



Universidad  
de Alcalá

# **Why 1+1 is greater than 2: Exploring the Synergy between Language Assistant and Teacher**

**Máster Universitario en Enseñanza del Inglés  
como Lengua Extranjera**

**Presented by:  
Nathan James Florian**

**Supervised by:  
Dr. Raquel Fernández Fernández**

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2021/2022

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	3
<b>2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b> .....	5
2.1. CO-TEACHING TYPES .....	7
2.2 OTHER CONTEXTS OF CO-TEACHING .....	11
2.3 CONTEXT OF THE LANGUAGE ASSISTANT IN THE MADRID BILINGUAL PROGRAM .....	12
<b>3. LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	14
<b>4. DISCUSSION</b> .....	25
<b>5. GUIDELINES &amp; RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	28
5.1 CO-TEACHING PRINCIPLES & GOOD PRACTICES IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION .....	28
5.2 MENTORSHIP & REFLECTIVE PRACTICE .....	29
5.3 MOTHER TONGUE POLICY .....	31
5.4 ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT .....	32
5.5 INTERPERSONAL SKILLS & TRAINING .....	33
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b> .....	34
<b>7. REFERENCES</b> .....	36
<b>8. APPENDIX 1: Questions for Creating a Collaborative Working Relationship     in Co-teaching</b> .....	39
<b>9. APPENDIX 2: The Coteaching Rating Scale     (Special Education Teacher Format)</b> .....	40
<b>10. APPENDIX 3: The Coteaching Rating Scale     (General Education Teacher Format)</b> .....	41

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The region of Madrid began its bilingual program in public schools in the 2004-2005 academic year. Since then, the initiative has grown significantly with just 26 primary schools at its onset to its now 597 primary and secondary participating schools (Consejería de Educación, Universidades, Ciencia y Portavocía de la Comunidad de Madrid, 2021). This educational change was not exclusive to the public realm as semi-private and private institutions have also adopted similar models of bilingual education. Notable non-public programs are BEDA (Bilingual English Development Assessment) led by Federación Española de Religiosos de Enseñanza - Titulares de Centros Católicos (FERE-CECA) and UCETAM's (Unión de Cooperativas de Enseñanza de Trabajo Asociado de Madrid) Bicultural-Bilingual and Bicultural programs (Buckingham, 2018). For the schools involved, regardless of funding, not only did this mean that certain content subjects would be taught through the medium of English, but it also entailed the incorporation of a new and innovative figure into the classroom: the Language Assistant (LA).

The main duties of the LA are to (1) serve as a model of spoken English and develop students' oral competence through conversation, illustrated through the Spanish term "auxiliar de conversación," (2) be a cultural ambassador by sharing and fostering interest in the cultural aspects of their country and (3) collaborate and plan with teachers to create teaching resources (Consejería de Educación, Universidades, Ciencia y Portavocía de la Comunidad de Madrid, 2021; Buckingham, 2018; Escuelas Católicas Madrid, 2013). These functions imply that a large part of the LA's role is carried out inside the classroom. Therefore, and albeit unofficially, the LA is indeed another teacher, which means that in one way or another, the LA and teacher teach together, or co-teach.

Across public and non-public programs, the requirements to be an LA are generally the same. Aspiring candidates must be natives of countries where the official language is English, or in the case of the BEDA program, possess a native-like level. Also, having obtained a bachelor's degree is mandatory. It is worth mentioning that the degree's field is not as important as simply having completed post-secondary education. However, programs state that a

background in education would certainly be helpful. Lastly, the nature of the position is temporary, being valid for only a couple of years. Therefore, LAs tend to be young adults who have recently graduated, as this profile is more compatible to spending at least a year living and working abroad.

The LA figure is held in high esteem in bilingual education in the Madrid region. According to the Language Assistant Handbook for 2021-2022, they are “crucial to the success [of the bilingual program]” (2021, p. 55). Also, the fact that the role was implemented at the same time as the program shows that policymakers could not foresee a bilingual program without the presence of an LA. Furthermore, the number of LAs has grown considerably since the beginning, which translates to a significant financial investment, and shows that the Ministry of Education is committed to maintaining the LA figure. This leaves little doubt that the LA is considered one of the key components of bilingual programs throughout the region of Madrid.

Even if the LA is an asset to bilingual programs, research also suggests that the LA may not always be successfully employed. A recurring challenge relates to the role of the LA. Although the LA’s duties and functions are described in program documentation, they are nonetheless ambiguous and open to interpretation. Although it is logical and expected that work relationships are not identical across all LA-teacher partnerships, the lack of clearly defined duties and functions has the potential to create problems that inhibit a healthy and productive working relationship. If a teacher is unaware of the possible benefits and advantages available through having an LA, they are less likely to successfully integrate the LA into the group as another element equally important as the teacher and the students.

