

# 50 Ways to Keep Your Co-Teacher

## Strategies for Before, During, and After Co-Teaching

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*General education teacher (overheard in the hallway): “Oh yeah, I used to have a special educator working with me in the classroom . . . but I do not know what happened to her!”*

We know! Although co-teaching may be here to stay, co-teachers themselves do not always stick around. As researchers, teacher educators, and co-teachers ourselves, we are keenly aware of the issues related to obtaining—and more important, keeping—good co-teaching teams. In fact, educators frequently relate co-teaching to a marriage; unfortunately, research clearly indicates that many co-teaching marriages result in struggle, separation, or even divorce. This article uses humor and mnemonics to highlight the keys to effective co-teaching that research and literature have identified. Our purpose is to clarify the critical factors necessary for developing and maintaining a successful co-teaching team.

### Clarifying Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is a service delivery option designed to address the needs of students in an inclusive classroom by having a general education teacher and a special service provider (e.g., special education teacher, speech/language pathologist, Title I teacher) teach

together in the same classroom to meet the needs of individual students. For true co-teaching to occur, both professionals must “co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess a diverse group of students in the same general education classroom” (Murawski, 2005, p.10). With the ongoing move toward inclusive education (wherein educators teach students with special needs in the general education classroom), co-teaching is a service delivery option that educators increasingly use to meet the needs of both teachers and students (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Although not all educators will experience co-teaching, more teachers than ever before are looking for tools to help make them more successful (see box, “What Does the Literature Say About Co-Teaching?”).

To rectify the problems associated with co-teaching, co-teachers should consider the following suggestions for before, during, and after co-teaching. Because many of these tips overlap (for example, issues related to planning occur before, during, and after co-teaching is already in place), those interested in co-teaching should read the entire article rather than using it as a step-by-step checklist. Also, the authors have based all tips on their years of experience, experiences of other co-teachers,

and research conducted on co-teaching. Thus, some of the hints are evidence-based practices already supported in the research, whereas others are practices suggested by experienced co-teachers. Following each tip is a question to ask yourself, your co-teacher, or other stakeholders. We hope that the catchy phrases will help ensure that you keep right on co-teaching and finding success for both teachers and students.

### Before Co-Teaching

1. *Hop on the bus, Gus.* Volunteer to co-teach before anyone tells you to do so. Inclusive education is not going away. Schools increasingly require that teachers collaborate, many by some form of co-teaching, because of the changes in the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 and changes related to the highly qualified component of No Child Left Behind (2002). Get ahead of the curve by volunteering and choosing a compatible partner before someone tells you that you must co-teach.

*Ask yourself:* Have I stepped up to the plate and volunteered yet?

2. *Talk to the boss, Ross.* Administrators can help provide materials,

resources, improved schedules, and more. Furnish them with articles that clarify co-teaching, and discuss with them your particular needs. Some resources that you may find helpful in sharing with administrators include Boscardin (2005), Murawski and Lochner (2007), Rea et al. (2002), Rea (2005), Walther-Thomas (1997), and Wilson (2005).

*Ask each other:* Have you considered what you need to create or improve your co-teaching situation and how those needs will affect student outcomes? How will you communicate those needs to your administrator?

3. *Get trained, Layne.* Co-teachers frequently cite the need for training in collaboration, co-teaching, and differentiation strategies (e.g., Mastropieri et al., 2005). Seizing opportunities for staff development in-service training and workshops is helpful, as is reading books and articles that focus on the collaborative relationship in inclusive classrooms. Ask whether you and your co-teacher can attend a workshop on co-teaching or inclusion together. (Speakers' bureaus like the Bureau of Education and Research [www.ber.org] can provide high-quality staff development.)

*Ask your administrator:* How can you help ensure that we are well trained in co-teaching before we begin?

4. *Make a new plan, Stan.* Recognize the importance of trying things in a new way. Benninghof (2003) states that one of the most common mistakes of co-teaching is that neither educator is willing to "loosen the corset" and be more flexible in this new relationship. Both teachers need to approach this new relationship with willingness to let go of control a bit and try new things.

