Can Team Working Shape Social Learning and Social Capital? : A Case Study of Team Teaching at a University in Japan

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Maki TANIGUCHI & Graham JONES

Introduction

This paper will explore how team working promotes social capital via social learning through action research on a case of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) team teaching within higher education. The action research is based on the results of a 15-week project at a university in Japan: the two authors of one non-native English-speaker and one native team-taught English to a class of 30 students during the Spring term of 2019 all in English with the goals of building an interactive social learning community composed of both teachers and students.

In EFL classrooms, both teachers and students learn by collaborating with one another. This study underlies a theoretical perspective that team teaching is part of social learning. According to Wals and Leij (2007), social learning refers to "learning that takes place when divergent interests, norms, values and constructions of reality meet in an environment that is conducive to learning" (p.18). This social approach toward learning requires a different style of teaching than traditional lecture-style teaching with one teacher and one group of students. Team teaching involving two teachers is like multiplication of volume: Teacher A's Dimension × Teacher B's Dimension × Students' Dimension. This study defines EFL team teaching as two or more English-language experts jointly teaching courses to facilitate active and participatory learning among the teachers as well as their students within elementary, secondary, or higher education regardless of their native language, gender, and academic or professional background.

Whereas team teaching is broadly conducted within primary and secondary education, there have been very few EFL team teaching experiments within higher education, and accordingly, there are few studies on it.[1] As a consequence, the benefits

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1) One of the substantial studies on university EFL team teaching in Japan includes Rehorick and Rehorick (2016). The study investigated impacts of team teaching on multi-dimensional EFL curriculum design. They examined the team teaching of two specialists who integrated teaching English language with subject contents: one of the team teachers was a language specialist and the other a subject specialist. However,

of team teaching for not only students' English performance but also English teachers' professional competence may be underexploited especially at university level. University EFL team teachers' professional development through creating social learning opportunities leaves much room for discussion.

This paper focuses on three main benefits of team teaching as part of social learning exclusively on the teachers' part. They developed a mutual understanding, integrated conflicting ideas and perspectives, and took a more risk-taking approach. That led to their professional self-transformation.

Background of the Study

Tajino and Smith (2016) reveals conditions that team teaching brings to the development of learning. They described team teaching in language education as "a collaborative learning experience in which two or more class participants work together as a team towards their development as teachers and students" (p.15). It is important to note that they reframed team teaching as team learning. They considered the entire class comprised by teachers and students to be a team and a learning community (p.17). Teachers should do some rethinking themselves that they are also learners, and students are a critical source for their learning. In reality, team teaching should be cooperative team learning among all participants in the classroom, where multiple ways of learning happen. It is only then that an EFL classroom can become a fertile soil for social learning.

Meanwhile, benefits of social learning are discussed in a range of other educational fields than EFL and in a variety of fields such as organizational development, corporate management, multi-stakeholder governance and so forth. Among others, the study of Stone and Barlow (2007) is worthy of attention for their suggestion on the process of social learning as follows:

New forms can emerge from points of instability, and even conflict, in social and environmental systems, when a vital network of conversation, free flow of information, and mutuality is maintained. Maintaining these networks requires an attitude of respect, and often reframing assumptions "about either/or"; "us versus them"; "black and white"; "we are the teachers, you are the learners" positions. Social learning can be facilitated by leaders with enough self-confidence and trust in

this study did not pay much attention to the group dynamics among all the participants in the curriculum development process.

the process to allow participants to express disagreements, confront differences, and take responsibility for their own decisions. (pp.417-418)

Social learning takes place when a community of learners can nurture social skills to agree to disagree, understand different perspectives, and be responsible for their own actions, even beyond educational settings, in diverse contexts.

In principle, these social skills can be enhanced inside and outside of EFL classrooms if a team of teachers and students try to transform instability and conflict into understanding. As far as EFL teachers' professional development is concerned, they can boost the process of social learning on their side, where they are willing to take risks of everyday team working challenges of creating team-based learning opportunities, as described below.

Methodology

The authors are practitioner-researchers: they carried out a university EFL team teaching project and did action research on their team teaching as part of social learning. They team-taught a required English communication course to 30 first year students of the Environmental Policy department throughout the spring term of 2019 at the University of Shiga Prefecture, Japan, which they were affiliated with at that point. The public university has a rather small body of about 2600 students and it covers academic disciplines from humanities to science and technology. The targeted course consisted of 15 weekly classes conducted all in English. The core goal of this course was increasing the students' English skills as a life skill, which included better communication for better relationship building, taking ownership of their learning as a life-long learner, and being socially responsible for their actions. The team teachers met at least one time before each class for lesson planning and had no more than one debriefing meeting to discuss what went well and what would work better.

