Engaging with WIDA Co-Teaching Cycles:
An Insight to Action Research

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How do teaching faculty at HKA engage with the co-teaching cycle to support multilingual learners?

Literature Review

'Co-planning is a process that supports the consistent, high-quality implementation of standards-aligned language, literacy, and core content curricula while allowing general education teachers and instructional specialists to coordinate and refine their plans for instruction and assessment. Creating the logistical support for collaborative planning must be a top priority: administrators must consider all the creative ways to provide opportunities for teachers to work together for a sustained amount of time, on a regular basis, with clear goals and agendas in place.'

Teachers should address the following during coplanning:
- "Review the target standards and core curricular goals
- Establish learning objectives and instructional procedures for reaching those objectives
- Target the academic language development of all learners, with special attention to ELs/MLs and other speakers of nonstandard English
- Integrate Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals into their lesson plans
- Determine appropriate modifications and adaptations that will offer the necessary support to students who need them
- Agree on formative assessment tools to be used to inform their instruction"

(Hongisfeld & Dove, 2022)

'The simple placement of two teachers in the same classroom does not constitute an instant teaching partnership.'

'...emphasise the need to engage in a complete instructional cycle of collaboration, which consists of for interrelated phases: collaborative planning, instruction, assessment, reflection. All four phases together will maximise teacher effectiveness and impact on EL's language acquisition, literacy learning and content attainment.'

(Dove & Hongisfeld, 2018)

'In co-teaching, there is no distinction between the EL teacher and the general education teacher; both work with the entire class on mastery of content and language-acquisition objectives.'

(Marietta & Brooker, 2011)

Methodology

- Mixed Method - Quantitative (survey) + Qualitative (interview)
- Survey to Primary and Secondary teachers Pre-K to Grade 12
- 45 responses
- 7 interviews in Primary School (2 class teachers, 2 specialist teachers, 2 co-teachers, 1 learning support teacher
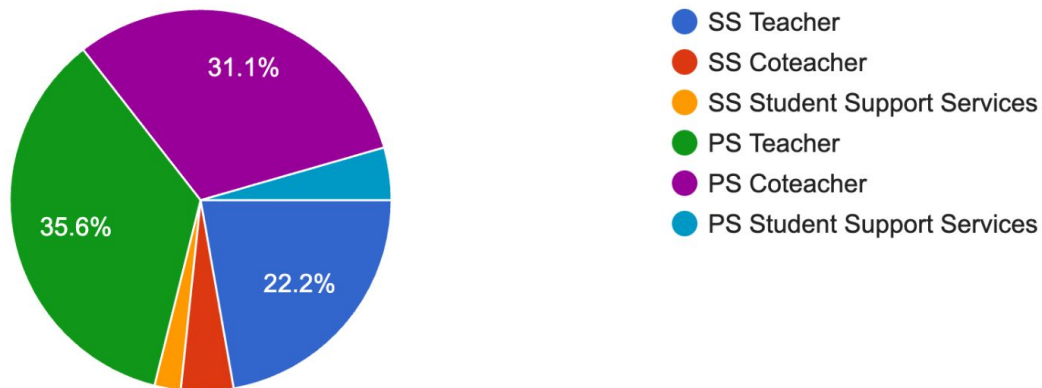- 5 interviews in Secondary School (4 Teachers, 1 Learning Support Co-Teacher)

