

Spring 2010

Centering on...

Collaborative Team Teaching

Grades K-12



FROM THE RESEARCH

Building Teaching Partnerships to Support Student Learning

Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) increases educational opportunities for all students. It can reduce the stigma often associated with being identified as having a disability. It creates a stronger system of support for effective instruction among the adults responsible for educating students, (Friend, 2008).

Long before the current federal legislative mandates, special educators proposed that students with disabilities *could* succeed in general education classrooms if their teachers forged partnerships that resulted in both high expectations and individual supports for the students, (Garvar and Papania, 1982). This rationale for co-teaching, an alternative to the separate special education service-delivery models, continues to be relevant.

Defining Collaborative Team Teaching

The collaborative teaching team, a general educator and a special educator, delivers special education services in the general education classroom. They have the joint responsibility to design, deliver, monitor and evaluate instruction for a diverse group of learners in classes where both are present and engaged simultaneously. (Fister-Mulkey, DeBoer, 1995).

Through CTT, students with disabilities have access to the same rigorous curriculum as their non-disabled peers, a fundamental aspect of the *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (2008). Opportunities for students with disabilities to achieve in CTT classes match those of their non-disabled peers. The high expectations of them also match those set for all of the other students. (See: On the Web, page 4.)

A CTT co-teaching team may be defined as two teachers who: coordinate their work to achieve common, agreed upon goals; share a belief system that each member has unique and needed experience; use a cooperative process to plan and monitor instruction; and engage equally in the dual roles of teacher/learner, expert/novice, giver and recipient of knowledge and skills. (Adapted from: Villa, R., Thousand, J., Nevin, A. (2004). *A Guide to Co-teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Online: www.corwinpress.com.)

Benefits of Collaborative Team Teaching

CTT brings many benefits to the school community, providing greater opportunity to capitalize on the unique qualities and the specialized knowledge, skills and instructional approaches of the two teachers in the class. Teachers report they experience greater professional growth, (Fister-Mulkey, DeBoer, 1995).

CTT increases flexibility in grouping and scheduling. Students wait less time for teacher

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The UFT Teacher Center promotes teacher excellence and high academic achievement for students through professional development based on current research and best practices. Designed to deepen educators' professional knowledge, activities include in-classroom and in-school support, borough-wide and citywide networks, conferences, seminars and college and in-service courses. UFT Teacher Center is a collaboration of the United Federation of Teachers, New York State Education Department, New York City Department of Education, participating schools and districts, School Support Organizations and area cultural institutions.

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Building Teaching Partnerships to Support Student Learning

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attention and spend longer time on tasks. Better teaching and learning conditions mean teachers can more effectively use research-based strategies. (See Professional Books, page 2, for more on co-teaching models.)

The CTT classroom fosters a greater sense of community, allowing students to experience and imitate the cooperative, collaborative skills that teachers model as they co-teach. These skills are often cited as essential ones for students' future success in school and careers. (See The Practitioner's Perspective, page 3, for more about CTT in classrooms.)

References

Friend, M. (2008). *Co-Teach! A Handbook for Creating and Sustaining Effective Classroom Partnerships in Inclusive Schools*. Greensboro, NC: Marilyn Friend, Inc. Online: www.NPRinc.com.

Garvar, A., Papania, A. (1982). Team Teaching: It Works for the Student. *Academic Therapy*, 18, 191-196.

Fister-Mulkey, S., DeBoer, A. (1995). *Working Together: Tools for Collaborative Teaching*. Frederick, CO: Sopris West.

Americans with Disabilities Act. Online: <http://www.ada.gov/pubs/adastatute08mar k.htm>.

NOTE: CTT can be a part of the continuum of services, (integrated co-teaching service) in New York State. See: DeLorenzo, J. (April 2008). Continuum of Special Education Services for School-Age Students with Disabilities. (Accessed 2-09-10) Online: <http://www.vesid.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/schoolagecontinuum.pdf>.



Co-Teach!

