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Creative Innovation Takes a (Team-Teaching) Family

ABSTRACT

Team teaching can be a valuable means of enabling cross-disciplinary collaboration, interdisciplinary study, and pedagogical innovation, but the logistical and intellectual challenges can seem too daunting to overcome. Here, we share the story of how four faculty members from professional writing, communications, and computing sciences developed a team teaching “family” as we imagined, created, launched, and ran an innovative experiential learning program at our university. The Design Thinking Studio in Social Innovation is a semester-long program worth four full courses of credit that brought us together with 14 students from disciplines across the university to learn and apply design thinking and social innovation theories to a large-scale civic engagement project. Here we explore the lived experience of the faculty during the pilot semester and how our team-teaching family was crucial to our personal and professional success supporting our “kids” in this high-stress environment. We then offer tips for creating your own team-teaching family.

KEYWORDS

team teaching, co-teaching, experiential learning, scholarly personal narrative, interdisciplinary collaboration, curricular innovation

WE BEGIN WITH A STORY...

Once upon a Tuesday in the spring, a family crisis hung heavily in the air. The kids were not getting along well, and Mean Mom was short on patience and kind of done dealing with them. Rationally, she knew that the kids were doing the best they could in a situation that made them uncomfortable. They were in a new space and spending a lot of time with each other, and they were working on big, meaningful projects with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar places. She knew they were entitled to express their frustration and cognitive dissonance.

Mean Mom felt that she had given them all the strategies they needed to succeed at their big but interesting tasks, but they just wanted her to tell them what to do. Despite having several new tools to approach their challenges, they reverted back to older methods and habits, even knowing these strategies wouldn't be the most effective way to move forward. They just wanted to feel in control again. When she gave her constructive and honest assessment of what they were doing, they pushed back. Mean Mom could see that her approach would work, but the kids were done listening if she wasn't going to tell them exactly what to do. Mean Mom had had enough.

When Cool Dad arrived, he could see Mean Mom needed a break, so he sent her out to take some time for herself away from the kids. He settled in by checking with everyone; laughing about the funny thing the dog did yesterday; challenging them to think more about what he and Mean Mom had

taught them about being independent, capable, and engaged; and getting them to organize their work more effectively. He tried not to share Mean Mom's frustration, but he also saw why Mean Mom felt the way she did.

Later that day, Mean Mom and Cool Dad met up for coffee to talk about what was going on with the kids. Needing to blow off steam, they vented for a while about their shared frustration. Soon after, Visiting Cousin popped in to see what was up. He wanted to see how Mean Mom and Cool Dad were doing and listened to their concerns about the family's struggles. Cousin had spent time with the kids that week and learned that they needed something to break up the routine and shake up their creativity. They wanted a refresher on some key strategies and sought a narrower framework for tasks before they could move forward.

He suggested to Mom and Dad that they think about the situation from the kids' perspective: they knew what they needed to do, but they didn't want to do it improperly. What Cousin said made a lot of sense; it helped Mean Mom and Cool Dad let go of some of the tension they were holding and think more proactively about how to help the kids work productively. They decided to change their approach the next day based on Cousin's empathetic feedback. They also called in Fun Uncle to play games for a change of pace. He could visit once or twice a week with activities that helped bring everyone's energy up while focusing on the important work to be done. With the family crisis resolved, the kids felt like they had support from a host of caregivers who were demonstrating that the kids' abilities to succeed were at the heart of the family. And they all lived happier ever after—at least until next Tuesday.

Much of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning focuses on the student experience, the “L” in SoTL. In their introduction to *Teaching & Learning Inquiry* 2(2), editors Nancy Chick and Gary Poole (2014) ask us to ponder how well we actually know our students and their “lived experience.” But what about faculty lived experience? What about faculty who are working at the edge of what Williams and colleagues (2013, p. 50) call the “vision of academia's future,” the place where “inquiry, evidence, and innovation in teaching and learning are part of the fabric of everyday life”?

In her ISSoTL 2016 opening keynote, Karen Manarin (2017) discussed the power of story and the idea that “some elements of teaching and learning cannot be easily represented in our current scholarly genres” (p. 1). Like *TLI's* focus on the interdisciplinary, the inter-methodological, and the nontraditional, she argues that exploring new stories of teaching and learning “might let us glimpse those elements of teaching and learning that get left out of our current understanding of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. It might let us read, and write, the stories of teaching and learning differently” (Manarin, 2017, p. 7). Similarly, Ng and Carney (2017) argue the value in “illuminating the interior, intellectual life of educators” and the “messy, nuanced arena of teaching and learning” (pp. 1, 11) via Nash's (2004) genre of the scholarly personal narratives. These narratives “do a lot of the work of autobiographies, personal narrative essays, and memoirs” and are constructed “around themes, issues, constructs, and concepts that carry larger, more universalizable meanings” (p. 30).

