

## THE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE OF COOPERATIVE ENGLISH TEACHING IN NTU

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### Abstract

Coteaching as a teaching theory and strategy was researched and put into practice by the authors of this article . A variety of means used to evaluate this coteaching project . The classroom observations , tests , questionnaires , interviews and other formative and sum mative evaluations reveal that the coteaching has not only promoted students language learning , critical thinking , cross cultural awareness and research competence , but also enhanced these coteachers professional development . Although coteaching is challenging and demanding for the teachers involved , we conclude that it should be encouraged .

### Key words

cooperative teaching ; language learning ; critical thinking ; cross cultural awareness ; professional growth

### 1 . Cooperative teaching

Cooperative teaching ( in this article it is shortened to coteaching ) first originated in the USA in the early 1970s . Coteaching is conceptualized as “ two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching some or all of the students assigned to a classroom . It involves the distribution of responsibility among people for planning , instruction and evaluations for a classroom of students . Another way of saying this is that coteaching is a fun way for students to learn from two or more people who may have different ways of thinking or teaching . Some people say that co teaching is a creative way to connect with and support others to help all children learn ” ( Villa , Thousand & Nevin 2004 : 2 ) . Others see co teaching as “ a way to make schools more effective , and an effective strategy that serves as a means of delivering instruction to students ” ( Erick , Ware , & Williams 2003 : 83 ) , or “ it offers many opportunities for enhancing student learning ” ( DiMeo , Merritt & Culatta 1998 : 287 ) . “ It creates a dynamic , high energy classroom situation that promotes increased learning for students and teachers . ” ( Friend & Cook 2003 : 30 ) . And the ideas are held dearly that “ it is a promising form of professional collaboration ” ( Morocco & Aguilar 2002 : 341 ) .

In China , research and practices in cooperative teaching began in the late 1980s and early 1990s . Educational scholars agree that coteaching has many positive effects on learning . Coteaching , with cooperative learning groups as its basic form , is regarded as an effective teaching technique which makes use of varied dynamic elements of teaching to promote student learning , and evaluates individuals on group performances and group achievements ( translated from Wang 1995 : 138 , 2001 : 7 , 2002 : 22 ) . Coteaching , as an original and practical teaching practice and strategy , not only enhances learning , but also develops students thinking skills , self respect , confidence , internal and external motivation and communicative competence ( Zhai 2004 : 286 ) . The purpose of coteaching is to optimize teaching practices and move students from passive learning to active learning ( translated from Wang 1995 : 29 ) . Coteaching is beneficial to originality cultivation ( Hu & Hu 2004 : 109 ) . Coteaching enhances student autonomous learning ( Li 2002 : 20 ; Zhang 2003 : 13 ) . English cooperative teaching helps to establish a student-centered learning style , enhance classroom learning and improve the students use of language .

Coteaching creates opportunities for good learners to help poor learners through varied group activities to make progress together ( Zhang 2003 7 ). However ,coteaching is challenging ,and makes many demands on coteachers ( Cai et al 2003 24 ).

## 2 . Research context

An action plan for a coteaching project was discussed at a VSO ( Voluntary Service Overseas )Ningxia Regional Workshop in August 2006 . Interest had previously been expressed in the idea of coteaching by some colleagues from Ningxia Teachers University ( NTU ). It was felt that this would be a good opportunity to try the experiment with a VSO volunteer . This is how our coteaching project was initiated .

This project was intended to provide more opportunities for student teacher contact and to bring together the strengths of two or more teachers with varied expertise to enhance students learning . The primary course objectives were to focus on student motivation ,critical thinking and autonomous learning and to look at evaluation theory and procedures . Improving student learning was to be given the highest priority . It was essential to maintain student interest throughout the project ,to ensure the educational value of the course and to ensure the smooth delivery of the project programme . The secondary objectives of the project were to optimize teaching practice and to improve the co teachers research competence .

To keep in line with our goals and objectives ,we confined our research questions to two primary ones :

- 1 ) How can we co teach effectively and make this a successful year for both teachers and students ?
- 2 ) To what degree does coteaching affect both preservice and inservice training ?

In the 2006 —2007 academic years in NTU ,three teachers voluntarily formed a collaborative teaching team to carry out this co teaching project through a culture course on “ The Societies and Cultures of Major English speaking Countries ” . The course was for six classes of third year English majors . Two of these classes were randomly chosen for coteaching . Like the other four classes ,they had a 2 hour lecture per week ,adding up to approximately 72 study hours and about 8 hours for examinations and other relevant business . Altogether ,there were over 150 hours of coteaching .

