

# ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINEES' PERCEPTIONS OF CO-TEACHING

Bachelor's thesis  
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<p>Samanaikaisopetus (co-teaching) on erittäin ajankohtainen ilmiö tämänhetkisessä koulujärjestelmässä, koska kouluun kaivataan yhä parempia keinoja inklusiivisen kasvatuksen edistämiseksi. Samanaikaisopetusta on tutkittu Suomessa melko laajasti, mutta erityisesti valmiiden opettajien näkökulmasta ja opettajaksi opiskelevien, tulevien opettajien, näkemykset eivät ole juurikaan olleet tutkimuksen kohteina samanaikaisopetusta tarkasteltaessa.</p> <p>Tämän kandidaatintutkielman tarkoituksena oli selvittää englannin opettajaopiskelijoiden näkemyksiä samanaikaisopetuksesta. Tutkielman aineisto koostui 23 englannin opettajaopiskelijan vastauksista verkkokyselyyn. Opettajaopiskelijoiden vastaukset analysoitiin sisällönanalyysin keinoin.</p> <p>Vaikka opettajaopiskelijoiden käsitykset ja näkemykset samanaikaisopetuksesta vaihtelivat, heidän käsityksensä samanaikaisopetuksesta olivat lähinnä positiivisia. Lisäksi englannin opettajaopiskelijat kokivat, että yliopisto-opinnot eivät ole tarjonneet tarpeeksi tietoa samanaikaisopetusta, ja että tälle olisi tarvetta.</p> <p>Vaikka tutkielma on tietyltä osin rajallinen, sen tarjoamaa tietoa opettajaopiskelijoiden mielipiteistä voidaan käyttää aineopettajaopiskelijoiden opintojen kehittämiseen. Tutkielmaa voisikin jatkaa laajemmalla otannalla ja vertaamalla eri opettajaopiskelijaryhmien näkemyksiä samanaikaisopetuksesta.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Co-teaching is a teaching method where two teachers jointly instruct, plan and assess lessons (Friend et al. 2010:11). The interest toward co-teaching has grown in recent years, as it can provide a practical way to promote inclusion in education – when there is an extra pair of eyes and helping hands, students’ needs can be met better, and students regardless of their needs or background can participate in general educational settings. My interest towards co-teaching grew one night last January when I was browsing job advertisements for English teachers, and it caught my eye that many job advertisements in the Helsinki region mentioned that “they appreciate experience or knowledge in co-teaching”. This intrigued me, as a future English teacher, since I was not aware that co-teaching is a phenomenon that I should be aware of – the notion of co-teaching had not come up even once during my studies and I wanted to know more.

Co-teaching has been quite widely investigated during the recent years (Friend et al. 2011, Saloviita and Takala 2010, Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012, Murawski 2009, Blednick and Wilson 2011). However, previous research on this field has concentrated on teachers’ perceptions on co-teaching (Saloviita and Takala 2010, Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012) and has failed to consider perceptions of teacher trainees. As teacher trainees are teachers of the future, it is important to investigate what their views are on co-teaching and whether the notion of co-teaching is discussed in their studies. The aims of this study, therefore, are to acquire some insight on how English teacher trainees perceive co-teaching as a phenomenon, and to examine whether they feel that there is enough training offered on co-teaching in their studies. As knowledge of co-teaching is appreciated in the job market, this information can be useful for the university administrators and for fellow teacher trainees.

First, I will introduce and define inclusion and its impact on co-teaching practices. Second, I will discuss different definitions of co-teaching and explore what co-teaching is in practice. Furthermore, the possible benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching are discussed. Third, methods of data collection and analysis will be explained. Fourth, I will present the analysis, exploring how the participants of this study define co-teaching, what kind of perceptions they

have towards co-teaching and if they think that there is enough training offered on co-teaching. Lastly, conclusions are drawn based on the information gained through the analysis.

## **2 CO-TEACHING**

In this chapter I will briefly define and discuss the concept of inclusion, as it has had an effect on co-teaching practices. I will then focus on co-teaching, defining it briefly and introducing how co-teaching is implemented in practice. Lastly, I will discuss possible benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching practices.

