CIDDL Research and Practice Brief 12 Interview Transcript

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Nicholas Hoekstra: hello, and welcome to the CIDDL research and practice brief series, my name is Nicholas Hoekstra. The purpose of this series is to have conversations about the innovative use of technology in special education, early childhood education, related services and leadership personnel preparation programs. Today we have with us as our guest expert Dr Peggy Weiss, associate professor in the Division of Special Education and Disability Research in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. Dr Weiss is going to discuss with us some of her research around effective models for co-teaching, how to better prepare educators for co-teaching in the field, and how technology can supports support co-teaching. So welcome Dr Weiss Thank you so much for joining us.

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Margaret Weiss: Thank you for having me; i'm really looking forward to this.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: Great. Well just to get started um could you walk us through a little bit about what co-teaching is and and perhaps why it is important in today's classes to support students? Sure, so co-teaching is not something new; it's been around for quite some time. it's just sort of evolved, I think, and how we use it, how we do it,

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Margaret Weiss: and what our expectations are about it. So, essentially, co-teaching is a special education service delivery model, and I think that's probably the nugget of information that we all need to keep in mind as we're having this discussion is that it's about delivering services for students with disabilities who've been identified and given IEPs. So, as such, the whole idea of co-teaching is really how are we going to get students with disabilities their services. And really, it's bringing together of two experts to deliver the services: one in learning and special education, which that's your special education teacher in the classroom, and one whose the content expert, the general education or the general curriculum instructor: whatever the level, whatever the content area. So you have these two experts working together to provide instruction that meets the needs of all the students in an inclusive classroom. So You are going to have a wide range of students an inclusive, in an effective inclusive classroom: students with disabilities, students who may be struggling, students whose English is their second language, students who are what we call average peers. You're going to have a wide variety of students in these co-taught classes and the idea is that you've got two experts from different arenas that can bring their expertise together to deliver quality instruction. And that's really why it can be very critical to help support all kinds of students in inclusive classrooms today.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: Great, and what would you say are the important elements that need to be present to ensure that co-teaching is successful?

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Margaret Weiss: Well, you know, like I said, co-teaching has been around for quite some time and one of the things that has captured people's attention, and that we've really spent a lot of energy and focus on is the relationship between the teachers. It's been described as a marriage or, you know, some other type of relationship, which, which is fantastic. But in reality that relationship between teachers is really a means to an end. And the end is providing quality instruction. And that's really where my research has been focused. It's not really that you're doing co-teaching, it's the quality instruction that's going on because of co-teaching. So I like to think about co-teaching as the product of co-planning, co-instruction and co-assessment. You can't have quality co-teaching without any of those factors. Like you have to have all three. So for co-teachers, it really requires understanding each person's expertise and what they bring to the table, The role they're going to take in the classroom, and in planning and in assessment, and the expectations that everybody has for that. What's the expectation of those teachers, the students, the parents who who want that service delivery model, the administrator, all those in the school building, and then collaborating together to capitalize on all these different pieces. So that kind of is a little bit about co-teaching in general, but thinking about these different components. Co-planning means that planning actually happens. both teachers understand the learning objectives that they're trying to accomplish and they determine the best way to go towards those objectives: How are we going to do this? What are we trying to accomplish? Co-instruction, which is really where I spend a lot of my time working with teachers and doing research, means that the content teacher focuses on the general curriculum learning objectives and the evidence based practices of that discipline - whether we're talking about a third grade reading class or we're talking about US history in high school -the general educated really focuses on what are those objectives, what is that curriculum, and using evidence based practices from that discipline. The special educator focuses on two components within that structure. Number one is making that instruction - what the general educator brings to the table - helping to make that instruction accessible to students with disabilities. So everybody in the class has the same objectives for learning, but we need some, we need to modify it in some way, we need to use the evidence based practices, high leverage practices, that we have in special ED to make it accessible to our students with disabilities. Faculty teaching learning strategies, while we're teaching content, it could be teaching the use of graphic organizers to better organize information, providing more opportunities to respond, more practice, more specific feedback. So that's one component that a special educators is bringing: taking what what the learning objectives are for everyone and making them successful. The second part of the special educator's job during this co-instruction is to deliver specially

designed instruction. And so remember back, I said that this is a service delivery model, right? Well, one of the things that's guaranteed to students with disabilities is this SDI. Instruction that they need for their unique needs. So that's the other obligation that a special educator has in this classroom is How can he or she deliver specially designed instruction so that that student with disabilities can meet their IEP goals. This is the component we see least often happening in co-taught classrooms, and the area that I work so often with with teachers. It's not not everybody gets everything the same in a co-taught classroom , so we really have to figure out the time, the way that we can deliver those, those, that specially designed instruction. The final element is, of course, that co-assessment. And that really is: teachers are collecting and evaluating data about student performance, and then they're using that data collaboratively to guide instruction. So they may set up their classroom in a variety of different ways when they know they have to reteach, or when they have to when they want to do extension activities based on what their understanding is of how the students are progressing. None of these things can happen, I want to be really clear that we're probably talking a lot about instruction because that's my area of focus - none of that can happen without the support of administrators and clear expectations as to what co-teaching is supposed to be about. I just want to add that piece.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: Right, it's it's a systems approach; it's not a, it's not two individuals.

