

# **Mastering the Art of Co-Teaching**

**Building More Collaborative Classrooms**

**Nicholas D. Young  
Angela C. Fain  
Teresa A. Citro**

**Series in Education**



**VERNON PRESS**

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[www.vernonpress.com](http://www.vernonpress.com)

*In the Americas:*  
Vernon Press  
1000 N West Street,  
Suite 1200, Wilmington,  
Delaware 19801  
United States

*In the rest of the world:*  
Vernon Press  
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,  
Malaga, 29006  
Spain

Series in Education

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020931408

ISBN: 978-1-62273-916-5

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# Acknowledgement

It is with sincere appreciation that we offer this public thank you to Mrs. Suzanne (Sue) Clark for editing this tome. Sue has recently retired from a long and distinguished career in public education and her first act of “taking it easy” was to work tirelessly on this manuscript. She is a stickler for the details and has a wonderful (and kind) way of polishing draft chapters. There is no question that the final product is far better due to her efforts. We want all to know that we are grateful for her editorial work. On a more personal level, the entire team offers heartfelt congratulations to her on her retirement. Sue should be proud of what she has done to support the thousands of students who were positively impacted by her efforts over many years of service to public education.



# Preface

Educators work almost exclusively alone, with only minor glimpses of others in their building with the exception of some planning time and the obligatory staff lounge lunch break. Co-teaching, however, offers educators and educational professionals a chance to do what is best for students - all students - plan, collaborate, manage and teach in tandem. In this atmosphere of togetherness, teachers become mentors, learners, leaders and followers. It is no easy feat, as there are many stumbling blocks; yet, the willing pair of teachers will find the road replete with benefits well beyond what is initially considered. *Mastering the Art of Co-Teaching: Building More Collaborative Classrooms* describes this very concept of co-teaching as a means to create a more collaborative and balanced classroom that benefits students and staff alike.

The book was written for regular and special educators, educational professionals who work within the classrooms, school administrators, guidance counselors, preservice, veteran and graduate education students. It covers a series of important topics that includes topics from how to co-plan, create a welcoming environment and how to assess students; work with a variety of service providers, paraprofessionals and families; as well as how to incorporate social-emotional learning into the co-taught classroom. Understanding that it is necessary to consider the stress of teaching in any form, professional development, relationships, mentorship and renewal are also topics of interest.

The motivation for writing this book came from several concerns:

- *Our concern that novice teachers are leaving the field within the first five years in record numbers due to stress and burnout,*
- *Our knowledge that veteran teachers who can mentor novices while teaching in tandem hold the key to more master teachers in the future,*
- *Our belief that co-teaching strengthens and encourages the best teaching practices when given the time, energy and supports needed,*
- *Our awareness that co-teaching is only possible with administrative support and professional development that honors the roles of both teachers,*
- *Our interest in promoting educational outcomes, knowing this begins within the classroom honoring all students from teachers who see every possibility in teaching and learning.*

Co-teaching, usually the pairing of a general education teacher and a special education teacher, can be traced back to 1975 and education reform (Wilson & Blednick, 2011). At its most basic level, co-teaching allows for the inclusion of students who may otherwise be separated during important learning times. This may be students with disabilities or linguistically diverse students as well as students with occupational or physical therapy needs. Teachers and educational professionals who have the opportunity to plan, collaborate and teach together give their students the opportunity to learn from others in the classroom. This is a heavy lift at first and should not be taken lightly.

*Mastering the Art of Co-Teaching: Building More Collaborative Classrooms* was written by a team of educators who represent preschool to the academy, all of whom are passionate about teaching and learning in the most fundamental ways. We offer this tome as a co-teaching guide to those who embrace this same passion for promoting successful educational outcomes for all students. For those willing to take the chance, or those who have been asked to co-teach, we hope you find the strategies and tools in the pages to follow as practical and useful as we have throughout our careers. For those of you who have chosen education as your profession, thank you for making a positive and productive difference in the lives of students.

### References

Wilson, G.L. & Blednick, J. (2011). *Teaching in Tandem*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD

## Chapter 1

# Effective Co-Teaching Strategies That Work

Karen Russo, EdD, *St. Joseph's College*

Teachers occasionally express concern about ‘fairness’ in education. They may be anxious that one student will need an instructional or behavioral support that others do not. Some educators may question the fairness of individualized teaching or behavioral expectations (Southern Poverty Law Center: Teaching Tolerance, 2018). They may believe that all students should be treated equally. If inequity is perceived, these teachers worry that they will receive complaints from parents or even from the students themselves. Educators should know, however, that fair isn’t defined as everyone getting exactly the same thing (Curwin, 2012). Fair is defined as everyone receives what they need and that everyone has the chance to be successful (Curwin, 2012).

