

Dilemmas Of Collaboration: Video Case Studies Of Collaborative Teaching Teams In Inclusive Classrooms

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Abstract

Due to an increase in the practices of collaboration and inclusion, current and future educators must learn to create and maintain complex relationships with other professionals, relationships that are not found in traditional classrooms. Case studies, especially multimedia case studies, present an opportunity for developing skills and perspectives in relation to collaboration. This paper provides the rationale and video case methodology used in the development of compelling multimedia case studies. These case studies will provide a rich basis for further discussion in the education of preservice and inservice teachers, teaching assistants and administrators.

Background

What began as a civil rights issue in the 1950s developed into the elaboration of the educational rights of children with disabilities and later into inclusion. Initially seen as a special education initiative, inclusion—defined as the practice of educating typical students and those with special education needs together—has become a prominent issue within the school reform movement (Berres, 1996).

In the 1990s, a link was made between the inclusion movement and the broader general education reform movement. This restructuring of education for all learners became the focus, and affected not only education programs for children, but also the lives and practices of teachers (Sapon-Shevin, 1996). Faced with the challenge of meeting the educational needs of an increasingly diverse student population, teachers frequently find themselves working in collaboration rather than isolation. Collaboration, “a style of direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties” (Friend & Cook, 1996), is seen as one means through which educators may meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population and explore, create and implement more complex forms of instruction (Pugach & Johnson, 1995). Understanding the relationship of collaborative teaching requires analyzing not only the structure but also the process of working together. Educators continually struggle toward the implementation of collaborative teaching within inclusive classrooms. Research has indicated clearly that educators need specific skills in order to work successfully with other adults in collaborative roles (Bradley, King-Sears, & Tessier-Switlick, 1997). The present multimedia case study project is designed to further develop teachers’ and teaching assistants’ understandings of collaborative teaching through the use of viewer analysis of both the structure and the process of working together.

Why Multimedia Case-Based Teacher Education?

One theoretical basis for the use of case studies may be found in the works of John Dewey. In *Experience and Education* (1938/1968), Dewey urged educators to examine ways in which they might provide learners with relevant experiences and opportunities for interaction. He believed that every teacher’s responsibility is to provide such experiential opportunities in order to promote student learning:

A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of shaping of actual experience by environing conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth. Above all they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile. (p. 40)

Dewey (1938/1968) then further explains the importance of interaction in learners’ experiences:

The word “interaction”, which has just been used, expresses the second chief principle for interpreting an experience in its educational functions and force. It assigns equal rights to both factors in experience—objective and internal conditions. Any normal experience is an interplay of these two sets of conditions. Taken together, or in their interaction, they form what we call a situation. The trouble with traditional education was not that it emphasized the external conditions that enter into the control of the experiences but that it paid so little attention to the internal factors which also decide what kind of experience is had. (p.42)

Educators have come to understand the importance of experience and interaction in student learning and have since concluded that the more students are engaged, the more they learn (Brophy & Good, 1986). Teaching with cases is one methodology in which educators and case authors provide experiences and create opportunities for interaction.

Case-based teaching is a process that requires students to formulate and solve real life problems (Christensen, 1987). Teaching cases were first used in the business and medical fields. Researchers have recognized that the use of cases in teacher education allows students to become actively involved in making real life decisions and reflecting upon their actions, relative to their lives as teachers (McNergny, Ducharme, & Ducharme, 1999; Shulman, 1996; Silverman, Welty, & Lyons, 1992). It is through this active participation in this process that student learning occurs. Cases provide a common experience through which individuals or groups of students can analyze the issues, dilemmas and opportunities of teaching. The multiple levels within a case present complex yet realistic problems. Multimedia presentation of cases supplies additional opportunities to observe the complexities associated with teaching and learning.

Multimedia cases provide teachers with a variety of opportunities to construct knowledge by drawing from multiple sources of information (Risko & Kinzer, 1999). The visual representation of a case involving classroom activity allows for the physical and social aspects of the classroom to be illustrated while viewing the dynamic interactions of its participants. The viewer becomes aware of the multiple layers of the classroom environment and how a variety of simultaneous events affect teachers' instructional decisions. In addition, the viewer may enter, exit, or view again the multimedia case at various points, relative to individual learning needs and interests. Experiences permitted through this technology could have significant effects on learning (Bransford, Sherwood, & Hasselbring, 1988). Risko and Kinzer (1999) describe how the use of multimedia in teacher education provides what Dewey called for in education, experiences and opportunities for interaction:

Videodisk and CD-ROM technology allows easy, rapid access to many sources of information—an access capability difficult to achieve with videotaped material. Such ease of access allows preservice teachers to combine information in ways that helps them foresee the effect of particular actions on teaching and learning outcomes. Multimedia allow flexible interactions with available information and provide powerful opportunities for helping the instructor and students access materials to address and resolve instructional issues. Instructors do not “prescribe” content in ways that inhibit students' active pursuit of their own questions. Instead, instructors use content to support inquiry. (p. 54)

Based on the theories, research, and practices of others and on our own work, we are developing multimedia case studies to be used in the education of preservice and inservice teachers and teaching assistants.

