NSW Department of Education

Co-teaching

A handbook of evidence for educators
(2nd edition)

NSW GOVERNMENT

| Foreword

This is the second edition of a handbook first published in 2020. Since that time, we have received encouraging and constructive feedback from educational researchers, policy makers, school leaders, and—most importantly—classroom practitioners. The feedback has enabled us to develop deep insights about how resources like this can be used to inform and support amazing educators that work together — sharing the planning, organisation, delivery, and assessment of instruction, as well as physical and virtual spaces.

The feedback clearly told us that educators value resources that synthesise research with practice. Therefore, this edition includes five profiles of schools that have approached co-teaching in different ways. We're enormously grateful to passionate educators who have co-authored these profiles and have been more than willing to share the strategies and structures that have made co-teaching a success in their school communities. We extend our special thanks to Rachel Calleja, James Collis, Shae Dunbar, Renae Mar, Amy Murphy, Sophie Ottley, Kim Rhodes, and Tobie White.

Research continues to show that professional learning is key for supporting teachers throughout the co-teaching cycle. For this reason, we have developed *Co-teaching: a professional learning pack for educators* to accompany this edition of the handbook. The pack provides 7.5 hours of scaffolded professional learning activities that educators can facilitate in their context. Activities are mapped to each stage of the cycle and include ideas contributed by the schools who have shared their stories in the profiles.

Both practitioners and researchers widely agree that co-teaching is more than just two or more teachers in the same room. When viewed as a cycle consisting of four stages— (1) co-planning; (2) co-teaching; (3) co-debriefing; and (4) co-reflecting—co-teaching has the potential to change practices throughout the school community. The benefits of this kind of change are both numerous and far-reaching, including improved differentiation, more holistic and integrated assessment, richer continuous professional learning, increased teacher and learner wellbeing, and improved pro-social skills in the learning environment.

In this handbook, we take a look at how many of these benefits can be realised by exploring, and learning from, recent research and the first-hand accounts of current practitioners. We synthesise findings and provide resources that current educators can use to shape their practice.

We hope you enjoy the handbook!
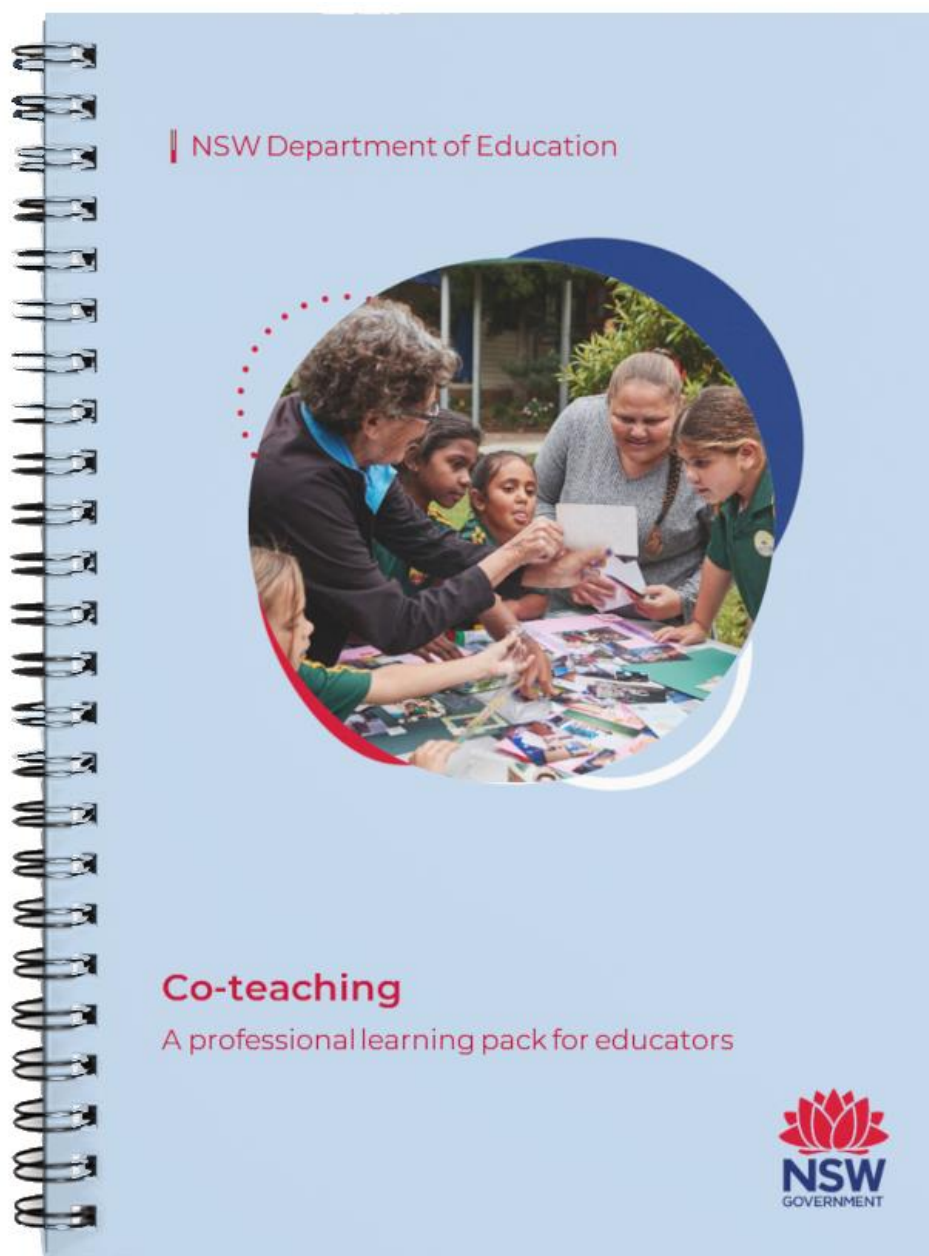
School Learning Environments and Change

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Yammer Group: School Learning Environments and Change

| Professional learning pack

This handbook has a freely available professional learning pack as a companion resource. It provides a sequence of school-based, self-managed activities to consolidate and deepen your understanding of the concepts and research in the handbook. The pack has been designed to flexibly support school-based professional learning focusing on the co-teaching cycle. It is best worked through with a team of two or more co-teachers.

Select *Co-teaching: a professional learning pack for educators* to access the pack.

Contents

"Will co-teaching solve all education problems? Obviously not. But in the hands of two teachers who are committed . . ., co-teaching enables them to create an excellent, joyful classroom community in which adults can teach and students can learn at their best"

(Murdock, Finneran, & Theve, 2015, p. 47).

| Evolution of co-teaching

The practice of co-teaching—where two or more educators are jointly involved in the educative process—predates modern western education. Before we examine what effective co-teaching requires, let's consider how it has evolved over the years.

Co-teaching through the ages

The practice of co-teaching has existed for several thousand years and references to teachers working together can be found in dialogue between ancient philosophers, liberal arts curricula from medieval times, and accounts of parents as learning partners in Indigenous cultural artefacts (see Figure 1).

Early in the twentieth century, its use in western education was especially promoted by constructivists such as John Dewey and Maria Montessori who viewed education as a collective mission towards learner self-actualisation. Although their views often ran counter to the prevailing culture of the single-teacher, single-cell classrooms of the industrial era, their thinking paved the way for teachers to challenge the status quo and view education as a collaborative endeavour.

By the 1980s, individual teacher autonomy—the idea of teachers simply closing their doors and teaching this way—was becoming unsustainable as a response to the complex and ever-changing world. The 1980s also was also a time of re-discovery in the west of Russian educational theorists such as Lev Vygotsky, whose thinking on collaboration was incorporated into a push towards more learner-centred instruction. Vygotsky and other socio-constructivists helped us to view learning and teaching as co-constructed activities and argued that learner autonomy and efficacy are ideally developed through collaborative partnerships.