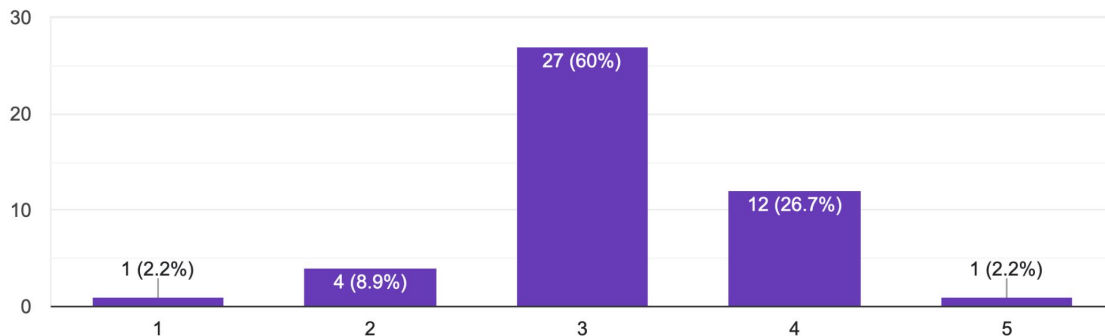# Findings

Which department do you work in?

45 responses

- SS Teacher
- SS Coteacher
- SS Student Support Services
- PS Teacher
- PS Coteacher
- PS Student Support Services

31.1%

35.6%

22.2%

Participants

How successful do you feel you have been implementing the collaborative instructional cycle (co-teaching cycle) with your team?
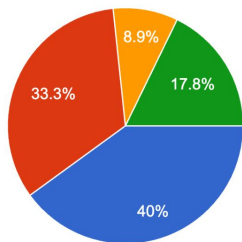
45 responses
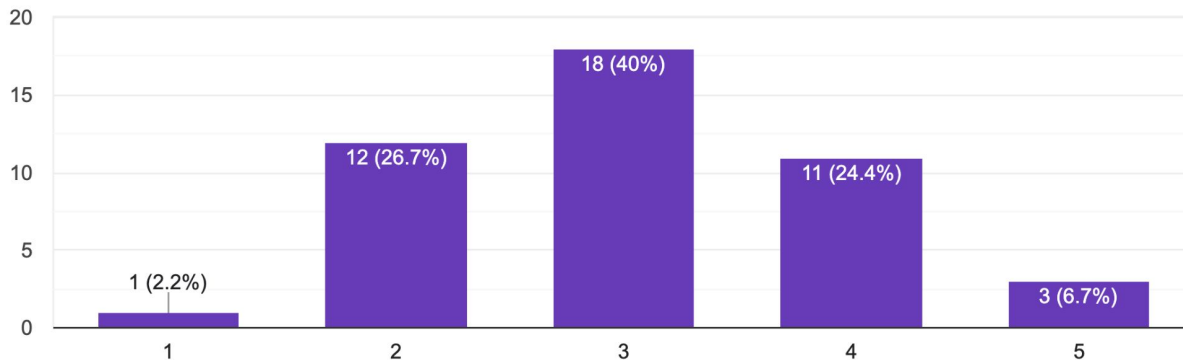
Overall Feelings

Survey Findings: Whole School

Which phase of the cycle do you feel most successful in?
45 responses

- collaborative planning (co-planning)
- collaborative instructional delivery (co-teaching)
- collaborative assessment of student learning (co-assessing)
- collaborative reflection (co-reflecting)

8.9%
33.3%
17.8%
40%

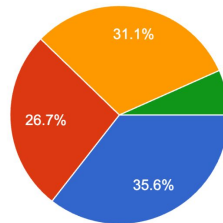## Which phase of the cycle do you most want to improve?
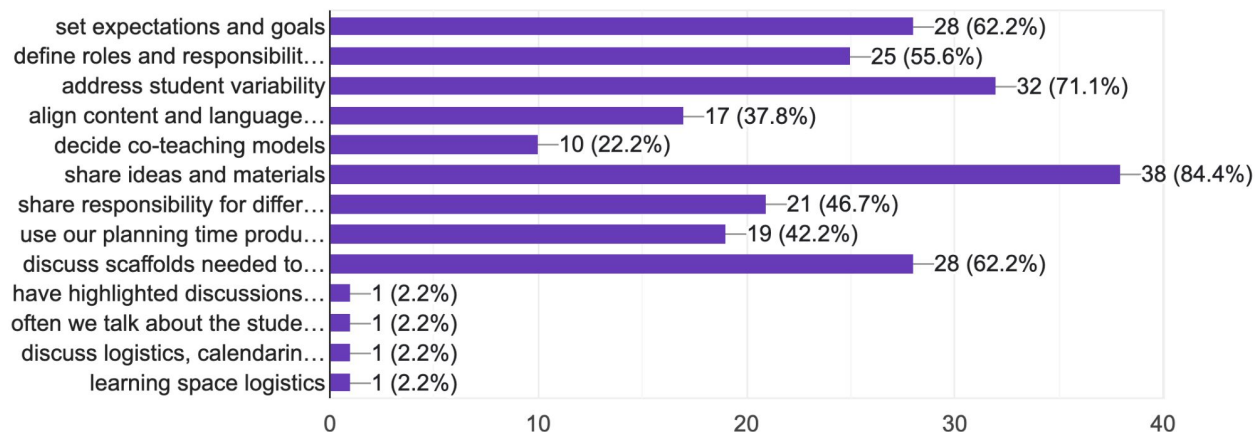45 responses

