

THE SHARED REFLECTIVE PRACTICE OF CO-PLANNING AN UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION COURSE BETWEEN ONLINE AND FACE-TO-FACE TEACHER EDUCATORS

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ABSTRACT

The current paper presents a reflective account of two teacher educators, from different instructional modalities, co-planning an undergraduate face-to-face education course. Wenger's writing around communities of practice provided the theoretical underpinning for the reflections put forward and contextual information regarding how the co-planning transpired. From a critical standpoint, observations and reflections related to the communication, challenges (and successes), and pedagogical decision-making between education colleagues are considered. Three central challenges are explored through the reflective lens: length of course between modalities, norming and autonomy, and scheduling between teacher educators to co-plan throughout the academic face-to-face semester. The qualitative nature of the study provides thick and rich detail pertaining to the shared reflections of the two teacher educators. The paper concludes with recommendations surrounding the continued exploration of how the instructional modality plays part in the co-planning process.

Keywords: Teacher educators, modalities, higher education, co-planning, reflective practice

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The researchers of this study are both full-time faculty members in a college of education. However, the researchers teach in different instructional modalities. This reflective paper addresses how the collaboration between these two teacher educators unfolded. As part of this practice, it was not known how two teacher educators, from differing instructional modalities, would co-plan an education course. The researchers' prior working relationship provided the foundation for the collaboration to take place. From one teacher educator to another, what insight could the online instructor provide to the face-to-face instructor for

a particular course that was now being offered face to face? Leonard (2014) highlighted, "Co-teaching can enhance the sharing that is fundamental to a community of practice" (p. 512). Wenger's community of practice theory is used as lens for how the two teacher educators collaborated throughout the experience.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The researchers of this paper were given the opportunity to work together to co-plan an education undergraduate face-to-face course. Martin and Demuke (2015) postulated, "Collaboration of teacher educators through co-planning, co-teaching, and co-reflection-practice is a way for individuals to work across boundaries of their own knowledge, skills, and dispositions in dealing with

the complexities and challenges of teaching” (p. 5). Although the original design of the collaboration was to provide assistance with grading and for one of the colleagues to serve as an assistant, the established past rapport of working together paved the way for much more collaboration and support to flourish. In addition to the established relationship leading to the experience, one of the colleagues is currently pursuing a doctoral degree whose research has illuminated the lack of literature regarding this specific topic. The dearth of literature pertaining to the collaboration of colleagues, who teach in different instructional modalities, proves the value and timeliness of this study. Moreover, Wenger’s communities of practice theory provide the theoretical lens through which the reflection is presented. The narrative aspect of the paper is intended to provide thick and rich detail of the experience.

It was unexpected how two teacher educators, from different instructional modalities, co-plan an education course. The lack of literature regarding co-planning between colleagues who teach in different instructional modalities proved to be a major hurdle in the collaboration process. Both colleagues were eager and enthusiastic with the opportunity to work together. However, no colleagues at the focus college had previously pursued the experience, and lack of literature pertaining to this topic left the two researchers to figure things out on their own.

The qualitative nature of the study allowed for thick and rich detail pertaining to the in-depth descriptions of how two teacher educators, teaching in different instructional modalities, co-planned an undergraduate education course. The shared reflection of the challenges and successes of the experience are intended to illuminate how Wenger’s communities of practice shaped the dialogue, decision-making, and collaborative process.

STATEMENT OF THE PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to provide the description of the shared co-planning process of two teacher educators from different instructional modalities. In an effort to provide a cohesive account of the experience, the reflections from the two colleagues have been synthesized to form the reflection in this paper. Finlay (2008) illuminated,

“Reflective practice is understood as the process of learning through and from experiences towards gaining new insights of self and/or practice” (p. 1). This reflective practice was informed by the challenges and unknown aspects associated with the collaboration of two teacher educators from different instructional modalities.

