Co-Teaching: Creating Success for ALL Learners

Supplemental Materials for the Workshop
Council for Exceptional Children and the San Mateo County Office of Education
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Overview of the Workshop

Welcome to this professional development session on co-teaching! Whether you are new to this exciting and effective way to provide specialized services or a co-teaching veteran, in this workshop you should discover ways to create strong co-teaching partnerships or to refine your practice, taking it to the next level.

Here are the key questions for the day and examples of the topics we’ll address:

1. How do we build (or renew) our partnership?
   - The vocabulary of co-teaching
   - Co-teaching applications: professional roles of co-teachers
   - Paraprofessionals in the context of co-teaching
   - Self-awareness and self-understanding
   - Novices and veterans
   - Co-teaching cycles
   - Data on co-teaching effectiveness

2. How do we create instructional intensity through co-teaching?
   - Description of six co-teaching approaches
   - Variations and elaborations on co-teaching approaches
   - Strategies for grouping students for co-teaching
   - Examples of lessons and evidence-based instructional strategies that are more easily implemented or enhanced through co-teaching

3. What is needed to make co-teaching sustainable?
   - Common planning time
   - Schedules for co-teachers
   - Co-teaching class composition
   - District level support for co-teaching
   - Principal/school support for co-teaching

4. What are common co-teaching issues, dilemmas, and challenges?
   - Partnership problems (reluctant partners; dominating partners, absent partners)
   - Parent questions and concerns
   - Getting started or renewing our practice
   - Your additional questions and concerns
Co-Teaching Defined

As is true of many concepts in the field of education, co-teaching has been defined in a number of ways. Some individuals consider any arrangement with two adults assigned to a classroom to be co-teaching, even when one of the individuals is a paraprofessional or parent volunteer. A more accurate and useful definition of co-teaching includes these elements:

- **Co-teaching is a service delivery option.**
  
  Co-teaching exists as a means for providing the specialized instruction to which students with disabilities, those who are English language learners, or who have other special needs are entitled while ensuring access to general curriculum in the least restrictive environment with the provision of supplementary aids and services.

- **Two or more professionals with equivalent licensure and employment status are the participants in co-teaching.**
  
  Co-teaching is based on parity. When paraprofessionals or other adults assist in classrooms, the contribution is valuable, but it is appropriately considered support rather than co-teaching.

- **Co-teachers share instructional responsibility and accountability for a single group of students for whom they both have ownership.**
  
  Both educators contribute to instruction as part of co-teaching. Perhaps the most significant re-conceptualization critical for co-teaching is the notion of a two-teacher classroom rather than a one-teacher classroom with “help” available from the other teacher.

- **Co-teaching occurs primarily in a shared classroom or workspace.**
  
  Although instructional reasons sometimes exist for physically separating students and teachers, co-teaching usually involves multiple activities occurring in one place.

- **Co-teachers’ specific level of participation may vary based on their skills and the instructional needs of the student group.**
  
  Especially in middle and high school when special educators, ESL teachers, or other specialists are co-teaching in subjects in which they have had limited professional preparation, their skill and comfort for contributing to initial instruction may take time to develop. In such situations, care must be taken to by co-teachers to outline roles and responsibilities so that both professionals do have meaningful roles capitalizing on their strengths.
Related Terms and Concepts...NOT Co-Teaching

In the rapidly evolving world of special services and supports for students, terminology often becomes an issue. For clarification, these are some terms sometimes used in confusion with co-teaching:

- **Collaboration**
  
  Although generally it is preferred that co-teaching be collaborative, collaboration is far more than co-teaching. **Collaboration** refers to how individuals interact, not the activity they’re doing. Thus, any activity—co-teaching, problem solving, consultation—may or may not be collaborative. Further, collaboration frequently occurs outside education, for example, in business settings and in health occupations.

- **Inclusion**
  
  Although co-teaching is integral to the inclusive practices in many schools, it is not a requirement for inclusion to occur. **Inclusion** refers to a broad belief system or philosophy embracing the notion that all students should be welcomed members of a learning community, that all students are part of their classrooms even if their abilities differ.

