

herald-review.com

Co-teaching newest way to provide classroom experience for student teachers

By VALERIE WELLS - H&R Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, October 30, 2009 12:00 am

DECATUR - It really is difficult to be sure which is the teacher and which is the student.

One stands at the front of the room, leading a class through a spelling lesson. Her voice easily carries, and the children are all facing the front and paying attention. The other stands at the back of the room, and in a few moments, she steps in to take over the lesson.

Co-teaching is a new way of training student teachers, now called "teacher candidates," that Millikin University is using with students.

"It's basically two teachers, meaning the teacher candidate and the teacher, sharing the classroom as two teachers would," said Connie Newton, field placement coordinator at Millikin.

In the traditional model of student teaching, the student observes for a few weeks, then gradually takes on teaching duties, teaching alone only for the last few weeks of a semester, and is under the direction of the cooperating teacher. In co-teaching, the teacher candidate is treated as a fellow professional, and the two work together on lesson plans, classroom management and daily duties.

"What I like about co-teaching is the children get to experience having two teachers from the very beginning," said Anita Schwartz, who teaches at Franklin School and is the cooperating teacher for Millikin student Michelle Brown. "The kids know from day one that there are two teachers, and they have great respect for them. We share things. We share lesson plans. When one of us is teaching, the other can help children."

Brown calls it a "win-win," because not only does she get the hands-on, real experience of being a teacher for the 14 weeks she's with Schwartz, but the children get the benefit of having two teachers, which makes a smaller student-teacher ratio and helps them grasp material and concepts more quickly.

Before beginning co-teaching, Newton said, cooperating teachers and teacher candidates spend a day in a workshop learning about each other and how the program works, so by the end of that day, all the ice is broken, and they can go right to work as a team.

In traditional student teaching, said Nan Gaylen, another member of the faculty in Millikin's program, the student teacher would watch the cooperating teacher, then do the same thing under that teacher's watchful eye.

The concept of co-teaching came from St. Cloud State University, Minn., Newton said, and its program has been in place since 2004, giving them statistics that show students in co-teaching classrooms post higher test scores than students in single-teacher classrooms or who have a traditional teacher and student teacher.

Reading scores in co-teaching classrooms were 78.8 percent meeting standards, while other classrooms were 67 percent. Among low-income students, 65 percent met standards, while only 52.8 percent met standards in other classrooms.

vwells@herald-review.com|421-7982