The Gibbs Model of Reflective Practice (1988) was used in this study to frame the analysis of the reflection. The Gibbs model paved the way for the researchers to conceptualize the reflective approach to this study. Further, Larkin and Pepin (2013) concluded the Gibbs Model of Reflective Practice is useful for analyzing non-routine or challenging incidents. The lack of literature regarding how higher education faculty, from differing modalities, co-plan a course section was a challenge and a non-routine environment for the researchers. Subsequently, the Gibbs model was useful to direct how the reflection process was to be unpacked. Table 1, below, provides a visual representation of how the Gibbs model is used as the reflective lens for this study.

The level of detail pertaining to the description of the shared co-planning process was intended to provide a cohesive account of the experience. Moreover, Hitch, Rowan, and Nicola-Richmond (2014) addressed the Gibbs Model of Reflective Practice (1988) is used iteratively to show how elements of the experience change and evolve. Thus, the researchers of this study addressed the latter three steps of the Gibbs model as part of this reflective study. For instance, the conclusion and action components addressed in Table 1 surfaced as the two teacher educators drafted this reflective study. Subsequently, the purpose of the study, now that the six steps of Gibbs’s model has been fulfilled, was to provide a thick and rich description of the co-planning process between two teacher educators from different instructional modalities.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ACTIVITY

On the surface, the two researchers met periodically to discuss the progress of the course, discuss new ideas and possibilities, and co-plan future lectures and course materials. However, when taking a closer look at the co-planning process, those experiences led to a deeper narrative regarding the support offered to each other during the process, the fervor and selflessness to freely

Table 1 Prompts through the Reflective Process.

Gibbs Model of Reflection	Fall Semester, 2017	Summer and Fall, 2018
Description	What happened between the two teacher educators as part of the co-planning process?	As the teacher educators reflected on the experience, they noticed the following: they shared resources and materials, planned for instruction, and stayed in contact with each other throughout the semester.
Feeling	What were the two teacher educators' initial thoughts about the co-planning process?	The teacher educators were enthusiastic to work together, but timid to norm, not interfere, and share practices. The prior rapport between the two teacher educators helped the feelings of fervor to the co-planning process.
Evaluation	What hurdles did the two teacher educators have to overcome as part of the co-planning process?	The teacher educators overcame hurdles subconsciously throughout the co-planning process. Only after the experience did they explore and make sense of the how they overcame each of the hurdles associated with the co-planning process.
Analysis	What impact might this co-planning process have on higher education faculty members' co-planning experience?	At the time of the experience, the two researchers were excited to learn from the experience to offer support to colleagues. As the reflection process unfolded the teacher educators uncovered the community of practice they established during the co-planning process.
Conclusion	What could be changed or modified from the outcomes of this reflective practice?	The ways in which higher education faculty members overcome hurdles associated with the co-planning process when different instructional modalities are a factor.
Action		A project like this could be beneficial to higher education faculty members who co-plan when different instructional modalities are a factor.

share resources and confidence gleaned through the norming process.

Length of course. First, online courses at the focus college are seven weeks in length; whereas face-to-face courses (for the same sections) are 15 weeks in length. Thus, stretching the curriculum to meet the longer duration provided challenges and successes regarding the collaborative process. Moreover, the additional length of the course provided opportunities to expand on ideas, learning experiences, and modeling for students. This is not to disparage the online modality. Rather the process of identifying how to supplement the course materials when the online curriculum was already full of useful instructional materials was the challenge. Thus, the opportunity to co-plan with a colleague was very helpful in the pursuit of crafting new ways to support the curriculum.

Norming and autonomy. Next, one of the colleagues had experience teaching the particular course while the other colleague had no prior experience teaching the content of the course. Subsequently, the beginning stages of the co-planning process found both colleagues navigating uncharted waters of respectfully offering opinions and ideas while trying to put a plan together. The

colleague with past experience knew of obstacles in the curriculum and how to best support students through the experience. On the other hand, the colleague with no prior experience of teaching the specific course had a plethora of innovative and naïve ideas to include in the planning process. This paradigm proved to be a challenge at the beginning of the co-planning experience but quickly became a success.

