Repositioning Warts & All: A Response to Coteaching Researchers

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Abstract: This paper is a response to our colleague's perspectives on our paper (GALLOFOX, WASSELL, SCANTLEBURY, & JUCK, 2006), that addressed ethical dilemmas we encountered when implementing coteaching in a secondary science education program. Although the respondents addressed this issue, they also raised other important points pertaining to their own experiences with implementing and researching coteaching. In this paper, we synthesize these perspectives and further discuss the implications of implementing coteaching.

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1. Introduction

The paper respondents, all involved in coteaching/cogenerative research at different locations around the globe, have written thought-provoking critiques. The original paper (GALLOFOX, WASSELL, SCANTLEBURY, & JUCK, 2006) addressed "the ethical dilemmas we encountered when implementing coteaching in a secondary science education program in cooperation with highly experienced but philosophically different colleagues in the field" (¶1). Although the respondents addressed this issue, they also raised other important points pertaining to their own experiences with implementing and researching coteaching. In this paper, we synthesize these perspectives, and also use the opportunity to discuss further the implications of implementing new models of practice, such as coteaching, within the field of teacher education. [1]

2. One Common Model?—Programmatic Similarities and Differences

2.1 Theoretical foundations of coteaching

At its foundation, coteaching is an approach to teacher education in which two or more individuals "teach at the elbow of another" (ROTH & TOBIN, 2002). Coteaching involves all participants in the praxis of teaching in classroom and conversational settings (ROTH, TOBIN, & ZIMMERMAN, 2002; TOBIN & ROTH, 2002). Coteaching also affords the participants time and space to critically analyze their practices. This analysis takes place immediately after coteaching, during coplanning sessions, or during cogenerative dialogues—focused discussions where participants examine issues and seek to produce a collectively generated outcome. Although studies that utilize ROTH and TOBIN's definition of coteaching typically incorporate the elements of shared teaching experiences, shared responsibility and cogenerative dialogue, the implementation of coteaching inevitably varies as a result of different contexts, participants and programs in which the model is implemented. The responses to our paper illuminate the potential differences that emerge when coteaching is implemented in a large, traditionally structured teacher education program that incorporates a variety of different stakeholders whose experience is grounded within the "old" program. In the sections that follow, we address some of the respondents' points regarding the programmatic issues that unfolded during our research and clarify some of the contextual points omitted from the initial paper. [2]

2.2 Programmatic similarities and differences

As the coteaching model becomes adapted around the globe it manifests differently in response to local contexts and programmatic needs, while sharing common theoretical underpinnings. This aspect of implementation raises an interesting dilemma for those involved with coteaching research, for while we share common theoretical understandings and many similar structures, there are also distinct differences that surface. Such differences provide rich opportunities for learning as well as potential dilemmas when talking across the research. For example, programs are introduced in different ways, and cogenerative dialogues have taken on different forms with diverse participants in the various settings. It is easy to overlook differences between coteaching models, particularly as programs continue to evolve. However, such gaps in dialogue can lead to false understandings of one another's programs. Therefore, we propose that when talking across models it is critical that coteaching participants and researchers are cognizant of such nuances and are careful not to assume the universality of experience. Authors could assist readers by describing the context of their programmatic implementation of coteaching, although often describing the particular coteaching model is not a major goal in disseminating the findings of a study. [3]

While the purpose of our original paper was not to describe the coteaching model as implemented at Biden High School (the research site described in the paper), some discussion is needed in order to highlight the similarities and differences

between other coteaching models. In the sections that follow we discuss ways that the different programs described in the response papers share commonalities and also diverge from each other. In doing so, we seek to clarify and broaden one another's understanding of the diversity of coteaching programs globally. [4]