### **2.1 The impact of inclusion on co-teaching practices**

Inclusion addresses and responds to the diversity of needs of all children and adults; it enhances their involvement and participation in their communities (UNESCO 2009:8). Thus, inclusion in education means all children should have access to education in their own communities and schools should meet the needs of all children, and especially those with special needs (UNESCO 2009: 8). According to Falvey and Givner (2005:3), inclusion in education means “schools create and provide whatever is necessary to ensure that all students have access to meaningful learning”. UNESCO (2009:8) suggests that this can be implemented by introducing modifications and changes in teaching approaches, content, structures and strategies. UNESCO (2009:9) claims there are several justifications for inclusion. Educational justification requires inclusive schools to develop ways of teaching that benefit all children. Secondly, inclusive schools are able to change attitudes and fight discrimination as all children despite their background or special needs are educated in the same school. This is also called as social justification. Thirdly, UNESCO introduces the concept of economic justification; inclusive schools are less costly to maintain than a complex system of schools specializing in different groups of children.

Indeed, UNESCO has been promoting inclusion actively since 1960 when they launched *The Convention against Discrimination in Education*. However, the major impetus towards inclusion took place in 1994 when UNESCO and 92 member countries signed the Salamanca Statement that calls education for all (UNESCO 2009:8). Since the launch of Salamanca Statement, there has been a drive to make educational practices and policies more inclusive

worldwide. This is the case also in Finland; inclusion is an official policy in the country (Pirttimaa et al. 2009:162, Ministry of Education 2007, Basic School Act 1998 and the Amendments 2010). However, even though there is a drive toward inclusion at policy level, there is a need for methods that enable true inclusion in schools. One of these possible methods is called co-teaching – it is seen as a way to promote inclusive education through enabling students with special needs to be part of mainstream classes without segregation.

According to Wilson and Blednick (2011:10), co-teaching aims to “provide an educational environment that emphasizes effective instructional practices through which all students learn and achieve success”. This definition is in line with the definition of inclusion, thus, co-teaching could be a great way to enable true inclusion in schools. Indeed, different organisations and countries suggest collaboration between teachers and co-teaching to be a way to promote inclusion. The European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (EADSNE) (2012) states that collaboration between teachers is essential for inclusive teachers and co-teaching is one way to do it. Moreover, the Finnish National Curriculum 2011 acknowledges co-teaching as a way to promote inclusion (Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012: 373). Furthermore, the new Finnish National Curriculum 2014 (2014:36) calls for collaboration between teachers and mentions that one way to create a sense of community in schools is using co-teaching as an approach to demonstrate what is a good co-operation like. Moreover, the Finnish National Curriculum 2014 emphasises cross-curricular learning, and co-teaching is suggested to be one way to implement it.

In short, as inclusion calls for education for all and demands teachers and schools to implement practices that enhance inclusion, co-teaching can be one possible solution for this.

## **2.2 Defining Co-teaching**

As I mentioned above co-teaching is based on co-operation. According to Friend et al. (2010:11) co-teaching, at its simplest, can be defined as two (or more) teachers partnering in order to jointly instruct a group of students with individual needs in general educational settings. Thus, co-teaching is also called collaborative teaching, team teaching, or cooperative teaching (Murawski 2009:9). However, regardless which term is used, all terms refer to collaboration between two educators. Indeed, two educators are needed for co-teaching, but who these two educators are varies depending on researchers’ opinions. Some researchers

define it to be the joint instruction of a general educator and a special teacher (e.g. Friend et al. 2010, Wilson and Blednick 2011) whereas others claim that co-teaching can happen between any two educators e.g. two subject teachers, or even other professionals (see. Beninghoff 2012.) Thus, co-teacher pairs can vary and can be constructed by different professionals. However, it is important that these two professionals who work together need to be equal i.e. a school assistant cannot be part of a co-teacher pair as s/he is not equally responsible for the instruction as two teachers are (Friend et al. 2010:11).

