

Running Head: CO-TEACHING

"Co-teaching Developmental Writing: A Heuristic Narrative in Preparation for further
Qualitative Inquiry"

Jonna Kay Beck

Texas State University-San Marcos

Abstract

Tom Carroll of the United States' National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) shared with our Expanded Education Council at Texas State University-San Marcos on December 9, 2009, that "Education traditionally focuses on developing individuals but now we have work to do on thinking about developing the team and the learning organization" (personal communication).

At Texas State, I have been part of an innovative program to improve services for students assigned to developmental writing classes. Rather than the traditional model of single instructor in front of a large class in which students are asked to write papers based on readings in an anthology, we used a team of two instructors to co-teach a class for fifteen developmental writing students focused on the process of writing based on *The Craft of Research* (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 2008).

In addition to restructuring the teaching team, we integrated technology into the course so that our millennial students could feel more at home with their writing process. Many of our assignments were turned in via Facebook, twitter, or e-mail to allow the students to demonstrate their digital literacy and to allow us to respond as quickly as possible.

This paper shares my experience in this co-teaching setting and shares the literature review I've undertaken in the field of developmental writing and co-teaching in preparation for further study in this area in order to promote positive change worldwide in developmental writing education.

key words: developmental education, writing process, team teaching, cross-generational education, technology in education

Background

I am a White, female, doctoral student from an academically privileged background who has taught English as a second language in South Korea, special education for students with emotional disturbance at junior highs in central Texas, and developmental writing at a 4-year university in central Texas. I am biased against people from backgrounds such as my own and against educators who do not understand or take time to learn about students who are different from them. I bring my experiences in a variety of educational settings and my willingness to walk a mile in my students' shoes to this research. However, I am both more than and less than those descriptions.

In the case of the topic I come to discuss today, I assume that co-teaching is increasing in popularity for special education inclusion in K-12 in the United States but is not used at the college level. I assume that developmental education classes are often neglected at 4-yr institutions. I assume that co-teaching fits with our postmodern society and will have a positive impact on any learner, therefore, on developmental learners. I assume that a high proportion of students in developmental writing are also ESL. I assume that international education may face similar concerns to US education. I assume that technology can enhance education for all learners.

Still, those of you listening to me know very little about me or about my work. You have read my title and heard my introduction, but you know little about what you will learn today or from whom you will learn it. My research perspective is subjectivist with an interpretivist

paradigm. I believe that the stories people tell about their experiences and the interpretations that I have as a researcher and they have as participants in their own research lead us to new understandings about what occurs and what can occur in our socio-cultural context. I believe that involvement and interaction with phenomena is the only way to affect change and that the only time for change is now.

Yet, I have told you that this paper will include a heuristic narrative – a story based on personal experience. Does a simple story based on personal experience fit with that which I have shared so far? I will leave that for you to interpret. For this paper is preliminary to work I hope to continue and expand upon in the future. This paper does, in fact, tell the story of a personal experience – a personal experience which spawned an idea – which sent me on a journey into a review of literature – which in turn left me looking at a situation which I believe needs to be further explored and experienced.

For the purposes of this paper, developmental writing is the title of the class at the university where I work. It is a course that some students have to take before they can enroll in full curricular studies. Students are placed in developmental writing based on scores on an entrance exam at our school. As I've reviewed the literature, I've found that I personally prefer the term basic writing, and that models for teaching basic writing other than the one we use and for selecting students into the course other than the one we use satisfy me more than ours, but I am working from our school's use for now because I am working from my personal experience.

So, to begin, I will tell my story.

Heuristic Narrative

In the fall of 2009, my department chair approached me and asked if I would like to join the developmental writing professor in teaching developmental writing. The chair said the class was too large and that the professor who usually teaches the class would need help. The chair suggested that the professor of record and I split the class into two groups. I met with the professor of record, and he and I decided instead to teach together. Over the course of the semester, we developed what I call a co-teaching model.

From my experience teaching junior high school special education, I am familiar with co-teaching as used in Texas public school where two teachers of record share the responsibilities for grading, lesson planning, and instructing, so this is why I used this terminology in my experience with the developmental writing class as it came to be. The professor of record and I shared lesson planning, assigning papers, grading papers, instructing classes, and interacting with students on a daily basis. He and I both attended classes and held office hours for students.

