

Two Teachers, One Classroom: The Challenges and Rewards of Team-Teaching

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to systematically and critically reflect on the implementation of team-teaching in my elementary school classroom over the past two years. The purpose being, to better understand the effectiveness of my team's approach to team-teaching. From a careful reading of relevant literature, I develop a foundational understanding of team-teaching by examining a variety of operational definitions. In doing so, I highlight the synonymous and interchangeable nature of the terms "team-teaching", "co-teaching", "cooperative and collaborative teaching", and "joint work". Secondly, I unpack what the scholars share are the benefits and limitations of team-teaching, and the essential elements required for creating effective team-teaching arrangements. Taking what I learned from the literature, I critically reflect on my experiences as a team-teacher. By sharing my perspective on my team's strengths and challenges, I outline what I have come to believe are the essential elements to forming an effective team-teaching classroom. I am hoping my experience can help others who are implementing team-teaching into their practice. Despite some challenges, the literature affirms that team-teaching is an enriching, valuable and effective way for two or more teachers to instruct a group of students.

Keywords: team-teaching, co-teaching, co-teacher, cooperative teaching, collaborative teaching, joint teaching, elementary and middle school.

Two Teachers, One Classroom: The Challenges and Rewards of Team-Teaching

Teaching can be a relatively lonely profession for many as school norms of individualism have traditionally and continuously defined school cultures (Lavié, 2006). “When most of our work occurs in isolation behind closed doors, we miss out on the collegial exchanges that can invigorate our instruction and help us evolve, professionally and personally” (Wild, Mayeaux, & Edmonds, 2008, p. 3). Even though our physical spaces and organizational structures continue to impose independence, there is increasing pressure from administrators and school districts to collaborate (Fallon & Barnett, 2009). By creating and implementing internal organizational structures that are more collaborative, Fallon and Barnett (2009) believe there are possibilities for collegial practices to increase and communities of support to improve (p. 2). The concept of school-based teacher collaboration has thus entered the educational change discourse as new orthodoxy and incorporated into curricula and teaching practices (Lavié, 2006).

Much of scholarship reports positively on the various processes of collaboration (Fallon & Barnett, 2009; Degan, 2018). Team-teaching, one of many forms of teacher collaboration, is a commonly used collaborative instructional model. It requires teachers to engage collaboratively with colleagues full-time. Implementing team-teaching is not a simple affair. It offers many exciting possibilities and great potential for success but also introduces new challenges to teaching.

Problem Statement

My team-teaching arrangement formed relatively quickly and I had limited experience or prior knowledge of what this teaching style is or how to implement it effectively. In June 2019, my principal approached me and proposed forming a team-teaching classroom by combining both the Grades 5/6 and 6/7 classes. She strongly suggested this would be an innovative teaching approach while also providing a unique opportunity to develop a rich professional and collaborative relationship with a colleague. My principal had a teaching partner in mind already, someone with whom she knew I had a collaborative relationship. My principal and I quickly arranged a meeting with this colleague to discuss the possibilities for team-teaching.

Team-teaching was a high stakes decision for my colleague as she would be required to move schools. The job was posted internally for me first, and I had a quick one-day turnaround to make my decision. After much back-and-forth discussion, my colleague decided she would apply for the posting too. I accepted the internal reassignment, and a week later, my colleague was hired.

Regardless of the appreciation I felt towards my principal for believing I would be well-suited to team-teaching, I felt apprehensive and uncertain. During the decision-making process, I felt like I would be letting my school principal down if I did not accept the team-teaching role. Since my school is small and does not have a vice-principal, my principal often reaches out to work collaboratively on school-wide initiatives and activities. We have developed a close relationship during the five years we have worked together. If there is anything my principal requires or a new idea or program she wants to introduce, she knows she can rely on my support. Feeling a sense of obligation to my principal's suggestion and the need to rush into making a decision left my new partner and me knowing little about how to effectively structure and implement team-teaching in a large multi-grade classroom.

We agreed to team-teach in June and were left to our own devices to plan and organize how to team-teach by September. We lacked initial guidance in developing a strong sense of team-teaching's theory and methodology. My principal had no background information regarding team-teaching as it was as much a new concept to her as it was to us. There was no discussion about access to professional learning resources related to team-teaching, or finding knowledgeable colleagues within the district to provide support.

In the beginning, I worried that team-teaching without adequate preparation would result in feelings of ineffectiveness, emotional distress, or strain my professional and personal relationships with my colleagues. I was concerned about letting my teaching partner down if I could not pull my weight and juggle working towards a graduate degree while learning to team-teach. There was also a lot of pressure for our teaching to be effective from our school community. Team-teaching was a new concept for our parent population and some questioned our ideas and approaches. Many voiced concerns regarding the number of

students in the classroom and worried about how we would teach three grades at once considering our unfamiliarity with this teaching approach. Dealing with these concerns produced a considerable amount of anxiety and stress during the first few months.

During my first-year experiences, I realized team-teaching is complicated and requires a lot of conversation, learning, and pre-planning. Being given minimal support and little time to figure out team-teaching and classroom setup for the new school year made beginning this endeavour both exhausting and challenging.

Objective

Considering that my teaching partner and I plan to continue team-teaching, I thought it would be helpful to reflect on my experiences thus far, assess our effectiveness, identify areas of growth, and identify strategies for doing so. I carefully and analytically reflect on what has worked well for our team and why, as well as what is problematic and why. Additionally, I examine why things did not work well, how we overcame the challenges we faced, and what we can do differently to identify possible solutions to the challenges we continue to encounter. Most importantly, I want to better understand what insights might be gleaned from a careful reading of the relevant literature related to team-teaching to enhance our team's future performance. Since I am only beginning to understand how team-teaching works, I believe it is essential to learn more about how effective team-teachers function.

My main objective for this study is to conduct a critical analysis of the literature pertaining to team-teaching in order to reflect on my experiences as a co-teacher in a team-teaching position. I hope to gain better insight and a deeper understanding of what scholars have learned about effective and ineffective team-teaching approaches and practices. Findings will be compared and contrasted with my experiences and current perspectives. I reflect on my experiences as a co-teacher to deeply understand how we have learned to work as a team and what aspects of our teaching could be improved. My school district emphasizes

increased collaborative work with colleagues. I believe this paper will be a valuable resource for teachers interested in beginning their own team-teaching arrangement because it describes different collaborative teaching practices and provides helpful advice and support.

Literature Review

This review analyzes literature written by various scholars who focus on team-teaching. I identified relevant literature from the following online databases: UBC's research repository, UBC's Library catalogue, Google Scholar, ERIC, Taylor & Francis Online – Journals, and SAGE Journals. I gathered books, book chapters, articles in professional journals, and peer-reviewed articles from scholarly journals. In my aim to provide an overview of team-teaching and how teachers across various teaching contexts have implemented it, I critically analyzed the literature to understand team-teaching, its benefits and limitations, and elements necessary for its successful implementation.

While attempting to keep information relevant and current, I focused on work published between 1990 and 2020. I included a few articles from the 1960's and 1970's because they provided useful details about the origins of team-teaching. Online searches using the term "team-teaching" identified abundant evidence of it as a teaching model used in the United States, Europe, and Asia, but locating the origins of team-teaching within the Canadian context was challenging, and its roots are not clear. The literature explained the basic principles and methodology of team-teaching that could be applied to different national educational contexts; thus, I used these sources throughout the literature review. My review focused on literature relevant to the contextual conditions of my team-teaching experience in an elementary school (K-7). Given that team-teaching approaches are similar across all grade levels, I also used relevant literature describing team-teaching methodology and practices at the high school and post-secondary level. Initial searches of the terms "team-teaching" and "elementary school" led me to widen my search to include "co-teaching," "collaborative teaching," "collaborative teaching teams," "cooperative teaching," and "middle

school”. “Middle school” was included in the list of terms because in many teaching contexts worldwide, Grade 6 and 7 are part of middle school. I searched for these terms within the titles of articles, abstracts, and keyword lists of publications. By focusing on a more comprehensive list of terms, I developed a richer working definition of team-teaching, how to implement it, and what educators need to make it a success.

In the scholarly literature, team-teaching is often defined as an approach to teaching in which one general educator works closely with one special educator to teach students with diverse learning needs. As a result, I had some initial uncertainty as to whether or not the term “team-teaching” could be applied to larger, combined grade contexts involving more than one general educator teaching together. However, classrooms in British Columbia are organized on an inclusionary basis and composed of students with varying learning needs (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2018). In my experience, general classroom teachers in British Columbia are supported by a resource teacher (RT) and also often by an educational assistant (EA). For this reason, literature discussing the collaborative work between general educators, special educators, and teacher support workers was included if relevant insights about team-teaching, in general, could be provided.

In what follows, I provide a brief overview of the origins of team-teaching and define key terms. Subsequently, I identify the benefits and limitations of team-teaching, and the essential elements required to successfully team teach to help me better understand my experiences in team-teaching, and provide suggestions for educators interested in implementing this approach into their practice.

