

BYRAM HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
ARMONK, NEW YORK

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Title of Project: *Co-taught Models of Success*

Year: 2015-2016

School/Grade: HCC/Grade 6-8

SUMMARY OF *INVESTIGATORS OF PRACTICE* ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Context:

We are a psychologist, a general education teacher, and a building principal representing the faculty of HCC Middle School. We engaged in the IOP process due to our acknowledgment that the gap between special education and general education students has widened based on NYS Testing and local achievement measures.

After we recognized that there was this gap, we decided to select a method to address it. Many districts in Westchester County have adopted a co-teaching model. It was determined by the administration to adopt the co-teaching model of Dr. Marilyn Friend, (a variation of this model had been used in prior years at HCC Middle School). Dr. Friend was contracted for seven professional development days during which the sixth grade general and special education teachers were trained. These sessions commenced in the spring of 2014 and the co-teaching model was implemented in September 2014. Dr. Friend was again contracted for six professional development days in June 2015 where the seventh grade general and special education teachers were trained. Our plan is to continue this for grade eight teachers and students beginning this summer (2016).

The three authors share the belief that including students with various learning profiles into the general education environment is the best methodology for student success. We are hopeful that our 2-year research project will support our long held belief.

Action Plan:

It was determined that before introducing a co-teaching model, general education and special education teachers should have the same understanding and models of co-teaching. This was accomplished by teachers receiving training of co-teaching models developed by Dr. Marilyn Friend by Dr. Friend herself. We believe successful co-teaching will look like Dr. Friend's models. Additionally, during the 2015-2016 school year, all faculty members received a copy of the December 2015/January 2016 Educational Leadership magazine, focused entirely on "Co-Teaching, Making It Work."

Our research question is: *What does success look like in a co-taught model classroom?*

As there is a myriad of literature in this area, we were hoping that implementing Dr. Friend's model would lead to success. As is common in educational methodologies, there is always a plethora of choices. Dr. Friend's models are proven successful based on the volumes of research that she has conducted to create her models. It is interesting to note that while conducting a cursory search on available material, Dr. Friend's research could be referenced in

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most of the bibliographies. We also referenced the article, "A Successful Formula for Middle School Inclusion: Collaboration, Time, and Administrative Support" from *Research in Middle Level Education* journal.

In short, co teaching is *when a general education teacher and a special education teacher work together to plan and deliver instruction to a diverse population in a general education setting.* (Effective Co-Teaching Practices A Simple Guide to Co-Teaching 2012)

The models themselves include the following:

- One teach, one observe
- Station teaching
- Parallel teaching
- Alternative teaching
- Teaming
- One teach, one assist

In order to capture the learning success by using these models, we set out to collect the following types of data:

2014-2015:

- Pre, mid and post teacher attitude survey
- Student post survey
- Parent post survey
- Academic achievement results: standardized testing, local assessments, NYS Student Learning Objectives
- Average 2015 NYS English Language Arts and Math standardized scaled scores comparing co-taught students, general education and self-contained population
- Numerical marking period grades comparing co-taught students and general education students in all four subject areas: Social Studies, Science, Math, English Language Arts

2015-2016:

- Still in need of: 2016 ELA/Math Scores and end of year academic marks for Co-taught students
- Amended teacher attitude survey: We learned that the survey given last year was lengthy (39 items) and altered this year's survey to eight questions (findings below)
- Socratic student group discussion facilitated by general education teacher (June 2016)
- Parent survey of both sixth and seventh grade students (June 2016)

Results:

At this point, we can make the following observations:

2014-2015:

Teachers:

- "As a general educator, I have learned a great deal about how to differentiate more lessons."
- "By planning units with the special educator, we can validate how diverse learning needs are being addressed on a daily basis in the lesson plans *(see planbook.com example)."

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Students:

Survey Results:

- I enjoyed having two teachers in the class
 - 44% strongly agree
 - 44% agree
 - 11% neutral

- I received more help in this class than in classes taught by just one teacher
 - 22% strongly agree
 - 55% agree
 - 22% neutral

- All students were treated as equals
 - 11% strongly agree
 - 44% agree
 - 22% neutral

- I like the variety of activities in the class
 - 22% strongly agree
 - 55% agree
 - 22% neutral

- I think I learn more when I have two teachers
 - 66% strongly agree
 - 11% agree
 - 11% neutral

- The class is more well behaved when we have two teachers
 - 22% strongly agree
 - 33% agree
 - 33% neutral

- I would like to have two teachers in my other classes
 - 33% strongly agree
 - 33% agree
 - 22% neutral

The following quotes are from student surveys:

- “When I have a question and one teacher is busy I can ask the other one for help.”
- “There are less distractions.”
- “I think that having two teachers in the room is good because I get more help.”

