Co-Teaching: Creating Successful and Sustainable Programs

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Marilyn Friend, Ph.D.
University of North Carolina-Greensboro
c/o 26 Rosebay Lane
Greensboro, NC 27455
Phone/Fax: 336/286-7050
E-mail: marilynfriend@marilynfriend.com

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Most school districts and school sites have made efforts in the past to provide an appropriate education for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Their efforts had varying degrees of success: In some districts, many students received an education largely with non-disabled peers, but in others, momentum decreased over time and little substantial change occurred. Recent federal legislation, specifically the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA), have led to a renewed interest in providing students meaningful access to general education in order to improve outcomes. More than ever before, efforts to reach this goal include the development of co-teaching programs.

The purpose of today's session is to briefly renew the defining characteristics of co-teaching, including what it should look like across elementary, middle, and high school settings. In addition, the presentation is intended to highlight factors that contribute to co-teaching's success and sustainability. The goal is to emphasize how shared understandings are essential for creating learning environments that meet the increasingly diverse needs of today's students while at the same time addressing practical issues that are faced by school professionals, particularly those that occur after the enthusiasm of start-up is past.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this presentation you will be able to

1. Summarize essential concepts that provide understanding of what co-teaching is and is not.

2. Outline a five-part model of factors that distinguish effective from ineffective co-teaching practice.

3. Describe six approaches for arranging teachers and students in co-taught classes.

4. Address personnel matters related to co-teaching, including preservice teacher preparation, hiring practices, and professional development.

5. Review strategies for addressing co-teaching program structures, including planning time, scheduling, and class composition.

6. Explain the impact of instructional quality on co-teaching outcomes.

7. Provide examples of school culture elements that may affect co-teaching, including those related to administrative support.

8. Discuss ways to measure the impact of co-teaching on student achievement and other outcomes.

Session Outline

A. Introductions and session overview

B. Review of key concepts related to co-teaching

1. What co-teaching is
2. What co-teaching is not
3. Co-teaching v. team teaching
4. A research-based model for co-teaching
5. Six co-teaching approaches

C. Co-teaching program quality

1. Personnel matters

- Teacher preparation
- Hiring new teachers
- Professional development for teachers
- Professional development for administrators

2. Logistics

- Common planning time
- Scheduling
- Class composition

3. Instructional quality

- Differentiated instruction
- Alternative interventions and tiering

4. Measurement of outcomes/evaluation of program quality

- Academic achievement measures
- Behavior measures
- Perception measures

5. School culture

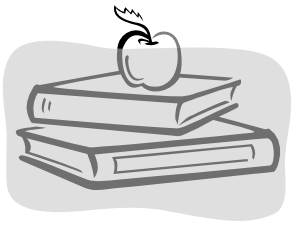
- Administrative support
- Expectations for teachers and other professionals

D. Conclusion

A Quick Review of Key Concepts Related to Co-Teaching

During this part of the workshop you will learn...

1. Reminders about the definition and characteristics of vocabulary terms related to co-teaching.
2. A research-based model of factors that contribute to co-teaching effectiveness.
3. Six approaches for arranging students and teachers in co-taught classes.



Co-Teaching as an Inclusive Service Delivery Option

DEFINITION

Co-teaching is a service delivery option in which

- Two (or more) educators or other certified staff
- Contract to share instructional responsibility
- For a single group of students
- Primarily in a single classroom or workspace
- For specific content (objectives)
- With mutual ownership, pooled resources, and joint accountability
- Although each individual's level of participation may vary.

Service Delivery in Inclusive Schools

Formal Service Delivery Options

Consultation. In consultation, a professional such as a psychologist, behavior specialist, speech-language therapist, or special educator meets on a regular basis with teachers to problem solve. By jointly identifying a problem, systematically developing an intervention, gathering data, and judging the intervention's effectiveness, teachers and consultants can maximize student learning.

