The
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Group

Voices from the Field: Multiple Perspectives on a Co-Teaching in Student Teaching Model

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Abstract

The goal of this project is to reform teacher preparation through the implementation of a research-based model of co-teaching in student teaching at teacher preparation institutions across the country. Four years of research conducted on a co-teaching model of student teaching has demonstrated a statistically significant increase in academic performance for elementary learners in co-taught classrooms. Co-teaching is designed to assist both the cooperating teacher and teacher candidate in collaboratively planning, organizing, delivering, assessing, and sharing the physical space of the classroom, allowing the classroom teacher to partner with the teacher candidate rather than give away responsibility. The Renaissance Group (TRG), a national consortium of teacher preparation institutions, proposed to take the co-teaching model initially developed at Saint Cloud State University and provide the training and support necessary for teacher preparation institutions across the nation to successfully expand it. The 14 institutions involved in this proposal collectively produce over 2,500 teachers each year and work with over 600 school partners. One hundred percent of these institutions work with high needs schools and all of them place students in classrooms where Adequate Yearly Practice (AYP) has not been met. During the 2011-12 academic year, TRG applied to the US Department of Education for a thirteen plus million dollar grant on behalf of its member universities to expand the co-teaching model. Although the proposal was not funded, the co-teaching model has become a high priority and practice in educator preparation institutions across the country.

Voices from the Field: Multiple Perspectives on a Co-Teaching in
Student Teaching Model

While many aspects of teacher preparation have been studied over the years, student teaching itself has experienced little change since the 1920's (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Student teaching is generally considered to be the capstone experience in the journey to becoming a "real teacher," the time when methods and theories are transferred and applied in actual classroom situations. Traditionally, student teachers begin their experience as a passive observer, eventually taking on the role of the cooperating teacher and finally left alone to take over the entire classroom. This model of learning to teach in isolation, however, is no longer best practice for preparing new teachers.

Linda Darling-Hammond (2006) asserted that the clinical side of teacher education has traditionally been somewhat haphazard and frequently disconnected from theoretical teachings. She advocated for the development of stronger models of teacher preparation and urged schools of education to design programs that would help prospective teachers "understand deeply a wide array of things about learning, social and cultural contexts, and teaching" (p. 3). Such an approach would move teacher preparation away from clinical experiences, where prospective teachers practice the art of teaching with little guidance, toward clinical experiences that allow candidates to "learn from expert modeling of practice" (p. 8) alongside teachers who can show them how to teach in ways that are responsive to learners who have a wide range of learning needs. A key report by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010) critically studied the role of clinical preparation and agreed with Darling-Hammond's assertions. The Blue Ribbon panel examined the status of clinical preparation nationwide and found it to be "poorly defined and inadequately supported" (p. 4). They reported that clinical experiences were the most highly valued element of preparation for teachers, and in many programs, the most *ad hoc* part of teacher education.

Field experience directors across the country experience increasing difficulty in securing high quality student teaching placements, with cooperating teachers wary of exiting the classroom especially during the term in which state-mandated No Child Left Behind (NCLB) tests are given (Ellis & Bogle, 2008). The number of placement requests coming from teacher education programs are not always matched by the number of receptive school sites or willing cooperating teachers (Goodlad, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Sinclair, Dawson, & Thistleton-Martin, 2006; Zeichner, 2002). Often, the institution's immense need for cooperating teachers is so overwhelming that they fall back on cooperating teachers who are willing to host teacher candidates, but do not model effective teaching practices for them. As a result, during the most impressionable time in the preparation program, future teachers often work with cooperating teachers who are ill-prepared for their role (Grimmett & Ratzlaff, 1986; Lewis, 1990), have unrealistic expectations (Sparks & Brodeur, 1987), and are tentative about the feedback they give (Morehead & Waters, 1987).

