

professionals are closely working together or struggling to find appropriate roles. And it is based on my own firm belief that although nothing can be the panacea for all of the challenges now faced by school professionals, co-teaching can significantly and positively assist educators to reach their most cherished goal—helping their students to truly reach their potential.

What Co-Teaching Is

Successful co-teaching begins with understanding what it is. Here are the essential elements of co-teaching.

Co-Teaching is an Option for Providing Special Services

Many models exist for offering special services in schools. Some students are supported when a specialist consults with a general education teacher, as might happen when a psychologist offers suggestions to a teacher for responding to disruptive student behavior. Other students leave the classroom to receive specialized instruction, as is the case when students with disabilities go to a resource room for remediation or tutoring, or students receive speech and language therapy in a small group. Yet other students spend most if not all of their instructional day in a special education setting, usually students with significant disabilities for whom a carefully structured environment with highly specialized supports is necessary. A few students even receive services in separate schools.

Co-teaching is similar to these other options in that it is a way students receive their special services. However, it is also unique. First, the other service options for students with disabilities are outlined in federal special education legislation and have existed for many years in public schools. Co-teaching is not listed like the other options, and it is relatively recent, an option that has evolved in schools because of a need for ways to educate students with disabilities in general education settings. Second, the other service models tend to be based on an assumption that the more intense a student's needs, the more time needed in a separate setting. Co-teaching is not based on this premise. That is, co-teaching sometimes is used as a means for students with relatively mild special needs to receive special education services, but it also can be the means through which students with significant disabilities

Professionally Licensed Educators Implement Co-Teaching

The individuals left out of this definition of co-teaching are paraprofessionals. Although these educators play critical roles in general education classrooms, their responsibilities are somewhat different. Appropriate roles for paraprofessionals are addressed later in this chapter.

Have you ever heard co-teaching referred to as a professional marriage? In many ways (but not all), this metaphor is apt—co-teachers lead a classroom family, jointly establish their own culture, and address the challenges that may arise. They share successes and jointly solve problems that occur. However, co-teaching marriages are not all alike. Consider these two situations:

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stakes testing. The special educator or specialist takes on the role of mom. This person—even if a strong professional—tends to be rather passive in the classroom, quietly redirecting students who are off-task and assisting students who did not understand the instruction that was delivered. Mom may believe that her role is to be a helper. If she believes that she should do more, she may feel like she does not have permission to proactively participate in classroom instructional and management decisions. That is, in this classroom, few conversations have occurred about professional roles; the teachers mostly are assuming traditional responsibilities—one teaching the overall group, the other ensuring that individual students receive remedial or other needed support.

- In the second classroom, the marriage is one from the twenty-first century. Roles and responsibilities are openly discussed and far fewer assumptions are made about the contributions that each educator should make. The special education teacher sometimes leads the science lab while the general educator ensures that all students are following the directions correctly. Sometimes the teachers divide the class in half and each one leads the same discussion so that all students have more opportunity to participate. However, the special education teacher also sometimes works with struggling learners who are greatly helped by a careful re-teaching of the material or additional practice applying core skills. These teachers blend traditional and non-traditional roles and responsibilities. They constantly are on the alert to find new ways to combine their strengths to improve all students' learning.

Which type of marriage do you think is most likely to foster student success? It is the latter, of course. However, the first type of professional marriage is all too common. For co-teaching to have enough impact to improve outcomes for students, both teachers must have a commitment to the entire instructional process and actively contribute to helping all students reach their potential. Effective co-teaching relies on setting aside assumptions and engaging in an ongoing discussion of how to engage both professionals in the process of teaching and learning.

All Students are Full Members of the Class Where Co-Teaching Occurs

Do you or your colleagues divide students as you speak, referring to “my students” or “your students?” Whenever this occurs, you are reinforcing an old system, one that explicitly or implicitly communicates that students with disabilities are the responsibility of special educators, not general educators. It is crucial to remember that special education was designed to be *in addition to*, not *in lieu of*, general education. And so general education teachers are charged with teaching every student in the class, including those with disabilities or other special needs, and they are as accountable for their learning as they are for the learning of their other students. Co-teaching tends to bring issues such as this to the surface; how ownership of students is discussed and addressed can have a significant impact on co-teaching success. Co-teaching is very much about *our* students.

