Good practices in team teaching in Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong

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Abstract

Team teaching between native English speaking teachers and local L2 English teachers

has become an increasingly common phenomenon in schooling in the East Asia region.

The relevant literature reports some positive impacts of team teaching and also highlights

some of the challenges or conflicts which arise. The aim of this paper is to focus on

reporting and analysing good practices in intercultural team teaching.

I draw on interviews and classroom observations from three schemes in which native and

non-native speaking English teachers have worked together as part of efforts to improve

English language standards of school children. The three initiatives from which

qualitative data are drawn are: the Japan Exchange and Teaching programme (JET); the

English Program in Korea (EPIK); and the Primary NET scheme in Hong Kong (PNET).

The paper concludes by summarising some of the good practices discussed and proposing

some characteristics of successful team teaching.

1. Introduction

Team teaching between native English speaking teachers (NESTs) and L2 English

teachers has become a common feature of schooling in the East Asia region, first in Japan,

then in Korea and more recently in Hong Kong. Within such schemes, there is potential

for the complementarity of NEST and non-NEST skills to be exploited profitably. The

involvement of native-speakers is not unproblematic however. The spectre of linguistic

imperialism (Canagarajah, 1999; Phillipson, 1992), the perpetuation of Anglo-American

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interests (Pennycook, 1998) or the myth of the superiority of the native-speaker (Cook, 1999) risk casting an ideological cloud over the process of enhancing English language teaching and learning through involvement of NESTs. When unqualified or inexperienced teachers are imported, tensions can become exacerbated and local teachers may feel resentment at their well-paid but poorly prepared NEST counterparts.

Within East Asia, one such large-scale scheme, JET, (Japan exchange and teaching programme) operating since 1987, has involved more than 70,000 participants and is well-documented in the literature. The stated aims of JET are twofold, to enrich foreign (mainly English) language education and to promote 'internationalisation' (JET review committee, 2001). McConnell (2000), in his substantial account of the JET scheme, claims that team teaching between NESTs and non-NESTs has led to changes in English education in Japan through the promotion of conversational English and other communicative activities which would not normally have been attempted. Gorsuch (2002) found that a positive impact on Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) was identifiable, for example, in stretching their abilities to communicate in English. Tajino and Tajino (2000) argue that teaching partners should have distinctive roles in the classroom and what is important is team learning, whereby teachers as well as students are encouraged to be open-minded in learning from each other. They acknowledge that this was rarely the case and much of the literature reports challenges with unclear roles and lack of training or experience in collaborative forms of teaching being particular problems (Gorsuch, 2002; Mahoney, 2004).

Another parallel scheme, EPIK (English program in Korea) started in 1996 on a much smaller scale than JET and is not widely known outside of South Korea. The stated aims of EPIK are to improve the English speaking abilities of Korean students and teachers, to develop cultural exchanges and to reform English teaching methodologies (EPIK, 2004). Ahn, Park and Ono (1998) report 'cultural conflicts' between NESTs and Korean teachers. Choi (2001) suggests that although team teaching was intended to be a key notion in EPIK, it was not enforced widely so that unqualified NESTs had the difficulty of managing students alone in the classroom. Kwon (2000) places EPIK within a wider

policy context which encourages the development of communicative competence in English, but reaffirms the challenges of co-operation between NESTs and local L2 teachers. Carless (2004) describes some positive impacts of team teaching on students but notes some problems in the organisation and management of EPIK.

These two schemes share much in common, both employing largely inexperienced and untrained teachers and both encouraging team teaching between NESTs and non-NESTs. In Hong Kong, hiring processes are somewhat different and native-English speaking teacher (NET) schemes only employ trained and experienced language teachers. In view of this trained status, Hong Kong NESTs have generally been deployed as solo teachers in secondary schools with varying degrees of success (Boyle, 1997; Storey et al., 2001). For example, Luk (2001) reports a generally positive response from students, whilst in a later paper Luk (2005) demonstrates how the lack of knowledge of the mother tongue can disadvantage the NEST in the communicative classroom. Storey et al., (2001) reported some instances of team teaching in secondary schools between NESTs and local teachers in order to tackle specific problems, such as low student motivation and discipline problems, often exacerbated by communication problems between NESTs and students. From September 2000 onwards, NESTs have carried out team teaching in primary schools, firstly in a two year pilot scheme and then in a full scale primary native-speaking English teacher (PNET) program. The main aims of PNET are threefold: to provide primary pupils with an authentic environment to learn English and develop their confidence in using English for communication; to develop innovative teaching and learning methods; and to promote the professional development of L2 English Teachers (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2004). To date, there appears to be better progress towards the first aim, rather than the second and third (Carless, 2006).

