

**Beneath the Veneer:
Marginalization and Exclusion in an Inclusive Co-Teaching Context**

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines co-teaching from a critical Disability Studies in Education perspective and analyzes the balance of power and discursive dominance in an inclusive co-teaching arrangement. Data for this study were derived from video recordings of two middle school co-teachers as they planned for and taught 8th grade math to a class of students with and without disabilities. Results of this study reveal the dominance of general education discourse and the state-mandated curriculum in this classroom, which reflects a larger ableist culture that privileges uniformity and standardization, not inclusion.

Introduction

Since the passage of PL 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, in 1975, special and general educators have been urged to work together to improve the education of children with disabilities through increased access to the general education curriculum. This effort is evident in a general shift toward more inclusive models of education that involve increasing the amount of time students with disabilities spend learning with their non-disabled peers in the general education classroom (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006; Wallace, Anderson, & Barhtolomay, 2002; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Consequently, many schools have restructured their special education service delivery models to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are met by special educators and general educators working collaboratively in an inclusive general education environment (Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005; Wallace, et al., 2002; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). The emergence of co-teaching as an inclusive collaborative approach to educating students with disabilities has resulted in a significant change in the roles of general and special educators and the professional relationship between them (Klingner & Vaughn, 2002).

Co-teaching is a model of inclusive education in which a general educator and a special educator are both physically present in the same classroom on a daily or regular basis, ideally collaborating and sharing responsibility for all of the students in a class (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1991; Cook & Friend, 1991). An increasingly common practice in general education classrooms, co-teaching has been a popular topic in inclusive education literature in recent years. However, despite the prevalence of many co-teaching models and studies evaluating their efficacy, many co-teachers continue to struggle and the implementation of effective collaborative instruction remains largely elusive (Pugach & Winn, 2011; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Common challenges are lack of planning time, inadequate administrative support, unclear delineation of roles and responsibilities, and unfamiliarity with content curriculum, which all undermine the inclusive potential of co-teaching (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Pugach & Winn, 2011; Scruggs, et al., 2007; Simmons & Magiera, 2007).

Acknowledging the challenges in contemporary co-teaching, Naraian (2010) suggests a critical analysis of contemporary practice to facilitate the transformation of special education and general education to inclusive education models. Pugach & Winn (2011) call for a renewed focus on co-teaching practices that not only support inclusion, but also counteract the historic isolation of special education teachers (and students) and other factors that impede the development of a school-wide culture of shared responsibility. The purpose of this study is to explore the micro-level interactions between one team of secondary level co-teachers and the macro-level relationship between the larger general and special education systems in this inclusive context. This analysis will address questions related to initiation, benefits, accountability, representation, and legitimation to explore the micro and macro-level interactions within this secondary co-teaching context (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

Literature Review

Co-Teaching

Although there is an abundance of publication about co-teaching (Cook & Downing, 2005; Cook & Friend, 1991; Friend, 2007; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003), the number of empirical

studies of co-teaching, particularly at the secondary level, is actually quite limited (Pugach & Winn, 2011, Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). The extant literature suggests that administration-supported voluntary co-teaching teams, targeted professional training, and adequate co-planning time are essential for successful co-teaching (Austin, 2001; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Pugach & Winn, 2011; Simmons & Magiera, 2007). Deficiency in any, or all, of these areas presents a challenge to effective inclusive co-teaching. Due to the content-specialized nature of the typical secondary education schedule, co-teaching at this level presents a unique set of challenges to the above recommendations. Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie (2005) suggest that the general and special education co-teachers be included in both content-specific and special education departmental activities, including departmental meetings, professional development, and planning. However, secondary special education co-teachers are often expected to be competent in multiple subject areas and collaborate with multiple general educators throughout the school day, which could limit opportunities for interdepartmental collaboration (Mastropieri, et al., 2005). As a result, co-teachers have continued to face the same challenges and struggles with little variation or improvement over time. This begs the question: Have we been missing something in the research that has prevented us from making significant advances in co-teaching?