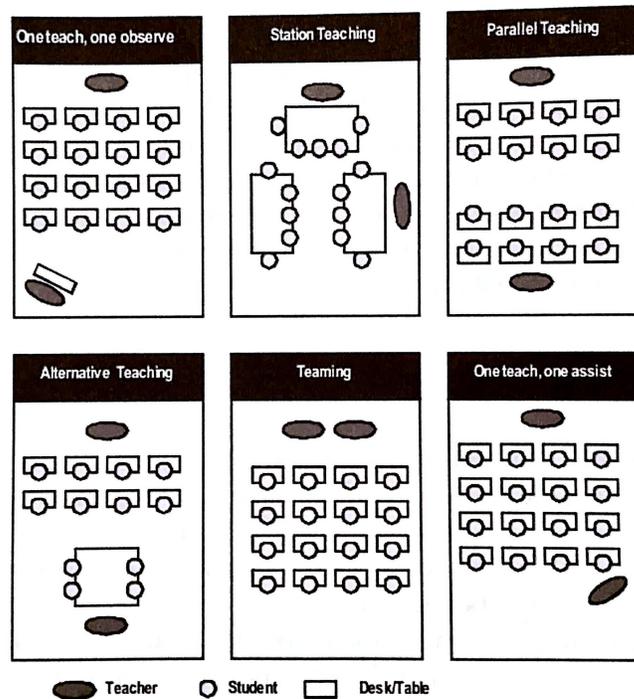
Co-teaching is often confused with general co-operation. That is why some researchers want to distinguish between co-teaching and for instance cooperative and collaborative teaching (Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012:375). Cooperative and collaborative teaching also include general co-operation between teachers, but in the end, the teachers have their own classes, whereas in co-teaching teachers share the same class. In addition, in co-teaching, teachers plan together lessons, jointly instruct during the lessons and also assess the students together. Thus, in other words, co-teaching includes co-planning, co-instruction and co-assessment (Murawski 2008, cited in Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012:375). As co-teaching requires two teachers to share responsibilities, co-teaching is often compared to a dating-relationship or even to a marriage (Murawski 2009, Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012:375). According to Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara, there are two reasons for this comparison. Firstly, for co-teaching to work teachers need to compromise and do teamwork. Secondly, teachers should be let to choose their own partners for co-teaching to ensure a good match between teachers.

### **2.3 Co-teaching in practice**

There are several approaches how co-teaching is implemented in the classroom, and here I present two different categorisations: one by Friend and Cook (2010, cited in Friend et al. 2010: 12) and another by Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2004, cited in Saloviita and Takala 2010:390). According to Friend and Cook (2010) there are six different approaches (See Figure 1): 1. One teaches, one observes, 2. Station teaching, 3. Parallel teaching, 4. Alternative teaching, 5. Teaming and 6. One teaches, one assists. In the first approach, one teacher focuses on instruction while the other observes what is happening in the classroom. In the second approach, station teaching, students are divided into stations and the teachers rotate between the stations helping the students. Parallel teaching means that the class is divided in

half; one teacher takes care of the instruction of one half and vice versa. In the fourth approach, one teacher works with most of the students while one teacher assists or teaches a smaller group that possibly might need more support. The fifth approach, teaming, is sometimes considered as the essence of co-teaching; in that approach teachers work as a team giving jointly instruction. And finally, the sixth approach, where one teacher teaches while the other circulates among the students helping them and offering assistance.

Figure 1 Co-Teaching Approaches (Friend and Bursuck 2009, cited in Friend et al. 2010:12)



The approaches of Villa, Thousand and Neville (2004) are quite similar to Friend and Cook's but there are only four approaches instead of six. According to Villa et al., *supporting teaching* happens when one leads the instruction while the other circulates among the students. The second approach they call either *station teaching* or *parallel teaching*. In this approach the teachers may rotate or may not between different groups of students i.e. this approach is a mix of Friend and Cook's second and third approach. In *complementary teaching* both teachers instruct the whole class but take separate turns. And finally, in *team*

*teaching*, both teachers share the same responsibilities and work as a team in order to support their students' learning.

## **2.4 Benefits of co-teaching**

Co-teaching benefits both students and teachers. From the teachers' perspective, there are many aspects of co-teaching which increase teachers' competence. Firstly, teachers report that sharing responsibility is empowering and co-teachers supporting each other might be a key in creating a positive teaching environment (Blednick and Wilson 2011:11, Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012:382). Secondly, according to Blednick and Wilson (2011:11), co-teaching can also be fun because of increased interaction and collaboration. This is in accordance with Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara's (2012:382) study's findings: teachers reported they felt that working together with another teacher was fun and energising, which promoted well-being and positive atmosphere at the work place. Thirdly, teachers report that co-teaching enhances professional development (Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012:382). Related to this, teachers also report that they think that the quality of teaching is improved because of shared co-planning, co-instruction and co-assessment. Moreover, teachers have more time for students when they co-teach (Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012:382).

According to Cook and Friend (2007, cited in Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012: 375), co-teaching is beneficial for students as it improves academic, social and behavioural outcomes of the students. The outcomes improve because every student gets more individual attention and two teachers can provide more security and peace in the classroom. According to Blednick and Wilson (2011: 11), co-teaching, among other things, increases the participation of the students, teaches them to respect and value diversity, diminishes social gaps between typically achieving students and students with special needs. Moreover, Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara (2012: 383) report that teachers in their study mention that co-teaching provides students to see how adults discuss and disagree in a constructive way.

