

Co-teaching: A New Partnership During Student Teaching

Joanie Hartnett: University of Central Missouri

Rahila Weed: University of Central Missouri

Ann McCoy: University of Central Missouri

Deb Theiss: University of Central Missouri

Nicole Nickens: University of Central Missouri

After more than 100 years of successfully practicing a traditional model of student teaching, a midwestern university recently transitioned to a new co-teaching model of student teaching. What factors contributed to the decision to implement a co-teaching model? What process was used to guide, facilitate, and implement this major change in the way things had always been done at this university? What partnerships were formed during the implementation process? The authors share the steps taken to implement this shift in paradigm and how the co-teaching model continues to evolve.

A traditional model of student teaching had been in place at this university for over 100 years. Teacher candidates were placed with cooperating teachers who understood this model well; student teachers observed quietly for a few weeks and then over the course of the semester assumed full responsibility for the classroom. After the mid-point of the semester, the cooperating teacher often left the classroom in the hands of the student teacher and only infrequently came back to the classroom. The cooperating teachers understood their role well; after all, each of the cooperating teachers had student taught using this same model. The model was viewed as being successful and many outstanding teachers had followed the model during their student teaching.

During the 2010-2011 academic year, two factors combined to cause this university to examine the student teaching model in place and to, eventually, move away from the traditional

model in place to a new model of co-teaching. One of these factors was the release of the report of the Blue Ribbon Panel of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) that describes the potential of clinical experiences to improve learning and achievement (NCATE, 2010). The report states,

Creating a system built around programs centered on clinical practice also holds great promise for advancing shared responsibility for teacher preparation; supporting the development of complex teaching skills; and ensuring that all teachers will know how to work closely with colleagues, students, and community. It will be a crucial step towards empowering teachers to meet the urgent needs of schools and the challenges of 21st century classrooms. (p. ii)

The authors of the report call for university teacher education programs and P-12 school districts to see teacher preparation as a shared responsibility. This report spurred the need to implement a clinical model as part of the strategic action plan of the College of Education.

A second factor fueled the motivation to consider adopting the model of co-teaching for all teacher candidates. It came in the form of a “charge” from the State Department of Elementary & Secondary Education for institutions to identify a student teaching model for their programs. The combination of these two factors caused faculty to begin examining current practices and to consider new options.

Why Co-teaching?

Many aspects of the co-teaching model made it intriguing to teacher education faculty from this university. In co-teaching classrooms, two teachers share all aspects of the classroom including the planning, organization, instruction, assessment, and physical space of the classroom (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008; Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010; Heck & Bacharach, 2010). Co-teachers utilize seven specific strategies as they plan and implement co-teaching. Co-teaching has been used successively as a model to guide the work of general education and special education teachers in inclusive classrooms (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2000; Friend & Cook, 2006; Murawski, 2010). The co-teaching model used in special education has provided a foundation for the adaptation of co-teaching as a model for student teaching.

A specific co-teaching model for student teaching developed at St. Cloud University in Minnesota was of particular interest to teacher education faculty at the university. Data collected by researchers from St. Cloud was convincing. These researchers noted significantly higher gains for students in reading and math proficiency in co-teaching classrooms. Teacher candidates

participating in co-teaching displayed enhanced classroom management, improved collaboration skills, and increased confidence in their ability to meet the diverse needs of children (Heck & Bacharach, 2010). The model implemented at this institution is closely based on the co-teaching model developed at St. Cloud University in Minnesota.

Implementing the Co-teaching Model

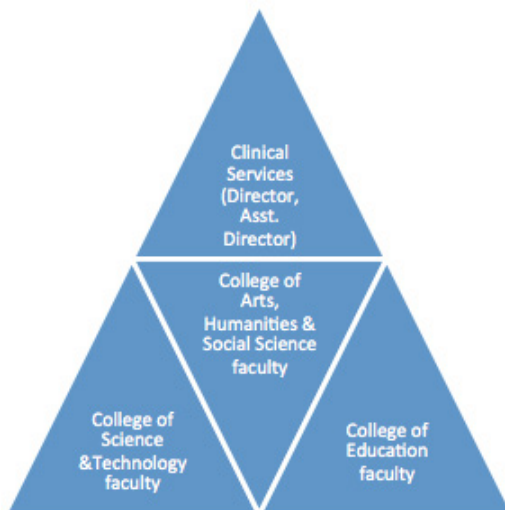
Initial Steps

As noted above, developing a clinical model was part of the strategic action plan for the College of Education. The co-teaching model was believed to be a good fit with this goal and would afford an opportunity to strengthen relationships with surrounding districts. Leaders in the College of Education recognized the need to proceed carefully and thoughtfully in investigating and implementing this new model.

