

Voices of Co-teachers: Exploring Professional Possibilities in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Elementary Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This paper shares preliminary results from the first two years of an ongoing, small scale, professional development and research project that is implementing and investigating co-teaching practices in culturally and linguistically diverse elementary classrooms. Participants comprised co-teaching teams in classrooms where Spanish was the home language of many students, and included one veteran teacher and one master's intern who had completed student teaching the year before. Results include a preliminary model for productive co-teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. Also shared are co-teaching teams' definitions for co-teaching, along with their perceptions of co-teaching overall and of specific co-teaching approaches (e.g., one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; parallel teaching; station teaching; alternative (differentiated) teaching; team teaching). Implications for research and professional practice are shared.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1) What factors support productive co-teaching?
- 2) How do co-teaching teams define co-teaching?
- 3) How do co-teaching teams perceive their collaborative professional practice, including:
 - co-teaching overall
 - specific co-teaching approaches (e.g., one teach, one assist; one teach, one observe, parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching)?

METHODS

- **OVERVIEW:** 2 years of ongoing, small-scale study investigates how supported, co-teaching practices may enhance engagement with math discourse in linguistically diverse elementary school classrooms.
- **PARTICIPANTS:** 7 co-teaching teams: one experienced teacher & one master's intern (post-student teaching). Professional development (PD) and collaborative support in co-teaching and math discourse.
- **DATA:** Interviews (audio & video recordings & transcriptions) and written reflections. The concept of cogenerative dialogue (Tobin & Roth, 2005) frames the ongoing qualitative analysis (Creswell, 1998).

CO-TEACHING DEFINITION (Friend & Cook, 2006)

Co-teaching is two (or more) educators who share instructional responsibility and mutually agreed-upon goals for a single group of students. The teachers have mutual ownership, pooled resources, and joint accountability, though individual teacher's roles may vary.

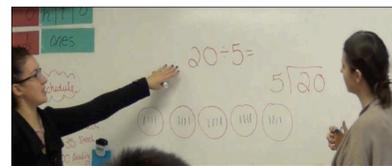
COMPONENTS OF CO-TEACHERS' DEFINITIONS

- **Collaboration & shared responsibility** (Aligned with Friend & Cook, 2006)
- **Shared goals & expectations** (Aligned with Friend & Cook, 2006)
- **Varied roles and approaches** (Aligned with Friend & Cook, 2006)
- **Co-planning** (not explicitly mentioned by Friend & Cook, 2006, but overlap with joint accountability)
- **Communication and reflection** (not explicitly mentioned by Friend & Cook, 2006, but overlap with accountability)
- **Differentiation** (not explicitly mentioned by Friend & Cook)

CO-TEACHING APPROACHES WITH BENEFITS NOTED BY CO-TEACHING TEAMS

Approach	Diagram	Explanation (Bacharach, Heck & Dahlberg, 2010)	Examples of Benefits Noted by Co-Teaching Teams
One Teach, One Observe		One teacher teaches while the other strategically observes and collects purposeful data. Co-teachers share and analyze observational data afterwards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having one teacher observe helps to inform instruction for grouping and differentiation • Planned observations of teacher practice can support professional growth
One Teach, One Assist		One teacher has the primary responsibility for planning & teaching; the other teacher moves around the classroom helping individuals and/or "voicing" student perceptions and questions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can support higher order thinking – for example, one teacher questioning individuals. • Can support use of hands-on materials. • Can allow teachers to do different tasks.
Parallel Teaching		The two teachers plan jointly but split the classroom in half to teach the same content at the same time. (Teaching may be done in different languages.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports greater student engagement, use of language, and individual attention. • Can observe student needs more efficiently.
Station Teaching		The two teachers share responsibility for planning & teaching. The classroom is divided into teaching centers. Co-teachers are at particular stations; other stations are run independently by the students or by another adult.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports differentiation (overlap with alternative teaching). • Students enjoy being able to move around and do different activities.
Alternative (Differentiated) Teaching		One teacher manages most of the class; the other teacher works with a small group inside or outside of the classroom. The small group does not have to integrate with the current lesson.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for more targeted, scaffolded, and/or sheltered instruction. • Helps support students to "catch up."
Team Teaching		Both teachers are responsible for planning, instruction, and classroom management of all students. Lessons are taught by both teachers who actively engage in conversation to encourage student discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-teachers can model academic conversations and vocabulary. • Allows teachers to support each other, jumping in when helpful.

