

## **Team Teaching in Teacher Education: Intra-College Partnerships**

**By Bárbara C. Cruz & Nina Zaragoza**

Several educators have argued for the necessity of collaboration among instructors in teacher training (e.g., Brigham, 1993; Kaufman, 1996; Fager, 1993; Austin & Baldwin, 1992), yet there continues to be a shortage of information regarding viable approaches, guidelines, and actual case studies. To further confound the situation, often what some authors call "team teaching" is nothing more than a series of instructors delivering independent lectures in their content areas.

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We have each collaborated with other faculty in our respective colleges of education in delivering preservice teacher instruction. In 1994 we had the opportunity of team teaching an interdisciplinary graduate course for preservice teachers, along with another professor at Florida International University in Miami, Florida. Overall, we found that while our collaborative undertaking produced a positive experience for the instructors and students, it also evinced areas which caused conflict and concern. Despite some philosophical, instructional, and personal conflicts that emerged over the semester, enthusiasm for

the integrated course and for collaboration remained, and continues to remain, strong. As a result of our experiences, we have developed a set of ten guidelines for faculty who are considering undertaking collaborative teaching in postsecondary education.

### **The Interdisciplinary Methods Course**

The collaborative course took place at Florida International University, a state university located in Miami with a student enrollment of over 22,000. The collaboration consisted of three separate educational methods courses: LAE 6355 (Instruction in Elementary Language Arts), RED 6155 (Instruction in Elementary Reading), and SSE 6355 (Instruction in Elementary Social Studies). Usually these three methods courses are offered by different instructors but taken by students simultaneously during the same semester; this was the first time that any of the courses was offered in a teamed format.

Students enrolled in this course were graduate-level, preservice teachers. They had all earned bachelor's degrees in various fields of study other than education, ranging from business administration to liberal arts. They entered the program to receive a Master's degree in Elementary Education, which would in turn enable them to receive certification to teach at the primary school level. In the regular program, courses are scheduled in the late afternoons and evenings as well as on weekends, since many of these students have full-time work responsibilities during the day. Our class met all day on Saturdays for sixteen weeks, which permitted the students to earn nine graduate credits during that semester (full-time status).

For the preservice teachers enrolled in the teamed course that spring, it was the second semester in their program (Block 2). Block 2 was comprised of: Instruction in Elementary Language Arts, Instruction in Elementary Reading, and Instruction in Elementary Social Studies. In addition, students were enrolled in EDE 6948 (Graduate Internship) that semester, which required each student to spend a minimum of two hours per week in a field school or alternative field placement (such as after-school programs, university tutorial programs, etc.) if a participant was employed full-time during school hours.

The three female professors involved in this project were members of three separate departments within the college of education—elementary (primary) education, special education, and educational foundations. The elementary education professor taught the reading education course, the special education professor taught the language arts course, and the educational foundations professor taught the social studies education course. Two of us were tenure-earning and one was tenured. We had not previously worked together.

In developing the course along an interdisciplinary and collaborative line, we adopted part of Joan D. Gailey and Virginia Schaefer Carroll's (1993) model for interdisciplinary and integrated teaching, which includes "lectures [that] are collaborative, consisting of dialogue, even disagreements" (p. 37). We planned for

individual class sessions in which at least two, but usually all three, professors could demonstrate how specific themes and skills could be integrated using the three content areas of language arts, reading, and social studies. Also, in part because the school district in which most of our students would be teaching has adopted an integrated curriculum design, we also visualized a course in which we would model integrated, interdisciplinary teaching.

We envisioned a course where all three of us would be in the classroom most of the time, but planned a few sessions in which either two of us, or even just one of us, would have the opportunity to lead the class. We planned for sessions in which all three (or sometimes just two) professors could demonstrate how specific themes and skills could be integrated using the content areas of language arts, reading, and social studies. For example, in one collaborative class, the language arts professor led a discussion on creating a literate community, the reading education professor demonstrated how discussion could be used to promote reading comprehension, and the social studies professor used discussion and questioning techniques to introduce contemporary social issues. On another day, two of the instructors (reading and social studies) collaborated to explore how the tenets and methods associated with multicultural education were dealt with as social studies concepts, while students learned about comprehension strategies within the context of folktales from various cultures.