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Margaret Weiss: Right right.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: Great, and I guess, so this, That being said, this becomes a very complex question, but could you touch upon a little bit on how do you think we can better prepare preservice educators for co-teaching in the field, and obviously this, this is probably going to happen at a couple stages, but what are your what is some of your advice on preparing educators?

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Margaret Weiss: Well, Nick, do you have another hour and a half? So, I think this is one of the areas of disconnect. And I have a colleague, Wendy Rodgers - she's at VCU - she and I do a lot of work in teacher classrooms and one of the things we hear over and over and over again is this, this, I call it a disconnect, where teachers have heard, been in professional development, learned in their preservice programs about the six approaches to co-teaching. So they've learned about: this is station teaching, this is parallel teaching, this is one teach one assist; these are all fantastic ways that you can organize co-taught classrooms, but they're grouping strategies. They are not the essence of co-teaching. They're just great opportunity that you can rearrange your classroom because you've got two adults who are trying to teach the students and you don't have that in singly taught classrooms. So, you've got these unique grouping strategies that you can use in this co-

teaching environment, but if we really try to teach preservice and in-service teachers that the objective of co-teaching is to include those three elements I talked about, quality general ed. construction, making whole group or general curriculum instruction accessible, and delivering SDI, we can clearly articulate to teachers that that is the purpose of co-teaching and needs to be part of all of your instruction, all of your planning, and all of your assessment, I think we'll go really far down the path of preparing preservice teachers to exist And to do well in a co-taught setting. I think the the other piece that we really have to spend some time and focus on in terms of preparing our preservice teachers, both general and special ED, and in professional development, is we really need to talk about what is the expertise that a special educator and and, on the other side, a general educator, what are the areas of expertise that they bring to the classroom? We we've done some research on on special educators and their identities. Like, how can you articulate to someone what it is that your area of expertise is? What do you know about yourself that, when you walk in and tell somebody what you do, what do you say to them? And oftentimes what's happened in our research is that we've seen special educators trying to be general. And that came out of, at one point in time, we were really worried about both teachers have to look the same, they have to act the same, they have to... we can't We don't want to be able to tell who the special educator and who the general educator was. And that really put special educators at a disadvantage because they weren't trained in the content, they were trained in areas of how do I reach really tough learners. So if we can, if we can help teachers understand the value they bring and their unique Expertise that they bring to a co-teaching situation, negotiate between the two, and then figure out how to hit these three elements in their instruction, I think we'll be able to really prepare them to use the six approaches and meet the needs of the students that they work with.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: Now that all makes sense, it sounds like it's more than, it's more than just about teaching about the model it's about teaching people to draw upon their strengths and to collaborate on these on these three elements that you've mentioned.

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Margaret Weiss: The reality is - sorry to interrupt - but the reality is it's not just "we're in the classroom togetehr" it's the quality of instruction that's being delivered. And that's that's the crux of it all.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: Right, right. And so obviously, part of our center's focus is on the use of technology. Could you kind of discuss with a little discuss with us a little bit how can technology be engaged to support co-teaching in these, in these three phases: in planning, in instruction, and in assessment?

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Margaret Weiss: Well, I think that's a great great question because, like I said, co-teaching has

been around a long time. I did it a long time ago and it was really hard without technology. Honestly, I can't imagine doing anything without technology, and more particularly after the pandemic. We talked with teachers and we've gotten great ideas from teachers in how to use technology. For example, in co-planning, the ability to share documents. Whether you are doing things like, doing lesson planning in Google docs, or, or we often use at Mason we have a Microsoft Office suite, so you can share on One-Drive and things like that. There are also access to shared presentation platforms Google Slides, Pear Deck, Nearpod; there's, you know, Zoom conferencing like we are doing, so you don't have to stay after school necessarily or all have to be in the same place at the same time. So you have all kinds of options for planning and and for actual instruction. You also have all of the options now that are available through the variety of learning management systems that the schools are using - Blackboard, Schoology, Canvas - they all provide things like instant access to student performance. So we could be on a zoom call and both pull up, you know, grades or, or even an assignment that a student has turned in and talk through "What do we see are some of the errors? What are we seeing as some of the successes? What do we need to do next?" So we can pull up student materials, we can communicate between each other within these platforms, we can even communicate with parents. It's all there and it just kind of requires co-teachers to develop some routines and procedures for doing what they need to do, right? Like, Okay, so i'm going to communicate with student A, B, C, and D's parents this week on the performance that we just talked about, on their final project, and you can do Students F, G, H, and I. And it all can be right there and you still have all of that documentation as well because you'll get a copy of that email automatically from the learning system. So, They're just a huge number of options to support the work that you need to do as a co-teacher.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: That sounds like, a lot of it to, it, it really helps with... I know i've seen a lot in, A lot of information about just the the difficulties that teachers have in just finding that time to collaborate together; finding that that space of time where two different teachers who both have very busy schedules are both available. But it sounds a lot like what you're saying with the the benefit of these technologies is they provide that space where you don't necessarily need to be both online, at the same time, always. You have chances where you can work on shared documents, work on work on shared platforms, that maybe helps people find those those abilities to collaborate where before they couldn't.

