SOCIAL STUDIES REFLECTIVE PAPER

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ABSTRACT

Two College of Education administrators who also served as adjunct faculty members decided to embark on team teaching a social studies methods course in a teacher preparation program. The analysis of the literature review indicated that very few studies had been conducted on the topic.

After reflecting about the benefits of previous PreK-12-grade team-teaching experiences, the writers chose to team teach a methods of teaching social studies course to students in the undergraduate elementary education program of study. Additionally, they sought to examine whether pairing of novice with seasoned faculty would be beneficial to both. Previously, this approach had not occurred at the college. The analysis of the results indicated that team teaching paired with known best practices in higher education instruction can be an effective approach to instruction. Further, the practice seemed to increase both faculty members' professional development and instructional effectiveness.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Armed with over 40 years of PreK-ninth-grade teaching experiences that included team teaching, two College of Education administrators who also served as adjunct faculty members pondered whether team teaching would be effective in a social studies methods course in a teacher preparation program. One instructor had over 25 years of PreK-ninth grade, as well as higher education, teaching experience that centered on English language learners and teacher candidates. The other had been in the educational arena for over 15 years. Her experiences included teaching elementary school, middle school, and undergraduate college students, and she was adept with educational technology. The course was designed for 15 weeks or one semester. Because this approach had not been implemented in the college of education at this institution of higher education, the instructors reflected on the plausibility of this approach.

As the instructors started the conversation about the idea of team teaching, other potential benefits began to emerge. For example, to unify all instructors, ideas had been surfacing about ways to connect novice instructors with more seasoned instructors. The latter could mentor and guide the former in dispositional traits as well as effective teaching strategies.

The varied experiences and backgrounds of the instructors also proved to be an added benefit to the teaching and learning that took place in the classroom. The instructor with robust higher education teaching experience and English language learner instructional experience, was able to facilitate the implementation of the curriculum and the structure of the lessons in a format that was pedagogically sound for the classroom students. The instructor's in-depth knowledge of the program also provided a foundation for expectations of foundational knowledge students would bring to the classroom. Knowing many of the classroom students were English language learners additionally provided opportunities to forecast language development needs, while also modeling such instructional strategies that would be used by these students in their own future classrooms. In a similar way, the instructor with varied teaching experiences focused on utilizing educational technology was effective in complementing the curricular implementation with strategical technology use. The instructor supported classroom students with higher engagement and

comprehension levels with the content of the course. Strategies, tangible tools, and transferable practices were shared with the students, through modeling and content instruction, which students would eventually be competent in implementing with their own future learners.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this reflective practice was to examine if the practice of team teaching in College of Education would be effective for our teacher candidates. As teacher educators, the authors knew that it was important for our teacher candidates to be able to collaborate, plan, teach, and reflect in a team setting.

Several experts have touted that when educators engage continuously in reflective practice, their students are more likely to demonstrate greater gains in their academic achievements (Zeichner & Liston, 2013; Ghaye & Lillyman, 2008; Roadman, 2010; McGregor & Cartwright, 2011). Reflecting on our own experiences of team teaching in K-12 settings, the authors realized that there were several advantages when the authors engaged in reflecting about our practice. For example, when the authors collaborated with another teacher to reflect on how to design a lesson on a particular concept, the authors were more likely to create learning experiences that were more inclusive and incorporate the various disciplines, including reading, writing, science, and social studies. Additionally, the authors recalled that our students were more likely to increase their academic achievement because there were two professionals who were able to address their learning styles and needs. Engaging in this type of thinking aligned with what Schon (1983) defined as reflection-on-action . In addition to examining our students' academic performances, the authors analyzed our own actions in our previous teaching practices. Reflecting on Schon's definition of reflection-on-action, Finley (2008), further elaborates that when practitioners engage in this experience, they could consider ways to incorporate those actions in their current or future practice.

Because the authors wanted to model collaboration, planning, teaching, and reflection with our teacher candidates, the authors also engaged in what Schon (1983) referred to reflection-in-action . While the previous concept focuses on previous experiences, Iqbal (2017), explained that during this experience, the practitioner is fully engaged, aware, and thoughtful about his/her present time teaching practice and its effect on the students' learning.

ACTIVITY/PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The co-instructors met several times prior to the start of the course. During the meetings, the two collaborated on planning the scope and sequence of the topics and objectives. This process was tightly aligned with the Sheltered Instructional Observational Protocol (SIOP) that was developed by Echevarria, Vogt, & Short (2016). Since both instructors were adept in this protocol, it enabled them to be transparent. This process allowed them to share and model it with their students, many of whom would eventually teach English Language Learner (ELL) students. Once the course began, the two also met weekly for an hour each time to review data, plan instruction, and reflect on the previous class.

