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Collaborating in Higher Education: Improving Pedagogical Practice

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Abstract

We presuppose that thoughtful pedagogical practice should be included in higher education as much as it is in K–12 classrooms. Effective and purposeful collaborative efforts provide faculty with opportunities to better develop their pedagogical practice. This article describes how collaboration has been utilized at the university level between a full-time faculty member and a K–12 educator from a partnership school district. Discussed here are the ways by which the instructors regularly collaborated, and when possible, incorporated elements of coteaching, to the benefit of the instructors and students alike. Furthermore, discussed are the lessons learned from the process and considerations that should be made when collaborating in higher education.

Introduction

The College of Education and Human Services (CEHS) at Wright State University in Ohio has had long-standing partnerships with local K–12 districts within the metropolitan area. As a member of the National Network of Educational Renewal (NNER), the CEHS strongly believes in the process of simultaneous renewal. According to the NNER, simultaneous renewal focuses on the ways by which teacher education programs and

K–12 institutions work collaboratively to improve student learning and teacher quality. Changes at all levels, including ones involving collegiate-level courses and program structures evidence this renewal (National Network for Educational Renewal, 2009). This paper describes how this simultaneous renewal has been enacted in the teacher education department of the CEHS. More specifically, it provides the processes by which two faculty members engaged in various collaborative efforts over the course of an academic year. At the onset, we expected this relationship to be one that was reflective of a mentor-mentee. What developed, however, was something much more powerful, much more successful, and much more beneficial for the students and instructors alike; a true collaborative partnership was developed. It was a natural progression stemming from a single conversation.

A Review of the Literature

Both instructors firmly believe in thoughtful pedagogy. As trained K–12 teachers, we value the role of purposeful instructional practices in all classrooms, even those in higher education. In our view, this requires that we be diligent in the ways by which we provide content, by which we foster students' work with the content, and by which we assess students' understanding of the content.

Pedagogical Importance

Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is a phrase thrown around, particularly in teacher education programs. So what does it really mean for one to have pedagogical content knowledge? The emergence of the construct of PCK is commonly attributed to Shulman (1986); it reflects the notion that teaching goes beyond attaining in-depth knowledge of a given area of content. Pedagogical content knowledge reflects an individual's abilities at effectively communicating content knowledge to others in ways that are understandable. This communicating is accomplished via various avenues, including but not limited to modeling, hands-on practice, exercises, etc. (Shulman, 1987).

From a constructivist viewpoint, the importance of PCK cannot be overestimated. Although there are varying perspectives of constructivism, it is commonly embedded in the notion that individuals do not merely take in information to which they are exposed and place it into long-term memory. Instead, they construct knowledge based on their individual experiences and prior knowledge (Gordon, 2009). As such, pedagogical content knowledge would represent the skills that individuals have to facilitate others' construction of knowledge in in-depth and meaningful ways.

Given its importance, PCK should be stressed at all academic levels; purposeful practices are what foster higher-order thinking, while purposeless "activities" focus on rote memorization (Zohar, 2004) and are often fostered by the presumption that instructors are merely deliverers of knowledge rather than learners (Suoranta & Moision, 2006). Instructors in higher education must create pedagogical situations in which learners are able to utilize their own experiences and knowledge to explore and critically analyze such situations (Haggis, 2006). Students should not be viewed as being solely responsible for their learning; instructors need to focus on making key ideas recognizable to students and aid them in understanding the interconnections between said ideas (Donald, 1983).

Though limited, the literature on pedagogical practices in higher education, which lacks consensus regarding its measures and operationalization (Stierer & Antoniou, 2004), clearly suggests that there is a dearth among higher education faculty who appreciate pedagogical practice. Overall, teaching practices utilized in higher education vary across disciplines, as the content of the discipline tends to underlie course planning decisions; however, practices are also influenced by institutional and instructional settings (Stark, Lowether, Ryan, & Genthon, 1988). Independent of this, research has evidenced that some collegiate faculty hold negative attitudes about pedagogical training and its associated skills; some faculty engage in non-course-related tasks while planning, indicating that planning does not require a great deal of concentrated effort (Stark, 2000). Many faculty also lack training in the art and science of teaching, lack significant time to focus on pedagogy given the multitude of their obligations, work with administrators who put little to no focus on pedagogy, and/or abjectly rely on content knowledge, the latter of which provides faculty with a self-imposed right to spend less time preparing to develop thoughtful and purposeful lessons. Although it may not directly address all of these concerns, collaboration with respect to pedagogy allows individuals to enhance and strengthen their pedagogical skills, and thus should be taken advantage of when opportunities to do so arise (Crow & Smith, 2005; McDaniel & Colarulli, 1997).