## **2.5 Barriers for co-teaching**

There are various barriers to co-teaching. Firstly, Takala Uusitalo-Malmivaara (2012:383) mention lack of planning time to be a major barrier to co-teaching. Furthermore, they report that unclear roles, different teaching styles and lack of communication can cause problems. Blednick and Wilson (2011:12) claim that also administrators and school officials can create

problems. Co-teaching needs support from administrators in order to be successful. They can do this by providing planning time for teachers, relieving co-teachers of some duties e.g. hall duty, or providing monetary compensation for after-school planning. Blednick and Wilson (2011) also point out that there are other barriers for co-teaching. Firstly, they mention that for some students co-teaching can be hard for their self-esteem; they are struggling with the content while others achieve success. Moreover, the students with special needs might get more easily attention than students who are typically achieving. Secondly, Blednick and Wilson (2011) discuss that good pairing is essential for co-teaching to be successful. This is also something what teachers who participated in Takala's and Uusitalo-Malmivaara (2012:383) study pointed out; co-teaching needs to be voluntary in order to succeed.

Co-teaching can be seen as a practical way to implement inclusion in mainstream classrooms. That is why we need to be aware how co-teaching works in practice and how it can have an impact even to the layout of the classroom. Moreover, before implementing co-teaching, it is necessary to be aware of positive and negative sides of co-teaching.

### **3. THE PRESENT STUDY**

#### **3.1 Research questions**

The aim of my study was to explore the perceptions of English teacher trainees at a Finnish university toward co-teaching. Furthermore, I wanted to know whether the students thought there was enough training offered on co-teaching. In order to do this, the study focused on the following questions:

1. What kind of perceptions do the students have on co-teaching?
2. Do the students think that there is enough training offered on co-teaching?

Even though co-teaching has been studied quite extensively in some respects, and there are some studies focusing on how teachers perceive co-teaching (e.g. Saloviita and Takala 2010, Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara 2012), little research has been done especially on perceptions of teacher trainees. The present study aims to address this field as it is important to know what future teachers think about the matter. Moreover, when beginning to conduct

the present study, I was interested in whether the teacher trainees feel that there is enough training offered on co-teaching as my experience is that there is not. This research question can provide useful information to the departments of languages and education how to develop their courses for subject teachers.

### **3.2 Description of the data**

The data was collected using an e-questionnaire. Google Forms was used to create the questionnaire and the respondents were asked to use English when filling the form (see Appendix 1). The questionnaire was piloted in March 2015 before distributing it to students specialized in English language teaching, and who were on their second year or more. The questionnaire was distributed via the university email list in April 2015. I chose to use the e-questionnaire as a way to collect the data because it enabled replies from all different year classes. However, one of the risks of using questionnaire is that it is easy to ignore, and that is what happened to this study's questionnaire as well; even though the questionnaire was distributed twice through the university mail list, it got only 23 replies. However, I considered this amount to be adequate, as the present study had an exploratory goal. The questionnaire was based on a qualitative approach with most of the survey questions being open-ended. This way I wanted to make sure that the respondents had the freedom to reply freely as much (or as little) they wanted in their answers to the questions. The background questions were related to the respondents' study history and work experience.

### **3.3 Methods of analysis**

As I decided to use e-questionnaire, the data was automatically stored into a computer file by the program used to conduct the questionnaire. Because of the nature of the questionnaire, I decided that using qualitative content analysis, as a method of analysis, would suit my purposes (Dörnyei 2007: 246). That is why, when I was analysing the data, I needed to code the replies first. I used colours for the coding and tried to find categories that correspond with the replies by simplifying the replies. The categories varied on each questionnaire question. Figure 2 demonstrates how the coding was done with the replies to the question *Explain in your own words what the term co-teaching means to you.*

Figure 2 Example of coding the replies

Examples from the data	Categories
<b>Explain in your own words what the term co-teaching means to you.</b>	
<i>(TT 22 It means that there are (at least) two teachers who teach together)</i>	<b>Two teachers are teaching the same group of students together in the same classroom</b>
<i>(TT 16 Co-teaching is shared teaching. I think one teacher is a more experienced one and the other less (a student teacher)?)</i>	<b>Cooperation between a more experienced teacher and a novice teacher</b>
<i>(TT 3 For me it's about sharing the responsibility of being a teacher with your colleague. Sharing ideas, coming up with lesson plans, using different methods and talking about different learners. Essentially it is like getting together with someone to work on a project. You have someone else's perspective on what you do )</i>	<b>Cooperation between teachers</b>

#### 4 PERCEPTIONS OF CO-TEACHING

The questionnaire yielded 23 responses from English teacher trainees, of which 22 respondents were majoring in English and one was majoring in German. All the participants, apart from one, had done at least the basic pedagogical studies for subject teachers, and 16 respondents had also done intermediate pedagogical studies for subject teachers. As one of the objectives of this study was to give some insight on how co-teaching is conceptualised by English teacher trainees, also the participant who had not done pedagogical studies, but had work experience from teaching, was included. First, the students' definitions for co-teaching are discussed. Secondly, as another objective for this study was to gather information on whether the participants think there is enough training offered on co-teaching, co-teaching and participants' studies are explored. Thirdly, the different views that the participants had on co-teaching are examined. And finally, focus is moved on what the participants see as possible drawbacks and benefits of co-teaching.

