

# The Role of Students as Co-Teachers

# 9

## Topics Included in This Chapter:

- ❖ Vignettes: Students in co-teaching roles
- ❖ Analyzing the cooperative process in the student co-teaching vignettes
- ❖ Preparing students to be co-teachers
- ❖ The research base for students as co-teachers
- ❖ Assessing students as co-teachers
- ❖ Frequently asked questions

**R**ecently, we observed a classroom of fourth and fifth graders who were actually co-teaching! In this chapter, we begin by defining *teaching* so that it is feasible to consider students as co-teachers. We briefly explain methods that allow students to become co-teachers, and through a variety of vignettes, we show the student co-teachers in action. We offer essential questions that must be answered when developing a peer-tutoring or adult–student co-teaching program. We summarize the emerging research base on students as co-teachers (including the barriers and disadvantages to students as co-teachers), provide a method for student co-teachers to be assessed, and pose and answer frequently asked questions to address the major barriers to implementing students as co-teachers. Readers interested in more information about collaborating with students as instructors and decision makers are referred to the Villa, Thousand, and Nevin 2010 text, *Collaborating With Students in Instruction and Decision Making: The Untapped Resource*.

What is teaching? We believe that to tap the vast resources the student body offers, we should use the broadest possible answers to this question. If you consult any dictionary, you will find a plethora of

meanings that the English language attributes to the word *teaching*. For example, to teach is to impart knowledge or skills. To teach is to give instruction. To teach is to cause to learn by experience or example. To teach is to advocate or preach. On the other hand, to instruct or to tutor or to train to educate implies methodological knowledge in addition to content knowledge. Students can and should become co-teachers. They effectively collaborate in school activities such as serving on school committees, being advocates for classmates and themselves, planning and evaluating instruction from their teachers, providing assistance in making friends, developing accommodations, leading their own person-centered meetings, and serving as tutors and co-teachers (Villa, Thousand, and Nevin 2010). In fact, children and youth who learn and practice being student co-teachers are more likely to grow into adults who are more effective advocates for themselves. They are likely to become more effective members of work teams, their families, and their communities. In other words, when students are co-teachers, they can embody all the verbs that are associated with the word *teaching*. They can tutor, instruct, impart knowledge, assess progress, demonstrate examples, act out the procedures as a model, and so on. In Chapter 2, we emphasized the reasons co-teaching is important in 21st-century schools. We want to emphasize here our most important reason for co-teaching: It allows students to experience and imitate the cooperative and collaborative skills that teachers show when they co-teach. All students benefit when their teachers share ideas, work cooperatively, and contribute to one another's learning. This often results in students becoming co-teachers themselves, as the following vignettes illustrate.

## ■ VIGNETTES: STUDENTS IN CO-TEACHING ROLES

Just as there are many faces of adult co-teachers, there are many ways for students to be co-teachers. Table 9.1 provides an overview of the roles and methods used by the student co-teacher teams described in this chapter.

**Table 9.1** The Many Faces of Students as Co-Teachers

Meet the Student Partners	Adult Co-Teacher Partner(s)	Curriculum Areas	Co-Teaching Approach
Bill, high school senior, attending college-level classes in math during junior and senior years	Sharon, a high school math teacher	Sharon, high school mathematics teacher, supports Bill in acquiring deeper understanding of mathematics, assisting fellow students, and exploring teaching as a career	Supportive for the first 3 weeks, complementary for the next few weeks, team for the remaining time
Christine, a high school student with special needs Cat, a high school student who wanted to develop her teaching skills		Cat tutors Christine in the content of 11th-grade health class so that Christine learned to teach a unit on personal safety to a third-grade class	Supportive and complementary
Dave and Juan, reciprocal co-teachers	Elaine, a third-grade classroom teacher, and Laurie, a special educator	Elaine and Laurie teach reciprocal teaching to all students and structured a learning contract for Dave and Juan to be more successful in mathematics (acquisition of facts)	Complementary (each served as teacher and learner)
Denny, a fifth-grade student with gifts and talents who has difficulty with interpersonal skills	Cathy, a fifth-grade mathematics teacher, and Shamonique, a gifted and talented teacher	Cathy and Shamonique teach <i>friendly disagreeing</i> skills and math problem solving with an emphasis on explaining the reasoning processes	Parallel (for acquiring the friendly disagreeing skills) and supportive (for applying the friendly disagreeing skills)
Co-teaching students	Ms. Marquez, teacher of 25 ethnically and linguistically diverse first, second, and third graders	Ms. Marquez teaches students to teach each other the computer and other educational technology skills that they know	Complementary

