

## Collaboration between Native and Non-native English-Speaking Teachers

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**Abstract:** This study is designed to be an empirical study of the nature of the collaboration between three NESTs and three Taiwanese teachers of English (TTEs), who are NNESTs, in elementary schools in Taiwan. The aim of this study is threefold: (a) to explore the nature of collaborative teaching by NESTs and TTEs, (b) to look into the support structures that I might have been developed during the collaboration between NESTs and TTEs, and (c) to gain insights into the experiences of NESTs and TTEs in connection with collaborative teaching in elementary school classrooms. The author wishes to build up knowledge of the practice of collaborative teaching by NESTs and NNESTs and accordingly to make viable suggestions on improving collaborative teaching of this kind.

**Key words:** Collaborative-teaching; Native English-speaking teachers (NESTs); Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Including native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) in school systems has become a prevalent practice in some Asian countries, for instance, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program and the English Program in Korea (EPIK). Since 1987, the Japanese government has recruited native speakers of English as teaching assistants through the JET Program in order to improve English language education at the junior and senior high school levels in Japan. Likewise, EPIK, sponsored by the Korean government, was established in 1995 "to improve the English speaking abilities of Korean students and teachers, to develop cultural exchanges, and to reform teaching methodologies in English". In Taiwan, NESTs have been recruited by local governments through non-state education agencies since 2001. According to the guidelines posted on the website of the Ministry of Education (MOE) (2003), NESTs are defined as teachers who are native speakers of English-speaking countries, four-year college graduates, and have a teaching license for elementary schools or language arts. As of 2005, ten cities/prefectures in Taiwan have implemented NEST programs, i.e., including NESTs in elementary school English classrooms. As the

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inclusion of NESTs in school systems seems to prevail in some Asian countries, it is of interest to look into issues concerning the inclusion of NESTs in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, such as collaborative teaching by NESTs and local English teachers who are non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs).

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In the field of education, collaborative teaching has been used as a tool in the classroom to promote the learning of students such as special education students and ESL (English as a Second Language) students. According to Robinson and Schaible (1995), collaborative teaching refers to two teachers working together in designing and teaching a course that uses group learning techniques. In other words, in a collaborative teaching situation, team teachers do not teach the material by monologue, but by exchanging and discussing ideas in front of the learners and using group learning techniques such as pair/small-group work and student-led discussion to promote students' learning. In Taiwan, the term, *collaborative teaching* or *team teaching*, seems connected primarily to English instruction by NESTs and TTEs at the elementary level as the method of collaborative teaching does not generally exist at any other levels in Taiwan. As stated in the guidelines posted on the MOE website (2003), NESTs employed in the school system are to work with TTEs as an English team at the school and to support the research and development of English teaching methods and materials.

Like many teaching models, the practice of collaborative teaching is not without its challenges. Welch and Sheridan (1995) have found that teachers need to tackle these four challenges when attempting to work together, conceptual, pragmatic, attitudinal and professional barriers. To meet the challenges of collaborative teaching, Robinson and Schaible (1995) provide a rather comprehensive list of guidelines for modeling collaborative teaching at the college level such as looking for a team teacher with a healthy psyche, choosing materials that speak to one another, discussing teaching philosophy and methods and reviewing criteria for grading, to name but a few. Nevertheless, it is debatable whether their suggestions can be applied to the practice of collaborative teaching in elementary school classrooms where team teachers come from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, e.g. NESTs and NNESTs

