

RESEARCH

Current challenges and practices in co-teaching in K-12 schools

Sarah Horne, MPS^{1*}

Manhattanville College

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*Correspondence:
sarah.horne@gmail.com

Abstract

The inclusive classroom has become an increasingly popular classroom model but is not consistently implemented in schools. This paper seeks to find which collaborative teaching practices are commonly used in K-12 schools today, how teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching methods, how teachers are prepared for co-teaching and their perception of the effectiveness of their training, the current challenges of co-teaching, and how those challenges are resolved. To achieve this, a survey was conducted amongst 54 anonymous and voluntary participants to compare the perceptions and experiences of those currently co-teaching with varying years of teaching and co-teaching experience. The results show that most teachers enjoy co-teaching and collaborating with their co-teaching partners, but the most common challenge of co-teaching is finding time to meet and plan. Similarly, most are not adequately prepared for pre-service or in-service teaching training, leading many to use ineffective co-teaching practices.

Keywords: *Co-teaching, inclusive classrooms, teacher preparation*

This study addresses the problem of determining the current challenges faced by collaborative teachers and the strategies they are using to create an effective co-taught classroom.

Purpose

The average classroom in the American public school system is becoming increasingly more inclusive as more students are classified in special education and more special education students are placed in general education classrooms. In the last ten years, the number of students who receive special education services in the United States has steadily grown from 6.4 million in the 2010-2011 school year to 7.3 million in the 2021-2022 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). The percentage of special education students who spend 80% or more of their day in the general education classroom is now 66.17% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). With more special education students in the general education classroom, there is a greater need for effective co-taught classrooms. The collaboration between a special education teacher and a general education teacher in one classroom helps ensure that the appropriate class content is taught and that it

is accessible, so all students can succeed. In the last few decades, more schools throughout the United States have incorporated the co-taught classroom model.

This increasingly common classroom model allows more students to have access to an accessible education while in the mainstream classroom, instead of being taught in a different classroom for most of the day, which separates them from their peers. To ensure that students are being taught effectively, it is important to understand how teachers perceive their co-teaching, what challenges they encounter, how they resolve those challenges and how they are prepared for co-teaching.

Synopsis

More students are classified in special education, and the teacher shortage, especially among special education teachers, has grown; there is a greater need to accommodate special education students in the mainstream classroom. Both issues highlight the immediate need for effective co-teaching in the mainstream classroom to ensure that the needs of all students are met, however, not all teachers are adequately or equally prepared or feel that they have enough time to collaborate with their co-teacher. This study explores different types of inclusive classrooms, how teachers are prepared by their schools, which co-teaching models and strategies are effective and why, and the obstacles that interfere with collaborative co-teaching and co-planning. For this study, the research question to be explained is whether current practices in collaborative teaching are effective in terms of teacher preparedness, effective teaching strategies and practices, and effective problem-solving strategies. As well as, how teachers are prepared for collaborative teaching, how they perceive their co-

teaching, and how they collaborate with their co-teacher in an inclusive classroom. Participants, therefore, were asked to participate in the survey.

Literature Review

The Inclusive Classroom

According to the National Center for Educational Disabilities, the database that tracks all students served by IDEA, the percentage of students provided benefits through special education has increased from 8.3% in 1976 to 13.2% in 2015. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act, there are thirteen disabilities (a) autism; (b) hearing impairment; (c) emotional disturbance; (d) deafness; (e) blindness; (f) intellectual disability; (g) multiple disabilities; (h) orthopedic impairment; (i) other health impairment; (j) specific learning disability; (k) speech or language impairment; (l) traumatic brain injury; and (m) visually impairment (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). In recent years, the areas of greatest increase were in other health impairments (OHI) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). In addition to the increasing number of students identified as having a disability, the frequency with which students with disabilities are educated in general education settings has also increased. (Allen, et al., 2020). These numbers and rapidly changing student population demographics affect a school's ability to service all these students appropriately and effectively. In recent years, the increased prevalence of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion principles in schools has emphasized the need for more inclusive classroom settings. For example, in New York, The New York State Board of Regents stated, "that all school districts and institutions of higher education [would] develop and implement policies and practices that advance diversity, equity, and inclusion ['DEI']—and that they will implement such

policies and practices with fidelity and urgency” (Rosa & James, 2023, p. 2). Schools throughout the country have begun to, and continue to, place a greater emphasis on the need for acceptance and inclusion throughout the school community, so the inclusive classroom is an important place to showcase and solidify these ideals.

Historically, special education classrooms have been separated from general education classrooms, thus creating a segregated school community. This model separated and disconnected students with disabilities from their general education teachers and placed the responsibility of this population on the special education teachers. (Allen, et al., 2020). To do away with this model, schools took a proactive approach to the vision of an inclusive learning environment. One of the ways schools were able to achieve this vision was by incorporating students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom. Inclusive classrooms help provide a solid education for all children and may help change prejudiced attitudes toward students with disabilities (Krischler et al., 2019). In-service teachers have also been provided with specific professional development designed to promote an inclusive culture, to reinforce this idea in the school community.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) states that all students with disabilities are to receive a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). The least restrictive environment for any student with disabilities is the general education classroom. According to the Sustainable Development Goal and the Education 2030 Framework for Action stated that “[inclusion] and equity in and through education is the cornerstone of a transformative education agenda, and we, therefore, commit to addressing all forms of

exclusion and marginalization, disparities and inequalities in access, participation and learning outcomes” (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2015, p. 7). Inclusive classroom environments aim to increase the efficiency of the students with disabilities and their peers who do not have disabilities by differentiating teaching materials and teaching methods (Gokbulut, 2020). Instead of having a separate general education classroom and a separate special education classroom, the inclusive classroom model combines the two. While it may seem like a simple idea to execute, the inclusive classroom requires the organization of the schools, teachers, and pedagogies involved, which are provided for each student to ensure they receive an education that fits their needs (Allen et al., 2020). The school and faculty involved in these inclusive classrooms must ensure that all students are supported and given the necessary tools to succeed.