A Handbook for Creating and Sustaining Effective Classroom Partnerships in Inclusive Schools

Co-Teach! focuses on the nature of successful collaborative team teaching (CTT) and the essential concepts about co-teaching. It describes helpful, real-life practices and gives examples. A valuable tool for educators across the K-12 continuum, *Co-Teach!* is used by UFT Teacher Center for professional development and teacher teams.

CTT partnerships are valuable to students, generating new ways to accommodate and meet students' learning requirements. CTT partnerships also benefit the teaching partners, permitting them to develop fresh perspectives in viewing classroom procedures and instructional practices and often, lead to a renewed sense of commitment to teaching.

How can CTT be used effectively in delivering special education services? How successful can CTT be? Marilyn Friend's *Co-Teach!* provides clear answers—answers important for all of the CTT school's stakeholders and for the ability of collaborative team teachers to support students in higher achievement.

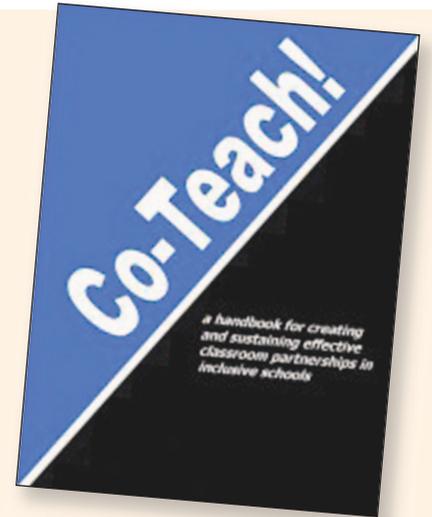
Topics in *Co-Teach!* include:

- Overviews of key concepts and co-teaching rationales.
- Variations of co-teaching approaches.
- How to select and use co-teaching approaches for instruction.
- Classroom practices and classroom management of instruction.
- Planning time and scheduling.
- Key information and suggestions for administrators.

Further Reading

Whether or not we are partners in a collaborative-teaching team, chances are excellent that we will work as co-teachers at many points in our careers. Another valuable book is *A Guide to Co-Teaching*. It expands pedagogical models and possibilities for teaching partners as well as for collaborative team teachers.

Villa, R., Thousand, J., Nevin, A. (2004). *A Guide to Co-Teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Online: www.corwinpress.com.



Friend, Marilyn. (2008). *Co-Teach! A Handbook for Creating and Sustaining Effective Classroom Partnerships in Inclusive Schools*. Greensboro, NC: Marilyn Friend, Inc. Online: www.NPRinc.com.

Collaborative Instructional Planning

Effective Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) is a strong focus at UFT Teacher Center school-based sites and citywide events where coaching and other professional development activities are structured around collaborative planning and co-teaching models. MS 226 and IS 125, in Queens, have CTT classes and are UFT Teacher Center sites.

MS 226, District 27, Queens

At MS 226 for grades 6–8, where Ira Faber is the UFT Teacher Center staff member, teachers Vanessa Reed (special education) and Ivy Penn (general education) are in their first year of co-teaching a seventh-grade class. Both are committed to ongoing professional development and offering their students the best possible instructional support.

So far, this year has provided new, positive experiences. They have incorporated four of six co-teaching models. Using these and differentiating instruction to match students' levels has been positively affecting students' learning.

The teaching models they use are:

- **Team-Teaching** (Both teach the same lesson.) This works especially well for their students during mathematics and for work on reading skills. During a practice read-aloud, each takes a turn, which allows students to benefit from hearing both teachers model fluency.
- **Alternative Teaching** (One teacher works with a larger group; one teacher works with a smaller group on specific skills.) This allows the teachers to focus their instruction on the specific needs of each group. Ivy and Vanessa find that this approach works well because each teacher focuses on the lesson she has designed for a particular group.
- **One Teach/One Assist** (One teacher teaches the lesson and the other assists by moving throughout the room.) Each can support the other's teaching and make additional explanations to individual students as needed. They alternate teaching and assisting, providing information in varied ways and giving related examples.
- **Parallel Teaching** (Teaching the same lesson to two groups of students.) This allows teachers to customize lessons so they meet students' learning modalities and styles, including visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning styles.