Meerman (2003), investigating the JET scheme, argues that the sharing and documenting of experiences are important for the long-term refinement of team teaching. Whilst the literature, referred to above and explored further later in the paper, reveals mainly mixed experiences of team teaching, insightful reports of classroom experience of team teaching

are relatively thin on the ground. JET is the most thoroughly documented of the three schemes under discussion, with a number of papers using survey methodologies (e.g. Browne & Wada, 1998; Gorsuch 2002; Meerman, 2003; Mahoney, 2004) which permit a useful broad picture of views, but there is dearth of refereed articles examining what goes on in the classroom or enabling the voices of co-teachers to feature prominently.

This paper draws on data from a wider study of NEST schemes in Japan, South Korea and Hong Kong which involved e-mail or face to face interviews with 67 participants, supplemented by classroom observations and video recording. The comparative element of examining views and practices across different contexts can contribute useful insights. Experiences in one context may be used to inform those elsewhere so that mistakes are less likely to be repeated and that successful strategies can be disseminated, reflected upon and adapted for another context. The paper focuses specifically on good practices in team teaching. Its main aim is to analyse some of the characteristics of successful collaboration between NESTs and non-NESTs from different cultures in the three schemes under discussion. It is intended that the reporting of positive team teaching experiences can serve as a springboard for enhanced understanding of team teaching and contribute to the further development of practice.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Firstly, using relevant literature, I develop a framework for the practice of team teaching between native and non-native English teachers from different cultures. Then I discuss three cases of good practice, one from each of the three contexts under discussion. Notwithstanding the limitations of generalising from a small sample of cases, the conclusions propose for consideration some principles of effective team teaching.

2. Team teaching between NESTs and non-NESTs

A useful definition of team teaching is that used in the documentation to support the JET scheme: "Any time two or more teachers work together to guide an individual learner or a group of learners toward a set of aims or objectives, that type of teaching can be called

team teaching", (Japanese Ministry of Education, Science, Sports and Culture, 1994, p.14). A motivation for the deployment of two teachers might be some dissimilarity between the partners in abilities or attributes so that they can complement each other. For partnerships between NESTs and non-NESTs, their strengths and weaknesses may be largely complementary (Medgyes, 1992, 1994). NESTs may facilitate wider student communication through English rather than reversion to the mother tongue, can be used as a cultural resource and may play a part in enhancing student motivation to learn and use English. The L2 teachers know well their students' needs and common difficulties, are familiar with local syllabi, textbooks and examinations, and know what it is like to learn English as a second or foreign language. The trained non-NEST may have the pedagogical knowledge to harness an untrained NEST or conversely the NEST English language proficiency may sometimes support a non-NEST with limitations in English.

Nunan (1992) argues that collaborative language teaching can only hope to succeed under three conditions: if teachers possess or are supported to develop appropriate skills; they have the time to implement team teaching; and they receive appropriate administrative or managerial support. The analysis below indicates that these conditions were only present to some extent in the schemes under discussion.

Clearly, part of the rationale for team teaching is that partners should complement each other as outlined above. How might this complementarity be achieved? What roles are expected of each partner? There is little guidance on these issues in EPIK or in PNET, but Wada, one of the main architects of JET suggests that the NEST should be actively involved in communication and interaction with students and that the JTE can explain facts about the English language and answer learners' questions (Wada, 1994). Nearly two decades of JET practice, however, have revealed considerable difficulties in achieving suitable roles for team teachers. For example, Tajino and Tajino (2000) note some anxiety among JTEs and some confusion among both NESTs and L2 teachers about their respective roles in the classroom. Crooks (2001) discusses the need for co-training of NESTs and JTEs. Turning to the Korean context, Choi (2001), using a questionnaire survey of 20 EPIK teachers, reported that the untrained and inexperienced NESTs

requested more support and professional guidance, but in view of the organisational challenges faced by the scheme, these were rarely forthcoming.

