

# A Case Study of English Co-teaching in Taiwan: Coordination, Cooperation or Collaboration?

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**Abstract:** *This research investigates a native English speaking teaching (NEST) assistant's perceptions of roles and professional relationships with partner local English teachers (LETs) in a prominent co-teaching program in Taiwan. Theories of interdisciplinary collaboration guide this study, which identify the NEST assistant's perceptions of aspects of co-teaching framed by themes in collaboration theory distilled by Montiel-Overall (2005a; 2005b). This descriptive study utilizes transcribed interview data to formulate the NEST assistant's self-perceptions of teaching roles and professional trajectories over the course of 11 months. Based on findings herein, implications for school administrators and NEST assistant program coordinators are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *team teaching, co-teaching, foreign English teachers, NESTs, ELT in Taiwan, primary English education, Collaboration Theory*

## 1. Introduction

There are various co-teaching programs in place in many urban and rural localities throughout Taiwan. The impetus for establishing these programs is to enhance the quality and efficacy of English as a foreign language (EFL) instruction to meet national curriculum objectives. Numerous studies have adopted the qualitative paradigm to examine the contexts of local communities and communities of practice (Fujimoto-Adamson, 2004; 2005; 2009; Mewald, 2014). These studies applied different research approaches (grounded theory and established theory) to various co-teaching situations in the EFL and ESL domains and identified a common theme in the discussion and findings: the degree of cooperation between the partners is paramount.

## 2. Literature Review

Herbert and Wu (2009) when summarizing the areas needing improvement in co-teaching interaction infer from participant complaints that "the need for better joint planning... is a vital element in

successful co-teaching," (p.61). Similarly, Fearon (2008) discovered that the amount of joint lesson planning had a salient effect on the partners' perceptions of co-teaching efficacy. Fujimoto-Adamson (2005) bases her imperative for study on the abundance of critical Japan Exchange Teaching (JET) program related studies which identify poor working relationships and lack of joint lesson planning as major debilitating factors. Dove and Honigsfeld (2014) adopted the framework of "Successful Change" in part because it incorporates cooperation, e.g., "shared vision and ownership" as one of the criteria for identifying such change in professional partnerships (64). Indeed, the theme of Dove and Honigsfeld's line of research is focused on the quality of professional relationship between the co-teaching partners, as collaboration is fundamentally requisite before co-teaching schemes can begin to impart positive learning effects above and beyond instruction by individual teachers (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

Chen (2007) qualitatively examined co-teaching LET-NEST pairs in the Taiwanese FET program. Chen reiterated previous findings that LET-NEST pairs lack communication and interaction, the NEST dominates lesson planning and teaching while the LET manages the students and serves as cultural mediator/translator, and the LET-NEST partners frequently disagree on approaches to collaborate in the classroom. Chen also found that the LET-NEST partners changed their original perceptions and attitudes of co-teaching towards noticeably pessimistic outlooks. LETs had begun the school year anticipating assistance from the NESTs, but quickly learned that they must assume more responsibility than anticipated, because the NESTs arrived with no situational awareness of the school's procedures, local culture, or clearly agreed upon notion of role in the classrooms. While most LETs felt that co-teaching was a worthwhile endeavor despite the drawbacks, one LET abandoned the notion of co-teaching altogether after numerous frustrations with incompatible partners. The NESTs often described the co-teaching relationship as an international marriage, while the LETs used metaphors which illustrated their personal struggles

working with their NESTs: “two women in a small kitchen”, “having to take medicine prescribed by a doctor”, and “being stuck in the middle of a lake” (p. 245).

Chen noted that the co-teaching partners were able to learn from each other, but the results do not allow for inference of collaboration. Chen found that the co-teaching pairs frequently availed of their compatriots for professional development and moral support, rather than each other. The reliance on “learning from other sources” (p. 247) does not support the notion of collaboration as being a key factor in professional development, but rather suggests that LETs and NESTs developed their skills mostly independently.

Because Chen (2007) was focused on trajectories of professional growth, discerning whether elements of collaboration are merely overlooked or genuinely absent is difficult. Similar to much of the current literature, Chen’s discussion merely repeats the general points gleaned from other studies that collaboration is a requisite factor of program success. To concisely synthesize the body of research on co-teaching across domain and type, e.g., special education, ESL, EFL, LET-NEST pairs, subject teacher-language teacher pairs, the primary issue is the degree of professional collaboration. Yet, extant research approaches this construct indirectly with theories and study designs which merely incorporate collaboration as one element of program success or as a side area which requires further study. In contrast, the present study directly addresses the issue of collaboration between co-teaching partners via the application of collaboration theory (Czajkowski, 2007; Montiel-Overall, 2005a; 2005b) to trace the trajectory and scope of collaboration between LET-NEST pairs working in Taiwanese elementary schools.

