Communication and Collaboration

Tips and Strategies for Co-Teaching at the Secondary Level

Wendy W. Murawski • Lisa A. Dieker

Kali is a special education resource teacher who has 32 students with mild to moderate disabilities on her caseload. The special education department at Chavez High School (CHS) decided 2 years ago to organize by grade level, so most of the students on Kali's caseload are in the 10th grade, although she has two in the 9th grade and four in the 11th. At the end of the last school year, CHS teachers discussed at great length how the school was supposed to become more "inclusive" and how the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act might affect secondary special educators.

Although Kali was accustomed to teaching resource classes in English and algebra, her principal just informed her that she will be expected to "co-teach" so that more of her students could be included in general education classes and have their needs met in those classes.

Christien, a general education 10th grade English teacher, also was recently told that he would be co-teaching with Kali. It is only a few days before school begins, and Christien and Kali find themselves meeting and asking the same questions. What exactly is co-teaching? How can it be done at the secondary level? What role will, or even should, Kali have in the general education classroom? Is this the same thing as being a glorified aide? Can co-teaching really help to meet secondary students' needs?

Secondary students with disabilities are expected to meet the same high academic standards as their peers without disabilities in general education classrooms, yet many do not experience success during their middle and high school years. This lack of success for students with disabilities at the secondary level often is impacted by miscommunication between educators (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 2002), an increasing difficulty with assignments, and an inability to address diverse learning needs given the strong focus on content mastery.

Reith and Polsgrove (1998) aptly state that, "it is not enough to merely place students with [disabilities] in general class settings without providing appropriate training, materials, and support to them and their teachers. To do so surely invites their failure" (p. 257). How can these issues be addressed at the secondary level? One tool being used by many special and general educators to meet the needs of secondary students is co-teaching. Co-teaching is a method by which educators can meet the needs of students with and without disabilities who are struggling in a secondary class. The term "highly qualified" in NCLB is leading to discussions that perhaps will require secondary special educators to be licensed in any content area in which they provide individualized instruction in a self-contained setting.

Based on this possible interpretation, co-teaching is becoming an increasingly more desirable, and for some, a more feasible, service delivery option. In the spirit of NCLB, co-teachers jointly plan and conduct instruction in a coordinated fashion to ensure the success of all students (Friend & Cook, 2003). This method of instruction is likely to increase the outcomes for all students in the general education setting, while ensuring that students with disabilities receive necessary modifications yet are provided instruction by a content expert. These teachers help one another

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by providing different areas of expertise that, when fused together correctly, can result in enhanced instruction for all students.

Though many schools are implementing co-teaching for students with disabilities in general education classrooms (National Center for Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995), teachers continue to search for strategies to make co-teaching a more feasible and beneficial alternative.

Both of us have had successful experiences co-teaching at the secondary level and now spend time consulting with school districts on strategies to make co-teaching a viable option for teachers. From our experiences, we are able to share practical ideas for preparing to co-teach at the secondary level. In addition, we provide teacher-friendly strategies specifically geared to the secondary level for the three major areas involved in co-teaching: planning, instruction, and assessment.

Preparing to Co-Teach

Faculty in secondary schools are well acquainted with change. New mandates or programs often are introduced at the beginning of a school year with the announcement that they are to be implemented immediately. This "ready, fire, aim" approach negates what we know about change needing time and professional buy-in. In accordance with the "ready, fire, aim" approach many schools take toward co-teaching and inclusive instruction, issues such as the following can arise:

- Teachers often are faced with schedules that are crafted before co-teaching teams are assigned; as a result, students with disabilities are often placed in classes that are already full.
- Special educators often are assigned to work with multiple teachers during the same class period, and thus, the teachers are not able to collaborate effectively with anyone.

Ultimately, these issues can result in (understandably) resistant teachers and a process that is doomed before it begins. Thus, educators who are considering co-teaching need to talk to their administrators and colleagues *before* starting the process. Reviewing the literature will reinforce the need for time—time to correctly schedule students, to develop a rapport with a future co-teacher, and to plan appropriate lessons to ensure that student learning occurs.

The Role of the Principal

One of the best approaches an administrator can take is to promote co-teaching by providing substantive information about this collaborative arrangement and encouraging teachers to proactively prepare for this change...*before* they actually start the process. Table 1 provides some suggestions for preparing to co-teach, as well as questions that teachers can ask to better assess the needs specifically related to secondary co-teaching.