- collaborative planning (co-planning)
- collaborative instructional delivery (co-teaching)
- collaborative assessment of student learning (co-assessing)
- collaborative reflection (co-reflecting)

31.1%
26.7%
35.6%

Overall Feelings

Survey Findings: Whole School

During the collaborative planning (co-planning) phase, do you: (please select all that apply)

45 responses

Category	Value
set expectations and goals	28 (62.2%)
define roles and responsibilit…	25 (55.6%)
address student variability	32 (71.1%)
align content and language…	17 (37.8%)
decide co-teaching models	10 (22.2%)
share ideas and materials	38 (84.4%)
share responsibility for differ…	21 (46.7%)
use our planning time produ…	19 (42.2%)
discuss scaffolds needed to…	28 (62.2%)
have highlighted discussions…	1 (2.2%)
often we talk about the stude…	1 (2.2%)
discuss logistics, calendarin…	1 (2.2%)
learning space logistics	1 (2.2%)

Collaborative Instructional Delivery- Co Planning
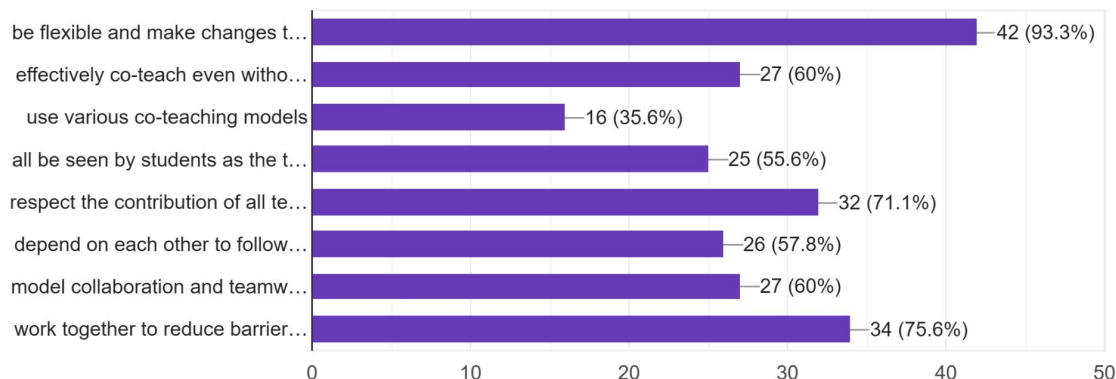
Sample responses:

- In an ideal world, co-teachers should also be contributing to planning but this means having teachers unpack units of study with the team beforehand before the planning time. This has not been happening due to time constraints.
- More collaborative time to be able to share co-teaching models.
- We generally plan for management of behaviour/learning support more than EAL support. There is more of a focus on that than on EAL strategies.
- During EAL co-planning we often discuss the needs of the learners and the best ways to support them during lessons. I have found planning approaches to be flexible and I feel that EAL staff are often flexible in their approach and value our input as co-teachers.
- I hardly ever am included in planning meetings with teams, so co-planning that occurs is often ad-hoc in specialist class rather than in dedicated meeting time.
- Align content and language goals
- Collaborative instructional delivery to support different learning styles/ needs seems to happen naturally during instructional time/ mini lessons. Looking to make the co-planning part more explicit and embed it as part of planning time.
- There is only one departmental planning period every other week, and this is also used for other activities as required by faculty management.

