

Co-teaching and Teacher Candidate Perceived Competence

Allison Bender, Kimberly Charles, Kelsey Jensen, Grant Johnson, Emma Nickerson, Jessica Olson, Meghan Ricci, Amy Werner, and Faculty Laura Dunbar, Janine Fisk, Deb Pattee
Education Studies and Special Education
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



Abstract

Recent trends in education have focused on teacher effectiveness including educational research, which has emphasized qualities that predict teachers' effectiveness in providing high-quality instruction, fostering student academic learning (Kennedy, Ahn, & Choi, 2008). Many researchers believe the concept of professional competence can apply to the teaching profession (Goodman et al., 2008; Oser, Achtenhagen, & Renold, 2006; Tenenbaum & Rosenfield, 1994). The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of teacher competency among Cooperating Teachers and Teacher Candidates using co-teaching models.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of teacher competency among teacher candidates and cooperating teachers using co-teaching and replacement models during student teaching. The specific research questions were as follows:

- What are the perceived levels of teacher competency in teacher candidates as they progress through student teaching using either the replacement model or the co-teaching model?
- Are there differences in the perceived teacher candidate competency between the replacement model and the co-teaching model as student teaching progresses?
- In which areas of professional competency do teacher candidates and cooperating teachers perceive gains during student teaching?
- What professional competency areas require further growth as perceived by the teacher candidates and the cooperating teachers?
- Are the areas of strength and growth different between those using the replacement model and those using the co-teaching model?

Operational Definition of Competency

Professional competence can be defined as the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and motivational variables that form the basis for mastery of specific situations (Kleme, Hartig, & Rauch, 2008). Kunter, et al. (2007) identified the following educator professional competencies: professional knowledge, beliefs related to learning, and motivational and self-regulatory variables.

Professional knowledge. Professional knowledge can be categorized in three types of knowledge that lead to teacher competency: subject-specific content knowledge, the subject specific pedagogical content knowledge, and general teaching pedagogical knowledge.

Beliefs. Pajares (1992) asserted, "beliefs are the best indicators of the decisions individuals make throughout their lives" (p. 307), and therefore, a teacher's beliefs are strongly connected to their lesson plans, instructional practice and classroom decisions. There is a wide spectrum of beliefs that influence behavior; however, two specific beliefs tend to correlate to teacher behaviors: teacher's sense of self-efficacy and content specific beliefs (Pajares, 1992).

Motivation and Self-regulation. Teaching demands high energy, attention, and a tolerance to many frustrations. Teachers must be able to self-regulate to maintain their effectiveness and commitment, which includes reflecting on pedagogical practice.

Selected Results

Pair One: Elementary, Special Education

Professional Knowledge:

"There are some subjects that I don't do very well in, so when it comes to those subjects I don't feel as confident." (TC)
 "I also think a life long learning is also necessary because the medical field is changing so fast, and what we are learning about the brain is changing at such a rapid pace and staying on that cutting edge of education is important." (CT)
 "So that tends to be more of a challenge, and also, um, just learning all the curriculum. Like as a classroom teacher I would have to learn the curriculum for that grade level, but I have to learn the curriculum for every single grade level and it's always changing." (CT)

Beliefs:

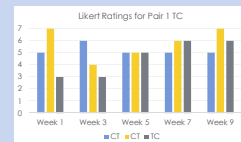
"I think creativity and fun is another important aspect..." (CT)

Motivation/Self-Regulation:

"I'm always at different places with my experience, so my huge goals was really just build rapport with students." (TC)

Community:

"I think that's so important to build a positive and good relationship with not just parents, but other teachers and students." (TC)
 "Also, being a leader among the staff, taking on extra responsibilities, and also in the community too, being a part of the community as a whole." (CT)
 "Building that relationship, making sure everyone knows what's going on, and that way it would also support student learning." (TC).