As with most educational initiatives, schools differ in their awareness and readiness level for implementation, as do the individual faculty members within each school. Teachers who are interested in co-teaching should begin by collecting and disseminating related articles and discussing these articles in general with their colleagues (see box, "Co-Teaching Resources" for articles that may help inform teachers and administrators interested in learning more about co-teaching).

The Roles of the Co-Teachers

Any collaborative relationship can be doomed if one partner dominates, or leads in a direction that the other partner is not expecting. Secondary teachers

Co-Teaching Resources

Adams, L., & Cessna, K. (1993). Metaphors of the cotaught classroom. *Preventing School Failure, 37*, 28-31.

Bahamonde, C., & Friend, M. (1999). Teaching English language learners: A proposal for effective service delivery through collaboration and coteaching. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 10*(1), 1-24.

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Bauwens, J., Hourcade, J. J., & Friend, M. (1989). Cooperative teaching: A model for general and special education integration. *Remedial and Special Education, 10*(2), 17-22.

Bondy, E., & Brownell, M. (1997). Overcoming barriers to collaboration among partners-in-training. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 33*(2), 112-115.

Boudah, D. J., Schumaker, J. B., & Deshler, D. D. (1997). Collaborative instruction: Is it an effective option for inclusion in secondary classrooms? *Learning Disability Quarterly, 20*(4), 293-315.

Dieker, L. A. (1998). Rationale for coteaching. *Social Studies Review, 37*(2), 62-65.

Dieker, L. A., & Murawski, W. W. (2003). Co-teaching at the secondary level: Unique issues, current trends, and suggestions for success. *The High School Journal, 86*(4), 1-13.

Dyke, N., Sundbye, N., & Pemberton, J. (1997). A recipe for efficient coteaching. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 30*(2), 42-45.

Friend, M., Riesing, M., & Cook, L. (1993). Coteaching: An overview of the past, a glimpse at the present, and considerations for the future. *Preventing School Failure, 37*(4), 6-10.

Gately, S. E., & Gately, F. J. (2001). Understanding co-teaching components. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 33*(4), 40-47.

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Murawski, W. W., & Swanson, H. L. (2001). A meta-analysis of coteaching research: Where are the data? *Remedial and Special Education, 22*(5), 258-267.

Salend, S. J., Johansen, M., Mumper, J., Chase, A. S., Pike, K. M., & Dorney, J. A. (1997). Cooperative teaching: The voices of two teachers. *Remedial and Special Education, 18*(1), 3-11.

Walther-Thomas, C. S. (1997). Coteaching experiences: The benefits and problems that teachers and principals report over time. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 30*(4), 395-407.

Table 1: Preparing to Co-Teach

Actions	Questions to Ask Yourself or Others
• Assess the current environment	• What type of collaboration currently exists between general and special education? • Has there been any discussion of inclusion, collaboration, or co-teaching? • How do teachers react when they hear about students with special needs in general education classes? Are there any who react favorably?
• Move in slowly	• What is our joint understanding of co-teaching as a service delivery model? • May I teach or co-teach a lesson with you? • Are there any areas that you feel less strongly about, in which I might be able to assist?
• Involve an administrator	• How is the district addressing the least restrictive environment (LRE) mandate and the inclusive movement? • Would our school site be willing to be proactive by including co-teaching? • What discipline areas will we target first? • How will we ensure that support is provided across all content areas, including electives? • Would we be able to count on administrative support, especially with co-planning time and scheduling assistance?
• Get to know your partner	• Could we complete a co-teaching checklist to help guide us in discussing our personal and professional preferences? • Are there any pet peeves or issues that I should know prior to our working together? • Do we both have the same level of expertise about the curriculum and instructing students with disabilities? • How shall we ensure that we both are actively involved and neither feels over- or underutilized? • What feedback structure can we create to assist in our regular communication?
• Create a workable schedule	• How often will co-teaching occur (daily, a few times a week, for a specific unit)? • What schedule would best meet the needs of the class and both instructors? • How can we ensure that this schedule will be maintained consistently so that both co-teachers can trust it? • How will we maintain communication between co-taught sessions?

by nature often are more territorial because of the subject-specific environment, and are often accustomed to teaching in isolation. Special educators who are interested in co-teaching in middle or high schools may first want to provide in-class support to a variety of general education teachers until they establish a rapport (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). They also may want to begin collaborating with one trusted colleague until their own co-teaching skills are developed.