It was not until the 1990s that both research and practice on co-teaching gained momentum as part of the inclusive education movement. For many at this time, it represented a way to bring together general educators (responsible for the instruction of all students) with special educators (most often responsible for the high-needs and high-risk students previously taught in self-contained, separate learning environments).

C. 400 BCE

Educational dialogue

Platonic texts written in ancient times speak to the educational value of dialogue between philosophers such as Socrates and Aristotle to find the extent of value and truth in their opinions.

C. 1000 CE

Co-teaching in liberal arts

The establishment and consolidation of medieval universities from the 11th century onwards led to the study of liberal arts. Students studied under the tutelage of multiple teachers to attain broad and interconnected knowledge of disciplines such as arithmetic, geometry, music theory, logic, and rhetoric.

C. 1400 CE

Parents as partners

Aztec artefacts from the 15th and 16th centuries document the education of children up to age 14 as a partnership between parents and local council to ensure the continuation of language and culture.
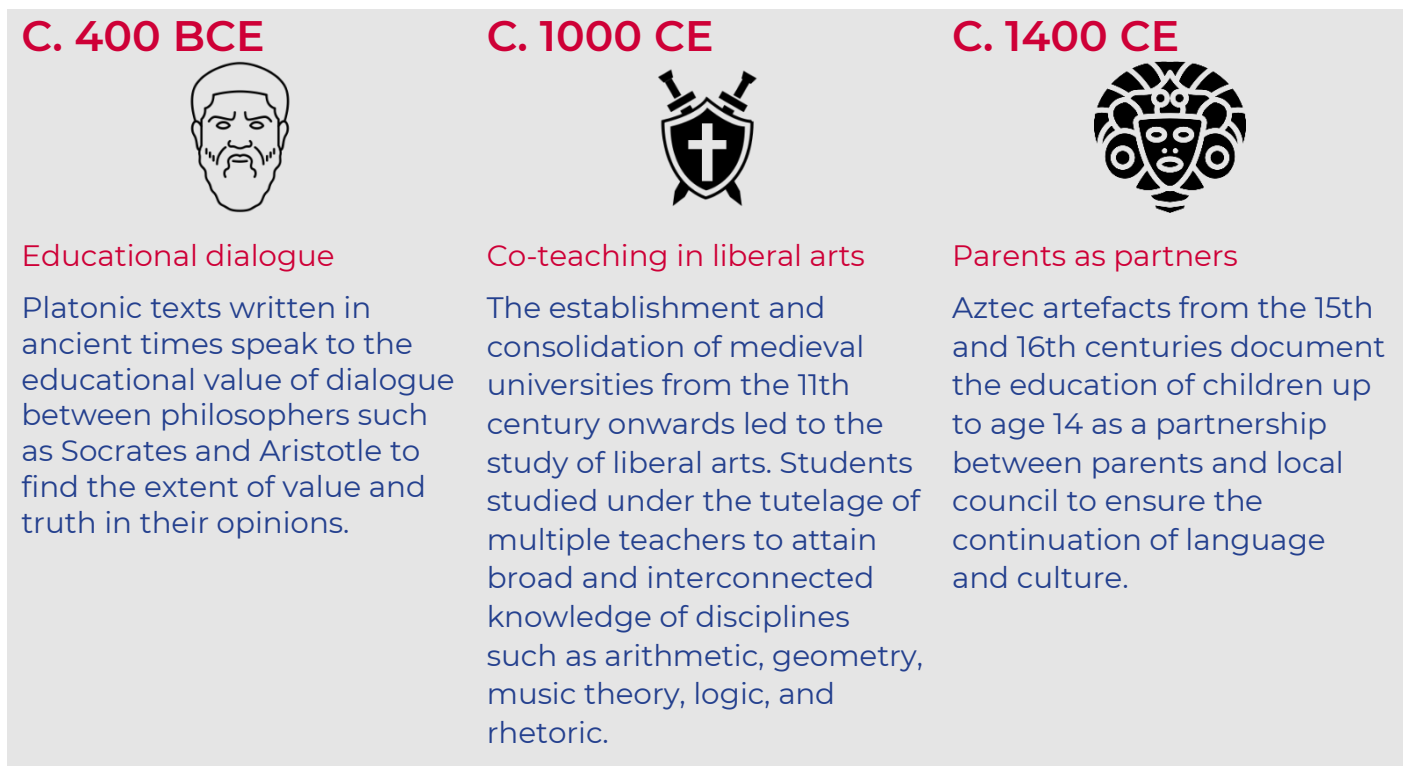
Figure 1: Co-teaching through the ages

By combining the work of these educators in the same space, school communities were able to develop inclusive classrooms where all learners had access to the expertise of both types of educators. Although much co-teaching research still emphasises collaboration between specialist and generalist educators, elsewhere the focus has widened to include other educational roles in the school such as teacher librarians, language specialists, and technology support personnel.

In surveying the four ages of teacher professionalism at the end of the 20th century, Hargreaves (2000) argued that the first two ages of "pre-professional" (pre-1960s) and the "autonomous professional" (1960-1980) involved teachers working in unchallenged isolation, while it was not until the compliance-related pressures accompanying the third age of the "collegial professional" (1980s-2000) that teachers started to work together to achieve common educational goals principally as a matter of necessity.

"By the mid to late 1980s, individual teacher autonomy was becoming unsustainable as a way of responding to the increased complexities of schooling. The world in which teachers worked was changing, and so was their own work"

(Hargreaves, 2000, p. 162).

Now well into the twenty-first century, co-teaching has become a core strategy in many school communities. Like many of the early twentieth century constructivists, educators in these schools see their work as a collective mission and view the four stages of the co-teaching cycle—co-planning, co-teaching, co-debriefing and co-reflecting—as essential to achieving this mission.

Pre-professional (Pre-1960s)

Transmission teaching forms the accepted and largely unquestioned wisdom of what teaching really is.

Autonomous professional (1960-1980)

Most teachers teach "in a box", instructing their classes in isolation, separated from colleagues.

Collegial professional (1980-2000)

