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A Study Regarding Content Specialist Team-Teaching at the Elementary Level in a Southwest Washington School

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Abstract

The focus of this qualitative study was to examine the practice of content specialist team teaching used at an elementary school. Documents analysis, interviews, and surveys were used with a total of 27 classroom teachers, 12 of whom were teachers using the content specialist teaming model. Data showed that using the content specialist team teaching model provided academic and social benefits for both the teachers and students in team-taught classrooms as well as others at this school.

Introduction

About five years ago, I was sitting with a colleague on a Friday afternoon, planning lessons for the next week. We sat in my classroom that day with our district's instructional guides and at least eight binders sprawled before us. Planning together was helpful but cumbersome with all of those instructional guides and not much time for planning every subject. We decided to try teaching together as a team, sharing students and curriculum responsibilities. Four years later, we are still team-teaching together, and intentional planning still takes time.

At Apple Elementary (pseudonym), a suburban school in southwest Washington, about a third of the teachers were using the content specialist teaming model at the time of this study. Each teacher was a content specialist in math, science, social studies, or literacy and was required to create lesson plans for mastery of the state curriculum standards in those content areas. Then, in two self-contained classrooms, two general education teachers taught different subject areas simultaneously, each taking approximately half of the required content and teaching it twice, once to a first class and again to a second class of students. Having enjoyed teaching this way, I was curious to know if research would show that our school's team-teaching model provided advantageous learning for students. This question guided my research: *Do students of varying academic levels all benefit from the content specialist team-teaching model used at my school?*

Literature Review

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic and to learn what other researchers have discovered, I reviewed several research articles related to the form of team-teaching I was studying. I found that the literature in this area offered little research at the elementary level, the majority based instead on secondary or college level education or on a different model, one with two teachers in one self-contained classroom with one group of students. Although there was little research directly related to my school's team-teaching model, several recurring themes emerged: teaming logistics, specialization in content areas, collaboration, and variety of experiences.

Teaming Logistics

The research showed that, when teachers found a match that met all of the needs required to build a good team, it produced beneficial results for both teachers and students. In Stewart and Perry's 2005 study, experience was found to be important when creating successful teaching teams. Teachers with little experience did not always feel comfortable teaming with teachers with a lot of experience, and some new teachers were afraid of being made to feel subordinate to the experienced teacher. Similarities in classroom management systems and the beliefs of both teachers helped to avoid confusion (Gerretson, 2008, p. 312). Factors like workload concerns and control issues caused some teachers to hesitate to work in teaching teams (Kloo et al., 2008; Buckley, 2011; Stewart & Perry, 2005). In the end, "if there is a mismatch about beliefs or in the partners' perceptions of their classroom roles, that effective partnership will be difficult to achieve" (Stewart & Perry, 2005, p. 8). "A 'good' team teaching partnership can energize a person, while an ineffective partnership can become a burden" (Stewart & Perry, 2005, p. 10).

Creating successful teaching teams requires enthusiastic pairs of teachers committed to ongoing coplanning, administrative support, compatible philosophies and personalities (Buckley, 2011; Kloo, 2008; Stewart & Perry, 2005). If the team teachers "have a shared understanding of roles in planning and in the classroom, they will be capable of making a stronger commitment to the partnership, and the potential for effective team teaching will be increased" (Stewart & Perry, 2005, p. 8). Co-teachers have been able to learn a variety of differentiation strategies as well as gain better understanding of the curriculum from teaching in a team (Nevin et al., 2008).

Organization and communication are important when coordinating between teachers who are in teaming situations. A clear system for both needs to be established for the teaming to be successful. Licitra (2009) suggested a three-part approach: appreciation, respect, and directness; coordination was also suggested as important. Appreciating each teammate regularly, respecting the partner's expertise, being direct with all communication, and coordinating so expectations can be met are crucial components for successful teaming (Licitra, 2009).

In Dugan and Letterman's 2008 study, students did not feel they had the ability to form personal relationships with their team teachers. In addition, Gerretson (2008)

notes concern by teachers that students will be expected to do better in teaming situations because the teachers have more focused planning time which adds pressure for the teaming teachers.

Specialization in Content Areas

It is unrealistic for “elementary teachers to have the specialized knowledge to facilitate mathematics instruction, as well as knowledge for every other subject they teach” (Reys & Fennell as cited in Gerretson, 2008, p. 303). Furthermore, Varma (2008) found that elementary teachers “often lack a deep understanding of science. Unlike secondary teachers, elementary teachers typically do not major in science, and 40% have taken four or fewer semesters of science coursework” (p. 594). However, “having elementary school teachers as content specialists was supported in part by findings from some cross-national studies on teachers’ mathematics knowledge for teaching” (An, Kulm & Wu, 2004; Ma, 1999 as cited in Li, 2008, p. 169).

Teaching as a content specialist allowed a teacher to focus on only those subjects he or she was teaching and concentrate professional experiences in those specific content areas as well. When elementary teachers were given the chance to focus professional development experiences on certain subject areas, they were able to become more confident and competent teachers in those subject areas (Gerretson, 2008). In Virginia, teachers were required to attain a bachelor’s degree in an area other than education prior to obtaining their licensure (Mastropieri et al., 2005). This would help develop subject-specific background for teaming by content specialists.

When teachers understood their content well, they created better ways of allowing students access to the content in order to increase student achievement (Gerretson, 2008; Varma, 2008). Gerretson (2008) urged “more time for lesson preparation [because,] if they taught fewer subjects, teachers could focus on their area of strength and spend less time refining lessons instead of preparing lessons in multiple areas” (p. 309). Moreover, principals reported teachers’ abilities to “present content more effectively and efficiently because they had fewer content areas to address” (p. 311).

Collaboration

“Collaboration pools the talents of numerous educators to meet the needs of all students in the general education classroom” (Patterson, 2008, p. 17) and heightens the competencies of all teachers involved (Titone as cited in Patterson, 2008). Team-teaching capitalizes on the idea of collaboration because it allows teachers to “share responsibility, have autonomy over their classes, and [be] better able to solve any problems which arise” (Abdallah, 2009, n.p.). Collaboration between teaming teachers decreases the amount of individual planning time for which each teacher is responsible. Teachers reflect on lessons, students, and other aspects of teaching and learning in a way only collaboration between teammates can offer (Abdallah, 2009; Stewart & Perry, 2005).

Patterson (2008) found collaboration to be highly important for professional networking for positive impact on learning opportunities for children. Feedback from students included comments about enjoying the different perspectives collaboration brought, benefiting from different teaching styles through collaborating teachers, being exposed to a variety of different viewpoints, and how it benefited their own learning (Patterson, 2008). In Dugan and Letterman's (2008) study, findings also suggested that students preferred team-taught courses involving truly collaborative teaching methods.

Collaboration between teachers has proved critical to making this model work in terms of improving student achievement. Rea and Connell (2008) emphasized that "collaborative teaching structures that are well-planned, skillfully implemented, and meticulously evaluated hold the potential for addressing the demands for greater accountability for improving student outcomes" (as cited in Patterson, 2008, p. 21). With teachers being held accountable by No Child Left Behind as well as state and district assessments, every teacher is looking for ways to improve student outcomes.