After introductions on the first day of the class, the two instructors informed the students about this unique opportunity. They likened it to when they worked as classroom teachers and how during those experiences, they often team taught with a colleague. Additionally, they expressed their desires to share their collective experiences using this approach with the students and eventually with a larger audience. The instructors indicated that the two would be writing in their own individual teaching journal to reflect on their teaching and learning experiences. To assist them in better serving their needs, the instructors also requested that after each class session, the students write a brief reflection about what they observed about the team teaching approach and how they perceived the instruction that occurred during that particular session. Furthermore, they reviewed the SIOP process since most of the students had already completed the course that was dedicated to effective methods of instruction for ELLs.

The transparency began immediately. When each instructor introduced herself, she was modeling how to initiate a rapport with the students. The introduction included photographs of the instructor, her hobbies and interests, and educational experiences. By discussing the significance of sharing personal qualities, the

instructor was setting the stage for the students to emulate the experience.

In subsequent sessions, while modeling situational thinking and decisions as reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983), the instructors proceeded with delivering the course materials with open dialogues and metacognition about their instructional process. For instance, during a lesson about designing a lesson plan, instructors utilized a think-aloud approach in drafting the lesson plan. They modeled asking each other questions and proposing solutions or ideas for planning according to the SIOP process while taking into account each student's skills and abilities. The questions that they posed were ones that the students had often asked in their reflections.

DESCRIPTION OF REASONS THAT EXPLAIN THE PROBLEM

The concept of team teaching varies (Conderman, 2011). The review of literature provided some insight on a form of team teaching that had occurred in other institutions (Daraviras, 2017 ; Metzger, 2015). However, the implementation of team teaching was done differently. The authors understood there were some challenges and some benefits of the team teaching that was implemented at the higher education level; however, more research was needed on the process of team teaching, and the implementation of team teaching to include two instructors with the same group of students in a class.

The concept of team teaching in higher education has been practiced and documented in various publications (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012; Leavitt, 2006; LaFauci & Richter, 1970). In that context, team teaching comprised of instructors planning the course objectives and determining the best resources and instructional/grading strategies. The instructors did not team teach the same class with one another. Rather, each instructor was responsible for teaching a class on his/her own (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012). In addition, in higher education settings, some challenges such as planning time, collaboration, compensation of two instructors for the same class, and policies regarding merit and tenure may prevent the approach to team teaching that is prevalent in PreK-12-grade institutions (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012). The structure of university level courses are to account for one instructor per course. At times instructors will collaborate on writing the curriculum or syllabus for their courses, and collaborate on the approach to teaching designated material or utilizing specific resources. Instructors will typically independently plan, prepare for, and implement curriculum, in addition to completing other duties such as assignment grading. While occasionally a graduate student or teacher's assistant will take on grading responsibilities, an instructor fulfills other aspects of teaching the course without other assistance or collaboration. Any formative or summative assessments revealing progress on student learning are analyzed without great inquiry into how the students are learning or which instructional practices are having the greatest impact on learning.

Finally, this approach had not been attempted by the faculty in the college where the study occurred. One reason that may be attributed to this may be that it was unknown whether it would have a positive impact on student outcomes, achievement, or learning at the higher education level. The importance of the student element would prioritize unveiling this aspect in our research. More information was needed from the student perspective on learning in a team-teaching environment within higher education.

EVALUATIONS OF REASONS THAT EXPLAIN THE PROBLEM

The review of the literature revealed that team teaching is also known by other terms, such as collaborative teaching or co-teaching. These terms could be used interchangeably in literature and in practice.

Definitions of Co-Teaching

Collaborative teaching, or co-teaching, "Involves two or more educators working collaboratively to deliver instruction in a heterogeneous group of students in a shared instructional space" (Conderman, 2011, p. 24) and involves three collaborative phases: co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing (p. 26).

Team teaching. Each instructor contributes equally, with instructors engaging in trading off or "tag-teaming" at specified signals or content breaks" (Friend & Cook, 2010, pp. 173-174). Team teaching is sometimes viewed as the "goal" of co-teaching endeavors (Conderman, 2011, p. 27).

Reflecting on their team teaching experience, Daraviras (2017), outlined the process she underwent in planning and delivering her instruction to cohorts of college freshmen. The group met weekly to share and discuss their approaches to teaching the topics and objectives of the courses. These resulted in faculty members gaining new knowledge and effective pedagogical methods. Additionally, time was dedicated during those meetings to reflect about teaching and learning that occurred in each instructor's course.