Scheduling. The third hurdle of the co-planning process was the timing and scheduling aspect of working together throughout an academic semester. The opportunity arose only weeks before the beginning of the semester. Moreover, the colleagues co-planned throughout the semester as the curriculum moved along the linear duration of the semester. Thus, in addition to other obligations, finding time to co-plan was a challenge. As an important note, the researchers were focused on the planning process because much of the instruction for this particular course was provided by one of the two colleagues. Subsequently, part of the planning process throughout the semester began with addressing how the curriculum was unfolding throughout the semester and finding solutions to instructional obstacles as they occurred.

Situational thinking. Communities of practice are meaningful and purposeful groups with members who share an authentic task (MacPhail, Patton, Parker, & Tannerhill, 2014). Thus, the situational thinking throughout the experience was situated on the domain of interest and collaboration of best practices. Throughout the process, decisions were made in the best interest of students. Situational thinking and decisions were solely based on overcoming the obstacles, in light of co-planning a course from two uniquely different teacher educators from different instructional modalities, to meet the needs of students. This is evident by forming a community of practice around the idea of sharing an authentic task and problem-solving throughout the semester. The teacher educators were under no obligation to conduct to collaborate. Rather, situational thinking and decisions were shared between the teacher educators with the sole focus on providing the best educational opportunities for students.

REASONS FOR THE PROBLEM

There were four contributors to the problem associated with the experience outlined in this reflective study. First, there is a lack of literature pertaining to the co-planning process between teacher educators who teach in different instructional modalities. The lack of literature and dearth of on-sight resources were the primary reasons for the problem. Second, the two teacher educators had limited time to prepare for the co-planning process in advance of the semester. Third, the lack of norming or sharing of resources prior to this experience was part of the problem. For instance, the two teacher educators were initially unsure how to norm together and timid to offer new ideas or insights regarding the course content. The researchers were happy to collaborate but both were timid with beginning the process because they were unsure of what to offer or expect. Finally, fourth, not knowing what to expect or if the two teacher educators were on track throughout the process was a reason for the problem. The researchers had little to use in the form of a guide, all the while no other colleagues at the focus college had pursued the specific co-planning process. Additionally, once the collaboration began and the researchers forecasted potential hurdles in the curriculum (as addressed above), the researchers were unsure of

the best route to take moving forward. In essence, the community of practice was evident, but the researchers were unclear how to give and take from the experience. Only after the two researchers had agreed to embark on this narrative reflective paper did they realize the community of practice provided confidence, norming, and reassurance throughout the process (See Conclusion and Action sections in Table 1).

The focus of this study was the reflective nature of how two teacher educators collaborated throughout an academic semester. Thus, Wenger's community of practice theory was selected as the lens to describe the process. The researchers attempted to peel back the layers to expose how the reflection process unfolded to illuminate how the collaboration took place and how hurdles were overcome. The Gibbs Model of Reflective Practice (1988) facilitated the process of this reflective study. Further, the purpose of this paper was not to address or evaluate the event and the reflection. Conversely, the researchers laid the foundation of the event, provided three central hurdles to the experience, and attempted to provide thick and rich detail of how the nature of crafting this paper has allowed for reflection to unfold. Seminal authors of reflective practice paved the way for this study and provide merit and authority of the account. However, Wenger's community of practice underpins how the specific collaboration of the two teacher educators, from differing instructional modalities, unfolded and hurdles throughout the experience were addressed.

The researchers set out to address how teacher educators from different instructional modalities collaborated to co-plan an education course at a college of education in the Southwest region of the US. The intended outcome of the study was to provide thick and rich detail as to how (1) the teacher educators went about the collaboration, (2) how the teacher educators overcame hurdles, and (3) to address how Wenger's community of practice underscored the process of collaboration. Thus, the preceding purpose of the study was to provide the description of how the process unfolded. Be that as it may, an indirect intended outcome was to provide a guide for future researchers who experience a similar opportunity of collaborating across instructional modalities. As suggested by Bleiler (2015), Wenger's communities of practice

theory can also serve as a “means for researchers to build on this inquiry and to conceptualize the commonalities and differences across collaborative contexts” (p. 248). The reflective account of the process and the descriptions of how hurdles were overcome should provide readers with the opportunity to glean from the experiences.

