

Introduction

Why This Book?



The big question is always, "Why?"

This book is intended to be practical, easy-to-use and easy-to-read for busy educators interested in jumping right into co-teaching. Numerous forms, worksheets, and examples are included. I use humor and an informal tone to make the information interesting and personal. That said, however, it is critical that I first explain why you need this type of handbook, what precipitated the writing of it, and then introduce you to the concepts of inclusion and co-teaching so that we are all on the same figurative and, in this case also, literal page.

The advent of No Child Left Behind (2001) with its mandate of more accountability for all children, including those with disabilities and its emphasis on the need for "highly qualified" teachers, has greatly impacted the makeup of today's typical classroom. In addition, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) continues the emphasis on least restrictive environment for students with disabilities while supporting the

need for access to the general education curriculum for all students. These laws have led to a complete paradigm shift in the way students with disabilities are educated and, subsequently, how teachers in schools are utilized to meet those needs in an inclusive environment.

One of the key ways that schools are addressing these needs is through pairing general education teachers and special service providers in general education classrooms in a technique known as co-teaching. By pairing educators with differing areas of expertise, teachers are able to better collaborate and differentiate. This also ensures that students are exposed to the general education curriculum and higher academic standards. Co-teaching is considered a viable option for ensuring that students have a “highly qualified” teacher in the room for the content, while also ensuring that all students’ individualized educational needs are met by having an instructor who is highly qualified in differentiation and individualization. Please note that while I frequently refer to the general education teacher co-teaching with a special education teacher, co-teaching can occur with any professional educators. Special service providers include special educators, Title I teachers, teachers of English language learners, teachers of the gifted, speech language pathologists, school psychologists, and so on. It does not include paraprofessionals, volunteers, and student assistants, for reasons I will explain later.

You will notice the theme of marriage evident in the title and chapter names; this is for a very good reason. The concept of having two equal adults paired together for a lengthy time to share in the education and raising of children—to include behavior management, social skills, academics, and emotional support—sure does sound like another relationship we are all familiar with in one way or another, doesn’t it? So, rather than focusing on how co-teaching is new and different in the educational arena, I have chosen to focus on how we can take what we know about successful, productive, and healthy marriages and relate that knowledge to the realm of co-teaching. Don’t worry though—no ministers or fieldtrips to city hall are required for this particular arrangement.

Despite the growing use of co-teaching, studies continue to reveal a lack of training regarding this service delivery model. Very little has been done in many districts to genuinely prepare teachers to collaborate in the same classroom. While many textbooks refer to collaboration and briefly address co-teaching, the practicalities of how to prepare for co-teaching and how to ensure that teachers have the strategies they need to do it successfully are lacking. Districts are clamoring for more information on how to use collaboration and co-teaching effectively, thus clearly demonstrating that this is an area of increasing importance. This text will address these needs by providing readers with a practical, easy-to-use manual on how to set up, conduct, and successfully maintain co-teaching at any school interested in supporting inclusive practices.

My intent is to provide readers with a detailed, comprehensive treatment of co-teaching, in a practical and easy-to-access format. The book is useful as a Co-Teaching 101 reference for schools that have no experience with co-teaching and want to begin to set it up. At the same time, it provides sufficient practical differentiation and application strategies for districts that already have

implemented co-teaching to help improve their current programs. Numerous templates and models are provided so that schools and districts can follow the steps to make co-teaching a feasible strategy for addressing diverse needs in the inclusive classroom. Each section has call-out boxes letting readers know where in the book they can go when they *want more on a topic*. There are EZ Reference pages designed to provide quick references for copying, sharing, and reminding educators of important topics. Each of the four parts also has a section titled Self-Assessment to aid in reflection and readiness evaluation, as well as a chapter titled Matchmaker, Matchmaker designed to provide administrators with helpful information regarding their role in creating, supporting, and evaluating co-teaching. In addition, a wide variety of resources and references have been provided throughout the text for those sites interested in reading further or learning about the theoretical and research base supporting the various sections. Because all organizations, districts, schools, and individuals are unique and have their own cultures, strengths, and needs, feel free to tweak and adapt as needed.

This book has been divided into four major parts: Dating, Engagement, Wedding, and Marriage. Sorry, no honeymoon details here. Within each of the four parts, there are chapters related to improving co-teaching effectiveness. Each chapter's title relates to the marriage analogy and the subtitles clue you in to its relation to co-teaching. Don't let the cutesy titles throw you; the information in each chapter is actually grounded in educational research and literature. You will find that the analogy works very well in taking a concept that is rather new and confusing (i.e., co-teaching) and putting it into a paradigm with which we are quite familiar (i.e., marriage). I have also found that humor encodes learning, and this analogy invites a variety of comedic comparisons.

While I have used the marriage comparison for years and am certainly not the only one to do so (e.g., Wasserman, 2008), I would like to recognize the many co-teachers who routinely go above and beyond in their daily interactions with children and with each other. Many co-teachers gave me permission to come into their classes and to use their pictures. Special thanks to those teachers at the CHIME Institute (preschool, elementary and middle schools), Granada Hills Charter High School, Montebello School District and Lincoln County School District. Thanks to the many professionals who have contributed to the concept of co-teaching, but especially to those good friends who have helped me as I conceptualized my contribution to the field over the years: Lisa Dieker, Claire Hughes, Sally Spencer, Rachel Friedman Narr, Wendy Lochner, Jeni Huber, and Lynne Cook. A special "shout-out" goes to Sally Spencer who actually tried to co-teach with me during the writing of this book; in retrospect, not something I would recommend. Luckily, we had a solid relationship and, many laughs and groans later, our marriage stood up to a very rocky semester. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Linda Hutchinson, my very first co-teacher. Not only did Linda give me a wonderful experience co-teaching, which has led to my focus and research over the past 17 years, she also gave me her son in marriage. So, if you begin to doubt that successful co-teaching can exist, just remind yourself that I did it—with my mother-in-law no less! (For those of you who are single and looking, I highly recommend finding a

co-teacher who has an available and very good-looking son, daughter, or friend. Whatever works for you.) Finally, I must also acknowledge my own family. My mom is my very own cheerleader, not to mention my business manager, who really helped me coordinate writing, teaching, traveling, and parenting. My son, Kiernan, is now four years old and is ready for Mommy to be “all done with that book!” My husband, Christien, has provided me with a solid, positive, and strong marriage to use as an exemplar for this book. Every day, we co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess—some days better than others, but always with a common goal and vision. Lucky for us, our classroom only has one student in it. Wouldn’t it be nice if you and your co-teacher could just start with one also? That would make your new relationship so much easier. Given how unlikely that is, however, I recommend that you read on for tips, strategies, and guidelines to make your own co-teaching marriage a successful one.