Theoretical and practical aspects of team teaching

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Abstract
The paper deals with the theory of team teaching and related terms. This theoretical background leads us to implementation of the team teaching approach during the EPTE (European Primary Teacher Education) teaching in the Pedagogy and Didactics module through English language as a mean of instruction. We adopted action research and case study as a qualitative research design. The purpose of the research was the reflection of participated teachers on important aspects of the team teaching practice (e.g., necessary time for planning lessons, collaboration, solving issues, as well as evaluation, etc.). The students’ attitude towards team teaching was positive and it was their first experience. We formulate several advantages, disadvantages, as well as implications for teacher practice.

Keywords: team teaching, teamwork, collaboration, action research, lesson planning

Introduction
A teacher’s individual conception of teaching is often based on intuitive practice and experience, but it necessarily has to be supported by educational theory as well. This cycle of reflected theory and experience is ongoing process, which develops a teacher’s skills and professional competences. Theory needs to be validated through practice and practice enriches, supports, or corrects theory.

Action research is a type of research, which can be very useful for teacher as an instrument for evaluation of any theoretical knowledge in educational environment. Integration of theory and practice can be explained by statement of Lewin (in Conkbayir and Pascall 2018: 155) “there is nothing so practical as a good theory”. Action research is also known as practitioner research which contributes to change and improvement of educational process through own evaluation where new knowledge is linked to theoretical background and reflected in individual experience. Schön (in Bates, 2019) described two types of reflection, which build new understanding that will shape teacher’s action:

- reflection-on-action starts after the teaching, practitioner reviews, analyses, and evaluates past practice with the effort to improve future practice;
- reflection-in-action is thinking during acting where practitioner responds to situations and makes decisions directly, they occur.

According to Conkbayir and Pascall (2018), there are two main goals of action research, to make improvements to practice in a school environment, and to generate new knowledge or theories. The authors have also stated the barriers, which should be overcome in reaching these goals. It might be:

- fear of the unknown, a teacher might not understand the proposed change or its role,
- teacher might feel that proposed issue or change are direct criticism of his practice,
- teacher might feel insecure about contributing to the process of change,
- teacher might feel exhausted at the rate of change in the setting.

Despite these barriers, action research can increase the professionalization, and as a reflective tool helps to every colleague involved in teaching to improve social and educational practice and it can be
shared collectively. This idea of sharing knowledge and experience among colleagues led to examine team teaching as a didactic approach. Of course, team teaching doesn’t have to always work. Kind of rigid teacher’s personality or a fear acting in front of colleagues could be a reason for not using this approach.

Team teaching becomes an instrument of teaching and practice improvement as well as professional development. Professional development is according to Guskey (2000: 16) set of “processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students.” The teachers should improve their knowledge, classroom practice, and promote students learning. Mentioned facts was inspiring also for our study.

Theoretical background of team teaching

Bates (2019) suggested that teachers are not, by nature, good team members. Team teaching involves at least two teachers who cooperate intentionally and methodically in the instructional process. This means that teachers have to learn how to work in team and develop soft skills and necessary collaborative skills. Colleagues who teach together in a team can build up professional bonds and can be a model for students. This kind of collaboration shows how teachers engaged in teaching can solve problems and ideas complexly (Marantz Cohen & Mule 2019). Team teaching seems to impact teaching and learning, in both, it is implemented in the different way. Buckley (2000) stated that team teaching:

- improves the quality teaching through teachers’ interactions,
- encourages teachers to learn new approaches from observing others,
- creates more time for lesson planning by spreading the responsibility among others,
- provides opportunities to form deep working relationships with colleagues,
- prevents routine arising from teaching the same material in the same way.

Team teaching is about leaving safe environment of individuals and be able to take the risk of collaborating with someone else (Plank 2013). If team teaching approach is chosen, we should be aware of why we adopt it and make the development of the team a priority. “The trick to creating teams is to learn enough about how groups function so that we can increase the chances that groups will become high performance teams”. Group becomes a team when members are able to establish goals and gain them by appropriate methods (Wheelan 2013: 3). Nor et al. (2014) also write that team is based on mutual interactions, reciprocal trust and support must be present because members are dependent on each other. In building a team is often mentioned teamwork and collaboration. These terms seem like synonyms that group of people work together efficiently towards a common goal. However, we can distinguish teamwork, which combines members’ individual efforts to complete a task. There is usually a team leader who delegates tasks to each member to contribute to the goal completion. On the other hand, collaborative work means that members complete a task collectively, work as equals and have no leader to make decisions (Stoica 2020).