One of the first steps taken was the establishment of a co-teaching team to guide, facilitate, and lead the implementation of the model. The organization of the team included representation across all colleges and included the certification office to ensure that training and implementation of the model was consistent across all education programs (see Figure 1). The faculty representatives from colleges outside the College of Education were involved with teacher education, regularly taught methods courses, and supervised student teachers. The inclusion of team members from outside the College of Education proved to be beneficial in ensuring buy-in from all faculty members involved with teacher education.

Five faculty were sent to the St. Cloud University Training in the spring of 2011. The training provided these faculty members with a great deal of information about the co-teaching model, its implementation, and its positive impact on teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and P-12 students. The faculty left the training

Figure 1 Organization of Co-teaching Team



convinced that transitioning to a co-teaching model would be in the best interest of our students. The group was committed to co-teaching and excited about leading the transition.

The co-teaching team, with full support from the College of Education, used the 2011-2012 academic year to inform all those associated with teacher education about co-teaching. The group made numerous presentations to groups on campus including the Teacher Education Council and the Professional Education Faculty. The co-teaching team members from outside the College of Education scheduled individual meeting times with secondary teacher education programs housed in other colleges. These individual meetings allowed the team members to visit with other faculty about their concerns regarding co-teaching and to answer any questions. Concurrently, co-teaching team members within the College of Education were meeting with departments in the College of Education to ensure that all faculty were informed about the new model.

The co-teaching team decided to pilot the co-teaching model during the fall 2012 semester. The pilot was initially designed to include 12 teacher candidates but was later modified to involve 18 students. This decision was made in order to have

a greater variety of teacher education programs included in the pilot. These students were carefully selected and invited to participate in the pilot. Six area school districts were chosen to host the pilot co-teachers. The co-teaching team visited each of these districts to present information about co-teaching to district administrators. In addition, the co-teaching team provided information about the need for careful selection of cooperating teachers for the teacher candidates. With the co-teaching model, it is essential that the cooperating teachers be not only excellent teachers but also skilled and effective mentors. Each of the six districts was excited about the new model and recognized its potential.

Pilots of Model

As soon as the districts, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates to be involved in the pilot were determined, a series of meetings and training were conducted (see appendix for a detailed timeline of implementation steps). The Office of Clinical Services and Certification played a vital role in preparing for the implementation of the model. Office representatives met with school district officials from participating districts and with each teacher candidate to ensure all involved were all on the same page with a shared understanding of what would be involved in the pilot of the model.

Training for pilot participants (teacher candidates, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors) was held in May 2012. Training materials from the St. Cloud project were used extensively. The morning session provided an overview of the co-teaching model that included information about research on the model and the co-teaching strategies. The morning training involved the teacher candidate, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors as well as any other person interested in learning about co-teaching. Several faculty members and school district personnel not directly involved in the pilot attended the training. The triads involved

in the pilot sat together during the morning session and had the opportunity to begin building the relationships necessary for a successful co-teaching experience. The university supervisors were excused after lunch and the teacher candidates and cooperating teachers were able to get to know more about each other and to do some initial planning.

In addition, district representatives and representatives from other universities that had attended St. Cloud training and were excited about the model began contacting Clinical Services and asking for information. Recognizing the need for consistency regarding co-teaching, Clinical Services organized a university collaboration meeting on co-teaching during the summer of 2012. Eleven institutions of higher education from across the state attended this meeting at which participation, training, and a general approach to co-teaching were discussed.

In addition to preparing for the fall 2012 initial pilot, co-teaching teams used the summer of 2012 to begin planning an expanded pilot for the spring of 2013. District contacts were made during the summer and plans for a second pilot began to take shape. The co-teaching team began holding collaborative meetings to discuss issues related to implementing co-teaching and to answer district questions. The group met once every two weeks during the 2012-2013 year.

For the spring 2013 pilot, 76 teacher candidates were placed in co-teaching partnerships in 21 school districts, more than quadrupling the number in the fall pilot. As part of this second pilot, one school district accepted six co-teaching teacher candidates in a single elementary building. The co-teaching team was interested to see how this “saturation” model of co-teaching would provide support for co-teaching pairs.

Training for participants of this second pilot was more of a challenge due to the large numbers

of people involved. Several trainings were held on campus to meet the needs of the participating school districts. In addition, individual training was offered and held for some at district sites.