Practices and Strategies for Collaborative Teaching

For collaborative teaching to be effective, both the special education teacher and the general education teacher need to work together to create a classroom that allows students with disabilities to be part of the learning community (Battaglia & Brooks, 2019). The special education teacher and the general education teacher can use their content specialties to ensure that an inclusive learning community exists and helps all students succeed. It is the role of the general education teacher to use their knowledge of their specific content area, while it is the role of the special education teacher to use their knowledge of the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the use of different strategies to assist the students with disabilities by differentiating lessons. In an inclusive classroom,

both teachers should be able to share in the learning and teaching process.

There are several ways in which general education and special education teachers can collaborate. One of the most important ways teachers can collaborate is by preparing and planning their curriculum ahead of time (Solone, et al., 2020). Typically, the general education teachers will share their lesson plans with the special education teacher so the special education teacher can prepare accommodations and modifications students with disabilities may need or benefit from; however, this is not always the case. Special education and general education teachers may co-plan lessons together. This allows both teachers and the class to be more organized and ensures that both teachers understand the lessons, the goals, and their roles. According to Paju et al. (2022), there are three modes of collaboration which include coordination, collaboration, and reflective communication. These three modes have been identified to characterize and analyze how co-teachers relate to their work activity and the objective of their work (Kajamaa & Lahtinen, 2016). With coordination, each participant is assigned a specific action which determines their roles and the basic order in which their expected action(s) will be completed. In cooperation, the participants focus on a temporarily shared problem or task; both co-teachers help find a solution to the issue at hand. In reflective communication, the co-teachers focus both on a shared object and their interaction, questioning and revising their interactions and execution of their lessons. Engaging in a reflective process enables co-teachers to shift from an individualistic co-planning process towards a more collaborative planning process (Paju et al., 2022). Engaging in the three modes of collaboration helps ensure that the

co-planning process is effective, and that co-teaching is equally as effective.

According to (Grady et al., 2019), there are six advanced collaborative teaching strategies for teachers to use in the classroom. By utilizing one or more of these strategies in the classroom, both teachers ensure that each has an active role in the classroom. "One teach, one observe" is one of the collaborative strategies used in the classroom during instruction. With this method, one teacher leads the classroom while the other gathers information about the class and the delivery of instruction. Another collaborative method is "one teach, one assist," where one teacher works with the whole class and the other works with a smaller group of students or individual students. Similar to "one teach, one assist" is "parallel teaching," where each teacher takes half of the class of mixed abilities, and each group completes the same work or different work in similar or different ways. "Station teaching" is another popular method used for collaborating teachers. With this method, students are divided into three or more groups, which rotate through multiple stations facilitated by one teacher per station, and students circulate among stations. "Alternative Teaching" is a method where one teacher works with a large group of students while the other teacher works with a smaller group to re-teach, pre-teach, or enrich the content. The final method used in a collaborative setting is "team teaching" where both teachers present information to the class in the form of debates, modeling information, comparing/contrasting, or role-playing (Grady et al., 2019). Over time, co-teachers find which model, or models, works best for them, but it involves trial and error.

Regardless of how teachers collaborate, to be successful, both teachers must have open communication and be open to each other's ideas

and criticisms. To achieve this, the co-teachers must develop an appropriate disposition when working together that allows them to be open to feedback and constructive criticism. Guise et al. (2016) defines dispositions as “a pattern of behavior exhibited frequently and in the absence of coercion and constituting a habit of mind under some conscious and voluntary control, and that is intentional and oriented to broad goals” (Guise et al., 2016, p. 57). When teachers develop an appropriate disposition, they are more open-minded and are more willing to collaborate. This allows co-teachers to have successful collaboration and makes co-teaching more effective.

Benefits of Co-Teaching

An inclusive classroom provides both special education and general education students with a unique opportunity to learn from one another. While this is an exciting step towards an inclusive and diverse classroom environment, it can present challenges to the general education teacher. General education teachers typically hold leadership positions inside their classrooms, but they often need assistance providing differentiating instruction in inclusive settings (Mofield, 2020). The diverse range of abilities can be a challenge for one general education teacher in a classroom (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016). To aid in this challenge, the special education teacher provides insight into how to differentiate class lesson plans and introduce different strategies to help make the content more accessible to all students. According to Hopkins (2023), general education teachers are responsible for all student learning in the classroom while special educators concentrate on individual students with significant support needs and on creating and enacting their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), collecting data on students' progress toward

IEP goals, adapting assessments, and directly teaching students. Co-teaching partnerships may also share the role and responsibility of student learning and supporting the goals and needs of student IEPs. Both teachers share important roles and responsibilities in the classroom and can rely on one another to ensure that their classroom and student's goals are being met.