This action research will evaluate the impacts of university EFL team teaching on the team teachers' part. The authors will do it through examining three cases. To analyze the effects, three sets of material will be used: a document reviewing the practitioners' lesson plans, the practitioners' observation on the students' and teachers' dynamics in class, and the practitioners' evaluation of the students' one-page essays for their mid-term assignment and presentation notes for their final assignment.

Three Cases

Case 1: English Typing Lesson

The team teachers gave the students a mid-term assignment: a one-page essay titled "My future: How I might use English in my life." The teachers had a different expectation for the students' English writing. While the non-native teacher assumed they would submit a typed-out essay, the native teacher assumed they would submit a hand-written one.

As a learner of English herself, the non-native teacher had trained in English typing skills as part of her English writing skills and recognized the importance of English typing for Japanese English learners' writing. On the other hand, the native teacher had not thought deeply about the necessity for students' training in English typing. The two discussed a relevant study (Gondree, 2014), which dealt with English typing training for Japanese university students. The teachers made sure that English writing skills involved English typing skills in this age of information and communications technology. Above all, they realized it was absolutely essential for their students to learn different text input methods when learning a different language system. They ended up recreating their predefined lesson schedule to assign one class to an English typing lesson.

In Week 6, the non-native teacher took a lead and gave the students English typing training in a computer room, while the native teacher checked the students' tasks and gave them feedback. Most of them could type out words, but they were not familiar with how to put an apostrophes, how to change upper-case letters into lower-case ones, or how to type with spaces between words, sentences, and paragraphs. They practiced typing sample English passages that contained English punctuations such as quotation marks and dashes. They responded to some tips more quickly than the teachers expected. They all submitted their nicely typed-out essay in the mid-term.

Case 2: Not Giving Too Many Examples

From the outset, the two teachers had a different approach towards giving examples to students in a communication task. The non-native teacher was trying to give the students minimum numbers of examples, whereas the native teacher was attempting to help them by showing as many examples as possible.

Through her teaching career at Japanese institutions, the non-native teacher found many Japanese students passively follow what teachers show, so as not to stand out. The Japanese teacher felt she needed to encourage her students to independently

engage in work. However, having taught English in many parts of the world, the native teacher struggled with Japanese students who sat down quietly in communication classes. Using specific phrases or templates was the way he devised to encourage Japanese students to speak up.

Right before Week 1, they realized that their different policies on giving students examples stemmed from the common goal of promoting students' active learning. Subsequently, they agreed that they were going to keep inspiring students to talk but to give students minimum numbers of examples to support students' ownership of learning predicated on their teaching philosophy: English is a skill for life.

Even so, in Week 13, there was a moment when these contrasting approaches spilled into the open. One of the students asked a question about how to start a presentation to make an impact on the audience. The students were supposed to make a two-minute individual presentation as their final assignment titled "My future: How I can keep levelling up my English." The native teacher answered in the following manner: "One way of doing it is beginning with a puzzle. You can start your presentation with an open question, for example, 'How can I improve my English?' Or, you can say, 'How can I take advantage of my English skills for my future career?' Another example could be 'What is my dream?' in a more dramatic way." In the middle of the answer, the non-native teacher interrupted the native teacher. She cut his talk off, saying "That's enough." She continued, "This group of people doesn't need any more examples. They can figure out how to start their presentation on their own." Instantly, she felt she might have embarrassed her partner in the face of the students.

In a few debriefing meetings, the native teacher told the non-native teacher that it was sometimes helpful for him to get a warning when he was giving too many examples. The non-native teacher appreciated that the native teacher was open to different approaches and constructively accepted her warning in class.

As it turned out, some of the students came up with a unique opening question even under their teachers' negotiated policy of giving students less help. One student started her presentation like this: "I want to improve my SLR skills. What does SLR mean? It means speaking, listening, and reading. Now, I'll tell you what kind of skill I need for my speaking, listening, and reading." In the end, 19 students out of 30 got 80 points or more out of 100 for their final assignment in accordance with the presentation rubric.

Case 3: L and R Pronunciation Quiz

When the team teachers explained something to their students, they tried to explain it with a dialogue style between them instead of one teacher holding the floor. The students could see or listen to two styles and voices, which was quite engaging for them. This dialogical style allowed the teachers to jump in over their partner anytime in class; however, that also meant things occasionally developed in unexpected directions.