Since I became a co-teacher after the semester had started, we worked with the syllabus and textbook that the professor of record used regularly. However, during our planning and assessment meetings, we would decide as a team what might need to be taught or used for each class, so sometimes the syllabus would change lesson-by-lesson. For example, the syllabus outlined from the beginning when certain chapters of the book would be read, but if we decided during our planning sessions that the students needed to move more slowly or more quickly, we would update the students in class or via our Internet announcement system that a change was being made to suit their needs. Similarly, if we decided that a supplementary material would be useful, we would add it during lab day.

In the class that I co-taught, we had 18 students. 2 were non-traditional; 4 were White; 4 were Black/African-American; 8 were English Language Learners; 10 were Hispanic/Latino; and

the male: female ratio was 10:8. My co-teacher was a dual language Spanish/English Hispanic male, so together, he and I had similarities with quite a few of our students in several different ways. In our teaching, we talked about how working together allowed us to reach more students than either one of us could have alone.

Neither my co-teacher nor I were close in age to any of our students; even the two non-traditional students were still much younger than he and I. But because we had each other to brainstorm with, we came to solutions quickly for how to reach students of the millennial generation. Our students all had cell phones with them, most of the iPhone style. So we decided to do an activity using their phones. On another day, we did an activity using YouTube. Also, our class included a lab section, and in lab we included a session using Facebook.

I found that when I was teaching and my partner was in the room, that the students enjoyed having him as a co-student. I use small group activities in my teaching, and my co-teacher would always participate when I broke the class into groups. Conversely, when my co-teacher led, he would use large group activities, and I would participate from the class, and the students enjoyed and fed off my answers. When we would share writing samples or would have free-writing time, my co-teacher and I would write as well; thus, the students would have two different writing models at the same time.

Literature

Tom Carroll of the United States' National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) shared with our Expanded Education Council at Texas State University-San Marcos on December 9, 2009, that "Education traditionally focuses on developing individuals but now we have work to do on thinking about developing the team and the learning organization" (personal communication). First and foremost, I am interested in what the literature says about teaming in the field of teaching. One form of co-teaching that is popular is in teacher training and retention, as noted by McCracken and Sekicky (1998). Sekicky taught 9th grade Language Arts and invited McCracken, a teacher education professor, into her classroom to co-teach in order to improve her own practice as an educator. At our own university, we practice such exchanges with programs such as Teacher Fellows and Teacher Recruitment and Induction Program (TRIP), and my father works for a grant furthering this cause, Center for Research, Evaluation and Advancement of Teacher Education (CREATE). York-Barr, et al (2007) outline the effectiveness of co-teaching in elementary ELL classrooms. Their study shows that the achievement for ELL students increases when co-teaching is used effectively. Friend and And (1993) outline various ways that co-teaching is used in special education in K-12 schools in the United States. They evaluate the history of co-teaching and suggest where co-teaching might go for special education. Admittedly, I have not reviewed all literature, and I have only highlighted what I consider important features here, but I have yet to find information on co-teaching in developmental writing classrooms.

Other literature I thought important to review dealt with developmental writing itself. For example, you'll find that I have several references that are in the anthology *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings, Third Edition* (Bernstein, 2007)¹, as this anthology was presented to me at a recent Conference on Academic Support Program at which I presented some of the teaching techniques I used in the developmental writing course that I co-

¹ Not listed as its own reference at this time; only listed as (Reprinted in...)

taught. Upon receiving this anthology, I realized that many seminal writings in my field are gathered in this one cover. For example, Shaughnessy (1994) analyzes “basic writing” as both a concept and a course. She discusses how it is most often part of an English department, where the teachers specialize in writing as a discipline and in writing as part of the analysis of literature. She points out that each individual comes at writing, especially basic writing, from a unique perspective and that cross-curricular access to basic writing skills needs to be acknowledged, relied upon, and utilized.

Lalicker (2000) outlines six kinds of basic writing programs as he sees them based on a survey he conducted of administrators of basic writing programs who participated in a Writing Program Administrators’ listserv in 1999. The five program types are as follows: Baseline or current-traditional, in which basic writers are allowed to enter college dependent on completing basic writing and need for basic writing is based on some standardized test; Stretch model, in which basic writing students enter standard composition but take it during two semesters instead of one; Studio model, in which basic writing students sit in a class-within-a-class type setting; Directed Self-Placement model, in which basic writing students choose to start with basic writing at the advice of a program director; Intensive model, in which basic writing students would participate in standard writing courses with additional time spent on areas of need; and Mainstreaming model, in which basic writing students are not singled out in any way and must use their own initiative through the Writing Center or tutoring or instructor conferences to alleviate their deficiencies. Currently, the program in which I have interest is operating in the baseline model, and I would like to move it do work to create a model not even considered here.

