

A Reflection on Lessons Learned from Implementation of a State-Mandated Co-Teaching Model for Student Teaching

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Abstract

The author reflects on challenges faced by teacher educators when Kentucky's Educational Professional Standards Board mandated a new Co-Teaching model for all of the state's student teachers in 2013. This article analyzes the overwhelmingly positive responses of cooperating teachers and the experiences of teacher candidates (student teachers) with co-planning and co-teaching. The article also analyzes the intra-university as well as inter-university collaboration that has resulted to implement Kentucky's unfunded mandated which has shifted student teaching from a traditional apprenticeship model to a co-teaching partnership model in order to assure more consistent clinical experiences for student teachers, raise achievement levels, and improve retention and success of classroom teachers.

***Keywords:* co-teaching, student teaching, special education, education reform, clinical practice, university supervisors, cooperating teachers**

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Autonomy and academic freedom are rights cherished by university educators, particularly by professors at independent liberal arts institutions. Consensus building and collegial buy-in precede most dramatic changes in higher education, where faculty councils regard the phrase *top-down* in much the same way that Kentucky Senator Rand Paul utters the word *liberal*.

Unlike university teacher educators, who are accustomed to deliberating and debating significant policy or program revisions, public school teachers have grown accustomed to top-down mandates for educational reform. The federally imposed No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is just one prime example. Individual states may have adopted Common Core State Standards, but P-12 teachers as individuals often have little voice in making curricular decisions that impact not only their instruction but also their accountability. In 2013, Kentucky, the first state in the nation to adopt Common Core Standards in Mathematics, Language Arts, and Science, also became the first to mandate a dramatic reform of student teaching practices throughout the entire Commonwealth. The Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board enacted a new regulation requiring all educational preparation programs throughout the entire state to adopt the same clinical model. This collaborative co-teaching model developed at St. Cloud State (Minnesota) University was named the *only* certifiable culminating experience for all Kentucky student teachers: “Beginning September 1, 2013, education preparation programs shall support the student teacher’s placement and classroom experiences by... providing opportunities for the student teacher to engage in extended co-teaching experiences with experienced teachers” (Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board, 16 KAR 5:040, § 6[5]) The new partnership model replaced a traditional apprenticeship model experienced by preservice teachers for decades. The ruling impacted not only P-12 public school teachers but also teacher educators at every college and university in the state and even neighboring states that seek to place student teachers in Kentucky schools.

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Kentucky's Educational Professional Standards Board (EPSB) also decreed that all cooperating teachers and university supervisors (no matter how many years they had successfully served in their roles) would have to be retrained, pass an online test, and earn a state-issued certificate in order to be eligible to serve as mentors to student teachers. Furthermore, university teacher preparation programs, which relied on the services of these cooperating teachers, were largely responsible for communicating this news and providing the mandatory training for all stakeholders (Kentucky Educational Professional Standards Board, 16 KAR 5:040, § 6[5]).

Since the adopted model for mentoring Kentucky student teachers had been developed at St. Cloud State University through a United States Department of Education Teacher Quality Enhancement Partnership Grant, Kentucky's EPSB also mandated that only teacher educators who had been trained directly by St. Cloud State University educators were eligible to conduct the state-approved training sessions required for every P-12 cooperating teacher and every university supervisor throughout Kentucky. Although no funding for conducting mandatory training sessions was provided, an EPSB-monitored system was designed to monitor the fidelity of educator preparation programs in statewide implementation of Co-Teaching.

Teacher educators at small independent liberal arts colleges, where financial resources and personnel are already stretched thin, as well as teacher educators at large public universities where student teachers may be assigned to broad geographical regions within the state and sometimes even in schools abroad, faced a daunting challenge: accomplish a systemic change in clinical preparation of all Kentucky preservice teachers in less than two years. In this narrative, the author, who has served as a Co-Teaching trainer at an independent liberal arts university in Kentucky's largest metropolitan area since 2012, reflects upon challenges faced and valuable lessons learned in implementation of a dramatic reform in teacher education. It is hoped that the reflections of this teacher educator will inform and inspire others who are striving to improve teacher preparation throughout the nation.

