



An Autoethnographic Approach to Faculty Development Through a Longitudinal Analysis of a Co-taught Workshop

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Abstract. The present contribution explores how a co-taught workshop, designed and delivered in the last two academic years within two curricular disciplines of the third year of the degree course in Science of Education at University of Macerata (Italy), took advantage of autoethnography as a reflective method to enrich the interdisciplinary relationship between the two professors involved and their mutual growth in terms of instructional design and teaching practices. The exploration of Self as a data source allowed both researchers (in their teaching role) to reflect on core areas of faculty development in connection with the specific co-teaching style they adopted. Autoethnography allowed all the involved actors (students and professors) to visualize a transformative direction in their academic identity and professional growth. The discussion of the results is based on a content analysis of different data sources where all the data were triangulated in a double connotation, that is, between professors and among the different sources in an iterative process.

Keywords: co-teaching · faculty development · autoethnography

1 Introduction

In the last two academic years a joint workshop was organized within the courses of “Educational Technology” and “Intercultural Pedagogy”, run in the first semester of the third year of the degree course in the professional socio-pedagogical educator curriculum (University of Macerata, Italy).

The reference framework was outlined starting from the theories of complexity [1, 2] and the need to activate laboratory dynamics of situated learning [3] in which the students, in the last year of their academic training, could represent themselves and identify with a work team. The challenge of joint professionalization – among students, professors, and the management of the class group – has been reinterpreted in a transformative key [4] on different levels. It is important to underline how the processes of reflexivity concerned all the subjects involved, in a logic of self-reflection and clarification of the meanings of the path undertaken.

The planning of the activities prompted the professors to reflect on the importance of proposing a format in which the meta-competence of “learning to learn” was more

explicit (for both students' and professors'). This competence is defined as the ability to pursue and persist in learning and to organize one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups [5]. Starting from this point, the workshops were planned as experiences in which the responsibility of the student was definitely interconnected with active teaching methodologies, and it was essential to gain greater awareness of the didactic education approaches used [6].

This required a creative imagination of participation, experiencing the workshop directly with an interdisciplinary objective: investigating the intercultural dimensions of the concept of travel (*Intercultural Pedagogy*) through digital autobiographical narrative artefacts available on the web (*General Didactics and Educational Technology*).

Starting from the definition of the topic, the professors opened a dialogue on the significance of the proposal in their respective disciplines, intercepting training trajectories that also supported a fruitful scientific and methodological dialogue at the research level. This step was essential to increase the motivation of the professors with a similar educational background but with different specializations.

The challenge was on different interconnected professional levels; the identities of the professors-researchers and the possibility of co-creating interdisciplinary paths drove them on in their reflexivity, in terms of didactic planning and educational significance. Subsequently, this paradigm was articulated in the conversation with the student community in a professionalizing laboratory mindset. In this regard, a space for reflection has been generated, in which the images, the representation and the identities of professors and students take on further reciprocal interpretations.

2 The Context of the Study

The project-based workshop was co-designed and co-taught by the two professors of "Educational Technology" and "Intercultural Pedagogy" and was meant as a "cluster" within the two different parallel courses, but the whole courses in their rationale was designed and managed taking into account the co-taught cluster. A relevant element concerns the voluntary participation of students who have chosen to attend the training proposal and to subdivide into interest groups.

The chosen hands-on approach for the workshop had the twofold objective to:

- improve the learning process for the students through the engagement in an interdisciplinary group work in order to reflect on both subject matters and their entanglement on a theoretical and practical dimension;
- improve the professional growth of the two professors involved, through their commitment to identifying/designing a proper activity to be developed by students, sharing the management of the teaching practice and performing assessments.