There were three teachers in the coteaching classes ,with three steps in each major or minor coteaching circulation :collaborative preparation ,coteaching and co evaluation . The textbook chapters were reorganized as seven main topics ,and the teachers collected supplementary materials for use in a variety of activities .

## 3 . Research methods and data analysis

Two of the three project members cotaught the class ,presenting the course content ,guiding activities in student groups ,and helping the students . In short ,they facilitated students learning in the same class at the same time ,while the third member observed each lesson ,taking notes of coteaching practices ,class activities ,interactions ,presentations and other class events . Coteaching and learning were assessed through tests ,students oral presentations and written reports ,classroom observations ,questionnaires ,interviews ,and other evaluation means .

### 3 .1 Coteaching practices

During the first ten weeks of this project ,the observer noted any observable signs of cooperation between the two coteachers .

At the beginning looked at and down . The following Table 1 is notes of the observations taken from selected classes .

It is seen from Table 1 that the in class cooperation between the coteachers increased . There was a progression from no cooperation to continual cooperation ,from shy to skilful ,from nervous ,inexperienced to calm ,and experienced . Table 1 obviously reveals a trace of the growth of cooperation between the coteachers . This growth mirrors their professional development .

Table 1 . Notes of the observations on the growth of cooperation in teaching

	Observable points of cooperation between W and Lin class	Comments
2nd coteaching	<p>One taught ,one observed ;            One taught class A ,the other ,class B ;            No observable cooperation in class at all ;            No request for ,no responses to students reaction ;            W and L were very nervous ,only focusing on teaching content .</p>	<p>a . There was no cooperation between the two teachers in class .            b . Their teaching was not a coteaching practice .</p>
3rd coteaching	<p>They shared teaching in classes A and B ,but taught different parts ,that is ,one teacher one task ;            Each taught different activities            No observable cooperation in class ;            No responses to the other co teacher s request ;            Co teachers were still nervous .</p>	<p>a . There was a sign of sharing teaching in class ,but it was a coteaching in real sense , since there was almost nothing different from a one teacher class , except one more teacher and one observer .</p>
4th coteaching	<p>Chinese teacher ignored foreign teacher s request ;            But by showing a picture ,gave her way to W ;            During his story telling ,she interrupted and reminded him of “the time ” ;            L gave a translation of “rebellion ” ;            L invited Bob again ;            W :Do you ( L ) need some Chinese explanation ? L confirmed that ;            L ( turning to W ) : “ welfare — am I right ? The spelling ?...            L :Now its for Bob .            in group works ,two teachers are getting around the class ;            More interaction ;            W and L held the idea box for ideas ,and more and more ideas come .</p>	<p>a . There was a big growth of coteaching .            b . There were more interactions either between two coteachers ,teachers and students , and students .</p>
6th coteaching	<p>Co teachers used some teaching strategies :some words you may not understand : e.g. stereotype , discrimination ,prejudice ,discrimination ;            — pre teach ,list ,explain ,to discuss ,ask sts ,use examples ;            Divide Sts into groups then instruction ;            Co teachers reminded Ss of time ,music during break , reminded of time again ,watched timer monitor of co-teaching ;            L getting around while W is explaining sth to one group ;            L interrupts again to give further explanation ;            Assignments explained by Lin Chinese ;            To form different ideas ;to be careful ,Change topic .</p>	<p>a . W and L identified problems and facilitated them by preteaching .            b . More cooperation between W and L .            c . Students are motivated to learn .            d . W and L worked as co-teachers ,colleagues ,and translator .            e . W was really careful in teaching different ideas .            f . They tried to motivated Ss .</p>

