

Keying In

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TEACHERS WITHOUT BORDERS

Team Teaching in Business Education

Last year, associate professor of business education **Kelly Wilkinson** served on a search committee for her institution. During the interviews, she brought up team teaching with her Indiana State University (Terre Haute) colleagues.

“You should have seen the look of horror on their faces,” she says. “When we teach, many of us feel the classroom is ours alone.”

Though 77% of middle schools in the United States now use some form of team teaching (Cromwell, 2007), the practice is much less common in high schools and universities. Not unheard of, just uncommon.

Associate professor of business education **Donna Everett** at Morehead State University (Morehead, Kentucky) thinks that business educators collaborate a lot around curriculum and around planning school years or BPA events. But in actually sharing the classroom, face-to-face or virtually, not so much.

“In Kentucky there is one course approved at state level—business math, which has to be taught with both a math and a business teacher,” she says. “It was a collaborative effort just to get it approved!”

Why so? The potential obstacles to team teaching are many: traditional departmental barriers (Sandholtz, 2000); lack of common planning time; skittishness from having tried teaming and having had a bad experience; the time it takes to manage it well; resistance from administrators who view team teaching as an expensive use of resources because two or more faculty are teaching one course.

Yet when teachers erase the borders between each others’ classrooms, everyone benefits. Research, for example, has shown that “team teaching, fully implemented ... leads to an improved work climate, ... increased teacher job satisfaction, and higher levels of student achievement” (Cromwell, 2007).

And from a professional development standpoint, when it works, it’s golden (see article opposite, “Teachers Talk about Teaming”).

This issue of *Keying In* explores NBEA members’ experiences with team teaching,

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Teachers Talk about Teaming

NBEA members are great collaborators, and *Keying In* talked with more than a dozen of you to learn what you’ve discovered about collaborative teaching. To our delight, you talked back (see sidebar, “Do’s and Don’ts ...”) and shared this honest and insightful feedback on what it takes to team teach effectively.

Meet the teams:

- **Nancy Zeliff**, professor, Computer Science/Information Systems Department, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, and **Kimberly Schultz**, associate professor, Kirkwood Community College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa;
- **Jessie Hayden**, clinical instructor, and **Janet Burns**, associate clinical professor and program coordinator, Technical and Career Education, Georgia State University, Atlanta; and
- **Kelly Wilkinson**, associate professor and CIRT faculty fellow, Business Education, Information,

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and Technology, Indiana State University, Terra Haute, and **Tena B. Crews**, associate professor of technology support and training management and associate director for technology teaching excellence, Center for Teaching Excellence, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

A Good Match Makes Light Work

Nancy Zeliff and Kimberly Schultz have co-taught several sessions (on e-portfolios and rubrics) at national conferences. Zeliff and Schultz have also collaborated with various colleagues on courses, publications, and in Schultz' case, editing an NBEA Yearbook. Zeliff and Schultz stress the importance of a good match and of creating a healthy give-and-take in team-teaching partnerships.

Teaming can be a disaster if the match isn't right. Just ask Schultz, who first tried it with an English teacher. "I did the word processing part; she sent the students to my room, went to the teachers' work room, and did cross-stitch," Schultz says.

Her second attempt, working with a Spanish class translating business letters, failed due to lack of commitment. But she got lucky on her third try, a computer applications class in which Schultz and her partner taught the Windows and Mac platforms, respectively.

"It went wonderfully," Schultz says. "When you find an individual you can connect with . . . it's a really cool thing."

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The partnership with Zeliff was like that, even though they live 300 miles apart. To work on projects, Schultz and Zeliff have met halfway at a public Wi-Fi hot spot, and when both attend the same conference, they usually set aside time to work together there as well. And once, when the two were co-authoring a book, Schultz drove 90 miles from Leon, Iowa, where she was living at the time, to Maryville.

"I went down there on New Year's Eve, and got there at 2 P.M.," she says. "We wrote for 12 straight hours. I got home at 4 A.M."

The keys to their success? Mutual respect and trust—and compatibility of goals and personalities. "I can start a sentence and [Nancy] can finish it," Schultz says. "When we're writing together and one of us is keying and can't think of a word, the other can think of it. We're able to pull things back and forth."