### 3. Overview of Theoretical Foundation

Montiel-Overall’s (2005a; 2005b) formal model of collaboration serves as the theoretical framework guiding the study. Collaboration is first defined as “a trusting, working relationship between two or more equal participants involved in shared thinking, shared planning and shared creation of integrated instruction.” (p.5). Montiel-Overall’s definition of collaboration builds upon a body of work which further identifies dialogue, reciprocity, shared power, negotiation of common ground, and complementary skill sets as key defining elements of collaboration. Synthesizing these elements of collaboration allows for classification of working partnerships ranging from simplest to most elaborate in terms of the quantity and complexity of these elements and the dedication to which they are mutually pursued by the partners.

The simplest formal conceptualization of partnership is coordination where individuals share information to alternate their activities, avoid work redundancy and strive to make separate schedules mesh smoothly where joint work activity occurs. Coordination is deemed the lowest level of collaboration due to its simplistic characteristics focused on synchronizing, organizing or ordering educational functions. Coordination also involves exchange of information and turn-taking in instructional activities at a minimum, but may extend as far as shared goals and shared assets such as schedule slots (time), a classroom, learning materials and students. Coordination may be recognized from attributes such as congenial, friendly interactions with shallow trust, and minimal or low degrees of communication.

The next level of working partnership is cooperation where the partners agree on shared goals and invest time and effort to meet them. Cooperation posits the partners as common stakeholders in a shared outcome. In addition to the information sharing and exchange manifest at the level of coordination, cooperative partners exhibit mutual trust, respect, and assume mutually agreed upon responsibilities. Cooperation is deemed a more complex collaborative arrangement than coordination as it is based on shared goals and joint functioning.

Characteristics of coordination are subsumed in this model, but the professional relationship is deepened by task sharing and division of labor by professional specialization. Cooperation may be recognized from attributes such as propensity to share information and reciprocity with medium levels of communication in addition to the collegiality and shallow trust present at the level of coordination.

The next level of working partnership is integrated instruction which elaborates on the previous two models with shared planning, shared creation of lessons and content, and shared lesson delivery by the partners. Montiel-Overall (2005a) states that shared thinking, shared lesson delivery, synergy, and equality in the professional relationship are prominent indications of the integrated level of co-teaching.

Like the previous two levels of collaboration, integrated teaching subsumes characteristics of lower level partnerships within its comparatively extensive list of indicators. However, the characteristic of mutual trust and collegiality at this level are qualitatively distinct from the previous two. Trust is envisaged as profound to the point of commitment to the shared goals, and collegiality is genuine rather than a façade to maintain peace in the office. Integrated teaching can be indicated by efforts to meld inductive and deductive approaches to grammar instruction, as well as the integration of communicative competence goals with linguistic

knowledge benchmarks. Findings from Herbert and Wu (2009) suggest that possible indicators are equality of power relations, perceived parity in work distributions, and mutual learning/professional development.

Integrated curriculum is the most advanced stage of collaboration hypothesized by Montiel-Overall (2005a; 2005b) and subsumes all of the characteristics of the previous levels including equality of the teaching partners, mutual respect, shared planning, shared lesson delivery, and shared goals. The single indicator distinguishing this model from the previous one is the scope of collaboration, where integrated curriculum occurs throughout the school or institution, or across institutions, and multiple co-teaching pairs are involved. At this stage of collaboration the school principal or administrative authorities are as important as the co-teaching pairs. The principal and administrators may arrange schedules with sufficient flexibility for the co-teachers to conduct preplanning and post-lesson evaluations. In addition, the principal and administrators may arrange training workshops aimed specifically on professional relationship building and cooperative behavior.

