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

Mary P. Truxaw | mary.truxaw@uconn.edu
Rebecca D. Eckert | rebecca.eckert@uconn.edu

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? How do co-teaching teams define co-teaching? How do co-teaching teams perceive their collaborative professional practice, including: • co-teaching overall • specific co-teaching approaches (e.g., one teach, one observe; one teach, one observe; parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative (differentiated) teaching, team teaching) Implications for research and professional practice are shared.

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 (co-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 co-teacher dialogue (Toon & Roth, 2005) frames the ongoing qualitative analysis (Cresswell, 1998).

CO-TEACHING DEFINITION (Friend & Cook, 2008) 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) • Differentiation (Not explicitly mentioned by Friend & Cook)

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Diagram</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Teach, One Observe</td>
<td></td>
<td>One teacher teaches children in the other either strategically observes and collects observational data. Co-teachers share and analyze observational data afterward.</td>
<td>• Having one teacher observe helps to inform instruction for grouping and differentiation. • Planned observations of teacher practice can support professional growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Teach, One Assist</td>
<td></td>
<td>One teacher has the primary responsibility for planning &amp; teaching; the other teacher assists in managing the classroom or certain students.</td>
<td>• Can provide multiple lenses on lessons through co-teaching. • Can provide more targeted, scaffolded, and/or sheltered instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>The two teachers plan joint lessons and split the classroom in half to teach the same content at the same time. (Teaching groups are in different, equivalent learning environments).</td>
<td>• Supports greater student engagement, use of language, and individual attention. • Can observe student needs more efficiently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Station Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>The two teachers share responsibility for planning &amp; teaching. The classroom is divided into teaching stations. Co-teachers at particular stations; other stations are run independently by the students or by another adult.</td>
<td>• Supports differentiation (overlap with alternative teaching). • Students enjoy being able to move around and do different activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative (differentiated) Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>One teacher manages most of the class; the other teacher works with a small group inside or outside of the classroom.</td>
<td>• Allows for more targeted, scaffolded, and/or sheltered differentiation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td>Both teachers are responsible for planning, instruction, and classroom management in their own space.</td>
<td>• Co-teachers can model academic conversations and支架. • Allows teachers to support each other, jumping in when helpful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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.” (JISA theme) and responsive to the diverse learning needs of students and teachers.

The co-teachers’ definitions, along with each team’s perceptions of productive 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, 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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Neag School of Education, Dean’s Research Incentive Award & UConn Scholarship Fellowship Fund

REFERENCES