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Collaborating to Meet Challenges of Co-Teaching Common Core Standards   *RESEARCH*

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Author's Note: *Members of the Collaborative Co-Teaching Project described in this article include Bellarmine University, Boyce College, Spalding University, the University of Louisville, the Jefferson County Public Schools, and OVEC (the Ohio Valley Education Cooperative).*

Abstract

Kentucky has led the nation in adopting Common Core Standards to revitalize education for next-generation learners and schools. To improve preparation of the state's next-generation teachers, Kentucky has also mandated reform in training student teachers. This article reviews experiences of teacher educators from four Kentucky universities that are collaborating to ensure both quality and consistency in Co-Teaching Training, a new state requirement for all P-12 cooperating teachers and university supervisors who mentor student teachers. The author reports cooperating teachers' responses to their initial Co-Teaching Training; analyzes educators' perceptions about a complementary relationship between Co-Teaching strategies and achievement of Common Core Standards; and reflects on mutual benefits of collaboration not only among the state's teacher educators but also in collaborative partnerships between higher education and P-12 teachers so that Kentucky schools can meet the challenge of producing graduates who are college and career ready. By co-teaching with partners from universities in our area, we are modeling the strategies that mentor teachers must practice with teacher candidates.

Keywords: collaboration, challenges, co-teaching common core standards

There is nothing permanent except change.
        Heraclitus, 500 B.C.

Veteran Kentucky educators have grown accustomed to living in a state of constant change and adapting to what an ancient Greek philosopher called the "permanence of flux." Since passage of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) in 1990, this Commonwealth has pioneered sea change in school instruction, accountability, and governance (Pankratz & Petrosko, 2002). Kentucky raised its "historically low ranking in nationwide educational assessments" as a result of systemic transformation of teaching and learning under the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (Wright, 2013). In 2009, Senate Bill 1 introduced Unbridled Learning, the state's complex and challenging new assessment and accountability system, designed to ensure that all next-generation high school graduates will be ready for successful transition to college or career. Kentucky became the first state in the nation to adopt

Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics, even before these had been finalized (Robelen, 2013). Leading the way again, Kentucky is the first adopter of national Science Standards, which are scheduled for implementation in the 2014-2015 school year.

To revitalize education for next-generation learners and schools, Kentucky has also initiated bold reform in the preparation of next-generation teachers. The state's most dramatic change in teacher preparation is the result of an Education Professional Standards Board (EPSB) regulation that establishes Co-Teaching as the new collaborative model for student teaching in Kentucky: "Beginning September 1, 2013, education preparation programs shall support the student teacher's placement and classroom experiences by… providing opportunities for the student teacher to engage in extended co-teaching experiences with experienced teachers" (16 KAR 5:040.Section 6. (5) (e) 1.). Kentucky has adopted a model for mentoring student

teachers developed at St. Cloud State (Minnesota) University through a United States Department of Education Teacher Quality Enhancement Partnership Grant.

In the state's newly mandated model, Co-Teaching is defined as "two teachers (a cooperating teacher and teacher candidate) working together with groups of students—sharing the planning, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction as well as the physical space" of a classroom throughout an entire student teaching experience (Heck & Bacharach, 2010, p. 3). The goal of this partnership model is to help pre-service teachers attain a higher level of success both during their mentorship and afterwards in their own classrooms.

Another hope is to improve academic achievement of P-12 students in Kentucky's co-taught classrooms just as in Minnesota, where "students [who] taught in classrooms that used the co-teaching model statistically outperformed their peers in classrooms with one teacher as well as those classrooms utilizing the traditional model of student teaching" in both reading and math proficiency during every year of a four-year study (Heck & Bacharach, p. 35).

Student teaching has long been recognized as the capstone of teacher preparation by each of the fifty states. The common rite of passage in teacher education, student teaching has traditionally followed an apprenticeship model that begins with observation of a master teacher's methods and progresses toward a gradual release of teaching responsibility from certified teacher to fledgling student teacher. Historically, a student teaching experience culminated with a solo week when a student teacher, working alone, assumed total control of instruction and management (Warren, 1959). Research has often questioned both weaknesses and widespread inconsistencies in clinical experiences of student teachers; however,

little significant change occurred in the student teaching paradigm until almost a decade ago (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010; Platt, Walker-Knight, Lee, & Hewitt, 2001).