In that spirit, we pick up Manarin's challenge here as we transgress typical genres to tell the story, in anecdote and in critical reflection, of our recent lived experience. We share our story of what happened when four faculty members were able to truly collaborate to design, develop, launch, and co-teach a radically different curricular program and how we became a professional family in the process. In this article, we explore the story of our team-teaching experience as we developed and ran the first pilot

semester of an innovative, undergraduate, four-course, full semester social innovation program at Elon University. We first briefly review some of the literature on team teaching and then share our experience, both as a story and informed reflection. Our goal is to make visible the lived experience of our teaching team and expand the conversation about co-teaching and faculty narratives with emphasis on the “T” in SoTL.

THE LITERATURE

The process of teaching together with colleagues has been explored in existing research on training teachers how to collaborate and explores a variety of definitions, activities, structural patterns, and values that undergird the act. Co-teaching is often cited as the higher-order term, with team teaching being a species of co-teaching. In a hierarchy of co-teaching activities outlined by Cook and Friend (1995) and updated by Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2008), team teaching is the most collaborative and intensive version of co-teaching in which the co-teachers share instruction time, student interaction, and overall authority in the classroom. For our purposes here, we borrow from these precursors to define co-teaching as the purposeful and intentional partnership between two or more instructors, preferably from different disciplines or specialties, who collaboratively develop, plan, deliver, adapt, and assess coursework for one group of shared students in a single physical or online space (Bacharach et al., 2008; Brody, 1994; Cook & Friend, 1995; Crow & Smith, 2005; Lock, et al., 2016; Roth & Tobin, 2004).

The research shows that team teaching has many benefits to professional development. Plank (2013) notes that effective team-teaching partnerships can be like small, intensive learning communities that provide an opportunity to “see your teaching from another perspective” and “the opportunity for a sustained and intensive kind of professional development” (Plank, 2013, pp. 1, 5). Teaming allows faculty to receive real-time feedback on teaching from a peer who has a similar investment in the experience, clarify and articulate their thinking, negotiate pedagogical actions and theories, and build meaningful relationships with students and peers in new ways (Bacharach et al., 2008; Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Plank, 2013). Furthermore, participants in a small study by Bacharach and colleagues found team teaching made them more reflective teachers and gave them “an energizing opportunity for faculty to renew their passion for their profession” (2008, p. 15).

Team teaching can often seem like a great idea but one that is also rife with “logistical, pedagogical, and intellectual challenges,” which might be putting it mildly (Hoon, 2014, p. 5). Team teaching complicates all of the planning, teaching, and assessment activities faculty are accustomed to doing themselves. Adding multiple voices, perspectives, values, and perhaps disciplinary perspectives to this process can require intensive discussion, negotiation, and adaptation for every class meeting (Plank, 2013, p. 3). This practice “requires a high level of mutual trust and commitment,” which can be energizing but also exhausting for experienced faculty (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 9). Ferguson and Wilson (2011) argue that “it’s their negotiation of expectations, processes, and methods that induce professional growth and change” (p. 54) that can be most valuable faculty, but again, this requires a shared commitment of time, compromise, and trust to be successful (Plank, 2013, p.3). Every act of teaching must be collaboratively inspected and negotiated.

Team teaching is hard. It is messy. It butts us up against disciplinary walls even as we strive to think and be interdisciplinary. It can force us to confront our own egos and “the way we’ve always done it” as instructors and colleagues. Not to mention the real challenges of teaching load, individual teaching evaluations, promotion, and compensation from an administrative perspective. But Hoon (2014) argues

that “in the same way that we have preached the benefits of peer learning to our students when we get them to work in groups, we teachers need to collaborate more with our own peers in teaching, much in the same way research collaboration is the norm in many disciplines” (p. 6).

What happens when we take that leap, ignoring (or harnessing) those logistical, pedagogical, intellectual, and egotistical challenges, especially when implementing innovative curricula and programs? In spring 2017, after 18 months from nascent idea to actual launch, we tested these boundaries and ran the pilot semester of the Design Thinking Studio in Social Innovation at Elon University. We know we never could have taken such a big leap of faith without supporting, encouraging, and challenging each other to create something innovative, which was truly scary in many ways—but which also made us more like a family than just simply co-teachers.

So what was it like for us? First, a word about our program.

