



VPI Information Brief 8 Co-Teaching in Inclusive Settings

CLASSROOM SCENARIO

Mr. Beignet, a high school English teacher, and Mrs. Chicory, a special education teacher, have volunteered to work together as a co-teaching team. Their class, English I, is located in Mr. Beignet's former classroom, and includes 26 students, 6 of whom have been verified with disabilities. Mrs. Chicory feels out of place in Mr. Beignet's classroom. She is frustrated, for example, by not knowing where the supplies and materials are located and frequently having to ask Mr. Beignet for help. She is worried that Mr. Beignet might have all the responsibility and be considered the "real" teacher, with herself being treated as a glorified aide. Mr. Beignet senses Mrs. Chicory's concerns and is himself worried about their differences in terms of roles, teaching and management styles, and planning abilities. Although they have worked together before, both are anxious about their future as a co-teaching team. What can Mr. Beignet and Mrs. Chicory do to maximize the experience for themselves and their students?

From a validated practices perspective, co-teaching is a fascinating instructional model to study. Although co-teaching is widely recommended and used in schools across our state and the nation - and makes wonderful theoretical sense - it continues to lack a strong evidence base to support its use in improving outcomes for students with and without disabilities (Murawski & Swanson, 2001).

Still, it is an important topic of interest to educators, particularly in a climate in which legislation (e.g., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004) mandates that students with disabilities progress in the general education curriculum to the greatest extent possible. In our VPI Information Brief, we provide a definition of co-teaching, a description of forms, and a summary of what the research says should be included and excluded from practicing models. We also provide Mr. Beignet and Mrs. Chicory with some suggestions as to how to proceed given their current state of affairs.

Marilyn Friend (2005) defines co-teaching as a "service delivery model in which two educators, one typically a general education teacher and one a special education teacher or other specialist, combine their expertise to

jointly teach a heterogeneous group of students, some of whom have disabilities or other special needs, in a single classroom for part or all of the school day" (p.140). Friend recommends the following examples as approaches for co-teaching: One teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; parallel teaching; station teaching; alternative teaching; and teaming.

In the one teach, one observe model, one teacher manages the instruction for the entire class while the other teacher gathers data on one student, small groups of students, or the entire class. The one teach, one assist approach uses one teacher as the manager of instruction for the entire class while the other teacher provides assistance. Parallel teaching occurs when the group of students is divided in half and both teachers provide the same instruction simultaneously. With station teaching, the instruction is divided into non-sequential components and addressed in separate areas of the room. Alternative teaching occurs when a small group of students is pulled to the side of the room for instruction. Teaming occurs when teachers fluidly share the instructional responsibilities for the entire group of students. Teaming requires the two teachers to have

complementary teaching styles and a strong collaborative relationship.

Proponents of co-teaching argue that it is a viable model for effective inclusion for at least two reasons. First, as compared to the consultation model, the special education teacher is not limited to making suggestions to the general education teacher. Rather, direct instructional support is provided in the general education classroom.

Second, co-teaching provides a direct means of special education service delivery that is believed to be neither stigmatizing nor isolating to students with disabilities (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002).

Recent case study research has supported the notion that co-teaching can contribute to improved student outcomes. When effective, the two teachers work well with each other and get along. When effective, co-teaching involves partner teachers who are engaged in many forms of effective teaching strategies, such as demonstrating excellent classroom management skills, enthusiasm for students and content matter, use of motivational strategies, and maximized student engagement (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Challenges must also be addressed in co-teaching settings. Mastropieri and Scruggs (2004) identified the following issues of concern: budgetary constraints; lack of sufficient planning time; lack of cooperation; increased teacher work loads; and maintaining a full continuum of services for students with disabilities. Case study research suggests that co-teaching can be more difficult in states in which high-stakes testing is the norm. In high-stakes environments, for example, guidelines for content delivery may be different than in non-high-stakes testing settings (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

What do we suggest for Mr. Beignet and Mrs. Chicory? We begin by applauding their willingness to

voluntarily work together in spite of concerns each have expressed.

Volunteering to co-teach is more related to eventual success than being forced into such a situation. We suggest that Mr. Beignet and Mrs. Chicory begin by sharing their concerns with each other as well as their desired roles. Hopefully, that will help engender a trust level that allows for teacher compatibility as the co-teaching arrangement develops. We encourage both teachers to focus on implementing instructional delivery strategies that maximize student engagement. In this way, both teachers can be seen as equal professionals in the classroom. Additionally, we urge both teachers to request adequate planning time from their principal.

References:

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- Mastropieri, M.A. & Scruggs, T.E. (2004). *The Inclusive Classroom Strategies for Effective Instruction* (2nd ed.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentices Hall.
- Mastropieri, M.A. & Scruggs, T.E., Graetz, J., Norland, J., Gardizi, W., & McDuffie, K. (2005). Case students in co-teaching in the content areas: Successes, failures, and challenges. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 40, 260-270.
- Murawski, W.W. & Swanson, H.L. (2001). A meta-analysis of co-teaching research: Where are the data? *Remedial and Special Education*, 22, 258-267.
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Questions for Reflection

1. What type of co-teaching approaches are used in your school?
2. What are some identified advantages of co-teaching in your school?
3. What are some identified barriers of co-teaching in your school?
4. What are some of the guidelines that were established prior to implementing a co-teaching model in your school?