Co-Teaching Occurs Primarily in a Single Shared Classroom

An assumption of co-teaching is that most instruction occurs with two educators working in the same physical space. This arrangement permits the educators to group and re-group students, draw on each other's expertise and energy, and revise and refine instruction as necessary. However, in some schools an informal agreement exists that when instruction seems difficult for students with disabilities or other special needs, those students and "their" teacher should leave the classroom. If this occurs only occasionally it probably is not a problem, but if students leave the classroom several times each week, two concerns arise. The first is that this may affect what is written on a student's individualized education program in terms of time that is being spent in a general education setting and access to curriculum. For example, in a middle school with 85-minute block periods, two teachers decide that the students with disabilities should leave the class each day after 40 minutes. If the IEP indicates that the student is supposed to be in the general education class, the arrangement is a significant violation of the IEP. In addition, if this occurs in a core academic class and the special education teacher is not highly qualified in that area, the student may not be receiving the access to curriculum promised in current federal law.

One other dilemma should be mentioned. If students with disabilities need some separate instruction, they certainly should receive it, and this should be reflected on the IEP. However, when this practice occurs, teachers sometimes have additional students leave the classroom. If the middle school teachers described above decided that two other struggling learners—who do not have IEPs—also should leave for the remedial instruction, they are violating those students' rights. If the students have not been determined to be eligible for special education, they should not leave general education to receive what could be construed as special education. This generally is true even if parents support the practice because federal and state laws clearly mandate a detailed, multidisciplinary assessment process and a team determination of eligibility and services for any student to receive special education.

A few exceptions to these guidelines may exist based on state policies or local programs (and you should check with the appropriate administrator about this). Also, splitting students occasionally to accomplish an instructional purpose is realistic (for example, having some students in the media center working on computers while others stay in the class to work on an assignment and then switching the groups then next day). In general, though, a fundamental question needs to be raised: If the aim in today's schools is to meet student needs in general education, why not have as the most common pattern keeping students there and providing support in that setting? Any service offered there is available to all students and gives the teachers many more options for meeting all students' needs.

The Focus of Co-Teaching is Access to the Curriculum

The expectations set by the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) clarify that students with disabilities generally should be learning the same curriculum as all students. Even for students taking alternate assessments, the goal is for there to be functional touch points with the general curriculum as might happen when a student with a significant intellectual disability learned just the vocabulary about safety related to electricity while other students learned detailed concepts and vocabulary about electricity. The essential consideration is that co-teaching should not, in this day and age, ever be treated primarily or exclusively as a means for socialization.

Although working on social skills might be a specific and very appropriate reason for a student with a disability to be in a co-taught class, it should not be the sole reason. In addition, an academic or pre-academic skill should always be addressed.

Co-Teachers' Levels of Participation May Vary

The final element in defining co-teaching concerns participation. This topic affects professionals in secondary schools more than those in elementary schools. Many special educators have a background in elementary education or licensure in a single secondary subject area, and yet they may be asked to co-teach in several subjects or in a subject which they have not had focused study. In these cases, it is particularly important to discuss what each person's contribution will be. The special educator may not deliver half the instruction, but some clear roles should be outlined. Could the special educator open the class with a brief review of material covered the day before? Take a lead in giving directions? Insert a learning strategy into the instruction to be covered through a brief lecture? Co-teachers address this topic in hundreds of creative ways when it is pertinent. In fact, there is only one clearly unacceptable approach...and that is to have the special educator take a completely passive role during instruction until he or she "feels comfortable" with the material. Although that option might occur for a specific lesson, if it is the pattern then the class is not co-taught, and the matter of whether it is worth having two teachers there should be raised.

Varying participation may, across all grade levels, also pertain to the chores related to teaching. If one special educator co-teaches in three or four classrooms per day, it is not realistic to expect that person to do half the grading, half the bulletin boards, or half the preparation of materials. No formula can determine how chores should be divided, but this topic is covered in more detail in Chapter 4.

Before leaving the definition of co-teaching, a final word of clarification is in order. You may live in a state or district where different terminology is used. Your state might use language that is in NCLB and have *consultative teaching* or *collaborative teaching* or both. The role of the special educator might be called *classroom support teacher* or another term. Such variations will always exist,

and it is not possible to address in one book all the variations that may be created. What is critical is that you understand the core concepts that underlie co-teaching so that you can recognize what it makes possible for students and realize the level of commitment that you need to make it succeed.

What Co-Teaching is Not

So many misconceptions about co-teaching exist and many professionals are using the term *co-teaching* for such a wide variety of arrangements that it is as important to clarify what co-teaching is *not* as it is to clearly define it. Here are a few examples of what co-teaching is not:

- Co-teaching is not having an extra set of hands in the classroom. In co-teaching, both professionals are considered integral to the instructional process, and both have essential teaching roles.
- Co-teaching is not one person (usually the general education teacher) teaching while the other person (usually the special education teacher) roams around the classroom to provide assistance to students who need help in spelling words or comprehending directions, or to address student behavior issues. Although providing assistance may be one component of a co-taught class, a topic addressed in Chapter 3, when one professional continually plays the role of the classroom helper, the entire notion of an instructional partnership is undermined.
- Co-teaching is not an arrangement where one person will take the lead teaching on Monday and the other on Tuesday. Variations of this misunderstanding are exchanging lead roles by week or by instructional unit. This type of turn-taking, usually a response to limited planning time, creates a classroom that has little more intensity than a class with one teacher because the richness of shared teaching often is lost. In this instance the fact that each teacher leads does not eliminate the fact that one of the teachers typically is functioning as an assistant.
- Co-teaching is not a convenient means for busy educators to get out-of-class responsibilities completed. For example, although all professionals have emergencies that call them from the classroom and days when the duplicating just did not get completed, co-

Co-Teaching and Related Terms

All too often in education, the terms used to describe practices are not clearly defined. Perhaps partly because co-teaching is still evolving, it sometimes is given other labels that actually are about related—but distinct—concepts and practices. In this section, co-teaching is distinguished from three of the most commonly confused terms: collaboration, inclusion, and team teaching.

Did you think that the co in co-teaching stood for collaborative? Actually, it simply refers to the joint nature of this service delivery model. And although effective co-teaching includes collaboration, the two terms are not synonyms. Collaboration is a very broad term that refers to *how* professionals work together—in schools, or in any other endeavor, such as social services, business, and medicine. As Friend and Cook (2007) note, collaboration is a *style* for interaction that is based on

- Further, collaboration is developmental, beginning with the belief by each participant that what is done together can be better than what anyone could do alone and including the growth of trust and respect and a sense of community.

One straightforward way to illustrate collaboration is to think about a school situation such as this one: Two professionals have been told they are to co-teach during the upcoming school year. When they have a chance to meet, the general education teacher says, "I didn't agree to this; I was assigned. And I understand that you do not have much background in social studies. Since I'm the one responsible for the test scores in the class, I think it would be best if you did things that would help the kids but not interfere with the flow of instruction—take notes, make sure the kids are paying attention. Then when I finish, you can help your students if they need it. OK?" As you might guess, this diatribe is anything but collaborative. It uses a very directive style. The classroom teacher has made it clear that she does not see a shared goal, that her participation is not voluntary, that she will be in charge (thus undermining parity), and that decision-making and outcomes are not shared.

But what if the teacher had said this? "I didn't sign up for co-teaching and I'm not sure I even understand what we are supposed to be doing. But I suspect the administrators are counting on us to figure out how to make this work, so I'm willing to give it a try. How do you see two teachers working together in one classroom? One thing that I see we need to consider is how to fit your expertise on reaching students with disabilities with my expertise in social studies. I'm anxious to hear your ideas and see what we can accomplish." The content and tone of this message is completely different. Even though the teacher was assigned to the teaching arrangement, working together is a choice she has made and exemplified voluntariness. Further, the teacher is communicating the presence of shared goals, decision-making, and accountability. Respect has been communicated as have the beginnings of trust and sense of community.

The strongest co-teaching is highly collaborative, but collaboration applies to many situations in addition to co-teaching (Fishbaugh, 1997; Friend & Cook, 1990). Middle school teams should be collaborative, as should grade level teams in elementary schools and departments in high schools. Similarly, intervention assistance teams rely on collaboration as do school leadership teams. If you remember that collaboration is a means for accomplishing the work at hand, you'll understand that co-teaching is just one type of work enhanced by the interpersonal style of collaboration.

Inclusion

In your school, are co-teaching and inclusion sometimes used as synonyms? Are classrooms where co-teaching is implemented called inclusion classrooms? Do staff members sometimes refer to “doing inclusion” (as in, “We do inclusion in fourth grade but not in fifth,” or “We do inclusion in the basic English class but not honors English”) when what they mean is that they are implementing (or not implementing) co-teaching?

Separating the concepts of co-teaching and inclusion is critical because they are very different from each other. As you learned earlier in this chapter, co-teaching is a service delivery option, a way to ensure that students with disabilities or other special needs receive the special instruction to which they are entitled while ensuring that they can access the general curriculum in the least restrictive environment.

Inclusion is not a service delivery option. Inclusion is a belief system or philosophy that guides all the practices in any specific school. In fact, the smallest meaningful unit for inclusiveness is the school. There is no such thing as an inclusion class, an inclusion teacher, or—sadly—inclusion students. All these terms imply that inclusion is about where students sit during the school day. General education placement certainly is part of inclusive schooling, but it is just one dimension of it. In an inclusive school, all staff members believe that it is their job to provide the best education for all students, respecting their pupils' diversity and maximizing their potential. They believe that full participation with peers is the strong preference and make decisions that move away from general education placement only after thoughtful deliberation, but the goal is always membership in the same learning community. Highly inclusive schools have some pullout services available to students for whom it is necessary, but that pullout is guided by data-based decisions, revisited often, and continued only for as long as necessary. Conversely, in schools where professionals proclaim, "We're an inclusion school—we never pull any students out," it is unlikely that inclusive practices exist. In these schools, only a single means of addressing students' needs is being used, and that is unlikely to be adequate.

