CHAPTER 6
MODELING COLLABORATIVE TEACHING IN TEACHER EDUCATION: PREPARING PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS TO TEACH ALL STUDENTS

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Abstract

In an effort to better prepare pre-service candidates to work with all students and to respond to the current collaborative team teaching trend within New York City public schools, the authors who are professors of bilingual education and inclusive education/disability studies, respectively, combined their student teaching seminars in bilingual education and childhood education, in order to: (1) provide a model of co-teaching as well as an experience and perspective of being a student in a classroom with two teachers; (2) provide pre-service candidates with ongoing access to the expertise of two professors during their student teaching experience; (3) engage pre-service teachers in critical conversations about identifying and resisting deficit constructions of both emergent bilingual students and students with disabilities; (4) engage in a self-study of...
teaching practice within this collaborative context; (5) consider how well our respective programs currently prepare pre-service teachers. The Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices approach gleaned data from the co-instructors’ weekly reflective journals and student evaluations to reveal multiple benefits of a collaborative classroom context for pre-service teachers as well as the professors. These benefits included a rethinking of academic structures, spaces for interconnectedness across fields, and increased professor and student learning. The findings challenge teacher educators to consider whether or not a traditional approach to teacher preparation truly offers pre-service teachers the tools to serve diverse students. The authors call on schools of education to transgress traditional academic boundaries to adequately prepare pre-service teachers for the 21st century classroom.

**Keywords:** Students with disabilities; emergent bilinguals; student teaching; co-teaching; inclusive education; higher education

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I have wanted to try some cross-disciplinary work and this is the perfect opportunity. It makes sense (at least in my head) that we could better address the complexities that our teacher candidates encounter in public schools by dissolving our own traditionally rigid disciplinary boundaries at the university level. Moreover, our students increasingly are being placed into co-teaching contexts. It seems significant that our teacher candidates will have the opportunity to experience co-teaching from the perspective of students as well as to observe a co-teaching model “in action.” I am eager to see what emerges from our partnership! (JV)

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**Introduction**

Adequately preparing teachers for the increasing complexity and diversity of 21st century public schools — and, in particular, the urban context — requires teacher education programs that reflect and address contemporary realities. The authors, a professor of bilingual education and a professor of inclusive education/disability studies (DS) respectively, prepare pre-service teachers to work within one of the largest and most diverse urban school districts in the country. In response to the large numbers of public school students identified as needing bilingual, English as a Second/Additional Language (ESL) and/or special education services, Collaborative Team
Teaching (CTT) classrooms (e.g., general education classrooms co-taught by a general education teacher and a special education teacher or a special education teacher and a bilingual education teacher) have become increasingly commonplace as a primary service delivery model within the school district. A range of terms are used to describe these settings. Although we use CTT, terms such as Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT), and Co-Teaching, among others, are also used to describe the same instructional model.

In an effort to respond to the current CTT trend, we combined our childhood education and bilingual education student teaching seminar classes to mirror the CTT instructional model. We established the following objectives for our collaboration: (1) provide a model of co-teaching as well as an experience and perspective of being a student in a classroom with two teachers; (2) provide pre-service candidates with ongoing access to the expertise of two professors during their student teaching experience; (3) engage pre-service teachers in critical conversations about identifying and resisting deficit constructions of both emergent bilingual students and students with disabilities; (4) engage in a self-study of teaching practice within the collaborative context; (5) consider how well our respective programs currently prepare pre-service teachers to work with all students.

Reflecting the school district’s recent trend toward a more inclusive response to students with disabilities and emergent bilingual students, our collaborative student teaching seminar likewise merged traditionally separate academic disciplines of childhood education, inclusive education/DS, and bilingual education. We reasoned that co-teaching at the college level would provide an opportunity not only to demonstrate a current instructional model, but also to create a collaborative context within which to engage pre-service teachers in identifying and resisting assumptions and practices that contribute to deficit constructions of students with disabilities (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008; Dudley-Marling, 2010; Linton, Melio, & O’Neill, 1995; Valle & Connor, 2011; Ware, 2006) as well as emergent bilingual students (Crawford, 2004; Freeman, 1998; García, 2009; Nieto, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999).

The following research questions guided the self-study.

1. How does a CTT seminar for pre-service student teachers impact learning for the professors and students?
2. What are the advantages and challenges to teaching across fields?
3. How can teacher education programs prepare educators to serve all students, including emergent bilinguals and students with disabilities?
Our new seminar configuration reflected Harris and Harvey’s (2000) assertion that college students, particularly those never before exposed to collaborative contexts, given the opportunity to “see instructors responding to concepts or theories differently, taking risks, and taking distinct positions in relationship to the material studied, an implicit value is being lived out in front of them: that differences in perspective are beneficial to learning, acceptable, and encouraged. Diversity is experienced as being valuable” (p. 29). Beyond providing a co-teaching model within the seminar context, we reasoned that the presence of two instructors speaking from their respective disciplines would enhance the knowledge base of our pre-service teachers (Anderson & Speck, 1998) as well as encourage them to more deeply consider diversity issues within their student teaching placements.

**Historical and Theoretical Perspectives on Co-Teaching**

Reflective of the areas of expertise that we brought to CTT, our historical and theoretical framework likewise incorporates perspectives from inclusive education/DS and bilingual education.

**Contextualizing Co-Teaching for Students with Disabilities**

How to best meet the educational and social needs of students with disabilities within American public schools remains an ongoing debate among educational communities. Although federal special education law requires that students with disabilities be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE), it has long been documented that public schools have over-relied upon segregated special education settings ranging from pull-out programs to self-contained classrooms to segregated special education schools, particularly in regard to students of color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Blanchett, 2006; Brantlinger, 2006; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Karagiannis, 2000). Over the last three decades, evidence of the negative effects of labeling — and the subsequent deficit constructions associated with labeling — has been widely documented (Connor et al., 2008; Dudley-Marling, 2010; Ware, 2006).

