

Chapter 1

Co-Teaching in a Nutshell

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

List 1.1 Characteristics of Co-Teaching

Co-teaching involves two professionals (usually a special education teacher and a general educator) working together to share in the planning, instructing, and ongoing assessment of a group of students. This model has also been adopted in delivering instruction to other diverse populations including at-risk learners, advanced learners, and English learners. The key components of co-teaching are:

- Two or more professionals working together in one classroom
- Both (or all) teachers actively involved with students in whole-group and small-group instruction
- Delivering instruction collaboratively to students with diverse needs
- Two teachers physically present in heterogeneous classrooms, with joint and equal responsibility for instruction
- Both teachers sharing the leadership role in the classroom
- Communication and collaboration becoming priorities
- Both (or all) teachers sharing in planning and assessing processes
- Continuum of services depending on the needs of the students
- Instruction delivered primarily in a single classroom setting
- Teachers sharing joint ownership of class, resources, and accountability

However, having two teachers in the same classroom is not all that co-teaching means; it requires co-planning, co-instruction, and co-assessment.

List 1.2 What Co-Teaching Is

- In the general education classroom
- More than one professional to support students
- Cooperative learning and collaboration for the teachers
- An opportunity for endless possibilities
- Dependent upon co-planning and co-scheduling

Therefore, *co-teaching* is two or more professionals working together to provide instruction to students in an inclusive setting.

- Teachers plan together, instruct the class together, and collaborate for assessment, grading, and differentiating instruction
- In an ideal setting, teachers have common planning time to facilitate their work together for inclusion
- Co-teaching allows teachers to meet the needs of struggling and advanced learners in the classroom
- Students learn from two or more people who may have different ways of thinking and teaching
- Co-teaching is a creative and collaborative way to connect with and support others in helping all students succeed in the classroom
- Co-teaching helps make schools more effective

List 1.3 What Co-Teaching Is Not

We just discussed the key elements of the co-teaching process. The elements listed in the preceding list need to be in place for a successful co-teaching program. However, because of the many misconceptions about the co-teaching process, we should also explore what co-teaching is not:

- Co-teaching is not easy
- Co-teaching is not the only way
- Co-teaching is not right for everyone in every situation
- Co-teaching is not a remedial classroom
- Co-teaching is not a way to "fix" weak teachers
- Co-teaching is not playing "tag team" in the classroom, with one teacher teaching one subject and the other teacher teaching the next subject without mutual coordination
- Co-teaching is not one teacher at the copy machine, correcting papers, or doing secretarial support while the other teacher provides direct instruction in the classroom
- Co-teaching is not one teacher delivering a lesson while the other decorates a desk or holds up a wall on the sidelines and watches; co-teaching requires that both certified teachers are directly involved in providing instruction and supporting student learning in the classroom
- Co-teaching is not two teachers deciding to combine their classes together to teach a lesson or a unit; this approach is called team teaching and may be valuable for certain projects, but it is not co-teaching
- Co-teaching is not occurring when one teacher dominates the discussion or instruction as the leading authority or prevails in decisions about what is to be taught
- Co-teaching is not inclusion, and inclusion is not co-teaching. These two terms are often used interchangeably. Inclusion is a philosophical practice in which a multitude of diverse learners of mixed ability are taught in the same classroom. Co-teaching is just one way to implement inclusion.
- Co-teaching is not designating one of the partners as a tutor to assist and support the general education teacher only with struggling students.
- Co-teaching is not happening when the special education teacher is in and out of the classroom inconsistently and therefore does not have a way to deliver instruction on a regular basis. In this situation, the general education teacher does not have an opportunity to share responsibilities for planning and delivering instruction and cannot count on the special education teacher as a partner. The special education teacher becomes more of a consultant instead of a co-teacher.

Taken from *The Co-Teaching Book of Lists*, by Katherine Perez. Copyright © 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

List 1.4 Framework for Co-Teaching

Many elements influence a co-teaching program's ability to successfully teach *diverse learners*.

School Culture

- Collaborative, collegial ways of working together
- Collective vision of an inclusive school
- Commitment to shared vision and beliefs
- System of traditions and rituals

Organization

- Dedicated and informed leadership
- Collaborative scheduling
- Ongoing professional development
- Adequate facilities
- Sufficient resources

Collaboration

- Time for reflection
- Tapping into strengths and talents of each teacher
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities
- Attributes and beliefs of individual teachers
- Utilizing all available resources

Instruction

- Scheduling and planning
- Adaptations and modifications
- Ongoing assessment and grading
- Differentiated instruction
- Use of multiple intelligences
- Whole- and small-group activities
- Realistic expectations
- Adequate use of space
- Carefully defined procedures and routines
- Selection of appropriate co-teaching models

List 1.5 How Co-Teaching Benefits Teachers

When done properly, co-teaching can be one of the most innovative practices in education. The exchange of knowledge and skills among team members and higher teacher-student ratios are some of the main benefits of implementing this process.

