

Six Models for Collaborative Team Teaching

One of the hardest things to get used to in a team-taught classroom is how to split teaching responsibilities; that is, actual instruction of students. This is merely one of the allocations of responsibility that is necessary in a team-taught classroom, but I think it is the most important one as it most directly impacts students. Today, there are six widely-accepted models of how to split instructional responsibilities in the team-taught classroom. Let's explore each of these models, some examples of how they could be implemented, and their pros and cons.

One teach, One Observe

In this model, one individual (generally the stronger of the two teachers in the content or subject being taught) handles all instruction while the other teacher floats or observes the class. This model can be useful when completing student observations for IEPs or Functional Behavioral Analysis (FBA), but does not really allow both teachers to add to the classroom.

Pros:

Minimal coordination or collaboration is required when planning
Allows the stronger teacher to deliver quality instruction without interruption
Can conceal weaknesses on behalf of a weaker partner in general or on a particular subject

Cons:

Does not fully utilize each instructional specialist
Can create a behavior/authority problem for the observing teacher if done regularly
Can breed frustration or contempt from the instructional leader if used too often (unless by mutual choice)

Example:

While one teacher teaches, the other sits in the back of the room observing and taking notes on one student for an IEP meeting.

One Teach, One Assist

In this model, one teacher instructs the class while the other teacher manages behavior or assists individual students as needed.

Pros:

Allows a teacher who may be instructionally strong to deliver instruction without interruption

Cons:

Does not make full use of two instructional specialists
Can establish one teacher as the "bad cop," resulting in negative feelings toward the behavior manager

Example:

While one teacher delivers the lesson, the other teacher walks around rewarding students with stickers, check marks, or private conversations. The floating teacher also narrates behavior and enforces class rules/consequences as necessary.

Station Teaching (Rotational Teaching)

In station teaching, each teacher plans and is responsible for a different aspect of the lesson, or for a different lesson entirely. There may also be independent work provided for the students. Students are divided into two or more groups depending on how many 'stations' are available, and either students travel from center to center or students stay in one position and a teacher or work travels to them.

Pros:

Each teacher can independently plan for an area or lesson of strength
Each student is exposed to similar material, but groups can be differentiated by level
Makes good use of two teachers for management purposes

Cons:

Requires excellent timing, which can take practice
Requires management of students working independently
May be logistically difficult depending on your classroom space

Example:

One teacher teaches a reading lesson on making connections to other texts, one teacher teaches a writing lesson on how to introduce dialogue in an interesting way, and one group of students works independently on the computers or in social studies centers. Students remain in their groups and travel to each station during the course of the class period or block.

Parallel Teaching

In parallel teaching, the class is split in half and each teacher takes a half of the class to teach the same lesson. Students all receive the same material.

Pros:

Provides a smaller group and thus more individual attention
Can provide control for socially-based behavior problems between students

Cons:

Requires excellent timing, which can take practice
Requires collaborative planning
Can be difficult to invisibly differentiate in a smaller group
Requires that each teacher be equally strong in the material to be presented

Example:

The class is split in two, both teachers teach the same lesson on cell cycles to a smaller group of students

Alternative Teaching

In alternative teaching, one teacher teaches the main lesson to a larger group of students while the other teacher works with the smaller group of students on an entirely different lesson.

Pros:

Provides excellent differentiation opportunities
Provides a chance for remediation or enrichment for students who need it
Can provide behavior control in the smaller group

Cons:

Must not 'pigeonhole' one group of students by consistently pulling them together
May reduce the efficacy of inclusion by separating students with special needs
May reduce students' exposure to the general education curriculum

Example:

The large-group teacher teaches a lesson on writing introductions to a story while the small-group teacher helps students brainstorm on a topic for a story.

Tag Team (Traditional Co-Teaching)

In tag team teaching, both teachers plan and deliver instruction together, with each teacher equally responsible for the material in the lesson. This can be scripted or spontaneous.

Pros:

Models an excellent respectful working relationship between adults
Allows both teachers to provide perspective on a topic
Can allow teaching of two strategies or ideas simultaneously
Promotes respect for both teachers

Cons:

Requires a rapport that cannot be rushed or faked
Requires meticulous planning together, which can be time-consuming

Example:

During a lesson on multiplication, one teacher teaches using the lattice method while one teacher teaches with the traditional method. Both teachers work together when students work in groups or independently.

Having used all of these in my classroom, I think station teaching, tag team, and parallel teaching can be the most useful. What works in your classroom? Share your suggestions and comments here!