A call for the critical reevaluation of the context of and discourse related to co-teaching was made over a decade ago in an attempt to address these ongoing issues (Trent, 1998). Although co-teaching was intended to improve service delivery and academic outcomes for students, Trent found that failure to understand collaborative discourse and necessary supports resulted in a cosmetic and contrived implementation of co-teaching. He noted a lack of special education research that engages with dialogue and discourse and recommended analyses that reveal patterns in thinking, communication, and actions that facilitate and impede effective collaborative instruction.

More recently, Naraian (2010) questioned the role of traditional conceptions of teaching and learning in the ongoing tensions in contemporary inclusive education. Naraian asserted “spaces such as collaboratively taught classrooms may purport to support the inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream educational experiences, but in the prescribed roles assigned to special and general educators premised on the delineation of “different” abilities, such spaces continue to spawn deficit discourses” (p. 1684). Future research, according to Naraian, should examine how special and general educators operate discursively within multiple contexts to create spaces to implement inclusive education. A critical examination of special and general educators’ interactions is necessary to understand the previously underexplored contextual aspects of co-teaching along the lines of Naraian’s (2010) and Trent’s (1998) recommendations and push the limits of contemporary inclusive education.

Co-teaching has the potential to be a model of inclusive practice; but in order to complete this transformation, a significant shift in practice and understanding on the part of both general and special educators is necessary. Simply declaring that educational collaboration is to be practiced does not actually guarantee such a positive or democratic outcome (Forbes, 2006). Effective collaboration requires each professional to critically reexamine their own discursive foundations and presupposed ‘truths’ by reevaluating their perceptions of normalcy and looking beyond the individualizing and totalizing constructions of special educator and general educator (Forbes, 2006).

Disability Studies in Education

Disability Studies in Education (DSE) is an alternative perspective on disability that problematizes the dominance of traditional education practices that reflect a medical model or deficit perspective of disability, while prioritizing social justice, democratic education, and broad conceptions of inclusion (Rice, 2006; Slee & Allan, 2001; Ware, 2001, 2004). A deficit model of disability situates differences among individuals along a socially constructed continuum of normality, whereby any deviance from normal is considered to be clinically significant (Harry & Klingner, 2007). While acknowledging that there is a broad range of difference in ability among humans, DSE challenges the rationality of exclusion on the basis of these differences.

Advocates of DSE find fault with the idea that much of contemporary inclusive education promotes tolerating human difference and assimilating defective students into the normal educational environment (Allan, 2006; Slee, 2001). The mere tolerance of difference and the assimilation of individuals with disabilities into normal environments can play a role in reproducing traditional negative views of disability and perpetuate exclusive practices in education (Allan, 2006). Inclusion, as such, is viewed as an education based in principles of democracy and social justice that addresses and values the educational experiences of all students (Sapon-Shevin, 2003; Slee, 2001; Ware, 2000). Inclusive education is not an endpoint, goal, or option; rather it is a prerequisite of democratic and socially just education. In a field where exclusion has been the dominant historic practice, a shift toward inclusion requires a commitment to change in deeply seated philosophies and pedagogies for both general and special educators.

This current study will critically examine the collaborative context of co-teaching by analyzing the interactions and relationship between two co-teachers in an 8th grade math class. It will provide teachers, administrators, and teacher educators with novel insight into the ill-understood context of secondary level co-teaching through exploring the power relations between the co-teachers, administrators, and the state department of education. To this end, the present study seeks to address the following questions: How were the co-teaching relationships established? Who defined what constituted appropriate knowledge in the co-taught classroom? Who initiated the lesson planning and set the goals and objectives of the lesson? How did both teachers benefit from the co-teaching arrangement and in what way? To whom the co-teachers were accountable? Whose realities and experiences were legitimated, or valued, in the classroom? Whose professional reality was recognized in the classroom? How was disability represented in the classroom? How were the teachers' professional identities represented? A comprehensive discussion of these questions will follow the analysis.

Methodology

Participants

The two co-teachers in this study were Val, a special education teacher, and Keith, a general education math teacher. Pseudonyms were assigned for the participants' and school names. The author initially met Val and Keith while supervising a student teacher in their class and was drawn by their strong positive relationship. At a later date, the co-teachers agreed to participate in the present study. They taught together in an 8th grade math class at Mathers Middle School in a large suburban school district in Western New York. Val had 12 years of

experience teaching in both self-contained special education classes and co-taught classes over the years. Keith, a former engineer, was a teacher for 16 years, certified in secondary math, chemistry, and general science.

