EDUCATION

Marilyn Friend Special Education

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795581554277159

Introduction: A Transformative Voice in Special Education

In the landscape of modern special education, few names carry as much weight and respect as Marilyn Friend. For decades, educators, administrators, and policymakers have turned to her research, insights, and practical frameworks to reshape how students with disabilities receive instruction. The phrase **Marilyn Friend Special Education**has become synonymous with inclusive practices, collaborative teaching, and systemic reform that prioritizes both equity and excellence. Whether you are a veteran teacher, a university student preparing for a career in education, or a parent seeking to understand the forces shaping your child's classroom experience, the work of Marilyn Friend offers a roadmap that is both visionary and thoroughly grounded in real-world application.

Friend's influence extends far beyond academic journals and conference keynotes. Her contributions have directly shaped the way schools approach co-teaching, the way general and special educators collaborate, and the way individualized education programs (IEPs) are implemented with fidelity. Understanding her work is not merely an exercise in educational theory; it is an essential step toward creating classrooms where every student, regardless of ability, can thrive.

Who Is Marilyn Friend? A Brief Professional Portrait

Marilyn Friend is a professor emerita of education at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she spent decades teaching, researching, and mentoring future educators. She has also served as a consultant to school districts across the United States and internationally, helping them design and implement effective special education programs. Her expertise spans the full spectrum of special education service delivery, but she is perhaps best known for her groundbreaking work on collaboration and co-teaching.

Friend holds a doctorate in special education from Indiana University and has authored or co-authored numerous books, including the widely used textbook *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals*, now in its eighth edition. This text has become a staple in teacher preparation programs, equipping thousands of educators with the interpersonal and professional skills needed to work effectively in inclusive settings. When educators search for **Marilyn Friend Special Education**resources, they are often seeking this foundational text or her practical guides on co-teaching.

Her career has been defined by a single, compelling question: How can schools organize themselves to serve students with disabilities more effectively, more humanely, and more equitably? The answer, she has argued, lies not in isolated special education classrooms but in genuine partnerships between general and special educators.

The Core Philosophy: Collaboration as the Cornerstone

At the heart of Friend's work is a simple but powerful belief: collaboration is the engine of effective special education. Too often, she observed, general education teachers and special education teachers operated in parallel universes. The general educator managed the core curriculum for the majority of students, while the special educator pulled students out for separate instruction. This model, Friend argued, fragmented the student's experience and undermined the goal of meaningful inclusion.

Friend proposed a different vision. In her framework, collaboration is not merely a nice-to-have or a soft skill. It is a structured, intentional process that requires shared planning, mutual respect, and clear communication. She identified several key elements of effective collaboration:

- Mutual goals: Both educators must share a common purpose for the student's success.
- Parity: Both professionals are viewed as equal partners, each bringing essential expertise.
- Shared responsibility: Both teachers share accountability for planning, instruction, and assessment.
- Shared resources: Time, materials, and space are jointly allocated and used.
- Voluntary participation: While often mandated, collaboration works best when educators choose to engage authentically.

This framework has become a standard in the field, and it directly informs how schools design their special education service delivery models. When educators study **Marilyn Friend Special Education** principles, they are learning that collaboration is not an event but an ongoing relationship that must be cultivated intentionally.

Redefining Co-Teaching: The Six Approaches

Perhaps Friend's most widely recognized contribution is her articulation of six distinct co-teaching approaches. Co-teaching, in her definition, occurs when a general education teacher and a special education teacher jointly deliver instruction to a diverse group of students in a single physical space. This is not mere team teaching or having an aide in the room. It is a deliberate, parity-based partnership designed to meet the needs of all learners, including those with disabilities.

Friend identified six approaches, each suited to different instructional goals and classroom contexts:

1. One Teach, One Observe: One teacher leads instruction while the other systematically collects data on a specific student or group of students. This approach is useful for gathering information about behavior, engagement, or skill mastery.
2. One Teach, One Drift: One teacher leads while the other circulates, providing brief support to individual students as needed. This is a flexible, low-stakes entry point for co-teaching.
3. Station Teaching: Students rotate among stations, with both teachers facilitating separate stations and a third station functioning independently. This allows for small-group instruction and differentiation.
4. Parallel Teaching: The class is split into two groups, with each teacher delivering the same content to a smaller set of students. This increases student participation and reduces the student-to-teacher ratio.
5. Supplemental Teaching: One teacher works with a small group on specific skills while the other instructs the larger group. This is often used for remediation or enrichment.
6. Team Teaching: Both teachers share the instructional role equally, leading discussions, modeling concepts, and facilitating activities together. This is the most collaborative and complex form of co-teaching.

Friend has emphasized that there is no single "best" approach. Effective co-teaching requires flexibility, ongoing communication, and a willingness to match the approach to the lesson's goals and the students' needs. When schools adopt the **Marilyn Friend Special Education** co-teaching model, they are committing to a flexible, responsive framework rather than a rigid formula.

