



Accelerating  
Opportunity



JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

# TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHING: A TEAM APPROACH

By Rachel Pleasants McDonnell | OCTOBER 2016



## **JOBS FOR THE FUTURE**

**Jobs for the Future** works with our partners to design and drive the adoption of education and career pathways leading from college readiness to career advancement for those struggling to succeed in today's economy.

**[WWW.JFF.ORG](http://WWW.JFF.ORG)**

**Accelerating Opportunity** seeks to change the way Adult Basic Education is delivered by putting students on track to earn a postsecondary credential and providing them with the support needed to succeed. The initiative targets workers who are underprepared for today's demanding job market and builds on the legacy of JFF's innovative adult education initiative Breaking Through, as well as Washington State's I-BEST program. Accelerating Opportunity is supported by a strategic partnership of five of the nation's leading philanthropies.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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# TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHING: A TEAM APPROACH

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*“As a team we make a better instructional model.”*

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Helping the nation’s 36 million adults with low basic skills access economic opportunities requires innovative approaches to education and training—and we can’t do it alone. Every day, adults come to community colleges across the country to gain the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in their careers. Fortunately, faculty are ready, willing, and able to work together to provide these students with high-quality learning experiences.

Matching a content instructor and a basic skills instructor to co-deliver instruction through team teaching is one potentially transformative strategy for student learning. Further, it supports college goals for student completion in efficient and effective ways. Jobs for the Future’s Accelerating Opportunity (AO) initiative to promote postsecondary student success shows that **team teaching**, while highly challenging, **is powerful for students, faculty, and the college as a whole**. Team teaching is integral to the initiative, and represents a major change from the way education is usually structured, with one teacher per classroom covering one content area.

This brief explores the power of team teaching in more detail, drawing on the experiences of team teachers from across the AO states as well as the implementation evaluation conducted by the Urban Institute and Aspen Institute. Our goal is to share insight into the experiences of team teachers from a variety of colleges and states. We first explore what team teaching is, and then focus on: how it benefits students, the ways teachers have approached the model, and the lessons learned over the course of the initiative.

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*“That’s the biggest thing that Accelerating Opportunity did for me—it made me confident in my work and it made me believe in myself. I was pushed out of my comfort zone during that first semester but I realized I could do whatever I set my mind to.”*

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– JOEL PEREZ, STUDENT, ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE, ILLINOIS

Our hope is that this will inspire others to apply the model and recognize its benefits for colleges and the students they serve.

## A TEAM APPROACH TO EDUCATION

Team teaching truly is a team approach to education. Experienced teams know each other’s styles and rhythms; they finish each other’s sentences and play off one another’s skills. As Jody Honeyman, a nursing instructor at Washburn Institute of Technology in Kansas describes it, “you have two instructors from completely different backgrounds, but they both have your best interests at heart.” Team teaching is a core component of both Accelerating Opportunity and Washington’s Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) model. This instructional approach utilizes both a career and technical education (CTE) instructor and an Adult Basic

Education (ABE) instructor in the classroom at the same time, with shared responsibility for delivering instruction. As team teachers, instructors actively collaborate and contribute equally to the class. The approach requires a high degree of collaboration outside the classroom as well, as instructors work to align curricula and create joint learning outcomes.

Team teaching draws on the unique expertise of each teacher. CTE teachers have deep expertise in their field, but don’t always have training in pedagogy/teaching techniques—especially effective strategies for underprepared learners. ABE teachers often have more experience with understanding how adults learn as well as with lesson planning, differentiated instruction, and other approaches that can help struggling students succeed. As Liz McNulty, an instructor at Elgin Community College in Illinois, describes, CTE is often focused on covering the required content in

### Accelerating Opportunity

**Accelerating Opportunity** is a national initiative of Jobs for the Future and was created to enable adults with low basic skills to acquire valued postsecondary credentials and rewarding careers. AO offers pathways to economic opportunity for those left behind in the nation’s recovering economy, through integrated instruction in basic skills and career and technical education; team teaching; accelerated learning; and structured career pathways, bolstered by comprehensive student support services.