Extant literature on EFL co-teaching programs in Asia provide compelling insight into this stage of collaboration, particularly since co-teaching programs are initiated by school principals and foisted upon teachers who in many cases are unwilling or apprehensive about co-teaching with a NEST. Thus, administrative involvement, a hallmark of integrated curriculum is present from the outset, yet many case studies have witnessed that collaboration never reaches this stage because co-teaching conflicts caused by philosophical or cultural clashes do not allow the co-teachers to transcend shallow displays of collegiality. Therefore, it can be surmised that the process of evolution from simple to complex models, implied as a monotonic progression by the writings of Montiel-Overall (2005a; 2005b), is in fact certainly polytonic and most likely a cyclical process of evolution with the models of collaboration serving as threshold levels that are attained and sustained temporarily or for longer periods. On some occasions the collaboration can collapse and fall to a lower level, only rise up again. In the optimal scenario, a threshold is sustained indefinitely once attained, and subsequently used to springboard to the next higher level of collaboration.

This multi-level model does not presume that the parties' "agreement" to adjust the level of collaboration is mutual or explicit; rather, it conceptualizes mental processes, hence the need to search document data and query the participant directly to identify each individual stance in relation to this process. Each bulleted item in Figure 1 represents a theme for inquiry to identify the participant's stage in the data record. The arrows

connecting each level represent a decision by the partners (either individually or jointly) to upgrade or downgrade the collaboration effort.

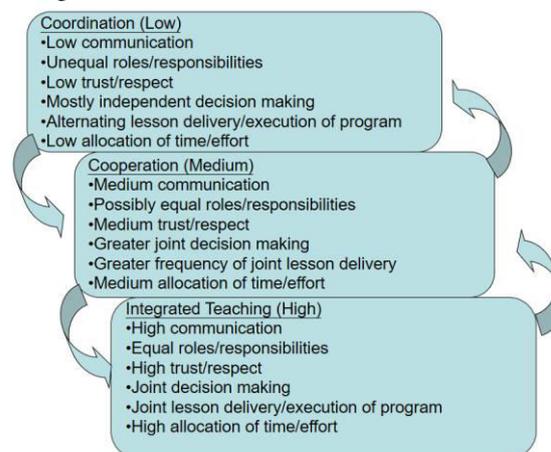


Figure 1. Themes indicating depth of collaboration.

#### 4. Statement of the Problem

Intuitively, co-teaching is an appealing way to enhance the efficacy of EFL programs due to the capitalization of intellectual resources and skill sets from partners (Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Carless & Walker, 2006; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Fearon, 2008). While there is research which points to certain cases where co-teaching pairs successfully deliver lessons (Carless & Walker, 2006) implying a degree of resultant learning in students, co-teaching programs are frequently initiated ostensibly on the simplistic assumption of "two heads are better than one", with little regard to theory as justification or a means to evaluate program success (Sutherland, 2010; Rutson-Griffiths, 2012). Furthermore, extant research unanimously identifies partner collaboration as a critical facilitative component of successful programs, yet a feature of co-teaching which is unreliably sustained or intermittently witnessed, hence, the need to focus investigations in this area.

#### 5. Purpose and Research Questions

This study examined the professional relationships of LET-NEST teaching pairs in a prominent EFL co-teaching program in Taiwanese elementary schools. Definitions and theoretical constructs of professional collaboration as delineated by Montiel-Overall (2005a; 2005b) form the framework for identifying themes and indications of collaboration in the qualitative data record. Extant research posits that collaboration is a key ingredient for co-teaching program success, yet no studies to date have sought to catalog the types of collaboration in LET-NEST co-teaching pairs. To meet this research aim, the present study utilized the following research questions:

- 1) What stage of collaboration is present at the outset of the co-teaching term with respect to successful and unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships?
- 2) What stage of collaboration is present at the conclusion of the co-teaching term with respect to the successful and unsuccessful partnerships?
- 3) What themes and indicators of collaboration are associated with successful and unsuccessful partnerships?
- 4) Can the theoretical collaboration levels classify distinct levels of collaboration in the data records of successful and unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships?

## 6. Significance of Study

Were the underlying factors of collaboration in LET-NEST co-teaching pairs to be understood, this variable could be rendered more consistent through training and remedial interventions. That is, the imperative for understanding the antecedent indicators of collaboration exists in order for complex interpersonal interactions to be rendered tractable to co-teaching program managers and school administrators. Furthermore, as the purpose of theory is to explain causation of observed phenomena (Bodie, 2009), adopting an emic perspective to examine the formation of collaborative professional partnerships elaborates collaboration theory as applied to the context of LET-NEST co-teaching programs, thereby solidifying the conceptual framework of collaboration for future research. Thus, the present study satisfies both pragmatic and theoretical imperatives for research.