Kinloch (2005) cites Lisa Delpit’s (1995) *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* and Peter Elbow’s (1999) “Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond ‘Mistake,’ ‘Bad English,’ and ‘Wrong Language.’” She brings back to the attention of those working in the field of composition instruction, especially composition instruction for those who speak a first language other than English or for those whose vernacular and conversational languages differ from standard written English, that giving the student a safe comfortable place to write is more important than how or what the student writes. She offers strategies to encourage speakers of other languages, even simply non-standard English, to write: compare home to university, write about language, describe language patterns, write out lyrics to songs, compare song lyrics written out to what you think you hear, e.g. Again, in thinking about strategies that have and have not been implemented in developmental and basic writing classes, I access Kinloch to know that use of culture and multiculturalism is a tried method for engaging writers, especially writers from non-standard English backgrounds.

Elbow (1999) writes as a director of a College English program and writes from a perspective of concern for speakers of dialects of English that do not conform to Standard English. Elbow has two goals: to help students of dialect feel safe where another Standard English has power and to help everyone master Standard English in order to negotiate college where teachers often strike first at surface errors in writing. Elbow, as did Kinloch, cites Delpit’s ideas that students need to be taught how to speak in certain cultural settings; however, Elbow believes that teachers must help make what he calls the mother tongue safe for writing. Elbow asserts that students will write more readily and more fluently if they can embrace the writing of their mother tongue – their home speech – their dialect. Elbow asserts that a new path can allow us to have a safe space for the mother tongue in writing and for his goal of Standard English in writing by simply allowing both and believing that both can exist together. He believes that everyone can copy-edit as successfully as he does with the right tools. Let everyone write in his

or her mother tongue, as no one's mother tongue is Standard English, and then use what is necessary to copy-edit into Standard English.

Elbow's work was seminal in the field of writing in moving toward a multi-cultural approach in the writing classroom and in moving toward a more process-based approach. Toward my goal of looking at co-teaching, for those who want to write more naturally and to do more copy-editing and revising, having two teachers in the class room should allow for more of a workshop approach so that those students who need more assistance in editing can have more attention during this time. Elbow says that some people come equipped to move from their mother tongue to Standard English while others need more help, modeling, or encouragement.

Ferris (1999) reports on immigrant student feedback to teacher written response during the writing process. Ferris indicates that immigrants come to America possibly unaccustomed to the ideas used in composition classes of drafting, receiving comments, rewriting, receiving more comments, rewriting again, and completing a final draft which will receive yet more comments. Research shows that immigrant students take teacher comments seriously, use teacher feedback well, prefer specific feedback, have some knowledge of grammar terms, and can take advantage of grammar practice skills.

I believe that the process of writing must be taught. Ferris's research indicates that L2 students need to be taught the process of using the writing process and need to be taught how to use teacher feedback. From my experience teaching developmental writing, I know that we had what I consider too many L2s in our class, and co-teaching meant that one of us could specialize or individualize for the L2s.

Finally, my co-teacher and I Booth, Colomb, and Williams (2007), when we co-taught developmental writing. I include it here because it is not a traditional selection for a developmental writing course. It is part of the reason I am still struggling to define developmental writing. We approached our students as writing students – period. However, the department did not define from above the program in which we taught. At any rate, what is important to me, is that I learned much about writing and the writing process from Booth, et al in their third edition, in which they share methods of writing, revising, and researching. The book includes information on why readers expect authors to write, how to ask questions that lead to writing topics, how to find source material for topics, how to make claims and evaluate them, what count as good reasons and sound evidence, information on different forms and genres of writing, and examples of their thoughts and ideas of teaching these concepts throughout.

Conclusion

After telling my story of co-teaching developmental writing and considering that I saw inequity in the classroom and greater opportunities for the students through having two teachers present; after reflecting on the developmental writing class in which I worked and seeing that it is not just from my perspective and believing that co-teaching might be a model for giving greater justice to it; after reviewing literature on co-teaching and developmental writing and seeing a gap between the two practices; after trying to define developmental writing and finding it difficult to do in some conventional way; I find that I am mired in many questions and inundated with ideas and potential projects. However, the one that I am focusing on at the moment is the one that can tie this story together. As I reflect on my personal story and on the review of literature that came of it, I wonder: What did the students think of this experience of having two teachers in their classroom? What did they think of being in developmental writing

at all? How effective were we as co-teachers? In my review of literature, I did not find an answer to my question of how students perceive co-teaching in developmental writing. I know that I have much more literature to review and that many other researchers take an interest in student perspectives and in how and why teachers teach writing the way they do, but I am at the beginning of a project and am testing the waters.

