



Coteaching as professional development for cooperating teachers



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Cooperating teachers experience professional development through coteaching.
- Coteaching cooperating teachers experience renewed energy toward their practice.
- Coteaching cooperating teachers expand classroom curriculum and practice.
- Reflection on practice as a cooperating coteacher promotes personal growth.
- Coteaching cooperating teachers develop as teacher educators and leaders.

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ABSTRACT

Coteaching provides opportunities for teachers to collectively share responsibility for student learning. This paper reports on findings from a longitudinal study in which cooperating teachers cotaught science classes with student teachers. Through coteaching with student teachers, teachers expanded their teaching practice and developed new insights about their teaching. Coteaching served as professional development for the cooperating teachers. The experience provided them with renewed energy toward practice, opportunities to develop and implement curriculum, reflection as a catalyst for changing practice, and an expansion of professional roles into new arenas.

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1. Introduction

Coteaching has emerged as a model for student teaching in teacher preparation programs. In coteaching, cooperating teachers and student teachers commit to coplanning, copractice and coreflection, thus sharing their knowledge and expertise to facilitate students' learning and strengthen their practice (Murphy & Martin, 2015). Promising use of coteaching has been reported internationally for varying grade levels and discipline areas. In Northern Ireland, Murphy and Beggs (2010) reported that coteaching resulted in improving primary students' science attitudes and preservice teachers' scores on teaching evaluations. In Sweden, a physics professor and primary school teacher cotaught science workshops

for preservice teachers (Nilsson, 2010), and Australian parents volunteering in middle school science classes cotaught a multi-disciplinary unit utilizing cogenerative dialogues to plan and evaluate instruction (Willis & Ritchie, 2010). In the United States, coteaching has been identified as a promising approach for improving clinical field experiences (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010).

Coteaching is a context for situated workplace professional development wherein cooperating and student teachers work 'at each other's elbow' (Roth & Tobin, 2005) and explicate practice within the ongoing context of teaching. Potential benefits of coteaching for cooperating teachers can be linked to current discussions in the U.S. of the importance of extended quality field experiences in teachers' in-service development (Baum & Korth, 2013; Boyle-Baise & McIntyre, 2008; Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2013). The renewed conversation around best practices in field experiences has also illuminated the

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development and learning needs of cooperating teachers—the field-based teacher educators who work with student teachers (Baum & Korth, 2013; Grossman, 2010).

While coteaching in the context of preparing science teachers in the United States was originally designed as a model to support student teacher learning (Roth & Tobin, 2005), the longitudinal study reported here provides evidence that coteaching with student teachers impacted cooperating teachers. This study details how coteaching provides authentic learning opportunities for cooperating teachers through situated co-construction and discussion of practice, exposure to student teacher's perspectives about science teaching and learning, and as stimuli for reflection. For over ten years we have been utilizing coteaching as a model for learning to teach. Drawing upon data from the first four years of implementation, this paper reports on cooperating teacher learning that emerged from the experience. Cooperating coteachers participated in formal professional development opportunities such as coteaching professional development meetings, writing for publication, and presenting at national conferences, however, this article specifically focuses on the authentic learning (Webster-Wright, 2009) that cooperating teachers reported resulting from coteaching, coplanning, and discussing their shared classroom practice with student teachers. This is the first paper to focus entirely on cooperating teacher learning within a coteaching student teaching experience.

This research emerged from a larger design-based research study (Cobb, Confrey, diSessa, Lehrer, & Schauble, 2003; Zheng, 2015) on the implementation of coteaching as a model for student teaching. The initial coteaching study had an iterative design with a focus on the development and improvement of the model. Earlier publications address outcomes including the development of the model and challenges associated with coteaching (Gallo-Fox, 2010a; Gallo-Fox & Scantlebury, 2015; Scantlebury, Gallo-Fox, & Wassell, 2008). One of the advantages of qualitative research is the discovery of the unexpected. An unanticipated outcome of the design-based study was the emergence of coteaching as a learning venue for cooperating teachers. The cooperating teacher reports led us to revisit data from the early years for more detailed study. This study focused on how coteaching provided professional development to the cooperating teachers. The research questions were: What do cooperating teachers report as outcomes from coteaching with student teachers? In what ways does coteaching provide professional development for cooperating teachers?

