

COLLABORATIVE CO-TEACHING AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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This article is the personal narrative of a university professor and a classroom teacher co-teaching a secondary methods course for pre-service teachers within the context of an urban school/university partnership. In this article we will chronicle the evolution and growth of our co-teaching, describe how we learned to negotiate boundaries, depict problems we encountered and successes we achieved, and we will illustrate how we came to develop our teaching partnership within the context of our respective institutional partnership.

The purpose of this article is not to concentrate on logistical matters of the partnership: the history of the formation of the school/university partnership, the agreements made by each institution, or the future plans of each institution. We do not even detail student evaluations. Instead, the purpose of this article is to share our lived experiences as co-teachers in an urban school partnership. Although other aspects of this partnership are important, our personal narrative within the context of our co-teaching is our focal point.

Our personal narrative was composed using qualitative data sources such as notes from presentations we have made, minutes from meetings, proposals, written correspondence, and response journals (Patton, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). We used our journals from this year to document our process of learning to work together, to improve our teaching, and to reflect about school/university partnerships. As Maxine Greene (1988) explains “stories and myths, and diaries, and histories give shape and expression to what would otherwise be untold about our lives” (p. x). This “translates into the view that education is the construction and

reconstruction of personal and social stories: teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and others' stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2).

Narrative inquiry as a type of research sanctions us as teachers to deconstruct and analyze their personal life experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It allows teachers to tell and re-tell their stories and lived experiences so that they may critically reflect and learn from those relationships. We share our insights in hopes of informing other teachers and professors about ways to work together outside the boundaries of traditional teacher education. We tell our story so that others may "broaden the horizons of <our> normal existential landscape by creating possible worlds" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 101).

Description

The authors (a high school social studies teacher, Cynthia Baker and an education professor, Denise Dallmer) met in a graduate class at the university. We began our co-teaching as a direct result of Denise teaching a course in which Cynthia was a graduate student. Neither the university nor the school district had influence in placing us together to co-teach a course or change the way the course was taught.

In the aforementioned graduate class, Denise explained the growing interest in school/university partnerships. She used her own experience to talk about these emerging partnerships. Denise discussed her current teaching assignment, which included a school university component. She believed that the lack of at least one teacher in a significant role was a weakness of the partnership. By coincidence, one of the teachers in her class, Cynthia taught in the partnership high school. After lengthy discussions in class and out of class, we decided to approach our respective institutions with our idea of co-teaching a methods course. The high school quickly agreed to the proposal but the university was bogged down with red tape and a

slow decision making process. At last, one week before the fall semester began, we were given approval.

All undergraduate students in the secondary education program at the university are required to take a nine-hour “block” of classes usually the semester before student teaching. The “block” is actually taught on site in an urban high school. The methods class, “Fundamentals of Secondary Education”, is taught every other day; part of the morning is spent in the practicum, and the other part of the day the students take the Fundamentals class. On alternate days, they take a special education class along with their practicum field experience. Their days are full and for many undergraduates, this is a stressful semester.

The urban high school has approximately 1,000 students: 22% are minority and 55% of the students are at poverty level. The high school serves three low-income housing projects and there are two alternative schools in this district. Teaching in this high school is a challenging experience for veteran teachers as well as novice teachers.

The College of Education consists of less than a 5% minority population. Thus, many undergraduates have had limited exposure to people and students different from themselves, and so this experience in the urban high school is met with trepidation on the part of university students. Many pre-service students “just get through it” while others find it to be a life-changing experience that causes them to change their future plans as evidenced by those students requesting to student teach in an urban school with the intention to teach full time in an urban setting.

Collaboration and Co-Teaching

Many voices in the teaching profession have called for changing the parameters and working relationships between schools and universities. John Goodlad (1988) and the Holmes group (1986) recommended that both schools and universities transform the way they work together to a more collaborative, shared model. Collaboration can provide “opportunities for reflection about practice, shared critique, and supported change” (Clark, et al., 1996, p. 196). Well-documented case studies and descriptions of school/university partnerships and the significance these partnerships may have to the advancement of schools and teacher education can be found in the teacher education literature (Darling-Hammond, 2000 and 1999; Teitel, 1997; Lieberman, 1990; Johnston, 2000; Goodlad, 1994).