One feature of the team teaching in the three schemes under discussion is that participants are essentially obliged to carry out some form of team teaching and have little or no choice as to who their partner might be. Many teachers, however, prefer to work on their own in the privacy of their classroom. For example, in Slovenia, NESTs were deployed as language teaching assistants and although the project was premissed on team teaching, most NESTs preferred the flexibility afforded by solo teaching (Alderson et al., 2001). When unenthusiastic partners are forced to teach together, problems are likely to arise. Cultural clashes between NESTs and non-NESTs were reported in Korea (Kwon, 2000) with a particular problem being when NESTs were perceived to be lacking sufficient respect for well-established Korean practices.

For team teaching to be effectively implemented, planning carefully and designating suitable roles would seem to be crucial. Moote (2003), in an interview study with a small sample of JTEs and NESTs, found that communication problems and a clash of teaching styles were two common challenges for intercultural team teaching. He also found that JTEs disliked the extra effort involved in planning team taught lessons, particularly in cases where a co-planning period was not built in to school administrative structures. Both NESTs and JTEs also mentioned that lack of ability in each other's native languages was a further barrier to planning. In view of school teachers' heavy workloads, it is often hard for them to find time for planning, and this may be a disadvantage of team teaching. The need for detailed planning can, of course, be circumvented if either partner dominates the lesson with their counterpart as spectator, disciplinarian or human tape recorder, but in that case the presence of two teachers is not being exploited and is arguably a waste of resources.

A team taught lesson is likely to have more impact on students if it is integrated with regular teaching rather than being a one-off performance. McConnell (2000) notes that there is little carry over from oral communicative team taught activities to other

individual JTE-taught English lessons. One of Moote's (2003) respondents took this further, seeing his role as pointless since he viewed the main goal of English classes in Japan as to prepare students for grammar and reading-based high school or university entrance exams. Similarly, Choi (2001) reports an EPIK participant stating that "because there is no exam [related to the conversational lesson], there is no reason for students to concentrate, so it is a struggle to catch their attention". Problematic is the failure to establish continuity between the different teaching approaches practiced in team taught and regular lessons. Team taught classes are clearly hamstrung if they lack integration into wider curriculum and assessment processes.

My synthesis of the above discussion is that despite its potential advantages intercultural team teaching is challenging because it requires a lot of enabling features. I divide these factors into pedagogic, logistical and interpersonal aspects. The pedagogic ones are training and experience with relevant general ELT approaches, more specific skills in the practice of team teaching and an ability to devise appropriate classroom roles, particularly those which would showcase the respective skills of partners. The logistical ones include at the micro school level, time available for planning and preparation, and associated support from administrators. In terms of macro-level logistics, for the potential of team teaching to be maximised there needs to be integration with system-wide curriculum and assessment priorities. The interpersonal factors include the ability to cooperate with partners, allied to sensitivity towards their viewpoints and practices, particularly when differences emerge.

3. Cases of good practice

To permit a fuller discussion of some of the potential for effective intercultural team teaching, I now discuss three cases of good practice, one from Japan, one from Korea and one from Hong Kong which seemed to represent the most successful experiences identifiable in my data set. The basis for identifying good practices derive from the framework outlined above. In terms of pedagogic aspects, there should be some evidence of positive student response being facilitated by the teamwork of the two teachers. With

respect to logistical issues, there should be evidence of team strategies to tackle or circumvent the inevitable logistical challenges which occur. In relation to interpersonal issues there should be some willingness to compromise and put team goals ahead of individual ones. Identifying these characteristics obviously involves me using a degree of professional judgement. To assist the reader in forming their own viewpoints, quotations are used freely to highlight participants' perspectives and as much detail as possible is provided within the constraints of a journal-length article.