The History of Team-Teaching

An increase of open-concept schools, multi-age groupings, continuous progress learning, individualized instruction, and new inclusionary beliefs during the 1950’s and 1960’s led to the development of team-teaching approaches (Rutherford, 1979). According to Bauwens and Hourcade (1991), this educative shift stressed that classroom instruction focus on meeting the needs of all students, including those

with diverse learning capacities. As a result, schools reached the point where students were no longer removed from regular classes according to ability (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1991). This trend continued in 21st-century schools worldwide as various collaborative teaching structures emerged (Lavié, 2006). It became the norm for special educators to work collaboratively alongside classroom teachers to support students with specific learning needs. However, team-teaching does not need to be a model solely used between general and special educators (Degan, 2018), but an approach that various teams of educators can implement in their classrooms.

Popularized in the United States as an example of progressive education (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013), team-teaching was proposed as a practice for gaining better behavioural control of large groups of students and introducing variety into the traditional single-teacher classroom (Murata, 2002). Within the recent context of school improvement, various collaborative teaching approaches have been proposed as a way of lessening teacher isolation, promoting collegiality and collaboration, and improving student achievement (Murata, 2002). In general, researchers who promote team-teaching believe it is a helpful approach for supporting the needs of all students in both primary and post-primary schooling (Golner & Powell, 1992; Murchu & Conway, 2017).

While not a new concept, team-teaching “is increasingly being positioned in research as central to advancing a range of valued educational goals, and to take advantage of the special expertise and competencies of all involved” (Murchu & Conway, 2017, p. 43). To help establish a framework and context for understanding team-teaching, the following section defines the types of team-teaching approaches identified over the past 50 years.

Terminological Framework of Team-Teaching

Terms such as “team-teaching,” “co-teaching,” “collaborative” or “cooperative teaching,” and “joint work” are often used synonymously or interchangeably (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999; Sandholtz,

2000; Welch, 2000; Krammer, Gastager, Lisa, Gasteiger-Klicpera, & Rossman, 2017; Murchu & Conway, 2017). “One problem in drawing conclusions from the literature is the general confusion over the terms” (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999, p. 37). Although there are subtle differences between the terms used, they are more similar than different and include the same characteristics. The following table outlines each of the five terms, followed by a discussion of further elaborations shared by scholars.

Table 1. Overview of key terms.

Team-Teaching	Co-Teaching	Cooperative Teaching	Collaborative Teaching	Joint Work
Two or more educators, who are equal in the classroom, take equal responsibility for planning, assessing, and sharing the instruction of a group of students. Lessons are taught by both teachers who actively engage in open dialogue to encourage participation and discussion by students.	Two or more educators work together to plan, organize, instruct, and assess the same group of students in a common classroom, with a strong focus on teaching as a team, complementing one another’s particular skills or strengths. Teachers are equals in the classroom.	Two or more teachers with a distinct set of skills work in a co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach a heterogeneous group of students in one classroom.	Involves the long-term relationship between two or more professionals who voluntarily collaborate and engage in dialogue, planning, share in creative decision making, instruction, and follow up for the purpose of improving instruction to students in a classroom.	The interdependence and shared responsibility of two or more teachers who work cooperatively together, are dependent on one another, and teach together in teacher teams.

One of the first scholars to focus on team-teaching was J.T. Shaplin, who describes it as “two or more teachers given responsibility, working together, for all, or a significant part of the instruction of the same group of students” (Anderson, Hagstrom, & Robinson, 1960, p. 72). As broad as this definition is, it was developed when team-teaching was relatively new and still being experimented with; thus, I sought a more precise definition.

Sandholtz (2000) is one of the first to create a more operational definition focused on the practical aspects of team-teaching. "Joint planning, joint instruction, and joint evaluation" (p. 40). Sandholtz (2000) further elaborates on the different ways team-teaching is configured including two or more teachers allocating individual responsibilities, team planning with individual instruction, or cooperative planning, instruction, and evaluation (p. 40). Welch, Brownell, and Sheridan (1999) share a similar notion and describe team-teaching as, "joint planning and the initial presentation of information followed by delegating specific instructional roles for various activities" (p. 37). For example, one teacher may take responsibility for introducing a lesson or content, reviewing activities, or providing enrichment. At the same time, the other teacher observes, monitors student progress, and provides support where necessary. Both of these authors define team-teaching as involving two or more educators working purposefully and cooperatively to plan, teach, and assess a group of students they share responsibility for (Buckley, 1999). Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010) provide a more specific definition: "team-teaching now typically refers to two elementary teachers who may share a double-size classroom divided by a sliding wall; they open that barrier and collaborate to teach their combined students" (p. 13). Team-teaching, in any appropriate instructional space, provides the opportunity to take advantage of the special competencies of the team members (Buckley, 1999, p. 5). As we can see, team-teaching can take on various forms. Friend et al. (2010) and Buckley (1999) provide definitions that are more useful and elaborate than Anderson, Hagstrom, and Robinson (1960) and Sandholtz (2000), and reflect current team-teaching practices. They give clear understanding about how team-teaching classrooms are organized, structurally and temporally, and the kinds of teaching processes shared between a group of teachers.

Cook and Friend (1995), two noteworthy scholars in the field of co-teaching, define it as "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended group of students in a single space" (p. 2). This is similar to Thousand, Villa, and Nevin's (2006) definition that co-teaching is "two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching some or all of the students assigned to a classroom" (p. 464).

Anderson, Hagstrom, and Robinson (1960), Welch, Brownell, and Sheridan (1999), and Sandholtz (2000) also describe the nature of co-teaching as two or more educators supporting a group of students. Welch (2000) also notes that Cook and Friend (1995) identified “four key components of co-teaching: two educators, delivery of meaningful instruction, diverse groups of students, and common settings” (Welch, 2000, p. 366). All of these definitions of co-teaching are similar to the descriptions of team-teaching previously described by Anderson, Hagstrom, and Robinson (1960), Buckley (1999), and Sandholtz (2000). Thus, co-teaching and team-teaching are synonymous and interrelated terms that can be used to describe various configurations of actions undertaken by two or more teachers within one classroom.

Cook and Friend (1995) highlight five “variations” of co-teaching detailed in Table 2. I classify these variations as pedagogical approaches as they describe general team-teaching techniques teachers can apply in their classroom regardless of the specific structural organization. Any number of students or combination of teachers can be involved in these pedagogical approaches. For example, teams can consist of two general educators, two special educators, or one general educator and one special educator. Teams may also include one or more EAs. Additionally, teachers may combine two standard-sized classes into one learning space, open an adjoining wall, or co-teach in one standard-sized classroom.

Table 2. Pedagogical Approaches to Co-Teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006).

One Teaches and One Assists	Station Teaching	Parallel Teaching	Alternative Teaching	Team-Teaching
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<p>Two teachers present in the classroom; one takes an instructional lead during lessons while the other floats around the room supporting students.</p> <p>Also referred to as '<i>supportive teaching</i>' by Thousand, Villa, and Nevin (2006).</p>	<p>Two teachers deliver different curricular content to rotating groups of students.</p> <p>Co-teachers teach the same content multiple times but to different groups of students.</p> <p>Rotation times and student groupings are pre-arranged.</p> <p>Additional stations for student collaborative or independent work.</p>	<p>Two teachers jointly plan and teach the same content, but split the class into two or three smaller groups for instruction in different areas of the classroom or school.</p> <p>Teachers have to coordinate their efforts so the students receive essentially the same instruction in approximately the same amount of time.</p>	<p>Students divided into one small and one large group.</p> <p>One co-teacher instructs the large group of students, while the other co-teacher takes the smaller group to pre-teach, reteach, or supplement regular instruction. Small groups can be used as enrichment groups.</p> <p>Groups are pre-determined by co-teachers.</p>	<p>Both teachers share instruction and take turns leading a classroom of students.</p> <p>Similar to '<i>complementary teaching</i>' (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006) Each co-teacher complements what is being shared by summarizing or elaborating ideas, providing additional examples, or modelling on the front board for the whole class.</p>
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For each pedagogical approach above, co-teachers work collaboratively to plan lessons and assess students. The five pedagogical approaches may be used by one or multiple team-teachers in any combination, at any point in time, depending on student needs. Cook and Friend's (1995) five approaches describe two or more educators' collaborative and cooperative work within one classroom and how instruction is differentiated. Murchu and Conway (2017) support this claim as they believe "the models of 'one teaches and one assists', 'parallel or split teaching', and 'station teaching' are models or configurations of team-teaching" (p. 48), where the interplay between lead and support teacher is flexible and may alternate.