Likewise literature is filled with accounts of problems and failures. For some schools and universities, theorizing about collaborative relationships was easier than actually implementing them. Barriers to making collaborative relationships effective and long-term are well documented (Maloy, 1985; Teitel, 1998; Oakes, Hare, & Sirotnik, 1986; Campbell, 1988; Sarason, 1982). For others, successful partnerships have developed into long lasting and enduring relationships.

For university professors and classroom teachers, one of the ways to work together collaboratively, is to co-teach methods classes. Brody (1994) offers a definition of co-teaching:

“It involves two or more teachers planning, teaching, and assessing the same students in the interest of creating a learning community and maintaining a commitment to collaboration with students and each other “ (p. 32).

Literature on co-teaching details co-teaching among many types of teachers: “master teacher” and pre-service teacher, special educator and classroom teacher, classroom teachers in one school building, and university professors and classroom teachers. Uncertainties and

dilemmas are described as well as advantages and benefits (Clark, et al., 1996; Roth, Masciotra, Boyd, 1999; Brody, 1994; Tobin, Seiler, Smith, 1999; Hohenbrink, Johnston, Westhoven, 1997).

Co-teaching can provide a vehicle for change. But, change represents different things for different participants. As three co-teachers explain: “How we changed is related to the problems and demands of our institutional contexts and our backgrounds and personalities” (Hohenbrink, et al., 1997, p. 297). For some co-teachers, personal change, such as increased confidence about teaching, is a result of simply having someone else understand and appreciate their teaching experiences; for others, change is brought about by planning curriculum together, reflecting on what topics are taught, and the justification for those topics in conversations that never occurred previously. Co-teaching stops the planning and implementation of curriculum in isolation: “developing new ideas or changing old ones depends upon supportive and frequent conversations with respected peers” (Brody, 1994, p. 33). It pushes the participants to engage in conversations through a lens that is multicultural and multi-dimensional, it pulls at the boundaries. Working collaboratively helps create energy for the teachers and that energy provides motivation to keep striving to improve teaching and complete projects (Hord, 1986). Co-teaching can provide support to try new methods/strategies in the co-teachers’ own individual classrooms.

One of the biggest barriers to co-teaching is time. A simple practical problem is the time that it takes to plan, meet, coordinate, and implement new shared curriculum. To expect teachers, in any circumstances, to add another layer of responsibility on top of an already hectic schedule, may be too much to ask. Faculty who have attempted collaborative initiatives write, “. . . there was simply insufficient time and resources to accomplish all that is necessary to maintain a good program and positive relationships - . . .” (Bullough & Birrell, 1999, p. 387). Additionally, it takes an enormous amount of time to develop long lasting relationships built on trust and that time

commitment may not be realistic.

Power struggles when working in collaborative relationships and the challenge of having truthful and candid conversations is an additional problem, which can't be minimized, especially if one partner is perceived to be more powerful than the other. Since collaborative efforts, by nature, are based on equity and parity, collaboration projects will not be sustained with uneven influence. For instance, there can develop equity issues concerning release time for faculty members participating in collaborative projects. "Backing away from conflict" may be an easier thing to do (Teitel, 1997).

Discussion told in two voices

Our discussion is told in both of our voices because "the sources of evidence for understanding knowledge, and the places knowledge may be said to reside exist not only in the mind but in the narratives of personal experience"(Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 269). We write together as well as explain our individual perspectives from our journal entries. The critical questions we raise and subsequent lessons we learned come from our shared discussions and lived experiences in which "our collective story has developed" (Eldredge, et al., 2000, p. 95). We attempt to explain the possibilities of collaboration and the tensions that arise. "A critical voice is concerned not just with representing the voices of oneself and others, but with narrating, considering, and evaluating them" (Britzman, 1991, p. 13).