Other difficulties exist in addition to the ambiguity of the LA role. Research has found that, although a teaching background is not a mandatory requirement for the position, a degree in education or teaching experience would most likely facilitate the teacher-LA partnership and have a greater positive impact on the quality of teaching (Codó & McDaid, 2020; Fernández & Halbach, 2010). Some studies have arrived at the same conclusion when looking at native English teachers (NETs) in Asian contexts (Carless, 2006; Liu, 2008). Although this is not identical to the situation in Madrid, it can nonetheless help us to better understand the role

and characteristics of the LA. Other problems relate to communication between the school/teachers and the LA, as well as the decisions made by school management regarding the distribution of the LA's working hours across grade levels (Litzler, 2020). It cannot be said that these problems occur in every school that employs an LA; there are schools that have considerable experience working with LAs and have created models that yield benefits (Calderón, Díaz, & Durán, 2020; Fernández Valverde, 2020; Leal Cobos, 2020; Sánchez & Vasco, 2020). However, there remains substantial work to be done to continue improving the successful integration of the LA figure in practice.

The present dissertation is theoretical in nature and attempts to establish a set of essential principles and strategies that will make the LA role better defined, while at the same time, more meaningful. To achieve this aim, an analysis of the research related to co-teaching in bilingual settings where a native, or a significantly proficient speaker of the language, is involved in the teaching-learning process will be carried out. Then, conclusions with their supporting justification applicable to the context of LAs in the region of Madrid will be drawn. Despite the inherent challenges that result from incorporating another educator into a classroom, the potential benefits, not only for the teacher, but also for the students, more than merit its place in bilingual education. Yet, its mere existence in bilingual programs does not guarantee its success. Thus, this is a great opportunity that cannot be passed up to strengthen the LA role, which will ultimately improve the quality of bilingual programs.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

As mentioned earlier, bilingual programs entail the presence of another figure, the LA, in the classroom, which means that, to some extent, there are two educators teaching at the same time. The term that could be loosely used to describe this approach is co-teaching. Co-teaching has existed as early as the 1970s whose original aim was for purposes of inclusion, that is to cater to students with special educational needs, but within general education classrooms, as opposed to a separate room isolated from their peers (National Association for Co-Teaching, n.d.; Cook & Friend, 1995).

From their research, Cook & Friend (1995) defend co-teaching asserting that it not only benefits students with special educational needs, but also those without. Regarding students with special educational needs, apart from learning alongside their peers, a primary advantage is that instructional time is optimized. With co-teaching, students are not “pulled out” of the general education classroom to receive individualized attention from the special educator, but rather remain in the classroom. This means that time is used more efficiently and not lost through the unavoidable disturbances of receiving instruction in a separate room (stopping activity in general education classroom, packing up, walking to a separate room, re-orienting the instruction). The other advantage for special education students is that they are less likely to receive the stigma that often results from segregating students based on learning needs. As long as co-teaching is done well, meaning that instruction is indeed geared toward all the students and does not simply segregate special needs students inside the classroom, general education students will more likely perceive any diversity in learning as normal instead of something inferior.

Concerning general education students, Cook & Friend (1995) cite that the strong point stems from the simple joining of two different professionals. The presence of two teachers in the classroom allows them to capitalize on the different perspectives offered by each one because each improves, and is improved by, the other. The authors elaborate how the distinctive benefits of this partnership are possible because “general educators who specialize in understanding, structuring, and pacing curriculum for groups of students are paired with special educators who specialize in identifying unique learning needs of individual students and enhancing curriculum and instruction to match these needs,” (p. 2). As a result of this partnership, instruction is more likely to be differentiated because the general educator will be exposed to ways that learning can be adapted to those students with special educational needs. Therefore, students with high abilities, and those who are not considered to have special educational needs but would certainly benefit from differentiated instruction, could be catered to more effectively according to their needs because the general educator would have received firsthand experience of how this can be done. Apart from the possibility of tailoring instruction to better meet the individual needs of students, co-teaching also lowers the student-teacher ratio. This allows for more student participation if giving each student a chance to participate is considered since the possibilities to do so in a smaller group are higher

than in a larger one. A lower student-teacher ratio also means that students can receive more individualized attention because two teachers can attend to more students than one teacher can.