Co-teaching. Co-teaching enables teachers or other licensed professionals to form instructional partnerships for the purpose of delivering high quality instruction to diverse classroom groups. Generally, students with disabilities or other special needs benefit from this option, but so do students who are gifted/talented, students who are typical learners, and students who are at-risk for school failure.

Instruction in a separate setting. Although the goal in an inclusive school is for most instruction to occur in general education settings, occasionally student needs indicate this is not appropriate. Examples of situations in which instruction in a separate setting might be preferred include a student needing some types of physical or occupational therapy, a student who needs highly specialized speech therapy, a student not learning as expected so that diagnostic teaching is needed, and a student whose behavior requires a small, structured environment.

Informal and Other Options for Supporting Students

Support in classrooms. Sometimes services should be delivered in a general education setting, but the partnership required in co-teaching is not needed or not appropriate. Support might be offered in a classroom when paraprofessionals assist students in general education classrooms.

Teaming. Grade-level elementary teams (or primary or intermediate teams), middle school teams, and interdisciplinary or departmental high school teams meet regularly to discuss curriculum and problem solve about students. Special educators and other support providers can join these teams to help create strategies and interventions as well as to address issues related to curricular adaptations. This helps to make communication more consistent and more efficient.

Informal problem solving. Teachers in inclusive schools often need to meet one-to-one to proactively or reactively problem solve regarding students they share. For example, a classroom teacher and a special education teacher might meet to discuss whether a student with an IEP who has violated a school rule should receive special consideration or be excluded from the upcoming field trip.

Collegial staff development. A hallmark of inclusive schools is the sense that there is always new information that can help teachers better address student needs. If teachers and administrators attend workshops, classes, or other staff development opportunities, they share what they have learned with colleagues.

A Teacher's Model for Co-Teaching

I. THE CORNERSTONE: A PHILOSOPHICAL BASIS

The members of successful co-teaching teams share several common beliefs that constitute a philosophy or a system of principles that guide their practice.

II. INDIVIDUAL PREREQUISITES

Individual teachers voluntarily bring certain characteristics, knowledge, and skills to the co-teaching situation.

A. Co-teachers have personal characteristics that enable them to work effectively with another adult.
B. Co-teachers have sets of common knowledge and skills.
C. Co-teachers have discipline-specific knowledge and skills.
D. Co-teaching is voluntary (NOTE: This teacher perception is not recommended practice for long-term program success).

III. THE PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP

Co-teachers have unique professional relationships.

A. The professional relationship is built on parity, communication, respect, and trust.
B. Co-teachers make a commitment to building and maintaining their professional relationship.

IV. CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

The interactions in a co-taught classroom are unique to this teaching arrangement.

A. Co-teachers clearly define classroom roles and responsibilities.
B. Co-teachers' instructional interactions reflect their professional relationship.
C. Co-teachers successfully maintain the instructional flow of the whole class by providing support to individual students.
D. The curriculum in co-taught classes explicitly addresses academic, developmental, compensatory, and life skills and reflects the needs of students in the class.
E. Co-teachers monitor their efforts.

V. EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

External support facilitates successful co-teaching.

A. Administrators support co-teaching
B. Appropriate professional development activities enhance co-teaching.

Based on Adams, L., Cessna, K., & Friend, M. (1993). Effectiveness indicators of collaboration in special education/general education co-teaching: Final report. Denver: Colorado Department of Education.

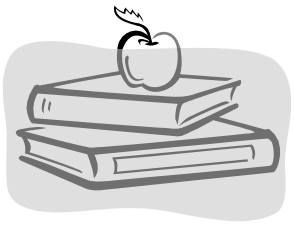
Co-teaching Approaches: Overview

Actual %	Ideal %	
_____	_____	**One Teach, One Observe.** One of the advantages in co-teaching is that more detailed observation of students engaged in the learning process can occur. With this approach, for example, 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.
_____	_____	**Station Teaching.** In this co-teaching approach, 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.
_____	_____	**Parallel Teaching.** On occasion, students' 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 teaching the same information, but they divide the class group and do so simultaneously.
_____	_____	**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.
_____	_____	**Teaming:** In teaming, both teachers are delivering the same instruction at the same time. Some teachers refer to this as having “one brain in two bodies.” Others call it “tag team teaching.” Most co-teachers consider this approach the most complex but satisfying way to co-teach, but it is the approach that is most dependent on teachers’ styles.
_____	_____	**One Teach, One Assist.** In a second approach to co-teaching, one person would keep primary responsibility for teaching while the other professional circulated through the room providing unobtrusive assistance to students as needed.