<http://www.acceleratingopportunity.org>

### I-BEST

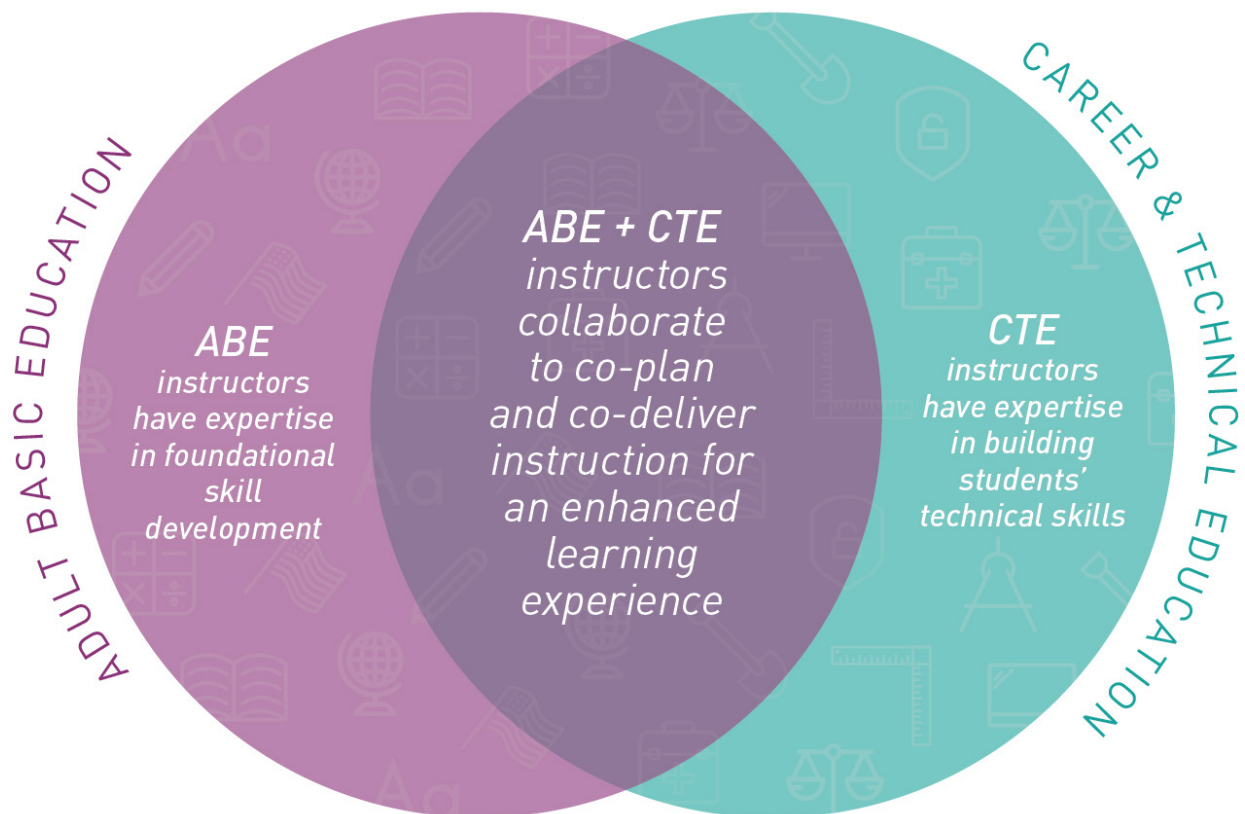
Accelerating Opportunity builds on the **Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training** model developed by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. Through I-BEST, Washington pioneered the use of postsecondary team teaching for Adult Basic Education students. SBCTC launched I-BEST in 2006 and has since scaled the program to all 33 colleges. Evaluations of I-BEST show that students are more likely to earn college credits and marketable credentials. As a partner in Accelerating Opportunity, SBCTC provided training on team teaching for college faculty.

<https://www.sbctc.edu/colleges-staff/programs-services/i-best/>



# TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHING

*A Team Approach*



## BENEFITS OF TEAM TEACHING:

- Accelerating Credential Attainment
  - Making Basic Skills Relevant
- Facilitating Campus Culture Shift
- Rethinking Instructional Strategies
- Providing an Extra Level of Support
- Strengthening the Connection to College

## THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF TEAM TEACHING

Team teaching looks different in every classroom, but the core of the model is the overlap in instruction. This means that for at least 25 percent of the time, the adult education instructor is teaching alongside the career and technical instructor, helping support students' understanding of the concepts covered in the CTE course—for example, the mathematics required to read a blueprint, or the prefixes and suffixes of medical terminology. In addition to the team-taught component, ABE teachers also deliver contextualized basic skills instruction in a separate class that reinforces the learning outcomes of the CTE course. Students might spend two or more hours per week in a support course.

