

Lessons learned from the professional development initiative “Start to team teach”

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Rationale

Education faces pressing challenges, including increasing student diversity and high attrition rates among (beginning) teachers (e.g. Keppens et al., 2019; Thomas et al., 2020). Team teaching is often proposed as a promising response, involving collaborative lesson planning, delivery, and evaluation by two or more teachers (Decuyper et al., 2024). However, initiating team teaching represents a significant shift in practice, and while several enabling conditions for successful implementation have been identified, the professional development needs of beginning team teachers remain underexplored.

This study builds on principles of effective professional development (PD) and design-based research. The PD program “Start to team teach” was developed by the ESTAFETT consortium within an FWO-SBO project. It integrated evidence-based insights, tools and materials from the broader project and was based on design principles such as appreciative inquiry, iterative cycles, and modeling by experienced team teaching coaches.

Research Design

The intervention study was conducted in two conditions: a LIGHT condition (group sessions for team teachers) and a MAXI condition (group sessions plus tailored school-based coaching for extended teams, consisting of participating teachers and key school stakeholders such as a school leader). Participants included 92 team teachers and extended team members from pre-primary, primary, and secondary education that participated in the PD in 2022-2023 and 2023-2024. Data were collected through end-of-program surveys, interim monitoring, and coach documentation of process and content-related experiences.

Results

Participants in both conditions reported high satisfaction with the PD program, rating it an average of 7.77/10. The program was perceived as practical, insightful, and supportive of implementing team teaching. Key design principles were consistently recognized and valued. Coaching was appreciated in the MAXI condition, where tailored support aligned closely with participants’ needs and fostered deeper professional growth. Collective participation was notably strong, with team teachers engaging alongside school leaders and other stakeholders, enhancing ownership and school-wide impact. Participants in the MAXI condition scored systematically higher on usability, skill development, school-level impact, and process ownership. Coaches also identified critical success factors for team teaching during the PD program, including a shared vision, structural support, continuity, and open communication.

Conclusion

The “Start to team teach” PD program effectively supports beginning team teachers in navigating the complexities of collaborative teaching. The program fosters learning at multiple levels—individual, team, and school-wide—and demonstrates the value of tailored, evidence-informed professional development. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how to design and implement high-quality PD for team teaching in diverse educational contexts.