What makes Kentucky's newly adopted Co-Teaching model appear so dramatically different is EPSB's expectation that *teacher candidates* must be able to work as peers alongside cooperating teachers, assuming an active instructional role as equal partners, not as *student* teachers. They must immediately transition from being students in schools of education to co-teachers in P-12 schools who are capable of co-planning Common Core lessons and co-implementing rigorous standards-based units of instruction. Of course, some universities and school districts have previously incorporated Co-Teaching into student teaching experiences (Bacharach, Heck, & Dank, 2004; Cramer, Nevin, Thousand, & Liston, 2006; Grothe, 2013). Kentucky is the first state, however, to *require* co-teaching practice from every teacher candidate (student teacher) and every cooperating teacher statewide. As a result, teacher educators have confronted the challenge of meeting this state's mandate: to provide Co-Teaching training required for all P-12 cooperating teachers as well as all university supervisors who mentor student teachers.

This article focuses on two questions of current significance for Kentucky educators committed to excellence in teaching and learning: 1) How have teacher educators responded to the state's new Co-Teaching mandate? and 2) How have mentor teachers responded to the state's new Co-Teaching mandate?

Data for this article has been gleaned from a variety of sources and stakeholders during the past eight months. A total of nine Kentucky teacher educators, representing

one public and three independent universities, participated in five different focus groups. These sessions also included input from three school district representatives in neighboring Kentucky counties where teacher candidates are assigned for student teaching by the universities. In addition, analysis of written responses from anonymous exit slips submitted by participants at the conclusion of Co-Teaching Workshops furnished valuable and specific feedback about initial perceptions. Exit responses were submitted by a total of 325 cooperating teachers. Two sessions also included 46 teacher candidates who are piloting Co-Teaching at the elementary, middle, and high school levels with their mentor teachers and university supervisors during fall semester, 2013. Weekly journal entries submitted by these student teachers will contribute valuable first-hand insights about implementation of Kentucky's Co-Teaching mandate and guide design of future support from higher education.

Background of Co-Teaching

Co-Teaching, though newly institutionalized as expected practice of all Kentucky student teachers, is far from a new practice in the classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995). In fact, the St. Cloud mentoring model is grounded in both theories and techniques of a widely used collaborative teaching model created by Cook and Friend. Their Co-Teaching approach "involves two or more certified professionals who contract to share instructional responsibility for a single group of students primarily in a single classroom or workspace for specific content or objectives with mutual ownership, pooled resources and joint accountability" (Friend & Cook, 2003, p. 18). This model places two certified teachers, both a general educator and a special educator, in one inclusive classroom, for the purpose of

meeting the diverse needs of special education students under the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Chandler-Olcott, Burnash, Donahue, DeChick, Gendron et al., 2012; Cramer, Nevin, Thousand & Liston, 2006; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005; Sims, 2008). Friend and Cook originally devised six strategies for Co-Teaching: one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; station teaching; parallel teaching; team teaching; and alternative teaching. In the St. Cloud Co-Teaching Model adopted by Kentucky, a seventh strategy has been added— supplemental teaching. Supplemental teaching is designed to allow "one teacher to work with students at their expected grade level while the other teacher works with those students who need the information and/or materials re-taught, extended, or remediated" because they have not reached the expected standard (Heck & Bacharach, 2010, p. 52).

During the past decade, co-teaching has also been utilized throughout the nation for meeting diverse needs of English Language Learners by embedding English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers or ESL teaching assistants into general education classes (Abdallah, 2009; Hayes, 2007; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). Academic outcomes associated with co-teaching in both special education (Mastropieri et al., 2005) and English Language Learner classrooms (Pappamihiel, 2012) vary greatly, demonstrating some successes, some failures, but many challenges. Inconsistent outcomes are commonly attributed to factors such as co-teachers' compatibility, previous training, and/or administrative support (Mastropieri, et al., 2005).

Inter-University Collaboration

Collaboration, though recognized as one of the vital twenty-first century skills for educators, is not always a common practice of teacher educators whose colleges compete for students and resources within the same region. Yet while participating in St. Cloud's two-day Train-the-Trainer Workshop, which is required for certification to lead Kentucky's Co-Teaching Training, representatives from our institutions realized that by working in isolation, the mission to train P-12 cooperating teachers and college supervisors of all student teachers in our region would be impossible. In order to succeed, higher education needed to present a positive, united front and to communicate consistent, clear expectations about Co-Teaching, especially since some P-12 cooperating teachers who serve our universities also assist other universities throughout the state. Therefore, four university placement directors along with a small group of teacher educators in our region began to meet as a professional learning community. First, we co-planned and then co-submitted a joint proposal to EPSB for regional delivery of Co-Teaching Training. All four universities even helped to facilitate the first and largest workshop, which included all cooperating teachers, teacher candidates, and college supervisors from one university.

Since February, 2013, this inter-university support group has met regularly to share ideas, experiences, and resources; discuss policy questions; and divide responsibilities for future Co-Teaching Workshops. In addition, we invited representatives from local school districts to join the group. By disseminating training dates, fielding participants' questions, registering cooperating teachers and recording attendance, our school district partners have facilitated communication between universities and P-12 teachers throughout this district. College teacher educators collaborate to offer monthly three-hour training sessions, which have been limited to a total of 75 participants. Co-Teaching Workshops fill to capacity immediately after they have been announced. Only through our inter-university collaboration could current demands for training be met in this area.

