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Committing, engaging and negotiating: Teachers' stories about creating shared spaces for co-teaching

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Co-teaching teams create their own unique shared space for co-teaching.
- Successful co-teaching is a result of numerous negotiations and a lot of time and effort.
- Commitment, shared meanings and engagement in sharing one's professional knowledge key elements in successful co-teaching.

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ABSTRACT

The study examined teachers' stories on developing co-teaching partnerships. The narratives of three two-teacher teams were used to illustrate joint professional landscapes. The teams narrated the development process as one in which commitment, engagement and negotiation were the key elements in shaping their professional landscapes. The findings indicate wide variation in the role of shared understanding and related engagement in co-constructing co-teaching practices.

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1. Introduction

Co-teaching has many faces. The research on co-teaching appears to proceed along two diverging paths. Along one of these, co-teaching is conceptualised within an inclusive education framework. In this approach, co-teaching is considered a necessary tool in enabling teachers to respond to the increased diversity in heterogeneous classrooms resulting from a shift in school systems towards inclusive education, i.e., classrooms where all pupils are taught together. It is therefore conceptualised as a support model in which a special education (SE) teacher, or other specialist, and a general education teacher work together to provide some or all of the students in the classroom with more individual attention (Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Along the other path, co-teaching is studied with a focus on teacher learning. In this approach, co-teaching is conceptualised as a collegial yet not necessarily equal partnership. These studies typically examine the role of co-teaching in developing pre-service teachers' skills (Hedin & Conderman, 2015; Kerin & Murphy, 2015; Roth & Tobin, 2001) or developing in-service teachers' professional practices (Rytivaara and Kershner, 2012; Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2016).

Common to both approaches is the idea of co-teaching as a tool, either to individualise teaching or to enhance teachers' professional skills. Another shared feature is that, despite the different contexts and conditions of co-teaching in the two frameworks, co-teaching is a relational practice in which two or more teachers plan and teach lessons and assess students together (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Co-teaching takes different forms depending on how issues such as the thinking of individual teachers are approached. However, co-teaching has not been earlier considered from the perspective of teachers' practical knowledge,

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regardless that teachers' work is guided by their professional knowledge.

Over three decades ago, Shulman (1986, 1987), identified six categories of teacher knowledge: general pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners, knowledge of educational contexts and knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values. These categories were not intended to cover the whole process of teaching, but to map teachers' professional knowledge base. Later, to illustrate the variation in teachers' orientations towards teaching, these categories were reduced to the three main categories of subject matter expertise, didactical expertise and pedagogical expertise (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). The narrative turn in the field initiated a more holistic view of teacher knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997). Thus, in this study, instead of a list of categories, the narrative conceptualisation of teacher knowledge adopted rests on the metaphor of a knowledge landscape in which teachers integrate their past and present experiences with their aspirations for the future, and thus better reflects the complex environment in which they work (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Connelly et al., 1997). Teachers' personal practical knowledge is also relational, as it develops and influences their professional working landscape (e.g. Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009; Connelly et al., 1997).

This study is part of a nation-wide professional development project on inclusive education in Finland. Teachers volunteered to participate in the nine-week co-teaching project with a partner of their choice and had full autonomy to develop their collaborative classroom practices as they saw fit. By focussing on the stories of teacher teams comprising a SE teacher and a general education teacher, this paper is positioned in the crossroads of the two perspectives on co-teaching: inclusive education and teachers' practical knowledge. In particular, the aim was to explore how teams developed their co-teaching partnerships as part of their knowledge landscapes. As teachers' work and their practical knowledge is always relational, teacher stories have proved important in the details they yield on the processes underlying how and why teachers choose to work in the way they do (e.g. Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Kelchtermans, 2016). Following previous work on the development of successful co-teaching (Rytivaara and Kershner, 2012; Pratt, 2014), we approached co-teaching as a collaborative partnership that teachers need to establish before they can effectively implement co-teaching in classrooms.

To explore how the teachers developed their co-teaching partnerships within their knowledge landscapes, we sought to answer two research questions:

1. How do the teachers describe their co-teaching experiences?
2. How do the teachers narrate the nature and development of their collaboration?

2. Conceptual framework of co-teaching

2.1. Conceptualisation 1: Co-teaching as inclusive practice

In this paper, a key perspective is co-teaching as an inclusive practice as the origins of this study are in developing inclusive practices in Finnish schools. Globally, the focus of inclusion has moved beyond the early "special needs" of individual students with disabilities (UNESCO, 1994) towards recognising and addressing issues of access and equity that apply to a range of students, including those from culturally, linguistically and socio-economically diverse backgrounds as well as those with disabilities (Thomas, 2013; UNESCO, 2015). Consequently, the focus has shifted away from a conceptualisation of inclusion centred on *where* students with disabilities are educated, and towards a focus on *how* inclusive pedagogies can be used to support the diverse needs of all students in heterogeneous classrooms (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Although co-teaching is regarded as a promising inclusive pedagogical practice for students with disabilities, much of the research in the area has remained focused on co-teaching as the pairing of an "expert" in the general curriculum content knowledge with an "expert" in "special" pedagogical knowledge (Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Shin, Lee, & McKenna, 2016). Moreover, teachers' co-teaching practices are often rooted in the special education model whereby general education teachers are responsible for the learning of most students and SE teachers for the few deemed as in need of it (e.g. Bourke, 2010). Studies using this approach have explored technical aspects of co-teaching in the classroom, such as specific models of co-teaching to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom context (Kloo & Zigmond, 2008), or teacher preferences or frequency of engagement with these models (Saloviita, 2018; Saloviita & Takala, 2010; Takala, Pirttimaa, & Törmänen, 2009). Other studies have measured the impact of co-teaching as an intervention aimed at specific outcomes, such as student attendance or achievement, for students with disabilities (Embury, 2010; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & Mcculley, 2012). While researchers agree on the value of co-teaching, it remains unclear *why* teachers engage in co-teaching. It also remains unclear *whether,* or if so *how,* they understand it as an inclusive pedagogy for all learners.