As many teachers begin to turn to one another for support and direction, the role of the teacher expands to embrace consultation and collaborative planning.
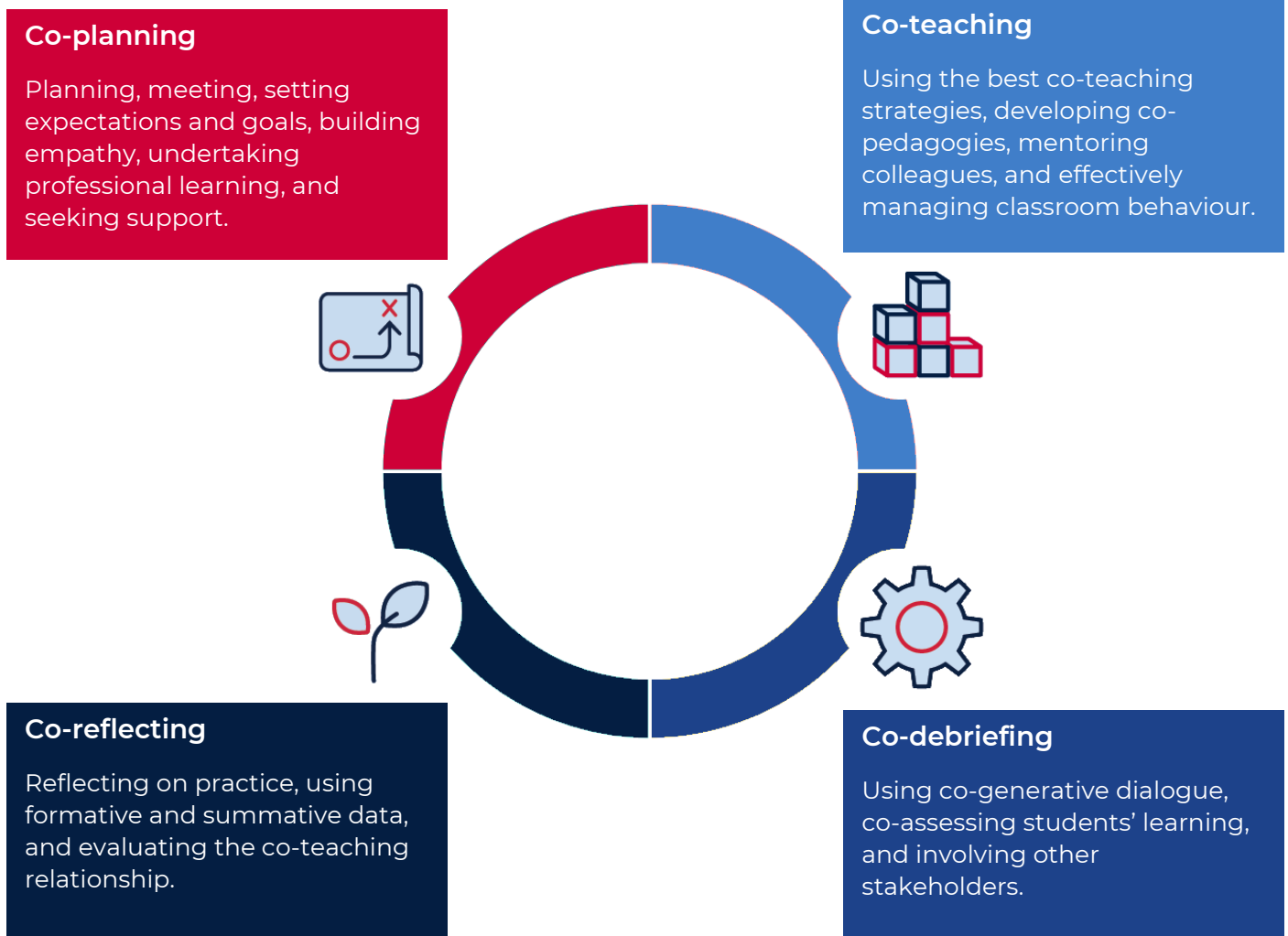
Post-professional (2000 and beyond)

A new, postmodern professionalism emerges that is broader, more flexible and more democratically inclusive of groups outside teaching and their concerns than its predecessors.

Figure 2: Hargreaves' four ages of teacher professionalism

The co-teaching cycle

This handbook synthesises research and practice on the most effective strategies for each stage of the co-teaching cycle. The advice and resources are based on research from the last ten years and educators' first-hand accounts.

Co-planning

Planning, meeting, setting expectations and goals, building empathy, undertaking professional learning, and seeking support.

Co-teaching

Using the best co-teaching strategies, developing co-pedagogies, mentoring colleagues, and effectively managing classroom behaviour.

Co-reflecting

Reflecting on practice, using formative and summative data, and evaluating the co-teaching relationship.

Co-debriefing

Using co-generative dialogue, co-assessing students' learning, and involving other stakeholders.

"The co-teaching cycle is the most powerful way to improve teaching practice. . . . It pushes professionals to make their practices transparent and public in order to become increasingly more skilled, reflective, and thoughtful"

(Sharratt & Fullan, 2012, p. 118).

Benefits of co-teaching

The benefits of co-teaching are well-documented in the research, extending from those within the co-teaching partnership—such as the ability to learn professionally from colleagues—to those that are identified in the broader school community, such as improved learning outcomes and more engaged learners.

Figure 3: Areas that benefit from co-teaching

Benefit #1: Co-teaching can support inclusion and differentiation through:

- reduced student-to-teacher ratios with more one-on-one time
- being a less restrictive environment for students with learning needs, where their needs are more likely to be met and where their learning outcomes are more likely to be improved
- providing opportunities for one teacher to work with small groups and/or individuals while another teacher is instructing the class

- the ability to provide multiple explanations of difficult concepts and joint feedback from different teachers
- opportunities to intervene earlier in the instructional process.

Benefit #2: Assessment and curriculum can be more holistic and integrated where co-teachers:

- are able to use co-debriefing and co-reflecting to share findings of evidence of learning and to forward plan
- take advantage of the presence of two or more teachers to gather and document on-the-ground insights.

Benefit #3: Co-teachers can broaden professional horizons by working with each other because:

- co-teaching represents a form of professional learning that is continuous and embedded
- co-teachers often work with colleagues with differing perspectives, practices, and values
- co-teachers can use their experience to mentor each other.

“Co-teachers can collaborate in a phenomenally fine-tuned fashion, co-participating in both the initiation and feedback components of the sequence and accomplishing together what one individual does in a single-teacher context”

(King, 2018, p. 12).

Benefit #4: Collective teacher efficacy is often stronger in schools with co-taught classrooms because:

- practice is less private when teachers plan, teach, debrief, and reflect together
- the co-teaching cycle encourages teachers to collaboratively evaluate their impact on learning
- co-teachers can support and validate one another to build confidence and a sense of shared efficacy.

Benefit #5: Co-teaching can foster learner and teacher wellbeing because:

- positive teacher relationships are often a springboard for an inclusive culture where students receive increased emotional support, develop trust in one another, and report a sense of belonging
- teachers can model positive peer relations
- co-teaching is often associated with reduced stigmas for students with learning disabilities
- co-teaching has been associated with reduced teacher burnout and improved morale
- co-taught classrooms have been shown to foster learner engagement and development of pro-social skills.

Benefit #6: Co-teaching can catalyse positive changes to pedagogical practice because:

- good co-teachers are often flexible and willing to adopt different approaches, strategies, and models as a result of working with one another

- it has been associated with improved pedagogical effectiveness of question-answer exchange during instruction
- it often leads to richer and more effective class discussions
- it enables high-impact joint feedback, which makes learning visible and enables co-teachers to manage competing voices and evaluate multiple students at once
- co-teachers who co-plan have been shown to use more varied high-impact teaching strategies and implement them more frequently
- co-teaching provides an opportunity for teachers to refine and reflect on pedagogy.

Co-teaching for changed practice in flexible learning spaces

The last decade has seen co-teaching gain even further momentum in the context of open-plan, flexible learning spaces where educators with varying backgrounds and areas of expertise work alongside one another as a matter of school policy. Research shows that co-teaching is an excellent strategy for building collective teacher efficacy, where teachers work together on shared learning goals and continually seek to understand their impact on students' learning. Collective teacher efficacy has been shown to have a very high impact on improving learning and teaching.

(Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018; Hattie, 2019).

"The power and promise of collective efficacy is that it can be influenced within schools, so focusing on it as a change point is a viable path to greater student achievement, greater commitment to learning, and a more inviting place to come and learn"

(Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018, pp. 44).

Challenges when co-teaching

To realise many of the benefits of co-teaching, school communities arguably must understand and work with a range of challenges that vary in scope and complexity. Co-planning helps to identify potential challenges and develop strategies to facilitate their mitigation, while co-debriefing and co-reflecting helps teachers to turn these challenges into positive actions moving forward.

Challenge #1: Problems with the co-teaching relationship can undermine success when:

- some teachers have philosophies and/or values that are too different and are too inflexible
- there is a lack of mutual respect
- some teachers struggle with conflict resolution.