As early as the 1980s, the less than satisfactory outcomes for students with disabilities in special education programs raised concerns...
Garvar & Papania, 1982; Will, 1986). By the 1990s, families and their advocates began to promote the slogan “Special Education is a Service, Not a Place” to express dissatisfaction with the predominance of segregated educational settings for students labeled with disabilities (Valle & Connor, 2011). Likewise, there began an educational movement away from the practice of mainstreaming, wherein a student with a disability could participate in general education only if he or she required no assistance to perform like his or her peers without disabilities toward the philosophy and practice of inclusion, wherein it is assumed that a student with a disability will benefit academically and socially from general education, even if his or her goals are different from the goals of non-disabled students (Villa & Thousand, 1995).

In an influential article co-authored by Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989), the notion of cooperative teaching, known today as co-teaching or CTT, was conceptualized as a service delivery model with a focus upon supporting students with disabilities in the general education setting. In the more than 20 years since, the number of inclusion classrooms with co-teachers has increased nationwide, primarily in response to two pieces of legislation — No Child Left Behind (2001) and the reauthorization of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004). In particular, the former requires that all students have access to the general education curriculum taught by highly qualified teachers, while the latter emphasizes that students with disabilities must be educated in the LRE. Thus, the recent federal emphasis upon placing students with disabilities within general education classrooms has given rise to more co-teaching at the K-12 levels.

Cook and Friend (1995) define co-teaching as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space” (p. 2). In other words, two certified teachers, typically a general education teacher and a special education teacher, share instruction in a general education classroom of diverse students with and without disabilities (Friend & Cook, 2010). Moreover, we also might understand such a partnership between teachers with different areas of expertise as

a reasonable response to the increasing difficulty of a single professional keeping with all the knowledge and skills necessary to meet the instructional needs of the diverse student population attending public schools and the complexity of the problems that they bring. (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010, p. 11)

While co-teaching is a practice that appears to be beneficial for students and teachers alike (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, &
McCulley, 2012), it is also the case that some teachers in these settings, as well as their administrators, are not adequately prepared in collaborative methods and approaches. Thus, it can be left up to chance whether or not a partnership becomes an effective one that benefits the learning of all students (Friend, 2007; Valle & Connor, 2011). It is our belief that pre-service teachers as well as in-service teachers and administrators, need sufficient exposure to strong models of collaborative teaching in order to effectively engage in such partnerships.

Contextualizing Co-teaching for Emergent Bilinguals

When considering the education of emergent bilinguals, co-teaching has not historically been an approach for this group of students. Within most bilingual education classrooms, one teacher who is proficient in both languages of instruction and knowledgeable in the content area(s) has generally been the classroom teacher. Emergent bilinguals in ESL models are often in general education classes for the majority of the school day and are either pulled out to work with an ESL teacher in a small group at their grade or English proficiency level, or the ESL teacher pushes in to their classroom and assists the teacher in supporting the students (Reyes & Kleyn, 2010). Although the latter approach does consist of two teachers working together, the amount of collaboration between the content and ESL teacher ranges significantly by factors such as lack of planning time, high numbers of teachers and grades, and a limited understanding of collaboration as a pedagogical approach (Honigsfield & Dove, 2010). Power dynamics between the ESL teacher and the content teacher often impede true collaboration because the ESL teacher may be subordinated to an assistant level, whereas content teachers are viewed as having “a real academic discipline” (Flores, 2012, p. 186). Arkoudis (2003) found a pseudo-collaboration present in such settings where the ESL teacher felt forced to yield to the content teacher, thereby obstructing possibilities for authentic collaboration.

Within bilingual education the growth of dual language bilingual (DLB) programs has given way to teacher collaboration. Within the side-by-side DLB model, one teacher takes on the English component in one classroom whereas the other teacher has the language other than English/target language component in a different classroom (Freeman, Freeman, & Mercuri, 2004). Two groups of students move between the two teachers, usually switching every other day. This type of collaboration is centered on
planning, to ensure the content students learn builds from one day to next, rather than repeating. Although teachers are in separate classrooms, a considerable level of collaboration is required on a regular basis.

As special education has moved toward a more inclusive approach, emergent bilingual students with disabilities at the elementary level also may be served in ICT classes with a bilingual education teacher and a bilingual special education teacher, who work together on a daily basis to provide bilingual instruction to all students and individualized instruction for students with disabilities. Thus, students who require both language and special education services have their needs meet within a single setting.

Only within the last 10 years has research identified and focused on collaboration within the classrooms for emergent bilinguals – as opposed to students with disabilities (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2012). During this decade, the research has centered on areas such as inclusive practices and social justice (Theoharis, 2009), designing standards-based curriculum and instruction (Short, Cloud, Morris, & Motta, 2012), teacher leadership focused on instruction (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010), and instructional approaches for emergent bilinguals and students with disabilities (Capper & Frattura, 2008).

The Problem of Normativity for Both Fields

In considering the current state of special education, it is worth noting that the field’s parent disciplines of medicine, science, and psychology are deeply rooted in understanding human difference as dysfunctional, deficit-based, and abnormal (Danforth & Gabel, 2007). Given these disciplinary underpinnings, it is rather predictable, in hindsight, that special education became institutionalized in a way that segregated students with disabilities from students without disabilities, as previously discussed. As such, normativity became the principle around which schools organized themselves, giving rise to the now legendary parallel systems of general and special education. Although inclusive classrooms are more commonplace now than ever before, the presence or absence of disability, normal or abnormal, continues to determine how and where a student is taught and by whom (Brantlinger, 2004).