Variety of Experiences

Team teaching "provides an opportunity for team teachers to be exposed to different teaching philosophies, techniques, and methods" (Abdallah, 2009, n.p.) where they often borrow ideas, modify, or enhance their own teaching practices in order to become more effective teachers. The design of the content specialist teaming model allows for a different level of flexibility which encourages creativity. "Innovations are encouraged, and modifications in class size, location, and time are permitted" (Buckley, 2011).

In a content specialist teaming classroom, "different personalities, voices, values, and approaches spark interest, keep attention, and prevent boredom" (Buckley, 2011). Gerretson's (2008) study found that using the strengths of both teachers had a positive impact on all student achievement. Students benefit from having more attention and therefore more support because there are not one but two teachers there for them (Stewart & Perry, 2005). English language learners can benefit from being "more exposed to and submerged in the English language" because "it gives them more chances to hear and understand the English language as it is used by native speakers" (Hoffman & Dahlman as cited in Abdallah, 2009, n.p.). More exposure to higher levels of vocabulary and variety of speech and language patterns is also a benefit to a student in a team teaching situation (Abdallah, 2009).

Content specialists were seen by the school staff as people who could be of help in certain subject areas for other teachers (Gerretson, 2008) as well as for students. "Because teachers bring diverse knowledge, skills, and dispositions into the classroom, sharing their talents offers a means to improve student learning" (Patterson, 2008, p. 17). Informed by this research, I analyzed the effects of the content specialist teaming model at Apple Elementary.

Methods

The mixed methods used to collect data for this study included documents analysis, interviews, and surveys. I examined a stratified sample of students and teachers from Apple Elementary to discover the effectiveness of the content specialist teaming model being used there.

Participants

Apple Elementary is located in a suburb of Southwest Washington. At the time of this study, there were 40 teachers at Apple Elementary, 12 of whom utilized the content specialist teaming model focal for this research. The remaining 28 teachers consisted of generalist classroom teachers (each with one set of students all day), Title I Reading teachers, specialist teachers (i.e., media, physical education, or music), English language teachers, or special education teachers.

A stratified sample was used to collect data from the primary subjects in this study: four classroom teachers, the principal, and eight students who had experienced the content specialist teaming model used at Apple Elementary. Four students were selected from a primary grade classroom, and four students were selected from an intermediate grade classroom. Each set of four students was selected based on a range sample of academic achievement levels. Of the four classroom teachers who were primary subjects, two taught a primary grade and two taught an intermediate grade. The school principal was selected because she was able to observe all classrooms in the school including those using the teaching model being studied.

Comprehensive sampling was used to identify the secondary subjects in this study: the remaining 36 teachers at Apple Elementary. Students in eight classrooms were also surveyed as secondary subjects, using a comparison sampling strategy: two primary grade and two intermediate grade classrooms with current experience of the content specialist teaming model, and the remaining two primary grade classrooms and two intermediate grade classrooms without teaming experience.

Ethics

To protect those who took part in the study, consent forms (see Appendices A, B, C) in English, Russian, and Spanish were given to all potential participants providing all of the necessary information for them to make informed decisions about their participation. During interviews, I made myself as approachable as possible and tried to alleviate any stress to participants by encouraging them to answer as openly and honestly as they felt comfortable. All participants were also given the option to discontinue interviewing at any time and to refuse to answer any questions without penalty. Also, I did not force or coerce any participants to take part in my research if they did not freely choose to do so. All data and records were kept secure at all times. The school and all participants have been given pseudonyms in this report in addition to other considerations taken to protect the confidentiality of all participants involved.

Data Collection

Data collection involved three different methods in order to learn more about the content specialist model being used at Apple Elementary. Utilizing three different methods allowed for triangulation by method. Documents were collected and interviews and surveys conducted with both primary and secondary subjects. The only subject to be interviewed but not surveyed was the principal. All interview and survey questions were field-tested and refined prior to using with study participants. Utilizing multiple sources also allowed for triangulation by source.

Documents. Relevant documents were collected and analyzed. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) website and the school district's website provided demographic information about the school. The school principal offered copies of scores from the Measurement of Student Progress (MSP), Washington's 2009-2010 state test administered to third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade students. In 2009, there were content specialist teams and generalist teachers at all three grades, so all scores from that year were analyzed. In 2010, however, there were both content specialist teams and generalist teachers only at third- and fifth-grades, so both of these grade levels were compared when analyzing the scores; the entire fourth-grade team was using the content specialist teaming model, so their scores offered no basis for comparison.

The teachers at Apple Elementary also recorded scores based on specific grade-level academic goals called *Smart* goals. The principal gave me access to these scores as well, so sets were collected for the 2009-2010 school year from those grade levels where the existence of both content specialist teams and non-specialist teams at the same grade level allowed opportunity to compare.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted with six teachers, the principal, and eight students at Apple Elementary (see Appendices D, E, F, G). Of the six teachers interviewed, two were classroom teachers who used the content specialist teaming model being studied, one primary grade teacher and one intermediate grade teacher. Two of the six teachers taught as generalists in their own classrooms and were not using the model, one primary grade teacher and one intermediate grade teacher. The remaining teachers interviewed consisted of two specialist teachers. All of the interviews were scheduled ahead of time and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

The eight students interviewed were split between primary and intermediate grade students. Two of these primary students and two intermediate students had experience in content specialist taught classrooms. The remaining two primary and two intermediate grade students were from classrooms taught by teachers using the generalist model. The same interview protocol was used with both sets of students. Interviews with students were not prescheduled and were less formal. These interviews lasted, on average, 15 minutes.

All interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed for further analysis. Each adult interview participant was given a copy of his or her interview transcription for validation.

Surveys. Students in two content specialist teaming classrooms, one primary grade and one intermediate grade, were surveyed (see Appendix H). Students in one primary and one intermediate grade generalist classroom were also surveyed (see Appendix I). Each survey offered open-ended questions in order to elicit as large a spectrum of responses about the content specialist model as possible. Overall, 31 out of 46 (67%) teaming classroom student surveys and 31 out of 48 (65%) generalist classroom student surveys were completed.

All teachers at Apple Elementary were also surveyed. The survey was open to any teacher, including classroom teachers (content specialist teaming or generalist), specialists, Title I teachers, and English language teachers (see Appendix J). Twenty-four out of 30 teachers participated in the survey, which were anonymous. Teacher surveys were compiled online using a secure password protected site. Students' paper surveys, also anonymous, were returned to a secure location by their teachers.

Data Analysis

Data was systematically analyzed using a method-by-method approach, starting with documents, then interviews, and last surveys. Preliminary themes were identified for each data type, then compared across all methods to refine themes for the data as a whole. Common themes emerged leading to preliminary interpretations which were tested against the data set for support. If an interpretation was supported by all three data types, then the interpretation was considered warranted and asserted as a finding.

The academic scores collected from both the MSP data and *Smart* goal data were first categorized by teaming or non-teaming groups and grade level. Then, they were separated by subject area to see if there were any trends based on grade level or content area. Next, student passing rates were calculated and compiled into graphs showing content specialist teaming and generalist passing rates side-by-side for comparison. This made trends, correlations, and comparisons visibly recognizable.

