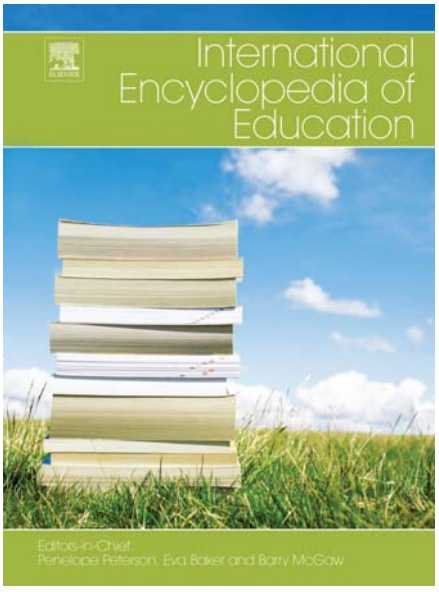
Co-Teaching

Article · December 2010

DOI: 10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.01134-9

1 author:

Elizabeth Dara Cramer
Florida International University
43 PUBLICATIONS **457** CITATIONS



Cramer E D (2010), Co-Teaching. In: Penelope Peterson, Eva Baker, Barry McGaw, (Editors), International Encyclopedia of Education. volume 2, pp. 560-564. Oxford: Elsevier.

Co-Teaching

E D Cramer, Florida International University, Miami, FL, USA

Glossary

Co-teaching – When two or more professionals share instruction for a single group of students in the same class, it is known as co-teaching.
Parity – It refers to perceived equality.

Federal legislative changes, such as those described by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) reauthorized in 2004 (Pub. L. No. 108-466) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (Pub. L. No. 107–110), require that students with increasingly diverse learning characteristics have access to and achieve high academic performance in the general education curriculum. To illustrate the recent increase in student diversity, data from the US Department of Education (2005) indicated that between 1994 and 2004, the percentage of students with disabilities spending 80% or more of the school day in a regular classroom increased by nearly 49.9–50% in 2004. These proportions can be expected to increase given the national trends of the past three decades and IDEIA's requirement to include students with disabilities as full participants in rigorous academic and general education curriculum and assessment. This leads to a need for increased collaborative planning and teaching among school personnel attempting to comply with legal mandates. One increasingly popular vehicle to provide this service is co-teaching (Morocco and Aguilar, 2002; Murawski and Dieker, 2004; Villa *et al.*, 2004).

Many different definitions exist to describe co-teaching. A co-teaching team can be defined as two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching some or all of the students assigned to a classroom. It involves the distribution of responsibility among people for planning, instruction, and evaluation for a classroom of students (Villa *et al.*, 2008). Both educators on the co-teaching team are responsible for instructional planning and delivery, assessment of student achievement, and classroom management. Friend and Cook (2007) expanded this definition stating, "co-teaching occurs when two or more professionals jointly deliver substantive instruction to a diverse, blended group of students in a single, physical space" (p. 113). In their definition of co-teaching, they noted the importance of both parties being appropriately credentialed professionals. Salend (2008) referred to cooperative or collaborative teaching as teachers who share responsibility and accountability for planning and delivering instruction, evaluating, grading, and disciplining students. The common theme among all of these definitions is that students are not removed from class to receive services but rather the services (i.e., academic instruction and supportive services) are provided in the general education classroom by two or more professionals who share responsibility for the students. This article focuses on this premise.

Rationale for and Elements of Co-Teaching Teams

Friend and Cook (2007) noted two rationales for co-teaching: to meet the educational needs of students with diverse learning abilities and to provide curricular access to students with disabilities. Co-teaching allows general and special education professionals to pool together their expertise. Most often, general education teachers have more in-depth knowledge about specific subject areas, whereas the special education teachers generally know more about differentiating instruction to meet the individual needs of students. This combined expertise provides both general and special education students with content knowledge taught effectively through group and individualized strategies. Although co-teaching professionals may not simply be general and special educators, (e.g., speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and literacy coaches), the fact that they are equal in credentialing and status ensures that they can, in fact, be partners in the classroom. In cases where a teacher and paraprofessional or classroom-volunteer work together to instruct students, supported instruction rather than co-teaching is occurring. While supported instruction can be a valid approach for instruction, it should not be confused with co-teaching. Similarly, when professionals are co-teaching, as both have equal and shared status, both should have equal and shared responsibility for instruction. It is a waste of resources to utilize a second licensed and trained professional in the room simply to have that person utilized as an assistant. Friend and Cook (2007) referred to situations such as this as "an inappropriate underuse of a qualified professional" (p. 115). In addition, when special education or related services personnel focus only on the student(s) with disabilities, more attention, stigma, or isolation of that student may occur therefore undoing some of