Collaborative Instructional Delivery- Co Planning

During the collaborative instructional delivery (co-teaching) phase, do you: (please select all that apply)

45 responses

be flexible and make changes t…	42 (93.3%)
effectively co-teach even witho…	27 (60%)
use various co-teaching models	16 (35.6%)
all be seen by students as the t…	25 (55.6%)
respect the contribution of all te…	32 (71.1%)
depend on each other to follow…	26 (57.8%)
model collaboration and teamw…	27 (60%)
work together to reduce barrier…	34 (75.6%)

Collaborative Instructional Delivery- Co Teaching
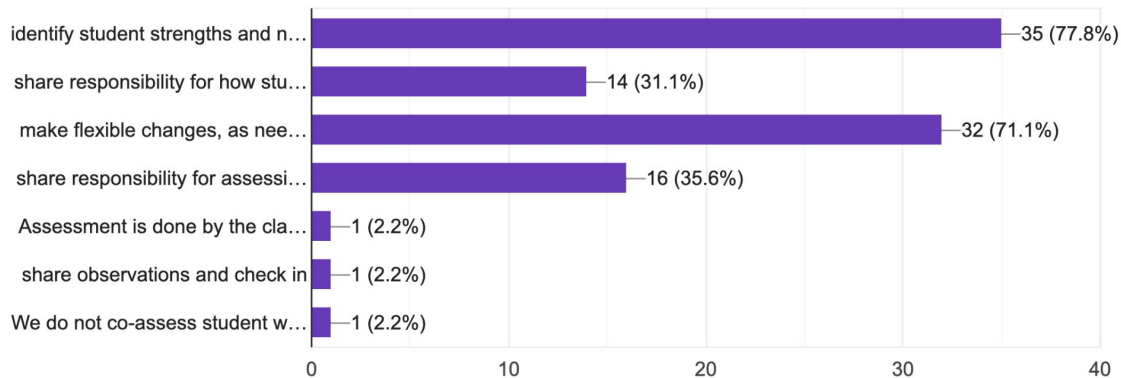
Sample responses:

- Whole class instruction is done my the class teacher for the first 10-15 minutes. For the rest of the class, the co-teacher and the class teacher circle around the room equally for one-on-one instruction.
- Many on our team are aware of various models or delivery types, but we don't often plan and use them (yet)
- Thinking out loud to model questioning and idea sharing
- I love co-teaching and wish it could be more effective with better planning and also having more time to co-teach, one or two ad-hoc lessons a week doesn't really amount to much.
- I find that I'm most effective at co-teaching when there is an agreed upon plan in place, and not-so well when a lesson is improvised.
- with more guideline plan in place, the co-teaching part can become more effective (still need to be flexible though)
- We try to work together in class, but as classroom teacher I take on the majority of content delivery
- It would be good to be able to be trained on how to co-teach the EAL model

Collaborative Instructional Delivery- Co Teaching

Survey Findings: Whole School

During the collaborative assessment of student learning (co-assessing) phase, do you: (please select all that apply)

45 responses

Response	Count
identify student strengths and n...	35 (77.8%)
share responsibility for how stu...	14 (31.1%)
make flexible changes, as nee...	32 (71.1%)
share responsibility for assessi...	16 (35.6%)
Assessment is done by the cla...	1 (2.2%)
share observations and check in	1 (2.2%)
We do not co-assess student w...	1 (2.2%)

