Co-Teaching: Idea to Implementation

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Idea

From a university perspective, it can be challenging finding field experience placements with quality mentor teachers. The field experiences we provide help shape (positively or negatively) the development of pre-service teacher candidates (PTCs). Our university is fortunate to have, as one of our field experience sites, a P-12 university Charter school in which faculty work closely with K-5 teachers. Together, faculty and teachers are able to provide meaningful experiences. As one of our field experiences, we require all EC-6 PTCs to experience a semester in the university Charter school. A benefit of this university and Charter school relationship is that the university is able to control the mentor teachers in which we work with and the experiences we provide our PTCs.

Perhaps the biggest challenge our field experience faces is accommodating our PTCs in the limited number of classrooms at the Charter school field placement. It is not uncommon to have as many as six PTCs placed with a given mentor teacher. How do provide a meaningful field experience while keeping all PTCs actively engaged in their field experience?

Our initial quest lead us down the path of co-teaching. Cook & Friend (1995) describe co-teaching as “Two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single space.” Co-teaching was a topic somewhat unfamiliar to us as field supervisors. After embarking on an extensive literature review and consulting with our Department Chair, we soon found co-teaching to be a topic of interest.

Training

To learn more about co-teaching we attended a Co-Teaching Train the Trainer Workshop in Minneapolis during summer of 2016. The training was provided by The Academy for Co-Teaching & Collaboration through St. Cloud State University and TWI Consulting. The training was designed to provide a foundation in co-teaching. The training provided insight into the following co-teaching models originally developed by Cook & Friend (1995):

1. Station Teaching: Students are divided into groups with each teacher instructing part of the lesson. This method of instruction is dependent on social interactions and task structures for the classroom. The expectation is that students will isolate one another through all interactions and complete work on their own.
2. Parallel Teaching: Students are divided into two groups. Each group works with a different teacher. The teacher may present different information to different ways of the students, present the same information in different ways, or they may discuss the same information.
3. Alternative Teaching: One teacher works with the majority of students, while the other teacher instructs a smaller group to research, enrich, assess, present, or another purpose.
4. Station Teaching: One teacher is in one group, while the teacher co-teaches with the other teacher.
5. One-teacher, One-observe: Students remain in one group, with one teacher leading instruction while the other teacher briefly interacts with students to focus attention, answer questions, further explain concepts, or out, and.
6. One-teacher, One-observe: One teacher leads instruction while the other teacher collects data pertaining the one or more children.

The training also provided an opportunity for co-teaching teams to interact with other universities, districts, and schools to see how co-teaching could be used.

The training was geared toward a mentor teacher and student teacher working as a co-teaching pair. While we found the training to be beneficial, we were left wondering how to facilitate the idea of co-teaching with one mentor teacher and as many as six PTCs being placed in a single classroom.

Planning

After numerous discussions, we decided to pair PTCs as co-teaching pairs. Together, we make up two of six field experiences as part of our field experience course, all PTCs are required to teach lessons related to mathematics and science.

We decided to let participants in our sections of the field experience self-select a peer to form a co-teaching pair. These co-teaching pairs would be as co-teachers for the duration of the semester, while implementing six models of co-teaching as it relates to the science and mathematics lessons they were to teach.

In order to prepare students for a peer to-peer co-teaching field experience, we wanted to train our PTCs about the different models of co-teaching. We designed a co-teaching orientation for PTCs enrolled in our section of the field experience. The orientation was co-taught by both of us, providing an overview of the co-teaching models. Our field experience also includes a one-hour lab that meets once a week. We decided to conduct our labs together, as co-teachers, to showcase the different models of co-teaching. Each lab, orientation and individual lab class, was facilitated by both of us, as field supervisors, using one or more of the six different models of co-teaching. Modeling of the co-teaching methods allowed each PTC to participate in the co-teaching models prior to the planning and implementing the components in their field placement.

In an attempt to collect data related to the co-teaching experience, we asked for, and received permission, to use a survey instrument from our training. We wanted to gauge the perceptions of our PTCs as it relates to their experience co-teaching.

Impact on future teaching...

- The most beneficial part of co-teaching was collaborating with my co-teacher. This gave me more confidence for the future when I become a teacher and have to plan with the teachers on my team.
- The most beneficial thing about my co-teaching experience was being able to bounce ideas off of my co-teacher and getting a different perspective. It incorporated my style of teaching [sic] with her style of teaching as well as incorporating the different learning abilities of each child in the classroom.
- While co-teaching was new to me in the beginning, I felt that it was important to learn about because it is directly applicable to our future in student teaching as well as in our future as teachers. I have developed more skills in communication and planning, and I have gained TWICE the teaching experience this semester! I saw valued the co-teaching and a co-teacher. I am confident that I will use these models in my future.
- I learned how to work well with another teacher. It also made me realize how other people can interpret your lessons differently.
- It made me realize how other people can interpret your lessons differently, unless you explain it to them.