#### 4.1 Definition of co-teaching

In the first question of the questionnaire the participants were asked to define co-teaching. Most of the participants described co-teaching to be that two teachers are teaching the same group of students together in the same classroom. In addition, many participants described co-teaching to include not only co-instruction, but also co-planning. Furthermore, some participants mention different kind of roles of teachers in a classroom and the equality of their roles. Most replies are quite simple and short, but there are a few descriptions that show deeper understanding and reflection on the subject, as illustrated in Example 1 by Teacher trainee 22 and in Example 2 by Teacher trainee 10.

- (1) *It means that there are (at least) two teachers who teach together: they can plan the lessons together, help each other in the classroom and develop their methods and other such things through discussions and feedback. The other teacher(s) might bring some additional expertise into the classroom. (TT 22)*
- (2) *Co-teaching stands for collaboration of two teachers who teach simultaneously one group and both are responsible for the learning outcomes of that group. They can take turns in teaching, or one can be the "lead teacher" and the other one assists and helps the students, or one teacher teaches/explains things and the other one rephrases and recaps the main points in order to clarify. In a inclusive classroom co-teaching is an excellent method to provide the support the students need. (TT 10)*

Some of the participants mentioned that co-teaching is especially common between a subject teacher or a class teacher and a special educational teacher as it is a way to promote inclusion, but there was also one respondent who described co-teaching only to be this kind of co-operation i.e. co-operation between a regular teacher and a special teacher.

Co-operation between teachers was another recurring topic, but the participants who described co-teaching to be co-operation did not find it to be joint instruction but rather other kind of co-operation and support from co-workers. Also working on a project was often mentioned in this category. Example 3 by Teacher trainee 3 illustrates this well.

- (3) *For me it's about sharing the responsibility of being a teacher with your colleague. Sharing ideas, coming up with lesson plans, using different methods and talking about different learners. Essentially it is like getting together with someone to work on a project. You have someone else's perspective on what you do (TT 3)*

There were also two participants who shared the notion of the two teachers in the classroom, as did the majority of the participants. However, the participants had a different view on the equality aspect of teachers; they described co-teaching to be cooperation between a more experienced teacher and a novice teacher. Indeed, according to Liwei (2008: 103-104) this is the way co-teaching is practiced for example in China where a native English teacher works together with a non-native English teacher. However, more often the non-native English teacher's role is to work as "an expert" whereas the native speaker is the novice teacher, as in general, the native speaker has had hardly any professional training.

#### **4.2 Co-teaching in university studies**

When asked if co-teaching has been discussed in participants' studies most of the respondents replied that they thought that the concept had been briefly mentioned, but not explained thoroughly. Most of them felt that the concept of co-teaching was still unclear for them and they would like to know more how to implement it in real working life. Example 4 by Teacher trainee 7 summarises most of the participants' views on the matter:

*(4) To some extent, yes, but not enough in my opinion. It is often mentioned, but rarely discussed in detail. Teachers' experiences and the practical implications of co-teaching have not been discussed enough. (TT 7)*

Moreover, some of the respondents who replied that there is not enough training offered on co-teaching clarified that there is not enough information offered on the subject teacher's pedagogical studies, but they have acquired more information from special education, which is their minor subject.

However, there were also respondents that felt that there is enough training offered on co-teaching. What is interesting though is the fact that two of them mentioned that they have acquired information on co-teaching from their minor subject, German, rather than from English studies or pedagogical studies. Both of them mentioned that they had an opportunity to do their teaching practice in German with another teacher trainee. Some participants replied that there is not enough training on co-teaching, but on the other hand, they felt that co-teaching is something that might develop quite naturally, and thus, there is no need for excessive training. Example 5 by Teacher trainee 2 and Example 6 by Teacher trainee 19 illustrate this view well.

