TEAM TEACHING *to* TEACH TEAMING

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New public relations practitioners are expected to collaborate and work in teams, but faculty typically do not model teamwork in the classroom. This case study demonstrates how team teaching can effectively teach teaming by example in public relations skills courses.

Team teaching is more work, not less, and it pulls grumbling students from their comfort zones. However, the greater effort of team teaching comes with significant payback for both teachers and students. With team teaching, educators can move from isolation to a higher level of collegiality, they can teach from their strengths, and they can become better teachers in general. Students benefit from the expertise of multiple mentors and the broadening of multiple perspectives. And dealing with multiple teachers helps prepare students to deal with multiple clients.

Flexibility, ego check, communication and a spirit of adventure are the most important factors in assembling a teaching team. Despite the extra effort required for team teaching, outcome competencies are improved, and, despite initial resistance, students applaud team teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Many names are used – co-teaching, collaborative teaching, cooperative teaching. Because we teach public relations students the importance of working in teams, we might most appropriately refer to it as "team teaching to teach teaming."

Team teaching is fraught with dangers outside the comfort zones of both students and teachers. Students are comfortable taking lecture notes and memorizing an established set of answers. They are quick to cry, "I'm confused," as soon as they are confronted with first one teacher and then another who assign them projects that can be approached from multiple perspectives. Similarly, teachers are comfortable reigning with autonomy over their classroom domains. However, public relations graduates will be dealing with multiple clients (much like multiple teachers) who have projects for which there is no established set of right answers.

But that's not the main reason we adopted a team teaching approach for the public relations curriculum at a mid-sized state university in the middle of the country. We did it because we were two teachers with different areas of expertise that did not pigeon-hole well into the course structures. One had some strengths for each course, and the other teacher had different strengths for the same courses. Like Yanamandram and Noble (2005), we find ourselves increasingly "expected to do more with less."

CASE STUDY

Our 10,000-population university is located in a 35,000-population town with very few teaching resources available in the off-campus professional community. It's at least two hours from a major metropolitan area. Our ACEJMC-accredited mass communication program has about 500 students with roughly one-third in the public relations sequence, which holds Certification in Education for Public Relations (CEPR). Faculty are spread thin teaching a 4-4 load with academic advising for 150-180 public relations students per semester.

One tenured professor, the "old woman," brought two decades of practitioner experience and a doctorate to the classroom in 1994. The new instructor, the "young man," has a master's degree and five years of experience in the profession and adjunct teaching. They are responsible for the 15-credit public relations curriculum, which includes MC 330 Principles of Public Relations, MC 332 Public Relations Writing & Design, MC 334 Public Relations Research & Strategy, MC 434 Public Relations Campaigns & Case Studies and MC 430 Strategic Communication Tactics. MC 430 is commonly known by the title under which it began – special topics. Public relations majors choose a minimum of three one-credit short courses from a menu of offerings taught by leading academicians and professional practitioners who come to campus for one or a couple of weekends to teach in their "special topics" areas of expertise.

Davis (1995) cautions that team teaching is well suited for considering multiple perspectives and developing synthetic thinking, but less effective for delivering a fixed mass of content. The relatively fixed content of the Principles survey course is taught by the old woman. On the other hand, because of the higher level of critical thinking and the multiple perspectives involved, the skills classes of Writing & Design and Research & Strategy are team taught. Writing is the young man's greatest strength, and design is the old woman's greatest strength. So students in Writing & Design complete several projects that are assessed for both writing and design. Because the young man is just beginning doctoral coursework and the old woman has decades of experience in a range of methodologies, she guides students through the instrumentation and administration for a variety of research studies in Research & Strategy. The young man teaches students how to apply their research findings in the development of effective strategies and tactics.

