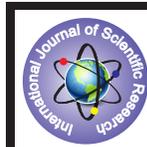


Use of Team Teaching in Instruction



Education

KEYWORDS :

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In the context of teacher development it is easy to perpetuate the teacher-training top-down model, to see 'teacher development' as a thinly-disguised 'teacher training', with an 'expert' 'advising' rather than 'instructing' even if it is a colleague who is upfront rather than an outsider. Without wishing to belittle the usefulness of such an approach, I would like to draw attention to another way in which teachers may develop, namely through working with a colleague in what is generally known as 'team-teaching', that is to say teaching a group in conjunction. In many higher education institutions the usual pattern of teaching is still largely based on an individual lecturer bearing responsibility for students in course module or unit, possibly supported by part-time staff tutors. At some levels of learning though, for example in postgraduate seminars, this model is replaced by a team teaching approach which involves a number of lecturers (usually between two and five) and possibly non-teaching professional support staff as well. Effective team teaching requires a re-orientation on the part of individual staff members and departmental administrators.

In team teaching a group of teachers, working together, plan, conduct and evaluate the learning activities for the same group of students. In practice, team teaching has many different formats but in general it is a means of organizing staff into groups to enhance teaching. Teams generally comprise staff members who may represent different areas of subject expertise but who share the same group of students and a common planning period to prepare for the teaching. To facilitate this process a common teaching space is desirable. However, to be effective, team teaching requires much more than just a common meeting time and space.

In view of the additional complexity which team teaching initiatives introduce into departmental organization and in view of the time needed for staff to adapt to the new structures, it is relevant to ask what benefits accrue from team teaching. How, for instance, does team teaching benefit lecturers, part-time tutors, students, and departments as a whole?

For Lecturers, who so often work alone, team teaching provides a supportive environment that overcomes the isolation of working in self-contained or departmentalized classrooms. Being exposed to the subject expertise of colleagues, to open critique, to different styles of planning and organization, as well as methods of class presentation, teachers can develop their approaches to teaching and acquire a greater depth of understanding of subject matter of the unit or module. **Part-time staff** can be drawn more closely into the department as members of teams than is usually the case, with resulting increase in integration of course objectives and approaches to teaching. **Team teaching can lead to better student performance** in terms of greater independence and assuming responsibility for learning. Exposure to views and skills of more than one teacher can develop a more mature understanding of knowledge often being problematic rather than right or wrong. Learning can become more active and involved. Students could eventually make an input into team planning. **Team teaching aids the professional and interpersonal dynamics of departments** leading to closer integration of staff.

Types of Team Taught Courses

On the basis of nature of content following are the three types of Team Taught Courses:

- Traditional team teaching involves two or more instructors teaching the same course. The instructors are involved in a

collaborative endeavor throughout the entire course. Some team teaching is more like tag-team teaching, in which only one instructor meets the class to cover a segment of the material. Tag-team teaching has its benefits, but it misses out on the benefits of dialogue and the give and take engaged by the team of instructors.

- The linked course approach involves a cohort of students, together taking two or three courses that are linked by a theme. For example, the theme could be "the environment" with the 3 courses being introductory biology, geography, and English. Once each week the instructors of these linked courses provide a one-hour seminar for the cohort in which the instructors jointly discuss connections, similarities, and differences between the content and objectives of the courses.
- Connected Courses are those that are arranged and connected by the instructors to meet at the same scheduled time so that the classes can meet as a whole when the instructors think it is appropriate. The instructors can illustrate and emphasize the interdisciplinary of certain topics or approaches appearing in both courses. For example, a connected pair could be an introductory political science and an introductory biology course where the role of public policy affects the biological environment.

Best Practices:

Following are the best practices to be taken care of by the instructors:

- **Accept the differences in opinion and teaching style** brought by the other faculty member who is collaborating with the teaching of the course.
- The instructors also must **share an interest in learning** from each other; otherwise the positive outcomes that will emerge from this experience will be limited.
- In some cases, instructors co-teaching a course may be **highly similar to one another**, which may present some challenges of its own. Although similarities across professors teaching a course may have the advantage of leading to less conflict, this sort of similarity may deprive students of the opportunity to gain multiple perspectives on course content as would normally be the case in team-taught classes. In these instances, instructors may want to explore using disagreements as an educational opportunity for students.
- Making sure that **both professors spend an equitable amount of time teaching** and preparing for the course. Resentment may be engendered if one instructor spends significantly more time than the other instructor.
- **All aspects** of the course should be **planned together by both instructors**. Careful and extensive planning can help prevent arguments later regarding assignments, grading procedures, and teaching strategies. Frequent meetings between instructors will allow them to familiarize with each other's working styles.
- **Team-teachers should attend each other's lectures**. This provides the best opportunity for the integration of different subjects and disciplines.
- **Instructor's should refer to (and be aware of) the idea's presented by their co-teachers**. The purpose of co-teaching is to push students to achieve higher levels of integration and synthesis in their study of new material. This can primarily be achieved by having instructor's interweave their material with one another.
- **Instructors should debate with each other**. Intellectual debate is crucial to the learning process, and, when successful and not hostile, such debates can teach students how to

view a variety of perspectives on a given issue. In addition, in a given debate a number of methodological approaches may be presented, and this allows students to discover which methodological approach best suits a particular line of inquiry.

- **Both co-instructors should apply uniform grading standards.** Conflicts can emerge amongst instructors when evaluating student work, as they may disagree about evaluation procedures. However, when uniform standards are not implemented, a strong sense of resentment may emerge amongst students.
- **Instructors should let students play a strong role in the instructional process as well.** One challenge of a team-taught course is that each instructor speaks less than they are accustomed to, so the instructors might compensate by allowing for less instructor-student interaction. This practice detracts from the benefits of team teaching and should be avoided.