- (5) *There has been no training on co-teaching but I'm not sure if any training is necessary. It is more about two people uniting their skills and strengths - just working together. I do not believe that there is any perfect model for co-teaching but it is more about the personalities of the two teachers: who do they want to co-teach. (TT 2)*
- (6) *I'm not sure if you really need training for it - the skills you need are negotiating skills, group work skills, time management skills etc. I think you learn plenty of those in university anyway. (TT 19)*

Moreover, four respondents, who all had been studying at the university for six years or more, replied that co-teaching was not mentioned even once during their studies. Thus, these findings indicate that co-teaching has not been discussed at all when they have done their pedagogical studies, but it is now at least mentioned at some point in pedagogical studies.

However, when the participants were asked whether they have experience in co-teaching, 18 of them replied *yes* and 13 of them had experience from their first teaching practice; in the pedagogical basic studies the first teaching practice is done with a fellow teacher trainee, in other words, the lessons are planned and carried out together. However, this is done just to save resources and time, and the notion of co-teaching is not actively brought up during the teacher training, apart from German teaching practice. For this question, all the participants who were on their sixth year or more at the university replied *no* or they had acquired experience on co-teaching in some other way.

To sum up, it seems that the participants feel that there is not enough training offered on co-teaching, or if there is, the training is very shallow and does not offer enough information on the practical implementations of co-teaching. This is in accordance with Saloviita and Takala (2010) study; according to Saloviita and Takala (2010: 394), the lack of knowledge on co-teaching was an issue that bothered the subject teachers the most (25%), whereas the special teachers the least (3%). This indicates that special teachers have more training offered on co-teaching in their studies than subject teachers. Moreover, it seems that for students who have done their pedagogical studies a while ago were not offered training on co-teaching at all, but it seems that this is gradually changing.

### 4.3 Views on co-teaching

The respondents' views towards co-teaching were mainly positive, and most of them felt that it is a great resource from many points of views. However, a successful co-teaching requires certain things, e.g. teachers' personalities need to match and support from administrators, and many of the respondents acknowledged this. The reasons why co-teaching was considered to be a good practice varied, but there were several similarities as well. Some participants focused on the fact that co-teaching enables teachers to focus more on their pupils as they have more time; therefore they can offer more support for them, especially for those who need intensified or special support. Example 7 by Teacher trainee 1 illustrates this view well.

*(7) It was nice and I wish it was standard procedure in all schools. The students who need extra help are better taken care of and the other students also get better teaching as a result of the teacher being able to focus more on them. (TT 1)*

Another recurring theme was the notion of support – from the teacher's point of view. Many of the respondents mentioned that it is great to have support from another professional in the classroom. This is in accordance with Blednick and Wilson's (2011:11) claims and also with Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara's findings (2012:382), as discussed in Chapter 2.4 of this paper. However, in most of the replies the respondents had not clarified what kind of support they meant. Furthermore, in many replies, the notion of sharing responsibilities was used. Example 8 by Teacher trainee 9 depicts this.

*(8) It gives you a sense of relaxation when you don't have to be responsible for everything. However, co-operation is key and the teachers' personalities have to match pretty well too in order for the co-teaching to work. (TT 9)*

In addition, one of the participants of this study introduced as how she has experienced co-teaching to be useful for a novice teacher. Teacher trainee 2 believes that co-teaching is beneficial to both, the novice teacher and to more experienced teacher:

*(9) Personally I felt that the experience was very useful for me as a novice teacher. I got to see how my colleague teaches and I also received a lot of support from him since I was not always sure what to do and how. He was more experienced and gave me some good advice. On the other hand I helped him by sharing the workload (e.g. assessment) and by bringing something new to the content of the course. I admit, however, that since me and my co-teacher had somewhat different teaching styles (I feel that I am more organised and he was*

*more of a "free spirit"/relaxed) I found co-teaching a bit challenging but I believe it was good for me to step out of my comfort zone and try something new. (TT 2)*

#### **4.4 Benefits of co-teaching**

This study's respondents' views on benefits of co-teaching correlated well with previous research done on the topic (see Chapter 2.4). As discussed earlier, the benefits of co-teaching can be examined from the teachers' perspectives and from the students' perspectives. What were considered to be benefits of co-teaching varied, but there were several similarities as well and it was possible to divide the findings into those that were considered to be beneficial for teachers and those that were considered to be beneficial for students.

In line with previous research done on the topic, also the participants of this study reported that they believed that major benefits of co-teaching were getting support and sharing responsibilities. How this was expressed varied; Example 10 by Teacher Trainee 1 and Example 11 by Teacher Trainee 8 demonstrate how differentially the same issue was expressed.