Challenge #2: Time, workload, and/or resourcing issues can become insurmountable, such as when:

- there is insufficient time to co-plan and/or co-planning time is frequently interrupted or rescheduled
- teachers feel they are overwhelmed.

Challenge #3: There is a lack of teacher parity manifesting as:

- one teacher feeling their knowledge and skills are not being utilised
- students perceiving one teacher as the 'real' teacher and the other as the assistant
- one teacher not meeting responsibilities
- roles and responsibilities being unclear.

Challenge #4: Professional learning does not support effective co-teaching practices when:

- it is unavailable
- it is not aligned with teachers' needs
- co-teaching dispositions are not considered
- it does not build teachers' capacity, confidence, and willingness.

Challenge #5: Learning environments are not conducive, such as when:

- students are not used to co-teaching
- there is an overload of high-needs and/or high-risk students to the point where their needs dominate
- there is unmanageable noise
- students frequently present behaviour management issues
- learning needs of high-risk and/or high-needs students are not met.

Challenge #6: Problems with co-teaching agreements exist, including:

- agreements that are overly informal and/or not observed
- important issues such as workload, assessment, roles, and responsibilities have not been adequately discussed
- co-planning time that has not prioritised the importance of reaching agreements.

Challenge #7: Poor perceptions of co-teaching within the wider school community undermine success, such as:

- co-teaching being seen as a special education or short-term initiative
- the assumption that it is merely the physical presence of two or more teachers in the learning environment
- significant or ongoing parental concern, misunderstanding, and/or scepticism
- perceptions of disparity
- teachers' views of 'my kids' vs 'your kids' rather than 'our kids'
- the 'I don't know' reflex
- flagging and stigmatising groups within the learning environment — for example, the 'remedial group'
- valuable people in the school (such as teacher librarians) not being seen as having an instructional role.
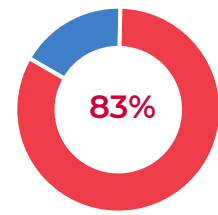
Leading co-teaching for school-wide change at Parramatta West Public School

School size: 856 students
Location: major cities
FOEI: 75
Year range: K-6
Teaching staff (FTE): 58.4

2%

83%
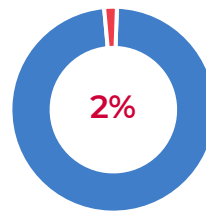
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Teachers at Parramatta West Public School co-teach in a less common architecture consisting of traditional and newly built classrooms. School leaders have adopted a strategic, school-wide steady approach to ensure a high standard of co-teaching pedagogy across all spaces. At the start of their journey, leaders explored core messaging to build a consistent language that would support the cultural shift required when bringing classes together. Initial professional learning sessions focused on building an understanding of the expertise required to become confident co-teachers. This enabled balanced, measured decisions to be made by co-teaching partnerships as they entered the first phase of implementation.

In Phase One, *Where to Start?,* school leaders facilitated structured professional learning activities using school-designed protocols to help teachers engage in balanced and critical discussion, foster metacognition, and reach consensus when exploring key questions such as "Where will we push together to make our practice transparent" and "How can we best align co-teaching with improved student outcomes?". The use of protocols has been integral to keep the growing meta-language of co-teaching consistent and strong co-participation. While Phase One starting points were non-negotiable and relevant to their current teaching space, teachers were supported to define what this would look like in a practical sense, in consensus with their newly established partners.

"For us, a level of co-teaching at the implementation stage required a 'non-negotiable' approach. However, we guided teachers through the decision-making process and made sure that decisions were made collectively, so that we understood why co-teachers were starting at certain points, and how we might support them to progress to that next level. What we didn't want was teachers starting a brand-new year, having not engaged in any co-teaching. We didn't want the understanding of, or participation in, co-teaching to be 'new information' for any staff members. Everybody needed to be engaging in this new pedagogy at the level that was right for them"

(Kim Rhodes, Parramatta West Public School).

Six months into the school's co-teaching initiative, Phase Two, *Where to Next?* focused on the improvement, refinement, and strengthening of co-teaching practice. The school-designed *Co-Teaching Agreement Tool* was introduced to assist co-teachers, EAL/D specialists, and release from face-to-face (RFF) teachers to find common ground and explore shared visions for improved learning and teaching within their co-taught classrooms. School leaders developed systems for all staff to be supported through regular and ongoing professional learning that centred on the co-teaching cycle and promoted the use of high impact co-teaching strategies.

Teachers will continue to participate regularly in evidence-informed and school-based professional learning that draws on their practice in action, through critical dialogue, co-planning, and reflection. School leaders regularly trial protocols and consensus tools prior to their use by co-teachers to ensure they foster reflective talk that is focused and engaged and captures the development of the school's growing co-teaching meta-language. Both school leaders and co-teachers consider critical, reflective talk as a powerful form of professional learning. School leaders aim to foster the development of synchronised co-teaching partnerships.

Key features of Parramatta West's approach:

- a phased approach to school wide change that promotes collective decision making in connection to learning spaces and the development of new pedagogical understandings
- a strong focus on the use of protocols and agreement tools to strengthen co-participation and support all staff in finding common ground and exploring their shared vision for improved learning and teaching
- the development of data collection processes for capturing the strengthening of co-teaching practises over time
- leaders prioritise time for professional learning opportunities that promote critical reflection of co-teaching and its impact.

"Phase 2 coincided with the concept of the co-teaching cycle being a continuous process. In this phase, we strengthened areas of success and refined the areas that required adjustments. Reflection allowed us to take a third-person view on our practice and discuss how effective our co-teaching has been in achieving student learning outcomes. The greatest benefit of the co-teaching agreement tool was to have an in-depth conversation guided by a structured protocol"

(Sinan Kocagil, Parramatta West Public School).

| Co-planning

Co-planning is the best way to ensure that any co-teaching initiative succeeds. Many co-teaching benefits rely on thoughtful and sustained co-planning while many of the challenges documented stem from poor co-planning. Here are key findings from research and practice to support effective co-planning in your learning environment.

Co-planning recommendations

Tip #1: Use co-planning to build empathy and understanding

- Allow time to identify and discuss your teaching styles, interests, goals, strengths, fears, and weaknesses. Surveys and templates can be used to learn more about yourselves and your colleagues (refer to suggestions on Page 33 at the end of this handbook).
- Discuss divergent beliefs and what they might mean for your co-teaching ahead.
- Interview new staff to learn more about their beliefs and experiences with co-teaching and what you might be able to do to help.

Tip #2: Protect co-planning time

- Try to schedule substantial co-planning time that is free from interruptions. Research suggests that at least 40 minutes is ideal to properly co-plan.
- Clearly designate meeting times for intended purposes (for example, co-creating resources, evaluating students' learning, or building empathy).
- Set and meet clear objectives.

Tip #3: Access professional learning

- Undertake professional learning and regularly access professional readings relating to co-teaching.
- If you speak with university partners about pre-service teachers that you are supervising—for example, during a tertiary supervisor visit—alert them to the importance of co-teaching in your school and encourage them to support pre-service teachers' training in co-teaching.
- Look for professional learning that covers both co-teaching strategies and managing the co-teaching relationship.

Hepner and Newman's (2010) strategic co-planning questions — a starting point to learn more about your colleagues:

- What are your expectations for students regarding: participation, daily preparation, assignments, and/or homework completion?
- What are your basic rules? What are the consequences?
- Typically, how are students grouped for instruction in your learning environment?
- What strategies do you use?
- How do you monitor and evaluate student progress?
- Describe your typical tests and quizzes. Describe other typical projects and assignments.
- Do you differentiate instruction for students with special needs? How?
- How and when do you communicate with families?
- What are your strengths as a teacher? What are your weaknesses?
- What do you see as our potential roles and responsibilities as co-teachers?
- What are your biggest hopes and concerns for our work as a team?

