

Six Co-Teaching Strategies

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One Teach, One Assist

In the One Teach, One Assist co-teaching method, one teacher will lead the lesson while the other teacher distributes materials, answers individual questions, checks that students are on task, asks the other teacher for further clarification when confusion arises, monitors student progress as they complete the assignment, and assists any other needs of the students during the lesson. The One Teach, One Assist strategy allows for flexibility during lesson planning and allows teachers to decide who teaches a lesson and who assists students based on personal content knowledge, strengths, and preferences. The One Teach, One Assist method can allow teachers to present information, engage students in learning, monitor student progress, and gauge their overall understanding of the content for future lesson planning.

The benefits and positive outcomes of this strategy include: one teacher is able to focus on the lesson without also trying to balance answering questions, students are more likely to stay on task, and questions are answered as the lesson progresses rather than after the lesson has already been completed. If a teacher has someone else answering the questions that arise, a teacher can focus on pacing the lesson and providing new information to students. Similarly, if another teacher is assisting and monitoring student progress, students are more likely to stay on task and complete the lesson or activity with the rest of the class. By utilizing One Teach One Assist, the assisting teacher is also able to answer questions immediately as the lesson progresses rather than when the leading teacher has finished presenting the information, ideas, and concepts. By answering questions as they arise, the teachers can keep students on the same level and intervene when students begin falling behind.

In contrast, One Teach One Assist can also result in a few negative outcomes or drawbacks, such as distraction or dependency. With two teachers performing intertwined, but separate functions, students may become distracted when the assisting teacher answers questions in close proximity or the students receiving help may lose track of where the leading teacher is in the textbook or lesson. While the assisting teacher often helps students stay on task, they may unintentionally cause students to fall slightly behind as well. Similarly, if One Teach One Assist is used for nearly every lesson in the classroom, students may begin depending on the assisting teacher for every answer rather than attempting an assignment independently.

As briefly mentioned earlier, some evidence for effective planning in using this co-teaching strategy can include: determining who will lead the lesson based on their strengths and background knowledge, creating a classroom environment that fosters co-teaching, and alternating teaching roles rather than defaulting to specific roles. Friend & Bursack (2015) provide evidence demonstrating how this co-teaching strategy allows for role rotation based on lessons and strengths, such as when “the special education teacher leads a lesson that is a test review, [while] the general education teacher helps students individually as they have questions about the vocabulary” (p. 84). The planning behind this lesson shows how the strengths, content knowledge, and abilities, are reflected in who teaches and who assists without limiting the special education teacher to defaulting to the assistant role. Co-teachers collaborate to plan lessons and activities that enable them to use their individual strengths to help foster learning in the classroom.

While One Teach, One Assist has several positive outcomes, it should only be used occasionally or utilized when certain classes have behavioral problems that inhibit their ability to pay attention and stay on task. Just as every classroom of students requires instructional

adjustments, the One Teach One Assist method can be employed when a lesson may be difficult to follow, questions often interrupt explanation, or when the required content presented in this manner creates an environment for students that is the most conducive to learning.

One Teach, One Observe

In the One Teach, One Observe co-teaching strategy, the leading teacher presents the lesson while the other teacher observes student behavior and gathers information about student learning, interaction, engagement, and participation. By observing and gathering data on student learning, both teachers can use the data to develop future lessons using the best practices that help all students stay engaged and learn. The observation allows both teachers to see which teaching methods work to help all or specific students learn and which methods need to be adjusted to appeal to everyone in the classroom. One Teach, One Observe also provides teachers feedback on their own teaching styles that enables growth and development as an educator.

Several positive outcomes from employing the One Teach, One Observe strategy include: gaining data on the academic, behavioral, and social skills of students, understanding which instructional methods work or do not work for all students, seeing the classroom interaction from a different perspective, collaborating to adjust teaching styles, and improving student pairing that is beneficial for every student. By observing the academic, behavioral, and social skills of students, co-teachers are more equipped to adjust lessons, group activities, and assignments based on the performance levels of their students. If one teacher observes when specific students become bored or distracted and begin to act in a different manner, then the co-teachers can also work together to find ways that prevent distraction and improve engagement. Similarly, if both teachers take turns observing how students react to different instructional methods, then the data

gained can provide direction in future lesson planning based on which methods did or did not work for specific students. When one teacher sees the classroom from a different perspective, this can also aid in understanding why certain students act or interact in different ways. The view from a teacher's standpoint will always be different from the view if one is immersed in the students' natural habitat. Similarly, different perspectives enable teachers to collaborate to adjust their teaching methods and student pairings or groupings for projects based on the data gained. By observing the interaction between students, teachers are able to discern which actions may be avoided by seating adjustments or which students need to be paired with an above average peer to help close the achievement gap and improve understanding.