2.3 Engaging participants

Approaches by both MURPHY and BEGGS (2006) and SCANTLEBURY (2005) both provided opportunities to introduce self-selected participants to coteaching. The model employed by MURPHY and BEGGS (MURPHY, BEGGS, CARLISLE, & GREENWOOD 2004) sought to place science specialist pre-service teachers in schools located across Northern Ireland. In contrast, the model implemented by SCANTLEBURY (2005) placed a cohort of teaching interns at one school. In both examples, researchers sought to help the participants develop a sense of ownership over the model and an understanding of what coteaching would look like in the classroom. As discussed in MURPHY and BEGGS (2006), participants met collectively to develop the model and signed a code of practice. Once coteaching began, the university tutor participated in coteaching as a means for providing additional support for the teachers' work. In contrast, SCANTLEBURY (2005) presented the model to teachers located at the school, and solicited involvement of interested participants. Both interns and teachers were engaged in conversations about the model on numerous occasions, invited to attend presentations by people involved in coteaching at another university, and were involved in weekly onsite seminars to discuss ongoing coteaching practices. Each program's goals included assisting participants to understand the model's theoretical underpinnings. We have identified some commonalities between the programs in Delaware, US, and Belfast, Northern Ireland. In the following paragraph we identify similarities between coteaching models located in the US in New York, Pennsylvania, and Delaware that were not apparent in the initial response papers. [5]

2.4 Cogenerative dialogues

LEHNER (2006) and STITH's (2006) responses focus on the programmatic similarities and differences related to cogenerative dialogues. However, LEHNER (2006) and STITH (2006) make assumptions about the program described in our paper in their assertions that the absence of cogenerative dialogue prompted issues around communication, participant roles, and power. For example, LEHNER (2006) claims, "without the use of cogenerative dialogue, where opposing ideologies could have been discussed, dualism emerged because the project lacked a field where diverse views of the practice could have coexisted." [6]

In our paper, we did not describe the use of cogenerative dialogue in the manner described by LEHNER and STITH, which they identify as a forum in which stakeholders get together to discuss events that took place during a lesson. Rather, in our program, cogenerative dialogues evolved as coplanning sessions between coteaching partners and in a whole-group seminar format. The practice of coplanning was initiated during the science methods course and continued

during the student teaching practicum due to a collective, acknowledged need for a group meeting to discuss lesson progressions, issues of instruction, and general classroom matters. These forums were helpful for addressing some, although not all, of the issues of communication described by STITH (2006). The use of the weekly seminar at the research site also functioned as a cogenerative dialogue in which cooperating teachers, interns, supervisors, and administrators could participate. During this meeting, all participants were offered the opportunity to engage in conversation about issues related to their experiences with coteaching, and how the model addressed the theoretical bridge between educational theory and teaching practices. The format and expectations of cogenerative dialogues were new to the participants, who were also coteaching novices. Although we acknowledge the power of cogenerative dialogue as "an ideal place where conversations could have occurred to speak across the barriers of difference and possibly resolve issues of conflict" (LEHNER, 2006, ¶3), these conversations did occur in whole-group seminars and extensive coplanning sessions. Regardless, even when effective, cogenerative dialogues are not a panacea that can address all of the ills of coteaching or student teaching. Rather, we recognize that cogenerative dialogues can take many forms and result in a variety of outcomes. However, like coteaching, all participants must understand the value of cogenerative dialogues and commit to ongoing, open dialogue about practice in an effort to reduce power differentials and improve teaching. Unfortunately this did not occur immediately in our implementation of coteaching. [7]

In order to effectively and appropriately implement cogenerative dialogues, one must first examine the context and potential participants. While the science teachers at Biden High School regularly met during faculty and departmental meetings, a variety of opinions and about effective science teaching were held by the individuals involved but not explicitly expressed. With the onset of coteaching, these individuals' perspectives were purposefully brought together, creating a new social structure that asked them to share and collaboratively construct their personal teaching knowledge and practices. Thus, the integration of both co-operating teachers and student teaching interns represented a significant reconstruction of each group's modes of teaching, as well as their actions and interactions regarding teaching science. The sharing of teaching experiences and ideas about science teaching were major steps to generating a shared knowledge of what it meant to teach science. Both coplanning sessions and the group seminar functioned as learning environments that fostered a sense of collective identity among the participants. From these collective meetings, coteachers formed a community of practice focused on communicating and displaying modes of teaching science that they identified as effective or ineffective. Thus, the construction of these collaborative meetings functioned as alternative forms of the cogenerative dialogue described by LEHNER (2006) and STITH (2006). [8]

2.5 Coteaching relationships and issues of power and voice

It is critical to note that the these individuals' perceived and prescribed roles and identities as interns, cooperating teachers, supervisors, and administrators held various levels of power as the model was implemented at in the high school.

