

# Autism Information Fast Facts



## Co-Teaching Efficacy: What Does the Research Say?

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Many school divisions across Virginia are engaged in initiatives to increase collaborative planning efforts and instruction between general and special education teachers. These co-teaching efforts are becoming more popular for several likely reasons.

- ▶ 1975 -- the Education for All Handicapped Children Act mandated service delivery in the least restrictive environment (LRE). However, the language in this law did not specify general education setting as the intent.
- ▶ 1990 -- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its amendment in 1997, clearly emphasized the need to educate students with disabilities in the general education setting "whenever possible".

The concept of inclusion, where students with disabilities are educated in the same or similar environments as their non-disabled peers, was an underlying principle of these later pieces of legislation.

The development of collaborative teaching was born out of the need to deliver specialized instruction to students with disabilities within the LRE. Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989) described cooperative teaching as a classroom where direct educational programming would include a special education instructor within a general education setting. They also defined several critical elements to this approach including team teaching, complementary instruction, and supportive learning activities. Six years later, Cook and Friend (1995) coined the term "co-teaching" and further defined critical elements of this model. They described co-teaching as "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space" (p.2). As a means to follow federal guidelines by providing special education in the LRE, a co-teaching model seemed to be a pragmatic choice.

Over the years since this initial research, numerous school districts have implemented initiatives where special and general educators have teamed together to provide support and instruction within a co-teaching context. Yet, existence of a research base which verifies the effectiveness of different co-teaching models is sparse at best. There have been different attitudinal studies that have examined teacher relationships and student beliefs. Studies looking at actual student outcomes are no exception to the issue of paucity of research. However, two specific articles have been published in which the authors either completed a meta-analysis or a synthesis of research in efforts to determine various aspects of efficacy related to co-teaching.

article #1

### A meta-analysis of co-teaching research: Where are the data?

by: Murawski, W. & Swanson, H. (2001)

The meta-analysis, conducted by Murawski and Swanson (2001) was comprised of an exhaustive search for quantitative co-teaching studies. Of the 89 initially found, 52 of them were omitted because they didn't contain substantial data. The remaining articles were analyzed to determine if they contained adequate data to determine an effect size, included four characteristics of co-teaching (e.g. general education teachers and special service providers working together, service delivery occurred in the same physical space, some degree of co-planning occurred, and instruction was delivered to a heterogeneous group of students with and without disabilities), and the co-teaching treatment condition lasted more than two weeks. Only six studies met all three of these conditions. Murawski and Swanson also coded the articles on other recommended co-teaching characteristics such as, parity, voluntariness, professional status, shared resources/accountability/ responsibility, and use of a variety of approaches for cooperative teaching.

The results of the analysis indicated the following benefits to special education students who participated in a co-teaching approach:

- ▶ Large increase in reading and language arts achievement
- ▶ Moderate decreases in absences and referrals
- ▶ Moderate increase in math achievement

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- ▶ Small to moderate increases in grades
- ▶ Small increases in social outcomes (peer acceptance, friendship quality, self-concept, and social skills)

The authors were cautious to note few of these studies include a control group of students with disabilities served in self-contained or pull out settings. This was a highly recommended area of study for future research.

article #2

## Collaborative models of instruction: The empirical foundations of inclusion and co-teaching.

by: Solis, M., Vaughn, S., Swanson, E., & McCulley, L. (2012)

Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, and McCulley (2012) conducted six syntheses of inclusion and co-teaching efficacy research studies. The purpose of this article was to provide school psychologists information on effective practices and implications to their own support activities to improve co-teaching outcomes. The authors' eligibility criteria was: co-teaching or inclusion focused articles only, could be qualitative or quantitative studies, and they had to be peer reviewed. The findings were summarized into four categories; student outcomes, collaborative models, teacher supports/attitudes, and beliefs/perceptions of collaborative models.

In regards to student outcomes, Solis, et al. (2012) referenced the same studies as Murawski and Swanson (2001). The most significant benefits were statistically large increases in reading and language arts scores as well as decreases in referrals and absences. These authors also agreed a need exists for more studies regarding the effects of co-teaching on various areas of student outcomes.

The most common and effective type of co-teaching model reported was the whole class-teacher led, also referred to as "one teach, one assist" model. In the studies reviewed, typically the special educator was in the subordinate role of assistant. This arrangement was reported across various grade levels and usually included the responsibility of behavior intervention. Manset and Semmel (1997) reported co-teaching as well as in-service training were essential components of successful inclusion programs.

Several of the articles from the syntheses examined teacher reports or beliefs of critical elements needed for successful co-teaching (Solis, et al., 2012). Resources such as materials, equipment, and access to specialized personnel were reported by general education teachers as necessary for positive inclusion outcomes. Co-teaching pairs reported administrative support as being important as well. Teachers emphasized the need for planning time and training on inclusion or co-teaching models. Approximately one third of all teachers surveyed thought general education teachers did not have enough expertise and training on inclusion models. In addition teachers reported the need for training on co-teaching models (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffee, 2007).

As school divisions across the Commonwealth embark upon new co-teaching initiatives or revise their existing initiatives, knowledge of the effectiveness and critical elements of successful co-teaching models is essential. The articles reviewed here indicated co-teaching is an efficacious approach to supporting special education students in inclusive settings. While there is more research needed to develop a robust evidence base for co-teaching, one can have confidence that supporting our students using collaborative teaching is "the right thing to do".

### FIND OUT MORE

#### **Successful implementation of co-teaching initiative across a school division in Maryland:**

Walsh, J.M. (2012). Co-teaching as a School System Strategy for Continuous Improvement. Preventing School Failure. 56(1), 29-36, 2012. DOI: 10.1080/1045988X.2011.555792.

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