The collaboration between a general education teacher and a special education teacher makes the lessons, materials, and classroom activities more accessible to special education students which helps them to be more successful in the mainstream classroom with their non-special education peers. Research on the perceptions of co-teachers in the field of special education found that teachers and students perceive co-teaching as favorable because there are lower student-to-teacher ratios, there is more attention paid to individual students, and there is more expertise in the classroom (Guise et al., 2016). This increased student success not only improves their grades but also improves their overall school experience and attitudes and beliefs about their abilities. According to Kirkpatrick et al. (2020), students felt that inclusive environments were preferable to pull-out models for social reasons; when students were separated from their peers, they experienced stress, discomfort, isolation, and stigmatization. Successful inclusion relies on the integration of students with special educational needs into their peer network; support may need to be provided to all students to support this integration (Kirkpatrick et al., 2020). When students feel more comfortable and included in their school and classroom environments, they can perform better on their school assignments and the co-teaching model provides students with that opportunity.

Collaboration also impacts the teachers involved. Often, in-service teachers find themselves isolated and restricted in their classrooms preventing them from growing professionally. Collaboration has many documented benefits for teachers, including higher levels of trust, greater job satisfaction, more positive effect on teaching, improved teaching, and increased teaching efficacy (Goddard & Kim, 2018). While collaborating with another teacher, all teachers involved must have an open mind that can introduce them to different teaching styles, strategies, or classroom activities that can improve their teaching to better aid their students. Teacher collaboration can stimulate educational innovation and professional learning through increased colleague engagement and interaction, critical feedback, and mutual understanding, which can lead to high levels of student achievement (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). In Finland, teachers are increasing collaboration and co-teaching in their schools because they are often regarded as positive and beneficial for the students and the teachers' professional development (Jäppinen et al., 2016). The benefits of co-teaching as a form of professional development are often overlooked when implementing co-teaching, but it is one of the most important and valuable benefits

Challenges of Co-Teaching

Collaboration between two or more teachers in one classroom can introduce new and different challenges for both teachers. One of the most common challenges to successful co-teacher collaboration is the lack of time to meet to co-plan. The workload of the general education and special education teachers, which consists of grading, lesson planning, and meetings, takes time away from collaborative planning on a weekly basis. When both teachers are unable to meet to have meaningful collaboration opportunities, it often leaves the general education teachers feeling unprepared to serve all students' learning needs and leaves the special education educators unprepared

to teach the content and make the necessary modifications to support special education students (Blanton et al., 2018). Co-planning and decision-making before, during, and after teaching cultivate a mutually trusting and respectful relationship. However, without this process, there is increased frustration, a lack of mutual trust, and a negative power dynamic, all of which result in ineffective co-teaching (Woodruff, 2023). It can be challenging to find a suitable time for teachers to meet during the school day due to their differing schedules. This may require teachers to meet before or after school, which can be challenging for both teachers. The lack of collaboration is a barrier to inclusive instruction, as both teachers need ownership of the instruction (King-Sears & Strogilos, 2018).

Since many co-teachers do not have time to plan during the school day, many school districts offer additional payment for teachers who collaborate outside of their scheduled working hours. In a study conducted by Woodruff (2023), Katy Vargas, an English as a New Language (ENL) teacher, at Fern Valley Middle School, stated that her school district provides extra pay for collaborating teachers for their additional work: "Our administration was serious about [co-teaching]...Our school was committed to doing it for real" (Woodruff, 2023, p. 88). Often teachers do not receive supplemental pay for their additional hours, which can create a lack of motivation among collaborating teachers. Additional support from school administrators is not always provided to co-teachers, but when it is, it can lessen the challenges of co-teaching and increase teacher motivation.

To prepare and continuously educate teachers on how to collaborate effectively, school districts often utilize a training service or consultant to educate their teachers on co-teaching methods.

Teachers greatly benefit from professional and academic preparation in school-based practices and there is a great need for teachers who are already on the job to be trained in the practices used in inclusive education, such as co-teaching (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). While the training has value and serves an important purpose in the collaboration process, there is a severe lack of training or time to complete training. Often, co-teacher training is available through educational institutions and online courses, which may not be feasible due to the time it takes to complete the training or the cost of the training (Battaglia & Brooks, 2019). Without the proper training and foundational understanding of what an inclusive classroom can look like, what roles each teacher has, and the strategies they need to effectively co-plan and co-teach, many teachers are left confused. A lack of understanding of the roles of the general and special education teachers in an inclusive setting can contribute to the sense of unease with the inclusion model (Allen & Barnett, 2020). Teachers should be properly prepared by their school districts on the reasoning, practices, models, and strategies of co-teaching to achieve effective co-teaching. Otherwise, teachers are left feeling confused, frustrated, or upset with their new role because they are unaware of what co-teaching entails.

Another major challenge among co-teachers is the loss of autonomy both teachers may experience (Mackey et al., 2017). Teacher's autonomy is their ability to make decisions and choices about their classroom and the educational activities within it. Teacher autonomy is one of the core factors of a teacher's career. When teachers have higher levels of autonomy, they are more likely to excel in their job performance and better support their student's needs (Tress, 2023). Special educators are often the

ones sharing the mainstream teacher's classroom, they often feel that their autonomy is compromised. They feel that they lack the ability to take part in decision-making and planning and rely on the general education teacher (Tress, 2023). This is why teachers need to have open and frequent communication to establish roles and ensure that each co-teacher has a say in how the class is run.

