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Actualizing characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents through co-teaching

Amy Satterlee Vizenor  & Jill Matuska

Abstract: A popular trend fusing regular and special education, co-teaching aims to combine the content expertise of a general education teacher with a special education teacher's understanding of meeting the needs of a range of learners for the good of all students. Co-teaching also serves as a vehicle for actualizing characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents. This article explores the perceptions of two co-teachers and 19 of the middle school students enrolled in their co-taught, sixth grade reading/language arts classroom. Five areas of interest emerged from a Likert scale survey and individual interview data: multiple perspectives, teacher expectations, teaching methods, accessibility, and efficacy. Each of these themes aligns with one of the characteristics of successful schools for young adolescents.

Keywords: co-teaching, early adolescent perceptions, middle school educators, characteristics of successful middle schools

This We Believe characteristics:

- Educators use multiple learning and teaching approaches
- The school environment is inviting, safe, inclusive, and supportive of all.

I was a Title One student. I was taught in a pee closet. Literally. Kids would go in and pee in this closet. I had to wait there with two boys. I was a turtle. Everyone else in my class was a blue jay or a robin. I was a turtle. I understand where my students are coming from. They don't want to be the special education student with the label. They don't want to be singled out. Before they were enrolled in a co-taught class, my students would say they didn't want to be in special education. —(Special Education Co-teacher)

Congruence of co-teaching with middle level practice

Two of the distinguishing features of middle level education are its respect for the early adolescent and its call for schools that are developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable (National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010). The memory above, shared by a special educator who herself received special services as a student, neglects all of these qualities. The recollection also highlights one of the benefits of co-teaching: the reduction of the stigma associated with special education, which can be both academically and socially damaging (Shifrer, 2013). Other potential outcomes of co-teaching identified by Wilson and Blednick (2011) include: (1) increased opportunity for differentiated instruction and professional collaboration; (2) higher expectations and teacher attention; (3) enhanced respect for diversity of learners; and (4) reduction of social and achievement gaps among students. Benefits of co-teaching for general education students include enhanced academic performance, teacher time and attention, development of cognitive and social skills, opportunities for active learning, and sense of classroom community (Walther-Thomas, 1997; Wilson & Blednick, 2011; Wilson & Michaels, 2006).

This We Believe, a seminal document defining middle level education, identified sixteen characteristics of successful schools for early adolescents (NMSA, 2010). This article offers a glimpse into one co-teaching partnership that actualizes several of the characteristics of successful middle schools, as evidenced by student perceptions of the co-taught classroom.

The emergence of co-teaching

Wilson and Blednick (2011) detailed the history of special education services, citing the 1975 Public Law 94–142 as an impetus for providing appropriate educational environments for students with identified special needs and noting the potentially isolating nature of early special education services. As attention to inclusion increased, co-teaching emerged as a model that offered students on individualized education plans the services they needed and the opportunity to engage in grade-level curricular activities with age-alike peers.

Simply defined, co-teaching is the pairing of a general education teacher and an educational specialist sharing a classroom for the purpose of providing high-level instruction to meet the diverse needs of a wide range of students (Wilson & Blednick, 2011). Ideally, co-teachers plan, teach, assess, and reflect together. Co-teachers team in every aspect of the teaching process to meet the needs of students with and without identified special needs. Though collaboration among educational specialists has long been a hallmark of special education programming, cooperation between special and general educators through co-teaching has gained momentum only recently, in part due to legislation (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) mandated school accountability by requiring districts to hire only “highly qualified” teachers and to use standardized tests to assess all students, including 95% of students receiving special services. Schools that failed to demonstrate federally determined levels of “adequate yearly progress” for *all* student groups received penalties for these gaps in student achievement. Years later, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) replaced No Child Left Behind. While still requiring standardized testing, this new legislation (a) allowed districts to set their own student performance goals, (b) focused heavily on college and career readiness, and (c) emphasized teacher effectiveness over teacher qualifications. Both acts acknowledged the importance of competent teachers and curricular rigor for every student, calling for a more inclusive definition of the *least restrictive environment* as described in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004).

Co-teaching between general and special education teachers requires sharing responsibility for educating students with and without special needs in the same classroom space. Co-teaching serves as a model for providing

the structure required to ensure quality teachers and educational access for all students in the least restrictive environment. Co-taught classrooms have become “relatively common” in the past few years, reducing the number of pull-out programs utilized for delivery of special education services (Friend, 2015/2016).

