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Student Perceptions of Co-Teaching

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Student Perceptions of Co-Teaching

A Project Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of
Minnesota State University Moorhead

By
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In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in
Special Education

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Dedication

This action research is dedicated to my husband and best friend, Mathew. Only with your love, encouragement, and support am I able to accomplish my goals. I also dedicate this research to our beautiful daughters, Maeve and Meara. Being your mom and watching you grow up has been the most meaningful part of my life. I am beyond grateful for you three, and I am proud to share this accomplishment with you.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to attain information on middle school students' perspectives of co-teaching based on their experiences in co-taught classrooms. Co-teaching is a commonly used practice, generally between a special education and general education teacher, to support and meet the needs of all learners in a diverse classroom. Because inclusive classrooms are composed of students with and without disabilities, the individual expertise of general and special educators is essential in constructing a harmonious co-teaching partnership (Jurkowski & Muller, 2018; Ritter et al., 2020). According to Kirkpatrick et al. (2020), when co-teachers work together to share their knowledge and learn from each other's areas of expertise, it creates an environment from which they are better able to support their learners and provide quality grade-level academic rigor. Despite the benefits and push for more co-taught classrooms, there is a lack of research focused on student perspectives of co-teaching. This study consisted of interviews of four middle school students who had been part of at least two co-teaching settings. Through the analysis of their answers to interview questions, the researcher identified the overarching theme that co-teaching supports students. Other positive aspects of co-teaching included the availability of teachers, multiple perspectives, shared experiences, and help in paying attention to lessons.

KEYWORDS: Co-teaching, Middle School Students, Interview, Student Perspective

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CO-TEACHING

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With the push to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, co-teaching is a frequently used practice in which two teachers work together to plan and teach grade-level content to all learners within an inclusive setting. This practice allows students with disabilities to be educated alongside their peers without disabilities; however, the co-teaching partnership must be carefully and strategically planned in order to create the greatest outcome for every learner. When co-teachers are able to communicate and work together efficiently, they reap the benefits. These teachers strengthen their teaching skills, learn from each other's area of expertise, and grow in their ability to work as a team all for the betterment of the diverse learners in their shared classroom.

As recipients of co-taught instruction, students play a vital role in the success or lack of success in such collaborations, yet their voices are not easily found in the research on co-teaching; therefore, the focus of this research was to gather information on students' perceptions of co-teaching based on their experiences in co-taught English classes in a middle school setting. Analyzing students' responses to interview questions related to co-teaching may help to broaden and strengthen the current research on co-teaching as students may provide insight that could assist teachers with implementing new co-teaching partnerships or altering current co-teaching practices. In addition, students' responses may validate why co-teaching is such a powerful model for instruction.

As students with disabilities continue to spend more time in the general education setting with their peers without disabilities, the need to provide appropriate support increases. If the use of co-teaching continues to rise, students' perceptions *must* be considered in order to continue to

not only evaluate the effectiveness of co-teaching partnerships, but to also build strong co-teaching environments where all students can benefit. With this in mind, what are students' perceptions of co-teaching?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Over the past decades, there has been an increase in the number of students with disabilities in the general education classroom due, in part, to the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA), which mandates that students with disabilities be educated alongside their peers without disabilities to the maximum extent possible (DeMartino & Specht, 2018; Yu & Cho, 2022). As deemed appropriate for students, inclusion in the general education setting is the main goal. Extensive research on inclusion indicates providing students with the least restrictive environment is heavily preferred over pull-out models of instruction; however, inclusion must be carefully considered and supported in order for students with disabilities to participate and remain in the general education classroom (Berry, 2021; Bouck, 2007; Chatzigeorgiadou & Barouta, 2021; Eredics, 2018; Kirkpatrick et al., 2020; Ritter et al., 2020).

Students with disabilities should not be pushed into general education settings without support across several settings and the involvement of multiple individuals. Student success is a team effort; therefore, a strong team with abilities to work together for the betterment of students with disabilities is the backbone to successful inclusion (Eredics, 2018). Team members such as paraeducators, special education teachers, school social workers, and speech-language pathologists often provide support in the form of 1:1 assistance in the classroom or observations to progress monitor the effectiveness of inclusion.