The co-teaching experience was designed with several styles and postures of the professors, in order to facilitate and stimulate the participation of the students both individually and in the groups. The experiences realized in the academic year 2020–2021 and 2021–2022 were organized in different ways, due to the effects of the COVID-19

pandemic. In the first academic year, the activity was online (36 participants working in small groups), and in the second academic year the activity was blended (38 participants working in small groups). In both academic years the professors used asynchronous tools (discussion forum and collaborative writing in LMS OLAT) and synchronous tools (the videoconferencing system TEAMS) with a duration of 14 h (in last three course weeks). The decision to deliver the activities at the end of the semester of lessons and in the final part of the courses facilitated a disciplinary study by students in the respective subjects. This allowed the students to have more knowledge and interpretative tools to start interdisciplinary discussion groups and design the final restitution. Likewise, the dialogue between the professors on the progress of the course programme made it possible to highlight key and critical points that emerged step by step.

The future educators critically experimented in a collective dimension themselves through problematizing logics that are typical of their profession. The university curriculum can design training modules strongly connected with socio-educational contexts, even starting from joint teaching programmes. In this regard, the transversal dialogue solicits students' meta-reflection and the implementation of laboratory dynamics in which the learning process assumes experiential and community connotations [7, 8].

Participatory teaching can encourage the training of professional identities capable of regenerating inclusive and proactive social environments. In small groups, students perceive themselves as members of a working team, experiencing collegial dynamics, through simulations, case studies, open discussions and the implementation of ideas. In the laboratory spaces, new knowledge and collective skills can be promoted [9], strengthening a joint reflexivity that is useful in facing social changes [10, 11] through a huge set of soft skills put into action during the experience [12].

As far as the professors promoting the initiative are concerned, it was very relevant and motivating to observe the students' sense of co-responsibility and their ability to share and achieve educational objectives. The cooperative spaces in which different personal and professional identities have been enhanced have also solicited dialogue between the two professors through exploration and narration of their own self, as well as of shared empowerment [13, 14].

Explaining this path within a training module carried out in co-teaching means enabling students to critically reflect and increase their awareness of the experience conducted, enhancing the sense of discovery and wondering as a way of reading subjective processes and relationships that characterize socio-pedagogical professional profiles [15].

At the same time, the mutual trust between the two professors has supported the processes of shared choice and revisions of the proposals which, over time, in a didactic formulation based on recurrence and attention to the development of meaningful relationships, have implemented new ways of co-planning and definition of feedback tools and methods of documenting what has been learned.

It is very important to underline that the voluntary nature of the students corresponds to the free choice of the professors to initiate a shared experimentation with the class and with themselves, as training professionals, in close contact with the learning environments. The interest that led to collaboration has given generative results in the creation of

spaces for reviewing the different teaching–learning paradigms, the choice of teaching methods and in managing the relationship with students and between the two professors.

The climate of the formative environment developed gives back to the student community a possible method of interdisciplinary work and the construction of plural thought. Equally, didactic co-planning gives professors back the sense of didactic educational action where different and similar professional identities meet in the learning experience; objectives, challenges and trajectories already known are made explicit, with a strong openness to the discovery of new ways of working together.

The learning process of the experience was scheduled in the following main tasks:

- Steps 1–2: web exploration and analysis of artefacts – Each group of students, consisting of a maximum of 4 members, chose the salient aspects to be explored in relation to the theme of travel as identity migration. Once the criteria and specific dimensions to work on were established, the group searched online for narratives related to the journey in which to find the essential elements to refer to and start the analysis of the material. Students were encouraged to select autobiographical artefacts (in particular migrant life stories) and discuss their formative, value and communicative connotations.

The professors, supporting the groups – through direct dialogue, remote feedback on the online platform, clarification emails, video calls – used communication skills, formative evaluation and return of intermediate feedback (feedforward), so that the groups orient themselves to take autonomous and reflective decisions [16]. This educational approach favoured a meta-reflection on a style of teaching, which, animating contexts, does not impose itself in a directive way, enhancing the contribution of all and favouring the co-construction of dynamic knowledge. The professors focused on the importance of the research question and on the assignment of work for the groups, to formulate them clearly, without making it mono-directional, through stimuli questions that facilitated a more aware reflection of the students.

