

Reflections on Collaborative Coteaching: A Teacher's Perspective on Empowering Learning

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ABSTRACT

Coteaching has emerged as an innovative educational strategy, blending collaborative and traditional teaching methodologies to create a dynamic and engaging classroom environment. This paper explores the experience of coteaching through the lens of a teacher, highlighting its potential to inspire active learning and mutual growth for both educators and students. By examining various coteaching models—such as one teach, one observes; one teaches, one assist; parallel teaching; station teaching; alternative teaching; and team teaching—this study outlines the benefits and practical applications of shared instructional roles. Through careful planning, active learning strategies, and open communication, coteaching has the potential to turn the classroom into a collaborative space that inspires everyone involved.

Keywords: Collaborative coteaching, educational strategy

INTRODUCTION

Coteaching breaks the traditional approaches in teaching world. It combines collaboration education and traditional one creating a vibrant classroom culture that boosts engagement and comprehension. As a teacher, coteaching is one of the best chances someone must reflect on what they are doing in the classroom, think of new ways to teach, and also share the job of teaching with their students. This collaborative process empowers students to have an active role in their education while also helping the teacher's experience by incorporating fresh perspectives and fostering a spirit of mutual growth.

In this article, I reflect on my journey as a teacher navigating the coteaching process. Through shared responsibilities, role definitions, and active learning strategies, I explore how coteaching creates a platform for intellectual discovery and enriches the educational experience for all stakeholders involved. By examining both the challenges and transformative benefits, this reflection sheds light on the potential of coteaching to reshape traditional classrooms into collaborative spaces that inspire learning and growth.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Coteaching is increasingly recognized as a transformative educational approach, particularly in the context of counseling education. Baltrinic, Marty, and McGlothlin (2016) conducted a phenomenological study exploring counselor education doctoral students' coteaching experiences with faculty members, highlighting the relational, operational, and developmental structures of coteaching. This highlights the potential of coteaching to enhance teaching preparation and effectiveness in counselor education programs.

The collaborative teaching strategy blends traditional instruction with active, shared responsibilities between educators, enhancing the learning experience for students while fostering professional growth for instructors. Within the realm of counseling courses, coteaching is instrumental in addressing complex theoretical concepts and ensuring the practical application of counseling techniques.

Marilyn Friend's (2014) coteaching framework introduces six models; one teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; parallel teaching; station teaching; alternative teaching; and team teaching. These models are particularly relevant in counseling education, where the integration of theory and practice is critical. For instance, the "one teach, one observe" model allows one instructor to lead the session while the other monitors student engagement, offering tailored feedback. This is especially beneficial in courses like Advanced Counseling Theories, where students require individualized guidance to navigate complex concepts. The following are the models of co-teaching commonly utilized in education (Marilyn Friend, 2014).

One teach, one observes model

This model involves one teacher leading the class while the other observes specific aspects of the students' behavior or engagement. The observer is not idle but focuses on collecting valuable insights, such as identifying students who need extra support or noticing which teaching methods resonate most effectively. For example, during a science lesson, the lead teacher explains the concept of ecosystems, while the observing teacher takes notes on which students appear engaged or need additional help. Its effectiveness by splitting roles, teachers can improve their understanding of classroom dynamics and adjust future lessons based on real-time observations.

One teach, one assist model

In this model, one teacher delivers the lesson, while the other moves around the classroom to provide individual support to students. This setup ensures that struggling students get immediate help without disrupting the entire class. For example, during a math lesson on fractions, the lead teacher demonstrates solving problems on the board, while the assisting teacher checks on students quietly to help those who might be stuck. Its effectiveness is when students who need more attention can get the assistance they need, and the lead teacher can maintain the flow of the lesson for the whole group.

Parallel teaching model

In this model, the class is divided into two groups, with each teacher responsible for delivering the same lesson to their group. This strategy reduces the number of students per teacher, allowing for better interaction and participation. For example, in a history class, one teacher might teach half the class about the causes of World War I, while the other does the same for the other half. Both teachers cover the same material but tailor their explanations to their group. Its effectiveness is when smaller groups make it easier for students to engage, ask questions, and interact with the material.

