The Inclusive Classroom: Providing Services to Students with a Variety of Needs
Lisa Labella
Wakefield High School
Arlington County (VA) Public Schools
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Abstract
With so much emphasis on inclusive education and team teaching in today’s field of special education, it seems obvious that this model can be used to address the needs of a variety of students. This paper examines the commonalities between the instructional needs of special education students and language minority students in the general education classroom. Some instructional and team-teaching techniques are discussed, as is some of the research that has recently been done in this area. The results of a survey given to students in team-taught classes provide some insight as to how students view this model.

Introduction
As a special education teacher working, for the first time, as part of a co-teaching model with special education students in mainstream classes, I have become increasingly aware of the unique position I am in to influence both teaching and learning. Having spent many years in the self-contained classroom, with a rather homogeneous population of students, this opportunity to compare and contrast the styles, needs, strengths and weaknesses, attitudes and work ethics of a wide range of students has been eye-opening. Wakefield High School has made a strong commitment in the past few years to inclusive education, providing team-taught, or “50/50” classes in many of the core subject areas, to include many of the higher-functioning learning disabled students who had previously been instructed in self-contained special education classes. (50/50 refers to the make-up of the teaching team, not the make-up of students in the class.) This model has provided these general and special education students’ access to two teachers, one of whom is a content area specialist, the other of whom is a specialist in the process of learning and learning differences.

Special education students in the mainstream come arrive in class with a set of classroom and testing accommodations that are individually designed to enhance their chances for success in this more challenging, but less-restrictive learning environment. Special education co-teachers arrive with a list of these students and their needs, and a cache of strategies that can be used to improve comprehension, organization, on-task behavior, follow-through, etc. In an effective co-teaching situation, the special education teacher has the liberty to assign independent work; pull out struggling, identified students for more intensive, individualized instruction; and issue independent incentives and consequences, etc. The potential of the IEP, with respect to maximizing possibilities for student success, is limitless.

Special education students are not, however, necessarily the students with the greatest obstacles or learning difficulties at our school. Wakefield High School, and the south Arlington community it serves, is wonderfully, culturally diverse. According to October, 2002 Civil Rights figures, with 1611 students, the demographic breakdown for the 2002-2003 academic year was as follows:
Non-native English speaking students, though provided with intensive support through the HILT (High Intensity Language Training) program in their first few years, must master the objectives for the state standardized tests (Standards of Learning) within a very short time upon entering the public school system. Without the benefits of the individualized education plans and the formal support provided to special education students and, in many cases, without the benefit of a U.S.-educated family member at home, non-native English speaking students face daunting obstacles to academic success.

These two groups of students, HILT and special education, struggle in mainstream classes due to the pace of instruction and quantity of material presented. Instructional strategies in the areas of vocabulary acquisition, organization of information, and multi-modal learning have been proven to increase comprehension and information retention. It seems clear that the role of learning specialist will be in even greater demand than planners envisioned.

As a member of Wakefield’s Language Minority Teacher Induction Program team, I decided to look at my role as the “process” person in the classroom to see if the support that I provide for special education students could be equally beneficial to the HILT or former-HILT students in my classes. Although my co-teacher and I implement many of the strategies and modifications across the board, for the benefit of all students, I focused my attention primarily on the responsiveness and progress of the HILT and special education students.

At the end of the school year, I created a survey for all students who were enrolled in Wakefield’s 50/50 classes and all teachers who were teaching them. My goals were to find out how effective these classes were, how the students and teachers perceived them, and which strategies and methodologies were thought to be most helpful. This information will be used for my school Professional Development Plan next year, which will attempt to make the 50/50 instructional model more effective for all students.

Connections to the Literature

Not a great deal has been written on the subject of using inclusive special education classes to reach non-native English speaking students, though, from my experience, there is an unmistakable sense in the schools that ESOL and HILT teachers are not eager to have their students grouped with special education students. Similarly, special education students are not eager to be grouped with ESOL or HILT students. It is my impression that these attitudes are based on unfortunate stereotypes and on a pervasive intolerance that exists in today’s public schools.

In my efforts to find articles on this subject, I sent an e-mail message to Erik Jacobson, a Harvard researcher and the author of a paper entitled, “Learning from Inclusion,” which described an inclusive education situation for adult ESOL students, as part of the Haitian American Public Health Initiative. Mr. Jacobsen replied,
Unfortunately, I cannot point you in the direction of any research that looks at inclusion with ESOL students. It has been a few years since I was actively looking at that topic, but at the time I couldn't find anything in the literature. The lack of such research, in fact, convinced me that using inclusion with ESOL students was something that needed to be explored further. I must say that I am happy to hear that you are working in this area. I think it is crucial, and will help to reform the field in the future. Good luck with your work (E. Jacobsen, personal communication, Winter 2003).