*(10) Innovativeness, support, shared workload, "second opinion" (TT 1)*

*(11) teachers can plan lessons together --> less work for one teacher  
- you get more ideas when working together  
- teachers can share about difficult situations in class and they also have someone there at hand if something happens and they need help ( TT 8)*

Teacher trainee 20 expresses nicely what sharing responsibilities and supporting each other is, at its best, in the classroom: acknowledging your co-teaching partner's strengths and finding them empowering:

*(12) teachers can put more weight on their own strengths and bring them up better in teaching*

Another reoccurring theme was professional development. Quite many of the respondents felt that co-teaching provides a way for personal growth and professional development. According to the respondents co-teaching can offer new information on various subjects but

also enhance professional skills. Example 13 by Teacher Trainee 10, Example 14 by Teacher Trainee 14 and Example 15 by Teacher Trainee 20 demonstrate this theme.

(13) *Learning new things (about learning difficulties, other subjects etc.), improving pedagogical skills, companionship with the colleague* (TT 10)

(14) *Personal development as a teacher through getting immediate feedback and new ideas and views on teaching from a colleague.* (TT 14)

(15) *I think it's important to learn from other teachers, which is what co-teaching can do extremely well. You're getting a sort of first hand experience of another teacher's preferences and methods.* (TT 20)

In addition, as Blednick and Wilson (2011:11) discuss and Takala and Uusitalo-Malmivaara (2012:382) report, one of the respondents of this study, Teacher Trainee 9, points out that co-teaching can promote well-being at work.

(16) *It might increase well-being at work, because it would decrease individuality and loneliness.* (TT 9)

From students' perspective, one occurring theme was that students get better education as co-teaching enables teachers to give more attention and acknowledge the needs of the students better. Co-teaching also improves peace and security in the classroom, as there "are two pairs of eyes and an extra set of hands". In addition, some of the respondent acknowledged that co-teachers' teaching styles can vary and this might benefit the students. This theme was expressed in various ways (see the examples below).

(17) *Co-teaching enables meeting the students' individual needs better. In addition, the extra set of helping eyes and hands in the classroom helps the subject teacher.* (TT 7)

(18) *The students might get a lot more out of it when there are two teachers in the class. One, for example, teaches and one walks around the room. Different styles can also benefit different students.* (TT 16)

(19) *It can help with individualising instruction, class management and other such things, where an extra pair of hands is usually needed. It can also make teaching more interesting for both the teachers and the students, as the knowledge and methods of two teachers are combined (i.e. the teaching does not get too repetitive too easily).* (TT 22)

#### 4.5 Drawbacks of co-teaching

The participants of this study were asked about potential drawbacks of co-teaching. The answers fell into four main categories: poor cost efficacy, time-consumption, poor matching of personalities and the issue of equality. Quite many of the respondents believed that a major barrier for co-teaching is the fact that it is costly, as there are two teachers in one classroom instead of one. However, it could be argued that having two teachers in one classroom is more cost efficient than having two institutions: one mainstream school and one special school. This is UNESCO's (2009:9) economic justification for inclusion, which was introduced and discussed in Chapter 2.1 of this paper. Example 20 illustrates this concern for cost efficacy.

*(20) if you have two teachers teaching ONE class it's quite expensive for the community. ( TT 5)*

Another concern about co-teaching was the fact that it was seen time-consuming. Example 21 demonstrates this view.

*(22) Arguments, spending 5 hours arguing about something totally useless. So generally spending more time on things that could be solved easily and quickly in your own head (I know, that's not very good for developing your skills and thinking. (TT 14)*

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2.5, good pairing of co-teachers is essential, and co-teaching should be voluntary. The previous example, Example 23, also demonstrates why good pairing is essential: it can diminish potential conflicts and save time when planning the lessons, as the personalities and teaching styles match. Example 23 by Teacher Trainee 17 demonstrates this possible barrier for co-teaching.

*(23) Cannot think of many. One could be that as there are different personalities, there are also different teachers and ways of viewing pedagogy and class interaction - if the co-teaching teachers had very different opinions on something that might cause some disagreements. (TT 17)*

In addition, Teacher Trainee 19 had experienced this potential drawback of co-teaching herself.

*(25) You need to make compromises and sometimes ways of working might really clash. When I was co-planning a course with someone, I soon found out*

*that we had very different views on how much time we want to spend on our work. (TT 19)*

The issue of equality was brought up by many respondents who acknowledged that it is important that co-teachers are equal in order to co-teaching to be successful. Teacher Trainee 5 summarises well this theme.