EVALUATION OF THE REASON FOR THE PROBLEM

The four reasons for the problem, addressed above, provided opportunities for the researchers to reflect on the experience. For instance, the lack of literature regarding this topic provided opportunity for the researchers to share their experiences as part of this reflective study. Second, the evaluation of the lack of planning preparation for the co-planning to take place before the semester began provided opportunity for the two teacher educators to collaborate throughout the semester. Third, the evaluation regarding the lack of norming and sharing of resources provided opportunity for the researchers to complete this process during the semester. Finally, the fourth reason for the problem, not knowing what to expect from the experience allowed the researchers to maintain a thorough schedule throughout the experience. These four reasons for the problem are further addressed below and synthesized in to three sub-categories: evaluation of length of course, evaluation of norming and autonomy, and evaluation of scheduling.

Evaluation of length of course. In reflection of handling the length of course obstacle, the researchers found impromptu lesson planning for each class session to be helpful. Leonard (2013) illuminated communities of practice provide a safe place to experiment, take pedagogical risks, and innovate instructional practice. Thus, the researchers blended instructional strategies, discussed supplemental materials to add to the face-to-face course, and considered time on task during each course session. Though the longer version of the course was an initial obstacle in the planning, this process allowed the researchers the opportunity to norm instructional strategies, consider how to meet students’ needs in the face-to-face modality, and create plans of instruction. As Sheehy, Bohler, Richardson, and Gallo (2015) addressed, researchers are beginning to focus specifically on teacher educators regarding the use of communities of practice. Subsequently, by reflecting on the norming

process throughout the planning of instruction, the researchers are answering the call for more attention to focus on how teacher educators share in a community of practice.

Evaluation of norming and autonomy. According to Chenault (2017), the higher education community overall, encourages autonomy and independence. These are unwavering values that fortify professional development in higher education. Additionally, growth, cooperation and evolution of thought are valued (Chenault, 2017). Although autonomy of instructional practices and philosophical ideas regarding the course were present at the beginning of the collaboration, the teacher educators slowly began to probe for mutual understanding. Williams, Ritter, and Bullock (2012) mentioned a community of practice is largely a social practice. Thus, the researchers began the planning process by asking probing questions regarding curricula in the course. This norming process allowed for both researchers to discuss personal views, ideas, and decisions regarding the planning development. This norming process was important because it aided in the two faculty members gaining a shared understanding of acceptable instructional strategies (Schoepp, Danaher, & Kranov, 2018). With the community of practice being largely a social construct, both teacher educators were not compelled to comply, accept, and adopt each other’s ideas. Rather, by slowly asking open-ended questions regarding instructional practices, mutual trust, decision-making, and planning occurred. Moreover, the teacher educators learned new instructional methods, shared course resources, and began sharing innovative ideas that were freely adopted or negated. Overall, the tedious work of starting the collaboration slowly was one of the biggest successes from the collaboration process because it established confidence in each teacher educator (Sheehy et al., 2015). Both researchers did not feel compelled to participate, rather both were open to the process once social barriers were overcome. This endeavor built upon community and collaboration among higher education faculty required a flux of power that led to a successful collaboration (Chenault, 2017).

Evaluation of scheduling. Innovation in any endeavor does not happen instantly. It requires time to evaluate current best practices, procedures, and make revisions in order to learn. Learning—the

acquisition of new skills and knowledge, as well as practices, is required for this invested change (Killion, 2016). The researchers overcame the obstacle of scheduling and investment of time in three ways. First, the co-planning process took place throughout the academic semester. Thus, the researchers stayed in touch weekly via email and phone call correspondence. The conversations were typically short, but the provided feedback was helpful to keep both researchers on track. Second, the online teacher educator observed and participated in at least one course session every two weeks. The observations and participations allowed the online teacher educator (with whom had previously taught the course) to observe how instruction was unfolding in the face-to-face modality. Third, both researchers wanted to participate in the process throughout the semester. Although trivial, both researchers intrinsically wanted the co-planning experience to be successful. Alas, the process was important for both teacher educators for internal and external reasons. Therefore, emails, phone calls, and face-to-face planning times were not viewed as scheduling obstacles, but rather opportunities to check-in, share experiences about the process, and plan for future course sessions. Wenger's communities of practice theory was evident in how both teacher

educators were excited to discuss challenges and new pedagogical approaches that could be applied to each modality.