In a co-teaching classroom that fully utilizes the expertise of both teachers, students are more likely to achieve more and remain on task more than they would be in a traditional pullout segregated program. Some of the other benefits include:

- Students with learning and behavior problems are surrounded by positive peer models in the general education classroom, and their behavior will most likely improve. This greatly facilitates classroom management for teachers.
- Educators who have experienced co-teaching find that they are more energized and creative, are able to trust one another, and have more fun teaching.¹
- Co-teaching encourages teachers to share expertise, providing one another with valuable feedback.²
- Teachers involved in co-teaching relationships state that this relationship results in increased professional satisfaction, opportunities for professional growth, personal support, and opportunities for collaboration.³
- Co-teaching enhances any needed whole-group instruction while still meeting individual needs.⁴
- The value added by having a special education teacher in the room to co-teach results in more individual attention for students, more on-task student behavior, and more interaction with teachers.⁵
- Special education teachers gain insight into the realities of the general classroom while general educators learn valuable lessons in planning, accommodating, and instructing students with learning or behavioral difficulties.⁶
- Co-teaching makes it easier to conduct hands-on activities and provide flexible testing situations.⁷

Taken from *The Co-Teaching Book of Lists*, by Katherine Perez. Copyright © 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

List 1.6 Advantages for the General Education Teacher

- Learning opportunities to reach *all* students
- Background information gained on special education
- More time to focus on content and less on individual problems
- Increased awareness of the extent of students' academic difficulties and ways to support diverse student learning
- Specific skills of the special education teacher's to match students' individual learning styles
- Awareness of different successful learning strategies
- More time to learn, share, and use learning strategies
- More focused techniques to help special education students
- Background information on special education students provided
- Assistance with nonidentified students who also need strategic support — assistance for *all* students, labels or not
- Support for students who need organizational strategies
- Feedback available from special educator on content presentation
- Student peer pressure in favor of appropriate behavior, so that inappropriate behavior is decreased
- Work together with special educator for home-school support
- Twice as much opportunity for teacher's assistance
- Professional growth opportunity and greater personal satisfaction
- Students organizational skills and efforts monitored by special education teacher
- More time for personal necessity breaks—like going to the bathroom!

Taken from *The Co-Teaching Book of Lists*, by Katherine Perez. Copyright © 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

List 1.7 Advantages for the Special Education Teacher

- Special education teacher's increased understanding of goings-on in the general education classroom
- More time-effective
- Specific content area specialization not needed
- Ability to learn the expectations of the general education classroom by teaching alongside a subject-matter expert
- More opportunities to use specialized intervention skills with more students
- More time to help students develop motivation, social skills, effort, and responsibility for their own learning
- Greater awareness of student progress and student performance throughout the day, so teachers are more in touch with students
- Knowing the daily procedures and routines of the general education teacher
- Having more time to use learning strategies within subject areas and to help students transfer and generalize information
- More realistic goals can be set for special needs students with increased exposure to "normalcy"
- Improved student behaviors
- "Reality check" for student goals within the general education setting
- More positive feedback from parents
- Rewards of seeing students succeed and establish credibility among peers
- More positive teacher-student relationships
- Partnering with a colleague to support IEP goals
- Mutual learning and appreciation for each other's expertise
- Professional growth and greater personal satisfaction

List 1.8 Advantages of Co-Teaching for Students

When students are provided with proper supports and learning strategies, they receive the benefits of a content expert providing instruction combined with the benefits of a learning strategies expert offering necessary interventions, scaffolding, and modifications for success.

- Positive social outcomes for students with and without disabilities⁸
- Behavioral and academic expectations still high for students⁹
- More individual attention and more interaction with teachers for all students¹⁰
- Increased student engagement and increased use of strategies by students¹¹
- Increased self-confidence and self-esteem, enhanced academic performance, increased social skills and stronger peer relations for all students¹²
- Exposure to the different teaching styles of two teachers
- More difficult for students to go "off task"
- Shorter wait times to get needed help from teachers
- Less fragmented learning that makes more sense

Taken from *The Co-Teaching Book of Lists*, by Katherine Perez. Copyright © 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

