

Would you like to teach with me?

Svetlana Elif Sobolev & Yeşim Güven

Team teaching can make learning a cooperative process for both teachers and students. This paper briefly summarizes the results obtained from a small-scale team teaching project conducted at the Department of Basic English, METU and discusses some benefits and challenges of the method from both the teacher's and the students' perspective basing conclusions on teacher and student feedback. The participants in the study were all trainees in an in-service program run by the Teacher Education Unit of the Institution. Thus, this paper also aims to present the validity of using team-teaching in training newly hired teachers in in-service training programs and attempts to draw the reader's attention to the potential opinions of various stakeholders involved in the process. The survey findings indicated that all the newly hired teachers in the in-service program found the experience beneficial. 97.5% of all the students involved in team teaching claimed they had no difficulties learning during a team taught lesson and 80% asked for more team taught lessons in the future.

Introduction

Team teaching, also known as collaborative teaching, may become an invaluable source of personal as well as professional growth for all involved in the process. Regardless of the various contexts which determine the format of the team, successful team teaching must go beyond sharing the same group of students and arranging meetings if a better quality of teaching and learning as well as growth on both parts – the teachers and their learners – are expected. Yet, team teaching in addition to being an effective pedagogical technique to simulate real-life conditions of learning and teaching in the classroom is also open to various interpretations. For the purpose of this paper, though, the following three definitions might be quite comprehensive:

Quinn and Kanter (1984) say the following:

“Team Teaching is simply team work between two qualified instructors who, together, make presentations to an audience.”

Rebecca Benoit (2001) defines Team Teaching as follows:

“...Successful Team Teaching has the potential to benefit all concerned. Teachers stand to gain in terms of their professional development. Team Teaching provides teachers with a partner to help them set objectives, make plans, implement lessons and evaluate the results. They have someone from whom they can draw inspiration and who can provide them with constructive feedback on their teaching....”

Specialists of Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, City University of Hong Kong (1998) add the following:

“...For lecturers, who often work alone, Team Teaching provides a supportive environment that overcomes the isolation of working in self-contained...classrooms. Being exposed to the subject expertise of colleagues, to open critique, to different styles of planning and organization, as well as methods of class presentation, teachers can develop their approaches to teaching and acquire a greater depth of understanding of the subject matter....”

The first definition refers to team teaching in its simplest application. The second one reflects the idea that teaming up could become an efficient way of sharing knowledge and practice between two

or more teachers with varying degrees of experience and expertise. What are then some professional traits that this approach asks for? Karin Goetz (2000) outlines the following traits that seem to be required for team teaching:

- Enthusiasm;
- Availability of a teacher for meetings;
- Desire to share and support;
- Having a broader view of the process;
- Flexibility;
- Desire to learn;
- Personal compatibility.

The third definition focuses on the supportive nature of the approach as it helps the team teachers develop themselves individually as well as a team.

The Team Teaching Project

As mentioned earlier, the project was conducted with teachers who were the participants of an in-service training program run at the Department of Basic English, METU. All of them experienced team teaching with the same trainer involved in the training program. The project was carried out along with the training program in order to provide trainees with the opportunity to experience ‘model’ lessons in their own classes, which ranged from beginner to upper-intermediate levels, as well as to become an essential part of it during the planning and execution stages. *Table 1* provides the profile of the participants involved in the project.

Items	Description
Participants	11 teachers (10 female) and 190 students (84 girls)
Years of experience of team-teachers	0-5 years (7 teachers) 6-10 years (2 teachers) 11 + years (2 teachers)
Level of students in the team-taught classes	Beginner (1 class), Elementary (4 classes), Pre-intermediate (4 classes), Intermediate (1 class) and Upper-intermediate (1 class).

Table 1. Profile of participants in the project

The Results of the Project

At the end of the project, after about one year, the trainees were asked to provide written feedback regarding the benefits of team-teaching as a means of training new teachers in an institution. *Table 2* provides a summary of teacher responses to the given survey while *Table 3* includes a trainee’s letter to comment on team teaching with her trainer.