A few studies about collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs have been conducted. For instance, Oliveira and Richardson (2001) detail their own lasting collaborative relationship, and discuss the benefits attained by collaboration between native and non native English-speaking educators. Likewise, a study by Matsuda and Matsuda (2001) demonstrates the possibility of facilitating autonomy and a collaborative relationship among native and nonnative English-speaking teachers through journal sharing. Yet, very few studies have been published about collaborative teaching of English by NESTs and NNESTs, let alone classroom-based research on the nature of teaching practice of this kind. In the short line of research on collaborative teaching by NESTs and NNESTs in the school system, Sturman (1992) conducts a case study of a cooperative project between the British Council Cambridge English School (CES) and a local Board of Education in Japan. In this project, qualified and experienced teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) from CES worked with Japanese teachers of English to team teach junior high school students. Sturman's study indicates that the teacher participants developed a successful approach to working together throughout the project and students' reaction was positive. As well, a study by Tajino and Tajino (2000) reviews team teaching practice in Japanese secondary EFL classrooms and explores how a NEST and a NNEST with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can work collaboratively to facilitate students' language learning.

Among the very few studies of collaborative teaching by NESTs and NNESTs, most of them have been conducted concerning the JET Program. For instance, Crooks (2001) examines the role of professional development in the JET Program. He describes in detail an in-service training system, including lectures, seminars, and workshops, for native English-speaking assistant language teachers (ALTs) and Japanese teachers of English (JTEs) working together in the JET Program. In comparison, Kachi and Lee (2001) investigate the team teaching experiences of JTEs and ALTs in the JET program. They have found that the biggest problem for JTEs and ALTs in team teaching is the lack of channels to access the upper educational

administration, and they suggest pre-service and on-going in-service training at different levels. For years, the JET program has been existent in Japanese high schools; but academic research has revealed some of the program's shortfalls such as lack of training, institutional conflicts, and the uncertain roles of team teachers.

To sum up, previous studies have suggested the strengths and challenges of collaborative teaching by NESTs and NNESTs. Yet, very little classroom-based empirical evidence has illuminated the nature of teaching practice of this kind. As collaborative teaching of English by NESTs and NNESTs in the school system is a rather new practice in Taiwan, empirical research focused on collaborative teaching performed by these two groups of teachers, especially in elementary schools, is scarce. More classroom-based studies are called for in order to bring to light the nature of collaborative teaching as well as team teachers' perceptions of the practice of collaboration in elementary school EFL classrooms.

### **3. THE STUDY**

#### **3.1 Participant Selection**

Six EFL teachers, i.e., three TTEs, Ho, Lin, and Su, who are NNESTs, and three NESTs, Ben, Kim, and Steve, were included in this study (These are pseudonyms assigned by the researcher). At the time of the study, the teachers were teaching in two elementary schools in a city located in the northern part of Taiwan. Ho and Steve were team teachers in one elementary school. Su, Lin, Ben and Kim taught in the other one, where Su co-taught with Ben, and Lin taught with both Ben and Kim. The NESTs were not teachers of ESOL, but all were qualified and licensed teachers of either the elementary or secondary level. Except for Ho, none of the teachers had previous experience of collaborative teaching of EFL in elementary schools.

#### **3.2 Data Collection**

In addition to documentary analysis of previous research, two kinds of instruments are employed to solicit empirical data: interviewing and non-participant observation in classrooms. The data collection includes: (a) transcriptions from tape-recorded interviews with the participants during the study; and (b) observation notes taken in classrooms.

#### **3.3 Research Procedures**

As mentioned above, interviews and non-participant observations were carried out to solicit data. Interviews with the teacher participants were conducted in two forms: stimulated recall and semi-structured interviews. Stimulated recall interviews included individual and focus group interviews, which looked at issues related to the teachers' experiences and perceptions of collaborative teaching. As well, interview questions were initiated from classroom observations without identifying the source of the questions. Each participant had two individual interviews, and also participated in one focus group interview with their colleagues. Two separate focus groups were identified: TTEs and NESTs. Semi-structured interviews with each participant took place after each classroom observation so as to clarify certain issues and phenomena that appeared in the classroom. Interviews were conducted in English or Chinese by the participants' choice. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed later.