Motivation for Mandated Model

Student teaching, the capstone experience in teacher preparation, has long been recognized as the common rite of passage for preservice teachers in each of the fifty states. While classroom demographics and teacher expectations dramatically changed, the traditional apprenticeship model for student teaching changed little for over four decades, (Oakes, Lipton, Anderson & Stillman, 2013). Confronted by research showing both weaknesses and widespread inconsistencies in student teachers' clinical experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2006; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010; Platt, Walker-Knight, Lee, & Hewitt, 2001), Kentucky's Educational Professional Standards Board deliberated these questions: How can clinical experiences in student teaching become more consistent and effective statewide? What research and best practices can be incorporated into student teaching experiences to best prepare twenty-first century educators for success in diverse, high-need schools? EPSB determined that one promising solution would be statewide implementation of a research-based co-teaching model from student teaching.

Although Kentucky was the first state to mandate a partnership model for student teaching that is most commonly associated with collaboration between certified regular and special education teachers, school districts and universities in at least thirty-five states across the U.S. have attempted to incorporate co-teaching methods into clinical experiences. (Bacharach, Heck, & Dank, 2004; Cramer, Nevin, Thousand, & Liston, 2006; Darragh, Picanco, Tully, & Henning, 2011). In other states, co-teaching may be more loosely defined and may even refer to two or more certified teachers of different disciplines who work together across the curriculum to demonstrate connections between subject areas, such as social studies and science. In Kentucky's mandated model for clinical preparation, however, co-teaching is strictly defined as "two teachers (a cooperating mentor teacher and *teacher candidate*) working together with groups of students—sharing the planning, organization, delivery and assessment of instruction as well as the physical space" of a classroom throughout an entire student

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teaching experience (Heck & Bacharach, 2010, p. 3). *Teacher candidates*, as student teachers must be addressed in the St. Cloud Co-Teaching Model, are expected to collaborate and co-plan with veteran cooperating teachers, assuming an active instructional role as partners from their first day in a classroom. Therefore, they must immediately transition from being students in schools of education to co-teachers in P-12 schools who are responsible for co-planning and co-delivering rigorous Common Core lessons.

In addition to providing consistency in preparing more capable teachers, a prime objective of Kentucky's mandated partnership model is to improve academic achievement of all P-12 students through co-teaching. Positive achievement outcomes during each year of St. Cloud University's four-year study of its Co-Teaching Mentoring Model influenced Kentucky's Educational Professional Standards Board to select this approach, where in both reading and math proficiency "students taught in classrooms that used the co-teaching model statistically outperformed their peers in classrooms with one teacher as well as those classrooms utilizing the traditional model of student teaching" (Heck & Bacharach, 2010, p. 35). Through intentional utilization of seven co-teaching strategies, St. Cloud mentor teachers and teacher candidates were better able to differentiate instruction and increase learning. Thus, it was hoped, that through adopting the St. Cloud Model, Kentucky mentor teachers and teacher candidates working as partners might also be able to engage more students, more often and increase student learning.

Connections to Cook and Friend's Co-Teaching Model

Though recently institutionalized in Kentucky as the required practice for mentoring all Kentucky student teachers, co-teaching is far from a new classroom practice. In fact, St. Cloud's model for mentoring student teachers is grounded in both theories and techniques of the widely used collaborative teaching model that Cook and Friend (1995) first designed for use by regular education and special education teachers in inclusive classrooms. In their original co-teaching model, Cook and Friend recommend that two or more *certified* teachers, both a general educator and a special educator,

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share instructional responsibility, resources and accountability for meeting specific content objectives in an inclusive classroom. The following six strategies for co-teaching practices are utilized in Friend and Cook's model: one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; station teaching; parallel teaching; team teaching; and alternative teaching.

In the St. Cloud Co-Teaching Model adopted by Kentucky, a seventh strategy, supplemental teaching, has been added. Supplemental teaching is designed to allow "one teacher to work with students at their expected grade level while the other teacher works with those students who need the information and/or materials re-taught, extended, or remediated" because their work is below or above the expected standard (Heck & Bacharach, 2010, p. 52). This seventh co-teaching strategy encourages differentiation to meet students' diverse needs and facilitates enrichment with more challenging learning opportunities for gifted students who exceed expectations.