Test Data:

- Comparison of NYS ELA and Math Scores for students who were self-contained in 5th grade and in the Co-Taught class in sixth grade:
 - 7 out of 9 students increased their ELA scaled score: 78% improvement
 - 6 out of 9 students increased their Math scaled score: 67% improvement

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Parents:

Survey Results:

- I consider both the general and special education teachers as my child's teachers in a co-taught classroom:
 - 80% agree
 - 20% strongly disagree
- I find the co-teaching classroom beneficial to my child's academic development:
 - 60% agree
 - 40% strongly agree
- I find the co-teaching classroom beneficial to my child's social development:
 - 80% agree
 - 20% strongly agree
- I would like my child to be in a co-taught class next year:
 - 60% agree
 - 40% strongly agree

The following are quotes from parent surveys:

- "I feel for some children who find a small special education class too easy and a regular large class too difficult this is the perfect solution. It will still challenge the child and allow them to learn more with the support they need. I wish they had these classes sooner."
- "The advantage is that the student can be challenged more and will learn more."
- "I believe the co-taught classroom has been extremely successful in allowing my daughter to maintain her social connections. Although I have no special ed comparison academically for middle school, think my daughter has benefited academically as well."

2015-2016:

Teachers:

- Amended teacher attitude survey: We learned that the survey given last year was too lengthy (39 items) and altered this year's survey to eight questions
 - The findings suggest that there is a consistent understanding of the Co-Taught model, specifically the goals and purposes
 - The findings further suggest that teachers see the effectiveness of the Co-Taught model on all students, those who are in general education, classified and at-risk
 - Some comments include:
 - "This was a great learning experience as far as understanding exactly what is expected of the students as well as learning about teaching styles. Being in the classroom provides a great "real-time" lens into what each individual student needs."
 - "I am pleased with the progress the two of us (co-teachers) have made this year. I am excited to build upon what we have done next year. I believe it will get easier the more we work together. The daily interaction of adults and students, I have found to most valuable. Students benefit the most."
 - "Students benefit when breaking into smaller groups, regardless of the

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grouping. They ask for some smaller groups and all enjoy/benefit from additional attention.”

Students:

- Socratic student group discussion facilitated by teachers (June 2016)
Student comments included:
 - “If the 2 teachers work together, it is much more efficient and it meets your needs.”
 - “You are more aware and alert because 2 people are watching you.”
 - “If one teacher is helping a student, the other can focus on the group.”
 - “I love stations!” (station-teaching model)

Parents:

Survey Results:

- I understand the purpose/goals of our co-teaching program
 - 60% strongly agree
 - 40% agree
- My child has learned better in the co-taught classes than she/he did previously
 - 50% strongly agree
 - 50% agree
- My child’s behavior is better in the co-taught classes than other classes
 - 20% strongly agree
 - 10% agree
 - 70% not applicable (no behavioral concerns)
- Co-teaching is benefiting my child
 - 80% strongly agree
 - 20% agree
- Co-teaching is benefiting other students in my child’s classes
 - 60% strongly agree
 - 30% agree
 - 10% neutral
- Overall, I am satisfied with the current co-teaching program
 - 50% strongly agree
 - 40% agree
 - 10% neutral

The following quotes are from parent surveys:

- “My child is comfortable knowing a co-teacher is available if needed. My child feels very comfortable reaching out to a co-teacher for assistance.”
- “He (my son) likes it and feels he is learning more than if he was in a small special education class.”
- “I think it is important that the general education teacher works with both special education and general education kids more equally.”

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Conclusions:

We believe that the implementation of this Co-Teach model has been successful due to the ample professional development training by an outside consultant, Dr. Marilyn Friend, and ongoing administrative support. Common planning time has been also essential for the general and special education teachers to communicate and collaborate as they plan for the upcoming classes and reflect on their previous lessons. The implementation of technology is critical during this aspect of this programmatic change. All teachers involved in the co-teach program were trained using Planbook.com which allows partner teachers to co-plan upcoming lessons. The general education teachers identified the details of the lesson and the curricular strand that is being addressed while the special education teacher is responsible for ensuring that any materials are adapted or that the delivery of instruction is specific to a child's learning profile.

From a social and emotional perspective, a review of the research surrounding students who have been separated from their typical peer group due to learning needs, suggests that these students' experience issues of low self-esteem, exposure to undesired student behaviors, and deficiencies in their interpersonal skills over time. Our focus was to include these students so that they can say they have the "same" teachers as their peers, that they will be exposed to prosocial behaviors, and observe positive student skills of their peers in the co-taught classroom while meeting their individual needs as outlined in their IEPs. We believe, based on student, parent, and teacher feedback that there has been improvement within this realm for classified students.

Implications:

What new questions do you have? What do you recommend for future research?

- Is the Co-Taught model benefiting the advanced learners? Do we need to examine our activities to insure that we are differentiating for this type of student?
- As we examine the 5 models of co-teaching, are we employing the station model sufficiently? If so, how are we using this model to improve instructional delivery for all students?

The implications for the teachers' practice is that the attitudes of the teachers are influenced by the amount of pre-training and ongoing support when beginning any initiative. Most teachers have been receptive to the new models of teaching and have appreciated the support, time and resources allocated toward this initiative and other professional learning communities that may follow. It has been helpful that the vision has been articulated by the administration and by their involvement; it demonstrates to the staff that this is a long-term investment for all of our students and faculty so that they may learn in a content-rich environment while supporting their individual needs.