### **Meet Bill and Sharon**

During his senior year in high school, Bill experienced a unique partnership with his mathematics teacher that evolved from supportive to parallel to complementary co-teaching and culminated in team teaching.

"It is pretty neat when you can help out students who are having trouble learning, challenge someone like me at the same time, and it doesn't cost the school district a dime." Bill made this statement after he had exhausted his school's mathematics curriculum by his sophomore year and attended university mathematics courses in his junior and senior years. In his senior year, he arranged an independent study in mathematics that included team teaching with Sharon, who taught the high school's most advanced math class. Bill wanted to refine his instructional skills even though he also tutored many students in mathematics after school.

During the first week of the team-teaching arrangement, Bill observed Sharon. At the end of the second week, he began teaching the last 10 minutes of the class; he was responsible for introducing the math concept or operation that would be addressed in the next day's lesson. Sharon and Bill met daily to review and approve Bill's instructional plan for the minilessons. After a month, Bill taught his first full-length class and continued for the rest of the semester. When he was not instructing the group as a whole, he worked individually with students who had missed class or who had difficulty with a concept. He continued to observe Sharon's methods and conferred with her on a daily basis to receive feedback on his own teaching. Bill also asked for feedback from the students. He was available to help after school, and some students even called him at home for help. One student in the class commented, "Bill is easier to understand compared with the other teacher, and he uses better examples."

Bill's inclusion in the mathematics teaching team had other positive effects. He reported that he was advancing his math education and learning about people at the same time. He also noted that his self-confidence had improved. Having been a student in the same class only 2 years earlier, he empathized with the students' struggles with the material. He believed that the students recognized and appreciated this empathy. Sharon was impressed with the professional and serious manner with which Bill conducted himself, the students' positive responses to his presence as her co-teacher, and his progress in using effective instructional strategies.

### **Meet Christine and Cat**

When Christine made a presentation before 200 parents, teachers, and administrators at her high school graduation, she stumbled slightly. The stumble came as she read something she had written 3 years earlier for a school newspaper article. She decided on the spot to make a modification. "I have... nothing... and I'm not handicapped," the 19-year-old proclaimed, and she immediately received a well-earned round of applause.

The applause came because the audience could see the newspaper article projected on the screen at the front of the room. In the article that she wrote as part of a journalism class she and her tutor had been taking, Christine explained, "I have Down syndrome, but I'm not handicapped." The modification represented Christine's anger at the labels placed on her and her refusal to accept the limitations that some labels imply.

Throughout her high school career, Christine enjoyed several types of peer support that made her full inclusion in a public high school possible. The peer support

helped Christine enjoy meaningful relationships with those who became her tutors, tutees, friends, advocates, and recipients of her advocacy. During her freshman year, the peer support came in the form of the cheerleading squad, of which Christine was the student manager. During her sophomore year, Christine participated in a journalism class responsible for the production of a weekly school newspaper. Because it took her nearly five times longer to complete class assignments, her teachers sought a full-time partner for her. Cat, a fellow student journalist who had a study hall during the same period as Christine, volunteered. The two worked together twice a week during class and every day in the computer lab during study hall to produce "Christine's Corner," a column featuring the unique accomplishments of various students in the school.