THE STUDIO PROGRAM

The Design Thinking Studio in Social Innovation immersive semester was conceived over coffee in spring 2015 by four professors in professional writing and rhetoric, interactive media, communication design, and computing sciences. Our original discussion was about the challenges of implementing a professional project management practice called Scrum into the classroom but morphed into a discussion about why it was so hard to teach students collaboration and project management skills in our courses while attempting to cover course material and keep students motivated. We jokingly started to imagine what it would look like if we “broke everything:” the tyranny of the credit hour and seat time, the semester structure itself, the number of seemingly unrelated courses students take in a semester, the fact that faculty own their courses but rarely interact with one another while teaching, even alphanumeric grades as the primary means of summative assessment. We mentioned our discussions to a few peers and key administrators, and before we knew it, we had tapped into a campus zeitgeist we did not know existed. After some discussions about how our program aligned with several specific university priorities, we were given administrative approval to run the pilot in spring 2017.

Fourteen juniors and seniors participated in the first pilot, combining academic work, design challenges, and service-learning projects. In the Studio program, students committed to a full semester’s worth of coursework in one integrated design and social innovation experience. Instead of four courses, they met in our flexible design space three hours a day, five days a week. For the first four weeks, we led the students in a “boot camp,” with readings about design thinking, empathy, creativity, curiosity, and social innovation; active design challenges to practice new mindsets and skills; collaborative design activities to develop a team identity, logo, and web presence; and a pilot design sprint to attack an unaddressed problem on campus. We then began to shift to the community-based service-learning work of the program, encouraging students to learn more about the surrounding county and towns, to frequent local business, and to develop an understanding of the social issues in our area. The second half of the semester was spent working on social design projects with members of two county consortia addressing community access and engagement with health, wellness, and food.

We co-taught and co-led these students in four classes, block registered and delivered as one unified experience, while developing the format as we went along. The Studio program was a labor of love and true interdisciplinary collaboration in the planning and execution that required a successful team-teaching relationship.

THE TEAM-TEACHING FAMILY RELATIONSHIP

A solid team-teaching partnership requires a strong personal and professional foundation. A truly collaborative relationship requires attention, cultivation, shared values, and shared commitment to the teaching project and students' learning (Eisen & Tisdell, 2002/2003; Lock, et al., 2016).

Professionally, we were fortunate that we each brought very different skills sets to the table from the beginning, which we recognized and amplified throughout our work together:

- Rebecca (Mean Mom) is the organizer and the writer, the rhetorician who pushed the logistics through, wrote the proposals for administration and materials for students, and led the curriculum development.
- Phillip (Cool Dad), a graphic and industrial designer by discipline, is more laid back than Rebecca but was equally involved in shaping the program, its curriculum, its identity, and its place at the university. He is an advocate for the program all over campus, our design leader, and the most passionate recruiter of students.
- William (Visiting Cousin), a media scholar, brought big ideas to the program, pushing our creative thinking about how to engage the community innovation network, in which he himself is active. William was our outside researcher presence who functioned like an ombudsman, compiling student feedback and sharing insights that helped us adjust or change course to meet their needs.
- Joel (Fun Uncle), a computing sciences faculty member, was our maker, engineer, and tech guru. He brought his perspective as a department chair to the budgeting and logistics of the program, and he was often the voice of reason in the planning (and eventually in the execution), there with a reminder that this program was a pilot and had to be treated as such.

The foundational and interdisciplinary elements of our team-teaching relationship became crucial to working through emergent pedagogical, intellectual, and even emotional challenges during this intensive semester pilot. Adapting Crow and Smith's (2005, p. 497) eight core characteristics of a strong team-teaching relationship into four categories—a relationship of trust and empathy; equal ownership of the teaching and learning process; shared power, responsibility, and accountability; and ongoing critical reflection—we can better articulate the successes and challenges of our own professional partnership.

Relationship of trust and empathy

Crow and Smith (2005) argue that the strongest team-teaching relationships are built on a foundation of empathy and trust (p. 497). Developing this relationship takes time above all else. After the initial coffee meeting at the beginning of our journey, we met regularly during the 18 months leading up to the pilot. This included weekly brainstorming meetings during semesters, regular reading discussions and proposal writing sessions over the summer, and intensive planning sessions. We used the time to imagine the big ideas, such as what the possible structures were for the program, how it would count toward students' degrees, how we would assess learning and the program, and how we would convince students to take a risk. We also worked out the nitty-gritty details of recruiting and registering students, planning day-to-day activities, and balancing our own time and responsibilities. We have pages

and pages of notes about all of these possibilities, numerous pictures of crowded whiteboard diagrams, and many proposals and administrative reports of varying lengths. Rebecca served as the primary writer for the group, but we all had an equal investment of time, thought, and energy in this development process.

While we started our relationship already respecting each other as colleagues, trust and empathy strengthened during this intensive development process. We share some very specific beliefs about teaching and learning that further solidified our relationship. We all believe strongly in project-based pedagogies that put students to work on real, or at least realistic, problems. We believe that students must learn to collaborate and have the time and space to work on a meaningful project together for a long period of time if they are to develop not only disciplinary skills but also humanistic capacities for perseverance, resilience, and empathy. And we share the belief that the traditional but arbitrary structures of higher education, such as seat time, semester course loads of unrelated classes, and grading, can make this challenging, if not impossible. Our shared beliefs about teaching and learning and sense of investment in both the program and each other created a trusting professional foundation for our team-teaching relationship.

