Ethical Considerations
for Teacher-Education Researchers of Coteaching

Stephen M. Ritchie

Abstract: In small-scale studies of coteaching, there are few genuine ethical dilemmas for researchers providing participants are engaged in ongoing dialogue about the purposes and emerging results of the research. When studies are up-scaled for teacher education programs, the territory is uncharted. This adds uncertainty about the ethical codes of practice for a teacher education program director who initiates such research. If the research is likely to lead to valued learning experiences for participating interns without harm to other participants, it may be ethical to proceed. In this paper I suggest that even though getting the balance right will continue to challenge researchers, it will be essential to establish and maintain dialogue between all participants.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Coteaching as a model of teacher preparation and professional development allows teachers to experience the classroom at the elbows of another practitioner and thereby develop a sense of practice they both share from the perspective of the other (ROTH, 2001). The coteaching projects implemented to date have mostly been small-scale case studies featuring the professional learning of participants in regular classrooms. GALLO-FOX, WASSELL, SCANTLEBURY and JUCK (2006) report on the ethical dilemmas they encountered as participants in a large project that involved the implementation of a coteaching model for interns in a teacher education program. Their *warts-and-all* discussion highlights the relatively uncharted field of research ethics in interpretive research generally (HOWE & MOSES, 1999), and in studies of coteaching specifically. In this paper, I foreground some contradictions I see as an outsider to this research project and

then comment on the ethical implications of teacher educators conducting coteaching research with interns. [1]

2. Some Contradictions

2.1 False expectations rather than "colliding philosophies"

The researchers acknowledge the significance of LAVE and WENGER's (1991) theory for the development of coteaching as a model for teacher learning (¶43). From this situated learning perspective, novice teachers begin their learning trajectory as legitimate peripheral participants in a community of teaching practitioners. They move closer to the center of this community as they progressively demonstrate effective implementation of those practices considered by its members as markers of membership. This takes time. Accordingly, it is unrealistic for an intern—in this case, Matt—to believe he should begin his relationship with a fully-fledged member of the community on an equal professional footing (¶15). Of course one should expect views to be shared in curriculum co-planning meetings, but this should not translate into the false expectation that the intern's contribution would necessarily hold the same weight as his more experienced coteacher (i.e., Rosie). This was not an ethical dilemma so much; it was an implementation problem for program coordinators who recognized a difference in expectations rather than a collision of philosophies. While Matt may have perceived this as a "disconnect," we never did find out Rosie's perspective of Matt's contribution and later reflections (¶17). This could be seen as problematic for the research component because a one-sided interpretation only is presented. [2]

2.2 Implementation problems or ethical dilemmas?

The report identifies three research ethical dilemmas for special treatment (¶13–21). I commented on the first dilemma above. The second dilemma focused on participants who opted out of coteaching. In research it is the right of all participating volunteers to opt out of a project at any time without repercussions from the researchers conducting the research. There is no ethical dilemma here for the researchers. This might have caused problems again for Kate, as program coordinator, and her co-researchers, but this should not be presented as an ethical dilemma. It is clear that one pair of coteachers opted out of the coteaching model. What is less clear is whether or not they opted out of the research project. If they continued to express the desire to participate in the research project, their different perspectives could have become a source of interesting data about the constraints they perceived to work against the implementation of the coteaching model. [3]

2.3 Inclusion and marginalization

The third dilemma discussed was the lack of inclusion of all stakeholders in research meetings. The authors obviously constituted the "in-group" who acknowledge their marginalization of Sheila and Sam from the research project

because these adjunct staff had expressed a skeptical view of the role of research in education (¶10). While we know that Sheila and Sam had agreed to participate as supervisors of the interns, we do not know whether they consented to be research subjects. Discussions about their roles in the coteaching project would only have been problematic ethically if they had not given their informed consent to participate as research subjects/participants. Again, this does not appear to me as a serious research ethical dilemma. Had the researchers engaged in ongoing dialogue with the clinical supervisors, this issue would not have been identified as an ethical dilemma. However, several research ethical dilemmas stemmed from Kate's dual role as program coordinator and chief investigator of the research. These become the focus of my following comments. [4]

3. Ethical Dilemmas

As a caring program coordinator Kate was particularly sensitive to the needs of her staff and interns. She also recognized for herself the need to stand back from data that involved those staff, particularly Sheila and Sam, for whom she supervised in the program. This action and her conflicting roles created research ethical dilemmas that were left unresolved in the paper. These dilemmas were related to the constructs of positioning, power, and care. [5]

