



Innovative Teaching and Learning Methodologies

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Abstract

This paper presents an evaluation of a professional learning and development framework. The framework was focussed on supporting teachers' learning and development regarding team teaching impacts. Research into team teaching practices has largely been conducted in special school settings and in classrooms in which English has been a second language. Often these studies have been based on only one or two classes. Consequently, the framework needed to be evaluated in order to determine the authenticity of data collected if new knowledge regarding team teaching in mainstream classrooms was to occur. Analysis of the data indicated that the framework design did effectively support teachers' professional learning and development from which students benefited academically, socially and personally.

Keywords: Professional learning, team teaching, professional development framework.

1. Team Teaching

The literature on team teaching is often difficult to discern from collaborative practices. Teachers can collaborate without co-teaching the same class (Buckley, 2000 [5]). Generally, the literature on team teaching has been largely conducted in special school settings and in classrooms where English is the students' second language (Nierengarten, 2013 [9]; Pearl, Dieker & Kirkpatrick, 2012 [10]; Pugach & Winn, 2011 [11]). Often the research occurs in only one or two classes. However, as there is little research in mainstream settings, across a number of different contexts a lot more needs to be known about:

a) the impact of team teaching on teachers' professional learning and development and

b) how team teaching impacts on students' wellbeing, learning engagement, and outcomes.

We recognised that in order to authentic team teaching data we had to develop a robust research framework that was informed by the existing knowledge regarding effective professional learning and development and that promoted opportunities for collaboration with academics and teams of teachers that would promote team teaching in classrooms and collaboration in the research space. The framework included regular mentoring support over the project to address the possibility of dwindling teacher engagement due to high workloads and teacher churn (Bayar, 2014 [2]).

In this presentation, we will consider the design of the project, its applicability in different settings and the successes and challenges that the teachers in our project experienced.

2. Professional learning versus Professional development

Within the field a distinction is made between professional training, learning and professional development (Easton, 2008 [10]; Victorian Parliament; Education and Training Committee Report, 2009 [12]). Although Villegas-Reimers (2003 [13]) acknowledged that teachers are more likely to grow and develop by engaging in different types of professional development activities and these, in combination, produce professional learning (pp. 69-93).

We set out to design a program that privileged teachers' agency and provided opportunities to develop over time. Teachers' agency is linked to inquiry-based, action-oriented learning rather than 'top down' delivery styles" (Victorian Parliament 2009 [12]). School based, job embedded and experiential learning are also identified as (Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009 [7], Easton, 2004 [8]) approaches that are more likely to be sustained over time, and form part of a larger school reform. We drew on Villegas-Remiers' (2003 [13]) systematic review in which she identified 7 key characteristics of professional learning/development (Villegas-Reimers, 2003 [13]).

3. Research contexts

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The research framework that we are reporting on involved nine mainstream schools and one special needs school across Victoria, Australia. Team teaching took place in primary and secondary schools located across urban, regional and rural settings. Ten schools were chosen as they represented a variety of different contexts. The project timeline was 8 months.

4. Action Research (research framework artefact)

Participating schools used an action research approach to investigate their team teaching practices. This allowed teachers' agency to be central and compliments the act of team teaching.

5. Unpacking the professional learning and development framework

5.1 Video recording practice

Brophy (2004, p. 292 [4]) argued "observers do not see much less remember, everything that occurs in the classroom ... and their access to ongoing events is affected by their placement in the room". In order to address this concern and recognise teachers as active agents, video recording was selected as a stimulus for teachers' analytical thinking and critical peer conversations to provide opportunities for teachers to foster their professional learning collaboratively. The video recordings were to be "a source for data and not data in themselves" (Erickson, 2007, p. 153 [6]). We noted the criticism of using video, as "an inherently ambiguous and incomplete stimulus that invites reaction and speculation" (Erickson, 2007, p.152 [6]). Video however provides a way to convey the complexity and subtlety of classroom teaching as it occurs in real time, with a richness and immediacy (Brophy, 2004, p. 287 [6]).