The interviews and surveys were analyzed similarly. With both the interviews and surveys, as many questions as possible (all questions in the case of the interviews) were open-ended in order for any possible trends to emerge regardless of my own opinions or presumptions. Each interview was transcribed following the conclusion of the interview session for validation and analysis. Themes from the literature review were used to help identify the preliminary themes in the interview responses, and new themes were also noted. The same method was used with the survey responses, which facilitated the development of themes across all of participant responses.

Similar responses were then clustered together. While examining the teacher surveys, demographic percentages were calculated about the responding teacher group based on responses to questions about current grade level and whether or not the

respondent was currently using or had used the content specialist team teaching model. After going through this process with the entire data set, themes and findings were determined and used to organize the data presentation in this report.

Limitations

One possible limitation was dependence on state test scores to see if students taught in content specialist classrooms performed better than students taught in generalist taught classrooms. Some students are better at taking tests, while others get test anxiety which makes them perform poorly even if they know the content well. Also, students are stronger in certain subjects regardless of the teaching model. These confoundments to strict comparisons were considered when analyzing the quantitative data.

Last, this study had a limited number of subjects which does not allow for making large-scale generalizations about content specialist team-teaching, although it does support the premise that content specialist team teaching has a positive effect on students, since data suggested that this was the case at Apple Elementary.

Data Presentation and Findings

Data gathered through interviews, surveys, and documents were analyzed in order to address the following research question: *Do students of varying academic levels all benefit from the content specialist teaming model used at my school?* In reviewing the data, the following themes emerged: students' academic benefits from teaming, teachers' and students' positive attitudes toward teaming, and teachers' professional investment in teaming.

Academic Benefits

Students from content specialist team-taught classrooms performed academically as well as or better than their counterparts in classrooms taught by generalist non-teaming teachers. In reviewing the documentary data, the highest percentage of students who passed the 2009 MSP test in intermediate grades at Apple Elementary came from teaming classrooms (see Figure 1). Approximately 90 students' scores from each grade level were considered in this data set. In every grade level and subject area except one, as many or more students from teaming classrooms passed as did students in non-teaming classrooms. In two grade levels, more than 15% of students who passed had been taught in teaming classrooms. Overall for 2009, students in teaming classrooms had passing rates significantly higher than students from non-teaming classrooms.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students passing the 2010 MSP test for both teaming and non-teaming classrooms. Approximately 90 students' scores each from third and fifth grades were considered in this data set. In contrast to the 2009 MSP results, slightly fewer students from teaming classrooms passed than from non-teaming classrooms in 2010.

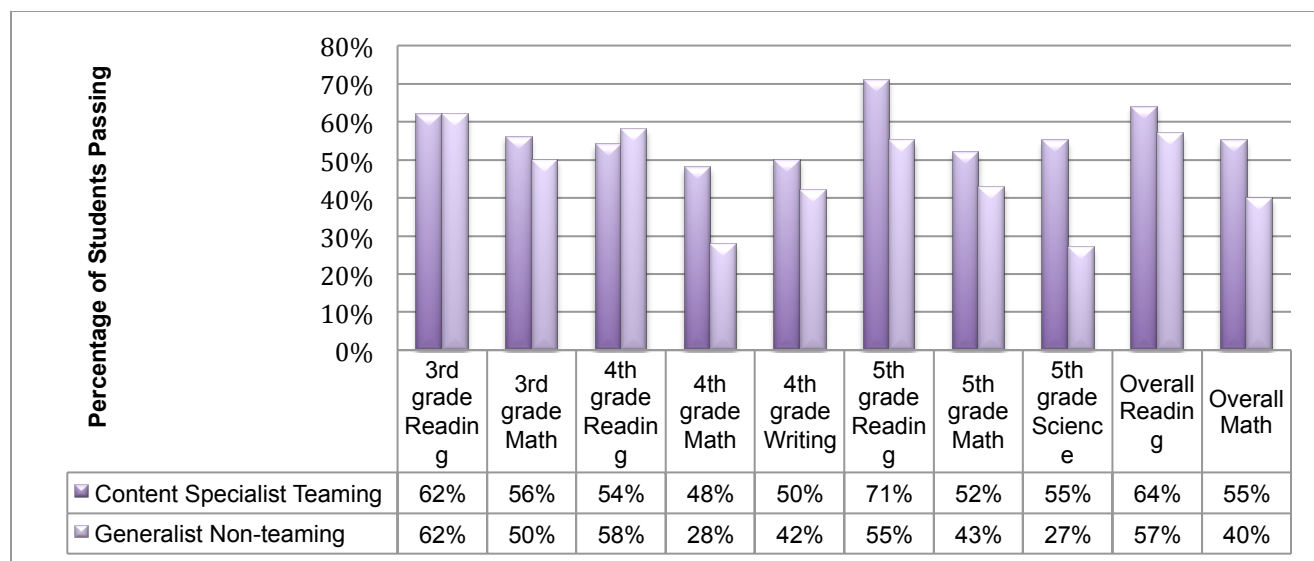


Figure 1. 2009 MSP test scores for content specialist teaming v. generalist non-teaming classroom passing rates. Source: Measurement of Student Progress 2009 Student Roster, September 2009

Although not as many teaming *classrooms* passed in 2009 as compared to 2010, more teaming *students* passed each time when teaming classrooms did pass. In 2010, 3% more students passed from non-teaming classrooms than from teaming classrooms in a given grade level or content area. In 2009, 28% more students from teaming classrooms passed than from non-teaming classrooms. Although fewer teaming *classrooms* passed, more team-taught *students* passed.

Figure 3 shows the 2009-2010 *Smart* goal percentages of students passing. Approximately 85 students' scores each from second, third, and fifth grades were considered in this data set. Both types of classrooms performed similarly in terms of passing rates, but the proportion of passing students from teaming classrooms was much higher. When non-teaming classrooms had more students pass, at most only 6% more students passed than in teaming classrooms. But, when teaming classrooms had more students pass, 18% more students passed. Although the incidence of teaming *classrooms* doing better was not as high, still more *individual* students passed.

All three figures indicate a trend toward an equal or greater number of students meeting standards from teaming classrooms as compared to students from non-teaming classrooms. On average, among all three sets of student scores, non-teaming classrooms had, at most, 3% more students passing when they did better while teaming classrooms had as many as 28% more students passing when they did better. More team-taught students in more grade levels and subject areas academically outperformed students from non-team-taught classrooms more often. My data confirmed Patterson (2008) who found improved student learning when teachers collaborated, sharing their talents with each other and their students.

