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Coteaching Placements: Issues in the Field for Preservice and In-Service Teachers

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Abstract

There are four decades of research available on teachers working together in inclusive settings (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995). The goal is accessibility of the general curriculum for all students, and this implementation framework has grown steadily (McLesky, Henry, & Hodges, 1999). However, classroom instruction that is truly collaborative with content specialists and strategy specialists sharing responsibility is still a struggle in most schools. The purpose of this study, conducted within a highly successful suburban university partnership district, is to explore coteaching in a shared learning environment through the eyes of two graduate preservice high school teachers and their cooperating teachers during a student-teaching practicum. The findings provide insights into the belief systems about role responsibilities and impressions of the experience in coteaching. The findings can also provide guidance for universities and school districts in developing coteaching environments where the best of content and pedagogical strategies are blended.

Introduction

In spring 2006 several faculty from a Midwestern state university were among select members of Ohio institutions of higher education who had the opportunity to investigate a new statewide Response to Intervention model called Ohio Integrated Systems Model, or OISM, aimed at addressing the achievement gap for students with disabilities and other learners considered to be at-risk. Faculty decided that a better understanding of the challenges of operationalising OISM could be reached by exploring the different perspectives of two preservice teachers working in a coteaching arrangement

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during their student-teaching experience. One teacher candidate (female) was seeking certification as a special education teacher and the other (male) was seeking certification as a content area specialist. A university partnership key administrator within that district sought to better understand the in-service teachers' perspectives as well, so the in-service special education teacher (male) and the content area teacher (male) were included in the data gathering and analysis. The perceptions of these four educators have been examined here to shed light on the successes, issues, and concerns of teachers who feel responsible for student achievement in a coteaching experience.

Literature Review

Coteaching may be defined as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space” (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 2). Villa, Thousand, & Nevin (2004) encourage teachers to extend that definition to one of complementary teaching or “enhancing” each other’s instruction. Also, increased interest in providing positive behavior supports on a school-wide basis may assist in a deeper commitment to teach all students (Colvin, Sugai, Good & Lee, 1997; Soodak, 2003).

A review of the literature on coteaching illustrates the benefits of such a model for students and their educators. Students, particularly those who have been low achieving, experience increased academic and social skills, and enhanced attitudes about themselves and others. Teachers report a boost in professional growth, personal support, and improved collaboration (Mahoney, 1997; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Welch, 2000). Recent legislation, including the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA) of 2004 and the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001, support coteaching models. Both acts contain directives to provide access for all students, including those with exceptionalities, to equitable learning opportunities in the general education curriculum, and mandate that schools go beyond simple “presence in the classroom” to documenting achievement by all students. Fulfilling these mandates discourages the present dual nature of the special education and general education roles in the classroom and encourages these professionals to come together to share their individual areas of expertise in mutually beneficial ways. McLesky and Waldron (2000) state that “. . . good inclusive classrooms require the combined expertise of the general education teacher (an expert in the content being taught as well as how to deliver that content to large groups) and the special education teacher (an expert in adapting content for individual student needs and delivering instruction to students who lack certain basic skills)” (pp. 29–30). Several researchers have found that all students ultimately benefit from collaboration and coteaching (Friend & Cook, 2003; Giangreco, 2007; Handler, 2006; Murawski & Dieker, 2004).

A difference in approach is forecasted by Walther-Thomas (1997) in her study comparing middle school and elementary school coteaching models. She warns middle school educators to be aware of the secondary school focus on content and proficiency assessments with limited professional collaboration opportunities. Dieker & Murawski (2003) conclude that success in coteaching at the secondary school level would include the following elements: 1) start early and clearly identify how the process will be implemented and evaluated; 2) have administrative support; 3) provide planning time prior to the start of each semester; 4) openly discuss grading, accommodations, and behavior management; 5) schedule students (with and without disabilities) into cotaught classes prior to the rest of the school schedule (p. 9).

University professors have seen the world of coteaching through shared learning environments before (McLesley & Waldron, 2000). However, to more fully understand the roles and perceptions of coteachers at the secondary level, the authors in this study directly viewed the coteaching experience of two preservice teachers during their secondary education student-teaching experience. The findings provide guidance in what universities can do to ensure accessibility to good coteaching environments where the best of content and pedagogical strategies are blended.

This particular study also examines coteaching through the lens of Ohio's Integrated Systems Model — a model funded by state improvement grant money and implemented through Ohio's Special Education Regional Resource Centers (SERRCs). OISM is Ohio's response to intervention (RTI) model. Response to intervention (RTI) models have been used to identify students with learning disabilities (Fuchs, 2003), for planning intervention for students with reading difficulties (Justice, 2006), and for working with students who exhibit challenging behaviors (Barnett et al., 2006). RTI is a multilayered system with increasing interventions for students identified as not responding through appropriate assessment measures (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). Imler, Dove, Miller, and Lewis (2007) describe the OISM/RTI model as “a three-tiered school-wide based model with 80–90 percent of the student population responding to school-wide interventions, 5–10 percent of at-risk students requiring targeted interventions, and 1–5 percent of the students requiring intensive interventions” (p. 12). Some of the key features are that the model uses scientifically based research, data-based decision making, and culturally responsive practices to address and intervene with students who are demonstrating academic or behavioral challenges. The key to RTI models such as OISM is that teachers use scientifically based interventions and ground their decisions for interventions in the data collected through appropriate assessment strategies. The teacher-education candidates in this study were a part of preservice course work that familiarized them with the OISM model and the intent to use the model as a guide to determine appropriate intervention strategies to help students with high-incidence disabilities academically

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and behaviorally within the inclusive, cotaught classroom. Their opportunity to coteach with educators who were experienced in content and in special education offered further insight into how the OISM model could work at the high school level.

