



TWO are BETTER than ONE

BY SUSAN E. GATELY

Increasingly diverse student populations in schools highlight the need for effective service delivery models to accommodate these students. One promising practice that is being utilized and becoming more commonplace in schools is coteaching (Reinhiller, 1996). Coteaching involves the deployment of a general education teacher and a special education teacher to work with a class of diverse students. Both educators assume full responsibility for the education of all students in the classroom, including planning, presentation, classroom management, and evaluation. There is some intuitive appeal for this mode of service delivery because greater numbers of students who have disabilities may be accommodated in general education classes. In addition, coteachers often report positive attitudes regarding coteaching (Friend & Cook, 1992).

In practice, however, successful coteaching is not easily attainable because of a number of factors, including lack of professional preparation, poorly defined roles, lack of clear expectations, and frustrations with implementation issues (Cook &



Susan E. Gately (sgately@rivier.edu) is an associate professor at Rivier College in Nashua, NH.

Friend, 1998). Another issue is continued ownership struggles (Wood, 1998). Weiss and Lloyd (2003) found that special education teachers consistently acted as aides to the general education teachers, but there was little evidence that the teachers worked together.

The dissatisfaction that teachers experience with coteaching and the relegation of special education teachers to the role of a classroom aides may be associated with the developmental nature of coteaching (Gately & Gately, 2001). As in any developmental process, coteachers move through predictable stages. Partners may proceed slowly through the developmental process, moving from a distant, sometimes hostile relationship to a collaborative, synergistic relationship. Knowing the developmental stages of coteaching may help administrators supervise and support coteachers.

Stages of the Process

The relationship between a general education teacher and a special education teacher proceeds through predictable stages: the beginning stage, the compromise stage, and the collaborative stage (Gately & Gately, 2001). At each of the developmental stages in the coteaching process, teachers demonstrate varying degrees of interaction and collaboration. Coteaching pairs may move through the developmental process at different rates depending on the interpersonal relationship and communication style of the coteachers. (Gately & Gately, 1993). Although some coteacher pairs click, others may struggle and progress through the developmental process slowly. Administrators must understand that some coteachers need time to develop their professional working relationship.

Beginning Stage

When coteachers start to work together, they may not know each other very well or may know each other socially but not professionally. For some, the change from discussing favorite TV shows or movies or personal family and social issues to discussing teaching styles and sharing classroom plans may be challenging. Accepting another professional in their classroom may be difficult for the general education teachers, and feeling comfortable in someone else's classroom may be difficult for the special education teachers.

PREVIEW

When done effectively, coteaching allows both teachers to assume full responsibility for the education of all students in the class.

The relationship between coteachers moves through predictable stages: the beginning stage, the compromising stage, and the collaborative stage.

Using a rating scale to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the coteachers' relationship can help the teachers reach the collaborative stage, pinpoint goals for improvement, and reflect on their practice.

Often both teachers have unclear notions of what is expected of them. Administrators can help by clarifying the teachers' roles and responsibilities. To do this, supervisors should examine their own vision of coteaching and share this vision with coteachers early in the process. Clarifying roles and expectations may ease some of the discomfort coteachers experience and help the teachers appreciate the need to work collaboratively.

Coteachers need time to develop their ability to communicate with each other. Planning time built into the school schedule will help coteachers move more quickly through the beginning stage of the coteaching relationship. Without developing their communication and relationship skills, coteachers may become trapped in a noncommunicative relationship. Professional development for coteachers before the start of the school year can help them get to know each other and begin to develop their style of communication.

Sometimes beginning coteachers experience a clash of communicative styles. This may exacerbate the dissatisfaction between the coteaching partners. It is imperative that supervisors encourage openness between coteaching partners. Unvoiced dissatisfaction often thwarts the development of the coteaching relationship and the effectiveness of the coteaching classroom.