Collaborating

Collaboration with respect to instructional practice tends to be rather rare at the collegiate level — possibly reflecting an overall lack of focus on pedagogy at typical four-year institutions — and may be a consequence of attempts to retain academic freedom; faculty generally attend to their sole engagement with their students (McDaniel & Colarulli, 1997), which is unfortunate since collaboration supports the premise that learning should be socially created (McDaniel & Colarulli, 1997). The benefits of collaboration in higher education have

been clearly evidenced, and its utilization need not be between two faculty members. Campbell (2010) explains how collaborative efforts between faculty and university librarians promoted students' skill sets related to academic research, a necessity as faculty were erroneously presuming that students' technological savviness equated to strong online research skills. McKenna, Yalvac, & Light (2009) also found that collaboration between engineering faculty and learning scientists fostered greater student-centered approaches to learning, enhancing the students' ability to gain a more meaningful, more in-depth understanding of the content. The opportunities for the faculty to critically reflect on their pedagogical practices with the learning scientists may have also influenced their perspectives on teaching.

Collaboration may take many forms; two in particular are described by McDaniel & Colarulli (1997). *Team-coordinated models* focus on a cohort that takes the same set of courses together. Although a set of faculty share students, faculty are not required to collaborate in any way; they maintain complete autonomy with respect to their pedagogical practice. *Team-teaching models* require some level of faculty interaction. These cohorts are required to understand how to integrate the content covered across their courses, similar to the middle school philosophy of teaming and multidisciplinary units. A more specific type of teaching models, *coordinated studies* involves faculty from varying fields coplanning and codeveloping a course, meeting for extensive periods of time and meeting in both large and small groups, around a central theme. Faculty must examine their content within the context of a larger knowledge view, fostering students' abilities to integrate knowledge. This type of curricula integration aligns well with the level and type of critical thinking required in graduate school. Faculty may extend and enhance their collaborative efforts by utilizing coteaching models and strategies.

Coteaching

When two or more faculty coteach, they become equally responsible for all aspects of instruction, including

planning, delivery, organization, and assessment (Bacharach, Heck, & Dank, 2003). Coteaching requires two or more instructors teaching the same group of students. Thus, the various modes of coteaching occur within one class, with all instructors present and engaged in the lesson. Coteaching can be reflected in a variety of ways, such as with "station teaching," "parallel teaching," and "team teaching." Station teaching involves setting up various stations around the room and having students rotate through them. Some stations require groups of students to work on their own while others require instructor facilitation. With parallel teaching, each instructor works with half of the class during a particular lesson; each group learns the same content, in the same manner, but benefits from smaller group size. Depending on the task, sometimes it is prudent for the two halves to be in two different physical spaces. Finally, team teaching requires a continuous flow of instruction between the coteachers with the entire class of students (Cook & Friend, 1995).

The benefits of coteaching noted at both the K–12 and collegiate level include student access to a greater variety of instructional strategies, varying perspectives of the same content (Cook & Friend, 1995), and greater student achievement (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Additionally, coteaching increases professional support (Cook & Friend, 1995), professional satisfaction (Walther-Thomas, 1997), and critical reflection among faculty (Crow & Smith, 2005).

Team-teaching models and coordinated studies in particular require a great deal of time, effort, and commitment. Add to that elements of coteaching, and it is easy to see why faculty resist these collaborative efforts. This paper describes how two faculty members were able to engage in varying types and degrees of collaborative efforts in a manner that was feasible and beneficial to all involved. The authors posit that collaboration at the collegiate level creates the opportunity for faculty to take purposeful steps in improving their pedagogical practices, and in turn, improving student learning. More specifically,

we describe the ways by which the authors were able to coplan lessons, codevelop assessments, and on occasion, codeliver content.