In recent decades, a shift in education has made the inclusive classroom very much the norm. Students with special needs are often served in a general education classroom. The least restrictive environment is the most desirable placement for a student to achieve learning and behavioral goals (Morin, 2020). Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 and amended IDEA through Public Law 114-95, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (Klein, 2016; Lee, 2020). In the law, Congress states:

*Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).*

Support for inclusion can also be found from the Council for Exceptional Children (2019), which issued guidance for professional special educators’ practices. Relative to inclusive classrooms, two such ethical principles seem particularly relevant and include “promoting meaningful and inclusive participation of individuals with exceptionalities in their schools and

communities; [and] practicing collegially with others who are providing services to individuals with exceptionalities” (Council for Exceptional Children, 2019, n.p.).

The field of teaching has become more complex and educators must be intentional about the ways in which they meet individual student learning needs (Ricci & Fingon, 2017). It is true that some inclusive classes are taught by one general education teacher, with support personnel providing additional services throughout the school day. Those services may be offered within the classroom or in a separate location (Watson, 2019). Very often, general education and special education teachers are paired to teach a class that includes both general education students and those with special needs (Stein, 2016). They share the responsibilities for teaching and managing one class – this is known as co-teaching (Trites, 2017).

### **What is Co-Teaching?**

Co-teaching is the partnering of a general education teacher and a special education teacher for the purpose of delivering instruction that meets the learning needs of all students in the classroom (Friend, 2019; Stein, 2016; Trites, 2017). While co-teaching does bring two teachers together, that is not the primary goal. The main purpose is to best serve students (Potts & Howard, 2011). It is “meant to provide specialized services to students with disabilities in regular classrooms, while ensuring they also get access to the same academic material as their peers” (Samuels, 2015, n.p.). Murawski and Bernhardt (2016) elaborated on this idea:

*Co-teaching requires more than just learning to “play nicely” together. It requires a paradigm shift—from teaching in silos to teaching in tandem, from owning the front of the room to sharing space, from sending students with special needs out of the classroom to thoughtfully differentiating for diverse learners. Before working on collaboration and communication skills, educators need to embrace the mindset that inclusion is an issue of both equity and social justice. Then, teachers and administrators will be more prepared for and committed to co-teaching (p. 31).*

In a co-taught classroom, the general education teacher has expertise in curriculum, pacing, and class management. The special education teacher may be equally expert in these areas, with added expertise in learning processes, and the individualized needs of specific students in the class. Together, these two educators create a learning environment that benefits all students (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamerlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

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## About the Authors

### **Nicholas D. Young, PhD, EdD**

Dr. Nicholas D. Young has worked in diverse educational roles for more than 30 years, serving as a teacher, counselor, principal, special education director, graduate professor, graduate program director, graduate dean, and longtime psychologist and superintendent of schools. He was named the Massachusetts Superintendent of the Year; and he completed a distinguished Fulbright program focused on the Japanese educational system through the collegiate level. Dr. Young is the recipient of numerous other honors and recognitions including the General Douglas MacArthur Award for distinguished civilian and military leadership and the Vice Admiral John T. Hayward Award for exemplary scholarship. He holds several graduate degrees including a PhD in educational administration and an EdD in educational psychology.

Dr. Young has served in the U.S. Army and U.S. Army Reserves combined for over 35 years; and he graduated with distinction from the U.S. Air War College, the U.S. Army War College, and the U.S. Navy War College. After completing a series of senior leadership assignments in the U.S. Army Reserves as the commanding officer of the 287<sup>th</sup> Medical Company (DS), the 405<sup>th</sup> Area Support Company (DS), the 405<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Hospital, and the 399<sup>th</sup> Combat Support Hospital, he transitioned to his current military position as a faculty instructor at the U.S. Army War College in Carlisle, PA. He currently holds the rank of Colonel.