The "ready, fire, aim" approach negates what we know about change needing time and professional buy-in.

Once a colleague demonstrates interest, teachers should involve an administrator in the conversation. Providing an administrator with relevant articles (see box, "Co-Teaching Resources"), data, and a proposed schedule, in addition to delineating the potential benefits for students at this level (e.g., preparing them for high school exit exams, college courses, social integration, or employment), is an excellent strategy. Teachers need to be prepared to answer questions related to logistics, relevance, disciplinary matters, and how co-teaching will impact student outcomes on grades, high-stakes testing, and standards-based instruction.

Finally, we encourage co-teachers to spend time getting to know one another. You can use one of numerous checklists (e.g., Adams & Cessna, 1991; Bradley, King-Sears, & Tessier-Switlick, 1997; Cook & Friend, 1995; Murawski, 2003) developed for assessing one's readiness to co-teach and to allow partners to craft an effective relationship. This type of proactive communication will help to set the stage for a successful partnership. We developed the worksheet in Figure 1 as a helpful guide for getting to know your partner before engaging in co-teaching at the secondary level.

Images of Co-Teaching

Once a team is formed, partners will need to consider the three major components of true co-teaching. These

Figure 1. Sharing Hopes, Attitudes, Responsibilities, and Expectations (S.H.A.R.E.)

Directions: Take a few minutes to individually complete this worksheet. Be honest in your responses. After completing it individually, share the responses with your co-teaching partner by taking turns reading the responses. Do not use this time to comment on your partner's responses—merely read. After reading through the responses, take a moment or two to jot down any thoughts you have regarding what your partner has said. Then, come back together and begin to share reactions to the responses. Your goal is to (a) Agree, (b) Compromise, or (c) Agree to Disagree.

1. Right now, the main **hope** I have regarding this co-teaching situation is:

2. My **attitude**/philosophy regarding teaching students with disabilities in a general education classroom is:

3. I would like to have the following **responsibilities** in a co-taught classroom:

4. I would like my co-teacher to have the following **responsibilities:**

5. The biggest obstacle I **expect** to have in co-teaching is:

6. I think we can overcome this obstacle by:

7. I have the following **expectations** in a classroom:

   (a) regarding discipline

   (b) regarding classwork

   (c) regarding materials

   (d) regarding homework

   (e) regarding planning

   (f) regarding modifications for individual students

   (g) regarding grading

   (h) regarding noise level

   (i) regarding cooperative learning

   (j) regarding giving/receiving feedback

   (k) regarding parental contact

   (l) other important expectations I have

Note: From *Co-Teaching in the Inclusive Classroom: Working Together to Help All Your Students Find Success* (Grades 6-12; p.36-37, by W. W. Murawski, 2003, Medina, WA: Institute for Educational Development.

include cooperating in the planning stage, the instruction of pupils, and the assessment phase. Effective co-teaching teams at all grade levels share in each of these roles, *including* planning and assessment. The following are some practical tips and strategies for each of these aspects of secondary co-teaching.

Planning

Planning is an integral part of any effective teacher's schedule and is a proactive way to determine what standards will be addressed. At the core of co-teaching is determining what instructional techniques will be most efficient and effective in helping all students meet those standards. One of the major benefits of co-teaching is that teachers bring different areas of expertise. These diverse skills are helpful during the planning stage, as both educators can find ways to use their strengths to ensure that the lesson is appropriately differentiated for a heterogeneous class. Many considerations must be reviewed before planning in an effort to maximize teachers' time.

- Get administrative support in scheduling common planning periods. Select once or twice a week to use part of a period for planning. If your school is on a block schedule, an entire 90-minute period 1 day a week should be ample amount of time to plan 1 to 2 weeks of lessons. According to Dieker (2001), secondary teams can plan a lesson on the average in 10 minutes or less, assuming that relationship building occurred before co-teaching.
- If a common planning period is not a possibility, explore other options, as follows: Consider having a substitute or administrator cover the class occasionally, meet during student activities, have coverage during student assemblies or field trips, meet during regular lunch or after-school times, or some schools have either a school-

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wide late start or early release day to ensure schoolwide planning time. Murawski (2003) offered other ways to find time, as well.