In addition to mandatory attendance and field hours, the course requirements included ten weekly assignments, keeping a personal journal, reflecting in a reading log, a four-part essay exam, and a final project completed with other students. The weekly assignments ranged from articulating personal teaching philosophies to teaching mini-lessons in the three content areas to small groups of children. The personal journal gave students an opportunity to reflect on concepts, activities, and ideas presented in class and experienced in the field. Students maintained a reading log that enabled them to relate personal experiences and connect relevant theories to the assigned readings. The exam was cumulative and reflected content relevant to all three courses as well as questions that combined elements from all three of the content areas. The culminating project was completed in a collaborative fashion with other students and included a detailed plan for an integrated unit of instruction along with a written rationale. It was organized around a social studies topic and students were allowed to select the elementary grade level of their choice.

Finally, as we developed our course, we adopted a position where we would not "perceive our students as passive vessels waiting to be filled with our resources and expertise" (Zaragoza, 1993, p. 20), but rather we tried to foster a student-professor collegiality wherein the personal experiences and knowledge of the participants would enrich the entire community of learners. We embraced Sandra Hollingsworth and Hugh Sockett's (1994) belief that it is imperative to provide students with the opportunities to articulate their own grounded beliefs, create their own knowledges, and evaluate their own growth.

### **Successful Intra-College Partnerships**

Although there has been significant discourse recently on the subject of collaboration and team teaching, much of it pertains to primary through secondary school levels (see, for example, Arhar, Johnston, & Markle, 1988; Inger, 1993; Walsh & Snyder, 1993; Solomon, 1994). These studies point out that teaming reduces teacher isolation, increases satisfaction, improves teachers' sense of efficacy, and can increase student achievement and motivation and create a positive affective classroom environment.

In our experience with interdisciplinary team teaching in postsecondary education, we encountered some setbacks but also enjoyed many more accomplishments. At the conclusion of the experience, we took the time to read our students' logs, to discuss with them their reactions to the integrated course, and to review our own journals that we kept that semester. What follows are ten guidelines that we feel can counsel teacher training faculty and other postsecondary instructors toward a positive team teaching experience.

We direct the reader to note that the first four guidelines concern issues of time. Collaborative efforts need to include not just *sufficient* time, but *substantial* time for sustained conversations (Hollingsworth, 1994). Given faculty's many academic, instructional, and sometimes administrative responsibilities, many might feel that the amount of time necessitated by team teaching is not "cost effective." We believe, however, that the benefits gained by both faculty and students are well worth the time expenditure.

### **Ten Guidelines for Success**

#### **1. Before embarking on any collaboration, take time to develop the course.**

In retrospect, the three half-day sessions we convened for designing the course and getting to know each other were not sufficient. Because course development is so important, faculty must be willing to devote a considerable amount of time giving thought to issues of content, pedagogy, and evaluation. If the faculty already have syllabi constructed for their courses, time needs to be spent reviewing them and integrating the topics. The faculty also need to vary the teaching styles and techniques used, taking an honest stock of their strengths and weaknesses.

#### **2. Establish mutual respect and trust.**

We also found that faculty embarking on a collaborative course must take time to get to know each other as *people* first. Discussions involving personal philosophies, politics, and pedagogy are critical for determining the suitability of collaboration. Conversations must be seen as a critical part of all collaborative efforts, not

just an extra "if there's time."

Before faculty can embark on any collaborative enterprise, they should take time to get to know each other, their work, their research, and their educational interests. Having a strong personal relationship first can facilitate the collaborative process. Respect and trust also comes into play when faculty need to be honest with each other about certain strategies and content coverage that perhaps were not successful. Trust is important for critical evaluations of others as well as critical self-evaluation.

One needs to be as cautious about entering collaborative relationships as when entering personal ones. To commit to a professional arrangement without getting to personally know each other is potentially inviting difficult interpersonal, philosophical, and instructional problems. Entering into collaborative work involves personal as well as professional decisions—to separate the two would be a disservice to the power and vision of true collaboration.