Val and Keith worked together as co-teachers for five of the last eight years. They indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to work together for multiple school years and shared what appeared to be very amicable personal and professional relationships with no observable signs of discord. The class consisted of 12 students who had special education Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 12 students who did not receive special education services. In this arrangement, Keith and Val's names were both listed as teachers on the official class roster and Val (the special educator) was assigned to co-teach in the math class for the entire period every time that it met. In addition to her work with Keith, Val followed the 12 students with IEPs throughout the day and co-taught with the three other 8th grade general educators in English, science, and social studies.

Data Collection

Over the course of a one-month time period, data were collected from video recorded observations of Val and Keith teaching together in their co-taught class, individual and team interviews, and team planning meetings. Ten hour-long observations of a single unit of study (geometric shapes and figures) were video recorded in the co-taught classroom for the duration of the class period. Detailed field notes and notations of time were taken during all observations, which facilitated references between the field notes, video, and transcripts. Additional data were generated from four hour-long semi-structured interviews and two hour-long team meetings, which were also video recorded and transcribed.

Analytic Framework

Data were analyzed using a framework for understanding power differentials in educational settings (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Within this analytic model, power relations are understood through an examination of initiation, benefit, accountability, representation, and legitimation. All transcriptions of video recorded observations, interviews, and meetings were coded for these five components of the framework. Data were further analyzed using a constant comparative method to identify recurrent or prominent themes for each of the five framework components (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Findings

Initiation

How were the co-teaching relationships established? Although Val and Keith's initial pairing was facilitated by the school administration, it was not school policy to have co-teaching teams remain consistent from one year to the next. Their continued assignment as co-teachers for 5 years was, according to Val, the result of a combination of their requests and administrative action and Val's flexibility. After Keith switched grades a few years ago, they remained a team because Val agreed to learn a new curriculum in order to have the opportunity to continue working with Keith. Additionally, Keith and Val had a very strong record of student

performance on the state tests, which was likely an additional factor in the administration's decision to support their continued partnership. The school and district administration were deeply involved in the initiation and continuation of Val and Keith's co-teaching arrangement.

Who defined what constituted appropriate knowledge in the co-taught classroom? The co-teachers were not the primary decision-makers in issues pertaining to the curriculum. The State Department of Education defined the curriculum and determined what constituted appropriate knowledge for 8th grade math. Keith's acknowledgment of the state is evident in his language in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 1

Keith: You're gonna see some questions on the state test that are not written the exact same way I've written mine. 'Cause I don't know how they are gonna write em.

Keith perceived the state to be the ultimate authority in the classroom. His use of 'they' to describe the state and the unpredictable nature of the assessment reflects his deference to the state as an external authority in the development of the annual assessments.

Although the curriculum was state controlled, Keith defined appropriate knowledge in the co-taught classroom by prioritizing certain concepts based on the likelihood of representation on the state test. He designated essential concepts as 'need to know' information, while topics not likely to be assessed were deemed 'nice to know' and subject to omission from class instruction if necessary. Val explained how the demands of the state test superseded the needs of the students with IEPs in a curriculum largely determined by Keith and the state:

Excerpt 2

Val: We have a lot of time, and he'll kinda tell me his time frame. Because I don't want to overstep the time frame because I know he's on the course of pre-March post-March for the state test. So I'm conscious of that.

Rather than contributing to the selection of an appropriate curriculum for the students with IEPs, Val's primary concern was helping them keep up with Keith's pace and using time outside of class to meet the students' needs. Keith's prioritization of the curriculum influenced the overall lesson planning as well.

Who initiated the lesson planning and set the goals and objectives of the lesson? Keith initiated the lesson planning and set the goals and objectives for each lesson, which were drawn from his personal files of lesson plans created over his career. Keith explains his view on Val's contributions to the lesson planning:

Excerpt 3

Keith: So I give her an idea of what's coming up and then she throws at me some ideas of what maybe we can do to make it easier especially in the tough sections

...

She's seen the topics I'm gonna cover,

how exactly I'm gonna cover it
she makes suggestions sometimes.

Although Val was familiar with the 8th grade math curriculum, she did not make any significant curricular decisions pertaining to the selection of content or pacing of instruction in the co-taught classroom.