For semesters two and three of our pilot, teacher candidates continued to be given a choice between co-teaching and traditional student teaching. Students continued to select co-teaching, but not all districts were willing to provide the release time for the cooperating teachers to attend the co-teaching training. Our twenty-one partner districts continued to support the training model by funding the substitute teacher costs. For the fall of 2013, 45 co-teachers were placed in twenty of our partner districts and in the spring of 2014, 65 co-teachers were placed in twenty-one districts. Increasingly the complaint by our partner districts was the cost, not only for the substitute teachers, but the loss in instructional time for training.

During all pilot semesters, data was collected to inform the co-teaching team of the successes and challenges of co-teaching and weekly meetings of the co-teaching team allowed for the monitoring and review of the data. One source of data was a weekly online journal completed by both the cooperating teacher and the teacher candidate. This journal (adapted from Bacharach & Heck, 2011) asked participants to specify the co-teaching strategy used and to identify successes and challenges experienced during co-teaching.

Cooperating teachers, teacher candidates, university mentors, and building administrators completed an End of Experience Survey (adapted from Bacharach & Heck, 2011) at the completion of the co-teaching semester. This survey asked participants to respond to questions designed to measure the successes, challenges, and benefits to all involved over the course of the semester. The co-teaching team used the data gathered from this survey to modify the processes used in the implementation of the co-teaching model.

Moving Towards Full Implementation

Feedback from pilot participants, responses to the weekly journal, data gathered from End of Experience Surveys, as well as a growing number of school districts demanding co-teachers in their schools reassured the co-teaching team that a move to co-teaching was the right step.

In the fall of 2013, the College of Education's site based council (consisting of faculty members from the College of Education, content areas and graduate programs, as well as department chairs and the Dean) voted to end the pilot and to adopt the co-teaching model for all student teaching in the fall of 2014. Based on evidence from the pilot, the site-based council believed that co-teaching was the best model for all student teachers. Operating under a dual system, with both traditional and co-teaching models of student teaching, created uncertainty and confusion at the district level, as well as for our student teachers, and no longer represented a "best option" for the candidates.

A Look Ahead: Revising the Model

The original co-teaching training team was tasked with how to make the co-teaching model a reality for more than three hundred student teachers, in all settings (rural, urban, suburban) across the state of Missouri. Once co-teaching was deemed the best approach, the co-teaching team requested that one member be allotted release time for a year to manage the full implementation of the model. The Dean of the College of Education granted this request, allocating the resources for a Co-Teaching Program coordinator.

One of the biggest challenges faced by the co-teaching team was how to train both student teachers and district cooperating teachers. During the pilot, the UCM training team was afforded the opportunity to conduct on-campus

training sessions. Participating districts were willing to pay the substitute teacher costs for the cooperating teachers' release time. In the next iteration, the approach will be to conduct dual platform trainings, with the co-teaching training offered in an online format and a facilitated planning session to be conducted in districts by co-teaching facilitators. This will allow districts to plan for their co-teaching collaboration on days that work best for their school calendars. District facilitators will be selected by school district administrators based on their experience and ability to work successfully with both experienced teachers and student teachers. Their role will be to monitor, coach and work with co-teaching teams and administrators in their own district. The university co-teaching team's role will be to monitor, coach and work with the district co-teaching facilitators.

The co-teaching team will continue to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the implementation of the co-teaching model. The team will monitor co-teaching data and successful implementation through bi-monthly reflections involving all participants. Annual meetings will be held with co-teaching district facilitators. In addition, the co-teaching team will receive monthly feedback from district facilitators on successes as well as challenges during the co-teaching implementation. The team will continue to evaluate the types of quantitative and qualitative data that is collected. Adjustments based on feedback from our co-teaching district facilitators, as well as University supervisors, student teachers, cooperating teachers and school administrators will be made.

One of the biggest challenges to full implementation of the co-teaching model is successful communication and "buy-in" from all constituents. Early perceptions of co-teaching among elementary and secondary education faculty, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates were not consistent. To address this, specialized collaboration workshops are

planned for the fall 2014. “Job alike” groups of elementary, secondary and K-12 education faculty will meet with University supervisors to discuss with the co-teaching team what characteristics and needs are unique to each level. Co-teaching can then be better defined and supported for the student teachers. In addition, elementary, secondary and K-12 education faculty will develop individualized department plans for integrating the co-teaching strategies into their specialized methods courses.

As with all change, communication is the key. The co-teaching team continues to engage in small group dialogue about co-teaching implementation with partner school districts, teacher education faculty, students and university supervisors. The pilot helped to recognize that “buy-in” and support are the keys to successful implementation. Therefore, ongoing dialogue with support is essential. Next year (2014-2015), the priority of the co-teaching team will be the careful examination and review of feedback data, in order to remain responsive to our many participants and address needs and concerns as they arise.