## TEAM TEACHING MODELS

The professional development provided by the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges presents six options for team teaching models. Teaching teams can determine which models work best in different situations and for presenting different types of materials. There is no one right way to team teach. The AO evaluation has shown that in many cases the team teaching approach evolves over time, becoming more egalitarian as instructors get to know each other and learn how to collaborate in the classroom more effectively.

- > **Complementary-supportive teaching:** One teacher is responsible for teaching the content to the students. The other teacher takes charge of providing follow-up activities on related topics or on study skills.
- > **Monitoring teacher:** One teacher is responsible for instructing the entire class. The other teacher circulates around the room, watching and monitoring student understanding and behavior.
- > **Traditional team teaching:** Two or more teachers actively share the instruction of the content and skills in the same classroom at the same time with the same group of students. Each teacher performs a different but equally important instructional task.
- > **Collaborative teaching:** Team teachers work together to teach the material not by the usual monologue, but by exchanging and discussing ideas and theories in front of the learners. The course uses group-learning techniques, such as small-group work, student-led discussion, and joint test taking.
- > **Differentiated split class:** A class with more than one teacher is divided into smaller groups according to learning needs. Instructors provide their respective groups with the instruction required to meet these needs.
- > **Parallel instruction:** The class is divided into two groups and each teacher is responsible for teaching the same material to their smaller group. This model is usually used in conjunction with other forms of team teaching.



a limited time period, whereas ABE tends to focus on interactive learning.

Jobs for the Future views team teaching as part of the larger umbrella of integrated instruction that also can include contextualized instruction and co-enrollment. Because students are enrolled in CTE programs while they are working on advancing their basic skills, integrated instruction dramatically decreases the amount of time it takes for students starting in ABE to get to a marketable credential. This is a much more effective approach than the typical way students are required to complete their basic skills or remedial education before even beginning their CTE coursework.

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*“The impact on the institution is that we learn to be better teachers.”*

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– JEANNE SAMUELS, DELGADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE, LOUISIANA

Accelerating Opportunity also demonstrated that supplemental instruction—contextualized basic skills instruction delivered outside of the team-taught class—is a critical component of an integrated instructional model.

At AO colleges, these classes provide an opportunity to reinforce concepts covered during class, build in additional academic instruction, and help students prepare for the GED when needed. Initially, not all states required colleges to offer supplemental instruction, and not all colleges required students to attend. Some AO colleges found scheduling supplemental instruction to be challenging; often it was offered at times that didn't fit in with students' schedules. Over time, many states and colleges have realized the importance of supplemental instruction to

ensure adequate ABE skill gains. As such, colleges are beginning to require that it be part of every pathway, as well as making attendance mandatory.

Students have by and large responded positively to having two teachers working together to deliver instruction. According to a survey of AO students conducted by the Urban Institute, the vast majority of AO students were happy with the instruction they received; 91 percent said the program met or exceeded their expectations. Many said that they benefited from having “different ways of learning,” and 43 percent of respondents expressed a desire for more team teaching. Similarly, students in focus groups conducted by the evaluation team said that the program had been a positive experience and that the team teacher was an “especially valuable support.”

## THE BENEFITS OF TEAM TEACHING

Team teaching works by accelerating credential attainment and adding relevance to basic skills instruction. It's also a more holistic model that incorporates work readiness skills, often through partnerships with career services, to prepare students both for work and learning. Tom Kossaris, an ABE/English as a Second Language (ESL) instructor at Black Hawk College in Illinois, describes it as, “getting them ready to enter the workforce, not just learning the machines.” At his college, he works with career services to help students create a resume; other instructors integrate job readiness and interviewing skills into supplemental instruction.

## MAKING BASIC SKILLS RELEVANT

Team teaching makes basic skills instruction relevant for students by directly connecting

academic content with the competencies that students need to know to be successful in their careers. As Liz McNulty at Elgin Community College in Illinois describes it, “the main difference [between AO and other ABE/ESL classes] is the contextualization of the ABE/ESL content, and the immediacy of it—it’s relevant to what they need to know.” Colleen Stribling, another instructor at Elgin, echoes this idea, noting that the students appreciate the extra support because they know it is something valuable that moves them ahead. Adam Lybrook, an automotive instructor at Gateway Community & Technical College in Kentucky, describes how he used to watch his students struggle through developmental classes, noting that “it’s hard to keep their attention with just basic skill building.” Now he sees them enjoying math and writing, and “it’s rewarding to watch them succeed.”