Elements of Co-Teaching Program Quality

During this part of the workshop you will learn...

1. Personnel matters that can affect co-teaching.
2. Logistics that facilitate or constrain a co-teaching program, including common planning time and scheduling
3. Instructional practices integral to co-teaching.
4. Evaluation strategies for determining co-teaching program impact on students and others.
5. School culture factors that are essential for co-teaching success.



Finding Time for Collaboration

Most professionals express concern about the time needed to form collaborative working relationships with their colleagues, particularly for activities such as co-teaching. They also worry about setting realistic expectations regarding time for collaboration. Although there is no secret to enable you to make more minutes in the day, these are some of the ways--some for elementary settings and some for secondary settings--professionals are making the most of the time they do have available:

1. Use other adults to help cover classes--including principals, assistant principals, counselors, social workers, department chairpersons, volunteers, paraprofessionals, psychologists, and supervisors. Of course, be sure to follow local policies on who can supervise groups of students.

2. Find funds for substitute teachers--some sources include grants from your state or local foundations, parent-teacher organizations, and disability advocacy groups.

3. Find "volunteer" substitutes--retired teachers, members of social or civic organizations, teacher trainees from local universities.

4. Begin each class period with independent work time. Have a partner learning activity or a problem or assignment on the board. Students are to complete the independent work while the teachers do informal planning.

5. Use instructionally relevant videotapes or other programs supervised by part of the staff to release the other part of the staff for planning.

6. When school-based staff development sessions are scheduled, arrange for them to begin late or conclude early with the saved time being used to collaboration.

7. Experiment with a late arrival or early dismissal day. This time can occur once per week, once per month, or once per grading period. Typically, the school day is lengthened and the additional minutes are "banked" to provide the release. The time thus created must be used in working with colleagues. It is not additional individual preparation time nor is it time to be spent on large-group, formal meetings.

8. Stay late after school once per month, but make it enjoyable by bringing snacks, flowers, music or other pleasant "atmosphere" items. If you bring walking shoes, you can accomplish both exercise and collaboration!

9. Treat collaboration as the equivalent of school committee responsibilities, especially if you are operating a pilot program. Time that others in school spend in committee meetings is spent working collaboratively.

10. 10. In elementary schools, divide labor for instruction to save time. That is, have each teacher take the lead for preparing materials for different lessons, making enough copies for all involved.

11. Reduce other work to have time to meet--for example, have students correct each others' work or create self-correcting materials.

12. For special educators, reserve time in the daily schedule that is not obligated to specific responsibilities. Use this time flexibly with lunch, planning, and other time to meet with teachers.

Scheduling Considerations

1. Scheduling for inclusive schools is complex and iterative. It usually takes several years for scheduling dilemmas to be resolved.

2. For the first year or two, it is common for a partial schedule to be developed. That is, some co-teaching and in-class support is created, but many traditional classes or the resource program remain.

3. In secondary schools, one strategy that has been successful concerns setting goals to reduce separate sections. This is accomplished by first listing all the sections of separate coursework offered (either subject-matter classes or resource sections) and then making a commitment to reduce by a specific percentage the amount of such coursework (for example, 15% the first year, 8% the second year).

4. In secondary schools, in-class services are sometimes more readily scheduled by clustering three students with disabilities for scheduling purpose (that is, these three students will have the same daily schedule). By placing two clusters of students in a class (that is, six students), in-class services can be justified.