*Ask each other:* Are you game to try something new? What "sacred cows" are you willing to sacrifice?

5. *Keep the numbers low, Joe.* Putting two full classes together is not the answer. One of the benefits of co-

## What Does the Literature Say About Co-Teaching?

Less than 10 years ago, little research on co-teaching existed (Murawski & Swanson, 2001); however, recent studies have found that it can be a very effective method for meeting students' needs (e.g., Magiera, Smith, Zigmund, & Gebauer, 2005; Murawski, 2006; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). However, as with any paradigm shift, change is difficult and barriers are common. Teachers have reported a variety of frustrations with co-teaching; they include lack of training (Mastropieri et al., 2005), lack of administrative support (Dieker, 2001; Rea, 2005), and a lack of parity in the classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Spencer, 2005). Dr. Lynne Cook, a noted expert on co-teaching, clarified that "co-teaching is not simply having two teachers in a classroom with one acting as a glorified paraprofessional or an in-class tutor for one or two students" (Spencer, p. 297), and yet that is exactly what many teachers complain is occurring (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002).

teaching is the lower student-teacher ratio (Friend & Cook, 2003). A good rule of thumb is to keep to the natural proportions of individuals with disabilities in society—about 20%. If you need to cluster more, up to 30% of the students might have a disability, but try to avoid having a class in which all 30% represent the same type of disability (e.g., a class in which 10% have behavioral disabilities and 20% have learning disabilities, rather than a class in which 30% have learning disabilities). Too great a number of students with learning or behavioral challenges jeopardize the benefits that you are hoping to see. Make sure that your inclusive class does not become a place for all struggling students—that is, in essence a special education class with only a few general education students.

*Ask each other:* How many students in our co-taught class have identified disabilities? How many are at risk, are English language learners, are gifted, or are otherwise exceptional?

6. *Prepare the class, Cass.* Just as you prepare to work together as a team, make sure that you have prepared students to start working in a more inclusive setting. Co-teaching "is not the only effective approach, and it is not necessarily the best approach for all kids" (L. Cook, as cited in Spencer, 2005, p. 297). Consider which students need to be in a

co-taught class, and then consider how you will adequately prepare them for this transition.

*Ask the parents:* Is your child prepared to be in a co-taught general education class? What services and adaptations need to be in place to ensure his or her success?

7. *Inform the parents, Clarence.* Send a letter home to all parents to inform them that two teachers will be in the classroom. It is not necessary to state that one of you is a special educator and one is a general educator. Simply state that two credentialed teachers will equally share in planning, instructing, and assessing the whole class (Murawski, 2005).

*Ask each other:* Who will take the lead in parental contact, or will we divide this task as a team?

8. *Share the news, Suz.* Be certain that others in the school are aware that you are co-teaching. This preparation helps ensure that administrators do not call either teacher away on a regular basis for an emergency meeting, to help with a behavior problem, or to talk to a parent. Parity is critical, as is the consistent presence of both teachers in the class. Co-teachers often report that they are unable to depend on each other for planning and instruction because one is often out of the class for a variety of reasons (e.g., for IEP meetings, for behavioral issues, or to substitute in another class).

*Ask yourselves:* Do the students see you both as the teacher, or do they

see one as the “real teacher” and the other as an aide who is in and out?

*Ask the administrator:* Are you prepared to treat us both as real teachers in the room and avoid calling the special educator out for various reasons?

9. *Don't need to be coy, Roy.* Make sure to communicate your pet peeves, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses with your co-teacher before the start of the semester. Talking about these preferences will help avoid personality conflicts and other miscommunications. Use the SHARE worksheet in Murawski and Dieker (2004) to facilitate conversation about important areas of teaching on which you will need to agree.

*Ask each other:* When can we sit down and review our responses on the SHARE worksheet?