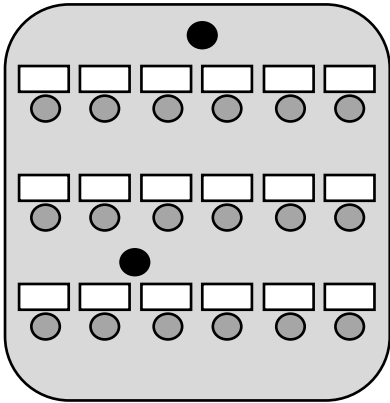
## 2.1 CO-TEACHING TYPES

The term co-teaching is a rather general term and could be interpreted in any of several ways, but there are numerous types that more concretely indicate what co-teaching looks like in the classroom. Cook & Friend (1995) list five types of co-teaching: (1) one teaching, one assisting, (2) station teaching, (3) parallel teaching, (4) alternative teaching and (5) team teaching. Figure 1 on the next page displays the corresponding classroom layouts of each type.

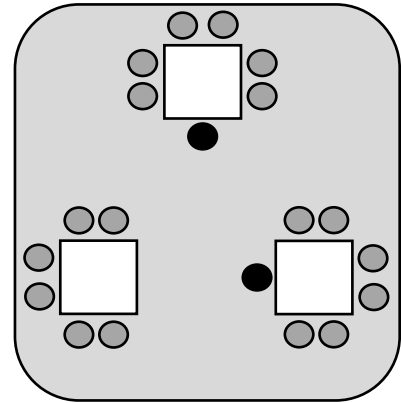
### One Teaching, One Assisting

This approach to co-teaching entails one teacher taking on the lead role in the classroom while the other assists or observes students as necessary. This type is simple and does not require much coordination from the two educators outside of the classroom. Firstly, the lead teacher has planned the lesson on their own. Secondly, the assisting teacher offers guidance instinctively during the session, which does not necessitate planning; to some extent, the assisting teacher is like another student. The major drawback to this approach occurs if the assisting role remains exclusive to one of the educators as opposed to being shared. If this is the case, then the person supporting could feel like a “glorified teaching assistant,” and even more so if the special educator is frequently the one assisting (Cook & Friend, 1995). Moreover, students will most likely perceive this imbalanced dynamic, which could place the assisting teacher’s authority in jeopardy. Therefore, the lead role should be distributed more equally amongst both educators to avoid these issues.

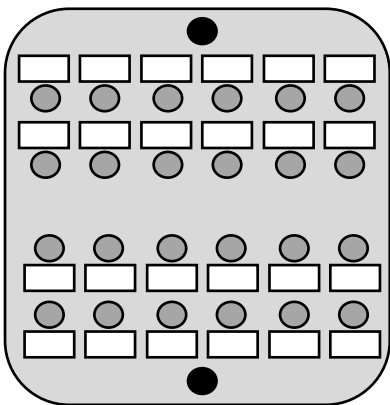
**FIGURE 1**



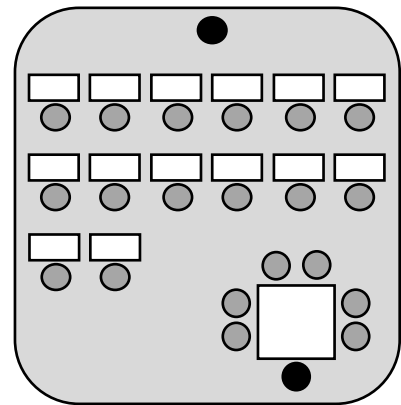
**One Teaching, One Assisting**



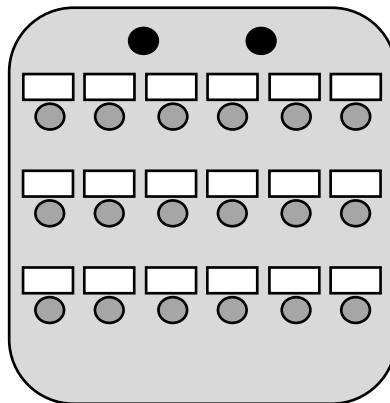
**Station Teaching**



**Parallel Teaching**



**Alternative Teaching**



**Team Teaching**

Source: Adapted from Cook, L., & Friend, M. (1995). Co-teaching: Guidelines for Creating Effective Practices. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 26. 3.



## Station Teaching

As the name suggests, learning in this type happens in small groups at “stations” or specific parts of the classroom designated for a particular activity. Each teacher is responsible for carrying out their activity that is different from that of the other teacher, but nonetheless complements it in some way. Although there must be at least two stations, it is not limited to only two. More stations can be included, but this means that students will be working independently rather than guided by a teacher. Each educator will repeat their activity as many times as there are groups.