5. In both elementary and secondary schools, the question of daily versus less-than-daily in-class services should be considered for at least some students.

    a. In a secondary school, in-class services might be grouped. For example, on Tuesdays during second period, the special education teacher will be either in one sophomore English class or one junior English class. This can occur on a set schedule of with variation based on teachers' judgments about meeting student needs.

    c. In middle school, in-class service could be negotiated based on the day of the week. For example, on Mondays the special education teacher co-teaches in English, Tuesdays math, Wednesdays science, and so on. Every student receives services every day, but not always in the same subject.

    d. Another middle school alternative is to schedule co-teaching by unit of instruction. For example, for the two weeks of instruction on integers co-teaching will occur in math every day. Then, as the English class reaches its major research project, co-teaching switches to that class for the next two weeks.

6. Special education teachers should pool their resources for addressing resource, in-class, and self-contained class needs. For example, if just one or two students need instruction in math, perhaps those students can attend a self-contained class during math instead of requiring a period scheduled by a resource teacher. In general, it is strongly advised that ALL special service providers participate in some in-class services in an inclusive school. If this is not done, teachers in self-contained programs themselves become isolated.

7. The schedules for special education teachers and paraprofessionals should retain some flexibility at the beginning of the year, if at all possible and if there is a great likelihood that additional students will be identified during the course of the school year. That is, at least some time during the week should be reserved for new responsibilities; this time can be used in the interim for assessment, observation, consultation, and other duties.

8. The best overall strategy for addressing scheduling is to work with a representative group from the school (each grade level; team, or department; an administrator; a representative from the related arts and/or vocational arts; other support staff (nurse, psychologist, speech/language therapist, ESL, others); and a paraprofessional. If this group begins its task of discussing scheduling before the close of the school year and continues it for two or three work sessions during the summer, usually a one-year plan can be developed.

9. Staff members not involved in re-thinking a school schedule should be prepared for the fact that first efforts may not be completely successful. Instead of resorting to complaining, staff members should be encouraged to suggest alternatives to improve the schedule for the following year. The more a schedule is developed taking into account ALL services, the more likely it is to meet student needs effectively and efficiently.

Class Composition for Co-Teaching: Which Students and How Many?

- In an elementary school or a small secondary school, all students with disabilities are sometimes grouped into a single section, classroom, or team. Terms such as "inclusion class," "inclusion classroom" or "inclusion team" might even be used. Generally, it is inappropriate to group students with disabilities in this manner, unless student needs are very mild and behavior is not a problem.

- In some schools, a decision is made that everyone should participate in the education of students with special needs. In these schools, the approach used is "one for you, one for you, one for you," with students being distributed equally across classes or sections. This approach has a tremendous risk of making it virtually impossible for special service providers to adequately address or even monitor student needs.

- One effective strategy for distributing students is to have teachers at a grade level or on a team, or the special education teachers, assign students based on their knowledge of the students and their classmates.

- In secondary schools, it sometimes happens that co-taught classes receive a disproportionately high number of students at-risk, the logic being that with two teachers these students will have a better educational experience. The problem with this approach is that it may result in a *de facto* segregated class being formed, one that looks very similar to a traditional special education class. Students do not have positive role models when this occurs, and the philosophy of inclusive practices is undermined.

- Professional common sense is the most logical way to make decisions about the number of students with disabilities or other special needs to be placed in a co-taught class. If a student with a moderate or severe disability is enrolled, the class should not also have several students with significant behavior challenges. If several students with learning disabilities are similar in need, it might be best if they are placed in the same location so that services can more readily be delivered.

- In addition to students with disabilities, students at-risk also should be considered in determining class composition. Just a few students with significantly higher needs than other students can affect the learning standards. The goal is to maintain the standard for most learners while making needed accommodations for students who need them.