St. Cloud State University's Co-Teaching Model

In an effort to strengthen the teacher preparation program, overcome the challenges of placing teacher candidates, and maximize the human resources in the classroom, St. Cloud State University adapted the work of special educators Cook & Friend (1995), applying the concepts and strategies of co-teaching to the student teaching experience. While co-teaching is not a new

phenomenon, its application in the student teaching experience is a new area of study. Co-teaching in student teaching provides two professionally prepared adults in the classroom, actively engaged with students for greater periods of time than does the traditional model of student teaching. This co-teaching model of student teaching allows children increased opportunities to get help when and how they need it. It affords teachers an opportunity to incorporate co-teaching strategies, grouping and teaching students in ways that are not possible with just one teacher.

Through a Teacher Quality Enhancement grant from the U.S. Department of Education, St. Cloud State University (SCSU) in Minnesota has studied the impact of shifting from a traditional to a co-teaching model of student teaching. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected on the impact of a co-teaching model of student teaching on teacher candidates, cooperating teachers and the students in the classroom. SCSU's co-teaching model of student teaching has been recognized as a promising practice by the NCATE Blue Ribbon panel on clinical practice (2010). In addition, this innovative initiative received the 2008 American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) Best Practice Award for Research in Teacher Education, and the 2007 American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) Christa McAuliffe Award for Excellence in Teacher Preparation.

The quantitative results gathered on this co-teaching model have been previously reported (Bacharach, Heck & Dahlberg, 2010). However, a brief summary of the quantitative results follow. The focus of this paper will be to share the qualitative data collected on the SCSU Co-Teaching model.

Quantitative Results

Data collected on the co-teaching model of student teaching focused on academic performance for elementary students in reading and mathematics as the result of being in a co-taught environment. The original research study on co-teaching utilized two independent measures of student academic performance over a four year period. The two measures employed were the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) and the Research Edition of the Woodcock Johnson Psychoeducational Battery, (WJIII-RE). The MCA is a standardized test administered every year in the state of Minnesota to measure students' performance toward meeting state standards. The MCA complies with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, and is aligned with what students are expected to know and do in a particular grade. This test is used to determine levels of proficiency and the degree to which the student is on track to pass the required Minnesota Basic Skills Tests in later grades. The study also employed WJIII-RE tests of academic achievement (McGrew & Woodcock, 2001). The WJIII-RE is individually administered, has been normed for all grade levels, and can be used as a pre- and post-intervention measure. Pretesting occurred in September and post testing occurred in May, using the same test.

Results from the MCA and the WJIII-RE were analyzed separately and yielded very similar results regarding the effect of co-teaching on achievement. In each of the four years studied, the MCA indicated a statistically significant increase in academic performance in reading and math proficiency for students in a co-taught classroom as compared to students in a non co-taught classroom. The WJIII-RE showed a statistically significant gain in all four years in reading and in two of the four years in math.

While the results comparing the achievement of students in co-taught classrooms to the achievement of students in non co-taught classrooms is convincing, possibly the most compelling data lies in the comparison between the academic achievement of students in three different types of classrooms. Using the MCA data, students in a classroom that utilized the co-teaching model of student teaching statistically outperformed their peers in classrooms that were taught by either a single teacher or a cooperating teacher and teacher candidate using a traditional model of student teaching in both reading and math.

Qualitative Results

While these quantitative results are notable, it was important to gather qualitative data on the impact of co-teaching on stakeholders involved in the co-teaching model of student teaching, including teacher candidates, cooperating teachers and the students in the classrooms.

Teacher Candidates
As is typical in most universities, teacher candidates at St. Cloud State University are observed multiple times during their student teaching experience by both their university supervisor and their cooperating teacher. At the end of the student teaching experience, the university supervisor completes a summative assessment based on the observed performance of the teacher candidate. This summative assessment is based on the ten Interstate New Teacher and Assessment Support Consortium (INTASC) standards for new teachers, plus one standard measuring professional dispositions—and was scored on a four-point Likert-type scale. Cumulative data showed that candidates in co-taught settings had equal or higher average ratings on each of the ten INTASC standards (Table 1). Co-teaching candidates outscored their peers at a level that nears statistical significance in two areas that are hallmarks of co-teaching, reflection and professional development, and partnerships. There were no statistically significant differences in the remaining standards which

Table 1

Teacher Candidate Summative Assessment (2005-2008)

