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Book Review

Team Teaching: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy

Richard L. Mehrenberg[1]

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Publisher Description: For those considering adopting team teaching, or interested in reviewing their own practice, this book offers an over-view of this pedagogy, its challenges and rewards, and a rich range of examples in which teachers present and reflect upon their approaches.

The interaction of two teachers—both the intellectual interaction involved in the design of the course, and the pedagogical interaction in the teaching of the course—creates a dynamic environment that reflects the way scholars make meaning of the world. The process naturally breaks down the teacher-centered classroom by creating a scholarly community in which teachers and students work together to understand important ideas, and where students don't just learn content, but begin to understand how knowledge is constructed, grasp the connections between disciplines as well as their different perspectives, see greater coherence in the curriculum, and appreciate how having more than one teacher in the classroom leads naturally to dialogue and active learning.

Regardless of discipline, college instructors seek out new ways to help their students to master content, make new connections, and better appreciate the complexities of their field. In the book, *Team Teaching: Across the Disciplines, Across the Academy,* editor, Kathryn M. Plank attempts to address these goals through the pedagogical strategy of team teaching.

Based upon the philosophy that "two heads are better than one", Plank describes many of the perceived benefits of team teaching. Some of the most important reasons given to encourage instructors to team teach are that it promotes deeper cognitive and ethical thinking among students, it allows cross-disciplinary studies to occur within the same classroom, and that it allows instructors to improve their own craft through ongoing observation and reflection of a colleague's teaching style.

Plank acknowledges that there are also several obstacles that may prevent quality team-teaching to occur. Perceived inconsistencies in grading and possible increased costs are two challenging, but surmountable problems. Plank asserts that although there may be some initial struggles to overcome, the potential rewards for teachers and students are worth it.

The remainder of the book consists of five case studies about team teaching at the college level. *Chapter One* shares the story of a paleontologist and a molecular biologist who decided to team teach a science class around the theme of "origins". The authors stressed the importance of having students examine the scientific method through two diverse, but equally valid lenses. Challenges included figuring out how to successfully balance instructional responsibilities, and a perceived inequity of instructor authority based on gender .

Chapter Two describes the diverse course offering between a philosopher and a biologist.

[1] Assistant Professor of Special Education at Millersville University

The instructors discussed how they incorporated lecture, writing, and hands-on activities to help first year students explore diseases and their impact on society. The biggest struggle for the pair was ensuring that assessments were viewed as valid and fair by students. They plan to address this issue in future sections through the incorporation of student generated rubrics.

Shifting from the sciences to the arts, *Chapter Three* concerns the combined efforts of a musician and an artist. Their class explored the various ways that art impacts the community. The authors include their actual course syllabus so that the reader can get a more detailed understanding of the class, student expectations, and logistics Field trips, guest speakers, and service requirements were all techniques used to immerse students in authentic learning opportunities. The authors mentioned that the ongoing support by their administration and colleagues greatly enhanced their experience.

The team teachers in *Chapter Four* highlighted how their personal differences that enhanced their experience in teaching for a course on racism. A black female social work professor and her white male colleague taught a course titled, *Racism in the United States: Implications for Social Work Practice.* The authors stated that the course gave students an open forum to ask questions and discuss topics with instructors from significantly different life experiences and backgrounds. Although it was perceived that a few students pushed boundaries, or took course topics personally, the instructors felt that the team teaching experience modeled a professional example of shared power and mutual respect.

Chapter Five concludes the book with the recollections of an instructor on his team teaching experiences from twenty years ago. The author took part in a scientific literacy course for non-science majors. A revolving panel of faculty from different fields took part in this basic course to give students a hands-on approach to the scientific method. The author explains how the course was successful, but was eventually abandoned as being deemed too cost-restrictive to run.

This text is recommended for college instructors with little to no familiarity with team teaching. The case studies, syllabi, and course outlines provides the reader with tangible examples of how this particular instructional technique could be utilized in any number of different environments. The reader would also learn to how to avoid, or at least be aware of, some of the more common challenges faced by teaching teams.

There are also two main criticisms of the book. In the introduction, Plank notes that the average college instructor lags behind his K-12 counterpart when it comes to the implementation of innovative pedagogy. This factor is especially true when it comes to co-teaching. Beyond team teaching, there exists a robust body of K-12 literature of effective ways for two or more teachers to share teaching responsibilities within classroom. Station, parallel and alternative teaching are but a few of the other common co-teaching models. Case studies that employed these methodologies would be a helpful inclusion to demonstrate the wide variety of co-teaching choices.

A second criticism deals with the lack of empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of team teaching at the college level. The introductory chapter focuses mainly on descriptive, rather than empirical data. Likewise, few of the case studies included student feedback, final grades, or peer observations that could be used as an objective measure of the methodology's success. Additional inclusion of this type of data would give readers additional confidence when attempting to implement team teaching on their own.