

Team Teaching

In the broadest sense, team teaching is defined as a group of instructors working together to “plan, conduct, and evaluate the learning activities of the same group of students” (Quinn and Kanter, 1984, as cited in CELT, 1998), however team teaching can take a variety of different forms. Examples of team teaching situations include:

- **Interactive team teaching:** members of the team teach the same group of students at the same time (CTL).
- **Rotational format teaching:** members alternate teaching the class. This is often done to allow the course material to be divided according to individual instructor specialties and skills (Quinn and Kanter, 1984, as cited in CELT, 1998).
- **Participant-observer team teaching:** “all participating faculty are present for all the classes, but only one is ‘teaching’ at a time.” The other members of the team are “participating observers” and can play the role of “model learner, observer, panel member, or resource” (Klein, 1990, as cited by CTL).
- **Team coordination:**
 - Meeting to share ideas and resources but teaching independently.
 - Sharing planning for instruction of a common group of students, with each instructor responsible for a portion of those students.
 - Using a curriculum level approach to develop paired or linked courses or integrated clusters of independent courses (CTL).

Reasons to consider team teaching

Benefits of team teaching for students

- Team teaching deepens students’ analytical abilities (CLT), encourages higher level learning objectives, and improves student performance and learning outcomes (CELT, 1998).
- Team teaching creates a model for intellectual discourse, allowing students to witness how scholars work through discussions and disagreements (Quinn and Kanter, 1984, as cited in CELT, 1998), and providing students with greater interpersonal and communication skills (CLT).
- Team teaching increases students’ active involvement in the material – even in a lecture format, the presence of multiple instructors allows students to engage with differing viewpoints and personalities – the “exposure to views and skills of more than one teacher can develop a more mature understanding of knowledge” (CELT, 1998).
- Team teaching creates a sense of academic community, “build bridges of understanding across disciplines,” and give students a greater sense of curricular coherence (CTL).

Benefits of team teaching for instructors

- Team teaching provides instructors with a supportive, rather than isolating environment, as well as the opportunity to build collegial relationships (CTL).
- Team teaching gives instructors the opportunity to work in an interdisciplinary setting, to learn from other subject matter experts, and to be exposed to different styles of teaching (CELT, 1998).

- Team teaching uses resources effectively – instructors can split up the responsibilities of creating course material and planning activities, and share expensive equipment and space (Quinn and Kanter, 1984, as cited in CELT, 1998).

Getting started

To effectively team teach there are a lot of decisions and agreements that must be made up front. These can be divided into three areas – planning, conducting, and evaluating.

Selecting team members and dividing responsibilities

- **Who will be on the team?**
 - William Newell describes the ideal team teacher as someone who is “open to diverse ways of thinking; wary of absolutism; able to admit that they do not know; good at listening; unconventional; flexible; willing to take risks; self-reflective; and comfortable with ambiguity” (Newell as cited in Davis, 1995). The optimal team has a good mix of subject matter expertise, interests and perspectives, backgrounds and qualification levels, and personality characteristics. This mix can “contribute to the collective strength of a team and the growth of individual team members” as well as “add to the experience the students get from interacting with the team” (CELT, 1998).
- **Who will lead it?**
 - The team leader has two levels of responsibility – internal and external. Internal responsibilities include setting the agenda, keeping records, coordinating schedules, and keeping the team on task. External responsibilities include communicating with the department to make sure the team has sufficient resources and is meeting expectations (CELT, 1998).
- **What is the role of each team member?**
 - All team members must take an active role in team meetings and planning sessions, and by following through on decisions that were made. If each team member fails to contribute equally to formulating and then completing the tasks that the team set out to accomplish, the team teaching experience will break down (CELT, 1998).
- **What are realistic team goals?**
 - Team teaching requires practice – it can take years to become truly effective as a team. Setting goals and timelines and having reasonable expectations for what can be accomplished is key. It is also important for each team member to know what they others hope to get out of the experience and what they hope to accomplish (CELT, 1998).