No	Extracts from written feedback received from the trainees at the end of the project:
1	"Team teaching is definitely an answer for my case, because I learn by example and real life experience."
2	"If I hadn't had the opportunity of team-teaching, I would not have been able to overcome my problems concerning timing. I was exposed to master conduct and it influenced me a lot. It gave me a positive impulse and it stimulated me as well. My performance did improve after this inspiring experience."
3	"I think every teacher should do team-teaching at some time during his/her career."
4	"I also benefited from team-teaching in the preparation phase. It was great for generating creative teaching ideas. I developed my teaching with the constructive comments and ideas of the teacher that I worked with!"
5	"I really liked it and I strongly recommend it."
6	"Team-teaching is a wonderful source of learning. I probably learnt more in 6 hours of team-teaching than I would be able to learn in years working by myself. Thank you for the chance!"

Table 2. Survey results

I worked with ... in a co-teaching training exercise and I would like to give my feedback with this letter.

I would like to start by saying that she put her whole self into helping me learn about teaching and did not put a time limit on how much she was willing to help. It was also a very comfortable, natural, non-stressful, and helpful experience, purely for the benefit of the new teacher, with no criticism or judgment involved. She never interrupted me while I was teaching in the classroom. She treated me as a partner and equal. She is a lovely person to work with and learn from. I thought it was helpful to work with her over a number of weeks instead of the occasional day.

Here is a list of some of the things I felt she was helpful with (as they may seem unconnected)

She gave me a broader view of the process of learning English for non-native speakers and therefore helped with many aspects of teaching them.

She helped me to understand how important it is and actually how to create a flow through the day, week and semester to connect the different parts of the lesson and week together to get and hold the student's attention. She helped with lesson planning, of course, as this is one method to ensure a flow.

She demonstrated classroom management techniques used to deal with students talking out of turn and not paying attention.

She gave advice and demonstration on managing classroom time to fit the learning needs of the students. She showed the importance of tailoring lessons to the level and needs of the students.

She gave help in understanding the general atmosphere of the classroom and the level and understanding of the students.

She helped with grammar explanations and new solutions/explanations to some of the student's most difficult questions.

She helped in understanding the focus and purpose of activities and extra materials that I prepared. She gave the student's perspective.

She helped me understand some of the difficulties in testing and helped explain these to the students as well.

She demonstrated how important it is to check the students' understanding and gauge their level before continuing a lesson. She demonstrated how to do this also.

She demonstrated the need and ability to be flexible with class time.

Table 3. A trainee's letter to comment on team teaching with her trainer

A thorough literature survey on the topic indicates a similar outcome for teachers who were ‘brave’ enough to ‘risk’ team-teaching. *Table 4* provides a brief summary of why team teaching is so effective according to Karin Goetz (2000).

No	Description of factors related to effectiveness
1	Teachers take turns during a lesson.
2	Teachers may give parallel / simultaneous instructions.
3	Teachers are actively involved in lesson planning.
4	Teachers support each other.
5	Teachers may divide class into small groups.
6	Teachers may monitor each other.

Table 4. The effectiveness of team teaching for teachers

Similar to the feedback collected from the trainees, student responses were also taken into account during the evaluation of the effectiveness of team teaching in the training process. *Table 5* shows some comments written by students as they responded to the survey conducted at the end of the Team Teaching Project. All 190 students who participated in the project filled out the questionnaire in Turkish. The English translation and summary is provided in **Appendix 1**.

No	Extracts from written feedback received from the students at the end of the project:
1	<i>"We experienced better concentration, higher motivation and participation and more efficient use of class time...."</i>
2	<i>"Lessons were lively and fun...."</i>
3	<i>"We had more exposure to input via different teaching styles (different examples, explanations, language, perspectives, experiences, etc.) and teachers completing each other...."</i>
4	<i>"We received more attention from teachers and experienced better classroom management...."</i>
5	<i>"We were exposed to real-life English and communication...."</i>

Table 5. Some student comments

As it can be concluded from the summary of the questionnaire given in **Appendix 1**, there were only 2.5% of students, who mentioned difficulties caused by team teaching as a method of instruction. *Table 6* generalizes the reasons outlined by these students.

