

Benefits of Co-Teaching

Why co-teach? Because there are numerous benefits, of course. Sometimes it is helpful to review those benefits, particularly if you and your colleagues are overwhelmed by the prospect of this paradigm shift. I am providing these in an easy-to-read bullet format but feel free to check out some of the excellent articles and resources for yourself. In addition, while I first provide the benefits to students-which are important, not to mention plentiful-I also provide the reported benefits to teachers. Let's face it, if teachers aren't happy, *ain't* no one happy! (For the language arts teachers reading this text, my apologies. I clearly meant to write, "If teachers are not in high spirits, no one else is exuberant either.") As teachers feel rejuvenated and empowered by the strategies and learning they glean from one another, they too will be more willing to bring those strategies to the classroom to improve the instruction for all students.

Benefits for Students ~

- Access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1997; Cook & Friend, 1995; Murawski, 2005a).
- Positive social outcomes for students with and without disabilities (Hunt, Alwell, Farron-Davis, & Goetz, 1996; Pugach & Wesson, 1995).
- Increased student engagement and increased use of strategies by students (Boudah, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1997).
- More individual attention and more interaction with teachers (Murawski, 2006; Zigmond, Magiera, & Matta, 2003).
- Improves students' social skills and self-concept through the reduction of pull-out situations that are thought to be potentially stigmatizing for students (Jones & Carlier, 1995; Salend et al., 1997; Walther-Thomas, 1997).
- Benefits to students with disabilities include increased self-confidence and self-esteem, enhanced academic performance, increased social skills, and stronger peer relations (Walther-Thomas, 1997; Weichel, 2001).
- Benefits to students without disabilities who participated in co-taught arrangements include improved academic performance, increased time and attention from teachers, increased emphasis on cognitive strategies and study skills, increased emphasis on social skills, and improved classroom communities (Walther-Thomas, 1997; Weichel, 2001).
- Delivery of services and modifications can be provided to students with academic difficulties or who are considered at-risk without requiring those students to be labeled as needing special education (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1997; Salend, et al., 1997).
- Students with disabilities had a more positive attitude, were provided with role models for behavior and learning, interacted more with nondisabled peers, and were exposed to higher level concepts and discussions than was typically found in a segregated special education setting (Dieker, 1998; Murawski, 2006).
- Jones and Carlier (1995) also reflected on the benefits to students with multiple disabilities when engaged in a co-taught setting and found that these students increased the amount of interactions they initiated, exhibited increased self-confidence, decreased aggressive/noncompliant acts, and that students without disabilities interacted "more naturally" (p.26) with them over time.
- The provision of individualized instruction through the use of differentiated instructional groupings and strategies made possible by having two teachers in the room is a key benefit for students with mild disabilities (Murawski & Dieker, 2004; Walsh & Snyder, 1993)
- Co-teaching approaches for bilingual classrooms have been found to produce significant possibilities for students, to include strong student-student relationships and increased student self-esteem (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999).
- Behavioral and academic expectations remain high for students with and without disabilities (Dieker, 2001; Murawski, 2006).
- Students with disabilities preferred to have co-teachers in content classes they deemed "difficult." They also preferred to have their needs met in general education classes rather than to receive services through a resource setting. Students in inclusive classrooms had higher self-concept in the areas of social skills and academic self-esteem than those students in resource classrooms (Murawski, 2006).

Benefits for Teachers ~

- Teachers involved in co-teaching relationships state that this relationship resulted in increased professional satisfaction, opportunities for professional growth, personal support, and opportunities for collaboration (Walther-Thomas, 1997; Weiss & Brigham, 2000).
- Special education teachers gain insight into the realities of the general classroom while general educators learn valuable lessons in planning, accommodating, and instructing students with learning or behavioral difficulties (Friend & Cook, 2007; Salend et al., 1997).
- Teachers working together leads by extension to increased friendships, which can in turn increase both morale and student performance (Salend et al., 1997; Weiss & Brigham, 2000).
- Having two teachers in one room allows for experimentation with new teaching methodologies (Giangreco, Baumgart, & Doyle, 1995; Murawski, 2006).
- Co-teaching makes it easier to conduct hands-on activities and provide flexible testing situations (Cross & Walker-Knight, 1997). Co-teaching enables whole group instruction to be provided while still meeting individual needs (Adams & Cessna, 1993; Murawski & Dieker, 2004).
- Co-teaching provides for more on-task time as both teachers are able to manage behavior (Cross & Walker-Knight, 1997; Gerber & Popp, 1999). In fact, co-teachers will spend significantly less time having to conduct direct behavior management than teachers instructing alone (Weichel, 2001).
- Co-teaching encourages teachers to share expertise, providing one another with valuable feedback (Cross & Welker-Knight, 1997; Hughes & Murawski, 2003).
- Co-teaching allows educators to assist one another in addressing issues related to content, accountability, and structure (Dieker & Murawski, 2003).
- Educators who had experienced co-teaching found that they were more energized and creative, were able to trust one another, and had more fun teaching (Adams & Cessna, 1993; Murawski, 2003).
- Hohenbrink, Johnston, and Westhoven (1997) reported on their own personal experiences with co-teaching and stated that it prompted self-reflection and led to significant changes in their understandings and teaching practices.
- Gately and Gately (2001) stated that as co-teachers move into the collaborative stage of interaction, “communication, humor, and a high degree of comfort punctuate the co-teaching, collaborative classroom” (p. 42).
- In a survey of special and general education teachers engaged in co-teaching, special education teachers reported increased job satisfaction, while general and special educators alike noted that co-teaching increased both teaching and learning potential (Bauwens et al., 1989).
- Research studies on co-teaching have found that the value added by having a special education teacher in the room to co-teach resulted in more individual attention for students, more on-task student behavior, and more interaction with teachers (Murawski, 2006; Zigmond et al., 2003).