



# With the right strategies, coaches can leverage co-teaching

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**F**or teachers and coaches, co-teaching can be exciting, rewarding, and full of powerful learning. It offers teachers supported experiences to apply new knowledge in their own contexts, exemplifying

active engagement in job-embedded professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

However, co-teaching is often underused in coaching (Sweeney & Harris, 2016), in part because sharing teaching responsibilities during a

lesson can be complex and challenging. Co-teaching requires the coach and teacher to make continuous, intentional decisions about how and when to take the lead. This kind of decision-making requires strong communication between the teacher and the coach, clarity about

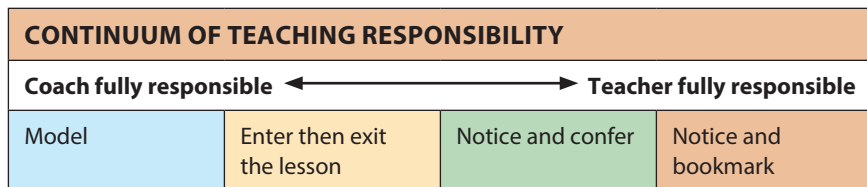
a teacher’s learning goals, and a deep understanding of possible co-teaching strategies.

As part of a project to help mathematics coaches facilitate content-focused coaching cycles, funded by the National Science Foundation (#2006263), we developed a deepened appreciation for the challenges and complexities of co-teaching. We noticed that existing coaching literature offered tips for co-teaching but lacked a comprehensive framework outlining a full range of possible co-teaching strategies.

To fill this gap and support the learning of the coaches in our project, we developed our own framework, calling it the continuum of teaching responsibility. We share this framework here, along with examples of how to use it that are drawn from our coaching experience. We aim to equip practicing coaches with language to make sense of the complex decision-making processes required of co-teaching and support other educators tasked with designing and implementing professional learning experiences for coaches.

### CO-TEACHING IN A COACHING CYCLE

Learning Forward (2011) describes coaching as an effective form of ongoing, job-embedded professional learning for teachers. Most coaching models involve a three-part coaching cycle in which a coach and teacher collaboratively plan, implement, and reflect on one or more classroom lessons.



In our experience, a coach often acts as a lesson observer or helps students as a second teacher during the lesson. Given that a primary function of coaching is to help the teacher learn to use high-leverage instructional practices (West & Cameron, 2013), we believe a coach and teacher actively and collaboratively teaching together can better support the teacher’s learning.

We developed the continuum of teaching responsibility to help coaches make productive decisions when taking this active, yet more challenging co-teaching role during lesson implementation with a teacher. We describe intentional co-teaching strategies that range from the teacher having more responsibility for the act of teaching and facilitating lesson activities at one end to the coach having more responsibility at the other end, with strategies involving more equitably shared responsibility in the middle (see figure above).

Noncollaborative actions, such as the teacher and coach working with separate groups or individual students, do not fit our definition of co-teaching because such actions do not explicitly create collaborative learning opportunities for the teacher.

Here are the forms of co-teaching that appear on the continuum.

*Model* is a form of co-teaching in which the coach assumes the lead role in teaching the lesson. When modeling, the coach facilitates a portion of the lesson (e.g. launching a task) while the teacher focuses on the coach’s use of instructional strategies and the students’ responses and actions. The teacher records noteworthy events to discuss with the coach during the post-lesson reflective conversation.

In special cases, a coach may model an entire lesson, but a coach should most often model a single part of a lesson based on the instructional goals and learning needs of the teacher. Sweeney and Harris (2016) used the term “micro modeling” to emphasize the importance of a coach only modeling small portions of a lesson.

In a second form of co-teaching, *enter then exit the lesson*, the coach assumes teaching responsibility for brief moments (West & Cameron, 2013). To do so, the coach identifies critical moments in the lesson that can be leveraged to support teacher development and intentionally enters the lesson by taking responsibility for lesson implementation for a brief period of time. This is sometimes referred to as side-by-side coaching (West & Staub, 2003).

In the third form of co-teaching,

*notice and confer*, the teacher takes the primary teaching responsibility while the coach notices key moments of the lesson related to the student learning goals or the teacher's instructional goals (Sweeney & Harris, 2016; West & Cameron, 2013). In conferring moments, the coach and teacher pause their interactions with students to discuss possible actions based on what was noticed. Conferring with the teacher during the lesson also marks important moments to further discuss during the reflective conversation after the lesson.

The final form of co-teaching included in the continuum, *notice and bookmark*, also positions the teacher to assume the lead teaching role while the coach notices and records key lesson moments without talking with the teacher or students.

The coach then uses these “bookmarked” moments to catalyze discussion in the reflective conversation about the learning goals of the lesson or the instructional goals of the teacher (Sweeney & Harris, 2016; West & Cameron, 2013).

## HOW COACHES CAN USE THE CONTINUUM

The goal of the continuum is to help coaches select the right co-teaching strategy to meet teachers' needs. As teachers learn to use new practices, they must move from initial awareness, through basic levels of proficiency, toward high levels of proficiency if the practice is to become embedded (Knight, 2007).

The continuum of teaching responsibility helps coaches strategically select forms of co-teaching based on a teacher's current level of proficiency with a practice and scaffold their co-teaching support over time to help teachers sustain this proficiency without coaching support. The following examples illustrate when and how a coach might choose to use each strategy along the continuum.