At the beginning of Week 14, the native teacher was making a comment about one of the students' written remarks, "I went to see *Araddin* last week. It was very good." Pointing out a mistake in the remark and correcting it to *Aladdin*, he continued that it was always useful to check L/R especially in foreign words used in Japan. While the native teacher was leading the class, the non-native teacher was observing the students and she saw them nodding. She considered it as a sign that they were expecting more practice in distinguishing these sounds. Then, she joined her partner's explanation as was often the case. She said to her partner, "Pronouncing R is very difficult, particularly for Japanese speakers including me. Because R sound doesn't exist in Japanese. Could you show us how to pronounce R and L again?" This is how an ad-hoc pronunciation practice started. The native teacher modeled L and R sounds by showing the different shapes of his mouth and position of his tongue. The students repeated after him and followed the movement of his mouth.

After several rounds of practice, the native teacher came up with a sound quiz for the non-native teacher; actually, the native teacher's original intention of the quiz was only a demonstration before he gave the students a quiz. The quiz went like this: "Now, I'll pronounce either right with R sound or light with L sound. You can tell me which, right or light? Are you ready?" The highlight of the spontaneous exercise was that the non-native teacher could not tell which was which in front of the students. She was not pretending to be bad at differentiating these sounds intentionally, but she just could not identify the difference at that moment. Immediately, the native teacher said to the students, "Making mistakes is totally OK. As you just saw, even an English teacher can't tell which is which! It is an essential part of your language learning process." At the same time, the non-native teacher honestly said to the students, "See, I can't do it. I'm still struggling with distinguishing L and R. Let's keep practicing together." She laughed at herself with the whole team, her students and her teaching partner.

The students were witnessing a true picture of a life-long language learner: making mistakes is essential for language learning. Rather than being disappointed by the non-native teacher's language ability, many of the students seemed to feel encouraged by

the fact that even the language expert was not perfect. In fact, the students relaxed into a pair activity and gave their partner a pronunciation quiz of R/L sounds, as the two teachers walked around the classroom and interacted and practiced with them.

Discussion

Demerits and Merits of Team Teaching

EFL team teaching is not all roses. Aside from negative effects on students, there can be negative effects on teachers. Among others, the whole process of team teaching involves logistical difficulties. It is time and energy consuming for teachers (and money consuming for institutions). More importantly, team teaching does not cater to everyone for investing their time and energy: it presupposes team teachers' readiness and patience to accept criticisms. For teachers who are defensive, judgmental, or unwilling to learn from others, team teaching might become team fighting.

Through overcoming the risks and costs of EFL team teaching, the teachers discovered some benefits to themselves, separately from their students, as the following analysis of the three cases will suggest. Mainly, team teaching had the potential to provide the teachers with three opportunities: learning, collaboration, and flexibility.

Learning

EFL team teaching can help diversify teachers' educational repertoires through sharing their learning about students as well as learning from students. Kohonen (1992) mentioned that teaching is "observing student learning, 'kid-watching', collecting and analyzing information about learners and using this information as a basis for planning further instructional actions" (p.36). When team teachers exchange the information about their students, individual teachers' learning about and from their students can be multiplied throughout a cycle of planning, implementing, observing, and evaluating.

One of the outcomes of the team teachers' multiplied learning was the English typing session. In that case, the non-native teacher unearthed the Japanese students' needs for getting familiar with English typing and told it to the native teacher. With different language backgrounds, the two teachers made sure that the standpoint of learners in Japan was missing in their plan for the day and they devised the English typing training.

In a precise sense, before they learned about their students, the teachers learned from their partner's academic, professional, and cultural experiences. The native teacher's academic background is in astrophysics, and he has previously taught English

in many parts of the world including Turkey. The non-native teacher's is in conflict transformation and peacebuilding, and she has built her career of teaching English in Japan. Their varied fields and understanding about local and international context gave them distinctive tools of classroom materials, methods of course management, and ways of interacting with students. It is fundamentally wrong to have a mindset that native teachers should lead non-native teachers in EFL team teaching, assuming native speakers are superior language teachers to non-native teachers. No matter where they are from, what professional experience they have pursued, or which language is their mother tongue, team teachers should work on equal footing. It is putting teachers' heads together for creating a better EFL learning environment that affects the enhancement of their students' learning experiences, not the fluency of English.