On the other hand, the One Teach, One Observe strategy can also have drawbacks, such as creating a divide between who students consider is the actual "teacher," rather than having equal teaching roles and credibility. While the data gained from observing students can be valuable, co-teachers can decrease their credibility and authority in the classroom if only one defaults to the observer role when necessary. If students acknowledge that one person always teaches lessons and the other assists or observes, students may feel less obligated to listen when the teaching roles are swapped. Another drawback from having a default observer to gain data is that the data on instructional methods only reflects that of the consistent leading teacher rather than both teachers. Although the information gained from classroom observation can aid in understanding student behavior and actions, co-teachers must share the responsibility of observing and recording to have equal reputations and authority in the classroom.

Effective planning for the One Teach, One Observe strategy could include considerations of who should teach the content based on strengths or preferences, which activities should be used to gain the data, and how the data should be compared. The co-teachers can decide between

themselves who will most effectively deliver the lesson and how the content should be delivered to gain specific information about students. One example of this Friend & Bursack (2015) describe involves the general education teacher teaching a lesson using grouping activities which enable the special education teacher to observe specific students who have issues with social interaction (p. 81). The co-teachers determine which issues to observe/gather data on and set the stage in which to gather the information, in this case, creating a cooperative learning environment and activity. The co-teachers can then determine how the data will be compared, such as noting the behaviors and interaction of more outgoing students alongside those with weaker social skills. When using One Teach, One Observe, co-teachers can pre-plan lessons that not only relate classroom content, but can also plan activities that can help produce actions or interactions they are wanting to observe and use these notes to plan future instructional methods or activities.

The One Teach, One Observe strategy should only be used occasionally to gather data or adjust teaching styles and methods to reach struggling students. If the observation and data collection becomes more important than actually teaching, then students will not learn what is necessary to help them at the next level. If this co-teaching strategy is used too frequently, then co-teachers risk falling into the default positions of primary teacher and observer. As everything should be used in moderation, the One Teach, One Observe strategy should not be neglected, but used appropriately for data collection, instruction analysis, and adjustment.

Station Teaching

In the Station Teaching strategy, teachers divide the students in groups, or stations, and each teacher works with an individual group to learn a skill or complete an activity while another

or two other groups of students work independently to complete an assigned task. Co-teachers can determine if they should split the class into two larger groups based on instructional needs of the students or if some learners can work independently. Station teaching enables both teachers to interact and teach students on a more personal level while also teaching small bits of the content in cooperative groups with hands-on learning activities. The station activities can be related, but not dependent on information from other station activities to complete. The rotation style of the Station Teaching strategy allows teachers to monitor the progress of all groups without students becoming restless once they complete a single activity.

A few benefits of adopting Station Teaching include: many aspects of a topic can be covered in a single window of time, curriculum is more easily modified, and the student-to-teacher ratio is smaller, which encourages participation. If co-teachers collaborate to develop station lessons, they can have a single broad topic and teach subtopic information and skills within the groups. Instead of giving all of the topic information to students at once, they can be paced through the activities with small group instruction to aid their understanding of the topic as a whole. Similarly, by using stations and group activities, the co-teachers can determine which activities can and should be modified based on the students in their classroom. If the majority of students are tactile learners, then the teachers can adjust the assignments to fit their specific learning styles. The Station Teaching strategy also reduces the teacher-to-student ratio that can make addressing the needs of all students difficult with whole group instruction. By dividing students into groups of fewer than nine or ten, the students may also be more comfortable in participating in the activities and small group discussion versus whole group discussion.

In contrast, Station teaching can also have a few negative drawbacks, such as noise distraction, early finishers becoming restless, and students not actually learning the content

covered in the group activity. Depending upon the number of groups, noise distraction from other groups can disturb students who are trying to hear the teacher explain certain instructions or who are trying to work independently. Although noise distraction is relatively easy for the teachers to acknowledge and correct, they should keep the noise levels in mind as they plan group activities. Similarly, co-teachers need to be diligent in planning activities that last the same length of time to avoid having restless early finishers from the independent groups. When students have already completed the assigned tasks, it will not take long for them to seek other means of entertain, usually means that are distracting for the rest of the class. Teachers should have extra activities ready in case the group work is completed much earlier than expected or some stations are not progressing as quickly as others. Finally, another issue that could arise with the use of Station Teaching could be that one person in the independent group completes the tasks, other students copy the information, and the majority of the students do not actually learn from completing the activity. While group work can be beneficial if the teachers are instructing small groups and all of the students are equally participating, independent group activities could lead to unequal participation, copied assignments, and fewer students actually understanding and being able to recall the information or skill.