Models

Co-teaching scholars typically agree on a variety of defensible models for co-teaching that can be used interchangeably depending on the students, the lesson and content, the learning objectives, and other expected student outcomes. Friend et al. (2010) described six approaches:

1. One Teach, One Observe: One teacher leads the whole class while the other records observational data.
2. One Teach, One Assist: One teacher leads the whole class while the other assists the lead teacher by answering individual student questions or redirecting student attention.
3. Station Teaching: Each teacher staffs a station related to the instructional content. An additional station requires independent work (Friend, 2015/2016). All students rotate through stations.
4. Parallel Teaching: Each teacher teaches the same content to half the class. Students benefit from lower teacher–student ratio and/or different approaches to the learning.
5. Alternative Teaching: One teacher teaches most of the students, while the other teacher instructs a small group for the purpose of re-teaching or enrichment.
6. Teaming: Both teachers instruct the whole class simultaneously, sharing in teaching content concepts.

While the list above is not hierarchical, some question the benefit of *one teach, one observe* and *one teach, one assist*, as these strategies are most similar to the traditional model. These techniques fail to capitalize on the potential of two educators in the classroom because they often present the special education professional in a subordinate role (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Further, Burks-Keeley and Brown (2014) studied student and teacher perceptions of five of the models (not including *one teach, one observe*), noting that students perceived *one teach, one*

assist as least effective in areas of teacher authority, student learning, and student confidence.

Co-teaching at a Midwestern Middle School

The research in this study takes place in a Midwestern fifth through eighth grade middle school with a student population of 600 students. Within the school, approximately 25% of general education teachers in content-based courses participate in co-teaching. In the fifth and sixth grades, co-teaching occurs in the language arts classes, and each co-teaching team consists of one regular education teacher and one special educator. In recent years, the program expanded, combining English language and response to intervention teachers with general education teachers in science and social studies.

When the district first implemented co-teaching, there was no training. The co-teachers intuitively reviewed standards, communicated about and implemented lessons, and reflected on what worked. Out of necessity, these early adopters researched best practices in co-teaching. To better prepare co-teachers, the district later added workshops to equip educators for their work together. The training consisted of two modules. First, teachers studied co-teaching “basics,” including a rationale for and models of co-teaching. Second, they completed “pairs” training, a workshop that aided co-teaching teams in understanding and communicating effectively with each other.

One middle grades co-teaching team

Miller, a language arts teacher, and Jones, a special educator (pseudonyms), started co-teaching five years ago. Jones and Miller’s pairing was uncomfortable at first. Miller desired to co-teach, noting her willingness to give up control and “be a team.” However, Jones started the experience with a negative attitude, thinking that Miller’s teaching style was overly rigid and inflexible.

In their sixth grade language arts class, Jones and Miller averaged thirty students of varied abilities and skill levels. Early in their co-teaching relationship, the two utilized the *one teach, one assist* model of co-teaching, easing their way into working together. Miller taught the content, and Jones assisted by helping individual students. Over time, Jones and Miller came to trust one another as they recognized and validated each other’s strengths in the

classroom. Jones realized that she was wrong about Miller and threw out previous conceptions. She came to appreciate Miller’s knowledge of the standards and ability to stay focused while also taking advantage of teachable moments to make connections with other content areas, and Miller valued Jones’s knowledge of methods for teaching writing.

Realizing that the strategy they used underutilized the co-teaching ideal, Jones and Miller began to divide instruction more evening, eventually eliminating the less effective *one teach, one assist* model (Burks-Keeley & Brown, 2014). Instead, they alternated teaching responsibilities, teaching a large group lesson together and then dividing students into small groups for further instruction—a blend of the *teaming* and *parallel or alternative teaching* models. They used *parallel teaching* when engaging students with the same content but in smaller groups. They implemented *alternative teaching* when one of the educators needed to teach different content to a subset of the class that might include students with and without special needs.