No	Extracts from written feedback received from the students at the end of the project:
1	<i>"We have to work harder but we learn better...."</i>
2	<i>"It's difficult to adapt to two different styles...."</i>
3	<i>"No need for two teachers; one is enough...."</i>

Table 6. Problems encountered during team teaching lessons

It is obvious that the first seemingly negative comment provided in *Table 6* is, in fact, a reflection of the increased pace of lessons and intensity of interaction in class. The second comment is additional evidence of the fact that the learner was exposed to real-life conditions of learning and that this pedagogical technique was effective enough to serve its overall aim. As for the third comment, it is a pure statement of a personal belief rather than the negation of the method.

On the other hand, the students’ positive comments provided in *Table 5* seem to be very much in alignment with the findings of the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching at City University of Hong Kong, which mentions the following about this method: “...Team Teaching can

lead to better student performance in terms of greater independence and assuming responsibility for learning...Learning can become more active and involved....” (1998).

It is noteworthy that the findings of the project as far as the student opinions are concerned are very much in tune with the ideas communicated by Karin Goetz (2000) outlined in *Table 7*.

No	Advantages of team teaching for students
1	Opening a student’s eyes to accepting more than one opinion.
2	Encouragement of cooperation with others.
3	Increasing the student’s level of understanding and retention.
4	Encouragement of higher achievements.
5	Providing mature levels of understanding knowledge.
6	Helping students blur the black-and-white way of thinking.
7	Enabling students to reach a greater variety of learning styles.

Table 7. Advantages of team teaching for students

Table 8 gives an overall numeric representation of the results obtained from the project.

Opinion	Per cent of participants sharing this opinion
Teachers found the experience beneficial.	100%
Students indicated that they had no difficulties learning during a team taught lesson.	97.5%
Students wanted to have more team taught lessons in the future.	80%

Table 8. Numeric interpretation of teacher and student comments

Description of a Debate Held in a Team-taught Class

As outlined above, the present study mainly focuses on the feedback received following a series of team teaching lessons in a number of classes in order to prove the validity of this pedagogical technique as a means of training new teachers. However, one of the milestones of the project was also a debate on team teaching held by the authors in an Upper-Intermediate class which had experienced team teaching throughout the semester with the writers of this paper. For the purposes of this study, the students from this class, who already had first-hand experience of and thus their own opinions on this method, were asked to participate in a debate focusing on the advantages and disadvantages of team teaching on the students, the teachers and the administration. The topic chosen was in accordance with the theme “Education”, which had to be dealt with as a requirement of the syllabus approved for that level of students in that particular year.

The students were eager to include some elements of role playing in the debate and decided to divide the class into seven groups accordingly. They decided that the jury of the debate, which was supposed to decide whether or not team teaching was an effective method of instruction, would represent the administration of Bilkent University, Turkey. They thought that pro-arguments on the side of students, teachers and administration should be supported by the representatives of METU, Turkey, while the con-arguments should be presented by the counterparts of these three groups from the University of Michigan, U.S.A.

Visual readers may find it easier to understand the class layout for the debate provided in *Figure 1*.

Jury of the debate (Bilkent University, Turkey)				
Students	Pro-arguments (METU, Turkey)		Con-arguments (University of Michigan, USA)	Students
Teachers				Teachers
Administration				Administration

Figure 1. Class layout

Students playing their roles in the debate came up with many interesting ideas the summary of which is given below in *Table 9*.

Role	Standing	Comments
Administration	Con-arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even best friends may not be able to get on well with each other. • Students may be biased about different teaching styles. • Students may seem afraid of two teachers.
	Pro-arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers with similar characteristics should be chosen. • Before starting team teaching, we train our teachers. • Financial issues are not a problem as there is the government's support. • No need to look for a substitute teacher
Students	Con-arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are confused. • There are 2 attention centers. • Students are under pressure. • There will be repetitions of input.
	Pro-arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers feel the need to improve themselves. • Students are more active. • Time is spent more efficiently. • More learning takes place.
Teachers	Con-arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team Teaching leads to competition between teachers. Teachers do not want to share materials. • Participating in a team means a teacher cannot teach alone.
	Pro-arguments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition is caused by personalities, not the method. • Planning or location is not a problem for professionals. • Teachers learn a lot from their colleagues. • Teachers do not choose their partners, the administration does.
Jury		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The method is worth trying out as it creates excellent learning opportunities and thus lays the foundations for self-development on the parts of learners and teachers.

