Infusing Coteaching Into the General Education Field Experience

Deborah J. Bennett
Audrey A. Fisch
New Jersey City University
Jersey City, New Jersey

With the proliferation of inclusion, teacher education programs must prepare general education candidates to work collaboratively in a coteaching environment. This study addresses a coteaching assignment introduced into the general education field experience course for secondary content majors. The candidates enrolled had no previous preparation in coteaching. The findings revealed that combining minimal reading, a focused observation assignment, and an online discussion forum that required writing and reflection enabled candidates to engage in a meaningful discussion of the challenges and benefits of coteaching. The study also revealed that these activities inspired some candidates to reframe discussions to benefit candidates observing negative models of coteaching.

Keywords: coteaching, inclusion, field experience, teacher candidates, technology

Over the past twenty years, general education classrooms have become increasingly diverse, particularly with the inclusion of students with disabilities and special learning needs (Cramer & Nevin, 2006). This national and ongoing trend is a response, in part, to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and No Child Left Behind Act (2001), both of which require that all students be included as full participants in the general curricula.

As the diversity of general education classrooms increase, coteaching, an instructional strategy which involves a general and special educator working together with the same group of students in a shared teaching space, has become one of the standard methods of classroom instruction (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Gately & Gately, 2001; Malian & McRae, 2010; McKenzie, 2009). And, according to McKenzie (2009), team teaching, cooperative teaching, and coteaching are among the most successful collaborative models (Austin, 2001; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993; Harbor et al., 2007; Idol, 2006; McKenzie, 2009; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Salend, 2008; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007).

The literature suggests that deploying two teachers in a fully collaborative practice is effective (Austin, 2001; Gately & Gately, 2001; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Trent et al., 2003; Walsh, 2012). However, the practice of having two teachers working together in a classroom has many forms, with varying levels of efficacy. Models that have been found unproductive include one teach—one help and one teach—one assist (Friend et al., 1993; McKenzie, 2009; Salend, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007).

In a metasynthesis of 32 qualitative studies of inclusive classrooms dating from 1995 to 2004, Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) found that while administrators, teachers, and students believe in the benefits of coteaching, the predominant collaborative practice is the ineffective one teach—one assist approach, where the special education teacher plays a subordinate role and is often relegated to the role of a paraprofessional or classroom aide (See also Gately & Gately, 2001; Harbort et al., 2007; McKenzie 2009; Murawski, 2006). In fact, McKenzie (2009) found that the disparity and ineffective inequity in collaborative roles was likely to be particularly severe at the secondary level where the content is complex and content expertise is at a higher level.

Several studies have concluded that teacher education is contributing to the problem. For example, some studies suggest that current and preservice teachers lack the appropriate preparation for collaboration and they are underprepared to share a classroom and work with another professional (Cramer 2010; Cramer & Nevin, 2006; McHatton & Daniel, 2008). Cramer (2010) notes that while most new teachers will be expected to work in coteaching teams, they graduate from preservice teacher education programs with "little to no training in co-teaching" (p. 562). Teacher education programs need to do more to provide candidates, particularly general education candidates, with the skills to be effective coteachers, capable of partnering with other professionals in the classroom to meet the needs of all students (Ford, Pugach, & Otis-Wilborn, 2001); Kamens, 2007; McKenzie, 2009; Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012).

Many of the problems related to collaboration in public education stem from the separation and segregation of special and general education programs in higher education, thus resulting in a "vacuum" (McKenzie, 2009, p. 389) in teacher training on collaboration. Recommendations for change in teacher education programs include "structured opportunities for collaborative planning and teaching" (Cramer & Nevin, 2006, p. 272), coteaching exercises, and/or internships in which general education and special education pre-service candidates have the opportunity to coteach as part of their initial training. Some scholars, including McKenzie (2009), have argued for large-scale structural reform, such as the merger of special and general education departments and programs. Such large-scale projects, however, are time-intensive and require large-scale buy-in from faculty and administrators.

This study was designed to measure the benefits of a small-scale intervention in the undergraduate secondary teacher education program. The program had no requirements for a special education course and did little to prepare preservice general education teachers to meet the challenges of collaboration and coteaching. Unable to make immediate large-scale structural reform, we decided to initiate changes to better prepare candidates to meet the needs of all their students. Our goal was to get the candidates to begin to think and learn a basic vocabulary about collaborative teaching, to develop an ability to think critically about the different kinds of collaboration taking place in the classroom, and to affect positively their attitudes towards coteaching. As a result, we designed a coteaching unit and inserted it into an established field experience. Many of the candidates were in placements where they were observing coteaching, yet their previous coursework had done little to prepare them to understand what they were seeing in the field. We hoped some preliminary background reading along with the opportunity to write, discuss, and reflect on their field observations would serve as a meaningful introduction to collaborative teaching.

However, we were concerned that the candidates would be negatively influenced by their observations of ineffective models, such as one teach—one assist, which we knew were the norm rather than the exception in the schools (Harbort et al., 2007; McKenzie 2009). If, as the data indicate, substandard collaboration is the norm in the schools, then it follows that candidates in field placements would be observing, learning from, and potentially building on these less than ideal models of collaboration. Thus, with little background knowledge of collaboration on the part of the candidates, a small unit infused into an existing field experience, and most of the interaction involving only writing and responding to each other, could we make an effective intervention in the candidates' understanding of and attitudes toward collaborative teaching?

Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the benefits of an infused coteaching assignment in the field experience of teacher candidates pursuing undergraduate degrees in secondary mathematics, English, and health science. The research questions examined were:

1. Would candidates who have no prior knowledge about the inclusive classroom be able to engage in a meaningful discussion of collaborative teaching?
2. How would the observation of negative collaborative models affect candidates' attitudes about the potential effectiveness of coteaching?

Context

Prior to their first formal field experience, all teacher candidates must take two education foundations courses, a developmental psychology course, and pass entry requirements for admission into the College of Education. It should be noted that candidates in the secondary programs spend one full day a week for one semester observing a middle or high school classroom in their content area and reflecting on their observations through the discussion forum in Blackboard, an online learning platform. This field experience, which was comprised of 15 weeks and one full day per week of observation in the schools, is not linked with any other course and candidates had limited contact with a University-Based Teacher Educator (University Supervisor).[1] Over the course of the semester, candidates responded to focused assignments on topics related to their field observations. They also posted short essay responses and engaged in peer discussion of those responses on the discussion forum (Fisch & Bennett, 2011). The peer discussion in the online discussion forum provided candidates with an extensive opportunity to share and learn from each other's observations and reflections. The coteaching assignment was one such topic.

