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ABSTRACT

Muskingum College in Ohio uses team teaching in Teaching Science and Social Studies in Elementary Schools and Teaching Mathematics in Elementary Schools, an 8-semester-hour inquiry block for preservice teachers. The course includes three areas of integration: coordination of course content among the three disciplines, team teaching of strategies common to all disciplines, and coordination of integrated course assignments. Faculty roles in the teamwork include co-planner, muse, cheerleader, critic, and teacher's aide. Though students get credit for mathematics, social studies, and science methods, teachers also integrate teaching of assessment, curriculum integration, multiple intelligences, national and state standards, classroom management techniques, and lesson planning. Prerequisites for this successful team teaching have included similar philosophies concerning students and teaching/learning processes, a strong psyche, flexibility, commitment to the process of team teaching, commitment to the process of continuous improvement, and trust. Benefits for team teachers have included mentoring, generation of creative ideas, pushing each other to higher standards, acting as sounding boards, supporting risk-taking, reflective teaching, and fun. Benefits for students have included effective modeling of collaborative teaching, experience with multiple perspectives, and improved teacher-student relationships. Problems have included the amount of time the project takes, an increase in vocal and written comparisons of teachers by students, and lack of team teaching role models for students during field experiences. Despite any limitations, the benefits outweigh the problems. (SM)

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Running Head: TEAM TEACHING AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

ED 417 172

Practicing What We Preach:

Team Teaching at the College Level

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Dallas, February 13-17, 1998.

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Overview of the Course

For the past four semesters, we have team taught *Teaching Science and Social Studies in Elementary Schools* and *Teaching Mathematics in Elementary Schools,* the eight-semester-hour "inquiry block" for preservice teachers at Muskingum College. The students, numbering from 18 to 24, are mostly juniors who have completed one course in principles of curriculum and instruction and have been admitted to the Department of Education. Following the inquiry block, students enroll in a "literacy block" of reading, language arts, and children's literature. Both blocks include field experiences in local elementary schools in preparation for student teaching.

To accommodate differences in recommendations by learned societies for teaching mathematics, science, and social studies, time is blocked to include single-subject instruction as well as integrated topics. Methods specific to teaching social studies and science are addressed on Mondays, mathematics pedagogy is covered on Fridays, and Wednesdays are reserved for exploring strategies useful for all three disciplines.

We plan the course outline to include the following areas of integration: 1) coordination of course content among the three disciplines, 2) team teaching of strategies common to all disciplines, and 3) coordination of integrated course assignments.

In coordinating course content, for example, we plan lessons addressing curriculum standards in mathematics, science, and social studies for the same week. Such coordination allows the students to draw inferences about standards in general, as well as gain specific information about each set. Working with standards intensely for a short period--and seeing them used in a variety of situations--makes a much greater impact than would a less coordinated

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approach. Other areas of coordination include emphasis on concepts and generalizations, planning, and assessment. In modeling strategies for planning and implementing instruction, we choose topics that lend themselves to integration across all three disciplines plus art and children's literature (e.g., Native Americans: Many Peoples, Many Moons).

Instructional strategies common to all three disciplines are taught once, with examples drawn from various fields. These strategies include cooperative learning, authentic assessment, and questioning techniques.

The major assignment for the block, a two-week unit for presentation and display at a Curriculum Unit Fair, requires integration of mathematics, science, and social studies, and can also include literature, music, and art. Journal assignments and field experiences are designed to include all three "inquiry" disciplines. Finally, course requirements are coordinated so that assignments and quizzes are spread throughout the term, thus avoiding the students' lament that projects for all classes are always due at the same time.

Our Team Teaching Roles

As we become more experienced in team teaching, we find ourselves taking on and developing many different roles. Among the personae we have adopted are co-planner, muse, cheerleader, and critic.

Although our co-planning role is most evident at the beginning of each term as we organize the topics and sequence for the course syllabi, we confer nearly daily throughout the term to coordinate the details of each presentation, assuring a variety of educational experiences for our students. A more teacher-directed lesson in science, for example, might be balanced by a more hands-on lesson in social studies. As we become more accustomed to working together, we find that we are spending less time in planning. We know each other's material, strategies, and

even punch lines, so blending our material to support and reinforce common objectives has become relatively easy. We have also developed a common vocabulary; it is no longer necessary to explain each lesson to each other. We know what is meant by "the bread lesson," "the PRAXIS introduction," and "the Curriculum Fair."

The role of muse is often played--and always appreciated. Our many and varied experiences in all kinds of educational settings mean a collective wealth of creative ideas. Lack of inspiration by one of us is nearly always countered by a useful--and sometimes brilliant--suggestion by the other. This role, too, has changed as we become more experienced with working together. In our early weeks of team teaching, we looked for help primarily during planning. Now we feel free to interject ideas as the lesson is progressing, often prompting stories or insights that we know the other one has in her repertoire.