The "co" in "co-teaching" refers to "cooperative" or "collaborative", and scholars describe "cooperative teaching" as an interchangeable and relevant term to both co-teaching and team-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995; Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999; Murchu & Conway, 2017). Welch, Brownell, and Sheridan (1999) define cooperative teaching as "a broad overarching umbrella of various instructional configurations two educators might use in a classroom" (p. 37). These "instructional configurations" are

similar to the pedagogical approaches of co-teaching described by Cook and Friend (1995). This form of shared instruction is flexible and implemented in at least three ways; one teaches and one observes/assists, complementary instruction (parallel teaching), and supportive teaching (alternative teaching) (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999). Even further, they state how the scholars Bauwens and Hourcade (1995) elaborate cooperative teaching to encompass:

“A restructuring of teaching procedures in which two or more educators possessing distinct sets of skills work in a co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviourally heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings, that is, in general classrooms” (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999, p. 37).

When defined this way, cooperative teaching is the same as co-teaching and team-teaching, and apply to the various explanations and approaches described above from Friend and Cook (1995), Welch, Brownell, and Sheridan (1999), Welch (2000), and Thousand, Villa, and Nevin (2006).

Many people mistakenly believe that “collaborative teaching” and “collaboration” are one and the same. The characteristics and virtues of more general kinds of collaboration and collegiality are often falsely attributed to other kinds of collaboration such as collaborative teaching (Hargreaves, 1994). Judith Warren Little (1990) makes the distinction between collaborative, collegial work, and collaborative teaching. Collaboration is a “generic construct” defined by Little (1990), who distinguished four different types of collaboration. The four types include storytelling and scanning for ideas, aid, and assistance, sharing, and joint work. All four are along a continuum of independence to interdependence. The first three involve minimal and temporary collaborative processes. Teachers come together for short periods to discuss teaching, problems in their classroom, or instructional ideas (Little, 1990). These brief and often infrequent interactions characterize general collegial work and teachers not sharing the same classroom space.

On the other hand, joint work involves a higher degree of interdependence and collaboration that is full-time or year-long (Little, 1990; Stein, 2017). Jang (2006) and Krammer et al. (2018), explain how Little (1990) uses the term “joint work” to describe the shifts in teaching from individualistic to collective, that subsequently leading to new forms of teaching. Little (1990) terms the interdependence and shared responsibility for teaching as “joint work”. Krammer et al. (2018) also use Little’s (1990) work to describe how, in relation to understanding team-teaching, “joint” explains how teachers work closely together and are strongly dependent on one another. “Teachers cooperating at this level usually work and teach together in teacher teams by doing co-teaching or team-teaching” (Krammer et al., 2018, p. 464). Krammer et al. (2018) also state how team-teaching reflects the joint work and joint teaching of two general educators in a double-sized classroom (p. 464). “Joint” refers to the collective action of teachers in planning, instruction, and evaluation, and is incorporated in the definitions of team-teaching provided by Sandholtz (2000) and Welch, Brownell, and Sheridan (1999). Little (1990) describes team-teaching the same group of students in the same classroom as joint work. In contrast, two or more teachers joining to collaboratively plan lessons, instructional approaches, and assessment practices, but executing their plans in separate classrooms comes close to joint work, but does not quite reach the point of interdependence and shared responsibility for instructional effectiveness, and student outcomes mentioned by Little (1990). There are different depths of teacher interaction and collegial relationships. From Little’s (1990) perspective, some forms of collaboration are more superficial, such as sharing ideas or resources, and then returning to individual classrooms. Others involve joint work on teaching practice and instruction together in the same classroom, such as when team-teaching, co-teaching, cooperative teaching, or collaborative teaching.

There are varying levels of collaboration, but collaborative teaching represents the most extensive and elaborate level. If we use Little’s (1990) distinctions, collaborative teaching consists of much more than the short-lived interaction between teachers to improve instruction. It epitomizes a consistent, long-term collaborative relationship between two or more teachers. Little (1990) would classify this as complete

interdependence on her continuum of collaboration. Many schools run the risk of labelling their classrooms as “collaborative without having the elements in place to guarantee that authentic partnerships exist” (Murawski, 2010, p. 9). Murawski (2010) defines authentic, collaborative teaching partnerships as those that involve constant interaction between at least two coequal parties who voluntarily engaged in dialogue, planning, shared and creative decision making, instruction, and follow up (p. 9). She goes further to state “collaborative teaching is another term used for co-teaching, team-teaching or cooperative teaching and regardless of which term is used, we are describing two or more professionals who deliver instruction to students in a classroom” (Murawski, 2010, p. 9). “Collaboration” may not necessarily involve teachers always sharing the same classroom space to instruct, whereas “collaborative teaching” does. When teachers co-teach or team-teach they are doing so in “collaborative teaching settings” (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999; Thousand, Nevin, & Villa, 2002). With minor variations in the wording of scholars’ definitions, one can see they have a closely linked, interchangeable, and synonymous nature. Overall, no one term is better than the other. The definitions have subtle differences, but they include the same characteristics; two or more educators, simultaneous or interchangeable delivery of instruction, diverse groups of students, collaborative and cooperative planning, teaching, and assessment in shared classroom settings. I define team-teaching as two or more teachers assigned that teach the same group of students simultaneously on a full-time basis. General or specialized teachers are equally responsible for a group of students, cooperatively and collaboratively plan activities, teach lessons, and assess student work based on pre-determined criteria. Since team-teaching is the most commonly used approach, I will use the term “team-teaching” to refer to my teaching context throughout the remainder of this study.

Benefits and Limitations of Team-Teaching

Potential Benefits of Team-Teaching

Many scholars believe team-teaching offers considerable benefits, highlighting the old adage of two heads being better than one. There are four commonly cited benefits identified in the literature.

Improves Teaching. Working closely with one or two colleagues allows teachers to observe and learn from other perspectives (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999; Buckley, 1999; Murata, 2002; Wild, Mayeaux, & Edmonds, 2008; Stein, 2017). It forces educators to articulate their ideas, make their reasoning visible, be open to different approaches, challenge assumptions, and often compromise with their teaching partners (Buckley, 1999; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006; Stein, 2017). When team-teachers approach the same topic from different angles, they are “provided a greater opportunity to capitalize on the unique, diverse, and specialized knowledge of each instructor” (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006, p. 241). Forming teaching teams can also provide in-service training and opportunities for professional growth (Sandholtz, 2000). Team members develop an expanded view of the curriculum, can implement new and innovative ideas, and broaden their repertoires and teaching strategies (Murata, 2002).

Empowers and Energizes. Team-teaching not only improves teaching practice and the breadth of curricular knowledge, but it also empowers and energizes educators (Buckley, 1999). It encourages teachers to take risks, experiment with non-traditional models, and better manage the stress of teaching (Buckley, 1999, Murata, 2002; Wild, Mayeaux, & Edmonds, 2008; Degan, 2018). Teaching can be both physically and mentally exhausting. Studies show that when teachers collaborate in team-teaching, they are less likely to feel overwhelmed or burnt out by their workload and their sense of self-efficacy increases (Degan, 2018; Krammer et al., 2017; Krammer et al., 2018). Team-teaching spreads responsibility, encourages creativity, and strengthens a sense of community (Buckley, 1999; Murata, 2002; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006). Through increased mutual support, teams can build close reciprocal relationships that boost morale and help form a positive classroom culture (Murata, 2002).

Benefits Students. Having two teachers in the classroom allows teachers to respond to all students' individualized needs and demands (Krammer et al., 2017). As Thousand, Villa, and Nevin (2006) share,

when teachers team-teach, “they are better able to meet the needs of diverse students” (p. 239), and it “allows students to experience and imitate the cooperative and collaborative skills that teachers show” (p. 41). As students see teachers working synergistically with one another, taking the lead back and forth, they see collaboration in action, and a classroom climate of shared collaborative values is established (Murata, 2002). Students may also witness situations when teachers have differences of opinions or disagree and how teachers navigate those conversations respectfully. With this modelling, students can emulate and practice the collaborative and cooperative skills they will need as adults.

Fosters a Collaborative Culture. Team-teaching not only fosters a collaborative culture in the classroom but stimulates an intellectual culture of collaboration between colleagues at a school (Murata, 2002; Wild, Mayeaux, & Edmonds, 2008). Colleagues witness the positivity and success experienced by team-teachers who demonstrate how to establish and maintain relationships and learn from them (Degan, 2018). As a result, school-wide reciprocal and collegial relationships are cultivated, developing social capital (Degan, 2018). Social capital refers to the positive relationships built and community of peer support between members of a group. Degan (2018) believes with strong social capital, a collaborative school culture is made possible. Thus, the benefits of team-teaching reach beyond the four walls of a team-taught classroom. While there is plenty of evidence outlining the benefits of team-teaching, there are several limitations to this approach, which might explain reasons why it has not attracted more educators (Degan, 2018).

Potential Limitations of Team-Teaching

Success is not always guaranteed, and team-teaching may not necessarily be a comfortable arrangement. Sharing responsibility, modifying teaching styles and preferences, and working closely with another adult presents significant challenges for some educators (Friend, 2008). Thousand, Villa, and Nevin (2006) describe how “all collaborative teams face common issues concerning instruction, time for planning and logistics, behaviour management, communication among members, and the evaluation of success in

collaborating” (p. 274). The four most commonly discussed limitations in the literature are teachers’ incompatibility, lack of partnership choice, increased time commitment, and difficulties finding suitable shared classroom space.