In addition, the researcher conducted a formal non-participant observation once every month for one period of class in the participants' classrooms. The focus of observation was on the nature of collaborative teaching by the teachers and the support structures that might have been present between them. Observations were carried out in the classroom where the teachers co-taught with their team teachers, namely, Ho with Steve, Su with Ben, and Lin with Kim. There were five observations in each pair of teachers' classroom, for a total of 15 classroom observations. Field notes were taken during observation and analyzed in combination with interview data gathered from the teacher participants.

### 3.4 Nature of Collaboration between NESTs and TTEs

According to the MOE guidelines mentioned above, NESTs are to work with TTEs at the school and support the development of teaching materials. Yet, in reality, the NESTs took sole responsibility for lesson planning, and it appears that the NESTs assumed a leading role regarding teaching in the classroom as well. In the interviews, all the NESTs commented that they were responsible for planning lessons, and it was up to the head teacher to pass them on to their co-teachers. By the NESTs' definition, co-teachers include TTEs and homeroom teachers who were not English teachers but in whose classrooms the NESTs came to teach. According to the job contract, the NESTs were required to write all the lessons for their classes in which they would co-teach with either a TTE or a homeroom teacher. At Ben's school, for instance, the NESTs and TTEs would have a preparation meeting once a week during which they could share ideas about how to carry out lessons for that week. Routinely, the procedure of lesson preparation was that the NEST wrote lesson plans by him/herself, and then before each class the NEST and the TTE would briefly discuss the lesson and activities to be carried out. Normally, it took five to ten minutes to go through the lesson before class, and this was the time when the TTE provided input to the lesson plan. In the case of teaching in the presence of a homeroom teacher, there was almost no lesson briefing in any form before class. Notwithstanding the job requirement, all the NESTs unanimously mentioned that it would have been better if they could have planned lessons together with their co-teachers.

However, it seems impractical for the NESTs to plan lessons with their co-teachers. As Ben commented in his second interview, "The problem is that the NESTs had many different co-teachers. It takes maybe a few hours to plan lessons. When are we going to meet and sit down together and go through it? It is not very practical."

With respect to teaching in the classroom, contrasted with collaborative teaching defined by Robinson and Schaible (1995), it is found that the NESTs took the leadership role, while the TTEs performed as teaching assistants. One of the TTEs, Lin, remarked in her first interview on how she *collaboratively* taught with the NESTs. She said that NESTs were to lead the class, and according to the rules, she was not allowed to get involved in English teaching directly in the class. She also mentioned that in the class she was to assist the NEST with respect to linguistic support. Therefore, she interpreted for the NEST whatever was necessary in the class and worked like an interpreter. According to the field notes taken in Lm's classes, a very common teaching episode was: the NEST gave the lesson, and she either stood far aside and watched or walked around the classroom and helped to discipline students. Classroom observations in other teachers' classes also show that the NESTs actually took charge of teaching. There were times that the essence of collaborative teaching could be minimally captured, i.e., when the teachers demonstrated how to play a game or acted out a dialogue together. For instance, in the classes of Ho and Steve, the researcher observed that teaching activities were initiated and led by Steve. Only when playing games or demonstrating activities did both Ho and Steve collaborate with each other. Similarly, collaboration of this kind was observed in the classes of Su and Ben.

#### **Collaborative dynamics: primarily present during the class time**

Another aspect of collaboration between the NESTs and TTEs is that interactive dynamics of collaboration were primarily present during the class time. One NEST, Steve, commented that because his Taiwanese co-teacher, who was very busy and couldn't leave her homeroom, they usually had a meeting in the classroom for ten or fifteen minutes so that they could go over the lesson before the class. Steve's accounts suggest that collaborative dynamics was mainly existent during the class time. The only times Steve and his co-teacher met apart from the class time was when they briefly went through lessons together as the lessons were designed by him alone. Furthermore, another NEST, Kim, replied emphatically in her first interview that "outside the classroom (beyond the class time) there was no collaboration" between her and her co-teacher, Lin. It seems that collaborative teaching was a practice exclusive to the English classroom. Beyond the class time, there was no, or very little if any, collaboration between the NESTs and TTEs, except for meeting in the classroom or office and going over lesson plans before the class.

