
**Categories:** Team Teaching, Collaborative Learning, Pedagogy, Cross-discipline

**Summary**

This article focuses on the preparation that the authors undertook to develop a team taught honors course. The authors first decided to develop a team based approach to an honors level course on gender after visiting the others’ course and finding that both they and their students enjoyed the interplay of differing perspectives and approaches to a common set of concepts. Having arrived at the decision to develop a team taught course on the same subject, they engaged in a lengthy process of planning that they feel is crucial to the successful deployment of a team teaching approach.

One of the initial elements of planning that the authors engaged in was an intensive examination of the literature in team teaching. In addition to providing them with a number of key considerations for the development of such a course, the literature review also helped the authors identify the benefits and challenges presented by this innovative pedagogical approach. According to the authors team teaching offers instructors several benefits including an introduction to new ideas about and approaches to teaching their subject, an opportunity to break out of the complacent routine that often sets in after teaching for several years, and the chance to end the type of intellectual isolation attendant to teaching within a specific field of study. For students, the benefits are equally, if not more so, important. According to studies of team teaching, students develop stronger student-teacher relations in team taught classes, experience more enthusiasm towards their classes (as 94% of students examined indicated a preference for team taught courses), had improved learning outcomes, and developed stronger analytical and communication skills than they did in traditionally taught courses. Additionally, students who had taken team taught courses noted that while the classes were, in general, more challenging, they also helped them develop a greater appreciation for diversity of both personal backgrounds and intellectual points of view.

The extent literature also helped the authors identify several key challenges common to team taught courses. Most prominent of these was the amount of time and effort required to develop a successful application of team teaching. Indeed, contrary to some expectations, team teaching consistently required greater investments of time and energy than did traditionally taught courses. Other challenges commonly noted within the literature were the potential for conflicts arising from personality differences and expectations, the lack of institutional support, and the perceived and real loss of autonomy and flexibility experienced by instructors.

Having laid out some of the benefits and challenges of team teaching, the authors turned their attention to offering suggestions for planning a team taught course. The first main consideration they discussed centered on doing the basic research necessary to proceed in an informed manner. Along these lines, they suggested engaging the literature on team teaching, discussing the process and experience with
colleagues who have collaborated on a course before, and reaching out at conferences to others who have done so. In essence, they suggested getting as much background information as possible from those who have expertise or at least experience in team teaching.

The authors also stressed the importance of team communication and planning. In order to successfully deploy a team taught course, instructors must engage in considerable planning prior to the start of the class. Among the myriad issues that must be considered are the class schedule, the goals and objectives set for the students, the materials and assignments given, and the roles that each member of the team will play during each given class session. This last issue pertains to more than just who will teach or lead each given session. Indeed, in order to truly team teach a course, the non-lead teacher should serve some function, such as observe or as an additional expert who will inject thoughts from time to time. To do so effectively, however, team members must decide, prior to the start of the semester, what the dynamic will be between them on any given day. This relationship must also be considered in terms of potential power structures and conflicts. While team members might assume, depending on their relationship, that they will be able to teach without personal conflict, the reality of the experience can create such conflicts anyway. Moreover, if the nature of the relationship has not been planned students can, whether consciously or not, create conflict between instructors by projecting their own assumptions about power and authority within the class. In order to mitigate this potential problem, team members must find a way to construct a unified agreed upon strategy for dealing with students.

Ultimately, the key to success in avoiding the aforementioned problems and providing an effective team taught course, according to the authors, lays in establishing a strong and constant system of communication. Team members must do more than simply work together prior to the semester to prepare for the course. They must also set a regular schedule for meetings throughout the semester, and maintain a continuous flow of open dialogue to ensure that all are aware of each of the other team members’ concerns. Essentially, team members must not only do as much planning as possible, but also must plan to keep planning throughout the semester.

Applications

This article’s utility is limited by two factors. First, it is only of interest to those who are considering team teaching. Second, it offers little direction on how to put a team taught course together. That is to say, the article offers neither examples of the elements of such a course nor any specific guidelines for doing so. Despite these limitations, the article is helpful to those who are interested in team teaching. In addition to noting some of the benefits and challenges of the approach, it also offers a series of thoughtful suggestions for preparing such a course. While these suggestions are, for the most part, broad stroke in nature, they nonetheless emphasize several points for consideration. In particular, the article stresses the importance of constant communication and ongoing planning. As a result, the article serves as a reasonable starting point for those who wish to further investigate the concept of team teaching.
Citations of Interest