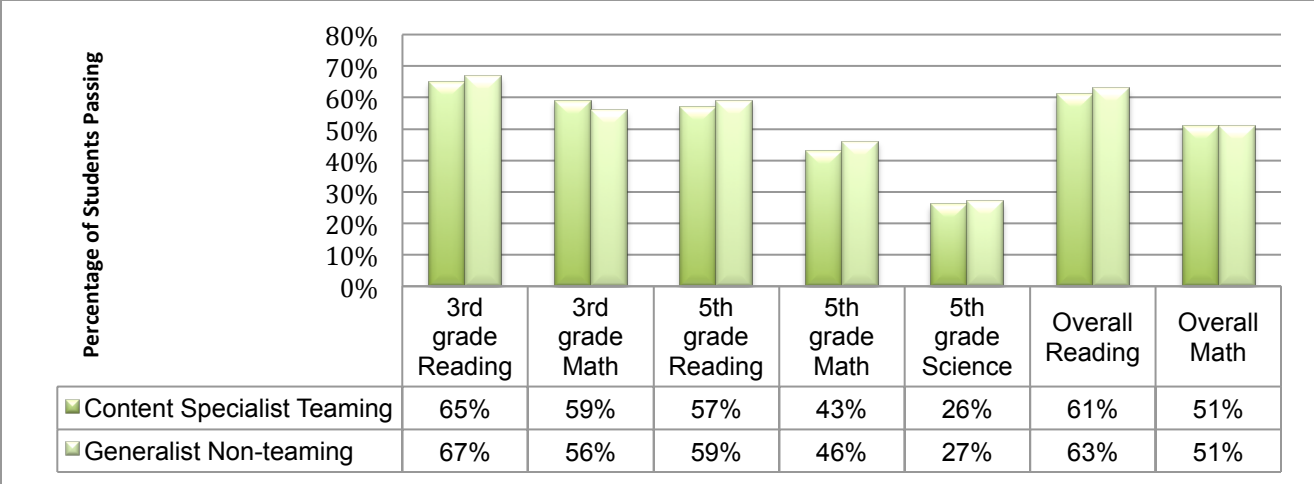


Figure 2. 2010 MSP test scores for content specialist teaming v. generalist non-teaming classroom passing rates. Source: Measurement of Student Progress 2010 Student Roster, September 2010

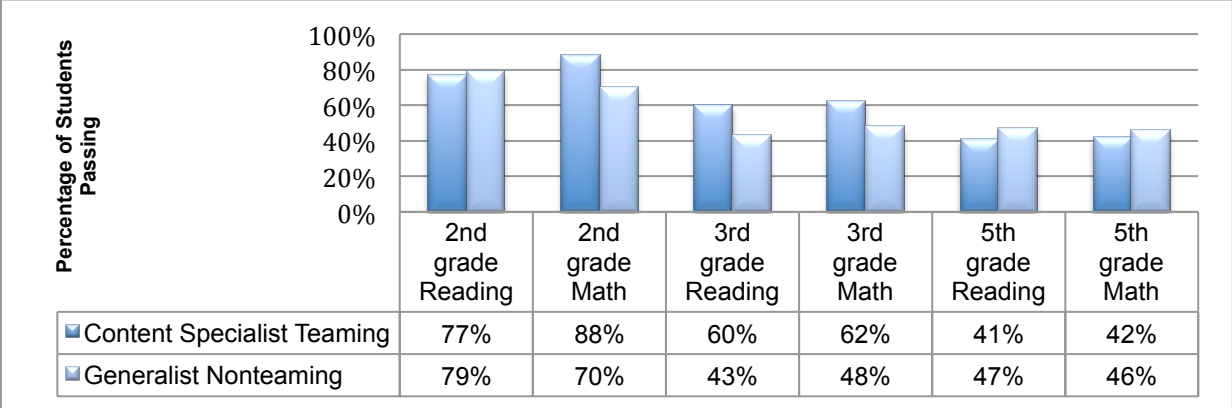


Figure 3. 2009-2010 SMART goal test scores for content specialist teaming v. generalist non-teaming classroom passing rates. Source: Apple Elementary, June 2010

According to a teacher at Apple Elementary, when given the chance to use the content specialist team-teaching model, “teachers would have a better understanding of the curriculum they teach and therefore the kids have a better understanding of those topics” (teaming teacher, personal communication, May 29, 2010). The documentary data I analyzed supported this opinion: in terms of individual passing rates, students from team taught classrooms performed as well as or better than non-team-taught peers. My test data indirectly supported Gerretson (2008) who stated that “content-specific professional experiences may afford elementary teachers greater opportunities to focus on subject area content, pedagogical content and instructional strategies at deeper levels, to become more confident and competent teachers” (p. 304). Teaming teachers had more time to focus on their content area since they only taught a portion of

the curriculum; therefore, students got a deeper level of instruction because their teachers were better prepared in the specific subject areas they taught. The principal of Apple Elementary reported, "I have observed that teaming produces better quality teaching as well as a high level of student engagement" (personal communication, June 3, 2010). The test scores reviewed as part of the document data support her observation.

The literature I reviewed focused on science and math as areas which greatly benefit from the content specialist teaming method, and the documentary data I reviewed supported this. Reys and Fennell (2008) found "it [was] essential that teachers of mathematics in the elementary school understand the mathematics content they teach, know how students learn mathematics, and are able to use pedagogical strategies that support student learning of mathematics" (as cited in Gerettson, p. 303). For my data regarding math scores, the trend held: students from content specialist taught classrooms passed more often in both grade level and subject area assessments. Out of eight sets of scoring situations (see Figures 1, 2, and 3), only two data points indicated more students from non-team taught classrooms passed than students from team taught classrooms. In those situations, when more students from non-team taught classrooms did pass, it was a small margin of 3-4% more students. When more students from team taught classrooms passed, the margin was 3-20%, a greater difference.

Varma (2008) found elementary teachers "often lack a deep understanding of science" (p. 594), and "previous studies of specialist-led delivery models for elementary science have documented that specialists typically have greater content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of curriculum in science than classroom generalists" (Schwartz as cited in Varma, 2008, p. 602). After reviewing the test data available to me, a similar trend appeared. In science, more students from team-taught classrooms passed more often than from non-team-taught classrooms (see Figures 2 and 3). In 2009, 28% more students from teaming classrooms passed than students from non-teaming classrooms while, in 2010, only 1% more non-teaming students passed than teaming students.

During the 2009-2010 school year, according to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Apple Elementary had 76% of its students qualify for free and reduced lunches and was thus considered by OSPI to be a high poverty school. There were also many areas of need in addition to poverty. According to OSPI, 19% of the student population had Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), 1% had Section 504 plans, 18% were considered transitional bilingual, and 1% of the students were in foster care. Because of these demographics, many of the teachers in their surveys and interviews shared feelings about Apple Elementary students needing more than just a basic level education from their teachers and their school. One teacher indicated feeling the team-teaching model might not be appropriate for students because it might not address the various academic needs in her classroom to be met (non-teaming teacher, personal communication, June 10, 2010). As previously noted, many of the teachers who did use the model communicated that it was beneficial to have another adult's pair of eyes on the students in order to make more informed joint decisions

based on multiple observations. Teachers who used the model were able to move students between their two classrooms in order to find the best fit for that student's needs. Students with IEPs were able to be grouped, allowing the special education teacher access to more students at one time.

Over 70% of teachers who responded to the survey mentioned that teachers who used the model had the ability to differentiate content better, one writing, "Team teaching allows for instructional differentiation in all subject areas, meeting student needs in a more beneficial way" (survey response, June 2010). One teacher pointed out that teaming "teachers can level kids in order to focus instruction and allow for more differentiation" (teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Another commented that "the team teaching model allows me to better differentiate my lessons and reach kids at varying levels" (teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Not only teachers but also students noticed the academic benefits of team-teaching. One student commented in an interview that "the best part of having two teachers and two classrooms is having one teacher teaching writing in one room where I use one half of my brain, and one teacher teaching math in a different room where I use the other half of my brain. I get smarter because, when I change rooms, I can change gears, which helps me" (teaming student, personal communication, June 10, 2010). Another student similarly commented on a survey that "having to rotate to the next classroom makes me switch my brain ideas" (teaming student, personal communication, June 10, 2010). An alternative view from another student in a teaming classroom: "It's hard for me to switch subjects in my brain, but that probably would be the same with only one teacher too, I guess" (survey response, May 28, 2010).

