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## **Teachers' Perspectives on the Impact of Co-Teaching in Supporting Inclusion in the Mainstream Classroom**

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# Teachers' Perspectives on the Impact of Co-Teaching in Supporting Inclusion in the Mainstream Classroom

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the award of  
Professional Master of Education in Post-Primary

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## **Abstract**

Inclusive practices in the classroom are an important consideration for post-primary teachers in delivering curriculum content to a wide variety of student abilities. Co-teaching is a strategy which aims to foster inclusivity through collaboration between teachers. This qualitative study highlight the experiences of five teachers currently working in the post-primary classroom. Themes such as support, planning, benefits and measurement of effective co-teaching emerged from a series of semi-structured interviews with participants. The findings indicate that, while there can be a lack of adequate planning time in order to prepare for these classes, teachers are enthusiastic about the benefits of co-teaching for themselves and their students.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Origin of the Dissertation**

The idea for this dissertation originated from my personal experiences co-teaching in an Irish post-primary school. A strong emphasis on co-teaching is a feature of this school, and senior management have made significant efforts in implementing this pedagogical approach. As a result of this policy, there were ample opportunities to utilise this teaching model, with the intended result of fostering an inclusive environment for students with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream classes. However, while co-teaching was widely incorporated into the delivery of lessons in this school, anecdotal evidence implied that the experiences of practiced teachers varied. This dissertation seeks to explore established teachers' experiences of co-teaching, as well as their opinions on how this teaching model affects inclusivity in their classrooms.

### **1.2 Background to the Project**

The co-teaching process can be defined as 'two or more educators possessing distinct sets of skills [working] in a co-active and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically...heterogenous groups...in integrated educational settings' (Bauwens and Hourcade, 1995, p. 46). International policy in the form of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Salamanca Statement (1994), helped underpin national legislation in the Republic of Ireland (Government of Ireland 1998, 2004), that placed the education of students with SEN on a statutory footing. Guidelines for inclusion in post-primary schools (Department of Education and Science [DES], 2007), as well as subsequent circulars (DES, 2014, 2017) advocated for the use of collaborative practices, including co-teaching, in the provision of special educational practices (Carty and Farrell, 2018). Furthermore, the new Junior Cycle framework (NCCA, 2015) recognises inclusivity as a core principle in the implementation of the three-year course. This has ensured that inclusive practices in the classroom are an important consideration of teachers' ability to deliver content to a range of abilities, and as such, their experiences will provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of the teaching model.

### **1.3 Rationale**

According to Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008), co-teaching has the potential to impact on human and technical subsystems within a school, and so an appropriate bank of research is required to inform school policy makers when implementing co-teaching strategies. As such, exploring and evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of various co-teaching practices on inclusion, can play an important role in ensuring an up-to-date understanding of best practice. This involves an examination of the various types of co-teaching models that can be employed; teachers' awareness and experience of one or all of these models; the effects on inclusion, both positive and negative, when employing co-teaching in the mainstream class; the factors that affect the implementation of co-teaching in the classroom; and the impact of both teachers' expertise on the quality of co-teaching students with SEN.

### **1.4 Dissertation Layout**

This dissertation will firstly review the relevant literature related to co-teaching. This will consider the legislation and policy which underpins inclusion in the post-primary classroom, the various models associated with co-teaching and both the challenges and benefits associated with this teaching approach. The methodology chapter will outline the qualitative approach to this study. This chapter will include details of the participants, the selection process, limitations and the ethical issues associated with this approach. The findings and discussion chapters will detail participants' responses to questions contained in semi-structured interviews. The thematic analysis will identify relevant themes to highlight how participants' experiences are situated within the current literature on co-teaching. Finally, the conclusion chapter will summarise the findings of the study, in addition to making recommendations for future research and practice.

### **1.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has acknowledged the origins of this dissertation in the researchers experiences of co-teaching while on teaching practice. As well as outlining the policy and legislation that underpins inclusivity, on which the co-teaching approach is centred, this chapter has also acknowledged the rationale for this study.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This literature review chapter will seek to present a concise overview of the relevant literature related to the concept of co-teaching. In presenting this review, it is intended that it will provide a context for this study, as well as highlighting the major themes appearing in current and relevant literature. Firstly, the policies that have influenced the development and implementation of co-teaching will be explored chronologically, as a means of providing an overview of the statutory framework in which such inclusive strategies are situated. Secondly, the definition of co-teaching will be discussed, highlighting the variety in interpretations and uses of co-teaching in the classroom. Thirdly, the various models of co-teaching will be explored, with three of the most common being selected as being relevant to this study. After this will be a review of the key factors necessary for the successful implementation of co-teaching strategies by teachers, where the perceived benefits for both teachers and students who employ or experience co-teaching will be presented.

However, to provide a context for the development and deployment of co-teaching as a strategy utilised in the post-primary classroom, it is first necessary to review the relevant policies that have underpinned its integration into the system.

### **2.2 Policy**

As co-teaching is closely aligned with the concept of the inclusive classroom (Carty and Farrell, 2018), it is important to recognise the progression of inclusivity as an educational concept in the Irish setting. Firstly, the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) acknowledged that the education system should, as a way of celebrating differences in learners' abilities, foster an inclusive environment that accounts for children's unique characteristics, abilities and needs. Consequently, it recommended that inclusive schools, in recognition of these diverse needs, should ensure that a high-quality education is delivered through appropriate curricula and teaching strategies. As such, children with SEN should receive whatever support they require to be in receipt of an effective education; this includes 'additional instructional support in the context of the regular curriculum' (ibid, p 22).

Within four years of the Salamanca Statement, the government in the Republic of Ireland placed the education system on a statutory footing for the first time since the establishment of the state with the Education Act (1998). Notably, article nine of the act, in

recognition of students with disabilities, required schools to promote equality of opportunity to all students. In addition to this, schools were to provide an education appropriate to students' abilities, by using available resources to ensure their needs are catered for. Following on from the Education Act, the Education for the Persons with Special Needs Act (2004), further emphasised the importance of the inclusive school and classroom. Article two of this act advocated for the inclusion of children with special educational needs (SEN) to be educated in an inclusive environment with students who do not have such needs, where it is deemed reasonable to do so.

Emerging from this series of government acts, has been several relevant guidelines and circulars which have specifically acknowledged the importance of co-teaching as a strategy in the inclusive classroom. Detailed guidelines drawn up by the Department of Education and Science (DES) in 2007, advocate for the use of co-teaching in the classroom as a way of way of ensuring 'as much integration as is appropriate and feasible with as little segregation as possible' (p. 16). This emphasis on the deployment of staff to positions of cooperative teaching within schools is continued in a department-issued circular. It called for schools to utilise teaching hours resources to promote an inclusive learning environment with the provision of targeted support in the form of team-teaching in a mainstream subject lesson (DES, 2014). Subsequent guidelines espoused the value of meaningful inclusion in stimulating and supportive environments, and the use of cooperative teaching in mainstream classes as a means of providing students with opportunities to engage in active learning experiences (DES, 2017).