Effective planning for using the Station Teaching strategy could include: separating students into groups based on instructional needs or ability, determining which teacher should help students with a particular activity, and deciding what long-term skills or goals the students should gain from completing the activity and how they align with the curriculum. As mentioned in the video, the teachers could divide the students into groups based on their abilities and provide more individualized instruction for those who have fewer skills, while allowing others who are performing at or above level to work with students of similar skill levels independently.

Although the entire class would be participating in small group instruction, the pre-planned groupings could help both teachers ensure that they are meeting the needs of students who may have IEPs or could benefit from more personal interactions with the teacher(s). In planning Station activities, teachers can also determine which activities should be instructor-led rather than independent and which teachers should lead the activities based on their strengths and areas of expertise. By conducting prior planning, the co-teachers are better able to help all of the students understand the content and why the content is important. Similarly, effective planning for Station Teaching, as well as for most co-teaching strategies, enables educators to determine which curriculum objectives are being met through these group activities and how to adjust other lesson plans into the Station model.

Unlike One Teach, One Assist, and One Teach, One Observe, Station Teaching can and should be used frequently to not only encourage peer interaction, but to also address several areas of a single topic that are vital to understanding the content as a whole. Station Teaching can be used to introduce chunks off of a major topic, help students review information for an upcoming test, and put previously learned skills to the test among the many other uses for this instructional method. Station Teaching encourages student participation and engagement; therefore, it should be used to foster collaboration, interaction, and learning inside the classroom to aid students as they continue to grow and develop.

Parallel Teaching

In Parallel Teaching strategies, co-teachers divide the entire group of students in half and teach their independent half the same lessons in an effort to reduce the teacher-to-student ratio while also encouraging more student participation, discussion, and interaction. Parallel teaching

enables co-teachers to keep students on track with lessons and divide and teach groups based on several different factors, such as their learning styles, performance levels, and personal needs. Parallel Teaching can also combine Station Teaching strategies as each teacher addresses and discusses new information, materials, and activities with their students.

A few benefits from Parallel Teaching can include: students receive double the exposure to a lesson and more opportunities to participate, teachers can monitor student progress and understanding more closely in smaller groups, and interaction between the students and teachers is easier when there are fewer distractions in a smaller setting. Friend & Bursack (2015) note that in some cases of parallel teaching “every student has twice as many opportunities to participate in a discussion or respond to teacher questions” when the same lesson is presented by both teachers (p. 82). If a student has the opportunity to be exposed to the lesson twice, then the information is more likely to stick with the student and be recalled later. Similarly, if teachers break the students into relatively parallel groups and present the lesson, they can more accurately note which students may benefit from more instruction and review and which students have a solid grasp on the information. Whole group discussion and interaction only provides surface-level understanding, but small group instruction, as made possible by parallel teaching, aids teachers in monitoring student progress. Finally, Parallel Teaching can make social interaction and discussion between teachers and students easier when there are fewer students participating in a group. The reduced number of students per teacher allows the teachers to ask more individualized questions and allow speaking time for each participant while minimizing any behavioral issues the teachers may encounter.

On the other hand, Parallel teaching can also have some negative outcomes or drawbacks similar to those of the Station Teaching model, such as noise distraction, limited space, and

teacher favoritism. If two teachers are presenting the same lesson at the same time, students may become distracted by the other group's comments or noise and lose focus of their own group's lesson. Similarly, if the classroom is small and does not allow a large amount of space to separate the two groups, the students may try to join the other group and cause further distraction. Another possible drawback that co-teachers should keep in mind is if they continually teach or "default" to the same group of students, the students may see a single person as the only teacher worthy of their attention and favoritism, which could certainly cause problems if the groups are swapped or taught by someone else. As in most co-teaching scenarios, the two teachers should balance their roles and take turns instructing the students to prevent lowered respectability and responsibility as well as favoritism.