Equally important was the personal connection we established. Crow and Smith (2005) acknowledge the critical importance of emotional intelligence and emotional response and the ways in which “emotions, values, and intellect are integrated in teaching as in any other sphere of human activity” (p. 502). On one hand, we simply enjoy each other’s company. As often as we buckled down and had deep critical conversations during those months of development and throughout the semester, we laughed and joked just as regularly—and thankfully we still do. We share memes with each other, laugh about funny personal and family stories, joke about bad television shows and movies, and exchange reading recommendations. We have other things to talk about than just our work with the program, which allows for moments of levity when needed. Fostering this lightheartedness in our relationship makes meeting enjoyable even when we have serious work to do.

This connection to each other as friends as well as colleagues and co-teachers gave each of us insight into the others’ strengths, weaknesses, pet peeves, and boundaries which allowed us to support each other emotionally during the pilot. As the story that opened this piece illustrates, Phillip was attuned to Rebecca’s emotional frustration that day and was able to give her some space to regroup. If one of us was frustrated by interactions with a particular student, the others were able to listen empathically while offering a different perspective to help the peer move past that hiccup with a student. Attuned to each other in these ways made celebrating successes, offering gentle critical feedback, and simply listening to each other is a critical and valuable part of our team-teaching relationship.

Equal ownership of the teaching and learning process

Scholars writing about co-teaching and team teaching agree about the importance of sharing ownership of all elements of the teaching and learning process. Crow and Smith (2005) spotlight equality in planning, teaching, evaluating, and assessing, and Eisen and Tisdell (2002/2003) note the importance of shared power relations among the teaching team and with the students. Student learning and faculty professional growth occur when co-teachers commit to “design[ing] and facilitat[ing] robust learning experiences for students” and when they “honor in an inclusive way the diversity required to engage both instructors and the students in the learning experience” (Lock, et al., 2016, pp. 25, 31).

Logistical constraints to equality

As noted above, we were equally involved in all of the work to make the first pilot of the Design Thinking Studio a reality. However, to teach in the Studio program, we had to negotiate course reassignments with our departments, deans, and provost, simply the reality of teaching schedules, workloads, and contracts. Rebecca had two course reassignments from two different sources to be able to teach full time, five days a week, in the Studio but also taught a departmental course two days a week. Phillip negotiated an overload allowing him to teach in the Studio 3.5 days a week while teaching a graduate capstone seminar. William, a junior colleague with less leverage than his senior colleagues, could not secure a course reassignment, but he served as the qualitative researcher and ombudsman for the students, visiting class weekly and interviewing each student four times during the semester. Finally, Joel dedicated two mornings a week to the Studio because he was also busy managing his understaffed and overpopulated computing sciences program.

With these other obligations, we had to move from a measure of equality to one of equity when the semester started, which did impact the instructor and student experience. Because Rebecca met with the students five days a week, including one day a week when she was the only instructor present, she acted as the academic leader of the course, leading discussions and activities, creating prompts for student reflection, and responding to written student work. Phillip, who taught 3.5 days a week, helped students give effective feedback in critique sessions and retrospectives, taught software design skills and design language, and led design discussions, often keeping a conversation going long after Rebecca would have stopped it, knowing that the students were on the edge of a creative breakthrough. Though not teaching, William hosted the program website on a shared server and participated in some of the deepest design sessions we had while collecting the research video interviews. And Joel ran hands-on design challenges with the students, using lots of cardboard, duct tape, and drinking straws to help students tap into a different side of their creativity and build their collaboration skills.

We met weekly throughout the semester to plan the pedagogical events of the week. We discussed weekly themes, proposed readings and discussion questions, and prepared creative activities and design challenges appropriate for our design thinking and social innovation themes. Because of our foundation of trust and friendship, we were able to frequently disagree but come to acceptable compromises. For example, as the academic leader, Rebecca could get stuck thinking the students needed more academic structure and readings, while Phillip and Joel advocated for giving the students more time and space to play and apply what they had previously read to hands-on projects. And on occasions when the students seemed to need additional guidance or strategies, we could offer multiple options based on our own experiences and decide among the most appropriate together.

At times during the semester, we did share equal engagement with the students. For example, during the last three weeks of the semester leading up to completing community projects and presenting at a public showcase of their work, students were able to select the relevant faculty member to help them at different stages of their work. When they struggled with team process, they asked Rebecca for a refresher on Scrum. When they were writing proposals, they also asked Rebecca for her expertise in this area. When one of the teams was completing three levels of prototyping for a community art fence project, students asked Phillip to teach them graphic design software so they could digitally mock up their idea. Both Phillip, having just built a fence at his home, and Joel, as our resident maker, were tapped to calculate materials, test paints, and help build the fence segment with the students.

