

**Two is Better Than One: Team Teaching in a Teacher Preparation Program**

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### **Introduction/Need for Idea**

Team teaching is an ever-present trend among K-12 education as the disparity of student to teacher ratio continues to rise across all levels (Winn et al., 1995). Further, as the teacher to student ratio increases among career and technical education, consideration of student safety and laboratory practice becomes a concern. Finally, team teaching allows for ease of differentiated instruction and is beneficial in reaching learners with individualized education plans (IEP) (Dieker, 2010). Higher education and teacher preparation programs often do not model team teaching though its effectiveness is supported in the literature (Winn et al., 1995).

Team teaching can encompass an interactive model where two or more teachers teach during the instructional time; a rotational model which places a team teacher in the teaching role on days of instruction that fit his or her expertise; or the participant-observer model, where each team member alternatively leads instruction while the other team member(s) add comments (White et al., 1998). Modeling team teaching in preservice courses can be effective as students will have the ability to interact and learn from multiple instructors with unique experiences. Preservice teachers will learn through observational learning and develop schemes to apply when experiencing this first-hand while conducting their student teaching experience (Hatton, 2006).

Finally, team teaching in a preservice teacher preparation program allows for multiple viewpoints and depth-of-knowledge through lived instructor experiences that are shared with preservice teacher learners. Likewise, team teaching prevents only one-sided viewpoints in field experience and practicum courses. Exposure to different approaches, perspectives, personalities, and experiences proves vital as preservice teachers develop their philosophy about the teaching and learning process (York-Barr et al., 2004).

### **How It Works**

Beginning the fall of 2019 and again in the fall of 2020, two courses (Agriculture Practicum and Early Field Experience) were team taught through the interactive and participant-observer models. Once approval was granted from administration, the two instructors began developing their individual thoughts on the dynamics of team teaching the senior cohort. After developing their individual ideals, an initial planning was held two weeks prior to the start of fall class session. This meeting began with both instructors sharing their visions of their courses. Then taking each set of ideals and tasks, a topical course outline was identified. This planning session allowed both instructors to examine their previous course topics and course content overlapping was found. Once a clear, complete, and concise course topic outline was identified the academic calendar was utilized to begin aligning topics to various weeks throughout the semester. At the completion of this planning meeting, both courses had a weekly topical outline and both instructors left with a successful game plan.

A unique feature of this team teaching group is the actual teachers. One teacher is a female teacher with ten years of teaching experience at the middle school, high school, and Young Farmer level. The other teacher is a male teacher with 30 years of teaching experience also at the middle school, high school, and Young Farmer level. Both instructors have been removed from the secondary school agriculture classroom for less than three years. The diversity of

experiences, connections, and perspectives they bring to the collegiate classroom is beneficial to the success of their team teaching. Following the initial planning meeting, both teachers were tasked to utilize their resources to schedule guest speakers to bring the school-based agriculture education program to the preservice teacher education students during the COVID semester.

With the overall semester plan outlined, the team teachers met on Thursdays prior to the start of the next week. Instructors refreshed each other on the topics for each course and made sure guest speakers were confirmed and additional course materials secured. The team teachers worked to teach the classes together, but each took the main leadership role in their initial course (i.e. teacher A took the lead in Early Field Experience and teacher B took the lead in Ag Practicum). Each teacher was responsible for their course assignment grading and final grading.

### **Results to Date/Implications**

During this challenging COVID semester, having a team-teaching approach has helped keep faculty and students in a positive mindset. From the teacher viewpoint, it has been comforting knowing you are not alone in your course instruction. A sense of comfort resides in each team teacher as they prepare to teach because of the collaborative nature and respect for a teaching peer. This also offers the students an ability to see multiple viewpoints and conceptualizes for the preservice learners that no two teachers are the same. One team teacher has been referenced as “cheery and fast paced” while the other teacher carries the label of “old school”. Students appreciate seeing two different teaching styles and realizing that both are effective in the classroom. No one teaching style is perfect. This comfort in the classroom also has allowed for more interaction between teacher and students and aids in more thought-provoking student discussions. Students indicate they like the process as they identify with one of the perspectives.

### **Future Plans/Advice to Others**

Anecdotally, it is suggested that students have learned from the team-teaching approach, research that investigates student perspectives is planned. Further, investigation on how students perceive team teaching (if conducted during their student teaching experience) will be investigated. From a midterm (formative evaluation) it was noted that students seem to struggle keeping the course correctly identified because they see both instructors in two courses. A possible solution could be to structure the senior cohort into courses by single class meeting days instead of the traditional MWF or TR schedule.

From the instructor viewpoint, the time for in-class attendance is higher than teaching a course alone. Team teaching is best suited for teachers that enjoy the classroom and focus on student engagement and building relationships. The ability to share the workload when developing courses, securing guest speakers, and providing the best experience for your students outweighs the higher attendance factor.

### **Costs/Resources Needed**

Time is the resource needed, as well as a commitment and trust in the partner teacher. Effective communication almost daily and organization are other resources of a successful team-teaching approach.

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