

Middle School Student Teachers and Special Education Student Teachers Working Together  
Middle Level Symposium  
Boone, NC  
May, 2010  
Dr. Elizabeth D. Dore

In October, 2008, the U.S. Department of Education announced Radford University's School of Teacher Education and Leadership (STEL) had been awarded a five-year grant totaling more than \$500,000. The grant supports development of an innovative, integrated teacher education program to prepare special education and general education teachers who work together to meet the needs of every child.

The transformation of the teacher preparation curriculum, Project MERGE, is a collaboration among STEL faculty in special education (high incidence disabilities, Kindergarten through grade 12) and general education (elementary, middle, and secondary) and faculty in the University's academic content disciplines. Montgomery and Pulaski County, and Roanoke City schools will also be collaborators in this effort. For this first year, the Middle Level Teacher Preparation program worked with Pulaski County Middle School in a seventh grade mathematics classroom where a content area student teacher and a special education student teacher co-taught during their practicum experiences.

There is much research available on the subject regarding elementary co-teaching placements, but very little on middle and secondary. This presentation will explain the myriad of details which need to be addressed in the process of setting up the program to work in the middle school. Several hours were spent during the summer of 2009 meeting with a committee specifically focused on the co-teaching in middle and secondary schools for Spring, 2010. There were successful meetings with the principals of both the middle school and secondary school involved, as well as meetings with persons from Central Office of both schools.

Also happening this spring, the entire faculty at Auburn Middle School (Montgomery County), VA, took a class in collaboration for graduate credit. This was funded with stimulus funds. As a result, we will be able to have three co-teaching placements at Auburn Middle School.

A notebook was developed wherein the two student teachers and the cooperating teachers had the opportunity to submit talking points. Subjects included:

- Things I learned about myself as a co-teacher.....
- Things I learned about my co-teacher.....
- I feel good about.....
- I'm frustrated by .....
- Something I am going to work on with my co-teacher .....
- Something I am going to work on as a co-teacher .....
- Questions I have .....

The Committee developed observation checklists to be used by University Supervisors as they are observing student teachers. Focus questions were developed to ask the students in the classrooms regarding having two teachers in their room, if there were different activities with these two teachers present, the best and worst part of having two teachers, and if they would like to be in a classroom again with two teachers. This survey will be administered after the SOL testing in May.

In October, 2009, funds from the MERGE grant made it possible for the two student teachers, the regular content area teacher, the special education teacher, and Dr. Dore to attend the Virginia Middle School Association Conference in Richmond, VA, to hear Dr. Marilyn Friend, a renowned leader in the co-teaching arena, speak and address issues of what co-teaching is and is not.

November, 2009, Matt Parr, the middle level mathematics student teacher, co-presented with Dr. Dore at the National Middle School Association Annual Conference in Indianapolis, IN, on the co-teaching project. Matt also submitted an article to the ATE-Middle School Sig newsletter which was published this spring.

In March, 2010, Matt accompanied Dr. Dore to the VA-ATE meeting in Sweet Briar, VA. He explained his knowledge and expectations before going into the spring semester as well as explaining the six methods of co-teaching:

- One teach, one observe
- Station teaching
- Parallel teaching
- Alternative teaching
- Teaming
- One teach, one assist

**PREREQUISITES OF A CO-TEACHING RELATIONSHIP**

**MATT PARR**

**RADFORD UNIVERSITY**

**DECEMBER 15, 2009**

For a co-teaching relationship to be successful, there are several guidelines which are agreed on by most experts. Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen (2009) describe the prerequisites of participating teachers' attitudes as being parity, mutual respect, mutual goals, shared accountability, and shared resources. These five rules are largely agreed upon by many experts and are repeated in many other forms of media.

Teachers who are participating in co-teaching must view the relationship they have with their counterparts as equal. There are aspects within education which special educators and general educators show their own special expertise (Friend, 2008). While the general educator is expected to have more expertise in curriculum and instruction, classroom management, knowledge of typical students, and pacing, the special educators show their expertise in processes of learning, individualization, paperwork, and emphasis on mastery versus coverage (Friend, 2008, p. 14-15). Recognition should be made that both teachers do have their own expertise, and those different qualities do not make one professional more qualified than the other. "If students see the special education teacher as an aide, they tend to only accept help from the general education teacher" (Magiera et al., 2005, p. 22).