	Observable points of cooperation between W and Lin class	Comments
8th coteaching	<p>W voiced :page 164 ,L offered a hand ;  W and L negotiated how to teach next ;  W stood up and L went around ;  Use “ Time out several times ;  Helped each other to group and teach ;  One taught ,one organized ;  Students discussed and prepared and performed ;  L looked very nervous today .</p>	<p>a . W and L draw on each other s merits and raise the level together .  b . Students were shown dramatic change in preparation for presentation .  c . Why is L so nervous today ?  What s wrong with L ?  d . Two helpers in class ; 3 pairs of Big eyes ; observing , watching , monitoring .</p>
9th coteaching	<p>L served an assistant shows pictures with a computer ;  time out time :W and L were getting around ;  Time out :W was watching on L s dealing with errors ;  W and L took notes ,discussed ,observed ,asked for ideas from students ;  more involvement in teaching ,strong communication  L invites W to sum up .</p>	<p>a . How to deal with spoken errors ?  b . Native speakers are aware of spoken errors committed by students in class .  c . Co teachers are helpers , observers ,and adviser .  d . What are the biggest problems in co teaching ?</p>
Interview	<p>The observer checked with L after class on co teacher s feeling .  L :<u>Time</u> :on each coteaching class ,2 hrs on content ;2 hrs on material preparation with W ;0 .5 hr discuss with W on teaching approach before class ;0 .5 hr assess /evaluate on co teaching after class ;2 hrs in class co teaching . About 6 hours for each time .  <u>Challengings</u> :time pressures ,quantity of reading — background ;2 co teachers , a regular observer /visiting teacher ,and some other occasional visiting teachers in class ,at least there are 3 teachers in class every time :a native speaker /foreign teacher as a co-teacher ,a teaching supervisor as an observer . We tried do to improve the next time as soon as possible .  In terms of <u>Coteaching</u> ,two thing are important :persistence and Co teacher s interests  Co teaching focuses on professional teacher education /raining .</p>	
10th coteaching	<p>before class : W and L discussed about teaching processes ;  L :I d like invite W to give you some more information on this part . = take the opportunity of native speaker ;  L :something you don t understand ,ask me or W ;  W and L were getting around the class and offered help to individuals or groups ;  W explained cultural terms such as Saint George — English ,Saint Andrew — Scotland ,Lords Temporal : Life peers ,etc ;  Liu explained :antidisestablishmentarianism = anti + dis + establish + ment + arian +ism (fandui fenlie /i guojiao zhuyi) ;  Time -Out and Idea Box appeared several times in class .</p>	<p>a . L worked as interpreter when W or students looked puzzled .  b . Strong interactions in class .  c . Coteaching is natural and works well .</p>

	Observable points of cooperation between W and Lin class	Comments
10th coteaching	W :Excuse me ,would you please say it in English ? Qs from W :What is the idea of keeping fast ?Why do you fast ? What does the “ Moon ” on the top of the mosque mean ? Students speak in Chinese when they cant express themselves in English ; L interpreted when W or students looked puzzled ; While L gave back to some students ,W saw and asked ; Qs from students ;interactions among S L :W :S :W :L .	

### 3.2 Class activities and coteaching strategies

Classroom observation suggested that the coteachers both prepared the teaching materials and designed the class activities carefully . A variety of activities were used in class :group discussion , individual student reports ,group presentations ,lectures ,games ,and drama performances .Students were encouraged to work together to read materials ,clarify language points and ideas ,discuss topics ,brainstorm ideas and do small subject research . To motivate students to participate in activities ,the coteachers invented various ways to group students . The groups were between 4-6 students .

The following is a list of some frequently used teaching aids in class .

PowerPoint displays of photographs ,posters and works of art were introduced ,as well as movies and movie extracts dealing with the course themes .

Printed pictures or pictures on screen to show historical figures ,typical foreign clothes ,customs ,food ,architecture and many other things .

Show in kind ,such as real British ,American ,and European coins and notes ,together with Chinese coins and notes .

Music and songs were played for appreciation or to show the difference between eastern and western cultures .

Performances or mimes were vividly used to show concrete cultural related actions or manners .

A “ Time out ” sign was used for a pause of 2-3 minutes for students to seek clarification .

An “ Ideas Box ” was always available in class for students to post their comments ,in Chinese or in English and anonymously if preferred ,on course content ,organization and methodology .

### 3.3 Evaluations

A variety of formative and summative evaluation tools were used in this project to evaluate learning and coteaching effectiveness . The evaluation consisted of six main parts :1 )students presentations ;2 ) tests ;3 )students self assessment ,peer assessment and teacher s assessment ;4 )classroom observations ;5 )questionnaires and interviews ;6 )coteachers reflections and communications .

Students presentations in class were assessed . There were three parts to the presentation evaluation . Self assessment and peer assessment techniques were introduced as well as coteachers assessments . Individual contributions were assessed for evidence of language skills ,then group presentation skills were assessed ,and finally there was a peer evaluation component which consisted of a simple appraisal of each presentation by the rest of the class .