Participants

A total of sixteen undergraduate secondary teacher candidates provided data for this study. All of the candidates were pursuing certification in English, mathematics, or health science and

[1] Here and elsewhere, we use the terms University-Based Teacher Educator to refer to what is sometimes called the University Supervisor and Mentor Teacher to refer to what is sometimes called the Cooperating Teacher. This language helps to foster an idea of partnership and to eliminate some of the hierarchical bias of the more traditional terms.

enrolled in a field experience at an urban, public university in New Jersey. All of the field placements were within the surrounding urban public school districts, and the mentor teachers (cooperating teachers) were tenured and certified to teach in their content area.

The average age of the candidates was 29 years, and the demographics of the participants mirrored the university's diverse, non-traditional student body. Seven of the candidates were white, seven were Hispanic, one was African-American, and one candidate's racial/ethnic identify was unknown. Twelve of the candidates (75%), were women.

Procedures

To prepare the candidates with some fundamental knowledge, we asked them to read Cramer's (2010) "Coteaching" because this work offered some basics about the legal and political background underlying coteaching. Cramer explains the rationale for, elements of, and benefits of coteaching as well as the challenges it offers teachers. The candidates were also asked to review Gately and Gately's (2001) stages and definitions of the coteaching process (beginning, compromising, collaborative) and Friend and Bursuck's (as cited by Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger 2010) descriptions of the different coteaching approaches (one teach—one observe, one teach—one assist, alternative teaching, parallel teaching, station teaching, and team teaching). With this information at their disposal, we asked the candidates to review the "Co-Teaching Observation Rubric" adapted from Gately and Gately's coteaching stages and use it to analyze a coteaching observation (see Appendix).

Gately and Gately (2001) characterized coteaching as a developmental process and defined three developmental stages of coteaching—the beginning stage, the compromising stage, and the collaborative stage. Broadly speaking, at the beginning stage, Gately and Gately describe the coteaching as guarded, with careful and infrequent communication between teachers who may be uncomfortable about their roles in this professional relationship. In the compromising stage, teachers exhibit a give-and-take behavior, communicating more, and being willing to sacrifice in one area to "get" something in another. At the most advanced collaborative stage, teachers work together and share all teaching responsibilities for all students so much so that it is "difficult for outsiders to discern which teacher is the special educator and which is the general educator" (Gately & Gately, 2001, p. 42).

In this study, the candidates were asked to: (1) observe a co-taught inclusion class, (2) write a brief description of the class observed, (3) identify the stage (beginning, compromising, or collaborative) in each of the eight Gately and Gately's (2001) coteaching components, and (4) discuss the behavior that led to the ratings in each component. Candidates observed a co-taught class either between their general education mentor teacher and a special education teacher or another team if their mentor teacher did not co-teach.

Data Collection

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected via the on-line Blackboard platform. Quantitative data included each candidate's ratings of the stages of coteaching based on the eight components of the coteaching relationship defined by Gately and Gately (2001) and statistics

enumerating online interactions by each candidate. Qualitative data from the on-line discussions consisted of each candidate's narrative of the coteaching class they observed, written analyses of the behavior they observed that led to the rating given to that component, and their on-line responses to each other.

Data Analysis

The data analysis included a combination of quantitative and content analysis of the qualitative data (Johnson & LaMontagne, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Narrative analysis of the candidates' discussions was conducted through coding, categorizing, and consensus as common themes emerged. Both researchers independently read and coded the discussions and compared their results. Through critical debate and negotiation, coding was collapsed into three specific categories—negative model, reframing negative models, and learning from indirect experiences. While tracking individual candidate's ratings, narrative assessment, and subsequent discussions, the researchers recognized a data disconnect between the coteaching observational ratings and candidates' narratives of the observations. This emerged as an additional finding to address.

Findings

Participation

To measure the candidates' level of engagement in discussions on coteaching, we analyzed numerical data on their level of participation. Surprisingly, the level of participation and interaction among candidates was unexpectedly high. The discussion area reflected a total of 60 messages for 16 candidates. The 60 messages included the original posting by each candidate (one per candidate, reflecting on what was observed) and peer responses. We expected each candidate to read two messages, as they were required to read two peer messages before writing their responses. With 16 candidates reading two messages each, we expected a total of 32 read messages. Instead, we found a total of 724 messages read by the 16 candidates. An impressive number of the candidates (10 out of 16) read all 60 postings.

With candidates responding to two of their peers' messages, we also expected to see 32 peer responses from the 16 candidates. Only 30 peer responses were expected, since one candidate did not participated due to illness. The actual number of peer responses was 43, 34% more than what was expected. The extra number of peer responses was due to five candidates replying to more than two peer responses. The data suggest that the candidates were motivated to read about the experiences of their peers and learn more about others' observations of a coteaching classroom. Their interest extended well beyond just fulfilling the course requirements.

Data Disconnect

Beyond the level of interest, the data captured a strange disconnect between the numerical ratings and the accompanying narratives written by the candidates. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the candidates' ratings using Gately and Gately (2001) stages of coteaching on each of the eight components—interpersonal communication; physical arrangement (with the subcomponents of seating, materials, and teacher movement); familiarity of content; instructional presentation;

classroom management; instructional planning; curriculum goals, modifications, and accommodations; and assessment. (The numbers of candidates range from 12-14 due to missing values.)