The above discussion indicates that the NESTs took the leadership role as opposed to their non-native counterparts with regard to lesson planning and teaching in the classroom when *ideally* both NESTs and NNESTs were supposed to work together. While the NESTs took charge of classroom teaching, the

dynamics between the NESTs and NNESTs were primarily existent during the class time and exclusive to the English classroom.

### **3.5 Support between Teachers: Linguistic Assistance, Classroom Discipline, and Cultural Understanding**

Teaching episode 1: after Steve introduced a new activity, Ho translated what was said into Chinese so as to make sure that the students understood.

Teaching episode 2: Ben gave a lesson, and Su walked around the class to ensure the students participated and maintained classroom discipline.

Both teaching episodes 1 and 2 were common in the collaborative teaching classes by the NESTs and TTEs. It appears that support structures of collaboration between the teachers were mostly constructed with regards to management of students, translation of instruction, arrangement of teaching props and demonstration. Interview data from the NESTs also indicate that the kinds of support the NESTs mainly received from their Taiwanese counterparts included "discipline, translation, explaining how to play games, and helping to record points for teams"

In addition to the support mentioned above, Steve acknowledged that his Taiwanese co-teacher actually helped him work with the students. He commented that his co-teacher would give him suggestions on activity design and help him to get a grip on the students' English ability and develop appropriate approaches. Evidently, the TTEs were more knowledgeable about students' learning styles and therefore how to motivate students. Data from interviews with the TTEs suggest that they were aware of this *expertise* that they could contribute to collaborative teaching. As Su commented, she believed that "Taiwanese teachers had a better understanding of students' learning styles, which are different from that of western students" and would remind her co-teacher when he was not aware of the difference or used a teaching approach that was beyond the students' current level. The remarks by Steve and Su manifest one kind of support rendered by the TTEs that could not be overlooked, i.e., to help the NESTs gain an insight into students' learning, and suggest a cultural aspect regarding support structures between the NESTs and TTEs. In spite of the fact that the NESTs assumed a leading role in classroom teaching, their Taiwanese counterparts provided them with a cultural understanding of Taiwanese elementary school students concerning learning styles and current levels of abilities.

By the teachers' accounts, the support between the NESTs and TTEs did not seem to expand outside the classroom, and the development of support structures was not bilateral. Namely, classroom support was mostly extended from the TTEs to the NESTs rather than being reciprocal. The field notes from classroom observations also show that the TTEs contributed to team support more than the NESTs did. Whereas the unilateral support structures were present between the team teachers, the structures were mainly developed for the purposes of linguistic assistance and student discipline. Support that was rendered by virtue of increasing cultural understanding concerning students' learning was reported by the NESTs and TTEs. Apart from the linguistic and cultural aspects, there was little evidence to indicate the development of a social aspect in the support structures. As the NESTs commented, there was no collaboration outside the classroom (beyond the class time). The TTEs also recalled that they had had little interaction with their foreign co-teachers except for the matter of going over lessons or relaying information about school activities. It is suggested that social support was absent in the collaboration between these two groups of teachers.

The above discussion shows that team support between the teachers was mainly unilateral, i.e., from NNESTs to NESTs, and was rendered because of the need to facilitate teaching in the classroom. Therefore, teacher support was mostly related to linguistic assistance, classroom management (such as monitoring students' behavior) and cultural understanding (i.e., providing understanding of students' learning styles and current level).