The first case concerns Josh, a trained elementary school teacher from North America, holding a TEFL certificate and a Master degree in Applied Linguistics. Josh also has 14 years of experience teaching in Japan at various levels. Josh is employed in Nagoya as a 'municipal NEST', a spin-off of the JET scheme catering for a demand for trained NESTs with local experience, employed directly by local governments rather than imported through JET (Tope, 2003; Wada, 2002).

During a field visit to his school in Nagoya, it was evident that Josh is very positively oriented to Japan and is highly acculturated to Japanese language and culture. Noticeable was his obvious enthusiasm in taking part in the rituals of Japanese school life, his love of the food, his mimicking of the intonation patterns and expressions of his colleagues. He outlines the impact of his speaking Japanese as follows:

So much of what I do and what I have achieved as an Assistant English Teacher seems to revolve around my ability to communicate in Japanese. Being asked to give speeches to students, making presentations for Parent Teacher Association meetings, participation in extra-curricular functions, these are only available because of communication in Japanese. I am tempted to speculate that NESTs without ability in the local language are marginalised to a great extent.

Josh also perceives that his ability in Japanese is useful in the classroom. He notes how in the team teaching situation, JTEs would identify more with their students than their teaching partners and in his own words, "ability in Japanese allowed me to gain insights into the community of JTEs and students". His fluency in Japanese also facilitates the development of relationships with co-teachers, "the relationship I establish with a JTE both in and outside the classroom seems absolutely vital to engendering more positive attitudes toward the target language and culture". After interviewing his main team teaching partner, it was also clear that she holds Josh in high esteem and is herself highly experienced in team teaching having already partnered 10 NESTs. She has generally got on well with these partners except for one or two who seemed "not positively oriented or sensitive towards the students, for example talking too fast and not modifying speech or content to the level of the students".

From their team-taught class I observed in Nagoya, I noted the positive reactions of the students towards Josh and the lesson. The two teachers interacted easily in both Japanese and English, with the focus shifting naturally from one partner to the other. The presence of two teachers was useful in allowing them to model dialogues, demonstrate question and answer routines naturally, and in providing additional support to students during seatwork. I interpreted the lesson as involving appropriate social norms i.e. use of Japanese, but also opportunity for hearing and using English. By following the social norms of Japanese schools, Josh becomes accepted by that community, and this in turn carries the potential to facilitate positive attitudes towards English language and non-Japanese culture.

Josh outlines what he sees as one of the essentials of team teaching:

During the first couple of years, I floundered at times until I realised that one of the keys in team teaching is getting local teachers to interact with me in front of students so as to use English publicly.

Two key issues here are firstly improvement over time, with Josh reflecting on his early experiences and then working out how to develop further, and secondly, the usefulness of students seeing their teachers negotiate or communicate in English, with a potentially powerful message that English is a tool for communication not just a means of passing examinations.

I turn now to a team teaching experience from Gangwon province in the North East of South Korea which seemed to represent good practice in collaboration between a Canadian EPIK teacher (Lewis) and a Korean counterpart (Kim). Lewis is not formally trained but conveys considerable professional commitment, or as he puts it, "teaching is vital to me and I'm always happy to discuss it".

The two teachers reported that they met once per week to plan the next week's lesson, taking it in turns to bring suitable materials and trying to integrate the materials with the students' regular English lessons, taught solely by Kim. Lewis described their preparation as follows:

Once one or the other of us comes up with some suitable material to work with, it's quite easy to rough out a plan for a 45 minute lesson, leaving some room for spontaneity. We do teach the same lesson to several classes, so we have the chance to fine-tune procedures a bit.

The partnership between Lewis and Kim is well-regarded by local professionals and administrators, and as a result they were chosen to carry out a demonstration lesson for others to observe and learn from. The video I received of this lesson illustrated an oral-based communicative lesson with both partners sharing the teacher's role equally and the focus moving from one partner to the other at different stages of the lesson. Group work was carried out, with students making a story based on a sequence of pictures. Lewis and Kim circulated around the groups encouraging or supporting the students and both reminded students "no Korean" to push them to try to communicate through the target language. Lewis stated, "Kim is exceptional, perhaps the only Korean teacher in this province who strives to teach English entirely in English". The groups then read chorally the stories that they had constructed. Lewis comments as follows:

I was sceptical about the value of choral responses at first but have since become an advocate. We deal with a wide range of abilities in each class and this seems to be one effective way to get some involvement from lower-level students. They have to pay attention and they can speak without feeling in the spotlight.

