



4-1-1980

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Recommended Citation

Sanderson, William (1980) "A blueprint for building an instructional team," *Educational Considerations*: Vol. 7: No. 3. <https://doi.org/10.4148/0146-9282.1891>

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Combined teaching efforts give variety to the classroom.

A blueprint for building an instructional team

By William Sanderson

With the advent of team teaching in the 1960s, teachers and administrators began to implement instructional team units within their buildings. The degree of change necessary to move from autonomous teaching to a teaching team is not great, but it must be planned well in order to be effective.

In an instructional sense, a teaching team consists of all the teachers of a certain subject and grade level. For example, all the ninth grade mathematics instructors within a building may unite their efforts to form a teaching team. The central concept of a team teaching unit is utilization of resources and maximum efficiency in the use of teacher time. Instructional teams allow individual teachers to draw on the strengths of their colleagues in preparing and presenting course material. The team also allows for shared responsibility in developing instructional objectives, in making decisions, and ultimately, in accountability.

Combined teaching efforts also allow for variety in teaching techniques often impossible to find in the autonomous classroom. This added aspect of variety may be a tool to help motivate students who have been low achievers in the classroom, as well as providing highly motivated students with the opportunity for more individualization than would be possible in the regular classroom.

Some activities used successfully in a team situation include large group instruction for lectures, films, filmstrips, and guest speakers, thereby freeing one or more instructors to work with students in need of special help or students working individually on projects; rotation of classes between teachers to allow the instructor to prepare a lesson of special interest to him and present it to a variety of students; small group discussions with one instructor while the remainder of the students are engaged in another activity with other instructors; and recitation sessions for further explanation of activities done earlier in the unit, usually conducted by one or more instructors while other students are pursuing different tasks.

How, then, can an effective team be molded? Outlined below are five steps, through which teachers should progress to form a solid team. Each step is defined in terms of time parameters, and selected objectives are given for each one to guide the group through the process.

STEP I

Objectives: To outline team format

To define units to be taught

To select specific units for individual preparation and presentation to the team.

Time: Two meetings, held no sooner than one semester before instigating the team unit in actual instruction.

One of the most important aspects of team teaching is the ability to work together. At the first meeting, a general consensus should be reached in the following areas:

1. What units shall be taught in the course?
2. Which individual teacher shall be responsible for preparing each unit?
3. What goals should we have as a team to guide our teaching throughout the year?
4. What instructional objectives should be used in directing the course through the year?
5. Can we work together smoothly and without major conflict?
6. Which one of us should be the "team leader," and be responsible for calling meetings, intrateam communication, and scheduling? (Generally, the team leader should be elected from the group.)

Once the consensus has been reached, the teachers should decide on time factors involved in their course. District and state regulations govern, for example, the makeup of certain courses. The group should set up a timetable for each unit in terms of weeks needed, and a timetable for the year to insure that all units are included.

When that is completed, the members of the team should select the units they prefer to teach. Other units should be divided equally among members. At this point, the members each need to write the specific objectives for their unit, based on the group opinion obtained earlier. It is best to do this individually, then meet as a group to edit the objectives and consolidate them as much as possible. Nothing is sacred when the team constructs a yearly schedule. Since each member is an individual, differences are bound to occur over teaching methodology or strategy. You may have to yield some of your ideas to

another member of the team, but you should expect the same courtesy when your unit is discussed.

STEP II

In area one you produced a master schedule for the year, developed objectives, and chose units to develop. Area two deals with the construction of the actual units you plan to teach the following year.

Objectives: To plan individual units for instruction.
To review individual units with the team.
Time: Three months—one meeting.

Since you maintain a significant degree of autonomy in writing your units, you should feel free to construct them in any manner you think feasible. Remember, though, that you are now planning for the **team** instead of just yourself, and plans may need to be slightly more detailed than usual. Also, your unit will be taught to **all** the students of the course simultaneously, thereby requiring more copies of tests, handouts, study guides, assignments, and other materials. With those things in mind, you should build your unit around some of the essential team teaching concepts, such as:

1. Use of large group—If lectures or demonstrations are to be given, you should try to implement them in a large group if possible. You need to tell your colleagues what they need to do during those periods, and provide them with the material to do it. You may wish to construct a "proctor" schedule for movies and filmstrips, so only one or two teachers are present with the class and the others are free for other activities.
2. Individual strengths—If members of your team exhibit expertise in certain areas, let them use it to the students' benefit during your unit. You may wish to incorporate a rotation of classes so all students in the team unit can experience that person's technique or ability in their area.
3. Don't be afraid to include field trips, since you now have several instructors. You can divide classes in such a manner that only small groups go on trips, while the rest are working elsewhere.
4. Individualization—If there are students who need special attention, make sure they receive it during your unit. It may be feasible to designate one teacher to work with such students.

When all the teachers have finished their units, a meeting should be held to review them to make sure they fit the objectives outlined in area one.

STEP III

Objectives: To consolidate the individual unit plans into a total course format.
Time: Two meetings.

Once individual plans are finished, a great deal of consolidation needs to be done. Each unit needs to be placed in order, with the others, to insure proper scope and sequence for the course. Also, for each unit, various secretarial needs should be completed.

The following questions should be answered during your area three meetings:

1. How should the units be arranged for the utmost ef-

fect in teaching the course?

2. Can we as a team combine certain aspects of all units (such as proctor schedules) so we have some degree of consistency between units?
3. Who will be responsible for typing and collating the handout material for the unit? Will that person have adequate time to do that work without spending an inordinate amount of time outside of school?
4. Which member of the team shall be responsible for working with students in need of special help? Should it always be the same teacher? (In some cases, members of the team may have had training in that area, so it would be best to have them free to work with these students if possible.)

At the completion of area three, each member of the team will know what units are to be taught, which instructor is teaching them, the length of each, proctor schedule(s) to be used, and individual responsibilities for each unit.

STEP IV

Objectives: To find facilities to accommodate your needs for the year.
To schedule those facilities as needed.
Time: One meeting.

When your team has reached area four, the only obstacle that remains is scheduling. Each member should offer suggestions for large group rooms, small group rooms, or other mechanical needs of the team. When a list of these rooms and needs has been completed, the team leader should visit the principal and schedule the facilities as needed. If a difficulty arises, there is ample time to explore other possibilities before the course begins.

STEP V

Objectives: To evaluate the team teaching unit at the completion of the course.

You may wish to review the team status at the end of the year. The best way to do this is to meet as a group, and study the objectives you established in area one the year before. The following questions may be helpful:

1. Did we accomplish most of the objectives we established for the course?
2. Did interpersonal relationships among team members help or hinder the team's instructional effectiveness?
3. Did we each get to utilize our individual strengths to the fullest extent during the year?
4. What activities seemed to be the most successful during the year?
5. What problems were encountered as a team this year?
6. Did we accomplish more as a team during the year than we would have teaching individually?

The evaluation step is optional, of course, but it is highly recommended because it affords you the opportunity to strengthen your team for the coming year. It may be wise to conduct an evaluation at mid-term using a format similar to the one above to help spot flaws or weaknesses developing within your team before they grow into more serious problems.