Ann E. Austin and Roger G. Baldwin (1992) feel that collaboration continues to be controversial mainly because of inequitable uses of power and influence by some team members, the loss of professional identity, and problems involving integrity. As Marcie L. Paul and Lawrence J. McAndrews (1991) put it, college professors often "value their autonomy, their independence, their ability to be sovereigns in their tiny classroom kingdoms" (p. 8). Collaborative partners must be willing to share the power in their classroom—not just with the other collaborators, but with their students as well.

### **3. Make time during the collaboration to regularly meet as a team.**

Deena J. Morganti and Flora C. Buckalew (1991) suggest that the collaborative team should spend no more time developing and teaching the course than was formerly spent by the individual instructors. While this makes sense from a cost effectiveness perspective, we found this to be impossible in practice. The amount of time to effect a collaborative course, by its very nature, surpasses the time needed if one was teaching a course alone.

Regular meeting times need to be established and adhered to by faculty members so that they may, on an on-going basis, gauge and evaluate the mood of the class as well as air concerns amongst each other. A strategic planning session before each class, as well as a debriefing session after each class, should be held where faculty can confer and discuss problems. Before-class meetings enable the instructors to review individual responsibilities, negotiate in-class time allotments, and agree on content coverage.

After each class session, faculty should also take some time to debrief. David M. Crossman and Sandra G. Behrens (1992) assert that team teaching requires formative evaluations of each class, in which the collaborators review what worked and what did not. Essential to this on-going evaluation is mutual trust and respect (see Guideline #8), so that faculty can make an honest appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of each session.

**4. After the collaboration,  
faculty should take time to process the experience.**

Once the course is completed, the faculty as a team should take time to think about and discuss the collaboration. What was learned? What worked particularly well? What should be changed or modified? Did the collaborative course arrangement work better than the "traditional" version?

We suggest that individual reflection should perhaps be done first. This could be facilitated by the keeping of a reflection log. After insights are recorded, they can then be shared (see Guideline #10).

Also useful during this end-of-course debriefing are students' comments on their course evaluation forms. These insights are particularly valuable if the teaming is to be done again. Instructors can then take note of which lessons, lectures, and activities were preferred by students. Paul and McAndrews (1991) integrated two separate courses in the history of Latin America and contemporary Latin American literature and culture; the second time they taught the class, they reported truer collaboration and increased student satisfaction, in part because of their ability to implement changes based on their experiences the first time they offered the collaborative course.

**5. Similar levels of commitment  
must be shared by all faculty members involved.**

Collaborative endeavors require an enormous amount of emotional, intellectual, and physical energy from all involved. Because of the high level of energy and large amount of time that must be devoted to any collaborative arrangement, all faculty involved must have the same levels of commitment to the endeavor and it must be mutually perceived that this is the case. If this is not established from the very beginning, there are bound to be hurt feelings, feelings by one or more members that they are being taken advantage of, or resentment that not everyone in the experience is "taking it seriously." While many might be committed to the vision of collaborative work, the commitment to the concrete investment of energy must be commensurate.

At the beginning of a team teaching experience, the interest and commitment level will likely be uniformly high. Over time, however, if the collaboration continues, equal commitment may be difficult to sustain. As instructors grow and their professional interests change, interest and intensity may wane. We suggest that individual instructors reassess their priorities and commitments periodically and that levels of commitment be openly evaluated on an on-going basis.

**6. Evaluation philosophies must be compatible for team teaching.**

The importance of assessment issues and their influence on instructional environments cannot be understated. The powerful influence that views on assess-

ment have on all aspects of education have to be seriously considered in any collaborative project. An educator's approach to evaluation is a window into his or her entire educational philosophy. Ultimately, the real issues in teacher education underlying evaluation practices are "what kind of knowledge counts?" and "what do we want our teachers to know and be able to do?" All instructional team members must agree on how students will be evaluated before they embark on the collaboration.

We found one of the greatest challenges to the collaborative endeavor to be the reconciling of our individual approaches to student assessment. Is one of the collaborators a more traditional evaluator, with regularly scheduled objective-type exam questions perhaps graded on a bell-curve, where necessarily only some can be successful while others fail? Or, does one of the team teaching members prefer to use more "authentic" forms of assessment such as portfolios, class presentations, and creative projects? Clearly, if one instructor embraces one of these positions while the other(s) does not, this could cause tension in the classroom. So that such clashes are prevented, possible collaborative relationships must begin with serious initial discussions and decisions about assessment and evaluation.

