

CO-TEACHING

Why ISU values Co-teaching: a why sheet for teachers

Citations

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As a learning community committed to inclusion, we understand that true inclusion is possible through our ability to embrace and implement agency. Agency enables us to deliver a curriculum that honors our learners, and we can achieve this with far greater success through collaboration and co-teaching. Co-teaching may be defined as two or more people sharing responsibility for a set of students, and sharing the planning, instructing and assessment (Cushman, 2004).

Reasoning and Research

Our ever-increasingly diverse classrooms can no longer be taught by one teacher, but requires the collaborative effort of several teachers who bring different perspectives and skill sets into the classroom to allow for more choice, more differentiation and more support. Therefore, co-teaching fits into the broader topic of diversity and inclusion. A lot of research has been done on co-teaching, which has been recognized as an inclusive teaching model since the 1960s (Friend & Cook, 1995).

Educators must be highly skilled in their ability to: observe and assess student learning; cater for different intelligences, personalities, preferences and learning styles; know the curriculum; differentiate for multiple access points to the curriculum; and utilize a broad repertoire of instructional strategies. Teaching is challenging, complex and ever-changing, and co-teaching allows educators to use their strengths, share the load of responsibility and learn from and alongside one another to order to stay relevant and current. Marilyn Friend writes: "co-teaching suggests that professionals who share instruction can combine their knowledge and skills to create learning environments in which instruction is both rigorous and flexible, standards-based but accommodated to each student's unique learning needs" (2008, p.11). Co-teaching empowers teachers to combine skills, personalities, knowledge and interests to develop exciting and personalized learning opportunities for all students.

Goddard et al., (2007) question the extent to which co-teaching relates to student achievement. Their analysis indicates





that “students have higher achievement in mathematics and reading when they attend schools characterized by higher levels of teacher collaboration” (p.877). Austin (2001) echoes this conclusion referring to reduced student-teacher ratio and diverse expertise and perspectives as factors relating to increased student success. In addition, effective co-teaching authentically models essential collaboration and social skills for the learners. Both Austin (2001) and Scruggs et al., (2007) note the benefit of exposure of ‘special needs students’ to peer models for appropriate behaviour, as well as increased tolerance, acceptance and understanding of difference. Teachers also note increased cooperation among their students in co-taught, inclusive classes (Scruggs, et.al., 2007) and value the remedial strategies, opportunities to review and opportunities for further support for all students (Austin, 2001). Overall, the literature connects well to the concepts of diversity and inclusion.

IB teachers, regardless of their subject or field of expertise, engage in collaborative planning, teaching and reflection to ensure a robust and transdisciplinary programme of inquiry that provides students with current, coherent and connected learning experiences (IBO, 2018). Through co-teaching practices, teachers gain the ability to look beyond their own disciplinary and personal boundaries, enabling lateral and creative thinking about opportunities for learning. IB teachers are required to embrace vulnerability, which Brene Brown describes as the willingness to: do things that do not come with guarantees, be honest about their personal weaknesses and their errors, and let their authentic selves be seen (2010). Tension is inherent in transdisciplinary learning and necessary for learning; it is through critical and reflective thinking, constantly questioning and challenging previously held assumptions that learning discoveries are shaped and connections are made (IBO, 2018). Working and learning alongside diverse people can be challenging and tests our resilience, but it allows us look beyond personal boundaries and take on new ideas, which is essential for developing intercultural understanding (Augsburg, 2014) which is in the mission statement of the IBO (2018). In order to do this, IB educators embrace vulnerability, inquire into the self, and are conscious and critical of their beliefs about learning through a cycle of experience, provocation and reflection on their own practice (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Research shows that most teachers see the benefits of working closely with colleagues and embrace opportunities to collaborate (Mohan et al., 2019). Teachers in successful co-teaching models are open-minded towards new ideas, able to embrace the process and are committed to their work and own learning. Co-teaching involves personal risk, requiring teachers to expose their expertise and practice with colleagues, as well as extra planning time. Research shows that co-teaching is a valuable for teachers’ professional growth, and many teachers see value in their collegial feedback (Mohan et.al., 2019). Collaborative forms of professional learning result in significantly higher levels of implementation than traditional forms of professional development (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010) which can develop daily habits of co-reflection and adaption, which then feeds directly into improved student learning.

Partnership

We want to partner with you and value your input and feedback. If you have ideas or questions we would love to talk with you to discuss this. You may find it helpful to consider these reflective questions:

1. What has been your experience of co-teaching to-date and what did you learn from it?
2. What could be your first or next steps in developing successful co-teaching habits and practices?