Benefit

How did both teachers benefit from the co-teaching arrangement? Keith and Val indicated that they benefitted from working with each other as co-teachers. Keith explained that because the students with IEPs tended to ask more questions than the other students it was a great benefit to have Val in the room to address student questions and allow him to keep on schedule with the curriculum. Keith also believed that Val's teaching style complemented his in that she engaged in pedagogic practices that he deemed necessary, but were either not his style, strength or responsibility. Keith explained how he viewed Val as a co-teacher:

Excerpt 4

Keith: She can get me to think of ways that I need to.
I don't always see the gaps that students will have.
Now in math- I'm good at that, and some of the other areas

...

If she has any ideas- which she does which you've seen also,
She just jumps in if I don't explain something well enough

Val's pedagogic contributions influenced the educational experiences and physical environment for all of the students in the co-taught class through the creation of visual aids. She commented:

Excerpt 5

Val: Keith, as a person, as a male, doesn't have
I would say...enriching materials
so like if I do something
for my class or for my thing,
I'll give it to him and then I'll go like
let's post these in your room, too...
and he's like oh whatever you want..

It appears that the posting of math-related visuals was not something that Keith placed a lot of value on doing himself, but it was something worthwhile that he let Val do in his classroom.

Keith often utilized the materials that Val made for the co-taught class in his other classes. At one point in the interview, both Keith and Val commented independently about an incident in which Val suggested that she make a visual for one of the projects, although Keith didn't think that it would be necessary Val created the aid anyway. In her interview, Val commented:

Excerpt 6

Val: I think they are gonna goof up writing an envelope
and he says I think they can write out an envelope.
I'm like I don't think they can...
so I was like why don't I just make an envelope
and he's like I don't think we're gonna need it
and he told me later on
Oh my God you wouldn't believe my other class
so many kids couldn't write out an envelope..
I know I've just seen it over the years so many times
...
and then he was like...
I used it in all my classes
you wouldn't believe how long other classes took

Referencing the same incident in his interview, Keith stated:

Excerpt 7

Keith: I hadn't even gotten to the blue class-
and that is the special ed class
and the yellow class is dying because
they don't know where to put the address
and luckily I've got that thing because Val made it
so I have it and I slap it up on the board
and say this is how you do it.

Although Keith acknowledged the utility of Val's contribution of the visual aid, she created it despite his initial deeming of it to be an unnecessary support and he found it to be very beneficial for all of his classes, not just the 'special ed class'.

Val indicated that being in a co-teaching team allowed her to become more familiar with curriculum and she appreciated a variety of professional experiences since leaving her self-contained teaching position. Co-teaching brought Val a sense of professional satisfaction. Because she co-taught in four different content classes (math, science, social studies, and English) with the same 12 students, Val stated that she felt more connected to other teachers and activities in the school community than before.

Excerpt 8

Val: I'm the PR person
in that I am working with each teacher
and talking to them
They will share things with me
and then share them with the team.
But I'll have known.

Based on her own experiences, Val felt that it was common for general educators and self-contained special educators to become isolated by the confines of their subject area or

classrooms. Because she worked closely with so many different teachers through co-teaching, Val felt that she had a strong sense of what was going on throughout the 8th grade team and the whole school and that this ultimately benefitted her students, her team, and herself.

Accountability

To whom were the co-teachers accountable? The outcomes of student performance in the class weighed heavily on the teachers, as the district primarily looked at the students' scores on the statewide assessments and course grades as indicators of successful teaching and learning. However, during his interview, Keith indicated that that he felt primarily accountable for teaching the 8th grade math curriculum to the all of the students. Keith explained:

Excerpt 9

Keith: My responsibility is to get all the kids to understand the material.
To get them to enjoy the material.
And the highest one is to get them to reach beyond what I have shown.
To reach beyond and look for themselves.

Keith explained that he tried to be sensitive to the needs of his students with IEPs, but repeatedly he indicated that his responsibility was limited to those areas related directly to the content delivery. Keith revealed his perception of students with disabilities as being either indiscernible from the others, in need of patience, or lazy.