## FACILITATING CULTURE SHIFT

Team teaching’s emphasis on collaboration often leads to better cross-departmental integration at AO colleges. Many CTE teachers commented that they hadn’t been aware of the college’s ABE program previously—but now they recognize what a great resource it is for students, and how dedicated the instructors are. On the flip side, for adult education teachers, John Carroll at Gateway Community & Technical College says that “being part of Accelerating Opportunity gets you outside your little ABE bubble.” For many CTE teachers, the experience of working in Accelerating Opportunity has opened a window into the world of Adult Basic Education, and has broadened their view of ABE students—both their strengths and their struggles. Fran Langlow, who teaches in the Allied Health division at Delgado Community College in Louisiana, says she is more aware now of the non-academic challenges that keep her

students from focusing on school—and also realizes that it’s not just her AO students who face these challenges. Another CTE instructor commented on the enthusiasm and appreciation for education she saw in her AO students, often more so than in her traditional classes.

Although colleges are always looking for ways to improve student outcomes, culture shift doesn’t happen overnight. Jeremiah Johnson at Central Georgia Community College in Georgia describes how college faculty were initially skeptical about AO students, and a lax screening process at first didn’t help. But over time, the college made more of an effort to assess students up front to ensure the program would be a good fit, and now he sees Accelerating Opportunity becoming part of the college culture. “It’s coming up at meetings, luncheons, and general discourse.”

This culture shift was noted in *The Second Year of Accelerating Opportunity: Implementation Findings from the States and Colleges* as a way to encourage cross-campus cooperation. The Urban Institute found increased collaboration between CTE and ABE departments over time, with team teaching raising general awareness of the adult education department and the students it serves.

## RETHINKING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

For many instructors, and especially CTE faculty, the process of team teaching in Accelerating Opportunity changed and improved their approach to teaching, even in their non-AO classes. For example, Jody Honeyman at Washburn Institute of Technology says that her experience with Accelerating Opportunity has given her more energy in her other nursing classes, and more hope for her students. Now, she gets everyone excited about learning—she thinks it’s made her a better

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*“Once you help a person discover what their passion is, you’ve done them a tremendous service.”*

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– KELLY WATKINS, WEST KENTUCKY COMMUNITY & TECHNICAL COLLEGE, KENTUCKY

all-around teacher. Jeanne Samuels, an instructor in Delgado Community College’s information technology department, says that in her non-AO courses she would often go faster than she knew she should; her co-teacher helped make sure the pacing met the needs of the students. She’s now much more focused on being clear on the concepts that students need to learn and ensuring that they are mastering those concepts. At Lake Land College in Illinois, the nursing department has taken a lot of the approaches developed through Accelerating Opportunity and used them in other sections; the nursing department now turns to the ABE department for ideas about improving instruction.

### PROVIDING AN EXTRA LEVEL OF SUPPORT

A number of instructors commented on the extra level of support that students get from having the ABE teacher in the classroom. Often, the basic skills instructor helps model successful classroom strategies, like asking for clarification on a complicated topic. The ABE instructors also tend to be more attuned to whether students are grasping the content. As Tom Kossaris from Black Hawk College describes it, “Having two instructors in the room at one time, with him rephrasing and sometimes approaching the point from the opposite direction, makes the difference.” He keeps an eye out for puzzled looks when the CTE instructor leads the class and asks clarifying questions as needed to make sure students are grasping the terminology. At Washburn Institute of Technology, Crystal Helm models effective student behavior by asking questions during class; she finds that having someone ask the questions they

may not have thought of pushes students to think of deeper questions.

Many instructors—both ABE and CTE—believe their students have a unique relationship with their ABE instructor that is different from their relationship with the CTE instructor. Often, students view the ABE teacher as more of a supportive figure or coach—someone who is there specifically to help them achieve their goals. Tom Kossaris at Black Hawk College views himself as an advocate for his students, making sure they get what they need from the college. At West Kentucky Community & Technical College, students stay with the same AO instructor for both semesters, even though the content teacher changes. This consistent presence is a huge support for students, contributes to their completion, and makes them feel more comfortable as they move through the program.