Initial Responses from Cooperating Teachers

When planning our first training session, university teacher educators anticipated less-than-enthusiastic reactions from veteran cooperating teachers. Coaching student teachers has always been a time-consuming commitment, motivated by dedication, not remuneration. We wondered whether experienced teachers would express frustration or even resistance to EPSB's regulation requiring them to work with student teachers as co-teachers while implementing seven Co-Teaching strategies.

It is gratifying to report that cooperating teachers' responses from each of the five collaborative workshops in our area have been overwhelmingly positive—almost 100% positive. Both in writing and in person, 325 mentor teachers appear not merely to have accepted but to have embraced Kentucky's reform of the student teaching paradigm based upon review of exit slips that posed five questions for all participants to answer:

1. What is your role (teacher candidate, cooperating teacher, university supervisor, other)?
2. What is the most valuable new idea or new information that you gained from this workshop?
3. Which two co-teaching strategies (besides observe and assist) do you anticipate being most beneficial to implement at the beginning of the professional semester? Why?
4. Which co-teaching strategy seems

most difficult for classroom implementation? Why?

5. What additional assistance and/or professional development do you need to achieve success in Co-Teaching?

Consistent themes clearly emerged from analysis of these anonymous responses submitted at the conclusion of each session as well as teachers' discussions during training sessions.

First, the most commonly echoed perception about co-teaching was that cooperating teachers do not view the state's newly adopted St. Cloud model as markedly different from practices that they were already accustomed to using in their classrooms. A representative response was "I have really been doing a lot of these [strategies] before, just did not know the labels." In fact, during each session, some P-12 teachers volunteered to share previous co-teaching experiences with a special education/general education colleague. Thus, many mentor teachers transferred positive perceptions about collaborating with certified colleagues to meet the needs of special education students to the newly mandated process of co-teaching with future student teachers. Such unexpected advocacy of co-teaching by cooperating teachers helped to set a positive and persuasive tone for professional development sessions. Participants heard P-12 practitioners who touted the advantages of previous co-teaching experiences: "My co-teacher and I work together so well that we have learned to think alike and can even finish each other's sentences. Every classroom needs a co-teacher."

A second predominant pattern of responses emerged from cooperating teachers who had no previous experience with co-teaching in special education. Their exit slips indicated both an interest and

openness to implementing the state's new Co-Teaching model. These responses are best captured by one cooperating teacher's observation that "learning seven different ways to work with student teachers will add some structure and variety to the semester." Participating co-teachers also seemed to welcome the prospect of increasing expectations and accountability for their student teachers: "I like the strategy of exchanging purposeful roles as observers [one teach, one observe] and working as an active duo from the very beginning the school year." Participants repeatedly noted that they found it helpful "watching trainers model each specific Co-Teaching strategy" and thought that "time to talk with other teachers about ideas for implementing the seven strategies in our own classes" helped them better understand each of the Co-Teaching strategies.

A third dominant theme in teacher responses focused on the name change in identification of student teachers. Creators of the St. Cloud model stress the importance of using *teacher candidate* in reference to a pre-service teacher so that P-12 students respect them as *co-teachers* rather than view them as fellow students. Heck and Bacharach (2012) advise: "Because student perceptions are critical to a successful student-teaching experience, cooperating teachers are instructed to introduce the 'teacher candidate' or 'co-teacher' so the first word students hear is 'teacher' (p. 12). While cooperating teachers voiced their understanding of the rationale, they also admitted that a change in terminology might perhaps be the most challenging to achieve in their classrooms: "Whatever name we use, most students and their parents will continue to think of us as the 'real teacher.'" One mentor teacher's words communicated an insight that cooperating teachers repeatedly voiced in our spring Co-Teaching Workshop, where cooperating teachers were

introduced to their teacher candidates assigned for the fall semester: "We'll be scheduling lots of summer co-planning time to get a head start and make this transition as smooth as possible when school begins. Thanks for giving us this chance to meet our teacher candidates in April instead of August!" Several cooperating teachers also predicted that assimilating student teachers into their classrooms as co-teachers would be far easier to achieve in the fall semester when student teachers begin the school year rather than in the spring semester when student teachers enter mid-year after routines, expectations, and classroom communities have been established.

