

# **The Power of 2:**

## **A Study of Co-Teaching in a Secondary School**

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Boca Raton

*The Power of 2:  
A Study of Co-Teaching in a Secondary School*

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## Abstract

Co-teaching originated in the 1960's, when it was popularized as an example of progressive education. Progressivism mandates that schools should be "child-centered" with the curriculum and instruction tailored to facilitate the development of the individual, based on scientific methodology. John Dewey was instrumental in advancing the merits of a progressive education and co-teaching is just one tenet utilized to advance his theories for development and learning. Due to the ever-changing nature of education in an increasingly more diverse society, modified forms of instruction, such as co-teaching, are becoming more widely utilized in the effort to increase the effectiveness of educating America's youth. Federal legislative changes, such as those required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have focused attention on students with increasingly diverse learning characteristics and the expectations that they perform at the same level as those deemed as being "normal" learners. Couple this with the declination of new teachers to replace those approaching retirement and it is no surprise that drastic measures must be taken to address the special needs of students and teacher attrition, if educators are to even hope to achieve the lofty goals set by federal and state governments. This dissertation serves to highlight the attributes of co-teaching in serving a more diverse student population, as well as amplifying some ancillary benefits in possibly slowly first-year teacher attrition, thus narrowing the chasm between those teachers slated for retirement and the influx of new teachers to replace them.

## Dedication

To all of those who have made this journey possible, I am in your debt.

## Table of Contents

List of Tables	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction to the Problem	1
Background of the Study	2
Statement of the Problem	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Rationale	4
Research Questions	5
Significance of the Study	6
Definition of Terms	8
Assumptions and Limitations	11
Nature of the Study, or Theoretical/Conceptual Framework	12
Organization of the Remainder of the Study	13
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Rationale for Completing the Study	15
Theoretical Framework	21
Thematic Relationships to Current Literature	25
Thematic Synthesis	32
Summary	35

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	40
Introduction	40
Philosophy	41
Theoretical Framework	43
Methodology	44
CHAPTER 4: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	54
Presentation of the Findings	54
The Participants	55
The Survey	57
Interview Questions	62
Qualitative Analysis	65
Direct Observation	66
Summary	73
CHAPTER 5: RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	75
Introduction	75
Results	77
Conclusions	84
Recommendations	86
Summary	89
REFERENCES	91
APPENDIX A. TEACHER SURVEY QUESTIONS	96
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR TEACHER PARTICIPANTS	99

## List of Tables

Table 1: Teacher Demographics	56
Table 2: Teachers' Responses to Survey Questions	58
Table 3: Codification of Interview Questions	64
Table 4: Qualitative Data Collection Types, Options, Advantages, and Limitations	65

## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### Introduction to the Problem

Federal No Child Left Behind legislation mandates that all teachers be deemed highly qualified by the end of the 2005-2006 school year (Yell and Drasgow, 2005). This means that all teachers, regardless of specialty or function, have to meet licensing requirements in core content areas in order to teach that particular subject. The problem with this mandate is that there are literally tens of thousands of special education teachers who are currently qualified to teach special education classes, however they are not qualified to teach a particular core content area. Special educators are being required to seek certification in those core content areas or act in the capacity of paraprofessionals, for lack of certification in a specific content area. The specificity of the mandate has administrators searching for solutions, in lieu of an absolute remedy for this far-reaching problem.

This mandate, coupled with a 10% increase in students with disabilities, ages 6-21, being served in general education classes between 1990-1995 (Aldridge and Goldman, 2002), magnifies the problem immeasurably, especially when over 44% of all special education students spend at least 80% of the school day in general education classes and more than 95% of all special education students attend regular schools (Aldridge and Goldman, 2002). While NCLB mandates that resource room teachers be highly qualified in whatever core content area is being taught, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), P.L. 94-142, stipulates that to every extent

possible, students with disabilities should be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Vaughn, Bos and Schumm, 2006).