Our study is informed by more inclusive approach in which all professionals share responsibility for all students, and all students are entitled to more intensive support regardless of whether they have a disability (Sailor, 2015). Such examples often draw on a multi-tiered support model such as Response to Intervention (RTI) (Murawski & Hughes, 2009), noting that co-teaching has the capacity to enhance the implementation of a tiered support model (Sailor, 2017). Within this approach, researchers and professionals have sought to understand and implement co-teaching practices that allow educators to work flexibly to provide effective support for all the diverse learners in their classrooms, an objective accompanied with an emphasis on relational pedagogies that foster a sense of community and shared endeavour in the classroom.

2.2. Conceptualisation 2: Co-teaching as a context for and focus of learning

Another key perspective in this study is that of co-teaching as the locus of professional learning. In much of the literature on professional learning, researchers have approached co-teaching as a tool for professional learning, as it quite possibly makes teachers' thinking activities more explicit (Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2007) and thus enhances their practical knowledge sharing. In general, teachers share their practical knowledge through everyday discussions as a part of their ordinary work (Mawhinney, 2010). Likewise, collaboration and reflection on one's practice are key elements in teachers' workplace learning (Bakkenes, Vermunt, & Wubbels, 2010; Hoekstra, Korthagen, Brekelmans, Beijaard, & Imants, 2009). As Oliver et al. (2017) noted, most means for sharing knowledge require that it first be verbalised. To clarify this issue, they present a model with three modes of sharing: participation, which includes directly experienced sharing (e.g. co-teaching); sharing through discussing an experience; and indirect sharing via reification of (the shared) knowledge. Some studies (e.g. Nilsson & van Driel, 2010;van Velzen, Volman, Brekelmans, & White, 2012) have analysed

practices whereby both experienced and student teachers learn together and from each other through co-planning, co-teaching and reflection. In experienced teachers' learning, such as peer coaching, experimentation also appears to be an effective way to learn (Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, & Bolhuis, 2009).

Nevertheless, the literature on co-teaching as a focus of learning is scarce. A situation in which co-teaching is used for a short period, often just a few lessons, to instruct a student teacher or for peer coaching, is different from a situation in which two experienced teachers, along with their individual professional knowledge landscapes, come together with the intention of jointly teaching a group of students, as is the case in this study. To find a balance between their professional landscapes, teachers need to find "narrative unity" (Connelly et al., 1997, p. 671) in their co-teaching partnership. This is a demanding task, as teachers' practical knowledge is implicit and deeply embedded in classroom practices, and thus challenging to communicate (Connelly et al., 1997; Van Driel, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2001). Sharing also requires trust and respect (Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, & Kyndt, 2017), which require time to develop. Earlier studies on student teachers' co-teaching underline the importance of teachers agreeing on common goals and responsibilities and their ability to integrate their differences in teacher thinking (Beaten & Simons, 2014; Shin et al., 2016).

The few studies on the co-teaching of experienced teachers have suggested that the relationship takes time and effort to fully develop its potential (e.g., Rytivaara and Kershner, 2012). Based on a literature review and her empirical data on secondary school teachers, Pratt (2014) constructed a detailed three-phase symbiosis model for the development of a successful co-teaching relationship. In the first phase, co-teaching is started either voluntarily or because it is requested or expected by the school administration. This leads to the second phase, the symbiosis spin, during which the teachers get to know each other, develop their collaboration through reflection, and build a partnership. They learn, for example, to switch roles flexibly during a lesson, complement each other, and negotiate their individual differences. In the third phase, the teachers work effortlessly and interdependently leaning on each other's expertise. Some of the teams in Pratt's (2014) study reached this fulfilment phase within a few months while others had still not reached it in their second year of co-teaching.

An explanation for such differences could lie in teachers' tendency to reflect on their practical knowledge. Lehtonen, Toom, and Husu (2017) found that reflection was an essential tool for co-teachers when discussing their joint practices as well as their goals, pedagogical strategies and beliefs, and in seeking to improve their co-teaching. Likewise, Fluijt, Bakker, and Struyf (2016) emphasised that teachers need to reflect together on the challenges of co-teaching to create a shared vision on what they consider to be good education for all students. Co-teaching cannot be developed in the absence of reflection by teachers on their roles, lesson objectives, content or materials (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011). However, reflection and asking for feedback are more commonly practised by some teachers than others (Runhaar, Sanders, & Yang, 2010). Thus, having at least one teacher in a co-teaching partnership with a low tendency to reflect on one's thinking and practices could pose an obstacle, as reflection on classroom practices can be challenging even when teachers frequently gather to discuss their work (Kuh, 2016). Nevertheless, earlier studies (Park, Oliver, Johnson, Graham, & Oppong, 2007; Postholm, 2008) have shown that observing and reflecting on one's own classroom practices not only makes teachers more aware of their practical knowledge but also results in the construction of new practical knowledge.

3. Methods

3.1. The context of this study

This study is part of a larger project aimed at developing various kinds of support for all students in the same classroom (see Ahtiainen, 2017). The main principles of Finnish education policy have been to provide all children with equal access to high quality public education and guarantee timely intervention in their neighbourhood school (see Halinen & Järvinen, 2008; Sahlberg, 2010). Students are supported primarily through part-time special education, which is a form of timely intervention that enables students to be taught in the neighbourhood school (Graham & Jahnukainen, 2011; Jahnukainen, 2011). Thus, the Finnish education system can be regarded as becoming more inclusive by default although some children are still being taught in special schools and classes (e.g. Pulkkinen and Jahnukainen, 2016). For instance, 38% of students receiving special support were taught in a special class in 2016 (bib_OSF_2016 OSF, 2016). However, key international documents on inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994, 2009; United Nations, 2007) have also influenced education policy in Finland (Halinen & Järvinen, 2008). The last major reform of the Finnish special education system began in 2008, after publication of the Special Education Strategy (bib_Ministry_of_Education_2007 Ministry of Education, 2007), and was followed by new legislation on the three-tier Learning and Schooling Support model in , 2011. This reform emphasised timely intervention and inclusive education (Ahtiainen, 2017; Pulkkinen and Jahnukainen, 2016). In the three-tier support model, support for learning can be provided via arrangements such as remedial teaching, differentiation, and o-teaching.