"Co-teachers must be good communicators, respect each other, have similar teaching philosophies, be willing to spend time planning together, and at times be willing to drop their own ideas and go with the other person's plans"

(Murdock, 2016, p. 46).

Tip #4: Seek support from leaders and administration

- Consult with school leaders when co-teaching groups are determined.
- Make sure that timetabling reflects the co-teaching arrangement as a year-long feature of how the class is taught.
- Maintain consistent co-teaching partners throughout the year, or longer if possible.
- Ensure consistency in terms of allocating high needs and/or high-risk students across classes.

Tip #5: Get the right agreements in place

- Develop shared goals.
- Ensure fair division of workload.
- Clarify roles.
- Determine key curriculum information such as essential questions, unit objectives, and vocabulary

Tip #6: Focus on effective communication and collaboration

- Communicate regularly with school leaders and administrative staff to make sure they understand what you need to co-teach effectively.
- Clearly explain your co-teaching aims and strategies to parents and students from the beginning.
- Emphasise your school's focus on co-teaching to university and industry partners.
- Involve key school personnel such as School Learning Support Officers (SLSOs), teacher librarians, and support staff in co-planning activities.

Tip #7: Use students' learning to inform planning

- Discuss individual students and the challenges and opportunities they present.

- Where possible and appropriate, involve students during the planning process to identify what their needs are and suggest ways of meeting these needs.
- Frequently analyse students' learning to date.

Tip #8: Structure the co-planning process

- Have a collaborative online space to support and streamline planning.
- Use differentiation planning approaches such as individual education plans (IEPs) and pyramid planning (all/most/some).
- Use both individual planning and co-planning.
- Use co-teaching lesson templates.
- Use strategic questioning to work out what is most important.

Should co-teaching be a choice?

Research suggests that co-teaching initiatives are most successful and sustainable when they are founded on choice, agency, and ownership. Co-teaching may work best when teachers are given some leeway to choose:

- whether and when they would like to participate

- the co-teachers with whom they are likely to work most effectively

- content areas of interest, preference, and/or strength

- specific areas of professional learning in which they need help

- the resources they need to co-teach effectively.

"Choice implies willingness and ownership . . . [and] a sense of ownership by the teachers results in them investing in the co-teaching relationship and increases the likelihood of success and sustainability"

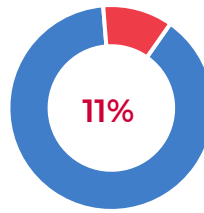(Nierengarten, 2013, p. 75).

An investment in co-planning at Riverstone High School
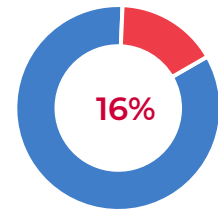
School size: 507 students
Location: major cities
FOEI: 128
Year range: 7-10
Teaching staff (FTE): 38.5

11%

ATSI

16%

EAL/D

Teachers at Riverstone High School attribute their success with co-teaching to a substantial investment of time in co-planning and co-debriefing their learning and teaching. At the start of their co-teaching journey, co-teachers identified the need to build their confidence by prioritising co-planning and developing a more robust understanding of the six co-teaching structures of Friend, Reising, and Cook (1993). However, after finding that initial co-planning efforts resulted in largely superficial collaboration and completion of delegated tasks in isolation, co-teachers worked with school leaders to recalibrate staff meetings and use inquiry to focus more substantially on their professional learning needs.

**Key features of Riverstone's approach:**

- changed staff meeting structure to allow more time for co-planning and co-debriefing
- use of inquiry questions to focus on challenging problems that co-teaching can address
- focus on professional learning on the six co-teaching structures to build understanding of how to apply co-teaching in each teacher's context
- annotated programs to identify which approach would be used in each phase of the lesson and by which teachers
- development of a bespoke co-planning template for inquiry-based co-teaching lessons that explicitly embed the skills of creativity and collaboration and leverage a range of co-teaching structures

"In the initial stages of our co-teaching journey, much of our collaboration was superficial. We found most of our meetings were spent delegating jobs to teachers to complete in isolation. This year, we have transformed our meeting structure and allowed time for meaningful discussion and the joint construction of inquiry questions. This has seen in increase in the engagement of staff involved in the projects and the quality of the lessons produced"

(Sophie Ottley, Riverstone High School).

| Co-teaching
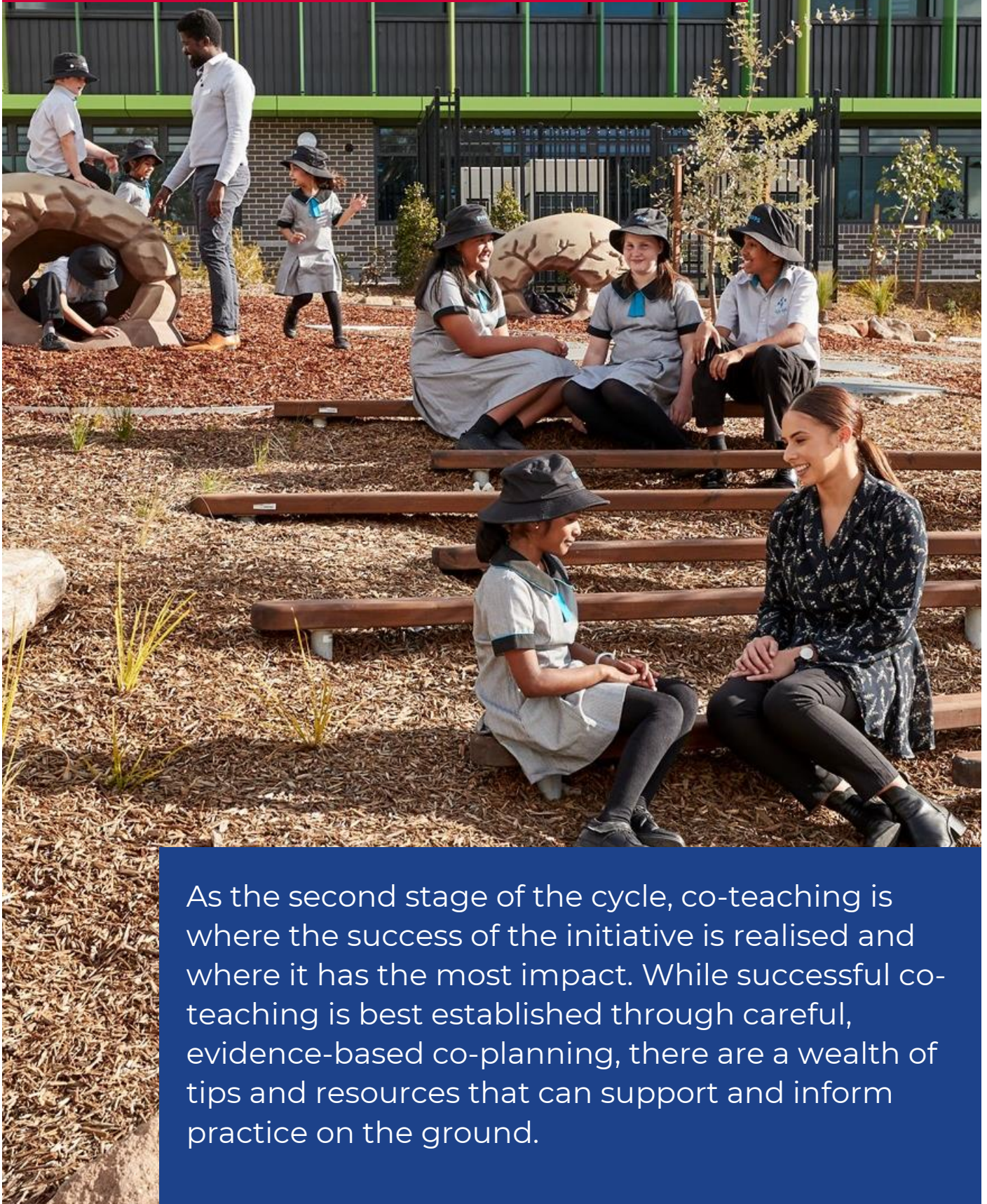
As the second stage of the cycle, co-teaching is where the success of the initiative is realised and where it has the most impact. While successful co-teaching is best established through careful, evidence-based co-planning, there are a wealth of tips and resources that can support and inform practice on the ground.