### Background of the Study

The history and evolution of co-teaching can be traced back to the 1960's, when the concept was popularized as an example of progressive education (Villa, Thousand and Nevin, 2004). Co-teaching was further advanced in the 1970's by legislated school reforms and teachers' increasing need to modify instruction for a more diverse student population. During this time frame, the effectiveness of many school-based collaborative activities, including co-teaching, began to be documented in research and practice literature. Co-teaching started becoming a valued commodity, as evidenced by Walther-Thomas (1997). Co-teaching models in 23 schools across eight school districts were evaluated, with positive outcomes being documented including improved academic and social skills of low-achieving students, improved attitudes and self-concepts reported by students with disabilities, and more positive peer relationships. Students perceived that these improvements were the result of more teacher time and attention (Walther-Thomas, 1997). The co-teachers also reported gains in professional growth, personal support, and enhanced sense of community within the general education classrooms. Conversely, the most frequently mentioned drawback was the lack of staff development to learn how to be more effective teachers.

According to Public Law 92-142 (Education for all Handicapped Children Act) in 1975, all students must be have equal access to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) within the constraints of an individualized

education program (IEP) approved by the appropriate authorities (Dozier, 2005). In 1990, the law was amended and its name changed to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This has also been amended several times, emphasizing the need to serve students with disabilities in the general education setting, whenever possible. Because of legislation, there has been an increased focus on educating students with mild/moderate disabilities (MMD) in the general education classroom, rather than pulling the students out and placing them in resource rooms or self-contained classrooms. This is a new shift in policy, with an emphasis placed on serving students in settings most like those of non-disabled students and shared joint responsibility between special and general education teachers, for all the students in a classroom (Dozier, 2005).

#### Statement of the Problem

The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, Pub. L. No. 107-110) sets forth provisions for having every child make the grade on state-defined education standards by the end of the 2013-14 school year (Department of Education, 2004). One tenet of NCLB further mandates that all teachers be highly qualified in a core content area by the end of the 2005-2006 school year (Yell and Drasgow, 2005); however, special education teachers have historically taught core content areas in isolated classroom settings, based solely on special education qualifications and the needs of the students and the school. These needs have increased almost 40% within the past decade, but with the current legislative constraints of NCLB, schools have few options for increasing the support needed for students with special needs, due in large part to a lack of increase in federal funding to support the mandate (Villa, Thousand and Nevin, 2004).

## Purpose of the Study

Co-teaching is currently being touted as a primary answer to federal legislative changes to NCLB and IDEA, as well as questions arising from the problems dealing with the surplus increase in students requiring special education services for various and sundry needs (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2006). The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the origins and fundamentals of co-teaching, differentiate co-teaching types and strategies utilized by rural secondary school teachers, and document the findings of co-teaching applications in satisfying the components of NCLB, with regard to meeting or exceeding the requirements of AYP, and IDEA.

While most proponents of co-teaching give laudatory marks for recorded qualitative attributes, many opponents say there is not enough substantial quantitative evidence of the program's success (Boudah, Shoemaker, & Deshler, 1997). Detractors go on to say that there needs to be more research conducted to find out if the numerical data, usually obtained through grades, supports the qualitative remarks which have already been reported. This study serves to add to the data already in existence, and explore implications for future exploration and study in the future.

## Rationale

While many models of collaboration and co-teaching have been developed to meet the needs of diverse learners within a single classroom (Adams & Cesan, 1993; Dougherty, 1994), few have been validated through empirical research (Bauwens et al., 1989; Cook & Friend, 1995; Gately & Gately, 1993; Reeve & Hallahan, 1994; and

Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004). This study tries not only to validate numerous qualitative studies on co-teaching, but also to corroborate program success with hard, fast data supporting qualitative findings.

Weiss and Brigham (2000) located 23 studies of co-teaching that provided efficacy data; however, most investigated data at the elementary or middle school level. Only eight of the 23 studies provided any kind of data at the secondary school level, and of those, only three had any quantitative data of any kind. This study will add to the latter by researching 9th and 10th grade Language Arts students at a high school in rural Indiana.

### Research Questions

Current federal No Child Left Behind legislation requires every teacher to be highly qualified in a specific core content area to be able to legally teach in that capacity, by the end of the 2005-2006 school year (Yell and Drasgow, 2005). Accordingly, all special educators are required to supplement a primary special education certification with an additional college degree, certification or extensive pedagogical examination in a specific core content area, in order to be able to teach in that capacity (Department of Education, 2004). Co-teaching could be one way of addressing the certification dilemma and simultaneously achieving an IDEA outcome of increasing special education students' time in a general education environment (Villa, Thousand, and Nevin, 2004).