Teachers must also display a sense of mutual respect for one another. As seen in the study done by Magiera et al. (2005), it is easy to see how general education teachers, particularly ones of upper level classes, tend to take over the teaching process due to their content knowledge. However, both teachers must be able to use their own respected gifts and expertise in order to give the students the most optimal education possible. Conderman, Bresnahan, and Pedersen (2009) suggest both teachers should be "free to offer their areas of expertise and creative ideas without fear or humiliation" (p. 4).

The third prerequisite which should be met by both teachers is specific mutual goals. These goals should be decided upon as early in the process as possible. If the two teachers are at odds with each other as to what they would like to accomplish, then future conflict is sure to arise. Teachers should collaborate openly with each other to meet the goals set forth by the pair (Conderman et al., 2009). Of course, this step also requires the use of parity within the collaboration process. The goals should be student oriented, but they should be shared by both instructors if the co-teaching process is to be a success (Conderman et al., 2009).

Teachers should also have a shared accountability for outcomes. Both teachers should take ownership within the classroom. “In co-teaching, both teachers share instructional and behavioral accountability for all students” (Conderman et al., 2009, p. 4). When the lesson or class is struggling, both teachers should be looking toward ways to correct the problem. If a class or lesson is a success, then both teachers should be able to note what was done right and equal credit awarded. The co-teachers are in the process together; therefore, the accountability should be shared.

The final guideline both teachers should meet is shared resources. Both instructors should have the same availability toward resources which can improve the class. Whether it is computers, books, ideas, methods, knowledge or anything else, both teachers should share what they have with each other (Conderman et al., 2009). Teachers can discuss ways to improve a lesson to meet the goals they have decided upon. Special education teachers should also be “encouraged to become an integral part of a particular content department. This gives special education teachers an opportunity to network with other general education teachers in that content area and to consider the needs of students with disabilities more strategically when curriculum issues are discussed” (Simmons & Magiera, 2007).

These guidelines for co-teachers deal largely with a partnership between the two teachers which is very close and all things are equal. Another example of this equality which must exist is explained in the video, 7 Effective Strategies for Secondary Inclusion (2007), where importance is largely placed upon teachers to do things together. They should co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess all equally and with the same goals and agendas. Both teachers should attend staff development and workshops together, and they should create a working relationship where they compliment each other in and out of the classroom. No matter the source, the things which are shared among successful co-teachers include a sense of parity, mutual respect, mutual goals, shared accountability, and shared resources.

## References

- Conderman, G., Bresnahan, V., & Pedersen, T. (2009). *Purposeful co-teaching: Real cases and effective strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Friend, M. (2008). *Co-teach!: A handbook for creating and sustaining effective classroom partnerships in inclusive schools*. Greensboro, NC.
- Magiera, K., Smith, C., Zigmond, N., & Gebauer, K. (2005). Benefits of co-teaching in secondary mathematics classes. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 37(3), 20-24.
- Seven effective strategies for secondary inclusion [DVD]. (2007). Port Chester, NY: National Professional Resources, Inc.
- Simmons, R. J., & Magiera, K. (2007). Evaluation of co-teaching in three high schools within one school district: How do you know when you are truly co-teaching?. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 3(3), Article 4. Retrieved July 22, 2009 from <http://escholarship.bc.edu/education/tecplus/vol3/iss3/art4>

