



Transcript- Episode 66

The Relationship Behind the Roles: Co-Teaching that Clicks

Hi, everyone, and welcome to the Inclusion Podcast.

This is Episode 66, and it's about when opposites co-teach, and Kristie and I are going to be sharing lessons from teaching together. I think at the time that this episode is likely to air, Julie, if you can believe it, we will have been co-teaching for six years. And we co-teach every day in multiple places, in multiple states, all virtually, all the time.

Yeah. And so if you kind of think about that, it's a pretty complex task to co-teach when we're, I live in New York, Kristie lives in Ohio, and we might be co-teaching on a single day in California, Alaska, and Arizona.

Yeah, for sure.

And when Julie first introduced the episode, we are using ourselves because we are quite opposite from each other, but complimentary at the same time. And if you're like, oh, my co-teacher and I aren't opposites, this episode is still for you. We probably, Julie, I hadn't planned it, but we should probably explain what we mean by co-teachers.

You started to allude to it because we are not physically in the same space, but the download for this episode is like a ton of strategy. So a couple of quick things, Julie and Paula Kluth wrote a book about [30 days to the co-taught classroom](#), and they had several fun ways to get to know your co-teacher. So Julie and I took that premise or that idea, and we made 101 ways to really get to know your co-teacher better.

And that can be at the start of a relationship, that can be six years into a relationship, that could be your 20th year of working together. How do you maintain a really deep and strong relationship? And so you can get that download at inclusiveschooling.com/download66. We like to talk about our opposites because we feel like that's our strength, but let's just talk a little bit about co-teachers, Julie, and then we can dive in.

Yeah, so when we say co-teaching, we mean any time two adults are responsible for the education of a group of students at the same time. And so as you can tell, our co-teaching probably looks very different than yours, meaning yours is probably not virtual, yours is probably in real life. But it doesn't matter if you're an eighth grade special ed teacher and you happen to be in seven different classrooms a day, those are all co-teaching relationships.

And if you're an elementary teacher and you spend half the day in a third grade classroom and the rest of your day in a fourth and fifth grade classroom, those are still co-teaching relationships. It doesn't mean it has to be all day, every day. It just means any time two adult humans are responsible for the care and education of students in front of them.

And Julie, even though we use the word teacher, so you've kind of described the "co", doesn't mean how long, it doesn't matter where you are or whatever, like all day, part of the day. But we use the word teacher and then that confuses people because we say you could be in a preschool classroom and you have a teacher and a teaching assistant and they're co-teaching. Or you could be in a high school and it's choir and speech and language therapist consults with the choir teacher and that's co-teaching.

So even though we talk about the word teacher, we don't mean you have to be a licensed teacher to be co-teaching.

Okay. Yeah.

No, that's really important. So now you might be going, okay, yeah, I guess I am a co-teacher for some or part or all of my day. And if that's how you're feeling, we want to talk about this.

If that's how you identify, I guess, as a co-teacher in some way, we want to talk about what it's like when opposites co-teach and how to leverage essentially the things that you're different at in order to make your teaching even more effective. And so Julie, I thought it'd be fun because I don't know the answer to this and I had to really think about it. So it might be, but you're quick.

You'll get it fast. When do you think you first noticed how different we were? Our first conversation? Probably about 30 seconds in.

Yeah, for sure.

I was like, whoa, this person is very different from me in every way. So the first conversation we had was over the phone and it was, you were talking to me about a poem, if you recall. And I could tell, I asked you a question about leaving the university and your response was very different than what I would have expected or the response that I would have said.

Interesting. Because I was thinking, I recognize that like you challenged me or like I wasn't like you. This is different.

I was different from you, but I didn't think of us as different. Meaning you were really willing to be silly and I was petrified by being silly. But I didn't really acknowledge that as we're different.

It's just like, wow, I can't be that free. And it wasn't until we took [Time Genius](#) that I think, I know. How many years ago was that into our relationship? But that's when I really understood how deeply we saw the world differently.

Oh, wow. Yeah. And so Time Genius, just in case you're curious, was a Marie Forleo class that we took that we really examined how we think about and use time.

And I think that did make things a lot more clear for sure. But yeah, I saw us as different from the jump. I think that the next thing I wanted to talk a little bit is like, how do you find harmony? And we say, and I do believe wholeheartedly that we are better together and that we build upon each other's strengths.