List 1.9 Advantages for the General Education Student

- Strong emphasis on learning skills, organization, and preparedness
- Opportunities for leadership through peer tutoring
- More productive and personalized learning experiences
- More contact time with teachers for greater individualized instruction
- Greater engagement in the classroom
- Enhanced sense of responsibility
- More time spent working cooperatively, acquiring new knowledge, and learning more about ways to make positive contributions in class
- More attention to the development of social skills
- Diverse learning techniques available and more attention to individual learning styles for instruction
- Improved self-esteem
- Better understanding and sensitivity toward students with different abilities
- Unique learning needs met for students with and without disabilities

List 1.10 Advantages for the Special Education Student

- Content expertise and learning strategies expertise offered in tandem, with specific interventions to help students succeed
- Access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities¹³
- Effort is recognized and valued, so students tend to like school more
- Improved self-esteem
- More meaningful grading and assessment procedures
- More positive attitudes, greater availability of role models for behavior and learning, more interaction with nondisabled peers, and exposure to higher-level concepts and discussions than in segregated special education settings¹⁴
- Opportunity to learn and grow in the least restrictive environment
- Opportunity to make contributions to the general education classroom
- Strong emphasis on learning skills, organization, and preparedness
- Practice in setting realistic goals
- Enhanced citizenship and sense of responsibility
- More opportunities for reinforcement of classwork when it is presented
- More contact time with teachers for individualized instruction based on student needs
- Less fear of failure and learned helplessness due to experiences with success
- More exposure to students with appropriate behaviors and successful learning skills
- Less stigma for seeking help when services and support are provided inside the classroom

List 1.11 Considerations for Starting a New Co-Teaching Initiative

- Start small and work with teachers who are willing to participate
- Work out issues and schedules carefully in a small group first before going full scale schoolwide; don't start without proper preparation and training or with reluctant teachers
- Provide in-depth professional development that is sustained over time for teachers
- If possible, match up personalities of prospective co-teachers carefully in order to properly implement IEP requirements
- If your school is struggling to find appropriate matches for co-teaching, teachers may need to be flexible by moving to a different grade level or a less preferred schedule

List 1.12 Where Does Co-Teaching Take Place?

Any benefit from co-teaching is diminished when students with special needs are pulled out for instruction in a segregated setting. This may seem like a sensible approach to handling wide gaps in ability levels, but this is *not* co-teaching.

- Students in a separate classroom miss out on class discussions, positive peer role models, and interactions between their teachers; instruction necessary for summative assessment might also be missed during this time.
- Co-teaching usually takes place in *one* classroom.
- Diverse learning needs can be accommodated through the use of flexible grouping, centers, tiered lessons, differentiated instruction, and mixed-ability groups.
- In some cases of alternate teaching, students may be removed to another space for a brief period and then the groups switched, for example, when part of the class is working on very active projects and other students need a quiet space to read and prepare for a test. This is a temporary situation that arises from the needs of the students and the lesson plan.
- It is critical that students remain in the "least restrictive environment," and there needs to be a compelling reason to pull them out of the general education classroom.

Taken from *The Co-Teaching Book of Lists*, by Katherine Perez. Copyright © 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

List 1.13 Terms Co-Teachers Need to Know

It is important to remember that special education is not a *place*, but rather a set of services.

Accommodations: Changes that allow a person with a disability to participate fully in an activity. Examples include extended time, different test format, and alterations to a classroom.

Adaptations: When instructional materials present a barrier to student learning, teachers often adapt the materials to allow students greater access to the information to be taught. These adaptations may involve changing the content or the format of the materials.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): This represents a state's measure of progress toward meeting state academic standards. "AYP is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year."¹⁵

Asperger Syndrome: A developmental disorder characterized by deficits in social interaction and restricted and unusual patterns of behavior and interests.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADHD/ADD): Neurobiological disorder characterized by distractibility, hyperactivity or impulsive behaviors, and a general inability to focus attention.

Autism: A lifelong developmental disability that usually begins sometime during the first three years of life. It is a neurological disorder that affects communication, social interactions, and perceptions of and reactions to the world.

Central Auditory Processing Disorder (CAPD): A disorder that affects a student's ability to process auditory information.

Cognitively Impaired or Mentally Impaired (CI or MI): Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning that exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior that adversely affect a student's educational performance.

Continuum of Services: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires each school district to ensure that there is a "continuum of alternative placements" available to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Emphasis should be placed on the provision of services and not the specific placements themselves. This continuum must include general education classes, special education classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals or institutions. This continuum of alternative services *must be* designed to ensure that there is an appropriate setting for each student according to the student's specific needs.

Co-Teaching: An arrangement in which two or more certified educators share planning and instructional responsibility for a single group of diverse learners, primarily in one classroom, for teaching specific content objectives. Although the approaches may vary and the teachers' participation may vary, both teachers have mutual ownership and share resources, planning, assessment, and accountability. Co-teaching is not the same as team teaching or inclusion.