OISM is essentially a response by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to the mandates of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEIA), and the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation to provide better access to general education for all students, regardless of their current level of functioning. By reaching out to institutions of higher education in the state, such as the one for which these researchers teach, ODE's aim is to institutionalize the OISM model through its inclusion in preservice education curricula. Using grant funds from ODE, these researchers decided to raise awareness of OISM through focused collaboration (in the form of coteaching) with one of the university's high-achieving, suburban partner school districts.

The Proposal

Principal investigators for this funded proposal agreed on a mutual goal of ensuring that graduates of the College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) teacher preparation programs have knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to meet the academic and affective needs of the diverse student population in pre-K through 12 schools. To support this effort, an integrated team of general and special educators, administrators from PK–12, university faculty, and the local Southwest Education Regional Resource Center (SERRC) came together to devise several tasks aimed at increasing awareness of the OISM model. The current discussion focuses on a pilot study involving a new field service placement model pairing general and special education student teachers in coteaching relationships at a partner high school. Coteaching, one specific collaboration model, is an example of a research-based practice consistent with OISM. Investigators in this study believe that teachers who effectively implement coteaching principles can better meet the academic and behavioral needs of students with and without exceptional learning needs in the general-education classroom.

Procedures and Methodology

Research Design

Although we present quantitative data from this study (surveys), the essential research design is a qualitative, single-site case study, in which our intent is to be flexible in our use of participant observation, unstructured interviews, and document analysis to reach a greater understanding of the coteaching process in a particular high school. Case study research focuses on “discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied” (Merriam, 1988, p. 3), and therefore has the potential to make “significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education” (p. 3). Through sustained interactions with participants, we attempt to provide a vivid description of

the participants' perspectives of their work together. We tried to understand how the practicing teachers and their student teachers "negotiated meaning" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 31) in their daily interactions, i.e., how they made sense of their experience. Our primary aim was to gain a greater insight into the people, events, and circumstances that can contribute to the success of coteaching relationships and thereby serve the needs of all students in a classroom.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Our university is specifically dedicated to supporting diversity in its myriad of forms. We have multiple institutional bodies at the university, college, and department levels that are charged with the task of making sure diversity is recognized and valued. Our preservice teacher education programs are established to provide a rich background in meeting the needs of learners with diverse characteristics, strengths, and needs. As faculty, we believe our philosophy about the value of diversity is clearly communicated to our teacher candidates throughout these programs and course work. The purpose of this study is to examine the ability of our teacher candidates to put into practice what we've been "preaching." Specifically, to what extent are the teacher candidates in this study able to implement what they have learned about diverse learners and coteaching to meet the needs of all students in their student-teaching placements? Will participants view coteaching as a positive experience? Will they see it as a viable component of the OISM model that meets diverse students' needs? Finally, what factors will influence the participants' coteaching experience?

Importance of Study

Current legislation (IDEIA and NCLB) emphasizes the need for schools to be held accountable for the achievement of all students. Students with disabilities are now routinely included in general-education classrooms with their peers who are typically developing. Their success depends on the ability of their teachers, both content experts and special educators, to work together collaboratively. Coteaching is a research-based practice that can support both teachers and students in the educational process. This study provides insight into the beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors needed by teacher candidates and their cooperating teachers as they begin working together collaboratively in high school settings, an environment that can be particularly challenging for students with disabilities and the professionals who serve them. It also has the potential to assist teacher educators who are responsible for preparing preservice teachers for their roles in serving a diverse student population in our nation's schools.

Limitations of Study

In this study we draw conclusions about coteaching relationships among preservice and experienced general and special educators. These conclusions, however, are rooted

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in the understanding that every learning environment is unique. The experiences of the participants in this study are contextual in nature. We studied only one site, and our number of participants was small. In addition, the researchers played a dual role as university supervisors of the student-teaching experience. The relationship between preservice teacher and the supervisor is influenced by the evaluative nature of the role. Nevertheless, a greater understanding of one school environment may provide inspiration and encouragement to other coteachers and teacher educators who aspire to more effective learning communities for all students and teachers. University supervision programs can better understand the support needed to promote an alternate form of student teaching.

Procedures

Selection and Description of Site. The district was interested in the coteaching project from the perspective of district accountability. The students are going to be held accountable. If the talents of every teacher are tapped, then more kids will be reached. Since the majority of initiatives are aimed at the elementary level, it is more difficult to make inroads at the high school level. This was a welcome opportunity to involve high school staff in a coteaching experience. This partnership district of 2,677 students and four schools is highly rated in the state's accountability system. It has an Excellent based on test scores and has been ranked 38th out of 825 high schools using the state assessment measures. The high school has 964 students and was recently recognized as a Silver Award–winning high school by *U.S. News and World Report* (February, 2008) that compared 18,000 public high schools in 40 states. There were 29 schools from Ohio receiving this silver award honor. The district Web site states, “The School District is an award-winning district that keeps students soaring toward excellence by maintaining high standards for personal and academic success.”