Incompatibility. One of the most cited problems in the literature is teachers’ incompatibility (Buckley, 1999; Welch, 2000; Krammer et al., 2018). In addition to different personality types and teaching styles, team members’ teaching philosophies may be drastically diverse, which can cause tension. Team-teaching forces members to rethink their practices and often compromise with their partner; however, some teachers may not be as open to compromise or making instructional modifications as others. More rigid personality types often disagree with more flexible and laid-back personality types, and vice versa (Buckley, 1999). Moreover, some teams may have difficulty sharing the “spotlight” or fear losing control in their classroom (Buckley, 1999). If team members have different beliefs or ideas about instruction, assessment, and planning, the team relationship can become contentious.

Lack of Partnership Choice. Many argue that team-teaching can have detrimental effects on educators who are “arranged” into the position by their administrators. Friend (2008) found that if administrators “force” such an arrangement on two or more parties, what often results is a reluctance to participate. Evidence shows that “teachers do not respond positively to top-down mandates and require some power over their decisions as so many choices are out of their hands” (Degan, 2018, p. 32). Furthermore, some educators expressed considerable concern about their relationships with colleagues when principals assigned team-teaching partners. The potential incompatibility of two teachers forced together hinders successful collaboration processes, and limits team-teaching effectiveness and quality (Krammer et al., 2018). Krammer et al. (2018) state this problem can be solved by inviting teachers to select their partners. Sandholtz (2000) supports this finding by mentioning “personality conflicts are often lessened when people make their own choices about team membership” (p. 49). The team relationship begins on a stronger basis when members have individually agreed to work together and have some sort of pre-existing professional

understanding or relationship (Krammer et al., 2018). When partners are not involved in such a significant decision-making process, a collaborative culture is more challenging to develop, and minimal buy-in to team-teaching may occur (Degan, 2018).

Increased Time Commitment. Another challenge for team-teaching is that unit and lesson planning, delineating instruction, and classroom responsibilities, and agreeing on assessment practices all take a considerable amount of time (Cook & Friend, 1995; Buckley, 1999; Murata, 2002; Friend, 2008). Team-teaching requires frequent discussion about every aspect of teaching, which as Buckley (1999) discusses, can be incredibly draining as group decisions happen slowly. Team-teaching is intellectually and interpersonally demanding (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006). In Welch's (2000) study, the only negative comment consistently made by team-teachers was the amount of time required to plan (p. 372). The more team members there are, the more challenging it can be to arrange schedules and establish an adequate amount of time to discuss planning and assessment. Scholars recognize that team-teaching is an approach that requires a significant level of collaboration. This can be particularly challenging for teachers with young children at home or school-aged children they must attend to after school. It is a substantial investment of time and energy; therefore, its longevity is difficult to sustain (Murata, 2002). If schedules do not account for additional time, team-teaching can be more of a burden to team members.

Finding Suitable Classroom Space. Not having access to a teaching space that supports team-teaching can be challenging and limiting (Degan, 2018). The degree to which classroom design supports team-teaching often varies from school to school. Some schools have open, flexible learning areas, others have classrooms with partition walls (Friend et al., 2010) that can be opened and closed, which provides the opportunity to teach larger groups of students. On the other hand, some classrooms only have a single door between rooms, or are extremely limited in how the space can be altered to accommodate team-teaching. In my experience in my school district, it is rare for schools to have large, open classrooms that allow for two

separate classes to combine in one room. Finding suitable shared classroom space is only a relevant limitation when team-teaching involves large groups of students.

The increased time team-teaching takes, the challenges in having to figure out how to share responsibilities and teaching space, and address pedagogical and personality differences are significant limitations because they substantially impact team-teachers' enjoyment and job satisfaction (Krammer et al., 2018). Furthermore, finding team-teachers who are open to learning from one another and adapting their approach to teaching can be challenging. These limitations can be large stumbling blocks and deterrents for teachers.

Essential Elements for Successful Team-Teaching

Scholars have noted the following elements as essential for successful team-teaching: support from administration, adequate time for professional development, knowledge of specific team-teaching methods, understanding of shared responsibility, trust and respect between partners, open communication, and complementary teaching philosophies (Cook & Friend, 1995; Buckley, 1999; Murata, 2002; Adams, 2012; Krammer et al., 2017; Stein, 2017; Degan, 2018; Krammer et al., 2018). Below I describe each element.

Administrator Support

Enlisting meaningful administrator support is crucial to the success and longevity of a team-teaching relationship. Administrators can model desirable traits and behaviours that promote collaboration, establish collaborative cultures within their schools, and engage teachers in problem-solving if and when the need arises (Cook & Friend, 1995). Other important types of administrator support include providing teams with resources that will enhance their preparation, provide additional training, and schedule additional planning time for teachers to collaborate (Cook & Friend, 1995; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006; Friend, 2008; Pratt, 2014; Krammer et al., 2017). Additionally, administrators can co-construct the rationale for collaborative teaching with the school community, assist personnel in understanding the changes in their roles and

responsibilities, evaluate the efficacy of the team-teaching practices at their schools, and provide team-teaching learning resources. For example, books, current literature, team-teaching experts, and district consultants (Cook & Friend, 1995; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006). By using the various learning resources, teams can strengthen their team-teaching practices (Solberg, 2017). Finally, to support teachers in sustaining team-teaching, administrators can provide ongoing opportunities and time to attend professional development workshops on collaborative planning and teaching approaches (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006; Krammer et al., 2017; Friend, 2008; Degan, 2018). Visible and active involvement of administrators in planning for and implementing a successful team-teaching program is essential.

Co-Planning and Reflection Time

A significant challenge in implementing team-teaching is scheduling opportunities to plan, reflect on lessons, and evaluate students together (Sandholtz, 2000; Welch, 2000; Murata, 2002; Bouck, 2007; Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Pratt, 2014; Degan, 2018). Time is a problematic resource for teachers to find when not scheduled into the workday, and finding time to co-plan and reflect is particularly important for the success of team-teaching. Since administrators are responsible for organizing teachers' schedules, they can support team-teaching by providing shared planning time for team teachers (Cook & Friend, 1995; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006; Friend, 2008; Pratt, 2014; Krammer et al., 2017). Extra time needs to be built into daily schedules for the team to prepare lessons and reflect on the successes or failures of those lessons together (Cook & Friend, 1995; Sandholtz, 2000; Friend, 2008; Degan 2018). One way administrators can do this is by providing shared preparation blocks to teachers. If administrators cannot provide shared planning time, teams will need to find ways to create co-planning time together.

Without pre-arranged times to meet, teams may feel ill-prepared for teaching (Degan, 2018). Team-teaching works best when all team members take opportunities to discuss classroom curricular content (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008; Degan, 2018). The planning process becomes more labour intensive, but the

benefits are that team members become more knowledgeable about topics, and learn from each other's understanding and opinions (Degan, 2018). Team-teachers are not required to plan together all the time. Teachers may not have the same planning or preparation time. Some individual planning will need to take place, but teachers should touch base before or after to discuss an idea, plan, or approach. Murata (2002) found that frequent interaction and collaboration between teachers helped establish a more effective teaching team. Discussion and reflection are significant parts of the process, as they enable teachers to improve their partnerships and instructional practices. Team-teaching can be a positive and rewarding experience. It contributes to teachers' professional learning and joint knowledge construction if teachers are willing to make the time for it.

Focused Professional Development

Historically, school professionals are trained and socialized to operate in isolation from one another. However, successful team-teaching relationships require skill development and professional learning opportunities focused specifically on team-teaching (Fallon & Barnett, 2009; Solberg, 2017). At the individual school level, planning is essential for clarifying the specific expectations for each team member (Cook & Friend, 1995). "Conversations about their expectations, teaching styles, understanding of students, and preferred classroom practices can lay the groundwork for a successful partnership" (Friend, 2008, p. 14). Professional development should also involve learning the skills necessary for implementing team-teaching models effectively with a specific focus on helping teachers develop effective communication strategies to avoid or mediate interpersonal conflicts when they arise (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008; Pratt, 2014).

Furthermore, Friend (2008) believes the first requirement is for teachers to jointly participate in workshops, book studies, learning communities, and other staff development activities related to team-teaching. "Without adequate training or professional development in team-teaching, teams may experience

some interpersonal challenges and organizational issues, and may be required to make it up as they go" (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999, p. 46). Meaningful professional development and mutually deciding what your team-teaching program will include aids in setting up a classroom for long-term success and helps foster positive working relationships.

