

Instructors' Experiences of Collaboratively Teaching: Building Something Bigger

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Instructors often teach in isolation with very little collegial interaction guiding their practice. In light of the research that exists identifying the value of collaboration within learning environments, the merits of such isolated practice must be questioned. Even though collaboration within educational settings has been identified as critical to the development of both instructors and students, highly collaborative approaches to team teaching have not been fully explored. The purpose of this study was to examine our own experience as team teachers in a team taught, educational psychology course. Through a phenomenological analysis of our lived experiences as instructors engaged in collaboratively teaching an undergraduate course, we gained understanding of the benefits of team teaching within a broader context. A thematic structure emerged that captured our experience of the process of co-teaching. This shared thematic structure consisted of one ground theme, named *we didn't have a manual for this/finding our way through*, and five themes, each providing insight into how we made sense of team teaching. The five emergent themes were (a) *You can't shoot from the hip*; (b) *Following and leading . . . all of us together*; (c) *If we walk away disagreeing, is it okay?*; (d) *The presence of another pushed us to go deeper*; and (e) *You build something bigger*. Implications for the use of team teaching in higher education are also explored, highlighting the value of collaborative praxis.

"I will build on what you project to the class and you'll build on what I project; and where you fall flat I'll pick it up or where I fall flat you will pick it up; and when I don't have the example for that student's question, you come back with the example for that student's question. If you catch that a student needed a visual to understand that auditory output, then you pick it up – cue me in, cue me in if that's what is happening there. And the next time we had class, it was powerful."

--Jessica, team-teacher

Traditionally, instructors have taught in isolation with very little collegial interaction guiding their practice. In light of the research that exists identifying the value of collaboration within learning environments, the merits of such isolated practice must be questioned. Bruffee (1993), Kagan (1994), and others have written extensively on the benefits of providing opportunities for learners to actively participate in the joint construction of knowledge, supporting a more effective learning environment. While extensive literature exists related to the benefits of collaborative learning, less research has specifically examined the inherent strengths of collaborative teaching.

Sullivan (1994), referring to the "Myth of the Independent Scholar," attributed the continual emphasis on academic isolation to the influence of enlightenment philosophies, which suggested that the development of knowledge required minds to be isolated and detached from the social world. In contrast to this widely perpetuated myth, Sullivan proposed that all academic ventures, including teaching, should be done in a

collaborative fashion, claiming that "true genius lies not in the exceptional mind, but in the mind's unexceptional ability to connect with another" (p. 27).

Our own experience as team-teachers in a team taught course has led us to believe that collaborative teaching enhances the learning environment for not only our students, but also for us as instructors. It is true that effective classroom environments provide opportunities for learners and teachers alike "to construct their own knowledge... in realistic situations...together with others" (de Jong & Pieters, 2007, p. 739).

In this paper, we discuss various approaches to team teaching. We also explore the results of a phenomenological study that examined our own lived experiences as team teachers in an undergraduate educational psychology course. We conclude with an examination of the ways in which these results can enhance teaching and learning, highlighting the importance of collaborative praxis.

Literature Review

The focus of the literature on team teaching varies widely. There are many definitions of the various approaches to team teaching, as well as strategies, potential pitfalls, and advantages of collaboration (Buckley, 2000; Davis, 1995; Reagan, 1994). Several studies have explored the nature and benefits of team teaching between general education teachers and special educators within K-12 settings (Schnorr & Davern, 2005; Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999; Wilson, 2005). Other studies conducted within a K-12 context have focused on preparing pre-service teachers

through the use of team teaching with mentor teachers or with colleagues in order to gain experience (Jang, 2007; Roth, Tobin, Carambo, & Dalland, 2005; Tobin & Roth, 2005).

Within higher education, several studies of team taught courses have provided a rationale and a structure for interdisciplinary teaching (Robinson & Schaible, 1995; Shibley, 2006; Vogler & Long, 2003). For example, Beck (2006) examined her experience with team teaching at a two-year technical college where aeronautical engineering instructors teamed with communications faculty for the purpose of helping their engineering students strengthen their writing and oral presentation skills. She provided several suggestions for implementing a team teaching model in higher education, including the ability to reflect and renegotiate when things do not go as planned, the willingness to invest more time and energy than in other courses, and the need to be respectful of other team members. Further, she noted the benefits of collaboration for both students and instructors, which included positive student feedback and improved performance on the part of the students.