When teaching a standard on explanatory writing, Jones and Miller *team-taught* the first two lessons on the writing process. They presented themselves as teaching equals, taking turns leading students through exercises in prewriting and drafting. As students began to write, the educators recognized that some students struggled to structure an introductory paragraph. The following day, the co-teachers utilized an *alternative teaching* format. Jones gathered the small group of special and general education students who needed assistance with the introductory paragraph and intentionally taught them how to craft it. While Jones instructed this *alternative teaching* group, Miller worked with the remainder of the students who were writing the body paragraphs for their papers. The next day, the teachers once again utilized *teaming* when they taught the whole class about effective transitions. They continued in this way through the writing unit, implementing skill-based *alternative teaching* groups as needed.

Implementing the more collaborative co-teaching strategies required planning time, which was challenging because the two did not share a common preparation period. As Nierengarten (2013) noted, lack of shared planning time is one of the barriers most frequently identified by co-teachers. Therefore, Jones and Miller did much of their planning through e-mail followed up by quick conversations before or after school.

Occasionally, they met for coffee on a Saturday to plan upcoming units. When planning for instruction and assessment, they incorporated principles of Universal Design for Learning and offered options that included multiple intelligences (CAST, 2011; Gardner & Hatch, 1989) in order to meet the needs of the range of learners represented in their classroom. The co-teachers often used formative assessment data, sometimes supplemented by standardized test data, to group students flexibly for *alternative teaching* opportunities. Each day, the co-teachers connected briefly via e-mail or after school to reflect on how the lesson went, discuss how they would adjust the lesson the next time they taught it, and revise plans for the next day's lesson, if needed.

Impetus for exploration: Co-teaching check-in

Vincent (pseudonym), a consultant who provided co-teaching basics and pairs training for co-teaching teams in the district, met with co-instructors periodically. As part of a professional development day, Vincent connected with Miller for a "check-in" to discuss successes and challenges in implementing the co-teaching model. Part of that conversation focused on the student experience: "What would *your students* say about co-teaching?" This discussion motivated the study of student perceptions of one co-taught classroom.

Student perceptions

The recent literature offers little regarding students' views of the co-taught classroom (Lersch, 2012). Since successful middle schools equip early adolescents to take an active role in their learning, "one that includes self-advocacy," soliciting input from middle grades students regarding their educational experience aligned with recommended middle grades practice and supported the need for this study (National Middle School Association, 2010, p. 16).

Study design. Motivated to gather input from middle level students regarding their perceptions of a co-taught classroom, Miller and Vincent designed a mixed methods study using explanatory sequential design (Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2003) and secured permission from school administration, as well as 19 of the 27 parents/guardians of students in Miller and Jones' language arts classroom. Eight families chose not to participate in the study.

After reviewing the co-teaching literature on student perceptions, Miller and Vincent developed a survey comprised of nine Likert items and one open-ended response item (Table 1). Miller and Vincent then used data from the survey to create eight interview questions intended to explain survey data (Table 2). After conducting interviews with individual students at the school site and reviewing interview data, Miller and Vincent inductively coded

Table 1 Survey on Student Perceptions of the Co-taught Classroom ($n = 19$)

Survey item	Percentage of respondents				
	SD	D	N	A	SA
1. I enjoy my co-taught language arts class	0	0	21	42	37
2. I like having two teachers in my language arts class	5	0	5	27	63
3. Students are treated fairly or equally in my language arts class	0	11	32	32	25
4. I am confident in my skills in language arts	0	0	21	37	42
5. The teachers in my language arts class expect me to work hard	0	0	0	16	84
6. The teachers in my language arts class expect me to complete my work on time	0	0	0	0	100
7. In language arts, I am expected to do more than I can do	5	11	5	32	47
8. I feel confident participating in language arts	0	5	16	37	42
9. I can learn as well as other students in my language arts class	5	0	16	47	32
10. What else do you want to share about your experience in language arts?	<p>That I learn a lot of stuff in [language arts]. And that I learn more stuff with two teachers.</p> <p>I think that having two teachers in [language arts] is great because you get to see both teachers humor and personalities.</p> <p>We have a blast and I love coming to [language arts] class. I learned more than I thought I would this year!</p>				

Table 2 Individual Interview Questions

1. What are the good things about having two teachers in language arts?
2. What are the bad things about having two teachers in language arts?
3. In language arts, do you feel that you are treated fairly or equally?
4. In your language arts class, what makes you feel confident?
5. When you are assigned work in language arts, do you usually know how to do it?
6. Are the expectations that your language arts teachers have for you too low, too high, or just about right? Explain.
7. In language arts, what kind of student do you consider yourself to be? Explain.
8. When you consider your classes with one teacher vs. your classes with two teachers, which do you prefer? Why?

transcripts of the interviews separately, met to determine codes, and re-coded interview data.