### **2.3 Definition**

While SEN in the classroom has seen significant progress in terms of being placed on a statutory footing, a concrete definition of co-teaching or cooperative teaching, has thus far proven elusive. While much of the research refers to co-teaching as being made up of at least one mainstream teacher, as well as one SEN teacher (Isherwood and Barger-Anderson, 2008; Carty and Farrell, 2018; Rexroat-Frazier and Chamberlain, 2018), there is also an element of the literature that provides a broader perspective through which this definition is viewed. The co-teaching concept has also been defined as 'two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space' (Cook and Friend, 1995, p. 2). Though the authors subsequently include references to the pairing of

general educators with special educators, this definition is also relevant in the context of schools deploying two general educators as a co-teaching team.

Another, more recent development in the literature is the use of co-teaching as a strategy utilised in teacher-training. This form of co-teaching is described as the practice of ‘pairing teachers together in a classroom to share the responsibilities of planning, instructing and assessing students’ (Duran et al., 2017, p. 1). While this bears a resemblance to the former definition, the intention for the latter is its use as an instructional model between experienced and student teachers. It is important however, to acknowledge that much of the literature consulted, placed an emphasis on the collaboration between a mainstream teacher and an SEN teacher being the optimal partnership with which to deploy co-teaching in the classroom. It is within this relationship that each teacher has ‘parity and [can] use their individual expertise to benefit all students’ (Pratt et al., 2016, p. 1).

It is clear then, that with a variety of definitions based on the myriad of ways in which co-teaching can be deployed by schools, there is difficulty in pinning down a definition that covers all teaching situations. However, considering this disparity, there is scope for this dissertation to encompass the variety of co-teaching situations to question what models are best applied to the definitions provided, as a way of exploring this teaching strategy in the contemporary classroom.

## **2.4 Co-Teaching Models**

While the term co-teaching essentially refers to a single teaching strategy utilised in the classroom, there are a variety of models which can be deployed. This literature review will focus on three models which have been identified as the most commonly employed, namely *One Teach, One Assist*; *One Teach, One Observe* and *Team Teaching* (Carty and Farrell, 2018). The *One Teach, One Assist* is the dominant model used in classroom (ibid). As the name implies, this model relies on the mainstream teacher to lead the class, with a second teacher aiding those students with SEN who may require additional instruction. However, while research recognises the value of co-teaching as a way of creating a positive climate for learning (Jackson et al., 2017), there is also the view that the reliance on the *One Teach, One Assist* model may be a factor in the perception that there are no significant benefits for students in a co-taught class (Carty and Farrell, 2018). The second model, *One Teach, One Observe*, is a model whereby one teacher has the primary instructional responsibility, while the second teacher gathers specific observational information on the students in the class while the lesson

is taking place (Bacharach, Washut Heck and Dahlberg, 2010). This model can be employed as a means of monitoring behaviour or achievement in the classroom (Carty and Farrell, 2018) and may also be closely associated with the use of co-teaching as a teacher training approach. The third model, *Team Teaching*, is a format in which both teachers share the instructional duties and can model communication and collaboration for students (Karten and Murowski, 2020). Whilst modelling these key skills for learners through teaching, teachers are also collaborating in the joint planning and assessment of students, as well as being prepared to assume a leadership role in the class when required (Marzocchi, Druken and Brye, 2021). However, it is also important to highlight that *Team Teaching* can have drawbacks if neither teacher is focused on small groups or individuals, or indeed taking longer to cover material as both teachers are concerned with delivering the same content (Karten and Murowski, 2020).

Ultimately, while the three models outlined above can be useful depending on the requirements of each individual class, to maximise effectiveness, there are several factors that can aid in teachers' preparation to foster an appropriately inclusive environment.

## **2.5 Co-Teaching Strategies**

According to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994), school heads have responsibility for arranging effective cooperation teachers, support staff and various partners in the educational process. In terms of the successful implementation of co-teaching strategies, this implies a top-down approach from school management, with such administrative support being key to the success of this strategy (Isherwood and Barger-Anderson, 2008). Furthermore, the authors espouse the view that teachers should be involved in the planning stages of such initiatives to offer their explicit support. Carty and Farrell (2018) echo this sentiment when advocating for a symbiotic relationship between management and teachers noting that this is key to the success of any such undertaking.

From a teachers' perspective, there are a number of professional qualities identified as being central to the successful deployment of co-teaching in their classroom. At the most elementary level, teachers utilising co-teaching strategies should be extensively familiar with the curriculum, the variety of appropriate co-teaching models and their roles and responsibilities, in the co-teaching relationship (Isherwood and Barger-Anderson, 2008). Understanding their role in such a relationship, however, necessitates a level of planning, on the part of teachers, for their co-taught classes. Interpersonal and teamwork skills, exchanging differing points-of-view and the mutual sharing of responsibilities are highlighted as critical

professional qualities when engaged in the collaborative aspects of the co-teaching process (Duran et al., 2019). However, while professional qualities are considered an essential ingredient in a successful co-teaching partnership, in addition to administrative support mentioned above, the effectiveness of this teaching strategy is reliant on well-matched teachers and sufficient planning time (DeMartino and Specht, 2018).

In terms of pairing teachers, parity amongst the individuals is considered a component of successful co-teaching (Pratt et al., 2016). Beyond this, as co-teaching requires a high level of trust and collaboration between both teachers (Marzocchi, Druken and Brye, 2021), a clearly defined purpose for the employment of co-teaching in the classroom, as well as the selection of a suitable partner is crucial to a desirable outcome (Rexroat-Frazier and Chamberlain, 2018).

Another common theme across the literature acknowledged the lack of planning time afforded to teachers (Pratt et al., 2016). This lack of planning was highlighted in addition to teachers' lack of specific training as well as lack of appropriate resources (Ferriday and Cantali, 2020). Crucially, the literature highlighted the view that a lack of preparation for co-teaching classes, resulted in teachers carrying out their lessons in a similar fashion to there being only one teacher present to deliver content to students (Magiera and Zigmund, 2005).

## **2.6 Benefits**

It is important to recognise the ambiguous nature of the literature related to co-teaching. On the positive end, research has shown positive outcomes for both teachers and students, though benefits for teachers are afforded a greater share of the literature consulted. As alluded to above, co-teaching emphasises relationship building between educators, with an explicit focus on collaboration, planning and communication (Friend, Embury and Clarke, 2015). Importantly, this collaborative approach can encourage a varied pedagogy in the classroom, as well as providing opportunities for reflection on their practice (Marzocchi, Druken and Brye, 2021). It is this reflective approach that can act as a catalyst for changing practice (Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury, 2016). In terms of utilising co-teaching as a teacher-training approach, there were noted benefits for mentors in refining their instructional practice (Pratt et al., 2016), as well as beneficial outcomes for student teachers with the literature showing those being mentored in a co-teaching environment out-performed those that were solo-taught (Friend, Embury and Clarke, 2015).

