A DETAILED STUDY ON CHANGING THE FACE OF STUDENT TEACHING THROUGH CO- TEACHING

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Abstract

From a relational standpoint, this study explored what transpired during the introduction of a co-teaching paradigm for student-teaching. Teacher-candidates and their mentor-teachers created caring connections, acknowledged and negotiated uneven power dynamics, and reported building a caring atmosphere via discussion and modelling when examined within the theoretical framework of care ethics.

Keywords: care ethics, collaboration, teacher education, co-teaching

Introduction

Co-teaching has lately been proposed as a collaborative approach to the student-teaching practicum, which is at the heart of teacher training (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010). Simply said, co-teaching is when two or more teachers prepare, teach, and evaluate together (Bacharach et al., 2010). Since its origins in the 1920s, the conventional paradigm of student-teaching has remained unchanged; rather than cooperating, teacher-candidates watch a mentor-teacher until they teach independently with little to no cooperation (Fraser & Watson, 2013). While collaboration occurs in the traditional model, it is not the primary organising approach, and some argue that the complexity of learning to teach in today's context necessitates collaboration: "Given the increasing diversity of today's schools and the prevalence of teacher accountability issues... learning to teach in isolation should no longer be an unquestioned practise" (Bachar). A mentor- teacher and a teacher-candidate teach together in a coteaching model of student-teaching, practising strategies requiring shared authority, consistent engagement from both teachers, and collaboration over planning, instruction, and assessment, with the goal of gradually assuming the role of solo teaching (Bacharach et al., 2010).

Co-teaching derives from collaboration between special and general education teachers to support mainstreamed students in the 1980s (Friend, 2014, 2015; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Over this time, the research on co-teaching between certified teachers has revealed benefits for student learning (Friend, 2015; Pisheh, Sadeghpour, Nejatyjahromy, & Silverman, Hazelwood, & Cronin, 2009; Walsh, 2012). Co- teaching allows for dividing students into ability groups, for example, which affords smaller teacher- to-student ratios and opportunities to learn concepts in various ways. Co-teaching can encourage student participation, open opportunities for students to

receive feedback, and support critical thinking as co-teachers model dialogue (Friend, 2014; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Patel & Kramer, 2013). Given the recency of the application of co-teaching to a mentorship context we do not know whether and to what extent these benefits might transfer. Current interest in coteaching as a mentorship model stems from the larger movement to improve our schools as collaborative learning environments (Baeten & Simons, 2014; Fraser & Watson, 2013).

Collaboration, the defining feature of co-teaching, is co-creation; collaborators both contribute, neither merely executes, and have opportunities to learn (Bacharach et al., 2010; Patel & Kramer,2013).

Research on certified teachers' collaboration in general education—in which teachers have their own classrooms but engage in the co-planning and co-assessing aspects of co-teaching—has shown increases in student learning outcomes (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009; Goddard et al., 2010; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Furthermore, the relationships that protective factors that promote resilience (Benard, 2004). One meta-study found "(t)eachers whose schools have strong collaboration report dramatically higher satisfaction . . ." (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, p. 8). This is promising given the need to slow the tide of high attrition rates, which we know are exacerbated by un-collaborative teaching environments (Baeten & Simons, 2014; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008). Given the promise of preparing teachers who have experience collaborating, many teacher preparation programs have shifted to a coteaching student-teaching practicum (Bacharach et al., 2010). As a teacher educator at a large urban university, our program's service area partners, superintendents and principals, encouraged us to prepare our teacher-candidates to collaborate. I was charged with leading a co-teaching initiative in my elementary education department. Using the lens of care ethics, this 3-year study explored what happened as co-teachers developed their collaborative relationships with one another.

Lack of Collaboration in Traditional Mentorship

The traditional mentorship model does not interrupt the current status of teachers' environments for collaboration, which unfortunately are often found to be competitive, unsupportive, and isolating (Baeten & Simons, 2014; Fraser & Watson, 2013; Friend et al., 2010; Hargreaves, 2002).