These power differentials became immediately apparent during instances of communication breakdown. However, they also remained below the radar of other coteaching stakeholders. Cogenerative dialogues are indeed a useful tool to address issues associated with communication and lack of voice. Regardless of their utility, it seems crucial to examine the cogenerative dialogue context(s). The coteaching arrangements differed at the various sites described in the responses; LEHNER (2006) describes a coteaching dyad comprised of two teachers (one a social worker and the other a teacher). From LEHNER's (2006) description, these coteachers both attend faculty meetings and appear to be equals within the social structure of the school. While STITH (2006) does not reference a specific coteaching model, we are aware that his coteaching experience was different from the Delaware model. In Delaware, there were multiple groupings of interns and cooperating teachers, as well as the incorporation of coteaching with the inclusion teacher. [9]

The coteaching model seeks to break down hierarchical power differentials by positioning coteachers as equals. However, this is a challenging goal that may be more easily attained amongst peers such as two classroom instructors as described by LEHNER (2006), than in situations where interns are interacting with cooperating teachers where there are different levels of social and cultural capital. In the coteaching model presented by MURPHY and BEGGS (2004), pre-service science specialists brought science content knowledge and science pedagogical content knowledge to their Northern Ireland coteaching partnerships, as their cooperating teachers were not historically trained in science education. Because of this each participant was perceived as having valuable knowledge to contribute to the partnership. In contrast, in the model implemented in Delaware, cooperating teachers all had science backgrounds as well as classroom expertise. While most cooperating teachers valued interns' ideas and the knowledge that they brought to the coteaching classrooms, interns were not automatically granted status as experts from whom the cooperating teachers could learn. Rather, interns were viewed as having new and potentially valuable knowledge about their content areas and perhaps new pedagogical approaches, establishing rapports and collegial interactions had to be achieved through other venues. RITCHIE (2006, ¶2) commented to this regard when he wrote,

> "It is unrealistic for an intern … to believe that he (sic) should begin his relationship with a fully-fledged member of the community on an equal professional footing. Of course one should expect views to be shared in curriculum co-planning meetings, but this should not translate into the false expectation that the intern's contribution would necessarily hold the same weight as his (sic) more experienced coteacher." [10]

Coteaching attempts to uncouple the power differential and to provide opportunity for equal voice. Even when all participants are trying to honor one another's voice, the success of a cogenerative dialogue can vary in uncoupling these power struggles. The power differentials we identified between Rosie and Matt displayed the complexity of creating a collaborative learning environment amongst individuals who have participated in education environments with distinct divisions of power. After taking into account these individuals' traditional social positioning

within the education system, their interactions appear to reflect their perceived statuses and roles. With the implementation of the coteaching model, these traditional teaching roles were disrupted, such that the participating student teaching interns and cooperating teachers attempted to adapt to these changes, as well as incorporate the theoretical underpinnings of the coteaching model into their teaching repertoires. While the student teaching interns began constructing their professional teaching relationships with each other, program administrators, and university supervisor(s) were able to participate in the methods course during the fall semester science methods course. The cooperating teachers at Biden High School did not regularly interact with the interns, administrators, and university supervisors until the start of the spring semester student teaching practicum. Thus, such a belated meeting impacted how the stakeholders were able to communicate their opinions about coteaching, science education, and pedagogical practice. [11]