Figure 1. *Distribution of Candidates' Ratings on the Interpersonal Communication, Physical Arrangement (average of subcomponents, Seating, Materials, and Teacher Movement), Familiarity with Content, and Instructional Presentation Components (Gately & Gately, 2001).*

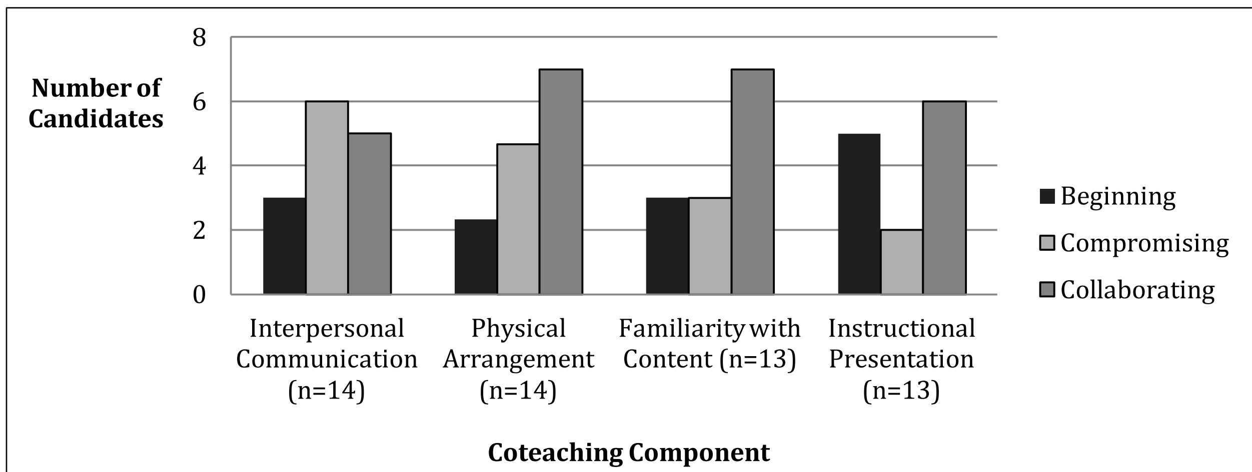
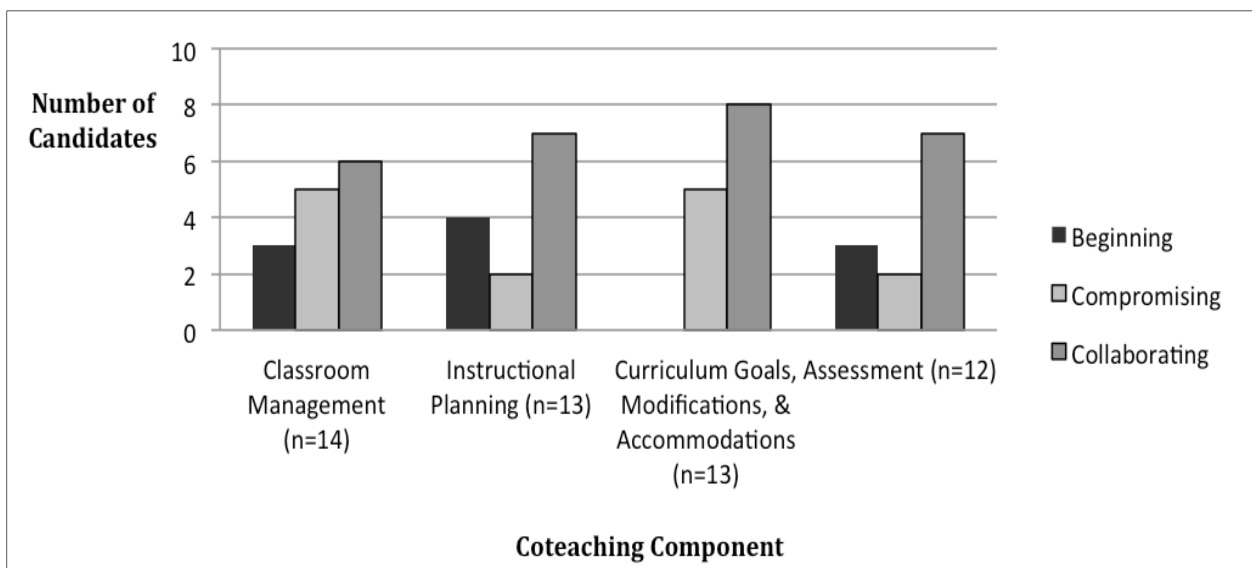


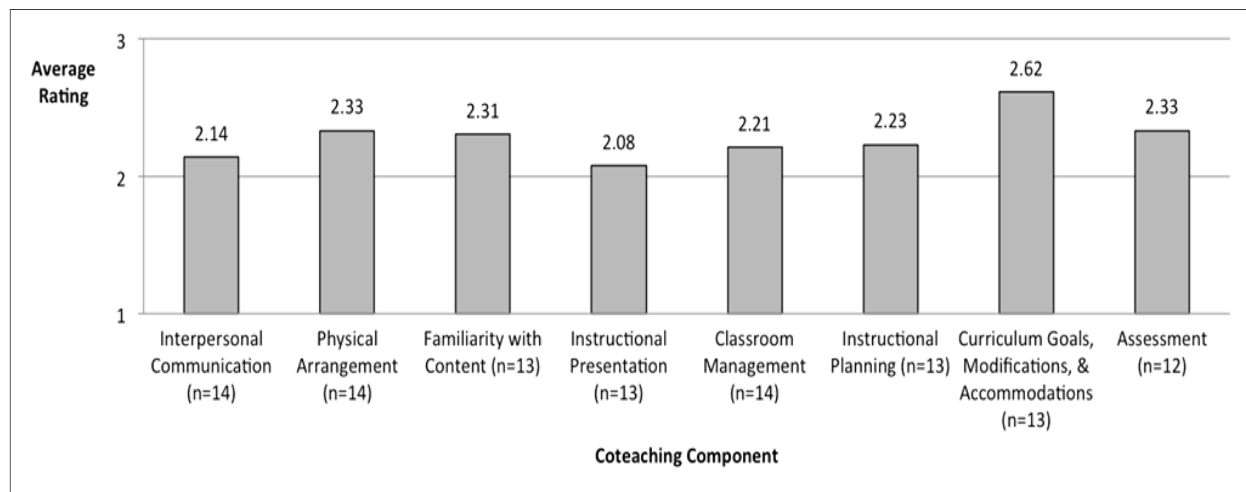
Figure 2. *Distribution of Candidates' Ratings on the Classroom Management, Instructional Planning, Curriculum Goals, Modifications and Accommodations, and Assessment Components (Gately & Gately, 2001).*



In all components but one, candidates most often selected the collaborative stage to describe what they observed. The only component where a lower stage prevailed (compromising) was in interpersonal communication. The highest incidence of beginning stage ratings (5 out of 13 candidates) occurred in the component of instructional presentation (see Figures 1 and 2).