3.2. Data

The study participants were public school teachers recruited for an intensive nine-week project on co-teaching starting at the beginning of the school year in August. We[1] selected 12 teams (28 teachers) for the project based on the teams' plans for the period. To support teachers and discuss their ideas and experiences of co-teaching, we arranged four meetings, two of which were held prior to the planned co-teaching period. At the first meeting in June, the main topics were our expectations of the participating teachers and their expectations of the project. At the second meeting in August, we gave a lecture on the principles of co-teaching and differentiation. The third meeting took place in September–October, when we visited all the teachers at their schools. At the last meeting in November, the teachers shared their co-teaching experiences thus far.

Teachers were compensated for the extra work involved in developing their co-teaching practices and writing a weekly journal about their experiences, as previous studies have shown lack of time to be a significant barrier to establishing co-teaching partnerships (Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). Compensation was paid for four additional hours of work a week.

Participants ranged from early-career to near-retirement teachers. As a part of the project, all 12 teams were interviewed twice: once informally in the autumn when we visited the schools and once formally in the spring. The main themes of the interviews were: 1) co-teachers' background and their co-taught classes (including early experiences of co-teaching), 2) early stages of the team's collaboration and co-teaching, 3) implementation of co-

[1] "We" in sections 3.2 and 3.3 refers to two project coordinators who are also the authors of this paper.

teaching (planning, grouping, roles and teaching methods), and 4) advantages and challenges of co-teaching. The school visits lasted 1–3 h and the spring interviews 35–75 min. The spring interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and form the main data for this paper.

We adopted a narrative framework and thus approached the teachers' stories as narrated experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2008). While based on the teller's experiences, stories are always contextual as they are produced for an audience at a specific moment in time (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Cortazzi & Lin, 2006; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998). Thus, the stories enabled us to explore teachers' co-teaching experiences as co-constructed in an interview among the two teachers and an interviewer. We were particularly interested in teachers' professional knowledge as "narratively composed, embodied in a person, and expressed in practice." (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124). Nevertheless, stories can be messy and told in non-chronological order, as tellers frequently move back and forth in time when sharing their experiences. Stories also have layers, take various turns and may have several plotlines (Lieblich et al., 1998; Plunkett, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1995).

3.3. Data analysis

To gain an overview of the data, we conducted a preliminary content analysis (Merriam, 2009; Riessman, 2008) on the interviews with eight teams of two or three teachers in pre-primary school and in the first and second primary grades. The analysis was guided by our understanding of co-teaching as a process that teachers develop over time. This understanding was an outcome of our previous research on the topic (Rytivaara, 2012b; Rytivaara and Kershner, 2012) and our experiences during the co-teaching project. We therefore focused on the teachers' reflective descriptions on their mutual collaboration and excluded descriptions of the practical implications of their co-teaching in the classroom (e.g., lesson content, grouping arrangements). We then coded these sections inductively and organised the 87 codes into themes.

After discussing the content of the codes in detail and in relation to each interview, we reached a consensus that the codes could be grouped under seven themes (see Table 1). The seven themes (content of theme in parentheses) that emerged from the data were 1) Willingness to collaborate (willingness to collaborate as a basis for co-teaching), 2) Commitment and engagement (decision to collaborate, co-operate and co-teach), 3) Getting to know each other (learning to know each other, mutual respect and trust, to be accepted as one is), 4) Mutual aims and responsibility (shared understanding of the aims of (co-)teaching), 5) Shared understanding of being a teacher (similar attitude towards students and classroom management), 6) Agreeing on the division of work (shared understanding of roles: to divide or share), and 7) Agreeing on the limits of collaboration (agreeing on the time and tasks that co-teaching covers). Each theme appeared in at least five team interviews.

We then compared teams and decided to analyse the stories of three teams (Table 2) in more detail. Two teams, Oona and Vuokko (team 1) and Auli and Janita (team 3) stood out as almost the opposite of each other in many ways; the third team, Maija and Tiina (team 2) was positioned somewhere between these two. Together, the three teams represented the variation found across the eight teams. All three teams reflected on five of the seven themes. All three teams comprised a SE teacher and a general education teacher, and all the students were in grades 1–2 (7- to 8-year-olds).

To illustrate the variation in teachers' experiences as well as the unique characteristics of the three teams, we constructed word images (e.g. Clandinin et al., 2006; Honkasilta, Vehkakoski, & Vehmas, 2016). Creating word images is an interpretive process (Clandinin et al., 2006, 99) in which quotes from the original interviews are organised in narrative form. In drawing together story fragments from the interviews (Driedger-Enns, 2014), we shaped the teachers' stories as we saw them but also each teacher's story of their partner. Thus, using word images, we illustrated the three teams' stories according to our understanding of them. Each of the five themes was reflected (see Martin, Tarnanen, & Tynjälä, 2018) by a word image composed of five intertwined elements that also organised it in narrative form: orientation towards working together, co-planning, roles, commitment, and evaluation of collaboration. By making the stories less messy, these organising principles make it possible to compare how the teachers created/constructed space for their collaboration, while also highlighting the unique characteristics and decisions of each team.

In the last phase of the analysis, one author thematised the final stories to make sure that all three stories included the same elements. Finally, we checked and agreed that the word images were faithful to the original interviews, i.e., that all the relevant elements of the original analysis were included and that the word images respected the contexts of the quotes.

Table 1
Themes across the stories. Numbers refer to teams. Stories of teams 1–3 were analysed in more detail. Team 1 Oona and Vuokko; team 2 Maija and Tiina; team 3 Auli and Janita.