Materials, students, and teachers are also separated at the beginning stage. Sometimes students with disabilities are seated together in a certain part of the room. The special education teacher may place him- or herself at the back of the room or be delegated to a specific area in the classroom by the general education teacher. Invisible walls often separate the two teachers.

[Figure 1]

COTEACHING RATING SCALE FOR SUPERVISORS

Respond to each question below by circling the number that best describes what you observe in the cotaught classroom. If you do not observe the behavior noted in the item, discuss the item with the coteachers to determine your rating. All items must be rated on the scale. Record your answers on the tally sheet on page 40.

[1 = Rarely] [2 = Sometimes] [3 = Usually]			Comments	
1. Nonverbal communication is observed.	1	2	3	
2. Both teachers move freely throughout the space.	1	2	3	
3. Teachers appear competent with the curriculum and the standards.	1	2	3	
4. Teachers agree on the goals of the cotaught classroom	1	2	3	
5. Spontaneous planning occurs throughout the lesson.	1	2	3	
6. Both teachers take stage and present during the lesson.	1	2	3	
7. Classroom rules and routines have been jointly developed.	1	2	3	
8. Many measures are used for grading students.	1	2	3	
9. Humor is often used in the classroom.	1	2	3	
10. Materials are shared in the classroom	1	2	3	
11. Both teachers appear familiar with the methods and materials with respect to this content area.	1	2	3	
12. Modifications of goals for students with special needs are incorporated into this class.	1	2	3	
13. Planning for classes appears to be the shared responsibility of both teachers.	1	2	3	
14. The "chalk" passes freely between the two teachers.	1	2	3	
15. A variety of classroom management techniques is used to enhance learning of all students.	1	2	3	
16. Test modifications are commonplace.	1	2	3	
17. Communication is open and honest.	1	2	3	
18. There is fluid positioning of teachers in the classroom.	1	2	3	
19. Both teachers appear to feel confident in the curriculum content.	1	2	3	
20. Student-centered objectives are incorporated into the classroom curriculum.	1	2	3	
21. Time is allotted (or found) for common planning.	1	2	3	
22. Students appear to accept and seek out both teachers' help in the learning process.	1	2	3	
23. Behavior management is the shared responsibility of both teachers.	1	2	3	
24. Goals and objectives in IEPs are considered as part of the grading for students with special needs.	1	2	3	

The special education teacher may be unfamiliar with the content or methodology that the general education teacher uses. This lack of knowledge may create a lack of confidence in both teachers. The general education teacher may have limited confidence in the special education teacher's ability to teach the curriculum and be reluctant to "give the chalk" to the special education teacher. At other times, the special education teacher may have more experience teaching the subject area than the general education teacher. This may create friction and uncertainty in the beginning teacher.

When the special education teacher's role is viewed as the helper, there may be little discussion about modifying the curriculum. Not knowing how the lesson is organized and will proceed places the special education teacher at a distinct disadvantage. As a result, the special education teacher may simply circulate the room, helping students remain on task and manage their behavior. Students are quick to notice this imbalance, which undermines the special education teacher's position as an authority and equal partner in the teaching process.

Compromising Stage

The second stage of the coteaching relationship is ruled by compromise. Teachers who have limited experience teaching together may work at this stage. Both teachers take on active roles. Although more communication is evident between the teachers, there is a sense of give and take: One teacher “gets” something, and the other must “give up” something else. In this stage, the teachers are enmeshed in a win-lose mode of communication. Although the teachers may agree to change their plans, modifications, or assessments, they feel that they have lost something when making the change.

Interpersonal communication becomes more effective, more open, and more interactive at the compromising stage. The use of humor is one indication that the partnership has moved to this stage. There is more physical movement between the teachers and an increased use of shared space and materials. Territoriality becomes less evident. But although the special education teacher may move more freely in the classroom, he or she rarely takes the center stage.