- **Team teaching**
  
  The term **team teaching** often is used to describe the situation in which two general education teachers combine classes and share instruction. In an elementary school, this might occur when two fourth grade teachers decide to open the retractable wall that divides their rooms and teach the entire group as one. In a secondary school, this might occur when an English teacher and a history teacher combine two classes to present an American studies course. Co-teaching is different from this type of team teaching in two important ways: First, in co-teaching the teacher-student ratio is drastically improved. Second, in co-teaching, two significantly different orientations toward teaching are blended. Finally, team teaching in the middle school literature often refers to a process for planning interdisciplinary instruction, but not sharing instructional delivery.
Why All the Buzz about Co-Teaching?

A number of factors are influencing the continued growth of co-teaching as an option for educating students with disabilities or gift/talents, as well as those who are English language learners. Three particularly relevant sets of factors include the following:

- **Federal law and policy and the state law and policy that must adhere to federal mandates.** Examples:
  - Federal law has set high standards for academic outcomes for all students. Many professionals have acknowledged that the only way to meet these standards is to ensure that all students have access to the same curriculum.
  - When teachers partner, especially in middle and high school, issues related to highly qualified status of teachers are resolved (in most locales).
  - When students with disabilities are taught in a separate setting, the intensity of their collective needs often results in the delivery of the standard curriculum not being accomplished.
  - Students who come and go from classrooms often miss significant segments of instruction. No mechanism typically exists for helping them to learn what they missed.
  - Learning that occurs in a separate setting often is fragmented--students often do not transfer what is learned in one setting to another.
  - When professionals work with each other, they often share their knowledge and skills. As a result, all of them become more effective educators.

- **Research and evaluation studies demonstrating the potential of co-teaching to positively affect student outcomes.** Examples:
  - The published body of experimental or quasi-experimental research on co-teaching is extraordinarily small. This unfortunate situation is the result of many complexities related to conducting co-teaching research. Issues include these: (a) identifying overall comparable student class groups in settings with and without co-teaching; (b) making sure that the students with special needs embedded within the co-taught and solo-taught classes are likewise comparable; (c) addressing comparable subject matter in the
Why all the buzz? (continued)

co-taught and solo-taught classes; (d) ensuring that the teachers involved have comparable skill; and (e) confirming the fidelity of implementation of co-teaching (that is, are co-teaching approaches being used appropriately). Some authors find positive results (despite these limitations, usually in program evaluation studies (e.g., Hang & Rabren, 2009). Others find a lack of strong research to support co-teaching (e.g., Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012).

- Many schools and districts are gathering data to support the effectiveness of co-teaching (e.g., Walsh, 2012). For example, in middle schools, the achievement data for students in a solo-taught class will be compared to the achievement data of a group of students taught by the same general education teacher, but with a co-teacher. Of course, it is important that both class groups represent the diversity of students in the school. When this is the case, co-taught classes often equal or outperform solo-taught sections, even though the former include more students with identified special needs. Yet other teachers measure the progress of their students across the school year, examining academic growth from one year to the next or reviewing the percent of student passing high stakes or end-of-course exams.

- The worldwide trend toward inclusiveness and social justice. Examples:

  - Students in co-taught classrooms often have better opportunities to learn social, behavioral, and cultural mores through informal interactions with peers and professionals.

  - Students who are ELLs often struggle with social isolation; services in a separate setting may exacerbate this issue.

  - The diversity among learners today often suggests that many students benefit from the services that specialists can offer within the context of the general education classroom.

  - The various points of view co-teachers bring to a classroom enable instruction to be richer, deeper, and tailored to each student’s needs.