The final exam was a summative assessment . It was agreed that the test should consist of two main sections — one testing student knowledge and the other testing their ability to formulate a critical argument . In discussing the grading of this last part ,it was agreed that evidence of a critical thinking was of more importance than pure writing skills . This was in line with the learning objectives of the course . Table 2 is a comparison of the final exam scores from the coteaching classes and non coteaching classes .

Table 2 . The average final exams according to exam section

	I . A (30 points) Multiple choice	I . B (20 points) True or false	II . (30 points) Short answers	III . (20 points) Critical argument	Total scores average
Coteaching class A	21 .31	14 .64	23 .31	15 .20	74 .46
Coteaching class B	21 .47	16 .12	24 .93	15 .81	78 .32
Non coteaching Class C	24 .70	14 .73	20 .03	13 .45	72 .91
Non coteaching Class D	23 .22	15 .24	20 .24	12 .07	70 .77

The final exam results ,as well as those of the presentations ,show that the students in the co-teaching classes were more adept at expressing their ideas with convincing evidence ,reasonable logical organization and critical thinking . There was only a slight difference in language proficiency . Student critical thinking has been clearly presented in final test papers . However ,in the section testing knowledge and pure information recall ,the students in the coteaching classes scored lower than their peers . The students were given a questionnaire ,and their responses complied (see Table 3 ) . All the students from the co teaching classes agreed that the co teaching culture course exposed them to teaching , and they gained more insights into British culture and American culture . A large majority believed that the coteaching approach helped to develop their research awareness . 78 % students believed that the coteaching approach cultivated small subject research competence . 83 % students agreed that the course cultivated their cross cultured awareness . All the students believed that their critical thinking skills had been developed .

Table 3 . Evaluation on the cotaught culture course

Learning materials	Rich	Not rich	No com mends
	100 %	0 %	0 %
Research awareness	Cultivated	Not cultivated	No com mends
	83 %	10 %	8 %
Research competence	Developed	A little	Not developed
	78 %	12 %	10 %
Cross cultural awareness	Cultivated	A little	Not cultivated
	83 %	12 %	4 %
Critical thinking	Developed	A little	Not developed
	100 %	0 %	0 %

Classroom observations revealed evidence of full preparations for the coteaching ,carefully designed class activities ,high levels of student motivation and participation and increasing coteachers and students . The students in the coteaching classes were more active in class . Interviews with students provided very positive comments on coteaching and learning . The coteachers reflected that they were satisfied with their coteaching project .

### 3 .4 Students critical thinking ,cross cultural awareness and research competence

From the start ,the students were encouraged to express themselves freely and to think independently and critically . Both the foreign teacher and Chinese teacher expressed their ideas or opinions in class so that students felt released and tried to express themselves . On certain topics ,the co teachers ,both

foreign and Chinese ,showed different ,even opposite ideas or opinions . At first ,the students expressed their surprise to see that “ definite ” things could have another face ,but they gradually understood and began to present their own ideas to convince their classmates .

Take the mid term exam presentations as an example . Students were asked to form small groups and work together to produce a presentation based on one of the cultural themes covered in the first half of the course . The theme was allotted to each group on a random basis ,but students were encouraged to interpret it in their own way ,provided they did not stray too far from the topic . It was emphasized that the presentations should show evidence of research ,critical thinking and cross cultural awareness . They were advised that their presentations would be recorded on video and group and individual performances analysed in detail for assessment purposes . The specific evaluation criteria were explained in class by the teachers before work on the presentations began . As a result ,many students demonstrated great verve and creativity in their presentations as well as the ability to collaborate effectively with each other in the research ,structuring and delivery of their presentations .

Judging by the students performance and their comments during the course and in the end of course questionnaire ,as well as the comments of visiting teachers ,this coteaching project has been successful .

#### 4 . Conclusion

Some conclusions about a coteaching contexts can be drawn from the above outcomes : Full preparation is essential ; Computer based operation skills are important as well ; Variety of activities highly motivates students interest ; Prompt in class monitoring is necessary to ensure successful learning . These are fundamental elements for any effective or successful preservice and inservice training for English language teachers .

The findings indicate some implications for training : Classroom action research is a good method of professional development . Cooperative teaching should be encouraged for teaching and learning effectiveness . However ,coteaching is challenging for the teachers ,in terms of cooperation ,technology , cross cultural communication and worries about coteaching itself .

In short ,co teaching is a cooperative and collaborative process involving students and teachers with the objective of improving the quality of both student and teacher learning . For it to be successful it must be clear to everyone involved that learning is a dynamic ,interactive and continuing process .

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