10. *Drop off the key, Lee.* Be willing to share all materials. To ensure parity, do not allow students to think that one teacher owns the materials or room because the other always has to ask permission to use items. Instead, demonstrate parity by creating common materials and space and putting both names on the board, the roster, the report cards, and any communications home.

*Ask yourselves:* If we look around the room and at our materials, do we emphasize one teacher over the other? What can we do to remedy that situation?

11. *Commit to co-plan, Dan.* Planning together is the most important part of co-teaching (Murawski, 2005). Before you enter the co-teaching relationship, talk to your potential partners about how you will identify time to get together to co-plan, especially when you are new to co-teaching. Dieker (2001) demonstrated through research that veteran co-teachers only need about 10 minutes to plan for a week; however, those teachers had previously co-taught. In new situations, overplanning is better than underplanning. Ideas for finding time to co-plan are

available in Murawski and Dieker (2004). Two excellent resources to help structure co-planning to make time and ensure consistency are *The Co-Teaching Lesson Plan Book* (Dieker, 2006) and the Co-Teaching Solutions System (CTSS) Teachers' Toolbox ([www.coteachsolutions.com](http://www.coteachsolutions.com); Murawski & Lochner, 2007).

*Ask the administrator:* Are you willing to support our efforts by purchasing *The Co-Teaching Lesson Plan Book* or CTSS Toolbox and helping us find time to meet regularly to co-plan?

12. *Each take a piece, Reece.* One of the best things about co-teaching is the opportunity to share—responsibility, accountability, workload, and fun! Letting teachers know that they will have someone else to help with planning, obtaining materials, grading, and other chores is one of the best ways to attract interest in co-teaching.

*Ask each other:* How will we break up the load so that we both will benefit?

One of the best things about co-teaching is the opportunity to share—responsibility, accountability, workload, and fun!

13. *Work where you are strong, Wong, and address where you are weak, Zeke.* Being aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses is mandatory. Be honest, and share with each other whether you are a procrastinator or a type-A control freak. Discuss whether you love or hate to plan, grade, and take care of discipline and other aspects of instruction. Although special educators do not need to be content experts, they need to be willing to expand on their content knowledge if that is an area of weakness, especially at the secondary level. General educators may share that they feel comfortable with the content and standards but may be less familiar with individualizing strategies or ways to make

content accessible to students who are struggling.

*Ask each other:* What are your strengths and weaknesses, and how do they affect your teaching? (Perhaps you will find that you two will truly complement each other. If not, you should discuss compromises.)

14. *It's OK to be trendy, Wendy.* Read current material on brain-based learning, and offer some “teaching to the brain” tricks as your role in the co-taught class. Be aware of other strategies, tools, and techniques that come from a variety of sources (e.g., English language learning seminars, as well as literacy and mathematics coaches); and be willing to use whatever might make a difference in student engagement and learning.

*Ask specialists in your district:* Can you share any new strategies with us so that we can help our students increase their academic, behavioral, and learning skills?

15. *Establish clear rules, Jules.* The co-teachers need to discuss the way that each person deals with behavioral issues before beginning co-teaching. Check to be certain that your rules are clear enough that you can provide consequences in less than 3 seconds and that you both are consistently acknowledging positive behavior and not merely reinforcing bad behavior.

*Ask each other:* What are our roles and preferences related to behavior in the co-teaching setting?

16. *Always be fair, Cher.* In a strong co-teaching climate, both teachers clearly understand that fair means that everyone gets what he or she needs (and that fair does not mean that everyone gets the same or equal things). In inclusive classrooms where teachers are clear about fairness from the beginning and share their philosophy with students, this issue never arises. However, if the co-teachers do not share this concept early, students and teachers will struggle to understand why

some students receive different support than others.

*Ask yourselves:* Do you both hold similar philosophies about fairness? If not, you need to discuss this issue in the first days of planning. This topic can make or break your relationship.