Table 9. A summary of the ideas of the students playing the roles of students, teachers and administration during the debate.

At this point it might be worth mentioning that according to the rules of the debate, the students had to come up with their comments on the spot, without any preparation and their comments were not prompted by their role cards or their teachers. Thus, looking at the outcome, the writers believe that the above mentioned student comments were not only genuine but also well-justified by the experience the students gained from being team taught.

Discussion of Results and Implications

Although the results of the project support the use of team teaching as an invaluable opportunity to train new teachers, the whole process may trigger some discussion as to the relative advantages and potential problems of team teaching in later years of teaching when used as a pedagogical tool that shifts the role of instruction from the individual to a team. The reason for this might be that, ideally, team partners who work together in this professional marriage are expected to be compatible in their knowledge, personality, and teaching philosophies. This assumption, though, may be questioned when teaching philosophies of team partners with varying expertise and personality traits are analyzed. **Appendix 2** provides the teaching philosophies of teachers who team-taught with outstanding performance not only with the same trainer during the in-service training program but also with each other as part of the process. Still, opponents of team-teaching may have a point when they question or ask for compatibility of team teachers. To illustrate, it might be true that occasionally one team member may be more competent and reliable than the other. Yet, a teacher who is incompetent, irresponsible, and personally insecure will not be able to survive in any classroom context whether alone or with a partner. Thus, it would be unfair to blame the method for such a rare incident.

If, though, team teachers aim for the successful implementation of this type of teaching, they certainly need to consider the following points. Firstly, students in a team-taught class should be reminded of the purpose and benefits of the experience. Secondly, once the team teachers decide to work together, sufficient time must be allocated to planning and division of responsibilities so as to encourage and allow for the maximum use of teacher strengths. Finally, administrative support is essential for continued success and credibility. Bearing these points in mind, this type of instruction is definitely worth experiencing for all involved.

The writers of this paper, who continue to teach together even now after five years of training, claim that team teaching involves daring to take risks – as does living. Thus, for them coming together as the trainer and the trainee of an in-service program was just the beginning of a long journey during which they had to keep together as it was in the nature of the process and that teaching together periodically was success on the part of the team partners as well as on the part of the students who will remain to be the most important stakeholders in the process.

References:

- Benoit, R. (2001). Team teaching tips for foreign language teachers. [On-line] Available: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Benoit-TeamTeaching.html>
- Goetz, K. (2000). Perspectives on team teaching. [On-line] Available: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/egallery/goetz.html>
- Publication of Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, City University of Hong Kong. (1998). Team teaching [On-line] Available: <http://teaching.polyu.edu.hk/datafiles/R27.html>
- Quinn, S. & Kanter, S. (1984). Team teaching: An alternative to lecture fatigue. (JC 850 005) Paper in an abstract: Innovation Abstracts, Eric Document Reproductive Service No. ED 251 159.

Svetlana Elif Sobolev (svetlana@metu.edu.tr) works as an English teacher at DBE, METU. She has been teaching English since 2005. Her professional interests lie in team teaching and learner and teacher motivation’.

Yeşim Güven (gyesim@metu.edu.tr) works as a teacher trainer at DBE, METU. She has been teaching English since 1988 and her professional interests lie in drama, discourse, testing, and team teaching.

Appendix 1. Student Feedback and Comments

Q.1. Please comment on the points you liked and disliked about being taught by two teachers in class.

- Positive Comments:*
- lively and fun lessons;
 - better concentration; higher motivation and participation;
 - more exposure to input via different styles of teaching (different examples, explanations, language, perspectives, experiences, etc.) resulting in better learning;
 - more efficient use of class time and sources;
 - more attention from teachers;
 - exposure to real-life English and communication;
 - teachers completing each other;
 - better classroom management.
- Negative Comments:*
- more work, more learning;
 - difficult to adapt to two different styles;
 - no need for two; one is enough.

Q.2. Did you experience any barriers to your learning during this period? If yes, please, explain.