Best Practices in Team Teaching

The *Speaking of Teaching* newsletter from the Center for Teaching and Learning at Stanford University has developed the Four Commandments of Team Teaching (2006). They are:

1. **Thou shalt plan everything with thy neighbor:** Careful organization and a willingness to compromise on everything from teaching methods and course material to assignments and grading strategies is crucial to avoid conflict cropping up in the middle of the course (2006). Students have reported that team teaching has been ineffective when instructors aren’t flexible, there is confusion about learning expectations, or there is a disparity in evaluation methods or grading (CTL).

2. **Thou shalt attend thy neighbor's lectures:** When multiple instructors are present in each class, sharing their differing perspectives and modeling academic debate and dialogue, students are able to get the full benefits of the team teaching experience. Even if scheduling or budget constraints make this impossible, there are other ways to achieve the same effect. This can be done by requiring all team members to be familiar with each other's course material and to reference each other's content in their classes, or by trying to plan at least a few sessions over the semester where all the instructors are present.
3. **Thou shalt refer to thy neighbor's ideas:** By "interweaving teaching partners' perspectives into each presentation," instructors model the process of integration and synthesis that they want students to achieve in their assignments. By drawing connections between the different course topics, and showing respect for each other's ideas, students will become more engaged in the course.
4. **Thou shalt debate with thy neighbor:** As mentioned above, one of the main benefits of team teaching is giving students the opportunities to observe intellectual debate between scholars. Watching instructors "debate using different methodological approaches allows students to discover the advantages of different disciplines, and to understand which methodology best suits a particular line of inquiry." Students also "learn how to encounter new material through a variety of perspectives, and gain a practical knowledge of different academic disciplines." It also shows students how to disagree without attacking one another (CTL, 2006).

Planning Your Team Teaching Experience

We have used suggestions made by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning Teaching at the City University of Hong Kong and the Center for Teaching and Learning at Brigham Young University and adapted them into a tool based on [our tool that helps TA/GAs and Supervising Instructors facilitate their first meeting together](#) [pdf]. See the *Team Building Tool* on page 4.

Work Cited

- Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT). (1998). *Team Teaching*. City University of Hong Kong. <http://teaching.polyu.edu.hk/datafiles/R27.html>
- Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL). *Team Teaching: A Brief Summary*. Brigham Young University. <http://ctl.byu.edu/tip/team-teaching-brief-summary>
- Leavitt, M.C. (2006). Team Teaching: benefits and challenges. *Speaking of Teaching*. Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University. 16(1). <https://web.stanford.edu/dept/CTL/Newsletter/teamteaching.pdf>

Team Building Tool

This tool can be used to set priorities and build understanding between members of your new teaching team. Work through the questionnaire individually, indicating to what extent you think each of the following is important for the success of the team teaching experience, and then meet to compare and discuss your responses.

	Very important	Important	Don't know	Not important	Not applicable
Goals and Expectations					
Improve teaching skills					
Step out of your comfort zone					
Potential for interdisciplinary research					
Improve student learning outcomes					
Opportunities for creative assignments					
Build a learning community					
Improve curricular coherence					
Planning					
Discuss educational philosophy with team members					
Meet regularly					
Develop agenda for team meetings					
Set expectations and deadlines for team members					
Share curriculum plans with an educational developer					
Develop team teaching guidelines					
Rotate roles and responsibilities					
Work on building team identity					
Develop shared set of teaching resources					
Share successful teaching experiences with team members					
Conducting					
Coordinate lessons and activities					
Attend each other's lessons					
Develop a process for recognizing students who are doing well					
Develop a process for recognizing students who are falling behind					
Discuss problematic students with the team					
Set consistent expectations for students					
Conduct team meetings with students					
Develop and apply common grading standards					
Evaluating and Revising					
Devise a way of evaluating the team's performance					
Maintain documentation for the course					
Devise a program for the induction of new staff members to team teaching					