

An Introduction to Cooperative Teaching

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(Copied part of the article that related to co-planning from http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/?q=collaboration/cooperative_teaching)

Keys to Successful Co-Teaching

As with any teaching technique, the skill of the teacher is as important, if not more important, than the technique. However, in co-teaching there are (at a minimum) three critical issues that teams should address prior to starting the process. If you are currently co-teaching, you may want to reflect on these issues to refine what you are already doing.

1. **Planning** - This seems obvious, but co-teaching teams need time to plan and a commitment to the planning process. If one teacher shows up on time and the other always arrives late, then this lack of commitment can hinder the teaming process. At a minimum, teams need 10 minutes per lesson (Dieker 2001) to plan. This figure was gathered from teams not in their first year of teaming. Therefore, in the first year, additional time for planning may be needed. Teams should not start their planning period with kid specific issues (e.g. the latest stunt a student pulled today), but they must focus on planning a lesson for the entire class. Kid specific issues should be addressed throughout the planning process or after the lesson planning is completed. Remember, if no planning time is available, this will limit the types of co-teaching that can be used in your school.
2. **Disposition** - The philosophy of the two teachers working together is important to consider. If one teacher believes all students should be included and appropriate accommodations are essential, while the other believes that having high standards means treating all students the same, these differences can greatly hinder the co-teaching process. Before starting the co-teaching process, discussing your perspectives on issues such as fairness, grading, behavior management, and philosophy of teaching are important in order to become an effective team.
3. **Evaluation** - This area is one that is lacking in many individual classrooms and in many schools which have adopted a co-teaching approach. If co-teaching is happening school-wide, then a systematic method should be used to evaluate both teacher satisfaction and student learning with this model. If teachers are working in a team setting, then at least every 4 weeks, they should set aside a few minutes to discuss two critical questions: "Is how we are co-teaching

meeting the needs of both teachers?" (For example, is the special educator meeting individual students' needs, and is the content teacher meeting local and state standards? and most importantly, "Is what we are doing good for ALL students?") If the co-teaching process is only beneficial for a student with a disability to gain social skills, yet everyone else cannot learn because of disruptions or because the curriculum is being modified for everyone, then these teachers must talk about this issue and how to more effectively address this student's needs and still ensure the entire class is learning. If such issues arise, it does not necessarily mean that co-teaching should not continue, but modifications and adjustments should be an expected part of the co-teaching process.

Barriers to Effectiveness

Several things can stand in the way of effective teaching in general. However, some issues that are unique or critical to the co-teaching process are described below with some suggestions as to how to address these issues.

1. Time - The amount of time to plan, the time spent developing a school-wide support structure for co-teaching, the time spent to prepare the students, and the time teachers are given to develop a personal as well as a professional relationship can all greatly impact the co-teaching process. This statement does not mean that co-teaching has to take more time, but initially the time must be dedicated to create a school and classroom that support teaching teams as well as including students. Leadership must either lead teachers in using this type of model or must empower teachers to develop their own skills. Also critical to making this type of structure work school-wide is that the schedules of students with disabilities and co-taught teams should be created first, and then other activities must fill in around these important structures. No matter how creative, a limited amount of time or structure for this process can jeopardize the success of this model.
2. Grading - Just as the time and structure must be determined and scheduled prior to the start of a co-teaching relationship, the same should hold true for grading. Co-teaching teams must determine prior to the start of the semester how they will grade students with diverse learning needs in their classrooms. Other ideas for grading are provided below, but the most important variable to remember is to determine how students will be evaluated prior to the start of the semester instead of at the end of the grading period.
3. Student Readiness - Even 10 years ago many students with disabilities were not included into the general education curriculum. They were

often pulled out and taught separate skills or curriculum. It is important to remember that simply including students into general education co-taught settings may not ensure their success. One of the struggles that teachers at upper grade levels must acknowledge is that many students with disabilities have received a disjointed education and may have large gaps in their knowledge base. Just as teachers take the time to prepare themselves for a co-teaching relationship, this same type of preparation may be needed to assist students with disabilities who will be included in the class who have either academic or behavioral gaps compared to their peers.

4. **Teacher Readiness** - Even in the strongest schools with the strongest teachers, resistance to a co-teaching model can occur because teachers often are considered to be autonomous. The best way to address a school-wide co-teaching model is to let teachers know (preferably using a family model) that they will be co-teaching next year. Then allowing teachers collective autonomy to design models or structures that will work for them but using collective accountability that these structures must show teachers should be allowed collective autonomy to design models or structures that will work for them, along with collective accountability which shows how they are using co-teaching to ensure all students are in their least restrictive environment and making strong achievement gains.
5. **High Stakes Testing** - At the core for everyone at every grade level in every district is the issue of how co-teaching may impact testing. As mentioned earlier, clear evidence does not indicate a conclusive outcome for co-teaching, but with that said, some things are critical to consider in relation to the impact of co-teaching on standardized assessment. First, any initiative that is implemented must be done in a careful and planned manner to ensure the success of all students. For example, if 15 students with the same disability are placed into a classroom so that co-teaching can occur, how will this impact the other 12-15 students in that class? Research clearly indicates that heterogeneous learning communities are the most productive, yet many times when we include students with disabilities, this factor is quickly forgotten. Second, is the co-teaching model being implemented to raise students' test scores, as a cost saving attempt, or in some cases as a dumping model? If students with disabilities are included without sufficient supports, this is not only against the law but will ensure failure of the co-teaching relationship. Third, is ongoing evaluation and data being gathered that reflect the intent of the co-taught setting? Whether co-teaching is occurring at a classroom or school-wide level, data on behavioral, academic, and social skills of all students must be gathered

and assessed on an ongoing basis. If this does not occur, then waiting until the local or state assessment indicates that students are failing is too late. Fourth, as data is assessed, school leaders need to look across the data and within the data. Are students in a specific quartile moving up for the first time? Over and over again students who are considered "at-risk" but do not qualify for special services talk about their feeling of success for the "first" time in co-taught settings. Finally, listen to the data and the students. In my work, students who are gifted assure me over and over again that they like co-taught classrooms, yet students with behavioral challenges often say they "get in trouble too much" or "don't like being double teamed." In both of these cases, our state or local assessments will not capture students' perceptions; however, these are critical to consider in all classrooms, but especially important in co-taught settings.

Summary

Like any educational practice, co-teaching can be successful if implemented in a school that embraces the philosophy of inclusion, by teachers who have had time to define their roles and are given continued time to plan. In addition, the students with disabilities who will be served in the co-taught setting need to be prepared for this change of service delivery. Finally, administrators and teachers must develop tools to evaluate the success of all students in this model if they are to measure their success and to make changes when co-teaching is not working. In the following section there are numerous tools that can assist you in thinking about your school, your classroom, and most importantly your students in attempting to create the most successful co-taught environment for all students.

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