For students, co-teaching strategies allowed their needs to be met in the mainstream classroom and is generally associated with acceptable outcomes for students with disabilities

(Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2001). However, as regards students taught in this environment, research has also shown mixed results in terms of the effectiveness of co-teaching (DeMartino and Specht, 2018). This is a view echoed by Rextroat-Frazier and Chamberlain (2018), who posit that the evidence is inconsistent in terms of student performance. The authors point to the fact that, for varying reasons, educators in a co-teaching partnership can have limited understanding of the learning needs of students with disabilities, in addition to co-teaching not necessarily being a choice, and so affecting its efficacy and outcomes (ibid). In fact, when appropriate training has not taken place on the part of the teacher, research has shown little difference for student outcomes (Magiera and Zigmond, 2005). The overarching consensus then, is that while there are some notable benefits for teachers in a co-teaching relationship, the efficacy and outcomes for students in co-taught classes are less clear.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

To conclude, the literature reviewed above presents elements of a dichotomous understanding of co-teaching as a teaching strategy. While there is consensus in the literature that co-teaching supports inclusivity in the classroom, ambiguity remains regarding teacher partnerships, adequate planning time and the benefits for those students taught in a co-teaching environment. The variety of definitions, coupled with a variety of co-teaching models, requires that teachers are appropriately informed in how and why co-teaching is employed, so that such strategies reach their full potential. It is also important to acknowledge that the benefits to teachers can be substantial if adequate resources are supplied, teachers are involved in the planning process and the backing of school management is forthcoming. The central question around which this dissertation will be based is: ‘what does effective co-teaching look like, how best can it be achieved and in what ways can effective outcomes from co-teaching be measured?’. Relevant discussions which have been highlighted in the literature will be referred to when seeking to situate relevant themes in the wider discourse surrounding the co-teaching approach. It is intended that this study will complement the existing literature by providing contemporary accounts of co-teaching experiences from the perspective of the Irish post-primary classroom, and benefit practitioners and research in this area.

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In its broadest sense, this research project seeks to explore the impact of co-teaching on inclusion in the mainstream, post-primary classroom. To facilitate this approach, it is necessary to examine the various co-teaching models employed, as well as teachers' experiences of utilising them in their lessons. This examination will be underpinned by evaluating both the positive and negative effects of co-teaching on inclusion, recognising the factors that affect the implementation of co-teaching in the classroom and assessing the impact of both teachers' subject area expertise on the quality of co-teaching students with SEN. As such, this research will seek to answer what does effective co-teaching look like, how best can this be achieved and in what ways can effective outcomes be measured. This chapter will outline the chosen research paradigm through which these questions will be answered, the methods employed to do so, how data is collected and analysed, as well as the limitations and ethical implications of this approach.

#### **3.2 Paradigm & Methodology**

Nested within the interpretivist philosophy, this project will employ a qualitative research perspective. Interpretivism is a theoretical perspective in which research is concerned with developing an understanding of 'everyday', as well as to gain insights into the *why* of people's actions (Rasmussen, 2017). Adopting this approach infers that this research seeks to understand individuals' perception of the world (Bell and Waters, 2014). As such, this approach takes the view that teachers, as individuals, act on the world based on their perceptions of the realities by which they are surrounded (Hatch, 2002). Whereas an objectivist approach, rooted in scientific methods, is considered a powerful approach within education research as it holds sway in terms of influencing public policy (Rasmussen, 2017), it is a method whose aims are to observe reality objectively. In contrast, a qualitative approach, which values inner states as much as outer expressions, relies on subjective judgements to bring these to light (Hatch, 2002). As the project is aiming to examine and understand teachers' experiences related to their individual practices, this approach was deemed appropriate as it incorporates the subjective nature of this enquiry and its purpose.

Furthermore, Wyse et al (2017) posit that, small scale qualitative research undertaken by teachers is particularly appropriate, as they are best positioned to make evidence-based

decisions on what should be taught, and how it is best achieved. In addition to this, the view that education exists through individuals' interpretations meanings and actions, therefore being socially constructed and reproduced (Biesta, Allan and Edwards, 2011) suits a qualitative approach. As such, this project will be conducted through the lens of interpretivism as it is considered the most appropriate method by which teachers' experiences of co-teaching can best be collected and interpreted.

### **3.3 Research Methods**

Selecting the research field is "informed by the research purposes, the need for the research...the problem to be addressed, and the research questions" (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2011, p. 227). As outlined in the previous chapter, a number of research questions have emerged from a review of the relevant literature. These questions will inform semi-structured interviews with the relevant participants. As a qualitative approach seeks to understand the *why* of peoples' actions, interviews offer the opportunity to probe responses, expand on ideas and examine motives and feelings offered by respondents, things which cannot be achieved with a questionnaire (Bell and Waters, 2014). Questionnaires, which tend to be associated with quantitative and mixed-methods approaches, would not suffice in this instance as such an approach does not look at the intentions behind people's actions (Biesta, Allan and Edwards, 2011). Furthermore, as education is a social reality, it exists 'in and through people's interpretations, meanings and actions' (ibid, p. 229) and so it is necessary to access these interpretations. As such, interviews with teachers who have experience of co-teaching has been selected as the most appropriate way of garnering this information.

Interview questions were designed to elicit appropriate responses from participants and gain an insight into their experiences of co-teaching. These questions were designed to form the basis of semi-structured interviews and derived from the research questions. As opposed to using a questionnaire, these interviews are adaptable in that the interviewer can probe responses, motives and feelings (Bell and Waters, 2014). The recording of one-to-one interviews with respondents is necessary for subsequent transcription and thematic analysis. Audio recordings allow for coding, summarising and noting responses that are of particular interest without having to write during the interview (ibid). This in turn contributes to a more conversational tone in the interview, with the semi-structured arrangement enabling participants to project their own ways of defining the world (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2011).

However, it is important to acknowledge that interviews are susceptible to bias by being selective with items that support a particular point of view or using language that indicates a strength of feeling in a certain direction (Bell and Waters, 2014). Creswell maintains that a hallmark of good qualitative research is the collection and report of multiple perspectives (1997), and so in order to reduce self-bias, it is necessary to triangulate the multiple responses of participants in order to give as objective a perspective as possible.

### **3.4 Sampling**

Participants are determined by purposive sampling, defined as a method that ‘will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 118). This approach to sampling was chosen as the focus is on the quality of information from a small selection of participants. As this research focuses on teachers experiences of co-teaching, all participants will have met criteria as a form of quality assurance (Creswell, 2007) prior to their interviews. The five participants included in this study currently work in a post-primary school in Ireland. As regards inclusion criteria, participants included in this study will be chosen based on at least three years’ experience in co-teaching learning environments; participants will have experience as both the lead teacher, as well as the support teacher; they will have experience in co-teaching both their own subject, as well as a supportive role in an unfamiliar subject; and there will ideally be a variety in the length of co-teaching experience across the chosen cohort. Student teachers, newly qualified teachers, and those who are working as substitute teachers will all be excluded from the study. This exclusion criteria is based on a relative lack of experience in terms of both years in the profession, in addition to relative lack of experience in the co-teaching environment of this particular post-primary school.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Analysing the data collected involves a system of organising, accounting for and explaining participants’ responses to the interview questions, so that respondents’ definitions of the situation are made sense of by noting patterns, themes and categories (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2011). As this study utilises a qualitative approach, thematic analysis is the preferred method with which to identify relevant information. As these interviews seek to understand the experiences of individual teachers, thematic analysis is regarded as a flexible research tool with

the potential to provide rich and detailed account of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method is used to identify, analyse and report themes within the data, with these themes capturing important information from respondents in relation the research questions (ibid). Furthermore, as the coding of data is undertaken in relation to the specific research questions, these themes will be identified through a process of deductive analysis. The themes will specifically relate to aspects of teachers' experiences of co-teaching including knowledge of co-teaching models, resources provided to teachers, co-teaching partnerships, student experiences and measuring success.