Today's communications tools—e-mail, faxing, VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol)—make collaboration more viable for colleagues like Schultz and Zeliff, who do not share the same zip code. At the same time, collaboration requires a certain give-and-take.

"Like a marriage, collaborating with a partner also requires sharing and relinquishing control," Zeliff explains. "Partners may not always agree on an idea, word, or phrase. Knowing when to 'let go' and when to battle for one's belief or idea are important."

Yet collaborating can be great fun. "If both teachers are passionate, you can lose track of time," Schultz says. "Even if only one is 'creative,' the other can let you go then reel you back—[like] blowing up a balloon and then letting out [the] air a little at a time. It's a natural high."

Not to mention rewarding for both instructor and audience. "You come up with ideas you might never have come up with on your own," she says.

"And quite honestly," Zeliff says of this and other collaborations, "it lessens our load."

Diversity Brings Richness, Improves Skills

Jessie Hayden and Janet Burns have team taught an alternative teacher

certification program at their university for two years. They've also co-authored an article recently published in the Journal of Industrial Teacher Education. Hayden and Burns emphasize the importance of honest communication, and their collaboration exemplifies the wisdom of teaching with a partner with whom you are not only compatible, but who has skills that complement your own.

"You can do so much more with students when there's more than one of [you] in the room," Burns says. "[The logistics of managing class] discussions, for example. And students benefit from having more than one perspective and different teaching experiences."

Every teacher has different ways of achieving the same ends, Burns explains. When two teachers team up, it brings more richness to the program.

"When I first asked Jessie to work with me, I gave her examples of topics and lessons I was having trouble getting across," Burns says. "She could come in and look at them from a fresh perspective. Sometimes I think you achieve expertise in an area, and you start forgetting what you already know and what basic knowledge your students don't have. It's helpful to have someone else step in and see [what you've missed]."

Yet, team teaching is not necessarily easy. "There is enormous room for disagreement. You do have to know who makes the final decision . . . and set up that policy upfront," Burns cautions.

To create conditions for a successful partnership, Burns and Hayden talked about everything before they entered into the team-teaching relationship. And they do mean everything: sharing responsibility for planning and teaching, handling disagreements about content or procedures (they didn't want to undermine one another in front of students); and presenting a united front (some students tried to play them against one another with respect to assignment deadlines and grading). They also committed to honest communication and to balancing each other's contributions to planning, execution, and feedback.

Their complementary personalities

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worked in their favor (“Jessie had strengths that were my blind spots [and vice versa],” Burns says), and their disregard for having to be “large and in charge” set the tone for a true collegial partnership.

That’s not to say there were no surprises. But their willingness to deal with sometimes uncomfortable feelings about their own preferred ways of teaching was a saving grace.

“[I’d think], ‘Oh, she’s teaching this differently than I did,’” Burns reflects. “I’d be sitting in the back of the room and have to take a deep breath. I was surprised I had such a strong feeling of ownership, even though I’d said, ‘Do what you want.’ I thought I was above that

sort of thing and had to do some self-monitoring and reflection in order to grow.”

“My own challenge,” Hayden comments, “was asking myself, ‘Am I doing this the way Janet wants me to do it?’”

Their commitment to honest communication helped them not only to surmount these challenges but also to consider this partnership a success.

“As a teacher, you get isolated. But when you team teach, you can develop your weak areas [because] you see . . . someone else who does that type of teaching better than you do,” Hayden explains. “I have gained so much from working with Janet. It’s made me a better teacher.”

Teaming Expands the Classroom, Inspires Lifelong Learning (in Teachers!)

Kelly Wilkinson and Tena Crews are team-teaching veterans, having collaborated with colleagues on teaching as well as on other academic activities. Wilkinson and Crews co-taught two semesters of an online and face-to-face course in business report writing, for research purposes, and are submitting a paper about their experience. What they discovered surprised them, especially with respect to how much they learned about teaching together and grading together more effectively.