During her junior year, Christine and Cat enrolled as second-year journalism students, resuming their partnership. Cat arranged to receive credit as a peer tutor for Christine. She planned, implemented, and evaluated daily lessons designed to assist Christine in completing health, journalism, and history assignments. She met weekly with her supervisor (a special educator who coordinated Christine's educational services), kept a journal, and learned Madeline Hunter's model of effective teaching (M. Hunter 1988, 1994; R. Hunter and Hunter 2006). With Christine as her tutee, Cat embarked on what developed into her future career as a teacher. Cat reported in her journal, "Not many kids my age get to sample the job that they hope to have five or six years down the road. Thanks to Christine, I get to do that. My transcript and portfolio will show that I've chosen this as an individualized course of study, and that should help me to get into the college I want."

Christine appreciated Cat's support. She explained, "It's boring having my teachers all day. I like having Cat as my tutor because we're friends and she is fun." Cat also participated with Christine in meetings with teachers, advocates, and administrators to plan for a smooth transition from high school to adult life. Christine noted, "I get scared. I don't know all those people, and sometimes I cry. That's why Cat helps me. She tells me it's okay, and she will stick up for me. After those meetings, we go to McDonald's and talk it over."

As much as Christine enjoyed the tutor-tutee relationship with Cat, she also wanted to reverse that arrangement so that she, too, was in the helping role. Christine did not have the content knowledge to assist Cat in all of her academic courses, so other opportunities were explored. What resulted was a weekly health lesson that Christine team taught with a third-grade teacher. Christine applied the knowledge she was acquiring in her 11th-grade health course to the personal safety unit offered to the third graders. Christine then evaluated her own performance by summarizing the lessons and the outcomes to Cat, who planned to be an elementary teacher. "I learned from Christine what worked and didn't work for little kids," Cat relayed. "By sharing her experiences with me, she helped me see that younger students have shorter attention spans. I'll remember that someday when I have a class of my own."

The coordinator for Christine's high school services wrote, "I feel extremely fortunate... Christine, in my opinion, is a remarkable woman who has freely shared her thoughts and feelings with others. In return, she has been the recipient of support, respect, and unabashed admiration from some of the most unsuspecting and extraordinary adolescents I have known. She and her friends have taught me that camaraderie and common sense are far more useful than a master's degree and that some of the best educational resources come free of charge" (as reported by Harris 1994, 300).

Christine and Cat not only experienced the unique feeling that comes from helping; Christine developed a new co-teaching relationship with the third-grade teacher, which served as a key performance demonstration of her Individual Education Plan (IEP) speech and behavioral goals. Christine made an extra effort to improve her articulation and to model appropriate behavior for the third graders she taught each week. Her skills in the academic classes she was taking improved steadily as she learned to translate into her own words what she was learning. Cat, similarly, experienced the benefits of practicing her own career goals in meaningful and realistic ways.

### **Meet Dave and Juan**

All the students in Elaine and Laurie's third-grade classroom learned how to be reciprocal co-teachers for acquisition of math facts. Each student co-teacher practiced sequential co-teaching steps using auditory, verbal, and written directions to match different learning styles. Elaine, the classroom teacher, and Laurie, a special educator, scheduled at least one opportunity per day for the student co-teachers to practice—approximately 10 minutes to allow for each partner to play the role of teacher and then switch to the role of learner. The students focused on six math facts per session (four known and two unknown or as yet not mastered), practicing with activities that matched various learning styles (e.g., auditory, visual, kinesthetic) until mastery occurred.

They noticed that Dave and Juan were two student co-teachers who frequently used derogatory put-down statements and failed to use praise, feedback, or other appropriate social skills they had learned during training. They also fought over the materials. Their progress in acquiring math facts as well as their written feedback, however, indicated that they perceived the sessions to be going well. When Elaine interviewed them about these concerns, Dave and Juan each accused the other. As reported by LaPlant and Zane (2002), Laurie provided additional social skills training, and both Laurie and Elaine demonstrated the social skills and supervised the tutoring sessions frequently. Dave and Juan developed more skills in making positive statements and sustaining positive interactions with one another. Elaine and Laurie then added two items to Dave and Juan's data-collection procedures: saying nice things and saying "thank you." Both Dave and Juan also kept a graph to give them a visual representation of their performance. Finally, Elaine and Laurie set up a contract whereby Dave and Juan collected jointly accrued points based on the number of times they both made positive statements. The points could be traded later for activities they both enjoyed (e.g., learning games, lunch with the supervisor). Not only were they learning more math facts, they treated each other with more respect, became friends, and eagerly volunteered to serve as co-teachers with other classmates.