To quantify the candidates' responses, scores were assigned (1=beginning stage, 2=compromising stage, and 3 = collaborative stage) to the candidates' ratings in each of the eight Gately and Gately (2001) coteaching components. In the physical arrangement component, subscores were assigned in each of the subcomponents mentioned by Gately and Gately (i.e., seating, materials, and teacher movement). The subscores in the three subcomponents were averaged to arrive at one score for physical arrangement, resulting in a score in all eight components for each candidate. An average score was computed in all eight components (see Figure 3)

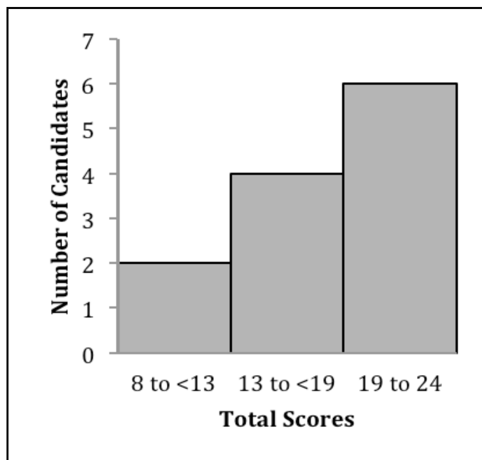
Figure 3. *Average Ratings for all Coteaching Components by Candidates (1=Beginning, 2=Compromising, 3=Collaborative) (Gately & Gately, 2001).*



The data suggested a number of issues for consideration. First, the ratings indicated that overall the candidates found the coteachers they observed to be in the compromising stage. The lowest ratings, indicating the weakest level of collaboration, were given to interpersonal communication and instructional presentation. The highest rating, well above the others, was in the category of curriculum goals, modifications, and accommodations.

We summed the component scores for each candidate to arrive at overall scores (see Figure 4). Half of the candidates gave a total score of 19 or above to their coteaching observation. A total score of 19 represented an average rating of 2.375 per coteaching component, while a score of 24 represented a perfect 3 (collaborative) in every component.

Figure 4. *Candidates' Overall Scores for Co-teaching Components (8 = beginning stage in every component, 16 = compromising stage in every component, and 24 = collaborating stage in every component) (n = 12) (Gately & Gately, 2001).*



Based on the overall scores, only two candidates indicated that the coteaching relationship was at the lowest developmental stage of coteaching. Given these scores, it would seem that the candidates were observing model coteaching arrangements. Also, it appears that the statistics here seem to negate the research in the field, thus indicating that in the cooperating districts, coteaching was functioning at a collaborative stage well above the national norm.

However, the individual ratings for various coteaching components as well as the overall scores computed for candidates on the coteaching class they observed were at odds with the candidate narratives. One candidate, Jennifer, illustrated this disparity. Jennifer, whose overall score for the coteaching observation was 18.67 (near the top of compromising), wrote of several interactions that gave her pause. She mentioned that the general education teacher "chastised" the special education teacher and that the classroom management was "very lopsided." She rated the instructional presentation at the collaborative stage but described the special education teacher as "more like an observer" and stipulated that the general education teacher "was the one leading the class."

Another candidate, Nancy, exhibited the same disconnect between her (high) ratings and (critical) narrative. Nancy's score for the overall coteaching observation was 21.67 (well within the range of the collaborating stage), yet in her narrative she pointed out that the general education teacher "would tell me all of the complaints that she had about the resource [special education] teacher."[2] More specifically, Nancy rated the instructional presentation component as in the collaborative stage, indicating the two teachers shared the presentation and instructional components of the lesson. Yet, she described the teaching approach as "one-teaching-one-

[2] In an attempt to improve readability, we have minimally edited our candidates' responses for grammar and punctuation. Attention has been paid to insure the substance of their comments was not altered by our changes.

observe" and backed up her opinion by saying that "the general education teacher developed every lesson plan and was the primary teacher."

Natalie had the same disconnect between her overall score of 21 (also, within the range for collaborating) and her narrative. When a peer commented on what a great coteaching experience Natalie had and asked her if she would like to coteach with a special education teacher one day, Natalie was hesitant and revealed that maybe her collaborative ratings were exaggerated.

> I think it depends on the SE teacher. I think it is very important for both teachers to work equally and work as a team. During this experience, I have noticed both the GE teacher and SE teacher work well together but I do still think the class considers the SE teacher somewhat a teacher's assistant or aide.

How can we reconcile the candidates' high ratings with their narrative comments? We hypothesized that the candidates were reluctant to criticize their mentor teachers. At times, the candidates were able to articulate aspects of the coteaching that made them uncomfortable, such as one teacher criticizing the other, but such encounters did not often translate to lower scores on the rubric. The candidates seemed hesitant to give the skilled practitioners they were observing low scores. As teacher educators, this reluctance posed a significant problem. Our goal with this exercise was to expose the candidates to coteaching so as to prepare them to collaborate successfully in their future classroom. If the candidates were reluctant to "see" the problems in the coteaching classrooms they observed, would this exercise serve to reinforce ineffective collaboration?

A closer analysis of the candidates' qualitative comments suggested the more promising aspects of the exercise. As noted above, the qualitative comments of the candidates were strikingly different from the quantitative results. In their narratives, candidates articulated confusion and discomfort with some of what they saw. In their peer-to-peer response interactions, they were able to critically think through the problems and possibilities for coteaching.

Reframing Negative Models

As noted above, Jennifer wrote that the "chastisement" between the teachers suggested that "interpersonal communication among [the two teachers] was not yet at the level of collaborating." She also indicated that classroom management was "lopsided" and "the general educator was the only one taking care of the discipline." In relation to *instructional planning*, Jennifer observed that collaboration was "at the beginning stage" and offered as evidence the fact that the special education teacher did not know what topic was being covered in class. Yet, despite these specific negative observations, Jennifer concluded that the

> teachers were at a collaborating level in both assessment and curriculum goals, modifications and accommodations. This was evident to me because they were both working one on one with different students and they were using different techniques and approaches with different students. Overall it was great to see a class like this because most of the things were being done very well and it seemed to me like overall it is a team teaching classroom.

In other words, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, which she has gathered and reported, Jennifer labeled these teachers as successful coteachers.

