Chapter 1
The Evolution of Clinical Practice: Moving from Traditional Student Teaching to Co-Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors examine the implementation of the co-teaching model within the clinical experience of a post-baccalaureate teacher credential program, examining the different levels of understanding and buy-in to the co-teaching model. Implementing mixed methodologies, the authors look specifically at the co-teaching experiences of three science co-teaching pairs. Although pairs highlighted within this case study predominantly aligned more with a traditional model of student teaching, each pair had at least one moment of co-teaching, which either provided a better learning environment for the secondary students and/or professional development for both the pre-service and in-service teacher. In the discussion and implications section of the chapter, the authors explore why co-teaching occurred in these specific contexts and how a teacher education program might better support its co-teaching pairs in their understanding and implementation of co-teaching.

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INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on their experience of learning to teach, pre-service teachers often refer to their field experience as one of the most influential factors shaping their development as a beginning teacher, with policymakers and practitioners also echoing this belief (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Guyton & McIntyre, 1990; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). Research has identified the influential nature of field experience as well as challenges associated with this experience (Borko & Mayfield, 1995; Darling-Hammond, Pacheco, Michelli, LePage, & Hammerness, 2005; Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009), with a current movement to reform and improve field experiences (Fraser & Watson, 2014; NCATE, 2010; Zeichner, 2002).

Traditional student teaching – a common approach to fieldwork during a credential program – typically involves a master teacher who gradually releases responsibility of classroom instruction to the student teacher, often with an extended period of “take-over” where the student teacher has full responsibility of the classroom with minimal master teacher involvement. This model is sometimes associated with a “sink or swim” method for learning to teach. Fraser and Watson (2014) in their article entitled “Why Clinical Experience and Mentoring Are Replacing Student Teaching on the Best Campuses” explain that traditional student teaching dates back 200 years – often serving as a culminating experience to a credential program “under the watchful eyes” of a master teacher and university supervisor (p. 2). Challenges associated with traditional student teaching include little training of the master teacher in the mentoring of a student teacher, often leading to the master teacher having the student teacher observe his/her teaching on a few occasions before handing over the classroom to the student teacher for solo-time (Hamman, Fives, & Olivarez, 2007; Heck & Bacharach, 2015). In addition, Heck and Bacharach (2015) posit that an additional drawback to traditional student teaching is that planning is often done in isolation and a clear power dynamic between novice and veteran teacher exists, reducing opportunities for the student teacher to learn from and with the master teacher. Recognizing that being an effective master teacher involves “active mentoring” more than just providing a student teacher with access to a classroom (Zeichner, 2002, p. 59), teacher educators and researchers recommend moving away from the “familiar routines of traditional student teaching,” and re-imagining how field experience can be an enriching learning experience for both teachers (Fraser & Watson, 2014, p. 11).

Co-teaching is one such reform effort that allows a pre-service teacher to co-teach alongside a cooperating teacher – collaborating in planning, instructing, and assessing. Although the clinical experience often focuses on the development of the pre-service teacher, co-teaching has the potential to positively impact the growth of cooperating teachers as they are faced with numerous educational reforms (e.g., Next Generation Science Standards, Common Core State Standards) and innovative instructional practices (e.g., project based learning). Drawing on the work of Badialia and Titus (2010) and Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2010), the authors of this study define co-teaching as the following:

Both cooperating teacher and pre-service teacher are engaged in student learning at all times through daily co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing.

The qualitative research study described in this chapter occurred during the 2014/2015 school year of a yearlong post baccalaureate credential program. Pre-service teachers who enrolled in the credential program simultaneously completed three quarters of coursework and a yearlong clinical experience that gradually increased from a practicum experience (consisting mainly of observing, assisting, and tutoring in a secondary classroom) to a co-teaching placement (teaching side-by-side with a cooperating teacher, first part-time – half days – and then full-time – full days). For the research study, participants included