Several authors have written about their experiences with interdisciplinary team teaching, providing insight into what they learned through the process and offering advice to those who would consider team teaching (Bakken, Clark, & Thompson, 1998; Dugan & Letterman, 2008; Letterman & Dugan, 2004; Wilson & Martin, 1998). Consistently, this literature has identified as essential the need for extra time for planning and reflecting, strong communication skills, and an ability to embrace diversity and differences of opinion. However, this literature has also expounded on the benefits of interdisciplinary team teaching, including expanded creativity, the opportunity to learn about other disciplines, and the ability to improve student learning.

While much of the literature on team teaching provides anecdotal data attesting to the reasons and suggestions for collaborative teaching, there are a few empirical studies that more systematically analyze the team teaching experience. For example, Davis (1995) conducted semi-structured interviews with 15 instructors from one higher education institution about their interdisciplinary team teaching experiences within five different courses. Davis established four components of team teaching: planning, content integration, teaching, and evaluation, with content integration only applying to interdisciplinary courses. Each component existed as a continuum where one end represented minimal collaboration and the other represented extensive collaboration. For instance, the collaborative end of the continua was observed when faculty worked closely as a team, developed a common syllabus, integrated diverse perspectives, and

occasionally taught together (p. 7). Davis reported that for his participants, the component with the lowest degree of collaboration was teaching. One participant expressed regret that there was not more interaction between or among faculty in the classroom. Another acknowledged that there was a great deal more collaboration in the classroom that could have been done saying, "we haven't created that environment here where the faculty interact in front of the student...we are frustrated that we don't do more together, but it's difficult to break the old patterns, when you are there in a lecture hall full of students" (p. 110).

Most of what the participants in Davis's (1995) study referred to as collaborative teaching was done through what Davis called "serial" team teaching, defined as "a lot of little mini-courses stuck together" (p. 110). This was essentially one course divided into segments with each person teaching a segment, a form of team teaching referred to by Brookfield (2006) as "sequenced solo teaching" (p. 159). Interestingly, instructors from one of the five courses in Davis' study did attempt to teach with collaborative lectures where they were "actually going back and forth at the same time in front of the class" (p. 110). Most of the instructors agreed that collaborative efforts renewed their motivation to teach, enhanced their conflict management skills, and deepened their pedagogical knowledge.

While much of the research on team teaching has focused on interdisciplinary courses, less extensive research exists related to those team teaching models in which the team teachers presented the same content. In two such studies (George & Davis-Wiley, 2000; Hatcher & Hinton, 1996), the teaching team was composed of one senior faculty and one graduate student, each sharing the teaching responsibilities within a graduate course. Both teams argued that the time and energy required to successfully conduct a team taught course was greater than a non-team taught course, however, the benefits made the effort worthwhile. George and Davis-Wiley cited the importance of extensive planning, communication, and humility. Hatcher and Hinton stressed that in spite of the increased time spent planning, collaborative teaching led to stronger instruction and greater student learning.

In another study where team teachers presented the same content, social work educators, Cohen and DeLois (2001), discussed the benefits of co-facilitation which included improving teaching skills, exposing students to effective models of collaboration, and promoting professional growth for the co-facilitators. Reflecting upon their experiences as co-facilitators, the authors found a way to "exploit each other's strengths while at the same time learning from them" (p. 32). Cohen and DeLois' approach to co-facilitation closely aligns with

Brookfield's (2006) supposition that in "true team teaching *all* activities are planned, conducted, and evaluated by all members of the team who are also present for all class time" (p. 159). In contrast to other models of team teaching where responsibilities were divided up among team members (Benjamin, 2000; Doebler & Smith, 1996; Shibley, 2006), what Wilson and Martin (1998) call a "you do this, and I'll do that" strategy (p. 6), our desire was to more fully collaborate at every level of planning and instruction.

Our Approach to Team Teaching

Within our own team teaching experience, we were committed to a collaborative approach "where we are both planning, we are both making sure we understand the material as it needs to be presented and we are both standing up there" (Kathy, team-teacher). Unlike "serial" team teaching, we "for sure knew this one thing, that we weren't going to do this, 'You teach. I teach. You take one section. I'll take one section.' We were really going to make this collaborative" (Jessica, team teacher).

