

Co-Teaching Considered



Collaboration between general and special educators

Vanessa Domine, PhD. • Chair of Secondary and Special Education • Montclair State University



*I'm a special educator. The person with whom I co-teach is competent, efficient, and assertive. Although she says she would like me to have a role in the classroom, she only asks me to do small, unimportant tasks, not partner for instruction. She also says that she likes to plan on her own, whenever she can find a few minutes, and so she isn't open to planning together. The students in the class who have disabilities are doing well and have mild needs. What should I do?**

Define It. Co-teaching involves two or more professionals with equivalent licensure and employment status.* It

involves **heterogeneous** grouping and students are treated as one group. Both teachers "live" in the **same classroom** setting. In co-teaching, teacher participation is varied, but ultimately there is **joint accountability**. Both educators are responsible for **planning, differentiating instruction, assessment of student achievement, and classroom management**. It is not an equal partnership, but it should be an **equitable** one.

**Paraprofessionals do not co-teach, per se, but provide invaluable classroom support.*

Build Rapport. The general classroom teacher and the special education teacher must establish a relationship and get to know each other on a **personal level**. This establishes **trust**, which is an essential component of co-teaching. Students can sense tension and harmony within the classroom environment. When there is a comfortable relationship there, the students will feel more comfortable in the classroom. Essentially, co-teaching is like a **professional marriage**.

Identify Personal Skills.

Co-teachers have to give up being in control of the classroom (Did we ever really "control" it in the first place?). Co-teaching requires **tolerance, flexibility, and a non-territorial disposition**. Teachers who are **self-aware of their**

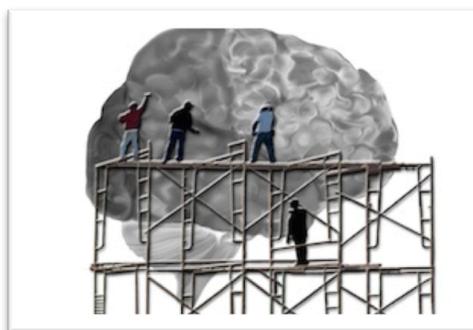
limitations are good candidates for co-teaching.

Plan When/How You Can.

There is never enough planning time. At minimum, meet at the beginning of the year to backwards design and decide how each unit will be taught based on IEPs and other considerations. Although there is room for a "divide and conquer" approach, it is essential that **both**

teachers are responsible and accountable for the entire curriculum. How much time may not be the issue, but rather **how that planning time is used**.

Online PLCs can compensate for some of that face-to-face time, but it cannot supplant even the strongest professional marriage.



Six Approaches to Co-Teaching:

Note: There is NO single best way to co-teach.

1. One Teach/One Observe

Co-teachers can decide in advance what types of specific observational information to gather during instruction and can agree on a system for gathering the data. Afterward, the teachers should analyze the information together.

2. Station Teaching

Teachers divide content and students. Each teacher then teaches the content to one group and subsequently repeats the instruction for the other group. If appropriate, a third station could give students an opportunity to work independently.

3. Parallel Teaching

On occasion, student learning would be greatly facilitated if they just had more supervision by the teacher or more opportunity to respond. In parallel teaching, the teachers are both covering the same information, but they divide the class into two groups and teach simultaneously.

4. Alternative Teaching

In most class groups, occasions arise in which several students need specialized attention. In alternative teaching, one teacher takes responsibility for the large group while the other works with a smaller group.

5. Teaming

Both teachers are enacting instruction at the same time. Also known as "tag team" teaching. Both co-teachers are equally responsible for planning, instruction of content, assessment, and grade assignment. Requires the greatest amount of planning time, trust, communication, and coordination of effort.

6. One Teach/One Assist

One co-teacher is in the lead role; another provides support. Who is in lead and who provides support may change during the lesson. Note: It should **never** be the primary method of co-teaching.

Identify Pedagogical Skills.

Individual teachers bring certain characteristics, knowledge, and skills to the co-teaching situation. Co-teachers have sets of common knowledge and skills, as well as discipline-specific knowledge and skills. It is essential early on to identify individual strengths, weaknesses and preferences. A shared philosophy of inclusion is also essential. Areas to discuss and deliberate include:

- Expectations for all students
- Routines
- Student discipline
- Grading
- Space usage
- Noise level
- Chores
- Confidentiality
- Planning Time

**In this abbreviated PD session, we explore the different shades of co-teaching and what it might look like. Much of the content of this session was adapted from Marilyn Friend's DVD "The Power of 2," which is an invaluable resource.*

For more info, visit:

www.marilynfriend.com. You can also find additional resources at www.nea.org