the possible social benefits of having the student included in a co-teaching situation in the first place. Under IDEIA 1997, any professional in the classroom can and should be working with all students, not simply those with disabilities.

Co-teaching is designed to minimize problems that typically occur with pull-out special education programs such as students missing academic instruction, lack of communication and coordination between professionals, scheduling problems, and fragmentation between general and special education curriculum (Wiggins and Damore, 2006). Co-teaching also potentially reduces the need for labeling students because all struggling students can benefit from the expertise of both teachers (Cramer *et al.*, under review; Wiggins and Damore, 2006). Villa *et al.* (2008) named five elements of co-teaching teams: (1) a common, publicly agreed-on goal, (2) a shared belief system, (3) parity, (4) distributed functions theory of leadership, and (5) cooperative process. A common goal may be for one particular outcome that teachers and service providers share for their students. A shared belief in the value of co-teaching is beneficial to the process. Parity refers to the perceived equality between true collaborators on a co-teaching team. In distributed leadership, both teachers make a conscious decision to share the leadership of and responsibility for the class. According to Villa *et al.*, the cooperative process finally is made up of (1) face-to-face interactions, (2) positive interdependence, (3) interpersonal skills, (4) monitoring co-teacher progress, and (5) individual accountability. Each of these elements can take place regardless of the model of co-teaching being utilized.

Friend and Cook (2007) described six approaches to co-teaching: (1) one-teaching–one-observe, (2) one teach–one-assist, (3) station teaching, (4) parallel teaching, (5) alternative teaching, and (6) team teaching. In the first and second approach, one teacher has the primary role of designing and delivering instruction while the other teacher moves around the room helping and observing individual students. In station teaching, the content of the lesson is divided between the teachers and every student moves to both teacher-led groups. Parallel teaching occurs when the class is divided and each teacher delivers the same content and instruction to his or her section of the class. Alternative teaching is employed when the special education teacher focuses on re-teaching, differentiating instruction, and making curricular accommodations and modifications for small groups of students with and without disabilities who may need extra assistance. This model can be flexible and permits any student who may need some additional help to receive additional instruction. Team teaching is used when teachers trade off roles and groups of students. For example, one teacher presents on an overhead the major events leading to the Civil War while the other teacher lists these events on a timeline on the whiteboard. In each of these models, even when teachers are not both physically instructing students at all times, both should always be sharing the responsibility for planning and instructional decision making.

Benefits of Co-Teaching to Students and Teachers

Villa *et al.* (2008) listed some beneficial outcomes of co-teaching. They noted that:

- students develop better attitudes about themselves, show academic improvement, and enhanced social skills;
- teacher-to-student ratio is increased, leading to better teaching and learning conditions;
- teachers are able to use research-proven teaching strategies effectively;
- a greater sense of community is fostered in the classroom;
- co-teachers report professional growth, personal support, and enhanced motivation; and
- increased job satisfaction can be experienced because needs for survival, power, freedom of choice, a sense of belonging, and fun are met.

While co-teaching is an initiative that developed out of special education laws and with the needs of students with disabilities in mind, in co-teaching classrooms, all students have the benefit of two qualified professionals using a variety of teaching strategies to meet the needs of all learners. This can be particularly beneficial for students with special learning needs who may not have been identified as having a disability. This can include English language learners (ELLs), students who are socially or culturally diverse, gifted students, students at-risk for failure, or students with potential need for special education who simply have not yet been referred. Students of all abilities and levels should be integrated together in instruction. Classroom placement should not isolate 'these' students from 'those' students. If special education students are seated apart from the rest of the class, they are still, in a sense, socially isolated from their peers.