Having a bit of flexibility within the set schedule was important. A support teacher in an interview commented that, in teaming classrooms, she noticed "integration was better for students" which meant "more learning for students" (personal communication, 2010). When a different support teacher was interviewed, she reported she could do her job better where teaming teachers used the model to academically benefit the students: "I know how to support the English language learners I support in classrooms that team better because there is a higher level of integration. I feel there is better learning going on for students" (support teacher, personal communication, June 8, 2010). That teacher also commented that teaming was helpful to her because "teams are very well organized and stick to their schedules. My support is seamless because team teachers work together well" (support teacher, personal communication, June 8, 2010). Non-teaming teachers also had the ability to integrate curriculum, but there was a difference in the integration of specialists' teaching styles. On the basis of such data, I assert this finding:

The content specialist teaming model had academic benefits for the students in the participating teaming classrooms because, given the opportunity, those teachers became more knowledgeable in specific content areas which increased students' academic understanding.

Non-Academic Benefits

Interviews and surveys provided evidence that both teachers and students considered the content specialist teaming model valuable. Teacher survey data showed that 92% of the teaching staff at Apple Elementary found the content specialist teaming model to be beneficial because of matching teamed teachers to their content expertise, although only half of those surveyed were currently using the model or had experienced it. One teacher commented “It is great for students to have a teacher who can focus on the content and really go in depth. It allows for students to capitalize on the teacher’s level of expertise that year” (survey response, June 2010). A specialist teacher who worked with many different classes observed that content specialist “teachers are excited about the curriculum they are teaching which spreads excitement! The kids taught by the teachers who are passionate about the subjects they are teaching will be excited about learning that subject” (non-teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Teachers commented that managing student behavior took time away from instruction. One teacher noticed behavior management benefits in teaming situations, recalling:

I have seen changes in students’ behavior when a certain student is moved between one teaming classroom group to the other, for example, Roger. He was moved from Mrs. Smith’s Red group to her Blue group. He blossomed behavior-wise just being with a different group! It was amazing the change in this kid. This was only possible because his teachers team-taught. If they didn’t, he would have been stuck with the same kids he was having problems with before, and he would never have had the chance to do as well as he did once he was with a new group of kids. (specialist non-teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010)

Behavior management benefits like this were possible only because there were two classes available to this student.

Having students move between groups also benefited them by giving them experience with the predominant model encountered in middle and high schools. Teachers from this school, throughout the year, continually visited the local middle school and had observed the transition experiences of former students: “Students with experience in teaming classrooms make the transition to middle school easier than students with no experience in a teaming classroom” (teacher survey response, June 2010). “Students benefit from an established routine, and I think it prepares them for middle school models,” commented another teacher (survey response, June 2010). The principal also noticed students from teaming classrooms “making an easier transition into middle school” (personal communication, June 3, 2010) because of their previous experiences. Moreover, “students also have opportunities to learn from people who teach in different ways which supports models used in middle and high schools” commented a teacher (teacher survey response, June 2010). Exposing students to

limited classroom changes through Apple's teaming model gave those students similar experiences to middle school class transitions.

When students from both teaming classrooms and non-teaming classrooms were surveyed, all students from teaming classrooms preferred being in those classrooms, although not all students from the two non-teaming classrooms surveyed preferred being in non-teaming classrooms (see Figure 4). At least half of the students in the non-teaming classrooms reported that they would prefer to be in teaming classrooms. Dugan and Letterman (2008) similarly found that students preferred team-taught classes that featured truly collaborative teaching methods. The content specialist teaming model required teachers to collaborate for the benefit of their students. It was apparent in the survey data that both teaming and some non-teaming students placed value on the collaborative system used by teaming teachers at Apple Elementary.

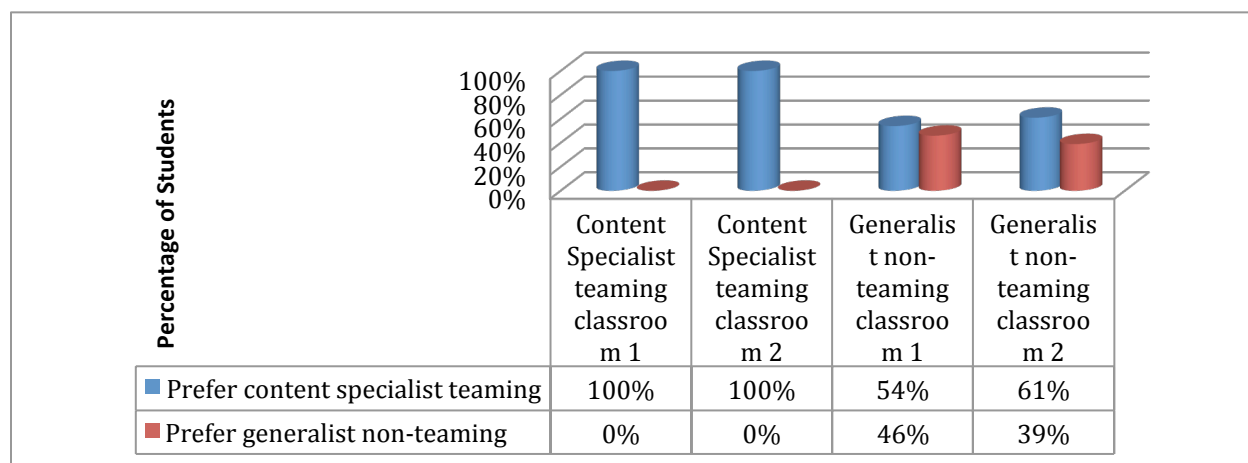


Figure 4. Survey results of students showing preference toward content specialist teaming classroom v. a generalist non-teaming classroom. Source: Student surveys, May/June 2010

Students valued the opportunity to have teachers with more proficiency in the areas they were teaching: “Having two teachers [allowed me to] get to know all the subjects more in-depth” (teaming student, personal communication, May 26, 2010). A student, in an interview, expressed appreciation for being able to capitalize on his teacher’s level of expertise, saying, “I like that the teachers teach ‘their’ subjects. Teachers can mess up when they have to teach everything. I feel more comfortable my teachers won’t mess up when they only teach ‘their’ subjects” (teaming student, personal communication, May 28, 2010).

Having two teachers allowed for differences in teaching styles in presenting information which students in non-teaming classrooms were not able to experience. Some students reported a preference for two content specialist teachers because of the availability of different teaching styles, one commenting on a survey, “I would want two teachers because they teach in different ways, and both ways [may] work for me” (non-

teaming student, personal communication, June 1, 2010). Buckley (2011) also reported that differences in perspective spark interest in the curriculum and prevent student boredom. "I like getting to have different lessons with different teachers" (teaming student, personal communication, June 1, 2010) another student commented, adding that the best part of having two teachers was "getting to do different activities in both rooms" (teaming student, personal communication, June 1, 2010).