Many pre-service teachers do not feel that their teacher training programs have adequately prepared them for co-teaching or that the expectations of co-teaching are different from what they were taught in school. Often, most pre-service teachers do not have any co-teaching experience during their student-teaching experience. While teacher preparation programs help teacher candidates learn the theoretical value of instructional collaboration, they often lack professional preparation through real experiences to develop collaborative skills as educators in the classroom (Brown & Viator, 2019). The traditional models of student teaching have three common characteristics to support teacher candidates' learning: (1) observation of cooperating educators; (2) feedback from cooperating educators and university field instructors; and (3) teacher candidates' reflection on their practice (Drewes et al., 2022). Teacher candidates often prepare their lesson plans and receive feedback from their cooperating teacher and program supervisors, so there is little to no collaboration in the teaching training process. Additionally, for teacher candidates who collaborate with their cooperating teacher, many worry that student teaching does not provide an adequate opportunity for authentic collaborative teaching. Co-teaching during teacher training occurs when teacher candidates collaborate with their cooperating teacher to co-plan, co-teach, and co-evaluate their instruction (Soslau et al., 2018). Many

cooperating teachers worry that they may provide too much support and do not provide enough opportunities for the teacher candidate to take the lead, which leaves the teacher candidates feeling under-prepared for collaboration when they are employed as teachers (Guise et al., 2016).

However, when authentic co-teaching is achieved during the teaching training experience, student teachers feel better prepared for both the positives and the negatives of collaboration. In a study conducted by Brown and Viator (2019), two teacher candidates found their collaboration beneficial as they enjoyed planning with their cooperating teachers. They found that their lesson plans were richer and more complete. One of the teacher candidates also felt disappointed by their co-teaching experience during teaching training because there was a noticeable disintegration in support. While both teacher candidates had different experiences, they felt that co-teaching experiences better prepared them for future collaboration (Brown & Viator, 2019).

Co-teaching means two individuals with their teaching philosophy, teaching strategies, and procedures working together in a classroom, which can make it difficult for some teachers to work together. The two collaborating teachers may not get along or have different teaching philosophies (Kokko et al., 2021). Teachers who have taught a subject for years and have their system may find it difficult to incorporate another teacher into their classroom. According to Mackey et al. (2017), the time taken to develop trust amongst co-teachers can be a major challenge as they may not know their co-teacher and may not be willing to share their instruction responsibilities with the other teacher initially. Some teachers consider their classrooms as their 'turf' and having an additional teacher might be considered as

an invasion of their professional space (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). It is often the special education teachers who feel that they lack authority and feel underused while working in a general education classroom (Solone et al., 2019). For example, the most commonly used model is the "one teach, one assist" model. However, this model often leaves the special educator feeling more like an assistant than an equal, collaborative teaching partner. As a result, the collaborative teaching partner is less effective in planning and teaching co-taught lessons (Brawand & King-Sears, 2017). Collaborating can be difficult because it is an adjustment from being the only teacher in a classroom to having another teacher in your classroom and having to coordinate and plan each lesson together. Despite this, for the sake of the success of all students, it is a necessary adjustment.

Resolving Conflict

In education, co-teachers may experience conflict with the planning and implementation of instruction, student outcomes, teacher goals, and personalities (Regrut, 2020). While conflict is inevitable at any point in a co-teacher's career, how the conflict is resolved is what makes co-teaching effective. According to Messarra et al. (2016), there are five main styles of conflict resolution: (1) competing/dominating, (2) compromising/sharing, (3) avoiding/withdrawing, (4) accommodating/obliging, and (5) collaborating/problem-solving. For this paper, I will only focus on accommodating/obliging, compromising/sharing, and collaborating/problem-solving to highlight how co-teachers can work together when dealing with a conflict. The accommodating/obliging style involves one teacher forfeiting their wants and needs to satisfy the other co-teacher's wants and needs. The

compromising/sharing style considers all co-teacher's needs, but it often leaves both teachers unsatisfied. The collaborating/problem solving style addresses all individual's needs and reaches a mutually acceptable solution by clarifying differences and maximizing joint gains (Messarra et al., 2016). For co-teaching to be effective, co-teachers must understand conflict resolution styles to reflect on their own practices and make improvements.

This understanding of how the inclusive classroom works, why it exists, why it is necessary, the practices used in an inclusive classroom, and the benefits and challenges of co-teaching was used to create a survey. The survey was created to analyze the perceptions of in-service co-teachers on the benefits, teaching methods, preparation, strategies, challenges, and conflict resolution involved in co-teaching. This section is referred to as the methods section.

Methods

Participants

The subjects of this survey were local elementary school (grades k-5), middle school (grades 6-8), and high school (grades 9-12) level teachers, in a suburban area north of New York City. The participants were general education teachers, who teach math, science, English language arts, or social studies/history, and special education teachers who teach math, science, English language arts, or social studies/history for special education. Some special educators also teach their special education classes in addition to co-teaching. The participants all currently work or have previously worked in an inclusive, co-taught classroom or classrooms.

Procedures

The researcher took the necessary steps to meet the requirements and approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Manhattanville University.

Once approval was granted from the board, the researcher gathered resources for the literature review to understand the challenges of co-teaching and the strategies used while co-teaching. The researcher then created a survey to reflect the literature review research on co-teaching.

