

Co-teaching as a model of teachers' cooperation in the school

Conderman, G., Bresnahan, V. & Pedersen, T. 2009. Purposful Co-Teaching. Real Cases and Effective Strategies. USA: Corwin Press

WHAT IS CO-TEACHING?

One widely accepted definition of *co-teaching* from Friend & Cook (2007) is the following:

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)

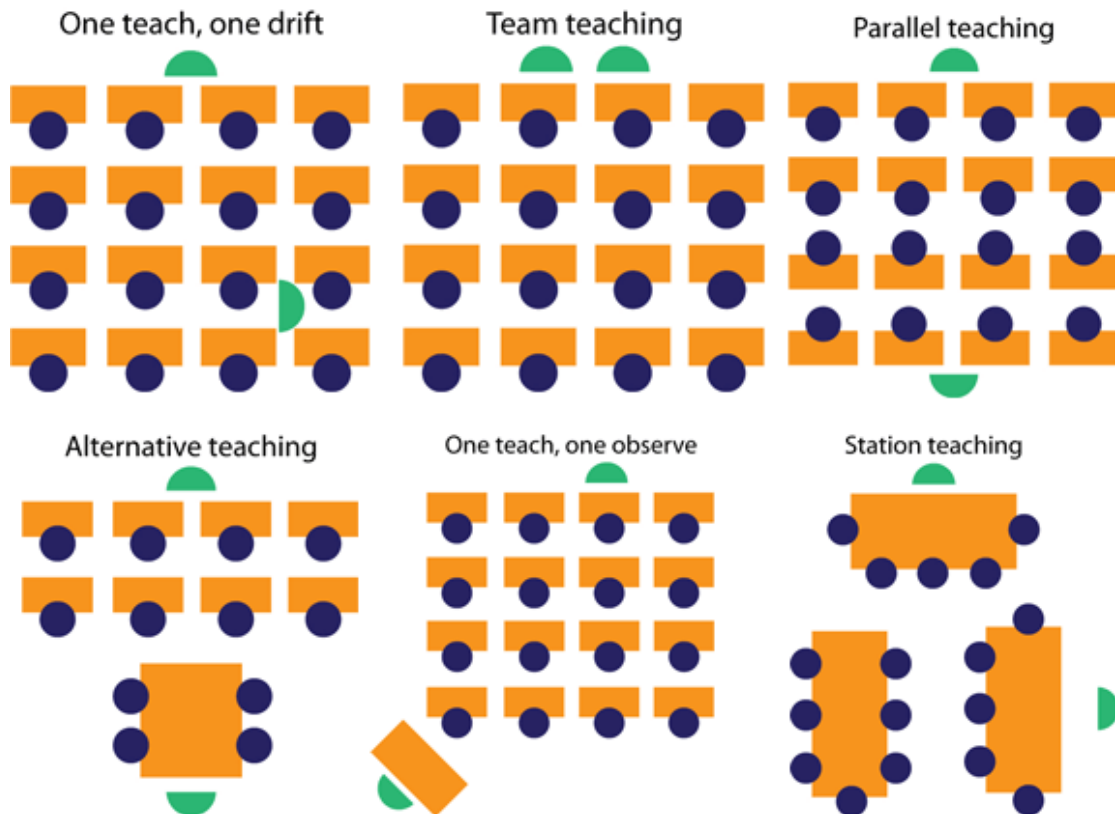
The four parts of this definition, as well as the examples we share in this book, provide the context for our discussion of co-teaching. First, co-teaching involves *two or more certified teachers*. Usually we think of co-teaching as involving a general and special educator, but given the definition above, co-teaching can occur between or among two or more special educators, two or more general educators, or two or more other certified professionals. Many certified service providers, such as speech-language pathologists, school social workers, physical or occupational therapists, and English as second language teachers, now provide their services or support in the general education classroom rather than pulling students out for services. This approach often provides greater opportunities for more integrated learning for students, rather than focusing on isolated skills in a totally different context. Integrated services allow for immediate application and natural assessment of critical skills. While in the general education classroom, these professionals may coplan and copresent lessons applicable to all the students in the class. For example, a speech language pathologist might join general educators in selecting and preteaching vocabulary words for an upcoming unit. Mastering the vocabulary words is critical for all the students in the classroom—not just those with special needs. As noted, co-teaching often involves a special educator and a general educator. In fact, many special educators co-teach with several different general educators every day.