### STRENGTHENING THE CONNECTION TO COLLEGE

Another common theme was that students felt more connected and supported in the AO model, both by their teachers and their peers. As Liz McNulty from Elgin Community College shares, students need this enhanced level of support because they “have a lot going on in their lives. They haven’t met with success in school previously and they have a lot of barriers. Some students have a lot of family obligations to contend with, and it’s hard for them to make and keep the commitment to come to every class. Few of them have the needed level of support from their families.” Through Accelerating Opportunity, she’s seen so many students get over the hump to persist and succeed. “That’s really rewarding to see—knowing they can succeed if they work hard, that they have

knowledge.” The increased level of support that team teaching provides helps students build their self-confidence and see themselves as learners. At Washburn Institute of Technology, Carol Hill describes “how empowered students feel after they’ve had some success—they feel confidence, feel much more capable, they no longer feel like they aren’t good enough.” As Kelly Watkins of West Kentucky Community & Technical College explains, Accelerating Opportunity “does more than get them a certificate; experiencing success in this class enables them to be more excited about their future.”

## TEAM TEACHING INSTRUCTIONAL APPROACHES

Different instructor teams at different colleges have come up with a range of instructional and delivery approaches to team teaching. While JFF has a preference for greater levels of integration—such as traditional team teaching—we recognize that the approach varies depending on the class itself. For example, many classes have a heavy hands-on component, while others are more lecture-based; this often depends on the subject area and course requirements. It also varies based on the teaching styles of the individual teachers. The following are just a few examples from AO colleges across the participating states.

 **Washburn Technical Institute** in Topeka, Kansas, is implementing Accelerating Opportunity in partnership with Let’s Help, a local community-based organization that is the area’s ABE/GED provider. In Washburn’s health care pathway, students concurrently attend GED classes at Let’s Help and CNA classes at Washburn Tech. Two AO instructors, Carol Hill and Crystal Helm, serve as both case managers and support

teachers. They function as liaisons between the two classes, attending the health care classes and staying in touch with an additional instructor at Let’s Help who focuses solely on GED prep. They also provide a lot of student support, including development of individualized learning plans and helping students navigate systems within the college. Carol is in the classroom 25 percent of the time—she takes notes and anticipates confusion, clarifying issues and concepts. When students have questions about college processes, such as how to enroll in classes, or just general reassurance, they come to her. Some students have difficulty with the math skills, especially with the metric system and decimals; she assists when students are struggling, and often creates study groups. Carol and Crystal communicate frequently with Jody Honeyman, the CNA instructor, about academic and non-academic student issues that might be barriers to progress.



At **Black Hawk College** in Moline, Illinois, ESL instructor Tom Kossaris assists with vocabulary, both while the instructor teaches and during breaks. If students have questions but aren’t confident enough to ask the instructor, he clarifies things for them during the break or outside of class. While the machining instructor is teaching, he looks around the classroom; if there are puzzled looks he asks the instructor a clarifying question. Often, if the teacher doesn’t “get the vernacular down to their level,” he helps by paraphrasing or asking “the right question.” He likens this role to “acting like an interpreter.”



Jeremiah Johnson at **Central Georgia Technical College** in Macon, Georgia, has used a variety of the team teaching models, including acting as a monitoring teacher and providing contextualized instruction. For example, when students are working on

measurement, he provides contextualized math instruction that connects what students are learning in their GED class to what they need to know for welding. At other times, he assumes the role of a student and provides a model for classroom behavior. Sometimes he even takes the test along with the students—he's found that this promotes a competitive atmosphere, with AO students wanting to show that they can do better than the ABE teacher.



For John Carroll at **Gateway Community & Technical College** in Florence, Kentucky, the approach varies depending on the subject. In Early Childhood Education, he spends more time in front of the classroom delivering contextualized content. If students have to write about a topic in their journals, he talks about how to organize material and develop an essay. When he team teaches with Adam Lybrook in the Automotive Technology pathway, he sometimes presents specific lessons, such as the algebra component of Ohm's Law. But, more often, he sits with the students to make sure they understand the concepts being presented and provides basic skills support outside of class. "Depending on what you are doing, it can really vary." He also adjusts the timing of his overlap based on the plan for the day; sometimes he comes in early to meet with the students who are struggling before the lecture part of the class.



At **Lake Land College** in Mattoon, Illinois, the co-teaching concept was new to the college and the instructors. The adult education and nursing instructors worked together to develop a system that drew on each of their strengths—the nursing instructor has deep content knowledge and the adult ed instructor provides a balance with a background in pedagogy. They meet together regularly to tailor instruction to the

individual needs of students in the class. Early on, they established clear roles; students go to the nursing instructor when they have questions about science or terminology, but they go to the adult education instructor for tutoring, or with general challenges or questions about study skills.



