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Continuum of co-teaching implementation: Moving from traditional student teaching to co-teaching☆

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Examination of co-teaching implementation by eight pairs during field experience.
- Existence of a continuum of co-teaching implementation.
- Community of practice critical for successful co-teaching.

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ABSTRACT

This mixed methods study examines the implementation of co-teaching as a model for the teacher education field experience. Participants included eight co-teaching pairs with the goal of determining the extent to which co-teaching occurred, conditions for success, and barriers to implementation. The authors posit that a continuum exists relative to co-teaching implementation with the cooperating teacher's view of his/her role and the purpose of the field experience contributing to where each pair fell on this continuum. This study provides insight into the conditions necessary for coteaching as well as factors that inhibited pairs from moving beyond traditional student teaching.

1. Introduction

Due to the influence of the field experience on pre-service teacher development, teacher education programs look to enhance this aspect of their programs. For over 200 years, traditional student teaching has been a global approach to the field experience, typically involving a master teacher releasing instruction responsibilities to the student teacher, often with an extended period of "solo time" (Fraser & Watson, 2014). In its infancy in Australia in the 1850s, this approach was known as the 'pupil teacher' system (Hyams, 1979). Recognizing perceived limitations of this approach, education stakeholders have argued for the reform of field experiences (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Cornu & Ewing, 2008; Darling-Hammond, Pacheco, Michelli, LePage, & Hammerness, 2005; The National Council for the Accreditation of Teachers, 2010; Zeichner, 2002).

Co-teaching is one reform effort that allows a pre-service teacher to co-teach alongside a cooperating teacher – collaboratively planning, instructing, and assessing. Drawing on the work of Badiali and Titus (2010) and Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2010), we define co-teaching as:

> Both the pre-service and cooperating teacher are engaged in student learning at all times through daily co-planning, co-instructing,[1] and co-assessing.

Co-teaching during the field experience can potentially develop future teachers who are "able to function as members of a community of practitioners who share knowledge and commitments, who work together …. and collaborate in ways that advance their combined understanding and skill" (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, & Le-Page, 2005, p. 13).

This mixed methods study occurred during the 2014/2015

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[1] For a description of co-instructional strategies, see Bacharach et al. (2010).

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school year of a yearlong post baccalaureate teacher education program in the United States. Pre-service teachers simultaneously completed three quarters of coursework and a yearlong field experience that progressed from a practicum experience (observing and assisting in a secondary classroom) to a co-teaching placement (teaching side-by-side with a cooperating teacher, first half and then full days). Research participants included eight single subject pre-service teachers (four English and four science) and their cooperating teachers.

The study's goal was to investigate co-teaching implementation and conditions necessary for co-teaching to occur. We were eager to determine the extent to which co-teaching occurred with each pair since this field experience model was different from traditional student teaching and required a certain level of understanding and buy-in to implement with fidelity. We argue that a continuum existed relative to co-teaching with the cooperating teacher's view of his/her role as a co-teacher and the purpose of the field experience contributing to where each co-teaching pair fell on this continuum. We provide recommendations for teacher education programs to support co-teaching pairs to move them further along the continuum as they implement co-teaching.

2. Literature review

2.1. Cooperating & pre-service teacher roles

Traditional student teaching. Historically in countries such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, cooperating teachers provided a space for pre-service teachers to implement and receive feedback on what they learned in their teacher preparation coursework. In this traditional model at its most basic level, the cooperating teacher's role is "classroom placeholder," where the pre-service teacher "exchanges places with the cooperating teacher who then exits to the staffroom" (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014, p. 8).

Additionally, the cooperating teacher within traditional student teaching serves as "supervisor of practica" (Borko & Mayfield, 1995, p. 9), overseeing the field experience as an evaluator and positioning the cooperating teacher as a superior rather than mentor (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Koerner, Rust, & Baumgartner, 2002). Research on cooperating teachers in the role of evaluator rather than mentor conclude that pre-service teachers in these environments tend to bend toward their cooperating teacher's methods, often assuming a subordinate role (Rozelle & Wilson, 2012; Valencia, Martin, Place, & Grossman, 2009). Although cooperating teacher as evaluator is one version of traditional student teaching, this model can also include cooperating teachers who view themselves as mentors employing effective mentoring practices.

