relationships within the consultant teacher model.

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________
Appendix F: Administrator Permission Form

To: Administrator's Name

I have read and approve the research study entitled "How do co-planning, shared work space, and grade specific curriculum knowledge impact a K-5 co-teaching team in the consultant teacher model?" by researcher's name and give consent for the study to be conducted at location of research study.

________________________________________  __________________________
Signature                                      Date

________________________________________
Title of person signing