

Team Teaching in Ireland

In Ireland team teaching is now a central piece to a range of stated policy developments that include initial teacher education, induction of newly qualified teachers and as a form of continuing professional development among teachers and principals (see National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals: www.napd.ie). Of note is that it is also emerging as central practice in an increasing number of schools.

With the growing frequency of use and purposes of team teaching now emerging a developing body of research into team teaching has begun to emanate lately from Ireland (e.g. Travers et al, 2014, see attached PDF). Inspectorate reports suggest the majority of second level schools in Ireland engage in some form of team teaching but both the frequency and quality of such teaching is not clear at this point.

A significant breakthrough in the shift from policy to practice emerged with the Cork Education Training Board 2007-2011 research project on team teaching. Now all 22 schools in the board are engaged in team teaching and initially the project began with 7 schools and 40 self-selected teachers. The schools are at secondary level and the focus was on literacy, numeracy, as well as supporting school retention programme such as Junior Certificate Schools Programme¹ and Leaving Certificate Applied² (both part-funded by EU: www.ncca.ie). Teachers were given professional development opportunities at cluster meetings which met monthly and focused on the various evidence-based pedagogical repertoires that were supported by team teaching and the choice of configurations of team teaching (use of additional teacher in a class):

1. Lead and support
2. Classic team teaching (equal exchange)
3. Parallel teaching
4. Station teaching
5. Alternative (split) teaching.

Inspectorate support in the form of classroom observations and subsequent discussions was also offered as was the work of and by Prof Barrie Bennett on Instructional Intelligences. Teachers were initially paired with their subject colleagues i.e. English and Maths but that has evolved to teachers being paired according to other skill sets that meet the needs of students. A very small minority of the teachers had specific professional development in special education. Advance preparation ensured that school timetables allowed for teams to be assigned to the same class at the same time (and students stayed in class instead of being withdrawn).

A DVD and guidelines booklet for secondary level teachers were produced to support use for team-teaching in classrooms: <http://www.cocorkvec.ie/index.cfm/page/teamteaching>

Irish Department of Education and Skills continues to encourage team teaching in policy documents and provides additional teacher resources to support the inclusion of students in mainstream classes (1 in 5 teachers employed in Ireland are assigned to support inclusion in mainstream schools where

¹ The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) is particularly targeted at students who are identified as being at risk of early school leaving. - See more at: http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/#sthash.hguP00by.dpuf

² The Leaving Certificate Applied is a distinct, self-contained Leaving Certificate programme designed for students who do not wish to proceed directly to third level education or for those whose needs, aspirations and aptitudes are not adequately catered for by the other two Leaving Certificate programmes.

99.2% of the population are enrolled). The project proved that team-teaching can be one of the most appropriate and cost-effective interventions that could be used to attend to learners' additional needs: important gains in students' learning and achievement can occur when team teaching is used effectively.

The project DVD mentions some of the **positive results** of team-teaching:

- higher results of students at state examinations than previously predicted
- improvements in literacy and numeracy scores from pre- and post- testing
- the team-taught subjects of English and Mathematics being identified by students as their favourite subjects
- improvements in students attendance, engagement, participation, confidence and pride in their work, as well as improvements in their attitude to learning and in their attitude towards themselves and others
- having full access to the curriculum and witnessing a range of skills being modelled by two adults (including how best to behave with one another especially in male-female team taught lessons)
- students speaking of being more confident, no stigma of withdrawal from class or school, being able to ask questions more easily, having fun and using all the instructional time available for learning.

Team teaching now plays a key role in both **initial and continuing teacher education**, taking into account the emphasis placed on competences of teachers to lead all students in learning, especially in critical skills such as literacy and numeracy. With team teaching, professional development occurs in practice, in the daily interaction, between teachers and students, in real time and in real classrooms.

Team teaching also has potential for improving **students' social and collaborative skills**, and other 21st Century gateway skills such as team work, critical thinking and creativity. The project showed that the development of students' skills in literacy and numeracy is closely linked with growth in their self-esteem, their self-confidence and their overall personal and social development. Students respond to the example of their teachers working together by collaborating and assisting one another in their learning, producing better quality work and raising the expectations of themselves and of their teachers towards student potential.

Collaboration among teachers and overall **school improvement** are closely aligned but require leadership from principals and leadership from teachers. Opening up classrooms from one teacher to another, opens conversations about pedagogy and about improving the quality of the learning experience for students. Such culture of constant improvement is at the heart of the effective school. Open and honest conversation among the principal, teachers and the wider school community about how good their work really is and how that learning can be improved also has positive consequences for self-evaluation of schools.

Team-teaching supports efforts to improve teaching and learning by:

- enabling teachers to share the classroom space with fellow teachers and principals
- ensuring that teachers can engage in responsible professional experimentation including taking risks and/or revisiting forgotten practices
- tracking student progress and capturing student successes

- encouraging constructive yet critical professional dialogue between teachers (and between teachers and principals) about how teachers' practice and students' learning can and should be improved.

In advancing team teaching it is important to keep a focus on the following:

- It is NOT a methodology but offers opportunities to use proven pedagogical practices to support learning (cooperative learning, framing questions, offering multiple forms of assignments, practice and feedback...)
- Teachers sharing the same values is more important than sharing the same teaching methods
- Time for planning etc. is an issue but imaginative use of time, including in-class time, allows for planning and review
- Collaborative practice, even where deemed successful by teachers, is not enough. The focus must remain on the learning and learning experienced by the student
- Team teaching is about 'team' i.e. the whole class, and not just about the two teachers
- At all times teachers need to be aware why they are team teaching and this will assist in determining if they are successful in achieving what they seek to achieve.

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