Station teaching

In this model, students rotate through different stations, each focusing on a specific part of the lesson. Teachers manage separate stations, or one teacher handles a station while others allow for independent or group work. For example, in an English lesson, one station might focus on grammar practice with a teacher, another on group discussions led by the coteaches, and the third on independent reading. Its effectiveness is when the variety of activities keeps students engaged, and the smaller station sizes allow for more personalized instruction.

Alternative teaching

In this model, one teacher works with a small group for focused instruction, while the other teacher continues teaching the rest of the class. It's ideal for addressing specific needs, such as reteaching or offering enrichment. For example, a small group of students struggling with division receives a mini lesson from one teacher, while the rest of the class moves on to multiplication with the other teacher. Its effectiveness is when students who need additional support don't fall behind, and the rest of the class can continue progressing.

Team teaching model

In this model, both teachers share equal responsibility for planning and delivering the lesson. They might take turns presenting or contribute to different parts of the discussion, creating a seamless teaching partnership. For example, during a literature class, one teacher explains the themes of a novel while the other shares insights into

the author's style, creating a well-rounded lesson. The energy of two educators working in sync make this model powerful and students benefit from the combined knowledge.

The team-teaching model is also prominent in counseling education, as it involves two instructors sharing equal responsibility for lesson delivery. This approach enables students to benefit from multiple perspectives, fostering a deeper understanding of diverse counseling theories and practices. For example, in a session on cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), one instructor might focus on the theoretical underpinnings, while the other demonstrates practical techniques through role-play. This dynamic approach not only enriches the learning experience but also prepares students for real-world counseling scenarios.

In addition, collaborative teaching team model (CTT) remains effective in counselor education program (Orr, Hall, & Hulse, 2008). This model address key features that prepare doctoral students for their future roles as counselor educators that includes structured supervision, active student engagement, role modeling and professional development, and feedback and reflection. To compliment CTT is active learning exercises, which another cornerstone of coteaching in counseling education (Cavazos Vela, 2020). Techniques such as group discussions, case study analyses, and role-playing provide students with practical insights into counseling theories. For instance, during a session on family systems therapy, students might engage in role-play to simulate family dynamics, guided by coteaches. This method not only helps students apply theoretical knowledge but also enhances their problem-solving and critical-thinking skills.

METHODS

Procedures

For this study, coteaching team was used in this activity. Coteaching with a student requires a slightly different preparation as compared to traditional teaching particularly pertaining to the organizational aspect of course load management and role boundaries between a professor and a coteacher. Therefore, some procedures should be considered before forming a coteaching team:

Process of Recruiting

Some things to consider are the coteacher's abilities in terms of interpersonal skills and time commitment. Hence, a graduate student is suggested as a potential coteacher. A coteacher needs also to understand the materials being used in the class and the workload that comes along with the responsibility of being a coteacher. A professor could assist a coteacher's understanding through discussion and explanation of the topics and preparation could be made by a student teacher prior to teaching.

Task Descriptions

After recruiting a potential coteacher, the next step is to determine the roles and responsibilities of the professor and the coteacher before the class begins. Task descriptions should include a broader range of teaching responsibilities and take account certain of abrupt issues that may arise during the class discussion that require an extra commitment. A coteaching team needs also to clearly decide who would do what based on the task description they have agreed upon. Some examples of the task description are following:

A Professor:

- a. Functions as a lead teacher in class
- b. Determines the course structure throughout the semester: reading materials, assignments, group discussion, and grading format
- c. Develops the syllabus and due dates for assigned assignments
- d. Takes charge of ultimate responsibilities: grade marks and grade appeals

A Coteacher:

- a. Meets with a professor prior to the class

- b. Understands reading materials and willing to ask for further clarification
- c. Understands the order of class activities and leads group activities in class
- d. Provides feedback for students on group activities in class

Potential Active Learning Exercises

The next step is to implement a number of potential active learning exercises to meet the objective of coteaching and gain maximum benefits of it. When choosing exercises, it is helpful to consider exercises or activities that fit with the class lecture and can be completed in the allotted time. Gray and Harrison (2009) suggested the following active learning exercises:

- a. Deck of Cards
- b. Test-Question Preview
- c. The one-minute paper
- d. How's It Going

The following link provides more detail explanations of planning and implementing coteaching:

Coteaching - City University of Hong Kong

FINDINGS

The findings that included student feedback highlighted several positive impacts of coteaching on their learning experience. For example, some students highlighted how they felt 'awkward' in the beginning of the class seeing two teachers in front of the class, however as the lesson went on, they demonstrated some degree of excitement to engage more in the class activity. Part of it they knew their questions raised in the class would get attention from either one of the teachers. This indirectly encourages the students to participate more and create students-centered learning environment in the class. The awkwardness could subside as the class dynamics growth.

Many students shared that the interactive nature of coteaching, with activities like group discussions, role-playing, and collaborative tasks, kept them actively involved in lessons. They appreciated the opportunity to learn from two teachers, each bringing unique perspectives and teaching styles. This dual approach made complex topics easier to understand and provided a more relatable and comprehensive learning experience. Furthermore, students particularly valued the individualized attention they received, as one teacher could offer one-on-one help while the other focused on the larger group. This additional support ensured no one felt left behind and contributed to a stronger grasp of the subject matter. The one-on-one help could provide more opportunities for personalized feedback from both teachers, which in turn improving students' understanding and confidence. Overall, students felt that coteaching not only made lessons more enjoyable but also enriched their learning experience by combining theoretical insights with practical applications in a way that was both supportive and engaging.

However, coteaching exercise is not without its potential challenges just like other teaching approaches. In this study, team teaching model required an ample time for preparation prior to class. This is because two teachers need to coordinate lesson plans and roles to navigate power balances between teachers. This is important to ensure equitable students' participation in the class.

DISCUSSION

I was delighted to have taken a College Teaching course this semester that enabled me to focus on the process of becoming a teacher, instead of merely focusing on skills and techniques that I should possess in order to teach certain subjects. As teaching is part of the learning process, I had an assignment to teach for one hour in Counseling Theories class. The task required me to select a professor or college instructor, whose subject I was interested in teaching. Prior to teaching, the professor and I sat few times together and discussed topics that I wanted to cover in the class and some guidelines of preparation provided by the professor. The professor and I made time to meet when I had questions about the topics where I needed more clarification.

The collaborative relationship between the professor and me inspired me to write about coteaching with a student. An objective of coteaching is to create active learning among students. A coteacher would assist a professor to create active learning by engaging all students in the class lecture. Active learning lectures offer significant benefits to students in their learning course including boosting their motivation level to learn better, creating pleasant learning settings, and increasing commitment when students' interest in the subject is enriched. The following link provides more explanation about the benefits of active learning and its strategies:

Lecture as Active Learning - Queen's University

<http://tinyurl.com/lb4kkk2>

Active Learning Strategies

<http://tinyurl.com/l4a569b> - Queen's University

Coteaching is an approach in collaborative teaching approaches. Coteaching simply can be defined as a student helping a professor teach or a professor teaching with a student (Gray & Harrison, 2003). In counselor education, the Collaborative Teaching Team (CTT) model was first developed by Orr and Hulse-Killacky in 2004 to meet the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards that provides pedagogical training in teaching to doctoral students through collaborative relationship with faculty member (Orr, Hall, & Hulse-Killacky, 2008). The following link offers an article by Goetz (2000) that describes different types of coteaching and its definition:

Perspectives on Team Teaching – University of Calgary - Egallery

<http://tinyurl.com/l7d42or>

CONCLUSION

Coteaching, if wisely conducted, would generate maximum benefits of learning to all parties: professor, coteacher, and students. A professor could get benefits by receiving feedback from students' perspectives, a coteacher could learn twice as much of the subject, and students could enrich their knowledge through participating in active learning exercises guided by two teachers. A coteaching reflection should be done by asking stimulating questions that can promote positive changes in the class. An example of a question would be "What changes should we take note and how the lecture would be different?" Being open to new suggestions and ideas could lead to teaching improvement and upgrading active learning exercises. Wentworth and Davis (2002) described through collaborative coteaching, professors, coteaches, and students join in a shared process of intellectual discovery.

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