As cheerleaders for each other, we counter the often-deadening isolation of the classroom. Who among us has not asked a perfectly-worded and fascinating question, only to be greeted by the blank stares of undergraduates? Who has not planned the "perfect" lesson, only to have the thing fall apart as the audience was less enthusiastic and inspired than the presenter? It is comforting to have an understanding colleague to say, "Some days are diamonds, some days are stone." And as critics, we hold the mirror of serious reflection for each other, assuring that our failures are examined and improved. Perhaps more importantly, we are assured that our triumphs will be celebrated.

We also occasionally serve as "divemaster," the person who watches the students for signs of distress while the instructor teaches. As observers not immediately on the stage, we are able to clear up students' misunderstandings or misinterpretations in instruction.

Another important role is that of teachers' aide. When we're short a copy, or when the

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masking tape that is usually in the classroom has walked away, we are available to handle the logistics without unduly disrupting the flow of the class. One of us is always available to give extra attention to individual students or groups.

The Educating of Team Teachers: Team Teaching 201

When we began this experiment, we were both fairly adept at working with other people but had little experience in team teaching. In retrospect, most of our early teaching was in fact merely co-teaching, a "you do this, and I'll do that" strategy which Bocchino and Bocchino (1997) call a "tag team." We have retained this strategy but have added to our repertoire: 1) "Speak and Chart" in which one of us writes while the other talks, 2) "Perform and Comment" in which one of us models a teaching strategy or technique while the other comments on the performance, and 3) "Speak and Add" in which one member presents information while the other adds "color" with stories, examples, and humor. Occasionally, we hit the epitome of teaming, the "Duet," in which both present the lesson in a seamless whole. We agree with Bocchino and Bocchino that this strategy requires trust, briefing and debriefing, and lots of practice.

Because of the differences in our learning styles, we have become much more aware of the differences in those of our students. At the beginning of each term, we administer a learning styles inventory, then perform a cluster analysis of the results to develop a clearer picture of the learning style preferences of that term's students. We plan each day's lesson so that each cluster will have at least some preferred activities: visual and auditory, kinesthetic and less active, group and individual. We also build a great deal of choice into each lesson: students can often choose whether to work alone or in groups and to complete an objective by reading, discussing, or making a picture or model.

We have become much more adept at recognizing areas of integration. Although students

get credit for mathematics methods, social studies methods, and science methods, we now integrate our teaching of assessment, curriculum integration, multiple intelligences, national and state standards, classroom management techniques, and lesson planning. These topics cut across discipline lines and are taught much more efficiently *once* rather than in each of several methods courses. We find that we are able to reinforce important concepts, using example from many areas, rather than boring students with multiple cursory overviews of the elements common to all disciplines. This year we have introduced the Educational Testing Service's PRAXIS III, a teaching performance assessment tool being piloted in the state of Ohio. Students have learned the vocabulary and procedures of the assessment instrument and are able to apply them in any of the disciplines that they teach.

We have also become more aware of opportunities for discipline integration. We are quite adept at incorporating into nearly any lesson the process skills usually taught in science, the graphs and charts sometimes reserved for mathematics, and the reading strategies typically found in social studies and the language arts.

Our team teaching efforts have breathed the contagious spirit of teaming throughout our department. The art education teacher works closely with us to help students enhance their curriculum units, the introductory methods teacher requires student attendance at our students' Curriculum Unit Fair, and several colleagues in our department, seeing how much fun we have had with our team, have begun to cautiously experiment with collaboration.

Prerequisites for Team Teaching

A study guide for the National Teachers Exam (Educational Testing Service, 1992, p. 118) reads as follows:

> *If team teaching is to be successful, the teachers involved must possess which of the following characteristics?*
>
> *(A) Equal popularity with the students they teach*
> *(B) Equivalent amounts of experiences*
> *(C) Similar backgrounds or training*
> *(D) Similar philosophies in terms of learning objectives*
> *(E) Similar approaches to the subject matter taught*

The answer is, of course, (D). It is essential that both teachers have similar philosophies concerning students and the teaching/learning process. If the philosophy is shared, differences in the other elements--experience, backgrounds, and approaches only enrich the team-teaching experience for both teachers and students.

Another prerequisite is a strong psyche. Team teachers share the stage in the classroom. One's teaching is constantly observed--and evaluated--by the other. The center of authority is constantly moving, with teachers being equal one moment and in a more or less dominant position the next. In addition, students are privy to the team-teaching relationship and as such are witnesses to apparent or implied differences of opinion.

A team teacher must be flexible. Both time and intended coverage of subject matter must be adjusted to accommodate the other team member. It takes a considerable amount of discipline not to infringe on the other's time--and an equal amount to be gracious when your time is infringed upon! Likewise, material covered by one teacher cannot be rehashed by the other. Only if there are new insights to be developed should the team teachers re-address an already covered topic.