## 7. Methodology

### 7.1. Context of the Study

A new co-teaching program was introduced to Taitung, Taiwan in the fall of 2014 which pairs young American college graduates with LETs as NEST assistants, referred to as English Teaching Assistants (ETAs) in the program's parlance. The program had been operating for 13 years in other Taiwanese cities before commencing at the Taitung site in 2014.

The American college graduates underwent a month of training workshops and orientations before placement as ETAs in Taiwanese elementary schools. In addition, each school's cooperation with the scholarly foundation is based on the school principal's desire to introduce the ETA into the faculty.

The ETAs were supervised and chaperoned by a coordinator who continually supervises their teaching performance at their assigned schools via contact with LET partner teachers, school directors and principals, and program advisors (academics

from the local university and the program's Taipei office) who are assigned as mentors to the NEST assistants. In addition, the coordinator arranges bi-weekly training workshops, and regular performance evaluations. In this capacity, the coordinator is intimately familiar with the daily occurrences at each school where the NEST assistants are assigned and is also aware of the NEST assistants' daily trials and tribulations such as illnesses, accidents, injuries and relationships with other NEST assistants and local people. The present researcher is said coordinator.

### 7.2. Participant

The focal participant in the present study is a NEST assistant who was partnered with three LETs over the course of one school year. These pairings represent three possible trajectories of professional relationships with partner LETs. Moreover, these pairings are all unisex (female-female) in order to partial out gender-based confounding variables and maintain focus on cultural and workplace specific variables

The focal participant is Donna B (pseudonym) who experienced a very short-term partnership with a substitute teacher, LET1. This substitute was replaced after one week by a second substitute, LET2, who stayed for the first semester of the year while the main teacher, LET3, was on maternity leave. The first partnership was recalled by Donna to be a positive work experience. The second partnership was recalled as negative professional relationship, while the final partnership was recalled as a positive relationship. Her case allows a within-person, constant comparative analysis which can identify the critical elements of collaboration.

### 7.3. Background of Donna B.

Donna is an African-American woman who graduated with honors from a prominent American university. In her junior year of college, she spent a semester in Shanghai on a study abroad program and concurrently volunteered as an English teacher at a private school for elementary school children. She arrived in Taiwan in early August and began the training and orientation protocol established by the scholarly exchange foundation that recruited her. It was during this time that she became acquainted with the researcher.

### 7.4. Data Collection

Before returning home at the end of her contract, Donna was interviewed by the researcher. The interview was semi-structured and guided by a list of 18 questions, which were designed based on the foregoing literature review and teaching observations. The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim

for text analysis. The interview questions are attached as Appendix 1.

## 7.5. Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed a qualitative approach of thematic analysis. Themes extant in Montiel-Overall's (2005a; 2005b) theory of collaboration were used to code and identify indications of collaboration with the aim of describing the level of the LET-NEST partnership. Codes were identified in the transcript, which were then classified by theme to identify the stage of collaborative process and the depth of collaboration.

We distributed 1,300 questionnaires to indigenous high school students in the eastern region of Taiwan. A total of 1,251 questionnaires were recovered, 1,216 of which were valid. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the scale of the educational expectations of significant others was .856. We employed the verification method proposed by Baron and Kenny [10] along with regression analysis to verify how the expectations of significant others play a mediating effect in the relationship between academic performance and self-expectations among indigenous students.

## 8. Results and Discussions

### 8.1. Results

As mentioned previously, LETs 1 and 2 were substitutes to cover for the main LET 3 who was on maternity leave at the beginning of the school year. Donna reported that the time with LET 1 was uneventful, mostly because of the short duration. As a result, the interview record predominantly describes events with LETs 2 and 3. Of the short time with LET 1, Donna recalls that it was mostly positive. Donna's recollection is that her relationship was mostly cooperative, being marked by shared lesson planning and shared delivery, and no professional or personal friction. The teaching mode was teach-assist with Donna as the main teacher.

I think with my first LET, what ended up happening was the coordinator came and explained my purpose for being there, and right away, 'cause she came on the first day of school, and right away it was like "ok, how about we do this?" and we were exchanging ideas and it was already like cooperation in that sense. And, um, she kind of had a goal of how she wanted classes to go, but then she would always consult me and be like how do think we should do this?" so yeah, it seemed like we were both contributing.