- Steps 3–4: a selection of artefacts and an instructional design of a lesson plan to be presented collectively to the whole class. Once the materials to be used had been chosen, the students designed a training action aimed at enhancing the autobiographical narrative in the social sphere, defining the target to address and the methods of sharing. The planned proposal was discussed with the whole class, through a face-to-face and / or online presentation in which all students were the protagonists of peer learning (in groups and with the reference class) [17, 18]. The professors first supported the design choices and the negotiation of shared knowledge in the small group, and in the final phase they gave a formative evaluation of the class discussion, identifying the strengths and criticalities of what had been achieved.

This process opened up space for dialogue between students and professors, encouraging an additional level of professional reflexivity, as part of a commitment to didactic planning in close interdisciplinary connection. The cooperative dynamics had a proactive reflection in the didactic choices and in the relational postures of all participants – students and teachers – strengthening the value of co-teaching and co-learning. The solicitation of the professors’ professional development is mainly based on the commitment

to common reflection and the desire to generate experiences with a formative impact of mutual learning.

The co-teaching experience has assumed considerable professional value for the professors involved, as the pedagogical approaches and didactic methodologies chosen were discussed. The time dedicated to the planning of the activity prompted the start of scientific research and the re-generativity of thought. The recursion and longitudinality of the training proposal that continues to evolve over time, allows the critical observation of the learning processes in the situation and the ways in which university professors can decide to co-design teaching paths in which interpersonal, interdisciplinary and professional intermingling is consciously chosen and researched. These challenging and meaningful movements prompt numerous reflections on faculty development and the impact on the quality of teaching. Some trajectories will be further explored below, highlighting the processes, paths and outcomes of what has been achieved so far.

3 Research Approach

The research is framed under a qualitative approach with autoethnography as a selected strategy of inquiry with the application of different methods of data collection during the longitudinal study and a twofold objective about the effectiveness of the co-taught format: (1) for students' engagement and group work modelling effect; and (2) for the professional growth of both the professors involved. The present study will just focus on the transformative potential of co-teaching for faculty development, since a previous study has already explored the impact of the format on students [15] and will be integrated in the applied triangulation of data.

Co-teaching (also referred to as “team teaching” and/or “collaborative/cooperative teaching”) [19] has been recognized as a transformative strategy since the 1960s in the USA and England and involved the reorganization of middle and secondary schools [20–23]. Its range of action has spread from the area of inclusion and special needs education [24–27] to a broader area of innovation in didactics and teacher training [28, 29].

In the academic context co-teaching is defined by Robinson and Schaible [30] as any experience where two teachers collaborate both in the design and implementation of a course, which implies the application of student group work techniques. The advantages of co-teaching practices for students (e.g. relation building; communication skills; modelling, etc.) are intensively reported by the international literature as along with the learning opportunities it provides for faculties. The two are reasonably intertwined (e.g. relationship building) and can be affected by the type of roles played by professors in working together [31, 32] and the interdisciplinary connection between two courses addressed to the same group of students [27].

In order to explore such potentialities the authors, in their role as professors, in the two-year-long co-teaching experience adopted a reflective collaborative approach (procedural and epistemological), a reciprocal autoethnographic process.

Autoethnography has largely been applied as a method of inquiry in the professional development of teachers [33, 34]. It can be defined as a “self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts” [34, p.710], and involves processes such as reflexivity, narrative inquiry and self-analysis able to provoke critical, emancipatory and transformative social practices [33] for faculty development.

As a fully recognized approach, autoethnography can trace its origin back to 1975 [35] with its formalization as a “new ethnography”, in which the main focus is the Self and the socially constructed identity through a reflective process:

While the ethnographic field constitutes that of the Other – that location to which the ethnographer “goes” to undertake the research – the autoethnographic field is that of the Self, in which techniques of data collection and recording are reconfigured to account for this inward investigation of the Self. A key element of this process is the charting of identity and those processes of sense-making that individuals engage in as part of the socio-cultural dynamic, with this potentially occurring across entire life-spans, multiple locations and diverse social contexts. [33, p. 371].