The survey includes a section for teacher information because it was important to understand the background of the participants. To understand how many years of teaching experience each participant had, participants stated the total number of years they have worked as a teacher and the total number of years they have worked as a co-teacher. This data would provide an understanding of the correlation between participants who had more teaching experience and teachers who had less teaching experience and whether they had positive or negative experiences with co-teaching. Participants were also asked to state how many classes and subjects they are currently teaching in total, how many classes and subjects they are currently co-teaching, and how many teachers they currently co-teach with. According to Blanton et al. (2018), when co-teachers are unable to be available for collaboration, they are both left feeling unprepared to serve their students properly and effectively. By determining how many classes and subjects each teacher teaches individually and collaboratively, it is easier to see the correlation between their experiences and level of success with co-teaching.

The second section of the survey was included to understand which co-teaching strategies co-teachers are currently using in their classrooms and how effective they believe they are. According to Grady et al. (2019), the six most used methods for co-teaching include (1) one teach, one observe, (2) one teach, one assist, (3) team teaching, (4) parallel

teaching, (5) alternative teaching, and (6) station teaching. Part of the current practices of co-teaching involve planning together and it is one of the major challenges of co-teaching, so participants were asked how often they meet with their co-teacher and if they think that is enough time to meet during the week. According to Woodruff (2023), without planned time for co-teachers to meet, there is increased frustration, a lack of mutual trust, and a negative power dynamic, all of which result in ineffective co-teaching, so it was important to understand this aspect. Another practice of co-teaching is to develop an appropriate disposition which creates a foundation for effective collaboration. To evaluate whether or not this disposition has been achieved or not, participants were asked if their co-teacher is, or co-teachers are, receptive to feedback and constructive criticism and if the participants give feedback to their co-teachers.

The third section of the survey was used to understand the participant's perceptions of their co-teachers and their co-teaching and to evaluate the benefits of co-teaching. According to Hopkins (2023), co-teaching promotes shared classroom and teacher responsibilities, such as grading, classroom management, content instruction, differentiated instruction, and planning which alleviates the amount of work each teacher takes on. Participants were asked how or if they shared those responsibilities to reflect that research. Participants were also asked about their level of trust with their co-teacher, whether collaboration has improved their teaching, and job satisfaction as a co-teacher. Collaboration has many benefits for teachers which includes higher levels of trust, greater job satisfaction, improved teaching, and increased teaching efficacy (Goddard & Kim, 2018).

The fourth section of the survey evaluates the preparation teachers are given before and during co-teaching. Participants were asked what type of training was provided to them by their employers before their co-teaching and to rate the effectiveness of that training. According to Chitiyo and Brinda (2018), teachers benefit from professional preparation in school-based practices, especially inclusive education, but many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to effectively co-teach. Participants were also asked about their preparation for co-teaching through their teacher training programs. Many teacher training programs do not prepare teacher candidates for co-teaching in an inclusive classroom. Brown and Viator (2019) state that teachers often lack professional preparation through real experiences to develop collaborative skills as educators in the classroom. Participants were also asked about their own student teaching experience and whether they experienced effective collaboration with their cooperating teacher. Participants were also asked if they thought student teaching in a co-teaching classroom would be beneficial in supporting this research.

In the last section of the survey participants were asked about the challenges they face while co-teaching. First, participants were asked if they were assigned to co-teach by their administration or if they volunteered to co-teach. Participants were explicitly asked which challenges they encountered while co-teaching to get a solid statistic to compare to the research. Some teachers consider their classrooms as their "turf" and having an additional teacher might be considered as an invasion of their professional space (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). Participants were also asked how they went about resolving those challenges: collaborating, accommodating, or compromising. For co-teaching

to be truly effective, teachers should follow the collaborating/problem-solving style because it addresses all individual's needs and reaches a mutually acceptable solution by clarifying differences and maximizing joint gains (Messarra et al., 2016). It is important to understand how co-teachers are currently addressing conflicts. Participants were also asked whether they believe they have lost some autonomy while being a co-teacher. When teachers have higher levels of autonomy, they are more likely to excel in their job performance and better support their student's needs (Tress, 2023). The level of autonomy teachers feel that they have while co-teaching may impact the effectiveness of their co-teaching.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected data using a survey constructed in Google Forms and analyzed the results by observing the frequencies of the participants' responses. The results from the data collection will be further analyzed in the results section to provide important insights and implications of the responses.

The data from the survey helps create a better understanding of the challenges co-teachers face, how they are prepared to co-teach, and how they

work to improve their co-teaching. The results from the survey are displayed in the results section.

Results

Participant Demographics

The participants in this survey included teachers who teach in school districts in the suburban area north of New York City. Of the participants, 29.6% work in inclusive classrooms at the elementary school level, grades kindergarten through fifth grade. Of the participants, 33.3% of participants work in inclusive classrooms at the middle school level, grades six through eight. Finally, 38.9% of participants work in inclusive classrooms at the high school level, grades nine through twelve. Participants also found the area of certification in which they are currently employed. Of the total participants, 31.5% work in general education grades kindergarten through sixth grade, 16.7% work in general education grades seventh through twelfth, and 51.9% work in special education grades kindergarten through twelfth grade.

Participant Information

Table 1 shows that 79.6% of participants had ten or more years of teaching experience, whereas only 46.3% of participants had ten or more years of teaching experience as a co-teacher.

Table 1

Teaching and Co-teaching Experience

Item	1-3 years	4-6 years	7-9 years	10 or more years
Total years of teaching experience	11.1%	1.9%	7.4%	79.6%
Total years as a co-teacher	22.2%	22.2%	9.3%	46.3%

Table 2 shows that 77.9% of participants taught four or more classes daily, 66.7% of participants stated that they work with one co-teacher. It also shows 37% of

participants teach one co-taught class, 33.3% of participants teach two co-taught classes, 9.3% of participants teach 3 co-taught classes, and 20.4% of

participants teach four or more co-taught classes. Of the co-taught classes, 51.9% said they co-teach one subject,

16.7% co-teach two subjects. 5.6% co-teach three subjects, and 25.9% co-teach four or more subjects.