#### At **Hutchinson Community College**

in Hutchinson, Kansas, ABE instructor

Stan Ploutz team teaches with a welding instructor who quickly recognized the benefits of the model. Students go into welding because they want a high-paying job, but they need strong math skills in order to be successful on the job. Stan is able to hone in on math instruction and tie the concepts back to welding. He and his co-teacher spent the summer examining the curriculum and determining where an additional emphasis on math would be helpful; during the first semester working together, they continued to meet weekly. He provides additional math support in the afternoons, and says that once students saw him as part of the instructional team, they were more willing to approach him with questions and participate in supplemental instruction outside of the CTE class.

## LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT TEAM TEACHING

### PICKING THE RIGHT TEACHERS IS CRITICAL

Team teachers and AO administrators often refer to team teaching as a marriage; the two teachers need to mesh well in order for the model to work. As one instructor put it, "if you can't trust the person unequivocally that you are in the room with, things are going to crash and burn for students." Beyond getting the personality fit right, the teachers need to be open to the model and to sharing their classroom. One ABE instructor

lamented that he still wasn't as integrated into the classroom as he would like, in part because his co-teacher felt that the team teaching was taking time away from her content instruction. Given that it takes time for the team to develop a good rhythm, many instructors recommended keeping successful teams together over multiple semesters.

Picking the right teachers to pair up for team teaching is more art than science. Many instructors mentioned how important it is for team teachers to be flexible; many instructors noted that a willingness to innovate is essential. Another common requirement is being focused on student success—and being willing to do what it takes to make sure students are successful. While not a requirement, many colleges found that it is helpful for the ABE instructor to either have some knowledge of the CTE area ahead of time or to develop that knowledge by first auditing the course.

## LEARNING TO TEAM TEACH TAKES TIME

Getting started with team teaching isn't easy; it's a big change from the way most teachers are used to working as individuals, rather than in partnership with others. Even with the right teachers on board, it takes time for instructors to get to know each other and adapt to each other's teaching styles. One instructor notes that it wasn't until he got into the classroom and started teaching that it really sank in what Accelerating Opportunity was. Jody Honeyman at Washburn Technical Institute comments that she was nervous about team teaching at first—she had never done anything like it—but thought it was a great idea to have another set of eyes, “someone who would know when students need additional help and be able to provide that help.”

As Fran Langlow at Delgado Community College describes it, the whole concept of co-teaching sounded great, but the logistics weren't totally clear at first. How would it work in the classroom? Who would teach when? She and her co-teacher caught on right away to the concept: “I'm going to teach the content and she's going to somehow tie that into their math skills.” But it took a while to sort out who would talk and when, and they're still experimenting with the various ways of delivering content.

For many instructors, the first semester of team teaching includes a lot of trial and error as they assess what works. In Fran and Libby's class at Delgado, the first semester was more traditional, with Fran doing the lectures and Libby modeling study skills and learning strategies. Later, they were able to develop and incorporate more strategies. Sometimes Libby would lead the discussion; or they might break into groups and have each teacher lead a group. Other times,

### Online Team Teacher Training from the National College Transition Network

As part of the Accelerating Opportunity initiative, the National College Transition Network at World Education developed two online courses for team teachers. The first, “Team Teaching—Models and Practice,” is a self-paced free course that provides an overview of the different models of team teaching. The second course, “Team Teaching and Integrated Curriculum,” is a facilitated course for instructional pairs, and helps the teaching team learn how to collaborate while developing an integrated course design that draws on each instructor's priorities and strengths.



students would work on an assignment and both teachers would circulate around the classroom. Sometimes Fran would present the content and then have the students do a research report on the topic (such as dermatology and skin diseases); she would grade for content, while Libby would grade for writing and research skills.

Part of the process is getting past the misconception that the ABE instructor is a teacher's aide. CTE instructors need to feel comfortable giving up some control of their classroom and ABE instructors need to feel confident contributing to a CTE program (welding, for example) that's far outside their realm of expertise. In some colleges, the ABE instructor started out primarily observing the CTE class, asking questions periodically and then running the support class. In other cases, the teachers would each teach their segment, with little collaboration or connection. One ABE instructor laments that, because he hasn't been really able to get to true team teaching, he hasn't been able to fully realize the benefits of the model—but he would like to become more integrated into the classroom.