Yes	No
2.5%	97.5%

Q.3. Did this process have any positive effect on your learning / contribute to your learning? If yes, please explain by giving an example.

Yes	No
70%	35%

Q.4. Did the presence of two instructors in the classroom distract you in any way?

Yes	No
2.5%	97.5%

Q.5. Being taught by two instructors with different teaching styles - Did it affect your learning process? If yes, please explain.

Yes	No
65%	35%

Q.6. Having experienced what it feels like to be team-taught, would you like to experience more of it in the future?

Yes	No
80%	20%

Appendix 2. Team teaching and teaching philosophy

Below are the teaching philosophies of some of the project participants.

Trainer "...My teaching is only effective as long as I can connect to my selfhood which shapes my identity and integrity. It is the voice of this identity and integrity that I have complete trust in...it reminds me of my potentials...; hence, I will not let any current popular thinking or peer pressure interfere unless my inward teacher approves of it...."

Trainee 1 "...My teaching is a reflection of my on-going learning which I believe to be an integral part of my professional life... I am open to learning and I learn not only by referring to literature sources or by consulting experienced practitioners, but also by actively observing my colleagues, following their advice and reflecting on my own professional achievements and failures...."

Trainee 2 "... I want to be the type of teacher who provides guidance rather than authority by providing the students with necessary skills to acquire the language. As a teacher, I am not to dictate certain rules but to give hints about the structures and have them discover the language. I am not the ultimate source of information while I can lead the students to the sources of information..."

Trainee 3 "...My teaching philosophy is ... to help my students learn and understand English without being strict. ... We will experiment together and find the best way that they like. I will prepare activities which will attract everybody's attention, no matter what intelligence type they are, all the students will find an activity which they will prefer. They will learn in the way that they choose. There will be individual and group work. Student will lead me by telling me which type of activity they feel more comfortable with..."

Trainee 4 "... I believe that what I present in my classes should be somehow relevant to my and students' daily lives. ... Another factor that influences students' learning is the element of fun. ... As a teacher, I don't want to be regarded as the only person who judges right and wrong. ..."

Trainee 5 "...I see teaching more as an art than a science. ... For me, teaching is not something starting when I enter the classroom and ending when I leave the room. I really have my students somewhere in my mind during the day. This is not a 3-hour job for me. ..."

Trainee 6 "...In my opinion, the first issue a teacher must solve is being "self confident" in the classroom... Self-confidence is related to classroom management very closely. ...A friendly and relaxed atmosphere is a good start. But the most important aspect is having and showing respect to the teacher and his/her peers by the students. In this sense, I am a benevolent ruler. I don't take power but if it is vested in me, I use it with good intentions. I also believe there is such a thing as having too much democracy. ... I hope to teach them about my experiences, respecting and enjoying life and the thirst to learn and to read. In short, I want to teach them the same things that I want to teach my own child. ..."

Trainee 7 "... In terms of classroom management, I always set the rules at the beginning of the term. These rules are the ones that are necessary for the normal process of a lesson. If they do not obey the rule or someone violates it, there are logical punishments like doing extra homework, giving the mobile phones to the teacher, etc. ... As a teacher, my priority is to have a positive atmosphere where learners can express themselves and communicate in their target language. ..."

Trainee 8 "...I...see myself as the facilitator of knowledge in the classroom. This role of facilitator I try to achieve through multiple levels of relationships. ... The first level of relationship is that of the one who knows something and is willing to share this something with them. This can be considered lecturing at its essence although I try and avoid the pitfall of being the one who speaks to them from a higher up authority. Lecturing like this, I have found through experience, can become a source of alienation towards the facilitator and the subject at hand...thus working against a transfer of knowledge. Therefore, I try to apply the right amount of unemphasized authority coupled with visible modesty to eliminate this threat against learning. The next level of relationship is that of a peer (despite differences of physical years) who looks through a similar window on the present currents that govern our world. ... The final level of relationship takes its roots from the recognition of differences of each individual. ... At this level, the facilitator has the full grasp of the personalities of each individual in the classroom and makes this known to each member of the class very openly. The questions and challenges become extremely customized, provoking the learner to respond openly and sincerely. ... I ... believe that a real medium of learning can be established only after a clear channel of communication is opened. ..."