Introduction

Cynthia knew that she liked what Denise said in the graduate class about teaching at an urban school and about innovative collaborative efforts. Denise knew that she wanted to work with a teacher in the urban school to add credibility to the teacher education program, and she appreciated what Cynthia was doing in her classroom. For both of us, it was a risk and a leap of

faith to commit to a yearlong project because we didn't have the benefit of beginning with in-depth conversations and taking time to get to know one another at a deeper level.

We started our collaborative teaching with high hopes and aspirations of changing the teacher education program at the university. We hoped that we could model co-teaching and that other teachers and professors would attempt it. We each had separate anxieties about our project. Those feelings are reflected in some of our journal entries.

From Cynthia's journal: *Didn't have time to change the syllabus or collaborate for that matter, so boundaries are unsure. I am nervous and timid.* Another entry: *I am very intimidated about team teaching- especially with a professor since I just got my Master's degree.*

From Denise's journal: *I am afraid I will talk too much. Because of time, we are using my syllabus from last year. I don't think that is collaborative, but we will revise it next semester. I know Cynthia is going to be great at this, and I'm so pleased she has agreed to do this.*

We wanted to help the pre-service teachers negotiate learning to teach, and for this semester, how to teach in an urban setting. We knew that an enormous percentage of teachers quit or fail within five years of teaching in an urban school (Haberman, 1995). We also shared the same perspective about curriculum. It "is created within the relational classroom experiences that individuals share with texts and with one another; at the same time, curriculum is also defined and created by the intersecting forces of existing schooling and social structures" (Miller, 1990, p. 2). In respect to our actual daily teaching, we knew that we didn't want to "take turns" teaching, but that we wanted the students to hear both of our voices on all subjects.

We were unsure how the undergraduate pre-service teachers would react to co-teachers and we didn't know the level of support we could expect from our respective institutions. Nevertheless, we were excited about working together in an innovative manner.

Lessons learned

A multitude and a variety of events occurred this past year. We have chosen not to recount them, but to use them as evidence and examples of what we have learned. Our reflections and advice are presented in no particular order. We feel that we were successful at some components of our co-teaching; at others, we feel we failed. Such is the nature of our collaborative effort.

Teachers in the field who want to co-teach or work in an school/university partnership must feel a sense of ownership in the teaching profession. They must see themselves as having something to give back to future teachers or feel invested in the teacher education profession. Traditionally, classroom teachers view the university as having primary responsibility for educating pre-service teachers. This notion has to change in order for collaboration to work.

This new, professional commitment can be seen in the way that teachers and professors work together, have meaningful discussions together, and present their research and experiences together. As a classroom teacher who co-taught a methods course explains: “Co-teaching makes you walk the talk. It makes me think and I have to justify my practice. Co-teaching keeps pushing me to think more deeply” (Eldredge, et al., 2000, p. 104).

However, many times it is difficult for the teacher, in particular, to bridge both worlds as well as have ownership in the teaching profession. What was difficult for Cynthia was that she was working so hard to provide excellent preparation for high school teachers. In the process, she saw the real need to improve the teaching in her own school (Goodlad, 1994). Many of the teachers saw the pre-service students as a burden; and they complained about having them at their schools. In particular, those were the teachers that were least prepared in their classes.

From Cynthia's journal: *I saw my major problem as getting the school people to buy into the partnership; they are cynical and weary.*

Cynthia felt pushed and pulled between the two worlds. Because of this "boundary blurring" (Lampert, 1991, p.672), sometimes she felt aligned with the university and at other times, she felt aligned with her school.

Any well-intentioned teachers cannot sustain such a time consuming and emotionally draining project without institutional support. The principal is a pivotal person in the school and the administration at the university should honor and respect the work of the "field professors". Although there may be the appearance of collaboration, it is an effort that requires sustained and thoughtful support of everyone involved; not just the co-teachers. At times, we felt that our efforts were met with silent resistance from our colleagues and administrators.

As Goodlad (1994) clarifies:

"The greatest danger to solid, lasting collaboration of university and school personnel in partner schools is *imagology* the transformation of both reality and ideology into various images of them. There occurs just enough progress to create the image of close connections when, in actuality, there exists as yet little more than symbols" (p. 100).