### 3.6 Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Collaborative Teaching

Interview data show that the NESTs had a view different from the TTEs' regarding the qualities and formats of collaborative teaching per se. When asked the attributes of collaborative teaching, Kim replied that "collaborative teaching is two teachers working together beforehand to come up with a lesson plan, and then decide together what they want to present and how to present it." She emphasized that in a collaborate teaching class, "teachers work as a team and figure out everything together" including how to discipline students and how to divide work. In comparison, Ho defined collaborative teaching as "a class being managed and taught by two teachers." Kim as well as the other NESTs interpreted collaborative teaching as collaboration between team teachers not only inside but also outside the classroom. By Kirn's definition, team teachers need to cope with teaching tasks together such as lesson planning, students' learning difficulties, and classroom management. In contrast, all the TTEs, as Ho explained here, seemed to emphasize collaboration of teaching within the classroom. Consequently, the NESTs and NNESTs had rather contrast perceptions of the *collaborative teaching* they actually practiced. When asked whether or not their teaching practice in reality had met their ideal of collaborative teaching, all the TTEs but Lin considered that their practice of collaborative teaching had tallied with their expectations, while the NESTs replied otherwise.

### 3.7 Different Perceptions of the Role Played by the Team Teachers

Another divergence between the NESTs and TTEs regards the role played by each of the team teachers. The researcher found that the NESTs were uncertain about the role that each of the team teachers should play in the classroom. Kim remarked that she needed another teacher in the classroom, but "the role of a NEST or co-teacher needs to be defined clearly." She thought the role played by each of the team teachers was vague and did not know the expectation of each team teacher. The NESTs considered that it was important to clarify their role in the classroom and that it should have been done before the school began. However, up to the time of the final interview for this study, the NESTs and NNESTs had not yet discussed this issue. When asked why the issue of clarifying co-teachers' role had never been brought up, one NEST, Ben, speculated that it was probably because he and his Taiwanese co-teacher(s) had a pleasant working rapport and there seemed no need to discuss this issue. Having said that, Ben felt his co-teachers seemed to see themselves more in a role of assistant and looked up to him for leadership as he was a NEST.

Compared to their counterparts, the TTEs seemed *clearer* about the role they played in the classroom. As Su defined, her role in collaborative teaching was "as a partner of the NEST, a homeroom teacher and a classroom manager." The following comments by Su imply that she was confident of her role- however, her remarks (e.g., *step into teaching* and *take his place to teach*) reveal that she was taking a supporting role.

The foreign teacher and I have a consensus. That is, I can step into teaching whenever students have difficulty understanding in the class. I can take his place to teach in the class when is necessary.

Lin, who was confused and saw herself only in a role of assistant or interpreter in the beginning of this study, came to realize that she actually could assume greater teaching responsibilities than she had initially thought. In the final interview, she said that she had managed to take part in teaching on a couple of occasions when her co-teacher was ill.

Now I think my role is more like a partner... In the past, I thought that the NESTs were supposed to lead teaching. I was afraid that I might be interfering in their teaching if I provided help without being asked to do so. Now I will offer help automatically and even teach for them. For instance, when the NEST was not feeling well, I told her that I would teach for her, and she was pleased to accept my offer....

Lin's re-consideration of her role in collaborative teaching, from being an assistant to becoming a partner, indicates the evolvement of her identity as a team teacher. Yet, Lin's statements (e.g., *offer help automatically* and *teach for her*), like the other NNESTs, do not seem to corroborate her claim, i.e., being a partner of the NEST. On the contrary, her remarks suggest the contradiction between her perception and the reality of the role she played in collaborative teaching classes. Furthermore, the TTEs' accounts were somewhat against the phenomena the researcher observed in the classroom. As discussed earlier, the field notes indicate that teaching activities were mainly led and initiated by the NESTs. The interview data also unravels that the NESTs were aware of their leadership and sensed that the TTEs' took a lesser role in

teaching. Nevertheless, the TTEs (except for Lin in the beginning of this study) considered the ways of teaching with their co-teachers as collaborative. It appears that there was a gap between the NESTs and TTEs' perceptions of each other's role in teaching together. A plausible explanation for this gap is that the TTEs had not as yet recognized the essence of collaborative teaching, i.e., to teach as a team on an equal footing.