Vincent interviewed the two co-teachers to gain understanding of the co-teaching relationship and provide context for the study. First, the co-teachers responded individually in writing to the following questions: (1) In what ways do your students benefit from enrollment in the co-taught classroom?; (2) What drawbacks do your students experience in the co-taught classroom?; and (3) As a professional, what do you find rewarding/challenging about co-teaching? After coding student data, Vincent interviewed the co-teachers together and separately to better understand their co-teaching partnership and to gain insight into student responses.

Participants. The sixth-graders involved in this study were enrolled in Miller and Jones's co-taught language arts classroom. Thirteen of the participants identified as general education, while six of the participants had individualized education plans in place for specific learning disabilities. Of the participants, 32% received special education services. Across the district as a whole, approximately 15% of students received special education services.

Successful middle schools equip early adolescents to take an active role in their learning.

Findings

Processing of the Likert items, categorized as ordinal data, included descriptive statistics and frequency tables (Boone & Boone, 2012). Analysis of the student interview

transcripts involved an inductive coding approach based on the work of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

Survey data

The 10-item survey addressed the participants' experiences in the co-taught classroom. As evidenced by selecting *agree* and *strongly agree* on each of the following items, over 75% of respondents noted (a) enjoyment of the co-taught class as a whole, (b) enjoyment of having two teachers, (c) confidence in their language arts skills, (d) confidence in participating in class, (e) high teacher expectations for students, and (f) a sense of being able to learn as well as other students in the class.

Items that conveyed student dissatisfaction with the co-taught classroom related to expectations for student work and fair or equal treatment of students. Seventy-nine percent of students (15 out of 19) selected *agree* or *strongly agree* in response to this survey item: "In language arts, I am expected to do more than I can do." The other item that reflected somewhat negatively on the co-taught classroom experience was fair treatment of students, with only 59% of the sixth graders (11 out of 19 students) signifying that students received fair or equal treatment in the co-taught classroom.

Interview data

In alignment with explanatory sequential design, Miller and Vincent crafted eight interview questions based on the survey data (Creswell et al., 2003). They then individually interviewed the participants, recording and transcribing interviews. Miller and Vincent used a coding process based on the work of Miles et al. (2014). First, they met separately to read the transcripts and identify descriptive codes to capture the essence of the data. They then met to share initial coding and to craft meta-level pattern codes based

on their initial descriptive coding. After Miller and Vincent reanalyzed interview transcripts using the pattern codes, they identified five areas of significance from the data: (1) multiple perspectives, (2) teacher expectations, (3) learning approaches, (4) accessibility, and (5) student efficacy. In reflecting on these themes, Miller and Vincent recognized alignment of the themes with characteristics of successful middle schools as defined by *This We Believe* (National Middle School Association, 2010). The themes and alignment with tenets of *This We Believe* are described in the following sections.

Multiple perspectives

A frequently named benefit of co-teaching referred to the co-teachers' multiple perspectives. Most of the student comments about multiple perspectives related to the ways in which the co-teachers teamed with one another, modeling a respectful relationship and offering differing points of view.

I like it with two better. Both of them can just work together instead of just one talking...they're funny.

You can get two topics, like if there's one topic, you can get two perspectives on it, and get different mind switches in it.

They can bounce things back and forth, and I like to hear what they both have to say.

As described in *This We Believe*, middle level educators who value young adolescents model inclusive, democratic, and team-oriented approaches to teaching and learning" (NMSA, 2000, p.15). Interview responses suggested that students viewed both co-teachers as contributing members of the co-taught classroom. This parity of co-teachers maximizes the impact of co-teaching team and enables the co-teachers to model inclusivity, respect, and democratic practices (Embury & Kroeger, 2012).

Teacher expectations

Another characteristic of a developmentally appropriate middle school is a challenging curriculum that blends planned and unplanned curriculum in a way that honors diversity among students and ensures that "interactions with students are positive and that each student is valued and treated equitably" and that "high expectations [are] held for all" (NMSA, 2010, p. 17, 18).