Participants. Although the original grant involved an integrated team of general and special educators, administrators from PK–12, university faculty, and the local Special Education Regional Resource Center (SERRC), this study focused on six participants in particular. The first set of participants for this study included two high school teachers as cooperating teachers for the teacher candidates. One was a high school social studies teacher and the other a high school intervention specialist (special education teacher) with a social studies background. These two in-service teachers had been assigned to coteach an inclusive social studies class of students with and without disabilities during the fall semester. Ned, the intervention specialist, has been with the same district for 25 years, 22 years of which have been as a social studies teacher at the high school level. For the last three years, at the principal's request, he began teaching students with disabilities. At first reluctant, he reports that he has really warmed to his new role. Anthony, the content area teacher, has

been teaching social studies for eight years. He is also a coach at the middle-school level. He completed working with his first student teacher this last spring, and that student teacher was recently hired in the district to teach at the high school.

The second set of participants for this study are two student teachers. Kristen is completing the intervention specialist licensure program, and David is in the field of social studies completing the adolescent young adult licensure program. Kristen's undergraduate degree was in Russian and international studies. For the past 10 years, she has served as a substitute teacher while being a stay-at-home mom. The content area candidate, David, has completed a Bachelor of Science from the College of Arts and Sciences with a focus on social studies. This means he has completed a concentration of course work in the content area and a minimum of two courses dealing with students with disabilities and inclusionary practices. His undergraduate degree is in social studies, and his master's course work has focused on pedagogical practices that exemplify best practices in the high school social studies classroom. The two student teachers were randomly assigned to the school site by the university's Office of Professional Field Experiences, but they did agree to involvement in the coteaching experience. The teacher placement within the high school was managed by the principal of the high school along with the district curriculum director who has been a part of the core group of grant investigators. Since both teacher candidates are in master's programs, they are eligible to substitute teach during their student teaching in the building with approval of the district and an application to the state.

The final two participants in this study served dual roles as coresearchers and as university supervisors for the two teacher candidates. They were also members of the original OISM grant team. Both are assistant professors in the teacher education department, trained and experienced in pedagogical practices and assessment of student teachers. One is a member of the special education program faculty, and the other is a member of the literacy program. Both supervisors have extensive classroom and administrative experience. One is trained as an assessor for Praxis III, Ohio's accountability system for new teachers. The other is a former elementary school teacher, principal, and special education supervisor. The 19 criteria of the Praxis III assessment form the foundation of the assessment tool used by the university in evaluating student-teacher performance.

Role of Researcher. "The personal characteristic most affecting the conduct of qualitative research is the investigator's identity as the essential research instrument" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 91). The very "humanness" of the researcher adds to the possibility of greater understanding because the researcher is continually sensitive to the context of the environment, automatically adjusting as the situation warrants (Merriam, 1988).

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Ironically, these very human qualities may also hinder the research process. Humans miss opportunities, and they sometimes knowingly or unknowingly let their personal prejudices interfere with the research process. Throughout the data collection and analysis, the university supervisors/researchers made a concerted effort to be aware of and set aside any personal bias that could influence their roles as researchers.

In considering the participant/observer continuum (Bogden & Biklen, 1992), we acknowledged our role as participants via the university supervisor process. We also attempted, however, to “internalize the research goal while collecting data in the field” (Bogden & Biklen, 1992, p. 90). As researchers and participants, we tackled the challenging task of building rapport with and supporting our teacher candidates and their cooperating teachers while at the same time “systematically and rigorously” (p. 91) collecting data to inform our research questions. We were participant observers, who “watch what people do, listen to what people say, and interact with participants” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 196).

Methodology/Data Collection

Within a case-study design, a researcher is interested in collecting empirical data, that which can be “obtained from the environments and accessed via human senses” (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 158). High schools are intriguing and complex places. In an attempt to tap into the richness of what was happening at this particular site, we employed a diverse set of data collection methods, including formal and informal observations in the classroom with follow-up conversations, verbal and written personal reflections, document analysis, and end-of-term surveys. This data were gathered at the beginning of, during, and at the end of the experience.

Formal Lesson Observations. Each of the preservice teacher candidates was assigned one of the two faculty participants as field supervisor. The student-teaching experience in both the intervention specialist and adolescent young adult (AYA) programs requires that preservice teachers be formally evaluated on lesson design and delivery a minimum of four times during the 10-week experience. In addition, a collaborative mid-term and end-of-term assessment is completed by the candidate, the cooperating teacher, and the supervisor. Each of these encounters provides an opportunity for discussion about pedagogy, the teaching environment, and candidate or supervisor concerns. These conversations were documented through formal assessment forms and also by supervisor notes.