One of Jennifer's peers called attention obliquely to the contradictions in Jennifer's narrative. Claudia observed, "It is quite interesting that you noted how although one level of the collaborative process may be excellent, others may need work." She continued with an important caution about the sunny assessment, picking up on Jennifer's comment about the general education teacher's chastisement of the special education teacher. Claudia wrote perceptively, "I think this was a way of the general education teacher 'marking his/her territory.' It's unfortunate because in reality this kind of chastisement may lead students to disrespect the special education teacher." This analogy represents an apt rebuttal of Jennifer's overall sense of successful coteaching.

Another candidate articulated what she saw as the "waste of resources" involved in the coteaching situation, which she found to be "less productive than what it set out to be." Elisa wrote about:

> a clear distinction in responsibility for the kids [exists] between both teachers. The GE teacher does not grade their work or collect their assignments; he directs the students to the SE teacher who usually sits in the back of the room with his back to the kids, not following class instruction or helping "his struggling kids."

She described a tense, even hostile working relationship between the two teachers:

> classroom communication is guarded. Even though the teachers spend the majority of the day together, they only speak when necessary to each other… they are never on the same page and they have both expressed to me that they do not like the others' methods.

Elisa's analysis of this situation, unfortunately, laid the blame almost entirely with the special education teacher. She wrote:

> I feel much fault falls on the SE teacher—he does not keep up with the GE teacher. For example, on any given day the class may have a test; the following day the GE teacher has "his" kids' tests graded and is ready to review them. The SE teacher, however, must leave the class to grade them and all this while the class is reviewing [the tests]…. The SE teacher demonstrates limited familiarity not only with the content but also with the accommodations the students require. Since his back is usually to the class, he rarely follows the lesson. When "his" kids struggle, he does not serve as a model for them—he asks them what their problem is and is quick to make negative comments and basically shut them down. The instructional presentation is done by the GE teacher. The SE teacher is unaware of the day/weeks lesson. There is little, if any, interaction among the two. Again I would say it's more of the SE teacher's fault because the GE teacher always has his teaching goals planned out.

Elisa's observations were pointed and revealing, but her overall analysis devolved into blame and fault—i.e., identifying the special education teacher as failing his peer and his students. This was a particularly problematic response in that it may have reinforced in Elisa, a general education teacher in training, ideas about her superiority and about the inferiority of special education teachers. While her observations were thoughtful, her conclusions raised a difficult set of problems.

Again, however, the peer responses of other candidates did substantial work in reframing the discussion. Megan S., for example, put Elisa's comments in a broader context of the difficulty of coteaching:

> Many people have this experience when they are observing a coteaching classroom. Not all people are comfortable with another teacher in the classroom. This [discomfort] is even greater when they do not agree on a vast majority of things. If the teachers have different ways of teaching and thinking, they will not be able to connect and teach a successful lesson together.

Megan S. didn't share Elisa's pessimism. She concluded her remarks with her "hope" that "by the time we are teachers, we are able to communicate with each other and successfully teach [together in] a classroom."

Another candidate, Natalie, tried to push Elisa even further. She disputed Elisa's comments about coteaching as a "waste" and reframed the discussion as one of collaboration. Natalie remarked, "I personally think it is a matter of being able to work as a team and actually working an equal amount." She also stressed the value of Elisa's observation of this negative model: "At least you were able to observe what changes can be done if you are ever in the situation to have to co-teach."

Elisa was not the only candidate who observed a predominately negative model of coteaching. After substantial negotiation on her part to find a coteaching class to observe, Megan L. arrived to find that the general education teacher was absent. "Even though there was a substitute," she explained, "I could still tell the type of coteaching environment that existed in that classroom." She continued:

> I observed the students finish an assignment that the teacher left on the board and then [watched the students] take out their cell phones, iPods and other electronic devices and continue to talk throughout the rest of the period. The Special Education teacher would go around and work one on one with his special education students. It was evident that the special education teacher simply serves as an aide to his particular students. He told me that he does not take part in the lesson with the general education teacher. The students he was helping continued to work for most of the period, but all the other students just pulled out the electronic devices and chatted the period away. He did not check to see if the general education students had done their work; he just allowed them to hang out the entire period. He never had control of the classroom, only of his special education students, and this was proof that he is a minor part of the classroom when the general education teacher is present.

Megan L.'s discussion was again reframed by another candidate. Lori deplored the situation that Megan L. observed, remarking that "It seems out of hand, and unfortunate that the SE teacher could not teach the entire class something, even a review." She went on, however, to refocus the discussion on the basics necessary for successful coteaching, suggesting that Megan L.'s observation underlined "why co-teachers should share teaching and lesson plans, at least one day out of the week." She also began to rethink the tacit devaluing of the special education teacher, wondering if the "co-teacher may not have [had] the training." Both these comments move us away from a cycle of blame and failure and towards strategies – planning time and training – for coteaching success.

Learning from Indirect Experiences

Not all of the candidates had negative observational experiences with coteaching. And, the online discussion forum on the Blackboard platform ensured that positive experiences could also be shared. Nii explained that he knew from the start that the two teachers he observed had a successful working relationship as the first teacher "cracked a few jokes" while introducing him to the second teacher. Nii wrote:

> It was apparent that Mrs. S. and Mr. Sh. was in the collaborating stage of coteaching …. Right away Mr. Sh. stated that they team taught. He explained that in regular teaching situation, they take turns teaching. For example, Mr. Sh. may do the opening and Mrs. S. may do the closing, alternating instruction…. I could tell that Mrs. S. [the special ed teacher] was a major part of the classroom by the way the [students] responded to her when she walked around to each student, making sure they were on task. The students were not afraid to ask Mrs. S. for help. The way Mrs. S. interacted with the students showed that she had a certain rapport with the students.