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Do’s and Don’ts for Successful Team Teaching

Do’s

- **Have a strong vision** of what you want to accomplish, and know why you’re teaming.
- **Think *simpatico*** – a colleague you respect, trust, and think you can work with.
- **Begin with the end in mind:** How will your students be different because of taking this class?
- **Outline and prioritize** educational standards, learning objectives, and assessments.
- **Plan your work** in detail, and put it in writing.
- **Get your administrator’s approval.** Try to schedule shared planning periods.
- **Take a personality or teaching-style assessment.** Then have a candid conversation about your similarities and differences and your respective strengths and weaknesses. If you’re both uncomfortable with a particular area, decide how you’ll handle it: simulations? collateral materials? guest speakers?
- **Set ground rules.** Who teaches what, when? How will assignments be graded? Which ones will be graded, and who will grade them? What if students have issues—whom should they consult?
- **Decide what defines success.** How will you evaluate whether what you expected actually occurred?
- **Pull your own weight.** Understand and apply your teamwork skills.
- **Stretch your wings:** Cross curriculum areas, take on new tasks, experiment with new activities.
- **Be gracious.** Check your ego at the door.
- **Debrief constantly.** Good communication is the key to successful collaboration.

Don’ts

- **Don’t collaborate for collaboration’s sake.** The process and the product must benefit the students.
- **Don’t teach with someone who’s just like you.** Instead, find your perfect complement, and capitalize on each other’s strengths.
- **Don’t make your team too large.** Working with more than three partners makes consensus difficult.
- **Don’t give up.** Keep trying: different projects, different partners.

Acknowledgments: Thanks to NBEA members **Sandy Braathen, Janet Burns, Tena Crews, Donna Everett, Jessie Hayden, Dennis Krejci, John Olivo, Glenda Rotvold, Kimberly Schultz, Kelly Wilkinson, Carol Yacht, and Nancy Zeliff** for their contributions to this sidebar.

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Technology offers the ultimate opportunity to push boundaries and expand classrooms. But is the learning equivalent to that in face-to-face classes? That's what Crews and Wilkinson wanted to know. They got the answers to their research question. And with those answers, some surprises, one of which resulted from their commitment to presenting a united front.

"Technically you are one unit," Wilkinson says. "[We wondered] how are we going to speak as one voice?"

This became particularly important when students found out that they were going online—and panicked. "So we told them everything we're doing, we're doing together—including grading," Wilkinson says, "—and we'd talk through it just to put them at ease." And they held the same virtual office hours, and if one of them wasn't there, the other one was.

"As collaborative educators . . . if there's a problem to be addressed, it's to be addressed by both [of you]," Wilkinson says. "If it's brought to one of you, then you're obliged to go the other and bring it up."

They used technologies like Adobe Connect Professional (formerly Macromedia Breeze) to video-record themselves reacting to a student's paper, then shared the electronic file with the student. "You're grading more than you would have had you graded 30 papers by yourself," Crews says. "But we felt it was fair to the students because we were both in the classroom and both seeing their work."

Crews, a seasoned educator and collaborator, wasn't thrown by any discrepancies in teaching styles between her and Wilkinson. In fact, Wilkinson says, their styles are similar—both use a lot of humor, and, she jokes, even their [Southern-accented] voices sound alike.

To their amazement, it was the assessment and grading that took them by surprise.

"I found people may teach differently, but they still get the information across. But when it comes to grading, people really have definite ideas," Crews says. "We've had to have more 'come-to-Jesus' meetings over grading than we ever did over teaching. I'm a big rubrics person, others are more subjective. It's

that lifelong learning light bulb again and again!"

Crews and Wilkinson ran focus groups to get information beyond what grades suggested and thereby discovered how important students felt it was to have both teachers grading their work. "The administration picked up on this and they're using the video [showing] two experts grading the paper and discussing it, it was so powerful."

Now, Crews and Wilkinson often grade individually on Adobe Connect Professional and send the URL and rubric to the student. "It's better than bleeding all over the paper," Wilkinson says.

There is one problem—some administrators consider dual grading an inefficient use of resources. But, Wilkinson says, "...grading as a pair was better. What [Tena] missed, I caught, and vice versa. And we did discuss it. I think it's richer. And in that sense, are you not using your resources more effectively for the betterment of the students?" ■

In Business, “Teaming” Breaks Down Silos to Share Critical Information

Even though Carol Yacht has a long history of collaborating with other academic colleagues, she thinks that educators miss lots of opportunities for collaboration, especially across disciplines. “We have a huge need for an interdisciplinary discussion,” she says.