Personal Reflections and Document Analysis. We collected written documentation through journals and e-mails. The special education faculty supervisor asked both the student teachers and the cooperating teachers to keep reflective journals to document their experience. They agreed. The content faculty supervisor suggested journaling to

the social studies student teacher and cooperating teacher but received such negative feedback that the idea was not pursued. We collected e-mail communications and other notes, which we used to harvest additional insights from different perspectives.

Surveys. At the end of the experience we asked each of the four participants to independently complete three surveys documenting their perspectives. The surveys covered levels of responsibility (survey adapted from Villa, Thousand & Nevin, 2004 in Appendix A); levels of agreement with a series of statements about education of students with exceptionalities (survey adapted from Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 2001 in Appendix B); and individual beliefs, challenges, and surprises of this experience (questionnaire constructed by the authors in Appendix C.)

Data Analysis

At the point of data analysis, we acknowledged the inherent difference between qualitative and quantitative techniques. “The qualitative researcher concentrates on the instance, trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully — analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation. The quantitative researcher seeks a collection of instances, expecting that, from the aggregate, issue-relevant meanings will emerge” (Stake, 1995, p. 75). In analyzing our qualitative data, we looked for patterns that would clarify relationships, shed light on issues of interest, and help us *understand* this particular case. In analyzing the survey data, we examined the number of similar and dissimilar responses from the various participants and attempted to find meaning in those outcomes. The result of this combined strategy was an analysis that offered a clearer picture of the coteaching relationships experienced by the participants, while preserving their voices and individuality.

Results: Answering the Research Questions

Observational and Reflective Results in the Beginning

University faculty, two of whom would be the student-teacher supervisors of the teacher candidates, facilitated an orientation meeting on the day of the district-wide kick off for the school year. The cooperating teachers and two student teachers attended this meeting in lieu of their building meetings. At this orientation meeting, teachers and student teachers made introductions since this was the initial meeting of the individuals involved. The facilitators introduced the participants to information about coteaching and OISM, and provided background information through several articles about coteaching. Participants watched a coteaching video and engaged in discussion with presenters around the topics of coteaching and inclusionary practice. Cooperating teachers then took student teachers on a high school tour, and plans were made for the next day’s beginning of the school year. The perspectives presented here attempt to best paraphrase the voice of each of the participants as they shared their thoughts at the

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end of the orientation day. The comments are gleaned from the data gathered through conversations, journals, and other communiqués.

Ned (IS Cooperating Teacher): As intervention specialist cooperating teacher and previous social studies teacher, I see my 25 years of experience as a vehicle to assist my student teacher in both the social studies and intervention specialist areas.

Kristen (IS Student Teacher): As an intervention specialist student teacher, this was a wonderful day! I am looking forward to working with these great guys and am really psyched. I am happy to be working in social studies. I'm not doing math — I don't know it, don't understand it. No math.

Anthony (Social Studies Cooperating Teacher): This is my second student teacher, and if David works out as well, I'll be thrilled. My last student teacher now has a position right here in the school. Plus, this couldn't come at a better time for me. My wife is about to deliver our first child and I plan to take a paternity leave to be with her for three to four weeks. Ned has been in my classroom before, so I know how that works, and with David here as my substitute while he student teaches, I will be very comfortable being at home. We have a lot to do before tomorrow as I show him how this all works, but today has been interesting. I think it looks like a good plan.

David (Social Studies Student Teacher): I'm a bit overwhelmed with everything. I just met Anthony, and I think we'll get along fine. He's going to show me how things work in his classroom, but it sounds like we're on the same page as far as teaching high school social studies goes. He's made it clear that we need to focus on students doing well on the OGT (Ohio Graduation Test) and that means making sure the content is covered thoroughly. He's the person in charge, so I want to do what he feels is best. He's the leader. Anthony is going to be out for a while to help his wife with the new baby, and that's just in about two weeks, so I hope things fall into place quickly because I'll be taking over all of his classes as his substitute. Kristen also seems nice, and I'm sure we'll work well together. I know I'll be glad to have the help in the classroom with different students. Right now it's just a lot at one time.

Observational and Reflective Results Mid-Point

By the middle of the term, Anthony had been on paternity leave with David providing substitute coverage for several weeks. The three remaining coteaching members began to

express criticism of others' roles. The student teachers looked at the immediate experience with very few, if any, concerns about long-range effects. The preservice teachers are with these students for 10 weeks, so their investment is limited to their student-teaching experience. The in-service teachers are focused on their long-term interactions and student performance. The cooperating teachers knew that after the preservice teachers were gone, they would be left with any residual effects on the coteaching relationship and student achievement. Supervisors provided formal lesson feedback by this time, and the midterm assessment was collaboratively completed. Since many of the conversations were more informal, the perspectives presented here attempt to best paraphrase the voice of each of the participants at this time in the experience. Meeting notes, informal conversations, e-mails, and journals provide the content of the different perspectives.

Ned (IS Cooperating Teacher): There is too much lecturing in this social studies class. David has turned down Kristen's suggestions for study reviews. He just wants to keep up the lecturing, lecturing, and staccato lecturing. These students need help! Kristen needs help. And I'm going to help her have a more meaningful coteaching experience. Perhaps she might coteach with the high school math teacher for a more cooperative coteaching experience. I don't believe that the principal, who hasn't attended any of the meetings nor in-service opportunities, supports this coteaching initiative.