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After experimenting with different scheduling structures, we have settled on four periods per week for each of the two classes. Two one-hour class periods and two one-hour lab periods are actually treated interchangeably because some weeks require more class time and other weeks require more lab time. And unsupervised lab time is sometimes appropriate for students to work with the colleagues on their teams, while instructor mentoring of teams one at a time is sometimes appropriate. Although the Campaigns class is also well suited to team teaching, this capstone course is taught by the young man, primarily because of FTE constraints.

Because we are not both with all of the students all of the time, we supplement scheduled meeting times with e-mail tutorials and message board communications on the course's homepage. Parente, et al (2007), explain how ELive! and discussion boards facilitate communication for a team-taught online MBA program. While public relations skills classes would suffer from elimination of on-site collaboration, we are moving toward greater use of such high-tech tools to develop an in-class/online hybrid course delivery. This, in fact, has exciting possibilities for expanding collaboration to multiple sites as with the international public relations program initiated by Dr. Mel Sharpe (Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana) and Dr. Roberto Simoes (Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, Brazil). A Brazilian student team planned a campaign for Muncie, while the U.S. student team planned a campaign for Porto Alegre through conference calls, e-mail, an interactive course Website (Sharpe, et al, 2005).

TEAMING FORMATS

Davis (1995) provides a simple definition of team teaching as "two or more faculty in some level of collaboration in the planning and delivery of a course," and McDaniel and Colarulli (1997) analyze various types of team teaching along four relationship dimensions: (1) curricular integration, (2) faculty-student interaction, (3) student engagement, and (4) faculty autonomy. In fact, scholars have offered several sets of teaming models, some of which are rather complex. Based roughly on the faculty autonomy dimension, we have organized the models into four formats: highest autonomy in the "Pow-Wow" approach, moderate autonomy with the "Chief-Indians" approach, and lowest autonomy in the "Two-for-One" approach. Also low in autonomy is what we refer to as our "Two-Partner Controlled Chaos" approach.

(1) **The POW-WOW approach** – Several studies have defined models in which autonomous instructors "pow-wow" to share teaching ideas and resources but function independently (Goetz, 2000; Maroney, 1995; Robinson and Schaible, 1995). Although some aspects of these models have enhanced our approach, we see them more as expected collegiality than as team teaching.

(2) **The CHIEF-INDIANS approach** – Several studies have defined models in which instructors take turns, usually with one "chief" teacher taking the lead in coordinating the schedule (Goetz, 2000; Leung, 2007; Morlock, 1988; Shafer, 2001).

(3) **The TWO-FOR-ONE approach** – Other studies have defined different types of two-partner models (Flanagan and Ralston, 1983; Galley and Carroll, 1993; Goetz, 2000; Maroney, 1995; Nead, 1995; Robinson and Schaible, 1995). Both teachers are always in the classroom; sometimes one teacher talks while the other moves, and sometimes the two teachers engage in Socratic dialogue. As Yanamandram and Noble (2005) found, students respond more favorably to team teaching when there are fewer team members, thus making "Two-for-One" models generally more to the liking of students than the "Chief-Indians" models.

(4) **The TWO-PARTNER CONTROLLED CHAOS approach** – otherwise known as the "toss the hot potato" model. Full-time equivalency (FTE) is often an insurmountable problem with "two-for-one" models. If a teacher has to be present for every class period, he expects (and deserves) full compensation credit for the course. "Large enrollments common in team taught classes," Shafer (2001) argues, "should make this a financially viable option." (Nope – not at our university!)

Beavers and DeTurck (2000) note the importance of making connections from course to course. Parente, et al (2007), make the point that students need a complete view of the broad picture – how the course material provides "interlocking pieces" rather than single-functional "silos."

OUTCOMES

The greater effort of team teaching compared to traditional teaching comes with greater payback for both teachers and students. Teachers can teach from their strengths in less isolation, and they can benefit from scheduling flexibility. Students get multiple perspectives and can operate at higher cognitive and creative levels while learning to maneuver team dynamics.

- **Teachers** – *from isolation to collegiality*

Team teaching moves professors from the academic isolation inherent in more traditional forms of teaching (Goetz, 2000), strengthens faculty relationships (Buckley, 2000), and builds "community" among teaching partners ("Team teaching – advantages, disadvantages").