17. *They are “our” kids, Sid.* Effective co-teachers always talk about “our” kids, not “yours and mine.” They do not differentiate students by label or assign them to one teacher or the other. Special education teachers or paraprofessionals do not hover over the students with IEPs but are helping all students. Consider how you can include students with special needs; is it that they are merely physically present, or do you and the students truly include them in the social and academic environment?

*Ask each other and any paraprofessionals in the room:* How have we ensured that we meet students’ needs without adults hovering over them or placing them in small segregated groups in the back of the classroom?

18. *Go to the Web, Jeb.* Be certain to check for available resources on the Web (such as [www.powerof2.org](http://www.powerof2.org), [www.specialconnections.ku.edu](http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu), [www.2TeachLLC.com](http://www.2TeachLLC.com)) to find tools to help you with your co-teaching. Also, blogs (online journals) can enable teachers to talk collaboratively across schools and across the country.

*Ask any available special education or technology specialists:* What Web-based resources have you found to help support our co-teaching relationship?

19. *Share your needs, Reed.* Make sure before you start that you discuss the “big ideas” that relate to content and curricula, as well as the individual needs of students with disabilities. Typically, the general educator takes the lead on sharing the content, whereas the special educator takes the lead on sharing individual student information; but



both teachers’ information should be equally valued. One teacher does not “trump” the other in power. If this planning can happen before you start to co-teach together, then you will have a clearer understanding of how skills, curricula, and students’ needs complement or clash with one another.

*Ask the general educator:* What curricula will we cover during the first semester?

*Ask the special educator:* What information do we have on the individual students so that we can better meet their needs within the context of our class?

20. *Hit the books, Brooks.* A plethora of available research describes the ways that children learn. For example, one of our favorites is the work of pediatrician Dr. Mel Levine. Levine has written groundbreaking work that does not rely on labels or disability categories but that helps educators and parents gain more knowledge about how children learn. Both co-teachers can read *A Mind at a Time* (Levine, 2002); go through Schools Attuned training, which is a weeklong intensive training program on neurodevelopmental constructs and identifying students’ strengths to improve all areas of need; or visit [www.allkindsofminds.org](http://www.allkindsofminds.org) so that they can begin to use similar language and strategies when working with struggling learners. Other excellent resources include those of Dr. Robert Brooks ([www.drrobertbrooks.com](http://www.drrobertbrooks.com)), Richard Lavoie, and Carol Ann Tom-

linson, as well as Margo Mastropieri and Thomas Scruggs.

*Ask your administrator:* Can you obtain copies of recommended resources for us to read or send us to specialized training?

21. *Talk about the grade, Wade.* Too many times, grading becomes an area of conflict between co-teachers. Before the start of the semester, teachers should talk about the variety of grading options and determine the best collaborative option. After deciding, they should share any adaptations to grading with individual students and their parents. An excellent resource for a discussion of various grading practices is Struyk et al. (1995).

*Ask each other:* With what types of grading adaptations are you comfortable? With what adaptations would you not be comfortable?

### **During Co-Teaching**

22. *Check your HALO, Jaylo.* Throughout your lesson planning and instruction, always check with each other that you have adequately addressed all learners in the class. You need to include students who are H(igh achieving), A(verage achieving), L(ow achieving), and O(ther), (Murawski, 2005). If you have addressed your HALO, you know that you will have a differentiated lesson designed to improve learning for all students. Another excellent resource for helping with lesson planning is “Building a Strong BASE of Support for All Students Through Coplanning” (Hawbaker, Balong, Buckwalter, & Runyon, 2001).

*Ask your administrator:* If you look at our lesson plans, can you clearly see that we address our HALO so that the lesson is appropriately differentiated?

23. *Walk the talk, Jacques.* Educators often impress on students that learning to work together is a life-long skill; co-teaching gives you a chance to model that skill. Consider how you can demonstrate to stu-

dents that you are equals in the classroom and that you can sometimes agree to disagree. Use the communication and collaboration skills that Friend and Cook (2003) recommend.