  - The U.N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which addresses inclusiveness as a lifelong right that should exist throughout the world in all pursuits.
## Co-Teaching Approaches: What Are Your Practices?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actual %</th>
<th>Ideal %</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Teach, One Observe.</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Station Teaching.</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>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 &quot;station&quot; could give students an opportunity to work independently.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parallel Teaching.</td>
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<td>On occasion, students' learning would be greatly facilitated if they just had more supervision by the teacher, more opportunity to respond, or embedded SDI. In parallel teaching, the teachers are both teaching the same information, but they divide the class and do so simultaneously to improve instructional effectiveness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative Teaching:</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<td>Teaming:</td>
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<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td>One Teach, One Assist.</td>
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<td>this 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.</td>
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Developing a Co-Teaching Program:  
How Do We Get Started?

If you are attending this seminar with the responsibility of gathering information to take back to school to get a co-teaching options started, you may be wondering what to do to get started. Here are some tips:

- Identify individuals who will lead the development of a co-teaching program.
- Gather information about co-teaching.
- With principal approval, have discussion groups and presentation to begin informing faculty and staff about co-teaching.
- Ensure that administrative support is in place.
- Directly address how co-teaching is part of overall school programs and services for students with special needs.
- Place co-teaching into the context of other school improvement efforts.
- Arrange for financial and other resources.
- Arrange for in-school or cross-school visits of co-teaching.
- Add co-teaching to school documents that explain services at the school.
- Plan and implement on a small scale before using co-teaching schoolwide.
- Share progress with colleagues.
- Identify problems and generate solutions for them.
- Create and implement program evaluation that includes professionals’ perceptions, student outcomes, and parent/family perspectives.
- If problems persist or resources are not in place, continue limited implementation, but clarify priorities for the situations in which co-teaching will occur.
- Plan and put into place long-term policies for co-teaching services.
- Review program on a regular basis and adjust policies and implementation as necessary.
- Advocate for implementation practices that foster success, not failure.
Refining Our Co-Teaching Practice:
How Can We Move to the Next Level?

Are you part of an experienced co-teaching partnership? Looking to continue to grow? First, congratulations on your dedication to your students and your willingness to continue to evolve your practice. When you are working to move to a new level, it’s important to consider in what area you’d like to grow and how willing you are to stretch yourselves as teachers to try new ideas. Here are several questions that might be the starting point for enriching your co-teaching practice.

- How extensively have you experimented with the six co-teaching approaches? Have you truly implemented each approach, selected deliberately, and analyzed the aspects of the approach that worked well and those that seemed to lead to problems in student learning or classroom operation?

- Have you worked to create new options based on the six co-teaching approaches? For example, have you tried blending parallel teaching and station teaching so that each teacher works with half the class and within the half each teacher splits the group in half (so that the groups are one-quarter of the students), meeting with each half for part of the instructional time allocated?

- Have you asked students to write about or tell you what they think about co-teaching? Have you used student feedback to make decisions about grouping strategies and instructional approaches within co-teaching?

- How have you addressed student grouping? Do you have several specific approaches that you use to group students to maximize their achievement in your co-taught class?

- How are you incorporating contemporary recommended instructional practices into your co-teaching? For example, are you using student data during your common planning? Are you using more visual instructional tools to replace some teacher words?

- Have you become students of co-teaching? Have you looked at the professional literature to learn what recent research shows related to co-teaching? What others are doing to improve practice? Have you visited others’ classrooms to get new ideas for your own co-teaching practice? Arranged to conduct your own action research on co-teaching?
A Principal’s Co-Teaching Checklist

Principals are by far the most critical professionals when it comes to creating and sustaining co-teaching programs. Here are essential beliefs, activities, and considerations for principals and other site administrators:

- Administrators have sufficient knowledge about co-teaching to understanding its potential and problems and to work with staff members to create and sustain an effective program.
- Co-teaching is an expectation in the school, existing in a culture of collaboration.
- All teachers in the school are actual or potential co-teachers.
- Prior to scheduling, an analysis is completed of the needs of all students with disabilities and the services required to meet those needs.
- Services less intense than co-teaching are implemented as appropriate.
- Services in a separate setting for part (and rarely, all) of the school day are implemented for students with significant needs who need them.
- Involve teachers and other staff members in developing the school schedule.
- Ensure that teachers receive professional development and plan for periodic group meetings throughout the school year.
- Include co-teaching as master scheduling is occurring.
- Master schedule for all special services at all school levels.
- Group several students with special needs in any single classroom, but keep the ratio at no more than 20-25 (elementary) to 30-33 (secondary) percent for students with disabilities. For ELLs, numbers depend on overall school enrollment.
- Ensure schedule is developed based on student needs rather than teacher preference or convenience.
- Create feasible and instructionally viable co-teaching patterns that include less-than-daily options but avoid every-other-day options.
- Hold co-teachers accountable for fidelity of implementation.
- Observe in co-taught classes, reviewing the quality of co-teaching by assessing the quality of instruction.
- Evaluate the co-teaching program (e.g., student achievement outcomes, teacher and parent satisfaction).
The Big Ten: Analysis of Co-Teaching Practice

The following 10 areas have critical importance for the effective implementation of co-teaching. Other areas also are important—for example, many exist in the administrative domain, but this set is likely to determine whether co-teaching will lead to effective student outcomes. Questions related to each area are included to facilitate your discussion.

1. The co-teaching partnership
   - What are indicators of parity in the classroom as well as outside the classroom?
   - How do we understand our distinct roles in the classroom? How do we communicate to parents, students, and others our distinct roles?
   - How mature is our ongoing communication?

2. Six co-teaching approaches
   - What proportion of co-teaching time is spent in each approach?
   - How are decisions made about which approach to use?
   - How have approaches been adapted/tailored to meet the needs of the students and the curriculum being taught/learned?

3. Instruction—general and specially designed
   - To what extent are the instructional practices based on a research? If asked, could we summarize the research that contributes to the practice being considered effective?
   - How are the specially designed instructional needs of students with disabilities directly addressed in the classroom? How are these interventions documented?

4. Data collection, interpretation, and use
   - What are examples of instructional data regularly gathered in the co-taught classroom? How are they recorded?
   - How are instructional data used to plan instruction?
   - How are data related to students’ IEPs gathered (e.g., academic, behavior with disabilities)? How are they recorded?

5. Classroom environment
   - How has the classroom been adjusted (e.g., furniture, available or white boards, teacher work areas) to accommodate the needs of co-teachers.
   - How have we directly created a supportive social and instructional environment for the diverse students in our co-taught class?
6. Classroom management
   - What routines have we put in place to ensure our classroom operates efficiently and effectively (e.g., moving from group to group; dealing with assignments and materials)?
   - How do we make decisions regarding grouping of students in our co-taught class? How often are those decisions reviewed? To what extent are several grouping strategies used?
   - How do we complete instructional chores, from set-up and clean-up to grading?

7. Behavior management
   - To what extent do students respond equally to teachers’ requests related to behavior?
   - Who is responsible for addressing behavior issues in the classroom (e.g., giving rewards or negative consequences; leaving with a student who is disrupting class)?
   - How often is the special educator pulled from the co-teaching setting to respond to student behaviors in other classrooms or settings?

8. Administrative support
   - How knowledgeable is our principal about co-teaching?
   - How has our administrator addressed scheduling of planning time?
   - How has our administrator addressed the appropriate scheduling of students with disabilities into general education classes, including those that are co-taught?

9. Quality of planning
   - What schedule and process do we have in place for planning?
   - If asked for documentation of our planning, including the implementation of SDI for students with disabilities, what could we provide?
   - What role does technology play in our planning (e.g., Wiki, Edmodo)?

10. Use of technology
    - How is technology used to gather, interpret, and use data in the co-taught class?
    - How have we used co-teaching as a means of leveraging the effective use of instructional technology?
    - What instructional and assistive technology are we using for students with disabilities and other special needs that could not be implemented in a solo-taught class?
Co-Planning Resources

Many resources are available to facilitate electronic co-planning. The items listed below often are available for multiple platforms (e.g., Mac, Apple mobile devices, Android mobile devices, Windows devices). Many are free or have a basic free version; others may include a charge based on the sophistication of the tools included in the app. Such options also change rapidly, and so you may find options you prefer or that some of these are no longer available.