Numerous studies touting instructional benefits of co-teaching in special education appear in professional literature (Conderman, 2011; Egodawatte, McDougall, and Stoilescu, 2011; Hughes and Murawski, 2001; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, and Blanks, 2010). In addition, research has supported Friend and Cook's (2003) argument that the flexibility of co-taught classrooms increases instructional options for all students, improves program intensity and continuity, reduces the stigma for students with special needs, and increases support for teachers expected to meet individual needs of special education students under the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (Chandler-Olcott, Burnash, Donahue, DeChick, Gendron, et al., 2012; Cramer, Nevin, Thousand, & Liston, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Sims, 2008). Yet, academic outcomes associated with co-teaching both in special education (Mastropieri et al., 2005) and in English Language Learner classrooms (Abdallah, 2009; Pappamihel, 2012) do vary greatly. Inconsistent co-teaching outcomes are commonly attributed to factors such as the co-teachers' compatibility, previous training, and/or administrative support.

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(Mastropieri et al., 2005) Aware of these formidable challenges for certified co-teachers, Kentucky teacher educators were concerned that unequally yoked partners—veteran teachers and novice student teachers—might find it even more difficult to establish communication and collaboration necessary for effective co-teaching.

Furthermore, Friend, Embury, and Clarke (2015) even express serious concerns about potential confusion among preservice teachers associated with use of the term *co-teaching* to label this alternative approach to student teaching. They prefer to identify St. Cloud's Model as *apprentice teaching* because co-teaching, as originally conceived, is a service delivery option for students rather than a clinical training model for student teachers. Since a mentor teacher not only has more knowledge but also more power to evaluate a teacher candidate's performance, Friend et al. (2015) caution: "Co-teaching relies on parity...Apprentice teaching may include specific instances of parity, as when the teachers are both working with students with responsibilities divided. This, however, does not imply that the entire relationship can or should have parity as the foundation" (p. 84).

Research and Reflection

Insights shared in this narrative are informed by both academic research and hands-on experience in implementation of Kentucky's state-mandated co-teaching model. The author acknowledges that she has served as a university supervisor in the co-teaching model. This lens adds valuable first-hand knowledge, as well as potential for bias in analysis of data. Another limitation of this report is that outcomes of co-teaching implementation at an urban independent liberal arts university may not be generalizable to co-teaching experiences at all other colleges or universities either in Kentucky or in other states. Nevertheless, the reflections that follow do offer an important contribution to the scant literature examining stakeholders' responses to Kentucky's mandated reform of clinical experiences in educator preparation and the use of a co-teaching model for student teaching. The following three questions are examined:

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1. How have Kentucky's cooperating teachers responded to mandatory co-teaching training?
2. How effectively have teacher candidates performed as co-teachers?
3. How have teacher educators at an independent liberal arts university supported Kentucky's co-teaching mandate?

Methodology

Reflections upon the impact of the co-teaching mandate and responses to the three research questions about co-teaching have been gleaned from a variety of sources. The design for this study is a mixed-research model in which compatible qualitative and quantitative data are analyzed and triangulated. According to Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), mixed model research answers a broader and more complete range of questions, provides stronger evidence for a conclusion through convergence and corroboration of findings, and adds insights and details that can be missed when only a single method is utilized. A brief description of sources used in data-gathering includes the following:

- In spring and summer 2013, a total of over 500 P-12 cooperating teachers took a four question survey after mandated trainings to assess their initial responses to co-teaching. Three clear, consistent themes emerged from a qualitative analysis of participants' anonymous responses on exit slips submitted at the conclusion of each training session.
- In fall 2013, when Kentucky's Co-Teaching Model was piloted at an independent liberal arts university, 46 teacher candidates submitted weekly journal entries about their co-teaching experiences to university supervisors. They reflected via email specifically upon progress and problems encountered in their co-teaching. Journal entries were collected, coded, and then analyzed for trends by the researcher. Using qualitative coding strategies, the researcher identified repetitive themes that clearly echoed from candidates' journals (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The validity of themes from teacher candidates' experiences was corroborated by interviews with their university supervisors.

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- In 2013-2014, near the conclusion of their professional semester, a total of 66 teacher candidates at an independent liberal arts university responded to a questionnaire with ten items. Forty-six teacher candidates participated in the fall, while 20 candidates participated in the spring semester. The purpose of this quantitative instrument, an end-of-term inquiry, was to assess program effectiveness and design future support as needed for more successful implementation of co-teaching.
- In fall 2014, a small case study at the same liberal arts university focused on two pairs of co-teachers, one highly effective partnership and one struggling partnership. This qualitative research included classroom observations as well as one-on-one interviews with both mentor teachers and teacher candidates.
- In spring 2015, a questionnaire was distributed to 21 university supervisors at the independent liberal arts university. This quantitative instrument asked them to evaluate their perceptions of co-teaching in the classrooms where they had observed and collaborated since 2013 when Kentucky's co-teaching mandate took effect. Many of these supervisors supplemented their numerical ratings with richly detailed comments that were used to draw conclusions.