Standard	Co-Teaching Mean Score N=408	Not Co-Teaching Mean Score N=728	*p*
Subject Matter	3.37	3.36	.55
Student Learning	3.32	3.28	.39
Diverse Learners	3.09	3.09	.95
Instructional Strategies	3.31	3.29	.68
Learning Environment	3.28	3.28	.94
Communication	3.32	3.32	.98
Planning Instruction	3.35	3.34	.98
Assessment	3.06	3.06	.82
Professional Develop.	3.47	3.40	.08
Partnerships	3.40	3.33	.08
Prof. Dispositions*	3.61	3.51	.01

is not surprising since these categories focus on knowledge attained in coursework prior to student teaching and all candidates, whether they co-taught or not, completed the same coursework. Professional dispositions is the one area where teacher candidates involved in co-taught classrooms statistically out-performed their peers in non-caught classrooms. Professional dispositions include such things as enthusiasm, reliability, responsibility, initiative, and sensitivity and responsiveness to the needs of students and staff.

Candidates completing a co-teaching student teaching experience were asked to complete an end-of-experience survey and were invited to participate in a focus group. End-of-experience surveys were completed by 249 teacher candidates and 195 teacher candidates participated in focus groups.

On the end of experience survey, teacher candidates reported many benefits from their participation in co-teaching (Table 2), including increased classroom management skills, heightened collaboration, and deeper understanding of the curriculum.

Table 2

Benefits of Co-Teaching to Teacher Candidates (N=249)

Teacher Candidates Indicated that Co-Teaching led to:	
Improved classroom management skills	92.4%
Increased collaboration skills	92.0%
More teaching time	90.0%
Deeper understanding of the curriculum through co-planning	89.2%
More opportunities to ask questions and reflect	88.6%
Increased confidence	88.4%

Teacher candidates participating in focus groups were asked to discuss the pros and cons of the co-teaching model of student teaching. Overwhelmingly, candidates discussed how important it was that students saw them as a "real teacher." Candidates co-teaching were introduced as a "teacher candidate" or "co-teacher" and were expected to be actively engaged with students from the very first day. As one teacher candidate said, "Being active in the lessons right away (through co-teaching) is better than observing. You feel more comfortable." Another candidate reported, "The strong bond you have with your co-teacher is just amazing. You truly do feel that you are a second teacher in the room, not a student teacher."

Teacher candidates consistently cited a number of key elements that led them to feel like a real teacher. These elements have been organized into three main themes: sharing resources, mutual support and learning, and equal partnership.

Sharing and managing resources including human resources

Many candidates noted that through the co-planning process they became much more aware of the resources available to them and much more confident about using and managing them. They also discussed how they were mentored to become the instructional leader where they were responsible for directing other adults in the classroom, including the cooperating teacher and paraprofessionals. One teacher candidate said:

> Looking back on it, I'm so glad that I did co-teaching because now I have more skills when it comes to working with people. When I go out there and I have paraprofessionals in my room or maybe on my own team, we'll have four teachers that need to work together. I know that I can handle that now. I don't think I could have done that nearly as comfortably before co-teaching.

Another candidate added:

> I like that my cooperating teacher helped me along with planning. At the beginning we sat down and planned together, but now that it's coming towards the end, I'm in charge and I'm telling her what I want to do. It's really great with my teacher because she gives me so much freedom. She's says, 'This is your time. Tell me what you want me to do. You be in charge and let me be your assistant.' I really like that.

Mutual support and learning

When co-teaching, both the teacher candidate and cooperating teacher share ideas and strategies. As a result, both partners benefit from the support and collaboration developed through the experience. As one cooperating teacher noted:

A highlight of this co-teaching experience for me was watching how my teacher candidate started implementing some of my techniques in her teaching style and then realizing how I was implementing some of her techniques into my strategies. We really grew together!

Equal partnership

Candidates felt they shared leadership, ownership, and responsibility for teaching and classroom management. Co-teaching pairs are provided with specific strategies and activities enabling them to openly discuss the power differential that exists between a cooperating teacher and teacher candidate. The goal in co-teaching is for both teachers to be involved in all aspects of the classroom, with no consistent "leader" or "assistant." One candidate described it this way, "My teacher includes me in everything. She always finds a way to incorporate my name so kids know it's both of us."