Teamwork could be explained by one of the first model dealing with the small group development, which is from Tuckman (1965). It is based on the notion that group is changing and goes through four stage process before it becomes a team. Any group must focus itself on successful completion of a task. At the same time, group members are related to one another interpersonally and create group structure, they act in time. The content of interaction is referred to as task activity. This model was set up to help individuals interact among themselves in a more productive manner with a goal on interpersonal sensitivity in a group of members and one leader. Four stages process develops through:

- Forming - interactions and relationships of members are established through testing, which identifies boundaries of interpersonal, and task activities (variety of expectations from the team occurs).
- Storming - is characterized by conflicts in relations of members because it is affected by individual emotional response to the task. This serves as resistance to group influence and task requirements.
Norming - resistance is overcome, members can find ways to solve conflicts, deal with disagreements and work as cohesive unit by adopting new roles and standards, by starting work cooperatively.

Performing - structure of the team relationships influences task fulfilment whereas roles are flexible, functional, and create team supportive energy directed to task completion.

In teamwork, leaders should demonstrate some attributes like know their staff (teachers), have a clear vision, respect to and care for their colleagues, have high expectations, demonstrate integrity, be role models (be motivating persons). They must be decisive, flexible, positive, innovative, introspective, willing to take risks. They must be able to understand people, communicate, know to delegate, set priorities, but also to have a sense of humor and know their content area/discipline (Sousa 2003, Carr & Walton 2014, Nor et al. 2014).

Collaborative work means that every team member contributes and shares the ideas, opinions, knowledge, is engaged and motivated to complete goals. It includes a willingness to solve problems, thinking creatively and critically, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, responsibility and adaptability. Collaborative teaching can help teachers to overcome the sense of isolation. Much of teachers’ work is solitary, usually done alone and it is an opportunity to consult with colleagues, to share mutual advice and to explore teaching by sharing ideas, to design, plan, evaluate processes in the class and to look on their own teaching from another perspective (Plank 2013). Team teaching includes principles of collaborative work, but it can’t be agreed that it is the same construct as the team teaching.

As mentioned earlier, to be able to work with others means to adopt or develop necessary skills. include understanding a variety of perspectives and meeting expectations as a team member. Doyle (2022) describes skills like communication, emotional intelligence and respect to diversity. Among essential communicative skills belongs:

- active listening (listening with understanding and without judgement),
- verbal communication (meaningful, respectful, polite),
- nonverbal communication (impacts as much as words, contextualize the speech),
- written communication.

Emotional intelligence is ability to identify, manage own emotions, recognize them in others and react appropriately (Goleman 2017). It includes resilience, curiosity, empathy, non-offensiveness, not taking criticism personally, compassion, conflict resolution etc. Respect for diversity includes sensitivity to cultural backgrounds, open communication, building expectations as well as consensus, facilitating group discussion etc. (Bartlett & Burton 2016).

In summary, a team consists of two or more members joining forces for common goals, who are responsible for teaching and gained results, team teaching connects teachers who collaborate, plan, and conduct lessons, evaluate students’ learning and own teaching (Nor et al. 2014).

Decision about distribution of responsibilities during teaching is up to teachers. We distinguish several forms of team teaching:

- Teachers are equal, and responsibility is distributed over the lessons, they are present at every stage in the lesson (collaborative teamwork).
- One teacher is a leader of the instruction and other teachers can help or support his teaching (teamwork).
- Two or more teachers equally participate on teaching and divide responsibilities during the lesson or according to different task (one teacher is responsible for example for designing activities, another for delivering content etc.).
- Frequent form of team teaching is interdisciplinary lesson/course. One teacher is a content expert, and another is a language teacher focused on linguistic needs (e.g., CLIL), or both teachers are experts in different science fields. In tertiary education is common collaboration among field experts in academic discipline who are responsible for different parts of the course (e.g., one leads lecturers and second seminars – practical parts of the course).
In our study, we focused on describing team teaching, their forms, as well as teamwork, and collaborative work in education.