Traditionally, a mentor-teacher gradually releases responsibility until a teacher-candidate teaches independently (Fraser & Watson, 2013; Patrick, 2013). In this gradual release model, teacher candidates and mentor-teachers alternate teaching responsibilities rather than reflect on their teaching to improve practice through collaboration (DarlingHammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; FeimanNemser, 2001). Traditionally, mentors guide candidates' socialization into existing beliefs and structures; candidates are expected to replicate what they see thus preserving the status quo rather than critiquing structures to transform them (Dewey, 1904/1965; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Since the conception of the traditional student-teaching model, Dewey (1904/1965) critiqued its lack of reflective and transformative learning. While student-teaching could be organized so that candidates contribute from current educational research and innovations encountered in their programs, and mentors contribute years of experience to helping candidates implement and critique innovations, the gradual release model of teaching in isolation fails to leverage these resources. For example, at my university, mentors were not explicitly involved in observing and sharing feedback in structured ways; they only participated through completing a multiple-choice summative assessment of teaching performance expectations. Dewey (1904/1965) argued that reflection on practice, not practice itself, is the site of learning. Unfortunately, research shows that teacher-candidates assume planning, instructing, and assessing for entire disciplines in isolation without reflection over mentor feedback (Edwards & Protheroe, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Absorbed by their own survival, candidates struggle to find time to reflect on practice and this undermines their own learning; little bandwidth is left for their students' learning (Edwards & Protheroe, 2003; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Likewise, the potential for mentors learning with their candidates—from reciprocal observations of each other's teaching, feedback, and reflection— goes untapped. Not surprisingly, Achinstein and Barrett (2004) found candidates experienced "practice shock" as they faced the complexity of teaching. They struggled with relational aspects of teaching, such as classroom management and they often defaulted to an authoritarian and control focus (Weinstein, TomlinsonClarke, & Curran, 2004). Arguably, candidates and mentors would benefit from student-teaching as an opportunity to learn from teaching—not just for the candidate to learn for teaching (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Perhaps a more collaborative mentorship model could afford more support and thus more reflection toward learning from teaching.

Co-Teaching Mentorship

Initial research reveals that co-teaching as a mentorship model contributed to increases in student learning outcomes (Bacharach et al., 2010) along with perceived benefits for both mentor teachers (Goodnough, Osmond, Dibbon, Glassman, & Stevens, 2009; Murphy,

Carlisle, & Beggs, 2009) and teacher-candidates (Goodnough et al., 2009; Kroeger, Embury, Brydon-Miller, Laine, & Johnson, 2012; Larson & Goebel, 2008; McHatton & Daniel, 2008; Murphy et al., 2009; Scantlebury, Gallo-Fox, & Wassell, 2008; Siry, 2011). In one 4year study with 35,000 elementary students, the students in co-taught mentorship classrooms outperformed their solo-taught peers in reading and math (Bacharach et al., 2010). Mentors involved in co-teaching reported increased confidence in their capacities, learning from candidates in science and technology and perceiving student learning increases (Goodnough et al., 2009; Murphy et al., 2009). Teacher-candidates described more support in co-teaching structures (Goodnough et al., 2009; Siry, 2011), confidence in their classroom management skills (Larson & Goebel, 2008), and ability to meet students' diverse needs (Kroeger et al., 2012; McHatton & Daniel, 2008). Candidates' perceptions of strong relationships with co- teaching mentors correlated positively with their sense of teaching efficacy; they deemed the mentorship relationship the most critical in their preparation (Edgar, Roberts, & Murphy, 2011).

The Relational Nature of Co-Teaching and Collaboration

The collaborative aspects of co-teaching render it a relational model (Murawski, 2009). In fact, coteaching collaborations between certified teachers have failed when relationship building was neglected (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009; Friend et al., 2010), parity was not achieved (Pratt, 2014), or relationships were unsupportive and judgmental (Damore & Murray, 2009; Murawski, 2009; Murawski & Dieker, 2013). Relationships between collaborators need to be developed for teachers to engage successfully in co-teaching strategies, such as reciprocal observations in which teachers give one another feedback and learn from teaching (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Feiman- Nemser, 2001). Furthermore, in co teaching relationships in a mentorship context, mentor- teachers and teacher-candidates face a power imbalance; one is experienced and responsible to evaluate the other. Thus, not only do these pairs find parity elusive (Stang & Lyons, 2008) but also candidates endeavor to be seen as "real" teachers (Bacharach et al., 2010). This struggle for parity in collaboration reflects issues with power dynamics well documented in the mentoring literature; teachers fail to share substantial feedback during collaborations characterized by "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 2002) and superficial politeness belying underlying tensions (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Strong & Baron, 2004). Innovation is stifled and practice stagnates (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015; Hargreaves, 2002). Co-teaching without attention to teachers' relationships may not suffice to interrupt isolating school environments for teachers.