Based on our core belief that knowledge was more than the sum of individual ideas, we determined that our approach to team teaching must extend beyond the idea of occasionally teaching together to *always* teaching together. We viewed team teaching as more than simply a pedagogic practice; it was a "philosophical commitment to the socially constructed nature of knowledge" (Miller, 1994, p. 284). In that our approach to team teaching employed a high degree of collaboration, as defined by Davis (1995), we referred to our approach as *collaborative teaching* instead of simply "serial" or "team teaching." One avenue through which teachers may gain insight into this approach is through walking in the shoes of the team teachers who engaged in this practice.

Method

Desiring to understand the lived experiences of instructors in a collaboratively taught course, our study employed a phenomenological method based on an approach developed at The University of Tennessee and employed there for over thirty years in a variety of departments and settings. Phenomenology examines the essence of a given experience; it is also a philosophical orientation in which it is believed that "the world is 'already there' before reflection begins" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 1). The focus of phenomenology is the "what" and not the "why" of the experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). Rather than causality and prediction, one of the objectives of phenomenology is to find the invariant structure, or the essence, of individuals' experience within a given phenomenon

(Creswell, 1998), such as collaborative teaching. This study aimed not simply to present the structure of the lived experience of team-teachers in a collaboratively taught course, but also to develop a "verbal portrait" (Polkinghorne, 1989) that revealed the emerging themes of those experiences. This verbal portrait is presented in the *Findings and Discussion* section in the form of quotes from each of the team teachers.

Participants

This collaborative teaching experience occurred in a required senior level educational psychology course for pre-service teachers at The University of Tennessee in the United States. The two team teachers, Jessica and Kathy, were graduate teaching assistants enrolled as doctoral students in the department of Educational Psychology and Counseling. As part of an instructional team that met to plan and to develop the educational psychology course under the supervision of a tenured faculty advisor, we were quite familiar with collegial collaboration outside of the classroom environment. During one academic semester (five month period), we were assigned to independently teach one section of the course and volunteered to teach another section in a collaborative format. In that we desired to gain further insight into the nature of collaboration within the process of collaborative teaching, we decided to systematically analyze our experiences.

While this was not the first university level course that either of us had taught, it was the first time that we had collaboratively taught at the university level and the first time we had worked together. Prior to engaging in this collaborative teaching, we had worked together on other research and teaching projects for approximately five months. Further, before entering graduate school, both of us had taught in inclusive K-12 classrooms that utilized some form of collaborative teaching. Kathy's experience as an inclusion teacher in secondary math classes reflected a relatively low level of collaboration, characterized by limited joint planning and very few classroom teaching opportunities. Jessica's experience as a primary classroom teacher and special educator included a high degree of collaboration within the planning process, but little actual collaborative teaching. In that we both hoped to expand our degree of collegial collaboration, we were drawn to the opportunity for collaboratively teaching.

Being both the participants and the researchers in this study, we recognize that we stood quite close to our phenomenon of interest. As is true for many disciplines, "education researchers are often researchers of familiar educational settings" (Rogers, Malancharuvil-Berkes, Mosley, Hui, & Joseph, 2005, p. 382). While some may question the potential bias of such research, Merriam (1998) noted that an awareness of "how biases or

subjectivity shape the investigation and its findings” (p. 23) is an important component of the research process. Therefore, throughout the study, we aimed to acknowledge and to value our history of participation in K-12 team teaching, along with our role as both the participants and primary researchers of this study.

Additionally, in order to acquire perspectives beyond our own, the data collection and analysis process was conducted in collaboration with five phenomenological research team members, including one senior faculty member. All of these research members, primarily doctoral students, were trained in phenomenological methodology. Throughout the study, we intentionally maintained a reflexive stance, viewing the process as “one that never ends” (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p. 11).

Data Collection and Analysis

Following the conclusion of the educational psychology course, a senior member of the phenomenological research team conducted one unstructured, open-ended interview with both team teachers. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. The phenomenological interview began with the following question: “When you think about your experience collaboratively teaching, what stands out for you?” The research team member asked subsequent questions to clarify information already given, refocus on unfolding themes, and acquire further details and/or examples. Prior to conducting the interviews, the senior research member/interviewer participated in a bracketing interview to bring to light her own possible assumptions and biases regarding collaborative teaching methods. The intent of the bracketing interview was to make the interviewer’s assumptions explicit, raising them “at the level of reflective awareness” (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989, p. 11).