Collaborative Instructional Delivery- Co Assessing
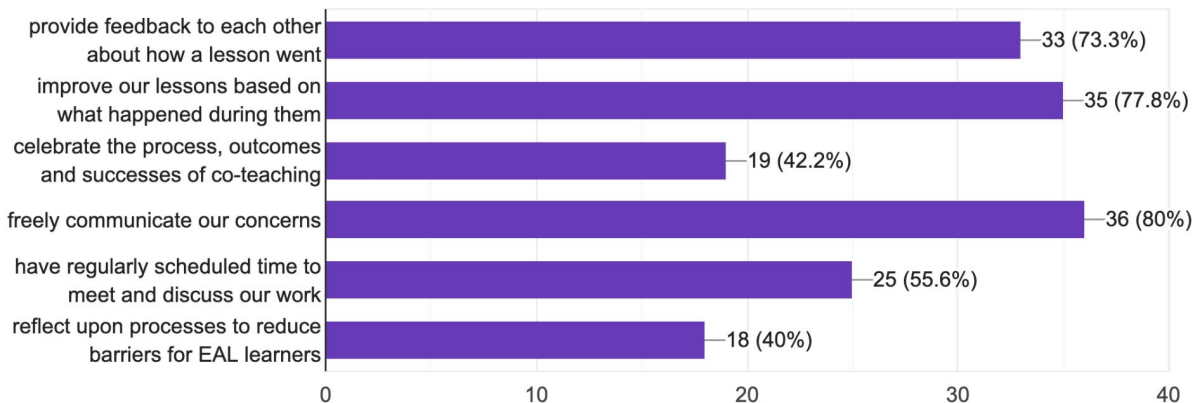
Sample responses:

- Co teachers help with seesaw posts and writing individual comments but homeroom teachers do all the other assessments.
- I do very little formal assessment in my role.
- We are flexible, but we always know who is supporting who before the lesson starts.
- It would be good to co-create success criteria before lessons but otherwise we work together and reflect together.
- More training needed for co-teachers in specific assessments.
- should set guideline and goals ahead of time, decide roles and responsibility, then touch based and co-reflect as a team
- Can also use more collaborative time to look at assessments to address needs and future planning
- All assessment defined & carried out by class teacher

Collaborative Instructional Delivery- Co Assessing

Survey Findings: Whole School

During the collaborative reflection (co-reflecting) phase, do you: (please select all that apply)

45 responses

Category	Value
provide feedback to each other about how a lesson went	33 (73.3%)
improve our lessons based on what happened during them	35 (77.8%)
celebrate the process, outcomes and successes of co-teaching	19 (42.2%)
freely communicate our concerns	36 (80%)
have regularly scheduled time to meet and discuss our work	25 (55.6%)
reflect upon processes to reduce barriers for EAL learners	18 (40%)

Collaborative Instructional Delivery- Co Reflecting

Sample responses:
- Usually after classes, the co-teacher would stay behind and have conversation about the lesson's progress overall.
- Have a time to reflect on the effectiveness of the new activities we are implementing. For the different targeted skills, it would be constructive to be able to assess how holistic the different skills are and be clear on the learning outcomes.
- Informal reflections are more frequent than formal/scheduled reflection time with a grade-level or class team.
- As we have high collaboration across the grade, if a lesson was first in the other class we will let them know if it went well or if changes should be made. Almost immediately if their lesson is next.
- We have to prioritize our time, so it is usually brief conversations on the go as well as our limited collaborative time together.
- Never enough time for formal reflecting - usually done verbally on the fly

Collaborative Instructional Delivery- Co Reflecting

Interview Findings: Primary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
1. Time Scarcity	• Insufficient dedicated planning time • Time to think about roles and responsibilities • Desire for dedicated time	"Ongoing and regular times to reflect on co-teaching models, roles, what teams might want to try." "There isn't enough time to think about roles and responsibilities in the classroom." "Morning time is golden time to set up for co-teaching. How can we assess our efficiency with morning duties?" "We don't have enough time to plan out units so everyone knows what they are doing."

Interview Findings: Primary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
2. Planning Structures	- Better planning structures are needed for successful collaboration - Time should be given for collaborative planning	"Collaborative planning is hard. Would like structure, uniformity, clarity in roles." "Better structures are needed for us to be successfully collaborating." "Have all grade levels follow a co-planning, c0-reflecting routine for collaboration similar to how we curriculum map." "…use shared planning documents."