Transforming cooperating and pre-service teacher roles. Pushing upon this traditional view of cooperating teacher as classroom provider and evaluator, Zeichner (2002) posits, "Being a good cooperating teacher is more than providing access to a classroom or modeling a particular version of good practice. It involves active mentoring" (p. 59). Zeichner (2002) elaborates, "The important thing to consider in thinking about classroom placement sites is whether the teachers in those classrooms are learners, questioning and examining their practices, and continually seeking to improve their practices" (p. 62).

Additional research conducted in Canada and the United States highlights the importance of a collaborative cooperating teacher (Beck & Kosnik, 2002; Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith, 1991; Graham, 2006) with the goal of negotiating meaning and developing understanding together through reflection (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009). Cornu and Ewing (2008) posit that "high-quality professional experiences should have dual outcomes" (p. 1799) including value to the pre-service *and* mentor teacher. Co-teaching supporters value the peer learning experience and the opportunity for shared learning about teaching through co-generative dialogue.

Cooperating teacher as mentor/coach. Building on Zeichner's and Cochran-Smith's call for a reconceptualization of the cooperating teacher's role, Cornu and Ewing (2008) contend that a shift in field experience models has occurred, moving from traditional student teaching with the goal of "mastering skills, techniques and methods of teaching" (p. 1801) in a supervision hierarchy to "more shared learning and joint construction of what it means to teach" (p. 1803). Research on mentoring during the field experience has identified effective mentoring practices including support and autonomy; opportunities for genuine dialogue; and collaborative planning, teaching, and reflecting (Tomlinson, Hobson, & Malderez, 2010). Additionally, reciprocity is crucial for successful mentoring for both teachers should have a voice and should grow professionally (Ambrosetti & Dekkers, 2010).

Viewing the field experience as a collaborative, mutual learning experience, the field experience's value moves beyond "having a laboratory for practice but in having knowledgeable others to guide and support learning" (Valencia et al., 2009, p. 314). During co-teaching, cooperating teachers position themselves as mentors – focusing on supporting the growth of the pre-service teacher – while simultaneously developing their own practice (Valencia et al., 2009). Co-teaching as a field experience model shows promise in re-envisioning the purpose of the field experience and the cooperating teacher's role.

2.2. Co-teaching during field experience

Although co-teaching has its origins in special education, in the 1980s teacher education programs began to appropriate the practice of co-teaching as a model for the field experience (Darragh, Picanco, Tully, & Henning, 2011). Numerous studies have been conducted on what co-teaching is, what it looks like in the field experience, its impact on learning for pre-service teachers and K-12 students, and co-teaching challenges.

Co-teaching and teacher learning. Recent co-teaching research has moved beyond gains for K-12 students and has focused on affordances and challenges for the development of pre-service and cooperating teachers, specifically examining the notion of co-generative dialogue. Roth and Tobin (2004) – seeking to capture the nature of a cooperating and pre-service teacher debriefing – coined the term co-generative dialogue to encompass "the collective and generative nature of theorizing praxis together" (p. 2). Drawing on Roth and Tobin (2004), researchers such as Scantlebury, Gallo-Fox, and Wassell (2008) define co-generative dialogue as "… when co-teachers discuss the issues that impact teaching and learning and collectively generate solutions to any problems" (p. 971). Since its initial inception, co-generative dialogue now includes not only post-lesson debriefings, but also "huddles" in the middle of a lesson when co-teachers reflect in the moment of teaching (Roth & Tobin, 2004).

Co-teaching research in the United States and Australia has found value in co-generative dialogue because it provides an opportunity to reflect on a shared experience (Badiali & Titus, 2010; Beers, 2008) and "examine their [teachers'] schema and practices in the presence of the other stakeholders in the classroom" (Beers, 2008, p. 447). The power of co-generative dialogue is found in how these reflective discussions provide a space to "articulate unintended and unconscious practices and, thereby, bring them to a conscious level; in the process, the power relationships and roles of participants can also be discussed" (Tobin & Roth, 2005, pp. 318–319). In the quest for teacher education programs to reform