Classroom Co-Teaching Models

Introduction:

In their book, *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, Marilyn Friend and Lynne Cook identify “co-teaching as a specific service delivery option that is based on collaboration.” As a service delivery option, co-teaching is designed to meet the educational needs of students with diverse learning options. Students at all academic levels benefit from alternative assignments and greater teacher attention in small-group activities that co-teaching makes possible. Co-teaching allows for more intense and individualized instruction in the general education setting increasing access to the general education curriculum while decreasing stigma for students with special needs. Students have an opportunity to increase their understanding and respect for students with special needs. Students with special needs have a greater opportunity for continuity of instruction as the teachers benefit from the professional support and exchange of teaching practices as they work collaboratively. Co-teaching involves two or more certified professionals who contract to share instructional responsibility for a single group of students primarily in a single classroom or workspace for specific content or objectives with mutual ownership, pooled resources and joint accountability (Source: Friend & Cook 2000).

There are six (6) basic integrated co-teaching (ICOT) models that can be found in the inclusion classroom:

I. One Teach, One Observe

- This model has one teacher teaching the lesson while the other teacher circulates around the classroom observing the students and collecting data.
- One of the advantages of utilizing this model is a more detailed level of observation as the students are engaged in the lesson. As the one staff member is instructing the students, the other is able to detail and collect information pertaining to student responses and participation, success of the strategies being implemented, level of retention and application or any other measurable data. The teachers can decide what types of specific observational information to gather during instruction and then analyze it together afterwards. One Teach, One Observe is excellent for those integrated co-teachers that are attempting to determine specific pieces of information as they related to the education of their students.

II. One Teach, One Assist

- This model has one teacher teaching the lesson while the other teacher circulates the rooms assisting students.
- There are several advantages for using the One Teach, One Assist model of co-teaching. This model is similar to the One Teach, One Observer, however, there is less intensive data-driven observation taking place. The primary instructor will present the lesson and activity to the students as the second staff members tends to students throughout the room. Rather than observing, the second staff member circulates through the room to provide assistance to students. It is imperative that the second staff member move through the environment without disrupting the primary lesson or activity that is occurring. The goal of the model to provide instruction and assistance without causing disruptions to the process and protocol as dictated by the lesson plan.

III. Parallel

- This model has both teachers teaching at the same time. The teachers divide the class in half and teach each group the same material.
- Parallel teaching is a great model in which to provide differentiated instruction to the students in your inclusion classroom. Since there will be students who have been in both the general and special education settings in your class, you will need to address the various needs and abilities in your classroom environment. Differentiated instruction allows you to work through the same materials but by catering and tailoring the lesson to the strengths of the students. Parallel teaching is one way to differentiate that instruction. This model also allows both teachers to work in a more intimate setting with the students which may result in increased student participation, engagement and application. There are many positives to using Parallel teaching but you must ensure that both instructors are working towards meeting the same goal.

IV. Station Teaching

- The teachers divide the content and students into smaller groups, or stations. Each teacher then teaches the content to one group and repeats the instruction for the other group (if appropriate, a third station could give students the opportunity to work independently).
- Station Teaching provides flexibility for the teachers in the inclusion classroom. As the class is divided into smaller groups, or stations, the teachers can work with students in a small group setting which is beneficial to student and instructor. Students who may be less likely to participate and be engaged in a larger setting may flourish during station teaching. Instructors also can be better feedback from the students in the form of informal formative assessments. The station teaching model is different from Parallel teaching. When using the Parallel Teaching model, students are taught the same materials, regardless of who their instructor is. With Station Teaching, both teachers are working on different ideas under the umbrella of the same concept or lesson plan. After they have worked with one instructor, they will switch and begin work on the activity with the other instructor. This can be modified to include a third station where the students may work, reflect or complete an independent activity as the other stations are working.

V. Alternate Teaching

- This model has one teacher directing the class through the lesson while the other teacher takes a small group of students aside.
- Alternate Teaching provides the opportunity to the students to and teachers to have more individualized instruction delivery and activities. The smaller group of students is selected based on their individual needs and may not necessarily be caused by their primary or secondary disabilities. Students working with the one instructor in the larger group setting should not be influenced or interrupted by the smaller group setting and vice versa. Alternate Teaching provides many different lesson plan scenarios and activities such as debates, cooperative working groups, learning extensions and differentiated instruction.