Austin and Hickey [33] see autoethnography as “a very powerful ‘method’ of provoking the type of *conscientisation* necessary for authentic community engagement and commitment espoused by critical pedagogues”, which reveals that it is of paramount importance to allow “the social transformative potential of teachers to actuality” [p.371].

If we see faculty development as a collaborative commitment in the academic community, co/autoethnography is one of the approaches to work towards a “scholarship of engagement” [36–38] where a mutual professional growth is reached through collaborative design and teaching practices.

Autoethnography is a widely used approach in qualitative educational research that focuses on the process of teacher professional identity formation and development [39–41] and is not limited to self-narrative in terms of data gathering and analysis techniques, giving the right value to the self (e.g. to the teacher reflections) and others (e.g. to any other actors within the situatedness of the teacher in relation to them). When dealing with co-teaching practices, autoethnography takes an enhanced social dimension, a dialectical relationship between the self, the colleague and practice [39] for a shared critical engagement (co-autoethnography).

4 Data Collection

Data were collected during and after the two co-taught workshop experiences, which covered two academic years (2020–2021; 2021–2022) and are fully described in Table 1. The diversified types of data satisfy the twofold objective of the research, since they aim at gathering both qualitative inputs about students’ artefacts and interactions (trace data) and the professors’ reflections as a source of “self” data (field notes, academic writing, methodological notes).

Table 1. Overview of data types and collection

Timing	Type	Description
Data collected during the first and second co-teaching workshop (November–December 2020 and November–December 2021)	Students' artefacts	Teaching plan Grid of analysis presentation
	Field notes	Professors' observations during the workshop and the final student presentations;
	Trace data	Students' requests via email and online written interactions in collaborative environments as part of the workshop activity; Students' comments and peer assessment during the final presentation (audio- and/or video-recorded)
Data collected after the first co-teaching workshop (March–April 2021)	Academic writing	Published academic paper about the co-teaching experience in terms of methods applied and their impact on students
Data collected after the second co-teaching workshop (April–May 2022)	Academic writing	In-progress academic writing about the co-teaching experience in terms of faculty development
	Semi-structured interviews	Video-recorded interviews with a sample of students
	Methodological notes	Written notes and comments stimulated by the interviews

Some of the collected data have already been used to analyse the students' engagement and group work co-teaching modelling effect and were the object of a published scholarly product [15], while data that pertain to the reflection process of both professors are the focus of the present analysis aimed at highlighting the opportunities for professional growth and the areas of faculty development that can be affected by co-teaching practices.

A more detailed specification needs to be offered about the semi-structured interviews with the students, which were organized online through a videoconferencing institutional system. The data were collected thanks to the participation of a sample of (8) students, on a voluntary basis, after the completion of the first session of exams. The professors, who moderated the interview sessions needed to engage the respondents in an atmosphere free from the potential conditioning and tense effect caused by their

exam performance. The interviewers used a protocol with a blend of probing open-ended questions, which were accompanied by “follow-up why or how questions” [42, p. 366].

5 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Self as a data source is represented by reflection outputs, which are mainly written notes and comments that were produced during the observation/participation process in different situations: (1) the collaborative organization and activation of the workshop; (2) the students’ group work; (3) the presentation of the final outputs by the students; (4) the interviews made with a sample of students.

Those data went under a triangulation process [43], which involved both the professors in the two-year experimentation.

The variety of observational inputs, which led to the core open questions, was affected by the different roles played by the two professors – that is, the “interactive, participant–observer, and rotational” styles [44, p.30] during the course design and implementation (Table 2).