*Ask the students:* When we as co-teachers disagree, how do you think that we should resolve our issues? What specific strategies can we use to better communicate with each other?

24. *Circulate the room, June.* When one person is leading, the other person should be moving throughout the room and making sure that the lesson is meeting the needs of all students (Friend & Cook, 2003). While one teacher is instructing the class, the other should not be grading papers, making copies, or catching up on individualized education programs (IEPs; Murawski, 2005). Discuss your comfort level with movement in the classroom.

*Ask each other:* What are some actions that one of us can do while the other is leading an activity or giving a lecture?

25. *Slip out the back, Jack.* A true benefit of co-teaching is the ability to take a much-needed bathroom break. As long as it does not become a habit or a way to escape class, the option of leaving one teacher in the room to facilitate class while the other runs to the bathroom is a basic, but very valued, benefit to co-teaching.

*Ask each other:* What nonverbal sign can we give to the other teacher that indicates we are desperate for a quick break?

26. *Give the brain a break, Jake.* The latest brain research emphasizes the need for “brain breaks” every 10 to 12 minutes for students to chunk knowledge. This type of brain break is especially important in a lecture type of setting. Monitor each other to see whether you are doing activities that allow students to process and chunk information.

*Ask each other:* Do we see the students self-initiating their own brain



breaks (e.g., putting heads on desks, doodling, or passing notes)? If so, we need to change what we are doing and discuss how to make sure that we are providing teacher-initiated brain breaks instead.

27. *Get them together, Heather.* In all settings, students need to feel valued. At the same time, teachers need to use classroom practices that are evidence-based. Cooperative learning has strong research support as an effective classroom practice (Johnson, Johnson, & Stanne, 2000), and it also provides opportunities for positive peer interactions. When done well, students with disabilities not only receive help but also have the chance to assist their peers in learning.

*Ask the students:* Why do you think that we sometimes place you in groups to work? What are the benefits and challenges to this type of activity? Do you enjoy it, and do you learn from it? How can we improve this cooperative style?

28. *Create a great climate, Violet.* Creating a positive climate for all students is critical. When teachers use such tools as cooperative learning or classwide peer tutoring, they need to be certain to allow students to assess their own behavior. Tools such as those that Dieker and Ousley (2006) suggest can be very helpful in allowing students to assess group behavior.

*The bottom line is for the teachers to ask each other:* What did we do today to create an environment that was accepting of all students?

29. *Repeat and clarify, Ty.* As all educators know, repetition aids retention. This strategy is helpful for all students, not just those with disabilities. Co-teachers can collaborate so that they can write information on the board, repeat directions, and provide verbal prompts throughout the lesson. These proactive strategies help ensure that fewer reactive strategies (like pulling out or reteaching) are necessary.

*Ask each other as you review your lesson:* How does today’s lesson meet the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, processing, and behavioral needs of students?

30. *Take a group, Snoop.* Instead of assuming that all students can learn in the large-group setting, do not be afraid to take a small group out to learn. As long as you do not always pull the same students out for reteaching (in essence, stigmatizing them the same way that a pullout class would), the use of a small group can be very beneficial. In addition, co-teachers can also take out a heterogeneous group of students who might need more challenges.

*Ask each other:* On the basis of the content that we need to teach, do any of the students need reteaching, preteaching, or enrichment?

31. *Boring is bad, Lad.* Differentiating instruction helps ensure that you are meeting more students' needs (Tomlinson, 2005) and can involve more interesting activities than straight lecture. Certainly, coming up with differentiated and motivating lessons is much easier with two people. Two teachers means that two people can help figure out how to "shake up" the lesson and ensure maximum student engagement.

*Ask each other:* What are we doing to make sure that the class is not boring?

*Then ask the students (if you dare):* Is this class boring? If so, what are your suggestions for making it more interesting—while still ensuring that we teach the content adequately?

