

## **Co-Teaching Models in Practice: Strategies for Inclusive Classrooms**

### *A Practical Guide for Educators*

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#### **Why Co-Teaching Matters**

Co-teaching is an evidence-based approach that allows two or more educators to share responsibility for planning, delivering, and assessing instruction for a diverse group of students.

When implemented effectively, co-teaching enhances inclusion, increases access to the general education curriculum, and allows for targeted support within the classroom environment.

Beyond simply dividing responsibilities, co-teaching represents a mindset shift toward collective ownership of all students' success. It promotes collaboration between educators with different areas of expertise, ensuring that instruction is both rigorous and responsive.

When students see two professionals working seamlessly together, they not only receive differentiated support but also experience a model of teamwork, communication, and mutual respect. This approach helps dismantle silos, reduces stigma around receiving extra help, and strengthens a culture of belonging in the classroom.

Research underscores the benefits: effective co-teaching aligns with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandate to educate students in the least restrictive environment and supports Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles by offering multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression (Friend, 2014; Murawski & Swanson, 2001).

Studies show that when teachers intentionally implement co-teaching models, students with and without disabilities demonstrate stronger academic growth, improved social-emotional skills, and higher engagement.

For educators, co-teaching also provides ongoing professional learning, as colleagues share strategies, refine practice, and reflect together in real time.

## The 6 Recognized Co-Teaching Models

Model	Description	When to Use	Classroom Example
<b>One Teach, One Observe</b>	One teacher leads instruction while the other collects observational data.	When specific data is needed on student behavior or performance.	While the math teacher teaches, the co-teacher records data on student engagement.
<b>One Teach, One Assist</b>	One teacher leads instruction while the other circulates to support individual students.	When students need targeted help without interrupting the lesson flow.	While the history teacher lectures, the co-teacher assists students with note-taking.
<b>Station Teaching</b>	Teachers divide content and students into groups; each teacher teaches a group and then rotates.	When content can be divided into distinct skills or topics.	In reading, one teacher works on fluency, the other on comprehension, and groups rotate.
<b>Parallel Teaching</b>	Class is split into two groups, each teacher teaches the same content simultaneously.	When smaller groups can improve participation and understanding.	Two groups review math problems separately for more interaction.
<b>Alternative Teaching</b>	One teacher works with a small group for remediation or enrichment while the other instructs the large group.	When some students need specialized instruction without missing core content.	A small group receives targeted phonics instruction while the rest of the class reads independently.
<b>Team Teaching</b>	Both teachers deliver instruction together, sharing leadership equally.	When both educators bring complementary expertise to the same lesson.	Two teachers model a science experiment together, alternating explanations.

## Examples of Creative & Non-Traditional Pairings:

- **Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) + Classroom Teacher:** embedding language strategies in content lessons.
- **School Counselor + Social Studies Teacher:** integrating SEL skills into academic content.
- **Reading Specialist + Science Teacher:** reinforcing literacy strategies in lab write-ups.
- **Occupational Therapist + Art Teacher:** supporting fine motor skills during creative projects.
- **English as a Second Language (ESL) Teacher + Math Teacher:** building math vocabulary alongside problem-solving.

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### Co-Teaching Implementation Checklist

Pre-Implementation Task	Key Considerations
Define Roles	Agree on instructional responsibilities and support roles.
Plan Together	Set aside regular time for co-planning lessons and assessments.
Establish Communication	Decide how to communicate during instruction (verbal cues, signals).
Align on Behavior Expectations	Ensure consistent expectations and responses to behavior.
Review Student Data	Identify students needing targeted support and strategies to use.

### **Common Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them**

- Unequal participation, where one teacher becomes an 'assistant' rather than a co-teacher.
- Insufficient co-planning time leading to disjointed instruction.
- Selecting the wrong model for the content or student needs.
- Failing to communicate expectations to students about the co-teaching structure.

### **Action Starter: Try Tomorrow**

- Choose one upcoming lesson and decide which co-teaching model would work best.
- Schedule a 15-minute co-planning session with your partner teacher this week.
- Experiment with a non-traditional co-teaching pairing for one lesson.