When asked which two of the seven Co-Teaching strategies (excluding the traditional one-teach, one assist and one teach, one observe) cooperating teachers planned to introduce first in their own classrooms, Station Teaching was consistently the most popular answer, receiving 29% [N=94] of the total votes. While many cooperating teachers explained that stations were already an effective element in their classroom instruction, others wrote comments like this secondary teacher who had not used stations before: "Sounds engaging! It will be beneficial for the co-teachers and students to rotate from group-to-group, practicing skills and learning content from both teachers." Supplemental Teaching is the strategy that was ranked second most likely to be implemented at the beginning of the Co-Teaching experience; 23% [N=74] of the cooperating teachers expressed beliefs that "Supplemental teaching will allow for extra help for struggling and proficient students." The need for differentiation was recognized over and over again as an advantage of incorporating Supplemental Teaching: "Supplemental teaching will meet individual needs. We are already using this [strategy] with small group interventions to bring up

skill levels."

The Co-Teaching strategy that cooperating teachers overwhelmingly perceived as most difficult for immediate classroom implementation was Parallel Teaching. In *Guidelines for Creating Effective Practices*, Cook and Friend (1995) define parallel teaching as follows: "Each teacher instructs half the students. The two teachers address the same instructional material and present the material using the same teaching strategy. The greatest benefit to this approach is reduction of the student-to-student ratio" (p. 4). Sixty-two percent [N=201] of the 325 cooperating teachers' responses anticipated disadvantages that might either postpone or prevent use of this strategy such as distracting noise levels, lack of classroom space, and inability to provide dual access for technology. The video that trainers showed to demonstrate Parallel Teaching may have actually contributed to participants' strong reservations concerning implementation of this strategy: The classroom scenario depicting Parallel Teaching seemed to showcase problems rather than possibilities of the strategy. One goal of university teacher educators in our Co-Teaching Cadre is to identify teacher candidates in local schools where each of the seven Co-Teaching strategies has been successfully implemented so that we can produce a library of videotapes for use in future Co-Teaching Trainings.

Cooperating teachers perceived Team Teaching as the second-most difficult Co-Teaching strategy to implement. Eleven percent [N=36] justified their reasoning by explaining "real team teaching takes a lot of knowledge and planning from both partners," "it's difficult to team if both are not exactly equal," and "it takes a while to become cohesive and know where to pick up when the other leaves off." Comments revealed that master teachers realize effective team teaching is a strategy that

often takes more skill and experience to develop than many teacher candidates may possess at the beginning of their professional semester. In addition, some special education teachers perceived fewer advantages to team teaching because "my classroom has a varying degree of ability levels so the other models just work better."

The survey's final exit question asked what additional assistance and/or professional development teachers needed to achieve success in Co-Teaching. A large area was provided for any other comments or questions. This question was most often left blank. Cooperating teachers who did respond tended to write a variation of three different comments, "I need time to practice," "None. I feel ready," or "I don't know what I need yet. Will let you know." Teacher educators can relate to the feelings behind all three statements. Both university teacher educators and P-12 mentor teachers have accepted the challenge of implementing bold changes in teacher preparation. All these changes need time, support, and continuing evaluation in order to make a successful impact on teaching and learning in Kentucky.

One strong theme that emerged during all five Co-Teaching Workshops was not anticipated. Cooperating teachers repeatedly made positive, overt connections between Co-Teaching Strategies and Common Core Standards. References were sprinkled throughout exit slips as cooperating teachers explained the reasons for their choices to implement specific Co-Teaching strategies "in order to reach the standards." P-12 teachers, instead of viewing the state's Co-Teaching mandate as yet another burden, seemed to believe that collaborating with a teaching partner would make it more likely for more students to hit difficult learning targets. Mentor teachers

persistently voiced optimism that Co-Teaching methods will provide an effective tool for differentiation in their classes, as an effective way to divide classes and conquer the great expectations of Common Core Academic Standards. One cooperating teacher's exit observations are representative of connections: "By co-teaching we can optimize student learning and double the teaching." One cooperating teacher remarked as she left a training session, "People come in and out of my room all the time telling me what I should be doing. What I need is help. These strategies and a good student teacher will make a real difference in achievement."

It is vital for educators at all levels to work together in collaborative and supportive communities of practice. This collaborative project between Kentucky teacher educators and P-12 partners is not unique, but it demonstrates the rejuvenating power of joining forces to affect change. As teacher educators continue to collect data about the impact of redefining our state's paradigm for student teaching, Kentucky's leadership in educational policy can be useful for educators in other states. This project has taught university teacher educators the power of co-teaching and has motivated us to incorporate co-teaching strategies into our university classes. By co-teaching with partners from universities in our area, we are modeling the strategies that mentor teachers must practice with teacher candidates. We trust that cooperating teachers and their pre-service partners will discover, just as we have, how working together as change agents can increase expertise, redefine perceptions of teaching, and spark a collaborative spirit that can never be mandated or quenched.

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