The “rotational” co-teaching style implies a turn-taking modality of teaching where units of instructions, connected to the workshop, were addressed by both professors individually in order to set disciplinary core aspects to be further addressed in co-taught classes. The “participant–observer” style offered an enhanced opportunity to collect data, since the two professors alternated in the roles of either instructor or observer and could, thus, perform a deeper observational process. A further style, the “interactive” modality, was used to offer students a blended support (in presence/online; synchronous/asynchronous) through multiple (both professors) written-based comments/suggestions using different channels (comments on shared online documents of draft student work; e-mail) and real-time discussions during the final presentations of the outputs of each group work.

Table 2. Co-teaching and reflection inputs

Co-teaching style	Professor role	Open questions
Rotational	Both professors individually addressed the chosen topic assuming a disciplinary perspective	What effort is required when designing and performing a co-taught workshop (14 h) within two different courses (each 48 h)?
Participant–observer	Both the professors alternate in co-presence, taking either an instructional role or an observer role	How do we (me and the other professor as observers) interpret a didactical event? What tacit presuppositions are guiding the meaning attribution to events?

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Co-teaching style	Professor role	Open questions
Interactive	Active involvement by both the professors, synchronously and asynchronously, for group work and final student presentation	How do we monitor student work and what supporting strategies are we adopting? What value do we assign to group work, and what criteria for an assessment?

The collected data were discussed between the two professors involved in order to highlight areas of potential faculty development in co-teaching. As a result of a process of negotiation of meanings, after a preliminary content analysis [44], five interpretative categories were identified to systematize the discussion of the transformative potentialities of the two-year experience (Table 3).

The chosen categories embrace different dimensions of professional development at the disciplinary and transversal levels, namely: (1) instructional design; (2) interdisciplinary understanding; (3) metacognitive skills; (4) communication strategies; (5) formative feedback and assessment.

The open questions that were stimulated by the different co-teaching styles were put under a focus of attention during the analysis step and linked to a specific interpretative category to frame the results. The first question highlighted the effort required by both professors in terms of course design, since planning and developing a co-taught workshop (14 h) within two different courses (48 h each) necessarily means that the overall instructional design aspects of the two courses had to be reviewed through the lens of the workshop's objectives to better modulate the whole didactical path. Co-designing an interdisciplinary workshop, in fact, required professors to carefully examine reciprocal instructional objectives and didactical approaches (e.g. timing and class organization), and that process fostered a deeper understanding of the choices made within the two disciplines. Even if professors have, in their daily academic life, formal and informal opportunities to share their ideas, strategies and approaches, the concrete effort put in the co-design task made it possible to make a step forward reified by a specific output (a joint workshop). Each professor had to embrace the other's disciplinary perspective and open up her background in an accessible way to the colleague (core contents – language – research aims) in order to present and organize a workshop that could be successfully integrated in the syllabi and engage students with a meaningful didactical trajectory.

Table 3. Reflection inputs for faculty development.

Open questions	Development areas	Transformative potentialities
What effort is required when designing and performing a co-taught workshop within two different courses?	Instructional design Interdisciplinary understanding	Co-designing an interdisciplinary workshop put the involved professors in the position of carefully examining instructional objectives through the lens of the different disciplines (e.g. core concepts) and of the disciplinary didactical approaches (e.g. timing and class organization)
How do we (me and the other professor as an observer) interpret a didactical event? What tacit presuppositions are guiding the meaning attribution to events?	Shared metacognitive reflection (presuppositions, expectations, reasoning process, etc.)	Being an observer in the co-presented classes put the involved faculties in the situation of sharing own focuses of attention related to the didactical event. The objects of observation may be different (one specific student's behaviour; the group discussion process; the impact of the peer support; etc.) and can help professors differentiate expectations in outcomes
How do we monitor student work and what supporting strategies are we adopting? What value do we assign to group work, and what criteria for an assessment?	Communication strategies Feedback and assessment	Blended group work (present, online) and teachers' collaborative supporting strategies through different channels allow an enriched communication flow between the two professors in order to provide an effective feedback to students

Observing the colleague in action was of paramount importance to visualize each professor's metacognitive reflections by sharing presuppositions, expectations and the reasoning process in the note-taking process (especially in methodological notes). Playing the role of the observer during the co-presented classes put both professors in the condition of comparing their own objective of the observation (one specific student's behaviour; the group discussion process; the impact of peer support, etc.). That process represented a highly formative step towards the accomplishment of an analysis of their most deeply held inner beliefs.