Meanwhile, Metzger (2015) conducted a study to examine the effects of instructors' team teaching on undergraduates' learning. While the feedback that the students provided indicated that the experience had positive benefits, there were some challenges they identified. These included management of the learning space, consistent communication, the manner in which the course content was delivered, and alignment of the learning objectives. For successful collaborative teaching experiences, he recommended instructors commit to a high level of organization. Additionally, it would be beneficial for the instructors to implement student-centered teaching techniques, and engage in regular reflection sessions. Finally, he touted the importance of clear communication to students. The gathering and reviewing of students' feedback will play a vital role in informing course redesign, implementation, and assessment.

In another study about the benefits and challenges of multiple instructors teaching the same course, Jones and Harris (2012), revealed that as long as the instructors are organized, provide clear instruction, and minimize confusion, the students do benefit academically. Additionally, the presence of a second expert instructor was viewed positively by the students. Additional studies conducted by Wilson and VanBerschot (2014) and Higgins and Litzenberg (2015) support the findings of benefits and drawbacks of using multiple instructors (Jones & Harris, 2012).

Most recently, Crawford and Jenkins (2017), concluded that when two instructors collaborated on a course, there was a positive impact on student learning. In the same study, they concluded that when there is a thoughtful inclusion of technology and blended learning, there is a higher incidence of student engagement and student learning with pre-service teachers. In turn, those candidates indicated they would be most likely to implement the same pedagogies in their teaching practice.

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Educational experts have conducted studies on effective instructional strategies specifically for Prek-ninth-grade populations. For example, Marzano, Heflebower, Hoegh, Warrick, and Grift (2016) focused on how teachers can best collaborate so that optimum learning can occur for students. To fully engage students in learning, Kagan, Kagan, and Kagan (2015) provided multiple instructional strategies. For all students, but especially English Language Learners, Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2016) advocated the implementation of Sheltered English Observation Protocol (SIOP). In addition, technology should be integrated in multiple teacher preparation courses to allow for educational technology competency development, and increase the efficacy of pre-service teachers' teaching with technology (Wetzel, Foulger, Buss, & Lindsey, 2014).

Students in the course wrote reflections after each class period to share their perceptions of the learning environment facilitated by the two course instructors. Through a review of the reflections, instructors were able to gauge student learning and make adaptations as the course progressed. Some consistent themes became apparent in the students' reflections. The first theme was the observable collaboration between the course instructors and the modeling of transparent decision making about planning of the lessons, as well as the application of the relevant teaching strategies. For example, one student stated:

> *"Professor Vasquez and Dr. Gilpatrick did a great job on co-teaching a lesson to the class about 9/11. I loved how they taught the lesson to the class they read a book to the class and at the same time asked questions while reading. This allowed students to be engaged about the topic and be able to be educated on what happened on 9/11. I will definitely implement this in my classroom someday. I believe it is important for students to be aware of historic events that took place in our country and how it has affected our culture and country through this event."*

Another theme that emerged was strategies for self-improvement and application to their skill-development. For instance, a student noted the instructors mentioned and modeled the use of wait time, and the student wanted to work on improving her own practice of this strategy. She said:

> *"I really liked how she used wait time. Today was the first day of class so it can be tough to get people to speak up and giving wait time encourages students to participate. That is something I will definitely need to work on. I have had experiences where I ask the class a question and I don't get an answer so I think I failed and I give the answer right away, to avoid the awkward silence."*

In addition, students noted they liked hearing valuable information and stories about their own PreK-ninth-grade's teaching experiences from both instructors:

> *"The method of tag teaming I believe was effective because we got to hear two different voices with two different opinions. I think the tag teaming is a great idea because you got to keep on your toes as to which instructor is speaking and the information they are giving and the value in each."*

Further, they wrote consistently about enjoying the teaching methods used in the classroom, stating the teachers went beyond lectures and instead had the class engaged in depth of knowledge learning experiences. Some of the strategies mentioned were pair-share, whole-class discussion, Socratic seminar, jigsaw, debates, surveys, various technology devices/strategies, researching, modeling, games, guest speakers, literature connections, and student presentations. Another said:

> *"Today's class was another great experience; this was my first time being a Socratic seminar. I think the earlier this method is used the more students will interact and think deeper into topics. Thank you for letting us experience this!"*

Students seemed to appreciate the consistent themes incorporated into instruction, which were cultural appreciation/awareness and content instruction through reading both authentic text and literature. Another noted:

> *"I liked how the instructor connected children's books to history. Having us predict what was going to happen is another great strategy the instructor used. I also liked how we had a chance to try to connect books to history and then share with our group. In my future class I plan to have my students make predictions as well as have them attempt certain activities individually after we do them as a class."*

DECISION

In addition to determining whether our team-teaching experiences would be beneficial for the teacher candidates, our goal in team teaching the course was to model effective and best instructional practices. Additionally, we wanted to examine whether pairing of novice and seasoned faculty members would be beneficial to the faculty members' professional dispositions and teaching skills development.