Table 2

Classes Taught

Item	1	2	3	4
Number of co-teachers	66.7%	24.1%	0%	9.3%
Number of classes taught daily	14.8%	5.6%	1.9%	77.9%
Item	1	2	3	4
Number of co-taught classes taught daily	37%	33.3%	9.3%	20.4%
Number of subjects co-taught	51.9%	16.7%	5.6%	25.9%

Co-Teaching Practices and Strategies

According to Table 3, 83.3% of participants use the “one teach, one assist,” so it is the most commonly used co-teaching model amongst participants. Team teaching is that second most used method, with 66.7%. Parallel

teaching is the third most used method, used by 55.6% of participants. 48.1% percent of participants stated that they use station teaching and one teach, one observe. Finally, 35.2% of participants stated that they currently use alternative teaching.

Table 3

Co-teaching Model in Current Use

Co-teaching model	Percentage
Parallel teaching	55.6%
Station teaching	48.1%
Team teaching	66.7%
One teach, one observe	48.1%
One teach, one assist	83.3%
Alternative teaching	35.2%

When asked about the effectiveness of each co-teaching model, eighty-one point eight percent of participants agreed that “team teaching” is very effective, while only sixty percent of participants agree that “one teach, one assist” is effective. Similarly, only 55.6% of participants found parallel teaching effective and only 45.5% of participants found alternative teaching moderately effective.

Forty-four point seven percent of participants found “one teach, one observe” slightly effective or not effective at all. Seventy-one percent of participants strongly agree or agree that station teaching is effective. Many participants commented that it did not matter which co-teaching model they used because they were in constant communication about what worked and what did not and were able to

adjust. Regarding co-teachers attitudes towards communication and feedback, 77.7% of participants strongly agree or agree that their co-teacher is open to feedback and constructive criticism. When asked

about the number of days co-teachers meet to plan, 29.6% of participants stated they only meet one day during the work week (see Table 5).

Table 4

Effectiveness of Co-teaching Model

Item	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Effective	Very effective
Parallel teaching	5.4%	10.8%	27%	40.5%	16.2%
Station teaching	2.6%	10.5%	15.8%	44.7%	26.3%
Team teaching	2.3%	2.3%	13.6%	47.7%	34.1%

Item	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Effective	Very effective
One teach, one observe	21.7%	23.9%	23.9%	21.7%	8.7%
One teach, one assist	4%	10%	26%	40%	20%
Alternative teaching	6.1%	9.1%	45.5%	21.2%	18.2%

Table 5

Number of Days Co-teachers Meet

Number of days	Percentage
0	14.8%
1	29.6%
2	18.5%
3	7.4%
4	5.6%
5	24.1%

In Table 6, 64.8% of participants strongly agree that collaboration have improved their teaching and 59.3% of participants strongly agree that they work well with their co-teacher. Regarding their student's

academic success 46.3% of participants strongly agree that their students have more success academically in a co-taught classroom. 33.3% of participants prefer co-teaching to solo teaching.

Table 6

Benefits of Co-teaching

Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
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My co-teaching partner(s) and I work very well together	0%	3.7%	13%	24.1%	59.3%
Item	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Collaboration has improved my teaching	1.9%	3.7%	13%	16.7%	64.8%
My students have more academic success in a co-taught classroom than a solo taught classroom	5.6%	11.1%	13%	24.1%	46.3%
I prefer co-teaching to solo teaching	7.4%	13%	27.8%	18.5%	33.3%

When asked about best practices in co-teaching, most participants agreed that they have generally positive attitudes and outcomes from co-teaching. Eighty-five-point two percent of participants strongly agree or agree that they feel comfortable sharing their ideas with their co-teacher and 77.8% strongly agree or agree that they can trust their co-teacher.

Seventy-seven-point eight percent of participants strongly agree or agree that they share classroom management responsibilities and 57.4% established specific areas of responsibility (e.g. teaching and grading), however, 44.4% of participants strongly disagree or disagree that each co-teach contributes equally when planning.

Table 7

Best Practices in Co-teaching

Practices	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
My co-teacher(s) and I contribute equally when planning	11.1%	33.3%	20.4%	11.1%	24.1%
My co-teacher and I share classroom management responsibilities.	1.9%	5.6%	14.8%	25.9%	51.9%
My co-teacher(s) and I established specific areas of responsibility	7.4%	13%	22.2%	24.1%	33.3%
I trust my co-teacher(s).	0%	5.6%	16.7%	5.6%	72.2%
I feel comfortable sharing my ideas with my co-teacher(s).	0%	5.6%	9.3%	13%	72.2%

My co-teacher(s) is/are receptive to feedback and constructive criticism	3.7%	5.6%	13%	29.6%	48.1%
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Preparation for Co-teaching

Most participants participated in workshops and professional development courses as part of their preparation for co-teaching with 44.4% (see Table 8). However, 37% of participants chose the “other” option and commented that they did not receive any training from their school district prior to their co-

teaching experiences. Mentoring was the third most common training amongst 22.2% of participants while consultations were the fourth most common form of preparation amongst 20.4% of participants. Training courses and training programs were the least common forms of preparation in which 13% of respondents participated.

