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ARMONK, NEW YORK

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**Title of Project:** *Exploring Co-Teaching Models in the Elementary Classroom*

**Year:** 2013-2014

**School/Grade:** Coman Hill School, 2nd grade & Special Education

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SUMMARY OF *INVESTIGATORS OF PRACTICE* ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

**Context:**

We are currently co-teaching one 45 minute period a day in a second grade classroom . One teacher is a Second Grade Mainstream teacher and one is a Special Education teacher. We have 21 students. Six students have IEPs (Individual Education Plans). These special education students receive a variety of support in and out of the classroom, as outlined by their IEPs. This is our second year teaching together. For our first year our focus was on getting to know each other as individuals and teachers. This year we wanted to explore more about co-teaching together. We are limited in our teaching and planning time together and wanted to research the most effective and efficient ways to meet the needs of our different learners.

**Action Plan:**

Related research questions

We developed the following research questions to frame our study:

- What co-teaching models can be effective in meeting the needs of all learners?
- How can various co-teaching models provide us with ways to meet the needs of all students in our classroom?

We chose these research questions to foster a common understanding of what co-teaching is and to give names to the models we were currently utilizing. In addition we were interested in learning if there were other valuable models we could implement. We also wanted to explore the various models and how they could help meet the needs of all of our students in an efficient and effective way.

Literature and Research Gathered to support our inquiry

We began our research by reading the literature below:

- *A Guide to Co-Teaching, Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning*. Richard Villa.
- *Co-teaching that Works, Structures and Strategies to Maximize Student Learning*. Anne Beninghof.
- *Practical Strategies for Co-Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms*. Douglas J. Fiore. (Webinar)
- Co-Teaching Observation in another school district.

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- Formal Observation and Feedback about our Co-Teaching Model.
- Student survey given to our class of 21 Students. (See Appendix A.)

We studied the various co-teaching models that Villa and Beninghof defined. We recognized that we were using elements from a variety of the models in our teaching together. Some included the following:

Supportive co-teaching model. One teacher takes the instructional role and one rotates around the class to support.

Parallel Co-teaching model. Both teachers work with different groups in different parts of the class.

Complementary Co-teaching Model. Both teachers lead the lesson and enhance instruction.

Our goal was to move toward the Duet Model which Beninghof describes as "unarguably, the best model for students." In this model not only is the instruction shared, but also the planning, grading and parent communication. While we do incorporate many components of this duet model, we feel time for planning is our biggest obstacle.

For our formal teaching observation this year we arranged to be observed while co-teaching. We each had an administrator come in to do the formal observation. The most valuable piece for us came in the feedback and discussion with our administrators after the observation. Our administrators reviewed our lesson and focused mostly on the co-teaching models we utilized during the lesson. We discussed what aspects of co-teaching happen outside of the actual lesson (i.e., parent communication, lesson planning, talking about students and their needs, etc.) It was pointed out to us that without realizing it, we had established norms for our relationship which plays a huge role in trust and being successful. For example, we do all parent communication together. We first talk about what we will email or discuss so we are in sync. Having that discussion and coming to a compromise before contacting families or attending meetings is imperative. Families need to know we are working as a partnership towards the same goals for their children.

Next, we observed another co-teaching relationship in another district. In our discussion with these teachers it became apparent that the ability for co-teachers to be most effective relied partially on the personalities of the co-teachers and the relationship between the co-teachers. This opportunity provided us with more validation that we were using co-teaching models effectively. It was at this time that our research began to shift from researching co-teaching models to fostering genuine student relationships within the co-teaching class.

Lastly, we designed a student survey. (See Appendix A). We had two goals. One was to gather

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feedback of what our students thought of our existing co-teaching model. Second, keeping in mind our new topic of research, we wanted feedback about their peer relationships in the classroom. Based on our survey we held focus groups.

**Results:**

Meaningful feedback we gathered during focus groups:

- 18 out of 21 students like having the special education teacher and the regular education teacher in the classroom at the same time. Some reasons the students stated included:
  - helps you learn more.
  - one teacher is easier to understand at times compared to the other
  - helps you focus.
  - more helping hands. For example, Student A said, “Two teachers means double the time, more instruction.”
  
- 3 out of 21 students did not prefer to have more than one teacher in the classroom at the same time. Those who preferred not to have two teachers in the classroom made the following statements:
  - held more accountable by having the work checked twice.
  - sometimes it felt like more work because each teacher would find some other way to improve the same work.
  
- 13 out of 21 students like working by themselves. Those who preferred to work by themselves made comments including:
  - like to think of their own ideas.
  - work at their own pace. For example, Student B said, “If your partner gets it wrong and you were right, you also get it wrong if you comprised your thinking.”

**Implications:**

Overall, through our foundational research and focus group discussions, we realize that we have a good understanding of what co-teaching models exist and how to implement them. Furthermore, we feel success in co-teaching is reliant upon a variety of factors:

Teacher Personality:

- be flexible
- check ego at door
- enthusiastic
- compassionate
- initiator
- hard worker
- puts student needs above all else

Establishing Norms

- only email and contact parents together
- respectfully disagree

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- respect each others' points of views
- always be positive with parents and present student issues to families in a professional way
- include each other and all teachers/staff on the team (For example, occupational therapist, special education aide, speech,etc.)
- the classroom and all students are "ours"

Goal

- to make all students feel included
- create a warm, safe, inclusive and risk taking environment where mistakes can be made
- to not know who is the Special Education teacher
- holding high expectations for *all* while supporting to avoid failure

Knowing your Learners.

- understanding the different learning styles of your students
- differentiating tasks and lessons
- knowing what co-teaching models are appropriate to use at certain times
- having students self reflect
- knowing the social, emotional and academics of all your students; that is, knowing the whole child

These realizations led us to modify our original questions:

**from...**

- What co-teaching models can be effective in meeting the needs of all learners?
- How can various co-teaching models provide us with ways to meet the needs of all students in our classroom

**to...**

- How do we nurture genuine relationships amongst students with different emotional, academic and social needs?

We are eager to continue our research and continue to better ourselves as co-teachers.

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**APPENDIX A**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Put a check in the box to answer the questions.

Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you like having Mrs. Cavalieri and Mrs. Borneman in the classroom at the same time?		
2. Would you rather have just one teacher in the classroom?		
3. Do you like working with the same teacher all the time?		
4. Do you like to work with different teachers?		
5. Do you like when you work by yourself?		
6. Do you like when you work in partnerships?		
7. Do you like learning in groups?		

Questions	Yes	No
8. Do you like to be <u>put</u> in partnerships?		
9. Do you like to pick your own partnerships?		

Any other thoughts?