Emotional-Behavioral Disorder (EBD): A student who has normal intelligence, but whose emotional or social behavior inhibits him or her from normal learning.

504 Plan: An accommodation plan for students who have difficulties in school, but do not qualify for special education services at this time.

Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA): A problem-solving process for addressing challenging student behavior. It relies on a variety of techniques and strategies to

identify the purposes of specific behavior and to help IEP teams select interventions to directly address the challenging behavior.

Inclusion: This term is not used in IDEA, and the Department of Education has not defined it. However, *inclusion* is generally accepted to mean that primary instruction and provision of services for a child with a disability are provided in an age-appropriate general education class in the school the child would have attended if not disabled, with appropriate additional supports for the student and the teacher. The least restrictive environment (LRE) is the legal basis for inclusion programs, as it strengthens and reinforces the objective of educating all students in a general education classroom to the maximum extent possible.¹⁶

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): The written plan for each student that defines the academic, social, behavioral, or functional needs of that student.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The federal law governing the education of children with disabilities. IDEA and its regulations define the least restrictive environment (LRE) and require that all states demonstrate they have policies and procedures in place to guarantee they meet the federal LRE requirements.

Learning Disability (LD): Average to above average learning potential, with difficulty learning in one or more areas (such as reading or math) and a severe discrepancy between a student's ability and achievement.

Dyscalculia: difficulty with math skills

Dysgraphia: difficulty with written expression

Dyslexia: difficulty reading

Dyspraxia: difficulty with fine motor skills

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines LRE this way: "To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities are (1) educated with children who are not disabled, and (2) special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."

Response to Intervention (RTI): RTI involves monitoring student progress to make data-based decisions for students to maximize student achievement. Methods may vary according to the levels of interventions provided. Universal interventions deal with core curriculum in the general education classroom. Secondary interventions involve more intense small-group work. Tertiary interventions are even more focused and provided primarily by an intervention specialist or a special educator. (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2007)

Scaffolding: The teacher provides support in the form of modeling, prompts, direct explanations, and targeted questions—a teacher-guided approach at first. As students begin to master objectives, direct supports are reduced and the learning becomes more independent.

Tourette Syndrome: A disorder that typically involves motor tics and one or more vocal tics at the same time, that occur many times a day over an extended period of time.

List 1.14 Opening Assumptions for Co-Teaching

1. The desired outcomes for students should drive how adults are organized.
2. All students need support to learn. Many of the supports needed today differ substantially from the way existing structures were designed to provide support.
3. Students will be better supported if a team of individuals is responsible for meeting those needs.
4. All educators have unique areas of expertise that are needed by students.
5. Adults in a school system need ongoing access to one another to learn, plan, contribute, feel supported, and share responsibility and accountability for meeting the needs of all learners.

List 1.15 A Co-Teaching Anticipation Guide

Mark A (if you agree) or D (if you disagree) with each of the following statements. You will find discussion guidelines to accompany this guide in the Appendix.

- _____ 1. There are many different models for implementing co-teaching in the classroom.
- _____ 2. Co-teaching can capitalize on the strengths and areas of expertise of each teacher.
- _____ 3. Co-teaching has the most favorable outcomes when teachers get to choose their co-teaching partners.
- _____ 4. *Inclusion* and *co-teaching* mean the same thing.
- _____ 5. Students generally have positive feelings about being in a co-taught classroom.
- _____ 6. Given the opportunity, most teachers embrace the idea of co-teaching.
- _____ 7. Grouping students by readiness levels in a co-taught classroom produces stigmatization.
- _____ 8. Team teaching is like tag-team teaching: first my turn, then your turn, and so forth.
- _____ 9. The groups of students with the special education teacher are always the students with an IEP.
- _____ 10. In the one teacher-one support model, one instructor teaches and the other does the grading, copying, and paperwork.
- _____ 11. In parallel teaching, a special education teacher is given a lesson plan and may make accommodations and modifications as needed.
- _____ 12. In planning a co-taught lesson, the subject matter teacher takes the lead, and the special education teacher focuses in on remediation.

List 1.16 The Beginning Stages of Co-Teaching

- Both teachers actively involved with students in whole-group lessons
- Co-teaching partnerships will emerge
- Teachers share leadership role in the classroom
- Teachers make communication a priority
- Moderate amount of planning required
- Teachers share in planning and assessing
- Itinerate schedules fit into this approach

Taken from *The Co-Teaching Book of Lists*, by Katherine Perez. Copyright © 2012 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.