3.1 Researcher positioning

Previously, I (RITCHIE & RIGANO, 2001) have studied the positioning of researchers in classroom research that uses teacher and student interviews. That research showed that researchers can elicit alternative storylines from teachers when the researcher reflexively re/positions him/herself as colleague and researcher during interviews, creating new interpretive resources about the teachers' lived worlds. Ethically, however, the teacher participants in such research need to become aware of the changed purposes of the research as the researcher takes up alternative positions. This can be accomplished when the researcher reaffirms informed consent periodically with the teacher, as recommended by HOWE and MOSES (1999). Kate, the program coordinator, entered classrooms positioned as coteacher/coresearcher. Positioned as colleague, Kate had potential opportunities to interact with her coteachers that would give her a unique perspective into what it was like for interns and cooperative teachers to engage in a systemic program of coteaching. We know that one pair of coteachers did not shift into coteaching mode in Kate's presence (¶19), denying her the opportunity to experience collegial storylines. We do not know from the paper, the extent to which other cooperating teachers accepted Kate's collegial positioning. Perhaps it was not possible for the cooperating teachers and clinical supervisors to accept Kate's positioning as anything but program coordinator or "boss." Under these circumstances, it would have been prudent for Kate to withdraw from coteaching and leave the coteaching research to her research associates. [6]

Positioning theory can also be helpful in disrupting singular interpretive stances. For example, Jennifer and Beth read Sam and Sheila's supervisory actions as

problematic in terms of implementing the coteaching model (¶35). Yet, Sam and Sheila may not have recognized their roles and observations as problems, especially when they were excluded from discussions that could have clarified the purpose of the research and coteaching model. By not recognizing the observed teaching practices as a problem they had no moral obligation to report on the events that were read as a problem for Beth and Jennifer. As well, recognizing Sam and Sheila as research subjects/participants rather than researchers on the periphery, could have led to an exciting new line of research. [7]

3.2 Power differentials

Kate was the "boss." Interns, cooperating teachers, research associates, clinical supervisors, and even Kate herself, recognized that Kate was the boss (¶18). There has been a long history of unequal status, power and resources between schools and universities (LEWISON & HOLLIDAY, 1997). Coteaching offers a context for a sharing of capital that is likely to diminish perceived power differentials between coteachers. Coteachers can carve out open spaces of their own that could not simply be categorized in terms of the binary of dominance-resistance, where the regular teacher is subservient to the researcher. Within this research chaotic space the coteachers can enact events that exceed the dominance-resistance binary. SCHEURICH (1997) suggested this openness is a constant source of possibilities. "[T]he understanding that the less powerful are not passive participants in the drama of dominance is a profound insight" (p.72) he asserted. Accordingly, the circumstances that led to the teachers' rejection of coteaching could become a source of inspired research into the constraints of implementing coteaching in teacher education. [8]

While the paper established that warts existed with the implemented program of coteaching, we do not get a sense of how widespread the virus might have been. In the cases discussed, however, it seemed that Kate's role as program coordinator interfered with her roles as coteacher/coresearcher. [9]

3.3 Caring for research subjects/participants

NODDINGS (1986) argued that the choice of research questions, design and overall conduct of the research should be based on the potential to contribute to caring school communities. Educational research according to HOWE and MOSES (1999) should be "for teaching" and not simply "on teaching" (p.34). By working alongside of classroom teachers and interns in a coteaching model in teacher-education research, researchers demonstrate their care and respect for all participants. There are several examples in the paper where the researchers demonstrated such care. For example, the researchers were concerned whether or not they should even be discussing what they perceived to be problems concerning the practices of clinical supervisors (¶20). This becomes less of a dilemma when researchers act in accordance with the principle of reporting in such a way that advances opportunities *for* teaching. [10]

4. Concluding Comments

HOWE and MOSES (1999) conclude, "to be truly ethical, educational researchers must be prepared to defend what their research is *for*" (p.56). Researchers of coteaching should have few difficulties defending their research—they work with teachers to improve the learning experiences for their students. The waters are muddied, however, when the chief researcher is also the teacher education program director holding the ascendant powerful position in relation to herself and other participants. While engaging in constant dialogue with all participants about their experiences with coteaching might help resolve some ethical dilemmas, it creates other dilemmas that can only be partially resolved. So, is it ethical for a teacher education program director to participate in research for coteaching? While there is no immediate clear-cut answer to the question, the over-riding issue for fully informed participants to consider should be whether the research project is likely to lead to the improvement of the quality of learning experiences for the interns without harming other participants. [11]

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Author

Stephen M. RITCHIE is an Associate Professor in Science Education at Queensland University of Technology. His research interests include science education, curriculum leadership, collaboration, teacher education, and integrating science and literacy in the curriculum.

Contact:

Stephen M. Ritchie

Associate Professor
School of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education
QUT, Kelvin Grove, Q'ld, 4059
Australia

Phone: +61738643332

E-mail: s.ritchie@qut.edu.au

Citation