Advantages of Team Teaching

The Instructional Advantages of Team Teaching include the following points:

- **Responds to the diversity of student learning styles and strategies** by diversifying teaching styles and expertise.
- **Changes the focus of the class** from a teacher-centered one, in which the single teacher is the sole authority, to a more dynamic one.
- **Encourages students and teachers to view the material from multiple perspectives.** This has the advantage of moving students away from dualistic, black-and-white type thinking towards higher stages of cognitive development.
- Allows students to **gain a wider base of content knowledge** than would be possible from the instruction of one instructor alone.
- **Merges different content areas** that otherwise might not be able to be brought together.
- **Lecture-style instruction is eliminated** in favor of a dynamic interplay of two minds and personalities: Lectures require students to act as passive receptors of communicated information, but team teaching involves the student in the physical and mental stimulation created by viewing two individuals at work.
- **Teaching staff acts as role models for discussion and disagreement.** Teaching staff members demonstrate modes of behaving in a disagreement as well as exposing students to the course content.
- **Team teaching makes effective use of existing human resources;** Acquisition of additional expensive resources or equipment is not required to implement this method; only reorganization is required to put the team into operation.
- **Team teaching has the potential for revitalizing instructional capabilities through a process of dialogue.** Team teaching benefits with the recognition that the instructor/student link is critical and offers an approach that has been shown to stimulate and provoke, while expanding and enriching student understanding.
- **Interest in traditional courses can be stimulated** as students share the enthusiasm and intellectual discourse that the lecturers communicate. Team teaching is not boring. Students are drawn into the situation from the first moment.

Pitfalls of Team Teaching

There are many pitfalls to avoid in team teaching. These are:

- **Failing to recognize** that team organization is fundamentally different from traditional departmentalized or self-contained arrangement. Actually, Team teaching is much more than an alternative scheduling format. It will lead to new, more professional relationships between teachers, their students, and administrators. Everyone involved needs to be prepared for changes of this kind.
- **Attempting to form a team without adequate staff development** in such things as team skills (communications,

group decision making, and organization of effective meetings) and team practices (goal setting, record keeping, evaluation). Sometimes it is assumed falsely that because teachers talk a great deal in the course of their work they do not need assistance with communication skills when they are thrust together as teams. A skill in working successfully with small groups is also essential.

- **Failing to understand that new teams will need time and practice** in order to develop into fully functioning teams. Several years are needed for teams to pass through the various stages of development-even truer if team members change and new members are acquired along the way. Team will probably not spend a lot of time student concerns until the members have developed norms and procedures to govern how they will conduct their meetings and make decisions. A timeline for a reasonable growth plan should be constructed.
- **Failing to establish and maintain links between the team and departmental administrators** who can provide support for the team's activities: if there are several teams in a department they will need a coordinator to whom they are accountable. The team may monitor its own internal functioning but it also needs to be seen to be functioning in the wider departmental context.
- **Sometimes modules are overloaded because of input from several team members** regarding material and too many activities in a module. This danger is considerable among teachers who are unaccustomed to team teaching. The team members need to adopt a policy of closely monitoring the amount of course material and assessment required of students and to set limits of what can be included in teaching the module.
- **A tendency to underestimate the amount of time needed to produce high-quality teaching resource material.** Almost certainly the team should seek the guidance of someone who has had experience in developing teaching resources and who can provide not only technical advice but also indications of a realistic schedule for such activities.

Checklist of Activities

The following represents a 'checklist' of things to do to ensure the operation of an efficiently functioning team. It may be that team members need to establish the exact priority; however, each is important and needs to be catered to if the team is to operate smoothly and achieve the goals it sets.

- Meet regularly
- Schedule students' learning activities
- Set consistent expectations for team members
- Rotate roles and responsibilities of team members
- Develop a team teaching guidelines booklet
- Share major curriculum ideas with other team members
- Develop a process for recognizing students who are doing well
- Develop a process for recognizing students who are falling behind
- Schedule class tests and assessment
- Determine which academic and personal skills students need to develop and make a point of addressing these in class
- Use community resources in teaching
- Develop a database of teaching resources relevant to the unit.
- Determine which activities can be best carried out in a large group setting and implement them
- Decide on consistent expectations of students
- Discuss problematic students with the team
- Discuss educational philosophy with team members
- Conduct team meetings with students
- Share curriculum plans with an educational advisor
- Attempt better coordination of lessons
- Share ideas of other team members.
- Develop agenda for team meetings
- Work on building team identify Develop teaching resources as a team

- Share successful teaching experiences with team members
- Foster staff development among team members]
- Participate in a conference as a team
- Hold a team-led departmental seminar
- Devise a way of evaluating the team's performance
- Devise a programme for the induction of new staff members to team teaching.

Conclusion

Teams take a variety of forms in different contexts. However, successful team teaching must go beyond sharing a group of students and scheduling a common meeting time if it is to make positive contributions to the quality of learning and staff development. Effective team teaching takes time to development. Effective team teaching takes time to develop to its fullest potential. Staff who are unfamiliar with it need time to work through the basic issues and routine matters before they can turn their attention fully to issues which affect students and to the impact which their teaching has on the department as a whole. This is time well spent because team teaching can be a valuable source of personal and professional development those who engage in it. It can also be source of considerable frustration if its goals are unrealistic, meetings are not productive and decision making is not well handled by team leaders. These pitfalls and others can be avoided or at least not encountered more than once if adequate staff development support is available and the relative complexity of demands which team teaching places on people is recognized both by the individuals themselves and their departmental leaders.

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