A Care Ethics Perspective

Co-teaching works in the context of relationships that are robust enough to sustain the creative process (Friend et al., 2010). But how and when do teachers learn to develop and nurture those relationships given the context of school environments where isolation may be the norm? As Friend et al. (2010) put it, "Much of the current teaching workforce has had little preparation for co-teaching roles" (p. 20). Teacher candidates are no exception;

research showed that prior experience did not prepare them to collaborate. The argument here is that coteaching in student teaching may create that opportunity for candidates and mentors. Care ethics provides a conceptual framework through which we can examine the nature of co-teaching relationships as well as their cultivation in the student-teaching context (Noddings, 2002). In care ethics, relationships are considered the impetus and medium for moral learning (Noddings, 2002). We learn to relate with care based on an innate desire to be in caring relationships. Given growing recognition of the importance of social, relational, and emotional dimensions of education, teacher preparation programs have begun to address the ethical dimensions of teacher development, particularly under the larger umbrella of social and emotional learning. These programs seek to develop candidates' capacities for caring relationships as well as dispositions to care (Rabin & Smith, 2013; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; Schussler & Knarr, 2013). These are complex relationships, and even as teacher education programs increasingly attend to SEL, it is a rare program that prepares candidates to develop professional relationships with other teachers (Murawski, 2009; Murawski & Dieker, 2013; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). When teacher education addresses caring dimensions, candidates learn not only to develop meaningful relationships with one another but also to help students develop relationships (Pang, 2005). Within care ethics, learning to care is a primary purpose of education. Educators orient themselves toward modeling and cultivating reciprocal, responsive, and enduring relationships (Noddings, 2002). Unlike traditional moral education where virtues are taught didactically, care ethics focuses on experiences of caring as the medium through which we learn to care. Caring entails engrossing oneself in another's concerns enough to understand their experience and undergo motivational displacement to respond to their needs. The one caring discerns between assumed and expressed needs. Caring occurs when the cared-for receives or recognizes caring; caring does not happen in a vacuum. Noddings (2010) explains engrossment as receptive attention:

In a caring relation, the carer is first of all attentive to the cared for, and this attention is receptive; that is, the carer puts aside her own values and projects, and tries to understand the expressed needs of the cared-for. (p. 391)

In care ethics, relationships are recognized as the medium through which experiences of schooling create habits of mind. Noddings' (2002) approach to cultivating caring centers on open-ended process-oriented practices: modeling, practice, dialogue, and confirmation. A teacher models caring relations, creates opportunities for practicing caring, and confirms other's best intentions. Among these, dialogue is salient for uncovering thoughts and concerns (Noddings, 2002).

How Co-Teachers Developed Caring Relationships

The increased shared teaching tasks and attendant reliance with co-teaching gave many co-teachers the opportunity to practice a care ethic. (Counter stories are addressed.)

Co-teaching served as catalyst to care

Within care ethics, reciprocity and mutuality characterize caring relationships (Noddings, 2002). Relationships are the center of a care ethic; through relationship, we learn how to care (Noddings, 2002). Co-teachers consistently described that co teaching required they be "more engaged," "trusting," "responsible," "closer," and "connected" to their co-teacher. This surprised candidates. Despite having learned about care ethics the semester prior to student-teaching, candidates held preconceptions of teaching free from complicated relationships with colleagues and students. "I think of movies where teachers triumph and kids listen and adore them, like the pied piper.

It's not like that." Co-teaching involved unpacking unrealistic criteria of effortless relationships (Friend et al., 2010; Murawski & Dieker, 2013). The difficulty of developing caring relationships challenged candidates' preconceptions: "The relationships you build in the field take much more effort than I knew. There is a presence you have to bring. How would you know about it prior?" Another candidate added, "If I knew it was about getting to know my mentor and students, I would have put more energy into that from the beginning." Mentors described depending on candidates in co-teaching more than they did in the traditional model and this contributed to practicing caring. In one mentor's interview, when asked what distinguished the co-teaching model, she pinpointed relationships: "I've had many candidates over the years, but when you know you have to co-teach with them you are going to share more and make more of a personal connection."

Co-teachers acknowledged power dynamics.

Co-teaching relationships in student-teaching demanded recognizing power dynamics. Given the hierarchical nature of their context, the co-teachers repeatedly described needing to navigate power to develop relationships. As stated above, mentors evaluate their novice candidates. Power dynamics in mentoring contribute to collegial competition and isolation (Friend et al., 2010), contrived collegiality (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hargreaves, 2002), and the lack of feedback required to learn from collaboration (Strong & Baron, 2004). What we know about power-sharing is that it is rare. Unsurprisingly, candidates who reported struggling to find opportunities to co-teach also described failing to address power to develop a co-teaching relationship. Approximately two pairs yearly or ~7% in all (11 co-teachers or six pairs over 3 years) reported having not co-taught at all due to time and relational restraints. Co-teachers characterized these strained relationships as "formal," "distant," and "inflexible." One explained, "As much as my mentor is open . . . she feels that little power thing.