Interestingly, Nii was able to contrast this positive coteaching example with another involving the very same teacher. He was able to observe Mrs. S. immediately afterwards in a coteaching scenario with a different general education teacher, Mrs. P.:

> This class was a stark contrast to [the other] class. This was definitely in the beginning stage of coteaching. Earlier, Mrs. S. mentioned that she played a more laid back role in Mrs. P.'s class. Through my observation, I saw that Mrs. S.'s role was reduced to an aid. The communication … was minimal. When we walked into Mrs. P.'s class, there was little introduction compared to the introduction I experienced with Mr. Sh. Mrs. S. just mentioned to Mrs. P. that I was there to observe an inclusion class. That was the extent of the communication between the two of them. Mrs. S. and I went straight to the back of the class. Mrs. P. did all of the instruction. She basically talked the whole class. When Mrs. P. tried to engage the students in the lesson, only a few students answered, while Mrs. S. stood by a student who I presumed may have been an inclusion [student], judging by his outburst and his behavior. It was as if Mrs. S. stood guard in order to keep [this student's] behavior in check while Mrs. P. taught the class.

Obviously, Nii noticed the “difference” between the two scenarios he observed. The responses from the other candidates, however, drew conclusions beyond Nii’s observation. For example, Elisa (cited above) who expressed the negative coteaching model she observed and her initial reaction of blame directed at the special education teacher, offered a different response to Nii’s observation. Her seemingly negative attitude toward coteaching was completely absent in the comments she offered:

> It sounds as if from the beginning they were very organized. That’s great that they were expecting you and it wasn’t a surprise. [It] makes the situation more comfortable. I like the team taught approach. As for the teachers you were with, I think it says a lot about them and how they still care. Being a “team” takes a lot of work, planning, and commitment to students and each other. It’s great that you were able to observe both situations. It will help you draw conclusions as to why coteaching may or may not work and how you (as a teacher) can do things.

In other words, reflecting on Nii’s two experiences allowed Elisa to reframe her earlier experience and articulate both her goals about successful collaboration as well as her specific ideas (e.g., planning, commitment) about how to make coteaching work.

Another candidate, Nancy, took Elisa’s comments on Nii’s report even further:

> That sounds like a great classroom to be in. This should be the way all inclusion classes work. The teachers and students should have no problems working together and they all should be treated equally as it seems to be in the classroom you have described. This [collaboration] benefits the students greatly because they know that they can go to either of the teachers for help, allowing for a more effective learning experience.

In other words, one successful coteaching model observed by one candidate and a positive experience paired with a less than model experience were enough to help another candidate articulate her commitment to coteaching, faith in the possibility of successful collaboration, and understanding of the benefits of successful coteaching for the students.

Finally, one candidate’s comments illustrated the way the candidates had begun to internalize the value of coteaching. After describing a successful observation, Lori wrote:

> Collaboration has to be learned. You have to admit that we adults spend most of our adult life trying to get along…. I think sharing the teaching of lessons ingrains a confidence in [a] student’s awareness of [cooperation] being an important aspect of adult/professional life.

Discussion

If the inclusive classroom is going to succeed in meeting the needs of all learners, teacher candidates need to be better prepared to meet the challenges of collaboration and coteaching, which they will face in their future classrooms. Strategies for improving teacher education

programs in order to provide this preparation have been enumerated (Cramer & Nevin, 2006; Ford et al., 2001; McKenzie, 2009).

This study suggests that small changes can make a difference in preservice teachers' attitudes and knowledge about coteaching. We introduced a coteaching assignment into the undergraduate field experience course for secondary education teacher candidates with no previous preparation in coteaching. Our research found that the infusion of a unit that included minimal reading on coteaching, a focused observation assignment that required a critique of current practitioners in a coteaching environment, and the opportunity to share these critiques and reflect on the observations in an online discussion forum, enabled candidates to engage in a meaningful discussion of the challenges and benefits of coteaching and served as an expedient and powerful, while obviously not fully sufficient, learning tool.

The candidates in the program were able to become comfortable with the developmental stages of the coteaching relationship, even if they were reluctant to numerically rate their mentor teachers as less than proficient practitioners. More broadly, although the models that the candidates observed were uneven and sometimes negative, as is reflective of the state of the field (Harbort et al., 2007; McKenzie, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007), these candidates were able to recognize less than adequate collaboration between coteachers without devolving into the language of blame or an overall pessimism about coteaching.

Because of the exchanges between candidates on the online discussion forum, we observed that the candidates were able to find avenues to articulate and refine positions in which they recognized the value of collaboration for teachers and students. Moreover, the candidates were able to do important work in appreciating the difficulty of achieving a true collaborative partnership in the classroom, framing a discussion of the challenges of collaboration in terms of time, training, commitment, and interpersonal skills, and beginning to outline personal strategies and ambitions for their own future collaborative partnerships.

Finally, our study revealed that the online discussion forum amplified the benefits of the observation of positive coteaching models in the field, even for those candidates who were unable to personally observe a positive model. The candidates were able to appreciate and learn indirectly from the positive experiences of their peers and to ameliorate the effects of their own observations of less successful models.

Researchers have argued that attitudes are precursors to behavior and with more positive attitudes, teachers are more apt to modify their instruction to meet the needs of all students (Swain et al., 2012). If so, our candidates are better prepared to do the work ahead of them.

Limitations

Clearly, the benefits of our study are limited. The candidates did not interact with special education teacher candidates, and thus were unable to break down barriers and prejudices between these two groups. Also, they did not begin to address the issue of special education teacher competency in teaching advanced subject matter. An extension of our research would be to ask the candidates, after the initial observation and discussion, to visit and evaluate a second

coteaching classroom in order to determine whether the discussion enabled candidates to deepen their understanding of the issues.

Conclusion

The proliferation of inclusion necessitates that teacher education programs undertake substantial revisions in their preparation of general education candidates. However, while these revisions go through the time-consuming process of programmatic and curricular reform, our research suggests that with one relatively small assignment, preservice teacher candidates can start to identify the value and the challenges of collaboration in the classroom. With this exercise, teacher candidates were able to embark on a powerful and meaningful conversation about coteaching, a conversation we hope they will continue with colleagues throughout their professional lives.

AUTHOR NOTES

Deborah J. Bennett is a Professor of Mathematics at New Jersey City University in Jersey City, New Jersey. Her interests include the teaching and learning of probability and logic. **Audrey A. Fisch** is a Professor of English at New Jersey City University. Her scholarly writing has focused on Victorian literature and culture and African-American literature. She has written about teaching for *Pedagogy* and *Feminist Teacher*. Fisch and Bennett have also published an article in the *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning* on the use of an electronic discussion forum during the initial field experience to foster interdependence and independence in pre-service teachers. The Monarch Center was instrumental in the professional development of the authors.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Deborah J. Bennett, K506, New Jersey City University, 2039 Kennedy Blvd., Jersey City, NJ 07305, (201) 360-2067; e-mail: dbennett@njcu.edu

References

Austin, V. (2001). Teachers' beliefs about co-teaching. *Remedial and Special Education*, *22*(4), 245-255. doi:10.1177/074193250102200408

Cramer, E. D. (2010). Co-Teaching. In P. Peterson, E. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education*, Volume 2, 560-564. Oxford: Elsevier.