Following the transcription of our (Kathy’s and Jessica’s) interviews, we read the interviews independently, noting and recording salient aspects of each text. We then met together to share the emergent findings, identifying salient features of each interview. In order to provide further trustworthiness to our analysis process, we brought the interviews to the phenomenological research team in order to further analyze and interpret the transcribed interviews. While each of the transcripts was read out loud, research members noted what stood out for them. Over the course of three research team meetings, research team members identified what Robbins (2006) called *meaning units*, justifying their ideas as they found support for each meaning unit within the transcript. Then, thematic commonalities were sought across the transcripts with only those themes supported by both Jessica’s and Kathy’s transcripts being included in the

final structure. As themes emerged, a shared structure was developed (Creswell, 1998) with each theme closely aligning with our words. In addition, there was an overarching theme, identified as the ground theme, which represented our general experience.

Findings and Discussion

The ground theme, *we didn’t have a manual for this/finding our way through*, and the following five themes emerged from the analysis process: (a) *You can’t shoot from the hip*; (b) *Following and leading . . . all of us together*; (c) *If we walk away disagreeing, is it okay?*; (d) *The presence of another pushed us to go deeper*; and (e) *You build something bigger*.

Ground Theme: We Didn’t Have a Manual for This/Finding Our Way Through

The overarching ground theme serves as the foundation out of which the other themes emerged. The ground theme, *we didn’t have a manual for this/finding our way through*, reflects our unfamiliarity with the process of collaborative teaching, including practical aspects and personal interactions. Gaining an understanding of this process required us to simply *find our way through*, as stated by one team teacher:

We didn’t have a manual that we were going by, so we would always say, “Well, let’s experiment with this and let’s see what the response is...Let’s feel what the response is by actually doing it and being practical about it and then we’ll put words to what actually happened and then maybe we can replicate it the next day.

Davis (1995) affirmed that in new team teaching ventures many instructors initially have “an uneasy sense that they don’t know what they are doing. They find themselves immersed in a collaborative process with other people...who also don’t know exactly what they are doing” (p. 47). Each of us experienced this sense of uncertainty as expressed in the following quotes:

And there was a piece where we were just finding our way through it...We had no idea what this was going to look like and feel like...and we didn’t know each other well enough by that point to even ask what it was going to look like.

The instructional decisions felt very different to me when I was in a team approach because when we first started, even before that first day, we asked each other, “So, what are we going to say? How

do we even do this? How do we know when to go back and forth with each other?

While we experienced this uncertainty during the initial weeks of the course, as time progressed, we became more comfortable with the process.

At the beginning of the course when we didn't know each other's styles, we didn't know each other's non-verbal cues, we didn't know how we acted, what meant what, I think we were a little bit hesitant and so it was like kind of trying to feel our way through.

We were very individualized when we first started and we didn't really mesh at first because we weren't sure how until we started actually doing and then we figured it out as we did it.

One of the aspects of finding our way through this process was the extensive amount of time required to plan for and reflect on each class session.

Theme 1: You Can't Just Shoot From the Hip

The first theme, *you can't just shoot from the hip*, explicates the idea that collaborative teaching demanded a major time commitment, something we saw extensively in the literature. The following two quotes illustrate each of the team teachers' perception of the amount of time required:

There's just a lot more involved in making sure you are prepared. You can't just go shoot from the hip. You can't assume that you know what you are going to say and roll with it as easily. You spend a lot more time thinking about it - about that class. I'm pretty sure I spent more time thinking about the class that I team taught than I did the class that I solo taught. Before class we would be talking about what we were going to do. After class we would talk about what went right, what didn't go right.

We had to think about everything. We spent way too much time getting ready for the class, going over what happened in the class. We spent so much time reprocessing what felt right, what went well, what didn't go well, what they understood, what they didn't understand, where we need to come up with a new instructional activity to fill in that gap and it was at a different level than we would do, or that I do, when I teach by myself.