Both teachers become increasingly confident with the curriculum, and the general education teacher becomes more willing to modify it and share in planning and teaching. The teachers may experiment with new approaches or ideas, but only tenuously and tentatively. The general education teacher often sees the modifications and accommodations as “giving up” something or as “watering down” the curriculum.

As the relationship between the general education and special education teachers develops, they begin to share some of the presentation or lesson structuring. Both teachers may direct some of the activities in the classroom. Often the special education teacher offers mini-lessons or clarifies strategies students may use. These interactions are clear evidence of the partnership working at the compromising level. Although movement to the compromising stage is an important step in the process, teachers and administrators should know that true collaboration moves beyond compromise.

Collaborative Stage

At the collaborative stage, communication is open and interactive and is marked by humor and comfort. The teachers effectively model communication styles and use nonverbal means to communicate. The teachers, the students, and visitors are comfortable in the classroom. At the collaborative stage, it is often difficult for outsiders to discern which teacher is the special education teacher and which is the general education teacher.

Special education students’ seats become intentionally interspersed throughout the classroom so they can participate in whole-group lessons. Students may participate in many cooperative grouping assignments. Teachers are more fluid in their positioning in the classroom. Both

teachers control space and are cognizant of each other’s position in the room. When one teacher moves to the left of the room, the other moves to the middle of the room so the classroom is always effectively covered.

Becoming competent and confident in the general education curriculum is an important component of the coteaching relationship. Although the special education teacher’s goal is not to deliver content—which is the responsibility of the general education teacher—knowing the scope and sequence of the content and the standards is essential to progress to the collaborative stage.

The coteachers plan the specific goals and objectives to incorporate in the classroom so all students can be successful. When both teachers are responsible for the success of all the students in the cotaught classroom, they must coplan and discuss goals, accommodations, and modifications that will be necessary for specific students to be successful. Extensive planning that occurs before the start of the school year and continues to occur on an ongoing basis enhances the coteaching relationship. Complaints of “not enough planning time” and “no planning time” should be taken seriously. Without planning time, some coteachers develop their relationship slowly. Without planning time, coteachers are not able to discuss the curriculum goals and modifications that some students may need.

At the collaborative stage, both teachers begin to differentiate concepts that all students must know from concepts that most students should know. This differentiation marks the beginning of the collaborative stage for both teachers. From this differentiation, modifications of content, activities, homework assignments, and tests become the norm for students who require them. Instructional planning—which involves on-the-spot, day-to-day, week-to-week, and unit-to-unit planning—is an important component of the coteaching relationship. Instructional planning depends on both teachers’ appreciation of the need for modifications of the curriculum as well as their acceptance of the responsibilities for teaching all students in the classroom.

The “mini-caucus” is evidence of the teachers working at the collaborative level. This occurs when the two teachers recognize the need for an on-the-spot change in the lesson and agree to change course to accommodate learners who may be struggling. The



When done well, coteaching is an effective way of providing instruction to diverse groups of students in general education classrooms.

item are tallied as directed and transposed onto the scale profile (see figures 2 and 3).

By examining the profile, teachers can pinpoint areas of strength and weakness in the coteaching relationship. Administrators and coteachers can use the profile to set specific goals for improvement, which may help them proceed more quickly through the developmental process. Coteachers can compare their results to their partners' and supervisors' results and use them as a forum for reflective practice.

Final Thoughts

In an effective coteaching classroom, a positive, collegial relationship between the two teachers is essential and often takes time and effort to develop. It can be nurtured by clear expectations from administrators, fostered through the mutual exploration of individual and partnership belief systems, and cultivated through time for reflection.

The Coteaching Rating Scale for Supervisors can be an effective tool in identifying a profile of strengths and weaknesses in coteaching classrooms. The scale focuses on the specific components of the coteaching relationship, and

supervisors and coteachers can use it to determine the effectiveness of classroom practices, determine goals for improving practice, and develop strategies to improve and enhance programs. It can also highlight important aspects of collaboration that contribute to the success of the coteaching model and accelerate the developmental process. **PL**

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