The model strategy is effective for providing teachers with mental images

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of how a practice can be used with their students (Senger, 1999). For example, suppose a teacher participates in a professional learning course about facilitating whole-class summary discussions that productively synthesizes student thinking. She may learn some initial facilitation practices but lack the mental images of what these practices look like that are needed to transfer the broad pedagogical concept into her own practice.

Through modeling, the coach can provide the teacher with concrete images of what a summary discussion could look and sound like with the teacher's own students, as well as an opportunity to examine and reflect on the instructional practices used by the coach to facilitate this discussion.

The enter then exit the lesson form of co-teaching allows the coach to model high-leverage instructional practices during in-the-moment opportunities that arise during a lesson. It also allows the coach to publicly bookmark an important moment in the lesson so the moment stands out and can be prioritized during the reflecting conversation.

For example, if a teacher is facilitating a whole-class summary discussion and the coach notices many students are not listening to an important idea shared by a classmate, the coach may enter the lesson by asking the student to repeat their thinking and then asking for another student in the class to restate this idea (Chapin et al., 2013). After this brief exchange, the coach would exit the lesson and return the teaching responsibilities to the teacher.

This move would provide the teacher with a practical teaching strategy to increase student participation during class discussions

and highlight an important lesson moment to catalyze further reflection when the coach and teacher debrief.

Using notice and confer, the coach can demonstrate the act of noticing important, yet often subtle, events occurring within a busy classroom and help the teacher make connections between her instructional decisions and these student reactions and events. In doing so, notice and confer allows a coach to help a teacher move beyond simply doing the actions of an instructional practice to reach higher levels of proficiency in which the teacher makes intentional instructional decisions that are responsive to students.

For example, before a whole-class discussion summarizing the day's lesson, the coach and teacher might confer about the strategies they observed students using, which strategies to share with the whole class based on the learning goals, and what questions to ask that can help students make connections between the different strategies (Smith & Stein, 2018).

Notice and bookmark is best reserved for refining and fine-tuning practices a teacher is using proficiently. This strategy allows the coach to collect data that can be examined collaboratively during the reflection conversation. The act of using data during reflection supports the development of a teacher's reflective capacity as well as the refinement of the teaching practices.

For example, the teacher may be able to generate high levels of student participation by actively using the turn-and-talk discussion practice (Chapin et al., 2013). However, the teacher wants to ensure that these conversations are helping students think deeply about the content. To support the teacher in refining this practice, the coach can use the notice and bookmark co-teaching strategy to collect student quotes during conversations and later share them with the teacher to reflect on the impact of the practice and implications for the future.

Coaches can use any and all of the co-teaching strategies on the continuum to scaffold their support for teachers. Although a teacher's growth in using new practices is rarely linear, a coach can plan for an appropriate starting place on the continuum and gradually release the teaching responsibility to teachers over time by moving co-teaching activities to the right side of the continuum as proficiency increases. By doing so, the coach can ensure the teacher is learning in ways that allow the emerging proficiency to be sustained without explicit support.

### NURTURING PARTNERSHIPS

Building an authentic and emotionally safe partnership with the teacher is an important aspect of productive coaching, as many teachers feel vulnerable in coaching situations and may not be comfortable making their practice public to others (Marzano & Simms, 2013). The continuum of teaching responsibility can support coaches to build and strengthen such partnership when co-teaching in at least two ways.

First, coaches can choose co-teaching forms in the continuum of teaching responsibility based on the teacher's social and emotional needs, as well as their instructional proficiency. These social and emotional needs include the teacher's feelings about new instructional practices, comfort level with coaching, and perceptions about their own learning needs. By being mindful of these important needs, a coach can efficiently build and strengthen a relationship with a teacher when co-teaching.

For example, even though a teacher may benefit from a coach modeling an unfamiliar practice, she might be leery about others taking over teaching duties, especially if she has had negative or controlling experiences with coaching in the past. In such a case, a coach might choose to only notice and confer during their first coaching cycle. This decision would honor the emotional safety needs of the teacher

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and still allow the coach to provide critical support in the moment so the teacher does not feel alone when experimenting with a new practice.

The second way the continuum supports the development of such authentic and emotionally safe partnerships is by providing a coach and teacher with common language to collaboratively design, and therefore share ownership of, co-teaching activities. For example, using a shared understanding of notice and confer, the coach and teacher can anticipate important classroom events to notice and critical instructional decisions they might make together when conferring.

The continuum also allows the coach and teacher to create clear boundaries and signals to avoid surprises that can quickly compromise relationships. For example, when using modeling or exit and enter the lesson, the coach and teacher can decide how and when the coach will assume teaching responsibilities and when the teaching responsibilities will be returned to the teacher.

### LEARNING FOR COACHES AND TEACHERS

We designed the continuum of teaching responsibility to provide coaches and teachers with common language and a full range of possible strategies to share teaching responsibility when co-teaching. The continuum has been a useful and important tool for growing our own coaching practice as well as supporting other coaches learning to make sense of the complex decisions processes required of co-teaching. We encourage

others to use the continuum to ensure co-teaching is a safe, rewarding, and powerful learning experience for coaches and teachers.

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