Having two teachers allowed for two different people to be available when a student needed help: "When I only have one teacher, there is not as many people to help you" (non-teaming student, personal communication, June 1, 2010), a student commented. Another student similarly said: "It's hard having only one teacher. We all have to share her, so not everyone would get the help they need. If we had two teachers, we would have more help" (non-teaming student, personal communication, June 1, 2010). "I like having two teachers because I can get help from them both, not just one teacher, when I need it" (teaming student, personal communication, June 10, 2010) an additional student mentioned. Having more than one teacher available to students was a benefit noticed by students from both teaming and non-teaming classrooms.

According to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Apple Elementary had the highest percentage of free and reduced lunch rates in its district, suggesting that many students had needs other than academic. The more positive role models they had in their lives, the closer those other needs came to being met. It was important to the teachers at Apple Elementary that not only were the academic needs of their students met but also the other needs required of the kind of population they taught. One teacher pointed out:

There are two sets of eyes on all of the kids. One teacher can pick up on different things about different kids, and there is less chance one of us will miss something. This is really useful especially with the population we work with considering all of the Child Protective Services' issues we come across. (survey response, June 2010)

"It also allows [a] teacher to share ideas and concerns with another teacher who knows the students" (teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010), another teacher shared. Having the ability to collaborate about students with someone else who also knew them personally allowed teachers the ability to address needs in a manner that might enhance learning. With two available teachers, "at least one teacher can connect with a student" (teaming teacher, personal communication, May 29, 2010), one of the teachers commented. It was important to the teachers, families, and students when there was even "one more committed adult in their [students'] lives" (survey response, June 2010). This evidence led to the following assertion of findings:

The positive attitudes both students and teachers felt toward the content specialist teaming model demonstrated non-academic benefits to students in the participating classrooms that were less available to those the non-participating classrooms.

Teacher Investment and Benefits

The research I reviewed indicated that teaming worked best when the teachers were fully invested in making it work for the benefit of the students. My data made evident that the teaming model worked at this school because the teachers valued the process involved in making it work and the benefits for students.

Research suggested that the following considerations contributed to the success of this model. The ability to collaborate regularly, to share a teaching philosophy, to create a consistent environment for students between two classrooms, and to have regular and ongoing communication were all key pieces suggested by the research for creating a successful teaching team (Kloo, 2008; Licitra, 2009; Stewart & Perry, 2005; Gerretson, 2008; Dugan & Letterman, 2008; Abdallah, 2009). I noticed a correlation between the literature and the comments the teachers made in my surveys and interviews. One teacher commented, "I know there are teams at our school who are working very well together and who make great teams. Third grade is working well, and fifth grade does reading and math teaming that is working really well also" (survey response, June 2010).

Research indications that collaboration was important were confirmed by my survey data. One teacher remarked that the teaming model "is effective as long as the two teachers involved have sufficient time to collaborate" (survey response, June 2010). One teacher commented about utilizing "time to collaborate with the other teacher regarding behavior [and] parent issues. It's not just one teacher's perspective but two" (teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010). Another teacher pointed out that "the load for decision-making is shared, especially with behaviors and areas where you are making more subjective decisions" (survey response, June 2010), suggesting that, when the collaboration was beneficial, it became much more than just discussing curriculum. Both teachers knew the students personally and could make joint decisions about them as a team, similar to the decision-making process parents may share with their own children, and benefitting from "a built in support system" (teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

One teacher pointed out that "teaming require[d] teachers to be very organized" (non-teaming teacher, personal communication, June 10, 2010). A high level of organization appeared helpful when coordinating all of the pieces necessary for creating a successful teaming situation. The principal of Apple Elementary commented that she noticed:

Teachers have more focused planning time [using the content specialist teaming model] and more time for material selection for lessons. I see teachers honing their skills and blossoming in their areas of expertise because they are team-teaching and have the extra time. (personal communication, June 3, 2010)

When the teaming teachers were able to focus on what they could do to benefit students, it appeared the model worked well for everyone. A support teacher who worked in multiple classrooms commented, "I think team-teaching here works well. I

think, for the teachers, it is helpful to be able to 'specialize' and focus on a smaller amount of content. I think having extended blocks of time to combine subjects is beneficial to all” (personal communication, June 2010).

In teaming situations, “instruction is benefited when the teachers who are part of the team work well together” (teacher survey response, June 2010). On surveys, several teachers noted the importance of the model working well “if both teachers have a similar style and expectations” (survey response, June 2010). “I would team-teach if I felt the teammate and I shared common management styles and shared similar beliefs about workshop” (survey response, June 2010), one teacher commented. In this way, my data confirmed the research reviewed which identified a priority on similar philosophies, management styles, discipline methods, and even schedules (Gerretson, 2008; Abdallah, 2009; Kloo, 2008).

Some negative concerns were raised about teaming being confusing for students and/or parents. One teacher commented, “I can see [switching between two teachers] being somewhat confusing for students, but they generally understand and do well after a few weeks of trying it out” (teaming teacher, personal communication, May 29, 2010). A student brought up, “I wouldn’t want to go back and forth between the two rooms” (non-teaming student, personal communication, June 2010). Also, decisions as to which teacher in the team should converse with which parents was handled by one team this way: “[We] just tell parents at parent-teacher conferences to contact the homeroom teacher. It just makes it easier that way. If the concern the parent has is about content the other teammate teaches, I just tell the parent I will talk with [my teammate] and call them back” (teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010).

Another teacher commented that one of her reasons for being apprehensive about using the teaming model was that she felt her transitional bilingual students would have a hard time getting used to another language model (i.e., another teacher's speech), and they may get confused which might negatively impact their language development (non-teaming teacher, personal communication, June 10, 2010). Hoffman and Dahlman (as cited in Abdallah, 2009) argue that, the more exposure students have to the English language being modeled, the better. More exposure to higher levels of vocabulary and to a variety of speech and language patterns by native English speakers will benefit these students (Abdallah, 2009). Being in a content specialist teaming classroom offers another opportunity for exposure to rich language from an experienced native English speaker who can intentionally guide those students.

In conversation, one teacher brought up the concern that content specialist teaming might limit the bond students need with their teachers (non-teaming teacher, personal communication, June 10, 2010). Another indicated feeling the opposite and commented, “I see my bond with my classes as strong as ever, even when I was only teaching one class” (teaming teacher, personal communication, June 3, 2010). A student communicated an equal bond with both teachers: “I get two very nice teachers” (teaming student, personal communication, May 25, 2010). Commented another, “This

year I have two really nice teachers, and I feel comfortable with both and talking to both” (teaming student, personal communication, May 28, 2010).

Similar to the teacher-student bond, one teacher commented that having only limited time with one group would negatively impact classroom community (survey response, June 2010). “I worry about the things that get lost by not having an always intact community” (teacher survey response, June 2010), was a comment from another teacher. A different teacher commented about loving team-teaching because “my teaching partner and I combine some class [times]” (teaming teacher, personal communication, May 29, 2010). A student commented, when asked about a preference regarding classroom placement, “I would like to stay in this class because there would be more kids in one whole group than one whole place” (teaming student, personal communication, June 2, 2010). “I really like that I get to meet new kids because we switch all the time. We have a bigger group of kids than other teachers” (teaming student, personal communication, May 28, 2010), commented another student. A student who indicated preference for a teaming classroom commented, “I would have more opportunity to have more friends” (non-teaming student, personal communication, May 3, 2010). The students in the teaming classrooms at Apple were not lacking in sense of community because of the efforts of their teachers to create community between both classes as a whole.