Some evidence of effective planning for the Parallel teaching strategy could include: the grouping of students based on ability, performance, and the like, and the attention to time management while teaching the lessons. As explained by one of the teachers in the video, the grouping of students in preparation for parallel teaching activities is not randomized, but it combines students from all performance levels with those who may have some weaknesses in learning. The grouping of students with consideration of their individual skill levels and abilities allows for unique peer interaction and varied group discussion. The grouping of students for parallel teaching activities can also aid teachers in monitoring the behavioral and social growth of students when the students are part of a smaller group. Another factor that reflects the effective planning for this strategy by the co-teachers is their attention to time management. In order for both lessons to begin and finish effectively, the co-teachers must pace themselves through the lesson and stay on pace with one another to prevent delays in the next lessons and activities during the class. In Parallel teaching, a teacher must not only be aware of themselves,

the students, and distractions, but they must also acknowledge the progress of their co-teacher and align their teaching styles and activities as closely as possible in an effort to educate all of their students.

The Parallel Teaching strategy should be used as frequently as possible to allow for maximized student engagement, interaction, and discussion. Parallel Teaching can also be used to teach to learning styles, such as visually-gearred instruction or listening-based lessons (Friend & Bursack, 2015, pp. 82-83). By using the Parallel Teaching strategy, both instructors are able to teach and interact with students without defaulting to an assistant role or solely observing the actions of a leading teacher and the students.

Alternative (Differentiated) Teaching

In the Alternative, or Differentiated Teaching strategy, co-teachers split the class by selecting students for instruction in a small group setting by one teacher, while the other teacher leads a lesson with the larger number of remaining students. The purpose of having an alternative group lesson away from a whole group activity enables the small group instructor to pre-teach activities that will be taught at a later time, provide additional instruction for students who may not have grasped the concepts during the original lesson, assess the progress and understanding of a variety of students, and provide enrichment or remediation for students who may benefit from it. Alternative Teaching allows teachers to be flexible during instruction while ensuring that all students understand critical concepts that they will need for the next level no matter their current grade level.

Benefits from utilizing the Differentiated Teaching approach can include: co-teachers can intervene when certain students begin falling behind, teachers can analyze their own teaching

methods, students benefit from personalized instruction, and both co-teachers are able to interact and connect with the students in their classroom. By employing Alternative Teaching using small group instruction, teachers are able to separate their students by needs and ability and reteach or reinforce concepts to help all of their students learn and succeed. If several students missed a lesson, differentiated instruction also enables teachers to present the entire lesson to students rather than dismissing it to continue with their planned lessons. Similarly, if teachers recognize that students are struggling to grasp a certain concept originally taught by one teacher, this provides data for the teachers to use in planning their future instructional methods, explanations, and activities. Another positive outcome from Alternative Teaching involves how small group lessons can be structured and personalized to fit the specific needs of the students which may be harder to address during whole group instruction. One of the most important benefits from co-teachers sharing the Alternative Teaching small group responsibility is the student-teacher interaction and connection that flourishes when the teachers instruct students on a more personal level. By creating small groups and swapping between the leading and small group roles, both teachers are able to interact with their students and build connections that enable students to learn from both instructors rather than a single teacher. The separation of students also aids teachers in monitoring the academic, behavioral, and social issues of their students without completely isolating them from class participation.

In contrast, the Alternative Teaching strategy can also have a few drawbacks, including students feeling labeled or isolated from others as well as creating a less inclusive learning environment. If teachers are not careful in selecting students from all achievement levels, they may risk causing struggling or weaker students to feel less than average or labeled as requiring extra attention than their peers. Likewise, if teachers continually select the same students for

participation in remedial small group instruction they are “undermining the purpose and principles of inclusive schooling” (Friend & Bursack, 2015, p. 83). Although this co-teaching strategy can aid in student learning, teachers must be aware of their student selections and instruction purposes in order to justify their activities and decisions should the need arise.

Evidence of effective planning for this strategy includes variation in small group selection, consideration of who should teach the lesson based on student needs, and the overall purpose of the alternative lesson. When planning to use Alternative Teaching strategies, co-teachers should pre-plan for which students may benefit from different activities or a review of key concepts from the original lesson. By planning for who will participate in the small group, the teachers can also personalize their instruction to best meet the needs of the students in the group. Similarly, depending upon the materials within the lesson and as explained by the teachers in the video, the educators are more effective in the small group lesson if they vary who teaches the second lesson based on who taught the original, or who the students in the group tend to follow and understand more easily. If one teacher originally taught the lesson and the students would perhaps benefit from a different method of explanation, then the other teacher can try to reach the students with a different approach. While the students may still struggle to grasp some of the concepts of the lesson, if co-teachers expose students to different methods and perspectives, then students may have a better understanding of the content. Other evidence of effective planning for this strategy can include pre-determining the purpose and goals of the small group lesson and outlining how those goals can be reached in order for the students to succeed in the long run. With effective planning for differentiated instruction, co-teachers are able to ensure student needs are met while also being heard by their teachers in a safe environment that allows for vulnerability as well as growth.