VI. Team Teaching
Using this model, both teachers are actively involved delivering the same lesson together. The Team Teaching Model was the ideal when inclusion classrooms were first developed. However, the 5 other models have evolved from what originally started as Team Teaching. There are no divisions within the classrooms, by the instructors or with the setting. All students are address through the lesson and activity by both instructors. The equality that comes from using this model is reflected in the delivery. Also, it is important to recognize the instructors need to be flexible and cognizant of the learning environment. Of the 6 models, this may be the most difficult to master because of the rapport and chemistry needed between the two instructors to make sure that they are working harmoniously towards the same goal.

How to Develop a Great Co-Teaching Experience (using the 6 models):

Co-Teaching is very different from working individually in your own classroom as exhibited by the six models, according to Friend and Cook. Developing a way to working with another instructor in the inclusion setting is something that needs to be addressed and matured as both teachers play specific roles in meeting the needs of the students in your classroom. According to Susan Gately, there are 3 levels of progression for the instructors to move through in order to create the best inclusion classroom experience for all involved. Gately believes that when done effectively, co-teaching allows both teachers to assume full responsibility for the education of all students in the class. The relationship between co-teachers moves through three predictable stages as both improve: the beginning stage, the compromising stage and the collaborative stage. At each stage, teachers will demonstrate varying degrees of interaction and collaboration.

The Beginning Stage:

This is the first level of evolution that both the general and special education teachers will proceed through as they work together in the inclusion classroom. When co-teachers start to work together, they may not know each other very well or at all. This is a fact that many instructors need to accept when given their assignments for a particular school year. Accepting that another educational professional will be in the classroom may be difficult for some to accept. Every instructor has their own specific pedagogy, teaching style and classroom management plan that they are comfortable with. This first stage is when both instructors step out of the comfort zone as both teachers attempt to understand how they will work with the other. Often times, both teachers will not understand the expectations of the other instructor in the room. Administrators will need to clarify and set the roles and expectations for both instructors.

The Compromising Stage:

This the first level where the relationship between the general and special education teacher will need to determine which one of the six classroom co-teaching models will be best served for their students. The ease through which this transition takes place will be dictated by the interpersonal communication between the teachers. Like all good teams, there comes a time of acceptance and a need to "gel" for the greater purpose of the class. Planning of the curriculum also must be developed utilizing the strengths that each instructor brings to the environment.
However, this is again dictated by the classroom co-teaching model that the duo has chosen to use. The model or models selected for use should emphasize the goals of the delivery instruction and reflect the needs of the students. While this is a good benchmark to be reached, it must be a stepping towards the final stage: true collaboration.

**The Collaboration Stage:**

Once team teachers have reached the collaborative stage, they are ready to work together at all levels in order to meet the needs of their students. Communication is open and interaction is comfortable and honest. This is reflected in the learning environment that is much more accommodating and less hostile when the instructors are working through the previous two stages. Students and staff alike may even have difficulty determining who is the general education teacher and who is the special education teacher. Planning is done in conjunction so that both instructors can exploit their strengths in the lessons. Often times, when instructors have reached this stage, lessons are much more fluid and flexible. Feedback from the students will reflect a much more nurturing environment between staff and students alike. Some instructors will be able to reach this stage much quicker than others, however it should be the goal of all integrated co-teachers to strive for the collaboration stage.

**Evaluation of ICOT Instructors (using the 6 models):**

Effective evaluation of ICOT instructors requires many variables that need to be addressed. When done well, "co-teaching is an effective way of providing instruction to diverse groups of students in general education classrooms (Gately, pg. 40)." The goal of the feedback and evaluations, as they are completed by the administrators is to develop exemplary teachers. These teachers need to show competency and mastery over numerous areas. These include interpersonal communication, familiarity with the curriculum, instructional planning and presentation, classroom management and assessments among others. As the two teachers work towards the three stages and attempt to have true collaboration, there will numerous opportunities for failure. However, the mark of true professional is the one who does not deviate from the goal when things become difficult or struggles ensue.

In an effective integrated co-teaching environment, there is positive and professional relationship between the two teachers. This is the essential key point to their collaboration. Without this, the relationship will dissolve and the classroom environment becomes hostile and inappropriate for learning. Developing exemplary teachers starts with solid fundamentals that can be shaped through critical evaluations that expose weaknesses that need to be strengthened for the good of the students. Using evaluations, such as the one above, teachers can reflect and determine what they need to improve upon to reach the collaborative stage. Metacognitive practices can help teachers raise awareness of their own practices as well. However, traditional evaluations are completed by your supervisor and included in your annual review. This will show instructors what levels of cooperation they have with their co-teacher. The lower the score, the more work that needs to be completed in certain areas. The higher levels reflect teachers that have 'gelled' and are working as a unit to meet the needs of their students.