While one dimension of time related to the amount of planning and reflection, another facet of time

revolved around the interpersonal nature of collaboration. The effectiveness of each class session was in many ways contingent upon the degree to which we understood and responded to each other. This understanding took time to develop as expressed by the following:

I mean it took so much time...but then we became much more at ease with the process and I think also much more comfortable with each other and we began to collaborate in a much more fluid way. So the front end of the course was very time intensive for lots of reasons. One, we were feeling our way through the process and secondly we didn't know each other as well as at the end so we were also feeling out, how do I interact with this person? How do I push back and they push me back and we construct something together? But as things progressed, that all worked itself out.

As we developed as team teachers, our perception of the time required changed and while we may not have actually spent less time preparing, we became more efficient as we learned to follow and lead, both each other and our students.

Theme 2: Following and Leading...All of Us Together

The second theme, *following and leading...all of us together*, represents the reciprocity that was fostered within classroom relationships. This reciprocity began to develop in our own relationship as described in the following quote:

I know that person well enough now, and especially near the end, that I can flow with them better. That's what flow is - it's that following and leading. But flowing in such a way that you actually know when you are following, when you are leading and when you are totally off, when you've overtaken this position of, "This is my classroom." And you forget that this is about following and leading both the learners and this co-learner that you are teaching with as well.

Brookfield described classrooms as being either autocratic, where one teacher makes all the decisions, or oligarchic, with the teacher and a "few committed, articulate, or favored students" making most of the decisions. A more ideal classroom, valuing the "true team teaching" model, is much "closer to a democracy as participation is equalized and teachers and learners take joint responsibility for deciding what and how to

study and how to evaluate learning” (p. 236). In other words:

It’s not MY classroom. It’s our classroom. It’s not my classroom even if I am by myself. It’s our classroom – the students’. I should be following their lead too.

There were times when the “flow” was accompanied by tension and challenge; at other times, it seemed as if there was no “flow” at all, as shown in the following quotes:

We totally fell flat on our face a couple of times and we felt it. We felt it where we would go, “Oh. That was hard; what was it that made it hard?” So we would ask each other and we would go, “We weren’t flowing with each other. We had our own agenda.”

Even if we went back today and did it again, we would have a day where we went, “Whoa, our cord of connection was really beautiful that day and we were connected with our students and with each other.” And then we would have another day where it would be like, “We are still working this thing out.”

This “cord of connection” represented our ability to lead and follow one another within all of our collaborative efforts. This did not evolve automatically; we had to *find our way through* it. Consistent with existing research on team teaching, our development of this “cord of connection” required a willingness and ability to work through conflict.

Theme 3: If We Walk Away Disagreeing, Is It Okay?

Much of the team teaching research addresses ways to deal with interpersonal conflict that will inevitably arise in any type of collaborative endeavor (Bakken, Clark, & Thompson, 1998; Bruffee, 1993; Davis, 1995; Creamer, 2004). The third theme, *if we walk away disagreeing, is it okay*, illustrates how we navigated such conflict. The following two quotes express our individual perceptions of conflict:

Team teaching is a very organic experience...there is something very human that happens when you have to collaborate with someone that much at that close of a level and you make a commitment to work through whatever you disagree on – for two reasons. First because your students are always first and secondly you do care about the other person.

That was really scary to me because I wanted to make sure that our relationship was still intact when all of this [team teaching] was over. And I guess there’s that dynamic that when you work closely with somebody, there’s always a tendency to wonder, “If we walk away disagreeing on something, is it okay?”

Working through such disagreements is not about conforming or about assimilation. The best collaboration should not be about group-think, but be about conflict, differences, diversity, and dialogue about diversity (Cooper, George, & Sanders, 1994). For each of us, these differences often led to some tense moments, as expressed by such words as “wrestle” and “fiery.”

Part of this process was doing that [disagreeing] and it being okay. And it’s okay to wrestle through issues and to walk away still maybe having a different opinion.

Probably the most challenging piece of it because we had different approaches sometimes and we had to bend with each other and there were times when I would go, “I wouldn’t have done that.”...and that’s where it would get fiery.

As we began to value rather than fear conflict, we realized with Dewey that “conflict is the gadfly of thought. It stirs us to observation and memory. It instigates to invention. It shocks us out of sheep-like passivity... conflict is a *sine qua non* of reflection and ingenuity,” (Dewey, 1922, p. 300). It was in this conflict that we experienced professional and personal growth, while also observing our students reap the benefits.