Our Process

Participants

In early 2007, the CEHS took a more direct step towards promoting simultaneous renewal with its decision to utilize the experiences of a partnership K–12 teacher for a one-year placement at the university level. The plan was simple; a teacher from a partnership school would be selected to teach in the Teacher Education Department (TED) of the CEHS for a full academic year. The district would continue to pay his/her salary, while the CEHS paid for a one-year substitute teacher for his/her class. Our first “hybrid educator,” as he was often called, was David Herick.

Herick has more than 22 years of experience teaching at the K–12 level (mostly at the middle level), which includes serving as a cooperating teacher for undergraduate and graduate licensure candidates; this made him the perfect hybrid educator. Although many of the department faculty had taught at the K–12 level, most had been at the collegiate level for quite a while. Herick brought with him a unique perspective to the department, specific middle-level teaching concerns, as well as issues important to middle-level educators, administrators, students, and families.

Courses

The collaborative efforts described focus on two specific courses and their respective students. The first course for which we collaborated is a graduate-level course in the middle childhood education (MCE) master’s program, and focuses on action research and assessment. The CEHS offers an initial licensure program in MCE. Although students earn a bachelor’s degree in MCE, this program does not allow them to apply for licensure at the undergraduate level. Instead, candidates must be accepted into the yearlong master’s program. Thus, these master’s

students are preservice teachers seeking initial licensure. They become licensed in two content areas in grades 4–9. Students in this course were part of one cohort. Both sections of the course met once a week. Nimisha Patel’s section included 29 students, while Herick’s section included 25 students. Only students in the cohort were enrolled in one of these two course sections.

The second course for which we collaborated is an undergraduate-level introductory educational psychology course. This course is required for all preservice licensure programs in the Department of Teacher Education. The classes consist of undergraduate students in various teacher education programs within the CEHS. Patel’s section consisted of 19 preservice teachers, while Herick’s section consisted of 22 preservice teachers.

Procedures

During Herick’s second quarter at the CEHS, we were both slated to teach two different sections of the same graduate-level research and assessment course. Initially, we intended to have a few discussions regarding the content and planned to check in with each other every so often. Given the situation, we felt it necessary to begin our discussions well in advance in order to provide Herick with an overview of the content and key assessments. Before the beginning of the second quarter, during which we would be teaching our respective graduate section, we met regularly to discuss the course content and to begin coplanning each class session. During the quarter, we continued to collaborate and coreflect on our effectiveness as instructors and the progress of our students. We also continued our coplanning sessions. At the end of the quarter we coreflected on the process as a whole.

Although to a lesser extent in many ways, we collaborated on an undergraduate course during the following quarter, as we were yet again both teaching our respective section of the same course. This collaboration required less coplanning as much of it was already in place; however, coreflecting and cofacilitating sessions were still an important part of the process. Reflected here is our

experience working on the courses and the ways by which we collaborated and utilized components of coteaching as means for renewing both of our pedagogical practices.

Student Feedback Data

At the end of each quarter, students at the university are asked to complete formal evaluation forms for each course in which they were enrolled. These forms focus on questions related to instructional effectiveness. The questions are both quantitative and qualitative in nature. There are six Likert-style items and two open-ended items. Students also have the opportunity to add comments beyond those addressed in the questions. Faculty have access to these comments during the following quarter. Data from these evaluation forms were examined for specific comments relating to our collaboration, and more specifically, our team-taught lessons for which we cofacilitated the class sessions.

For the undergraduate class on which we collaborated, we examined the students' final exam scores; this exam was the same for both sets of our students. We paid close attention to the content that was team-taught. Finally, we focused on the informal feedback provided by students, particularly impromptu conversations that occurred after class or during office hours that related to our collaborative efforts.

Collaborating with Components of Coteaching

Given our value for pedagogical content knowledge, our appreciation for collaboration, and our opportunities to learn from each other, there was no doubt that we would collaborate often. The following describes why we felt it was important to take on these opportunities, how our students and how we benefitted from the process, and some helpful hints for effectively collaborating with a colleague.

Collaboratively Coplanning

Nimisha Patel. Initially, my focus centered on meeting with Herick on occasion to help him with the content and to maintain course consistency. I soon realized that our

work could be much more collaborative as we discussed specific challenges I faced when I taught the course before and the ways by which we could make it more meaningful and engaging for students. I was confident that Herick's ideas would enhance the quality of this course; he had more contemporary middle-level teaching experience and an arsenal of best practice.

