

MUSE faculty proposal

Nadya Pancsofar, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Faculty at TCNJ since August 2008  
Department of Special Education, Language, and Literacy  
Office: Forcina Hall 305  
609-771-3150  
pancsofa@tcnj.edu

The Scope of Co-teaching: Analyzing Data from the Co-teaching Experiences Survey

Student collaborator: Rosie Rarich

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## 1) Intellectual Merit

Co-teaching, commonly regarded as collaborative teaching between special education and general education teachers in a shared classroom space, has become highly recommended in the field of Education for supporting inclusive practices and the full integration of children with disabilities in general education settings (Friend & Cook, 2009; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008). Co-teaching occurs in the context of in-class instruction for children with disabilities within integrated settings. That is, rather than pulling out students with disabilities for instruction in self-contained resource rooms, students may remain in the general education classroom setting, receiving joint instruction by general education and special education teachers for one or more content areas. While co-teaching is a widely implemented and well-regarded practice, it is a new model and there is very little research on co-teaching experiences in schools. Early pilot data for this study (MUSE, 2010) suggests that there is tremendous variation in co-teaching philosophies, practices, attitudes, and available supports across teachers and schools (Pancsofar, Minervini, & Petroff, manuscript under review). This research study bridges the gap between co-teaching literature and implementation. This research will inform not only the principles behind the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education settings, but also the current realities of this educational approach.

The proposed MUSE project is aimed at analyzing data from a large study of co-teaching experiences in New Jersey. In the spring of 2011, we will recruit approximately 150 general education and special education teachers (grades Preschool-12) from six districts in New Jersey to complete a detailed survey on the scope and practice of co-teaching. The Co-Teaching Experiences Survey was developed for this study and piloted over the course of one year. It is a multifaceted measure of educators' co-teaching experiences, including structural factors, training, philosophies, and self-efficacy. During the summer of 2011, all survey data will be completed, and we will begin the initial analyses for this study. The research objectives of this MUSE study are:

1. To analyze descriptive data on the variability of co-teaching experiences as reported in the Co-teaching Experiences Survey.
2. To identify typologies or clusters of teachers who share similar co-teaching experiences, as measured by structural variables (e.g. number of co-teachers, class size, grade-level, content area, planning time).
3. To assess whether these structural variables are associated with teacher self-efficacy, roles, and responsibilities in the co-taught classroom.
4. To assess whether pre-service training on co-teaching is associated with teacher self-efficacy, roles, and responsibilities in the co-taught classroom.
5. To begin work on an observational measure of co-teaching that can be piloted in schools in fall 2011.

This MUSE project is of great importance to the field of Education and will produce multiple scholarly outcomes. There is a dearth of empirical research on this widely implemented approach to the education of children with disabilities. This study will enhance pre-service and in-service training opportunities available to teachers, as well as directly inform the practice of teachers and administrators across grade levels and content areas. This project will yield the following scholarly products:

1. Presentation at the 2012 conference for the New Jersey Council for Exceptional Children (NJCEC), the main professional development event for special educators in New Jersey

2. Manuscript to be submitted to *Exceptional Children*, the leading research journal in the field of Special Education.
3. Research proposal to extend this work to include observational measures of co-teaching in classrooms.

## **2) Role of Student and Mentor**

For the eight weeks comprising the MUSE program, Rosie Rarich, the MUSE student, will learn about the research process and produce scholarly outcomes. Rosie will synthesize the existing research in this area, writing a comprehensive and thorough literature review. She will learn how to use SAS software to create summary statistics of our data. With my guidance, Rosie will run analyses to address the key objectives of this study, and write-up these findings in a proposal for the 2012 NJCEC conference and in a manuscript to be submitted to *Exceptional Children* in fall 2011. To provide further depth to Rosie's research experiences, she will help develop an observational measure of co-teaching, which I plan to pilot in fall 2011.