Strong Communication

Honest, open, and ongoing communication is essential for establishing a positive professional relationship with a teaching partner. Communication builds community and helps develop effective practices (Cook & Friend, 1995; Buckley, 1999; Degan, 2018). It is necessary during lesson planning, instruction, discussions about assessment, and post-lesson reflection. Teachers need to have in-depth conversations about their teaching philosophy and style, beliefs about discipline and classroom management, how they would like the teaching space shared and organized, and how they envision instruction taking place (Bouck, 2007). The responsibilities and expectations team-teaching partners have for each other must be communicated and agreed upon. To make collaborative decisions, team members must feel comfortable with one another to constantly communicate about what is happening in their shared classroom (Degan, 2018). Beginning your partnership by being open to sharing and spending time together establishing a respectful relationship is essential.

Being able to provide one another feedback, being willing to listen, and respond openly and positively to a partner's ideas and suggestions is another crucial piece to building a strong partnership (Buckley, 1999). As mentioned, communication about teaching does not just occur in planning or thinking about instruction, but must take place after a lesson finishes. Opportunities must be taken for team-teachers to discuss both a lesson's successes and shortcomings. Negative feedback can always be challenging to navigate; therefore, teaching partners need to let one another know how they prefer to receive feedback so they can reflect appropriately (Cook & Friend, 1995). When you have a positive, established relationship

with your partner, you are more likely to be open to their ideas, and the relationship is more likely to be sustained (Degan, 2018).

Furthermore, partners will not always agree with one another and may have fundamental disagreements that could interfere with a positive working relationship. Respectful communication and being open to sharing and listening to your partner's feelings can help (Buckley, 1999). When you have an established relationship built on open and honest communication, disagreements are easier to navigate and overcome (Cook & Friend, 1995; Degan, 2018).

Mutual Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities

Team-teaching is a highly complex relationship that requires team members to share control of lesson plans, delivery of instruction, and classroom management. Team members need to be open to sharing and feel their roles, responsibilities, workload, and decision-making power are equally shared (Bouck, 2007; Krammer et al., 2018). Pratt (2014) discusses co-teacher's parity of roles and feelings of equality as necessary in building effective and trusting relationships. It is important for there to be no sense of hierarchy within a shared classroom space. Teachers "need to believe they are equals in planning, instructing, classroom management, and grading" (Pratt, 2014, p. 9). Some teachers achieve parity by dividing up responsibilities, and ensuring such roles are flexible and carry equal weight (Pratt, 2014). There should be no hierarchy between teachers. There needs to be mutual understanding and a sense of fairness (Cook & Friend, 1995). One team member cannot feel like they are doing a larger share of the workload than the other. If this happens, resentment may occur and a strain put on the collaborative relationship (Cook & Friend, 1995). In daily work, a negotiation process occurs. Responsibilities for specific classroom activities, such as decisions about what, and how to teach and assess students' learning are brokered (Krammer et al., 2017). "Ensuring that both teachers in a co-taught class have productive roles is primarily a matter of being deliberate about the practice" (Friend, 2008, p. 15). "Given the multiple roles teachers need to play in today's

classrooms, co-teaching can create situations in which teachers can potentially assume fewer roles in general or moment to moment because they know their partner can take on the others, thus becoming better in the roles they do play” (Bouck, 2007, p. 49). In an ideal arrangement, the team shares responsibility from a joint perspective and balances classroom roles and workload, while being open and flexible to make alterations as they go.

Trust

Ensuring trust is established is another component of a strong professional team (Buckley, 1999; Murata, 2002; Pratt, 2014; Degan, 2018). Team-teaching classrooms need strong social capital to achieve a mutual sense of trust (Degan, 2018). Degan (2018) defines social capital as the “positive relationships between members of a group that facilitates those members trusting each other, sharing resources, and collaborating,” and concludes that “strong social capital positively affects interpersonal relationships and facilitates trust and support, which leads to collective and self-efficacy” (p. 19). Having the desire to work together and place themselves in the vulnerable position of having their teaching being watched by a colleague requires that team members respect and honour one another as professionals (Pratt, 2014; Degan, 2018). Partners must trust that they will support each other rather than critique or judge their teaching or ideas. This includes respecting each team member’s feelings and knowledge (Pratt, 2014). Respect and trust are strong predictors of team cooperation (Degan, 2018).

Trust grows as teachers demonstrate respect and care for each other (Pratt, 2014). In her study of effective teams, Pratt (2014) found that the most successful partnerships consisted of those who thought of each other as more than just colleagues. They developed an understanding of each other beyond the classroom. With a high level of trust, partners are able to move beyond conversations about the students and planning, to being open, and sharing personal interests and life experiences (Pratt, 2014). Team-teaching partners become one of the most important people to one another at work. Building a trusting relationship

where roles and conversations are fluid and seamless takes time to achieve, and requires flexibility, practice, and patience.

Compatible Philosophies

A significant quality to forming an effective team-teaching relationship is "having a notion of the other as someone who shares a similar philosophy and whose strengths are complementary" (Murata, 2002, p. 70). Knowing who shares your teaching views and conceptions allows for ease in decision making, and easy sharing of responsibilities and tasks within the classroom (Pratt, 2014; Krammer et al., 2018). Compatible teachers share similar beliefs about curriculum instruction (Pratt, 2014). For example, if one teacher prefers to have a teacher-centered classroom where the teacher lectures, and the other prefers a student-centered classroom where students have voice and choice in their learning, these teachers may not be compatible. Furthermore, compatibility relates to knowing the personality types with whom you get along. To predict whether or not team-teaching partners would be compatible, Murata (2002), Pratt (2014), Degan (2018), and Krammer et al. (2018) highlight the importance of pre-existing relationships. Prior to initiating a team-teaching relationship, it is helpful if teachers either know each other or have had several previous conversations. Teachers need to discuss their teaching styles, philosophies, preferred teaching methods, and approaches to assessment. Also, sharing areas of expertise, comfort, and insecurities can help partners better understand one another. In established team-teaching relationships, team members know if they have compatible attitudes about teacher's work, instruction, and curriculum. Pratt (2014) explained that, "teachers were compatible by having similar perspectives or by using individual strengths to complement each other" (p. 8). Having compatible ideas about classroom organization, instruction, and assessment can help team members establish what Murata (2002) labelled as a "team consciousness" and "synergy" (p. 73). Once teams have achieved this, teachers can be innovative and experiment with new strategies without fearing judgement (Murata, 2002).

The compatibility of teachers' shared beliefs and philosophies about teaching and learning are fundamental to successful team-teaching relationships. If not, they are likely to encounter difficulties or tensions when sharing a classroom or making collective decisions (Pratt, 2014). This does not mean teachers have to be exactly alike and will not encounter disagreements. Teachers must be open to the possibility of adapting and compromising. Scholars also suggest that teachers should use their differences as strengths, but they must agree on planning curricula, instructing, and managing student behaviour (Cook & Friend, 1995). Nevertheless, when teachers share compatible philosophies and attitudes about teaching, participate in intensive shared planning, and share teaching responsibilities, it contributes to a high quality of teaching that permeates the classroom (Friend et al., 2010; Adams, 2012; Pratt, 2014).

Scholars highlight the following actions as important for fostering the essential elements of team-teaching. Gather background information and research on team-teaching prior to beginning the partnership. Discuss team-teaching possibilities with administration and potential partner(s) ahead of time to establish roles and responsibilities. Pre-establish co-planning time, teaching schedules, and clarity about your purposes, goals, and rationale to ensure adequate support is given. Finally, choosing a compatible partner(s) is essential for facilitating trust, positive communication, and mutual understanding.

Summary of the Literature

This literature review has helped me gain a deeper understanding of team-teaching as a complex and unique model of collaborative teaching (Sandholtz, 2000). My review revealed that having two teachers responsible for planning, instruction, and assessment for the same group of students is defined as both team-teaching and co-teaching. Although the terms team-teaching, co-teaching, cooperative teaching, collaborative teaching, and joint work are used interchangeably, there is little difference between the terms. "The heart of the concept of team-teaching lies not in details of structure and organization, but more in the essential spirit of cooperative planning, constant collaboration, close unity, unrestrained communication,

and sincere sharing” (Buckley, 1999, p. 5). There is no single team-teaching model and several variables influence the approaches a team takes.

Team-teaching affords participating teachers ongoing opportunities to observe and learn from their partner(s), gain different perspectives, and increase pedagogical knowledge. “Working in partnership with another teacher, bouncing ideas off of one another, planning and orchestrating the perfect lesson, having two pairs of eyes and four hands, creating something that is better than that which each partner brings” (Adams, 2012, p. 11), are positive outcomes of team-teaching. However, the increased work demands, time-consuming nature, and disagreements caused by incompatible pedagogical beliefs can leave teachers questioning whether the benefits outweigh the challenges.

Comparing a team-teaching relationship to a professional marriage seems fitting. It takes equal commitment from both parties to work. To ensure the success and support of partners, teachers must have positive relationships and trust. Open and honest communication is a critical component of any effective team relationship. Partners need to feel comfortable sharing ideas, feelings, and questions regarding teaching without worrying about judgment. Disagreements are natural, but how they are handled and communicated respectfully is important. Creating and maintaining a positive collaborative culture, being provided with professional development opportunities, and having administrator support can help teachers feel job satisfaction and avoid feeling isolated (Degan, 2018).