32. *Plan to laugh, Taff.* Make laughter a part of your classroom practice. Laughter reduces stress and can help encode learning. Think about being the cartoon or joke-of-the-day person. Having another adult in the room who understands your jokes is nice, but the real challenge is finding humor that students understand.

*Ask yourselves:* How have we incorporated laughter or emotion into our lesson for today?

33. *Keep standards high, Sy.* Standards-based instruction is one of the stat-



ed benefits of inclusive education; all students can have access to grade-level curriculum (Thurlow, 2002). Do not water work down just because a student has a label. Consider identifying methods of teaching to the standards that also enable students with special needs to succeed; one resource, for example, is the Kansas University Content Enhancement and Unit Planning strategy ([www.specialconnections.ku.edu](http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu)). This type of resource can help take content and break it down into accessible parts for all the students in the room.

*Ask yourselves:* What strategies are we using for the whole class that will really help struggling students at the same time? Also, are we basing all accommodation and modification decisions on the needs of the students rather than on their labels?

34. *Ensure success, Jess.* When you are in the co-teaching setting, remember to plan for the range of needs in the classroom, including students who have English language needs, students who are slow learners, students who have disabilities, students who are gifted, and students who fall into multiple or other categories. Remember to think about each student as an individual and consider the type of scaffolding or support that he or she might need so that you are challenging all students. Each student has the right to be successful in your class.

*Ask each other:* Which students do we not seem to reach effectively?

*Ask parents:* Do you believe that the class is meeting your child's needs? If not, do you have suggestions or strategies so that we can help ensure success for your child?

35. *Help students pay attention, Christian.* Students with attention issues in the classroom need to have stimulation that can help them focus on the most important task—your teaching. One of the benefits noted in the research is that teachers in co-teaching settings have to do less direct classroom management simply because two teachers

are in the classroom (Murawski, 2006). However, for some students, proximity will not be enough to keep their attention.

*Ask each other:* Have we incorporated activities of high interest and movement into our co-taught lessons? Are our kinesthetic learners able to stay focused?

36. *Break out the toys, Joy.* Many teacher-friendly manipulatives are available for students. They hold students' attention, make a lesson kinesthetic, and help with active learning. Although teachers may not be able to buy all the materials they want on their own, consider talking to other teachers about sharing materials, asking district and school administrators what is available, and seeing whether community stakeholders will provide financial support (many local businesses have surplus that they are happy to share).

*Ask your administrators:* Can we get Wikki Stix ([www.wikkistix.com](http://www.wikkistix.com)), Gelboards ([www.gelboard.com](http://www.gelboard.com)), Play-Doh, or erasable highlighters to use in our lessons? What types of materials are available for us to use?

37. *Take a time out, Scout.* If a student or group of students is getting on your nerves, communicate your frustration to your co-teacher by using a nonverbal signal and switching roles instead of blowing up at them. Being able to take a self time-out from kids for a moment or being able to switch student groups is another benefit of co-teaching.

*Ask yourself:* Have you ever had a moment when you just knew you were going to lose it? Won't it be nice to have a chance to avoid that situation?

38. *Don't disappear, Dear.* Last-minute IEPs, behavioral problems, and parent concerns can pull special educators out of the co-taught classroom on a regular basis. Some administrators even have special educators substitute for another teacher's class when a substitute is unavailable. That strategy affects the conti-

nunity of instruction, impairs the teachers' planning, and makes general educators begin to believe that they cannot depend on the co-teacher to be there for instruction. Administrators and both teachers must commit to a continuing relationship for at least the semester (preferably the year) to provide continuity to students. In addition, administrators and other personnel must understand that they should not call either teacher out of class unless a true emergency has occurred.

*Ask each other and the administrators:* Are we all committed to make this work? Do we really understand what that commitment means? How can we communicate this to others?

39. *Don't be late, Nate.* Even when teachers are co-teaching with multiple people and going to separate classes, it is important to start the instruction with both teachers present and on time. Their collective presence sets a tone of parity and allows the class to start immediately.