One theme that emerged from student interviews was their recognition of their teachers' good intentions toward and high expectations for them:

I think they just want us to strive to be as good as you can be so that we can get better.

They say, every time we do something, if we say we can't, they say we can. And we eventually do it.

The downside of teacher expectations concerned a sense of favoritism, as mentioned by two students. The participants reported a perceived discrepancy in how students in the classroom were treated. One student, who was not served by an individual education plan, noted:

Mostly like some students get like treated better than others sometimes...for some students like I know that if we do something bad then we'll get a mark for it, but for other students if they do something bad sometimes they won't get a mark for it.

The "mark" to which the participant referred was a hash mark made by a teacher in a student's planner. In order to participate in school-wide reward days, students needed to have fewer than five marks per quarter. Given that the co-taught class serves students with and without identified special needs addressed by individualized learning plans, expectations for students in terms of academic performance and social behavior may vary. The reason for this perceived inconsistency might not be clear to students.

Multiple learning approaches

According to *This We Believe*, part of ensuring developmentally defensible curricular practices for middle level students involves utilizing multiple learning approaches:

Teaching approaches should capitalize on the skills, abilities, and prior knowledge of young adolescents; use multiple intelligences; involve students' individual learning styles; and recognize the need for regular physical movement....Varying forms of group work are used to increase student engagement and achievement, with students being clustered for short periods of time randomly, or by ability, interest, or other criteria. (NMSA, 2010, p. 22-23)

Student participants commented on the co-teachers' capacity for implementing a variety of teaching methods, noting their ability to utilize appropriate, individualized, and small group instruction.

Well the thing about it is that when we do projects we... can just split up groups so um Miss [Jones] can take one and Miss [Miller] can take some and then we don't have to be a big clump of a class and get it all done.

Um, you get to learn two things because both teachers teach differently. And you can split up into

different groups to learn...I think it's a good idea to have two teachers.

I've known her longer from last year and everything. I kinda know she helps me better like how I understand myself.

This particular co-teaching team utilized multiple intelligences, movement, and flexible grouping to better meet the needs of learners, and their students recognized the advantages. Appreciation for learning in small groups was one of the benefits of co-teaching most frequently cited by student participants.

Teacher accessibility

Though *This We Believe* (NMSA, 2010) refers to interdisciplinary teams in describing a teaching team supported by organizational structures, effective co-teaching partners share common characteristics with impactful interdisciplinary teams: "The team is the foundation for a strong learning community characterized by a sense of family. Students and teachers on the team become well acquainted, feel safe, respected, and supported" (p. 31).

In the co-teaching classroom, having a teaching duo allows for one of the educators to address a student's academic or emotional needs while the other continues to teach the rest of the class, creating a space in which students "feel safe, respected, and supported" (NMSA, 2010, p. 31). Among benefits of co-teaching identified by students, accessibility was significant. The following comments capture multiple student responses regarding the benefits of having two teachers:

...if you have a question you can always ask one teacher, but if one is already talking to somebody it can take a while, and so it's nice to have another teacher open.

Um you have...well you can take more time because they switch off and then one person goes out and helps and the other person keeps teaching.

The "extra" adult in the room made a difference in terms of student perceptions regarding their access to a teacher and their ability to get help when needed. Middle school students took advantage of this "access" not just during class, but also at other times of the school day by e-mailing both teachers with questions. However, the following exchange between interviewer and student suggested that not all students appreciated the close monitoring they received.

Student: The bad thing [about a co-taught classroom] is that, um, double security so we can't sneak out.

Interviewer: So, in your classes with one teacher do you try to sneak out sometimes?

Student: Sometimes. At least put things in my locker a lot...I get my stuff and run back in so no one notices.

In this participant's viewpoint, being noticed was a "bad thing."

Student efficacy

In an ideal middle school, the school environment is one that is inviting, supportive, and safe, as evidenced in part by "the talk one hears" (NMSA, 2010, p. 33).

Communication among the students and adults in the building reflects the value of each person in the community, and this "safe and supportive environment encourages students to take intellectual risks, to be bold with their expectations, and to explore new challenges" (NMSA, 2010, p. 34).