Within our collaborative student teaching seminar, it is noteworthy that we chose to contrast the “medical model” of disability that undergirds the deficit orientation of special education with a DS perspective of disability – an interdisciplinary field that conceptualizes disability as a marker of identity that intersects with race, ethnicity, language, class,
gender, and sexual orientation (Gabel, 2005). Students were encouraged to consider disability as natural human variation rather than pathology. We placed particular emphasis upon understanding disability within cultural, historical, and social contexts.

Just as special education is centered on the normativity, emergent bilinguals are also judged against native English speakers. This rarely achievable standard centers not only on speakers having English as their maternal language, but this being their only language, thereby positioning English monolingualism as the norm and the ultimate goal. However, this native English speaker notion has been problematized on a variety of levels: (1) with the regional and cultural diversity across our nation, there is no one way of speaking English that is native; (2) it is usually speakers of Standard Academic English that are affiliated with this label, whereas speakers of other varieties of English — often from minoritized groups — are not seen within this label (Blommaert, 2010); and (3) when applying English as native to some speakers, it implies that it can never be appropriated by speakers of other languages (Garcia, 2014). Therefore, our students were also encouraged to consider that as emergent bilinguals are developing a linguistic repertoire that includes features from two or more languages, their perceived non-nativeness creates an obstacle to being or even becoming part of the societal norm.

A Case for Modeling Co-Teaching in Higher Education

In an effort to better prepare our students to teach diverse students, we decided to combine and co-teach our student teaching seminars. We reasoned that our respective students would benefit from a semester-long exposure to a co-teaching model as well as two professors with expertise in bilingual education, TESOL, special education, childhood education, and DS. Moreover, it was our assumption that students would be better prepared to teach in public schools if the pedagogy in teacher education reflected the current practice of co-teaching.

Methods

This research was guided by the Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP) approach (LaBoskey, 2004; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).
Because we were afforded a unique opportunity to co-teach across fields—a practice rarely implemented at the tertiary level, S-STEP allowed us to better understand our own experiences while contributing to a larger conversation across our fields. The qualitative methods permitted us to systematically study ourselves through reflection and dialogue that spanned the semester of our CTT student teaching seminar.

The Self-Study Process

Co-teaching at the college level requires a fundamental change in the long-standing tradition of strict disciplinary boundaries and single authority within the academy (Harris & Harvey, 2000). Such an instructional transition requires of co-instructors “a learning (or reacculturation) process to incorporate the new skills and assumptions into their existing mental structures” (Henderson, Beach, & Famiano, 2007, p. 117). In order to facilitate and document our re-acculturation process, we wrote and exchanged weekly entries about our individual and shared practice in reflective journals. The reflective entries were purposefully open-ended so that each instructor could write freely about her perspectives, experiences, and observations. The topics addressed ranged from student learning to collaborative approaches to general concerns. The presence of a critical other (Ghaye & Ghaye, 1998) served to deepen the reflective process. It is worth noting that our commitment to reflective practice through dialogue—a well-established benefit for professionals (Schon, 1983)—mirrored the reflective journaling required of our student teachers. In this way, we validated the collective responsibility for teaching and learning that grounds a collaborative classroom context. For the final reflection, we responded to the same questions asked of seminar participants on the course evaluation.

Following the completion of the semester we each reviewed the data to come up with preliminary themes that arose in the journals. We compared our themes to develop a coding scheme that was used to analyze the data and determine key findings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011).

Participants and Setting

This study requires our positioning as key participants in the research. Jan Valle, a faculty member in the Childhood Education program with a
specialization in inclusive education/DS, regularly teaches the childhood education student teaching seminar. She has worked within the field of special education for over thirty years and in various collaborative settings. Tatyana Kleyn, a faculty member in the Bilingual Education & TESOL program with a specialization in multicultural education and immigration, has taught the bilingual student teaching seminar for seven years. Until this experience, Tatyana had not formally taught in a CTT class, but often collaborated with educators in informal ways and wanted to experience such partnerships within her classes and teaching.

Our combined student teaching seminar had a total of 17 female students in their twenties and thirties who were a mix of graduate and undergraduate students earning their first certification in either childhood education or bilingual childhood education (grades 1–6). The students came from U.S.-born and immigrant backgrounds, mainly from Latin America. Many had graduated from the school system where they were student teaching.

The New York City school district (where our students were student teaching) boasts a diverse student body with 15.5% of emergent bilinguals (referred to English Language Learners) and 17% of students with disabilities. Students from these two backgrounds are served in bilingual education settings (22%), ESL classes (71%), and special education classes (6.8%) (NYC Independent Budget Office, 2013). Figures for students in CTT classrooms are not available, but from our own work in schools and Jan’s annual collaboration with the school district on a summer Co-teaching Institute we have observed first-hand an increase in this teaching approach.

Findings and Discussion

Three broad themes emerged from our findings and frame the discussion that follows:

(a) Impact upon Structures of Academia,
(b) Discipline Dis/connections, and
(c) Reciprocal Learning.

Impact upon Structures of Academia

After our planning session I am very excited about the semester that lies ahead. I can already see that I am going to be learning a lot (such as the different models of team
teaching). I am also looking forward to having conversations with a colleague that are not about programming, scheduling or meetings, but that really get at the teaching and learning process and what happens (and does not happen) in the classroom. After our first meeting I realized that many of the conversations at the “office” are around more administrative issues than educational ones, so this is going to be a refreshing change. (TK)

You are so right, Tatyana, about how our collegial conversations primarily revolve around administrative issues! I am really looking forward to being stimulated by your ideas and learning from you. The fact that it seems like a “luxury” to talk with a colleague about teaching reveals a lot about how skewed our time is toward creating and maintaining administrative structures. I am so glad that we have this opportunity. Perhaps it will inspire us to think about ways to make this kind of engagement happen more often among faculty. (JV)

From the time that we began talking about co-teaching, we were aware of the transgressive nature of such an arrangement within our School of Education. As is common in most colleges and universities, our colleagues almost always teach within their respective disciplinary programs. Over the years, however, there have been a few instances of team teaching — to be distinguished from co-teaching in that the instructors taught their own courses, then switched at mid-term to teach their respective content to each other’s class. Currently there is no structure in place at our university to pay two professors to share a single course. Thus, we were able to co-teach only by merging our relatively small student teaching seminars in bilingual education and childhood education into a shared classroom space rather than teaching in two separate classrooms.

From the onset of our shared project, we recognized how the structure of co-teaching dramatically altered the content of our usual collegial conversations. As reflected in the journal excerpts above, it was immediately clear how much traditional academic structures dictate the nature of exchanges between colleagues. Changing how we typically work opened up rich avenues for pedagogical conversations that otherwise do not take place.

Implementing co-teaching in higher education. In planning for co-teaching, we identified a shared commitment to connecting theory to practice in meaningful ways. In light of the steady increase in the number of CTT classrooms within our respective fields, we shared a mutual concern for preparing our students to teach within this model. As CTT classrooms become more commonplace, our students are more likely to be placed in such settings for student teaching. Moreover, our graduates are more likely than ever to secure teaching positions in classrooms with two teachers.
Thus, we reasoned that modeling a co-teaching relationship might help prepare our students for the kind of work required in the field:

It seems significant that our teacher candidates will have the opportunity to experience co-teaching from a student perspective as well as to observe a co-teaching model “in action” ... I am wondering what the students think about having two professors. It will be interesting to see how everything unfolds through the semester. Tatyana and I have our ideas about why we chose to co-teach. It will be interesting to see how students experience and respond to the co-teaching model. (JV)

Not only did co-teaching enhance our students’ understanding of this pedagogical model, but also we gained deeper insight into the benefits and challenges of co-teaching and its application to higher education. Here Tatyana reflects on her oscillating position within a session Jan led on differentiation:

As a co-teacher, I found myself moving between the role of a facilitator and the role of a student myself during this activity, and I really loved the flexibility I had in doing so. It also made me think about how we differentiate at the college level, or if we do at all. Maybe that’s for another reflection paper!! (TK)

In the following journal excerpt, Jan reflects on what she experiences as a challenge of co-teaching at the higher education level:

Given that I am working in the field with CTT teachers while co-teaching with Tatyana, I find it interesting that the biggest challenge for both the CTT teachers and ourselves is finding adequate time to co-plan. In light of our erratic schedules, we struggle to find a consistent time and day of the week to meet. At times, we have no other choice but to make “phone dates.” I wonder if time to co-plan could be blocked as part of the seminar — both before and after class? (JV)

Through the practice of co-teaching, we found new opportunities for self-reflection at the level of higher education:

Reflecting back upon the semester, not only would I have liked more planning time but I also would have liked to have integrated the instructional needs of individual students into our planning. Had we done this, I think that we would have gotten to know each other’s students better and we might have used “flexible grouping” more effectively. (JV)

Our experience of modeling a current pedagogical practice within public schools certainly reinforced us how important it is for Schools of Education to maintain relevancy to the field.

In light of the recent trend toward CTT classrooms in New York City public schools, I believe that our students benefited from seeing an effective co-teaching relationship “in action.” The class seemed to enjoy the natural energy and humor between Tatyana and
myself which contributed to a positive classroom climate. Moreover, the students seemed to gain a lot from having access to the expertise of two professors from different academic fields. (JV)

**Disrupting disciplinary boundaries.**

I can’t wait to find out what Tatyana and I can do together! She and I have had many conversations about the parallels between special education and bilingual education — on so many levels. As we went through our syllabi together, the intersections between our disciplines became apparent — and yet, there is much to contribute from our respective disciplines. (JV)

As reflected in the journal excerpt above, co-teaching afforded us the opportunity to disrupt traditional disciplinary boundaries and explore related outcomes within a sustained context. Doing so enabled us to forge new territory in regard to pedagogy and collaborative research in ways that traditional structures have not. Moreover, we began to consider how traditional structures might actually impede student learning:

Our collaboration does put into question the rigid divides in academia, and I agree that we must start rethinking the ways such separations hurt our students in terms of preparing them to teach ALL students. Perhaps this is something that can be addressed in a larger School of Ed. specialized meeting and/or when we have to rethink our program designs based on the new certification structure. (TK)

As the semester progressed, we began to identify specific ways that permeable disciplinary boundaries enhanced the education of our students:

I feel like yesterday’s class really took advantage of the combination of students and the strengths they bring. By starting out mixing our students in the lesson sharing groups, we had students break out of their comfort zones and the results were positive. In my group the childhood education students were able to see how objectives for language and content are important when working with emergent bilinguals. (TK)

During announcements this week, Tatyana spoke about an upcoming conference regarding Mexican-American students. I love how co-teaching increases the information flow to both bilingual and childhood education students. It seems significant that childhood education students understand the relevance of such a conference to their work given the persisting (and increasing) categorizations of student populations within public schools, I think that Tatyana and I can demonstrate resistance to such ideas by helping our students conceptualize all students as everyone’s responsibility. (JV)

The activity where students worked in groups to discuss different aspects of classroom culture really brought out the similarities (e.g., social networks, management, routines) and differences (e.g., schedules, class layout) between bilingual and general education classrooms. I was glad that all the students now know a little more about how dual language classrooms work. (TK)
It also appeared that our mutual orientation to sociocultural approaches to education from within our respective disciplines influenced our students to think more critically:

The fact that we both approach education from a socio-cultural lens that is critical of systems that maintain the status-quo and oppression of certain groups, especially those who are in bilingual and special education, helped to anchor us regardless of the topic or student groups we discussed with our student teachers. I think our critical lens showed them that they need not blindly accept deficit views of children. There were many times over the semester where they showed surprise and even disgust at the system and its structures that go against what is best (or even just good) for children...I think we were effective in helping to prepare all our student teachers about the realities of teaching EBLs and students with special needs, tools to teach them and some apprehension about “support” structures that do just the opposite. The degree to which we did this, however, is not clear to me. (TK)

The dissolution of disciplinary boundaries, however, also exposed the degree to which our students have come to identify with their respective disciplines. It is of interest to us to consider if and how disciplinary boundaries within higher education might unwittingly reinforce the opposite of what we are teaching about inclusive practices:

I also like that we are mixing the groups for the Lesson Share. It does seem, however, that the two groups retreat back among “their own kind” if we do not “impose integration” upon them. I am wondering why this might be the case. They giggle in acknowledgment when we point out their self-imposed physical segregation in the classroom, yet they persist in their seating arrangements. Have we somehow unwittingly reinforced this notion somehow? Or maybe it is just the nature of students to sit where they always sit? Should we have “imposed integration” from the first time that we met as a class? (JV)

I think the question of segregation across programs versus “forced integration” is an interesting one. It mirrors the larger issues of segregation in our society in many ways, but specifically along racial/ethnic lines. I also notice that within the bilingual ed. students there is intra-group segregation by undergrad and grad students too. I think part of the reason for this is human nature, we are creatures of habit and comfort, so once we get used to something (where we sit) and someone (who we sit and interact with) we stick with that. While I do think there is a time and place for segregation, I also see it as very problematic if it’s the norm. For instance, in our class there are definitely times when we needed students to separate into bilingual or childhood groups to provide them with instruction specific to their field. However, we have created many opportunities where students must collaborate across groups. I guess the question becomes to what degree must it be forced and if it only happens in that setting, why is that? (TK)

**Identifying program gaps.** An unexpected outcome of our collaboration is the identification of gaps within and across our programs. This most likely occurred because co-teaching afforded us the opportunity to engage
in sustained conversations about pedagogy. Discussion of programmatic issues is evident in the following journal exchanges:

I have become increasingly aware of persisting patterns and gaps in the childhood education program particularly in regard to students with disabilities and differentiated instruction ... I am wondering if Tatyana sees similar issues in the bilingual education program and, if so, how their program addresses such issues. (JV)

I also notice gaps where students do not have the basic knowledge required to successfully work with bilingual children. My question about that is what have they simply forgotten or never really had to apply until this point. It seems many of the concepts they've learned don't really “click” until they get into the classroom. That said, I also realize there are areas that are either not taught or not taught well to our students. A significant concern I have is that all of their methods classes are not taught with emergent bilinguals in mind. Therefore, they never really consider how to scaffold for language and content. Another area where they need support is how to negotiate between two languages in various bilingual education models. Hopefully my co-authored book will help clarify this ☺ (TK)

I could not agree more that students across ALL programs and departments should be exposed to the kind of discussion you facilitated during class. Are you as concerned as I am about childhood education majors (much less all of the other majors) being adequately prepared to teach students with disabilities and students whose first language is not English? I wonder if we should think about doing a faculty presentation to discuss the gaps in curriculum we have identified through our partnership? (JV)

**Discipline Dis/connections**

I approached my partner to co-teach this seminar because I felt educators should be prepared to work with students with exceptionalities as well as emergent bilinguals, regardless of their certification areas. I also see a lot of socio-political connections between the fields and the way they and the students they serve are stigmatized on so many levels. However, I see conflating the fields as problematic in some ways too. I think this is because there are concrete differences, and I want those to come out as well. Emergent bilingual students and programs that serve them are often confused for remedial programs and the students as having language disabilities. For example, once I was shown a classroom where emergent bilinguals were combined with students who had hearing difficulties. I guess what I am trying to say is that these are two separate fields with students with distinct differences and I want to make sure that they comes across in our seminar as well. (TK)

I so appreciate that you shared your uneasiness about “conflating the fields” in a way that might reinforce rather than challenge persisting underestimations about the capability of English Learners. Your legitimate concern reflects much about the negative status of special education within public schools. Someone in my field coined the term “disability creep” to describe how non-disabled people who are associated with “the
disabled (including special education teachers and parents) likewise come to be regarded by others as less competent. A pause for thought! I am wondering how we might engage our students in the conversations we are having with each other? (JV)

Before our semester began, we came with some understanding that there are clear connections between bilingual education and DS. And it was this basis that led us to come together to co-teach a seminar. However, Tatyana voiced hesitations about focusing only on similarities without teasing out the differences. In fact, her first and last journal entry as described earlier reiterated this point. Bilingual education is a stigmatized field in many respects, and special education is even more so. This could be Tatyana’s way of separating the two as a way to protect emergent bilinguals from a field where deficits – as opposed to differences – are prevalent.

**Assessment and labels.** Labels that are imposed upon students drive both fields. Much has been written about the power of assigning labels when it comes to self-perception, outcomes, and stereotypes (Golash-Boza & Darity, 2008; Pollock, 2004). Within both fields the labels stem from assessments, which have also been deemed problematic on a variety of levels (Dudley-Marling, 2010; Menken, 2008; Valencia & Villarreal, 2005; Valle & Connor, 2011). Being aware of the challenges labels pose in the field of bilingual education such as the federal term of Limited English Proficient (LEP), Tatyana was aware of both her minimal knowledge of terminology in inclusive education/DS and the potential for harm when labels are used haphazardly:

My last challenge I am facing as I look ahead is my VERY limited knowledge of the field of disability studies. I already fear I have used offensive terminology or perpetuated stereotypes in this very reflection that the field is working so hard to overcome. (TK)