LET 1 was more or less one teach, one assist. So my co-teacher was mostly in front of the classroom and I kind of walked around and made sure the students were paying attention. I gave them more

like, uh, help. Sometimes I would lead on games and things, but she would also, kind of at that time, assist. So we switched roles in that respect.

Based on the descriptions of the partnership with LET 1 in the interview transcript, this level of collaboration can be described as cooperation. Donna and LET 1 quickly settled into a cooperative stage indicated by discussion of goals, i.e., lesson objectives, discussion of roles when delivering the lesson, possibly equal roles as lead teacher and assistant. LET1 had a very easy disposition regarding the forced partnership with Donna primarily because she viewed herself as a low-ranking, quasi-assistant teacher who would only be present for a week. In the first week of the academic year, the school was still recruiting candidates to fill the semester-long contracted substitute position. As a result, LET1 assumed her duties were primarily to take attendance and supervise the children, so she was very open to having extra help from Donna.

In contrast, Donna identifies her partnership with LET 2, the contracted substitute, as a time of friction. This partnership lasted approximately five and a half months. In the interview, Donna asserts that she began the partnership with an intent to collaborate earnestly, as she applied the label "committed marriage" as the metaphor of choice. Donna also claims that the professional relationship quickly soured and ended as "joint custody" of the students where the co-teachers adopt a façade of collegiality to coordinate the teaching of the students.

I think at the beginning it was kind of like a committed relationship, and then at the end it was kind of like joint custody.

Donna summarizes her discontent as an inability to fulfill her goals of making English learning an enjoyable endeavor for the students. She mentioned one particular turning point in the relationship when she attempted to discuss her roles and responsibilities with LET 2 and may have inadvertently increased the tension. Donna had felt excluded by being shunted as the assistant who was rarely called to assist.

But what ended up happening was I kind of stood in the back. That was hard because in my mind I'm going to do this and do that, and I want to be more involved in class and so having that conversation kind of brought a little bit of tension, because obviously I'm not a teacher here, but I came here to teach.

A key incident mentioned in the interview when the level of cooperation between Donna and LET2 suddenly dropped is the misunderstanding over a late workbook submission by one student. Donna received the homework, but forgot to inform LET2 who mistakenly thought the student did not hand it in. After events were sorted out, LET2 was angry and

publicly, but indirectly berated Donna in front of the class of students. Although the admonishment was indirect, it was blunt enough for Donna to feel the full weight of LET 2's anger. This public "demotion" of Donna effectively made their status as teachers unequal, and therefore at a lower level of collaboration.

...And I made the mistake of not telling my LET that this workbook was late, and so this student got in trouble and the student was like "but, teacher, I turned it in", and the end result wasn't exactly what I liked, it was kind like a scolding of me in front of the students and saying "who was the real teacher here, I'm the real teacher here, so give ME your workbook." It was kind of embarrassing and difficult...

Observation of Donna's teaching with LET2 found the pair to use teach-assist mode of lesson delivery with Donna assuming the assistant role. This style of teaching positions the partners in an unequal status and implies a reduced amount of joint lesson planning and communication.

Finally, Donna identifies her partnership with LET 3 as a time of positive professional and personal partnership. Again, Donna began the relationship with a collaborative intent, akin to the metaphor of "committed marriage". She also claims that the partnership ended as such and maybe even bloomed into an "extended family"- type of relationship where other teachers provided assistance to English-related learning activities for the students.

... my final LET,... it started off as a committed relationship and then it moved into this extended family, ... Mostly because not only were we teaching English, ... but our school was getting involved, ...school and staff was helping us promote English language at the school ...I also hung out with her and did things with her outside of school which made it seem like a family affair rather than just academics.

Donna also noted that she adopted more complex modes of collaborative teaching with LET 3.

...we also did one teach- one assist, but we also incorporated other forms of teaching like station teaching. We also tried split classroom teaching, we teach the same lesson but split the class...Parallel teaching, yes.

The interview never uncovered any incidents of miscommunication or reduction in collaboration. It is therefore surmised that the partnership with LET3 represents a distinct dynamic characterized by successful co-teaching. Teaching observations of this partnership corroborate these findings. Donna and LET3 adopted split-teaching, a form of stations teaching with only two stations. This mode of lesson delivery entails high degrees of joint planning and communication during lesson execution.