*Ask each other:* Is tardiness an issue? What are our options to remedy this problem?

40. *Play some games, James.* Multiuse games (like Jeopardy, Bingo, and Who Wants to Be a Millionaire) are great ways to reinforce concepts in an inclusive classroom. Students become more motivated to learn when they are enjoying themselves. Two teachers in the room can facilitate and control games more easily than one teacher.

*Ask students:* What games do you like to play? If we include these activities as an instructional method, do we have your commitment to interact appropriately? What does that mean to you?

41. *Change your approach, Coach.* Novice co-teachers often report mainly using a "one teach, one support" approach in the classroom (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). Although that approach is understandable, students do not receive the benefits



of having two credentialed teachers in the classroom when co-teachers use that approach. In addition, the role of the support teacher becomes more like that of a paraprofessional (Scruggs, et al., 2007; Weiss & Lloyd). For improved student outcomes, it pays to do more regrouping and try a variety of approaches and strategies to make the most of co-teaching.

*Ask yourselves:* How often do we regroup students? Can we look at our lesson plans and see that we frequently vary our instructional approaches, rather than merely taking turns leading the lesson?

42. *Address their MI, Guy.* As a co-teaching team, consider how you can plan lessons that address the various strengths of the learners in your classroom. Educators too often focus on the use of sight and sound (e.g., lecture and overheads), yet these are the two areas in which many students with disabilities have limited skills. Therefore, think about how to address in your lessons all the multiple intelligences (MIs), as well as the various ways that students learn (Stanford, 2003).

*Ask the specialists in your district:* Does anyone have more information on MI theory, and can you provide us with subject-specific strategies that we can use with our students?

43. *Address different learning styles, Giles.* Recognize that only about 50% of students have visual and auditory learning style strengths; the other 50% are typically kinesthetic/tactile learners. Teachers tend to be visual and auditory learners and continue to teach in the way that others taught them. This method of teaching, however, does not match with many of the students' learning styles in inclusive classrooms.

*Ask yourselves:* How have we ensured that we are teaching these students in a way that connects with their learning styles? Have we considered our own learning styles and how they affect our teaching styles?

44. *Don't depart, Art.* Pulling students with IEPs away for testing is not always necessary. Instead, allow all students to determine their learning style preferences, and let those preferences identify how you will test them. Doing assessments in a variety of ways can allow students to demonstrate their learning instead of penalizing them for having a disability. Look to the work of Carol Ann Tomlinson (e.g., Tomlinson, 2005) for a plethora of ways to differentiate by product (in addition to differentiating by content and by process).

*Ask students:* On the basis of your own learning style, would you prefer that someone read this test to you or would you prefer to read it yourself? Everyone can choose his or her own method for this particular assessment.

45. *Record your voice, Joyce.* Using listening centers with tape recorders and headsets enables co-teachers to allow some students to work independently (e.g., in station teaching) while the teachers work with smaller groups. Tape recorders also are a perfect solution for students who

need tests read to them, since the co-teachers do not need to read a test multiple times for multiple students. Also, make sure that your administrators know that you are using this strategy and that students are not merely chillin' out to their favorite band.

*Ask administrators:* Are funds available for purchasing blank tapes and tape recorders for us?

### After Co-Teaching Has Begun

46. *Collect some data, Jada.* Having two teachers in the room allows you both to collect data on student achievement, problem and positive behaviors, and areas of need. Curriculum-based assessments, benchmark tests, Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), attendance information, data on academic engaged time, and class grades are types of data that you can collect to demonstrate the success—or lack thereof—of co-teaching teams. Make sure to work together to collect information so that you can make decisions on the basis of data rather than on the basis of opinion or emotion. An excellent resource for collecting concrete data on co-teaching actions is the Co-Teaching Solutions Systems (CTSS) Observation System ([www.coteachsolutions.com](http://www.coteachsolutions.com)), created for observers to document what is occurring in the co-taught classroom. A highlight of the CTSS Observation System is a self-survey that enables co-teachers to self-assess and then electronically compare their responses with the observers' feedback.