Mr. Jacobson’s article described a class for young adults, where “traditional” ESOL students were enrolled in classes with young adults with special needs. The goals of his inclusion model were threefold: that students’ English and literacy skills improve, that the students with special needs develop confidence in their interactions with others, and that the ESOL students develop a heightened sensitivity to individuals with special needs. Jacobson concluded that, “By focusing on skills rather than labels, and by being sensitive to interpersonal dynamics, I think our attempt at inclusion has been successful” (Jacobson, 2000, p. 2). His paper emphasizes the importance of employing all students as resources, utilizing their particular areas of strength. Further, he suggests that students cannot be placed in single, fixed categories, e.g. advanced, beginner, etc., since, in both of these populations, for example, someone who is a fluent and expressive speaker may be unable to write a coherent or grammatically correct sentence. Receptivity to a wide variety of growth, demonstrated in a variety of ways, is key to measuring the success or failure of an inclusion program.

Jennifer York-Barr, another researcher and associate professor of educational policy and administration, is a strong proponent of inclusive programs and instructional collaboration. In an article about team teaching, collaboration is described as being challenging but effective. It is said of York-Barr’s findings about teaching special education and ESOL students in an inclusive general education setting,

When collaborative instructional models are implemented well, many of these children can remain in general education classrooms and receive instruction appropriate to their individual abilities and needs...teachers with a variety of specializations – such as general educators, special educators and teachers of English Language Learners – can work together to accommodate a wide range of abilities and backgrounds (ResearchWORKs, 2003, p. 3).

York-Barr’s research shows that everyone benefits from the range of experience and expertise that is brought to bear by collaboration and team teaching.

In an article by the Hong Kong International School, an inclusion model for teaching ESOL is described as providing access to challenging content and interaction with English-proficient peers. It is their belief that the collaboration between teachers increases the effectiveness of the classroom. This article suggests that the instructional strategies that are designed to support second language learners, in fact, benefit all students. The following list from the HKIS article articulates the benefits of inclusion for all teachers and learners:
• It increases collaboration and negotiation
• It develops higher order thinking and problem solving
• It provides context for teaching cultural sensitivity
• It enables us to be teachers as learners and learners as teachers
• It provides a climate conducive to risk taking
• It gives students control of their own learning
• Students become active learners in a meaning-focused environment
• It encourages and mandates flexible, differentiated instruction
• It requires student self-assessment and self-monitoring
• Multilingualism draws together, rather than separates, the [our] school community (Hong Kong International School, 2000, p, 4).

Methods
Since this was only the second year of Wakefield’s commitment to inclusion, many of the teams of co-teachers were collaborating for the first time, some by choice, others by assignment. Common problems, such as finding planning time, defining the roles of the teachers, arranging the classroom to accommodate different groupings, etc. were being ironed out in classrooms throughout Wakefield High School. Different arrangements could be found throughout the building, depending on the personalities, teaching styles, subject matter and student make-up of each class. In some classes the students were aware that one teacher was a special educator while, in other classes, students never questioned the arrangement. The following is a list of various co-teaching models, compiled from our experience and the many lists that circulate around the internet and various collaboration workshops:

Models
• **Lead teacher/Assistant** – lead teacher provides instruction, co-teacher monitors for management and understanding (grazing !)
  o lead teacher is not necessarily the same teacher all the time, and not necessarily always the general education teacher
  o can provide individual attention, helps with classroom or behavior management
• **Parallel teaching** – each teacher delivers the same content to different groups
  o smaller groups enhance on-task behavior and allow for more individualized instruction
• **Multiple Groups** - two teachers teach different material, students rotate
  o similar to using learning centers or cooperative learning groups
  o one group can be an independent, non-supervised activity
• **Two Groups** – each teacher works with a separate group that is designated by skill and knowledge level
  ♦ special educator does not always work with lower ability group
  ♦ students benefit from exposure to both teachers
  ♦ teachers have the opportunity to work with entire range of content and student ability levels
• **Team Teaching** – Two teachers direct entire class, with one teacher leading the instruction and the other elaborating and interjecting examples
Strategies
Without exception, the special education teachers who were assigned to teach 50/50 classes at Wakefield this year had five or more years of successful teaching experience. HILT or former-HILT students were not identified in these classes until the end-of-the-year survey was given to assess the students’ views on the 50/50 experience. Many of the students had more than one 50/50 class on their schedule this year. Below is a list of many of the strategies that were used by special educators in these classes.