While these supports are beneficial, they may lack consistent communication amongst team members, which is a necessary trait of any team. Even though these team members may

have the ability to work together, the supports they provide are not true collaboration as they have the ability to run smoothly without checking in on each other on a regular basis. A more effective solution to support students in inclusive settings is teacher-teacher collaboration.

Teacher Collaboration

According to Vaughn and Bos (2020), teacher collaboration is “the interaction that occurs between two professionals, often between special education teachers and general education teachers, and to the roles that they play as equal partners in problem solving endeavors” (p. 120). Features of successful collaboration include working together to identify and address issues through well-thought-out solutions, sharing ideas and strategies to support instruction, and reflecting and providing feedback on progress monitoring plans (Vaughn & Bos, 2020).

Collaboration is not simply putting two individuals together and hoping for the best. Collaboration is not two individuals placed in a classroom without a purpose and shared values. Collaboration is not getting along without challenging one another’s potential. Rather, successful collaborators must be able to work together, brainstorm solutions to problems, communicate effectively, and actively listen to each other (Ritter et al., 2020).

Collaboration can occur in several forms with consultation and co-teaching being two of the more effective forms as they both require collaborators to actively and efficiently communicate and work together in order to problem solve individual needs to ensure all students have access to the general education curriculum in an inclusive setting (Vaughn & Bos, 2020). Considering consultation, special education teachers often assist general education teachers by modifying assignments and assessments, suggesting ideas for behavior plans, or frequently checking with the general education teachers regarding the progress of their students with disabilities (Hallahan et al., 2012; Vaughn & Bos, 2020). While consultation is a step in the right

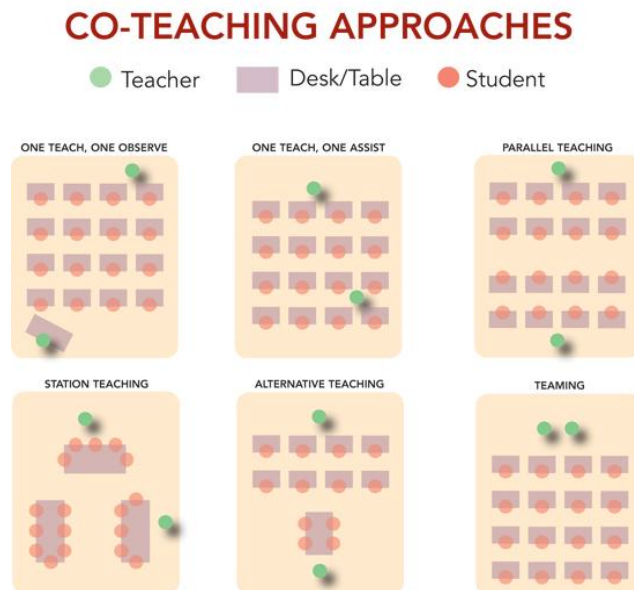
direction for supporting students in the inclusive classroom, co-teaching has the potential to impact the lives of students in a much more meaningful way.

What is Co-Teaching?

Co-teaching adds to the definition of collaboration described earlier by including the features of cooperatively instructing together in a classroom to ensure all learners, including those with disabilities, receive appropriate instruction (Vaughn & Bos, 2020). Co-teaching typically occurs in the general education setting so as to provide students with disabilities access to grade-level curriculum alongside their peers without disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Co-teaching, as illustrated by Figure 1, can occur in one of six widely known models: one teach and one observe, one teach and one assist, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching (Friend et al., 2010).

Figure 1

Co-Teaching Approaches



SOURCE: Co-teaching: Concepts, Practices, and Logistics, Marilyn Friend, Ph.D., August, 2006

Note: Figure 1 referenced from <https://collaborativeteaching.weebly.com/co-teaching-models.html>

During one teach and one observe, one teacher instructs the whole class while the second teacher observes individual students or the whole class in order to gather academic, behavior, or social data (Eredics, 2018; Friend et al., 2010). With one teach and one assist, one teacher instructs the entire class as the other teacher walks around assisting students as they need help. In station teaching, the teachers split the instruction: each teacher teaches a specific skill to half of the class, and then the students switch to the other teacher so they receive instruction of both skills. During parallel teaching, the class is split in half with each half being taught by one of the two teachers. Alternative teaching allows one teacher to provide more explicit, direct instruction to a small group of students for pre-teaching, enrichment, remediation, or progress monitoring while the other teacher works with the remaining students. Finally, both teachers share equal responsibility in planning and leading whole class instruction together with team teaching (Eredics, 2018; Friend et al., 2010).

