



# Explaining Perpendicular Co-Teaching to Students

## Planning for Success

As with most any classroom strategy, perpendicular co-teaching's success is heavily dependent upon how it is presented to students. After all, convincing individuals that they should inherently value a skill or concept even though other members of the class are stepping away from it and going on to other things can be tricky. Furthermore, you run the risk of any number of negative responses (students identifying themselves as "stupid" because they have to keep working on a concept others have already learned or complaining because they find the other group's topic more interesting).

There are a number of strategies that can help avoid this problem. Our favorite is something we call the "Melting Pot" Presentation. It takes a little time (maybe 20 minutes following the assessment), but it's well worth the investment. The steps involved are listed on the side bar.

By investing twenty minutes of class time in creating a group understanding of what you are trying to accomplish, you create a shared vision that can be referred back to at any time, and during any future lesson.

## "Melting Pot" Presentation

**Step One: Don't let the students know the test is a test.**

Whatever assignment, activity, or assessment you are using to determine which (if any) students have reached your desired level of success, present it as a learning opportunity rather than an evaluation. This prevents students from perceiving their later groupings as being correlative with achievement.

**Step Two: Let them know what you know that they know....you know?**

Take students through a slide show featuring images specific to various interests, cultures, and skills. Have volunteers raise their hands to identify each item. Point out that no one person in the class recognized all of the subjects shown. It took the group working together to answer all the questions. Discuss how they all benefit from the fact that they, as individuals, have different backgrounds and knowledge bases. Example pictures that you might use are available on this site.

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**Step Three: Compare your contrasts.**

Compare the classroom environment to other settings. Is everybody at Coca Cola a lawyer? Is every person working on a TV show an actor or actress? What other jobs or job skills are necessary for these example settings? Just how important is it that there are so many different types of expertise involved? Then, ask students how this might translate to an academic setting.

**Step Four: Learning by degrees.**

Explain that the basic "unit" on your skill/concept is technically over, and that the class is now going to be divided up. Some of the students will continue on with the same topic, becoming genuine "experts" in the focus area. They will be the "go-to" people for that particular subject. The others will begin early preparation for the next unit so that they can be the experts in THAT subject, or are going to explore something else so that their additional learning can be added to the collective knowledge base. You could also compare it to some of them earning two Bachelor's degrees, in different subjects, and some of them earning a Master's in just one.