On the teacher survey, teachers were asked whether, given a choice, they would choose to teach using the content specialist teaming model. More than half of responding teachers answered they would prefer to use this model (see Figure 5). They also explained why, saying, “It is such an incredible growth opportunity” (survey response, June 2010), and “I wish more teachers had the opportunity to use the model” (survey response, June 2010). One teacher commented, “I think the model benefits both students and teachers at our school” (survey response, June 2010).

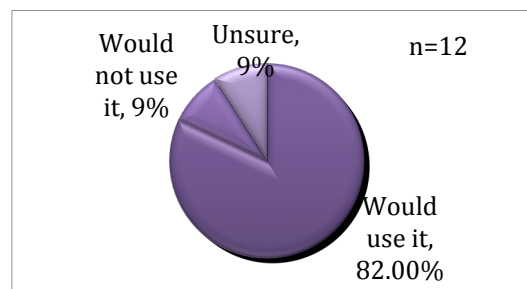


Figure 5. Teachers’ preference using the content specialist teaming model or not (regardless of experience). *Source:* Teacher surveys, June 2010

When the teachers involved in the model put in the effort to make the model work for the benefit of the students, this model was shown to have academic and social results in this situation. This evidence led to the following assertion of findings:

The content specialist teaming model had positive academic and social results at Apple Elementary School when the two teachers involved were professionally attuned to making it work to benefit the needs of the students involved.

Conclusion

When I began this research project, I honestly felt that I would not find any benefit from content specialist teaming other than that the model was easier for teachers due to the fact that it had made planning much less complicated for me. I assumed students benefited whether instruction came from one teacher in a traditional elementary classroom situation or from multiple teachers in a teaming situation. While that attitude helped ward off any researcher bias associated with the fact that I preferred using the model I was also studying, what I found surprised me. For students as well as teachers at Apple Elementary, the content specialist teaming model was more beneficial in many areas than the traditional generalist non-teaming model. To determine the generalizability of my findings, large-scale research as well – as academic data other than test scores – is needed.

I believe that nearly all teachers want what is best for students. Through this research project, I found evidence that the teaching model I currently use actually worked for not only teachers but also for students. Learning that students in non-teaming classrooms would prefer to be in teaming classrooms especially supported my decision to continue teaching using the content specialist team-teaching model. I felt that it was not only my choice but also my students' preference. I remembered one student's comment: "I would want to stay in a class that had two teachers because, if you have two teachers, they both watch you and take care of you" (teaming student, personal communication, June 6, 2010).

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Appendix A
CONSENT/ASSENT FORM

Greetings! This is an invitation to participate in a project study to determine how our teacher teaming model is working here at [REDACTED] Elementary. Your participation is very important to help determine the benefits of this model with our students. The project will involve:

- (1) 20 minute one-on-one interviews with students about the teacher teaming model used at [REDACTED] Elementary
- (2) 30 minute one-on-one interviews with teachers about the teacher teaming model used at [REDACTED] Elementary
- (3) surveys for teachers and students about the teacher teaming model used at [REDACTED] Elementary

Participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to participate (or allow your child to participate) in some parts of the study but not others, if you wish. There is no penalty whatsoever for not participating. All responses will be completely confidential – pseudonyms (fake names), but no real names will be used in reporting. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study, you may call me at (360) 604-6975 or email me at kathryn.reid@evergreenps.org. Please retain the top portion of this invitation for your records and information. Please return the bottom portion of this invitation with your signature by June 8, 2010 by returning it to school with your child or to my box in the office.

Thank you!
Katy Reid
(360) 604-6975

***** PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY, DETACH, AND RETURN *****

Parents and guardians of participating children

I consent to have my child, _____, participate in the project study of the contents specialist teaming model at [REDACTED] Elementary, including (please check all your child may participate in):

- interview
- audiotape of interview
- survey

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Participating students

I consent to participate in the project study of the content specialist teaming model at [REDACTED] Elementary including (please check all you are willing to participate in):

- interview
- audiotape of interview
- survey

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Participating adults

I am a: parent, teacher, school administrator.

I consent to participate in the project study of the content specialist teaming model at [REDACTED] Elementary, including (check all you are willing to participate in):

- interview
- audiotape of interview
- survey

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Non-participation

I do not wish to participate in the study.

I do not wish to have my child, _____, participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Appendix B

Разрешение на участии в исследовании (форма).

Здравствуйте! Мы приглашаем вас принять участие в проекте по изучению влияния модели учительского группового обучения в Начальной Школе [REDACTED]. Ваше участие очень важно для нас, т.к. мы хотим выяснить положительное влияние модели обучения на наших учеников. Проект включает в себя:

- (1) 20 мин. один на один интервью с учеником о модели обучения в школе [REDACTED].
- (2) 30 мин. один на один интервью с учителем о модели обучения в школе [REDACTED].
- (3) анкетирование учителей и учеников о модели обучения в школе [REDACTED].

Участие в нашем проекте по желанию, вы и ваш ребёнок (ваши дети) можете принимать участие частично или полностью в исследовании. Если вы решите не принимать участие в исследовании, мы с уважением отнесёмся к вашему решению. Все ваши ответы на наши вопросы будут полностью конфиденциальны, мы будем использовать только вымышленные имена в нашем докладе. Если у вас возникнут какие либо вопросы по проекту, вы можете звонить мне по телефону: (360) 604-6965 или писать мне на мой электронный адрес: kathryn.reid@evergreenps.org. Пожалуйста, сохраните верхнюю часть этого письма/формы для информации. Пожалуйста, заполните нижнюю часть формы и верните в школу не позднее 7 мая, 2010 года.

Спасибо,
Katy Reid
(360) 604-6975

***** Заполните печатными буквами, и верните нижнюю часть формы *****

Родители и опекуны участвующих детей:

Я разрешаю моему ребёнку, _____, участвовать в проекте по изучению влияния модели группового обучения в Начальной Школе [REDACTED] (отметьте всё, в чем ваш ребёнок согласен участвовать):

- интервью
 запись на аудиокассету
 анкетирование

Роспись: _____

Ф.И. _____

Участвующие ученики:

Я согласен участвовать в проекте по изучению влияния модели группового обучения в Начальной Школе [REDACTED] (отметьте всё, в чём вы согласны участвовать) :

- интервью
 запись на аудиокассету
 анкетирование

Роспись: _____

Ф.И. _____

Участвующие родители или опекуны:

Я являюсь: ___родителем, ___учителем, ___школьным администратором.
Я согласен(на) участвовать в проекте по изучению влияния модели группового обучения в Начальной Школе [REDACTED] (отметьте всё, в чём вы согласны участвовать):

- интервью
 запись на аудиокассету
 анкетирование

Роспись: _____

Ф.И. _____

Не участвующие:

- Я не желаю участвовать в проекте.
 Я не разрешаю моему ребёнку, _____, участвовать в проекте.