**Co-Teaching Survey**  
**January 18, 2010**

**1. What do you think of when you hear the term co-teaching?**

- Two people working together in a classroom teaching the same content using different teaching strategies (S)
- Two teachers planning lessons together, sharing the teaching of lessons, sharing students, responsibilities, resources, etc (S)
- Two teachers teaching together (M)
- Two people teaching together (M)
- Two people teaching one classroom (M)
- A general ed teacher and special ed teacher teaching the classroom together and not having traditional defined roles (S)
- A general ed and special ed teacher working a collaborating together in an inclusion classroom (S)
- Two equally qualified professionals teaching a group of students in the same setting (M)
- Two teachers working together to teach a class (M)
- I think I'm excited! I would love to have the opportunity to co-teach (M)
- More than one teacher leading a lesson (M)
- During my blocking classes (M)
- Shared responsibilities, equal, planning, collaboration, effective (S)
- Two teachers working together to teach (M)
- Two teachers teaching together, working together for the benefit of the classroom (M)
- Two teachers working together for a common goal (M)
- Matt pops up in my head and tells me about it: two teachers working together to teach one class (special ed and gen ed) (M)
- Two teachers teaching and consistently working together on a day-to-day basis (M)
- Two teachers working together to teach a class either by taking kids out or by splitting the class in two (M)
- Two teachers teaching/working together in one class (M)
- Two teachers in one classroom who organize lessons incorporating knowledge from their areas of expertise. They both present the lesson in an organized manner with instruction geared to reach all students effectively. Planning is crucial (M)
- Cooperation, business model (S)
- Teachers sharing their talents and skills to reach all students; shared responsibility for reaching each child (S)
- Two teachers in the same classroom "teaching" together (M)
- A classroom teacher and special educator working together to teach the students in a class together – where both teachers are teaching equally at times (S)

- A classroom with two or more teachers working together to make an optimal learning environment (S)
- Support, creativity, fun (M)
- Two teachers teaching and planning together (S)
- Working together with two or more people to reach one common academic goal which is beneficial to all students (S)

## 2. What has been your experience with people with disabilities?

- On campus transition program; blocking/student teaching (S)
- Many experiences, both professionally and personally (S)
- I taught SPED summer school for severely disabled students (M)
- Haven't had a lot of experience, but what I did have was positive (M)
- Positive experiences, but limited in quantity and duration (M)
- I have taught autism, ID, LD, EBD (S)
- I have taught LD, Autism, ID, EBD (S)
- I have taught and been around people with mild disabilities (M)
- Auburn incorporates them into the activities and I really enjoy having them in the classroom (M)
- My brother had a number of learning disabilities and I watched how frustrated he would get growing up because his primary teachers were always so short and impatient with him (M)
- It is my experience they should be as fully integrated as possible in a "normal" school day (M)
- During blocking I taught several LD kids and I also had one student who was deaf (M)
- In depth (S)
- I have worked with a few knowingly and it was difficult at first but as I learned more about them, it grew easier and more enjoyable (M)
- Personally I have a cousin-in-law who has Downs Syndrome. I have worked with her for six years. I have also taught children with disabilities in after-school programs and while blocking (M)
- Positive and rewarding – some experience with people with disabilities (M)
- Average (M)
- I've volunteered at a facility/day care for autistic children. I have been a substitute teacher's aide and worked one-on-one with children with multiple disabilities (M)
- I have had experience with people who have both physical and mental disabilities (M)
- One of my concentrations in undergrad was special education (M)
- I have been around several types of people from all ages with a variety of disabilities. Disabilities ranging from learning disabilities, visual/hearing disabilities, behavior issues, and developmental (M)
- Sometimes very positive, but also very negative. My mother and father have sustained injuries as a result of working at NVTC (S)
- Loads – disabilities in the family and ten years professional/paid experience (all ages)(S)

- Worked at southwestern VA training center; have relatives and family friends who are physically and mentally impaired (M)
- I have met and interacted with people with physical, learning, and intellectual disabilities throughout my life and time at Radford (S)
- Throughout my live at Radford (S)
- Knowledge about the disabilities makes working together easier and successes possible. (M)
- Working with students with disabilities during my undergrad student teaching and graduate student teaching (S)
- I have worked with people with disabilities during my undergraduate and graduate school field experiences (S)

**3. Rate your knowledge of:**

Content	Only basic knowledgeable	Somewhat Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable	Very Knowledgeable	Expert
<b>Science</b>			3	3	
<b>Math</b>		1	1	6	
<b>Soc Studies</b>		1	7	1	2
<b>English</b>		1	5	8	1
<b>SPED</b>			3	8	2