While each model has its own purpose and can be used interchangeably based on the goal of the day's lesson, participating teachers must still collaborate on all aspects of the chosen model as well as the necessary roles needed to implement purposeful co-teaching. As discovered in a study by Bouck (2007), there are several roles that occur in an inclusive classroom: instructor to large class or individuals, disciplinarian to large class or individuals, classroom manager, supporter, gatekeeper or authority, and confidant. Although these roles are meant to be shared in the teaching partnership, there has been a trend for specific teachers to take on certain responsibilities (Berry, 2021; Bouck, 2007; Johnson et al., 2022). The general education teacher should not assume the responsibility of instructing the large class while the special education teacher assumes responsibility for instructing individual students. While special education teachers should not be deemed sole disciplinarian due to their background in behavior

management, general education teachers should not be the primary classroom manager (taking attendance, grading assignments, etc.) simply because the co-teaching experience happens in their classroom. Co-teaching is all about shared responsibility, which has shown to improve teacher satisfaction and efficacy (Berry, 2021).

Benefits of Co-teaching

When teachers share responsibility and coexist as equal partners in their relationship, they can evoke changes in their school to benefit not only themselves, but also the students. In a study by Kirkpatrick et al. (2020), voluntary special education and general education teachers partnered together to co-teach and shared their perspectives on the benefits of co-teaching upon completion of their year together. Even though they came from different areas of education, both special education and general education teachers shared similar outlooks; both sets of teachers viewed extra support for the students as being a major benefit to co-teaching (Kirkpatrick et al., 2020). Jones & Winter (2023) echoed this by sharing that the reduced student-teacher ratio made it so teachers were more readily available to assist students as needed. Benefits for the teachers included learning new teaching techniques, witnessing different perspectives, shared responsibility, and appreciating the skills and experiences brought by the co-teacher. Both sets of teachers indicated the same benefits for the community: seeing a model of collaboration, greater support for students, and increased positive relationships (Kirkpatrick et al., 2020).

In addition to these areas, co-teaching allows for teachers to grow in their professional development (Chatzigeorgiadou & Barouta, 2021). When teachers have the opportunity to work alongside their colleagues in close proximity on a consistent basis, they can reflect on their teaching strengths and weaknesses on a regular basis. This self-reflection allows teachers to open

themselves up to learning and sharing different techniques and strategies to benefit and support the diverse learners in their shared classroom (Chatzigeorgiadou & Barouta, 2021).

While teaching students of varying abilities can seem daunting, co-teaching is a means for teachers to support not only the students, but also one another. Working together on a daily basis, co-teachers who are fully committed to working with and supporting each other are more likely to gain positive experiences with inclusivity. As a result, teachers may experience greater perceptions of teaching efficacy and positive attitudes about inclusive settings, which is necessary for successful inclusive education (Ritter et al., 2020).

Drawbacks and Challenges of Co-Teaching

Alongside benefits, there are potential drawbacks and issues that may arise when taking on the responsibility of co-teaching. Implementing successful and effective co-teaching is not as simple as it seems (Friend et al., 2010). One area to consider is knowledge and familiarity of co-teaching. When attempting to take on this new role, many teachers are ill-prepared since they have little to no background knowledge on co-teaching or how to teach learners of diverse abilities in an inclusive classroom (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018). This, in turn, tends to lead to mixed attitudes towards working with students with disabilities. In a collection of articles on preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, Yu and Cho (2022) found the preservice teachers displayed overall positive attitudes towards inclusion; however, the participants of the studies indicated some concerns in their confidence and preparation to teach in an inclusive setting. Some were not entirely clear on what inclusivity meant or what supports they might need in order to make an inclusive setting run smoothly; other preservice teachers did not feel prepared to manage the responsibilities of an inclusive classroom. In addition, several of the articles suggest preservice teachers feel more comfortable working with some areas of disability (specific learning

disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, attention disorders) compared to disabilities deemed more challenging such as severe cognitive disabilities, behavior disorders, multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, and visual impairments (Yu & Cho, 2022). Knowledge and experience plays a major role in teachers' attitudes towards inclusion as first-year preservice teachers hold the greatest negativity towards inclusion compared to preservice teachers in their final year of the program, as highlighted in Yu and Cho (2022). These findings suggest attitudes towards inclusion become more positive with each passing year of experience and knowledge; therefore, it would be beneficial to co-teach in an inclusive setting for multiple years in order to develop and strengthen these positive attitudes. This is especially important because positive attitudes towards inclusion impact positive feelings towards students with disabilities, which have shown to lead to positive beliefs about their abilities (Ritter et al., 2020). As a result, students with disabilities are more likely to experience an increase in their self-efficacy and self-worth when they feel supported by their teachers.

Lack of knowledge about co-teaching and working with students with disabilities is not the only obstacle to successful collaboration in an inclusive classroom. Insufficient planning time often leads to the downfall of co-teaching partnerships. Shared planning time is necessary for teachers to discuss lessons, assign roles, share their expertise on various areas, and support each other (Berry, 2021; Bouck, 2007; Kirkpatrick et al., 2020). A study by Bouck (2007) demonstrates the importance of sharing a common planning time. During the initial year of the study, the participating co-teachers shared a planning time which they utilized to plan lessons for the week and determine what parts they would be responsible for in the lessons. Because the special education teacher knew what was going on at all times, she was viewed as equal to her general education partner. Unfortunately, this was not the case during the pairing's second year

together as they lost their common planning time due to school restructuring and budgetary constraints. The special education teacher found herself in a less active role. The partnership took on more of a one teach, one assist model of co-teaching, which has been shown to evoke less cooperation between co-teachers (Jurkowski & Muller, 2018). As a result, the special education teacher felt more like an aide in the classroom as opposed to an equal teacher alongside the general education teacher (Bouck, 2007).

While planning time is vital to building a strong co-teaching partnership, how much time is necessary? Even though participants in a study by Kirkpatrick et al. (2020) were allotted common planning time, the average planning time ranged from 45 to 60 minutes per week. Teachers with restricted planning time might consider alternative forms of collaboration such as communicating over the phone or by email; however, these alternative methods do not have the same impact as in-person collaboration. With the minimal planning and collaboration time, most participants suggested more devoted planning time as being necessary to strengthen the co-teaching experience (Kirkpatrick et al., 2020). Only through carefully planned time together can co-teachers truly develop lessons together and make a positive impact on their inclusive classroom.

Factors for Successful Co-Teaching Partnerships

Providing teachers with ample time devoted toward crafting their co-taught lessons is one of the most important factors to consider. Time before and after school is not sufficient for teachers to develop and implement meaningful lessons. Shared time must be considered prior to the start of the school year and those co-teachers must be guaranteed their common planning time to support the co-teaching experience (Kirkpatrick et al., 2020). According to Berry (2021),

teachers who are allotted a common planning time are more likely to feel confident about the curriculum as well as their abilities to teach learners of varying abilities.

Training and support are additional factors necessary to strengthen collaboration in an inclusive classroom. As noted earlier in a study by Yu and Cho (2022), preservice teachers often have mixed attitudes towards working with students with disabilities in an inclusive setting due to the teachers' lack of knowledge and preparation for servicing students with disabilities; therefore, preservice teachers should be educated on co-teaching as well as actually experience co-teaching during practicum and student teaching experiences. Without proper training and support, teachers are left not knowing what to expect from their partnership. In a study by Jurkowski and Muller (2018), participants co-taught for a year without any outside support or training. Pairings were to work together to develop and strengthen their co-teaching experience with the hope that cooperation would improve by the end of the year. This did not occur; in fact, the opposite happened. Teacher and student perceptions of the teachers' cooperation decreased. Without support, they were unable to effectively work together in harmony. An additional factor that may have contributed to these dismal results was that these new pairings were put together by the administrators at the schools (Jurkowski & Muller, 2018). The teachers had no say in who they partnered with, which is contradictory to the research that states holding shared values is imperative for effective co-teaching (Bouck, 2007).