- Ask the general educator to provide an overview of content, curriculum, and standards to be addressed before the planning meeting. In return, the special educator should provide a snapshot of any individualized education program (IEP) goals, objectives, or possible modifications for students in the shared class (Dieker, 2002). This type of information sharing is critical at the secondary level where general educators are prepared to be content specialists and special educators are prepared to focus on individual learning needs. Therefore, this type of discussion across curriculum and IEPs is critical to the success of co-teaching. Both teachers can then jointly address how to present the content in order to maximize learning and retention for all students.
- Begin planning sessions by discussing *what* will be taught (content objectives) and *how* it will be taught (co-teaching approaches or adaptations/modifications). Try to save student-specific issues until the end of the planning session; otherwise, the majority of the planning time may be spent only focusing on one or two students.
- Use a premade co-teaching plan book. Dieker (2002) created it as one plan book for both special and general educators to use to assist in role delegation and to ensure that they made accommodations for students' learning or behavioral needs.
- Include days in which the special educator will take the lead on planning. At the secondary level, the special educator may or may not be able to lead the content, depending on their curricular strengths, but they still can take a lead role in lessons focused on general core content, test-taking strategies, social skills instruction, organizational techniques, or vocational lessons related to preparing students for college or future careers. General education teachers often have large quantities of grading every evening, and the ability to defer the primary responsibility of planning a lesson will likely be welcomed and can be beneficial to all students.

Instructing

The actual process of teaching in the same classroom to the same students at the same time is often the component that is most disconcerting. Giving up total control of the classroom can be daunting. If teachers take the time to address the following areas, however, instruction is frequently reported to be the most rewarding part of co-teaching.

- Find out more about the different approaches to instruction that have been well-documented and described in the literature. Friend and Cook (2003) described the more common approaches as One-Teach-One Support, One-Teach-One Drift, Alternative Teaching, Parallel Teaching, Station Teaching, and Team Teaching. Co-teachers would be best served by reviewing these different models, in addition to real-life examples of how these approaches might look in a general education classroom. In addition to Friend and Cook, some other excellent references for more insight into different ways to collaboratively share the instruction in a classroom include Bauwens and Hourcade (1997), Friend and Bursuck (2002), and Hughes and Murawski (2001).
- Discuss learning style preferences. If one co-teacher is more kinesthetic/tactile and the other is more auditory/visual, these preferences can be infused into the lesson to assist students with varying learning styles. In addition, having more than one teacher in the room makes addressing Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligences, or other methods of creativity and differentiation, much more feasible.
- Come up with unobtrusive signals for one another to communicate when it is time to move on, extra time needs to be given, one teacher needs to leave for an emergency, or a teacher sidebar is required.
- Give students short "brain breaks" to process information and to clear their heads. Use this time to have teacher sidebars to discuss how the lesson is going and what changes might need to be made. Recent brain research indicates that students need a "brain break" about every 10 to 15 minutes to summarize what they are learning (Jensen, 1998). These breaks are a great role for the special educator to take the lead in planning and delivering.
- Create signals with students that are consistent and can be used by either teacher to aid in transitions, to gain attention, or to make an announcement. Consistency and structure are important to classroom management at any level.
- Vary instructional practices. See Table 2 for a variety of complementary teacher actions during co-teaching at the secondary level. One of the key benefits of co-teaching is that having two instructors allows flexibility and creativity during lessons. Teachers often report that having another adult with whom to work breaks up the monotony of the typical school day.
- Post a structured agenda for the class, which includes the standard to be addressed, as well as an additional goal. At the secondary level, "soft" skills (such as social or study skills) often are not a conscious part of the curriculum. However, they are frequently a component of students' IEPs and they are critical for all students for success in life. A planned agenda helps both co-teachers and students remember the objective of the lesson; middle school and high school students often are capable of participating in planning and discussing these objectives.

The goal of all secondary teachers is to ensure the future success of their students as they prepare to become responsible and productive citizens.