But I also wouldn't say that it is seamless or without bumps or pain, right? But I don't want to trigger the negative emotional attractor, but I do want to recognize that relationships are a challenge. And then you can maybe pick some that are a little bit more positive. But how do our differences make our work harder, but also better? Or what habits have we generated that because we're opposites, our business is better? Or what does compromise look like? Any of that.

Yeah. So in case you don't know us well, our differences can be described in the fact that Kristie loves a good spreadsheet to sort of make sense of something. And I would prefer some sort of creative vision board with multi-colors and lines, things and stickers, and probably some washi tape to make that same point.

And so I'm a very visual person. I'm a very big thinker. Kristie really, really likes the detail and gets excited about managing the smaller pieces.

I can't even explain it because it doesn't sound fun to me, but managing the smaller pieces and parts of our business. So you asked kind of how do those go together? And I would say they make lots of things bumpier. They make lots of things bumpier.

So let's say we're going to create something brand new. We've learned over time that we can't start with a brand new creation plan, just the two of us and a piece of paper, because we're going to argue for a long time about how to start and what starting means and what the finished product means and how it might look for you versus for me. And usually by the end, I'm pretty confused and shut down and you're pretty angry and we're over it and we move on to some other task.

And so bumps happen all the time because we approach things differently. But I think over the six years, we've learned to go, oh, okay, this isn't similar for us. So how do we proceed? And how do we do this in a way that usually means the big idea is pretty amazing and all the details are in place because of our work together. It's kind of a simple way to say it.

Yeah, exactly. It's like we're two halves of a whole, but sometimes those halves just don't like line up with each other perfectly.

We really have to work at it. And I think that seeing how effective we are on the other side keeps us both motivated to go through the bumps.

Mm-hmm. I think it also helps us recognize, or at least I'll speak for myself. I feel like I've become more in tune with my own nervous system. It's almost like you're a mirror for me.

Like I can see things more clearly about how I'm perceived and why I do the things I do because they're helping my nervous system. But that has given me greater appreciation for how I'm perceived by others or how calming my nervous system didn't help others.

Yeah. So we know that teaching is a creative process and it involves all kinds of different ways that you have to negotiate things from prepping to teaching to assessment, you know, all the aspects. To dealing with a behavior that's a problem in the classroom.

That's right.

So all those on-the-fly moments, all those planning moments, all the pieces and parts that go into this very complex thing that we'll call teaching. And so a lot of people struggle when they're different because of the differences. And so I just want to take a really concrete thing and ask you, Kristie, a lot of people get worried or think a lot about who leads, who follows, when do we hand over the mic? You know, when is it your turn? When is it my turn? And the very real feelings that come with those decisions.

You know, it's funny you asked that one, Julie, because I was thinking about parity this morning because I had not ever used that word until I met you when we started talking about co-teaching. So a couple of things I'm thinking. One, I believe I've had to learn. How do you say, like, it's not personal. Let's say I think you're hogging the mic.

Okay. Seems likely.

But what I've actually learned is oftentimes when you do things that I think are like, oh, you must think you're smarter than me or you think you have something better to say than me, it's twofold.

One, it's my own insecurities about myself that you're probably not thinking. How many times have you said, Kristie, you know what I'm really thinking about you right now? How many times have I had to write a letter to myself to say, what is Julie really thinking about me? Which is always positive, supportive, encouraging, always, right? And so like, I had to learn that it was my own projection or my own insecurities that were taking it personally. And then I think well into our lives together, I realized that I understood your insecurities.

And so sometimes things that you did were your coping strategies. They were things that you needed to do to bring yourself to feel in homeostasis. And I could respect that because it didn't feel like you were hogging.

Like I was like, oh, she needs to know what's next. Or she is feeling anxious right now. So doing this thing soothes her nervous system.

So when I think about parity, which is sorry, your question, for me, it wasn't about even the distribution of work or the distribution of decision-making, which I think is important, but it was understanding why I felt there was a lack of parity, or why in some instances, someone did something that didn't seem like it was valuing our parity. Does that make sense? I don't know how to say that more succinctly.

No, I think it's just, you're really just sort of underscoring that there's so much beneath the surface when you look at parity.

And it can be about ego-driven kind of things. It can be about deeper feelings. It can be about worries, et cetera.

And I think both of us have learned that it's not personal. It's actually just how do we get this content out in the very best way that we can in the moment with the planning that we've done, right? So it's like, sometimes we really, really plan how we're going to kind of share the microphone and share the big ideas. Now, many of you are co-teaching in a special ed or general ed room.

