

Countdown to Co-Teaching: ARE YOU READY?



Many new teachers accept positions that include co-teaching assignments. What does it mean to co-teach? What does co-teaching look like? How do teachers begin to co-teach?

Co-teaching is defined as the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher or another specialist for the purpose of jointly delivering instruction to a diverse group of students, including those with disabilities or other special needs, in a general education setting and in a way that flexibly and deliberately meets their learning needs (Friend, 2008). Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010) offer six approaches to co-teaching.

Models of Co-Teaching

- 1. One teach, one observe.** In this approach, one teacher leads instruction while the other observes the students in the class.
- 2. One teach, one assist.** One teacher is the active teacher while the other circulates and assists students. The co-teacher answers questions, directs attention, and provides additional explanations.
- 3. Station teaching.** Students rotate among several different learning stations. Each co-teacher leads a station, while the other stations are completed individually by students.
- 4. Parallel teaching.** The class is divided into two

heterogeneous groups. Each teacher provides the same instruction to one of the groups.

5. Alternative teaching. Pre-teaching, re-teaching, review, and accelerated instruction are provided by a co-teacher to a small group while the other teacher leads the remaining large group.

6. Team teaching. Both teachers equally share the instructional delivery because they know the curriculum and they are at ease with each other's teaching style and management techniques. This model takes longer for teachers to feel comfortable implementing.

Choosing the Model to Implement

The model implemented depends on many factors. First, the co-teachers' strengths should be considered. If a teacher has a passion for a topic or a unique strategy, the co-teachers can implement the one teach, one assist model. If there have been many students absent in the class, the alternative teaching model allows one teacher to re-teach those students.

Benefits of Co-Teaching

Co-teaching benefits everyone. Students benefit from having two teachers support their learning. If a student does not understand the directions given by one teacher, the co-teacher can explain it again. Students receive more one-on-one feedback and instruction. Co-teachers benefit from joint planning. More elaborate lessons can be presented. Each teacher can take responsibility for planning and assessing student growth. Co-teaching provides support for each teacher as well.

Getting Started

For co-teaching to be successful, pre-planning is essential. Conversations about each teacher's expectations allow teachers to get acquainted, understand unique characteristics, and develop a plan for success. Constant communication from pre-planning through implementation is crucial. When plans go differently than expected, it is important to spend time reflecting and brainstorming solutions together.

Cook and Friend (1995) suggested discussing planning time, parity signals (how will we convey to students and others that we are equals in the classroom?), confidentiality issues, acceptable noise

levels, classroom routines, discipline, feedback, and pet peeves.

Questions for co-teachers to discuss:

1. What are your expectations for students regarding participation, daily preparation, written assignments, and homework completion?
2. What are your basic classroom rules? What are the consequences?
3. How are students grouped for instruction in your classroom?
4. What instructional methods do you like to use (lectures, class discussions, hands-on activities)?
5. How do you monitor and evaluate student progress?
6. In what ways do you differentiate instruction for students with special needs?
7. How and when do you communicate with families?
8. What are your strengths as a teacher? What are your weaknesses?
9. What do you see as potential roles and responsibilities as co-teachers?
10. What are your hopes for our work as a team? What are your concerns?

Walther-Thomas, Bryant, and Land (1996)

Care must be taken to adequately plan and communicate throughout the process. Co-teachers become frustrated when adequate planning time is not allowed.

Successful co-teaching benefits all students and teachers. Meeting the diverse needs of all students is challenging; co-teaching is one effective method teachers can use to reach all students. 🍏

References

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