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Co-teaching recommendations

Tip #1: Use the structures of Friend, Reising, and Cook (1993) as a starting point

- Use the six structures (explained in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 4) to learn about different approaches to co-teaching and build diversity into your lessons.
- Avoid overuse of any one strategy — especially 'One teach, one observe' and one teach, one assist, which can undermine teacher parity.
- Share the structures with guests and pre-service teachers.

Tip #2: Extend pedagogy to co-pedagogy

- Use interdisciplinary team-teaching to co-teach integrated assessments and units of work.
- Use Project-Based Learning (PBL) to provide authentic experiences for learners to collaborate in co-taught classrooms.
- Carefully incorporate thought-provoking topics, deep questions, and Socratic circles to promote authentic co-taught class discussions.
- Use anchored instruction that situates learning within a meaningful, problem-solving contexts.
- Encourage learners to present extension or passion projects.

Table 1: Popular co-teaching structures explained

| Structure:	Method:
One teach, one observe	Both teachers are present, but one takes the lead while the other monitors students' learning.
Station teaching	Teachers divide the content to be delivered, and each takes responsibility for part of it. Eventually all students participate in all stations.
Parallel teaching	Teachers jointly plan instruction, but each delivers it to half of the class group.
Alternative teaching	One teacher works with a small group of students to pre-teach, re-teach, supplement, or enrich while the other teacher instructs the large group.
Team teaching	Both teachers share the instruction of students, taking turns leading a discussion, demonstrate concepts or learning strategies, and model appropriate question asking or conflict behavior.
One teach, one assist	Both teachers are present, but one takes the lead; the other teacher assists students individually.

| One teach, one observe | Station teaching | Parallel teaching | Alternate teaching | Team teaching | One teach, one assist |
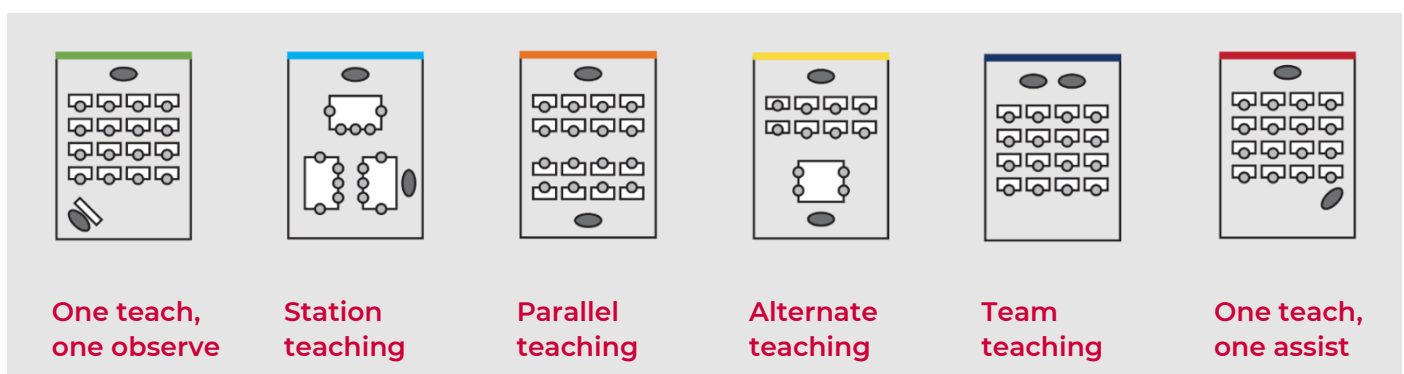
Figure 4: Popular co-teaching structures visualised

Tip #3: Use co-teaching as a mentoring process for colleagues

- Expose colleagues new to the school early to co-teaching with more experienced co-teachers.
- Use leader and assistant approaches such as 'One teach, one assist' only in the early stages with new teachers; as soon as possible, structure the learning so that these teachers take a more active role.
- Encourage all teachers in the school to observe more experienced co-teaching teams.
- Think flexibly about pairings and groupings — don't be afraid to suggest unusual combinations of teachers!
- Use a suitable peer coaching model for more experienced co-teachers to mentor their colleagues.
- Develop structured social and learning activities and routines so that teachers and students become accustomed to co-teaching.

Tip #4: Communicate effectively in the co-taught learning environment

- Use questionnaires at the start of a co-taught unit of work to gather data about students' learning preferences.
- Use frequent thinking aloud strategies to foster metacognition and support students with cognitive task analysis.
- Establish teacher parity and ensure that students and the wider school community views all co-teachers as equally important.
- Use both active interplay (e.g., tightly pre-planned exchanges between co-teachers) and passive interplay (e.g., non-presenting teacher informally adding ideas to the lesson) when co-presenting.
- Experiment with instructional role play such as 'informed teacher, uninformed teacher' (e.g., one teacher pretending not to know something and asking their colleague in front of the students) and 'good cop, bad cop' (e.g., varying black and yellow hat thinking)
- Use shared online spaces to support further collaboration.

### What is "teacher parity" and why is it important?

Teacher parity is the practice of seeing all co-teachers as equals at all times. Research shows that effective co-teaching partnerships report parity at every level with a shared classes in every way. Parity needs to be communicated clearly and transparently — for example, by making frequent use of parity signals such as "we", "us", "our class", as well as having both teachers' names on doors to convey their equal importance.

"Parity implies equal status, or equality in substance. In a co-teaching relationship, parity suggests that all classroom responsibilities are shared equally, including instructional planning and delivery, discipline, grading, and collaborating with parents, among other tasks"
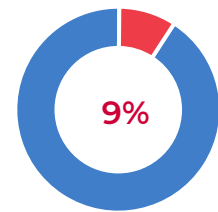
(Sileo, 2011, p. 34).

Data makes all the difference at Armidale Secondary College

School size: 1158 students
Location: inner regional
FOEI: 100
Year range: 7-12
Teaching staff (FTE): 102.7

18%

9%
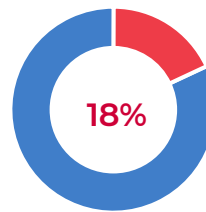
Indigenous

EAL/D

Teachers at Armidale Secondary College believe that successful co-teaching starts with a strong case for change to bring culture, leadership, and evidence into alignment. Prior to introducing co-teaching to the wider school community, dedicated teams spent time analysing data across the school. Teams then presented findings to colleagues and used the data as a reference point throughout the early stages of the co-teaching journey.

Co-teaching teams have found that interrogating the data and using findings to inform their practice has provided a number of benefits. Teachers have identified existing pedagogies that are still delivering appropriate outcomes for the time and effort invested while identifying gaps where new strategies are needed. Having a data-informed understanding of their practice has in turn enabled co-teachers to cultivate a richer understanding of evidence-based practice in the wider school community.