Excerpt 10

Keith: I think I know what (...) who all the special ed kids are,
but I'm not positive I do.
They are kids in the classroom.
It doesn't matter if they are special ed or not.
Now some of the kids in the class that I know are special ed,
I will be much more patient with.
Mary for example is someone that I think has a lot of ability,
but she is lazy.
I might light into her because I feel that that can get her going.
Michele is working hard, the last thing I want to do is be sharp
or give her tone because she doesn't need that at all.
She needs encouragement.

Having previously identified his primary role as disseminator of information, Keith left most matters pertaining to the students with disabilities to Val.

Keith attended the math department meetings generally without Val, unless a student with an IEP was being discussed. Keith did not participate in the special education department meetings unless he was specifically invited by Val to discuss one of the students in the co-taught class. In describing himself as an educator, Keith made it clear that he saw his and Val's responsibilities situated along traditional general education/ special education lines. In his interview, Keith spoke about Val's various accountabilities and the toll that it takes on her:

Excerpt 11

Keith: It's a nice dream world
she could sit down and plan with me for an hour every day-
and never see her kids
'cause she's got four other teachers
to plan an hour with every day with as well
and make sure she's on top of that stuff.
She just can't do that.
And then call all the parents that she has to call
for this kids not doing their homework, this one is...
it's just too much for her to do.

Keith saw Val as the manager of the relationships between the various individuals- students, parents, administrators, and faculty colleagues, who interact in this co-teaching situation.

Val's accountability to the students was evident in the great efforts she made to be supportive of the needs of her students and is evident in the following passage.

Excerpt 12

Val: So, not just the constant between the kids.
I think it's my role- not their mother, but kinda.
I feel that way- their mother in the classes.
But between them I keep them up to date too because there's so much.
...
Val: I use enrichment, lunch, after school.
But if it is a contract year I don't use my lunch.
And it is a contract year, but how can you not?
They need extra time how can you not give it to them?
...
Val (returning from a visit to the doctor): I know I should go home.
But I have the kids after school today,
and there is no one else to cover them
and I feel bad.
I dropped off a prescription.
I know, but I can make it.
Special ed teacher.

At various times, Val revealed that she felt more like the students' mother than teacher in helping the students keep up to date with all of their work in the co-taught classes. In almost direct contrast to Keith's emphasis on content, Val seemed to prioritize care-taking and supporting her students in times of contract dispute and in personal illness. After leaving school with an illness to visit the doctor, Val returned and cited her role and identification as a special education teacher as justification for her returning to work while still ill. The last segment is, perhaps, the most telling passage, as Val explicitly self-identifies as a special education teacher and states that if she were not present that no one else would step in to support the students with IEPs in her absence. Val's actions and words reflect both her and Keith's shared assumptions

about the roles and responsibilities of the co-teachers aligning with traditional models of special education.

Val also indicated that she felt accountable to the district to keep up with professional development, IEP documentation, and the provision and management of special education services for the students with IEPs. She expressed some frustration about the district administration's limited acknowledgement of the array of responsibilities that she had.

Excerpt 13

Val: All day broken up fights.
Called home, dealt with parents.
These kids come with so many issues.
All these extracurricular things- trips, conferences, AIS letters.
Extra things besides getting these kids to be successful,
and ready, and appropriately behaved.
And you go to a meeting and the district is like just
read those IEPs more carefully cause you missed this wording.
Because it said consultant teacher instead of integrated CT.
Granted I went through all the IEPs with a fine-toothed comb,
fixed them, sent parent letters.
And they are like "well you missed one here."
OK. You just want to say I'll show you what I can miss-
But you feel like a little rat in a thing.
I'm busting my butt- and instead of you missed this, how about
Well great job dealing with all that,
plus making contact with all the parents
To do that when I am cleaning up a mess
that was not my mess to begin with.

From the above passage, it is clear that Val was under great pressure from the special education department and district administration to maintain the appropriate documentation and implementation of the students' IEPs. However, she understands the general education perspective as well.

Excerpt 14

Val: I have colleagues in the special ed department that will say to me,
well um I wish you would just slow down...
they are just going too fast.
and I'm like ok that's cause they are under pressure.
and I guess I see the content area side a lot
they are under pressure because their names are listed.
And then administration...
"why did only this many of your kids pass the test."
And so I understand the special ed point of view
because that is my role
but I also understand the content...
that they have to move because the curriculum

and the test is approaching
so its' kinda trying to find a balance.

