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How Collaborative Teaching Benefits Teachers, Students, and Programs

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How do we define collaborative teaching?

Collaborative teaching: “Any academic experience in which two teachers work together in designing and teaching a course that itself uses group learning techniques” (Robinson & Schaible, 1995)

Co-teaching: The traditional concept in which 2 teachers share or divide responsibility for planning, designing curriculum, teaching, and assessing the same group of students

I developed a structure in an Intensive English Program (IEP) in which I was an administrator and coined this term to describe it:

Collaborative Course Teams (CCT's): A structure in which two or more teachers work together in designing and planning a course that each teaches independently, but simultaneously, in an academic term. Teachers create a community of practice centered around the course as its domain of interest.

What are Communities of Practice?

A term coined by learning theorist Etienne Wenger and anthropologist Jean Lave

“Communities of practice are groups of people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor.” These communities of practice “share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger).

Three parallel elements of communities of practice:

1. Members have a shared domain of interest.
2. Members take part in joint activities and discussions, help one another, and share knowledge.
3. Members are practitioners or professionals sharing resources and expertise over time.

How Collaborative Course Teams Work

The curriculum coordinator(s) selects CCT Leaders, who:

- Start with a strong set of student learning outcomes (SLO's), objectives, and sample syllabus developed in conjunction with the curriculum coordinator
- Work with the rest of the CC Team to decide which topics/chapters of the textbook(s) to cover to help students meet SLO's
- Work out a calendar with dates of proposed quizzes, tests, and due dates for major assignments listed
- Organize the effort to write assessments, develop rubrics, etc.
- Share ideas, materials, and lesson plans with the team as desired
- Communicate with the appropriate administrator for support
- Communicate with the rest of the team—especially new instructors
- To make this structure work, these roles must be clearly communicated in multiple modes to all stakeholders.

How does collaboration benefit programs? How does collaborative teaching benefit teachers?

- Teacher collaboration can help programs achieve institutional, program, and curricular goals by making teachers better aware of best practices and practices that are best-suited for a particular context.

- Collaborative learning benefits students by:
 - Fostering higher achievement
 - Leading to greater retention/persistence
 - Improving interpersonal skills
 - Increasing regard for positive interdependence (Robinson & Schaible)
 - Contributing toward group goals increases students' commitment to said goals and to the group (Dornyei)

Teachers who engage in collaborative teaching reap similar benefits

My experience with collaborative teaching

Intensive Program A

- 10-week, intensive quarters
- Under 100 students, 1 or 2 sections per course
- Adjunct, part-time load, to Adjunct, full teaching load
- Co-teaching as a matter of practicality: overloaded classes, classroom shortages
- Jr/sr relationship (In terms of program experience) between two teachers in the same class accomplishes multiple goals
- Less effective with two teachers of similar levels of experience—personal dynamics
- Teachers of all skills in a level collaborated via e-mail and weekly meetings

Intensive Program B

- Intensive, 7-week terms
- Rapid growth, from @ 100 to 250+ in approx. 18 months
- Adjunct, part-time load to Adjunct, full-time load → full-time staff, full load
- Program Transitioned from 1 or 2 sections to multiple sections of courses = more instructors & adjuncts hired = less standardization of curriculum, differing levels of course quality
- Limited Collaborative structure, but roles not equally weighted among FT & adjunct. Program pace, schedule = collaboration more challenging than gratifying for primary instructors
- No centralized structure for facilitating collaboration among primary course instructors = inconsistency, frustration

Intensive Program B 2.0

Administrative Structure for Collaborative Course Teams

The Future of Collaborative Teaching Approaches

With the widespread adoption of blended learning models around the world, new joint teaching models have emerged: (Yang et al.)

1. On-site leadership: On-site teachers organize course content that includes both direct content delivery and delivery of digital content provided by off-site teachers.
2. Off-site leadership: The off-site teacher delivers the content via two-way videoconferencing while the on-site teacher organizes student participation, provides face-to-face student support, and evaluates students' performance.
3. Digital co-teaching: Two or more geographically distant teachers co-design activities which require student collaboration online.

Collaborative teaching benefits teachers, students, and programs:

Helps maintain student-centered classrooms
Reinforces new styles of teaching and innovative approaches
Fosters more effective classroom practices when success stories are shared
Helps teachers overcome a sense of isolation by facilitating mutual support and encouragement
Contributes to the positive sense of collegiality and community in higher education
Is essential in meeting the needs of diverse or changing student populations

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