Team-teaching can be a successful teaching approach that has many benefits, but it is important to recognize that it also has its challenges. Buckley (1999) believes team-teaching is better understood from the inside, beginning with personal experience. In the next section, I use the key elements to analyze the effectiveness of my approach to team-teaching.

Reflections on My Team-Teaching Experience

The process of team-teaching has pushed me to reflect on my teaching practices, it has re-energized my teaching, and provided a strengthened sense of a close professional community of support. Below, I describe how my team is organized and how it functions, and reflect on my experiences over the past year and a half as a team-teacher. These reflections are based on my personal perspectives and do not include the perspectives of other team members. I end by providing advice to educators who are considering team-teaching approaches in their classroom.

My Teaching Context

My team-teaching context is similar to Buckley (1999) and Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger's (2010) definition of team-teaching; two or more teachers working collaboratively to instruct a group of students in a combined classroom. In my case, a Grade 5/6 and Grade 6/7 class were combined into one multi-grade class. To accommodate the large number of students, my new teaching partner and I required a large classroom space. Fortunately, the previous Grade 5/6 and 6/7 teachers taught in a learning space separated by shelving and bookcases that could be removed and converted into a large, open classroom.

Our teaching team consists of my teaching partner (TP), one full-time resource teacher (RT), two full-time educational assistants (EAs), and myself. My TP and I are responsible for delivering instruction and assessment aligned with British Columbia's curriculum. The RT provides targeted support to English Language Learners (ELL) and students on Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The EAs provide behaviour management, emotional, and academic support to students on Behaviour Plans who require guidance co-regulating, and students with Ministry designations such as autism. Prior to forming our teaching team, I had a personal and professional relationship with my TP, and had worked with both the RT and EAs.

The five of us are in the classroom at all times except when the RT, TP, or I have our two separate, scheduled preparation times or when the EAs go on their recess and lunch breaks. Having a full-time RT is

unique to our classroom and school. We are fortunate in this way, as our small school was granted an additional RT due to the number of student needs and our principal decided to provide us with full-time resource support.

Three of the five members of our team (the TP, RT, and myself) work together to set specific learning goals for our group of students, design curriculum, and prepare lessons and units. At the beginning of the year, the three of us established two afterschool meeting times each week to plan lessons and units. We meet before school each day for approximately forty-five minutes to review the day's activities and materials. We also spend most of our recess and lunch breaks together, where we debrief lessons, discuss student needs and engagement, and reflect on whether we need to alter our daily or weekly plans. The RT joins us for all planning sessions, paying careful attention to ensuring that students with diverse learning needs are considered in all activities. In my experience, it is uncommon for RTs to participate in planning with classroom teachers.

In our classroom, the EAs are responsible for working closely with four students who require co-regulating support and, if necessary, making decisions to move these students to a quieter learning space. They also help support other students who have questions or need help. The EAs constantly check in with my TP, RT, and myself about how to best support students during activities, but they work more closely with our RT. The RT meets with the EAs one day each week after school to collaboratively establish behavioural plans and alterations for the students they are assigned to support. Each morning the EAs also check in fifteen minutes before the start of the school day to learn how they can best support the students they work with during that day's lessons. The EAs are an integral part of our team. From my perspective, they feel comfortable providing feedback and suggestions for lessons, and share their ideas or questions during class discussions to prompt student thinking. We try to be responsive to all our students' needs and sometimes need to make decisions "on-the-fly." Therefore, the five of us often check in with each other to

review our next steps while students are working independently. These continuous check-ins benefit our daily practice, upcoming plans, and students' learning.

My teaching partner and I do not pre-determine who will take the lead in each lesson. It has always been an organic process that often involves someone keeping us on time while the other may be in conversation or helping a student. The RT never begins or leads a lesson, but will share her ideas and provides additional guidance to prompt student thinking. The three of us have a common understanding that prompting questions and comments are welcome at any time. I feel we are comfortable adding and building on each other's ideas if someone has missed something significant. If our EAs have something to share, they too add freely to the class discussion. During instruction, we spread ourselves around the room and slowly meander while adding ideas to the class discussion or directing students to better engage in the lesson. Since our classroom space is large, we find this technique helps keep students engaged with the speaker and provides us with the opportunity to silently cue students who may not be attending to a lesson or discussion. Our team has established mutual understanding and respect for one another and believes it is vital for all to be involved in every lesson. Each day there is always some form of co-planning and co-instruction taking place among all five of us.

Our Team's Strengths

From my perspective, we have experienced success in many of the potential benefits and essential elements described in the literature. We have developed strong communication and trust, established a supportive and collaborative community, organized planning, and reflection time, asked for guidance from other professionals to improve our teaching, and noticed considerable student benefits.

Communication and Trust. As Cook and Friend (1995) have outlined, strong interpersonal and communication skills are essential for effective team-teaching. These have been our strongest assets from the beginning. I believe we recognized early on how important open, honest, and frequent communication is, which has helped us establish what Cook and Friend (1995), Buckley (1999), Thousand, Villa, and Nevin

(2006), and Degan (2018) describe as a positive professional and collaborative community. Having strong communication skills has allowed the five of us to establish close, supportive relationships with each other. We have always actively listened and shown respect for each other, which has built trust. According to Degan (2018), when team-teachers trust one another, they develop strong social capital and have positive professional relationships. I believe we have achieved this by spending time together, being open-minded when listening to new strategies and ideas, and sharing appreciation for one another and our various areas of expertise. Having trust has allowed us to communicate our opinions, professional needs, and concerns without fear of judgement. Since we have established strong social capital within our team, we can respectfully disagree, compromise, and find the middle ground when needed.

Supportive Collaborative Community. Closely related to communication and trust, another element to our cohesion and success has been our ability to support each other through difficult times. We manage student behaviours by pooling our knowledge and various strategies together. Degan (2018) mentions how important supporting one another with difficult students and situations is for team-teaching. Having the ability to provide backup or step away when emotions and patience with challenging student behaviours are increasing has highlighted the benefit of having more than one teacher in the classroom. We are all mindful of how and when to approach these situations and ask for help when it is needed. Dealing with difficult conversations with parents is more manageable and has also been less emotionally exhausting. When discussing approaches to these difficult conversations, team members bounce ideas off of each other and choose the best approach. One benefit described by Thousand, Villa, and Nevin (2006) is reduced emotional burden and burnout. I have partners to share the heavy workload and help solve problems or respond to challenging situations alongside. We have established a supportive professional community in what Murata (2002) describes as a positive classroom culture.

Effective Planning. Although Sandholtz (2000), Welch (2000), Murata (2002), Friend (2008), Friend et al. (2010), Pratt (2014), and Degan (2018) all call attention to the challenges of finding time in

daily schedules for team-teachers to meet, our planning and reflection is another strength for our team. With such a large class, we recognize that planning together is essential for ensuring we are well prepared, on the same page, and responsive to evolving student needs. By scheduling two standing meeting times a week, we have enough time to discuss ideas and prepare for the week ahead. This consistent meeting time has allowed us to maximize our time together and prioritize tasks, two necessary components described by Cook and Friend (1995), and Degan (2018). We also have daily check-ins to regularly reflect on lessons and plan our next steps during break times. In my experience, minimal amount of extra work needs to be completed at home because we efficiently use our time at school and divide up our workload. This has had a significant impact on establishing a better work-life balance. Team-teaching has made the stress of teaching more manageable for me, a considerable benefit described by Buckley (1999), Murata (2002), Wild, Mayeaux, and Edmonds (2008), and Degan (2018). As a team, I believe we have done well to schedule the appropriate amount of planning and reflection time Cook and Friend (1995), Murata (2002), and Degan (2018) discuss as required for successful team-teaching. Being able to plan and share ideas with colleagues is the best part of team-teaching, and consequently, I feel energized and empowered in my teaching.

Improved Teaching and Access to Support. Coming from different backgrounds and levels of training and experience, I have learned from my team members' strengths and knowledge. I have observed and learned from others' perspectives, and used team-teaching as in-service training and an opportunity for professional growth (Sandholtz, 2000). We have received guidance from district consultants, who have helped us identify new ideas and supported and encouraged us through the introduction of innovative teaching techniques and learning activities. Murata (2002) described this as gaining an expanded view of teaching pedagogy. We have been able to implement new and innovative ideas in our classroom with the support of other professionals with various areas of expertise. Furthermore, some shared professional development opportunities and workshops have helped us understand and revisit our teaching philosophies,

exposed us to new teaching strategies, provided opportunities for us to establish a common language, and reach shared goals for our students.

