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Co-Teaching in Higher Education: From Theory to Co- Practice**

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Book Reviews / Comptes Rendus

Jarvis, Daniel, H., and Kariuki, Mumbi (Eds.) (2017). *Co-Teaching in Higher Education: From Theory to Co-Practice*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. Pages: 258. Price: 50.40 CAD (hardcover).

Reviewed by Linda Pardy, Associate Professor,
Communications, University of the Fraser Valley.

In a time when higher education is talking about interdisciplinarity and the need to find new ways to collaborate in the teaching space across subject areas, this book is timely. Jarvis and Kariuki reached out to colleagues engaged in a variety of co-teaching strategies to bring together a collection of examples and stories grounded in theory, but focused on the day-to-day reality of taking on innovative teaching practices. They promote the book as a dialectic approach to learning from each other. And this approach is consistently applied throughout. As a result of its conversational tone, the writing flows, making it easy to gain insights about considerations and actions that are required when moving from theory to co-practice. This approach gives the reader an open and honest overview of what co-teaching realistically involves.

The book is divided into an introduction and ten chapters. Jarvis and Kariuki introduce the complexities of teaching and outline that their motivation for the book came from their own experiences of having co-taught together three graduate level

courses at Nipissing University. They share their deep reflections on idea generation and the work associated with taking on the challenge of co-teaching. They contextualize the scope of the book by drawing on current literature and outlining their strategy for inviting others who have co-taught to contribute. They thoughtfully selected both Canadian and international professors to share their work, and more importantly their lessons learned from engaging in a co-teaching practice. Contributors not only describe their co-teaching projects, but also reflectively write about co-creation, co-planning, co-facilitating, and co-assessment. It is gaining insight into these four elements that makes the book extremely useful for anyone contemplating co-teaching.

Chapter one illustrates how using a dialogic pedagogy can support the creation of co-teaching practice in a large undergraduate sociology course. The authors describe how they divided their time and use of the teaching space to include the learners as well as each other in the delivery of material. They demonstrate how their formal lectures shifted to interactive large classes and they provide strategies for use in both small and large classes. “By having more than one teacher present in front of the class, the position of the knowing teaching is diffused” (p.14). This statement framed an overview of the interplay that occurred between the co-teachers as they explored how best to work together. They also unpacked their thinking as they questioned what is meant by deep learning and who holds knowledge in the learning space. The reader gains insight into complex concepts that need to be considered such as openness to dialogue, the shifting of perspectives, and the creation of a learning environment that potentially can radically transform learning experiences for both professors and the students.

Chapters two and three provide examples of creative courses delivered at Nipissing University. Chapter two showcases how professors can cross discipline boundaries to create themed courses that engage students in learning from a variety of perspectives. Links are provided to the course details making it easy to take a more in-depth look at the example courses described. Chapter three describes

how dialogue and debate were used to stimulate collaboration and a co-teaching practice between Religious Studies and English Literature. While these subjects often draw on each other, this chapter illustrates the powerful learning experience that occurs when students experience the interconnectedness of the disciplines at the same time. These chapters also provide explicit examples of how faculty can maintain their content expertise but at the same time contribute to “deep interdisciplinary” work. The authors are realistic and don’t shy away from outlining the challenges. In chapter three there is an excellent section on creative conflict and course planning (p.70). It is these applied and practical discussions about how shifting philosophical approaches to content and teaching can help support creative curriculum design, and in turn create new opportunities for liberal arts, science and professional studies students to work together in one knowledge creation space.

Chapter four outlines the experiences and challenges of five educators teaching in a pre-service teacher education program. The chapter works through each element that needs to be considered when trying to introduce the need for interdisciplinarity and the connectivity of disciplines. And while this chapter specifically relates to teacher education programs, the section on “the dark side of collaboration” (p. 102) is useful for anyone regardless of subject area.

The authors in chapters five and six provide examples of co-teaching in disciplines that are not commonly seen together (e.g., visual arts/science and visual arts/math). Both provide excellent examples of how faculty across very different disciplines can co-plan and foster co-teaching relationships. In chapter five the authors applied dialogic learning to their writing by using a conversational, almost script like, format to share their creative experience of co-teaching. They share their formal and informal conversations to deeply discuss how they came to appreciate the distinctions between multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches. Chapter six weaves the one author’s recent graduate research, the other author’s experience and their use of literature into the discussion. They lay out each step of the process from start

to finish and demonstrate how they took a strength-based approach that enabled them to draw on their expertise and reduce conflicts such as “discipline turf wars” (p. 159). Furthermore, they stress the importance of institutional support to remind the reader that without such support “teaching innovations fail to flourish, and face the danger of becoming mere educational fads” (p.160).

The next three chapters each continue to share examples of co-teaching, but also outline other factors related to implications for stakeholders, co-assessment strategies, and graduate level courses. While the same themes previously covered are reinforced, discussion in relation to specific contexts and audiences is useful and demonstrates how the stages of co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessment when combined with ongoing reflection, as well as stakeholder engagement, create conditions of ongoing professional development and programmatic improvement. Each of the final chapters provides explicit examples and use the literature to ground their work. This in turn provides the reader with a solid foundation on which to begin exploring how co-teaching may work within their own universities and contexts.

The final chapter is careful not to advocate that co-teaching is superior to other forms of teaching. It also skillfully summarizes the promising practices in co-teaching and the critical dialog that needs to be done at each stage of the process. The authors reflect on the benefits of engaging in dialogic community as a co-teaching practice without underestimating the effort involved, and they set the stage for additional research to be done in the co-teaching area. They also reinforce the realities of administrative support and workload issues. At times the insights gained from the chapters are repetitive, but when linked together and brought into a theory-to-co-practice overview at the end there is a wealth of information, research, lived experience and expertise that realistically reinforces key considerations for both faculty and administrators that need attention before moving into interdisciplinary work or co-teaching practice. 🍁