How do inclusion and co-teaching fit together? Co-teaching as a service delivery option is one way that students in inclusive schools may receive their services. But it is not the only way. As noted earlier in this chapter, some students may be served through consultation, that is, indirect services. Other students may receive some service in separate settings, either in combination with co-teaching or in place of it. The bias is always in favor of general education placement, but even more importantly, the needs of individual students are the first consideration.

Team Teaching

You may find that *co-teaching* and *team teaching* are sometimes used interchangeably, but two factors distinguish these terms and are reasons to understand their differences.

The first distinguishing feature of co-teaching versus team teaching concerns the number of students in the class group. Examples of team teaching throughout its rather lengthy history (for example, Warwick, 1971) typically have been characterized as keeping a constant student teacher ratio. That is, when team teaching was introduced in the 1950s as a high school model called the Trump Plan (Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993; Geen, 1985), it involved high school general education teachers combining multiple sections of a course so that one master teacher would deliver instruction and then the other teachers would facilitate discussion and other class activities. When three teachers were involved, the arrangement would include approximately 75 students. Team teaching later was applied to elementary open-concept schools in which teams of approximately four teachers would share responsibility for teaching 100 students. Again, the student-teacher ratio was a constant. Even today, team teaching often is used in reference to middle schools where the 25-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio still is in place. It also sometimes describes high school courses that are interdisciplinary such as an American studies class that teaches history through literature by blending a section of the history class with a section of a literature class so that the teachers can collaborate on instruction.

Co-teaching is very different. In co-teaching, the teacher:student ratio is dramatically reduced. That is, a class of 25 students with one teacher might be changed to a class of 25 students, five of whom

have disabilities, and two teachers for part or all of the school day. Changing the teacher:student ratio from 1:25 to 1:12.5 makes the classroom a very different teaching/learning environment, one that cannot be accomplished in team teaching.

The second difference between co-teaching and team teaching concerns teacher expertise. In most of the professional literature that has addressed team teaching over the past five decades, team teaching has been carried out by two general education teachers. Co-teaching presumes that the two professionals have very different types of skills. This raises the question of each teacher's contribution. Here is one way to think about this.

General education teachers have these four areas of primary expertise:

1. **Curriculum and instruction.** General education teachers must hold knowledge of what needs to be taught, in what order, and how this content fits into the larger curriculum picture.
2. **Classroom management.** General education teachers always get their students in relatively large groups. They must be highly skilled at getting all the students engaged, keeping them engaged, and doing this while addressing their various learning needs.
3. **Knowledge of typical students.** These teachers have a good sense of whether student learning or social/behavioral functioning is within the parameters they expect. Although some teachers make mistakes in this arena, classroom teachers generally make sound judgments about whether students are simply struggling or may have a disability. Remember that general education teachers make most of the referrals for students eventually identified as having disabilities.
4. **Pacing.** General education teachers have to know how to get through the curriculum in the time allocated. Particularly in this age of accountability, this is an essential skill. They are vigilant to be sure that all essential skills for the grade level or subject are introduced to students so that they are prepared for high stakes testing and other assessments.

Of course, these are not the only skills that general educators possess, nor is it true that special educators do not have any of these skills. The point is that general educators, as a whole, have a specific set of priorities that are central to their role.

However, the same can be said for special educators and other specialists. Here are the four primary areas of expertise for special educators:

1. **Process of learning.** Whether a special educator works with young children or students about to leave high school and regardless of the specific disability those students have, the goal of the special educator is to help their students learn how to learn. That is, they provide them with strategies, accommodations, and modifications to facilitate learning, and they offer remediation or developmental specialized instruction.
2. **Individualization.** As professionals, special educators are trained to focus separately on each student and to design and deliver exactly what that student needs. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) has as its foundation this notion of individualizing, as noted in the requirement that each student receiving special education have an IEP.
3. **Paperwork.** Although all teachers complete paperwork, the paperwork for special educators tends to be more extensive than that for general education teachers. In addition, the paperwork—IEPs, other student records, test reports, documentation of parent contacts, and so on—can have legal ramifications, and so it must receive focused attention from the special educators.
4. **Emphasis on mastery versus coverage, with pacing as a secondary consideration.** Even in this era of increased accountability, special educators tend to prioritize helping students to truly master specific concepts and skills, even if it means not getting to all the content that is supposed to be addressed. Their rationale is that students whose understanding is incomplete are unlikely to be able to use the information and also unlikely to succeed in the next level of learning.