Perspectives on Team Teaching

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Background

The Australian Science and Mathematics School (ASMS) is a senior secondary public school with a specialist focus on science and mathematics education. Part of the school’s charter is to transform science and mathematics education and to increase participation and success of senior secondary students in science, mathematics and related technologies.

Literature surrounding team teaching identifies it as a practice that has positive outcomes for student learning, however much of the literature focuses on models of team teaching where there is a subject specialist and non-specialist, or where there is a significant difference in the level of teaching experience between the two team teachers. While team teaching has been practised at the ASMS in various formats throughout the school’s nine year history, it has predominantly taken place at the Year 10 and Year 11 level and little has been formally documented. In 2012 team taught classes were established for Year 12 Chemistry and Maths Studies where both teachers of the class were subject specialists. Various pedagogical approaches were employed and data was collected from students and teachers about their experiences of team teaching.

Research Design

Due to the limited reliability of comparison between team taught and non-team taught classes, the decision was made by the team teaching learning community to focus on subjective data from teachers and students rather than use grades or marks as a point of comparison. This allowed significant impacts on learning, such as class culture, community, atmosphere and engagement to be addressed.

Results and Discussion

Student feedback: Team Teaching Supporting Learning

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<th>Promotes dialogue and increased participation</th>
<th>Encourages multiple perspectives</th>
<th>Improves evaluation and feedback</th>
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<td>Two teachers helps keep class interesting, it is easier to stay involved.</td>
<td>It allows teachers to explain things in different ways and by them doing that I can choose a way that works well for me.</td>
<td>I (l) have more opportunity to ask for help.</td>
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| I like being able to learn from two different people. It helps me to stay more focussed. | Many methods of remembering are presented and often at least one helps. | This is great! I get the benefit of two persons’ knowledge. On the other hand there are now two teachers to satisfy...

Student experiences of team teaching

Teachers

In addition to the benefits of team teaching for students, there were a variety of benefits for teachers involved in team teaching, including high levels of job satisfaction. Teachers were exposed to a variety of ways of presenting concepts and gained access to a wider range of teaching resources, and so were challenged to more carefully consider and select their own pedagogical approach. Consequently, team teaching resulted in a more deliberate focus on planning and greater efforts to vary the pedagogical approach.

Team teachers felt supported and valued in their role as teachers by their co-teacher and identified the team teaching approach as an important factor that allowed them to more effectively support students in the classroom. Team teachers also valued this opportunity to be involved in ongoing professional dialogue, which supported their development as more reflective practitioners.

Essential Qualities of Successful Team Teachers:

- mutual respect
- trust
- shared values
- risk-taking mentality
- balance of differences and similarities
- willingness to accept challenges and ideas

Teachers all identified the relationship with their co-teacher and the ability to choose their own partner as critical to the success of team teaching. Students were highly aware of the positive working relationship that existed between the team teachers and interestingly also attributed this relationship between team teachers as a key reason why team teaching was so successful for them.

Conclusions

Data from this study indicates that team teaching has been an overwhelmingly positive experience for both students and teachers and that it has been a successful method of increasing student engagement and participation at Year 12 level in science and mathematics. The ability of teachers to choose who they team with has played a crucial role in the success of team teaching. Future directions include continuing team teaching in science and mathematics at Year 12 level and expanding the formal team teaching approaches to other subject areas and year levels at the ASMS.

References