Cramer, E., & Nevin, A. I. (2006). A mixed-methodology analysis of co-teacher assessments. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 29*(4), 261-274. doi:10.1177/088840640602900406

Conderman, G., & Johnston-Rodriguez, S. (2009). Beginning teachers' views of their collaborative roles. *Preventing School Failure, 53*(4), 235-244. doi: 10.3200/PSFL.53.4.235-244

Fennick, E., & Liddy, D. (2001). Responsibilities and preparation for collaborative teaching: Co-teachers' perspectives. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, *24*(3), 229-240. doi:10.1177/088840640102400307

Fisch, A., & Bennett, D. (2011). Independence and interdependence: an analysis of pre-service candidates' use of focused assignments on an electronic discussion forum during the initial field experience. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Teaching and Learning*, *1*(1), 23-42.

Ford, A., Pugach, M. C., & Otis-Wilborn, A. (2001). Preparing general educators to work well with students who have disabilities: What's reasonable at the preservice level? *Learning Disability Quarterly, 24*, 275-285.

Friend, M., Reising, M., & Cook, L. (1993). Co-teaching: An overview of the past, a glimpse at the present, and considerations for the future. *Preventing School Failure*, *37*(4), 6-10. doi:10.1080/1045988X.1993.9944611

Friend, M., Cook, L., Hurley-Chamberlain, D., & Shamberger, C. (2010). Co-teaching: An illustration of the complexity of collaboration in special education. *Journal of Education and Psychological Consultation, 20*(1), 9-27. doi:10.1080/10474410903535380

Gately, S. E., & Gately, Jr., F. J. (2001). Understanding coteaching components. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 33*(4), 40-47.

Harbort, G., Gunter, P. L., Hull, K., Brown, Q., Venn, M. L., Wiley, L. P., & Wiley, E. W. (2007). Behaviors of teachers in co-taught classes in a secondary school. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 30*(1), 13-23. doi:10.1177/088840640703000102

Idol, L. (2006). Toward inclusion of special education students in general education: A program evaluation of eight schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 27*(2), 77-94. doi:10.117 7/07419325060270020601

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, 20 United States Congress 1412[a] [5]), Pub. L. No. 108-466.

Johnson, L. J., & LaMontagne, M. J. (1993). Using content analysis to examine the verbal or written communication of stakeholders within early intervention. *Journal of Early Intervention,* 17(1), 73-79. doi: 10.1177/105381519301700108

Kamens, M. W. (2007). Learning about co-teaching: A collaborative student teaching experience for preservice teachers. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 30*(3), 155-166. doi:10.1177/088840640703000304

Malian, I., & McRae, E. (2010). Co-teaching beliefs to support inclusive education: Survey of relationships between general and special educators in inclusive classes. *Electronic Journal of Inclusive Education 2*(6). Retrieved from http://corescholar.libraries.wright.edu/cgi/ viewcontent.cgi?article=1115&context=ejie

Mastropieri, M. A., Scruggs, T. E., Graetz, J., Norland, J., Gardizi, W., & McDuffie, K. (2005). Case studies in co-teaching in the content areas: Successes, failures, and challenges. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *40*(5), 260-270. doi:10.1177/10534512050400050201

McHatton, P. A., & Daniel, P. L. (2008). Co-teaching at the pre-service level: Special education majors collaborate with English education majors. *Teacher Education and Special Education 31*(2), 118-131.

McKenzie, R. G. (2009). A national survey of pre-service preparation for collaboration. *Teacher Education and Special Education, 32*(4), 379-393. doi:10.1177/0888406409346241

Murawski, W. W. (2006). Student outcomes in co-taught secondary English classes: How can we improve? *Reading and Writing Quarterly, 22,* 227-247. doi:10.1080/10573560500455703

Murawski, W. W., & Swanson, H. L. (2001). A meta-analysis of co-teaching research: Where are the data? *Remedial and Special Education*, *22*(5), 258-267. doi:10.1177/0741932501 02200501

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Pub. L. No.107-110, 20 USC 6301, 115 Stat. 1425 (2002). Retrieved July 10, 2011 from http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf.

Rice, D., & Zigmond, N. (2000). Co-teaching in secondary schools: Teacher reports of developments in Australian and American classrooms. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, *15*(4), 190-197.

Salend, S. J. (2008). *Creating inclusive classrooms* (6th ed.). Columbus, OH: Pearson.

Scruggs, T. E., Mastropieri, M. A., & McDuffie, K. A. (2007). Co-teaching in inclusive classrooms: A metasynthesis of qualitative research. *Exceptional Children, 37*(4), 392-416.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1994). Grounded theory methodology: An overview. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 273-285). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Swain, K. D., Nordness, P. D., & Leader-Janssen, E. M. (2012). Changes in preservice teacher attitudes toward inclusion. *Preventing School Failure*, *56*(2), 75-81. doi: 10.1080/104 5988X.2011.565386

Trent, S. C., Driver, B. L., Wood, M. H., Parrott, P. S., Martin, T. F., & Smith, W. G. (2003). Creating and sustaining a special education/general education partnership: A story of change and uncertainty. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *19*(2), 203-219. doi:10.1016/S0 742-051X(02)00104-X

Walsh, J. M. (2012). Co-teaching as a school system strategy for continuous improvement. *Preventing School Failure*, *56*(1), 29-36. doi: 10.1080/1045988X.2011.555792