A consequence of the logistical constraints

Our equal teaching experience with the students at the end of the semester came after working through conditions created earlier. While each of us equitably contributed to the weekly plans for teaching and learning, the realities of our physical time with the students in the Studio had unintended consequences in how the students perceived each of us and created the conditions for the Mean Mom, Cool Dad, Visiting Cousin, and Fun Uncle roles to emerge. For example, like any service-learning partnership, we experienced the common miscommunications, opposing schedules, and conflicting goals that can slow down projects; however, these issues are magnified because at least one of us met with the students every day. As Rebecca and Phillip realized the extent of these project issues, we as a teaching team discussed ways to keep the students busy and learning while we worked with our partner contacts to resolve these issues. At the time, students were completing a five-day design project based on the Google Ventures five-day sprint model as part of the culmination of the boot camp period.

Collectively, we decided to take two actions: (1) Extend the sprint project by three days, which was reasonable given where the students were with their projects, and (2) add a photo scavenger hunt to get students in the community talking to residents. All four of us worked on developing the scavenger hunt and enjoyed creating fun clues for the students. Together, Rebecca and Phillip presented the changes to the schedule, along with a brief explanation of the reason for the changes, and William introduced the scavenger hunt. And when delays with the community project continued, the faculty regrouped and introduced a community history research project for the students to again keep them learning about the community while we worked out the service-learning projects.

As Rebecca was the most visible faculty member, she got the brunt of student frustration in this situation. Rebecca read and commented on all of the student reflections, so it fell to her to sort through the not-unexpected irritation students were sharing in their written reflections, especially some comments that the scavenger hunt and history project were forms of busy work rather than productive learning experiences tied to the goals of the course. And because Rebecca was with the students the most, she led the in-class follow-through on these activities, unintentionally contributing to the perception of her as the Mean Mom/academic taskmaster.

The students may have been mirroring her own concern with the schedule delays, but discussions around these activities were stilted and unproductive when she was the sole faculty member present. But when Phillip arrived, he was perceived as the one in a better “mood” and who offered constructive feedback, asked additional questions, and helped the students connect the work to the partner work they would eventually do, i.e. Cool Dad. Luckily, William was also conducting interviews with the students at this time, hence the Visiting Cousin moniker, and was able to help us remind students about the parts of the situation that were out of our hands and how the added projects were valued by all the faculty as important to the upcoming community work.

Overall, our contractual responsibilities at the university determined our actual teaching contributions to the Studio in terms of time, and that distribution of faculty participation made equally sharing teaching responsibilities impractical. We divided the work as equitably we could and tried to represent a unified front to the students, adapting as needed. This also impacted our team-teaching relationship in terms of power, responsibilities, and accountability in the Studio, which also contributed to our perceived Mean Mom, Cool Dad, Visiting Cousin, and Fun Uncle roles.

Shared power, responsibility, and accountability

Next, Crow and Smith (2005) argue that best team teachers share power in the classroom, responsibility for students learning, and accountability for risks taken (p. 497). Research has found that students often appreciate the opportunity to learn from multiple people in one environment and to have multiple faculty to go to with questions, but also that the learning environment is complicated when students do not understand why the course is team taught in the first place, what the power relationship is between the faculty members, and who has power over student grades (Benjamin, 2000; Dugan and Letterman, 2008; Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Plank, 2013; Roth and Tobin, 2004).

Our team-teaching approach allowed us to develop and redevelop relationships with each of the students during the semester. Ferguson and Wilson (2001) note that team teaching provides “an avenue by which the teachers could increase their interaction with the students to both benefit their learning and build meaningful relationships” (p. 55). Over the course of the semester, we got to know our students very well, and we were each able to build different types of relationships with the students based on personal, professional, and disciplinary interests. We were able to leverage these relationships by working with students in various ways, trading roles when a student needed a new opinion or disciplinary resource, an honest reality check, or a specific strategy from one of our areas of expertise, as shown above when students came to Rebecca for writing and project management help and to Phillip for design work. Students also went to Joel with web and coding questions, and William for non-teaching perspectives. This sharing of responsibility and power for student success was a positive aspect of our teaming, while other aspects of shared power, responsibility, and accountability showed themselves in other ways.

Power

Generally speaking, the elements of the team-teaching relationship are made visible, intentionally or not, to students who will take their cues from the faculty members about who to interact with, when, and how (Bacharach et al., 2008; Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Plank, 2013). While team teaching experiences might be “fraught with internal questions of power” in certain circumstances, our power relationship was essentially set up for us given the number of hours we had with the students per week based on our contractual obligations (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011, p. 62). While we may have gone into the experience equally owning the program, we eventually defaulted to who was in the classroom the most. Because our physical presences did vary, students struggled a bit, especially initially, to understand our relationship to them and each other.