Co-teaching must be voluntary, and participants must share similar beliefs and values with their co-teaching partner. When the partnership is voluntary, the teachers are more likely to trust and feel comfortable with each other, which are essential features for improving communication and collaboration (Bessette, 2008; Bouck, 2007). Teachers must value each other's expertise and be open to learning from one another. Further, administrators should

check-in regularly with their co-teaching pairs. Co-teachers should have the opportunity to voice their experiences as well as any concerns or issues. Finally, there is a strong need to discuss the classroom, including students, in terms of *ours* as opposed to *mine* or *yours* (Berry, 2012; Bouck, 2007). Shared ownership helps to strengthen the partnership and build a safe, successful classroom.

Up to this point, the research has focused on the teachers involved in co-teaching relationships, but what does the research say about co-taught settings from the perspectives of the students in these settings? Do student perceptions match with teachers' intended purpose for co-teaching? The research is lacking from the perception of students, which is unfortunate since the target of co-teaching is the students.

Student Perceptions

Based on minimal research in this area, when teachers collaborate to implement co-teaching effectively, students notice (Berry, 2021). In co-taught settings, students feel greater support as they receive help quicker and learn from two different perspectives; if one way of teaching is not working, the other teacher can share his or her way of teaching. Furthermore, students are aware that the lesson can move forward even when one teacher needs to assist a student individually or attend to a matter outside of the lesson (Berry, 2021). Despite these positive findings from one study, further research in this area is needed to justify these results as reliable in the research on co-teaching.

Even though students typically benefit from strong co-teaching partnerships, there must still be a match between students' perceptions and teachers' perceptions of co-teaching in order for teachers to continue to develop and strengthen their co-taught instruction and partnerships (Johnson & King-Sears, 2020). While teachers may feel their students understand the intent

behind how the teachers manage the co-taught classroom, students' perceptions and experiences might not match the teachers' intended purpose (Bessette, 2008). According to a study by Bessette (2008), middle school students across two different schools typically depicted the special education teacher as having a lesser role in the classroom; in their drawings, students showcased the special education teacher as the helper or support person as opposed to an instructor. These findings were concerning for the special education teachers; however, it made them realize they needed to make changes to their current co-teaching practices. In addition, some general education teachers were surprised to realize how often their students were confused with the content and delivery of instruction. Gathering students' input is a way to help guide co-teachers in recognizing and addressing areas of concern as well as praising their strengths. Though gathering student perceptions is widely underutilized, teachers can do so via one of three ways: surveys, exit tickets, and interviews (Johnson & King-Sears, 2020). The current research sought to gather students' perceptions of their experiences in co-taught classrooms through the use of one-on-one interviews.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore middle school students' perceptions of co-teaching from their experiences in co-taught classrooms through the use of interview questions. This research used a phenomenological approach to acquiring the qualitative data. The main focus of phenomenology is to understand how a particular phenomenon, in this case co-teaching, is experienced by a certain group of individuals (Given, 2008). This study sought to answer the following question: What are students' perceptions of co-teaching? The subsequent sections will describe the process for gathering information, ethical considerations, and the participants.

Research Methods

In order to obtain a list of students who had at least two experiences with co-taught classrooms, I gathered a list of students in my current co-taught English 8 classroom. From this list, co-teachers from an earlier co-teaching experience highlighted the names of students they had taught as part of their co-taught classroom. From the narrowed-down list, I met with the students as a group to explain the study and pass out consent letters to any student interested in participating. A total of nine consent letters were handed out; four students returned the signed consent forms. I enlisted the help of my Minnesota State University Moorhead advisor, Dr. Marci Glessner, in conducting the semi-structured interviews so that students would not feel swayed to respond to the questions in a particular manner if interviewed by me, their teacher. I arranged the date and time for each interview to take place over a Zoom meeting with Dr. Glessner. The interview occurred in a private setting with no other people present.