Appendix
Co-Teaching Observation Rubric

		BEGINNING	COMPROMISING	COLLABORATING
INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS		➢ **Classroom communication is guarded** • Interpersonal communication lacks openness • Teachers seek to correctly interpret verbal and nonverbal messages • Clash of communication styles • Level of dissatisfaction	➢ **Classroom communication is open and interactive** • Interpersonal communication is more open, interactive and amount is increased • Teachers develop nonverbal signals • Respect for different communication styles with give & take of ideas	➢ **Classroom communication models effective styles for students** • Interpersonal communications demonstrate effective ways to listen, solve problems, and negotiate ➢ **Teachers use non-verbal communication in and out of the classroom** ➢ **Reflect positive role models for students in regards to different communication styles**
PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENT	Seating	• Impression of separateness • Students with disabilities are seated together	➢ **Outside observer unaware of which students are SE and which are GE based on seating arrangement**	➢ **Students' seating arrangements become intentionally interspersed for whole-group lessons** ➢ **All participate in cooperative groups**
	Materials	➢ **Little ownership of materials by the SE teacher** ➢ **SE teacher asks permission to access or share materials**	➢ **Some shared materials**	➢ **Materials are truly jointly owned**
	Teacher Movement	• SE teacher has a delegated place to sit away from the front of the classroom or GE teacher's space ➢ **Little ownership of space by the SE teacher**	➢ **Some movement and shared space** • Territoriality less evident ➢ **SE teacher moves freely, but rarely takes center stage**	➢ **Teachers are fluid in their positioning in the classroom** ➢ **Teachers control space and are cognizant of each other's position in the room** ➢ **Classroom is always effectively covered**
FAMILIARITY WITH CONTENT		➢ **SE teacher demonstrates limited familiarity with the content or methodology used by GE teacher** • GE teacher has limited confidence in SE teacher's ability to teach the curriculum SE teacher makes limited suggestions for accommodations or modifications	➢ **SE teacher demonstrates some knowledge of curriculum or methodology** • Increased confidence for both teachers regarding the curriculum • GE teacher becomes more willing to modify the curriculum • Teachers begin to share in planning and teaching	➢ **Teachers demonstrate the specific curriculum competencies that they bring to the content area**
INSTRUCTIONAL PRESENTATION		➢ **Teachers present separate lessons** ➢ **One teacher is seen as the "boss" who holds the chalk and the other is in the role of the "helper"** ➢ **SE teacher helps identified students & GE teacher helps GE students** ➢ **Students treat SE teacher as an "aide"**	➢ **Some of the lesson presentation is shared** ➢ **Teachers direct some of the activities in the classroom** ➢ **SE teacher offers mini-lessons or clarifies strategies students may use**	➢ **Teachers participate in the presentation of the lesson, provide instruction, and structure the learning activities** ➢ **The "chalk" passes freely between teachers** ➢ **Students address questions and discuss concerns with both teachers**

Appendix *(Continued)*

	BEGINNING	COMPROMISING	COLLABORATING
CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT	➢ **One teacher assumes the role of the "behavior manager" so the other teacher can "teach"** • Little or no discussion or use of whole class or individual behavior plans	➢ **Teachers take turns managing behavior/teaching** • Increase in communication & mutual development of rules and routines for the classroom • Some discussion and use of individual behavior plans	➢ **Rules, routines, and expectations are mutually implemented** • Teachers are implementing a class behavior management system • Evidence of individual behavior plans, use of contracts, & tangible rewards/ reinforcers as well as community building activities
INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING	• Teachers do not plan together ➢**At times there are two distinct and separate curricula being taught** ➢ **Two types of service delivery may be observed**	➢ **Evidence of some mutual planning exists, SE teacher is aware of the flow of the lesson** • Teachers begin to show more give and take in the planning process	➢ **Mutual planning and sharing of ideas is consistently evident** • Teachers continually plan and share • Teachers are able to respond to the need for on-the-spot changes in the lesson to accommodate the needs of the students
CURRICULUMGOALS, MODIFICATIONS, & ACCOMMODATIONS	• GE teacher views modifications as "giving up" something or as "watering down" the curriculum • Little interaction regarding accommodations to the curriculum • Teachers do not appreciate the need for modifications in content	➢ **Co-teachers use modifications and accommodations, particularly for students with more "visible" special needs** • Modifications and accom-modations for learners with special needs are generally restricted to those identified in the IEP	➢ Teachers differentiate concepts that all students must know (big ideas) from concepts that most students should know (essential knowledge) ➢ **Differentiation, accommodations of content, activities, homework assignments, and tests for students who require them are observed** • Teachers consider ways to integrate the goals and objectives written in the IEP
ASSESSMENT	• Two separate grading systems, equally maintained by separate teachers • GE teacher solely responsible for grading • Teachers begin to explore alternate assessment ideas • Number & quality of measures are limited	• Teachers begin to share grading responsibilities • Teachers explore alternate assessment ideas • Teachers discuss how to capture student progress • Number and quality of measures begins to change	• Teachers share grading responsibilities • Teachers appreciate the need for a variety of options for assessment • Individualize grading procedures for all students and/or specific progress monitoring may occur • Use of subjective and objective standards for grading

Bold items are typically observing behaviors.

The Co-teaching Process

Stages	Description
Beginning	At the beginning level of co-teaching, teachers communicate superficially, as they develop a sense of boundaries and attempt to establish a professional working relationship. Moving from a social relationship to a professional relationship with a colleague may be difficult for some pairs of teachers. Some general educators may experience feeling of intrusion and invasion. Special educators may feel uncomfortable, detached, and excluded. At the beginning stage teacher tread more slowly as they work to determine role expectations. Communication may be polite, guarded, and infrequent. Unless there is a clear sense of the developmental process and the goal of collaboration is a mutual one, teachers may get 'stuck' at this level. It may be that much of the dissatisfaction that is noted in the literature regarding co-teaching is expressed by teachers who continue to interact at the beginning level.
Compromising	Teachers who have adequate relationships display more open and interactive communication. An increase in professional communication is evident. Although students benefit from this increase in communication, a sense of 'give and take' and compromise pervades at this level. The special education teacher may be taking a more active role in the classroom teaching but, in doing so, may have had to 'give up' something in return. The compromises at this stage help the co-teachers to build a level of trust that is necessary for them to move to a more collaborative partnership.
Collaborative	At the collaborative level, teachers openly communicate and interact. Communication, humor, and a high degree of comfort punctuate the co-teaching, collaborative classroom. This high level of comfort is experienced by teachers, students, and even visitors. The two teachers work together and complement each other. At this stage, it is often difficult for outsiders to discern which teacher is the special educator and which is the general educator.