Kristen (IS Student Teacher): This hasn't worked out as I had initially hoped. David began lecturing without interruption; I felt as though I was competing with Ned as he took over the study review sessions. Now, David won't listen to any of my suggestions. Students are only expected to take notes. So this is what coteaching is about? I'm the helper — the assistant! I really thought that coteaching meant that we were equal partners, but we're not. Ned and I attended the scheduled conference though the general education team did not. While I was gone, David presented my lesson plan to his university supervisor as his own. How dare he!

Anthony (Social Studies Content Teacher): I think things are going pretty well. I've talked to David often on the phone and we've e-mailed daily. He's sending me his lesson plans to look over, but he's doing everything the way I think he should. I like that he's keeping a good pace. It's important that he knows that we have to cover the content and the students have to know this stuff for the OGT. It has been such a great help to me to have David. I have not had to worry about the class or the students making gains. And with Ned and Kristen in there, it's all covered.

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David (Social Studies Student Teacher): I'm loving it! Things are going so well. I was a little nervous at first when Anthony went out to help with the new baby, but it gave me the responsibility of the class right away, and I had to get organized and be on the ball. Anthony gave me all his overheads and materials from last year and that helped, but I've made some of my own outlines on the overheads to use. I really appreciate your suggestions for lesson questioning too. I've gone through the master's program almost as an independent study since I was on a different cycle. I've not really taken any classes specifically on how to teach, but I've read some good books on teaching as part of my classes, and I created a social studies unit. I got an A on that, so I'm guessing I'm on the right track. Kristen's great. She has a lot of good ideas of how to help her kids, and she just blends in to the class. We don't have a lot of time to plan, so I've not been able to fill her in on the content I'm covering, but you saw the one class where we tried to coteach like we saw in the video. (A parallel coteaching model was used as a review for a test.) We've only seen that one example, but it seemed to work well for us. She just doesn't have the background in the content. That's what worries me the most.

Observational and Reflective Results End of Term

As the term ended, participants reflected on the entire experience and their learning over the term. This involved the lessons formally observed and evaluated (both student teachers did well on observed lessons using the 19 criteria of Praxis III), the collective entries of journals and e-mails, end-of-term assessment conversations, and reflections on the surveys.

Ned (IS Cooperating Teacher): The math teacher welcomed us into his room for an additional coteaching experience. Despite Kristen's initial reservations with math, she has done very well in his positive class atmosphere. I believe that teacher pairings are critical. We are making progress. I see it. Students need to apply their knowledge to present-day situations to see significance. And the students are making progress here — they are learning and demonstrating academic gains!

Kristen (IS Student Teacher): What a difference between the two general-education teachers. David wouldn't allow me to be an equal partner in the room, while the math teacher has even asked me to serve as substitute in his absence. I believe that all of my inclusion classes have a higher overall classroom average than those without an intervention specialist. And the

building principal has praised me for assisting a new student prior to identification. I just hope that David treats his future coworkers with a little more respect or he may have some real issues to deal with!

Anthony (Social Studies Content Teacher): Overall this has been a good experience. There have been a few bumps along the way but nothing major. We had to talk to Ned because he was taking too much time talking in class, which was bogging down David's presentation of material. I'd think that he would understand since he is a former social studies teacher that we are expected to cover the material for the test. This has been a good experience for David since he's had to work with someone else in the classroom. With inclusion growing, this is probably something he will have to deal with in his classroom someday.

David (Social Studies Student Teacher): I have some mixed feelings. Overall it has been a good experience. I really liked having the classroom on my own while Anthony was on paternity leave for several weeks. That was probably the best experience I could have had. I also really like Kristen; she works really hard and is such a help in the classroom for the kids who don't get it the usual way. We really wanted the coteaching to work, and we did it the only way we saw it demonstrated in the video. We didn't have the video to go back to, so we did it the best we remembered. I wish we could go see someone else who is doing this, to actually see someone in action. I have a better understanding of the pace you have to keep in a classroom. Sometimes there were some issues between Anthony and Ned about who was in charge of pacing, but sometimes people don't understand how much you have to cover. I guess I thought we'd get more help along the way in trying to figure this whole thing out, but everyone is so new at it that the help just wasn't there.

Perceptions of Responsibility

The first survey (Appendix A) was adapted from Villa, Thousand, & Nevin (2004), which asks each teacher to first document his/her ownership of responsibilities. In this case the teachers each responded that they believed a task was their primary responsibility (P), secondary responsibility (S), equal responsibility (E), or that they should give input in the decision making (I). Those results are compiled in the chart below.

The chart shows that there is much more agreement of responsibility for tasks than there is disagreement. In 10 of the 14 questions, three of the four participants shared the same perception of responsibilities. The two preservice teachers marked 50 percent

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of the survey responsibilities the same. A majority of their responses were seen as equal responsibility, a shared ownership of the task. The two in-service teachers marked only four of the responsibilities the same. The two special education teachers marked 10 of the 14 questions the same. The two content teachers marked 5 of the 14 questions the same.