Student Benefits. Buckley (1999), Murata (2002), Thousand, Villa, and Nevin (2006), and Krammer et al. (2017) describe the increased individualized attention to students and improved student ability to emulate effective collaborative and critical thinking skills as one of the potential benefits for students in a team-taught classroom. I have witnessed each of these in my classroom. When students work independently, the five of us can move around the room, ensure we connect with each student, answer questions, and provide targeted support to specific students who require it. I believe our students have developed positive collaborative practices with their peers. Our students witness effective collaboration practices as the five of us interact during lessons and respond to each other's ideas. We model critical thinking by asking thought-provoking questions and occasionally debating or disagreeing with each other. As a result, I have heard students share their ideas more freely at their tables, listen politely to their peers' ideas and opinions, and disagree respectfully. I think they have learned these skills by witnessing our modelling. By showing students that it is okay to have contrasting viewpoints and establishing a classroom community built upon trust, respect, and openness, I believe more students feel comfortable sharing their ideas. These elements highlight how our collaborative relationships have created what Murata (2002) describes as a climate of shared values within our classroom.

I believe participating in this collaborative teaching team over the past two years has allowed us to co-instruct and support each other, learn from one another, and equitably share various teaching responsibilities. As a result, I have established a better work-life balance and we have established a strong collaborative professional relationship. I believe the more we share, discuss, and unpack curricula together, the deeper our understanding of concepts and the richer our instruction becomes. Sharing classroom presence with other professionals and participating in lesson preparation and instruction has been beneficial in terms

of feedback, support, and access to unique and diverse perspectives. Team-teaching has been an invaluable opportunity that has been both challenging and inspiring.

Our Team's Challenges

Scholars describe interpersonal differences, lack of teacher choice, time commitment, and lack of shared classroom space as the common limitations to team-teaching. From my perspective, the increased time commitment of team-teaching, including not sharing common preparation time, and doing too many extra-curricular activities, are our biggest stumbling blocks. We faced additional challenges as well, including a lack of preparation time, professional development, and support in getting established, and an over-reliance on whole group instruction.

Time Commitment. As Cook and Friend (1995), Buckley (1999), Murata (2002), and Friend (2008) discuss, team-teaching is a considerable time commitment. Every teacher within British Columbia is provided with two, fifty-five-minute non-teaching blocks a week away from their students for preparation and planning time. Since my team and I do not have the same preparation time, major decisions and plans are made with my TP and RT outside of instructional hours. This has been one of the most challenging aspects for our team, as a great deal of my extra time has been spent completing my Master's degree. On occasion, I worry I am not pulling my weight as a team member, and my teammates will resent me for having other priorities which take up a considerable amount of my free time. During two after-school planning sessions a week, we often get carried away with numerous ideas. We end up discussing units and themes for extensive amounts of time without coming to any cohesive conclusions or decisions. Sharing and discussing three peoples' ideas takes time, patience, and compromise, three key components of team-teaching discussed by Cook and Friend (1995), Buckley (1999), and Degan (2018). Before moving forward with our plans, we all must agree. Early on, I found that if a decision was made by myself, the TP, or the RT without the EA awareness, it created an imbalance, and felt awkward that some team members had more decision-making

power than others. Therefore, Buckley's (1999) point that group decisions are slower to make rings true for my team-teaching experience.

Finding downtime or time to take breaks throughout the day has also been challenging to manage. We are always discussing how things are going, planning, and sharing ideas. Often, we use breaks to check in, catch students up on work, reflect on lessons, or plan the direction of upcoming lessons. This constant interaction and collaboration highlights how "team-teaching makes more demands on time and energy" (Buckley, 1999, p. 13).

Having no shared preparation time and feeling our time together after school was often stretched thin, I expected to take on fewer additional school-wide committees and extra-curricular activities. This was not the case for our first year. My TP, RT, and I all stayed on the same number of committees and coached both the girls' and boys' basketball and volleyball teams because no other staff members were willing to take them on. All of the extra-curricular activities became challenging and exhausting to balance. In addition to our two weekly collaborative planning sessions, every day at lunch or after school, there was a meeting, practice, or game to attend. This year, due to the circumstances of the Coronavirus pandemic, extra-curricular activities and some school-wide committees were suspended, which immediately created a better balance to our daily workload. Regardless of not needing to make any decisions to cut back this year, I now have a better idea of what extra-curricular duties I can manage while team-teaching in the future.

Lack of Preparation, Professional Development, and Support. In the beginning, there was a lot of unease about whether or not team-teaching would be suitable for my TP, RT, and myself. My uncertainty came from starting team-teaching quickly, having minimal administrator assistance, and knowing little about effective team-teaching approaches. Welch, Brownell, and Sheridan (1999) warn that without adequate training and professional development specific to team-teaching teams can experience organizational issues. This was a challenge we faced in organizing and managing our time. We needed more support and resources from our administration to help us begin team-teaching and more focused professional development

opportunities throughout the year to gain a deeper understanding of effective team-teaching models and implementation. As discussed by Cook and Friend (1995), we needed more time to preplan and discuss our expectations and preferred classroom practices. As a result, without pre-determining who would lead specific lessons, teaching together at the same time was difficult to adjust to, as the five of us often ended up jumping into conversations and talking on top of each other.

Focus on Whole Class Instruction. Although scholars did not discuss the challenges of whole-class instruction, I believe we relied too heavily on it as our primary delivery method, and did not differentiate our instructional approach enough. Our lack of preparation and professional development has resulted in a lack of awareness of the different ways team-teaching models can be implemented. Friend (2008) highlights how essential it is to be deliberate about your practice and ensure all team members have productive roles. When we first began, I recognized it was challenging for my TP and I to relinquish control during lessons. Since we did everything together as a large group, I wonder how successfully we supported students with varied learning needs. From the perspective of Cook and Friend (1995), exposure to more varied instructional approaches is a significant benefit of team-teaching. Capitalizing on the knowledge and expertise of all team members by implementing small group instruction would allow more targeted instruction to students (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Throughout all of the challenges faced during the first two years, I have learned how team-teaching can be intellectually, personally, emotionally, and physically demanding (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006), and learned more about what components are required to building a strong and effective team.

Looking Forward

Despite numerous successes, I believe there are several aspects of our team-teaching that can be improved. Using what I have learned throughout the last two years, I have outlined the following recommendations to improve our approach to team-teaching.

Better Time Management. Filling our recess and lunch times each day with tasks to complete, planning and assessment has its advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, it allows us to catch up and change class plans. On the other hand, it makes for extremely busy days. I recommend we ensure that we take at least one break a day to relax and recharge. Additionally, our two after-school meetings a week feel long, tedious, and draining. We need to be more mindful about how in-school time is used and ensure we are efficient with how we plan after school. Setting time limits and sticking to an itemized meeting “to do” list may help in this area. I believe this will improve over time, the longer we work together and have practice in making efficient decisions.

Organize Shared Preparation Time. We have experienced both successes and challenges with having common preparation time. Sharing the same preparation block during our first year helped minimize the amount of time spent before and after school planning and assessing together. I recognize this can be difficult to arrange because some “prep teachers”; teachers who relieve classroom teachers for their planning time and teach one curricular subject to the class, may not be willing or comfortable teaching large groups of students in a combined classroom. It will be important to have conversations with our school administrator and prep teacher before the start of the year, outline how beneficial shared preparation time is for our practice. If it is not possible, we could inquire with our administrator about using some school professional development funds to provide us with extra time to collaborate. The disadvantage of this approach is it would limit opportunities to engage in professional development outside of the team or outside of the school. Discussion at the beginning of the year to outline our professional development expectations and desires to plan for workshop opportunities throughout the year would be beneficial.

Limit Extra-Curricular Activities. Given the increased time required to team teach, teachers should be mindful of how many extra-curricular activities they take on. Remaining on committees and leading many extra-curricular activities for students in our first year meant collaboration time was minimal. Our colleagues and administrators reach out to our team to provide additional services to the community because they

incorrectly assume we have the extra time because there are more adults in the room. Consequently, I felt pulled in many directions. I have found that I always want to be able to do it all, and by not wanting to let anyone down, I never said no to someone who asked for my participation or leadership. We need to balance our workload better to avoid physical and mental burnout. Setting better boundaries, saying “no,” and taking on less will help to alleviate the feeling that our time is constantly stretched thin. At the beginning of the year, I think we need to outline the committees and extra-curricular activities we are willing to do and communicate this to our colleagues. Additionally, ensuring our administrator supports us in the number of committees and teams we agree to take on will be essential for managing schedules and a work-life balance.

Small-Group Instruction. Ensuring we all connect with or have time to support every student does not always happen. Based on what scholars have described as effective pedagogical approaches to team-teaching, I recommend that we take more opportunities to experiment with Cook and Friend’s (1995) variations and find ways to utilize two or three teachers for smaller group support and differentiated instruction. Organizing students into small groups or one-on-one instruction is easier in a team-taught classroom. While one teacher oversees the whole group, the other can work with certain students on specific tasks and targeted skill development. This will allow us to deliver more intentional instruction to students who are struggling or require further attention.

