

Co-Teaching in Secondary Schools: 7 Steps to Successful Inclusion

Co-teaching refers to collaborative teaching between two certified teachers who combine their expertise to jointly teach a class of students. It is most frequently utilised in an inclusive setting wherein some of the students have disabilities or other special needs. It usually includes a general education teacher and a special education teacher. Co-teaching can be a challenge at any year level because it requires educators to reshape their thinking, modify existing practices and accept change. This reshaping acknowledges that these changes are not easy! Designed to address the implementation of co-teaching, this reference guide provides educators working in secondary school environments with practical and evidence-based strategies to help build stronger, more effective teams.

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STEP #1: Beginning with a Goal

Effective co-teaching partnerships begin with a shared vision. How will you know whether your teaching partnership is successful? How will you measure your progress? Consider starting with a discussion of key questions. For example, how will you as co-teachers:

- Raise overall class achievement?
- Raise achievement of individual students?
- Engage your students?
- Address specific student behaviours?
- Ensure equality in your way of functioning/collaborating?
- Work together as a team to identify the challenges/solutions?

Practical Tip: Once you determine your goals, look for training and in-service topics in areas such as instructional strategies or technology. Choose professional development opportunities you can attend together as a first step to reaching this goal!

Team Goals	What are the Challenges?	What are the Possible Solutions?
1. What are your goals for your class?		
2. What are your individual student goals? (be specific if you have particular in mind!)		
3. What are your expectations of your Co-teacher?		
4. What do you want your inclusive/co-taught classroom to look like/feel like?		

Important Co-Teaching Considerations

Co-teaching versus "Simply Supporting". If a team is truly co-teaching, co-planning, co-instruction and co-assessment should all be evident. However, in the reality of secondary schools where a special education teacher might be expected to co-teach with four or even five different general education teachers, this is not always possible. Therefore, there may be instances when the role of the special educator may be more limited. Perhaps it may only be feasible to assume one of these roles: to co-plan OR co-instruct OR co-assess. This is called facilitative support or enhancement support. In this role the special educator is not trying to co-teach but to simply support the teacher in one of three areas. This may occur more frequently when the special education teacher is present in the classroom for only a portion of the instructional time. Sometimes a general education teacher is supported solely by a paraprofessional. In such cases, the responsibility for instruction resides with the general education teacher, though the paraprofessional is a valued member of the classroom environment.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Rather than retrofitting lessons for students with disabilities, teachers are now expected to use principles of UDL so that ALL students have access to content. The premise behind UDL is that curriculum can be made accessible through the development of adjustable materials, varied instructional approaches and relevant assessment methods. Specifically, teachers are called to provide Multiple Means of:

- Representation – to provide students various ways of acquiring information and knowledge
- Expression – to provide students with alternatives for demonstrating what they know
- Engagement – to tap students' interests to challenge and motivate them to learn

UDL is for EVERYONE and co-teaching provides a perfect platform!

STEP #2: Defining Specific Strengths

It's not in everyone's nature to claim to be an "expert". However, considering the specific strengths of each person on a collaborative team is imperative. Research has repeatedly shown that, in many co-teaching partnerships, special educators have been viewed as "paraprofessionals" and changing this trend is critical. The solution is to establish a clear understanding of each educator's specific strengths and talents prior to collaborating. Sometimes even knowing areas of expertise outside of education can contribute to a positive partnership. Is one of you talented in art? music? technology? Is there a way you could use this talent to enhance your course? Above all, it is essential to remember that clear, honest communication with your co-teacher is imperative...this includes non-verbal communication as well.



What Do I Bring to the Team?

Some of you are content experts, others are experts in behaviour, learning strategies, speech/language or technology...the list goes on and on! Share the following with your partner:

- Teaching strengths
- Personal/Professional interests or talents
- Areas of greatest challenge
- Ways these can add to your partnership

What do I Bring to the Team?	Co-Teacher	Co-Teacher
• Teaching Strengths		
• Personal/ Professional Interests or Talents		
• Areas of greatest challenge		
• Ways these can add to your partnership		

Practical Tip: Communication is the key. The more you know about one another, the easier it is to collaborate. Use opportunities, such as lunchtime, to talk informally and simply get to know each other better and thus strengthen the partnership.