Her views are informed by her own experience and by her recent work as an advisory member of the Microsoft Dynamics Academic Alliance. “Collaboration is a huge part of what the Academic Alliance talks about,” she says. “We haven’t explored [collaboration] enough. So often [business education is taught] as ‘departments.’ We are in silos, and that is creating problems for students who are going to work in business. In the real world, accounting does talk to marketing and human resources talks to manufacturing.” She believes students need to see those crossovers.

Jerry Flatto, another member of the Alliance, agrees. “Until recently, business had separate information systems that weren’t sharing information very well,” he says. “The push for sharing information came with Y2K updates. Was business going to spend all its money on existing [piecemeal] systems or bite the bullet and buy integrated systems? It was akin to buying something new instead of trying to patch up an old house.”

Flatto is an associate professor in the Information Systems Department of the School of Business at the University of Indianapolis in Indiana. He realized that his students, who tended to specialize in areas like marketing or accounting, were getting a silo’d education instead of an integrated one. As a result, they missed the big picture and lacked insight into how specialized disciplines interact to help the larger organization meet its goals.

Flatto decided to augment the traditional business curriculum by giving students hands-on experience with enterprise resource planning (ERP) software (he chose Microsoft Dynamics GP). He wanted his students to have a competitive advantage when they graduated.

It wasn’t an immediate success—he was, after all, trying to get traditionally educated students to think outside their disciplines. But little by little students began applying what they learned, seeing its implications and understanding how businesses use interdisciplinary information.

“In real life knowing the software probably makes a difference in whether [students] get hired and how fast they advance,” Flatto says, noting that 50,000 companies in the U.S. and Canada use the software, 400 of them in Indiana alone. “My guest speakers consistently say that they look for technical skills in new hires—that’s nice but expected—and also whether they can understand and communicate the big picture. And in promotions, what separates you [from contenders] is the understanding of how your role fits in with Corporate.”

For its work on this project, Flatto’s school recently won the Pinnacle Award for Excellence in Education at Microsoft’s 2007 customer conference, but what’s important to Flatto is this: now, four years into the initiative, upper level students say they “suddenly understand what you [Flatto] were talking about.” ■

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how they’ve addressed the challenges of constant communication and limited time, and why they do what they do. Perhaps learning of their experiences will inspire you, too, to become a teacher without borders.

A Call to Cross Disciplines

Though teaming to teach business education is not a widespread practice, it does happen, and when it does, it takes various forms: team teaching the “conventional” way, in face-to-face courses; using technology to team with colleagues in different geographical locations; presenting workshops with peers; pairing student teachers with cooperating teachers and alternating who

takes the lead; “catching up” instruction in classes with students who are disabled; and collaborating with doctoral students and with experts from the business world or from other business departments.

One of the more exciting—and important—collaborations involves teaching across disciplines. Bloomsburg University (Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania) business education professor **John Olivo**, for example, once taught a course in human factors management that addressed office design and layout. He invited a health sciences teacher to address repetitive stress injury, sick building syndrome, and other business issues that had a medical component and thereby an insurance impact.

“We need to do more cross-disciplinary collaboration so that students can get different and complete views on a topic,” Olivo says. “Also, the more strategies [teachers in training] see, the more they can develop a [teaching] strategy that works for them.”

Dennis Krejci, business teacher at Tri County High School (De Witt, Nebraska), also crossed disciplines when he co-taught a lesson in currencies and one in marketing and advertising with a foreign language teacher.

“We looked at multinational companies advertising in the U.S. and Germany and compared magazine ads,” he says. “It worked really well. Her students got to see that . . . German class

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was not just speaking and writing—and they got to see other things that I do [beyond] what they hear [from classmates].”

Frenship High School in Wolfforth, Texas, where Everett’s former student **Kim Hurst** teaches, uses technology to facilitate more cross-discipline connections. The faculty created a curriculum map, similar to a “scope and sequence,” that details the content and skills students must attain in core subjects and electives. Hurst, a business applications and technology teacher, can “keyword” a concept to see which of her colleagues are teaching it, and when, and if they are interested in team teaching.

“My Web 1 students created a Black History website for credit in their social studies class,” she writes. “Web 2 students created a website on credit that proved useful to them in their economics class. My Digital Graphics 1 students have created review quizzes for the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in Flash and workplace skills posters for business education classrooms.”