While thematic analysis offers a straight-forward approach to investigate the data, it is also important to recognise potential pitfalls in relation to this method. Central to this is to ensure that there is no mismatch between the data and the analytic claims, and that interpretations, as well as analytic points, are consistent with the data (ibid). Again, it is necessary to ensure consistent triangulation of responses so that bias throughout the data is minimised.

### **3.6 Rigour**

The quality of the qualitative research process focuses on the trustworthiness of the process. A chief consideration in relation to qualitative data, is the subjectivity of respondents in terms of their opinions, attitudes and perspectives which combine to exhibit varying degrees of bias (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2014). Adding to the level of bias in terms of interviews, are the characteristics of the interviewer and the content of the questions (ibid). While there is a case for controlling the degree of reliability in terms of the data through the use of highly structured interviews, utilising open-ended or semi-structured interviews is deemed necessary to enable participants share their unique experiences and definition of a situation (ibid). Therefore, when analysing the data, is important to be conscious of this bias by maintaining a critical attitude towards the interpretation of the data (Bell and Waters, 2014). This extends to the selection of questions developed for the interviews, well-formulated guidelines when coding the data (Priya, 2021) as well as transcribing the interviews verbatim.

In addition to this, a process or auditing – ensuring records such as interview transcripts and data analysis methods at the various stages are maintained – can help enhance the reliability of qualitative research (ibid). This point is reinforced by Cohen, Morrison and Manion (2014) who posit that, in order for rigour to be achieved, there should be careful audit trails of collected evidence, as well as respondent validation when coding the results. The authors also suggest

the importance of qualitative research provides a ‘clear, detailed and in-depth description so that others can decide the extent to which findings from one piece of research are generalisable to another situation’ (ibid, p. 186)

### **3.7 Limitations**

A central limitation to this research is the lack of triangulation due to the small sample size, as well as the small-scale nature of the research. This research utilises a single-method approach which, although popular, can be viewed as more vulnerable in terms of the research findings (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2014), and is the product of a purposive sampling approach. In addition to this the deductive thematic analysis ‘tends to provide a less rich description of the data overall’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84). However this approach is deemed appropriate it will provide a more detailed analysis of specific aspects of the responses.

Another important limitation of qualitative studies is bias. This can be observed on two fronts. Firstly, as cross-checking sources can prove difficult, data can be selective, biased, personal and subjective (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2014). Furthermore, despite attempts to address reflexivity, data can still be prone to problems of observer bias (ibid).

### **3.8 Ethical Issues**

This study has received ethical approval from Hibernia College. In line with the British Research Association (BERA) guidelines (2018), this project complies with ethical issues outlined below. Adhering to article 40 of the guidelines, that researchers ‘recognise the entitlement of both institutions and individual participants to privacy’ (BERA, 2018, p. 21), the five teachers involved in this study, will be assigned pseudonyms to ensure their identities are protected. The post-primary school in which these teachers work, will also only be referred to in terms of its broad geographical location. In line with article 50, all data will be stored in password-protected and encrypted folders. In accordance with Hibernia College’s privacy policy, the data will be kept for three years after the project is complete. The data will only be used for the purpose for which it was gathered and, in accordance with GDPR, participants will have access to their data if required.

Article 8 and 9 of the guidelines address the issue of consent, to be sought at the outset of the study. Participants should understand what is involved in the study, outlined in an information sheet, as well as ‘why their participation is necessary, what they will be asked to

do, what will happen the information they provide, and how...it will be reported' (ibid, p. 9). In addition to this, participants will be informed of their right 'to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time' (ibid, p. 18). In addition to an information sheet outlining the aims of the research, participants will also sign a consent form.

Finally, the research design and interview process will aim to put participants at ease, avoid making excessive demands and take steps to mitigate any potential risks to participants arising from the research process.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the interpretivist research paradigm, the approach which has been highlighted as the most appropriate to answer the research questions proposed in this study. Also, the methods by which participants will be identified as well as how their responses will be analysed have been outlined. Purposive sampling, with associated criteria, will be used to select five participants, whose responses will be transcribed and coded in order to identify themes related to the research questions. In addition to this, aspects related to academic rigour, the limitations of the study and the ethical implications of the research have been addressed in order to provide clarity to the structure of this project. The following chapter will present the findings of the five semi-structured interviews carried out with participants.

## **4.0 Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Three broad themes were identified as being particularly relevant in terms of the original research questions outlined. Responses in relation to support, efficacy and measurement were highlighted as being pertinent to how co-teaching is perceived by teachers operating in that environment. Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions which took account of their experience, understanding of planning for a co-teaching class, factors that influence an effective teaching partnership and how best to measure this effectiveness. The variety of responses highlights the nexus of opinions that surround the implementation and delivery of co-teaching as a strategy for supporting students in the post-primary classroom.

### **4.2 Planning and Support**

In terms of planning, there were common themes amongst the participants in regards to the limited time that they felt they were working within during the school year, but all regarded this as part of working life at post-primary level. This sentiment was summed up by Sally, a teacher with roughly five years' experience:

‘...we are given some time...but...I suppose there's never enough time when you're working in a secondary school’.

(Sally, Interview 3)

Regardless of this, there was broad agreement amongst the teachers, that regardless of time constraints, the task of planning for a co-teaching class was not significantly impeded. In fact, the planning for classes rarely differed from planning without a co-teacher in terms of the content to be covered and resources to be utilised. Jennifer, a teacher with about four years' experience was one who espoused this view:

‘...the stuff that I'd cover in my classes where I'm not co-teaching is the same stuff that I'd cover in a class with a co-teacher. The co-teacher is there to help support any additional needs in the class...the content will still be the same’.

(Jennifer, Interview 4)

This was a view echoed by Aoife, a more experienced teacher with over twenty years in the classroom:

‘We set the plans at the start of the year with the department meetings and whoever comes in, they follow what I'm doing and I can give them a hand or whatever...if they're from the same department, brilliant...they know the plan’.

(Aoife, Interview 5).

It is important to note that these three teachers were speaking from the point of view as a lead teacher in a co-teaching environment, and that differentiation was also acknowledged as important to delivering content to the students. As a support teacher in a co-teaching environment, Denis, with roughly five years’ experience in the classroom, offered his perspective on expectations around planning and resources:

‘we would maybe think about the students that could use support...but mainly it would probably they’re planning the resources, the lessons like, and I’ll follow their lead’.

(Denis, Interview 2)

In addition to this, Jennifer also outlines the challenges of planning as a support teacher in a co-teaching partnership:

‘I can't imagine a situation really where I would be planning for someone, you know...for another teachers class...I wouldn't be able to plan outside of that without them’.

(Jennifer, Interview 4)

On the topic of support, from either the Department of Education or school management, participants were generally very appreciative of the support in place. Again, while it was acknowledged that time would always be a factor when subject planning, participants were in broad agreement on the efforts of school management to implement and support teachers:

‘...I think the management in this school have been really good, really supportive. They see the value in co-teaching...[they] want to use co-teaching to support the kids that need it’.

