What is Co-Teaching?

The co-teaching model is quickly gaining favor over the “sink or swim” method of student teaching. Through co-teaching, the mentor teacher and student teacher collaboratively plan and deliver instruction from the beginning. This allows the student teacher to focus on specific strategies and skills, rather than being required to pull it all together at once, at the expense of student learning. Throughout the student teaching experience, the pair alternate between assisting and/or leading the planning, teaching, and assessments. This collaborative approach enhances the learning opportunities for students, combines the knowledge and strengths of both teachers, and increases both teachers’ skills. A gradual shift in responsibility from the mentor teacher to the student teacher assures that the candidate is able to demonstrate increased competency over time.

Research demonstrates that student learning is enhanced when mentor and student teachers collaborate to provide individual instruction to struggling students, monitor group work, provide meaningful feedback on assessments, incorporate technological instructional tools, and monitor student progress and behavior.

The student teaching experience, while remaining basically unchanged for over 100 years, is the most critical component of teacher preparation. It is imperative that the structure of that experience adapt to the increasing complexity of classroom teaching and be reexamined in light of new educational reform initiatives. The co-teaching model ensures that student teachers provide a service that will enhance student learning, as well as prepare the student teacher for the 21st century classroom.

What are the Benefits of Co-teaching in a Common Core Aligned Classroom?

- Support with meeting the needs of students in large and diverse classrooms
  - Reduces student/teacher ratio
  - Allows for diverse strategies
  - Increases student engagement time
- Increased options for flexible grouping of students
- Enhanced collaboration skills for the teacher candidate and cooperating teacher
- Mutual support for both the cooperating teacher and the teacher candidate
- Another set of eyes to observe and help problem solve
- Support in classroom and lesson preparation
- Flexibility to try things you wouldn’t be as willing to do alone
- Support in grading assessments and providing meaningful feedback

Co-Teaching Myths/Reality

Myth #1 – Teacher candidates must be left on their own to sink or swim in order to learn.

REALITY: Teacher candidates in co-teaching settings are supported in their efforts to becoming a professional. The cooperating teacher models and assists as the teacher candidate acquires the knowledge and skills of teaching. This is in sharp contrast to the sink or swim model that requires the teacher candidate to implement all of the complexities of teaching at once.

Myth #2 – Co-teaching inhibits a teacher candidate’s ability to develop classroom management skills.

REALITY: Rather than having to manage a classroom all alone, a teacher candidate has the support necessary to implement and learn effective classroom management strategies. As the skills are gained, the teacher candidate takes the lead. In this model, they are learning the critical skill of collaboration.

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