Public School Students

Since academic achievement data was not available for grades 7–12, students in co-taught classrooms were surveyed to gather insight about their experiences with teacher candidates. The survey was administered over four years to 1,686 students. The survey listed the most frequent benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching based on a review of co-teaching literature. Students were asked whether in their current co-teaching experience a benefit happened more, the same, or less than in their previous student teacher experiences. Likewise, possible drawbacks were listed, and students were asked to identify whether they had experienced these individual drawbacks in their current co-teaching experience.

Most students stated that they received more help with questions in co-teaching classrooms than they did in settings that did not include co-teaching (Table 3). Students in co-teaching classrooms also reported they enjoyed the different styles of teaching and appreciated more individual attention. Only 4% of the almost 1,700 students surveyed found no benefits to being in a classroom where the teacher candidate and cooperating teacher were co-teaching.

Table 3

Benefits of Co-Teaching (2004-2008 n=1,686)

Benefits of Co-Teaching	Percent Responding
More help with questions	79.7
Different styles of teaching	68.9
More individual attention	66.4

Get two perspectives	65.8
Teachers build off each other	60.3
More creative lessons	51.2
Assignments graded and returned faster	50.9
More energy between teachers	46.1
Better discussions	45.0
More in-depth knowledge	43.1
No benefits	4.0

Although very few drawbacks were identified by secondary students (Table 4), some found two explanations confusing while others were unsure about which teacher they should go to for answers to questions or for help with issues.

Table 4

Drawbacks to Co-Teaching (2004-2008 n=1,686)

Drawbacks to Co-Teaching	Percent Responding
No drawbacks to Co-Teaching	47.6
Confusing with two explanations	18.8
Confusing who to go to	13.5
Grading issues	13.0
Contradicting information	11.6
Teachers interrupt each other	8.8
Candidate too dependent	8.3
Less material covered	7.1

Survey participants also cited differences between their co-teaching experience and previous student teaching experiences (Table 5). Secondary students, most of whom had experienced a teacher candidate in a traditional student teaching setting, noticed clear differences between traditional student teaching and co-teaching. Almost 80% of secondary students surveyed indicated that co-teaching should be used more often in student teaching.

Table 5

Differences between Co-Teaching and Traditional Student

Teaching (2004-2008, n=1,686)

Differences in Student Teaching Experiences	Percent Responding
Cooperating teacher and teacher candidate worked more as a team	62.1
Teacher candidate was more involved with the lessons	59.1
Teacher candidate was more ready to teach	56.1
Teacher candidate was more prepared for class	50.8
Teacher candidate brought in more new ideas and methods	50.5
Cooperating teacher was more involved with the class	42.3

Over 540 students in grades 1-12 were interviewed in focus groups over the course of the four-year project. Students overwhelmingly identified increased engagement and available help when they needed it as the biggest benefits to co-teaching. They described the benefits of co-teaching in the following terms:

- Increased opportunities to work in small groups
- More individual attention
- Questions answered faster
- Papers and grades returned more quickly
- Better behavior by fellow students
- Fewer classroom disruptions

Students noted they spent less time waiting in class and more materials were covered when co-teaching was used. In addition to getting help when they needed it, students in all focus groups appreciated the two different styles of teaching, and they enjoyed being able to do a variety of activities that were not possible with just one teacher. Furthermore, students indicated that they felt more connected to school and looked forward to going each day.

Cooperating Teachers

Cooperating teachers who participated in the co-teaching model of student teaching were invited to complete an end-of-experience online survey. The 279 cooperating teachers completing the survey reported experiencing a variety of benefits as the result of participating in co-teaching (Table 6). Cooperating Teachers indicate that co-teaching led to the ability to reach more students, particularly those with high needs. One teacher noted, "The students in my

classroom love the attention they are given by an additional teacher. The opportunities to extend, review, repeat, and individualize lessons to meet student needs is extremely valuable."