- Yet another consideration in assigning students for co-taught classes concerns students receiving assistance through other programs. For example, in elementary schools a number of students may be enrolled in a reading program or an ESL program. Generally, students should not be grouped into classes on the basis of services received. However, the number and intensity of all services in a classroom is a factor to review when assigning students.

- In middle schools and high schools, assigning students sometimes becomes problematic because schedules are built by computer. Few teachers report that the computer scheduling is adequate. Two alternatives exist: Either teachers (usually the special education staff) can schedule students by hand prior to computer scheduling, or they can modify students' schedules after the computer has generated them. In most cases, when the latter system is employed students needing in-class assistance who are assigned singly in a class are re-assigned to a co-taught class.

A Framework for Instructional Accommodations

Instructional accommodations can occur in most aspects of instruction. The following six areas are especially important.

1. **How instructional content is selected**. This area includes the amount of instructional content students are expected to learn and the basis for selecting it. This area can include both modifications and adaptations.

2. **How the instructional environment is arranged**. Many factors affect learning even though not necessarily directly related to instruction. Examples include physical environment, classroom climate, and the availability of materials.

3. **How instructional content is structured and presented**. Techniques teachers use during large-group, small-group, and individual instruction to foster student learning are usually adaptations. Many students learn strategies as part of curriculum presentation.

4. **How students learn the instructional content**. This encompasses strategies students use to relate instructional content to other learning, to identify and hold the most important aspects of it, to remember it, and to use it are part of this area.

5. **How student learning is evaluated**. The fifth area includes alternative approaches for assessing student learning and options for grading students on daily work as well as on report grades. In co-taught options, alternative assessment strategies are often more feasible than in other settings.

6. **How the adults work together.** Strategies for facilitating instructional accommodations include consultation, preparation of adaptations by special educators or others, co-teaching, in-class services from paraprofessionals and others, intervention assistance and other teams, and systematic problem solving. This workshop captures just one of these options.

Marilyn's Advice on Observing Co-Teachers and Providing Feedback

1. Identify specific indicators that demonstrate to you that the quality of co-teaching is high. The observation tool above addresses categories of information that you might seek to gather. Several specific indicators that help provide more detail on the above are these:

   - What examples can be found in the classroom of differentiation? Are some students reading form alternative materials? Are some students completing a task out loud or on the computer? Are tools such as whiteboards available to all students?
   - What is the nature of the interactions between the teachers during instruction? Do they speak directly to each other in a way that furthers the purpose of the lesson? Do the engage in conversation with each other and students?
   - Is it difficult to discern, at least on the surface, which educator is the core content teach and which is the special educator? Is there evidence in the classroom of the expertise that each person brings to the instruction? For example, if a story involves big feet and little feet, have the teachers found a size 5 shoe and a size 16 shoe to demonstrate what they mean? Is there a visual organizer on the board that summarizes and explains the relationships among topics recently introduced?

2. Feedback sessions with co-teaching teams should include these items:

   - First, ask co-teachers to what extent the instruction observed was typical. Also ask what the co-teachers thought was particularly effective and what did not occur as planned or what was problematic.
   - Also ask co-teachers how the classroom was structured and how the teaching and learning was significantly different because of two teachers being present instead of just one?
   - Ask co-teachers how the instruction just observed was designed to address the heterogeneous needs represented in the classroom. Included with this question might be one about explaining any "invisible" differentiation that was occurring.
   - As co-teachers to think about "other possibilities." That is, if they were told to re-teach the same lesson but to do it using a different approach to co-teaching, what might they try? This question can help to prompt teachers not experimenting with several options to expand their practice while checking on the flexibility of well-established partners.
   - End a feedback session with a small action plan for next steps to foster even more effective co-teaching. For co-teachers using exemplary practices, the plan could relate to refining behavior management or instructional approaches or addressing concerns related to a specific student.

Evaluation Data: Implementation and Outcomes

To accurately judge whether co-teaching as a service delivery option is effectively meeting the needs of students with disabilities, several considerations are necessary. The first is whether what is being called co-teaching would be considered such when applying a definition as the one discussed elsewhere in these materials. Once that fact can be confirmed, that is, once treatment integrity is clear, then the impact of co-teaching on student outcomes, adult perceptions, and other indicators can be examined.