Prior to asking the interview questions, Dr. Glessner let the participants know the session would be recorded for the purpose of transcribing the interview. Students were provided a hard copy of the interview questions (Appendix A) and co-teaching models; Dr. Glessner also highlighted the questions and co-teaching models via screen sharing. In addition, the students were given the opportunity to ask questions and gain clarification about the process. Students were notified that all of their responses would be anonymous. Upon completion of the interviews, Dr. Glessner downloaded each transcript and removed all identifiable information, which included names and pronouns, and replaced them with pseudonyms and gender-neutral pronouns. The transcribed interviews were sent to me for analysis in order to identify patterns and themes in the students' responses.

Ethical Issues

In preparation for this study, I gained approval by Minnesota State University Moorhead's International Review Board (IRB) on March 13, 2023 (Appendix B). Ethical concerns were considered and addressed in regards to the researcher-participant relationship as well as the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in this study. In order to lessen the concern of how this study could impact the future of the researcher-participant relationship, all participants were interviewed by a researcher to whom they were unfamiliar (Dr. Glessner). In this way, participants could respond to the interview questions without feeling tempted to respond in a particular manner so as to not potentially offend me, their teacher. To address the ethical concern of confidentiality and anonymity, all participants were interviewed in a private room with no other individuals present. The participants were assigned a pseudonym, and all other identifiable information (gender-specific pronouns and other names) was removed from the transcripts prior to me receiving them for analysis.

Participants

This study was conducted in a rural middle school of approximately 300 students in Melrose, Minnesota. The middle school demographic population consists of 72% White students and 27% Hispanic/Latino students. At the time of the study, the middle school had been practicing co-teaching for six years, and there were three co-taught sections: two in 6th grade English and one in 8th grade English. The participants of the study included students who had been a part of at least two different co-taught experiences during their time in middle school. The four students (one male and three females) in the study received co-taught instruction in 6th grade English and were currently receiving co-taught instruction in their 8th grade English class. Two of the four students (both females) were special education students; one received services for specific learning disabilities (SLD) and the other received services for other health impairment (OHI). The small number of participants in the study allowed me more focus on their responses. A summary of the demographic information of the participating students is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Student Participants (n = 4)

<i>Demographic Item</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
Gender		
Male	1	25
Female	3	75
Ethnicity		
White	3	75
Hispanic/Latino	1	25
School Services		
General Education	2	50
Special Education	2	50
Primary Disability		
No disability	2	50
Other Health Impairment	1	25
Specific Learning Disability	1	25

Data Analysis

This research used a phenomenological approach to acquiring the qualitative data. The main focus of phenomenology is to understand how a particular phenomenon, in this case co-teaching, is experienced by a certain group of individuals (Given, 2008). Once all the data was sent to me, I analyzed the data using the phases of thematic analysis as explained by Braun and Clarke (2012). I familiarized myself with the data, which included reading through the students' interview transcripts several times. I coded the data based on what stood out with each participant's responses. With the list of codes, I took note of how often certain codes appeared and paired together similar codes in order to develop overarching themes. I reviewed potential themes to highlight in the report. I then decided upon and defined the main theme, which was supported by four subthemes, before producing the report. The subsequent chapter highlights the results, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to reveal students' perceptions of co-teaching based on their experiences. Upon examination of the data, one major theme was evident in the students' responses: co-teaching provides students with extra support. Table 2 depicts this theme as well as the sub themes and participants' quotes that support the indicated sub-theme.

Table 2

Overarching Theme, Sub-Themes, and Participant Responses

Theme: Co-teaching supports students	
Sub-theme	Participant Responses
Availability of teachers	“If one of the teachers was helping out another student, the other can help out with the other students as well.” “You could ask one teacher questions instead of waiting in a long line to ask one teacher questions.” “It is pretty convenient because when the teacher is busy, you can always go to the co-teacher.”
Multiple perspectives	“They both explain it in two different ways to make it a little bit easier for me to understand.” “There’s always two people to get opinions from.”
Sharing experiences	“They’re adding information; they’re joking like sharing experiences and stuff.” “They can both give you advice.”
Helps pay attention	“It’s just more fun, so it’s easier to pay attention.” “It’s really fun to hear them talk, so it’s just way easier to listen.”