Here Lewis shows evidence of being sufficiently open-minded to learn to appreciate the value of choral-speaking or choral-repetition which is probably more common in Asian than Western contexts.

In an e-mail dialogue with me, Kim discussed their interactive classroom roles as follows:

We try to share the teacher's role equally in class. For example, Lewis gives one instruction then I give another instruction. Sometimes I repeat Lewis' speaking again when my students don't understand because I recognise what parts my students don't understand and they understand my English better. I don't speak Korean at all in team teaching classes.

Lewis thought that she sometimes unnecessarily repeated his instructions because she was dubious about whether the students could catch his meaning fully, but "if she feels she needs to clarify, I won't disillusion her. Too much else is working well to quibble the point". I interpreted this as illustrative of the kind of interpersonal sensitivities which may ease the path of team teaching.

Lewis also emphasises the partnership nature of the team teaching situation:

Both teachers should know what each other is doing and must use the same routines with the children. We often discuss what we think should be done about seating arrangements and organising the class. We work quite closely together so we have to have a good rapport.

Kim stated three main advantages of NEST/non-NEST team-teaching:

• Korean teachers know their students' standard so can support the EPIK teacher in preparing suitable materials;

- The Korean teacher can further develop her teaching methods and improve her English communications skills;
- The presence of the Korean teacher can help to maintain discipline and encourage the students to take the EPIK lesson seriously.

On the basis of her 6 years experience as an EPIK co-teacher, she also emphasised the need for continuity of personnel in that she was able to learn from her earlier less successful experiences with team teaching and develop an enhanced understanding of how to co-operate productively with EPIK counterparts. Similarly to Josh's case in Nagoya, the importance of relationships inside and outside the classroom was also prominent as Lewis indicates "in this province it is part of the Korean co-teacher's job description to help engender a happy off-work situation for the visiting foreigner and as a result real friendships do occur".

Lewis and Kim were able to achieve a positive working partnership. By working together over a sustained period of time, they got to know each other, became familiar with each other's preferred teaching strategies and built up a productive professional and personal relationship.

Turning now to a Hong Kong case, Tim is a trained and experienced ESL teacher from New Zealand. He was involved in collaboration with sixteen teachers across two year levels, Primary 3 (Year 3) and Primary 5 (Year 5). His perception was that collaboration was working very well with seven of these teachers, quite well with another seven teachers and not well with two teachers who he characterised as "older, very strict in the classroom and less confident in English". For team planning at a macro level, meetings were scheduled about once every 5 weeks. A common strategy in these meetings was for the L2 English teachers to state the problematic parts of the textbook and for Tim to suggest how the textbook might be adapted or to volunteer to teach that part. The L2 English teachers normally taught seven or eight (out of nine) English lessons of the week on their own and as Tim was only involved in one or two lessons per week with each teacher, he usually was the dominant teaching partner when he was present. He argued that there was not enough time to plan individual lessons together so it was easier for him

to take the lead role. He did like it, however, if the teachers joined in the lesson in some way, for example, through supporting the pupils or helping with activities, such as group work. In one of the lessons I observed, the local teacher adopted a strategy of focusing her involvement specifically on supporting the four weakest pupils in the class. This seemed a useful strategy in exploiting the presence of two teachers in the classroom.

The student response in Tim's school seemed generally positive. A co-teaching colleague reported that "students are more talkative when he is there and they are developing positive attitudes through games and activities". It was noticeable that students liked to greet Tim, they wanted to talk to him and there was considerable interest in his lessons. One of the lessons I observed indicated particularly high levels of motivation. Students had constructed very attractive mini-cities with model buildings, banks, schools etc. This served as a backdrop for the use of prepositions to locate the buildings in the mini-cities and more open-ended expression about their favourite buildings.