- **Teachers** – *teaching from strengths and teaching better*

Parente, et al (2007), conclude that team-teaching faculty are "more collegial and robust" because of their working relationships. Yanamandram and Noble (2005) note that they are "more inclined to be passionate and enthusiastic" because they are teaching the areas of their greatest expertise. And they have partners to remedy any weaknesses. Partners learn new teaching

"Orientation to Controlled Chaos"

Some students were quite disconcerted by what seemed to be chaos when we began team teaching. We use two classrooms, two computer labs and two conference rooms. Everybody has to be on his toes to know which is the designated room of the hour. We have control, but that was not initially apparent to some of the students. To them, we seemed to just "toss the hot potato" back and forth. So we instituted an "orientation to controlled chaos."

Because public relations majors have the old woman for the introductory course, they initially came into the first team-taught class knowing her but not the young man. So we selected a class period part-way through the introductory course and presented ourselves as equal teaching partners. Due to the inclination to view the old woman at professor rank as "senior" to the young man at instructor rank, she begins each orientation session with a brief overview and then he takes the lead in the presentation. It also helps that he teaches the capstone course, thus associating him with the highest level skills class.

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approaches from each other and, as Shafer (2001) notes, "The presence of professional peers serves as subtle reinforcement to keep lecture notes current, grade conscientiously, and resist the temptation to get by with a minimum of effort."

- **Teachers –** *flexibility and professional development*

Team teaching does not provide faculty with more time (in fact, planning and coordination require significant additional time), but it does provide flexibility in scheduling. Yanamandram and Noble (2005) identify team teaching as "a management tool for addressing the pressure on resources, notably time." The schedule can be arranged to free team-teaching partners for professional development conferences and research. And, beyond the scheduling flexibility, team teaching can foster professional development because teaching partners can also be research partners with expanded scholarship ideas (Helms, et al, 2005; Mckee and Day, 1992).

As Beavers and DeTurck (2000) note, "We become aware of the world outside our narrow fields of endeavor." This may be the most valuable outcome of team teaching for both teachers and students.

- **Students –** *confusion v. opportunity*

Team-teaching partners must help students turn the "confusion" inherent in "different" into the "opportunity" inherent in "diversity." Parente, et al (2007), warn that a "new and different learning environment" often creates anxiety, and this seems to be even more pronounced among students with long-established classroom expectations. Before interviewing students about team teaching, Leung (2007) expected upper-division students to appreciate tapping into the expertise of instructors from different backgrounds for the specialized courses typical of advanced studies. Instead, upper-division respondents were more negative than lower-division respondents about team teaching. Beavers and DeTurck (2000) admonish us to "resist the inclination to teach to students' comfort zones." We must not choose the comfortable fantasy of oversimplification in preference to the uncomfortable complexities that characterize reality.

Buckley (2000) posits that exposure to alternate perspectives promotes the development of critical thinking skills in students (p. 15). And Goetz (2000) echoes the reasoning of Buckley and Shafer. "The potential for diversity and ambiguity within team teaching may prove disconcerting for some students who might be confused by more than one way of looking at issues or grading assignments," Goetz argues. "Exposure to the views of more than one teacher permits students to gain a mature level of understanding knowledge; rather than considering only one view on each issue or new topic brought up in the classroom, two or more varying views help students blur the black-and-white way of thinking common in our society, and see many shades of gray." Goetz concludes that, "the discomfort of a few may be to the ultimate benefit of the many."

- **Students –** *two mentors, two approaches and more expertise*

Students vary in preferred learning styles, and team teaching increases the likelihood that any given student will encounter a compatible teaching style (Goetz, 2000; Jacob, et al, 2002; McDaniel and Colarulli, 1997). The presence of two teachers also reduces the tension of any student-teacher personality conflicts. It's hard to claim a gender bias, for example, when one teacher is a young man and the other is an old woman. And two teachers working together are better equipped than one alone to cope with difficult students.