The monitoring actions, activated to sustain student group work, represented a collaborative effort for the two professors who maintained an interactive style and analysed each

other supporting strategies on three different levels: (1) communication (preferred/most used channel: short written comments; e-mails; oral interventions; (2) kind of feedback (task-level; process-level; self-regulation level; self/motivational level) [45]; (3) final assessment (negotiation and remodulation of criteria). The analysis of the methodological notes, taken during the monitoring process, highlights a focus, in both professors, on the colleague's supporting actions and the explication of reflections on the acquisition of a new professional awareness in terms of a variety of strategies to adopt (e.g. "I noticed that, at the beginning, I was mostly focussed on task-level feedback, but reading my colleague's comments made me reflect on the opportunity to balance my interventions in a different way"). In the discussion of this specific category the exchange that occurred between the professors after the students' interview was also relevant, whereby more than one respondent reported the change in the approach towards tasks due to the different supporting actions that the two professors offered jointly during the process. The triangulation of personal written notes with the data gathered thanks to the interviews made it possible to add a further level of reflection on the effectiveness of the multiple interactive styles adopted in co-teaching to support the students' learning paths, mainly in terms of motivation and commitment, results that integrate the analysis made during the first year of the experimentation [15].

6 Conclusions

Autoethnography applied to a co-teaching experience allowed all the involved actors (students and professors) to visualize a transformative direction in their academic identity and professional growth. Students had the chance to reflect on their attitudes, skills and motivation through their active engagement in the interdisciplinary group work and could also appreciate the collaborative dimension in terms of their professors' effort in designing and activating a joint workshop. The modelling effect was clearly addressed in students' responses to interviews, statements that appear aligned both with the first-year data [15] and the international research on the appraisals of collaborative teaching [31] while reporting a sense of comfortability in receiving support by two different professors with their own specificities and modalities. Moreover, students stressed that they felt more confident in asking for help and talking about their doubts when the two professors were co-present, a specification that makes the professors reflect on the balanced and successful results of the adoption of an interactive style in co-teaching.

A further mention needs to involve the role of the proper balance between the synchronous/asynchronous feedback flow for the development of supporting strategies by professors: the decision to use asynchronous communication tools (collaborative writing spaces) to integrate oral real-time interventions with written comments on students' work in progress was not only an additional scaffolding for students, but also an opportunity to modulate and integrate reciprocal feedback at the task, process and self levels [16] and this was possible thanks to a blended space-time of learning. The "blended" learning format has also been affected by an ongoing transformation due to emerging forms of collaborative teaching [46]; the presented joint workshop revealed its strengths in terms of the digital space as a supporting environment for students during the development of the process and as a reflective archive for professors with a source of rich written-based data (comments, suggestions, etc.).

All data were triangulated in a double connotation – that is, between the two professors and among the different sources in an iterative process that undoubtedly represented an additional potential for faculty development in terms of the adoption of research procedures [39] for researchers/professors that are used to different kinds of methodologies given the different epistemology of the disciplines and areas of application.

Co-teaching revealed a demanding and challenging format, both in terms of instructional design and implementation, but was highly rewarding in terms of the students' motivation, engagement and purpose-fostering approach in their growing identity as future educators. Autoethnography was a necessary quality step to enable the professors involved to apply a continuous reflection process and learn how to consider themselves as a primary data source in their professional growth.

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