The Alternative or Differentiated Teaching strategy should only be used occasionally in the classroom and for specific justifiable reasons. Alternative Teaching is appropriate for students who may benefit from pre-teaching or re-teaching activities, enrichment for above average students, and remediation, but it should not be used to isolate learners with weaknesses, low performance levels, or disabilities. While all content and activities should be relevant to the curriculum and classroom, co-teachers must be conscious of their grouping choices as well as their purposes for utilizing specific strategies in the classroom.

Team Teaching

In the Team Teaching strategy, co-teachers have equal roles in instruction and both lead the lesson in a highly engaging and collaborative manner. Teaming enables both teachers to model effective collaboration for students prior to group projects and remind each other when elements or steps in a lesson are overlooked. Team Teaching also allows the teachers to re-teach steps or sections of a lesson on the spot as the lesson progresses rather than after the information has been presented. As the name suggests, Team Teaching allows co-teachers to work as a team to relate content to their students and gauge their understanding within the lesson.

Several positive outcomes of Team Teaching include: students are engaged in the lesson, co-teachers are able to model effective planning and partner collaboration, and co-teachers have equal roles in the classroom. If both teachers are presenting information and asking questions throughout a lesson, students are more likely to stay actively engaged when the lesson is presented in an extremely active and energized manner. Teaming also allows co-teachers to model collaboration and creativity to their students prior to group activities that students can mirror when working with one another. As discussed in the video, often times students only have

one teacher who cannot properly model elements of effective collaboration although he/she expects the students to collaborate with others. By employing Team Teaching, co-teachers are able to show students how to work together and balance group work. Similarly, by teaching a lesson as a team, co-teachers are seen as having equal roles in the classroom rather than having a primary teacher and an “assistant” teacher.

Some possible negative outcomes or drawbacks for utilizing the Team Teaching strategy could include: the co-teachers’ teaching styles are not compatible enough for collaboration, lesson pacing is difficult to maintain, and some student needs may be overlooked when the entire group is participating in one lesson. According to Friend & Bursack (2015), co-teachers should keep their teaching styles in mind when planning a collaborative lesson as their individual styles may not work well together and a different strategy, such as Station Teaching, may be more appropriate (p. 84). When using a Team Teaching approach, co-teachers should also try to maintain the same levels of explanation and participation as well as pacing as they bounce off of one another during the lesson. Just as Parallel Teaching requires attention to the length, instruction time, and pace of a lesson, Team Teaching should also keep those ideas in mind to prevent a lesson from taking up too much instructional time, resulting in student boredom or loss of focus. Another drawback to the Teaming strategy is that some students’ learning needs may be overlooked during whole group activities. If a student is struggling to follow the lesson and a teacher is unaware of the situation, the student may fall behind the rest of the class or possibly even begin acting out due to frustration. Co-teachers should keep student needs in mind and monitor the actions, facial expressions, or lack of attention of students to keep them engaged and focused throughout the lesson.

A few pieces of evidence of effective planning for this strategy includes the co-teachers' planning of the lessons, and the subsequent separation of instruction based on their strengths as well as the active reinforcement of what the other says during the lesson. As stated in the video, the co-teachers often plan the lessons, and then determine which one will lead the direct instruction based on their strengths and expertise. Although both teachers share roughly half of the lesson each, they are able to have choice in teaching content that interests them while relating information and skills to their students. Other evidence of effective planning for this strategy that could be planned or spontaneous is their active reinforcement of the other's methods to encourage students to believe both teachers and understand the content at hand. If the co-teachers support one another during the lesson with positivity, then the students will not only listen and follow both teachers no matter who is leading the instruction, but the students will also be more apt to mirror the same positive behavior during other collaborative activities with each other.

The Team Teaching strategy should only be used occasionally to ensure that all students' needs are met that may or may not be addressed during whole group instruction. Although Team Teaching is highly active and engaging, other strategies should also be used to monitor, gauge, and assess student growth, progress, and understanding. As with all collaborative activities and co-teaching strategies, teachers should not rely on one method too much, but incorporate many different instructional methods and approaches in an effort to appeal to the learning styles, performance levels, and unique needs of all students.

References

Friend, M., & Bursack, W.D. (2015). *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers*. (7th Ed.) Boston: Pearson.