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Margaret Weiss: Absolutely, I think, shared documents are critically important, so one teacher can post the lesson plan and another teature can go in and comment, you know, at a totally different time. It really gives the option of people being flexible in their timeframes, yeah. We don't all have to sit around the table together and still be able to

communicate really well.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: Great. And finally, my last question, which I think is really pertinent for what we've lived for the past couple years is how can co-teaching be used in synchronous and asynchronous instruction?

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Margaret Weiss: Yes, the pandemic taught us a lot. um, I think one of the things that that was really interesting to me is again, talking with teachers and finding out how they were actually using and structuring thier co-teaching, You know, during all of the, whether it was hybrid instruction, synchronous instruction, asynchronous instruction, they had to do it all. Some of the things we learned, particularly for synchronous instruction; we just talked about all kinds of different technologies that could be used in synchronous instruction, right? Like you can be co-creating or co-constructing documents with students, just like you could be with with teachers, right? So you can use these multiple technologies. We also found that co-teachers were able to use breakout rooms, so instead of, you know, having to reorganize the classroom and hearing all the noise from all the different groupings, you can actually do all the groupings - like station teaching, parallel alternative teaching - in breakout rooms. Which meant fewer distractions, of course, you always you know, is that student really there or is it just their camera or just their their image. But we really, teachers used a lot of the breakout rooms that would allow them to to have smaller groups or break students into smaller situations, and even if the students were actually working together in breakout rooms, teachers could go in and out of those rooms really easily. So that was one of the things that that was done quite effectively. Co-teachers were also able to collaborate on instruction by one checking in on students using chat box using the chat room feature, right? So they could individually check on, just like in the in the one-teach-one-assist in person kind of situation, but in this way, nobody even knew that the teacher was checking in on the individual students, using the chat room feature. One could instruct or be talking while another annotated slides while they were talking, filling in guided notes, you know, so they could actually be co-instructing given all the different ways that you can do; I'm thinking particularly zoom, right? Or in any of these learning... like blackboard has collaborate, you can do all of these things. You can annotate, you can share screen, you can do all those things that two people can host so they can they can actually be using the shared screen and annotate it, creating a strategy like how am I taking notes while this teacher is talking. And then the students can actually see that. So we found a lot of really fun, really effective things like that going on in the synchronous instruction. For asynchronous instruction, we also kind of saw teachers as almost dividing and conquering in a lot of you know, because asynchronous instruction really takes a lot of pre work, really building up those materials. So, having those two teachers provided an opportunity for creating videos to reteach. You know, once they got data about students not understanding or needing

more practice opportunities, one teacher could create some some videos or provide additional practice materials while the other was maybe grading or assigning different roles to manage discussion boards, or who to contact students to follow up. Some teachers began using Voicethread and also other multimedia feedback options so that the students were actually, you know, hearing their voices. And there were just many, many different options like that. But it also provided the opportunity for collaboration and division of Labor when the teachers were working together. In this case, they spent a lot more time with the planning aspect of it, because the delivery of instruction was completely sort of different in these asynchronous situations. So Those are just some of the ideas that we had when we were working with teachers and trying to come up with some solutions for how to make it all work during this pandemic time. But I think a lot of that is still being used for the day where they have asynchronous learning in various divisions of things like that.

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Nicholas Hoekstra: Fantastic. I think that's Those are all really, really interesting examples and it's nice to have a silver lining out of out of what we've learned over the past couple years in less than ideal circumstances so. Dr. Weiss, I want to thank you very much for your time today. It's been really interesting hearing about your work, we appreciate it. For more information about CIDDL research and practice briefs and other resources for higher education and related services, please go to ciddl.org. And don't forget to follow us on social media, subscribe to our channel and leave us a message. Thank everyone for joining us, and thank you again, Dr Weiss for your time.

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Margaret Weiss: Thank you, it was a great opportunity, I appreciate it.

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awesome.