David Herick. While most faculty were very generous with suggestions, materials, and strategies for working with university students, it all felt very one sided; I was contributing little. This did not align with my mission to work collaboratively and contribute active classroom teaching experiences to university faculty and programs. In spite of my nervousness, I recognized that this course would provide me the opportunity to reflect upon my own practices as well as examine effective and appropriate middle-level assessment procedures. This, in conjunction with Patel's assurances of collaboration, was welcomed as my prior experiences with higher education had all been as a student. It also fostered my excitement to teach the course. I felt as if we were equals; Patel sought to learn as much from me as I from her. Though Patel had the course well planned and organized, she was still open and encouraging to incorporating my ideas. I immediately knew we shared the same appreciation for reflective practice and student-centered learning, setting us on the right path.

Our Efforts at Coplanning, Coreflecting, and Coteaching

Our first goal was to come to a mutual understanding of our course objectives, an essential step in collaboration. Patel's prior syllabus guided our work, but we expected significant changes. We initially discussed the order of delivered content and correlating assignments; we needed to develop a covision and a common perspective of our purpose before engaging in this level of collaboration. Though considerations of specific weekly plans were made individually, we reconvened often to work through the details, reflecting on our strengths and expertise to foster a logical flow of content. Though time intensive, it

alleviated much of the work required during the quarter the course would be taught. Time was spent on regular, weekly, predetermined meetings; we were responsible to each other to be prepared and ready to work.

Some may consider preplanning an entire quarter-long course more than sufficient for collaboration. For us though, weekly reflection is a part of the practice of preparation; it highlighted our shared goals, student-centered passion, and method and practice of instruction. Meetings afforded us opportunities to reflect on lessons and on our effectiveness as collaborators, providing us with regular opportunities to modify plans. This was imperative as unexpected variables such as students' prior knowledge, interest, and current value for the information influenced the lessons, which actually fostered our academic freedom.

It is impossible to share all of our collaborative efforts and coteaching experiences, so we discuss here a few of significance. Though relatively limited, our coteaching with respect to "delivery of instruction" was conducted with a level of purposefulness that resulted in a positive influence on our students and us. We attended to our own strengths and from there, determined which lessons would be most prudent to coteach.

Our first team-taught lesson required that we each spend about two hours in each other's class so each group of students experienced the same lesson, with both of us in the room. Our students understood that neither of us was the "expert" or "novice"; we were there to provide varying perspectives based on varying experiences. As the course was for preservice teachers, this lesson focused on standardized testing and the state-mandated value-added system. The latter is being utilized as a measure of student achievement on standardized assessments and a measure of teacher effectiveness. As an educational psychologist, Patel had more in-depth knowledge of statistics and score-interpretation. As a practicing teacher, Herick had been making value-added based modifications to his practice for a few years and had been thoughtful of its influence on community stakeholders. It only made sense for us to coteach this lesson.

As usual, we coplanned the entire session and assigned roles. We first went through standardized tests in general and then specific scores. Patel led a discussion on this and Herick added commentary as he saw fit. We then utilized Herick's standardized test report so students were able to see exactly how these scores are presented. Patel explained score differences, and Herick noted common teacher and parent misconceptions about them. This team-teaching gave students thorough knowledge of standardized testing and its influence on contemporary classrooms.

The second part of this lesson focused on value added. Value added is the system utilized by the State of Ohio as one measure of K-12 teacher effectiveness. The system focuses on examining students' standardized tests scores across grade levels. In order to "make value added" teachers are to move each student one grade level forward across annual tests. While Herick initiated the discussion, Patel commented throughout, adding her expertise and experiences. As Herick discussed the background of value added and its state-level implementation, Patel noted its neglect of important developmental trends experienced, particularly during the K-12 years. During the lesson, students analyzed a value-added score report and generated plans for instructional modification based on specific data provided. Both of us were able to assist groups with this more complicated task, making the time spent on this portion much more efficient and educationally sound. Throughout the lesson, the team-teaching approach worked because we were both equally involved in the conversation; we both had information and personal experiences to contribute, resulting in a smooth interplay between us. We both provided information while asking and answering questions. We prepared in advance for our respective areas of focus but also ensured we understood the other's, allowing us to interject our thoughts, suggestions, and experiences throughout the entirety of the lesson.