Table 8

Preparation for In-service Teachers

Type of training	Percentage
Workshops	44.4%
Training course/programs	13%
Consultations	20.4%
Mentoring	22.2%
Professional Development	44.4%
Other	37%

When asked about the effectiveness of their training, 66.7% of participants stated that “other” was the least effective form of training and preparation for co-teaching (see Table 9). Most participants specified “other” as no training. Similarly, consultations were identified by 37% of participants as being not effective at all. Alternatively, 37.1% of

participants agreed that professional development is effective in preparation for co-teaching. Workshops were identified as being moderately effective by 33.3% of participants. Mentoring was identified as generally effective by 44.4% of participants as was training courses and training programs at 42.3%.

Table 9

Effectiveness of Preparation for In-service Teachers

Preparation	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Effective	Very effective
Workshop	19.4%	8.3%	33.3%	19.4%	19.4%
Training courses/programs	23.1%	15.4%	19.2%	15.4%	26.9%

Consultations	37%	14.8%	18.5%	18.5%	11.1%
Mentoring	25.9%	11.1%	18.5%	18.5%	25.9%

Preparation	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Effective	Very effective
Professional development	17.1%	8.5%	25.7%	37.1%	11.4%
Other	66.7%	6.7%	13.3%	6.7%	6.7%

When asked about which changes would be beneficial to help better prepare teachers for co-teaching, 72.2% of participants strongly agree that paid planning time during the school year would be the most beneficial change to make co-teaching more effective (see Table 10). Paid planning time during the summer was identified as another beneficial change to make co-teaching more effective with 57.4% of participants strongly agreeing. 46.3% of participants strongly agreed that student teaching in a co-taught classroom would be

beneficial preparation for future teacher candidates. Additionally, 29.6% of participants strongly agreed that their student teaching experience provided them with effective collaboration opportunities and 31.5% of participants strongly agreed that improved teacher training programs with an emphasis on co-teaching and collaboration would be beneficial. Furthermore, 25.9% of participants strongly agreed that more in-service training would be beneficial for effective collaboration.

Table 10

Beneficial Changes Recommended in Co-teaching Preparation

Recommended change	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
More in-service training opportunities	9.3%	22.2%	20.4%	22.2%	25.9%
Improved pre-service teacher education program preparation	1.9%	18.5%	25.9%	22.2%	31.5%
Student teaching placement in a co-taught class	5.6%	5.6%	16.7%	25.9%	46.3%
Collaboration with cooperating teaching during student teaching	18.5%	9.3%	16.7%	25.9%	29.6%

Paid planning days during the summer	0%	1.9%	16.7%	24.1%	57.4%
Paid planning days during the school year	0%	0%	5.6%	22.2%	72.2%

Challenges in Co-Teaching

Of the participants, 81.5% agreed that lack of time to meet and plan is the most challenging aspect of co-teaching (see Table 11). The participants stated that the second most challenging aspect of co-teaching was the unequal distribution of workload and classroom responsibilities with 42.6% of the votes. Lack of preparation and training, and loss of autonomy, were the third most challenging aspects of co-teaching, reported by 33.3% of participants.. A total of 25.9% of participants agreed that lack of collaboration was the fourth most challenging aspect of co-teaching. Furthermore, 18.5% of participants agreed that “other” and lack of rapport were the fifth

most challenging aspects of co-teaching. Many stated that developing a trusting and dependable co-teaching partnership takes time. Teachers are often moved around, so there is not enough time to build an efficient and effective co-teaching partnership. Among the participants, 33.3% of participants agreed they feel that they have lost some autonomy while co-teaching. Other participants specified “other” as competing responsibilities and the placement of students in inclusive classroom settings. Finally, lack of communication was identified by 16.7% of participants as the sixth most challenging aspect of co-teaching.

Table 11

Common Challenges in Co-teaching

Challenge	Percentage
Lack of time to meet/plan	81.5%
Lack of communication	16.7%
Lack of rapport	18.5%
Lack of preparation/training	33.3%
Lack of collaboration	25.9%
Unequal distribution of workload/classroom responsibilities	42.6%
Loss of autonomy	33.3%
Other	18.5%

Of the participants, 40.7% agreed that the most common way for co-teachers to overcome the challenges they encounter was to collaborate (see

Table 12). Secondly, 29.6% of participants stated they use compromising and accommodating to resolve challenges. Alternatively, 20.4% percent of

participants chose “other” as their method of overcoming challenges. Participants provided several responses, such as one teacher did all the planning, both teachers learn together, and both teachers make time to communicate with one another. Of the participants, 75.9% were assigned to

be co-teachers, while the other 24.1% of participants volunteered to be co-teachers (see Table 13). With these results, the researcher can analyze and make appropriate suggestions and implications for the future of co-teaching in the conclusion section.

Table 12

Resolving Conflict

Resolution type	Percentage
Created an alternative solution to satisfy both teacher’s wants (collaborating)	40.7%
Created a solution to satisfy some of both teacher’s wants, but not all (compromising)	29.6%
Forfeited your wants to satisfy the other teacher’s wants (accommodating)	29.6%
Other	20.4%

Table 13

Type of Co-teaching Assignment

Type of assignment	Percentage
Assigned	75.9%
Volunteered	24.1%

Conclusion

Discussion

Of the 54 participants in the survey, 79.6% of respondents have ten or more years of teaching experience. This is an important finding because it qualifies them as veteran teachers or teachers with a significant amount of experience. Due to their experience in the field, their responses provide great value to the results of the survey and suggestions for the future of co-teaching.