In the above selection, Val explained how her role as a co-teacher gave her the ability to appreciate the accountability of general and special education perspectives. The pressure to keep up with Keith and the general education curriculum was evident throughout this study, but Val's understanding of general and special education accountabilities enabled her to mediate the pressure while protecting the students to give them the greatest chance for success. To the administration, however, success seemed to be recognized in the form of accurate paperwork and passing test scores.

Representation

Whose professional reality was recognized in the classroom? Although the class was designated by administration as an inclusive co-taught class and both Keith and Val's names were on the official record, the general education reality appeared to be the expected standard of practice. The class and room were generally identified as Keith's, where when the phone rang during class Val would typically answer the phone saying 'Hello, this is Mr. K's room, this is Mrs. V speaking.' Keith's significance as the recognized authority in the room was apparent and is reflected in the language and the actions of both teachers.

Keith's co-taught and traditional classes were expected to progress at the same pace. With the exception of the curricular narrowing to 'need to know' concepts, Keith did not appear to vary his teaching practice or materials significantly among his classes. The notion that the student with IEPs needed to keep up with the pacing of the class is clear in Val's language.

Excerpt 15

Val: I won't slow down the class but I will get the struggling learners.
So if it's something, yeah, that they are not getting as a whole...
and you are not gonna pull twelve of them aside.
In that case I would say Keith,
I will take it in my room and do twelve.
If it is something I can keep going over or whatever.

In the above passage, Val spoke matter-of-factly about the need to use her separate special education classroom to meet the needs of the students with IEPs. Val's used her separate classroom to take the students for small group work, testing, and consultations outside of class time. Because of the varied needs of the students with IEPs Val made herself available to the students outside of the co-taught classroom time. Throughout the day, the students regularly visited Val's room- stopping by in the morning, during lunch, and after school for support or extra help.

Val also indicated that she was not comfortable posting visual aids to support the students in the co-taught classroom because of restrictions on state testing. Referencing the placement of visual aids in the co-taught classroom, Val explained:

Excerpt 16

Val: ...we don't put a multiplication chart up in his room

because I think on the state test,
um we can't use calculators on part one
but you can use them on part two

Despite the potential benefit of having multiplication charts visible in the co-taught classroom, Val's perceptions of acceptable use of this visual aid during the administration of the state test has influenced her use of supportive materials in the classroom at other times as well, despite potential benefit to the students.

How was disability represented in the classroom? Disability did not appear to be openly discussed or acknowledged in the co-taught classroom. However, when the needs of the students with IEPs became too great or too distracting, Val would work to minimize the distraction as soon as she saw a potential incident brewing. In most instances, Val was able to discretely talk with the student to settle the issue. Unfortunately, there were times when Val could not intercede in time and a student's needs or disability became too much of a distraction for Keith. For example:

Excerpt 17

Val: (to Jonny, a student who is banging on his table with excitement)

Calm down honey.

Keith: (yelling at Jonny)

I'm sorry do you understand how big of a distraction that is?

I'm trying to go over this for everybody else in the class.

It's wonderful that you got it Jonny, but that's a huge distraction.

You're sitting right up front you're pounding on the table.

Everyone wants to know what's Jonny doing pounding on the table instead of what's Mr.K doing up here!

In this instance, Keith stopped the entire class and publicly expressed his frustration with the student, he then apologized to the class for the misbehavior of the offending student. Keith tended to view the students with disabilities just as he would any other student until and unless they became a distraction or a disturbance to his teaching routine, at which point Val intervened or the offending student was called out in public. Val, on the other hand viewed the students with disabilities as being in need of support to keep up with Keith's pace and to manage the stress that came with keeping up.

Legitimation

How were the teachers' professional identities represented? Val and Keith's identities seem to follow along traditional lines, while still being interrelated as co-teachers. Although Val understood that her primary role was to support the students with IEPs in the co-taught class, she struggled with her own professional identity in the co-teaching arrangement. She explained her thoughts on this:

Excerpt 18

Val: I feel like I'm being pulled every which way.

Sometimes I feel like you don't get the recognition.