This is good news in several ways. The preservice teachers see many of the tasks of teaching as equal or shared responsibility. There is a majority of instances where there is agreement among three of the four participants so more people are on the same page than not. The intervention specialists are highly unified with their sense of responsibility. With so much in agreement, with so many factors seen as equal responsibilities, the door to continued collaboration is there to be opened and further developed.

Perceptions of Responsibility (Survey Results)

CT=Content Teacher, IS=Intervention Specialist, CTST=Content Teacher Student Teacher, ISST=Intervention Specialist Student Teacher

Question	Similar Responses	Different Responses
1. Development of units/ lessons	CT, CTST, ISST (Content Teacher's Primary Responsibility)	IS (Equal Responsibility)
2. Create Advanced Organizers	CT, IS, ISST (Content Teacher's Primary Responsibility)	CTST (Equal Responsibility)
3. Monitor and assess student progress	IS, CTST, ISST (Equal Responsibility)	CT (Primary Responsibility)
4. Assign Grades	CT, CTST (Primary Responsibility) IS, ISST (Equal Responsibility)	
5. Schedule/facilitate team meetings	IS, ISST, CTST (Equal Responsibility)	CT (Primary Responsibility)
6. Train paraprofessionals	IS, ISST, CTST (Equal Responsibility)	CT (Secondary Responsibility)
7. Assign paraprofessional's responsibilities	CT, CTST (Secondary Responsibility) IS, ISST (Equal Responsibility)	
8. Supervise paraprofessionals	CT, CTST, IS, ISST (Equal Responsibility)	
9. Recruit & Train Peer Tutors	CT, IS, CTST (Equal Responsibility)	ISST (Primary Responsibility)
10. Facilitate Peer Support and Friendship	IS, CTST (Equal Responsibility) CT, ISST (Primary Responsibility)	
11. Communicate with Administrators	IS, ISST, CTST (Equal Responsibility)	CT (Primary Responsibility)
12. Communicate with Service Providers	IS, ISST CT (Intervention Specialist's Primary Responsibility)	CTST (Equal Responsibility)
13. Communicate with Parents	CT, ISST (Content Teacher's Primary Responsibility) IS, CTST (Equal Responsibility)	
14. Develop Individual Education Plans	IS, ISST, CTST (Intervention Specialist's Primary Responsibility)	CT (Equal Responsibility)

Perspectives on Students with Exceptionalities

The second survey (Appendix B) developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (2001) asks teachers to strongly agree, agree, remain neutral, slightly disagree, or strongly disagree with a series of 31 statements about teaching and in particular about teaching at-risk students. The respondents as a whole group answered strongly agree or agree to 84 percent of the questions. This is another positive sign of unity among all four teachers. Forty-two percent of the responses were mixed with some variance, and 6 percent were undecided. Ten of the mixed-response questions show vastly different beliefs. Those 10 questions are the focus of the chart below.

The positive findings from this survey are the strong congruence on 84 percent of the statements. That means that for the most part the teachers are on the same page about instruction of all students, including those with exceptionalities. The areas of concern deal with the perception that some teachers do not know enough of the content and other teachers do not know enough about pedagogical practices for all learners, advocacy for the hardest to teach, and a focus on growth through reflection and collaborative planning.

The greatest negative concerns the preservice special education candidate who responded 29 percent of the time with responses that were very different from the other three participants. In 32 percent of her responses, the answer was disagree or strongly disagree. Those questions deal with knowledge of content material (Q1), teachers' understanding of exceptionalities (Q4, Q9, Q10), instructional practices (Q19, Q28), advocacy for all learners (Q30), and teacher reflection (Q31). Journal entries and conversations documented in the study point to the special education teacher's less-than-positive experience in the social studies classroom. Her responses on this survey reinforce that she does not share the same beliefs about teachers' understanding of teaching at-risk students.

Teacher Understandings of Pedagogy for All Learners (Survey Results)

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Undecided	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
CT	15	14	2	0	0
CTST	9	19	2	1	0
IS	22	4	0	4	1
ISST	19	2	3	4	3

Special Education Student Teacher's Contrasting Responses

Questions	St A	SI A	U	SI D	St D
1 Understanding of Exceptionalities	3			1	0
4 Knowledge of Resources for Special Education	1	2			1
9 Knowledge of Learning Styles and Exceptionalities	1	2			1
10 Understanding of Perceptions of Exceptionalities	2	1			1
19 Every Teacher is a Language Teacher	1			2	1
28 Understanding of the Use of Data for Decision Making	1	2			1
30 Teachers as Advocates for All Children	3				1
31 Teacher Collaboration to Meet Student Needs	3				1

Coteaching Placements

Perspectives on benefits, challenges, and surprises

According to the participants' responses, the benefits of this experience were primarily connected to the gathering of new information about coteaching and the resources to support that effort and the personnel involved. Comments from the content teachers are much more positive than those of the intervention specialists. Content teachers appreciated the time to meet people and talk, to provide guidance and discussion and clarity of expectations, and the support of additional teachers in the classroom. Anthony stated that he would love to have an assistant like this in every one of his classrooms. The intervention specialists' perspectives were not as positive. They mentioned several negative components such as teacher selection and lack of collaboration. Their positive comments included close personal connections, good resource materials, and a free lunch.