(Denis, Interview 2)

Sally echoes this, with a strong endorsement of the school management:

‘Management have been really strong in terms of emphasising the reasons for co-teaching or the expectations of co-teachers...that's management...realising, recognising the value and pushing on with it’.

(Sally, Interview 3)

In terms of ways in which management could support effective co-teaching, Thomas, a teacher

with more than a decade's experience, proposed that co-teachers partnerships could be two teachers from within the same department:

‘...I know that's not always possible...but if it's for being effective, then definitely two from the same subject would be my number one priority’.

(Thomas, Interview 1)

These responses highlight the uniformity in the teachers' attitudes towards the positive support provided by management, while also acknowledging issues related to time were systemic in the post-primary system at large, rather than a feature of planning for co-teaching in this particular environment. It was also notable that one teacher viewed co-teaching as a way of training and supporting student teachers and newly qualified teachers:

‘I think that could be a great experience for them to see experienced teachers working away... classrooms are complex places, so for new teachers to come into a class with an experienced teacher in that kind of team teaching role, I think that can be invaluable’.

(Aoife, Interview 5)

While this perspective was not a central feature of the literature consulted, it did feature and it is notable in that it recognises the teaching model as a valuable support model for teachers as well as students. This perspective can not only support inclusivity for students in mainstream classes, but also offers the opportunity for teachers to hone their skills of fostering inclusivity in their lessons.

### **4.3 Effective Co-Teaching**

When asked what effective co-teaching looked like, the issue of teachers from the same department leading a co-teaching class together was raised once again. While, as mentioned previously, teachers understood this was not always possible, there was a sense that in an ideal scenario, this would be preferable as it had yielded positive results in the past:

‘the most effective co-teaching classes I would have would be with a fella who knows the curriculum...can have a conversation, a more in depth conversation because we both know the subject well’.

(Thomas, Interview 1)

Both Thomas and Aoife were the most experienced participants taking part, and both shared the view that two subject specialists in a co-teaching partnership was the most effective in their

view, with Aoife stating that:

‘someone from your own department is probably the biggest factor, I think...there's so much to cover, it can be so specific’.

(Aoife, Interview 5)

However, while other participants did not necessarily disagree with this assertion, they placed the focus more on the state of the relationship between the co-teachers. A personal relationship was proposed as being a crucial factor in an effective working relationship within a co-teaching environment:

‘...people who would have good relationships...that relationship in a classroom can be, it has been more productive for me in the past’.

(Jennifer, Interview 4)

Outside of personal relationships and subject knowledge, participants did place a value on planning and the importance of knowing your role in the class, as being key to an effective co-teaching environment. Both Sally and Jennifer recognised the value of planning in order to achieve positive outcomes, as well as it being critical to ensuring both teachers understand their role when delivering the content:

‘...that partnership in the classroom could probably have used more planning and I could have maybe been stronger in trying to outline what I expected or what I wanted from that person’.

(Sally, Interview 3)

‘If you're a co-teacher, you don't want to step on the lead teachers toes too much...I mean it can probably take some time to work out your roles’.

(Jennifer, Interview 4)

According to Denis, effective co-teaching should be considered in the light of the support offered to students in the class, with the ultimate goal of inclusion. In particular, the role that the support teacher plays, in a *one teach, one assist* model, is critical when considering whether or not the co-teaching dynamic is effective:

‘I suppose that would probably be effective co-teaching...making the class as inclusive as possible’.

(Denis, Interview 2)

This theme of inclusion was echoed by Aoife, who, although was generally the lead teacher in

her co teaching lessons, recognised the value that the support teacher brings to a class in the *one teach, one assist* learning environment:

‘...you have a teacher in the class...making that child feel included in the lessons and to make sure that they understand’.

(Aoife, Interview 5)

The responses offered by participants highlight the variety of interpretations of effective co-teaching and the beliefs of the teachers utilising this approach to teaching and learning. While the exact nature of the partnership varied from subject knowledge to strong personal relationships, all participants realised the value in a strong working partnership for successful outcomes in an inclusive learning environment.

#### **4.4 Measuring Effective Co-Teaching**

While the previous two themes elicited varied, yet relatively definitive responses from participants, the issue of how exactly effective co-teaching could or should be measured, drew less conclusive responses. All teachers interviewed were unsure exactly how this teaching could be measured, and answers varied from a results-based focus, to the amount of content covered in a given class. In a response that was notable in its difference the other participants, Denis suggested that effective co-teaching could potentially be a teacher-based measurement when stating:

‘...you could probably think of the amount of work you get through. So how many chapters you get done, how far you get done in the course...if there's a teacher in the class with you, does that help you get more done...’.

(Denis, Interview 2)

This response placed the focus of measurement on the teachers’ performance in the class but this was at odds with the other four teachers’ responses. Thomas, while again acknowledging the quality of the teaching partnership, referred to students’ results:

‘because co-teaching...is a support model of teaching, it's the outcomes, the results or the successes of those students who require extra support in the class’.

(Thomas, Interview 1)

Both Jennifer and Sally concurred with this claim, though Sally was more specific in what exactly these results should be based on and her response was in relation to L2LP learning

outcomes:

‘...maybe achieving learning outcomes for students with needs...SEN students. Maybe if you're achieving their learning outcomes...’.

(Sally, Interview 3)

While both participants made reference to a results-based measurement, it is important to note that these were not definitive answers in the context of the question. Instead, the answers that they arrived at, also noted the importance students’ engagement in class, as well as feeling their voice was valued in class discussions.

It is interesting to note that only one participant, Aoife, was relatively decisive in how best to measure the effectiveness or success of co-teaching, although she acknowledged the measurement of such was not a straightforward task. Her response was firmly focused on the concept of inclusion in the classroom:

‘To make sure all the kids are included, you know, kind of regardless of their ability in the class...they walk out of that class every day and they've got something...that's because of two teachers’.

(Aoife, Interview 5)

While she was steadfast in her belief that effective co-teaching should be measured through the lens of inclusion, she acknowledge that there elements of effective teaching that can not necessarily be measured:

‘...you know, not everything can be measured all the time...there's so many variables...the way it was taught, could be the energy. It could be the interest of the students, could be a personality in that class. It could be the needs in that class in terms of, you know, having extra support and whatever else...’

(Aoife, Interview 5)

It is also interesting to note that, aside from Denis, all of the responses in relation to effective measurement were student-focused, and this alludes to a general sense that teachers in co-teaching environments had an awareness of their responsibility in terms of student outcomes.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

The variety of responses from participants in this study has highlighted a largely uniform,

though sometimes contentious attitude, in terms of teachers currently working in a post-primary learning environment. The requirements of a co-teaching class, while being unique in regards to the partnership dynamic between teachers, is subsumed by the need to plan, resource and deliver content that adequately encompasses the relevant elements of the curriculum for students. This is particularly applicable to students with additional learning needs, an actuality borne out by the responses of those who partook in this study.

## **5.0 Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter will outline the findings of the previous section, and how these responses integrate within the current literature on co-teaching. The following three broad themes have been identified as being pertinent to teachers experiences in the wider context of co-teaching: support and planning, effective co-teaching and outcomes of effective co-teaching. These broad themes have been further refined into more specific sub-themes, with the intent of capturing a snapshot of co-teaching practices in the contemporary post-primary system.