Table 6

Benefits of Co-Teaching to Cooperating Teachers (N=279)

Cooperating Teachers Indicated that Co-Teaching led to:	
More help for students with high needs	94.5%
A better relationship with their teacher candidate	92.3%
Professional growth through co-planning	90.5%
Enhanced energy for teaching	89.0%
Ability to host candidate without giving up classroom	87.1%

Cooperating teachers felt they had a better relationship with their teacher candidate than they did with candidates they hosted who did not co-teach. Another benefit reported by cooperating teachers was the emphasis on continued professional growth. One teacher noted, "I liked it because most curriculum we've had a long time. She'd see it with a fresh look and make suggestions. It was nice to hear new ideas."

Cooperating teachers overall agreed that the co-teaching experience provided richer learning opportunities for candidates. One teacher said:

> Teacher candidates get a better experience of what teaching is truly about. They end up spending more time working with students either one on one, in small groups, or as a whole classroom. Their experience is closer to a true classroom."

Yet another cooperating teacher stated:

> I believe my teacher candidate received far more teaching experience in planning, instruction, and management from the very beginning—becoming engaged in the teaching of lessons right away (as compared to candidates who have gone through a traditional student teaching experience with me.)

In addition to the end-of-experience survey, 107 cooperating teachers participated in focus groups. Cooperating teachers who co-taught agreed that they completed projects more successfully, found class time to be more productive, modeled and participated in effective teamwork, and believed their teacher candidates became competent more quickly. One cooperating teacher summed it up by saying:

> Watching my teacher candidate grow in all aspects of the teaching job was rewarding. Teaching is no longer a solo job so learning how to delegate and use her resources is so essential! The co-teaching model gives candidates an opportunity to grow in all aspects of the job.

Partnerships

Universities and their school partners have noted a number of benefits as they shifted to the co-teaching model. School districts partners reported feeling more valued and indicated they had a closer connection to the teacher preparation process. As one cooperating teacher stated, "I learned so much about how to help a student teacher myself. This has never been addressed before. Somehow we were just supposed to know what we were doing. It was very helpful, supportive, and enjoyable."

District administrators also supported the implementation of the co-teaching model. One middle school principal said "The results are proven as far as I'm concerned we have better student teachers, we have better cooperating teachers, so it's the best of both worlds for me."

The impact of co-teaching at the university has been significant. The largest impact has simply been on the ability to make placements. Prior to the implementation of co-teaching, little was done to prepare cooperating teachers to host a candidate; there was no formal preparation, and the information about the program was expected to be delivered by university supervisors. With the advent of cooperating teacher workshops, the number of teachers interested in and willing to host a candidate rose dramatically. According to the coordinator of student placements at SCSU "The use of a co-teaching model of student teaching has made placing student teachers SO much easier!" In fact, in some areas, we now have more cooperating teachers willing to host than there are available candidates.

Conclusions

Teacher preparation programs face continued scrutiny, and to address these concerns it is imperative that teacher educators examine all aspects of their current preparation programs. The student teaching experience serves as a critical component in teacher preparation and must undergo careful review. The SCSU co-teaching model provides a proven alternative to the traditional student teaching experience. This model not only strengthens university/school partnerships but also has the ability to provide benefits for all stakeholders. Teacher candidates who co-teach with their cooperating teachers do so in an environment where they are guided and mentored as they learn the art of teaching. Cooperating teachers experience professional growth and find it easier to meet the needs of the students in their classrooms. Students receive more individual attention and get their questions answered faster.

The qualitative data reported in this paper coupled with the quantitative data reported early (Bacharach, Heck & Dahlberg, 2010) provides a persuasive argument for colleges and universities to adopt a co-teaching model of student teaching. Teacher preparation institutions adopting a co-teaching model of student teaching can strengthen their partnerships and better prepare teachers for tomorrow's classrooms. In the words of one Assistant Superintendent:
… the compelling evidence is clear. Traditional student teaching is not conducive to maximizing educational benefits for our students. Co-teaching, however, has transformed the student teacher and teacher relationship. Instead of throwing a student teacher into the complexities of teaching, without a lifeline, student teachers are coached as they practice the art of teaching. Teaching is rocket science, and co-teaching is the power source!

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