For example, we saw student perceptions of us start to come into play within the first couple of weeks. Initially, students came to Rebecca with their personal questions and issues, emailing only her when they were sick, pulling her aside to discuss their concerns about workload or stress that might be impact their presence in the Studio. But as she led more and more of the intensive academic elements of the program, their initially gendered perception of who was more empathetic switched as they began to see Phillip as more accessible and parent-like. Rebecca had noticed early on that students were beginning to treat her as a more distant academic authority instead, a role that pigeonholed her into a possible bad cop role compared to good cops Phillip and Joel whose interactions with students to that point had revolved around interactive design challenges and lessons. It did not help that Rebecca

had been leaving the Studio during these challenges to stay on top of course plans and responses to student work.

With this realization, Rebecca brought her concern to the others, and while we tried to address the disparity and show more shared power and responsibility, again the reality of our different time commitments to the program outweighed these efforts, allowing the Mean Mom and Cool Dad roles to solidify. The roles persisted throughout the semester despite efforts to “shake things up” on several occasions.

Responsibility and accountability

In terms of sharing responsibility for student learning and accountability for risks taken, we always presented a united front with the students, working to show them we were each dedicated to the success of the program and their learning. Eisen and Tisdell (2002/2003) argue that members of the teaching team must share power “with the learners so that they can take some responsibility for their own learning” (p. 2), advice we took to heart during two program “reset” conversations we had with our students. Continuing the example of the scavenger hunt and history project that we created when the community projects were delayed, we realized we needed to do a better job of not only explaining to students what was happening with the partners but also sharing agency with them to move forward productively. We had taught the students the Scrum project management framework, one of Rebecca’s professional specialties, so for the first reset conversation, we had asked students to conduct the process review meeting, called a retrospective, for the program with us.

We conducted the retrospective on a day when all four faculty members were in the Studio so that we could all participate. Rebecca and Phillip introduced the activity to the students and had everyone, faculty included, spend five minutes brainstorming ideas on individual sticky notes for the following categories: keep doing, start doing, do more of, do less of, and stop doing. Once time was up, everyone added their sticky notes to the corresponding category drawn on a large white board. We were then able to have an open discussion about perceived and actual issues and generate possible solutions collectively. Students had a professional venue to share their concerns and potential solutions and to hear our personal perspectives as well. As faculty, we were able to share our individual thoughts on successes and disappointments so far, how each of us—students included—had agency to change what we do not like, and to reaffirm that we were all in this together. For Rebecca it was an opportunity to humanize herself with the students, and for Phillip to remind them of their responsibilities, too. Through this activity, and another to follow a month later, we created a pressure valve release which resulted in better faculty-student alignment and shared plans for moving forward.

Because there were four of us in our team-teaching group, equally sharing power, responsibility, and accountability during the pilot semester was never realistic. So, we focused on being present in the ways we could, building varied relationships with our students, and presenting a unified front whenever necessary.

Ongoing critical reflection

Just as critical reflection is crucial to student development in immersive learning experiences like our Studio program, study abroad, and service learning courses, faculty grow as professionals through reflective practice and peer mentoring as well (Bacharach et al., 2008; Ferguson & Wilson, 2011). Crow and Smith (2005) note that “the reciprocity that enabled empathetic and constructive dialogue about

shared professional experience” is core to the value of a team-teaching experience (p. 504), as instructors are able to see their teaching through the eyes of another who is critically invested in the same teaching and learning activities (Plank, 2013). Lock and colleagues (2016) argue that this reciprocity means learning from each other and together; it requires regular open conversations, open-minded debate about what’s working and what is not, constructive feedback, and shared plans to deal with any conflict (pp. 31-32).

Active, regular, and shared reflection during our Studio pilot semester was crucial not only to the learning environment but also in helping us sustain our relationship of trust and empathy as well as share ownership of teaching and learning, power, responsibility, and accountability. As noted, during the pilot semester, the four of us met weekly to plan learning activities, address unanticipated hiccups, and to pulse-check how everything was going and how everyone was holding up; this was in addition to informal meetings after class and any emergency “war councils” that came up. All of these meetings allowed us to not only stay a few steps ahead of the students, but also to assess and address emergent challenges and to ground each other during the process. These meetings offered a time and space for talking through learning situations, offering possible next steps, and giving and receiving critical feedback on how we were each handling teaching and learning.