Seek Support and Professional Development. Given that team-teaching is still relatively new to our team and continues to involve a lot of experimentation, I believe we need to identify sources of information on team-teaching and talk to others with team-teaching experience either within or beyond our school district. In my view, we need to do a better job of seeking professional development opportunities focused on team-teaching practices. Additionally, we need to improve our ability to communicate our needs and ask for administrator support. Our administrator could provide access to learning resources, such as new reading materials, and further professional development opportunities to learn more about effective collaborative teaching strategies. The true purpose of team-teaching is to work closely and collaboratively

with colleagues. These colleagues do not just have to involve classroom teachers, resource teachers and educational assistants, but administrators can be additional team members and provide a considerable amount of guidance with their professional expertise.

Despite my belief that there are areas where improvement is needed, I believe that our team works well together. We are compatible in our teaching pedagogies, vision, and goals for our students. In a relatively brief period, I believe we have established a close partnership and a collaborative teaching style that has energized us and our teaching. A considerable amount of the emotional drain and day-to-day business and stress of teaching in isolation has greatly diminished by working collectively with colleagues. By being present in the classroom together all day, every day, the students appear to thrive in the dynamic learning environment witnessing effective collaboration and respectful communication first hand.

Advice for Teachers Considering Team-Teaching

Working with another teacher can be an enriching experience, and just like any relationship, takes time to establish. Team-teaching is only as effective as each member of the team. The literature has provided me with a deeper foundation for understanding terminology, required elements, and pedagogical approaches to team-teaching. From my perspective, the benefits greatly outweigh the negatives. Based on what I have learned from scholars and from personal experiences with team-teaching, I hope the following advice will be helpful to educators and colleagues who may be interested in, and considering the possibility of, team-teaching.

- **Have Familiarity.** Choose a partner you know, someone with whom you already have a professional relationship and with whom you believe you are compatible. Your teaching styles do not necessarily need to be identical, but your values, beliefs, and educational philosophies towards instruction and the curriculum should be similar. Having comparable views on discipline, organization, work ethic,

student expectations, teaching philosophies, and smaller things like how you envision your classroom to look can help make your partnership harmonious.

- **Share a Vision.** Discuss your purpose and decide on a set of goals you aim to accomplish within a school year. Have conversations about what you want to achieve and what you want your students to achieve by year's end. A shared vision helps establish consistency in curriculum, assessment, and teaching. This supports both student and team success because all teachers reinforce the same expectations and practices. The vision provides a reference point for all decisions. It is important that all members agree and can visualize the year's trajectory.
- **Establish Trust.** Team-teaching is a shared commitment. To establish a strong foundation of trust, you should build your relationship first and get to know one another. Share your personal and educational values. Have conversations about your expectations for team-teaching, and what roles and responsibilities you are willing or not willing to undertake. Discuss what you believe are your strengths and weaknesses, and how you can best support one another in these. Establishing a foundation of trust will allow you to build a relationship of openness and honesty. You will be able to rely on one another, lower your sense of vulnerability, and you will feel comfortable taking risks.
- **Communicate Frequently.** It is essential to communicate openly, tactfully, and often. Before you begin, share your key teaching principles, values, beliefs, and expectations for classroom and behaviour management. Be willing to listen to new ideas as well as share your own. You will learn from each other and increase your understanding of each other's experience and teaching methods. Positive communication will not only help you build rapport but contribute to establishing trust.
- **Disagree Respectfully.** No two teachers are exactly alike, and disagreements are likely to happen. Be mindful that you may need to have tough conversations. If and when disagreements occur, be courteous and calm, and listen to the feelings and opinions of your partner(s). If need be, ask your

administrator for guidance. When you disagree respectfully in front of students, they can learn to emulate similar behaviours.

- **Daily Check-Ins.** Daily, short check-ins in the morning to prepare and decide who will lead and support which lessons will set you up for a smooth teaching day and minimize feelings of being overwhelmed. Having short check-ins at the end of the day can help you reflect on lessons, student progress, and discuss any social, emotional, or behavioural occurrences that might have come up during the day, allowing you to make plans for the following day.
- **Weekly Meetings.** Schedule weekly meeting times and ensure you have a list of priorities to get accomplished. Strategize your priorities for each meeting, and do not give yourselves too many tasks to get through. Making effective and efficient decisions as a team is key to a strong partnership. Keep meeting times consistent so all team members can organize their personal lives. Having one team member take notes provides a point of reference if anything is forgotten or needs revisiting.
- **Create a Shared Online Platform.** Prioritize your workload and find an online platform to share to-do lists, notes, resources, plans, and assessment frameworks. When you are not together, classroom tasks can still get completed, and everyone on the team can view what has been worked on. Google Docs is an invaluable and free resource that can track team members' suggestions, questions, or changes to lesson plans.
- **Be Flexible.** Be willing to adapt and change when facing challenges due to scheduling. Real-life happens, which is why it is important to be honest and open with your co-teacher. Be understanding when your co-teacher has something come up and be willing to work around it. Things also frequently change in the classroom. Not only do you need to be willing to be responsive to your partner(s) ideas, you need to consider the changing needs of your students. Be flexible in planning, prepare for the unexpected, and be open to make alterations in the moment to support the best interests of students.

- **Be Willing to Compromise.** It is almost impossible to always be attached to one particular idea or way of doing something. Partners need to be able to discuss ideas and come to an agreement about the best approach. Sometimes this involves altering original ideas. As long as one partner does not feel they are the only one compromising all the time, the partnership will remain balanced and feel effective.
- **Differentiate Instruction.** Utilize how to use all the teachers in the classroom. Experiment with various ways to deliver instruction to students. For example, try implementing parallel, alternative or station teaching. One teacher can introduce a lesson or activity, while the other works with a small group of students giving a mini-lesson or additional support.
- **Designate Teaching Subjects.** If you do not have common prep times, it will be important for you to discuss and decide who will teach which lessons and/or subjects during the week so that each team member can prepare independently. This process should feel equal and fair. You could alternate what you teach or teach to the strengths of each partner. For example, if one teacher feels stronger teaching French and the other prefers Science, subjects could be divided this way.
- **Be Consistent.** Consistency in schedules and organization is key, but all teachers should have the same academic and behavioural expectations of their students. Before the year begins, create a plan with your team to decide on your expectations for classroom, hallway, gym behaviour, homework, and discipline. Agree on consistent messaging for students. Building a consistent classroom environment will also benefit students, provide routine, and stability.
- **Organize Materials.** Combining your classrooms for team-teaching involves bringing an abundance of materials with you. It will be important to spend some time discussing how you will compile your teaching materials and which resources you will no longer need to manage available classroom space. Flexibility is key here. Designate classroom areas where materials for students will go and how you will organize your teaching resources such as instructional books.

- **Create a Plan for Work-Life Balance.** Plan together ways to achieve a work-life balance. Be open to discuss with your partner(s) some aspects of your personal life so that you can set reasonable meeting times and boundaries. Be willing to be flexible with each other's individual responsibilities and commitments. You may also need to set boundaries regarding additional extra-curricular commitments and committees at your school. Discuss what you and your partner are willing to take on and be mindful not to take on too much.
- **Connect with Administration.** Administrators may not have much if any, background knowledge or experience related to team-teaching. It will be important to spend time with your administrators to share the team members' understanding of team-teaching and your classroom vision. Invite administrators into your classroom to see team-teaching in action. The administrators should also be aware of your curricula and support any innovative teaching strategies or practices you wish to implement.
- **Request Support.** It may be your responsibility to educate the administration on team-teaching first to ensure they know how to best support you. Acquiring professional development resources can benefit your teaching team and administration in understanding the successful implementation of team-teaching and how administrators can provide support. Ask administration about providing collaborative time or common prep blocks to review how your team-teaching implementation is going and plan for the future. This may require using school funds to have substitute teachers in your classroom so you can meet during instructional hours rather than personal time to discuss and reflect.
- **Find Professional Development Opportunities.** If team-teaching is new to your team and administration, participating in additional professional development workshops can provide further insights into establishing an effective team alongside obtaining professional reading materials. It is also essential that you and your team attend the same professional development workshops to discuss

what was learned, share your opinions, and have a common understanding of concepts or activities to implement in the classroom.

- **Appreciate One Another.** Show your appreciation for one another and laugh often. Teaching, in general, is a stressful profession with little downtime. Team-teaching is no different. It is challenging and forces you to stretch your teaching practices and ideas beyond what you are accustomed to, but you are never in it alone.

Team-teaching requires planning, skilled management, open-mindedness, flexibility, imagination, and creativity. It is like riding a tandem bike. It brings together teachers with different expertise, talents, abilities, and strengths. Team-teaching has felt successful for us because we thoroughly enjoy teaching and learning from each other daily. Our relationship has become synergistic. While things may get a little hectic, a strong, supportive community is forged within a team-taught classroom. Team-teaching works best when teachers take opportunities to nurture their collaborative relationships and when there is true parity between teaching partners. Understanding the nature of teamwork in team-teaching will help keep the team on track, benefiting both the teachers and the students in the end.

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