Dr. Young is also a regular presenter at state, national, and international conferences; and he has written many books, book chapters, and/or articles on various topics in education, counseling, and psychology. Some of his most recent books include *Maximizing Mental Health Services: Evidenced-Based Practices that Promote Emotional Well-Being* (2019); *Masculinity in the Making: Managing the Transition to Manhood* (2019); *The Burden of Being a Boy: Bolstering Educational and Emotional Well-Being in Young Males* (2019); *The Special Education Toolbox: Supporting Exceptional Teachers, Students, and Families* (2019); *Sounding the Alarm in the Schoolhouse: Safety, Security and Student Well-Being* (2019); *Creating Compassionate Classrooms: Understanding the Continuum of Disabilities and Effective Educational Interventions* (2019); *Acceptance, Understanding, and the Moral Imperative of Promoting Social Justice Education in the Schoolhouse* (2019); *Empathic Teaching: Promoting Social Justice in the Contemporary Classroom* (2019); *Educating the Experienced: Challenges and Best Practices in Adult Learning* (2019); *Securing*

*the Schoolyard: Protocols that Promote Safety and Positive Student Behaviors* (2018); *The Soul of the Schoolhouse: Cultivating Student Engagement* (2018); *Embracing and Educating the Autistic Child: Valuing Those Who Color Outside the Lines* (2018); *From Cradle to Classroom: A Guide to Special Education for Young Children* (2018); *Captivating Classrooms: Educational Strategies to Enhance Student Engagement* (2018); *Potency of the Principalship: Action-Oriented Leadership at the Heart of School Improvement* (2018); *Soothing the Soul: Pursuing a Life of Abundance Through a Practice of Gratitude* (2018); *Dog Tags to Diploma: Understanding and Addressing the Educational Needs of Veterans, Servicemembers, and their Families* (2018); *Turbulent Times: Confronting Challenges in Emerging Adulthood* (2018); *Guardians of the Next Generation: Igniting the Passion for Quality Teaching* (2018); *Achieving Results: Maximizing Success in the Schoolhouse* (2018); *From Head to Heart: High Quality Teaching Practices in the Spotlight* (2018); *Stars in the Schoolhouse: Teaching Practices and Approaches that Make a Difference* (2018); *Making the Grade: Promoting Positive Outcomes for Students with Learning Disabilities* (2018); *Paving the Pathway for Educational Success: Effective Classroom Interventions for Students with Learning Disabilities* (2018); *Wrestling with Writing: Effective Strategies for Struggling Students* (2018); *Floundering to Fluent: Reaching and Teaching the Struggling Student* (2018); *Emotions and Education: Promoting Positive Mental Health in Students with Learning Disabilities* (2018); *From Lecture Hall to Laptop: Opportunities, Challenges, and the Continuing Evolution of Virtual Learning in Higher Education* (2017); *The Power of the Professoriate: Demands, Challenges, and Opportunities in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Higher Education* (2017); *To Campus with Confidence: Supporting a Successful Transition to College for Students with Learning Disabilities* (2017); *Educational Entrepreneurship: Promoting Public-Private Partnerships for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2015); *Beyond the Bedtime Story: Promoting Reading Development during the Middle School Years* (2015); *Betwixt and Between: Understanding and Meeting the Social and Emotional Developmental Needs of Students During the Middle School Transition Years* (2014); *Learning Style Perspectives: Impact Upon the Classroom* (3rd ed., 2014); and *Collapsing Educational Boundaries from Preschool to PhD: Building Bridges Across the Educational Spectrum* (2013); *Transforming Special Education Practices: A Primer for School Administrators and Policy Makers* (2012); and *Powerful Partners in Student Success: Schools, Families and Communities* (2012). He also co-authored several children's books to include the popular series *I am Full of Possibilities*. Dr. Young may be contacted directly at [nyoung1191@aol.com](mailto:nyoung1191@aol.com).

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Dr. Fain has worked in the field of special education for the past 20 years. She received her PhD and M.Ed. in special education at Georgia State University, as well as a B.S. in Therapeutic Recreation. She earned national certification as a Nationally Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (TRS) and worked as a therapist for several years with children who had severe emotional/behavioral disorders (SEBD) and/or autism. Dr. Fain has worked in some of the most restrictive educational environments that students with disabilities are served, as both a TRS and special education teacher. She worked as a clinical instructor at Georgia State University while earning her doctorate and at the University of North Georgia while concurrently serving as an assistant professor. She is now an assistant professor at the University of West Georgia.

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Dr. Citro is the Chief Executive Officer, Learning Disabilities Worldwide, Inc. and the Founder and President of Thread of Hope, Inc. She is a graduate of Tufts New England Medical School and Northeastern University, Boston. Dr. Citro has co-edited several books on a wide range of topics in special education, she co-authored a popular children's series *I Am Full of Possibilities*, and she is the co-editor of two peer review journals dealing with special education issues.