*Ask each other:* What data are important to us? How will we collect our data, and who will do the collecting?

47. *Remember to evaluate, Mate.* Having others provide feedback on your co-teaching, as well as conducting your own self-evaluations, is important. Administrators or other observers may want to start with the questions provided in Wilson (2005) for

outside evaluations. These questions include the following:

- Are the roles of each teacher meaningful?
- Are co-teachers using strategies to promote success with all students in the classroom?
- Does evidence indicate that successful learning is occurring in the class?

Although these questions provide a structure for outside observers, co-teachers should agree on a standard process and time to evaluate their own teaching and the co-teaching relationship.

After you have a standard date on your calendar (at least once a month), we recommend asking two simple questions.

*Ask each other:* Is what we are doing good for both of us? If not, what are we doing that we could change so that we both are happy with the relationship? Is our co-teaching good for all students in our class? If not, what can we do to ensure that all students are benefiting from our collaboration?

48. *Avoid any blame, Ame.* If any areas are not working, be sure that you and your co-teacher deal with them yourselves. Venting to others in the teachers' lounge is a sure way to ruin a potentially good co-teaching relationship and does not remedy the situation. Instead, commit to having fair and open discussions only with each other about what is and what is not working.

*Ask each other:* How do you prefer feedback, especially when one of us is not pleased? What type of a plan can we create to evaluate and address issues as they arise?

49. *Share your success, Bess.* Be certain that you tell everyone who will listen what is working. Co-teaching often spreads at a school when teachers hear about the benefits and successes of students and faculty. An inclusive school should include all faculty, staff, students, and parents; it should not rely on only a few people who collaborate successfully.

*Ask district personnel:* How can we share our successes across the district? Are there other co-teaching teams with whom we can communicate to share tips, strategies and successes?



50. *Let the celebration begin, Vin.* As previously mentioned, educators often compare co-teaching with a marriage. If you and your co-teacher follow these simple 50 tips, you will be ready to pour the champagne and look forward to celebrating an anniversary. Congratulations on this wonderful collaboration—we knew you could do it!

*What question should you ask each other:* Would you do it all over again? Of course!

### Reflection

With each of these tips to keep your co-teacher, we provided questions—questions for you to ask yourselves, your co-teachers, your administrators, your students, your students' parents, and other personnel in the school and district. Asking these questions helps ensure ongoing communication and treatment integrity (that is, the assurance that any intervention is implemented as intended). Too often, administrators throw co-teachers into an arranged co-teaching relationship; and the co-teachers focus on their resentment that no one asked them for their opinion, that they were not trained, or that they do not know the content or the special needs of the students the way that the other educator does. The authors sincerely hope that our tips and questions can enable co-teachers to avoid negative relationships and make the most of any situation. By doing so, they can focus on the positive experiences that they as teachers are receiving and the academic, behavioral, and social benefits that the students are experiencing.

We have used tips that are based on research-based and practical strategies



to offer ways for co-teachers to obtain, maintain, or even improve their current collaborative relationships. Co-teachers can and should reflect on each question and determine where they need to do some problem solving. Facilitators or administrators engaged in supporting co-teaching can use these questions to guide their own co-teaching staff development.

We have offered ways for  
co-teachers to obtain, maintain,  
or even improve their current  
collaborative relationships.

Ultimately, in our own reflections, three important components to successful co-teaching emerged that permeate all 50 tips. For each of the previously mentioned suggestions, please also keep in mind the following:

- Be willing to try new things.
- Be willing to be equals.
- Be willing to listen—to each other, to students, to parents, and to others.

We are certain that those who approach co-teaching with a positive can-do attitude—just like any other aspect of teaching—will experience the truly wonderful benefits that co-teaching has to offer . . . and better yet, that the students will as well!

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