### **7. Procure administrative support.**

We cannot stress enough that there needs to be financial and moral support from the administration—everything from released time for course development, to agreements about the funding credit to be assigned to individual academic departments, to the unspoken value that is given to collaboration. Often, participation in collaborative teaching and writing projects is informally and formally evaluated as requiring half the effort of individual work.

Austin and Baldwin (1991) maintain that administrators play a critical role in fostering collaboration. The college and university administration must reward collaborative efforts, both publicly and privately, by removing organizational barriers, rethinking resource allocation, and eliminating many of the informal traditions and explicit policies that may inhibit faculty collaboration, such as criteria for tenure and promotion, policies for merit pay, and standards for faculty evaluation.

This issue is best summarized by Gailey and Carroll (1993), who state that:

Interdisciplinary teaching is not possible without administrative support. Even those administrators who support, in principle, the idea of inter-disciplinary teaching must address complicated practical matters, such as determining load hours, how to list the course, and integrating the course within the curriculum. (p. 38)

Also, because collaboration involves risk (see Guideline #8), especially for junior or untenured faculty, the administration needs to transmit a clear message that collaborative teaching and research is considered as highly as "traditional" teaching situations and single-authorships. Otherwise, junior faculty will consider collaboration a jeopardy to tenure and/or promotion.

**8. Understand that collaboration involves risk.**

A successful collaborative effort also depends on participants' comfort with risk. To become involved in a nontraditional model of instruction does involve a certain amount of risk within the traditional university structure. Hollingsworth and Sockett (1994) point out that it is clear that breaking from traditional models involves taking a professional risk.

Colleagues who are not overly worried about earning tenure or securing promotion will probably dedicate more time to nontraditional collaborative models. However, while faculty should keep in mind that entering into collaborative relationships does entail risk-taking, the vision of the value of these types of endeavors should minimize anxiety.

**9. Model collaboration.**

If collaboration is to be the *modus operandi* for a course, not only should this cooperation be modeled by the professors, but the students should also be expected and required to engage in collaborative assignments, projects, and in-class exercises. Team teaching provides a wonderful opportunity for team learning. In addition to many other benefits, group projects enable the individual student to become an active learner and equips students with the skills to excel in self-directed work (Wagner, 1992). We expressed to our students the hope that the positive group experiences they had would provide a solid base for future team teaching as they made the transition from pre-service to in-service.

**10. Build in time for reflection.**

Time to reflect on the ongoing experience should be built into the course, by both students and professors. These reflections can remain private or be shared as the participants wish. We suggest making regular entries into individual "reflection logs" during the experience. Each of us kept a journal wherein we expressed our dissatisfactions, accomplishments, and concerns. When we met as an instructional team, we used these written reflections as points of departures for discussion.

Part of the evaluation scheme for our course included a reflection log we asked students to keep throughout the semester. Students revealed that they felt comfortable first reflecting and responding to critical issues in a personal log and then having the opportunity to share those thoughts in the safe, respectful classroom environment that we endeavored to create and maintain.

**Conclusions**

Despite the preceding words of caution, we wholly endorse and encourage faculty to undertake a collaborative teaching assignment. On the part of our students, evaluations overwhelmingly rated the course a positive experience. The



students seemed to genuinely appreciate that the integration of the three methods courses reflected the school district's expectations and was a powerful connection between theory and practice.

As for us, we learned a great deal from each other—in terms of both content and pedagogy. Our experience echoed the heightened sense of departmental teamwork described by Cheryl LaGuardia (1993). In addition, we gained new friendships that have been both personally and professionally rewarding. Linda A.M. Perry (1993) found that one of the most important benefits of team teaching “were the friendships that grew from the experience of having my teaching methods and myself validated by other members of the team” (p. 12). We enthusiastically concur.

While issues pertaining to commitment, communication, philosophy, and recognition will need to be addressed, they cannot be allowed to remain obstacles that hinder collaborative efforts. If we are going to advocate team teaching, cooperative learning, and an integrated curriculum, we must be able to model what we preach. Yes, it is hard work; yes, it takes more time; yes, we may be taking some risks professionally. But ultimately, the rewards of team teaching are most definitely worth the effort.

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