RQ1. The first research question aimed to identify the initial level of collaboration with each partnership. The interview transcript indicates that Donna began the partnership with LET1 at the medium level of collaboration, cooperation. Subsequently Donna's partnership with LET2 likely began at the lowest level, coordination. However, Donna in her interview recollections claimed that she intended to begin that relationship at the cooperation level. Yet, the teaching observation report indicates that several key benchmarks of collaboration were lacking, e.g., Donna had a noticeably reduced role in class with most instructions delivered by LET2 in Chinese, and lesson activities had Donna and LET acting separately. Finally, Donna began the partnership with LET3 at the integrated teaching stage. The interview record noted that LET3 represented an immediate change in partnership dynamics, and the teaching observation also found the pair adopting comparatively complex modes of co-teaching.

RQ2. The second research question aimed to identify the final level of collaboration with each partnership. The interview transcript suggests that Donna ended the partnership with LET1 at the medium level of collaboration, cooperation. The primary support for this assumption is that the partnership was too short for noticeable changes to occur. Another important clue is the socializing outside of work which indicates that Donna and LET1 immediately established a high degree of earnest collegiality that continued after the working relationship ended. Hence, the professional partnership ended at a level of collaboration as least as high as it began. Next, Donna's relationship with LET2 ended at the level of coordination. Indications of coordination were found in both the interview transcript and observation records. They acted the part of a team by conducting teach-assist lessons, but actually were able to play these parts with minimal pre-lesson co-planning. Donna and LET2 were never able to repair their professional relationship after the homework incident and public admonition. Finally, Donna's conclusion of the partnership with LET3 ended as integrated teaching, even touching upward to integrated curriculum.

RQ3. The third research question aimed to identify the themes and indicators of collaboration associated with successful and unsuccessful partnerships. Donna's interview transcript claimed that LET2 represented a distinctly unsuccessful partnership, whereas LETs1 and 3 were successful. First, both LET1 and LET 3 were open-minded and non-critical of Donna's ideas and suggestions. In fact, LET3 would often seek suggestions from Donna, such as asking about her discussions at her training workshops. Likewise, LET 1 demonstrated a

remarkably open attitude by immediately querying suggestions from Donna.

Another indicator of successful partnerships related to open-mindedness is flexibility. LET1 was described as often switching lead teacher and assistant roles with Donna during their one week of teach-assist lesson delivery. Meanwhile LET 3 also was flexible enough to try other forms of co-teaching which elevated their partnership to integrated teaching. Furthermore, Donna exhibited considerable flexibility when she adapted her original role as communicative language teacher to the more abstract role of “agent of change” or “influencer.” She endeavored to realize this new goal by initiating her own English-related activities, which ultimately led to the more fulfilling “extended family” collaboration.

Another indicator of success related to both open-mindedness and flexibility is trust. LET1 was a short-term temporary substitute who has hired on a day-to-day basis. As such, she was willing to acquiesce some status as lead teacher in order to try Donna’s ideas, which implied that she trusted in Donna’s teaching skill and knowledge. LET3 gave Donna full trust when she agreed to participate in an Easter egg hunt activity. This was an entirely new cultural experience for LET3, so she trusted Donna as the cultural expert.

A further indicator of positive collaborative partnerships is equality of status. However, this benchmark is more internal to the partners rather than explicitly acknowledged by the school community. LET1 possessed very low status in the school because she was a temporary substitute. This could explain her willingness to immediately engage in teach-assist with occasional assistant role. The exact frequency of switching between the lead teacher and assistant roles is unclear, but it potentially reached parity if Donna was not dissatisfied. This parity of status would only exist implicitly in the mutual perceptions of roles, and only witnessed by the occasions of socializing in and outside of work. Meanwhile LET3 held higher status at the school due to her seniority, yet, on occasions of high collaboration, equal status could be inferred. LET3 and Donna frequently socialized together, and during the Easter egg hunt, LET3 deferred to Donna on many aspects of the activity due to her implicit status as cultural expert.

Finally, a key indicator of successful collaboration is communication of goals and roles. Numerous mentions of open communication appear in the literature on co-teaching, but it should be emphasized that merely increasing communication does not lead to better collaboration. The critical discussion which leads to collaboration must be about goals, mission objectives, and the teaching roles that these long-term goals imply.

RQ4. The fourth research question aimed to assess the feasibility of using the theoretical collaboration levels to classify distinct levels of collaboration in actual co-teaching partnerships. The summative self-assessment of the relationships by Donna clearly indicates that the LET 2 partnership was low level collaboration, the LET1 partnership was mid-level collaboration, and the LET3 partnership was high level collaboration.