DECISIONS

Due to the lack of literature pertaining to the collaboration between teacher educators, from different instructional modalities, the following decision diagram outlines the process of how the problem was evaluated, how decisions were made, and what new information was learned from the experience. Table 2, below, is intended to provide a visual representation of the process so future researchers can have a clear understanding of the process.

In review of the reflection process for the experience of co-planning an education course, both teacher educators learned new instructional strategies that could be applied to both instructional modalities. The above-mentioned evaluation of the three challenges faced throughout allowed for new learning to emerge. Below, the researchers expand on new knowledge and understanding gained from the experience. The goal of providing these decisions and new knowledge and understanding gained is to provide readers and future researchers tools to apply when co-planning with colleagues from differing instructional modalities.

Throughout the reflection process, three hurdles

Table 2 Decision Diagram

Evaluation of each challenge	Decisions made regarding each challenge	New knowledge and understanding gained
Length of course: This challenge was the first step in the co-planning process. Tackling this challenge paved the way for future planning to unfold.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to add supplemental resources to the curriculum. • Each class session required individual lesson plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for face-to-face instruction requires a different style of planning. • Learning in a synchronous environment requires the use of supplemental resources.
Norming and autonomy: Researchers in the field have indicated teacher educators are often left to their own planning processes and often work independently. Thus, the natural norming that took place throughout the co-planning process was a clear challenge for both researchers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probing for deeper understanding began with starting small. To this end, both researchers shared practices to begin learning how the other planned for instruction. • A high level of collegiality was necessary for fruitful co-planning to occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional planning takes time for identities to be shown and instructional practices to be freely shared. • Each teacher educators had to share ideas throughout the process for the co-planning to be successful.
Scheduling: All collaboration requires both parties to plan and schedule accordingly. But, unique to this study, the researchers' instructional modalities caused an additional hurdle of finding time to co-plan throughout the academic semester.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There must be a collective interest to co-plan for the process to be success. Planning took place throughout the semester and new ideas were openly shared with the idea both teacher educators could benefit from the process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The researchers often did not plan as much as needed during each session. Subsequently, routine planning sessions were necessary throughout the academic semester.

needed attention for collaboration to be successful. The reflection process allowed both researchers to consider new pedagogical methods to take back to each instructional modality. For instance, the use of instructor-led videos is now used to teach in both researchers' courses. Also, both researchers have expanded collaboration regarding co-planning courses with new colleagues. The evaluation process of each of the three hurdles are provided below. Further, new knowledge and understanding regarding the length of course, norming and autonomy, and scheduling are addressed in detail below. The three are equally important and the researchers could not rank in order of importance. Further, the new knowledge and understandings addressed below are interwoven and connected as part of the process. Subsequently, the three elements lead to practical knowledge learned from this reflective process.

Knowledge and understanding gained from length of course. Researchers in the field have previously illuminated differences between the online and face-to-face modalities (Bergom, 2015). Subsequently, the researchers of this study were less interested in confirming this reality. Rather, the researchers accepted the differences and began the planning process knowing new resources and curriculum were necessary to fulfill the extended length of the course to fit the face-to-face academic semester. Moreover, a juxtaposition of how to plan for instruction between modalities became apparent. Thus, the researchers learned early in the co-planning process more content was necessary to fulfill each face-to-face class session than what was currently being used to teach the same course in the online modality. This is not to disparage or draw comparison between the two modalities, but rather to highlight new knowledge and understanding gained regarding the differences between teaching in both modalities.