Key features of Armidale Secondary's approach:

- analysis of school participation data such as attendance and truancy records
- analysis of learning and teaching data such as HSC, NAPLAN, and assessment results
- drawing on findings from student experience data such as *Tell Them from Me* (TTFM)
- recourse to departmental models and guidelines such as the *School Success Model,* curriculum documentation, and NESA guidelines
- development of new practices and professional learning to build capacity, and explore how school operations such as timetable can be altered to support new practices.

"Every time you encounter resistance or 'fear' of change, refer back to the data. Teaching and Learning must change to support high challenge, high reward school cultures and push teaching and learning into the twenty-first century. Having clear, school-based data will help teachers understand why we are co-teaching and help the process develop"

(Tobie White, Armidale Secondary College).

| Co-debriefing

Co-debriefing helps teachers build trust, grow professionally, and become more aware of themselves and one another through constructive, critical analysis of teaching.

Co-debriefing recommendations

Tip #1: As soon as possible following a lesson, use co-generative dialogue to understand problems and co-generate solutions

- Focus on contradictions that arise (i.e., exceptions to what usually happens in the lesson), which might include both positive and negative things that need to be addressed, eliminated, or increased.
- Ensure that all participants in the dialogue have equal power to call and convene a meeting, initiate topics, respectfully speak, and say whatever is on their mind.
- Share turns at speaking, ensure the discussion is balanced, practise active listening, and encourage those who have been silent to talk.
- Avoid moving onto a new topic until all participants have the sense that a solution has been co-generated.
- Use very short video-recorded segments of the lesson (or vignettes) as focal points for discussions about what was happening and why it happened.

Tip #2: Use co-assessment to make sense of students' learning

- Focus on any aspect of learning that was observed.
- Follow a structured, focused approach to evaluating co-teaching practices and their impact on learning.
- Use checklists to structure items for discussion.
- Establish meetings for the sole purpose of evaluating co-teaching strategies and analysing student data.

- Draw on both descriptive data about the lesson to support objective assessment of students' learning.
- Address the core question of whether the evidence indicates that successful learning is occurring for all learners in the class.

Tip #3: Involve other stakeholders in the evaluation of your co-teaching

- Don't assume that everyone—including school leaders—will have a clear understanding of effective co-teaching and recognise when some may need help building their understanding.
- Work proactively with school leaders to identify gaps in co-teaching knowledge and skills and provide targeted professional learning to address these gaps.
- Identify and flag timetabling issues that may be impeding successful co-teaching.
- Leverage successful co-teaching to increase and institutionalise co-teaching practices throughout the school.

What is co-generative dialogue and how can it be used?

An essential component of co-debriefing is co-generative dialogue (or cogen), which is when "co-teachers discuss the issues that impact teaching and learning and collectively generate solutions to any problems". Co-generative dialogue also includes not only post-lesson debriefings, but also 'huddles' in the middle of a lesson when co-teachers debrief in the moment of teaching.

(Scantlebury et al., 2008, p. 971)

"The power of co-generative dialogue is found in how these reflective discussions provide a space to articulate unintended and unconscious practices and, thereby, bring them to a conscious level; in the process, the power relationships and roles of participants can also be discussed"
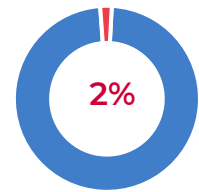
(Guise, et. al. 2017, p. 371).

Transdisciplinary co-teaching at Lindfield Learning Village and the "web" of teacher expertise

School size: 510 students
Location: major cities
FOEI: 0
Year range: K-12
Teaching staff (FTE): 39.8

<1%

2%
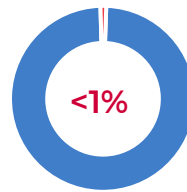
ATSI

EAL/D

At Lindfield Learning Village, teachers in stage-based teams co-plan and co-teach syllabus-aligned transdisciplinary units of work. These units provide an opportunity to combine teachers' differing passions and expertise while encouraging students to think deeply about questions and problems that transcend traditional subject boundaries. Each unit has a "big conceptual question" designed as a hook to engage students while also serving as a focus for co-planning sessions. As the unit is being co-taught, teachers within each stage assume responsibility for developing learning and teaching resources generally in fortnightly rounds. The school's Learning Support team are actively involved in discussions to support individual student learning.

"Co-teaching comes with its own complex set of challenges. Therefore, establish key processes and roles, and be open and transparent about everyone's values to make the 'co' experience as successful as possible. It is through the 'co' that we grow both personally and professionally"

(Amy Murphy, Lindfield Learning Village).

Teachers believe strongly in having clearly defined roles both in, and outside of, the classroom. Pre-planned co-teaching approaches such as masterclasses with small group interaction, the use of flexible furniture, and visual cues all help to make co-teaching visible while providing leeway for co-teachers to vary their pedagogies as needed. Transparently agreed roles and responsibilities streamline planning and delivery processes, while involvement of stakeholders in the wider school community helps to build collaborative professionalism and cohesion. Teachers feel that planning for larger multi-class cohorts rather than individual classes fosters a strong sense of joint responsibility for the students within each stage. In turn, teachers feel well-equipped to address wellbeing, learning needs, or assessment questions, responding to learning needs that arise through collaborative and open dialogue.

Stage teams have developed a structured approach to co-planning that involves the four phases of *Connect, Plan, Implement, and Evaluate*. 'Connect' unpacks key ideas that emerge from discussions about syllabus outcomes from target key learning areas and how they can be connected. In 'plan', sequences of learning are devised, key roles are established, and action items for individual team members are documented. Throughout the 'implementation' stage, ongoing conversations occur before, during, and after lessons to celebrate successes and identify areas for improvement. As the final stage, 'evaluate' utilises debriefing questions such as 'what went well…?' and 'even better if…?'. Teachers consider the conversations across the four stages as essential for ensuring successful delivery of the transdisciplinary units in their co-taught classrooms.

Key features of Lindfield Learning Village's approach:

- transdisciplinary units of work that promote thematic, conceptual, and content links between key learning areas
- involving the learning support teachers and officers in discussions and check-ins
- explicit teacher roles such as 'canvas coordinator' for ensuring consistency in learning design, 'creative coordinator' for ensuring that programmed concepts are visible throughout the unit of work, and 'data coordinator' for analysing students' learning
- a structured and explicit co-planning methodology
- an established *code of collaboration* that underpins co-teaching relationships, fosters respect and trust, and supports team-based problem-solving when challenges arise.

"Co-teaching and planning can seem quite complex when first working in a transdisciplinary team. However, the ability to lean on each other's strengths quickly removes many barriers. By designating roles, and sharing responsibilities, the overall workload of a teacher can be significantly reduced. This allows for deeper creative discussions between teachers early in the planning phase of a transdisciplinary unit, leading to meaningful and authentic learning experiences for students. Another benefit of co-teaching is the ability for a continuous dialogue regarding student learning needs to develop between teachers. This allows teachers to rapidly adapt their learning sequences and assessment tasks to better suit where their students are at in-the-moment"

(James Collis, Lindfield Learning Village).

| Co-reflection

Co-reflecting enables colleagues to identify what is working, necessary changes to practice, and the next steps that are needed to move forward. Research shows that co-reflecting should combine evaluation of students' learning, deep collegial discussion, professional learning, forward planning, and decision-making.

Co-reflection recommendations

Tip #1: Engage in critical, reflective practice

- Offer and value varying perspectives of the same lesson.
- Share observations about the learning that your colleagues may have missed and ask them for observations you may have missed.
- Identify and explain how, through observation, you gained a better understanding of the struggles and successes of groups of students.
- Candidly and through constructive criticism, discuss your teaching effectiveness and its impact on learning.
- Identify and use available formative and summative data.