Tim was very much aware that collaboration with him placed some pressure on the L2 English teachers and increased their workload, so his interactions with local colleagues were based on open-mindedness and flexibility. The English co-ordinator expressed the view that teachers liked working with Tim because he brought fresh ideas and new teaching strategies. She also praised his knowledge of language acquisition theories and strategies, and this exemplified the respect he enjoyed in the school. Tim pointed out that teachers were often keen to practise speaking to him in English, just before they sit for a high-stakes oral examination which teachers need to pass.

The main impact for Tim of his collaboration with L2 English teachers was finding out more about the local educational culture. As Tim explained, "They advise me on things that won't work and what things you are not allowed to do". He appreciated the time they took in "looking after him". Tim did however, find a few things frustrating, for example, the over-emphasis on testing and marking without feeding results back into the learning process; and the reluctance to deviate from the textbook. One of the strategies he used to maintain good relations with colleagues was to accept these elements as part of the Hong Kong educational culture. He believed that it was important not to be too frank or critical

of local teachers' beliefs or to risk causing them to lose face by correcting any English errors that they might make.

In summary, the three cases have illustrated elements of what I interpreted as successful team teaching. All three NESTs evidenced sensitivity to the feelings of their local counterparts and in turn seemed to be welcomed and supported by them. The NESTs placed a premium on the ability to fit in well and respect local culture or practices. They did seem to be having positive effects on student learning and motivation, although a key question that the data are unable to address is the extent to which the team teaching is leading to improved student language performance. The NESTs also prompted the L2 teachers to communicate more in English and to consider different ways of teaching. The three NESTs also had particular individual characteristics and priorities. For example, Josh was engaging particularly actively with Japanese to facilitate his role in the school. Lewis was building from experience his own conception of effective team teaching. Tim was showing a certain amount of leadership in textbook adaptation and teaching strategies.

4. Conclusion

Team teaching between NESTs and non-NESTs carries the potential to draw on the complementary abilities of participants. The literature reviewed in the earlier part of the paper has, however, exemplified some of the difficulties of this form of intercultural team teaching. These challenges are not altogether surprising when one considers various salient factors: NESTs in JET and EPIK largely lacked ELT training and experience; partners had different backgrounds and native languages with NESTs often being unfamiliar with the host culture or language; there was not always sufficient training or support for participants related to team teaching; there was little or no flexibility as to whether to participate in team teaching or in choosing partners; and team teaching was often not integrated effectively with the rest of the curriculum.

Three cases of good practice have been reported as a counterpoint to these challenges. Some of the positive outcomes of these collaborations are summarised below. Firstly, the student response to team teaching was largely reported to be positive, in terms of lively and enjoyable lessons, students having more opportunities to listen to and speak in English and cultural exposure to different nationalities. Secondly, the presence of two teachers in the classroom can allow co-teachers to provide more support for students and thereby group work becomes more practical. This can be particularly useful when classes are large or when there is a wide variety of abilities within a class. A third reported advantage was that co-teachers can demonstrate dialogues or question and answer routines. Fourthly, the two teachers can play to their strengths; as indicated earlier, the NEST in terms of English pronunciation, fluency or cultural knowledge, the non-NEST in terms of knowing the students' background, mother tongue and common difficulties as well as familiarity with syllabi and examination systems.

The suggested implications from the cases are that intercultural team teaching seemed to be most successful under the following conditions:

- Sensitivity and goodwill of participants;
- The development of relationships inside and outside the classroom;
- Willingness to let minor points of tension subside for the sake of maintaining harmonious relationships;
- Either some degree of shared philosophy or a willingness to compromise or make sacrifices;
- NESTs exhibiting a respect for, or acquiescence in, culturally well-established classroom practices even when holding different views;
- Continuity of personnel over time, which could be manifested either by a pair being given the time to develop a productive relationship or the practice of team teaching with multiple partners over time.

With respect to the framework for team teaching presented earlier, it is interesting that these conditions are grouped mainly within the interpersonal dimension. Whilst not discounting the importance of pedagogical and logistical issues, my concluding proposition is thus that the success of intercultural team teaching may rest, to a significant extent, on the interpersonal sensitivities of participants.

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