Роспись: _____

Appendix C
FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO/APROBACION

¡Buenas! Los estamos invitando a participar en un proyecto de estudio para poder determinar de qué manera está funcionando el modelo de trabajo en equipo con maestros aquí en la escuela primaria [REDACTED]. Su aporte es de suma importancia debido a que nos ayudará a establecer los beneficios del modelo para con nuestros alumnos. El proyecto incluirá:

- (1) 20 minutos de entrevistas personales con los alumnos relacionados con el modelo de trabajo en equipo con maestros que se utiliza en la escuela primaria [REDACTED]
- (2) 30 minutos de entrevistas personales con los maestros con respecto al modelo de trabajo en equipo con maestros que se utiliza en la escuela primaria [REDACTED].
- (3) encuestas tanto para los alumnos como para los docentes acerca del modelo de trabajo en equipo con maestros que se utiliza en la escuela primaria [REDACTED]

La participación es totalmente voluntaria y ustedes podrán optar si desean colaborar (o si autorizan a su hijo/a a que participe) en alguna parte del proyecto, si es que así lo desean. La no participación no acarrea ningún tipo de infracción. Todas las respuestas se mantendrán de manera confidencial – al realizar el informe se utilizarán pseudónimos (nombres ficticios), pero no nombres verdaderos. Si tienen algún tipo de consulta o inquietud referente al estudio, podrán comunicarse conmigo llamando al (360) 604-6975 o enviándome un correo electrónico a kathryn.reid@evergreenps.org. Por favor quédese con la parte de arriba de la invitación para guardar en sus registros y tener la información. Por favor devuelva la parte de abajo de la invitación firmada antes del 7 de mayo de 2010 y devuélvala a la escuela ya sea con su niño/a o deposítela en mi casillero.

¡Gracias!
Katy Reid (360) 604-6975

***** POR FAVOR ESCRIBA PROLIJAMENTE EN LETRA MOLDE, SEPARE Y DEVUELVA EL PAPEL *******

Padres y tutores legales del niño/a que participa

Presto mi consentimiento para que mi hijo/a, _____, participe en el proyecto de estudio sobre el modelo de trabajo en equipo con maestros en la escuela [REDACTED], que incluye (por favor marque todas las áreas en las cuales participará su hijo/a):

- entrevista
 entrevista en cinta de audio
 encuesta

Firma: _____

Nombre en letra molde: _____

Alumnos que participan

Presto mi consentimiento para participar del proyecto de estudio sobre el modelo de trabajo en equipo con maestros en [REDACTED] que incluye (por favor marque todas las áreas en las cuales participará):

- entrevista
 entrevista en cinta de audio
 encuesta

Firma: _____

Nombre en letra molde _____

Adultos que participan

Soy: padre/madre, maestro/a, administrador de la escuela.

Presto mi consentimiento para participar del proyecto de estudio sobre el modelo de trabajo en equipo con maestros en [REDACTED] que incluye (por favor marque todas las áreas en las cuales participará):

- entrevista
 entrevista en cinta de audio
 encuesta

Firma: _____

Nombre en letra molde: _____

No deseo participar

No deseo participar del estudio.

No deseo que mi niño/a, _____, participe del estudio.

Firma: _____

Appendix D
Interview Protocol Questions (Teacher)

Interviewee: _____ Date: _____

Category: _____ Grade level: _____

1. Do you currently teach using the content specialist teaming model used at our school?
2. How did you make the decision to teach using the teaching model you currently use?
3. Do you have any opinions about the content specialist teaming model being used at our school?
If so, what are they?
4. Why do you feel that way?
5. Do you see this model having any benefits for our school?
6. Do you see this model having any negative affects?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix E
Interview Protocol Questions (Specialist)

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Category: _____

1. Do you currently teach using the content specialist teaming model used at our school?
2. How do you feel about working with teachers who do use the teaming model?
3. How do you feel about the content specialist teaming model being used at our school?
4. Why do you feel that way?
5. What benefits do you see this model having for our school?
6. Do you see this model having any negative affects?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about the content specialist teaming model being used at our school?

Appendix F
Interview Protocol Questions (Principal)

Interviewee: _____

Date: _____

Category: _____

1. How do you feel about the content specialist teaming model at our school overall?
2. Are there any grade levels you would not support content specialist teaming at? Why?
3. Do you feel it is a model that it is beneficial to students? What are the benefits you see?
4. Do you see any negative effects of content specialist teaming?
5. Is content specialist teaming a model you would recommend for other schools? Why or why not?
6. Is there anything else you would like to share about the content specialist teaming model being used at our school?

Appendix G
Interview Protocol Questions (Student)

Interviewee: _____ Date: _____

Category: _____ Grade level: _____

1. Do you currently have one teacher or go between two teachers and two classrooms?

2. How do you feel about that? What do you like or dislike about it?

3. If you could have your way, would you rather be in a classroom with one teacher all day, or spend half the day with one teacher in one classroom and half the day with a different teacher in a different classroom? Why?

4. What do you think would be the best parts about having one teacher all day long? The worst parts?

5. What do you think would be the best parts about having one teacher in one classroom for half the day and a different teacher in a different classroom for the second half of the day? The worst parts?

6. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

Appendix H
Survey Questions (Student in a teaming classroom)

Date: _____

Please circle what grade you are in right now.

K 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th

1. What have you liked about having two teachers teach you in different classrooms?

2. What have you not liked about having two teachers teach you in different classrooms?

3. Would you like to be in a class where you had two teachers and two classrooms again? Why or why not?

4. If you could be in a class that had only one teacher and one classroom, would you want to be in that class or stay in a class like what you had this year? Why or why not?

5. Is there anything else you would like to share? Please use the back of the paper also if you need more space.

Appendix I
Survey Questions (Student in a non-teaming classroom)

Date: _____

Please circle what grade you are in right now.

K 1st 2nd 3rd 4th 5th

1. What have you liked about having only one teacher teach you all subjects in one classroom?

2. What have you disliked about having only one teacher teach you all subjects in one classroom?

3. If you could be in a class that had two teachers that taught you in two different classrooms throughout the day, would you want to be in a class like that? Why or why not?

4. If you had the option to be in a one teacher/one classroom class or a two teacher/two classroom class, which would you choose and why?

5. Is there anything else you would like to share? Please use the back of the paper also if you need more space.

Appendix J

Survey Questions (Teacher)

1. What grade level do you teach?
 - a. Kindergarten
 - b. First
 - c. Second
 - d. Third
 - e. Fourth
 - f. Fifth
 - g. Specialist

2. What are your opinions about content specialist team teaching in general, whether you have chosen to teach using our school's teaming model or not?

3. Do you currently use the content specialist team teaching model being used at our school?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

4. Why did you make that decision?

5. Have you ever had the chance to use the content specialist team teaching model in the past?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

6. If you have chosen to team-teach in the past but have not continued to, why did you make that choice?

7. Do you feel there are any benefits at all to team-teaching (whether you have had to opportunity to use the model or not)?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

8. What might those benefits or non-benefits be?

9. If you ever had the choice to team-teach (regardless of your current teaching situation), would you choose to team-teach using our school's model? Why or Why not?

10. Do you have any other thoughts or feelings that you would like to share about the team-teaching model being used at our school?