

COLLABORATIVE TEACHING: GETTING STARTED

Collaborative teaching has meant the sharing of responsibility, workload, successes, and challenges. The many benefits of collaborative teaching have been articulated by hundreds of teachers who have experienced successful teaming. Nevertheless, both general education and special education teachers have expressed some common fears as they enter this form of collaboration for the first time. Having another professional observe you teach, share your space, and share responsibility for the learning outcomes of the students creates some level of anxiety in all who will engage in collaborative teaching. The following are some tasks or issues which if discussed prior to teaming can ease the transition to successful collaborative teaching and help to create a climate of mutual respect.

Getting to Know Each Other

1. What instructional and organizational routines does each member use? How does each teacher envision the classroom functioning?
2. What are the pet peeves of each team member? We all have at least one! Example: If you do not want students to use pens on quizzes and tests, state it; if you cannot stand students chewing gum in class, let it be known.
3. What is your philosophy toward learning?
4. What is your expertise that you will bring to this team?
5. What are your biggest hopes for our work as a team? What are your biggest concerns?
6. What are your expectations for students regarding participation? Daily preparation?
7. How are students typically grouped in the classroom?
8. What instructional methods do you like to use? (e.g., lectures, class discussions)
9. What practice activities do you like to use? (e.g. cooperative learning groups, labs)
10. Describe typical projects and assignments.

Planning

1. What will the composition of the class be like? Who are the students identified as having special needs and what are their special needs?
It is essential that the general education teacher knows about the students with disabilities or challenges that will be in the co-taught class.
2. What are our individual roles and responsibilities? Discuss what each of you can do in the class regarding instructional delivery. Discuss team teaching, complementary instruction, and supportive roles that the collaborative teacher can perform in the general education class.
3. Who adapts the instructional procedure and curriculum for select students? The task of making accommodations is usually thought of as the special educator's responsibility. However, it is some times easiest for the person who is developing the materials to include the accommodations at that time. For example, at teacher writing a test in an essay format might make a multiple choice version at the same time.
4. How will IEP accommodations/modifications be monitored? Where will the information about the students' accommodations be kept? Example: specified binder, grade book, file folder, etc.
5. Who plans for what content? Teachers need to determine the overriding objectives for the class, and be specific about the objectives of each unit they will teach. Take the time to talk about instructional expectations. Review the general education curriculum and discuss the standards, the scope and sequence, and pacing for the course. Both teachers need to have an

overview of the course content including outcomes and assessments. The special education teacher should be provided a copy of the course standards and if possible, a teacher's edition of the textbook.

6. When will planning take place? Successful planning takes at least 30 minutes of sit-down time. Establish common planning time to plan for instruction and to evaluate the effectiveness of co-teaching. Don't let problems or unresolved issues that could cause friction in the team go undiscussed. Co-teachers have reported that common planning time must be scheduled weekly for teachers to plan for instruction in the co-taught classes, however, this time is not always available during the school day.
7. Who will be responsible for what? Consider duplicating, assignment and test development, etc.
8. Discuss programming, units, and daily lessons.
9. Make the most of planning time with tailored agendas.
10. Discuss the acquisition and utilization of supplies and equipment needed for the classroom.

Presentation

1. How will the content be presented, i.e., will one person teach and the other(s) arrange and facilitate follow-up activities or will all members share in the teaching of the lesson?
2. How will parity be communicated to the students? Students must see the teachers as partners and as possessing equal authority.
3. How do we interrupt the lead teacher? During whole group instruction, usually one teacher is the lead teacher and one is in a supportive role. Interruptions by the supporting teacher can make it look like the lead teacher has made a mistake and is being corrected by the supporting teacher if not handled carefully. On the other hand, it is often the supporting teacher moving about the room who recognizes when students are confused and by asking questions which clarify the information for everyone, the supporting teacher can impact the lesson in a very positive way.