One shortcoming of the Collaboration Theory as applied herein is that two of the critical variables determining the level of collaboration, open-mindedness and flexibility, are not included as characteristics of collaboration. The case study of Donna shows that these two variables might be associated with equal status, frequent communication, and joint lesson planning. As such, they should be included into a revised theory of collaboration that includes pre-condition characteristics.

## 8.2. Discussion

The findings of this case study of co-teaching partnerships between an American ETA and Taiwanese LET have important implications for extant literature on co-teaching arrangements in Asia and Taiwan. Currently, there are various co-teaching programs in place in many localities throughout Taiwan. The scope and depth of the problems that plague these programs have been documented in several studies (Chen, 2007; Chen & Cheng, 2010; 2013; Tsai, 2007). It is known that the professional relationships between the NEST and LET can sour, producing sub-optimal working relationships, and hence sub-optimal teaching (Chen, 2007; Chen & Cheng, 2010; 2013). On the contrary, cases where the NEST-LET interactions contribute positively to the learning experience of the students have also been observed (Chen, 2007; Herbert & Wu, 2009; Tsai, 2007). It is also known that experienced teachers who have been recognized as excellent educators do not necessarily work well when forced to partner with another teaching professional (Creese, 2010), and specific examples have been observed in Taiwan as well (Chen, 2007; Chen & Cheng, 2010).

The case of Donna B. in Taitung corroborates some findings from previous research and also contributes new information which can guide future studies. Herbert and Wu (2009) had identified lack of joint lesson planning as one critical factor of co-teaching success. The case of Donna confirms this finding, as her successful, collaborative partnerships were marked by joint lesson planning. Conversely, when the lesson planning was omitted in her partnership with LET2, Donna reported the feeling of “joint custody” of the children, like an estranged couple who only pretend to work together for the sake of the children.

Miyazato (2007) and Fujimoto-Adamson (2005) asserted that power sharing is difficult for the LET. Recollections from Donna suggest that LET2 was also unwilling to share status or power with Donna. LET2 would grudgingly respect Donna only after she had provided some kind of service such as teaching phonics, or taking over the whole period when worksheets unexpectedly could not be printed. At other times when Donna had angered LET2, she responded by demoting Donna to mere assistant or live CD machine. The roller coaster highs and lows were caused by the inconsistency of LET2's power (status) sharing.

Tsai (2007) had observed three pairs of LET-NEST teachers in a different co-teaching program in Taiwan and found that certain modes of co-teaching corresponded to differing degrees of collegiality. Specifically, the teach-assist pair exhibited moderate collegiality, while a second pair used team-teaching, and the third pair used both parallel and team-teaching. The present study partially mirrors these findings in that high-level collaboration is indicated by parallel teaching and high collegiality (Donna and LET3). Meanwhile, the teach-assist mode of lesson delivery may be variably associated with low-level (Donna and LET2) and mid-level collaboration (Donna and LET1).

Finally, this study has shown that LET-NEST mismatches in perceptions of the NEST's role and purpose constitute a critically important hurdle to overcome. Donna had perceived herself as an equal colleague whose communicative approach to language teaching should be seen as a valid, complementary pedagogical approach to traditional grammar-vocabulary based teaching. Yet, LET2 had merely considered her an assistant per the job title, and "unqualified" to teach due to a dearth of experience.

This theme is ubiquitous among research into co-teaching programs across Asia. For example, Miyazato (2007) and Fujimoto-Adamson (2005) described the fundamental contradiction and concomitant administration problems arising from the fact that unlicensed NESTs are positioned as target language experts in the partnership with Japanese LETs. Wang (2012) had noted that Taiwanese LETs are apprehensive towards partnership with NESTs because they do not want to be demoted to human translators, since the new partner automatically gains status from his/her identity as a native speaker language expert.

Regarding new findings which can inform future research, this study shows that the levels of collaboration in Montiel-Overall's (2005a; 2005b) framework are overlapping. The individual characteristics may be independent constructs and can rise to compensate for reductions in other characteristics, leading to transition zones where it is difficult to cleanly distinguish one collaborative level

from another. Moreover, two personality characteristics, open-mindedness and flexibility not included in Montiel-Overall's theory were found to be possible mediating variables which coincide with increased communication, mutual respect, and joint lesson planning.