Theme	1*	2*	3*	4	5	6	7	8
Willingness to collaborate				x	x	x		
Commitment and engagement	x	x	x	x		x	x	
Getting to know each other		x	x	x			x	x
Mutual aims and responsibility	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Shared understanding of being a teacher	x	x	x			x	x	x
Agreeing on division of work	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Agreeing on the limits of collaboration	x	x	x	x				

4. Findings

The findings are organised around the three word images. While each story illustrates the unique experiences and perspectives of the team in question, all three stories encompass five themes: *orientation towards working together; co-planning; roles; commitment; and evaluation of collaboration*. The word images, however, are based on the interviews and extracted quotes, and thus the themes receive different emphasis in each story. Each quote in the text is followed by a line number that indicates its location in the word image. The stories also reflect the development of each team/co-teaching as a process.

4.1. Team 1: Oona & Vuokko: A journey of clear structures

1 Neither of us really knew
2 what we had got into [literally: "came along"].
3 Then we started, like, what's all this about.
4 Let's see together,
5 spontaneously got going,
6 got going, like, to see where it will take us.
7 This was not a new situation for us.
8 We collaborated already last year.
9 The class was prepared with clear rules,
10 children know how to behave in class,
11 we knew each other.
12
13 Now that there are two of us,
14 The lessons we teach together,

Table 2
Description of the teams.

	Team 1 Oona and Vuokko	Team 2 Tiina and Maija	Team 3 Auli and Janita
Background of the teachers and years in teaching	GE teacher Vuokko SE teacher Oona who works as a resource room teacher with students receiving part-time special education Vuokko: 35 years Oona: 11 years	GE teacher Maija SE teacher Tiina who works as a resource room teacher with students receiving part-time special education Tiina: 12 years Maija: 3 years	GE teacher Janita SE teacher Auli who work with a small group of students Auli: 3 years Janita: 10 years
Grade level	2	1	2
Number of students in co-taught lessons	20	20	17 (of whom two were the small group's students integrated into the general education classroom during the co-taught lessons)
Number of co-taught lessons weekly	5	Autumn term 4–5, spring term 2	3

15 we do together, and we plan together.
16 We have equal roles.
17 We meet weekly,
18 don't look beyond the week to come.
19 agree on the main lines,
20 agree on who does what.
21 We have agreed parts,
22 clearly defined own parts.
23 We agree on the parts.
24 Each prepares on their own time.
25 Can trust that the other one will do her part.
26 We are equals,
27 The challenge is to find time
28 and we find it.
29 When it happens that
30 we just didn't find time to plan it together
31 divide the work
32 We split the class in half
33 and we switch during the lesson.
34 One can be more alert and innovative
35 yet the work goes fifty-fifty
36 and it is shared.
37
38 We haven't reflected much on what has happened,
39 on our roles,
40 whether something could have been done differently.
41 We haven't got that far yet.
42 We are very different personalities,
43 yet we can work together just fine.
44 It just takes off with somebody, I suppose.
45 One learns then, too.
46 Been working nicely.
47 Need to use common sense.
48 Chemistry needs to be there.
49 Normal adults use their common sense.
50 One should have an open mind to begin with
51 and think more as one proceeds.
52 We've been able to agree on things,
53 yet we have not spent too much time.
54 It's been a reasonable amount of work
55 and stimulating.

Their joint path begins when Oona and Vuokko decide to get involved in a collaborative project on the SE teacher's (Oona) initiative. At first, they are uncertain about what they have committed themselves to (1–2); yet this shared uncertainty about what lies ahead sparks a cautious curiosity (3–4) that unites them. The teachers decide to participate in the co-teaching project that then "got going" (5) like a vehicle, with them jumping on board while pondering the destination (line 6). They describe their decision as "spontaneous" (5), a word that could be interpreted at least in two ways. On the one hand, "spontaneous" refers to a behaviour where they decide on something without preparation or pre-consideration. On the other hand, it could reflect the team's idea of engaging in a professional activity without any prior experience or training in it. Thus, it is about improvisation at a moment when there is no map pointing the way. Nevertheless, they emphasise that being in such a position is not "a new situation for us" (8) as they had collaborated the year before and thus already knew the class and each other (7–11). In sum, their commitment to the unknown is a mixture of being curious and wanting to try something new while also being cautious and feeling uncertain about what lies ahead.

Even with their shared earlier experience of classroom collaboration, the teachers considered systematic co-teaching a new situation for them. "Now that there are two of us" (line 13) indicates a change in relation to both their earlier, less frequent, collaboration, and to solo-teaching. In this new situation, they have agreed to follow a path in which they emphasise the role of structure and order throughout, from weekly co-planning sessions to agreements on the "main lines" (19) of joint lessons, to their respective roles regarding "who does what" (20) and in "parts" (22, 23) in the classroom. The repetition of "part" (21, 22, 23, 25) is of particular interest. The word is used as a reference to a situation in which the involved parties have clear agreed responsibilities and tasks and that these boundaries between them are not to be crossed. Therefore, once tasks have been distributed, each teacher "can trust that the other one will do her part" (25). Similar clear roles are expected of the "children [who] know how to behave in class" (10).

In this story, the meanings of "together" (14, 15) and "equal" (16, 26) in relation to the teachers' roles in the co-taught classroom also merit closer examination. The teachers' consensus that "the lessons we teach together, we do together, and we plan together" (14–15) elaborates their commitment to co-teaching. For them, co-teaching is about two teachers doing the same amount of work, "fifty-fifty" (35). They seem to think that an unequal division of work might result if a lesson is not carefully planned or if the teachers are not properly prepared. Their interpretation of the terms "together" and "equal" might also be an attempt to make sure that both will be equally engaged in the classroom, that they both know the plan and will contribute equally to the lesson. Both will be given space, and neither will be more of a leader than the other. On those occasions when the teachers did not have an opportunity to discuss the next lesson and "divide the work" (line 31), their solution was to engage

in parallel teaching where each teacher plans half the lesson and "to split the class in half" (line 32). They had also limited their co-teaching to three weekly lessons as agreeing on everything that happens in the classroom is rather time-consuming. In this way, their co-teaching programme demanded only "a reasonable amount of work" (54). In sum, they were seeking to strike a balance between trying something new together while wanting to keep their individual workloads strictly under control.