The instructional strategies that were modeled included Kagan et al. (2015) strategies, Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol, multimodal strategies, and culturally inclusive techniques. Wherever applicable to support these instructional approaches, the use and implementation of technology tools were also modeled for students' learning experiences and engagement. It's important to note that throughout the semester we collaborated and continuously reflected on our approach as well as how the students were responding. Table 1 below demonstrates the process that we followed in conducting this study:

Discuss → Share → Reflect → Analyze → Discuss → Recommend

Figure 1. Process

The analysis of the instructors as well as the students' reflections indicated that team teaching paired with known best practices in higher education instruction can be an effective approach to instruction. This conclusion supports reflection-in-action as well as reflection-on-action touted by Schon (1983).

Throughout this process our thinking was guided

by reviewing students' responses, addressing their needs as well as our own reflections about the teaching experience. Our regular meetings and planning process informed our practice. As the course progressed, the authors were encouraged by positive student experiences. This process affirmed Schon's (1983) theories of reflective practice.

The team-teaching experience had a positive impact on both the novice as well as the seasoned faculty members. In her research reflection journal, the seasoned faculty member noted that serving as a mentor to the other faculty member was important in ensuring that she modeled the most effective and appropriate professional dispositions as well as instructional practices. Additionally, she was able to acquire new skills and knowledge about various modes of technology. Meanwhile, the prominent advantages for the novice faculty that was noted in her reflections were the andragogy and differentiating instruction for varied students' cultural backgrounds and abilities including English Language Learners. As a result, both instructors increased their professional knowledge and capabilities.

Further contributing to our decisions were the consistent themes that emerged from the reflections. They consisted of observable collaboration between course instructors and the modeling of transparent decision making about lesson planning, as well as the application of the relevant strategies. Strategies for improving one's teaching practice and their application to their skill-development were other themes that supported this decision. Yet, another theme that became evident was the value of varied and diverse teaching experiences that the instructors utilized to illustrate applicable concepts. Engaging in various teaching methods and strategies was another topic that the students consistently mentioned in their reflections. Finally, the students were able to recognize the significance of thoughtful integration of culturally relevant and inclusive practices in their teaching practice.

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

The practice of team teaching is a relatively underutilized in the higher education world. In addition to supporting the review of the literature on this topic, the writers' experiences and the students' reflections supported the effectiveness of this approach in higher education. It is our recommendation that team-teaching experiences are implemented in higher education. In addition to supporting the professional development of the faculty members, the authors found that the practice is effective for student learning. This particular study was limited to one course in a teacher preparation program, and the results suggested that the practice was effective. Future studies could focus on whether team teaching could be applied effectively in other disciplines in higher education and in other non-traditional higher education environments such as online and virtual courses.

The instructors were able to learn from the teaching strategies modeled by one another. This enabled each instructor to grow professionally through the experience. Collaborative meetings that consisted of planning lessons, discussing informal class sessions, and reviewing student assessment data, led the instructors to gain valuable insight into the justifications, decision-making, and thought-process of one another. During these sessions the instructors often shared innovative ideas for instruction and grounded principles of teaching and learning with research-based practices and methodology, such as Kagan's et al. (2015) cooperative learning strategies and Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP). These critical discussions were instrumental in each instructor's professional development.

The two instructors varied and diverse PreK-higher education teaching experiences provided an opportunity for insights into each other's teaching and communication styles. While both instructors subscribed to the facilitation teaching style, one tended to conduct her teaching by incorporating the students' knowledge and experiences because of her strong affinity in building relationships and connections with the students. While this resonated with those students' cooperative learning styles, those who were more inclined to be independent learners were more likely to benefit from the other instructor who conducted her teaching by incorporating technology strategies.

The authors recommend that when considering team teaching in the higher education settings, the administrators devote some time in the thoughtful pairing of seasoned and novice faculty members. Some considerations the authors recommend include the number of years teaching, previous experiences, and teaching styles.

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