### **Meet Denny, Cathy, and Shamonique**

Denny (a pseudonym), a fifth-grade student who was gifted and talented and had challenging interpersonal behaviors, was in Cathy and Shamonique's classroom with 24 peers (Conn-Powers 2002). He often insisted that his ideas were the only correct ones and ridiculed his classmates. During a social studies lesson that required debate skills, Shamonique, the gifted and talented education co-teacher, taught the students a new skill—encouraging others by asking them, in a friendly way, to share their ideas for solutions—to use when they worked in groups. In this

cooperative lesson, students were expected to use the skill at least twice during a 40-minute problem-solving session taught by Cathy, the fifth-grade mathematics co-teacher. In their groups, students were expected to solve an equation, explain their reasoning, apply computational skills, and use friendly disagreeing skills they had learned during social studies. Each group kept track of its friendly disagreeing skills by tallying members' use of the five ways to disagree. They referred to the posters that they had created in a previous lesson, which prominently displayed the five ways to disagree (see Table 9.2).

**Table 9.2** Examples of Friendly Disagreeing Skills

Friendly Disagreeing Skills	What Words Might You Say?	What Might You See and Hear?
Ask for different opinions	Why do you think that is best? What is your answer?	Lean in, friendly face, mild tone of voice
Ask others to explain why	Will you show me how that works? Will you help me see how to solve the problem?	Lean in, friendly face, quizzical tone of voice
Add on or modify	Could we expand on your answer? How about if we added . . . ? Is it OK to change . . . ?	Lean in, friendly face, questioning tone of voice
Offer alternatives	Wouldn't this work too? What do you think about . . . ?	Lean in, friendly face, mild tone of voice
State disagreement	I have a different idea. Can I show you how my answer is different?	Lean in, friendly face, excited tone of voice

In addition, each group recorded its problem-solving strategies on the poster paper. The lesson overall was quite successful. All six groups met the criteria. Denny participated for the entire lesson, and his team members praised him for encouraging them to disagree with him. The impact of this positive peer pressure was powerful. While Denny played tetherball with another group from his class at recess, Shamonique overheard him use one of the friendly disagreeing skills, the alternative-idea method: "What do you think about this way to hit the ball?"

### **Meet Student Co-Teachers for Computer Use**

Ms. Marquez, a classroom teacher in an ethnically and culturally diverse elementary magnet school for computing and technology, was considered an outstanding teacher. Her class consisted of 25 first, second, and third graders: 15 Anglo children, 8 Mexican Americans, 1 Chinese American, and 1 African American. The classroom

seating and the placement of computers were flexible and adaptable to students' needs and the specific learning activity.

Ms. Marquez noticed that the children used the computers individually, in pairs, in larger groups, or with the teacher depending on the task and the students' computer skills or preferences. She assigned each student to be a study buddy with another student and reminded them that sharing and helping were expected. Study buddies were taught specific social skills for cooperation (e.g., sharing ideas, explaining answers) and were expected to produce an academic product from either a teacher-selected assignment or a student-selected assignment.

Learning styles and cultural differences were easily accommodated because Ms. Marquez selected software with animated graphics, sound output, sound input, or visual text to meet the auditory or visual learning styles of many children. In addition, the keyboard and mouse required kinesthetic learning (for more on effective instructional practices for students who are learning English, see Gersten and Baker 2000).

When it came to grouping students, Ms. Marquez reflected on Chisholm's (1995) research, which highlights the fact that gender is the only factor that appears when children are able to select their working groups: "Cross-gender groups at the computer were essentially non-existent" (p. 170). Consequently, Ms. Marquez ensured cross-gender groupings by assigning male and female students to work together on certain assignments. Later, one child explained that she worked with everybody (meaning both boys and girls), thus showcasing the egalitarian nature of the classroom.