Although the teachers did not talk about how they ended up with such a structured co-teaching model, it appeared to result from a process of accommodation. They had to reconcile two "very different personalities" (42) with two rather conflicting ideas on teacher collaboration. The teachers thought on the one hand that collaboration is a rational decision made by two professionals, a situation in which "normal adults use their common sense" (49) and agree on things with an "open mind" (50), and on the other hand they described successful collaboration as a matter of luck where "it just takes off with somebody" (44) and where "chemistry needs to be there" (48). Nevertheless, even if the teachers seemed to consider their solution a success, i.e. they "can work together just fine" (45), they also saw co-teaching as a journey in which "one learns, too" (45). Moreover, it takes time to learn to trust one another and reflect on shared practice: "we haven't got that far yet" (41).

4.2. Team 2: Tiina & Maija: A journey of experimenting

1 It was natural to come along.
2 We were colleagues last year.
3 We probably both had an interest in
4 what it might be like,
5 what are the ways to co-teach.
6 And also having a big group
7 supported the idea of having lessons together.
8 More benefits and help from two teachers.
9 [The project] certainly gave extra motivation.
10 If it had occasionally felt difficult,
11 didn't give up then.
12 We collaborated so much during those weeks,
13 Maybe more than we would otherwise have done (collaborated).
14 We tried out quite a few materials, methods, roles.
15 In the autumn, we thoroughly devoted ourselves to planning,
16 scheduled a regular time in our calendars,
17 checked on the study/teaching material.
18
19 One starts talking, one goes on easily from there.
20 One can always add another thought to it.
21 We watch and listen
22 how to take turns.
23 We've had good interaction.
24 We've wanted to change roles
25 rather frequently
26 to add experience and perspectives.
27 When there're two teachers,
28 then one can take the lead from the beginning.
29 We both know the plan.
30 We know where to begin.
31 That's co-planning good for.
32 One can start the lesson/teaching flat out.
33
34 Often shared reflection after school
35 what was the problem if there was one
36 what went well.
37 A few words about the next session.
38 From the beginning we have discussed
39 the pupils in this group
40 classroom practices
41 pondering solutions together.
42 Routines have been established.
43 No need to plan everything from the beginning.
44 we have ways to proceed.
45 Roles come more naturally.
46 No need to think so much about what and when.
47 Not very fixed roles about
48 one being a classroom teacher and
49 the other a SE teacher.
50 It's Maija's classroom.
51 The classroom teacher manages the classroom.
52 SE teacher has knowledge on
53 challenging cases and learning difficulties.
54 Each has special expertise.
55 We feel strongly about working as a pair.
56 Both master the whole.
57 Joint responsibility.
58 Both learn from each other.
59 Equal colleagues.
60 We are equal.
61 We are teachers.
62 We are colleagues.

The SE teacher, Tiina, had volunteered for the project with another teacher at first, and when Maija came to substitute for Tiina's original intended co-teacher, they nevertheless felt it was "natural" (1) to participate in the project together. Having worked as "colleagues" (2) the previous year, Maija and Tiina already knew each other; this appeared to have affected their decision to participate in the co-teaching project. In the beginning, they only had a vague "idea of having lessons together", and thus they committed themselves to the project with curiosity about "what [co-teaching] might be like" (4) and were eager to learn more about "the ways to co-teach" (5). In addition, they hoped that co-teaching would provide them with "more benefits and help" (8). During the project, they focused on developing new joint practices by "[trying] out quite a few materials, methods, [and] roles" (14). At this phase of the experiment, the emphasis was on engaging in detailed co-planning. Thus, they had "scheduled a regular time" (16) for co-planning each week.

Their initial motivation towards co-teaching and commitment to the project and not giving up even "if it had occasionally felt difficult" (10) seemed to have paid off. In addition to an intensive beginning phase when the teachers collaborated systematically and put a lot of effort into their collaboration, they now felt co-teaching had become easier, with "routines - - - established" (42) and "roles [coming] more naturally" (45). Co-planning and "good interaction" (23) resulted in flexibility, where either one could always "lead" (28) or "start the lesson flat out" (32) as they were both familiar with the lesson plan. For them, it was important to "add experience and perspectives" (26) and thus share their expertise rather than stick to a co-teaching model and establish certain roles. Moreover, they preferred a shared teaching model where they could equally start talking without deciding each other's turns and tasks beforehand. In other words, they could re-negotiate their roles as needed.

Their situational and practice-based approach is also apparent in their frequent "common reflection after school" (34), when they reflect on critical points during that day's co-teaching session as well as share the positive outcomes of their joint endeavour and prepare for the next session. These reflective sessions were part of their collaboration "from the beginning" (38) and appears to be

related to their joint professional learning as co-teachers. Furthermore, the data illustrate how they have become an established team with very similar ideas about co-teaching, enabling them to proceed without "[a] need to plan everything from the beginning" (43).

The teachers' idea of "working as a pair" (55) was embedded in their understanding of a team as a unit where "special expertise" (54) is shared and "both learn from each other" (58). This shared understanding leaves no doubt that the teachers have discussed not only their co-taught lessons and pupils together but also the principles underlying their collaboration. Similarly, they simply note that "It's Maija's classroom" (50), with no need for further elaboration. Thus, it is only to be expected that they emphasise their unique professional knowledge and strengths while at the same time producing and reproducing the common ground for their collaboration through specific uses of language: "we" (16 repetitions), "both" (56, 58), "equal colleagues" (59), "equal" (60), "teachers" (61), and "colleagues" (62).

