Chapter 5
Team Teaching in the Online Graduate Environment:
Collaborative Instruction

Richard G. Fuller
Robert Morris University, USA

Jean Bail
Philadelphia University, USA

ABSTRACT

Team teaching has long been thought to have positive benefits for learners and teachers in a variety of educational settings. Using an action research model the authors describe the outcomes of team teaching an online graduate level disaster research and statistics course. Separated geographically, two online instructors taught at a distance over the course of five semesters using an interactive team teaching model that allowed for greater interaction and instructor presence. Data was reviewed from instructor reflective logs and student responses to the team teaching model. Results of the study indicate that there was a positive benefit in developing synergy in content and pedagogies, continued instructor learning and continuous reflection on instructional design. Students also reported greater instructor presence and a greater understanding of the research and statistical process through immediacy of feedback and the added access and clarity that resulted from the team teaching process. The use of an interactive team teaching model provides greater clarity and interaction with students and should be considered as an online pedagogical opportunity.

INTRODUCTION

The term team teaching is used in a variety of situations from K-12 instruction where a special education teacher teams with a general education teacher to higher education professors teaming to increase the sharing of expertise, with positive results and increased opportunities for student learning (Murata, 2002). Little has been reported regarding this phenomenon in distance learning situations. This action research study developed through the team teaching of an online graduate Disaster Medicine and Management Applied Research and Statistics Course that became something more than just the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-2017-9.ch005

typical online research class. For some graduate students, learning research and statistical analysis can be a daunting task; coupled with the online learning platform it can create the need for what Moore (1996) terms as transactional distance. This necessitates greater instructor presence and interaction to guide students through the learning process mastering research knowledge and skills.

The desire to establish a team teaching model was developed to provide participants multiple instructor perspectives in disaster research and a variety of online pedagogical approaches to assist learning. Research methods courses typically cover what students consider dry material, and as a result, instructors are often looking for ways to increase their students' interest (Burkley & Burkley, 2009). The expanded expertise of two faculties collaborating in an online research based course during both the preactive or planning phases and the active teaching phases can build enthusiasm and generate greater thinking in the development of research skills. It was anticipated using a co-teaching or a team teaching model would enhance the learning experience and provide a variety of online pedagogical opportunities to graduate level participants.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This action research study is to understand and ascertain the educational synergistic effects that can develop through team teaching in an online environment. Several guiding questions were developed for this research. What must two professors do to enhance the synergistic effect in the online environment? How can two instructors who are geographically separated by time and space develop, establish and deliver the preactive and active teaching phases, in an online teaching and learning platform? What are the pedagogical, administrative, and logistic factors that must be overcome to effectively team teach in this model?

BACKGROUND

The terms cooperative teaching (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995), team teaching and collaborative teaching (Welch & Sheridan, 1995), and co-teaching (Friend & Cook, 1996), are used frequently in the literature. Co-teaching is two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching some or all of the students assigned to a class. It involves the distribution of responsibility among people for planning, instruction, and evaluation of students (Cushman, 2004). Cook and Friend (1995, p. 2) describe co-teaching as "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended group of students in a single physical space." Wenzlaff et al. (2002, p. 14) further state that co-teaching is "two or more individuals who come together in a collaborative relationship for the purpose of shared work for the outcome of achieving what none could have done alone." Some may define this as a synergistic effect resulting from the collaboration of team teaching efforts. Team teaching can be described for the purpose of this action research as an equal partnership and expectation to contribute substantive material to maintain the integrity of an online course. This is not just a division of labor but a synergistic effect and expectation of mutual engagement to provide greater clarity and interaction with students.

Throughout the literature, there are references to team teaching in elementary and secondary education settings specifically touting the advantages of general education teachers teaming with special education to promote a synergy for student success (Friend, 2007; Barth, 2006; Mastropier et al., 2005). This advantage is also reported in the higher education traditional classes. Vogler and Long (2003) presented diversity models of team teaching utilizing faculty from various departments presenting a cross-disciplinary class with the advantages of faculty teaching particular sections, exposing participants to specific expertise. Helms and Alvis (2005) contended that graduate