Another coteaching practice we engaged in focused on coassessing. Although we did not both coassess all of the students, we knew it was important to ensure that we

were assessing students in the same manner, particularly for the unit portfolio, which is a CEHS requirement. The rubric for this newly modified portfolio was developed at the college level. Consequently, we both had to ensure that we had a common understanding of it by using inter-rater reliability. We both scored work from students in both sections of the course. Agreements and disagreements in ratings led to conversations explaining prescribed scores and a consensus related to scoring. The rubric for the portfolio is based on “target,” “acceptable,” and “unacceptable” levels of performance for 15 specific criteria. One criterion about which we had greater discussion focused on emotional intelligence. We found that students were having difficulty expressing how they are emotionally intelligent in a written reflection. As such, we had differing views on what was a “target” level reflection, particularly since the rubric is very broadly written. We decided that students would have to address at least two distinct characteristics of emotional intelligence and provide specific behaviors and/or actions in which they engage that reflect their emotional intelligence. In the end, we came to common expectations and views of the project, reflecting the evaluative component of coteaching and utilizing another way of maintaining course consistency.

After our initial work, another opportunity for further collaboration arose; it focused on an undergraduate educational psychology course. While we both utilize this content within our teaching practices, our formal knowledge of it varied. For Patel, it is her area of expertise. For Herick, it was content he learned in his teacher preparation program and has implemented ever since. Hence, our collaboration focused on renewing Patel’s approach to varying aspects of the course and fostering Herick’s revisit of the content. We had a solid foundation of the course, so meetings focused on modifying some assignments, tweaking lessons and making a few changes here and there, and we continued to coreflect. So our collaboration stood strong, and we again made thoughtful application of coteaching with respect to delivery of instruction as appropriate and as possible.

For a team-taught lesson, we codeveloped and cowrote various real-life classroom scenarios relating to K–12 student motivation, particularly in the context of Maslow’s humanistic needs. Students were asked to develop a skit reflecting appropriate teacher/student/administrator responses to these situations in order to successfully resolve the issue at hand. They determined how the teacher should react and considered different K–12 student reactions they may encounter. They had to understand how K–12 students’ perceptions and actions would influence teacher responses. We processed, asked, and answered questions and made varied connections to our K–12 teaching experiences after each skit. Patel’s K–12 teaching experience was focused in an urban, high gang active middle school. Meanwhile, Herick’s experience focused on an elementary school in a suburban, middle class area. These differences allowed us to share a multitude of factors and situations that our preservice teachers needed to consider. We were also able to highlight some of the ways to resolve concerns while respecting the cultural context of the community environment. This lesson resulted in a fluid and thorough discussion of theoretically based rationales for teacher responses and included a variety of perspectives regarding the scenarios. Again, neither was the “expert” or “novice”; we both gave varying perspectives, interjecting and summarizing, on the same issues.

As the summer approached, we found that we would have yet another opportunity to collaborate. During the summer, we both taught the same cohort, and the classes met back to back. Patel taught the assessment course on which we initially collaborated, while Herick taught a graduate-level reading assessment course. When possible and appropriate, we sought overlapping content that would be enhanced through cotaught lessons; using the second part of Patel’s class and the first half of Herick’s allowed us to engage in team-teaching.

One of our goals was to develop a thoroughly engaging and meaningful lesson related to the use of rubrics as scoring guides. Through a serendipitous conversation, we

determined the use of movies would be the way to focus the lesson. During the second half of Patel's class, we team-taught a lesson on rubrics: the types, their purpose, and their importance. We gave students an example rubric, highlighting essential components such as criteria, levels of performance, as well as weighting options and point systems. We continued by sharing various rubrics that we each had created and comparing them to other types of scoring guides. During the discussion we equally contributed ideas, thoughts, and suggestions. We continued our team teaching during the first half of Herick's class. Students chose a movie genre and created a rubric that reflected a strong movie within that genre. Both of us roamed the room, assisting groups as necessary. While groups shared their rubrics with the entire class, we both commented on the strengths and weaknesses of each rubric. Additionally, we provided suggestions on how to improve them. After this activity, we discussed the appropriateness of using varied scoring guides and differences in grading systems.

This lesson worked well for several reasons. First, we both have a thorough knowledge of the curriculum; we understood the goals and objectives related to rubrics and their importance in effective instruction. Relying on our student-centered focus, we addressed the material in a meaningful way that was well received by our students. Finally, we were both willing to give the time to plan and implement an effective lesson and to adjust our class schedules in order to bring in the coteaching experience. Dedication, desire to improve student learning, and flexibility were key factors in the lesson's success.