In sum, Tiina and Maija were committed to the project from the start, perhaps as a result of their earlier experiences of collaboration, and this commitment helped them overcome minor challenges that they encountered. However, somewhere along the way, co-teaching took on new meanings for them, as they reported putting a lot of effort into experimenting and thus learned not only new classroom practices, but also new dimensions of equality such as shared responsibility and flexibility in the classroom.

4.3. Team 3: Auli & Janita: A journey into shared teacher identity

1 We met the day before school started.
2 We didn't know each other at all.
3 Got straight down to work.
4 We discussed if co-teaching was possible in the first place.
5 Had to make room.
6 It was insane to make it work.
7 Little by little we learned
8 what to do, the way to work.
9 Realised we complement each other.
10 Even though as teachers
11 we are similar,
12 We think a bit differently.
13 Gives you a new perspective.
14
15 We spend little time on planning.
16 Rather ex tempore see what happens.
17 Rather automatic.
18 Then it just gets going and
19 something comes out of it.
20 No need for an exact plan.
21 In the beginning we had very detailed plans.
22 In the beginning we did our planning sitting down.
23 Now we do it as we go.
24 This is so elementary for both of us.
25 We know what we're doing.
26 We both know what a child is supposed to know.
27 and if they don't, then what to do about it
28
29 We discuss things across the classroom,
30 talk and join in.
31 We're not "now I talk and you keep quiet"
32 One begins when the other isn't sure where to begin.
33 Janita's classroom, Janita's rules.
34 Having more of us allows us to work differently.
35 One works the classroom while
36 the other can do something else
37 in a small group or with an individual student
38 tests and other things.
39 Very convenient.
40 Everyone benefits from the flexibility.
41
42 We/us
43 responsible for teaching
44 of the same mind
45 been doing great
46 More by accident than design.
47 The way we can collaborate,
48 so great.
49 To be just the way one is.
50 Today you or I do more.
51 Totally more by accident than design.
52 We know each other, these pupils, parents.
53 We can share.
54 Each one knows the topic.
55 Encouragement.
56 Emotions constantly at stake.
57 Talking with somebody
58 Clears the deck for the following morning.
59 Aspiration of having nearly full-time collaboration.
60 Definitely want to continue.

The third word image is about two teachers who had never met before the project began at the beginning of term in August. Nevertheless, they both had earlier experience of co-teaching, both negative and positive (not cited here). In the spring, one teacher had applied for the project, but the staff situation at the school had suddenly changed; in the autumn, the other teacher joined the staff and on the classroom teacher's initiative, the two teachers decided to start co-teaching together. Their commitment to share their teaching and responsibility for students was very strong from the beginning. The decision to co-teach was followed by an initial phase during which they worked hard "to make it work" (6). They described co-teaching as something they could develop to fit their needs: first they "had to make room" (5) for collaboration, and after an "insane" (6) effort they learned, "little by little" (7), a way of working together that suited them best. It is noteworthy how they consider co-teaching as something flexible yet something to be learned, whilst at some point they "realised" (9) they complemented each other, as if, complementing each other was not something to be learned but a permanent team feature.

Part of their co-teaching learning process was about them learning a way to approach one another's similarities and differences. They experienced thinking "differently" (12) as a chance to gain "new perspective[s]" (13), rather than taking the view that in co-teaching both teachers ought to think the same about everything. It is noteworthy how they distinguish their being "similar" "as teachers" (11, 10) yet admitting they "think a bit differently" (12). The teachers' comment on being similar as teachers refers to their similar commitment to teaching and doing their best to support pupils. This appeared to be the cornerstone on which their collaboration was being built: they "know what [they] are doing" (25) and preferred to proceed pretty much "ex tempore" (16) in the classroom, rather than make detailed lesson plans. In other words, they were both comfortable with teaching without detailed planning, comfortable with seizing the moment and with accepting whatever lies ahead in the classroom. However, the teachers did not have this approach to teaching when they started co-teaching; instead, it had evolved over time, as they noted that "in the beginning" (21, 22) they "had very detailed plans" (21) and planning was done

"sitting down" (22), whilst "now [they] do as [they] go" (23). In addition to having less need of detailed planning, which might indicate that the lengthy planning sessions were a time where the teachers got to know each other, co-teaching had made the teachers realise they "complement each other" (9) and that their shared pedagogical thinking is based on trust in their own and their partner's knowledge and skills.

Sharing played a strong role in this team both inside and outside the classroom. For this team, co-teaching meant that two teachers took care of all the tasks that a teacher usually handled alone: "Having more of us allows us to work differently" (34). As a team, they were even able to share moments of insecurity with the interviewer, such as when they told how in the beginning of a lesson it may happen that "one begins when the other isn't sure where to begin" (32). Thus, they worked in unison in the classroom – it did not matter who said or did the things that needed to be said or done, but they trusted that each would do her share and everything would get done. Nevertheless, they were clear that while it was "Janita's classroom, Janita's rules" (33), the co-taught classroom was a shared space where the two teachers "discuss across the classroom, talk and join in" (29–30). They even emphasised how they respected one another's teaching by never overriding each other. Their idea of equality was based on a shared workload, where it was accepted that every day is not the same and that each did have not to do an equal number of tasks every day. They felt that in the last analysis "everyone benefits from the flexibility" (40), probably referring to both teachers and pupils.

The ease of sharing was, perhaps, based on a successful balance between being "we" (42), a joint actor "responsible for teaching" (43), and two people able "to be just the way one is" (49). Being "of the same mind" (44), for example, accepting that not both of them would always be performing at their best in the classroom, obviously supported the teachers as "us" (42). Their sharing is so fluent they barely need to explain things as they both "know each other, these pupils, parents" (52). It is noteworthy, though, that the teachers considered all this to be "more by accident than design" (46, 51). This contradicts the beginning of the story where the teachers emphasised the hard work they had done to make co-teaching possible in the first place.