Is it easy to change a 100 year old model?

Our traditional model for student teaching had been in place for more than 100 years and had, for the most part, been viewed as successful. Due to the longevity of the traditional model, the change to a new model of co-teaching involved some challenges along the way. However, the vision of clinical education described in NCATE’s Blue Ribbon Panel report is compelling. Our co-teaching model resulted from our university and partner districts sharing a common vision for change and a realization that teacher preparation is indeed a shared responsibility. This realization and our institution’s willingness to commit time, resources, and energy to the transitioning phases have resulted in a stronger model for student teaching that benefits all.

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Appendix

Summary of Co-teaching Development

Spring 2011 to Current Date

- Spring 2011- Five individuals sent to the St. Cloud model training; two faculty- elementary education, one faculty- art education, one faculty -middle school education, one faculty –mathematics education)
- Fall 2011-Presentations to Professional Education Faculty and potential school district partners
- Fall 2011-Visits with faculty from teacher education programs on campus
- October 2011 to February 2012- Identification of school districts, cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and teacher candidates for participation in the fall 2012 pilot
- October 2011 to February 2012- Meetings between university representatives and fall 2012 pilot school district officials
- February to March 2012-Meetings between Office of Clinical Services and Certification and teacher candidates for fall pilot
- May 11, 2012-Training for pilot participants
- June 2012-Director of Clinical Services and Certification sent to St. Cloud training in nearby district
- June 6, 2012-University collaboration meeting on co-teaching was held at the university off-campus site with eleven institutions; participation, training and general approach to the co-teaching model discussed
- August 2012-First pilot begins with 18 students and 6 school districts
- Fall 2012-Decision made to expand the pilot for the Spring 2013
- August 29, 2012-Training team begins regular bi-weekly collaborative meetings to coordinate activities
- October 11, 2012- Presentation on co-teaching at state association of Colleges for Teacher Education
- October 29, 2012 – Overview presentation to university supervisors by training team
- November 1 & 2, 2012 – Seventh university individual completed St. Cloud training in St. Cloud, Minn. (Co-director of Clinical Services and Certification)
- November 9, November 30, and December 7, 2012 – Training for spring 2013 Pilot Participants (cooperating teachers, teacher candidates, district administrators, university supervisors and invited participants); district participants chose the option that best fit their situation for attendance at the training
- September-December 2012 – Meetings with secondary departments about expansion of the co-teaching model and requirements of this expansion
- January 14, 2013 – Second pilot begins with expanded co-teaching placements in 21 school districts with 76 teacher candidates
- May 2013- Co-teaching trainings conducted by the co-teaching training team at a metro area school district as well as at the university
- August, 2013- 45 co-teacher candidates placed in 22 school districts placed in fall 2013 semester
- November, 2013- Campus Teacher Education Council votes to make the co-teaching model the official model of student teaching for all teacher candidates
- November 22 and December 4, 2013- Co-teaching training held for Spring 2014
- December 9, 2013- Dean approves the position of coordinator for co-teaching
- January 2014- 65 co-teaching candidates placed in 21 school districts in spring 2013 semester
- April 14, 2014: Clinical Advisory Board-The co-teaching coordinator presented a proposed change to the Co-Teaching Training Platform
- April 29, May 5, May 20, 2014- Co-teaching training held for the fall 2014 semester

- May 5, 2014- Program coordinators meeting: The co-teaching team presented the dual platform training for implementation in the Spring of 2015
- May 7, 2014- COE Advisory Board- Co-teaching team informed districts of the co-teaching model for all student teachers placed in districts, as well as the dual platform training for Spring 2015
- May 20, 2014: 29 teacher candidates, 37 cooperating teachers, 3 university supervisors co-teaching training at metro district

Authors Note

Dr. Hartnett is an assistant professor at the University of Central Missouri in the Department of Education Foundations and Literacy. She teaches undergraduate and graduate middle level methods courses.

Dr. Weed is an associate professor at the University of Central Missouri in the Department of Art & Design. She teaches undergraduate art education courses.

Dr. McCoy is an associate professor at the University of Central Missouri in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science. She teaches undergraduate and graduate mathematics education courses.

Dr. Theiss is an associate professor at the University of Central Missouri in the Department of Elementary/Early Childhood Education. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in the College of Education.

Dr. Nickens is a professor at the University of Central Missouri in the Department of Elementary/Early Childhood Education. She serves as department chair and coordinator of graduate and professional partnerships.