As a mentor, I will introduce key research concepts to Rosie and support her fully as she gains a deeper understanding of these concepts by engaging in research analysis. As a research assistant on a large longitudinal study at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I regularly trained undergraduate students on how to use SAS software for data analysis in educational research. I look forward to sharing this expertise with Rosie. As a MUSE scholar, I will expect Rosie to take the lead on writing about this study, synthesizing the previous work in this area, as well as presenting our findings. However, I will support her in all of these endeavors through regular meetings and ongoing communication. As a first-time MUSE mentor in the summer of 2010, I found myself very comfortable and skilled in developing the growing research skills of my student. I feel that such mentorship is central to the teacher-scholar model at TCNJ, and I have actively engaged in opportunities to further develop my mentorship skills through MUSE, Independent Studies, and presentations to student groups on the research process, graduate school, and scholarly activities. I have also maintained an active research agenda and record of success in publication. Last summer, I was able to include my MUSE student in an authorship role in manuscript preparation and submission.

Rosie is an outstanding match for the MUSE program. Having had Rosie as a student in two of my courses, I am familiar with her strong academic skills and positive disposition. Rosie contemplates important issues in Education with great depth and curiosity. She is a gifted teacher, who will undoubtedly find success in the classroom. With Rosie's unique set of talents, she is poised to become a strong leader in Education. The MUSE program will provide Rosie with a deeper understanding of how research informs pivotal decisions in Education. Through this experience Rosie will become a more informed leader in our field and an even more competitive applicant for future graduate programs and employment.

## **3) Broader Impacts**

As a pre-tenure faculty member at TCNJ, participation in the MUSE summer program will be important to my development as a teacher-scholar. In the past year, I have actively and purposefully shared my prior MUSE experience and successful application with colleagues in the School of Education, in hopes of greater representation of Educational research in the impressive MUSE roster of student-faculty projects. Through MUSE I will continue to develop a deeper understanding of interdisciplinary research at TCNJ, and I would like to become a more active participant by presenting at a Monday Community Lunch. For Rosie, this would be an invaluable experience in research that would shape her future opportunities in graduate study, as well as her professional impact in the field of Education.

## **Appendix 2: Budget**

- a) Student stipend: \$2,500 for 1 student
- b) Faculty stipend: \$1,000

Note: Student housing is not requested because student's home residence is local.

Total requested: \$3,500

### **Appendix 3: Past MUSE award report**

I participated as a MUSE mentor in 2010, working with Gabrielle Minervini on the pilot phase of this current study. During this summer project, Gabrielle had the opportunity to be immersed in the full research experience. She reviewed existing research on co-teaching, wrote literature annotations and became familiar with APA style for formatting references and papers. She conducted 9 interviews with general education and special education teachers, who were currently engaging in co-teaching. Gabrielle transcribed and coded these interviews, conducting a thematic analysis of the transcripts. She presented the results of this analysis in a poster at the MUSE banquet.

My collaboration with Gabrielle did not end with the MUSE program. In the fall semester after MUSE, I wrote a manuscript of our pilot study, based on Gabrielle's analysis. Gabrielle is a co-author on this study, and she is gaining valuable first-hand experience in the process of publication and dissemination of research findings. Our manuscript is currently under review at *Remedial and Special Education*, a leading journal in Special Education. Gabrielle also wrote a proposal to present her MUSE research at the 2011 New Jersey Council of Exceptional Children conference, which is the main professional development event for special educators in New Jersey. The proposal was accepted, and Gabrielle and I will be presenting at her first professional conference next month (March, 2011). Gabrielle is also completing an Independent Study with me this spring semester, in which she will participate in data collection for the larger study on co-teaching. Gabrielle and I continue to discuss her future plans for graduate study, and I am confident that this research experience has made her an even more highly competitive applicant for graduate programs.

The MUSE program allowed me to more fully develop my skills as a mentor. It was an honor to have the opportunity to work with a TCNJ undergraduate student through such a pivotal research experience, and to see the way in which Gabrielle's love for research has grown. One of the strengths of this co-teaching study is the many opportunities to involve TCNJ students in each stage of the research experience. I was pleased to find that through working with Gabrielle, my direction for this research became more fully realized.