Participants in this study suggested that they felt supported and encouraged by their co-teachers. Asked how they viewed themselves as learners in the co-taught classroom, sixth graders identified increased confidence and heightened academic efficacy:

...they help us like, "yeah, you can do it." And they get our confidences up to normal. I consider myself to be a good student because, like, they help me, and I can focus more on my homework and know what to do so I can do it thoroughly.

I feel more confident because, you know, you get more work done, and they always say that you can do this, and then I keep repeating it in my head.

The co-teachers set a tone that influenced the students' beliefs in themselves and that encouraged academic productivity.

Implications and recommendations

The impetus for this study came from a desire to better understand how middle level students perceive the co-taught classroom. Informed by student survey and interview data, as well as insights from the two co-

teachers involved, this study reveals ways in which co-teaching aligns with characteristics of successful schools for early adolescents. Three recommendations for implementing co-teaching at the middle level resulted from this study, each of which aligns with the philosophy of *This We Believe*.

Teach students an equity mindset

One of the few drawbacks mentioned in interviews with students was the perceived level of fairness in the classroom, likely because there were different expectations for some students than others. In providing an equitable environment, in which teachers attend to every student's learning needs and offer "appropriately challenging and relevant opportunities for every student," there will be inconsistencies (National Middle School Association, 2010, p. 13). Co-teachers could mediate this issue by practicing transparency with their students about the fact that, in the co-taught classroom, each student gets what he or she needs, and sometimes those needs are different. Early adolescents are naturally motivated by "fairness." By redefining the concept of fairness with their students, teachers could promote equity over equality. Indeed, the goal of meeting the needs of *all* students is one of the benefits of co-teaching for students with and without disabilities (Wilson & Blednick, 2011).

Intentionally develop co-teachers

Philosophically, teaming is a "fit" for middle grades schools. Co-teaching offers another level of teaming, which administrators can support by pairing individuals who are interested in co-teaching and giving them opportunities to grow into their new roles through ongoing professional development that reflects best practice (NMSA, 2010). Miller and Jones teamed well together because they set aside preconceptions and invested in their co-teaching relationship. Over time, they were willing to share the classroom in full, utilizing co-teaching methods that went well beyond the commonly used *one teach, one assist* model. Because they desired to co-teach in the best interest of their students, they were willing to persevere to overcome challenges. However, the co-teaching scenario does not always end so well. In fact, the literature is wrought with stories of dissatisfied co-teachers (Connors, 2016).

By redefining the concept of fairness with their students, teachers could promote equity over equality.

Middle level leaders could better support co-teaching practice by providing a strong foundation for their co-teachers and removing some of the barriers to co-teaching with early and "ongoing professional development," as well as organizational structures like common planning time that "foster purposeful learning" (NMSA, 2010, pp. 30–31).

Done well, co-teaching can be a satisfying experience for general and special education teachers. Functional co-teachers report increased opportunities for professional growth and development, improvement in understanding curriculum and accommodations, enhanced personal support, and fun (Scruggs et al., 2007; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Wilson & Blednick, 2011).

Solicit student opinion

The co-taught classroom is an environment shared not only by teachers but also by students. Co-teachers can create a sense of ownership among students by soliciting their opinions about what happens in the classroom and by taking their ideas into consideration, using the "hands-joined" approach. When "teachers and students work together" to build their learning activities, they co-create their learning environment (NMSA, 2010, p. 16). Increasingly capable of critical thought, many middle school students are able to analyze what happens in the classroom and evaluate, to some degree, what works for them. As noted in *This We Believe*, student-teacher collaboration "leads to increased achievement, demonstrates democratic processes, and furthers meaningful student-teacher relationships" (NMSA, 2010, p.17). Making an effort to gather student input regularly is one way in which co-teachers can ensure that students' needs are being met and promote students as advocates in their own education.

Conclusion

Co-teaching shows promise not only as a method for delivering special education services in the mainstream

classroom but also as a way to embed several characteristics of successful schools into the middle school experience. The blend of high expectations, teacher accessibility, and more personalized teaching methods possible when two professionals collaborate to deliver instruction affords students the opportunity to experience academic success—something many of them may not have experienced in the mainstream classroom in the past. When co-teachers can appreciate the value that each person brings and truly utilize each person's strengths and capabilities to educate *all* of the students in the classroom, everyone benefits.

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