‘Are you a math teacher? Science teacher?’
‘Oh you are special ed.’
Luckily I know people who are like ‘oh you are on roller skates.’
And you are taking care of these kids all day.
‘And you have patience.’
‘And I could never do that.’
So that makes you feel better

In the above passage, Val reveals that she often doesn’t feel like she gets recognition because she is not a content area teacher and few understand the demanding nature of her responsibilities as a special educator. She also revisits the perception of her mothering role as a special educator requiring patience to take care of the students all day.

Keith discusses his perception of his identity in relation to Val’s:

Excerpt 19

Keith: I’m a high school teacher.
I think in terms of high school.
I show the kids it, they are responsible.
I’ll help them out and some.
But I’m not an elementary teacher who is soft and cuddly and-
(raises voice pitch) Oh you didn’t get it the first five times I said it?
Let me tell you a sixth time.
You just need to keep hearing it.
No as you probably already seen, I’m like
look I said it a couple of times.
That’s enough you should get it now.
Whereas Val tones me down. She’s like here’s what you do.

Keith indicated that he did not feel that he was adequately prepared or well suited to meet the needs of all of the students, particularly those who need substantial support, in his classroom.

Analysis of Power Relations

Although initial observations suggested that Keith and Val had created a successful inclusive arrangement, use of Bishop and Glynn’s (1999) critical framework revealed a significantly different depiction of their collaborative reality. This framework allowed for a critical analysis of Val and Keith’s co-teaching relationship through exploration of initiation, benefit, accountability, representation, and legitimation within their collaborative context.

From the establishment and continuity of their co-teaching relationship to the definition of curriculum to the content of daily lessons, the state, the district, and Keith dominated the initiation aspect of this partnership (excerpts 1, 2, & 3). While the state and district determined the content of the curriculum, Keith prioritized that content and directed the daily flow of lessons. Val made sure that she was flexible enough to help her students succeed in this general education dominated environment. This reflected their acceptance of the dominance of the traditional general education focus, while designating the needs of the students with disabilities

as being potentially beyond the scope of the co-taught classroom, as accommodations for struggling students were made outside of the regular class time and space.

Like initiation, the concept of benefit in this co-teaching arrangement is multi-faceted. It appears that the entire student population, those with and without IEPs, benefitted from Val's creation of visual aids for use in the classroom (excerpts 5, 6, 7, & 16). Val indicated that she felt that she benefitted professionally from the interpersonal relationships developed with her colleagues (excerpt 8), while Keith spoke of the practical benefit of having Val in the classroom to answer questions and jump in to lessons when necessary and to provide emotional support for the students with disabilities (excerpt 4).

Accountability in this co-taught classroom was clearly a complicated concept. As co-teachers, Keith and Val shared responsibility for teaching the 8th grade math curriculum and meeting the needs of the diverse class of students. However, they were also accountable to their respective academic departments for the specific responsibilities of their contracted jobs and traditional responsibilities dominated their interactions (excerpt 11). Keith indicated his accountability rested primarily in content delivery and issues pertaining to mathematics (excerpt 9). Val's accountability, on the other hand, was broadly dispersed among students, parents, Keith, and administration (excerpt 12). Interestingly, Val mediated between the often-contradicting accountability pressures of general and special education by rationalizing the dominance of the state assessment driven system (excerpt 13). As indicated in the initiation and benefit discussions, the authority of the state and the importance of the mandatory assessments emerged as sources of stress for both the general and special educators in terms of accountability, as well (excerpt 14).

In this environment of high stakes testing, regimented curricular pacing, and limitations on accommodations, there appeared to be neither adequate time nor space for disability in the co-taught class. The general education reality was represented in this environment, as the more challenging needs of Val and the students with disabilities were largely met outside of class time and space. The pedagogic marginalization that permeated the co-taught classroom created a physical and emotional atmosphere that necessitated and justified the use of a separate special education space (excerpt 15). In a class where there was such pressure to have all students perform at the same level and progress through the curriculum in a uniform and predictable manner, disability was viewed as a distraction that needed to be mitigated and represented in a segregated location (excerpt 17).