It's a very common pairing. And when I was co-teaching as a special ed teacher, I think it was really challenging because I had a lot to say, but I wasn't the content expert. And so it became this very tricky balance of how do we talk about the fact that you might be the chemistry teacher and I'm the special ed teacher, but I still want to have parity in this room.

And I still want to co-teach in a way that makes sense for both of us. And so I think it's about hard conversations. I think it's about saying, gosh, I felt really like I took over a story that Kristie did one time.

And so I was having a blast and I was trying on hats and doing all sorts of things, right? And I didn't know that it felt like I took over the story because I thought this was funny and I was having a good time. But later when she said that, it's like, oh, let me reflect on that. Ooh, I could see how it felt that way.

But without you saying it, I wouldn't have known that's how you felt. And so some of this is just the hard conversations to say, here's what I can bring to this. And here's how that felt to me.

And those things we're not used to doing as educators. It's not comfortable to say the hard truth.

Well, and it has to be a safe place.

So I'm going to say two things about that instance, because as soon as Julie said it, I was back on the stage in Australia and you had a cowboy hat on. And it was hilarious.

It was hilarious.

And so one thing I wanted to say about it was, I wish in the moment I could have returned to homeostasis and seen that you were providing a really important access point for the learners. I wish I could have seen that in the moment. And I think if I could, if I can, and I think I work at this, anytime I start to feel the hackles or the insecurity or whichever emotion it is, if I go, is this helping some other learner in here? Is this about them and not me? And if I see our co-teaching strength, first and foremost, that we can provide and support more nervous systems because we have the two of us, it instantly is fine.

But I'm not always able to do that.

Yeah, sorry. Oh, I just said you're not always able to do that in the moment.

In the moment. Because my lids flipped and all the things. But I also believe that it is taken, and I'm so grateful that we've been making it this long because Julie is a safe harbor.

So in our work, whether it's in [Behavior 360](#) or just any training we do, we end up talking about safe, seen, soothed, and secure. And that I could bring that up with Julie, I don't think in the early years I would have. And I would have stuffed it or been snarky about it or resentful. But because over time our relationship became so safe, I could bring it up.

So Kristie, I'm listening to the brands of listeners who are going, that's right, it takes time to build trust with a co-teacher. So why do I keep getting moved from second grade to fourth grade to sixth grade to eighth grade to da-da-da-da.

And the truth is we wish we could solve that for you, but we can't. Because sometimes you're needed in multiple ways, in different times, in different places.

And it is true.

The more time you have with someone, the more you're able to talk through the challenges that exist. And all I would say to you who are new co-teacher partners every single year or few months is that you have to get good at having hard conversations more quickly. You have to sort of accelerate your learning and accelerate this trust, which reminds me of the handout that we have for you all.

Let's talk about that. Because I was thinking, well, maybe we could just start with easier things or at least things that help us understand each other. So that when we do have a hard conversation, it isn't so rough.

Yeah. And that is to say, let's build trust between each other, whether we've been together 20 minutes or 20 years. So what we have for you is 101 ways to get to know your co-teacher.

And it, like Kristie said, was based off of the 30 days to the co-taught classrooms. That's a book that we have that has lots of really useful pieces to it, but we took it and expanded it. So whether you're just getting to know your co-teacher, you might be asking questions like, why did you become a teacher? What is your favorite lesson of the year? What is your worst habit? What is your best joke? What do you like most about the first day of school? Those are the kinds of things you might talk about.

But let's talk about when you've been together for a while, Kristie. What examples do we have for how to keep the relationship strong?

Yeah. Things like, what's something I can do to help you feel more supported? Even like, how do you prefer to handle conflicts or misunderstanding? Just knowing that and talking about it before it happens.

What are your non-negotiables in a great classroom? Like, could you imagine, Julie, if we would have had those words when we were first co-teaching? And this

could be, again, a para and a educator having these conversations so that we understand some of those things that we think everybody just knows.

Yeah. Yeah.

And I think just all of these questions will get you closer. And I think how people have used these questions varies greatly team to team. But some people have cut up these questions and they use them to kick off every single new meeting that they have.

Some people just will glance over them and pick a question that they really like that day. Some people will spend a good amount of time, say at the beginning of the year or the middle of the reconnecting and reestablishing that relationship and talking about the harder things that are challenging you at the time through the use of this particular resource. And then we even have some for those of you who are kind of veterans at doing this.