Neither one of us was given any kind of reassigned time for planning and collaboration. We collaborated because we felt that it was the most responsible, ethical way of preparing teachers, especially for teachers working in an urban setting. We met weekly to plan for class; we met after school to write tests together; we designed rubrics for grading; we took turns grading papers; and we problem solved with students about their field experiences. We emailed daily, we talked on the phone constantly, and we planned regional and national presentations

about our work together. We took turns going back and forth from the high school and the university to plan our together while we did our other jobs.

All this being difficult enough, for Denise, and other university professors, who attempt collaborative field-based efforts, the fear of not having time to publish and not knowing how valuable their collaborative efforts were seen back at the university was a concern (Goodlad, 1994).

Denise's journal: *I don't know how I am supposed to publish when I am out in the field so much. I wonder what kind of weight this will hold when the RPT committee meets?*

For Cynthia, the layering of more teaching beyond her high school teaching, at times was weighty and exhausting. Both Cynthia and Denise questioned whether the students or administrators appreciated and valued their time and effort.

Cynthia's journal: *This year was extremely difficult. On top of 90 students per semester, I had college students. It was another prep and more grading. Without the support of my school, it is extremely frustrating and overwhelming.*

Denise's response journal: *I don't think Cynthia is getting the best end of this deal. She works so hard in her own classes <her high school classes> and then she teaches with me, too. I feel I am receiving a great deal of assistance, but I'm not doing much for her in a concrete way. It's not an equal partnership.*

The following is an example of the dilemma that we faced and illustrates the problem of change. The semester before our co-teaching began Denise had written a paper for a national conference about the school/university partnership. When she was accepted to present, she knew that in order to make her presentation accurate and to tell the complete story of the partnership, Cynthia needed to be there. Cynthia was excited about going and felt that she had valuable

insight to offer other classroom teachers who were thinking about forming a partnership with a university. When Cynthia asked for the professional days off from teaching to attend the conference, her school was reluctant to give her the time away from her classes. The school needed her to teach her classes; substitute teachers are hard to find. She was only given the professional days off after Denise was at a meeting at the university with an administrator from the school district. Denise consulted with the school administrator who had been talking about collaboration and explained the situation. The next day Cynthia was given the approval to go.

Email from Denise to Cynthia: Cynthia, I saw _____ from the board office at a meeting today. I don't know if you wanted me to do this, but in front of others at the meeting (about collaboration) I explained how you couldn't get the time away from school to present. Why are we talking about a partnership when we can't even get you to go to a national conference? Now, I worry I got you in trouble.

Collaborators must share the same basic philosophy about teacher education, and, for our situation, working in an urban setting. They must have a sound respect and regard for each other. In other words, they need mutuality and connectivity (McGowan & Powell, 1990). Even though they must hold each other in high esteem, this does not necessarily mean that they have to agree about all facets of teaching and learning. Differences of opinion modeled in front of the pre-service teachers show opposing points of view and healthy debate.

After presentation <at a regional conference> from Denise's journal: *We laughed because we were not afraid to talk in the presentation <we thought we would be nervous when we were preparing>. I wonder if the fact that we are opinionated helps our collaboration. I actually used to think that because we have our opinions that it would be the opposite <people had to agree on*

everything in order to collaborate>, maybe our personalities just mesh or we realize that our collective effort is better than any one of our single efforts.

From Denise's field notes: *We talked about classroom management today. Cynthia has such a different take on discipline than I do. We both discussed and argued our point of view in front of the students. It was productive for the students to see us disagree and still respect each other.*

From Cynthia's journal: *I believe what we taught was valuable for the classroom. I feel that most of the students get it and are becoming more aware of their students as well as their own teaching styles.*

As Brosnan (2000) explains: "To build lasting working relationships, it is essential to begin with people of like minds and common philosophies. The fundamental philosophies must be mutual enough so that even if we differ, we can respect each other's work and have faith that our underlying principles will not be compromised" (p. 273).

Both the professor and the teacher must see this endeavor as professional development. The professor must value the expertise and judgment of the classroom teacher. Teachers have knowledge that professors must admire, in particular, the "authenticity of current practice" (Chase and Merryfield, 2000, p. 136). It should be a collaborative effort that is based on mutual respect. As Hohenbrink, Johnston, & Westhoven (1997) explain: "Appreciating another person's knowledge and expertise came to mean seeing a potential for others to contribute to our own thinking and our shared project" (p. 299).