As stated previously, the primary purpose of this study is to analyze the origins and fundamentals of co-teaching, differentiate co-teaching types and strategies utilized by

rural secondary school teachers, and document the findings of co-teaching applications in satisfying the components of NCLB, with regard to meeting or exceeding the requirements of AYP. Accordingly, the research questions for this study include the following:

1. How is each type of co-teaching differentiated in a secondary school classroom?
2. What factors influence the selection of particular style of co-teaching?
3. How is that style implemented within the secondary school classroom?
4. What are the effects of co-teaching utilization within the secondary classroom setting?
5. Is co-teaching a viable alternative in lieu a lack of highly-qualified teachers for key core content areas?

### Significance of the Study

Questions as to how to implement co-teaching and inclusion programs are multiplying as fast as new requests to find alternatives to utilizing these new strategies. Although there is laudatory literature concerning these tools for instruction, there is also an abundance of disharmony and discord among faculty members who are steadfastly stalling for a better program. Some educators would rather promote a series of new curricula aimed at differentiating instruction, while others advocate a mixture of the two. This rift suggests that more studies are needed to extrapolate as much information as can possibly be gained in an attempt to support the advances seemingly gained from pilot programs already.

Another point to consider is that most of the research done to date, has been qualitative in nature, and that which has had quantitative data has provided mixed reviews for researchers, as the data did not fully support previous qualitative findings (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Although a quantitative approach was considered for this study, logistics dictated that a qualitative approach would be more beneficial. This study consisted of qualitative data, collected via a survey or questionnaire containing 12 questions, some of which pertained to the participant's teaching experience, while the rest contained open-ended questions geared specifically toward answering the research questions for this study. Each question was analyzed and compared to questions from other respondents, with all observations recorded in narrative format, as well as utilization of a triangulation of data to codify and categorize recurring themes. Lastly, a description of the processes, subjects, environment, conditions, procedures, both direct and participant observations, and any other descriptive data was recorded as a qualitative narrative to address any remaining issues associated with social threats to internal validity, not previously covered.

#### *Definition of Terms.*

The definitions of several terms used throughout this dissertation are provided below:

*Achievement Gap.* The documented difference in student performance on state and local assessments between high and low performing children, especially the achievement between minority and non-minority students, and disadvantaged children versus more advantaged peers.

*Co-teaching.* The Bauwens et al. (1989) definition of co-teaching as “an educational approach in which general and special educators or related service providers jointly plan for and teach heterogeneous groups of students in integrated settings” (p. 19) was adopted for this study.

*EAHC.* Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142): The first federal law guaranteeing all children with disabilities the right to a free, appropriate public education; it contains provisions including that the education must be provided in the least restrictive environment and the education must also be specially designed to meet the unique needs of the student with disabilities.

*Elementary School.* An educational setting, in the United States, which provides services to students who are in kindergarten through fifth grade.

*ESEA.* Elementary and Secondary Education Act. An act passed into law in 1965 to provide legislation and regulations to distribute and target resources sufficiently to make a difference to local educational agencies and schools where needs are the greatest. It was amended in 2002 to become the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

*FAPE.* Free appropriate public education. Special education and related services that have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge; meet the standards of the state educational agency; include an appropriate preschool, elementary or secondary school education in the state involved; and are provided in conformity with the individualized education program required under this law.

*IDEA.* Individuals with Disabilities education Act. This law is the principle source for the legal responsibilities of boards of education with respect to special

education. It was first enacted as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 and serves to guide school districts with respect to responsibilities of providing specially designed instruction to meet the needs of children with disabilities. The law was reauthorized in 1997.

*IDEIA: IDEA (2004).* Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (enacted in 2006). The reauthorization of the existing IDEA, making significant changes to the current federal law. It focuses on language consistency with the new NCLB mandates, provides increased flexibility for schools, expanded choices and controls for parents, a shift from paperwork to substantive achievement as a measurement of compliance, and includes measures to ensure school safety and reasonable discipline of students.

*LRE.* Least restrictive environment. A core concept in determining the appropriate educational placement for children receiving special education services. LRE refers to the concept that children with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with non-disabled peers.

*Middle School.* An educational setting, in the United States, which provides services to students who are in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade.

*NCLB.* No Child Left Behind Act. Federal act, signed into law in January 2002, which builds on the foundation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act while retaining the prior legislation's basic framework of standards, assessments, and accountability. The Act makes significant changes in the way schools will go about the business of educating the nation's young people, particularly with regard to increased accountability for states, districts, and schools.