### **5.2 Support and Planning**

#### **5.2.1 School Support**

In order to implement co-teaching successfully in the classroom, it is essential that administrative support is provided for by school management (Isherwood and Barger-Anderson, 2008). As highlighted in the previous chapter, all participants in the study were united in their opinion that the school management provided positive support for the employment of co-teaching. One factor that was identified as being an area for improvement in terms of developing co-teaching partnerships, was for teachers from the same subject departments being paired together. However, it is also important to acknowledge, that in the various definitions of co-teaching outlined in the literature review, none referred to the necessity of both teachers being two subject specialists. The literature did highlight however, the need for well-matched teachers and sufficient planning time (DeMartino and Specht, 2018).

In terms of the support offered by school management for time to plan, teachers were again unified in their responses. While all participants felt that they had a limited amount of time, particularly in relation co-teaching, they did acknowledge that this was a common feature of working at post-primary level, and not necessarily the fault of school management. Regardless, that did pose a challenge when it came to developing appropriate resources and planning for a co-teaching class.

#### **5.2.2 Planning Time**

A strong link can be drawn between the issue of planning time, and the ability for teachers to create resources for a co-teaching class. While all of the participants involved recognised a

systematic lack of time in terms of planning at post-primary level, it nevertheless affected the amount of time that they felt they were able to dedicate to the creation of resources. In addition to this, a lack of time impinged on their ability to engage in thorough and effective collaborative conversations with their co-teaching peers. Where there was a lack of planning and preparation for co-teaching classes, the literature conceded that teachers developed resources and carried out classes in much the same way as there being only one teacher present (Magiera and Zigmond, 2005). This was reflected in the responses of participants, as most acknowledged the reality that a limited amount of planning time in general, led them to prioritise the development of resources and lesson planning for a class regardless of the co-teaching dynamic. It is important to note that in some instances, teachers may not have an assigned co-teacher for a period of time at the start of the year. As such, they planned accordingly, and participants saw the introduction of a co-teacher at a later stage as being a benefit in terms of carrying out their lesson plans. However, this approach is in contrast to the recommendation that successful co-teaching is reliant on a high level of collaboration between teachers (Marzocchi, Druken and Brye, 2021). With such time constraints impacting on dedicated planning for co-teaching, there remains the possibility that the full potential of co-teaching is unrealised.

Furthermore, it is also recommended that teachers are centrally involved in the co-teaching planning process with management from the outset (Isherwood and Barger-Anderson, 2008). While none of the participants indicated whether or not this was the case, the fact that it was not explicitly mentioned when discussing the positive support from management, indicates it is unlikely to be the case. Regardless, it was clear from the teachers involved, that they were committed to the co-teaching teaching strategy, as well as their belief that school management provided a level of support that was commendable in the post-primary system.

## **5.3 Effective Co-Teaching**

### **5.3.1 Effectiveness of Co-Teaching Models**

*One teach, one assist* and *team teaching* were identified by teachers as the most commonly used models in the co-teaching classes they had experience of. Additionally there were also references to the *one teach, one observe* model of co-teaching, although it was made clear that this model was not necessarily selected as a teaching strategy. It was as a result of co-teachers not fully understanding their role in the partnership. *One teach, one assist* has been identified in the literature as being the dominant model used in co-teaching environments (Carty and

Farrell, 2018), and this was also the case for the participants involved in this study. Four of the five teachers involved in the study recognised this model as being the most utilised in their classes, while one teacher, Thomas, used the *team teaching* method. Reflecting on effective co-teaching, this latter participant referenced the value of in-depth conversation, the deep level of collaboration, and the ability to rely on a co-teacher who is adept in their subject. These characteristics are acknowledged as supporting the benefits of the *team teaching* model as outlined by Marzocchi, Druken and Brye (2021). Importantly, this approach, when implemented successfully between two teachers, can model effective communication and collaboration for students (ibid). For the other teachers involved in the study, the *one teach, one assist* model was dependant on strong working relationships and ideally, teachers from the same subject area.

### **5.3.2 Co-Teaching Relationships**

In terms of co-teaching relationships, participants were largely in favour of both teachers being subject specialists. This implied that there was a greater value placed in a teachers knowledge of the curriculum, than of the specific role they undertook in delivering the lessons. Having two teachers from the same subject department allowed for a deeper understanding of what material needed to be covered throughout the year, and how best this could be achieved. This reference to teachers from the same subject department speaks to wider sense of equality between teachers in a co-teaching environment. In fact, parity between potential co-teaching partners is seen as a key factor to the success of a partnership (Pratt et al., 2016), and so is notable that the teachers interviewed viewed this as a desirable consideration.

As mentioned, participants also placed a value on one's understanding of their role in a co-teaching partnership. Again, regardless of the co-teaching model employed in the class, planning to ensure a deep understanding of what was required of each partner in terms of delivering the content or supporting learners, was seen as critical to positive outcomes. Teachers believed that such planning would allow for a more active role to be played by teachers, particularly those in a supporting role. This in turn, may help to dispel the perception that the *one teach, one assist* approach does not hold significant benefits for students (Carty and Farrell, 2018), as the supporting teacher would ideally play a crucial role in supporting those students with needs in terms of accessing content.

### **5.3.3 Role of Inclusion**

One of the more interesting outcomes of the interviews with participants was the references, or lack thereof, to the concept of inclusion when discussing effective co-teaching. While all teachers' beliefs surrounding successful co-teaching were rooted in an inclusive classroom, only two participants explicitly referred to inclusion as being integral to fostering such a learning environment. In the light of definitions outlined in the literature review, inclusion is deemed to be central to the concept of co-teaching. This is reflected in the fact that much of the discourse acknowledged co-teaching partnerships as being made up of a mainstream teacher, as well as a special education teacher. While this study takes a wider view in terms of pairings, the central focus is still on support and inclusion for a diverse group of students in a single physical space (Cook and Friend, 1995). As such, two participants espoused the belief that effective co-teaching should be implemented to ensure that all students are included in the lessons through appropriate support. Such support highlights the value that a co-teacher brings to the lessons, and this was also seen as a way of measuring the effectiveness of co-teaching as a mode of teaching.

## **5.4 Outcomes of Effective of Co-Teaching**

### **5.4.1 Measuring Effective Co-Teaching**

As outlined in the previous chapter, measurement of effective co-teaching proved more difficult for participants to define. The majority of responses focused on measurement through analysing student outcomes. This ranged from academic results, to the level of support students received in a co-teaching class. The latter point is consistent with the literature, which identifies the ability of teachers in a co-teaching arrangement to achieve acceptable outcomes for students with disabilities (Mastropieri and Scruggs, 2001). This view was supported by one of the respondents, who, without defining any specific learning disabilities, referred students with SEN achieving the learning outcomes for L2LP. Although academic results were the focus of this reply, they were in the context of achievement with the support of a co-teacher. In fact, student achievement was the common thread linking all participants responses, with only one connecting effective co-teaching with the amount of extra content that teachers were able to cover over the course of the academic year. It is interesting however, that the ambiguous nature of participant responses in regard to measurement of student outcomes, is an issue also reflected in the literature. For a variety of reasons, the evidence in terms of in terms of student

performance is inconsistent (Rextroat-Frazier and Chamberlain, 2018), although it must be added that this was, in part, based teachers' understanding of the necessary requirements of individual students' learning needs.

