

# MAXIMIZING LEARNING FOR ALL STUDENTS

INCLUSION PRACTICES FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION



## COLLABORATION and Co-Teaching

As a special education teacher in the 1990's, I pulled students out of their general education classes for extra help with reading and math. But as the students returned to their classrooms, they had to reacclimate to what was going on in a class that was inevitably doing something else in their absence. It was these

students who at that moment were like visitors in their own classrooms. Separation for instruction was not optimal for the students, their teachers or their classmates. We needed a different approach. The students needed to stay put and get the help they needed in the place they belonged. Our school's solution:

**collaboration**, between teachers, assistants and others, with an emphasis on a form of collaboration called **co-teaching**. Successful collaboration would need commitment and a willingness to share roles. Staff and faculty had much to learn.

### COMMUNICATION MAKES COLLABORATION AND CO-TEACHING WORK.

True collaboration has the following characteristics (Friend & Cook, 2017):

Collaboration is ideally a **voluntary** commitment between partners. It

requires that **each person's contribution is equally valued and that each has equal power in decision making**.

Collaboration is based on partners having one or more **mutual goals** to help them maintain their shared commitment. In collaborative relationships, partners **share responsibility for participating and decision making**, as well as **sharing their resources** like time, knowledge and materials. Finally, collaborators **share accountability** for the outcome of their shared work, especially as it relates to their students.

Demonstrating true collaboration in the classroom generalizes into settings in and out of school. Working well with others is a skill both educators and students need in "real life." A collaborative

### Resources for Collaboration and Co-Teaching

[www.cultofpedagogy.com/co-teaching-pushin/](http://www.cultofpedagogy.com/co-teaching-pushin/): Co-teaching resources, and a great site in general for teaching blogs, podcasts, videos and more

[www.Pinterest.com](http://www.Pinterest.com): Join and search by topic for resources on planning, models, templates and making co-teaching work.

[www.teachervision.com](http://www.teachervision.com): Articles and resources for collaboration and co-teaching.

[www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/collaborative-team-teaching-what-you-need-to-know](http://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/collaborative-team-teaching-what-you-need-to-know): Collaborative Team Teaching: What You Need to Know in simple language.

[www.teachhub.com/effective-co-teaching-strategies](http://www.teachhub.com/effective-co-teaching-strategies): Examines strategies for effective co-teaching.

Can we as Catholic School teachers and catechists in PREP be creative and enterprising in the use of these strategies to foster inclusion?

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approach demands flexibility and commitment. True collaborations may still meet with challenges, including their school's culture and whether it values a collaborative approach, power imbalances between collaborators, cultural differences between collaborators, and pragmatic issues such as actually finding time to collaborate. It is important to keep the focus on student learning, to set realistic goals, to value collaboration as an effective interpersonal style, and to learn to trust collaborative partners. Most importantly, communicate! As these characteristics emerge, collaboration improves. It takes time.

**Co-teaching** is one service delivery option for collaboration. When **two or more professionals** co-teach, their **class is diverse** but their **classroom space is shared**. Co-teaching aims to ensure high quality service delivery for all students, including students with disabilities, students who are academically gifted, and students who are English Language Learners. Co-teaching enables students to spend less or no time as "visitors" to their classroom because of missed instructional time from being pulled out. Time out of the classroom is less necessary, because **instruction is delivered jointly** in any of several styles:

**One teaches, one observes**, so that needed student data can be gathered by the observing professional.

**Station teaching**, which allows students to work at stations with educators strategically planning and delivering instruction along the way.

**Parallel teaching**, which lowers the student-teacher ratio as professionals provide the same instruction to divided but diverse groups.

**Alternative teaching**, which provides intense small group remedial or enrichment instruction without the groups leaving the classroom.

**Teaming**, where both educators plan and provide instruction together to the whole group through discussion, demonstration or other pairing strategies.

**One teach one assist**, which can be helpful when planning time is scarce, but may underutilize the expertise of one professional. Ideally, this model should be used infrequently.

Co-teaching has the capacity to bring intense and individualized instruction into the general education classroom, leading to less stigma, less fragmentation of instruction and a greater sense of belonging for students needing supports or enrichment. Successful

co-teachers work hard to **be clear about roles and responsibilities** in their instructional delivery. They **value each other's philosophy and beliefs** about education, figure out how to **demonstrate parity**, and **agree upon routines and behavior management** of their shared classroom. Successful co-teachers work through important details, like how to **give each other feedback**, how much **classroom noise** they will tolerate and even **knowing each other's pet peeves**. They acknowledge that scheduling, planning time and the distribution of students with special needs across classes may be ongoing challenges, but work together and with the school's administration to create opportunities to plan and deliver instruction using the co-teaching model to which they have committed. Finally, co-teachers **celebrate the large and small successes** of this chosen model of collaboration, because ultimately, they are working to meet the needs of their diverse classes. Coteaching can even be fun, both for the students and for co-teachers! It was for me.

Communication makes collaboration and coteaching work. Enjoy the journey.

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Each edition of **Maximizing Learning for All Students** will explore inclusion practices and evidenced based strategies that minimizes barriers and maximizes learning for ALL students.