**Research design**

The aim of the research was to investigate whether team teaching is beneficial to university students participating in the international class. We decided to adopt a qualitative research design, particularly, we used case study and interview. The case study explores teachers’ perspectives and reflections on necessary time needed to plan and prepare team teaching lessons, collaborative practice, solving questions together, evaluation of the teaching and learning process, etc. (Canaran & Hakki Mirici, 2020). Students were interviewed about realized lessons and their feedback about the team teaching.

The participants of the case study were 2 Slovak university teachers, teaching Pedagogy and Didactics module in EPTE programme (European Primary Teacher Education), both focusing on the same research area (education science) and 17 students studying pre-primary and primary education study programmes from 6 different European countries in summer semester 2021-22. The communication language was English and not even one member of the team and group of students was a native speaker. English was a foreign language and the level of communication depended on individual experiences of the participants.

We set the participated teachers’ professional profile as a necessary part of this case study. The first teacher has a master's degree in primary school education and doctoral degree in Pedagogy. She has 17 years of experience in education at primary and university level. The second teacher has a master’s degree in pedagogy and teaching and doctoral degree in Pedagogy. She has 19 years of experience at university level.

Team teaching was implemented in 12 lessons (divided in 3 teaching days) in HEI in Porto (Portugal). Lessons were created and prepared respecting given curriculum of EPTE module Pedagogy and Didactics. The process of the team teaching was divided into the 3 stages (Figure 1). Each part is important, cannot be omitted and play crucial role in the process of teaching and learning.

**Figure 1:** The process of the team teaching

The preparation stage consisted of several meetings and discussions about the curriculum, topics, as well as philosophy of the team teaching. It was the opportunity to get to know each other better and to share opinions about the important issues. Teachers focused on philosophy of team-teaching, what is it about and how to handle it. They discussed the purpose of this conception of teaching and their expectations. “Is the team teaching beneficial for me as a teacher? What should I expect of it? Why do I want to implement this conception? How should I implement theory on team teaching into the
practice?”. There were also questions oriented on students. “Is the team teaching beneficial to students? Do my expectations meet students’ needs and goals? Will be the team teaching approach interesting to students?”. Teachers communicated and made decision about distribution of roles during the teaching. Both teachers were equal in the teaching process, and they distributed topics to be taught according to their expertise and professional interests. They discussed the goals and content of the taught module. One of the important questions was: “How should we motivate students and involve them into the educational process?”. It was taken in consideration that students are at different knowledge level, with different experiences from cultural, educational environments and for all participants English was a foreign language.

The stage of **planning and implementation** was very interesting and demanding for both teachers. There were several meetings to discuss and debate EPTE curriculum (module Pedagogy and Didactics), to set goals and prepare topics supported by theory, tasks, and activities. Teachers decided to divide the themes according to similarities and logical aspect. They wanted to support and activate prior learning and memory, enhance learning outcomes and critical thinking skills, improve communicative skills and collaboration. An integral part of this stage was collecting literature and gathering of various resources connected with the topics and setting criteria for evaluating students work and lessons. Finally, a time management was agreed upon.

The curriculum of the P&D module was divided into 3 separate meetings, 12 lessons altogether (lesson duration 60 minutes). 1st teaching day was covered with the main topic, teacher as an educational professional and included several themes focused on professional competences (Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications), teacher’s roles, teacher’s standards, beginning teacher’s characteristics etc. During the 2nd teaching day, didactic aspects of teaching and learning were discussed. There was presented a lesson plan and how to build it up, what must contain (goals, curricula, outcomes etc.), as well as comparison of national primary school curriculum of participating European countries, work with taxonomy of cognitive domain, construction of knowledge through higher level thinking processes, strategies from prior learning to new learning, instructional approaches, and methods suitable for primary school. Main topic of the 3rd teaching day was cooperation, teamwork, team teaching, leadership, and styles.

In the planning stage, teachers discussed if the teaching material, scholar texts are suitable for students, if prepared activities cover the topic and make sense in connection with stated goals. “Are selected scientific texts appropriate to the students’ level of knowledge? Are these texts understandable to them? Can students manage prepared activities and tasks?”. The team teachers shared the responsibilities of designing and preparing the activities for students and they arranged order of planned activities and tasks as well as approximate time needed for the completion.