Current Work

Purpose

I am currently conducting a research study first to understand the effectiveness of the innovative teaching technique of co-teaching at the college level in the developmental writing classroom and then to promote change in the field of developmental writing.

Research question

To begin, my research will focus on the following question:

What effects occur in student perceptions about writing and the writing classroom in college level developmental writing classrooms at a 4-year university in central Texas with the introduction of a co-teaching model?

I intend to expand this research in the future to include further topics and problems including the following:

How are college level developmental writing classrooms different at a 4-year university in a Spanish speaking country?

What effects occur in student perceptions about writing and the writing classroom in college level developmental writing classrooms at *that* 4-year university with the introduction of a co-teaching model?

In each with the introduction of podcast teaching modules on take-home iPods in each setting? (funding necessary)

With the integration of developmental reading and developmental writing into a unified curriculum in each setting?

With the compacting of the combined developmental curriculum into an intensive 9 week semi-mester in each setting?

I am also interested in equity within developmental writing, especially at the university where I am currently focusing my study, and then at the universities where I hope to expand for my comparison studies. Specifically, I want to know about the equity in enrollment/necessarily required participation based on language proficiency measures, immigration status, college attendance generation, and socio-economic status, as the group that I taught was not diverse along those measures.

As I achieve a level at which I can pursue these questions, more terms will need to be defined, but I know that as my research continues, my terms will come into focus and the contributions I make to the field of instruction in the area of developmental writing will help me to build a firmer foundation for how I interpret and help others interpret the semantics in this area.

Works Cited

- Bangert-Drowns, R. L., Hurley, M. M., & Wilkinson, B. (2009). The effects of school-based writing-to-learn interventions on academic achievement: A meta-analysis. *Review of Educational Research, 74.1*: 29-58.
- Beck, J. (2009). Multi-teaching: Teaching the joneses to speak to the nets. *Conference for Academic Support Personnel*, San Antonio, TX.
- Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.C., & Williams, J.M. (2008). *The Craft of Research, Third Edition*. Chicago: U Chicago Press.
- Carroll, T. (2009). Personal Communication.
- Elbow, P. (1999). Inviting the Mother Tongue: Beyond 'Mistakes,' 'Bad English,' and 'Wrong Language.' *The Journal of Advanced Composition, 19(3)*, 359-88. Retrieved from Available at: http://works.bepress.com/peter_elbow/12
- Ferris, D. R. (1999). One size does not fit all: Response and revision issues for immigrant students. In L. Harklau, K. M. Losey, & M. Siegal (Eds), *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition*. (Reprinted in *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings, Third Edition*, p. 83-99, by S. N. Bernstein, Ed., 2007, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's).
- Friend, M., & And, O. (1993). Co-Teaching: An Overview of the Past, a Glimpse at the Present, and Considerations for the Future. *Preventing School Failure, 37(4)*, 6-10.
- Kinloch, V. (2005). Revisiting the promise of *Students' right to their own language*: Pedagogical strategies. *College Composition and Communication, 57(1)*, 95-113. (Excerpted and reprinted in *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings, Third Edition*, p. 40-55, by S. N. Bernstein, Ed., 2007, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's).
- Lalicker, W. B. (2000). A basic introduction to basic writing program structures: A baseline and five alternatives. *Conference on Basic Writing BWe: Basic Writing e-journal*. (Reprinted in *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings, Third Edition*, p. 15-25, by S. N. Bernstein, Ed., 2007, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's).
- Lavelle, E. & Zuercher, N. (2009). The writing approaches of university students. *Higher Education 42.3*: 373-391. JSTOR.
- McCune, V. (2009). Development of first-year students' conceptions of essay writing. *Higher Education, 47.3*: 257-282.
- McCracken, N. M., & Sekicky, N. (1998). An invitation to success: Co-teaching and Learning in English 9G. *The English Journal, 88(1)*, 32-40.

Shaughnessy, M. (1970, 1994). Some new approaches toward teaching. *Journal of Basic Writing*, 13(1). (Reprinted in *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings, Third Edition*, p. 2-13, by S. N. Bernstein, Ed., 2007, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's).

York-Barr, J., Ghere, G., & Sommerness, J. (2007). Collaborative teaching to increase ELL student learning: A three-year urban elementary case study. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 12(3), 301-335.