For example, as the first story in this paper explores, if one of us was having a bad day or was overwhelmed, another who was fresher or more energized was able to tag in and take over. In that instance, Rebecca and Phillip were frustrated but too close to the situation to make reasonable decisions about how to move forward with the program’s work. Phillip saw that Rebecca needed a break and offered it to her, which she would reciprocate later in the semester. William, in his unofficial role as ombudsman, he was able to summarize the patterns in the students’ interviews to help Rebecca and Phillip see the situation more clearly. Based on the trust he had built with the students William helped Rebecca and Phillip better understand the student perspective and offered a gentle critique of how their stress was contributing to the students’ own reactions. And Joel was there to remind us that what we were doing really was a pilot, a prototype, and that we had to cut each other and the students slack as we built the program together.

We learned a great deal from each other throughout the pilot semester in terms of leading discussions and activities, planning workshops, creating different learning environments, supporting students, and being effective teachers and colleagues. Nothing was done in the classroom that we did not talk about in advance first, so we all had ownership of the entire experience and outcomes. We were able to truly collaborate, not just cooperate, and the program was better for it. And because we had spent so much time together imagining, designing, writing, and advocating for the program, we were comfortable sharing ideas—good, bad, and silly—throughout the process. We debated, we raised points and came back to them in a few days, we suggested, but we never argued or were on diametrically opposed sides of an issue. If someone felt that strongly about something, the others conceded and supported.

None of us can recall a time when we truly argued or disagreed, though we do all recall the day a few weeks before the pilot when someone finally said, “this is terrifying,” and we all agreed in relief. And we are also honest with each other at the end of the semester that we did not achieve some of our goals for the pilot semester and that we failed in some of our attempts to redirect the program mid-semester. Based on these honest and ongoing discussions, we go into the second pilot semester having grown as colleagues and instructors together.

THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

William, with human subject research approval and informed consent, interviewed the students four times over the course of the semester to help us understand the teaching and learning experience. In these interviews, students almost never mentioned the team-teaching aspects of the program, perhaps by design of the interview protocol or because we did not emphasize it with them. Two students noted they had assumed they would learn something specifically disciplinary from each of us and would like more from our areas. Only one student mentions our relationship and personalities, suggesting near the end of the semester bringing professors from other disciplines into the program:

[Rebecca] did have like a really big presence, and sometimes I felt like that was too much. It would be interesting to see if [bringing in outside speakers and professors] could help maybe lessen it. [Rebecca] is kind of an intense person, so maybe that would help, because I know Philip and Joel can't be there [as often].

Another mention comes as a student reflects on her frustration with a teammate and how a negative attitude was affecting the cohort. She notes that after class, she and another student “actually talked to one of the professors, we talked to Phillip, and [Rebecca] was there too.”

Clear and open communication was a theme in student interviews, especially related to the challenges of the service-learning work. We had impressed upon the students that we were developing the curriculum and partnerships over the course of the semester, and the students wished we had been even more open with them throughout the program, with one commenting, “I think people thought our professors had more of a plan moving forward than we [i.e., the professors and students collectively] did.” Realizing this was the case compounded student confusion when we (somewhat abruptly) gave the students an overabundance of freedom midway through the semester. The same student wished we would have acknowledged their sense of being unmoored at that time, saying had the faculty team come to the students and said, “Yeah, okay, great, we know you don’t know what you’re doing [either],” we could have better included students in decision-making about how to move forward.

Another student commented on a day where we did just that, holding a program retrospective meeting, discussed above, and this student respected the faculty team for being “brave enough to stand up” and admit the service-learning aspect of the program wasn’t going the way we had expected and then work with the students to develop alternate approaches. Another empathized with our challenges and service-learning aspect of the program, saying,

I really feel for the professors, because I know they've really put in effort, and they've really tried, [to create a good service-learning partnership. I think] “they feel like they are failing us . . . and I don't think people are as grateful as they should be to the professors for [their hard work to create a great experience].

Overall, the students were less aware of our specific team-teaching efforts but did see us primarily as a unified team who cared about them and the program. Students even suggested bringing more professors into the mix by adding subject matter experts in the community issues we were addressing to provide an additional perspectives and skill sets. Based on their interview responses, we see that the students did not ultimately dwell on the challenges we faced, but instead believed that they had

learned valuable skills in problem-framing, communication, empathy, and resilience, which was ultimately our goal. Their comments remind us that to truly co-create with students, we need their voices as part of the teaching team as well.

TAKEAWAYS AND ADVICE

When we examine our experience through the lenses of a trust- and empathy-based team relationship; equal ownership of teaching and learning; shared power, responsibility, and accountability; and ongoing critical conversations, we know we have all grown personally and professionally while developing and leading this immersive Studio program. Based on our experience, we offer the following advice to those considering co-teaching or team teaching, especially in any type of immersive or innovative learning environment.