Reflections

Reflection One: Cooperating Teachers Value Co-Teaching Training

Cooperating teachers trained by our university have been almost 100% positive in exit responses after the state's mandated co-teaching training. In fact, most mentor teachers (91%) voice appreciation for their newly required training as cooperating teachers. Mentor teachers consistently comment on exit slips or during co-teaching trainings that although they have previously served as cooperating teachers, their past *training* focused only on completing evaluation forms rather than learning helpful new strategies for coaching, communicating, and collaborating with a novice teacher. Instead of expressing resistance to unpaid training sessions after school hours or during summer vacation, as university teacher educators had

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anticipated, cooperating teachers write: “I like the new structure that using these seven strategies gives to my work with a student teacher.” Appreciative responses to co-teaching training echo research on master teachers by Grote (2013): “Although teaching adult STs [student teachers] is quite different from teaching children or youth, MTs [master teachers] are often given a large burden for beginning teacher growth with very little training in how to do so... Consequently, MTs are almost always on their own, seemingly undervalued by the universities, and attempting to single-handedly sort out a method for directing their ST” (p. 23).

Teacher educators at our independent liberal arts university have been gratified to witness veteran cooperating teachers’ spirit of openness in implementation of the new co-teaching model for student teaching. When asked about her feelings concerning co-teaching, one mentor teacher volunteered, “I feel so invigorated and renewed when working alongside my candidate. I am learning so much about technology from her.” Unfortunately, mentor teachers often report that they themselves experienced a “sink or swim model” as student teachers because their assigned cooperating teachers had exited the class as soon as a student teacher entered. Most frequently mentor teachers report that they volunteered for co-teaching with the goal of “giving a future teacher a better introduction to teaching than the one that I received,” “growing as a professional,” “learning more about technology,” and “looking at methods in a new way and brainstorming new lesson ideas with my teacher candidate.” Kentucky’s Co-Teaching Model appears to be attracting teachers who are more eager to share instruction than to abandon their classes to an apprentice. Exit slips overwhelmingly communicate mentor teachers’ commitment rather than compliance to the co-teaching model: “I look forward to having a partner who will help to shoulder the heavy work load and help me meet students’ diverse needs.”

A second most commonly echoed perception about co-teaching is that most cooperating teachers do not view the state’s newly adopted student teaching model as markedly different from the collaboration with special education colleagues that they are already

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practicing. A representative response is “I have really been doing a lot of these [strategies] before, just did not know the labels.” The author has co-facilitated eight co-teaching workshops, and in every session, a cooperating teacher has testified to the entire group about benefits of collaborative teaching with a special educator. One teacher at a June 15, 2015 training volunteered what she considered an advantage of co-teaching with a student teacher as opposed to collaborating with a special education colleague: “When I plan lessons with my ECE (special education) co-teacher, we never know whether she will get called away to work in another classroom. Planning with a teacher candidate will be less frustrating because we’ll always be teaching the same kids together.” During a recent co-teaching workshop, another elementary teacher announced, “I wish we’d done this kind of collaboration when I went through student teaching. It wouldn’t have taken me five years to get to be a competent teacher.”

To prevent the possibility of confusion with co-teaching in special education addressed by Friend et al. (2015), teacher educators have recently added to our mandatory training agenda a brief but basic review of the different purposes between the two co-teaching models now practiced in Kentucky classrooms. Cooperating teachers are reminded that while they work as partners, mentor teachers must function as *senior* partners with power to guide and responsibility to explain to teacher candidates why past experience has taught them that some instructional strategies are simply more effective than others. Viewed through the lens of current cooperating teachers, similarities between co-teaching as a service delivery option (Friend & Cook, 2003) and a student teaching model (Heck & Bachrach, 2010) have actually seemed to reinforce each other rather than cause confusion. In fact, one cooperating teacher, after serving as a mentor teacher under the state-mandated St. Cloud model, shared these comments on her candidate’s final evaluation:

I have learned some important lessons about collaborating with my special ed colleagues by working as a mentor teacher. I never had any co-teaching experience until my

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first teaching job, so I am thinking that my teacher candidate will find it easier and less threatening to collaborate next year because she's already learned how important it is to iron out communication issues. When you co-teach, you have to park your ego at the door.

