

Benefits of Team-Teaching at the Post-Secondary Level:

On boarding, Mentoring, and Retaining Faculty

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Team-teaching has been a common tool in the elementary and secondary levels for many years, but the idea of it at the post secondary level is not as prevalent. Colleges and universities often cite issues with cost and scheduling when thinking about an idea like team teaching, yet teachers at every level have found this type of on-boarding and mentoring helpful in order to take the theory and practice into the real world classroom. I have had experience at the secondary level as a student teacher and a mentor for other student teachers, and I have found that this type of team approach is helpful in not only teaching people how to teach but also helpful in retaining teachers. I have also seen success with the team approach at the post secondary level. New teachers at all levels need support but how much support and from whom? These are pertinent questions that came to mind when I started researching the idea of mentoring new faculty members at Florida Keys Community College. Despite some drawbacks with cost, scheduling, and finding the right mentor, I have observed many positive aspects to team teaching.

There are many different approaches to team-teaching especially at different levels in the education system. At the elementary and secondary level, teachers are placed into the student teaching role where they experience a mix of team teaching and stand alone practice. At those levels, it is a gradual shift from observation to teaming and finally stand-alone teaching. This is where the new teacher learns how to plan, assess, and implement different lessons. The experienced teacher models the teaching and then lets the student teacher try it out in the actual classroom. The student teacher also learns about the other aspects of teaching such as contacting parents, grading, and professional development. The student teacher may also be

introduced to a different type of teaming where he/she may be paired with a special education teacher. This type of teaming has many benefits for the student teacher because he/she gets to learn about the practice behind the theories learned in college.

At the post secondary level, team-teaching was used in a few different ways. Even though the elementary and secondary levels have found success in student teaching as a training tool, the post secondary levels often do not use such practices. Many times the colleges and universities assume the faculty members are prepared for teaching. This is not always true because many content area experts have little to no training or experience with actual teaching. Team-teaching may help in training faculty members inside the classroom and out because they would have an experienced mentor to help, but it must be implemented carefully. According to Higgins and Litzenberg (2015), "Due to constraints on faculty members' time, team-taught courses commonly use a rotational approach where the semester is broken into components, with each faculty member responsible for "their" portion of the course" (p. 105). This type of separated teaming resulted in confusion from students about expectations and grading. They later experimented with the idea of teaming an experienced professor, an inexperienced assistant professor, and a professional from the industry (p. 105-106). They found positive results for student perception as well as value for the faculty for professional development. Higgins and Litzenberg go on to explain, "Direct benefits to both industry and faculty (and ultimately the department and university) are identified from this experience, and then formalized into three types of transfers: enthusiasm, experience, and engagement" (p. 109).

This type of teaming helps to build teaching skills and comfort within the classroom and institution. Having experienced experts mentor and engage in the process helps the new instructor prepare for the new role as instructor.

At Florida Keys Community College, I was able to try out teaming in an introductory Speech class. I worked with the Marketing Director for FKCC, Amber Ernest-Leonard, in order to plan the course. I had experience teaching in the English and Composition classrooms, and she brought in real-world experience to make a multi-faceted class. This situation was planned after Amber expressed some apprehension about teaching a class. She had the credentials and experience in the field, but she did not have experience teaching in the classroom. This is where I was able to work with her to help plan, organize, and implement different teaching strategies. According to Laughlin, Nelson, and Donaldson (2011), "Instructors benefit from team teaching as much as learners do since the interaction with a colleague energizes both instructors and gets them thinking in new ways" (p. 13). I was also able to learn and grow as an instructor because I was learning new ways to teach others how to teach at the college level. This type of mentoring and support continued through out the course where we taught together in the classroom and worked outside of the classroom to continue to plan and monitor the success of the students. I was able to show her every step of planning, teaching, and grading from beginning to end. It was such a successful experience that Amber has continued to teach the class for the past three years.

Mentoring and learning from colleagues is a positive aspect as long as it is implemented correctly, but there are also benefits to the students. Many of the

students benefitted from having two instructors in the room because each instructor is able to impart knowledge from two different areas and perspectives. Laughlin, Nelson, and Donaldson (2011) found that, “Two or more varying views help learners blur the black-and-white way of thinking common in our society and see many shades of gray” (p. 15). This type of environment fosters collaborative thinking and demonstrates the benefits of working as a team if it is implemented properly. The article goes on to state, “Adequate training or prior knowledge of the rationale behind team teaching is critical. Team teachers must discuss in advance their teaching philosophies, team roles, and course objectives” (Laughlin et. al. 2011 p. 16). It is important to carefully choose and train team teachers before implementing such a process. Not only does it take more time to plan and prepare for the semester and each class, but it also takes a great deal of cooperation in the classroom to have a co-teacher. If proper steps are not taken, the students may become confused or have difficulty following the directions of two instructors.

One potential drawback to team-teaching is the cost to the institution and instructors. Some institutions ask instructors to split the overload pay while others are asked to volunteer to team-teach. In one study at Rogers State University, Jim Ford and Laura Gray team-taught in a course called, *Women in the Literary and Visual Arts*. According to Ford and Gray (2011), “The first few times they alternated who was compensated and who donated their time; the past several years Laura has been paid to teach the course while Gary (as a department head with an already full teaching load) has volunteered” (p. 105). This situation could cause potential issues in an institution especially if team-teaching became part of the expected schedule.

The ideal situation would be to have both instructors fully compensated, but budget constraints do not always afford such luxuries. Often times, institutions and faculty members find different ways to integrate teaming. One such way is to use guest lecturers. Ford and Gray (2011) go on to state, “While guest lectures are a common enough practice, having a different professor lecture every week is more unusual. In the spring 2007 Honors Humanities II course, a total of fifteen other faculty members lectured in their area of expertise” (p. 106). Even though the students had positive comments about the course, Ford and Gray (2011) found, “For the method to work, the honors director or course professor needs to make clear to every professor the goals and rationale of the course and to plan carefully with all of them how their particular contribution will fit into the overall course” (p. 106). There is also the potential to create confusion about assessments and grading when working with other faculty members, but the benefits of team-teaching are worth the time to properly plan.

Team-teaching has many benefits for the instructors and students in the various levels of education. From elementary to post secondary institutions, there have been many different examples of team-teaching and its positive impacts on schools. Even though budget constraints and schedules do not always align with this idea of teaching, it is still worth trying especially when considering training for teachers. At the post secondary level, teachers might not have the same level of teaching experience or background to be fully prepared to take on the challenges of a classroom. Team-teaching as a mentoring model is one way to help support the

new faculty members. It is important to support teachers at every level to ensure success for teaching and students.

References

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