Reflecting on the Process

At the onset, we intended to have a few discussions about content; this, however, evolved into regular collaborative meetings over the course of an entire quarter and beyond. As we reflected on our collaborative experiences, we recognized that it fostered the pedagogical necessity at the collegiate level. Our first step was to always determine the objectives for the course as a whole and for specific lessons; we thought about why we were teaching the

content. Only then could we coplan lessons within the context of the assessments we would use.

The preplanning fostered self-reflection and preparation, ensuring we analyzed our own understanding and perceptions of the content. If we could not discuss the content logically and coherently in a planning session, how were we to explain the concept to our students? Preplanning allowed us to recognize our own knowledge base and provided us with the time to further our understanding of the material. Consequently, we were able to determine how to utilize some coteaching models to our advantage. The benefits of having the opportunity to prepare for class were more widespread than content knowledge; it gave us the time to create activities, including specific discussion guides, group activities, and individual tasks, all of which were meant to foster critical thinking.

The benefits of our collaboration and coteaching moments to our own teaching are clearly evident. Of greater importance may be the impact on students. Course evaluations revealed that students appreciated cotaught lessons and thought that such lessons helped them learn the content. For example, one student noted, "...uses specific scenarios and content that related to my learning. ...I enjoyed having her coteach with Mr. Herick." During the team-taught lessons, students were able to ask specific questions related to our individual experiences. Impromptu discussions during the quarter indicated that students felt they had the benefit of varying perspectives based on varying experiences and that it helped them make specific connections to the content since all students were concurrently in practicum/field placements. When grading the educational psychology final examinations, it was clear that the majority of the students did particularly well on the content that was team-taught. Additionally, general comparisons with students in previous quarters indicated that the students who experienced the team-taught lessons did particularly well.

Our collaborative efforts also resolved the concern related to course consistency for the graduate cohort, for whom two sections for most courses are needed due to student numbers. We ensured that the objectives and

expectations for the entire cohort were the same; we coplanned everything, had the same expectations for student outcomes, and required the same assignments and level of work in both sections. This was evidenced by our cocreated lessons and assignments, our team-taught lessons, and our work with inter-rater reliability.

Our collaboration and coteaching experiences not only positively influenced our teaching practices, but also strengthened the partnership between Herick's district and the CEHS. Herick's experiences with the collaboration and cotaught lessons led him to discuss it with faculty and administrators in his district. Since that time, many of his colleagues have participated in half-day coteaching workshops that have been cofacilitated by Patel and her colleague from the CEHS. Furthermore, teacher candidates placed in Herick's district have also participated in the workshops. Consequently, greater collaboration and coteaching practices have begun to be utilized between cooperating teachers and teacher candidates, reflecting the essence of simultaneous renewal.

During this process, we learned a great deal about collaborating and coteaching. First, it is important to consider the time required to successfully and effectively collaborate, to coplan, to create common assessments, to develop shared objectives and goals, and when possible, to coteach. Effective teaching is about purposeful preparation, a task made more time consuming with two instructors. In order to be successful, collaborators and coteachers must be willing to regularly put aside time to work with each other, purposefully plan lessons, and reflect on the process. The next step is to determine for which course collaboration and potential coteaching would be appropriate and beneficial. Once decided, it is time to find a collaborator and coteacher. This person may teach a section of the same course as yourself or may teach another course that aligns well with your course.

Thoughtfully consider the most appropriate collaborator; collaboration does not work well with just anyone, and friends do not always make the best collaborators. As such we do not recommend forced

collaboration, particularly among individuals who hold negative views on the process. Each collaborator's emphasis on teaching and classroom practices must blend well with that of his/her partner, allowing for mutual compromise. For example, our success was based on a solid foundation of similar philosophies, shaping a student-centered approach with a common value and a respect for the art and science of teaching. More importantly perhaps, collaborators must have a mutual respect for one another. They must be open to giving constructive criticism and be willing to receive it. This process is similar to that of a "critical friend." Critical friends are those who observe one's work with the purpose of helping one enhance his/her practice. As with our collaborative efforts, it is important for the relationship between an individual and his/her critical friend to include trust, confidence in feedback, a shared value system (within the context of the purpose of the relationship), honesty, and openness (Swaffield, 2005). Studies on critical friends note that their utilization improves one's self-reflection and practice and one's recognition of his/her teaching style (Dahlgren et al., 2006).