And like one of my favorite ones is, what's one risk you want to take in the classroom this year? Like, we're upping our ante in our education and our skills. And so what's something that I could do to support that, kind of you taking that risk? Or what are your favorite ways to celebrate your own growth? That could just be an interesting conversation because if you're like Julie and me, it'd be like, oh, I don't celebrate. And Julie would be like, I celebrate that I woke up and had coffee and got here today.

And I'm like, that's way too much celebration. That's just required of being human. Right? So we get to understand how we perceive even celebrations.

Yeah. So use this in its intended way. So if a question annoys you, doesn't work for you, then skip it.

But use it in ways that will bring you closer and closer to your co-teacher, because some of this work that you do that helps you to learn how you're similar, how you're opposite and how you work on a day-to-day basis is going to make your co-teaching relationship even stronger.

And so be sure to get the download at [inclusiveschooling.com/download66](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download66). And I do like this idea, Julie, that if you kind of laughed or nodded your head, or you're even kind of rethinking whether or not you are opposites, then make sure you share this with your co-teacher and make a plan together about how you want to move forward with strengthening your relationship.

Thank you for tuning in. And don't forget to subscribe and catch up on past episodes, where we share valuable insights, straight talk and practical steps to challenge outdated special education practices. You can find every episode with the show notes at [inclusiveschooling.com/inclusion-podcast](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/inclusion-podcast) to build more inclusive schools together.

SHOW NOTES

What This Episode Is About

Co-teaching is powerful, and complicated. In this episode, we reflect on **six years of co-teaching together** while being very different people with very different working styles.

Whether you're a general educator and special educator, a teacher and paraprofessional, or any two adults sharing responsibility for students, this episode explores how differences can become strengths instead of sources of tension.

Key Takeaways

- Co-teaching includes **any time two adults share responsibility** for students, full day or partial day, in person or virtual.
 - Differences in personality, communication style, and problem-solving are common, and not a problem to "fix."
 - Strong co-teaching relationships require trust, self-awareness, and honest conversation.
 - Parity isn't about equal airtime, it's about shared purpose and mutual respect.
 - Understanding how your co-teacher regulates stress helps prevent misunderstandings and conflict.
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Episode Download / Handout

101 Ways to Get to Know Your Co-Teacher

This relationship-building resource includes **101 conversation starters and reflection prompts** designed to strengthen co-teaching partnerships — whether you've been working together for 20 minutes or 20 years.

Inside the download:

- Questions to build trust early
- Prompts for navigating conflict and communication styles
- Reflection tools for experienced co-teaching teams
- Ideas for strengthening collaboration mid-year

Why download it?

Before we can share instruction well, we have to know each other well. This handout gives you simple, real questions that help build trust, clarify expectations, and surface the stuff that usually goes unsaid in co-teaching partnerships. If you want co-teaching to feel balanced and sustainable, not awkward or uneven, this is a really good place to start.

👉 Download at: inclusiveschooling.com/download66

Practical Co-Teaching Moves

- Define co-teaching broadly
 - Talk about differences early instead of assuming alignment
 - Normalize hard conversations as part of collaboration
 - Share how stress shows up for you, and what helps
 - Use relationship-building questions regularly, not just at the start of the year
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Additional Resources

[11 Things Rocking Co-Teachers Do](#): This blog highlights key habits and practices that strengthen collaborative teaching partnerships, drawn from Julie Causton's *The Educator's Handbook for Inclusive School Practices*. The list emphasizes shared ownership of the classroom, equitable distribution of planning and instruction, intentional communication, and ongoing collaboration to meet all students' needs. It's a practical, teacher-friendly set of guidelines for educators looking to build more effective and inclusive co-teaching environments. This resource serves as a quick reminder of core strategies that support professional teamwork and inclusive practices in classrooms.

[30 Days to the Co-Taught Classroom: How to Create an Amazing, Nearly Miraculous & Frankly Earth-Shattering Partnership in One Month or Less](#): This book offers a day-by-day, practical roadmap for building strong, effective co-teaching partnerships. Written by Julie Causton and Paula Kluth, it breaks collaboration into manageable steps that help educators develop shared understanding, improve co-planning and instruction, and expand their teaching structures to better support all learners. Packed with tips, worksheets, templates, and reflective tasks, it's designed to help teams grow more connected and intentional in just 30 days. This resource is ideal for co-teaching teams looking for actionable strategies to enhance collaboration and inclusion in their classrooms.

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