Pair Two: Elementary, Third Grade

Professional Knowledge:

"I think one of the things competent teachers has is they need to have the flexibility, and to think on their feet." (CT)
 "...Time management and really planning out each lesson and how you're kind of the pacing guide in all that." (TC)

Beliefs:

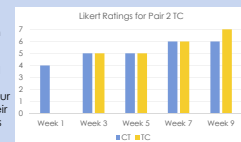
"...she's very caring, she has a very good teacher tone with the students and she's willing to work and see where her improvement needs to be..." (CT)

Motivation/Self-Regulation:

"I think just having the energy too: I think kids really do tend to feed off of their teacher's energy" (TC)

Community:

"I really take the time to get to know each of them individually and my past experience has always shown me that that will play in my favor..." (TC)
 "...first off, getting to know your students is kind of, I feel like step number one when you come into a classroom. And once you kind of gauge where your students are in their academic skills, their levels, their personality, then from there you can create lessons that really cater to each student's needs." (TC)



Pair Three: Middle School, Music

Professional Knowledge:

"...she is really good at coming up with different analogies you know with posture and breath support... you know just really knowing the subject." (CT)
 "I think my educational goal every year of my life has been to not procrastinate as much." (TC)

Beliefs:

"So they know what best works for them and not [to] be afraid to mess up and try a different way to see what works for them." (CT)

Motivation/Self-Regulation:

"We kind of just settled into routine and unless you have that element of discomfort that comes with growth, then you don't get the growth." (TC)
 "...focus on what is essential for tomorrow, its good to have the big picture." (CT)
 "...I'm myself I'm not like putting on a fake teacher front." (TC)

Community:

"...comfortable and genuine in front of the students, she's a real person and...the kids love that, absolutely love that, she is very organized...she has been fantastic communicating..." (CT)
 "I feel really confident with my ability to build relationships." (TC)
 "There's an expectation that kids will be kind to one another and will have a strong community and I love that and we are achieving those goals." (TC)



Pair Four: High School, Special Education

Professional Knowledge:

"... knowledge of special education and IEPs is very important because its something that we need to follow by law..." (CT)
 "I looked for someone who is able to modify instruction in several different ways so whether that be general education curriculum modified to special ed curriculum..." (TC)
 "...confident in knowing what they're teaching..." (TC)

Beliefs:

"...I have strong patience. I think I get along with the students really well..." (TC)
 "...So far she gets along really well with the students and gets along really well with the staff..." (CT)

Motivation/Self-Regulation:

"...I think right away just establishing the fact that you know I am a teacher as well in the room..." (TC)

Community:

"...the most important one is that they are able to form a relationship with staff members as well as students, especially in the special education setting..." (CT)
 "...I'm able to create those strong relationships with them right away, get to know them on a personal level..." (TC)



Emerging Themes:

Consistent with our operational definition of teacher competency, the following themes emerged:

Professional Knowledge

Beliefs

Motivation/Self-Regulation

However, one more theme emerged that was not part of our original definition:

Community

These themes were consistent throughout the data set from both Teacher Candidates and Cooperating Teachers.

Methodology

This research utilized a case study framework following the guidelines of Creswell (2007). Creswell (2007) defined a case study as a bounded system (case) where multiple sources of data have been collected over time to report a case-description and case-based themes with detailed analysis. Because multiple teacher candidates and their respective cooperating teachers served as participants in this research, the design is considered a collective case study as described by Stake (1995), as "each case study will be instrumental in understanding" possible benefits of co-teaching "but there will be important coordination between the individual studies" (p. 3-4).

Participants were asked to complete the following tasks during the nine-week study:

- an initial and a final interview each lasting approximately 20-30 minutes during which participants answered questions regarding personal impressions of teacher competency
- participation in a pre-study survey consisting of a Likert Scale Rating of the Teacher Candidate's perceived competency and a prompt to support the rating
- Record a lesson segment at the beginning and the end of the study period

Following the coding process outlined by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), open to focused coding was used to analyze the data. Both internal and external codes were used. Excerpts were taken from the initial interviews and coded to generate as many ideas, or internal codes, as possible during the open coding process. These internal codes were analyzed to see if relationships existed between them. This process helped to determine the primary codes for the focused coding process, and any codes not prevalent were dropped after further data analysis.

Trustworthiness measures to ensure credibility of data have included data triangulation and peer review.

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Acknowledgements

This research was funded through a Faculty/Student Research Collaboration Grant provided by the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. We also wish to thank our participants who were willing to take part in our study.