Perhaps the strongest evidence of cooperating teachers' positive response to the state's mandated co-teaching training, however, is the fact that for the past three summers (2013-2015) as soon as co-teaching sessions are posted on our school district's professional development website, they immediately fill to capacity. In fact, local principals have even invited teacher educators to deliver co-teaching training to their entire faculty as a means of promoting differentiation and more effective collaboration between general and special educators.

Reflection Two: Co-Teaching has Increased Success, not Failures, of Candidates

When Kentucky mandated a Co-Teaching model for student teachers, university teacher educators feared increased failures among our candidates. In the traditional apprentice model, after all, student teachers had enjoyed a slow, easy transition into teaching duties by first watching—sometimes for weeks—and then imitating methods that the cooperating teacher modeled to design instruction and manage behavior. The co-teaching model instead demands that all candidates assume an active supporting role in the classroom on their first day.

The five colleges in this geographic region who collaborate to offer co-teaching trainings have graduated a total of 315 teacher candidates since 2013. Unanimously we can report that not one of our student teachers has failed the professional semester (student teaching) as a result of the state's new co-teaching expectations. While, unfortunately, there have been some unsuccessful teacher candidates at each of our institutions, supervisors do not attribute teacher candidates' lack of success directly to co-teaching. What university teacher educators and placement directors have observed

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is that a teacher candidate's lack of knowledge, professionalism, or work ethic does become more quickly apparent in the new co-teaching model. In all but one case, supervisors at our small independent liberal arts university have been able to intervene and eventually remediate candidates' problems in knowledge, skills, or dispositions primarily because these concerns surfaced so early in the co-teaching semester.

Teacher candidates' weekly reflective journals as well as their responses to questionnaires administered at the end of their student teaching semester confirm the powerful impact of co-planning upon a successful partnership between mentor and candidate. In fact, surveys reveal a direct correlation between the number of hours that teacher candidates report devoting to co-planning and the candidates' overall satisfaction with the co-teaching relationship. Candidates who rated their co-teaching experience "very successful" reported spending an average of at least 2 ½ hours in face-to-face co-planning with their mentor teacher each week. This total does not include individual planning or preparation after the school day, which candidates noted was even more labor-intensive. On the other hand, teacher candidates (7 of 66 respondents) who estimated spending an hour or less in weekly co-planning admitted that they "did not feel comfortable in their classroom" or that "students regarded me more like an assistant than a teacher." Reflections by both teacher candidates and their university supervisors confirm that the effectiveness of the co-teaching model depends upon the effectiveness of co-teachers planning together.

Mentor teachers have also reported some valuable co-planning insights gleaned from their successful partnerships. Reflecting on the value of co-planning, one mentor teacher wrote: "Assuming at the beginning that my teacher candidate knew the content well enough to teach it was a big mistake. I learned to ask him in planning for a quick preview of his explanations to prevent confusion of our students." A teacher candidate also reflected in her required weekly journal: "It was so valuable for my cooperating teacher to discuss with me not just *what* we were planning to teach but also

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why and how.” As the professional semester progresses, “very successful” candidates assume more leadership in co-planning; but daily debriefing and clear delineation of each partner’s responsibility consistently continue.

Student teachers who perceived themselves as “very successful” also mention communicating daily with their cooperating teacher by text, email, and phone. Their strong, positive relationship, in some cases, even continued after student teaching ended. It is too soon to determine whether this personal-professional bond forged between mentor and teacher candidate will help to improve teacher retention, another state goal for implementation of co-teaching; but this is a question worthy of future exploration.

Instead of increasing failures, as feared, co-planning and co-teaching seem to be promoting preservice teachers’ success and growth in the classroom. Fourteen university supervisors at an independent liberal arts university who responded to a 2015 questionnaire “strongly agree” [4 on a 4-point scale] that our school’s teacher candidates are 1) developing more effective lessons and 2) developing more collaborative dispositions as a result of practicing co-planning with mentor teachers.