Ultimately, Keith identified as a math teacher and Val identified as a special education teacher- both along traditional general and special education lines. Through discussion of initiation, benefit, and accountability in this analysis, it has become clear that general education, fueled by building, district, and state administration, has the dominant position in this attempt at inclusive co-teaching. As a result, Keith's general education identity was legitimated in this environment and Val's identity was only legitimate once people understood that she was a special education teacher. His self-identification as a high school teacher and his thinly veiled designation of Val as a soft and cuddly elementary teacher betrayed his conceptions of their roles as being polarized along traditional lines (excerpts 18 & 19). Ironically, as middle school teachers, Keith's depiction did not accurately reflect either one of their current teaching positions.

In maintaining his distinction as the purveyor of math knowledge but not the provider of support for all students, Keith placed a substantial pedagogic distance between Val and himself. Keith did not expect his work in the co-taught classroom to be any different from his efforts in

his other general education math classes. Not only did Val accept this and assume all of the traditional roles and responsibilities of the special educator, but she worked tirelessly to make sure that none of this ‘special education stuff’ interfered with Keith’s work as a math teacher.

Discussion

Ultimately, Keith and Val were not able to create a community where diverse learners were appreciated for their strengths and supported in their growth. Under the guise of an inclusive classroom, they created a somewhat tolerant general education environment that relied on the use of marginalizing practices and segregation to make sure that the students with disabilities kept up with the general education pace. The emphasis on normalization and assimilation in this arrangement resulted in the marginalization of Val and the students with disabilities. Val and Keith accepted segregation and dominance of the traditional general education model of instruction in this nominally inclusive arrangement. This reflected their engrained conceptions of what it meant to be a general and special educator and hindered their ability to be inclusive co-teachers. An inclusive co-taught classroom should not just be another place to educate students with disabilities. Rather, it needs to be a place where new professional identities are conceptualized in order to provide an appropriate education to all students in the classroom, regardless of their status as a general or special education student.

Co-teaching has the potential to promote a problematic division of labor that positions students with disabilities and their special education teachers in the margins of a general education dominated classroom (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011) and this certainly appears to be the case with Val and Keith. Val’s role in this co-taught class was, at best, reactive and marginalized, while in the confines of her segregated classroom professional autonomy allowed for proactivity and a sense of community. However, the community to which she belonged was exclusive, segregated, and disabled- not inclusive.

Val and Keith were not able to prioritize the development of an inclusive learning community because, in their quest for survival, they never questioned the rationality and rigidity of the traditional system. It is important to note that Keith and Val were not entirely to blame for their superficial engagement with inclusion. Institutional validation reified Val and Keith’s flawed co-teaching practice, which prevented them from being self-reflective or critical of their arrangement. Connor & Ferri (2007) acknowledge this type of situation when they ask, “when much of what is done in the name of inclusion is unsuccessful, how much of the failure is due to an educational system that is not wholly interested in change or equity?” (p. 74). This represents perhaps one of the most significant barriers to inclusive education today.

Conclusion

The dominance of general education discourse and the state-mandated curriculum in this co-taught classroom reflects a larger ableist culture in which uniformity and standardization are privileged through current federal education legislation (NCLB, 2001). The use of a student’s perceived ability to keep up and standardized assessment scores as predictors and indicators of success reveals a conceptualization of inclusion that differs significantly from that proposed by DSE. Inclusion is not a place; it is a way of interacting with others, respecting difference, and encouraging all individuals to contribute and participate in a community regardless of their race,

gender, class, or ability (Allan, 2003; Brantlinger, 2006; Dixon, 2005; Sapon-Shevin, 2003; Ware, 2004).

Transformation from the dominant traditional general education system to an inclusive system will require time and critical reflection on current pedagogy. Preservice teacher education programs must move toward a models that position inclusive education at the core of teacher preparation and away from dual certification programs that merely add special education coursework to existing general education programs (Blanton & Pugach, 2011; Florian, 2012). In order to achieve the ideals of inclusion, preservice teacher education programs must provide all teachers with strong foundations in content, pedagogy, diversity, and collaboration (Blanton & Pugach, 2011).

Collaborative preservice teacher education programs have the potential to facilitate this monumental transformation to by encouraging discourse and pedagogy that redefine the roles of general and special educators within the context of inclusive education. Without careful reconsideration and reconfiguration, we will continue to reproduce the inequities of the centuries old education system that has left us in a place where we talk transformative inclusion, yet walk traditional exclusion.

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