Co-teaching and collaboration.
The literature review below was undertaken by Matt Bush, Vic Hygate and Neill O’Reilly in July 2014 as part of their post graduate studies into modern learning environments. For those who are seeking additional research on this subject the review together with the attached reference list provides further reading. The findings were quite clear to the reviewers, teacher collaboration is key to improving outcomes for our children.

Literature Review:
Whilst there is significant research regarding the benefits of collaboration, there is comparatively a small body of research regarding co-teaching.

Research evidences collaboration as key to improving schools and schooling systems (Fullan, 2011). Improvements are evident in both teacher competencies, retention of beginning teachers, training of student teachers and student learning outcomes, through the provision of mutual learning opportunities and support structures which sustain teachers through change processes (Fullan, Cutress, & Kilcher, 2009; Fullan, 2011; 2014; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2007). Sergiovanni, adds weight to this claim by suggesting the ideal collaborative workplace would enable teachers to work, debate, plan and problem solve together, observe one another’s lessons and sharing successes as well as challenges (1992). Research provides evidence individuals will outperform themselves (relative to own past performance) when working collaboratively and collaborative schools out perform individualistic ones (Fullan, 2008; Rosenholtz, 1991; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Conversely, a limiting factor in schooling improvement is the lack of collaboration; and teachers unable to learn reciprocally on a continuous basis within their own classrooms (Elmore, 2004; Levin & Fullan, 2009).

Collaboration has the potential to significantly improve not only how teachers work but also the effectiveness of their work.

Researchers identify collaboration occurring in many ways. Hargreaves and Fullan provide a useful continuum of collaboration from “scanning and story telling (exchange of ideas, anecdotes and gossip), to help and assistance, to sharing (of materials and teaching strategies), to joint work (where teachers teach, plan or inquire into teaching together)” (2012, p. 112). The strategy of joint work defined as teachers planning,
assessing and mining data collectively, is an effective expression of collaboration and has been defined as professional learning communities (PLCs) by a range of researchers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hattie, 2012; Kise, 2006; Robertson, 2005; Timperley & Parr, 2004, Stoll, 2011). The role of PLCs is to transform learning and value the professional integrity of staff while improving teacher competence and knowledge through strategic collegial interaction. PLCs are characterised by the use of quantifiable evidence and shared experience to enquire into teaching and learning issues and examine strategies to improve outcomes (Ross, 2013). A criticism of PLCs “contrived collegiality”, where administrators require that teachers meet to plan, assess and mine data resulting token responses (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 118). An inherent problem is the lack of opportunity for teachers to participate in genuine, ongoing learning about teaching and learning in the context where they work (Elmore, 2004, Fullan, 2007). The contention of this scoping report is that co-teaching is the most logical response to this problem and provides the most effective basis for collaboration.

Co-teaching then, is another way that teachers can collaborate. Specifically, co-teaching occurs when two or more registered teachers share responsibility for a group of students, usually within one workspace, through a shared approach that includes the pooling of resources and joint accountability (Friend & Cook, 2010). Co-teaching (or team teaching) has its origins in the American Middle school movement of 1963. W M Alexander proposed a structure of five teachers assigned to 75-150 students in an open learning environment (George & Alexander, 1993). Co-teaching in USA is part of the inclusive school movement typically involving a classroom teacher and specialist teacher working collaboratively with special needs children. In a local context, (and particularly in relation to Modern Learning Environments) co-teaching describes two or more classroom teachers planning, teaching, assessing and interacting together in one space. Effective co-teaching strategies include alternate teaching, station teaching, parallel teaching, one teach-one observe, one teach- one assist and team teaching (Friend & Cook, 2010). The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation argues co-teaching provides an appropriate structure for professional learning communities via collaborative analysis of pedagogy enabling teachers to improve practice on an ongoing basis (OECD, 2013). There is evidence that co-teaching benefits students while improving teacher methodologies through collaborative practice including providing opportunities for students to gain multiple perspectives on the curriculum, teachers learning from and
supporting one another, and having a genuine reason to plan assess and mine data collaboratively (Fullan, 2007; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Measel, & Fincher, 1972; McDuffie, Mastropierrì & Scruggs, 2009; Perry & Stewart, 2005; Pratt, 2014; Wilson & Michaels, 2006). Additionally, collaboration leads to an increased sense of agency and efficacy as teachers support and challenge one another. While there is some evidence of successful practice in co-teaching environments this evidence represents a relatively small body of research comparative to other factors influencing student learning outcomes (Blackmore, Bateman, Loughlin, O'Mara, & Aranda, 2011; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Hattie, 2009). It is evident that co-teaching has the potential to provide the most authentic method for teachers to collaborate and significant potential benefits are possible for both teachers and students alike. However, at this time the sector would benefit from specific examination of the impact of co-teaching in mainstream education in a comparable or New Zealand context.

Teachers with personal experience of co-teaching identify potential challenges and stress through a loss of autonomy, the requirement for staff to work with other teachers possessing differing work-styles, personality, or incompatible values and beliefs about teaching and learning (University of Kansas, 2014). A level of trust is necessary for co-teaching to be effective as the de-privatised nature of co-teaching increases vulnerability (Conderman, 2011; Fullan, 2007; Osbourne, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2005; Tannock, 2009). Administrative support for planning and assessment time has been identified as a key component to enable effective co-teaching. Furthermore, reflection time is associated with empowering teachers to improve co-teaching relationships, communications and most importantly, pedagogical frameworks (Friend & Cook, 2010; Jang, 2006; Roth, Masciotra, & Boyd; 1999; Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010). Research described above provides clear evidence for the need for ongoing genuine collaboration to enhance teacher competencies and improve learning outcomes.

References:


