

The Four “Knows” of Collaborative Teaching

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To meet the challenge of successfully educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom, collaboration between general and special education is essential (Rainforth & England, 1997). One way in which teachers collaborate is through co-teaching, which is “the collaboration between general and special education teachers for all of the teaching responsibilities of all students assigned to a classroom” (Gately & Gately, 2001, p. 41).

The literature has fairly well documented the benefits and challenges of co-teaching at the elementary level (Jackson, Ryndak, & Billingsley, 2000; Manset & Semmel, 1997). Co-teaching at the secondary level, however, presents a different set of challenges and has taken longer to be embraced by educators (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; see

focus on helping teachers meet the challenge of co-teaching at the secondary level. Here, we examine challenges and benefits of secondary-level co-teaching and provide suggestions for practice, based on our own experience and on a literature review.

The Challenges of Co-Teaching at the High School Level

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) suggested that the nature of high schools presented greater obstacles for co-teachers because of the emphasis on content area knowledge, the need for independent study skills, the faster pacing of instruction, high-stakes testing, high school competency exams, less positive attitudes of teachers, and the inconsistent success of strategies that were effective at the elementary level. Smith (1997) reported that teachers found the

box, “What Does the Literature Say”).

In this article, we

wider gap between students with and without disabilities at the high school level a challenge. Ellett (1993) suggested high school teachers might be less willing to make accommodations for students with learning disabilities because of large class sizes.

Moore and Keefe (2001) conducted focus groups with general and special education teachers co-teaching in elementary and high schools and found that concerns about adequate planning time, administrative support, resources, professional development, and teacher willingness were similar across both levels. However, high school teachers implementing inclusive education felt additional barriers existed because of larger class sizes, seeing many more students each day, large school size, and unclear roles of general and special education teachers. Keefe and Moore (in press) found similar results from interviews with high school teachers who had experience with co-teaching. They also found that grading was a particular source of concern to general education teachers because of the high stakes

attached to grading at the high school level (e.g., grade-point average, ranking, scholarships, and college acceptance). Finally, a major barrier to successful co-teaching resulted from the lack of parity felt between general education and special education teachers. General education teachers tended to consider themselves the content experts and viewed special education teachers as not sufficiently knowledgeable of high school curriculum. In turn, special education teachers often felt that they were treated as educational assistants rather than teachers and not recognized for their expertise in modifying curriculum.

We know that teachers alone cannot be responsible for overcoming many of the issues cited above. For example, systemic barriers such as the need for planning time, resources, smaller class sizes, and professional development will require administrative action at the school and/or district level. While acknowledging that these factors are important to successful co-teaching, this article will address areas that teachers *do* control. We have found that teachers who have a strong collaborative relationship may be able to have a successful experience despite systemic barriers. For example, teachers who are committed to co-teaching will find the time to plan and seek out professional development opportunities.

The concept of collaborative teaching can be extremely unnerving for teachers because it forces them to adjust their teaching styles to accommodate not only the students in the class, but also the extra adult in the room. Nevertheless, co-teaching, when done correctly, provides teachers with more confidence about working with a diverse population and allows teachers to see their co-workers and students in new ways and establish positive relationships.

Toward Successful Co-Teaching

Based on our own teaming experiences and a review of the literature (see box), we propose four essential areas that educators need to “know” to be successful in creating and maintaining co-teaching relationships at the high school

level: (a) know yourself, (b) know your partner, (c) know your students, and, (d) know your “stuff.” We also offer two strategies, which we have found to be particularly helpful in facilitating these ways of knowing between teachers in high schools.

Know Yourself

Knowing yourself is harder than it sounds. We all tend to assume that we can be successful in collaborative situations. We count on our expertise in our subject area and our experiences with our colleagues to bolster the belief that, “Of course I can team with another teacher. We are both professionals!” However, it is that same expertise and experience that can sabotage even the most well-intentioned efforts at creating a team approach to learning. Knowing yourself consists of recognizing strengths and weaknesses that may never have been called into play before. Sometimes you have to give up a “sacred” tenet to share responsibility. You can’t panic when someone else has possession of your grade book. How can you survive if someone works with your favorite student, stealing the affection that you have nurtured for months? What if she’s right and you’re wrong?

Knowing yourself also means admitting any preconceived notions you may have toward an inclusive teaching environment. As much as we hate to admit it, stereotypical notions about children and their capabilities permeate our educational institutions. Question yourself about your biases. Reflect on situations that possibly shaped your views as an educator and share those insights with your partner. Realize that it’s okay to acknowledge that there will be challenging students and difficult situations

**As a successful co-teacher,
you need to (a) know
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What Does the Literature Say About Inclusion in Secondary Schools?

There is a critical shortage of research into the inclusion of students with disabilities at the secondary level (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). The majority of the research to date has focused on teachers’ perspectives towards inclusive settings. The literature indicates that general education teachers claim they do not receive the professional preparation or appropriate teaching experiences to make them comfortable providing special instruction to students with disabilities (Ellett, 1993; Houck & Rogers, 1994; Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon & Rothlein, 1994). General education teachers are often apprehensive and unsure how to provide modifications and strategies for students with special needs.

Given these findings we should not be surprised that secondary teachers have been found to have more negative attitudes overall toward inclusive education than elementary education teachers (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Some educators have criticized this literature on teacher perspectives because it involves teachers who are not actually teaching in inclusive settings (McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, & Loveland, 2001). In contrast, when McLeskey et al. compared the attitudes of teachers in inclusive versus non-inclusive settings in Grades K-6, they found the teachers in the inclusive settings to be far more favorable toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education.

in a co-teaching environment. Realize that there are probably areas where you may need assistance and convey any initial fears or apprehension about your inclusive setting to your partner. Know that you as a team-teacher are there to listen, to provide support, and to hear

It is important to foster relationships outside of the classroom.



your partner's fears and worries without being judgmental.

Self-analysis is fraught with pitfalls, but you must embrace it if you want to be part of a team. Freudian delving will not be helpful, but honest insight is essential. Some of the other questions you must answer are personal as well as professional.

Before teachers can plan for the effective engagement of students in their own learning, they need to know each other's preferences and styles.

- How much am I willing to surrender to another teacher? Can I allow her to create a unit, a lesson, a modification, or even an assignment in an area that I feel is my bailiwick?
- How much am I willing to learn from a colleague? Will I resent or be intimidated by suggestions from someone not considered to be my superior? How will I react to new information, methods, or ideas that are not my own?
- How much am I willing to share the bond I have developed with my students? Will the other teacher become the inspiration that I hoped I would be? Will they be asked the questions that I want to answer?

- How much am I willing to step in when I know that I can contribute to a plan, an activity, or a project that I haven't created? Will I be supportive and offer assistance graciously?
- How much am I willing to share control over classroom organization and management issues, particularly discipline and grades?

This critical step of knowing yourself is foundational to the development of a good co-teaching relationship. Knowing yourself must be considered so that you can make sure you include the second "know"—know your partner.

Know Your Partner

Once again, this is not an easy task. As teachers, we often engage in professional dialogues with our colleagues and openly exchange stories of trials and successes. We also exchange great ideas in academic areas. Such discussions, however, do not provide the information we need to find a compatible partner. Teammates must connect on both personal and professional levels. Their relationship must be a model for the students in their classrooms, as well as a guiding force.

Developing a relationship with a co-teaching partner is similar to developing any lasting relationship. It is not necessary that you are best friends, but you must foster friendship. You will spend many hours together, hours of disagreement, hours of exultation, hours of distress, and hours of success. Regardless of the degree of professionalism, a successful partnership must include the

heart and a vision. Perhaps this is where it all ties together. What is the vision that you can create with your partner? Can this vision sustain you through the difficult times?

Find out who your partner really is. What does he or she like to read? Which films does your partner like? Let your partner see your own preferences. Learn to understand each other's affections and idiosyncrasies. Laugh together at jokes, at funny incidents with students, at administrators, and at yourselves. Share a celebration, a happy hour, harmless gossip. Know with whom you will be sharing the intimate space that a classroom can become.

Knowing the overall teaching styles and preferences of your partners is also important. What can be neglected, however, are the nitty-gritty, everyday policies that may lead to irritations that then lead to deeply seated resentment. Find out how your partner feels about other people talking in the classroom, whether the students can use pen or pencil, or whether a student can get up to sharpen pencils. The seeming minutiae of daily classroom activities can become the critical elements that take on great magnitude as the year progresses. Perhaps these items are of such importance because they seem too small to worry about.

Before teachers can plan for the effective engagement of students in their own learning, they need to know each other's preferences and styles. Co-teaching arrangements place teachers in positions that are not routine. It is as if they have to plan how to plan with each other. Based on our own teaming experiences, we designed a "Collaborative Teaching Introductory Worksheet" (see Figure 1) as one way to get to know your potential co-teaching partner. You can modify this format to meet the needs of each situation. We have found that it helps provide a framework to ensure that teachers communicate with one another. This is critical because the time pressures of teaching often lead to the best of intentions to communicate going astray.

Figure 1. Collaborative Teaching Introductory Worksheet

Teacher Name _____

Teacher Name _____

Subject _____

Instructions: Under each subheading, jot down notes about how you would like to address these issues in the classroom. Complete this worksheet individually, then meet with your team teacher and share your answers.

Student Behavior

Environment

Assessment

Homework Policies

Teacher Responsibilities (Grading, teaching, planning)

Additional Comments:

Know Your Students

Knowing your students means a lot more than test scores and individualized education programs (IEPs)—and it takes time. Devote the early weeks of class to learning who these youngsters are. Use a variety of assignments to assess not only their abilities, but also their interests and self-perceptions. Latch on to their dreams. Hear and accept their values. Listen to their voices as they talk to each other and you—both of you. Abandon criticism and embrace acceptance. In this way, students, too, become part of the team. You

and your partners are embarking on a complex mission. To make it succeed you will need the help of your students. Be aware of who they are and allow them to know who you are.

