BACKGROUND AND DEFINITION
As a pedagogical model, co-teaching has been practiced for a number of years. Initially, co-teaching was designed and used for instructional collaboration between teachers of exceptional children and general education teachers, with the expressed purpose of enabling general education teachers to better support the learning needs of special needs students. Co-teaching practice has been described as a “collaborative partnership between general and special education...teachers for all of the teaching responsibilities of all of the students assigned in a classroom” (Gately & Gately, in Honigsfeld & Dove, 2001, p. 8). And Popp has referred to this specific model as a “keep-in” as opposed to “pull-out” model (2000).

More recently, the use of co-teaching has broadened to classrooms of general education teachers and teachers of English Language Learners (ELL), with the goal of providing support to ELLs and helping them meet academic standards, while allowing for collaborative opportunities between general education teachers and teachers of ELLs (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008).

Regardless of the instructional setting, co-teaching represents a service delivery model grounded in the philosophy of inclusion (Anderson, 2008) that seeks to improve teachers’ instructional practices through professional collaboration. So while the practice of co-teaching has varied over the years, perhaps one of its most useful definitions is provided by Cook and Friend, as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space” (Cook & Friend, in Murawski & Swanson, 2001, p. 258).

Villa, Thousand, and Nevin have identified critical features of co-teaching that can be instructive to understanding its use, including:

- A coordination of work to reach “one common, publicly agreed-upon goal”;
- A belief system that all co-teachers possess unique and needed expertise;
- A demonstration of parity by alternatively engaging in the dual roles of teacher and learner, expert and novice, giver and receiver of knowledge and skills;
- Shared leadership structures so that all co-teachers experience task and relationship functions of the traditional lone teacher (2004, p.3).
The authors also define co-teaching by what it is not, including:

- One person teaching one subject, followed by another teacher who instructs a different subject;
- One person teaching one subject while another teacher prepares instructional materials or corrects papers;
- One teacher facilitating a lesson while another teacher idly watches;
- The dominance of one person’s ideas for classroom pedagogical strategies; or
- One person acting as a tutor (2004)

**Benefits to Teachers**

As an instructional model, co-teaching offers benefits for both teachers and students. Co-teaching provides teachers opportunities for professional growth; it reduces teacher-student ratio; it allows for the sharing of knowledge, skills, and resources; and it facilitates teachers’ ability to adapt and modify their lessons.

Co-teaching reaches far beyond simply having two teachers in a single classroom at one time. In fact, successful co-teaching is a highly collaborative endeavor between the teachers involved and includes time for teachers to co-plan and debrief the co-teaching experience. Effective co-teaching supports the improvement of instructional practices that meet the needs of all students. At its core, co-teaching helps participating teachers accomplish the following:

- Develop their interpersonal, collaborative, and conflict resolution skills;
- Hone their instructional expertise;
- Develop their knowledge and skills for differentiating instruction; and
- Develop their skills for classroom management.

In a study conducted to assess attitudes and concerns of secondary teachers from 15 urban and suburban Seattle, Washington school districts, teachers mentioned common planning time and a positive working relationship with a co-teacher as two of the most important features of co-teaching. They also cited shared responsibility and philosophy, as well as mutual respect, shared resources, similar instructional style, and equal commitment (Kohler-Evans, 2006) as being important to the co-teaching endeavor.
Elsewhere, it has been noted that co-teaching affords participating educators a different type of professional encouragement—moving from feelings of “alienation and isolation” to “community and collaboration,” meeting “basic psychological needs of belonging, fun, choice, power, and survival” (Villa et.al, 2004 cited in Santamaria & Thousand, 2004). Others have noted that teachers who have engaged in co-teaching often express a willingness to try new ideas and practice more creativity in the classroom (Basso & McCoy, 2007; Friend & Cook, in Gately & Gately, 2001; Santamaria & Thousand, 2004; Villa, et al., 2004). In fact, some teachers have expressed a feeling of empowerment (Duke, Showers & Imber, cited in Santamaria & Thousand, 2004) as a result of collaborative decision-making that is an element of co-teaching.

**Benefits to Students**

Students also profit from the co-teaching classroom. Because effective co-teachers model collaborative practices (Olsen, 1968, cited in Santamaria & Thousand, 2004), they demonstrate authentic teamwork and problem-solving, both of which are highly desired skills for students. Having access to two teachers can provide for more individualized attention to students, as it reduces teacher-student ratio ([http://tcteacher.org/co-teaching.php](http://tcteacher.org/co-teaching.php)). Most recently, the effects of co-teaching between student teachers and veteran teachers have been reported. In a four-year study of students in co-teaching classrooms and traditional single-teacher classrooms, students in the co-teaching classroom statistically outperformed students in reading and math achievement as compared to students in the traditional classrooms (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010).

Clearly, co-teaching has positive implications for both educators and students when it assists teachers in meeting the goal of helping students realize their full potential (Friend, 2005).

**Common Challenges to Implementing Co-teaching**

Co-teaching is not without its challenges. In interviews with teachers and administrators in schools that have used co-teaching, teachers indicated that sufficient time to co-plan lessons, discuss classroom procedures, and evaluate student work proved to be the most significant challenge. Lack of administrative knowledge of and support for co-teaching was also cited as a potential barrier to effective co-teaching (Anderson, 2008).
Clearly, challenges associated with co-teaching have implications for professional development. Educating administrators on the need for sufficient time to engage in co-teaching—from planning, to implementation, to reflection—is critical for co-teaching success (Anderson, 2008). Others have noted that “successful implementation of the co-teaching model requires communicating long-term visions, having clear expectations, and monitoring progress at the classroom level” (Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996).

Thus, it is beneficial for all teachers in the school to understand the purpose and function of co-teaching so that colleagues of co-teachers honor the co-teaching initiative and the required time to plan and facilitate it, thereby ensuring that healthy collaborative teacher-teacher and teacher-administrator relationships thrive.

**Co-teaching and the Ohio Resident Educator Program**

Just as co-teaching has been used for teachers of general education, students with special needs, and English Language Learners, co-teaching can also serve as a component of a differentiated support system for new teachers. These new teachers, known in Ohio as Resident Educators (RE), may participate in co-teaching with their mentors or other veteran teachers as a form of support to help REs develop required knowledge and skills represented in the Ohio Standards for the Teaching Profession and practiced in the Ohio Resident Educator program, including the use of formative assessment processes, such as professional goal-setting, instructional planning, observation, and reflection. To that end, effective co-teaching between REs and veteran teachers can do the following:

- Provide support that deepens REs’ understanding of the nature of knowledge and inquiry;
- Provide power learning opportunities for REs to thrive in a professional culture;
- Provide implicit support that includes reflection, experience, processes, and collaboration; and
- Address REs’ areas of strength and areas for growth.
References


Phuong, T. & Guzman-Ortega, S. (2011, February). The power of mentor/teachers partnerships in the elementary classroom, New Teacher Center Symposium, San Jose, CA.