## ■ ANALYZING THE COOPERATIVE PROCESS IN THE STUDENT CO-TEACHING VIGNETTES

These examples of student co-teachers illustrate the five elements of the cooperative process—face-to-face interaction, positive interdependence, interpersonal skills, monitoring, and accountability. We emphasize again that when these elements are present in a co-teaching partnership, in this case a student co-teaching partnership, the quality of the relationship often is more creative and yields better outcomes. The face-to-face interactions included student co-teachers in one-to-one tutorials (e.g., Dave and Juan, Christine and Cat during journalism class), small-group instruction (Ms. Marquez's students co-teaching each other computer skills, Denny and his classmates co-teaching their reasoning for math problem solving and keeping track of friendly disagreeing skills), and large-group instruction (Bill and Sharon co-teaching the math class). Positive interdependence varied according to the age and grade level of the student co-teachers (e.g., goal interdependence for Bill and Christine, reward interdependence for Dave and Juan). Social skills also varied according to the ages and needs of the student co-teachers (e.g., Christine improved her articulation so that the third graders could understand her; Denny learned to disagree in a friendly way that even helped him with a playground event). Methods to monitor and be accountable for progress included Dave and Juan's self-recorded graphs and the frequent feedback sessions between Bill and Sharon.



## PREPARING STUDENTS TO BE CO-TEACHERS

In this section, we describe the vital role that adults play in creating successful student co-teachers. We describe several instructional methods that support students to serve in co-teaching roles: cooperative learning, peer tutoring, dialogue teaching, and instructional conversation.

The vignettes show that adult co-teachers play a vital role in creating successful student co-teachers. For example, Bill needed the agreement of Sharon, the math teacher, to become her co-teacher. Christine and Cat exchanged teacher and learner roles during the debriefing session for Christine's teaching of the safety unit for third grade. In this way, Cat could hear how differently third graders learn compared with Christine's learning needs. Elaine and Laurie explicitly taught reciprocal peer tutoring skills to their third graders and provided additional supports for Dave and Juan. Denny's co-teachers, Cathy and Shamonique, arranged for all the fifth graders to learn how to disagree in a friendly way.

Students are more likely to become effective co-teachers when their co-teachers explicitly teach how to tutor or work as study buddies. Co-teachers with successful student co-teachers also make sure that student co-teachers enjoy the reciprocity involved in being both teacher and learner. Co-teachers create more opportunities for students to practice co-teaching skills when they set up *cooperative group learning* so that all members of the group can practice the communication skills involved in teaching others what they know. Denny's co-teachers used cooperative group learning with an emphasis on teaching the social skill of friendly disagreeing. Dave and Juan's co-teachers used structured peer tutoring to help students with emotional challenges become kinder and more effective partner learners. Ms. Marquez was a co-teacher with her students to ensure improved computer skills for all the children. Bill and Christine benefited from having their co-teachers (Sharon and Cat) work with them as coaches in developing teaching skills.

Co-teachers who rely on cooperative group learning make sure that students are responsible not only for their own learning but also for the learning of the other members of their group. They are responsible for showing certain social behaviors with their peers. The co-teacher's role shifts from that of a presenter of information to a facilitator of learning. There are five major tasks in a cooperative lesson: (1) clearly specifying the objectives, (2) making decisions about placing students in learning groups to ensure heterogeneity, (3) clearly explaining what learning activities are expected of the students and how they will demonstrate positive interdependence, (4) monitoring the cooperative interactions and intervening to provide task assistance (e.g., answer questions, teach task-related skills) or to increase students' interpersonal and group skills, and (5) evaluating student achievement and group effectiveness (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec 1998).