Issues of power and voice are a critical focus when examining the interaction, as well as sharing of teaching responsibility amongst individuals within a coteaching setting. With the implementation of the coteaching model at our site, participants were provided with various first-hand accounts of coteaching via research literature and meetings with individuals and groups using coteaching. However it is important to note that their examples of coteaching differed from the coteaching that took place at our institution. During the methods course associated with the student teaching practicum, coteaching interns immediately identified that their coteaching arrangements differed with regard to their multiple intern-coop coteaching groupings. This arrangement created a complex scenario of teaching relationships and made each coteaching group unique, even though they were also part of a larger coteaching community (interns, cooperating teachers, supervisors, researchers, and administrators). In addition, the similarities and differences of these members' science content background, educational experiences, perspectives on pedagogy created a diverse grouping of opinions and ideas concerning science education. The combination of these experiences with the variety of personalities amongst the community members simultaneously provided and negated opportunities for communication. [12]

Both the power issues and lack of communication between Rosie and the student teaching interns were a major concern for the interns in subsequent years. At the initiation of the second year of implementing coteaching at Biden High School, the administrators and associated researchers met with the cooperating teachers and supervisors to discuss the findings and issues associated with the first cohort. In particular, Rosie, the administrators, and researchers met and discussed the previous cohort's interns' reactions to their coteaching experience and allowed Rosie to express her reactions and opinions. This meeting was intended to address the control issues from the previous year, as well as investigate how the coteaching model functioned within this teaching arrangement. With regards to the ethical dilemmas identified in GALLO-FOX et al. (2006), the issues presented attempted to highlight instances during which voices may have been silenced. It was the intent to offer these instances as opportunities to examine and learn more about interactions and associated issues that can unfold during coteaching.

Communication is a valuable tool in addressing and remediating issues
associated within coteaching; however, it does not always serve to resolve
issues. Moreover, the influence of one's social role (i.e., student teaching intern,
cooperating teacher, administrator, university supervisor) functions as another
significant force that affects individuals' levels of communication. [13]

3. Issues in Implementation?

RITCHIE (2006) asks whether some of the dilemmas we raise are
implementation issues, rather than ethical issues. GALLOFOX et al. (2006)
specifically addressed ethical dilemmas that arose during the first year of
coteaching's implementation at our university. As MURPHY and BEGGS (2006)
urge, on-going research informs each progressive iteration of the model. It is a
recursive process, in which one seeks to build on strengths and improve areas
needing growth. Perhaps some of the points raised by RITCHIE (2006) could be
considered implementation dilemmas, but they are also ethical concerns. While
coteachers are involved in the student teaching experience they have a choice as
to whether to engage in the research. As a program coordinator, Kate, faced ethical
choices on monitoring her exchanges with those participants. RITCHIE (2006)
suggests that Kate could have withdrawn from the research. However, because
of her professional and long-term affiliation with the cooperating teachers
involved, Kate felt that the teachers were more likely to participate if they
perceived that she was active in the process. Kate did, however, choose to take a
secondary role in the research process. Jennifer and Beth served as the primary
researchers while participants were in the field. [14]

RITCHIE (2006) questions whether what we framed as ethical concerns are
actually problems with implementation. NODDINGS (1988) raises the feminist
perspective with an ethic of care when conducting research in schools and how
adherence to those ideals frames research on teaching. One possible
explanation for the difference in perspective is related to what issues researchers
chose to foreground and emphasize in their work. For us, because of Kate's
feminist ideology, an ethic of care for those participating in the research is the
primary construct. [15]

The relationships between the program administrator and associated science
teachers at Biden High School partially influenced the coteaching model at our
institution. Thus, the relationships between the administrator and the cooperating
teachers had an impact on the interactions among the interns, cooperating
teachers, administrators, and supervisors. The coteaching arrangements also
differed from examples at other sites, in their complex groupings of interns and
cooperating teachers, as well as the incorporation of coteaching with the inclusion
teacher. [16]

4. Coda

Teacher educators have implemented coteaching in different countries. Although all models share common theoretical underpinnings, the ways that coteaching manifests in the field varies according to context. As a result, researchers need to be aware of both similarities and differences in models when talking across contexts. Otherwise false assumptions may be made, or conversations about the research might not achieve their full potential. The range of perspectives about coteaching represented in our original paper and the respondent's papers are rich and varied. Drawing on a range of varied perspectives, including ones sensitive to issues of gender, provides opportunity for rich dialogue. [17]

Acknowledgments

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