Moving Beyond the Classroom: Systemic Implications

Friend's work is not limited to what happens between two teachers in a room. She has also addressed the broader systemic conditions that make collaboration possible or impossible. In her writing and consulting, she

emphasizes the critical role of school leadership. Administrators must schedule common planning time, provide professional development, and create a school culture that values shared responsibility for all students.

She has also addressed the preparation of teachers. In many teacher education programs, general education and special education candidates are trained separately, often with little exposure to one another. Friend has argued for more integrated preparation models, where future educators learn together how to plan, teach, and assess diverse learners as a team. This vision of teacher preparation directly supports the principles of **Marilyn Friend Special Education**by ensuring that collaboration begins not on the first day of school but from the very start of a teacher's career.

Another systemic consideration Friend has highlighted is the role of paraprofessionals. In many inclusive classrooms, paraprofessionals provide crucial support, but they are often underprepared and poorly integrated into the instructional team. Friend has advocated for clear roles, proper training, and respectful partnerships between teachers and paraprofessionals.

Practical Applications for Schools and Educators

For schools seeking to implement Friend's frameworks, several practical steps emerge from her work. First, schools must protect common planning time. Without dedicated time for co-teachers to plan together, collaboration becomes superficial or nonexistent. Friend recommends at least one shared planning period per week, with guidance on how to use that time productively.

Second, schools must invest in ongoing professional development. Friend has emphasized that co-teaching is a skill that must be learned and refined. Workshops, coaching, and peer observation can help educators move from novice to proficient co-teachers.

Third, schools must attend to the interpersonal dynamics of co-teaching relationships. Friend has written extensively about communication, conflict resolution, and the importance of building trust. She has acknowledged that co-teaching can be challenging, particularly when personalities clash or when teachers have differing philosophies. She offers strategies for navigating these challenges, including structured communication protocols, regular check-ins, and a commitment to student-centered decision-making.

Fourth, schools should use data to inform co-teaching decisions. Friend recommends that co-teaching teams collect data on student outcomes, instructional quality, and collaboration effectiveness. This data can guide adjustments to the co-teaching model and demonstrate the impact of inclusive practices.

Finally, Friend has urged schools to celebrate successes and share stories. When co-teaching works well, it transforms not only student learning but also professional relationships and school culture. By highlighting these successes, schools can build momentum for deeper implementation of **Marilyn Friend Special Education** principles.

Addressing Common Misconceptions

Despite the widespread adoption of Friend's ideas, misconceptions persist. One common misunderstanding is that co-teaching means two teachers simply sharing a room without changing their practices. Friend has been clear that co-teaching requires a fundamental shift in how instruction is planned and delivered. It is not easier than solo teaching; in many ways, it is more demanding.

Another misconception is that co-teaching is only for students with disabilities. Friend has emphasized that co-teaching benefits all students, including those who are advanced learners, English language learners, or simply struggling with a particular concept. The small-group structures and differentiated instruction that co-teaching enables can raise achievement for everyone.

A third misconception is that co-teaching is a one-size-fits-all solution. Friend has consistently argued that schools must consider their unique contexts, including the grade levels, content areas, and student populations they serve. The six approaches to co-teaching offer flexibility, but they must be adapted to local conditions.

The Enduring Legacy of Marilyn Friend in Special Education

As schools continue to grapple with the challenges of inclusion, accountability, and equity, the work of Marilyn Friend remains remarkably relevant. Her emphasis on collaboration, her practical frameworks for co-teaching, and her systemic perspective have shaped special education practice for more than three decades. She has helped move the field from a model of separation to a model of partnership, from a focus on compliance to a focus on outcomes, and from a deficit-based view of disability to a strengths-based view of student potential.

Friend's influence is evident in the growing number of schools that adopt co-teaching as their primary service delivery model. It is evident in the teacher preparation programs that now include coursework on collaboration and inclusive practices. And it is evident in the countless educators who have adopted her vocabulary, her frameworks, and her commitment to serving all students in the general education classroom whenever possible.

For anyone seeking to understand the past, present, and future of inclusive education, the name Marilyn Friend is indispensable. Her work offers not only a vision of what schools can be but also the practical tools to make that vision a reality.

Conclusion: A Call to Action for Educators and Leaders

The principles of **Marilyn Friend Special Education**are not abstract ideals; they are actionable strategies that can transform classrooms and schools. Friend has given educators a language for collaboration, a toolkit for co-teaching, and a compelling vision of inclusive education. But the work does not end with reading her books or attending her workshops. It requires daily commitment from teachers, ongoing support from administrators, and a collective belief that every student deserves access to high-quality instruction in the least restrictive environment.

For educators who are new to co-teaching, the journey may feel daunting. Friend herself has acknowledged that collaboration is messy, time-consuming, and sometimes frustrating. But she has also shown that it is worth the effort. When two teachers commit to working together, when they share their expertise and their vulnerabilities, and when they put students at the center of every decision, the results can be extraordinary.

Marilyn Friend's legacy is not just in the books she has written or the conferences she has addressed. It is in the classrooms where students with disabilities are learning alongside their peers, where teachers are growing through collaboration, and where schools are becoming more inclusive, more effective, and more humane. That is the true measure of her contribution, and it is a legacy that will continue to shape special education for generations to come.

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