There are several other instructional methods that encourage and prepare students to be co-teachers. *Dialogue teaching* may be the perfect method for those who have been silenced (e.g., students of color, those

at risk, second-language learners, students with disabilities). Dialogue teaching means that students help to generate the curriculum, design their own instructional methods, and report their progress within a framework of consciousness-raising group dynamics (Kluth et al. 2002). Dialogue teaching also involves changing the pace of classroom speaking to allow more time to think before responding, valuing different types of contributions (e.g., laughter, gestures, typed words on a communication board), and making sure topics are important to the students (e.g., issues related to race, gender, class, ability). Co-teachers who practice dialogue teaching develop skills in listening to and differentially responding to their students' linguistic habits and verbal styles, especially for the students who are learning English as a second language or the students who are nonverbal. Student co-teachers who practice dialogue teaching can acquire powerful new awareness of their strengths and contributions.

Achievement increases when learners receive appropriate scaffolding of content instruction to help them learn English (Echevarria and Graves 1998; Graves, Gersten, and Haager 2004). Achievement also improves when teachers provide interactive and direct approaches to instruction for oral language, literacy, and academic content (Thomas and Collier 2001). Other effective techniques include guided practice, active learning, opportunities for frequent conversation in English, instructional presentations with multiple media, and curriculum modifications.

*Instructional conversation* (Garcia 2002, 2005), also referred to as the *discourse of sheltered instruction* (Echevarria and Graves 1998), is a particularly compelling teaching-learning process to use when the student co-teachers are also students who are learning English and are fluent in other languages. Student co-teachers who use instructional conversation learn how to encourage talking. They, as well as their partners in the co-teaching relationship, practice the give-and-take that is a hallmark of authentic conversation. This is different from the typical one-way teacher-to-student talk that often dominates classrooms, in which the teacher asks questions and the student answers. Instead, the co-teacher who uses instructional conversation accepts responses in either language (e.g., Spanish or English) and, in a response, models the English phraseology through restatements and furthering comments to discover more about what the speaker knows. The co-teacher who uses instructional conversation also ignores inappropriate responses or inaccurate usage, such as incomplete utterances to convey meaning, rather than providing immediate correction as is the usual method in traditional instruction. Instead, the co-teacher models appropriate constructive social interaction by continuing the conversation while modeling the correct usage. Co-teachers who practice instructional conversation often add a visual component by writing the words and sentence structures on a chalkboard or chart paper (an especially helpful technique for the specialized vocabulary that often appears in science and math subjects).

A common characteristic of these teaching and learning activities is that they encourage students in the co-teacher role. The outcome is that students receive the benefits of a more active role in communicating their understanding of the academic content. This, in turn, leads to increased retention and achievement.

The authors are familiar with numerous schools that have started formal peer tutoring and co-teaching programs (Villa et al., 2010). Peer tutors

can tutor in a single classroom, across grades, or even across schools (e.g., middle-level learners tutoring in an elementary school). In our experience, the establishment of adult and student co-teaching teams primarily occurs at the high school level, but we have seen examples of high school-aged students co-teaching with adults in middle and elementary schools. High schools in California, Colorado, and Pennsylvania, with which the authors have assisted in the development of a co-teaching program, have had as few as 18 and as many as 50 high school juniors and seniors earning an elective credit by serving as members of adult and student co-teaching teams. Whether a school is interested in establishing a peer tutoring or a co-teaching program, there are at least six essential areas in which many questions are posed that must be answered when developing a formalized program (Villa et al. 2010). The essential questions are presented in Table 9.3.

**Table 9.3** Essential Questions to Answer When Establishing Peer Tutor or Co-Teaching Programs

I. Identification	Who will participate?
II. Recruitment	What are the potential sources of tutors or co-teachers?
	How will potential participants and their families be informed?
	Who has received or who needs training in teaching skills?
III. Training	Who will conduct the training?
	Where will the training occur?
	What will be taught in each session?
	What materials are needed for teaching and how will the instructor use them?
	How will the peer tutor or co-teacher evaluate the quality and effectiveness of his or her own technical and interpersonal behavior?
IV. Delivery and Supervision	When, how often, and where will the instructional sessions occur?
	Who is responsible for supervision?
	How will you communicate with the classroom teacher, the special educator, and any others who are concerned with the tutor and/or co-teachers learners' performance?
V. Evaluation	How will you measure the students' progress?
	- tutor
	- tutee
	- co-teacher
VI. Reinforcement and Recognition	How will you provide recognition for partner learner/peer tutoring and co-teacher participation?