Team teaching is grounded on team learning. When team teachers are ready for learning from students as well as from their partner(s), they can integrate their expertise into more effective teaching plans, tools, and methodologies. These multiple standpoints allow teachers to pay more attention to the dynamics of their students and learn more about them, creating a beneficial cycle.

Collaboration

EFL Team teaching can give teachers a great opportunity to transform their conflict into cooperation. Lederach (2003) defined conflict transformation as "to envision and respond to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships" (p.22). A negative conflict between team teachers can be transformed into "an opportunity, a gift" (p.18); in fact, it is a source of trustful and respectful relationship building.

Consider the case of the teachers' conflicting policies over giving the students examples of how to start an impactful presentation. It was quite natural that the two language experts had incompatible teaching goals or strategies. Yet, they constructively dealt with the conflict in preference to avoiding it. The thing is that they shared the vision of increasing their students' English skills as a life skill. That made them realize they were not fighting for a right method or agenda but figuring out ways to better help their students.

Team teaching is the process of team building. It takes time for teachers to understand what their partner values, prioritizes, and cares about in EFL education and where it comes from. That is finding out the common ground underneath their

differences.

Flexibility

EFL team teaching can provide much running room for teachers to handle a situation at the right moment by bridging a gap between what was intended and the actual outcome. As for the gap filling, Bailey *et al.* (1992) pointed out that while one teacher is leading a class, it enables the other team teacher(s) to "spontaneously contribute fresh ideas or pertinent illustrations to a lesson" (p.169). As one of team teachers is focusing on a teaching task, the other teacher(s) can pull back for the big picture, and this distribution of multitasking roles and responsibilities helps the other teacher(s)' swift coordination.

As the case of the spontaneous L and R sound quiz shows, one of the greatest learning moments for the community came from the teachers' catching cues from each other and jumping at the chance. The non-native teacher's mistake went against the native teacher's intention (and the non-native teacher's). Turning the tide, the native teacher changed the unexpected into a teachable moment for the students. Also, at the right moment, the non-native teacher rode on the unexpected happening to resonate with the students' challenges of English learning.

The team teachers could display an attitude of improvisation, doing their own part, and coordinating the two parts in parallel. While the native teacher was leading with his authority, the non-native teacher was subordinating her authority to her partner, and vice versa. The crucial precondition of distributing authority like this was that the two exercised their leadership and ownership in each class instead of following or controlling one of them. That was how they switched their roles, tasks, and plans during a single class.

Team teaching is built upon team playing. It is seizing a chance to support each other. Interdependence based on independence affords teachers opportunities to jump in over their partner, offer relevant explanations, and come up with a unique idea. That helps them feel more comfortable with uncertainty and risk-taking.

Application: Creating Social Capital

All the three cases demonstrate that the teachers' team working drove team learning, team building, and team playing among them in a mutually reinforcing manner. The success of team teaching as part of social learning depends on how team teachers take advantage of "the amount of space for possible conflicts, oppositions and contradictions"

(Wals, 2007, p.497). The team strived to include as many different cultures, models, accents, experiences, gaps, voices, and mistakes as possible and transform them into a source of their better understanding, communication, and relationships.

What motivated the team teachers to overcome conflicting ideas and measures and have fun with them was their curiosity to go on learning throughout their lives. That was exactly the ways social capital was generated. The teachers were multiplying opportunities for discoveries and inspirations within a learning community— "networks together with shared norms, values and understanding that facilitate co-operation within or among groups" (Keeley, 2007, p.163). There is a potential that people's way of learning can shape social capital and, eventually, their professional career.

Conclusion

The following three factors can contribute to the development of social learning and social capital in EFL classrooms. (1) Team teaching is grounded on team learning, where teachers learn from each other, and from their students. (2) Conflict between teachers is a gift that can be transformed into team building. (3) Flexibility, spontaneity, and having fun—team playing—bridges gaps between teachers' intended and actual outcomes within the classroom.

Overall, when teachers take risks and cultivate a readiness to laugh at themselves— and always operating under shared core values—team teaching can facilitate team learning, team building, and team playing in a mutually reinforcing way.

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This paper will examine how team working promotes social learning and thus social capital through a case study of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) team teaching within higher education. The authors (one a non-native English-speaker and the other a native) conducted an action research project: they team-taught English to a class of 30 university students in Japan for 15 weeks with the aim of creating a social learning community as one big team of both teachers and students. Three elements of team working arising from this action research on the side of the team teachers are presented and discussed.