Reflection Three: Co-Teaching is Practiced and Supported through Collaboration

The first line of support for co-teaching has come from university supervisors. Kentucky’s mandated model emphasizes a triad approach that has transformed the role played by university supervisors as well as the roles played by mentor teachers and teacher candidates (Heck & Bachrach, 2010). Instead of functioning primarily as an evaluator whose chief duty in the traditional model is to assess a student teacher’s performance, the university supervisor must also become more of a collaborator. Supervisors at our independent liberal arts college have welcomed the opportunity to work more collaboratively as an integral member of a three-person co-teaching team. Teacher educators anticipated that university supervisors would bear the initial burden of the state’s co-teaching mandate because both teacher candidates and

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cooperating teachers were unfamiliar with this newly adopted model. On a 2015 questionnaire about their perceptions of co-teaching, university supervisors answered “disagree” (an average of 2.75 on a 4.0 scale) in response to the statement: “Working as a supervisor in the co-teaching model requires more time than in the traditional student teaching model.” Yet, the supervisors did clarify that more time and communication are necessary at the initiation of co-teaching relationships. One supervisor elaborated on a common sentiment: “Supervisors have to be attuned to signs of incompatibility or frustration at first.” Early conversations and meetings with the cooperating teacher plus close reading of candidates’ weekly journals prove helpful. University supervisors report that they must also support co-teaching by “stepping in to mediate problems if possible before they become barriers to developing a compatible working relationship.” Our School of Education is fortunate to have a cadre of experienced supervisors, many of whom are retired public school teachers, who have embraced the importance of their new supporting roles in the co-teaching triad.

Working in a college of education at an independent liberal arts university facilitates communication, and collaboration is more often the norm than the exception. In 2012, to prepare for the state’s mandate, our entire faculty engaged in co-teaching training. Since that time, co-teaching pedagogy has been intentionally incorporated into education classes required of all initial certification candidates. Successful intra-departmental partnerships have formed, inspired—not mandated—by Kentucky’s Co-Teaching Model. Mathematics and Science Methods professors, who supervise teacher candidates, have recently merged their two courses to model STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). Another co-teaching partnership is Science and Social Studies Methods for elementary teachers. Not only do teacher educators at our liberal arts university intentionally model the seven co-teaching strategies, they also assign students to co-present interdisciplinary lessons. By experiencing co-teaching pedagogy first-hand, teacher educators learn better how to help our candidates develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions that they will need to succeed

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in the state's mandated student teaching model. Cross-content partnerships have not only proved to teacher candidates that we can practice what we preach about co-teaching; collaboration has enriched our instruction and enhanced our own professional growth as teachers of teachers.

Another unexpected but most beneficial outcome of state-mandated co-teaching is our formation of an alliance consisting of a representative from the local school district and teacher educators from five very different colleges in our geographical region. Three of the institutions are small independent liberal arts universities, while two are large public universities. All of the schools benefit from this partnership that originated as a result of Kentucky's Co-Teaching Mandate. Since February, 2013, our inter-university support group has become a true professional learning community. We meet regularly to share ideas, experiences, and resources; discuss policy questions; and divide responsibilities for the area's co-teaching workshops. By disseminating training dates, fielding participants' questions, registering cooperating teachers and recording attendance, our local school district partner has helped us to achieve what each of us working alone had viewed as a mission impossible—to fulfill an unfunded state mandate requiring transformation of a long-established student teaching model by re-training all Kentucky teacher educators, cooperating teachers, and teacher candidates.

Conclusion

We do not yet know how Kentucky's mandated Co-Teaching Model for student teaching will impact student achievement, especially because our state like many others is in the midst of transition to new accountability standards. Teacher educators do not yet know how the student teaching model may affect future utilization of the collaborative co-teaching model practiced by certified special and general educators. It is also too soon to judge whether knowledge, skills, and dispositions developed by the Co-Teaching Model will increase teacher efficacy and retention within the state. Anecdotal reports on the efficacy of co-teaching are surprisingly

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positive, but quantifiable data must be systematically collected to evaluate outcomes of Kentucky's statewide model. Critical voices continue to ask whether a co-teaching model adequately prepares teacher candidates for independence later in their own classroom when a partner is unavailable. Again, current anecdotal data appears positive, but long-term research is necessary to corroborate or refute beliefs that a co-teaching model for student teaching is superior.

The reflections of this teacher educator are intended neither to criticize nor to endorse more top-down educational reform. The author's purpose instead is to report lessons learned and celebrate the commitment shown by Kentucky educators who are uniting to meet the many challenges of an unfunded state mandate. By working together, teacher educators at an independent liberal arts university in Kentucky are increasing expertise, redefining perceptions of teaching, differentiating instruction, and exhibiting a collaborative spirit that can never be quenched — or mandated.

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