Interview Findings: Primary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
3. Professional Development	- Need for ongoing training - Allocating PD time to focus on collaboration - Upskilling all teaching faculty	"We need some ongoing training on collaborative planning." "Building capacity in teams- Can we use more Wed PD time for coaching co-teachers?" "We need to use planning sessions and PD Wednesday more effectively to allow for collaborative planning." "We should have time at the start of the year to plan for collaboration."

Interview Findings: Primary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
4. Teaching Faculty Experience	- Continuity of Teams - Maintaining Staff	"Continuity of teams would allow for more successful collaboration." "The success of collaboration is down to teacher experience." "Continuity of teams would greatly support co-teaching cycle (forming, storming, norming, performing)." "How can we retain co-teachers? Can we explore improving the co-teacher package?"

Interview Findings: Primary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
5. Role Ambiguity	- Unclear role boundaries - Student perception of teacher roles - Subject knowledge limitations	"Having a LS / EAL teacher feels like the EAL students get a bit forgotten. It would be better to have individual roles in each grade level." "Sometimes co-teachers don't know what to do whereas the LS / EAL teachers come in and work with students straight away." "LS / EAL teachers are co-planning well but co-teachers need more training to do it well."

Interview Findings: Primary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
5. The Phases of the Collaborative Instructional Cycle	- Planning is most successful - Instructional delivery often means stations or parallel teaching are the default - Reflection and assessment are happening the least.	"Co- planning is going well, co-teaching- trying out different things." "Co-planning both formally and informally are going well. The delivery, reflection and assessment are not so strong." "Small groups work best or two teachers teaching the same lesson in two groups." "We often reflect and assess but don't replan in response to this." "Never enough time for formal reflecting - usually done verbally on the fly." "Informal reflections are more frequent than formal/scheduled reflection time with a grade-level or class team."

Summary of Key Findings:

The data shows that teaching faculty in the primary school generally know how the collaborative instructional cycle should work but finding the time and knowing exactly who does what makes it hard to put into practice. Collaborative planning is happening however there isn't enough time to do this would like to.

Right now, the most common way to collaborate is through station or parallel teaching.

Teachers have said they want more planned time to collaborate, where they have planning structures in place to organise themselves to follow the collaborative cycle. They also feel they need clearer roles outlined. When collaboration does work well, it clearly helps multilingual learners by giving them chances to hear language again, getting different kinds of help, and having changes made to how they are assessed.

Primary School

Interview Findings: Secondary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
1. Time Scarcity	- Insufficient dedicated planning time - Ad hoc collaboration - Last-minute planning - Desire for dedicated time	"Time is the number one thing" "Often I find myself only discussing with the teacher on the fly because of limited time" "We have no actual time to work together at all scheduled" "I would love to see more of the Wednesday time besides 45 minutes every other week dedicated to collaboration"

Interview Findings: Secondary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
2. Informal or Reactive Collaboration	● "Collaboration" usually occurs through unstructured and spontaneous interactions	"We're talking about it maybe the night before when I share a document and say, oh, this is what we're doing tomorrow" "Most of our time is just anecdotal checks in the corridor" "We don't actually go through a proper process" "It's not collaborative. It's me saying, oh, this is what we're doing"

Interview Findings: Secondary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
3. Role Ambiguity	- Unclear role boundaries - Student perception of teacher roles - Subject knowledge limitations - Parallel teaching as default	"I haven't necessarily worked in the capacity where teachers have that particular label. And so I guess I sometimes I'm unclear on what roles are required" "Co-teachers in the classroom may also feel like they are not aware of where they can intervene" "It builds up a reluctance for me to go into that [EAL] group, because I see how those students react to me as the voice that just drones on in English very, very fast. And so when I do go over to work with the students, they look at me like - You go away. Miss [EAL teacher] is our person, right?" "I'm not a specialist in any of my subjects... so trying to coach in a class where you don't know the subject, like the material, you can't ask offhand questions/answer some of the questions because you don't know them."