In addition, while at times, students will need to receive small homogenous group instruction, in inclusive classrooms, co-teachers should work with heterogeneous groups and allow students the opportunity to work cooperatively and learn from each other. Students who in the past would have been pulled out of the classroom can remain in one setting with their peers all day allowing them to have more smooth, uninterrupted instruction, and full access to general education curriculum. Co-teaching could be one way to increase special education students' time in and access to general education and to decrease reliance on special education placement to solve learning and behavior problems of culturally and linguistically

diverse students (e.g., Bahamonde and Friend, 1999; Cramer *et al.*, under review; Garrigan and Thousand, 2005; Salazar and Nevin, 2005).

Partnerships between highly qualified general educators who have demonstrated subject-area expertise and highly qualified special educators who have complementary expertise in specialized learning strategies could result in implementing the research-based curricular and instructional approaches required by the NCLB Act. All students need their teachers to learn and use the most effective teaching strategies, educational materials, and lesson formats currently known to educate all students. Teachers can accomplish this by exchanging such information and expertise through their co-teaching partnerships. Typically, the general educator is an expert of content and the special educator is an expert on adapting instruction. Each can learn and benefit from the expertise of the other. If other trained professionals are involved (such as a speech and language pathologist or a literacy coach), they bring even more specialized skills to the class. In addition, they have the emotional support of another colleague that they collaborate with on a daily basis and a partner to collaborate with on classroom decisions.

Meeting the Needs of Co-Teachers

While the majority of co-teachers see co-teaching as a beneficial experience, they are consistent and clear about what needs to be in place for co-teaching to work: planning time, compatibility of co-teachers, training, appropriate student skill levels, and ongoing administrative support (Cramer and Nevin, 2006; Cramer *et al.*, 2006; Scruggs *et al.*, 2007). Time is needed for planning, meetings, and professional development. Regularly scheduled meeting times should be built into the schedule for teachers to instruct students, plan, and reflect on what has occurred. The ideal would be reserved time each day through common planning time. In addition, teachers would like to have input on whether or not they co-teach and who their partner is. Co-teaching is often compared to a marriage and if the partners are not compatible with each other, the relationship will inevitably fail.

Most future teachers graduating from preservice teacher education programs today have little to no training in co-teaching; yet they are often expected to work at least part of the day in co-teaching teams. When asked, teachers consistently point out the need for more training. Another need that teachers often refer to is for students who are being included in co-taught classrooms to have appropriate skill levels to access the required curriculum. For example, teachers express frustration if students are expected to achieve the same state grade level standards and are functioning below grade level. Despite concerns over any of the aforementioned teacher needs, the perception of administrative support (or lack thereof) can be the ultimate factor in determining whether or not teachers feel co-teaching is working. Administrators and school leaders need to believe in co-teaching as well as provide financial support. It is easy for a co-teaching class to become a special class (that is, where a disproportionate number of students in the class have special needs). When the administrator really understands what co-teaching is and buys into the concept, benefits occur for both special education and general education children (Cramer *et al.*, 2006).

There are many barriers to co-teaching. Some of the most common include (1) limited financial resources, (2) complicated logistics of assigning caseloads to service all students, (3) class size and ratios, and (4) maintaining a positive and collaborative relationship between professionals. Additional problems often arising at the secondary level (Salend, 2008) include (1) lack of time to plan and resources, (2) unclear roles of teaching team members, (3) resistance from colleagues, (4) scheduling, (5) increased workloads, and (6) increased responsibilities (Cook and Downing, 2005; Murawski, 2006). Lack of content-area expertise is also more prevalent at secondary level (Cramer and Nevin, 2006). To counteract co-teaching barriers, Salend recommended that co-teachers do the following:

- agree on goals and establish ground rules;
- learn about each other's beliefs and teaching styles;
- understand and coordinate responsibilities, expertise, and roles of others;
- utilize a variety of scheduling arrangements;
- understand cross-cultural perspectives;
- physically arrange the classroom to support collaboration;
- hold common expectations for grading academic, behavioral, and social performance;
- develop communication, problem-solving, and team-building skills;
- understand co-teaching is an ongoing process with stages;
- work toward equal status and shared workload;
- vary arrangements of teaching based on purpose, content, and student needs;
- include families in the process;
- communicate regularly to reexamine goals;
- address conflicts immediately;
- use a range of strategies;
- engage in self-evaluation and reflection; and
- acknowledge and celebrate success.

