



Go Team!

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Making the most of our best resource.

Managing resources is a constant challenge for schools. The desire to equip children with the best tools for learning means Australian schools spend millions on textbooks, computers and hands-on learning materials, just to name a few. In the current climate schools are increasingly recognising that the most valuable resource in the classroom is the teacher. During the pandemic, schools were forced to manage chronic staff and student absences in creative ways and, while collapsing two classes into one room may have been new for some, it is in fact a decades old practise that can bring out the best in teachers and create a dynamic environment for learners. Schools started shifting desks and using outdoor spaces to provide a choice of work areas for students while teachers shared the subjects, teaching to their strengths and supporting in the classroom so that focus could be targeted to the needs of the students.

This style of classroom environment is often called team teaching or co-teaching. It is an opportunity for teachers to hone in on a specialist subject and for students to get the support they need as well as engagement in independent activities and extension tasks. Not all lessons should be co-taught or team-taught. There is a strong argument for the importance of a core classroom with a core teacher to build a sense of belonging and connection. However, many schools are discovering that freeing primary teachers up to take ownership of a particular subject has many benefits for the students in their care.

Co-teaching or Team-teaching?

The differences, pros and cons.

Team teaching is where one teacher teaches a subject and classes rotate to that teacher for that specific subject. Essentially this is the common secondary school model, however in the primary context, each teacher plans, presents and assesses their subject area in consultation with each other.

Example: In Year 6, there are two classes. Miss Corden teaches 6C and Mr Wilkinson teaches 6W. On Tuesday afternoons, the classes rotate. In the first lesson Miss Corden teaches Information Technology to 6C and Mr Wilkinson teaches Visual Arts to 6W. In the second lesson the classes swap and Miss Corden teaches the Information Technology lesson to 6W while Mr Wilkinson teaches the Visual Arts lesson to 6C.

Co-teaching is when two or more teachers are present in the classroom and they work together through the teaching process: planning, teaching, monitoring and assessing. One teacher will take charge of the programming. That teacher leads the lessons while the other teachers may withdraw a small group to focus on a specific task or roam the classroom to offer support to the main group.

Example: In Year 2 there are three classes. The teachers are Mr Smith, Mrs White and Mr Jones. Each morning the three classes join together for Spelling lessons. Mrs White is the lead teacher for Spelling and has discussed with her colleagues the needs of the classes. Mr Smith has one child who is accelerated to a Year 4 word list and Mr Jones has two children who are also accelerated. All classes have a number of students who need additional support in managing Year 2 level spelling words. While Mrs White leads the lesson, Mr Jones sits with a group of accelerated learners and guides them through extension tasks. At the same time, Mr Smith works with a 'campfire' of students requiring extra support as they complete Mrs White's lesson.



IMAGE SOURCES: Anna Samoylova (Unsplash), Maksim Chernyshev, Vanessa Brown (Scopio)

Benefits of team teaching are based in the fact that we know that students do not all learn at the same rate or indeed in the same way. Having a diversity in teaching styles benefits the diversity of learners. Educators with different areas of expertise are invaluable to the students' learning. In addition, the focus on one subject area creates a reduction in the preparation workload which frees up the teacher to be available for the children in other aspects of school life (marking, feedback, parent liaison, etc).

Disadvantages lie in the logistics of collaborative teaching. All team members must be willing to share their skills and resources as well as learn from their colleagues. It is a close and dynamic relationship that can be challenging for some. It's also possible that the larger teaching environment is disconcerting to some students who prefer the more intimate classroom. This can be aided by establishing strong classroom management practises and personal seating allocation that is consistent each lesson.

Resources to explore further

Academic Articles

Anderson, R. S. and Speck, B. W. (1998) "Oh what a difference a team makes": Why team teaching makes a difference. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 14, Issue 7, Pages 671-686

Buckley, F. (2000). *Team teaching: What, why, and how?* SAGE Publications Ltd: Thousand Oaks, CA

Davis, S. R., Poole, W. and May, L. G. (2021) Two Teachers, One Classroom: The Challenges and Rewards of Team-Teaching. Faculty of Education Curriculum and Leadership,

Little, A., Hoel, A. (2011) Interdisciplinary Team Teaching: An Effective Method to Transform Student Attitudes *Journal of Effective Teaching*, v11 n1 p36-44 2011

Australian Organisations

Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) - www.aitsl.edu.au

'Quality teaching and leadership is at the heart of our work. For over a decade, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers have supported teachers to reflect on their practice and develop and grow their expertise.'

Federation University Australia - www.federation.edu.au

'At Federation University, the desire to transform lives and enhance communities informs everything we do. From research that improves people's lives right around the world, to supporting our students to succeed at their studies and in life – we make a difference.'

Institute of Teachers Aide Courses (ITAC) - www.itac.edu.au

'ITAC is the pre-eminent and leading provider of nationally recognised teacher aide courses in Australia. ITAC is a specialist provider delivering research-based, best practice skills.'

Stronger Smarter Institute - www.strongersmarter.com.au

'Working in teaching teams 'to create transformative change in Indigenous educational outcomes.'

International Organisations

Co-Teaching Connection - <http://www.marilynfriend.com/>

'Professor Emerita Marilyn Friend PhD (University of North Carolina) has written teaching materials for teachers and administrators; more than 50 articles about collaboration, inclusive practices, and co-teaching; and a highly popular video series on co-teaching and other inclusive practices.'

Structural Learning - www.structural-learning.com

'We enable educators to get the best out of their pupils by developing resources that enable children to think their way through the curriculum.'

NOTE: To access these resources as hyperlinks, download this document from our website.

These articles are meant to be a guide and not prescriptive. Each individual's personality, experience and context will make every situation different. We hope this has been helpful for yours.

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