You will get the chance to know your students and create an environment where they can articulate their needs

In getting to know your students, abandon criticism and embrace acceptance.

only when an aura of trust exists in the classroom. Students know when team teachers don't get along. They can sense hostility even if the teachers pretend they have an amicable relationship. Only when students can see they are in a safe environment where trust is inherent, will they be able to confide in us and tell us what they need to be happy and successful in the classroom. This is true regardless of the labels placed on the students.

These students need to know each other almost as well as you know your partner. Such knowledge may seem to

Figure 2. Collaborative Planning Form

Subject: _____ **Period(s):** _____ **Prepared by:** _____

Lesson Overview:	Education Standards Addressed:
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Lesson Element	General Education Teacher Responsibilities	Special Education Teacher Responsibilities	Additional Notes/Comments
Tasks to be completed:			
Criteria for student success:			
Learning strategies:			
Strategies to implement positive behavioral support:			

come at a cost. Perhaps you need to alter some aspects of the curriculum to allow teachers and students the easily lost chance to know each other. In addition to modeling effective teaming, teachers may need to offer direct instruction in areas such as reaching consensus and dividing labor so as to facilitate effective collaboration between students.

Knowing your students can open lines of communication between teacher and students. These connec-

Self-analysis is fraught with pitfalls, but you must embrace it if you want to be part of a team.

tions will enable you to invite the students to become partners in the classroom. The students have a lot of knowledge about the effect of the classroom environment on their learning. An emerging area of research recognizes that student perceptions can be a source of valuable information for teachers (e.g., Klingner & Vaughn, 1999; Kortering & Braziel, 2002). We must help students be aware that we value and respect their “knowing.” When we listen to their concerns and include students in our decision-making processes, students will realize that they have a real stake in what goes on in their classroom. Remember: You can’t address a student’s needs if you don’t know what they are.

Know Your Stuff

We often assume that teachers work in their areas of specialty because that is what they know; but teachers are a varied group, having skills and knowledge that reach beyond categorization. Imagine then the opportunity for growth when two educated educators put their heads—and hearts—together. Curriculum and instruction can be creative and successful only if partners share information and responsibility. Both teachers have the responsibility to become knowledgeable about the day-to-day routines in a classroom. For example, a special education teacher may need to read Hamlet for English class or review the FOIL (first, outside, inside, last) method to solve algebraic equations for math. FOIL is a learning strategy students use to learn the order

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in which to solve certain algebraic equations. Likewise, English or math teachers may need to read a special education journal article or attend learning-strategies workshops. Both teachers need to be involved in creating IEPs for each student. Both teachers must be familiar with the materials and appropriate teaching methods and be willing to take over a lesson or provide on-the-spot modifications for a student in the class. Although there will naturally be some delegation of tasks based on individual preference and ability, the core of a successful partnership is the mutuality and parity of the relationship.

Delineating roles and responsibilities for each unit taught is a critical part of the ongoing communication needed for a successful partnership. The "Collaborative Planning Form" (see Figure 2) is a tool we have found useful to help guide team planning. Although we admit that finding the time to plan can be troublesome, we have found that there are many creative ways that this can be accomplished. Use e-mail to send your thoughts about enriching an

existing lesson plan; walk together to the lunch line to discuss concerns about students; or stay behind a minute after the bell rings to do some quick reflective practices on what went well in the class. As our mothers used to tell us, if you really want to get something done, you will find the time.

Final Thoughts

Co-teaching is a long-term commitment to a long-term relationship. Admittedly, there are many challenges to co-teaching; but when it works, the feelings of accomplishment, trust, mutual respect, and camaraderie are indescribable. There is joy in sharing success, in having someone to celebrate with. Teaching can be a lonely profession.

Entering into a collaborative partnership is always a risk, but knowing yourself, your partner, your students, and your stuff are critical steps to eliminate possible tension and controversy before the school year begins. If we are to meet the diverse needs of our students, we must listen and communicate with each other for guidance and advice.

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ships between special and general education teachers at a large suburban high school in the southwestern United States. The first author has experience with co-teaching at the elementary level and advocates for co-teaching by general and special education faculty at the university level (Keefe, Rossi, de Valenzuela, & Howarth, 2000). The second and third authors are a special education teacher and a general education teacher who have extensive experience co-teaching at the high school level.

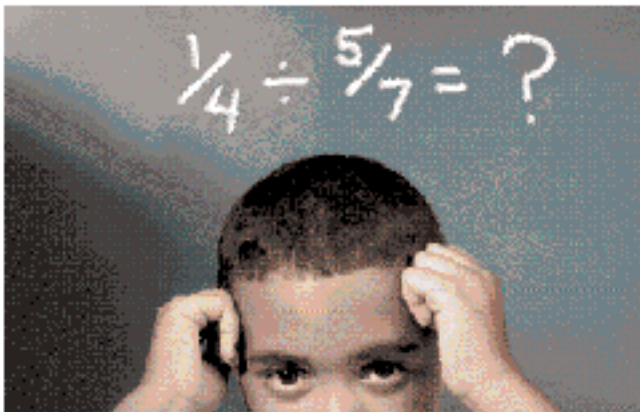
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