Tip #2: Reflect on goals throughout the journey

- Schedule regular reflection points throughout the year.
- Incorporate both short reflection activities such as '3-2-1' (three comments for further discussion, two strategies to improve, and one area in which we are doing a fantastic job) and longer structured evaluations.
- Re-examine and re-evaluate earlier co-planning goals, including goals that have been achieved, goals that still lie ahead, and goals in need of adjustment.
- Consider reflecting on goals individually prior to reflecting in pairs or as a group.
- Celebrate successes and ensure that school leaders and the wider community are aware of them.

Tip #3: Honestly evaluate the co-teaching relationship

- Accept that not all teachers are going to work well with other teachers.
- Acknowledge different beliefs about what is best for students.
- Consider letting school leaders know when you feel the co-teaching partnership is not working in the best interests of your students.
- Explore and discuss possible regroupings in consultation with school leaders.

Hepner and Newman's (2010) strategic co-reflection questions:

1. Has parity been achieved? Do students see both teachers as equals?
2. Are we satisfied with our roles and responsibilities?
3. Do we communicate effectively? Can we easily read each other's non-verbal cues?
4. Are resources freely shared?
5. Do we feel our time is used productively? Do we feel our knowledge and skills are valued?
6. Is behaviour management shared?
7. Are we confident in our knowledge of curriculum content?
8. Do we feel frequently acknowledged and reinforced by each other?

"The importance and power of reflection to educators and their professional development cannot be overstated. These reflective practitioners can use data from observations, student performance and students themselves to guide and direct instructional decisions. Educators that co-teach are in an ideal situation to spur their own professional growth through dialogue with their co-teachers"
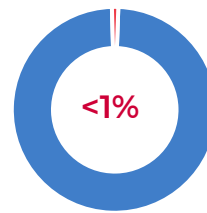
(Nierengarten, 2013, p. 80).

Co-reflection in action at Northbourne Public School: strength through vulnerability and curiosity
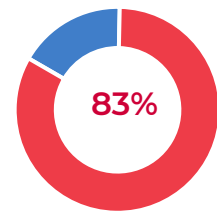
School size: 855 students
Location: major cities
FOEI: 17
Year range: K-6

<1%

83%

ATSI

LBOTE

At Northbourne Public School, cohesive, trusting, and collaborative co-teaching relationships underpin successful co-reflection. Teachers allow themselves to be vulnerable when discussing their practice and believe that collective efficacy is strongest when they can learn and grow together. Teachers also seek to enact the school motto—*Curious minds, Bright futures*—in their professional learning by modelling open-mindedness and 'leaning into' experiences.

"Taking risks and being responsive to the environment has enabled us to develop high trust relationships that ultimately benefit students. We have found that taking small steps together makes the journey more enjoyable and allows us to reach new heights along the way. Although you will trip and you will fall, it is all part of the learning and the fun!"

(Renae Mar, Northbourne Public School).

Professional learning plays a vital role in explicitly guiding teachers through each stage of the co teaching cycle. By strategically building cohesive and collaborative relationships, teachers have allowed themselves to be vulnerable and co reflect on their practice together. At the start of the school's co-teaching journey, the concept of co-reflection was new for many teachers and a curiosity about this practice evolved through ongoing discussions. The use of "bite-sized" micro-PL activities has supported and challenged teachers as they incrementally increase the proportion of time spent co-teaching, a process that school leaders describe as "moving at the speed of trust". Throughout their professional learning and co-teaching, the school has drawn on student feedback to gauge attitudes towards learning in co-taught classrooms, with most students recognising benefits to their learning when two teachers can collaborate with a wider group of peers. Teachers have reported being surprised at how simple co-reflection can be and how effective this practice is for supporting professional growth.

Key to the school's success with the co-teaching cycle has been the development of interactive wall displays to clarify key aspects of each stage in the cycle and document the school's professional learning journey to date. Teachers feel that these displays help to celebrate and share learning with the wider school community, clearly define core values, ensure that co-teaching is part of the school's learning culture, and capture key moments in the co-teaching journey. Displays are readily visible throughout the school, and QR codes are used to provide links to content that is dynamically updated with evolving reflections, images, case studies, and examples of practice.
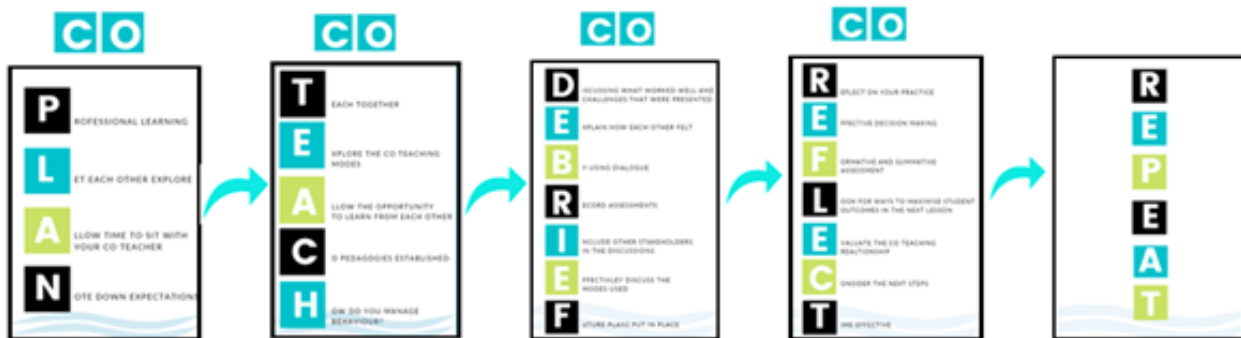

Figure 5: Example wall display to visualise each stage of the co-teaching cycle

Key features of Northbourne's approach:

- co-teaching being seen as part of the school's broader strategic direction
- use of professional networks, such as SLEC to underpin current research and inspire best practice
- development of explicit, "bite-sized" professional learning experiences that focus on each stage of the co-teaching cycle and explicitly guide teachers in how to co-reflect
- video examples used to highlight the powerful impact of this phase and resulted in the development of an enthusiastic, collective mindset
- students' feedback used to inform and guide co-reflective sessions
- encouragement of teachers to be vulnerable and curious when reflecting on their practice while promoting a culture of collective efficacy
- celebration of successful co-teaching through rich professional conversations, interactive displays and showcase events.

"By making our experience visible (on display) and dynamic (ever-evolving), this display provides an interactive opportunity for teachers that brings life to our journey and that can provide professional learning (through case-studies, examples of practice at our school and others, resources, videos, etc). The display is also a way for our staff to celebrate their success and can be part as of an induction to co teaching for new staff"

(Rachel Calleja, Northbourne Public School).

| Conclusion

Although co-teaching arguably has a vast history that spans time, place, and culture, this report focuses on more recent research and the first-hand accounts of educators to inform and guide teachers' practices. When viewed holistically, the research and practice present an in-depth picture of what works well and the pitfalls that need to be avoided.

By looking at the evidence for effective practice at every stage of the co-teaching cycle, teachers can be supported throughout their co-teaching journey. Encouraging two or more teachers with differing backgrounds, interests, and areas of expertise to work alongside each other continues the legacy of inclusion at the same time as enriching professional capital. Co-teaching celebrates the vision that has been held by great educators both past and present of communities of practice that work together to make all the difference.

Best wishes for your co-teaching practice!

We hope you enjoy the handbook!

School Learning Environments and Change

Email: SLEC@det.nsw.edu.au

Twitter: @SLEC_DoE

Yammer groups: School Learning Environments and Change

| Select Resources

These short open access articles include a range of planning scaffolds and templates, recommended questions, first-hand accounts from teachers, and further advice for each stage of the co-teaching cycle.

To access the free open access version of these articles, we recommend searching for the bibliographic reference in Google Scholar (www.scholar.google.com)

Co-planning

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