*Secondary School.* An educational setting, in the United States, which provides services to students who are in the ninth through twelfth grade.

*Special Education.* Specifically designed instruction, at no cost to parents or guardians, to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child, including classroom instruction, instruction in physical education, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions.

*Student Achievement.* A measure of student academic performance using district curriculum-based assessments that measure progress against common expectations for student academic performance.

*Title I.* The largest federal program to assist the academic achievement of the disadvantaged student. The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education, and to reach at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. Title I revisions in the No Child Left Behind Act build on the earlier law, but add additional specificity and requirements, particularly in the area of assessment and accountability.

### Assumptions and Limitations

There are many assumptions currently in play, with reference to co-teaching, and many of these are wrong. One assumption implies that co-teaching is a rather simple concept that is easy to implement and provides for instantaneous positive results. This could not be further from the truth, as co-teaching has been proven to be a complex,

sensitive, and professionally demanding phenomenon (Rice & Zigmond, 1997; Knudson, 2005). As Keefe, Moore, and Duff (2006) point out (p. 160):

The situation requires a kind of marriage that takes place between two teachers, one in which the right hand knows what the left hand is doing. Co-teachers need to know each other's teaching philosophies, classroom management styles, grading systems, and personalities.

Teachers who enter a co-teaching relationship take a leap of faith; faith in their partners and faith in themselves. This newly formed pair has to realize that all past experiences, requisite skills, and learned behaviors will now have to be shared with a partner, if their cadre of students is to be taught effectively and influenced successfully. Students will receive more individualized attention and there will be an extra set of eyes to monitor behaviors in the classroom, but the success of the instruction will depend greatly on just how well the teaching dyad adapts, improvises, and overcomes each new challenge.

#### Nature of the Study, or Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

There has been a huge proliferation towards implementing co-teaching programs, across the country, but this has largely been a case of “the blind leading the blind”, due in large part to implementing programs without having properly researched co-teaching models and trained personnel. Although co-teaching has been a method of instruction for many years, research has just begun to address the issues of implementation, instruction, and effectiveness (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). Replicating data has been difficult because of the vast delivery methods of co-teaching and the variable factors related to students being serviced and teachers implementing the programs (Weiss & Lloyd, 2003).

Weiss and Brigham (2000) found over 700 studies that described co-teaching in some way, shape, or form, but only 23 provided evaluative or interpretive data, and “far fewer addressed secondary school classrooms” (p. 270). Of the few data-based articles on secondary school settings, results have indicated that co-teaching can be moderately effective for influencing student outcomes (Murawski & Swanson, 2001). Moderately effective because, although students’ strategic and organizational skills increased, test and quiz scores decreased for students with mild disabilities and low achievers (Boudah, Shoemaker, & Deshler, 1997).

While it is assumed that student outcomes should be a priority, given the current status of NCLB and the mandate for standardized academia and assessment, most of the research on co-teaching has not been focused on student outcomes data (Boudah et al., 1997; Reinhiller, 1996; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Knudson, 2005). Instead, research has hinged upon the roles, actions, and perceptions of general education and special education teachers (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Keefe & Moore, 2004). Empirical research has to continue to determine the extent to which co-teaching is improving the academic and social achievements of students with disabilities, as well as their non-disabled peers.

### Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the study, identifying the background and statement of the problem, as well as providing the conceptual framework for the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on the topic of the study; this chapter explores the theoretical foundations of the study, a

review of related research studies, and a summary of the chapter. Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and methodology. This chapter primarily identifies the design of the study, the methodology, and data analysis and procedures, as well as describing the limitations of the study. Chapter 4 presents the quantitative and qualitative findings, and chapter 5 discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Murawski and Swanson (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of co-teaching research and found that only 6 of the 89 articles reviewed allowed for in-depth analysis (Cramer, 2006). The authors concluded by stating that although the research on co-teaching is lacking, that does not mean that co-teaching should be eliminated altogether. Further, it is imperative that more data be gathered in classes where the merger between general and special education faculty members has been successful, as well as those where the process has not worked so well (Murawski and Swanson, 2001). This is extremely important in current terms, with deference to the NCLB requirement that all teachers be “highly qualified” by the end of the 2005-2006 school year (Department of Education, 2004). Most special educators in public education are not core content “experts” and, although very qualified to diagnose and treat learning disabilities, are deemed as “not highly qualified” to teach core curriculum to students with special needs (Yell and Drasgow, 2005). Due to the lack of information on collaborative teaching, or co-teaching, it is important that more research be conducted toward filling this void, and quickly, as collaboration is no longer just an ingredient in school life, but an essential feature (Burnett & Peters-Johnson, 2004; Villa & Thousand, 2005; Cramer, 2006).