After finding an appropriate collaborator, focus on one or two specific content pieces for your collaboration, utilizing each other's strengths. This requires thinking ahead and spending time planning independently and together. Attend to the implementation of the lesson and be prepared to reflect afterwards on how things went. Expand as you begin to find success in the process. Upon reflection, be ready to take equal responsibility for the process from beginning to end, responsibility for bringing ideas to the table, for individual tasks, for failures experienced (they will happen), and just as important, for successes experienced.

Although this collaboration worked well for both of us, it was so due to our willingness to share a common voice. Unfortunately, some collegiate faculty, in attempts to retain some level of academic freedom, shun from sharing this voice and student goals with a collaborator. In order for collaboration to work, a mutual respect of each other's strengths is essential. An equal recognition and value for what each collaborator brings to the table is what makes

the process successful. If not for this, our efforts would have been sure to be rather fruitless. Collaborative efforts infused with individualism and power struggles will only lead to poor results. When instructors are able to come to a common understanding of the importance of collaboration in professional development, great things will happen.

Final Thoughts

Nimisha Patel. My experience taught me how valuable collaboration and coteaching can be at the collegiate level and enhanced my ability to critically analyze my own teaching practices. It has reminded me of the importance of continuous renewal: renewal of lessons, renewal of ideas, renewal of practices, and renewal of perspective. Though we might not have been able to enact a true-to-form coteaching (Cook & Friend, 1995), we were able to integrate it into our teaching practices in a manner that was beneficial to everyone involved.

While the process of collaboration and coteaching has taught me much, I have no doubt benefitted from Herick much more. Beyond fostering my content knowledge, Herick has helped renew my sense of creativity in the classroom while providing me more insight into best teaching practices. He has served as my sounding board for great and not-so-great ideas. Never would my pedagogical skills have been enhanced as they have had I not worked so collaboratively with Herick. For example, I think much more about how I can utilize other instructors during class sessions. Furthermore, I consider the content covered in the other courses my graduate students are taking while simultaneously enrolled in mine to determine how the instruction may be enhanced through collaboration.

David Herick. My lessons learned from my collaboration and coteaching experiences with Patel are many and long lasting. I have learned that they can take a multitude of forms; there are a variety of ways to effectively collaborate to meet students' needs. I have learned that collaboration is time consuming but well worth it. In our case, the hours put into planning and reflecting on our courses resulted in student-centered instruction that was well received by our students. Collaboration by practice

and definition encourages variety and engagement; it allowed me the opportunity to revisit previous knowledge, learn new content, and develop new techniques and methods from my university partner.

Effective collaboration and coteaching require honesty, a strong work ethic, dedication, a willingness to learn, as well as little sense of territory. Patel models all of these attributes to the highest level, and this helped me develop the same attributes. Add these to our willingness to laugh and explore and we were sure to be successful! I have been able to take my collaborative efforts and coteaching experience back to my home school and apply them to my teaching team. I am grateful to have had the chance to learn from and work with Patel.

Summary. The collegiate setting tends not to be very conducive to collaboration, let alone coteaching practices; as such, it is difficult to implement the latter in its truest form. This, however, does not mean that the underlying ideas of coteaching should be disregarded by university faculty. What it means instead is that faculty must seek ways to collaborate and to implement coteaching strategies within the existing frameworks of their respective departments. Those of us who seek to be effective educators should find ways to integrate these practices into our instructional methods in a manner that is beneficial to our students as well as ourselves. We are not limited in this engagement by the departments within which we work, but rather by our hesitation to engage in the approach. This hesitation is expected considering the factors involved in effective collaboration. However, if implemented well, these factors are greatly outweighed by the benefits. Effective collaboration requires thoughtfulness of some basic guidelines. First, trust that your collaborator is as invested in the process as you are; remember that he/she wants it to succeed as much as you do. Keep personal judgments out of the process; critique the process itself but never the person. Finally, remember that all faculty members bring their particular strengths to the table; embrace them and find ways to make them a part of your own repertoire. Using these as a foundation is the key to successful collaboration.

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