Our first suggestion is simple: **invite peers and mentors to coffee**, not with the immediate intention of forming a team on a specific topic, but just to informally talk, share stories, ask questions, and develop insights. Perhaps you know some people who are also interested in a specific teaching strategy or are intrigued by the work some folks are doing in another program. Our partnership started with a shared interest in Agile project management, but our first coffee conversation revealed much deeper shared interest in redesigning what “school” means. Low-stakes, curiosity-driven meetings are not only good for general collegiality and networking but also to expand connections that could lead to possible partnerships in the future. These informal, collegial conversations outside of meetings and responsibilities can lead to an important network that can be tapped for co-teaching.

When you have found some likeminded colleagues with whom to share an existing project or have seen a shared interest in a team-teaching opportunity emerge out of these casual conversations, **have an intentional conversation about if and how to move forward as a team**. Judge which mix of skills, disciplinary knowledge, and special expertise might be needed in your program, but also pay close attention to the affective characteristics—what shared values are important, necessary temperaments, types of personalities needed for success? Discuss individual schedules and commitments to determine who might realistically be able to contribute most to the collaboration, what roles individuals might play on the team, who might not have time to continue. An intensive team-teaching partnership is not a working relationship like that of being on a committee with a shared goal; team teachers must trust and respect each other, work well together, be able to manage conflict constructively, and enjoy spending time with each other. You have to be willing to both share and concede opinions, to let go when your co-teacher wants to pursue a different route than you would, not let your ego reign, and built real empathy and camaraderie. The more you can do to be sure skills, personalities, available time align before the team teaching experience, the better.

Similarly, we recommend you **spend time together, a great deal of time together**, developing the program or course collaboratively before the actual teaching begins. Build and own the course or program together, work together to come up with many possible iterations of how it could be framed and run, then collectively choose the best path forward. Doing so reinforces the commitment to creating the same level of learning value and encourages everyone to share in teaching, learning, research, and advocacy for the course or program with administration. This gives you equal stake in success. Because we spent so much time developing the program together, we had built a shared vision and solid professional and personal relationships; we knew what to expect of each other, and there were no

surprising revelations or power grabs or other shocks during the semester. We already knew we could count on each other, so we did.

Next, clearly **determine how the team will work** before, during, and after the course or program runs based on whatever heuristic makes the most sense for you. Our division of labor during the semester was essentially based on how many hours we would spend in the classroom per week with the Studio students given our contracts and reassigned time in the program. But we also approached the work initially based on our strengths, with Rebecca taking on much of the writing related to the program, Phillip and William recruiting and working with design, and Joel leading the technical logistics. We adapted roles as we went, and you can revisit your preliminary assignments during team meetings throughout the collaboration. Logistically, work together for buy-in, remaining flexible about the realities of everyone's unique situations and allowing for leaders to emerge in different aspects of the shared work.

In the classroom, we highly recommend that you **model collaboration** for your students who might have trouble understanding the team-teaching relationship and power dynamics at first. Be engaged all the time because students will see your relationship and use it to justify their own behaviors, positive and possibly negative, in the program. Be present, attentive, and engaged when a peer is leading a discussion or activity, ask questions, and follow up on points without overstepping. Be role models for professionalism but don't hide camaraderie. Students need to see strong professional relationships that they can model in the future. We suggest talking to students about how you collaborate, disagree, and compromise to help them build their own collaborative relationships with peers; this is something we plan to do more of next semester.

And finally, **be intellectually and emotionally available to each other** within the bounds of your professional team. Team teaching is intensive, time-consuming, and counter to our usual approaches. Challenge each other, learn from one another, and collaborate rather than just cooperating. Be open to sensing what is happening in ways students treat and interact with you and your co-teachers. We did a good job intellectually and emotionally supporting each other during the pilot semester, but on the other hand, we missed that the students were assigning us the roles of Mean Mom, Cool Dad, Visiting Cousin, and Fun Uncle, which definitely impacted our relationships with students later in the semester. We are being proactive in the second pilot to better manage these perceptions and how they impact our teaching and the students learning.

We began this piece with a story and have shared our lived experiences as a team-teaching family with you here. We believe the collaboration we were able to model for our students as we all dealt with the wins, losses, opportunities, and challenges of the Design Thinking Studio pilot semester was one of the true strengths of the program and will continue to be an asset as we continue to pilot the curricular model yearly. Mean Mom and Cool Dad led a second pilot in spring 2018. Mean Mom remained the academic backbone of the program and worked to develop stronger relationships with students as people. Cool Dad strove to share the bad cop duties with Mean Mom while continuing to lead creative experimentation with the students. Fun Uncle popped in occasionally to run creative challenges. And Visiting Cousin came with tech advice and interviewed the kids so we could create the strongest learning environment we possibly could for our students. We hope that after the second pilot, we have new nicknames.

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