Evernote (evernote.com) (or a similar note-taking app). Evernote is an option for simply sharing information such as lesson plans, web information, and so on; you also can label or tag your notes to make organizing them simple. With the free version, you can share any “notes” that you create but others cannot change them in a notebook. A premium version allows changes and sharing of notes. This option is particularly attractive if you and your teaching partner are already Evernote users.

On-line Planbook (https://planbook.com/). This is a versatile on-line lesson planning option that was created by teachers for teachers. Co-teachers may each have an account and link them, or (more typical) they create and share a single account. Planbook is a comprehensive lesson planning app that can be accessed through your phone, tablet or computer. It includes all state standards, which simplifies the planning process. Teachers an include attachments, and SDI can be annotated in the tab called Notes. Other features include the ability to move lesson plans such as when the schedule is disrupted and the option of transferring one year’s lessons to the following year. The version of Planbook with all features costs $12/year for individual subscriptions, less when an entire staff is enrolled.

Google shared calendar. If you already use Google options for e-mail and group collaboration, you also could create a Google calendar dedicated to co-teaching. To do this, you first create a dedicated co-teaching calendar, sharing it with your partner (specific directions are given on the site’s help page). You then make your daily co-teaching time a repeating “appointment,” inserting lessons plans into the description box within the appointment (reached by clicking on the appointment). The specialist can annotate the lesson plans with SDI, either embedded in the lesson or at the end of it.

Google Docs. If you have access through your school district to Google Apps for Education (GAFE), a Google doc might be one of the simplest ways to create your own planning approach. You can follow the simple directions to set up your shared space in just a few minutes through your Gmail account. One newly added enhancement is the availability of lesson planning templates. There are three of these for co-teaching, and so you can choose one that suits your planning requirements and preferences.

Trello. Do you prefer apps that are highly visual? If so, Trello might be of interest. It lets teachers organize their lesson plans in columns that can be customized. To add a lesson, teachers create cards that describe its activities. These can be moved column to column as the work is completed. This app can be particularly helpful if lessons are frequently changed.
Apps for Co-Teachers

As co-teachers increasingly use various tablet devices and even their smartphones in their partnered classrooms, they are finding a wealth of apps to support their instruction. These are examples of the apps they are using. Note that you will need to explore which platforms and devices are supported (e.g., Apple, Android; iPhone, Samsung Galaxy Tab 3) because such information changes rapidly and new options emerge almost daily. Also, cost information should be verified as this, too, changes frequently.

- **Class Dojo**
  
  This is a highly popular behavior management app. You create a class group, determine behavior to focus on, and record student behavior. An audible signal can be turned on so that students know if a behavior has been noted as positive or negative. Student information can be shared with parents, and you can generate reports related to your data.

- **Teacher’s Assistant Pro**
  
  This is another behavior management app. It allows you to track and record student behaviors—both positive and negative. This information can be sent to parents, and you can create reports related to behavior. This app has many dimensions for customizing it for your co-teaching situation.

- **Noteshelf**
  
  There are many note-taking apps available. This one works well when you need to keep data on particular students over a period of time. The app permits you to create as many notebooks as you need (for example, one for each student in the class who has a special need). Within each notebook, you can keep student data or other information. You can type or use a stylus to write in the notebooks, notes can be highlighted, and the information is exportable.

- **Interval Timer**
  
  Co-teachers sometimes need to gather data related to student academic or social behavior using interval recording (for example, for how long does a student work before stopping, how long does it take a student to being work). This app lets teachers determine how often they want to check on the student and alerts them to check on that student. Although designed for health and physical activities, used with an earbud and smartphone in a co-taught class, it makes this type of data collection easily managed.

- **Spreadsheets**
  
  Spreadsheets (Office Excel; Google Sheets) comprise a versatile data collection tool. Track competencies mastered, behavior, or IEP goal progress on them.
References, Readings, and Related Materials