IMPLEMENTATION DATA (process)

- Core question: What has occurred?

- Examples of specific questions:

  - What training activities have been undertaken to foster collaboration, inclusive practices, and co-teaching?

    - Staff development? (school and district)

      Evidence: announcements of training opportunities, participant logs, training materials, minutes of meetings, copies of newsletters

    - Parent education?

      Evidence: advertising materials (e.g., e-mail announcements, brochures), training materials

    - Student education?

      Evidence: training materials

  - How has service delivery changed for students with disabilities?

    - Has the amount of pullout time decreased?

      Evidence: student schedules, IEP records of service delivery

    - To what extent has co-teaching been implemented? In which classes? How often? For what periods of time? To what extent is classroom co-teaching practice judged to meet criteria for quality?

      Evidence: teacher schedules, teacher reports, observational data, checklists

- How have instructional practices (academic and behavioral) changed?
  - To what extent is differentiating occurring?

    Evidence: teacher reports, student materials, observational data, unobtrusive measures (e.g., posting of classroom expectations and reward systems)

OUTCOME DATA (results)

- Core question: What has been the impact of the activities/changes implemented?
- Examples of specific questions:
  - How has student achievement been influenced by the implemented activities?

    Evidence: longitudinal student achievement data (self-comparison); achievement data from current year for students with disabilities and peers without disabilities in the same school (within-school patterns); achievement data for students with disabilities and students without disabilities from participating schools and comparable non-participating schools (cross-school comparison)
  - How has student behavior been influenced by the implemented activities?

    Evidence: longitudinal student discipline records for students who have been in a single school for 2-3 years (self-comparison); discipline records from current year for students with disabilities and peers without disabilities in the same school (within-school patterns); discipline records for students with disabilities and students without disabilities from participating schools and comparable non-participating schools (cross-school comparison)
  - What has been the impact of the initiative's activities on the perceptions of school professionals, parents, and others?

    Evidence: survey or questionnaire results; interview data, anecdotal reports

Ten Factors that Undermine the Effectiveness of Co-Teaching Programs

1. Ignoring the importance of a shared understanding on the part of all professionals involved (teachers, related services personnel, administrators, paraprofessionals) of what co-teaching is and what it involves.

2. Using co-teaching as the basis of all inclusive services in a school, often fostering a school culture that implies that if a student with an IEP is in a general education setting, then there must be a special educator there to provide services.

3. Failing to distinguish clearly among the roles of the various adults who might be in classrooms—teachers, related services staff members, paraprofessionals, student teachers, volunteers.

4. Basing co-teaching on the preferences and wishes of staff rather than on clear standards, expectations, and the needs of students. A typical result is that co-teaching may be offered only at certain grade levels or on particular middle schools teams or in just some high school departments.

5. Neglecting to develop implementers' knowledge and skills: co-teaching, differentiated instruction, positive behavior supports, and related areas.

6. Implementing co-teaching without using a range of options for grouping students and dividing instructional tasks between the educators. The related question is this: What is being called co-teaching practice?

7. Using co-teaching approaches such that the students in the classroom do not receive increased instructional intensity, often occurring when professionals over-use one approach (e.g., teaming or teaching/assisting). How is this classroom significantly different because two teachers are there?

8. Time: Failing to arrange for at least periodic shared planning time for co-teachers, teachers failing to use that time wisely, using time as a reason not to implement co-teaching practices.

9. Placing too many students with special needs into a co-taught class. One version concerns placing a highly disproportionate number of students with disabilities in the class; another concerns placing an appropriate number of students with disabilities in a class, but then filling in the rest of the class slots with students who struggle to learn or who have other special needs.

10. Failing to gather on-going data that demonstrates the impact of the co-teaching services on student achievement.

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