### 8.3. Limitations

Being a constant comparative analysis of data from only one case study, the present study is necessarily limited in its transferability to other co-teaching programs in Taiwan or other Asian EFL settings. In addition, the emic perspective adopted in this study was limited to the NEST assistant to preclude possible confounding of participant retrospection caused by possible information leaks were both partners to participate. The risk of such leaks was high, since the researcher worked in the official capacity of program coordinator, and these could have resulted in defensive posturing and compromised veracity during the participant interview.

### 9. Conclusion

This research investigated a NEST assistant's perceptions of roles and professional relationships with partner LETs in order to identify the types and degrees of professional collaboration that ensued. Theories of inter-disciplinary collaboration were adapted to describe cooperative themes arising from NEST-LET interaction. The participant's experiences with three different LET partners allowed for a constant-comparative analysis which identified key personality characteristics not mentioned in Collaboration Theory. Further research into co-teaching collaboration should seek to identify a process of evolution in the professional relationship with emphasis on identifying pre-condition variables or characteristics of the partnership.

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## 11. Appendix 1

### Interview Questions

The following interview questions were devised to query two broad areas: professional relationship and teaching efficacy

#### ETA-LET Relationships:

1) How would you describe your relationship with the LET at the beginning of the year and at the end?

a) Blind date—still feel like the relationship was set up by the Foundation

b) Committed marriage—you are a team working together to “bring the children up right”

c) Joint custody—separated or already divorced but coming to class together because you still have to try for the “children’s sake”.

d) Extended family or “village”—working together with other LETs or even other staff in the school. The school or other groups of teachers become a community around you to help the students learn English.

Why do you think this way?

2) How often did you ask your LET for advice on teaching, cultural, or life issues?

3) How often did your LET ask YOU for advice on teaching or cultural issues?

4) If you spent time on field trips or other activities, do you feel they contributed to a positive relationship with LETs and other faculty members? Do you feel that these experiences positively or negatively impacted your relationship with the students?

5) Imagine you were to do a program similar to the Fulbright ETA program in another country, and you will return to the blind date stage all over again. How would you describe yourself, particularly your personality, to a prospective LET partner?

#### Teaching self-efficacy:

1) At the outset of the school year, after the first few workshops and orientation sessions, did you envisage a clear role for yourself in the classroom or school? Please describe your interpretation of ETA responsibilities and roles.

2) Now, in retrospect, would you say that your ideas about the role of ETAs have changed? How so? Please describe.

3) Which model of co-teaching did you utilize with your LET in each class? Please comment on why you chose that model and your degree of success implementing that model.

a) One teach, one observe

b) One teach, one assist (drift, float around classroom to individual students)

- c) Parallel teaching (split class-same lesson, content—better teacher-student ratio)
- d) Station teaching
- e) Alternative teaching (class is split, maybe unevenly, one group gets differentiated instruction)
- f) Team teaching (LET and ETA deliver lesson content together)
- 4) About what point in the school year would you say that you had an adequate situational awareness with respect to the English language abilities of each class, grade level you taught?
- 5) Do you feel that you were always able to maintain this situational awareness? Even with classes in different schools?
- 6) How did you and the LET divide responsibility for assessment of student work? Do you feel you had sufficient voice in student assessment?
- 7) What was the scope of your usual lesson planning with the LET—day-to-day planning, planning weeks in advance, months, or the whole year?
  
- 8) Did you feel that you were a participant in macro-planning? I mean, did you participate in discussions or were made aware of the whole year's syllabus and curriculum objectives?
- 9) How do you feel about your quality of micro-planning with your LET? I mean, the times that you two get together to plan a week's or day's lessons etc. Is your lesson planning time productive? Sufficient?
- 10) What aspects of English learning and instruction do you emphasize in class? Do you know if the LET shares the same emphasis as you? How do you know this? Was it discussed between the two of you, like explicitly planning roles and responsibilities or do you just sense the LETs pedagogical focal points through your own observations?
- 11) Are you aware of any kind of confusion on the part of the students because of any kind of conflicting signals from you and the LET? If so, what kind of confusion or problems occurred? How was the students' confusion resolved?
- 12) How often did you and the LET co-develop instructional materials? Was such collaboration useful or productive?
- 13) In retrospect, do you believe that you have made progress in your teaching professionalism? Please provide examples of knowledge or skills related to teaching and EFL instruction that you have learned this year.
  - a) How much of this do you attribute to the weekly training workshops?
  - b) How much of this do you attribute to your professional interaction with the LETs?