I remember one particular time that it was rough. I mean it just wasn’t coming together at all and it was so frustrating. It was like, “Okay. I would have never had this problem if I was just teaching by myself.” And it was just frustrating but then, you work through it and you kind of push and you kind of pull and when it is all said and done, you grow from it.

Theme 4: The Presence of Another Pushed Us to Go Deeper

The fourth theme, *the presence of another pushed us to go deeper*, emphasizes the opportunity for reflective practice through the process of collaborative teaching.

When you collaborate with someone else you see yourself...you see a lot about your assumptions that you make that can be adjusted based on people's response and based on questions that people ask or vice versa. And so I thought, "Well, this will be very challenging and it would really push me." I didn't realize it would push me in being a reflective teacher.

According to Parker Palmer (1998), "when we deny our own condition, we resist seeing anything in others that might remind of us who, and how, we really are" (p. 47). To avoid reflective practice is to bury unquestioned assumptions, potentially limiting our capacity for professional and personal growth.

If I didn't team teach, I would have walked in with my assumptions and my understanding based on my perspective and I wouldn't have been able to see somebody else's point of view and get a better understanding even if it meant adjusting my understanding.

The initial uneasiness about the collaborative process, the sacrifice of time for this novel experience, and the promise of personal conflict, all converged in the presence of the other and pushed us toward growth.

It was this tug between being comfortable with the process and uncomfortable in a personal way – of knowing that this was really making you grow personally and professionally and in a collaborative sense as well, of knowing when to be quiet and knowing when to really recognize that your idea might really stink and someone does need to push you back on it.

As we look back at our own growth, we see that this process of "pushing back," despite its occasional discomfort, is necessary in order to create something bigger than what we are able to do individually.

Theme 5: You Build Something Bigger

The final theme, *you build something bigger*, encapsulates the nature of the co-construction of knowledge within our experience of collaborative teaching, as we each expressed in the following two quotes:

I remember one day Kathy said to me, "This is what constructivist principles are all about." And I said, "What?" She said, "What just happened right here." We had come up with something that was bigger than what we had individually brought to the table. And it was challenging to get there but

when we got there it was like, "Wow! This is really, really neat to have this feeling of disequilibrium. You've pushed my thinking on this so I need to reconcile what's going on here." And eventually it happens. You reconcile and you build something bigger than you could have built on your own.

We would have to kind of wrestle through some issues like – maybe I had one way of looking at a particular concept and Jessica had a different way of looking at a concept and we couldn't just plan it. We had to kind of wrestle through that issue first and kind of, I guess it's co-constructing.

In comparison to teaching in isolation, collaborative teaching provided a rich opportunity to engage in constructive modes of teaching. As Vygotsky (1978) suggested, thinking is modified through social interactions with others; as those thoughts are then internalized, future learning and teaching ventures are enhanced. In our highly collaborative approach to team teaching, the potential for *building something bigger* seemed to be maximized.

Conclusions

As we found our way through this process, the time spent allowed us to deepen our understanding of the course content, improve interactions with students and each other, develop a capacity to embrace differences, and work toward a more collaborative approach to teaching and learning. Abundant research exists supporting the use of collaboration for professional and personal growth, both in and out of the classroom. For example, Harris and Harvey (2000) noted that the participants in their collaboratively taught course engaged in deeper levels of discussion and experienced a more enriching learning community due to the "distinct life experiences and different academic backgrounds" of the two instructors (p. 28). Among other advantages, Buckley (2000) suggested that collaboration increases the level of scholarship, reduces burnout by alleviating the isolation felt by individual teachers, and builds a sense of community among instructors and students. Despite the recognized value of collaborative teaching, the "Myth of the Independent Scholar" continues to dominate the university classroom, begging the question: What is it that stands in the way of instructors engaging in collaborative praxis?