Morning Team Meeting

Development Of The Multimedia Case Studies

These multimedia case studies grew out of a qualitative research study done on collaborative teaching in inclusive classrooms by Ann Monroe-



Baillargeon. The study contributed to the growing body of work on teacher collaboration while expanding our understanding of educators' own perspectives of collaborative teaching in elementary inclusive classrooms (Monroe-Baillargeon, 1998). Upon completion of her study, Monroe-Baillargeon began exploring the possibility of developing her data into case studies. It seemed limiting to develop narrative case studies in which the facial expressions, body language and complex interactions between the adults on the team might be lost in the narrative description. Hence, the decision was made to develop multimedia case studies which would allow various viewers to select the portions of the case study that were of most interest to them, and to replay those parts that they wanted to see again. The use of digital video technology would allow viewers multiple perceptions of the complex relationship of collaboration as portrayed in the lives of these teaching teams.

Figure 1

Figure 2
One Team Telling Their Story



Tom Hergert first encountered Ann's work at a research conference in 1997 and was intrigued by her study of this complex teacher relationship. Ann's challenge in recruiting a video producer for the case study project was to convince her colleague, Tom, that in fact it does make a difference who is behind the camera, and that a person unfamiliar with the work would not bring his insight and awareness to the project. Tom agreed that elements essential to the ultimate quality of the case studies included the insights of the producer, the equipment used, and the collaborative relationship between the researcher and the producer. Consequently, the videotaping of two of the four teams profiled in Ann's dissertation took place May 12 through 14, 1999. Both classroom activities and individual interviews were videotaped (see Figure 1).

Because of the limited taping time available in each classroom and with each team, Ann's well-established relationships with the teams and her familiar presence in the classroom proved critical. There were moments when individual students were distracted by the camera and when the whole class would attend to Tom or Ann's presence, but, generally speaking, the classroom activities seemed to proceed as normal (see Figure 3). This may be attributed to the intensity of student needs, the level of teacher involvement with the students, and the density of classroom activities.

Figure 3
Showing Students The Camera



Interviews with teachers and teaching assistants were especially rich in their content and level of engagement. The individuals in each team were enthusiastic in telling the story of the collaboration from their own perspectives (see Figure 2). This encourages us in considering further work in this direction. The opportunity to speak about oneself appears to be an uncommon and appreciated experience for these teachers and teaching assistants.

At the end of each taping day, the original video was copied to VHS tapes, backups created, and field notes written. Each VHS tape included time code information to ensure accurate communication about particular scenes and sequences (see Figures 4 and 5). During the next several months, Ann transcribed the tapes for the description and documentation of classroom events, and the word for word account of all interviews. These transcriptions were then individually analyzed and coded by Ann and Tom. Through their collaborative analysis and discussion, the following six themes emerged: classroom sharing, power and philosophy, student benefits, professional development, attitudes, and administration (see Figure 6). Portions of the videotapes coded within each of these themes were then edited together by Tom to create a coherent case study for viewer analysis.

Figure 4
Video Frame With Time Code Information



Figure 5
Detail Of Time Code Information



Figure 6
Thematic Matrix

Team Description	Classroom Sharing	Power And Philosophy	Student Benefits	Professional Development	Attitudes
SCHOOL A Grade 6 Inclusive Team	Multitasking Work Check Direct Teaching Chris / Debate Amy/Joan of Arc Student Assessment Work Check	Individual Strengths and Weaknesses Letting Go of Power Individualized Instruction	Modeling Male & Female Collab. Team Preparing Students for Middle School	Chris's Story Sharing Ideas & Skills	Team Members Open and Listeni
SCHOOL B Grade 1 Inclusive Team	Direct Teaching Circle MultiGroup Teaching Cooking	Learned From the Process Conflict Resolution Learning Skills From Each Other	Learning Skills From Each Other Individual Ideas and Perspectives on Planning	Communication w/ Others Changes Modeling Behavior & Skills for Assisatnts. Learn from Others & Collaboration Asst. w/ No Education Group Meeting	Attitudes of the Assistants Trust: All Membe of the Team Spea of This
ADMINISTRATOR	Roles & Systems	Admin. Support Administrator's Role as Facilitator Teacher Choice		Time and Space to Learn Roles of Members Collab. As Process	Hardest Things to Change

These case studies combine video clips of interviews and classroom observations in an attempt to illustrate the dilemmas that the team members experienced as they worked together in their urban elementary inclusive classrooms. These multimedia case studies allow for a more direct relationship between the learners and the subjects of the video. By seeing the collaborators in context and hearing from them directly, the viewers are able to develop a broader understanding of collaborative relationships. The video sequences provide for examination of real life situations in detail and offer a rich basis for further discussion.

Implications For Teachers, Teacher Educators And School Administrators

Based on the findings and implications of Monroe-Baillargeon's (1998) study, we believe that the development of multimedia case studies may assist educators who are contemplating collaboration with others, as well as teacher educators intending to prepare preservice or inservice teachers to work collaboratively. Administrators involved in educational reform and policy may also find these case studies helpful in furthering their understanding of collaborative teaching, in particular the complexities of teaching collaboratively within an inclusive classroom.

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