Support for Students

Overall, the students in this study had positive views of co-teaching. The participants mentioned several benefits of co-teaching with availability of teachers for help being the one

benefit stated by all four participants. The students felt they could get help quicker and receive assistance from both co-teachers. With two teachers circulating around the room, students felt their questions could be addressed in a timely manner. One student also noted that they could receive more in-depth help from one teacher knowing there was still another teacher available to continue helping other students.

In addition to receiving help in a quicker fashion, students appreciate that co-teaching provides them with multiple perspectives. If one teacher's way of explaining the content is not working for some students, the other teacher could explain the material in a different way to hopefully clear up any confusion and make it easier for more students to understand.

As the teachers explain the lesson content from their unique perspectives, they also share their lived experiences and advice that can reach a greater number of students. Students seem to appreciate when teachers share their experiences as they may help students make connections to the content to strengthen their understanding of the material. Students tend to value the advice and suggestions their teachers give; therefore, it is helpful to have two teachers from whom to seek advice. Student K clarified these findings with their example during a group assignment. One teacher was giving tips and suggestions to solve the question, but Student K could not be swayed to change their answer. Only once Student K received additional advice from the other teacher were they able to understand both sets of advice and figure out the correct answer.

According to students, a final benefit of co-teaching is increased attention. With two teachers, students tend to pay attention better. Because of the communication and interaction between two teachers, students are more engaged and find it easier to pay attention. One student mentioned class as being more fun due to the positive environment as evident by the teachers

sharing their experiences, joking around, and communicating their thoughts to each other during the lesson.

Students' Advice

Students tend to have a positive view of co-teaching. They seem to appreciate having two teachers in the classroom; however, the students did share strategies that could strengthen co-teaching in the future. While it is important to continue developing students' vocabulary, some students may need directions and concepts clarified in simpler terms. Co-taught classrooms are the perfect settings for implementing this advice. When one teacher explains a concept, the other teacher can reexplain the information as needed using different words to simplify or clarify the information or directions.

Several students also mentioned the importance of preparation and communication. The classroom needs to be organized and lessons should be well planned between both teachers in order for the classroom to be effective. If the lessons are planned together so both teachers feel adequately prepared, the teachers could share teaching opportunities more equitably. Better preparation can support improved communication. One student mentioned that it is important for the teachers to have good communication skills (verbal or nonverbal) during lessons so the lesson flows smoothly. Clear communication can lessen potential misunderstandings. This might mean teachers need to thoroughly explain classroom rules and procedures and follow through with them on a consistent basis so that both teachers and all students know what is expected on a daily basis.

Challenges

Even though their perceptions were mostly positive, students did mention a few challenges with co-teaching. Sometimes they found multiple adults walking around the

classroom during tests to be distracting. Having an extra teacher in the room can sometimes make the room feel more crowded. Finally, the students shared they do not get ample wait time when given opportunities to discuss ideas with their peers. Sometimes the teachers want to jump right into the conversation without allowing the students more time to think through their responses within their group.

What surprised me?

I felt that analyzing students' responses to interview questions related to co-teaching would help provide insight that could assist teachers with implementing new co-teaching partnerships or altering current co-teaching practices. In addition, I thought students' responses could possibly validate why co-teaching is such a powerful model for instruction. Instead, I was surprised to find students did not seem to have a clear vision of what a co-teacher was as inferred by student responses to interview questions. Even though Dr. Glessner explained each model of co-teaching to the participants and a visual was available to them as a reference during their interviews, students still did not seem to have a clear understanding of the difference between a co-teacher and other adults who were in their classrooms (paraprofessional, student teacher, or helper). Due to the push for students with disabilities to be in the general education setting, the participants have experienced having extra adults in their classrooms since their early elementary years; therefore, they may have had a hard time distinguishing between the varying adult roles at school, aside from the general education teacher. Three of the participants mentioned seeing the one teach and one observe model of co-teaching along with at least one other model being demonstrated by the adults; however, this is not a model of co-teaching exhibited by the co-teaching partnerships at Melrose Middle School. This finding suggests that the participants were unclear about the role of the additional adults in their classrooms.