According to the United States Department of Education (2001), the proportion of students with primary placements in general education increased from 33% in 1992 to 46.7% in 2001. These proportions can be expected to increase given the national trends of the past three decades and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

requirement to include students with disabilities as full participants in rigorous academic and general education curriculum and assessment (34 CFR, P.L. No. 105-17). Like IDEA, the NCLB Act's requirements for high standards and student performance are intended to foster conditions that lead to better instruction and learning, equality of opportunity to learn, and excellence in performance for all children. Central tenets addressed by this comprehensive act include (1) the preparation, training, and recruitment of high-quality teachers, (2) language instruction for students with limited English proficiency, (3) schools equipped for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, (4) informed parental choice, (5) innovative and research-based instructional programs, particularly in literacy, and (6) accountability for educational outcomes (USDOE, 2004).

#### Rationale for Completing the Study

No Child Left Behind legislation clearly states that all teachers must achieve the status of being "highly qualified" by the end of the 2005-2006 school year (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). There are three basic requirements that teachers must meet to be deemed highly qualified, as viewed by the Department of Education (DOE). First, teachers must hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university. Second, teachers must have full state teacher certification or licensure for the area in which they teach. Third, teachers must be able to demonstrate subject matter competency in the core academic subjects that are being taught. Teachers can demonstrate this competency by passing a state-administered test in each of the core subjects desired to be taught. The structure and content of these tests can be determined by the individual states.

NCLB further defines core academic subjects as English, reading-language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics, government, economics, the arts, history, and geography (USDOE, 2001). If a teacher teaches in two or more of these subject areas, then a status of highly qualified must be obtained for each subject being taught. The problem arises when a special education teacher, teaching in the capacity of a resource teacher, tries teaching one of the core content subjects to students with learning disabilities. Under NCLB guidelines, the law pertains to them, just as it pertains to general education teachers. Each specific subject area being taught must be instructed by a teacher who is highly qualified to teach that subject, regardless of his or her background.

The situation is compounded by the fact that Public Law (P.L.) 94-142, originally referred to as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, and more recently as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), emphasizes placing students with special needs in the least restrictive learning environment, which includes the general education classroom (Vaughn, Bos, and Schumm, 2006). General education teachers are not required, by any law, to take any kind of classes or become certified in any way, shape, or form to teach a specialized form of instruction in accommodating these students. IDEA 2004, the most recent reauthorization of P.L. 94-142, stipulates that teachers must be informed of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in their classrooms (IDEA, 2004), replete with a listing of current goals and accommodations for those individual students, but it does not inform the general education teacher how to alter or tailor the course of instruction for each individual student. Granted, teachers around the country get some form of training, in various forms

and phases, in how to differentiate instruction and how to alter individual teaching methodologies to accommodate students with disabilities, but the extent, quality and implementation of these techniques and training is suspect, as best. Additionally, one change implemented in IDEA 2004 excludes using short-term or benchmark objectives in the IEP, except for students who take alternative assessments based on alternate achievement standards (IDEA, 2004). This means that students who normally would be assessed, briefly, at the 6, 9, or 12-week marking period for a determination of progress in meeting those short-term goals, now may go the entire year before being assessed. Meanwhile, any alterations in accommodations via an amending of the student's IEP, which may have previously been done to help a particular student, now may not be addressed until it is time for that student's annual review, in which case it might prove to be too late.

One method for bridging these gaps in educating students with disabilities in the newly restructured, highly qualified, classroom is cooperative teaching, or co-teaching (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004). Co-teaching, which was first documented in the 1970's, then experimented with in the 1990's, has recently surfaced again as a plausible method for including students with special needs in the general education classroom, while simultaneously bringing the services of the special educator to the affected students. This is also another reason for completing this study, as this new concept is a major change to the structure of the modern classroom (Alvy, 2005; Normore & Floyd, 2005). Recent studies have shown that new and high-year tenure teachers are the most averted to change and changes of this magnitude serve to boost the attrition rates of teachers in these categories. New teachers, fresh out of teacher-prep programs are not