Nevertheless, their idea of sharing went deep into the affective sphere of teaching. As they put it, in teaching "emotions [were] constantly at stake [and] talking with somebody clears the deck for the following morning" (56–58). Looking ahead to the next term, they had the "aspiration of having nearly full-time collaboration" (59), as they had experienced co-teaching a means of working that they "definitely want to continue" (60).

5. Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to study co-teaching in relation to co-teachers' professional knowledge landscapes. By focussing on experienced teachers, our study expands the literature on co-teaching as a professional learning process (e.g. Nilsson & van Driel, 2010; van Velzen et al., 2012). Findings showed that teachers learned from and with each other during co-planning by talking together and in classrooms by teaching together. Moreover, each co-teaching team had created their own unique shared space for co-teaching. Comparison of the teams revealed not only differences in their co-teacher partnerships and phases of development (see Pratt, 2014) but also joint elements necessary for a successful co-teaching partnership. First, the teachers' *commitment* to the project gave them time to negotiate on the *meanings of co-teaching*. Second, the teachers became *engaged in sharing their professional knowledge* while developing joint co-teaching practices. In the next section, these themes are discussed from the perspective of teachers' practical knowledge landscapes and inclusive thinking as part of those landscapes.

5.1. Co-teaching as a learning journey within/towards inclusive education

The first step in learning to co-teach was commitment to building a partnership with a colleague. The remuneration for extra work was probably the most significant factor in enhancing the teachers' commitment, as lack of planning time has been identified to be a major barrier to co-teaching (Scruggs et al., 2007; Shin et al., 2015). The project also supported commitment by giving teachers educational support and a timeframe long enough to maintain their commitment and stabilise the partnership. These factors combined created the initial space in which individual teachers could start co-planning their journey towards becoming a team.

After committing themselves to working together, the next phase of the teachers' journey was learning to share their practical knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996; Clandinin et al., 2009), i.e., to discuss their personalities, professional backgrounds and classroom practices. This phase was characterised by negotiation, much of which probably took place when the teachers were planning their co-taught lessons together. While all three teams emphasised the importance of co-planning, particularly at the outset of collaboration, their stories revealed that the teams attributed different meanings to co-planning and co-teaching. Although the data on the actual negotiations on the meanings are limited, the shared meanings were manifested in the teams' practices.

The dyads Maija and Tiina and Auli and Janita interpreted co-teaching as sharing the work. They emphasised co-teaching as a learning process aiming at joint practices rather than seeing themselves as two individuals working in the same room. They used co-teaching as an opportunity to explore their classroom practices and roles and to discuss about pupils, that is, to share their practical knowledge. This resulted in a shared space of working that extended beyond their co-taught lessons. In particular, Auli and Janita, who were unknown to each other before the beginning of term, went furthest in flexibility and level of sharing. They handled both the direct and the indirect work (Takala et al., 2009) together as much as possible. In contrast, for Oona and Vuokko, who had co-taught the same group of students the previous year, co-planning and co-teaching was about dividing the tasks between them in a very structured manner rather than sharing them. A possible explanation for this difference could be the fact that Oona and Vuokko's previous collaboration had been implemented with no extra time for co-planning, a factor that would likely have influenced their orientation to developing their co-teaching partnership. Thus, their shared co-teaching space was much more limited with respect to their teacher responsibilities, perhaps more as a result of a compromise than a jointly created space. Nevertheless, all co-teachers need to negotiate whether co-teaching is, for them as a team, about sharing the work or dividing it. Interestingly, the terms share and divide are not distinguished in Finnish (both translate as "jakaa").

All three teams considered teachers' individual differences a strength of the team yet also emphasised the importance of reconciling two personalities and their teacher identities into a coherent system in which they felt they could still be themselves. Auli and Janita worked hard at learning to know each other and gradually came to understand that their practical knowledge landscapes were similar. This resulted in a space where, like Tiina and Maija, they were able to work "fluently in an interdependent relationship where they lean on each other's expertise", as Pratt (2014) described the third phase of her model. In other words,

they became “we” (see Rytivaara, 2012b). Interestingly, Oona and Vuokko, in turn, emphasised that co-teaching was about two individuals, and two separate packages of practical knowledge, as if they were still pondering this question. Their “narrative unity” was quite different from that of the other two teams (Connelly et al., 1997, p. 671).

A key element in exploring differences between teams is reflection. While reflection on joint classroom practices seems to support the co-construction of new professional knowledge (Park et al., 2007; Postholm, 2008), some teachers tend to reflect on their practices more than others (Runhaar et al., 2010). In the teams of Maija and Tiina, and Auli and Janita in which the co-teachers frequently reflected together on both successful moments as well as matters that could be improved (see also Vangrieken et al., 2017), trust in the co-teaching partnership appeared to be more common. Nevertheless, the stories illustrate that, in a co-teaching context, it is not necessarily as difficult for teachers to share their practical knowledge as earlier research has suggested (Connelly et al., 1997; Van Driel et al., 2001).

After the initial commitment and detailed planning sessions of the first few weeks, both Auli and Janita and Maija and Tiina felt ready to move towards a much lighter version of co-planning as they had learned to know each other and synchronise their practical knowledge in a way that supported their aims. Oona and Vuokko's story contained no such turn; however, they had learned that the structured co-planning style, focussing on teaching content and methods, suited them best. These two kinds of stories – two with a turn and one without – reflect the phases in the model proposed by Pratt (2014). Two teams had moved on to the fulfilment phase, while Oona and Vuokko remained in the previous phase of symbiosis spin and thus were still building their partnership. It is noteworthy that Oona and Vuokko acknowledged the possibility that their collaboration could be further developed, but they did not feel like doing this yet. Despite the different pace of development in their partnerships, all three teams were satisfied with their co-teaching experiences. This prompts the interesting question of what leads teachers to take the next step from the symbiosis spin to fulfilment phase. An answer could lie in teachers' will to learn and develop professionally (Van Eekelen, Vermunt, & Boshuizen, 2006; Vermunt & Endedijk, 2011).