Knowledge and understanding gained from norming and autonomy. Butler (2014) asserted that teacher educators are different than other higher education faculty. Subsequently, both teacher educators have K-12 experience where collaboration is a common thread woven in to that profession. Thus, the assumption is the norming process between the two teacher educators would have taken a natural and successful course of action. The researchers taught different grade

levels in their past K-12 teaching experiences, thus this aspect of their professional identity was not as useful as expected. Rather, the researchers' prior working relationship proved to be the most beneficial aspect of the norming process. The researchers had developed trust between each other and were used to freely sharing ideas. But, when it came to co-planning a course with one researcher having much more content knowledge regarding the course than the other, the process nearly started from the beginning in terms of the teacher educators feeling out the process. Thus, both researchers gained new knowledge regarding how to slowly approach collaboration by asking probing questions regarding pedagogy and not making assumptions regarding shared practices.

Knowledge and understanding gained from scheduling. Much of the co-planning took place throughout the face-to-face academic semester. Thus, scheduling time to co-plan was a major challenge. The researchers learned two important aspects regarding scheduling: not as much planning was done during each session as both expected and routine planning sessions were necessary. The researcher who had prior experience with teaching the course content in the online modality routinely observed face-to-face class sessions to offer support and observe instruction. This process allowed planning sessions to be expedited as less attention was given to current events and new issues that had surfaced and more attention could be directed to planning for future instruction. Also, the two teacher educators were committed to the semester-long process and knew the co-planning process was going to require time and effort throughout. Subsequently, the researchers gained new knowledge and understanding of how much time is necessary to plan for instruction and the desire to agree early in the process that co-planning will required attention throughout the semester and will not be accomplished in one planning session at the beginning of the semester.

REFLECTIVE CRITIQUE

The purpose of this reflective study was to provide thick and rich detail pertaining to the co-planning process of two teacher educators from different instructional modalities. The reflective nature of the study was intended to provide a framework for future experience of higher education faculty,

who come from different instructional modalities, working together to co-plan. The following questions guided the researchers throughout this reflective practice: How do two teacher educators, from different instructional modalities, describe the process? How does Wenger's communities of practice theory apply to the co-planning process of two teacher educators who do not share the same instructional modality? These questions helped the teacher educators to stay on track of addressing how the event unfolded and how Wenger's community of practice theory was used as a lens for the descriptive reflection.

Future inquiry about similar activities/projects should include the broader scope of higher education faculty, outside the realm of teacher educators, to perhaps showcase the juxtaposition of the collaboration process. In essence, the scope of this particular inquiry should address potential differences or similarities regarding how colleagues offer ideas, share resources, and support each other's growth and development contingent on the faculty member's instructional modality. Researchers have begun to scratch the surface of suggesting teacher educators are different in terms of preparation and pedagogy/andragogy than other higher education faculty (Butler, 2014). Subsequently, researchers could support or repudiate this research by addressing the co-planning process of higher education faculty, other than teacher educators.

An additional recommendation for future research is to take a deeper look at how Wenger's community of practice theory fits in to the broader discussion regarding higher education faculty who serve in different instructional modalities. For instance, a premium should be placed on how the instructional modality plays part in decision-making, planning, and teaching. To this end, once further explorations of the aforementioned qualities are addressed, the blend of elements through the lens of a different instructional modality could illuminate similarities and differences regarding how the instructional modality informs instruction.

SUMMARY

Co-planning between faculty members of higher education who do not share the same instructional modality is in the infancy stage of understanding. In this particular study, two teacher

educators, from different instructional modalities, set out to co-plan a face-to-face semester-long education course. The researchers viewed the process of reflecting on the experience through the lens of Gibbs Model of Reflection. Further, Wenger's Communities of Practice theory surfaced from the reflection process. The researchers were faced with three main challenges or hurdles. First, the length of time to teach the same course in online modality is drastically different than the face-to-face modality. This proved to be a challenge in terms of how to add supplementary content to expand on the curriculum. Next, the researchers had to slowly approach the process of norming with each other to co-plan instruction. This was first deemed to be a challenge but quickly became a success. Finally, the researchers learned the importance of scheduling time to meet with each other throughout the semester. Planning for instruction took a lot of time throughout the semester and the researchers quickly success by the online teacher educators routinely visiting the face-to-face teacher educator to offer support with teaching and to observe instruction. Overall, the reflective nature of this paper allowed for the researchers to share practices and offer guidance for future researchers to co-plan with colleagues from different instructional practices.

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