Teachers' perceptions of collaborative teaching and the role played by team teachers were discussed above. It is shown that there was a mismatch between the NESTs and NNESTs regarding how they actually practiced collaborative teaching. The gap also occurred between teachers' perceptions and reality in view of team teachers' roles in the classroom. The teachers were confused and uncertain about their responsibility and role in collaborative teaching.

#### **4. SUGGESTIONS**

From the above discussion of the research findings, several suggestions on improving the practice of collaborative teaching are made. First, in line with Chou's (2005) study, the NESTs in the present study actually took charge of teaching and were responsible for lesson planning. The finding that NESTs lead teaching in the classroom, which contrasts with the model of collaborative teaching defined by Robinson and Schaible (1995), calls for extensive in-service training focusing on collaborative teaching. A training module of this kind ought to address the needs of both NESTs and TTEs (including homeroom teachers in whose classrooms NESTs come to teach) with the intention of helping team teachers develop effective collaborative teaching skills as well as the ability to jointly plan lessons. In addition, training sessions aiming to improve mutual understanding between NESTs and TTEs in relation to host and guest cultures, the students and the school should be part of the in-service training,

In accord with Goetz's (2000) study of the perspectives on collaborative teaching, the present study reveals issues involved in collaboration between team teachers, i.e., planning for collaborative teaching and team teachers' roles. The discrepancies in the teachers' perceptions with regard to the format of collaborative teaching and the role of team teachers put forward the second suggestion: the necessity of searching for a viable model of collaborative teaching. This model, rather than being prescriptive, would inform NESTs and TTEs of their role as opposed to that of their counterparts in collaborative teaching so that teachers would know what is expected of each other when working together. As well, the model needs to be accountable in the local context and "the development of a collaborative culture" should be an integral part of it. To that end, the researcher wishes to emphasize the need for collaborative reflection by both NESTs and TTEs on a regular basis. Through collaborative reflection, team teachers can engage in a dialogue about various imminent concerns such as the role of team teachers, students' learning difficulties, and even culturally sensitive issues like student discipline. Team teachers are to explore their teaching procedures and therefore to recognize that they are on an equal footing and are jointly responsible for deciding teaching methods, lesson formats, and assessment schemes for students. The researcher suggests that NESTs and TTEs take a tandem approach to collaborative teaching. Namely, NESTs should utilize all the resources and assistance that TTEs provide on the one hand, and on the other hand, NESTs need to fully involve their co-teachers in teaching. A feasible instruction model in a collaborative teaching class would be for the NEST and TTE to demonstrate lessons together so that both are fully included in the class and the students know that both teachers are equal.

Finally, the fact that collaboration between the NESTs and TTEs was absent outside the classroom (beyond the class time) brings home the issue of how to develop "a collaborative inquiry community" in the school setting. As Crook (2001) emphasizes, there needs to be greater support from all levels, including the educational authorities and the schools, for the collaboration between NESTs and NNESTs. To build a community of practice in which team teachers are able to engage in collaborative inquiry without burnout, school districts and individual schools need to provide support mechanisms for teachers. Support efforts of this kind should include regular teacher collaboration time and release time for professional development (such as attending conferences and workshops) and collaborative social experiences.

## 5. CONCLUSION

As intended, this study provides insights into the nature and supportive structures of collaborative teaching by NESTs and TTEs in elementary schools in Taiwan. The teachers' perceptions of the collaboration they had engaged in were also explored. The study shows that there was a divergence between the NESTs' and TTEs' perceptions of each other's role in collaborative teaching. As well, the teachers had a rather different view of how collaborative teaching should be performed. In spite of the fact that this study was conducted on a small scale in a Taiwanese context, it is hoped that the research findings can help shed light on collaborative teaching by NESTs and NNESTs in other contexts such as China, Japan and Korea. The researcher suggests more classroom-based empirical research, e.g., comparative studies of collaborative teaching in different contexts, be conducted so as to better understand, and accordingly, to improve the practice of collaborative teaching of this kind.

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