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It is imperative that both teachers be committed to the process of team teaching. Both must be willing to spend additional time in planning future lessons, in reflecting on and improving completed ones, and in jointly grading integrated projects. Both must be willing to solve problems as they arise rather than terminating the team teaching experience.

We have also discovered that it is important that both teachers be committed to the process of continuous improvement. Only with this spirit can we move beyond merely co-teaching to truly working as a team.

Finally, we have learned that it takes time to develop the trust that is so essential to the development of the team teaching experience. After two years we are able to quite easily give--and take--constructive criticism.

Benefits for Team Teachers

For us, the benefits of team teaching have been substantial. First and foremost, the junior faculty member, in her first year at Muskingum College, had an ideal mentor in the senior faculty member. Administrative details, as well as scholastic expectations, were communicated; answers to questions about process and procedures were easily obtained.

We both highly value the creative ideas that develop as we discuss each lesson. The "give and take" of our discussions nearly always result in plans that are more complex and more complete than we could have developed on our own. Materials, as well as thoughts, are freely shared.

We push each other to higher standards of teaching. With a colleague in the classroom, we strive constantly to do our best. We know, too, that our efforts, our insights, and our occasional moments of brilliance will be recognized and affirmed.

We each serve as the other's sounding board, particularly in matters of student testing and

grading. With two of us examining a situation, students are held to high academic standards while being guaranteed that their work is evaluated fairly.

An unexpected benefit is the support for risk-taking that team teaching affords. We each feel that with the other's encouragement and professional insight we can try new strategies, knowing that the debriefing will be supportive and encouraging and will result in improved future lessons.

Good team teaching necessarily results in a more reflective approach to teaching. We spend a great amount of time--often over lunch--discussing the course activities and reflecting on those strategies that seem to work and on those than do not work as well. Insights from the observing (as opposed to the actively teaching) partner often result in better adaptations of strategies to meet student needs and preferences. Immediate feedback from a peer is gratifying, especially when the class is less than demonstrative!

Finally, for us, team teaching has been just plain fun. We both missed the company of other adults when we taught in the public schools and enjoy the camaraderie evident in our joint classroom.

Benefits for Students

As team teachers, we provide our students with an effective model of collaborative teaching. They directly experience the increases in creativity, discussion, and social interaction that inevitably come with tasks shared by companionable peers. In our student evaluations, students often comment on the effectiveness of team teaching and some wonder why anyone would ever want to teach alone. We, of course, reinforce this opinion by including a great deal of cooperative learning and team building in our teaching methods.

The students also benefit from experiencing two perspectives on complex issues. Often

we agree; sometimes we disagree. It becomes apparent to students that there is often no one "right" answer, only the opportunity to discuss the pros and cons of each alternative, to question reasons for a specific position, and to decide for oneself how the issue should be addressed or the problem solved.

Because we allow students to witness our differences of opinion, they feel that they know us as people as well as professors. Student evaluations reflect improved student-teacher relationships.

Students overwhelmingly agreed that having two teachers--especially for a three-hour block of time!--is simply more interesting than having one. We agree.

Problems

The primary problem with our team teaching experiment is the great amount of time it takes. One team teacher receives six hours of course credit for teaching the block; the other receives two. We each spend an additional two to three hours per week in class beyond what our course load assumes, as well as an additional one to two hours of planning. Luckily, our offices are close, and our schedules allow us to do much of our planning over lunch.

An additional and unanticipated problem is the increase in vocal and written comparisons of the teachers by the students. Areas of comparison include teaching style, difficulty of testing, and perceived dominance in the classroom. This problem continues to perplex us because it invariably shows up on student evaluations. We feel that our teaching styles are very compatible, that our expectations are quite similar, and that our relationship is collegial, not hierarchical. One student's comment about a tendency to "one-up-manship" has led us to be more cautious about sharing perspectives and experiences. We realize that comparisons of faculty members are common among students; perhaps we invite more overt comparison by teaching together and by

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asking for feedback about team teaching on our course evaluations.

Another problem we struggle with is the lack of team teaching role models for our students. In few of the field experience classrooms do students get to see "real" teachers working collaboratively with others.

Possibilities

For us, the benefits of team teaching far outweigh the problems. Our plans are to continue to team teach the inquiry block and to carry our integration of curriculum to the next step. In the future, we intend to pursue the following:

1. Further integration of units on curriculum standards, assessment, and planning. Each of these units will revolve around "essential questions" jointly developed by teachers and students to fully explore the topics. Class instruction and assignments will be directed toward searching for answers to the essential questions.

2. Development of the literacy block to integrate instruction in reading, language arts, and children's literature.

3. Promotion of collaborative learning/teaching experiences for our pre-service teachers, including those registered in the inquiry and literacy blocks and in student teaching.

4. Promotion of collaborative teaching in our educational community.

We both feel strongly that our team teaching experiment is a work in progress: we still have more ideas than we have time to implement. As we seek to improve our courses through a collaborative effort, we hope to provide ever better experiences for ourselves and our students as teachers and learners.

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