Likewise, students did not seem to have a clear vision of why co-teaching was utilized in classrooms. Some students thought the extra adult was present to practice their teaching skills in order to learn new strategies or become more comfortable working with students. In response to the question of why do teachers want to co-teach, Student K stated, “Maybe they get nervous alone. Maybe they just think it’s fun to work with other people teaching.” Similarly, Student J expressed, “Oh, so like if they want to be teachers that they want to teach by themselves, they could learn better and faster, and then they could get used to the environment of having kids around them.” These responses seem to indicate that the students may have viewed the special education teacher as a student teacher as opposed to a co-teacher.

Limitations of Study

There were several limitations identified within the study. First, data was collected from only four students at one middle school in a rural setting. The small sample size makes it challenging to determine if the findings are a true representation of the population represented by the participants. In addition, the participants were asked to think back to their 6th grade co-teaching experience in addition to their current co-teaching experience when answering the interview questions; however, there was a two-year gap between those experiences. Thinking about their current year may have been more readily accessible to the students as opposed to trying to remember their 6th grade experience, which was not a typical school year for them due to COVID-19. Students spent the 2020-2021 school year at this particular middle school learning twice a week in-person at school and twice a week at home via synchronous learning on Zoom. Even though it was only two years ago, the unique circumstance of that particular school year may have been too difficult for students to recall the co-teaching experience. A final limitation was that Dr. Glessner did not have specific examples from the Melrose classrooms to illustrate

co-teaching to students. While there was a visual available for the students, they may have benefitted from hearing real-life examples in order for them to make a stronger connection to the terminology co-teaching.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study was conducted to not only add to the existing literature on co-teaching, but also to strengthen the research by exploring a largely untouched avenue of co-teaching: students' perceptions from their experiences. Despite the fact that the participants in this study had at least two experiences in a co-taught setting, their understanding of co-teaching was limited. To strengthen future research, students should receive further knowledge on co-teaching prior to being interviewed. This could come in the form of a mini-lesson that includes videos of each model of co-teaching. The lesson should also differentiate between the various adult roles at school (co-teacher, paraprofessional, and student teacher) in order to ensure students' responses refer directly to co-teaching.

Future research should also consider including additional means for gathering student input. Because Johnson and King-Sears (2020) determined students' and teachers' perceptions of co-teaching should match in order to continue to develop and strengthen co-teaching instruction and partnerships, adding another form for gathering student feedback, such as a survey for all students in addition to interviews from a few students, could reinforce the research findings.

Finally, future research should consider gathering information from students who have had back-to-back co-teaching experiences in addition to the previously mentioned suggestions. Together these suggestions could help link students' responses directly to co-taught instruction and settings thereby further enriching the research around this popular model of teaching.

Conclusion

Student disabilities within the school setting will never go away. There will always be a need to assist students who are at a disadvantage compared to students without disabilities.

Co-teaching is a common practice aimed at supporting students with disabilities so they can be successful alongside their peers in the least restrictive environment. Ample research on co-teaching centers around teachers' perceptions; however, students' perceptions are just as valuable, if not more, to improving and evaluating co-teaching partnerships and practices.

Students' perceptions must continue to be addressed in order to address the effectiveness of co-teaching as means to help all students in the classroom.

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Appendix A

Student Interview Questions

1. What did/do you like about having two teachers in the classroom?
2. What did/do you not like about having two teachers in the classroom?
3. How does having two teachers in the classroom help you learn?
4. Why do you think teachers want to co-teach?
5. Describe a time when it seemed like having two teachers was helpful.
6. Describe a time when it seemed like having two teachers was not helpful.
7. Do you have any tips for co-teachers?
8. Which model best describes what you experienced in your co-taught classroom?
(show cards with the models of co-teaching)

Appendix B

IRB Approval Form

Institutional Review Board



DATE: March 13, 2023

TO: Marci Glessner, Principal Investigator
Megan Berg, Co-investigator

FROM: Dr. Robert Nava, Chair
Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB

ACTION: **APPROVED**

PROJECT TITLE: [2029669-1] Student Perceptions of Co-Teaching

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

APPROVAL DATE: March 13, 2023

EXPIRATION DATE:

REVIEW TYPE: Exempt Review

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Exempt Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the Minnesota State University Moorhead IRB.

This project has been determined to be a project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of .