Still, many opportunities for cross-disciplinary teaming remain untapped. This concerns many educators, because their students are entering a business world in which silos are breaking down (see sidebar, “In Business, Teaming Breaks Down Silos...”). They urge colleagues to cross borders, despite perceived obstacles.

Challenges That Yield Rewards

One of the biggest challenges to team teaching—the amount of communication and time it takes to plan a successful team-teaching experience—can yield some of the greatest rewards.

“It always takes longer to work in groups than to puzzle something out yourself,” Everett says. “But what you gain is the value of another perspective.”

She tells about an Innovations in Education course that she taught with a doctoral student. “Having been a teacher educator, I understood the issues and what teachers needed. My partner knew the resources,” she says. “It was exciting to sit down and talk about the course—my mind was racing with ideas for developing a course that could be very meaningful for teachers.”

Everett says she loved sharing the responsibilities and seeing the topic from more than one viewpoint. And, like Olivo, she liked giving her students the opportunity to see different styles of teaching.

Those benefits accrue to teachers as well, Olivo explains. “You have a chance for improvisation, for creating excitement in the classroom,” he says. “You can play off each other’s strengths. With the right match, it’s a win-win for faculty and a win-win for students.”

Feeding off each other’s strengths can also lighten the planning load psychologically, even if it doesn’t lessen the time involved to get the work done, according to **Glenda Rotvold**, a teacher of information systems and business education at the University of North Dakota (UND) in Grand Forks. Rotvold teamed with **Sandy Braathen** (also at UND) to deliver a presentation on [using humor to deal with stress] at NBEA’s 2007 annual convention.

“When you . . . work together well, you seem to be able to keep moving forward,” Rotvold says. “If one person gets stuck on something, you still have

[someone else] who might have a different perspective. It helps you stay focused and energized. And it’s a good way to socialize!”

The quality of the end product goes up, too. “When you hear different ideas, when someone asks a question and challenges your ideas, it helps you think better,” she adds. “You have a richer experience.”

Richer—if you keep the communication channels open. “Sometimes you could sense that someone wasn’t saying something for fear of hurting your feelings,” Braathen explains. [But] you have to trust each other and not be afraid to be honest (and to deliver bad news in a professional way), because you’re working toward the same goal.”

In this kind of situation, Braathen doesn’t want anyone worrying about her feelings. “My feelings will be hurt much more if we bomb in front of a national audience!” she says.

Enhanced Professional Relationships

One of the benefits of team teaching that NBEA members seem to value most is the depth and sheer enjoyment it brings to their professional relationships. Rotvold notes, for example, that her team-teaching experience allowed her to connect with colleagues who then became a resource for future collaborations.

“To my surprise, [working together on this project] was much more fun than I thought it would be,” Braathen adds. “I had a fantastic time, and we saw different sides of each other and became better friends. If you gave me a choice of working with these two on any project, any time, I would not hesitate.” ■

Resources

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Keying In Feature Story. . .

TEACHERS WITHOUT BORDERS



The 2008 NBEA Annual Convention will be held at the **Marriott Rivercenter** and **Marriott Riverwalk Hotels** in **San Antonio, Texas, March 19–22, 2008**. The goal of the convention is to provide a program that will enhance the skills of our members, create networking opportunities, and challenge educators to return to their classrooms ready to empower the next generation of business professionals. The convention will feature more than 40 educational sessions that meet the varied and common goals of business educators, 20 computer workshops to expand specific skills and introduce additional technology, and three general sessions where prominent speakers will be featured. Concurrent sessions will address the following topics: “Everything Google,” Strategies for Integrating Emerging Technology, Business Ethics, Instructional and Personal Use of “You Tube,” Creative Teaching Strategies, Entrepreneurship, Student Transitioning from Secondary to Postsecondary Education, Preparing for Careers in a Changing Business Environment, Generational Learning, Business Etiquette, Use of Game Technologies for Strategic Thinking, Online Course Delivery, E-commerce, Motivating Teachers and Students, Building Partnerships Between Business Education and the Community, Identity Theft, Business Communication, Using Web Technologies in Internet Searches, International Experiential Learning, Motivational Strategies for Students and Teachers, Creation of Project-Based Learning and Simulations, Middle School Business Education, Active Learning Strategies, Advanced Accounting Education, Reading Strategies in Business, Building Business Education at the Secondary Level, and many more!

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