The outcomes for teachers in co-teaching partnerships however, was more positive. Numerous benefits were outlined for this collaborative approach, which again was supported by the literature.

#### **5.4.2 Benefits of Co-Teaching**

The literature is clear in outlining the benefits for teachers involved in co-teaching partnerships, and much of these benefits were supported by the responses of the participants. In fact, as outlined in the literature review, the benefits for teachers were more prominent than outlining the positive student outcomes. This may be due to the fact that positive outcomes for teachers were more apparent, as well as being definitively expressed by educators. The most obvious benefit was that co-teaching partnerships offered the opportunity to collaborate, plan and communicate with peers (Friend, Embury and Clarke, 2015). This was clearly appreciated by the respondents, particularly those involved in team teaching, as well as those who already enjoyed a positive, personal relationship with peers outside of the classroom. Participants also alluded to the fact that one of the advantages of co-teaching, was the ability for their peers to bring an alternative approach to delivering content, a point highlighted in the literature when referring to collaborative efforts resulting in a varied pedagogy in the classroom (Marzocchi, Druken and Brye, 2021).

In addition to this, one participant highlighted the importance of a co-teaching partnership as being particularly beneficial to student teachers, when paired with a more experienced, qualified peer. This point is addressed in the literature, which identifies the positive outcomes for student teachers mentored in a co-taught environment as opposed to those who did not partake in such partnerships during teacher training (Friend, Embury and Brye, 2015). These benefits included the development of communication skills, increased collaboration in the classroom and emphasis on reflective practice.

#### **5.5 Conclusion**

As is clear from the discussion, the broad themes extrapolated from the findings, are largely consistent the information outlined in the literature review. On the theme of planning and

support, participants were noticeably appreciative of the support offered by management in terms of co-teaching. This was tempered by the challenge of finding the time to prepare in greater depth for these classes, though this challenge was acknowledged as being systemic in terms of working at post-primary level. Effective co-teaching, while eliciting varied responses from teachers, was aligned with the literature in terms of identifying inclusion, collaborative relationships and the understanding of individual roles as being at the core of a successful co-teaching approach. Participant responses are largely consistent with the literature consulted, particularly in relation to the challenges, outcomes and perceived effectiveness of the co-teaching approach to teaching and learning.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This research aims to seek an insight in to teachers experiences of co-teaching in the Irish post-primary classroom. Considering that co-teaching is intended to foster an inclusive learning environment, it is important to understand these experiences as the success of such approaches is based on teachers' positive beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion (Young, Mannix McNamara and Coughlan, 2017). As well as outlining the research questions derived from reviewing the literature in the area, this chapter will provide a summary of the research findings as they relate to these questions. Lastly, both the limitations of the project, as well as the implications for practice will be outlined, with a view to positioning the research moving forward.

### **6.2 Research Questions**

The study sought to understand what effective co-teaching looks like, how best can it be achieved, and in what ways can effective outcomes from co-teaching be measured using thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with five post-primary teachers, the intention was to understand participants' interpretations, meanings and actions as they navigate the co-teaching environment (Biesta, Allan and Edwards, 2011).

Teachers' experiences were largely in line with the research consulted at the outset of this project, and provided a valuable insight in to the lived experiences of those educators utilising this teaching method in their post-primary classes. While there were challenges in terms of the amount of specific planning time allocated to teachers for co-teaching, all of the participants were uniform in their recognition of the support offered by school management. Less consistent however, was what effective co-teaching looked, although responses largely focused on the quality of professional and collaborative relationships and the effectiveness of this teaching model, generally put down to individuals understanding their roles in the partnership. Lastly, regarding the measurement of effective co-teaching, this study was again largely in line with the literature which identified mixed results in terms of effective outcomes (DeMartino and Specht, 2018). Teachers in this study cited various methods of measurement including positive academic results, fostering a sense of inclusion in class and the benefits of a co-teaching partnership on student teachers.

### **6.3 Limitations**

While this study has highlighted a range of insights in to co-teaching experiences in the Irish post-primary system, there are also some notable limitations. Firstly, there were a limited amount of interviews undertaken for this project, with only five participants recounting their experiences. Additionally, the teachers involved were drawn from a narrow pool of individuals with experience of working in a co-teaching environment, and as such, this purposeful sampling method can result in responses can be biased, personal and subjective (Cohen, Morrison and Manion, 2014). Furthermore, the small number of participants only allows for a limited triangulation of data, and so the responses may lead to a homogenous representation of co-teaching experiences.

### **6.4 Implications for research and practice**

It is hoped that this study will help inform the broader research agenda in providing a valuable insight into the lived experiences of teachers working in a co-teaching partnership. Understanding the challenges and benefits of utilising this approach can help to inform teaching practice at post-primary level. This will be particularly relevant in the area of SEN and inclusion in the mainstream classroom. Also, the use of co-teaching as a means of partnering student and newly qualified teachers with more experienced peers, offers a valuable opportunity for these teachers to support and learn from experienced practitioners. This the opportunity to reflect on, and change their own practice (Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury, 2016). While the measurement of effective co-teaching is less clear, the implications of the study can benefit this researchers own teaching practice through awareness of the various ways in which effective co-teaching can be measured.

### **6.5 Conclusion**

In the context of co-teaching in the contemporary Irish post-primary classroom, this project has identified a range of themes from interviews with teachers experienced in this teaching methodology. Although the findings were largely in line with previous literature in this area, the study highlighted the benefits and challenges faced by teachers engaged in collaborative practice, as well as the perceived impacts this approach has on their students. It is also

acknowledged that, while the scope of this study is limited, it has the potential to impact on future research in the area of co-teaching, and it is envisioned that it is particularly relevant in the broader context of SEN, inclusion and teacher training.

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## Appendix A: Principal Information Sheet

Dear Principal,

I am writing to you in relation to a research study I will be undertaking in fulfillment of my Professional Masters in Education degree with Hibernia College. It would like to provide you with information about my study and seek your consent to conduct the research with members of your teaching staff.

The aims of this research project are to explore the impact of co-teaching on inclusion in the mainstream classroom. This involves an examination of the various types of co-teaching models that can be employed; teachers' awareness and experience of one or all of these models; the effects, both positive and negative, on inclusion, when employing co-teaching in the mainstream class; the factors that affect the implementation of co-teaching in the classroom; and the impact of both teachers' subject areas on the quality of co-teaching students with SEN.

To address these areas, I propose to conduct five short (20 minute) semi-structured interviews with post-primary school teachers working in co-teaching classrooms. My project has received ethical approval from the Hibernia College Ethics Committee. Interviews would be held at the convenience of the school and of the teachers concerned on school premises. With their written consent, interviews will be recorded for transcription and dissemination purposes. Participation in the study is voluntary. Interviewees may refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. No school, teacher or student will be identified specifically in any publication of the work. I am writing to you to gain your informed consent that I may request an interview with five members of your teaching staff and that I may hold the interview in your school in March/April 2023, at a time convenient for the school and the teachers concerned. Confirmation of your consent can be sent to me directly via email.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone \_\_\_\_\_ or at the following email address \_\_\_\_\_

I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

I, \_\_\_\_\_ have read and understood the letter of information provided to me by \_\_\_\_\_ of Hibernia College Dublin. I agree that in order to conduct research about co-teaching in my school, he may request an interview with five teachers and upon receipt of their consent may conduct interviews on school premises at times convenient for the teachers and the school. I understand that participation is voluntary and that there are no physical or psychological risks associated with the study. I know that all answers provided during the interview will be used for the purposes of the study only and that all responses will identify no individual or the school itself.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Information Sheet

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: Hibernia College, Block B, The Merrion Centre, Merrion Road, Dublin 4.