Over time, as the pair understands how each can contribute, it's easier to try new approaches. The AO implementation evaluation, which included observation of teaching pairs in years one and two of the initiative, found that by the second year, teams had begun to settle into an approach that worked well for their team's chemistry, the needs of the students, and course content. As one instructor notes, "it takes a while to see what fits, and it differs with each class."

## **ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IS CRITICAL, ESPECIALLY FOR MANAGING STAFF TURNOVER**

For many instructors, getting some upfront training on team teaching was a good starting point, but it didn't really sink in until they got into the classroom and started testing out ideas. The CTE instructor learns to figure out how the ABE instructor can best support student learning while the ABE instructors become comfortable with the course material and determine how to build in the basic skills component. In addition, while staff turnover is challenging in any program, it can become even more difficult in the AO model, where the relationship between the teachers is so critical. Ongoing professional development helps ensure that teaching teams are supported throughout the process of getting comfortable with the model, and helps address the challenges associated with staff turnover. It gives teachers the opportunity to test out new teaching techniques between trainings and also creates a forum for learning from their peers—something a number of instructors said they would like to do more.

States and colleges have explored a few different approaches to providing ongoing professional development. For example, at Delgado Community College, the AO team holds monthly workshops for all the AO instructors. During the workshops, teachers learn about developing and teaching common objectives, working together as a teaching team, and designing activities they can use in the classroom. Colleen Stribling from Elgin Community College had a teacher from another pathway serving as a mentor as she got started with team teaching. At the state level, Illinois' year-long Transitions Academy developed by the Southern Illinois Professional Development Center provides a range of trainings throughout the year.

These activities can help reinforce and encourage teachers' commitments to working in teams.

### **BUILDING IN TIME FOR PLANNING IS CRITICAL**

Team teachers need time to plan together—not just at the beginning of the semester, but throughout the term as well. Instructors don't need a full semester of planning—often a month in advance is sufficient—but the combination of upfront and ongoing planning is essential. Fran Langlow at Delgado Community College notes that you have to be organized in order to successfully team teach—there's a lot of preparation, and that's what makes it work. "When you're the only teacher you can wing it sometimes, but you can't do that in a team teaching model." At some colleges, instructors had built-in planning time; others met more informally, getting together before or after class to make adjustments to the syllabus or course activities. At Hutchinson Community College, Stan Ploutz and his paired welding instructor used the summer to work on ideas and collaborate on developing the curriculum. They examined the welding curriculum and identified times when it would make sense to emphasize math concepts. Colleen Stribling, an ESL teacher at Elgin Community College, communicates with her co-teacher frequently—especially during labs while students are working on their machines. As an ongoing process, they confer about who needs additional support, and possible interventions for specific students.

### **THERE ARE MANY CREATIVE WAYS TO INTEGRATE ABE CONTENT**

One of the most common challenges mentioned related to the strict rules about who can teach what content as part of some technical programs. Both nursing and automotive programs, for example, often require certified instructors to

deliver specific course content. The initial fear is that, if team teaching requires a minimum 25 percent overlap, the ABE teacher has to teach some of the CTE content.

What many instructors have come to realize, though, is that the ABE instructor can help students with fundamental academic skills, as well as all the things that aren't part of the official curriculum but are important for being able to function in a professional environment—soft skills, college-going skills, communication, etc. John Carroll, the ABE instructor at Gateway Community & Technical College, describes how when the lecture in the automotive class includes a mathematical concept, he's able to jump in and show the students four different ways to understand the math component. For team teachers working with nursing programs, the ABE instructor can help students with the math they need for the nursing curriculum, and can follow up with students to make sure they understand the material. These are things that students are expected to—but often don't—know coming into class. Many instructors also talked about modeling student behavior by taking notes, asking questions, and clarifying vocabulary. All these strategies can work well in a program with strict rules about content delivery.

### **GETTING CTE INSTRUCTOR BUY-IN CAN HELP EXPAND THE PROGRAM ACROSS CAMPUSES**

The AO implementation analysis found that most CTE instructors became supporters of Accelerating Opportunity over time, despite initial skepticism about team teaching. These CTE instructors make great ambassadors for the AO model. Once they saw the benefits to their students, they were eager to communicate them to others. One instructor

talked about how he goes to other teachers in his department as well as other departments to talk about the success of the program and how well his students are doing. Similarly, Adam Lybrook, the automotive technology instructor at Gateway Community & Technical College, says that when he talks to other faculty, they can see his excitement for the program, which makes it easier to sell them on the untapped potential of AO students. Stan Ploutz, the ABE instructor at Hutchinson Community College, suggests improved retention as a key selling point for discussions with other faculty, and focusing on how team teaching can help more of their students succeed.