Davis (1995) attributed the lack of effective team teaching to several factors including "traditions, lack of time, and a certain lack of imagination" (p. 112). Traditional views of teaching tend to perpetuate the image of an individual instructor who has developed

proven expertise in a field and whose responsibility it is to pass that expertise to her students. Collaborative teaching can be perceived as a challenge to the authority of the professor in the classroom by those who underestimate the power of collaboration. Further, there may be resistance to team teaching by more “autocratically inclined” instructors and “cost-conscious administrators” (Brookfield, 2006, p. 160). As seen in our study and in other studies examining various forms of team teaching, authentic collaboration in the classroom requires a relinquishing of individual control, an investment of time in the pursuit of professional growth, a commitment to work through conflict, and a willingness to embrace differing perspectives and ideas.

To relinquish individual control is to recognize that the classroom is *not my classroom, but our classroom*, and that only through *following and leading...all of us together* can we construct a greater understanding. As Miller (1994) suggested, we believe that “knowledge is the result of many minds approximating a ‘truth’” (p. 284) and that only in the act of coming together can we truly deepen our understanding. In this coming together, team teachers must learn to “be okay” with the uncomfortable growth pains common to the process of collaboration. In that there is not a “how to” manual for collaboration, instructors must embrace the challenge of learning “on the job.”

As shown in our thematic structure, *finding our way through it* demanded a significant time investment; we could not simply *shoot from the hip*. We needed additional time to jointly plan, reflect, and teach, while also navigating the interpersonal interactions inherent to collaborative teaching. Although some may see the amount of required time as a hindrance to collaborative ventures, this drawback is minimized in light of the benefits of both professional and personal growth. In order to be *pushed to go deeper*, time is required. Nevertheless, through creativity some of the challenges of time may be overcome. For example, opting to collaboratively teach during an academic term in which both team teachers have fewer job demands is a valid consideration. Further, as Beck (2006) noted, gaining “administrative buy-in” through systematically demonstrating student gains may perhaps open up more opportunities for collaboration (p. 9).

As institutions of higher education continue to recognize and value the importance of collaboration in developing knowledge and growth among their instructors, novel means of facilitating collaborative teaching must be more systematically instituted. Palmer (1998) stated that “involvement in a community of pedagogical discourse is more than a voluntary option...it is a professional obligation that

educational institutions should expect of those who teach. To not do so fosters institutional incompetence” (p. 144). Thus, simply recognizing the value of collaboration is not enough. Instructors may give mental assent to the need for collaboration but feel that it is not really a viable option. With the variance in team teaching approaches, many options exist, allowing instructors to engage in some form of collaboration that matches their work place demands. A “serial” approach, as Davis (1995) described it, may be the most pragmatic option for collaboration and while it may not incorporate the level of collaboration that we attempted to implement, we believe that any type of collaboration is better than no collaboration at all.

We recognize that team teaching is “a valid part of our praxis, a way of working that strains our schedules and – occasionally – our tempers, but which demonstrates that the collaborative model is a method for living, not just a classroom exercise” (Davis, 1995, p. 108). Despite the potential for “strain,” “tempers,” and occasionally *walking away disagreeing*, team teaching provides a natural opportunity for engaging in dialogue with colleagues in order to promote professional growth. Collaborative efforts enrich us as instructors, enabling us to more deeply reflect as we are pushed to question our assumptions and challenge our current level of understanding. Further, as we learn to construct knowledge together, to challenge one another, and not simply assimilate our ideas, we are enabled to *build something bigger*.

While one implication of this study is the benefit of collaboration for instructors, we also recognize the value of collaborative teaching for students. For example, we were able to model for our students what it means to approach the classroom as a community of learners, *not as my classroom but our classroom*, and to walk out both the “difficulties and rewards of working as a small community” (Wolf, 1994, p. 108). Benjamin (2000) found that when team teaching was simply about sharing the workload, it was not necessarily beneficial to the students; however, when team teaching was implemented with the purpose of improving teaching and learning, there was much more collaboration and there were greater benefits to both the instructors and the students.

As valuable as collaborative teaching is for instructors and for students within educational settings, we must not miss the potential power of collaboration within a broader context. Our thematic structure, applied to the larger community, illustrates that when we are willing to engage in reflective practice with those around us, listen to the thoughts and perspectives of others, even when there is inherent risk of conflict and disagreement, the opportunity to *build* greater understanding emerges. It seems fair to

suggest that as we *follow and lead* within a community, investing time as well as emotional and intellectual energies, we make space to *build something bigger* than we could have built ourselves.

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