The challenges were more congruent between the two groups and the four individuals. All felt that the lack of time together from beginning to end was a barrier to success. The lack of outside support from the school, district administrators, and university was mentioned by each participant. This was seen as a lack of ownership by some teachers, and fostered a lack of direction and confusion about purpose and goals. The need for mutual planning time was discussed by each participant as a major roadblock to success. Participants believed common planning times would have allowed for the defining of roles, development of content knowledge, and exploration of alternative methods with clarity of instruction. Everyone stated that the introduction and discussions needed to start earlier with more time to get to know each other and the personalities involved.

There were also surprises for everyone. All participants were surprised that they were pretty much left on their own to make the experience work. They were all surprised at the lack of involvement at the building level from the principal and the seeming lack of ownership by the district or the university. Although the requirements of the student-teaching experience were met and additional contact points were included to lend support, this was not seen as adequate. Additional information about specific models of coteaching was needed. Several participants wrote that they were surprised that they did not have a chance to process the events with each other throughout the experience. Content teachers were pleasantly surprised at the positive impact of having additional support for students in the classroom and how well the entire project had worked in spite of the lack of time to plan together. Intervention specialists were surprised that no one was interested in actually seeing how the classroom was functioning or not functioning.

Discussion: Lessons Learned for District/University Partnership

District lessons

Lessons learned from our study at the district level involve the areas of organization, commitment, and support. Jang (2006) found that the traditional secondary school

teaching culture promoted lack of interaction, a high teaching load, as well as conservative faculty attitudes. All participants need to understand that communication is the integral component of establishing a collaborative school culture (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). Organizationally, communication through orientation and in-service meetings should begin early in the summer prior to coteaching. This clearly supports the Dieker & Murawski (2003) findings that coteaching needs to start early and clearly identify how the process will be implemented as well as evaluated. The surveys used in this study to gather information about beliefs and perspectives after the experience could be used to begin an initial conversation around teaching BEFORE the experience begins. In this way, each teacher can reflect on embedded personal beliefs and at the same time begin to discuss these beliefs with each other to open the door to shared understandings.

Time should be set aside throughout the coteaching experience for all team members to meet jointly. This might enhance a common understanding of both individual and partner roles. Commitment of all team members (administration, general education teachers, intervention specialists) is crucial to the success of coteaching. Support would include ongoing discussions with university faculty and should include integrating best practices within lessons as well as coteaching.

University lessons

Lessons learned at the university level involve organization, commitment, and seminar development. More in-depth preplanning is needed prior to initial training so that team members can reflect on their roles and those of others. Course work for all preservice teachers needs to include an emphasis on a variety of ways to effectively teach content as well as emotional intelligence techniques.

Harbort et al. (2007) found that additional training for both special education and general education candidates should incorporate guided-practice opportunities in areas such as coplanning, communication, and ongoing assessment of coteaching. All members should be committed to attend professional development activities and meeting afterwards to discuss and integrate their learning within the coteaching process. Joint seminars including all team members should be held to identify ongoing issues and concerns so that they might be dealt with in a timely manner.

Further, university faculty needs to develop and maintain a more in-depth presence within coteaching professional development opportunities. Preservice teachers in this study designed lessons after only one coteaching model, and without support materials, because it was all they knew. The role of the university can be to bring that ongoing coaching of models to the teachers and support their implementation.

Coteaching Placements

Implications

Coteaching is just one example of research-based practices that support the implementation of the OISM model in Ohio schools. This study focuses on the coteaching opportunity of preservice and in-service educators in a content area and in special education. The data gathered offer insight into what the OISM model needs in order to work at the high-school level. For OISM to be successfully implemented and maintained, teachers and administrators from school districts and faculty from universities must be willing to merge practice through a definitive commitment of time and effort.

Attempting to “fit something in” while maintaining the traditional structure of field experiences results in less-than-ideal outcomes. All participants must be willing to devote the extra time needed for planning, collaborating, and assessing. They need to know up front the commitment they are making and how that differs from the traditional field placement process. For example, one orientation meeting is not enough. University faculty should conduct additional professional development sessions during the quarter. These sessions should be planned around the questions and needs emanating from the teachers and student teachers in the classroom. Although benefits to teachers and students will become apparent over time, if teachers and student teachers are to “buy in” to the model initially, the additional time required of both cooperating teachers and student teachers must be compensated for in some extrinsic way, perhaps through additional stipends or graduate credit.

The challenge is to help teachers understand that coteaching, as one of the research-based practices supported by the OISM model, is manageable. This study attempts to discern to what extent teacher candidates in this study were able to implement what they have learned about diverse learners and coteaching to meet the needs of all students in their student-teaching placements and what factors influence the participants’ coteaching experience. The good news is that belief systems about diverse learners are evident. Both sets of teachers wanted to meet the needs of all students. The difficulty came in the implementation. Most of the participants in this study seem to believe that with the right support the experience could be positive for everyone involved — students and teachers.

This model will support strong student achievement if teachers are willing to work together to serve the needs of all their students. However, the needs expressed by these in-service and preservice teachers call for university personnel and PK–12 districts to work together intentionally to promote fidelity to the coteaching model with ongoing communication and development of understanding of the vastly different and important roles that core content teachers and special education teachers both bring to the classroom for students — and student achievement.