Interview Findings: Secondary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
4. Need for Professional Development	- Need for refresher training - Onboarding challenges for new staff - Gap between theory and practice - Basic awareness of the model but lacks confidence in implementation	"We were provided several trainings during my first year and second year. I don't think they did it this year" "For new teachers to the school, there should be some sort of framework for the first six weeks" "I feel like there's no very targeted time that is intentional just for learning support" "I would love to see a refresher course like first aid every three years"

Interview Findings: Secondary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
5. ML support/Strengths in the collaborative cycle	● Effective co-reflection ● Successful differentiation ● Collaborative assessment	"I think for us, we think similarly. We have similar relationships with the students as well, and I know for some of these things, whether it's a behavioral issue all the way through to theory - we're able to discuss along the way what we could do different next time." "We typically do meet about once a week. Sometimes it's every two weeks. And what we do is focus on the students that are a higher tier. And we think about differentiating not only instruction, but also assessment." "Having an individual who can slow it down with them, and who can actually have that repetition of language helps a lot" "I think we challenge each other's ideas a little bit about how we want to get students to a particular benchmark. We're good at creating task sheets together and task specific criterion, and then also particularly good, I think, with moderation of assessment or standardization."

Interview Findings: Secondary School

Common Themes	Description	Responses
6. Valued Qualities in Collaboration	● Openness and transparency ● Shared responsibility ● Flexibility ● Mutual respect	"I think that if they even see a better way of doing something, particularly if they're working with students, they may know them even better than I would." "I think we're very flexible, and you just have to respond to the moment, and some of our students in particular that are Tier 5 and above, it's hard to know what space they're going to be in. And so we have to meet them where they're at." "I think we challenge each other's ideas a little bit about how we want to get students to a particular benchmark."

Summary of Key Findings:

The data reveals that while teachers generally understand the collaborative instructional cycle in theory, implementation is hindered primarily by time constraints and unclear role expectations. The most successful aspects of collaboration occur when teachers have physical proximity (same staff room), dedicated meeting times, and clear communication channels.

The parallel teaching model (content teacher with whole class, support teacher with specific students) dominates current practice, with limited examples of true co-teaching.

Teachers consistently expressed a desire for more structured collaboration time, clearer role definitions, and systematic approaches to implementing the collaborative cycle. The benefits for multilingual learners were evident when collaboration was successful, particularly in providing language repetition, differentiated instruction, and assessment modifications.

Secondary School

Discussion

How are these findings relevant to other school contexts?

These findings suggest important actions for schools with strong desire to implement a strong integrated content and language learning environment across the curriculum for multilingual learners.

In schools with strong desire from stakeholders to implement and engage in the co-teaching cycle, successful implementation will be limited without sufficient time, clarity, structure, and upskilling.

Discussion

How is this research important to the field?

This research project represents a data point of attempted implementation of strong collaborative models with the intent of creating classroom environments that are inclusive for all learners with particular focus on multilingualism. The findings suggest and reinforce the need for intentionality and support at the systems design level in order for implementation to be successful.

There is a possibility for further research in the field on identifying and testing a change process for schools designing more collaborative classroom environments for diverse learning needs.

Discussion

We can consider the following broad actions to support and advance teacher collaboration for multilingualism at HKA:

Prioritize Scheduled Collaboration Time

- Ensure teams have regular and consistent time with relevant members of their collaboration team

Clarify Roles and Responsibilities

- Facilitate teams in defining their roles and responsibilities in collaboration (enhance co-reflection)

Formalize Collaborative Structures

- Support teams to build routines and habits
- Provide sample templates / models for teams to consider when forming at the start of the year

Expand Co-Teaching Models

- Upskill faculty in additional one or two group co-teaching models

Highlight and Share Successes

- Create opportunities for celebrating effective collaboration
- Highlight model co-teaching

Recommendations for HKA

Bibliography

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