Denise's journal: *Cynthia and I talk a great deal about the lack of understanding our pre-service students have about dealing with adolescents. It's not just me; she thinks there is a lack of understanding on our students' parts. I'm going to propose a curriculum change for our*

secondary education students, based on these observations/conversations that they need another course just on adolescent development/at risk students. I'm glad she sees this, too.

For Cynthia, the collaborative co-teaching provided her with a colleague to discuss not only the college teaching, but also the circumstances of her high school teaching.

Cynthia's journal: *I had someone to share my concerns with about my students <at the high school> and to reassure me about my decisions.* And another entry: *The one thing I feel when I teach with Denise is support; I haven't experienced this in seven years of teaching.*

Conclusions

What we believe to be true after this year of co-teaching is that the benefits of collaborative teaching for teachers and professors are multi-layered. For Denise, co-teaching improved her teaching and grounded her theory to what is happening in today's classrooms. Co-teaching with Cynthia forced her to re-examine why she chose topics and the relevancy they hold for pre-service students. It provided a sense of satisfaction that was not possible when teaching on campus far removed from classroom students and classroom teachers.

For Cynthia, co-teaching a methods course brought her someone from the university to support her teaching efforts at her school. She felt validated and appreciated for all of her labor and the time that she spent in order to provide the best education for her students. She felt that because she was in an urban setting her students needed her to put in more work and care than if she were teaching in a different setting. She did this unfailingly; yet, she felt unrecognized and unappreciated many times. For Cynthia, as an experienced teacher, co-teaching contributed to a sense of renewal professionally. Both Cynthia and Denise were each other's professional sounding boards. Through this experience, we became colleagues and friends.

For the undergraduate pre-service teachers, this co-teaching effort connects theory to practice. No longer can students sit in a methods course and complain that the professors are out of touch with reality of today's classrooms. It provides much needed "linkage conceptually and operationally" (Goodlad, 1994, p. 124). Our students were involved with the life of the school. As professors we made the decision to require them to attend faculty meetings, department meetings, and site-based committee meetings with parents and faculty. The college students worked basketball tournaments, watched football games, chaperoned school dances, observed the Youth Center staff making home visits, and proctored state proficiency tests. Being situated in an urban high school opens the eyes of the pre-service teachers to a wealth of diversity, helps to overcome their fear of teaching students who are different than they are, and strengthens the preparation they receive in the teacher education program.

However, naively we were surprised by the constructional problems of teaching between and within two institutions. Cynthia sometimes faced criticism and jealousy from the other teachers in her school. She received more scrutiny and critique from the pre-service teachers since she wasn't a "real professor". For Denise, there seemed to be a lack of university interest about her work at the high school. Since she was physically teaching somewhere else, meetings that were scheduled back on campus were difficult for her to attend. Those professors who have no interest in teaching on site dismiss her work in the schools.

Even with those obstacles, we both agree that our experience in co-teaching has been professionally rewarding. We learned that collaboration does not mean sameness; in fact, "it is through our differences that we learned more about ourselves and clarified or readjusted our own perspectives as we considered our differences" (Johnston and Kerper, 1996, p.14). As Brody validates: "In co-teaching, stories are the basis for resolving differences and finding similarities

in beliefs and ideas” (Brody, 1994, p. 33). Our experience has taught us that collaboration requires compromise, meaningful dialogue, risk taking, and time. We still believe it is the best way to provide teacher education --the joining of theory and practice. In fact, we co-taught a graduate education course this past summer and co-authored a grant that we were awarded.

Real enduring collaborative relationships seem to withstand the initial defensive posturing about one’s own practice and the ability to see beyond one’s own world of expertise. This being difficult in itself, there must be institutional support and a structure in place to support the work of both teachers and professors. Additionally, we believe that educators as collaborators should share the same basic philosophy of working, teaching, and learning. Only when these conditions are met will collaborative relationships be able to effect change and be sustainable .

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