## ■ THE RESEARCH BASE FOR STUDENTS AS CO-TEACHERS

In this section, we summarize recent research in several areas: peer tutoring, partner learning, students in coaching roles in cooperative groups, and student-led conferences. Several theoretical frameworks undergird the research and practice base for students as co-teachers. For example, cognitive psychologists have verified that *reciprocal teaching* (see Palinscar and Brown 1984) is effective in significantly raising and maintaining the reading comprehension scores of poor readers. In a reciprocal teaching exchange, students alternate being the teacher who coaches the comprehension skills being practiced, similar to the way that Dave and Juan interacted to learn their math facts. Another theoretical framework that explains the success of students as co-teachers is *social learning theory* (Johnson and Johnson 1989, 2005). When students work as co-teachers, they form an interdependent relationship that allows them to learn from each other as they teach.

First, there is a strong body of research about the benefits of peer tutoring. Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, and Martinez (2002) and Fuchs, Fuchs, Thompson, and colleagues (2000), for example, show that peer tutoring helps teachers individualize learning materials to address a broader range of instructional needs. Students at risk for school failure in urban multicultural and disadvantaged neighborhoods also have increased their reading skills when the whole class engaged in peer tutoring (Kourea, Cartledge, and Musti-Rao 2007). When students co-teach in a peer-tutoring system, there are more opportunities to respond to and practice academic content than in more conventional teacher-directed lessons. There is also evidence that peer tutoring facilitates positive changes in students' social behaviors and school adjustment (Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes et al. 2002). Moreover, Faltis (1993) and Walter (1998) cite peer tutoring and cooperative group learning as methods that are especially beneficial for students who are learning English.

Similarly, a rich research base documents the benefits of students as co-teachers within cooperative group-learning formats, especially for building relationships among diverse populations. Johnson and Johnson (1989, 2000, 2002, 2005) summarize the impact of cooperative learning on the processes of acceptance and rejection. When students experience cooperative group learning (i.e., positive interdependence, positive interpersonal social interactions, systematic feedback on their academic and social skills progress), they show more frequent and open communication, deeper understanding of other perspectives, more clearly differentiated views of each other, improved self-esteem, more successful achievement and productivity, and increased willingness to interact with others who are different from them. When students work in co-teaching roles, they experience elements similar to cooperative group learning. For example, positive interdependence occurs through shared goals and division of labor, student co-teachers must show

good interpersonal and communication skills in the teacher role, and they both assess how their teaching is affecting their learners and receive feedback about their performance from the educator working with them in the co-teacher role.

In addition, there is a nascent body of literature that should encourage educators to continue exploring how best to achieve the student co-teacher role. For example, when students took on the role of reporting their own progress at family-teacher conferences, Countryman and Schroeder (1996) found that the positive evaluation data from students, parents, and teachers resulted in the decision to continue the practice for future conferences. Teachers at a middle school included their students as co-presenters when holding family-teacher conferences. The students led the meetings by introducing their family members to the teacher, showing their parents or family members selected examples of their work, explaining the progress they had made, and outlining the goals for the next marking period. Evaluation comments focused on the students' honesty in reporting their progress, increased student empowerment to be responsible for their own educational programs, and improved school-community relationships because of the more personal format.

## ASSESSING STUDENTS AS CO-TEACHERS ■

One way to assess students as they develop their co-teaching skills is to encourage them to self-evaluate by using the checklist shown in Table 9.4. Individually, each student co-teacher can use the checklist and then compare with his or her student co-teachers the Yes versus Not Yet assessments. This allows team members to have a starting point for discussing the strengths of the student co-teacher partnership thus far and target areas for improvement.