### **BE PREPARED FOR LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES**

Many instructors mentioned that scheduling can be difficult, especially with a mix of full- and part-time faculty. It can be tricky to figure out a class schedule that works within the constraints of instructors' schedules, facilities and classroom space, and students' needs. Similarly, there can be upfront challenges to making sure students are registered properly. None of these challenges are insurmountable; teachers and program staff just need to expect some initial growing pains as the program gets up and running and in order to accommodate their students.

### **HAVING AN AO COORDINATOR AND A NAVIGATOR OR SUCCESS COACH HELPS TEAM TEACHERS FOCUS ON INSTRUCTION**

While the ABE instructor often serves as a supportive element, team teachers are just one piece of the constellation of services that keep students engaged and the program running smoothly. Like other innovative programs, this model depends on collaboration with many college

offices and departments. Jeremiah Johnson at Central Georgia Technical College describes his experience as a lead ABE instructor; in this role he was initially responsible for both instruction

and program management, including recruiting new students. This made it difficult to put as much energy into teaching as he would have liked. Now that his college has a coordinator in place, he can focus more on delivering quality instruction. More than one instructor expressed that having a coordinator to handle things like registration was a huge help. Other instructors mentioned how helpful it was to have a success coach or navigator who could intervene when students were facing major barriers. One instructor felt that, by trying to serve as both the success coach and an instructor, he often was too busy tracking down the students who weren't coming to class to focus in on the students who were there and ready to learn. A success coach is better equipped to refer the student to community resources and keep them coming to class. Says Dirk Muffler, director of adult and alternative education at Lake Land College, "we lose students because of transportation, family issues, child care. Navigators do their best to find ways to prevent this from happening. They work with students to connect to social services, college services—anything they can do."

### **LEADERSHIP BUY-IN MATTERS**

Strong leadership buy-in can alleviate logistical challenges and support instructors through the growing pains that accompany early implementation. At Lake Land College, the Associate Vice President of Instruction is a major supporter of Accelerating Opportunity, and has been able to help AO students access books, study aids, and other resources. Tom Kossaris describes how, at Black Hawk College, "everyone's on board—

from the president to some of the vice presidents.” In his experience, “from top to bottom, everyone has to be involved, has to be eager for success.” College leaders must understand and value this program as part of the college’s mission and core. At Gateway Community & Technical College in Kentucky, Adam Lybrook’s department chair in the Automotive Technology department has access to the college president. His belief in and promotion of the program encourages strong internal institutional support that helps AO staff overcome potential barriers and helps the program grow.

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*“At Delgado, we’ve seen how team teaching enhances the experiences of our students and faculty, and we are committed to support the work of our teams.”*

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– JOAN Y. DAVIS, CHANCELLOR  
DELGADO COMMUNITY COLLEGE

## CONCLUSION

We know that improving the quality of classroom instruction is critical to increasing student success. We also know that changing instructional practice is difficult, and many education reform efforts are only able to make minor tweaks to what happens in the classroom. Part of the power of team teaching is that it is such a fundamental change—using two teachers with different backgrounds to teach one course—that it pushes even the most seasoned instructors to rethink their approach to classroom practice. It inspires conversations about how to shift pedagogy to best meet the needs of students, and how to adjust pacing, delivery, and curriculum to ensure that students have the opportunity to efficiently master course content. And it encourages teachers to work together to better support their students and themselves.

If community colleges are going to get serious about improving student outcomes, we need to invest in strategies that promote this level of culture shift in the classroom in tandem with overall college commitments to helping their students succeed. The early experiences of team teachers in Accelerating Opportunity show that, while team teaching isn’t easy, it holds tremendous potential and is a strategic solution for making learning more effective and relevant. As Crystal Helm at Washburn Technical Institute says, “we’re living proof that this works. If you can be flexible and try it—embrace it for a while—you will see the benefit.”

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*“The more experiences...the more collaboration I have with other types of individuals, the better teacher I am. I learn a lot about different situations and how they deal with them. . . . The more you participate in the different initiatives happening, it keeps you current in the field, and widens your experiences.”*

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– COLLEEN STRIBLING, ELGIN COMMUNITY COLLEGE, ILLINOIS



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