Co-Teaching and National Teacher Standards: Meeting Goals

Teacher education standards reflect the set of knowledge and skills of co-teaching. Standards from National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) (2005), the

Table 1 Analysis of standards from professional organizations

INTASC[a]	*CEC*[b]	*NBPST*[c]
Standard 3 requires teachers to understand how learners differ	Knowledge and skills in understanding characteristics of learners with different cognitive, physical, cultural, social and emotional needs	Teachers adjust their practice according to individual differences in their students
Standard 4 requires teachers to use a variety of instructional strategies	Competencies related to knowledge and skills for instructional content and practice	Teachers show multiple methods to engage student learning and to enable students to reach goals
Standard 10 asks teachers to collaborate and communicate with parents, families, colleagues to support student learning	Competencies related to communication and collaborative partnerships	Teachers collaboratively work with others and coordinate services

[a]http://www.ccsso.org/projects/Interstate_New_Teacher_Assessment_and_Support_Consortium/
[b]http://www.cec.sped.org/ps/ps-entry.html
[c]http://www.ets.org/nbpts

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) (2005), and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) (2005) were analyzed for content with respect to inclusive education and collaboration or co-teaching. As shown in **Table 1**, there seems to be substantial agreement among these diverse boards with respect to knowledge and skills for differentiating instruction, working collaboratively with others, and supporting the education of diverse learners. For example, INTASC Standard 3 requires teachers to understand how learners differ; Standard 4 requires teachers to use a variety of instructional strategies; and Standard 10 asks teachers to collaborate and communicate with parents, families, and colleagues to support student learning.

In comparison, CEC standards for entry into the profession includes competencies related to knowledge and skills in understanding characteristics of learners with different cognitive, physical, cultural, social, and emotional needs; competencies related to knowledge and skills for instructional content and practice; and competencies related to communication and collaborative partnerships. These are strongly correlated with NBPTS Standard 1 – teachers adjust their practice according to individual differences in their students; Standard 3 – teachers show multiple methods to engage student learning and to enable students to reach goals; and Standard 5 – teachers collaboratively work with others and coordinate services. In the results of a study of the relationship between teaching standards and co-teaching (Cramer *et al.*, under review), co-teacher attitudes, beliefs, and actions appear to be correlated with the standards shown in **Table 1**. Since co-teaching clearly aligns with recognized professional standards in the field, teacher training at both the pre-service and in-service levels should focus on preparing professionals to work collaboratively toward the common goal of meeting the needs of all learners. This will address the needs of increasingly diverse learners, the legal requirements of access to the general education for all students, and the practical need for all teachers to feel well-prepared and supported in their efforts to do so.

Conclusion

Co-teaching is a widely researched method of instruction whereby two trained professionals work collaboratively to plan, implement, and evaluate instruction for students with and without disabilities. Any necessary services for students with disabilities are provided inside the general education classroom and the general education curriculum is made accessible for all students with appropriate accommodations. While there are many accepted models for co-teaching, all involve the sharing of the responsibility for planning and instructional decision making.

Overall, teachers and administrators perceive co-teaching to be beneficial for teachers and for students, both with and without disabilities. However, sufficient planning time, compatibility of co-teachers, training, appropriate student skill level, and ongoing administrative support are necessary. While research has consistently been able to provide information about what occurs in co-taught classrooms and perceptions of key stakeholders, ongoing research is still necessary regarding the true implementation of co-teaching and its efficacy as a service for students.

Bibliography

Bahamonde, C. and Friend, M. (1999). Teaching English language learners: A proposal for effective service delivery through collaboration and co-teaching. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation* **10**(1), 1–9.

Cook, L. and Downing, J. (2005). The practicalities of collaboration in special education service delivery. *Intervention in School and Clinic* **40**(5), 296–300.

Cramer, E. D. and Nevin, A. I. (2006). A mixed methodology analysis of co-teacher assessments: Implications for teacher education. *Teacher Education and Special Education* **29**(4), 261–274.