Student co-teachers can also complete the checklist jointly. Rather than coming to consensus on an item, we suggest that the team use a different approach to self-rating. We suggest that, for a team to give an item a *yes* rating, every member must definitively agree that a *yes* is appropriate. If any one team member is not sure about a *yes* rating, the response must remain *not yet*. This reduces the temptation to pressure the person with a differing perception to give in for the sake of consensus and, instead, encourages a real dialogue about the differing perspectives, perceptions, and experiences of members of a co-teaching team.

Others who are not on the team but who are requested to respond or who have a responsibility to observe the student co-teachers can use the checklist to provide constructive feedback (in much the same way that Laurie and Elaine did for Dave and Juan). We encourage student co-teachers to revisit the list frequently, talk about the items, and select some items to focus on for improvement. This is how independent, self-regulated learning develops!

**Table 9.4** Checklist: Are You Really a Student Co-Teacher?

Directions: If you wonder whether your students are co-teachers, ask your students to check *Yes* or *Not Yet* to each of the following statements. Then add the number to discover their current Student Co-Teacher Score.

<i>We know we are student co-teachers when we...</i>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Not Yet</b>
1. Explain instructional goals or objectives of a lesson.	_____	_____
2. Apply a scoring guide (rubric) to grade work produced.	_____	_____
3. Detect mistakes or misunderstandings.	_____	_____
4. Provide instructional feedback to correct mistakes without giving away the answers.	_____	_____
5. Celebrate the successes of our students.	_____	_____
6. Communicate with other co-teachers to plan, teach, and evaluate lessons.	_____	_____
7. Discuss concerns or disagreements freely with co-teaching partners.	_____	_____
8. Use a problem-solving method when faced with conflicts.	_____	_____
9. Ask for help when necessary.	_____	_____
10. Add item of interest to your own situation: _____.	_____	_____
<b>Total</b>		

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. Isn't it true that students are not developmentally mature enough to be capable of co-teaching? After all, it takes 4 years of college for teachers to learn the profession.**

Yes, it is true that certification of teachers requires at least a 4-year college degree, methods classes, and understanding of learning and assessment techniques. However, we suggest that the goal is not to have students perform at the same level of proficiency as certified teachers. The most important strategy for overcoming the belief that students are not developmentally mature enough to serve as co-teachers is for the teacher to explicitly model and implement those strategies that facilitate students in partner-learning roles. School personnel must ensure that student co-teachers are trained, monitored, and provided with ongoing coaching and support. Moreover, school personnel can select instructional methods that set the context for students to practice co-teaching roles, such as cooperative group learning, peer tutoring, and dialogue teaching (as described earlier).

**2. How can teachers justify taking time away from teaching the curriculum and helping students meet the standards for graduation to teach instructional methods to student co-teachers?**

We agree that a major disadvantage of the use of student co-teachers is that it seems there isn't enough time in the school day to provide for all the required subjects. Conscientious teachers often worry that the time required to prepare students adequately to serve as co-teachers is time that could be better spent on teaching the curriculum. The structure of the typical school day requires that teachers guarantee that a specified number of minutes be used to teach mandated subjects. It could be argued that the time required to prepare students as co-teachers is time well spent; when students are trained as co-teachers, there is more one-on-one time available to meet the unique learning needs of more students.

In addition, we know some school districts require students to engage in service-learning activities as part of graduation requirements. Co-teaching roles can fulfill the spirit of service learning.

In fact, celebrating students as co-teachers can be perceived as the penultimate goal for teachers who practice co-teaching. Whether they use supportive, parallel, complementary, or team-teaching approaches, co-teachers model collaboration and communication for their students. Co-teaching teams can set the expectation among their students, other educators, and specialists that students will be members not only of student governance but also of peer support teams; learning teams; teams to plan Individual Education Programs; and teams to plan transitions from elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, or high school to life after school. Student co-teachers themselves become the most effective voices for showing and telling about the results. Creating a variety of methods for students to share their successes, trials, tribulations, and unexpected positive outcomes of being co-teachers is a powerful way to overcome barriers and disadvantages.