It gets to her to have to share the students with me." Another said, "I felt like if I added ideas or anything I'd step on her toes." The candidates described their mentors as "unwilling to share their power" and lacking in "openness." A close examination of these cases—through surveys and interviews—revealed that candidates reported needing time to

develop expertise and encouragement to engage. Mentors described their "hesitancy" and "discomfort" in intervening, reflecting t h e traditional mentorship models in which mentors are less involved. Analysis revealed one pivotal way co-teachers connected and developed strong relationships—through facing their power imbalance. Candidates describe negotiating power as required by increased involvement (required to co-teach). In a survey when asked to "describe co-teaching," a mentor contrasted co-teaching with a straightforward power-down model of mentor-candidate: "It's (co teaching is) anti-hierarchical cause you are negotiating power, sharing teaching together." One wrote in a survey: "I'm not sitting in the back and watching—I'm teaching 90% of the time. We have to work out sharing power together while teaching." Video-ed observations of co-teachers show both teachers engaged. Notably, they also do not reveal particularly able candidates, which arguably could pave a smoother path to parity. Instead, what distinguished these co-teachers was their approach to the power dynamic.

Limitations

These co-teachers described developing caring relationships in the context of a program focused on SEL and care ethics (as explained in the methods). This orientation toward care ethics could have led them to perceive and value caring relationships and focus particularly on developing them. This predilection may have contributed to the tendency t o agreement o r groupthink (Maher, 2005). Thus, given their program's stated focus on caring, co-teachers may have over-inferred the importance and existence of caring relationships. They also may have just felt emboldened to notice and value caring relationships. Interview and observation data represented self-nominated co teachers likely to be interested in learning to co teach; thus, the data may reflect those who undertook this learning. To search for disconfirming evidence, participants were asked to share honestly about co-teaching struggles through multiple forms of data collection (including workshop discussion and anonymous survey).

Ultimately, it was in co-teachers' interest to share their challenges—because impediments could impede teacher-candidate credentialing. Their reported issues and counter narratives helped to broaden and underscore the findings. Perhaps the prior focus and understanding of care ethics and SEL did lead to openness to the value of caring relationship and a penchant to try to learn to care.

Given the complexity and importance of developing co-teaching relationships, perhaps this study shows that collaboration would require such an orientation toward relationship's worth. For despite candidates' prior knowledge of care ethics, they still reported surprise at the centrality of the role of relationships and the challenge or "presence" that collegial collaboration demanded. We cannot assume that any experience described here will transfer into candidates' practice as novice teachers or that the mentors will continue to develop strong co-teaching relationships in future mentoring or in the larger school context. Further research is needed to investigate the possibilities for transfer, sustenance, or impediments to developing caring relationships in which co teachers can collaborate.

Conclusions

This study expands the application of care ethics in the context of teacher relationships in which power needs to be shared. Co-teaching between teacher candidates and mentor teachers presents a power differential, and thus, these processes inform co teaching in a teacher preparation context. That said, power is at play in co-teaching relationships in both mentoring and certified teaching contexts (e.g., Carter et al., 2009; Friend et al., 2010). When power differentials in relationship go unacknowledged, they contribute to dynamics that interrupt collaboration, such as contrived collegiality and superficial politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Hargreaves, 2002). In such cases, co-teachers struggle to achieve parity (Pratt, 2014) and share feedback toward mutual learning (Strong & Baron, 2004). Thus, these co-teachers' stories may inform teacher collaboration in general and teacher preparation specifically. Co-teachers acknowledged and mitigated hierarchy to develop strong collaborative relationships. Experience in caring collegial relationship occurred. Co-teaching serves as a relational model in the formation of a teacher-candidate's teaching practice. Candidates have an opportunity to learn from sophisticated moves in professional collegial relationship, such as acknowledging hierarchical roles and establishing parity intentionally, for example, by a candidate sharing an innovation and a mentor seeking feedback. From this perspective, the traditional model where a candidate might flail without a mentor intervening would hardly cultivate caring collegial relationships; rather it seems a set up to perpetuate competitive and isolating environments (Friend et al., 2010) where growth stagnates (Hargreaves, 2002; Strong & Baron, 2004). In contrast, the co-teachers described creating conditions to learn from one another.

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