Processing

1. What is the best way for feedback to be given to each member of the team? Not everyone takes advice and criticism the same way.
2. What strategies will be used for assessment of the partnership?
3. How will you resolve differences? Some differences of opinion are normal. Have a plan to communicate concerns while they are still small.
4. Schedule a date each grading period to complete an evaluation of your co-teaching practice. Discuss the results and adjust as needed.

Grading and Evaluation

1. How do you monitor and evaluate student progress? How do we grade so that the grades accurately reflect student achievement?
2. Describe your typical tests and quizzes.
3. Who grades the papers? Who evaluates which group of students, i.e., do team members collaborate in evaluating all/each students' performances or is each team member primarily responsible for evaluating a subset of students? Some teachers have divided the task of grading daily work evenly – each teacher takes home ½ of the assignments.
4. Who is responsible for maintaining the grade book?
5. Who is responsible for completing the students' report cards?
6. Who completes the paperwork for students identified as needing special education?

Classroom Management

1. How do we manage the classroom? Classroom management strategies and a plan for implementing them when there are two teachers in the room should be agreed upon prior to teaching together. Most teaming teachers agree that whoever is the lead teacher at the time should be in control of the class. However, the supporting teacher may help students stay on task by moving nearer to them or quietly redirecting them to the task. Certainly, the supporting teacher should inform the lead teacher of any major problems that he/she does not see (or take care of them).
2. Who carries out the disciplinary procedures and delivers the consequences?
3. How is discipline handled when one or both teachers are on planning time?
4. Discuss daily class routines and procedures for students. Examples: leaving the class for water and restroom, late to class, asking questions in class, turning in written assignments, sharpening pencils, lining up (elementary), walking down the hall (elementary), taking make-up quizzes and tests, getting missed assignments, turning in late assignments, transition within classroom (noise level).

Scheduling

1. How is scheduling of the student to be established?
First look at the general education classroom – at what times can the student be working on goals in the general education classroom? When that can't happen, pull out.
2. Will collaboration take place on a regular consistent basis or on a more flexible basis?
3. When and how often will the team members meet to discuss students' performance?
4. Who should attend the meetings?

Communication

1. Who communicates with parents? The team may decide that in many cases, it should be the general education teacher who communicates with families, just as they would for students who do not have disabilities. In specific cases, it may be the special education teacher that takes primary responsibility for ongoing communication with the family.
2. Who communicates with support staff, i.e., secretaries, custodians, etc.?
3. How will parents be informed that their student will be in a co-taught class? (See Co-Teaching Parent Letter in handouts.)
4. Make a list of all correspondence which will use both teachers' names. Example: notes to parents, newsletters, syllabi, schedules, report cards.

Other

1. Prepare specifically for the first day of class together.
The first day of class can set the tone for the whole year. How will each of you be introduced to the students? What can you do to convey to the students that two professional teachers are in the classroom working together? Use "we" instead of "I". Make sure first day tasks are shared by both teachers, e.g. passing out texts, going over rules, assignments, expectations in the class, etc. Do the same during open houses, "Meet the Teacher" nights, and parent-teacher conferences.
2. Plan for the first two weeks before school starts. It is important for two teachers who are co-teaching for the first time to spend some extensive time discussing the curriculum, how the workload will be shared, and specifically what they will do during the first days of class.
3. How will conferences and IEP's be handled?

4. What is needed from the administration to make it work?
5. How will you notify your co-teacher that you will be absent? How will instructional responsibilities be handled when using substitutes? Note: an absent co-teacher should always provide a substitute. This substitute should not be pulled from a co-taught class to cover another class.
6. How will the physical space of the classroom be used in support of both teachers? Will the co-teacher be provided a designated area or desk in which to keep his/her materials?
7. What information is confidential?
8. Discuss paperwork responsibilities. These may include: attendance procedures, discipline referrals, progress reports/newsletters to parents, bulletin boards, copying papers, etc.