5.2 Strengths Weakness Opportunities Threats (SWOT) analysis

Borko, (2010 [3]) argued the need to know more about "how to capitalise on the power of video representation's... to guide teachers' ... in an intentional manner" (p. 176). While being conscious of concerns about descriptive reflection reproducing existing beliefs, SWOT analysis was employed to guide teachers' reflections and enact their agency by critically reflecting.

5.3 SWOT as data

The SWOTs were audio taped and transcribed for reflexive analysis with a mentor from one week later to reflexively analyse their reactions and speculations. This element of the research framework supported opportunities to have challenging team conversations.

5.4 Advice networks

In order to provide agency through networks we were mindful of the work of Baker-Doyle and Yoon's (2011 [1]) who found "that teachers did not naturally build advice networks that would cultivate the highest levels of practitioner-based social capital" (p. 75 [1]). Consequently, small cluster meetings of 3-4 schools were established for teachers to meet, observe and discuss team teaching practices, seek advice and learn new or adapted strategies for team teaching.

5.5 Workshops, repository and monthly school visits

The research framework built in further support through four full day workshops in which teams of teachers came together to share and problematise their emerging action research findings. Each school had a Deakin Mentor who visited at least once per month. An online repository was established for teachers so they could access audio and video recordings of workshop presentations and activities, related literature and other resources created by, and shared between, schools (see <https://blogs.deakin.edu.au/teamteachingproject/>).

6. Evaluation of the Framework for Professional Learning and Development

Our evaluation of the framework has multiple layers and data sources, which includes analysing: teachers' email correspondence, our field notes, the degree of sustained teacher engagement over time, and the quality of their engagement.



7. Data Source One: Email communications

There was evidence that teachers were taking the initiative in asking their visiting peers to provide feedback. For example, School A sent the following communication before its cluster meeting:

We are looking forward to hosting our first Cluster Meeting tomorrow. We have identified some focus questions we would like to use to guide your observations and our subsequent discussion:

In each of the classes where you observe team-teaching is there evidence of:

- teachers being able to incorporate student interest /voice /choice in the activities that are offered? (and does this seem to be enhanced by having more than one teacher in the room?)
- teachers using their individual strengths to cater to student need?
- teachers having a rapport with each other and being able to bounce ideas of each other to encourage student involvement?
- teachers being able to monitor all students (either with regards to behaviour management or ensuring all students are significantly scaffolded and supported in their learning)?

8. Data Source Two: Field notes

Teachers appeared motivated and actively participating in mentoring conversations and workshops. We did not experience difficulty in getting school teams to send us data (audio recordings of SWOT analyses) for transcription for discussion. School teams freely shared the challenges as well as the successes. During cluster meetings, we noted all teachers asked inquiring or probing questions about the team teaching observed. Teachers in most schools reported that they were “trailing different type of team teaching approaches” (School B), which indicated to us that they were sufficiently supported and confident to take risks to improve their practices.

9. Data Source Three: Retention of participants

The project sustained teacher engagement over time. We found that even in schools that indicated they had little leadership support or experienced high teacher churn, the design of the framework continued to provide support for the most vulnerable. We did not experience participation attrition.

10. Data Source Four: Quality of teacher engagement

The quality was recognised when teams of teachers began to lead other staff in professional learning opportunities. Actions such as implementing team teaching protocols for the whole school, presenting at public conferences, running whole school team teaching days, using video and SWOT analyses and engaging students in providing feedback. School action research reports showed teachers were active rather than passive participants who took ownership of their research (as reflected in the high quality of their reports) and prepared written final reports which they publicly presented.

In this presentation, we will present artefacts from the repository (video recorded evidence, school team final reports and presentations) as documented evidence of quality of teacher engagement.

11. Conclusion

The levels of support embedded within the framework design did support teachers in ways that made them feel valued. The framework provided the opportunity to capture authentic team teaching data due to teachers' active levels of engagement which validated its robustness.

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