Cramer, E., Nevin, A., Salazar, L., and Landa, K. (2006). Co-teaching in an urban, multicultural setting: Research report. *Florida Educational Leadership* **7**(1), 43–50.
Cramer, E.D., Salazar, M., and Marshall, D. (2008) Urban inclusive practices: A mixed methodological examination. *National Journal of Urban Education and Practice* **1**(4), 385–397.
Council for Exceptional Children (2005). *CEC International Standards for Entry into Professional Practice*. Arlington, VA: Author. Retrieved April 19, 2005: http://www.cec.sped.org/ps/ps-entry.html.
Friend, M. and Cook, L. (2007). *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, 5th edn. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
Garrigan, C. M. and Thousand, J. S. (2005). The effects of co-teaching on student achievement in the reading domain. *New Hampshire Journal of Education* **8**, 56–60.
Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) (2005). *Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium Standards*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State Schools Officers.
Morocco, C. and Aguilar, C. (2002). Co-teaching for content understanding: A school-wide model. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation* **13**(4), 315–347.
Murawski, W. W. (2006). Student outcomes in co-taught secondary English classes: How can we improve? *Reading and Writing Quarterly* **22**(3), 227–247.
Murawski, W. W. and Dieker, L. A. (2004). Tips and strategies for co-teaching at the secondary level. *Teaching Exceptional Children* **36**(5), 52–58.
National Board for Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) (2005). *Performance-Based Teaching Assessments*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Services.
Salazar, L. and Nevin, A. (2005). Co-teachers in an urban multicultural school. *Florida Educational Leadership* **5**(2), 15–20.
Salend, S. J. (2008). *Creating Inclusive Classrooms: Effective and Reflective Practices*, 6th edn. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
Scruggs, T. E., Mastropieri, M. A., and McDuffie, K. A. (2007). Co-teaching in inclusive classrooms: A meta-synthesis of qualitative research. *Exceptional Children* **73**(4), 392–416.
US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2005). *The Condition of Education 2005* (NCES 2005–094), Table 27-1.
Villa, R. A., Thousand, J. S., and Nevin, A. I. (2004). *A Guide to Co-Teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
Villa, R. A., Thousand, J. S., and Nevin, A. I. (2008). *A Guide to Co-Teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
Wiggins, K. C. and Damore, S. J. (2006). ''Survivors'' or ''Friends''? A framework for assessing effective collaboration. *Teaching Exceptional Children* **38**(5), 49–56.

Further Reading

Dieker, L. A. (1998). Rationale for co-teaching. *Social Studies Review* **37**(2), 62–65.
Nevin, A. I., Cramer, E. D., Voigt, J., and Salazar, L. (2008). Instructional modifications, adaptations, and accommodations of co-teachers who loop: A descriptive case study. *Teacher Education and Special Education* **31**(4), 283–297.
Swanson, H. L. (2000). What instruction works for students with learning disabilities? Summarizing the results from a meta-analysis of intervention studies. In Gersten, R., Schiller, E., and Vaughn, S. (eds.) *Contemporary Special Education Research: Synthesis of the Knowledge Based on Critical Instructional Issues*, pp 1–30. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
Thousand, J., Villa, R., and Nevin, A. (2007). Collaborative teaching: Critique of the scientific evidence. In Florian, L. (ed.) *Handbook of Special Education Research*, pp 417–428. London: Sage.
Trent, S. (1998). False starts and other dilemmas of a secondary general education collaborative teacher: A case study. *Journal of Learning Disabilities* **31**, 503–513.

Relevant Websites

http://www.circleofinclusion.org – Circle of Inclusion.
http://www.cec.sped.org – Council for Exceptional Children.
http://www.ccsso.org – Council of Chief State School Officers.
http://www.ets.org – Educational Testing Service.
http://www.powerof2.org – Power of 2.
http://hawbaker.pls.iowapages.org – Research: Coteaching and Coplanning, Becky Wilson Hawbaker: Teaching, Research, and Outreach at Price Lab School, UNI.
http://www.geocities.com – Special Educator's: Co-Teaching.
http://712educators.about.com – The Co-Teach Model, About.com.
http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu – The IRIS Center.