Second, the definition of co-teaching notes that these professionals *jointly deliver substantive instruction* to students. In other words, both professionals are meaningfully involved in the delivery of instruction, and instruction reflects recommended practices in the field. This is critical with the emphasis on research-based instructional practices under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). With two or more professionals in the room, the instruction should be qualitatively different than if you were teaching the class by yourself. With others in the room, perhaps different instructional grouping systems, different technologies, and varied assignments can be used that would be difficult—or impossible—to implement with just one teacher. Many co-teachers report that they are able to use approaches they could not implement on their own, perhaps due to classroom management or other issues. Co-teaching allows teachers to explore new or different ways of teaching all students.

Third, co-teaching occurs in *diverse classrooms*. A major tenant of co-teaching is that two teachers can better meet the needs of students in diverse, inclusive classrooms. According to Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, and Wehmeyer (2007) inclusion seeks to ensure a place for all students in the general education curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate for each child, and professional collaboration is the strategy that advances inclusion and enhances the likelihood of its success. Clearly, IDEA creates a presumption in favor of educating students with disabilities with those who do not have disabilities. A clear progressive trend toward greater inclusion has been witnessed since 1984–1985, when the U.S. Department of Education first started collecting inclusion data (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The shared expertise of both teachers is needed to differentiate or individualize instruction in such classrooms. However, not every inclusion class will have a co-teacher. Many districts have guidelines regarding the number or percentage of students with disabilities placed into a general education class that warrants a co-teacher.

Finally, co-teaching occurs *within a shared physical space*. Although on occasion, one teacher may remove a student or small group from the main instructional area for a specific purpose, such as remediation or assessment, both teachers and all students typically share a common physical space for the majority of instruction. Consistently separating or removing the same students from their peers, even if their instruction is different, is inconsistent with the co-teaching model. Further, both teachers should have equal opportunities to plan and provide instruction to all students within the same space. Clearly, the special education teacher was not placed in the inclusion classroom only to teach the students with disabilities.

Co-teaching models



Friend, M. & Bursuck, W.D. 2019. *Including students with Special Needs: A Practical Guide for Classroom Teachers. 8th Edition.* USA: Pearson.

Description:

1. **One Teach, One Drift.** In a second approach to co-teaching, one person would keep primary responsibility for teaching while the other professional circulated through the room providing unobtrusive assistance to students as needed.
2. **Team Teaching:** In team teaching, both teachers are delivering the same instruction at the same time. Some teachers refer to this as having one brain in two bodies. Others call it tag team teaching. Most co-teachers consider this approach the most complex but satisfying way to co-teach, but the approach that is most dependent on teachers' styles.
3. **Parallel Teaching.** On occasion, student learning would be greatly facilitated if they just had more supervision by the teacher or more opportunity to respond. In parallel teaching, the teachers are both covering the same information, but they divide the class into two groups and teach simultaneously.
4. **Alternative Teaching:** In most class groups, occasions arise in which several students need specialized attention. In alternative teaching, one teacher takes responsibility for the large group while the other works with a smaller group.

5. **One Teach, One Observe.** One of the advantages in co-teaching is that more detailed observation of students engaged in the learning process can occur. With this approach, for example, co-teachers can decide in advance what types of specific observational information to gather during instruction and can agree on a system for gathering the data. Afterward, the teachers should analyze the information together.
6. **Station Teaching.** In this co-teaching approach, teachers divide content and students. Each teacher then teaches the content to one group and subsequently repeats the instruction for the other group. If appropriate, a third station could give students an opportunity to work independently.