From an inclusive perspective, the detailed stories indicated that the two teams in the fulfilment phase were team teaching while the third, in symbiosis spin, was drawing on more structured models such as alternate teaching and parallel teaching (e.g. Friend et al., 2010). Because the kind of team teaching in which teachers share equally and flexibly all tasks (Rytivaara, 2012a; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Pratt, 2014) is the most distinct co-teaching model compared to solo teaching, this result suggests that there may be a connection between the co-teaching model adopted and the current phase of the co-teaching partnership (Pratt, 2014). Moreover, the meanings that teachers attribute to co-teaching could mirror their ideas of inclusive practices. Nevertheless, if teachers are to use co-teaching within an inclusive framework, they also need to negotiate the meanings they attribute to a good education for all students (Fluijt et al., 2016).

It is noteworthy that although the framework of the co-teaching project was to develop inclusive classroom practices and all three teams comprised a SE teacher and a general education teacher, none of the co-teachers emphasised their professional backgrounds in reflecting on their classroom roles. All considered that both partners were equals in the classroom, planning and teaching equally and having equal responsibility for all students. This finding of teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching as professional collaboration between two or more educators rather than co-teaching as the pairing of an “expert” in general curriculum content knowledge with an “expert” in “special” pedagogical knowledge exemplifies genuinely inclusive practice (Sailor, 2015).

5.2. Further research

Methodologically, the co-teaching literature relies heavily in interview data, and thus lacks information on the real time actions of collaborating teachers in and out of the classroom. Video recordings of co-planning and co-teaching situations in the preliminary stage of collaboration would shed more light on the microlevel processes of teacher collaboration; for example, how teachers negotiate and learn to settle various matters with a colleague. Moreover, such data could usefully illustrate how teachers construct an understanding of, for example, co-teaching: is it a set of tasks co-teachers are to divide between them, or is it a process with multiple issues that they tackle flexibly together? This, in turn, raises questions about how a teacher's practical knowledge gained from solo teaching can be integrated with the idea of co-teaching and how teachers go about negotiating their shared understanding of co-teaching.

Moreover, the possible connections between the co-teaching model adopted by teachers (e.g. Friend et al., 2010) and the phase of the co-teaching partnership (Pratt, 2014) merit further research. As this study showed, inclusive thinking is only one aspect of the practical knowledge landscape that guides teachers’ work. To understand all the dimensions of co-teaching and how successful partnerships are developed and maintained requires more theoretical and methodological perspectives. Further research is also needed on the issues that teachers in different countries regard as worth sharing and that need negotiation and on cultural aspects of the process, such as power issues between colleagues.

6. Conclusions

In sum, co-teaching was approached both as a context of learning, in which teachers learn from each other's expertise along with how to function together in the classroom, and as a focus of learning, in which teachers explore their roles and develop their co-teaching practices together. Perhaps the most important finding of this study is that successful co-teaching is not something that just happens but something that teachers develop together. Rather, co-teaching is a result of numerous negotiations and a lot of time and effort; it cannot be expected to evolve in a situation in which two teachers meet each other in a classroom once or twice a week without any co-planning. Teachers need to negotiate a shared understanding of co-teaching. Such shared understanding and related engagement in co-constructing co-teaching practices can vary widely across co-teacher partnerships. Hence, a “mismatch” and possible ensuing failure to create a good co-teaching partnership could be avoided if teachers are encouraged to share their thoughts, feelings and expectations about co-teaching (see also Beaten & Simons, 2014; Gurgur & Uzuner, 2011; Shin et al., 2016), rather than leaving them to believe that co-teaching is a simple pedagogical tool one can select from a toolbox of teaching methods and readily apply in the classroom. The present stories show that these negotiations have important consequences for the co-teaching practices, and thus constitute its foundation.

By combining the perspectives of teacher learning and inclusive education, this study adds to our understanding of co-teaching as a space that is actively created rather than as a fortunate coincidence. Thus, our study challenges the often-repeated mantra that co-teaching should be voluntary and that teachers should be free to choose their partners (e.g. Scruggs et al., 2007). Moreover, the success of the present teams seemed to be worth all the effort expended, as all three teams continued to co-teach for the rest of

the school year. The challenge for schools, and hence also for teacher education, remains one of supporting teachers' skills in reflecting on their thinking and practices, and, particularly in co-teaching teams, on joint reflection.

This study illustrates that different professional backgrounds do not need to become an issue, and that the role of a SE teacher can be much more than one of focussing on the individual needs of specific students (Florian & Spratt, 2013). When, in co-constructing the frame for their collaboration, teachers succeed in finding ways of integrating their pedagogical thinking and classroom practices, co-teaching can be a truly inclusive tool that enhances the individual learning of all pupils, as it means that both teachers are working with all the pupils in the classroom. Thus, co-teaching does not concern special education (teachers) alone but all teachers, and the current aim of expanding inclusive education calls for including the basics of co-teaching in all teacher education programmes.

Countries like Finland that have high teacher autonomy (Webb et al., 2004) offer a fruitful context for studying teaching practices and teachers' use of their practical knowledge, as the school system gives teachers free rein to teach as they wish. In the case of co-teaching, however, high autonomy could become a problem as it entails a long list of negotiable issues. In contrast, school systems in which teaching methods and the curriculum are more mandatory could provide teachers with clearer structures for co-teaching. Nevertheless, teachers all over the world have their unique practical knowledge landscapes, and studies from different countries and contexts can add to our knowledge on topics that teachers consider worth negotiating as well as on those that constrain negotiation.

The small dataset limits transferability of this study as teachers' experiences are always unique and situated in place and time. We have tackled this by describing the research process and the research context in detail. Another limitation is that the final stories as presented in this paper were not discussed with the teachers. However, the main processes and key elements were the same across the stories, which strengthens the trustworthiness of the findings.

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