The last stage was focused on **evaluation**. Teachers reflected team teaching approach, their own teaching, and students’ learning processes occurred during the lessons. Team teachers questioned themselves if team teaching was useful, if they fulfilled the given goals, managed the time, completed the activities and tasks, if students developed required knowledge and skills. “Was team teaching beneficial to me? In which way? Does team teaching help me to improve professionally? Which competencies did I developed? What should be done differently and why? What was the attitude of students to the teaching?”. The students were interviewed after the last lesson on pros and cons of team teaching. They were asked for sharing their opinions and experiences, evaluating the team teaching from their perspectives. “Have you ever experienced team teaching before? Was the team teaching beneficial to you, in which way? Have you been motivated to participate on lessons where team teaching was used? Have you developed any collaborative skills? Use three words to describe your experience with team teaching.”

Each teacher involved in team teaching wrote a reflective lessons report contained answers to above mentioned questions, overall impressions of the lessons, as well as advantages, and disadvantages. They
focused on situations, activities and facts which went well, did not go as were planned, and could be done differently next time. By sharing their experiences, they contributed to their professionalisation, and the findings are presented below.

Results and discussion

Based on the case study, the teachers’ reflective lessons reports and interviews with students, we came to the findings which can be consider as beneficial for the most participants when using team teaching.

- Teacher can see the content knowledge in different perspective enriched by a collaborated colleague’s point of view. Professional discussion develops new perspectives on subject topic.
- Teacher can improve collaborative and communicative skills like sharing information, formulating the ideas, reasoning and problem solving, making decisions, taking responsibility.
- Teacher can be more creative. Sharing thoughts between teachers leads to new ideas and proposals. Collaborative teaching is an inspiring approach and brings enthusiasm into the team. This led participated teachers to think about their way of teaching, expectations, giving instructions, activities, etc.
- Teacher can adopt new teaching methods and techniques and employ alternative teaching practice.
- Teacher can better manage the time. S/he is forced to plan activities in collaboration with the colleague precisely in advance. This requires a lot of time and energy in preparation and planning stage, but at the end less effort in lesson realisation.
- Teacher can realize his/her strengths, weaknesses, and necessary aspects of their individual teaching conception.
- Precise planning leads to dynamic lesson with positive atmosphere and it can be motivating for student to participate on tasks actively.
- Different teachers bring different communicative styles, teaching styles, and it gives students more opportunities to interact with them. Teachers become appropriate role models.

In our research, team teaching reveals benefits in scientific language extension, positive attitude, developing positive feelings such as comfort, productivity, and creativity, tension reducing, sharing good practice, and enhancing self-confidence. In interview, students considered the team teaching as an interesting approach because most of them experienced it for the first time.

In comparison to our findings, Nor et al. (2014) pointed to the similar team teaching benefits and mention another advantages, for example, positive effects on a person’s health, joint scholarly resources, student’s favour teaching style, and promotes interdisciplinary contact between academicians. Students are stimulated by viewing at least two teachers, lecturers discussing the topics. Learners can expand or enrich their understanding of the topic and communication styles. Effective teamwork leads to make better decisions, solve complex problems, develop soft and collaborative skills as well as enhance creativity in comparison to individual work. Buckley (2000) observed that students can see various perspective of the subject content, can take in consideration more opinions, which can encourage their critical thinking skills. Students can obtain a more mature level of knowledge by comparing various views of matters.

Conclusion

Team teaching was implemented as a procedure of action research focused on investigation of its impact on teaching and students’ learning. We adopted Tuckman’s model dealing with small groups development, which is also possible to use in school collaborative environment. Team teaching becomes a pedagogical approach, which leads to improvement of professional skills like creative and critical thinking, learning from each other, solving various problems together, and collective responsibility. The university teachers participated on team teaching supported their content knowledge with the
experience and it was beneficial for both sides, teachers as well as students. We paid less attention to language as linguistic category because English had communicative role through which the module content was delivered to students. It can be concluded that team teaching as didactic approach brought more advantages into the instruction with direct impact on teaching and learning.

References