When asked about how many classes each respondent taught daily, 77.9% of respondents taught four or more classes daily. This is an

important finding because it shows that co-teachers are busy and have multiple classes to plan for in addition to their co-taught class or classes. This also includes grading and meetings for several students as well. Since most teachers teach four or more classes, it may be difficult to coordinate meeting times with the other co-teacher or co-teachers to plan lessons or reflect on the previously taught lessons. In fact, 29.6% of respondents said they are only able to meet with their co-teaching partner or partners once a week. Overall, 81.5% of respondents found that the lack of time to meet and plan is the most challenging aspect of co-teaching.

These are important findings because they highlight how busy current co-teachers are with their classes and other work-related obligations which prevent them from planning with their co-teacher. The information from these results could help administrators better understand the amount of work their co-teachers endure and could delegate some of the co-teacher's other responsibilities or classes for them to focus more on their co-taught classes.

According to the results, the most used co-teaching model amongst respondents is "one teach, one assist," which is used by 83.3% of participants. This is consistent with the research by Brawand and King-Sears (2017) which also says that "one teach, one assist" is the most used co-teaching model. Despite "one teach, one assist" being the most used co-teaching model, most teachers who use the model do not find it the most effective. As the results state, 47.7% of participants found "team teaching" to be effective and 34.1% of participants found "team teaching" to be very effective. Only 40% of participants found "one teach, one assist" to be effective and 20% of participants found "one teach, one assist" to be very effective. These findings are important in the field of co-teaching because they raise the question, why are most co-teaching partnerships using "one teach, one assist" as their preferred model when they do not find it to be the most effective? Using the results of this survey could help emphasize the use of team teaching instead of "one teach, one assist" in future preparation and training for co-teaching.

Regarding best practices in co-teaching, 72.2% of respondents feel comfortable sharing their ideas with their co-teacher or co-teachers. Similarly, 72.2% of respondents stated that they trust their co-teachers. This shows that most co-teachers are willing to communicate their ideas and establish

mutual trust to create an effective co-taught classroom. Co-teachers should continuously look to communicate with one another because it will improve the quality of their co-teaching and lessons. Additionally, 64.8% of respondents strongly agree that co-teaching and collaboration have improved their teaching. This is an important finding because it shows that there is significant value in having teachers collaborate in addition to collaborating to create an inclusive classroom. This point should be emphasized when preparing teachers for co-teaching because it may make them more willing to co-teach and may make them more optimistic about collaborating.

When asked about preparation for co-teaching, 44.4% of respondents found workshops and professional development as the most common method for co-teaching training as an in-service teacher. Many also found "other" as having no formal training. When asked about the effectiveness of their training, 66.7% of respondents found "other" as the least effective method of training, which was specified as no training. This is a significant finding because many of the respondents did not have any in-service training to better prepare them for co-teaching and what that entails or how to make it effective. School administrators should consider this finding when incorporating inclusive classrooms in their schools so they can prioritize training their teachers. It will help the teachers and the students when the teachers know how to navigate co-teaching, especially if they have not done it before. When asked what recommended changes would be beneficial in helping prepare teachers for co-teaching, 72.2% of respondents strongly agree that paid planning time during the school year would be the most beneficial. This is an important finding because most teachers would rather get paid during

the school year to plan for their co-taught classes than during the summer. This would make planning more effective and efficient since they can reflect on their practices and make necessary adjustments as needed. Implementing this for co-teachers would make co-teaching better because co-teachers would feel more motivated to meet with their co-teachers because they would get extra compensation for their planning, and they would be given dedicated time to plan.

Respondents were asked about how they go about solving challenges with the co-teacher or co-teachers. Collaborating was found by 40.7% of respondents as the most common method by which conflicts are resolved. This is an important finding because most teachers are willing to collaborate and work through challenges with their co-teacher or co-teachers so that all needs are met, without having to compromise or accommodate. This shows that most teachers are effective problem solvers and want to make their co-teaching as effective as possible. This result can help make co-teaching better by incorporating this point into teacher preparation and training for co-teaching. This number can also grow if teachers are made aware of and trained in effective ways to collaborate when resolving conflicts.

Limitations

This study was limited by the amount of time given to conduct this research. The time limitation also prevented the researcher from creating a more in-depth survey. The number of participants was also limited by the time allotted for conducting this

survey because, due to their busy schedules, some school administrators did not respond or took too long to respond to the researcher's first request. Another limitation of this study was the ability to send the survey to certain districts. Some schools do not allow surveys from outside their district or are unwilling to participate, making it difficult to find participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

As many of the respondents commented, a co-teaching partnership takes years to establish and grow. A suggestion for future research would be to study co-teachers in their first year of co-teaching or first year of a co-teaching partnership and research how their co-teaching strategies change or develop, how their perceptions of co-teaching change, and how the challenges of co-teaching change over a few school years. Additionally, it would be beneficial to see those partnerships while they are teaching to see the co-teaching models in use and to compare the effectiveness of the different models with the same group of students. Another suggestion for future research would be to conduct interviews with co-teachers and school administrations. Interviews with co-teachers would provide a more in-depth understanding of the teacher's perceptions of their co-teaching. The interview with school administrators would provide perspectives on integrating co-teaching into their schools and the challenges they encounter about teacher placement, teacher preparation, student placement, concerns from parents, and problems between co-teachers.

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