Title of Study: *Teachers' Perspectives on the Impact of Co-Teaching in Supporting Inclusion in the Mainstream Classroom*

### Outline of the Research Study

The aims of this research project are to explore the impact of co-teaching on inclusion in the mainstream classroom. This involves an examination of the various types of co-teaching models that can be employed; teachers' awareness and experience of one or all of these models; the effects, both positive and negative, on inclusion, when employing co-teaching in the mainstream class; the factors that affect the implementation of co-teaching in the classroom; and the impact of both teachers' subject areas on the quality of co-teaching students with SEN.

### Objectives of the project:

This project seeks to address the following questions:

- What does effective co-teaching look like?
- How best can it be achieved?
- In what ways can effective outcomes from co-teaching be measured?

### What would I need you to do?

Your participation in this research project is greatly appreciated. This research project has received ethical approval from Hibernia College Dublin. If you agree to participate, you will participate in a short semi-structured interview with the researcher. Any information you provide about your own identity or that of the school will be anonymous and confidential. Quotes from the interview may be used and may also be published in the research however your name and the name of the school will not be published. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcript will be made available to you on request. This research will be used in a publication of a thesis for Hibernia College Dublin. It may also be used in conference proceedings or used in academic articles. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

### What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of the research is to complete small-scale study which forms part of the final year of the Professional Masters of Education (Primary) with Hibernia College Dublin.

## Appendix C: Consent Form

Researcher's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: Hibernia College Dublin

Title of Study: *Teachers' Perspectives on the Impact of Co-Teaching in Supporting Inclusion in the Mainstream Classroom*

Consent (to be completed by the participant)

Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study? Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study? Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions? Yes/No

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without your withdrawal having an adverse effect for you?

Yes/No

Do you agree to take part in this study, the results of which are likely to be published or presented at a conference? Yes/No

Have you been informed that a copy of this consent form will be kept by the researcher?

Yes/No

Are you satisfied that any information you give to the researcher will be kept confidential?

Yes/No

Your name and the name of the school will not appear in the research report. Yes/No

Participant's Name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D: Interview Schedule**

1. Do you think you are given enough preparation time in order to develop resources and/or a plan for a co-teaching class?
2. Do you feel you have adequate knowledge in how to plan for a co-teaching class?
3. What factors do you feel make for effective collaboration between teachers in a co-teaching environment?
4. In what ways do you think senior leadership/school management can support teachers in planning for effective co-teaching?
5. What is your knowledge of the six co-teaching models?
6. In your opinion, what does effective co-teaching look like?
7. In what ways do you think effective co-teaching can be measured?

## Appendix E: Thematic Analysis Exemplar

Transcript Excerpt - Interview 4 (Jennifer)

PLANNING, TRAINING & SUPPORT

EFFECTIVE CO-TEACHING

BENEFITS OF CO-TEACHING

*And that works for you?*

Yea...and as a co teacher, as, you know, someone who comes into another teachers classroom. I can't really plan...I don't think I remember ever really planning for that. I just do what I'm needed for or what the teacher needs me to do, really. It would be...I can't imagine a situation really where I would be planning for someone, you know, for a class...someone else's class. For a co...for another teachers class, who's the lead teacher in that subject? I wouldn't be able to plan outside of that without them. So, not really planning that sense for a...as a co teacher, if that makes sense?

*And in either of those roles, you feel you have no time, to prepare.*

Well, it depends. But I don't think that's going to change and it's not the school's fault. I understand the reasons for co teaching, but time is limited in a school, as I'm sure you know so. It can be tricky to have dedicated time to plan for a co teaching class, but that hasn't really stopped me and I don't think it has made the classes any less, any less informative or good for the students.

*OK, and what factors do you feel make for effective collaboration between teachers in a co teaching environment?*

Well, that could be any number of things. I've had some good co teachers and I try to be a good teacher when I'm in that role. But sometimes if you're in a subject that you don't know anything about, that can be very difficult. In those cases, I really find that you're very much...it can be about helping with behaviour, to manage the class, to sit with students who you know will be challenging for the teacher or who have no interest in the subject. And just try and get them to do as much work as you can. In terms of students with SEN or additional needs? I very much found that being the co teacher...being an effective...did you say effective?

*Yes, effective.*

Yeah, being an effective co teacher with the students who need support, maybe it's. Sometimes just getting them to write their homework in their journal. Or to maybe ask a question on their

behalf so you know. For example if the class is given ten questions for homework, maybe I would ask the teacher those...there are particular students which needs to...does that student need to do all ten questions? Or maybe do they only need to do three questions or five questions? Or it depends on the student's ability really, I guess.

*So what is it that you think makes effective collaboration?*

Well, knowing your role, probably. If you're a co teacher, you don't want to step on the lead teachers toes too much I suppose. I mean it can probably take some time to work out your roles. A few months, maybe two months at the start of the year to really know what your purpose is in the class. But I think once you know what your role is and you're comfortable with the students and that teacher, the lead teacher. For the mainstream teacher, then I think it can be effective. Are we talking effective for the teacher or for the students?

*The teachers and their collaboration between them.*

Yeah, then definitely knowing your role, I think that leads to good collaboration between teachers and I think it can be effective for the students in the class. But each class is different and the role you have to play in each class in each subject is different and you probably have different things to offer depending on the subject. So outside of my subject, and I mean, I would have a knowledge of maths or a knowledge of geography or English or whatever, but not too much. So if I'm co teaching in those classes, I would probably do well and be able to support to a better level or to a higher level if it's in my own subjects.

*So knowing your role, anything else?*

Well, I know what I want if I have another teacher in my class. Because my subject is a quite a practical subject, I've very specific things that I would need another teacher to do. If they don't have experience, I have found that difficult in the past, but I have had teachers in there...I have one particular teacher in there and they can be very helpful. But in general, especially the practical side...there can be...it can be demanding if you don't, if you don't really know what you're doing, and if you don't have that as a subject. Because, you know, sometimes students...it's very difficult for a teacher who doesn't know that stuff to really support me in a way that would be...that would really take the pressure off in terms of time.

*Yeah I can imagine.*

I've also and, you know, I...the teachers I would get on the best with, in the staff room, so people who would have good relationships, my friends basically. I tend to...I think those co teaching situations, those that, that relationship in a classroom can be, it has been more productive for me in the past. Probably because I can say whatever I want. I don't have to tiptoe around them or be worried about what they might think because we would get on well outside of the class or outside of school. So I can, very straightforward...I can explain in a very straightforward way what I expect or what I need and what I want from the students. And what

I need that teacher to do and to help me with. And it's been...I've generally found they're the easiest classes, but that's just from my point of view. I'm only assuming that that is from the other teachers point of view as well. I hope it's from the other teachers point of view.