"People have this idea of what co-teaching looks like, but they don't realize all the different ways – all the different models it can look [like]. It has to be what's best for you ..." ~KG, Gr. 2 Co-teacher~



"... co-teaching dynamics is really about how to engage with someone else because classrooms are kind of like a bedroom. It's kind of our private space – public spaces for kids and teaching, but just think, at the end of the day, teachers become very protective of their own space. And I think that this [co-teaching] allows for practice in the area of engaging with another adult about best practices in the classroom with kids." ~LB, Principal~

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CO-TEACHING

Outcome	Co-Teachers' Voices
Positive student outcomes (academic, linguistic, & social)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "... This year especially us working together, has really helped the kids soar. They've gotten things that they haven't in the past. There's a deeper understanding of concepts for sure... We have a new curriculum this year and its very involved and just having both of us together to split the kids up or do more modeling or observing of one another has just been very helpful." (GrK, 2015-16, interview)
Increased instructional flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "... one-teach, one-observe really helped us to gauge the students' understandings quickly and helped to inform our instruction for grouping." (Gr2, 2015-16, reflect)
Increased student-teacher interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Small groups worked so much better because you had a teacher who was dedicated to that group." (Gr2, 2015-16, interview) • "...it gives the kids a chance to form bonds with two different people." (Gr2, 2015-16, interview)
More positive working environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "It's powerful to be able to be in the same space, and hearing the same language and seeing the same strategies. Which is something that we don't get to see most of the time ... [it] really helps you to see." (Gr2, 2015-16, interview)
Positive teacher outcomes (professional growth)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "... it makes you look at your own instruction too." (Gr4, 2015-16, interview) • "And there would be times too I'd hear how she would say something, and it would make me think of how I could explain. ... oh yeah, I can say it that way too." (Gr2, 2015-16, interview)

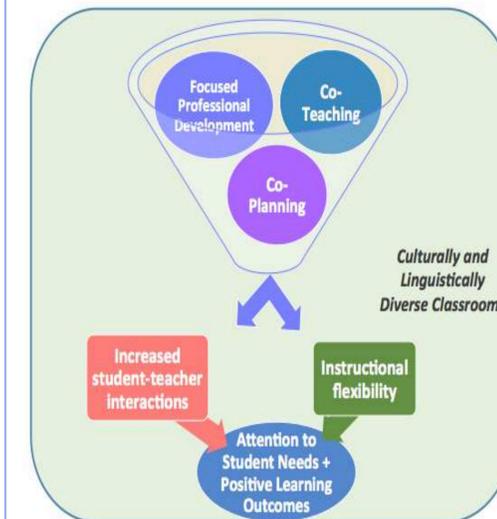


RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This research documents voices of co-teachers, describing their collaborative practice in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. These voices, informed by qualitative data analysis, highlight the potential for co-teaching as a means of supporting the "dreams, possibilities, and necessity of public education" (AERA theme) that is responsive to the diverse learning needs of students and teachers.

The co-teachers' definitions, along with each team's perceptions of professional co-teaching practice, emphasize the three interacting factors (focused PD, co-planning, co-teaching practices) which must be considered when designing and implementing productive co-teaching experiences. In summary, **co-teaching**, when accompanied by **focused PD** and **co-planning** opportunities, have the potential to increase **student-teacher interaction**, **instructional flexibility**, and **attention to student needs** – and, thus, may promote **positive student learning outcomes**.

This work is significant because it has the potential to identify best practices, strategies, and tools to support teacher education and PD with specific emphasis on co-teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.



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