*(26) Both teachers have to be equal. It does not work if one decides on everything and does everything and don't give the other a chance to make suggestions. (TT 5)*

One of respondents, Teacher Trainee 9, was worried about equality and unclear roles, and how it could be confusing to the pupils

*(27) Teachers getting stubborn and having difficulties in deciding who is in charge. Who gets to have the final say in for example educating the kids. Just like parenting, both adults have to agree. You don't want to send mixed messages to your kids. (TT 9)*

By observing these examples, it is clear that even though the respondents reported that they felt that there was not enough training offered on co-teaching, the respondents had perceptions and views toward co-teaching and they were able to analyse their own perceptions on this phenomenon. Moreover, it seems that co-teaching was seen mainly as a positive method to teach and most of the respondents were willing to implement it in their teaching or at least try it, but the respondents also acknowledged potential drawbacks of co-teaching.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

The aims of this study were to explore the perceptions of English teachers trainees toward co-teaching and find out whether there is enough training offered on co-teaching. Based on my data, it is obvious that the participants feel that the university, where the present study was carried out, has failed to introduce the concept of co-teaching as a part of English teacher trainees' studies. According the participants of this study, the concept of co-teaching had not been mentioned even once, or it had been briefly mentioned, but the practical

implementations of co-teaching were not introduced or explained. Finnish universities should acknowledge that knowledge of co-teaching is crucial for future teacher as it is, among other things, valued in the job market. Moreover, the new Finnish National Curriculum 2014 mentions co-teaching as a way to demonstrate what is a good co-operation like and also emphasises cross-curricular learning, which can be implemented by using co-teaching as a method. The curriculum guides how teachers organise their teaching in Finland; therefore, the universities should acknowledge that if the curriculum promotes co-teaching, so should also their departments of languages and education.

As the results in the previous section show, English teacher trainees perceive and define co-teaching in various ways. This is understandable, as co-teaching can be defined and implemented in so many ways, and even researchers who have studied co-teaching have failed to agree on the definition. In addition, researchers use different terms for the same phenomenon; terms such team teaching, collaborative teaching and cooperative teaching are often mixed with co-teaching (Murawski 2009:9). However, what can be drawn from the data is that the respondents' views towards co-teaching were mainly positive, and most of them felt that it is a great resource from many points of views and they were willing to try it as a teaching method in future even though they were also aware of the potential drawbacks of co-teaching.

The present study answers the both research questions quite well. However, due to the extent of this study, more extensive research should be done on the topic. For example, it would be interesting to compare how perceptions of different teacher trainee categories differ, i.e. if there are differences between subject teacher trainees, class teacher trainees and special teacher trainees. If a similar study was conducted in the future, some aspects could be improved. Firstly, interviewing the participants could be considered, as there a researcher has a possibility to ask clarification. Secondly, questions in the questionnaire could be modified as the question about participants' views on co-teaching and the questions about the benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching provided quite similar replies and that is why the data was difficult to categorise as different questions provided similar answers. Finally, it might be interesting to compare the results of the present study and the possible future one whether the subject teacher education program has been modified to offer more information on co-teaching and how it can be implemented in the classroom.

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## APPENDIX 1

## English teacher trainees' perceptions towards co-teaching

\*Pakollinen

### Background

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1. Sex \*

*Valitse kaikki sopivat vaihtoehdot.*

Female

Male

2. Year of birth \*

.....

3. Major \*

*Merkitse vain yksi soikio.*

English

Muu: .....

4. Year at the university \*

*Merkitse vain yksi soikio.*

1st

2nd

3rd

4th

5th

6th or more

5. Work experience at school \*

.....

.....

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.....

.....

6. Work experience as months \*

.....

7. Teachers' pedagogical studies for subject teachers: Basic studies done \*

*Merkitse vain yksi soikio.*

Yes

No

8. Teachers' pedagogical studies for subject teachers: Intermediate studies done \*

*Merkitse vain yksi soikio.*

Yes

No

## Co-teaching

9. Explain in your own words what the term co-teaching means to you. \*

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.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

10. Has co-teaching been discussed in your studies? How? \*

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.....  
.....

11. Do you think there is enough training on co-teaching? \*

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.....  
.....  
.....

12. Do you have experience in co-teaching? \*

*Merkitse vain yksi soikio.*

Yes

No

13. If you answered yes, elaborate how it was used and by whom.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

14. How do you find co-teaching? \*

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

15. Would you be willing to do co-teaching in future? \*

*Merkitse vain yksi soikio.*

Yes

No

Maybe

16. Elaborate your answer on the previous question. \*

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17. What do you see as the potential drawbacks of co-teaching? \*

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18. What do you see as the potential benefits of co-teaching? \*

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**Thank you for your participation.**

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