- **Students –** *team modeling*

Eisen and Tisdell (2002-2003) note that we live in the high-tech information age. "Increasingly, the spotlight is on knowledge construction and the ability to work with other people in teams."

Mason (1992) notes that students in business programs are likely to be part of collaborative teams in their work environments. "While MBA students are expected to collaborate and work effectively in teams," Parente, et al (2007), argue, "faculty do not typically model collaboration in course design, delivery or evaluation." This is also true in the practice of public relations. "If we preach collaboration but practice in isolation," warn Robinson and Schaible (1995), "students get a confused message." Robinson and Schaible conclude that, "Through learning to 'walk the talk,' we can reap the double advantage of improving our teaching a well as students' learning" (p. 59).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Existing research findings have identified some of the factors important in successful teaching partnerships, but additional study is needed to define ideal combinations of teacher characteristics for different types of team teaching, to identify the most effective distribution of workloads, and to determine appropriate preparation of both teachers and students for the dynamics of team teaching that differ from more conventional learning modes.

Yanamandram and Noble (2005) conclude that "the most critical factor in determining the success or failure of a team teaching effort is the actual composition of the team." Knowledge expertise is not the most important factor. Far more significant are flexibility, mutual respect and ego check, support and communication, and a spirit of adventure.

Beavers and DeTurck (2000) identify flexibility in both logistical and scholarly matters as the foremost factor in the success of team teaching. Both partners need to be flexible in order to adjust to unforeseen complications, but both must also stay current with the agenda. Falling behind is unfair to both the partner and the students. "An instructor who is incompetent, irresponsible, and

personally insecure is not going to function well in any classroom, alone or with others," Shafer (2001) warns. "Even competent individuals who are uncomfortable with having their assumptions challenged . . . will disrupt the team teaching process."

"Don't take things personally," Maroney warns, because the partners may occasionally have widely divergent points of view. In fact, Robinson and Schaible (1995) recommend that team-teaching partners "practice disagreeing amicably." Team teachers must be "united, not divided," advises Maroney (1995), particularly in regard to assessment. Evaluation by a team of teachers will be stronger than the judgment of one alone, but students who are so often grade-driven deserve some consistency (Goetz, 2000; Parente, et al, 2007). Goetz warns that "a clever student may attempt to play one teacher against the other in order to improve his/her grades."

Teachers rigidly attached to their own comfort zones are not well suited for team teaching. Neither are those who are unwilling to relinquish total control. And some fear that team teaching will be more work than traditional teaching. (Okay – that's true. It really is more work.)

Maroney (1995) warns that "yeah butters" have no place in team teaching. ("Yeah, but that won't work. . . ." "Yeah, but I tried that before. . . ." "Yeah, but. . . ." "Yeah, but. . . .")

"No one should be required to participate," Shafer (2001) advises. "Only individuals who volunteer and are competent in their fields, professionally and psychologically secure, and comfortable with spontaneous public debate are suitable." In addition, because insurmountable differences in teaching philosophies "can create a chasm in the team's working relationship," Goetz (2000) adds that team teaching partners should be able to choose each other.

"Team teaching involves daring to take risks," concludes Shafer (2001). "So does living." And "the best approach to finding one's way," Beavers and DeTurck (2000) conclude, sometimes "is to revel in the getting lost." Therefore, those who have a spirit of adventure and are willing to take some risks to enhance their students' learning experiences are prime candidates for team teaching.

Hmmm . . . spirit of adventure and risk-taking . . . **sounds like public relations educators**.

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Evaluation by a team of teachers may be stronger than the judgment of one alone

We divide the objective elements evenly between the young man and the old woman, but we team-grade the subjective elements. We begin by independently assessing student work. Then we compare our impressions, which are sometimes identical but more often enhanced because each of us tends to focus on elements missed by the other. The most important part of team-grading is constant communication to guard against inconsistency.

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