Two additional models they will now consider incorporating, as needed, are:

- **Station Teaching** (Students are placed in two groups and the lesson content, which is potentially difficult or needing particular sequencing, is also divided.) Sometimes, a third station is set up, for students to work independently.

- **One Teach/One Observe** (One teacher teaches and the other teacher, using a rubric both have created, observes.) This allows teachers to gain deeper understanding of individual students.

Note: Models adapted from: Friend, Marilyn. (2008). *Co-Teach! A Handbook for Creating and Sustaining Effective Classroom Partnerships in Inclusive Schools*. Greensboro, NC: Marilyn Friend, Inc.

IS 125, District 24, Queens

At IS 125 for grades 5–8, where Angela Miuta is the UFT Teacher Center staff member, teachers believe each co-teaching pair is as unique as the students they teach. Students reap the benefit, they say, when co-teachers clearly define their individual and shared instructional focus. Students have the opportunity to learn more, and to have their individual needs met more quickly. Co-teachers also believe they are making what might seem like minor changes and these are resulting in major changes for students.

How are they accomplishing this? First, faculty professional development has provided opportunities for teachers to share their specific needs. Second, the school culture emphasizes the importance of the equality of team members—both make instructional decisions. It is important for students to see the partners as equals who make shared decisions about all aspects of the classroom, including discipline, lesson structure and anything that occurs in the classroom.

At IS 125 the special education partners in collaborative teams follow “their” classes, each partnering with several subject-area teachers (science, social studies, math and English language arts). This can be challenging, especially identifying time for shared planning. The administration has designated common planning time for meetings in which reflective questions guide collaborative discussion. Co-teachers decide on co-teaching strategies that they adapt to the instructional needs of students, for example, selecting skill-embedded content-area lessons. Here one teacher presents content and the other focuses students on a skill they need to use immediately in meeting that lesson's task demands, perhaps note-taking or capturing the lesson's organizing ideas.

CTT partners coordinate the planning and delivery of instruction, bringing to bear knowledge and skills across the wide span of general and special education. This includes:

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ON THE WEB



The Access Center: <http://k8accesscenter.org>

As educators, we support the principle that students with special needs must have access to the general education curriculum. This principle is the foundation for *The Access Center: Improving Outcomes for All Students K–8*. It was developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) with funding from the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education.

Ensuring that students in K–8 actually do have access to the curriculum in our classrooms demands knowledge. The *Access Center* identifies resource categories and topics for us. The Access Center is maintained by AIR.

General education teachers, special education teachers, co-teachers in the general education classroom and staff developers, all will find resources here.

Search and find resources for such issues as: effective interventions for struggling readers; strategies for accessing algebraic concepts K–8; strategies on differentiation of instruction; and inclusive education. Major categories include:

- Co-teaching.
- Content-area resources (reading and language arts, mathematics and science).
- Instructional and learning strategies.
- Foundational information on research, curriculum, standards, assessment and professional issues.
- Professional development modules (with presentations, hand outs and notes).



THE PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE

Collaborative Instructional Planning

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- Developing knowledge about the students—their strengths, weaknesses and non-verbal behaviors—and the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) of students with special needs.
- Adapting assessments, tasks, lessons and units to match both the learning needs of students with IEPs and the learning needs of the general education students.
- Knowing the curriculum in the content areas.
- Differentiating instruction to address students' levels, learning styles and individual interests.
- Checking for students' understanding and being prepared to clarify and re-teach.
- Creating contracts and behavior plans when necessary.
- Maintaining close contact with parents.
- Adjusting to each other's personalities, teaching styles, class rules, expectations, grading systems and spontaneous ideas.
- Meeting and communicating as co-teaching partners to plan and organize instruction, assess student work and participate in grading.



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