- Parallel note-taking
- Providing outlines
- Creating enrichment and supportive learning activities
- Creating vocabulary practice
- Putting lecture material on graphic organizers
- Answering individual questions during lecture or discussion
- Checking notebooks and assignment sheets
- Teaching organizational strategies
- Following up on unfinished work and missing tests
- Providing individual study practice
- Editing written work
- Recording information on to cassette tapes
- Holding seminars
- Creating study materials
- Modifying reading and written assignments
- Providing feedback to content teacher about amount of information and methods of delivery
- Alerting content teacher about difficult or confusing vocabulary or concepts
- Working with individual ability-based groups, using different materials
- Working with individual heterogeneous, groups on same content and materials
- Teaching and implementing reading and writing strategies
- Modifying tests
- Reading tests or problem test items
- Providing incentives to individual students
- Preparing and implementing behavior contracts

Results
Unfortunately, at this writing, the results of the Standards of Learning tests are not official and are, therefore, not available for publication in this paper. Based on our experience and on the unofficial test results, however, I am extremely confident that the test scores in my two 50/50 history classes will exceed those of last year, and possibly exceed our initial expectations. Students in our classes responded favorably to the high expectations, the numerous opportunities for practice and remediation, and the access to two different teaching styles.

The results of the end-of-year survey have been compiled and condensed below. A copy of the entire survey can be found in Appendix I.
Student Survey Results

♦ 277 total surveys completed in ******50/50, team-taught classes
♦ 228 non-HILT respondents, 49 HILT or former HILT respondents

**Areas of Instruction That Are Most Improved by Having Two Teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HILT / former HILT</th>
<th>NON-HILT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Answering specific questions</td>
<td>Group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 Projects</td>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 Homework</td>
<td>Answering specific questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Areas That Are Enhanced by Having Two Teachers**

- Note taking for lectures
- Research
- Personal Issues
- Use of technology
- Vocabulary Instruction
- Practice

**At-a-Glance Comparison of Results**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HILT</th>
<th>Non-HILT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two teachers are present in class each day</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers in the class share responsibilities</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers in the class cooperate and seem to get along</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having two teachers in the class is not a distraction</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both of my teachers are able to help me with organization</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both of my teachers are able to help me with content</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get more individualized help because there are two teachers</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If I had a choice I would select more team-taught classes</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

The results of the student survey suggest that non-native English speaking students view the team-teaching model even more favorably than do other enrolled students. They seem to view the relationship of the teachers in a positive light, and find value in having access to two teachers. An interesting finding, to me, is the difference in the number of students who would choose more team-taught classes if the option was available. A likely explanation is that many American students now understand that more than one teacher often indicates the presence of students with special needs. It is not unusual to hear such remarks as, “This is an LD class,” or “This is a stupid class,” if more than one teacher is in the room. Non-native English speaking students have not suffered the ill effects of this uninformed thinking. Fortunately, this type of comment and attitude was much less common this year at Wakefield, presumably due to the presence of multiple teachers in so many classes across so many disciplines. Surely, as collaborative teaching and inclusive education become more common, this type of stigma will lessen and disappear.

In conclusion, my experience suggests that there are many benefits of inclusive education for language minority, special education and, in fact, all students. The opportunities for differentiated instruction are clearly more numerous, as are the opportunities for specific strategy instruction. The opportunities for multi-modal instruction that meets a wide range of learning styles are greater, and the opportunities for individualized instruction are increased considerably. As school systems begin to recognize that students with learning differences and language minority students have similar needs that respond to similar teaching strategies, greater numbers of students will reap the benefits of co-teaching arrangements and the rewards will be experienced by greater numbers of students with a widening array of abilities and needs.

References


### Appendix I

This brief questionnaire is for all students who are in at least one class this year that is being team-taught by two teachers. These questionnaires are anonymous and will be used to improve instruction at Wakefield. Please be honest and thoughtful with your responses. If any of these questions do not apply to you, just write in, “NA.” Please feel free to comment further on any area of team-taught instruction on the back of this page. Thank you!!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are two teachers in my class each day.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teachers in my class share responsibilities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both of my teachers are able to help me with <strong>organization</strong> issues (notebooks, supplies, homework, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both of my teachers are able to help me with <strong>content</strong>.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I get more individualized help in my class because there are two teachers in it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers cooperate with each other and seem to get along.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having two teachers makes it possible to do more group work.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some teaching teams work better than others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>If I had a choice in the matter, I would select more classes that are team-taught.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Having two teachers in the room is a distraction to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>There is one teacher that I am able to work with better than the other.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I like having the choice of teachers to go to for help.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My teachers are able to exchange roles in the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My teachers bring different strengths to the classroom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am in the HILT program now or have been in the past 5 years</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Circle One**

1. How would you best describe the roles of your team of teachers?
   - Teacher/Teacher
   - Teacher/Instructional Assistant
   - Teacher/Behavior Manager

2. How do you think a team teaching situation should be?
   - Teacher/Teacher
   - Teacher/Instructional Assistant
   - Teacher/Behavior Manager

**Circle all of the areas of instruction that you think are IMPROVED by having two teachers:**

- Note taking for lectures
- Vocabulary Instruction
- Homework
- Group work
- Projects
- Practice
- Answering questions
- Personal issues
- Organization
- Research
- Use of technology
- Other