Appendix A

Coteaching

Coteaching Elements:

- two or more teachers (or other professionals employed as licensed staff), one a general educator and the other a special service provider, share physical space in order to actively instruct a blended group of students, including students with disabilities
- it combines the general educator’s knowledge of the curriculum and pacing with the special educator’s skill in individualizing to create a powerful instructional option for students
- a service delivery option used to promote inclusive practice
- a fundamental shift to an understanding that classrooms with two teachers are partnerships that shape instructional practice

In this section, reflect on the “Coteaching Elements” above. Then, indicate the degree to which you feel each team member would take responsibility for a task on the Coteaching Roles and Responsibilities Matrix.

Code Key: P = Primary responsibility
 E = Equal responsibility
 S = Secondary responsibility
 I = Input in the decision making

Coteaching Roles and Responsibilities Matrix

RESPONSIBILITIES	NAME	NAME	NAME	NAME
Develop units, projects, lessons				
Create advanced organizers (e.g., concept map, lecture guide)				
Monitor and assess student progress				
Assign grades				
Schedule/facilitate team meetings				
Train paraprofessionals				
Assign responsibilities to paraprofessionals				
Supervise and train paraprofessionals				
Recruit and train peer tutors				
Facilitate peer support and friendship				
Communicate with administrators				
Communicate with related service providers (e.g., speech language therapists)				
Communicate with parents				
Develop Individual Education Programs				
Other				

Coteaching Placements

- Friend, M. & Cook, L. (1996) *The power of 2: Making a difference through co-teaching*. (Inclusive Series-Tape 3). Forum on Education, Indiana University Educational Services.
- Villa, R. A., Thousand, J. S., & Nevin, A. I. (2004). *A Guide to Co-Teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning*, Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Appendix B

Teacher Understandings:

In this section, check the category which most clearly describes your understanding to the statement. Please answer all questions.

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Undecided	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Teachers have a solid base of understanding of the subject matter in the content area they teach.					
2. Students with exceptionalities may need modifications depending on their learning strengths and needs.					
3. Students with exceptionalities should have equitable access to and participation in the general curriculum.					
4. Teachers know about and can access resources regarding special education.					
5. All children have similar patterns of learning and development that vary individually.					
6. Children with exceptionalities may exhibit greater individual variations in learning and development.					
7. Knowledge of the impact of exceptionalities on learning and development will optimize learning opportunities for each student.					
8. Students with exceptionalities come from a variety of cultures, languages, classes, and ethnicities.					
9. A specific exceptionality does not dictate how an individual student will learn.					
10. An exceptionality can be perceived differently across families, communities, and cultures based on differing values and belief systems.					
11. Teachers must tailor instructional strategies to the particular learning needs of individual students.					

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Undecided	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. Teachers know how to modify and adapt the general curriculum to accommodate individual students' needs.					
13. Students with exceptionalities who have goals related to an expanded curriculum will also need specialized instruction to achieve those goals.					
14. Classroom acceptance is important for students to develop social responsibility, self-esteem, and positive peer relations.					
15. Students with exceptionalities are welcomed in classes and are included by teachers.					
16. Activities that foster engagement, self-motivation, and independent learning may need to be structured for students with exceptionalities.					
17. Communication or language delays often accompany students with exceptionalities.					
18. A high priority should be a safe environment so that students with exceptionalities are encouraged and supported to use language and contribute their ideas.					
19. Teachers teach language and communication skills.					
20. Students with exceptionalities may require adjustments in goals, teaching strategies, or supports.					
21. Students with exceptionalities may need expanded curriculum including functional life skills, communication skills, or behavior/social skills.					
22. Planning for students with exceptionalities requires an individualized plan and is a collaborative process.					
23. Individualized comprehensive assessments are required for students with exceptionalities to determine eligibility for services, planning, monitoring, and evaluation.					

Coteaching Placements

	Strongly Agree	Slightly Agree	Undecided	Slightly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. Students with exceptionalities participate in the overall assessment programs in classrooms.					
25. Some students with exceptionalities may require alternate assessments.					
26. Teacher reflection is essential for designing, monitoring, and adapting instruction for all students.					
27. Teachers evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching practices based on learning strengths and the needs of individual students with exceptionalities.					
28. Based on data-based reflections, teachers engage in actions that consistently support and promote the achievement of students with exceptionalities.					
29. Families, schools, and communities are important contexts for teaching, learning, and development.					
30. Teachers advocate for students with exceptionalities to receive the support they need to be successful in the general curriculum.					
31. Teachers collaborate with each other, with other professionals, and with families to ensure that students with exceptionalities are valued members of the classroom, school, and in larger communities.					

Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (2001, May). *Model Standards for Licensing General and Special Education Teachers of Students with Disabilities: A Resource for State Dialogue*. Washington, D.C.: Council of Chief State School Officers

Teaching Experience Survey

Question	Benefits	Challenges	Surprises
1. Initial OISM Inservice at Board Office			
2. Cooperating Teacher Support			
3. University Support			
4. Administrative Support			
5. If we were beginning again, what would you do the same?			
6. If we were beginning again, what would you do differently?			
7. If we were beginning again, what would be your suggestions for success?			

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