2. Cooperating teacher professional development

A few studies have documented the characteristics of quality professional development programs. Large scale studies of effective math and science professional development (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007) have found the following characteristics important: coherence with local contexts, duration in regard to both contact hours and time span, active learning, collective participation with colleagues, time to plan for implementation, and a focus on content. Several researchers have called for professional development experiences that provide teachers with extended time to learn about practice within teacher learning communities that produce and extend new knowledge, practice, and cultures within the profession (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Hewson, 2007; Luft & Hewson, 2014). Whitcomb, Borko, and Liston (2009) identified important factors such as “situated in practice, focused on student learning, embedded in professional communities, sustainable and scalable, and both supported and accompanied by carefully designed research” (p. 208). Similarly, Wilson (2013) described effective professional development as content-focused which

engages teachers in active learning, enables collective participation of teachers and administrators, and is coherent with school practices and policies, and is sufficient in duration. Ultimately, successful professional development is an extended, on-going process, not a single event (Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2010; Loucks-Horsley, Love, Stiles, Mundry, & Hewson, 2003; Luft & Hewson, 2014; NASEM, 2015; Supovitz, Mayer, & Kahle, 2000). Yet, teachers in the United States are rarely engaged in sustained and ongoing professional development (Luft & Hewson, 2014; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010).

Teachers need opportunities to collaborate with each other to experience modeling of new instructional strategies, to practice those strategies with students, and to have time to reflect on practice (Luft & Hewson, 2014). Clarke and Hollingsworth (2002) suggested that professional development programs should encourage teachers' agency by engaging them as learners in a professional community and supporting teacher reflection and enactment. Opfer and Pedder (2011) argued that the process of teachers' professional learning should not be viewed as a specific event, but as a complex system that is highly contextualized.

Despite a current shift toward more innovative methods of professional development, researchers know little about the actual professional learning that occurs within such contexts (Hewson, 2007; Wilson & Berne, 1999). This is partially due to ongoing development, but also due to difficulties accessing teacher learning in professional development programs. Moreover, teacher learning is cyclical rather than linear, and involves changes in beliefs and practices through personal, professional and social interactions, and teacher reflection (Murphy, Scantlebury, & Milne, 2015; Simon & Campbell, 2012).

One context for teachers to examine practice within authentic contexts occurs during the supervision of student teachers. Yet, there is little research that examines the ways that cooperating teachers are impacted by their work with student teachers (Spencer, 2007), rather research on cooperating teachers often examines the role of the cooperating teacher (Clarke, Triggs, & Nielsen, 2014), the nature of cooperating teacher and student teacher interactions (Smith, 2005, 2007), and ways that cooperating teachers conceptualize their work (Clarke, 2007). Additionally, cooperating teachers have documented reflections on the feedback provided to student teachers, but not how reflection or feedback has influenced their teaching (Clarke, 2006). Three studies surveyed cooperating teachers working within traditional models of student teaching. Ganser and Wham (1998) surveyed 454 teachers and found that the cooperating teachers reported benefiting from student teachers' enthusiasm and energy, and “new ideas, techniques, and strategies” (p. 49). They also valued the opportunity to see their classroom from another's perspective and the affirmation of their own practice. Koskela and Ganser's (1999) survey of 302 K-12 cooperating teachers found that 45% of cooperating teachers valued “receiving ideas and information from the student teachers” (p. 111) and 21% “looked forward to the [student teacher's] energy and enthusiasm” (p. 111). Supervising student teaching was a positive professional experience for most cooperating teachers. A decade later, Spencer (2007) surveyed 184 cooperating teachers and found that participants moderately reported that serving as a cooperating teacher supported their professional development.

Qualitative research by Landt (2004) found that cooperating teachers working within traditional student teaching models learned through their interactions with teacher candidates. While not all of the 18 teachers' practice changed, the cooperating teachers refined how they taught and interacted with students. These changes were attributed to the teachers' increased opportunities to observe and be observed and the increased reflection and the collegiality that resulted within the student teaching

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