Table 2: Teacher Actions During Co-Teaching

If one of you is doing this . . .	The other can be doing this . . .
Lecturing	Modeling notetaking on the board/overhead; Ensuring "brain breaks" to help students process lecture information
Taking roll	Collecting and reviewing last night's homework; Introducing a social or study skill
Passing out papers	Reviewing directions; Modeling first problem on the assignment
Giving instructions orally	Writing down instructions on board; Repeating or clarifying any difficult concept
Checking for understanding with large heterogeneous group of students	Checking for understanding with small heterogeneous group of students
Circulating, providing one-on-one support as needed	Providing direct instruction to whole class
Prepping half of the class for one side of a debate	Prepping the other half of the class for the opposing side of the debate
Facilitating a silent activity	Circulating, checking for comprehension
Providing large group instruction	Circulating, using proximity control for behavior management
Running last minute copies or errands	Reviewing homework; Providing a study or test-taking strategy
Re-teaching or preteaching with a small group	Monitoring large group as they work on practice materials
Facilitating sustained silent reading	Reading aloud quietly with a small group; previewing upcoming information
Reading a test aloud to a group of students	Proctoring a test silently with a group of students
Creating basic lesson plans for standards, objectives, and content curriculum	Providing suggestions for modifications, accommodations, and activities for diverse learners
Facilitating stations or groups	Also facilitating stations or groups
Explaining new concept	Conducting roleplay or modeling concept; Asking clarifying questions
Considering modification needs	Considering enrichment opportunities

- Use disagreements and discussions about content for modeling appropriate communication techniques among adults. Avoid second-guessing or disagreeing with one another about assignments, however, in front of students. Obviously, heated arguments among adults do not model effective collaboration or communication techniques.

Assessing

The link between instruction and assessment is key, especially in this time of high stakes testing. Assessing students to determine if they are learning and to identify what instructional changes may need to be made is a perfect area for collaboration. Special and general educators can work together to determine what is working instructionally for the whole class, what areas may need revision or re-addressing, and if there are specific students who may need individual accommodations. However, as with the other areas of co-teaching, assessment requires that co-teachers take time to discuss potential areas for concern or disagreement...*before* they become a real issue.

- Recognize that grading frequently becomes a sticky topic and is one that should be discussed proactively to avoid confrontation. Because grades at the secondary level carry a lot of weight, general education teachers often are concerned about the implications of modifying assignments or grades. Teachers need to discuss students individually to determine what is appropriate for each and come to a consensus in advance.
- Consider a variety of options for assessing students with and without disabilities, to include alternative and authentic assessments, permanent product, and modified assignments.
- Devise a way to assess process and effort, in addition to final product. Discuss how students with IEPs will have their goals and objectives assessed and how these achievements will be reflected in their grade.
- Provide menus of assignments that allow students to self-select projects or papers that are of most interest to them. This technique allows for differentiation and encourages students to pick an assignment that best meets their particular learning style and to demonstrate their gifts and talents.
- Create rubrics that will help students (and co-teachers) see what is being assessed and how.
- Share the load by taking turns grading papers. At first, each teacher could grade a few of the same papers separately as a basis for comparison. Coteachers could then discuss and refine the grading standards to ensure reliability and validity between graders, in addition to providing a forum to discuss any potential differences.

Final Thoughts

As we have noted, educators can use two basic questions to guide the co-

teaching process. As teachers work collaboratively, they should continue to ask themselves, "Is what we are doing good for both of us?" and "Is what we are doing good for all of our students?" If the answer to these two questions is "yes," they should continue to co-teach, refining and improving as they go. They may even want to share their success with others.

If the answer to either question is "no," it may be time to revisit this article or to seek advice from other teachers who have had success with a co-teaching model at the secondary level. Ultimately, the goal of all secondary teachers is to ensure the future success of their students as they prepare to become responsible and productive citizens. Co-teaching, like any other proposed teaching methodology, needs to serve that goal for it to be a continued option in the secondary classroom. Following these tips and guidelines should help to ensure a successful and rewarding experience for both teachers and students alike.

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Wendy W. Murawski, *Assistant Professor, Department of Special Education, California State University, Northridge.* **Lisa A. Dieker** (*CEC Chapter #155), Associate Professor, Child, Family and Community Sciences, University of Central Florida, Orlando.*

Address correspondence to Wendy W. Murawski, Department of Special Education, California State University, Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330-8265 (e-mail: wwmurawski@yahoo.com).

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1522 K Street, NW, Suite 1032
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 408-3338 • Fax: (202) 408-3340
E-mail: napsec@aol.com • Web: www.napsec.org