In the two fields, assessments are the centerpiece by which labels are prescribed. Over the semester we looked at these assessments, what they consisted of and their problematic nature when it came to validity, cultural and linguistic bias, and overall ethics. The common issues began to present themselves:

I was unaware that there was such a thing as a state language test [for students labeled English language learners]. Again, I am struck by the parallels between disability studies and emergent bilingualism…I am interested in the gatekeeping aspect of this test and the consequences it holds for students. (JV)

When I moved into the accommodations part of standardized assessment [for emergent bilinguals], I was curious as to the overlap with special ed. accommodations. I imagine
there are many. Perhaps we could have created some kind of Venn diagram to show what modifications are allowed for both groups and which are only for one or another. (TK)

With the issues that assessments present and the potential negative consequences of labeling, these two areas dictate who becomes a part of each field and often times determine the educational and life trajectories of students who are forced into labels that act as obstacles to opportunities.

**Pinpointing the similarities and differences.** Although we had both come into the semester with a baseline understanding of how our fields compare and contrast, there were moments in the class that illuminated these areas. Students played a role in heightening our awareness:

Jan’s discussion about students who are identified as “special ed” started with a question about the difference between a student with an IEP and a struggling reader. I thought that was a great question and I appreciated the way one of the students in the bilingual program answered it. She said that a student with an IEP has learning difficulties that are diagnosed and a struggling reader could be someone learning the language so they simultaneously have difficulty when it comes to reading in that language. I thought this was very insightful and starts to tease apart the two fields, although I know it’s much more complex than that. (TK)

Through the sharing of lesson plans across fields, the issue of language arose as a central defining feature within both bilingual education and inclusive education/DS:

Your point about how “the childhood students were able to see how objectives for language and content are important when working with emergent bilinguals” is striking to me because these same objectives apply to students with learning disabilities — a disability with presumed neurological etiology that impacts language processing in one’s native language. Given that learning disabilities are considered to be “language-based”, I am wondering how similar the teaching methods in our respective disciplines are? And might it be that “our methods” are, in fact, basically grounded in tenets of “good teaching” that would benefit all students? (JV)

The questions Jan ends with show that our understanding of our similarities have begun to crystallize, but one semester of collaboration is nowhere near enough to truly see all the intersections that may exist between bilingual education and inclusive education/DS.

**Contextualizing the coming together of the fields.** During the semester that we co-taught, we also saw our respective fields come together within the school system where our student teachers were placed.
Ironically, as our collaboration was taking place the Department of Education restructured the Office of English Language Learners. It has been disassembled and is now a part of the newly formed Office of Special Education and English Language Learners. If I was optimistic about how the system worked I could tell myself that this new office is going to work with all teachers to support students in both these areas (which I feel we did and tried to do over this semester) that would be fine, but my more pessimistic side sees more problems than opportunities with such a structure. (TK)

I share your pessimism regarding the likely outcome of such a pairing. Administrators may have the best of intentions for these students, but it is the belief system of teachers that will determine the outcome. Quite frankly, it is simply EASIER to believe that certain groups of children do not belong and that other people can teach them better and in other places that benefit them more. It is of no surprise to me that similar issues plague both special education and bilingual education. Unless we change how we “do” school (and who benefits from the way school “is”), I do not think that significant change can take place. However, I do believe in the power of grassroots organizing and the capacity of individuals to engender change at multiple levels. I think that our collaboration this semester is one example of resisting the status quo in that we actively challenged our students to consider the consequences of “how things are” for two categorized groups of students. Yet I know that they need MUCH more support in developing effective resistance strategies as future teachers. Maybe our collaboration is a first step in that direction. (JV)

Regardless of the issues that undermine each field, the key underlying issue is one of social justice where students are seen for the strengths they bring rather than for what they lack. Furthermore, the fields are fighting to be seen as a part of a holistic education system, rather than a peripheral aspect of schooling that relegates students who do not fit within an ascribed normativity or English proficiency as outsiders and others. There are clearly differences that the fields engender, but their struggle for inclusion — in the full sense of the term — is what brings them together. And this thread was what evolved for students and the professors over the course of the seminar.

Reciprocal Learning

This semester I probably had my highest learning curve in terms of learning when I teach. Although I always learn from my students, there is something more intense about learning from a colleague who comes from a different field. While I know I have a long way to go in terms of my understandings around disability studies and special education (and now I know the difference between the two!) I at least feel I can have a knowledgeable conversation and a more in-depth awareness of the issues and inequities in the field. (TK)
As co-teachers, we both admittedly began the semester with minimal knowledge about each other’s field. But by the conclusion of the semester, we had developed an increased awareness and understanding of our fields and their intersections. Although far from claiming expertise, we became more attuned to the issues of each other’s field and more confident addressing them within our other teacher education courses.

**Learning through meeting, co-teaching, writing, and reflecting.**

Not only are all of our students gaining knowledge about dual language classrooms, so am I. Co-teaching is such a great way to increase our respective knowledge by learning from one another in the classroom. I think we are on to something! (JV)

It is rare that professors have the chance to continue to learn about disciplines not directly related to the boundaries of their classes, programs, and research. However, this co-teaching opportunity gave us a range of ways to continue our professional growth and learning. For example:

Each week, we had the privilege to give and receive feedback about our respective and collective teaching practices — a luxury in our otherwise hectic academic lives. We did this through informal conversation as well as weekly journals to one another. The process of writing a weekly entry and receiving Tatyana’s written response to the entry as well as reading and responding in writing to Tatyana’s weekly entry provided multiple opportunities to not only focus upon our practice but also to challenge each other’s thinking. (JV)

The opportunity to make sense of new ideas through writing as a way of thinking and then receiving feedback from an expert in the field certainly expanded our understandings in ways that merely reading a book or journal article could not foster. Learning side-by-side with our students was another way we were able to take advantage of each other’s expertise during class time:

Something I found unique to our co-teaching class was the ability to sit back in the role of the student during the time Jan discussed differentiated instruction. I found it very effective to take on a different position as it allowed me to reflect more about how we are instructing our students as well as to learn from my co-teacher. (TK)

I am eager to know more about what you were able to observe about our students. I loved that you freely commented and asked questions within this model — it felt very natural to me. (JV)

This type of learning was not only evident to us, but to our students as well. One noted, “You two work well together, feeding off each other’s thoughts and asking for support in reference to your specialties.”
Learning about each other. As faculty members in different programs, the opportunities we had to get to know about each other have been limited and largely left to our own devices. Most of our interactions are in meetings where the agenda is set beforehand. We connect around the needs of students, but rarely have a chance to engage in conversations about our interests, research, and teaching. This experience drastically changed our discourse patterns and allowed each of us to gain a fuller understanding about each other as people and professionals:

As we described our professional backgrounds to the class, I learned much about Tatyana that I did not know. I am reminded again of Tatyana’s earlier journal entry in which she reflected upon the functional nature of most faculty exchanges. There is so much talent and experience among the faculty that remains untapped—and even unknown. I am hoping that what results from our “experiment” of partnership might help all of us think about how to more mindfully engage with one another. (JV)

Although our department has held Brown Bag Lunches for colleagues to share their research, these one-shot approaches only skim the surface in introducing faculty to each other’s expertise. In contrast, the sustained nature of co-teaching a course provided varied opportunities for us to learn about each other and our fields in ways that are rarely possible during the functions of regularly scheduled university life.

Pedagogical approaches. After teaching the same class for numerous years, it is possible to become tied to one’s pedagogical approaches, especially if something appears to work. Co-teaching requires each person to confront other teaching styles, whether it means watching a new approach in action or trying out an unfamiliar strategy with her partner. The latter was our case when Tatyana suggested using the Collaborative Descriptive Inquiry (CDI) model to structure how students support one another in their lesson planning (for more on the process see Himley & Carini, 2000):

Tatyana explained the process very clearly to the class. I love learning new strategies from my partner! I think the lesson plan sharing is going to become a vital part of the seminar… I plan to incorporate the journal and Lesson Plan Share into my fall seminar. Thank you, Tatyana! (JV)

Our combined student teaching context gave us the opportunity to go beyond reading or learning about a new instructional approach to seeing one another put practice into action with our own students. Observing firsthand the positive impact of an instructional approach upon student learning fostered an eagerness for us both to incorporate new approaches within our respective teaching repertoires.
Increased understandings across fields with a lot left to learn. Each field has its own way of functioning, which to an outsider may seem like business as usual. However, it is not until we learn more about established practices from someone in the field who has studied and experienced these traditions that we can start to better understand and question the status quo. This was precisely what happened when Tatyana was able to listen to Jan’s presentation on the assessments used to refer students into the special education system:

I was completely appalled, as was the rest of the class, at the types of questions students are presented with in the assessment schools use to determine services, placement and/or labels. It was way beyond just cultural bias; it was utterly ridiculous!! It almost seemed like a joke, I was wondering if you were going to stop and say “gotcha!” But this is real and an embedded part of our institutional practices in special education. It is also shocking and disgusting. I heard a few of our students say, “I am not referring anyone!” With this nonsense for an assessment, we might as well just flip a coin to see if students are really in need of services. What is being done to change this? And what can I do to help? (TK)

This type of learning is critical to understanding the larger inequities of our educational system. It is also the type of learning that can lead to collaboration and action as we are much more powerful when our voices come from across fields.

Within the arena of emergent bilingual students, the program to prepare teachers to serve them is called Bilingual Education & TESOL. Although faculty outside this program are familiar with these two models in name, few can truly explain the goals of each and how the approaches differ. This was also the case for Jan, who finished the semester with a much more nuanced understanding of each:

I finally understand the difference between bilingual education and TESOL!... I increased my knowledge about bilingual education through weekly exposure to Tatyana’s professional expertise. What a treat it was to hear Tatyana’s presentations in class and to engage with her in planning meetings! Not only do I feel better prepared to engage with childhood education students around bilingual issues (although, admittedly, I have a long way to go but boy is it on my radar now!), I also feel more connected to the bilingual education program. (JV)

To sum up, what is clear from this experience is a strong recognition of the benefit of the experience for us both and the realization of just how much knowledge is within our reach.

I have also learned that I have a lot to learn from my colleagues! Wouldn’t it be amazing if everyone was required to team teach, just think about how much we’d learn from one another’s area(s) of expertise, pedagogical approaches and their general
personaliesties and backgrounds. Granted, I am sure they wouldn’t all be equally success-
ful, but it would build a certain culture of interconnectedness on a variety of levels.

(TK)

**Conclusion/Implications for Teacher Educators**

It felt like a gift to be able to reflect in such a deep way, and do so with the feedback
of an invested colleague. It’s a rather sad statement to make, because that should be
the norm, not a special treat! I also feel fortunate to work at a university where such
“experiments” are allowed and encouraged and to have done this with a colleague
who is so smart, witty, committed and a talented writer (guess who will be editing
out papers ;-) I learned a lot about CTT and special ed. (although I too agree I have
a long way to go!) and I believe all our students came out of this experience having
learning a lot about two specific populations of students, and teaching and learning
in general. (TK)

As stated elsewhere in this chapter, we conceptualized this study based
upon a mutual desire to (1) better prepare student teachers to teach *all*
students, (2) provide student teachers with the experience of learning within
a classroom context led by two instructors with unique and intersecting
areas of expertise, and (3) conduct a self-study of our co-teaching processes
at the university level. We now return to our research questions to synthe-
size our findings and offer implications for teacher educators and schools
of education.

**Collaborative Teaching Impacting Professor and Student Learning**

The CTT offered a rich learning venue for all involved in ways that differed
from traditional classes taught by one professor within a specific program.
As faculty members with two different areas of specialization, we were able
to learn more about each other’s fields. This led to a greater understanding
of areas of intersections and disconnections, thereby not only expanding
our respective knowledge base and that of our seminar students, but also
the knowledge base of future students as we integrate our new knowledge
into other courses. It is worth noting that our seminar students expressed
gratitude for the opportunity to learn about children who inevitably will be
students in their future classrooms, but who are not the focus of their cho-
sen majors and teaching certification.
Advantages and Challenges to Teaching across Fields

Our experience highlighted a range of advantages to teaching across our fields of bilingual education and inclusive education/DS. First, our areas of expertise are artificial in many ways and do not reflect the diversity of students and experiences teachers face. A broader approach to understanding students with different linguistic and ability backgrounds reflects the realities of 21st century schools. We must be willing to acknowledge that perhaps the biggest challenge to co-teaching at the university level is our own rigidity of thinking and being that keeps us in our traditional disciplinary boxes. It is of interest that our seminar students persisted in over-identifying with their respective majors within our shared classroom context – no doubt a reflection of the deeply entrenched university system of disciplinary isolation. This particular finding reinforces the need for courses that contextualize learning within the larger field of education and make explicit connections to related disciplinary areas.

Developing Schools of Education that Prepare Educators to Teach All Students

Based upon our experience of co-teaching at the university level for one semester, we offer fellow teacher educators our (1) “lessons learned” gleaned from our particular co-teaching experience and (2) suggestions for creating spaces for co-teaching within the current university structure.

Lessons learned. With the advantage of hindsight, we see that we might have been more mindful about actively facilitating community among our students. In this regard, we seriously underestimated the impact of traditional disciplinary boundaries upon our students’ capacity to see themselves in any other way. In order to increase cohesion among students, we suggest the following strategies for enhancing community in a co-taught bilingual and childhood education setting at the university level: (1) begin the semester with community building exercises that teachers typically use in CTT classrooms to bring seminar students together and to provide a model of co-teaching strategies; (2) rotate seating and/or groupings each week; (3) pair a childhood education student with a bilingual education student to serve as each other’s expert resource partner throughout the semester; (4) insist that everyone learn each other’s names and use them during
discussions; (5) talk much more about the importance of classroom community in a CTT classroom; and (6) provide ample opportunities for “turn and talk” and small group discussion in “mixed groups.”

Not only did we discover how entrenched our students were in their disciplinary areas, we also surprised ourselves by the realization of our own attachment to our respective disciplines. In hindsight, it appears that we acted in ways that reflected responsibility at some level for our “own students” — although we were not aware of it at the time. For example, we did not engage in any kind of in-depth conversation about our students’ individual and collective needs — a hallmark feature of co-teaching. Had we done this, we would have gotten to know each other’s students better and used “flexible grouping” more effectively. Moreover, it did not occur to us to read papers from each other’s students. We graded our respective students’ papers without considering the message it sent to our class community and the limitation it placed on our capacity to know all of our students. Early in the semester, Tatyana commented in her journal that maybe we should have created a new syllabus rather than pulling aspects from our respective syllabi. In retrospect, we believe that creating a shared syllabus might have “set the stage” for our own sense of collaboration. Lastly, we have considered how we might have enhanced a sense of community with our students had we read some of our journal entries aloud to them and solicited their insights and input as part of our meaning making.

Suggestions for creating spaces for co-teaching. The co-teaching seminar at the center of this discussion was made possible through our own initiative. There are no institutional supports or incentives within our School of Education to offer a course that integrates educational disciplines. Such a structure is certainly not unique to our university and for that reason we pose the following suggestions for moving toward a more inclusive approach to teaching at the university level: (1) cultivate relationships with colleagues outside of your own discipline; (2) begin collegial conversations about the intersections and disconnections within your respective disciplines; (3) jointly study the literature about co-teaching; (4) present research about the benefits of co-teaching to the administration along with research possibilities; and (5) look for contexts within which to launch co-teaching easily. For example, combining our seminars gave us a space to co-teach at an initial level and provided data to share with administration and faculty for the purpose of growing more inclusive practices within our own School of Education.

Our findings challenge teacher educators to consider whether or not a traditional approach to teacher preparation truly offers pre-service
teachers the tools to serve students with all the social and human differences they may bring to the classroom. In the current climate in which schools of education are increasingly under the microscope for evidence of quality and effectiveness, this work pushes us to rethink traditional boundaries and approaches for teacher education programs. It is clear that divisions and specialties in academia are not as clear cut as we believe them to be, or even reflective of the reality of K-12 classrooms. Therefore, there is a need for faculty to teach across programs/areas of specialty and to collaborate with one another not only to increase individual knowledge, but also as a means to integrate knowledge across the teacher education curriculum. In light of the current trend toward collaborative classroom contexts within public schools, we contend that it is imperative for schools of education to dare to transgress traditional academic boundaries in order to adequately prepare pre-service teachers for the 21st century classroom.

**Limitations**

Although we contend that the results of this study contribute much-needed knowledge about co-teaching at the tertiary level, we also acknowledge its limitations. First, our data is derived solely from our observations and reflections. Although we had planned to include student voices and perspectives, the data we collected from a brief student survey distributed at the end of the course were less robust (although very positive) than we had hoped. Second, this S-STEP took place within one classroom during one semester, offering a window into a singular experience. Despite these limitations, we contend that our findings make a valuable contribution to the literature and could be applied to multiple contexts that prepare teachers to work with emergent bilinguals and students with disabilities including those who may also be emergent bilinguals.

**References**