In this approach, both teachers have a more equal role than in one teaching, one assisting, thereby reducing the possibility of students attaching less importance to one teacher. Furthermore, a lower student-teacher ratio favors pupils, and those with special educational needs can be mixed among groups, which helps to avoid the stigma from segregation based on learning needs. However, this type of co-teaching does indeed present some challenges. Primarily, the noise level will likely be high. Also, teachers will have to synchronize their activities very well to prevent any one group from waiting for another to finish. If there are more than two stations, planning will have to be prepared in even more detail because students will have to monitor themselves if there is no teacher present at their station.

## Parallel Teaching

This type involves both educators leading the same activity but each to one half of the class. A lower student-teacher ratio is the main advantage, which provides more chances for students to participate and receive individualized attention. This approach is well suited for things like “drill-and-practice activities, projects requiring close teacher supervision and discussion of activities,” (Cook & Friend, 1995). Parallel teaching is like station teaching in that teachers have to synchronize their instruction so that groups finish at the same time. However, more collaboration and planning are required to ensure that the instruction students receive is the same even though certain factors will make identical instruction unlikely such as student heterogeneity and each teacher’s own interpretation and realization

of the activity. Another matter to address is that the noise level is likely to be high since teachers and students will be talking at the same time.

### Alternative Teaching

Although co-teaching strives to attain the genuine inclusion of both general and special education students, there are still times when the learning needs of special education students are best catered to in a small group, which is one of the goals of alternative teaching. This type consists of one educator teaching a large group of students during which the other attends to a considerably smaller group of students. However, the danger of stigmatizing students with special educational needs still exists if they are continually placed in the small group. To prevent this, Cook and Friend (1995) recommend mixing groups so that they are never made up of only those with special educational needs and cycling every student in the class through the small group.

### Team Teaching

This approach to co-teaching is unique in that it is the only one where both educators are working together directly, rather than separately with groups of students, and exercise the same role in the classroom. Essentially, teachers work more closely together to accomplish some pre-established goal, hence the word “team” in its name. Cook & Friend (1995, p. 7) describe and capture the pedagogical potential of this type of co-teaching:

The teachers might take turns leading a discussion, or one may speak while the other demonstrates a concept, or one might speak while the other models note taking on a projection system. The teachers who are teaming also role play and model appropriate ways to ask questions. This approach requires a high level of mutual trust and commitment. It is an approach with which some co-teachers might never be comfortable. On the other hand, many veteran co-teachers report that they find this type of co-teaching rewarding. They note that it gives them a renewed energy in their teaching and prompts them to try new ideas for reaching their students.

## 2.2 OTHER CONTEXTS OF CO-TEACHING

Other contexts of co-teaching exist apart from those that strive to achieve the full inclusion of students with special educational needs in the general education classroom. In eastern Asian countries like China (specifically Hong Kong), South Korea and Japan, there are programs in place similar to the LA one in Madrid. Each one hires native speakers of English to work in primary schools alongside local English teachers. Eligibility requirements regarding educational background vary slightly across all three programs. As is the case in Madrid, a bachelor's degree in any field is required in the Japan program, whereas this, along with some sort of English language teaching certification, is necessary in order to be eligible for the programs in Hong Kong and South Korea (English Program in Korea, 2013; Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2022; Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, 2015). Although there are small differences with regard to eligibility requirements, it is worth mentioning that every program, one way or another, makes explicit reference to the importance of having some kind of language teaching background or experience. However, the initial program eligibility requirements could have been different and modified over the years because Herbert and Wu (2009) have identified certain challenges that exist between the native speaker and local teacher that stem from a lack of teaching experience or background. With its complications and all, these are other examples of co-teaching since there are two people working together directly in the classroom to teach students in primary schools.

A context of co-teaching quite different from that above occurs at St. Cloud State University, located in Minnesota, USA, in a monolingual English setting. It currently uses a co-teaching approach with its students majoring in Elementary Education during their student teaching experience. In this sense, teacher candidates work alongside in-service teachers to fulfill the instructional experience requirement of the university degree. This differs from East Asian contexts mentioned above because the purpose is for teacher candidates to acquire practical teaching experience, not to serve as models of the language and culture. Moreover, all those involved tend to be native speakers; thus, there is no foreign language element, except in the case where there could be a portion of elementary students who are English language learners (ELLs). The university was awarded a grant from the United States Department of Education in 2003 to implement a student teaching program based on co-teaching, as

opposed to the former “sink or swim” approach, which consisted of the teacher candidate taking on a more passive and solitary role. The university was tasked with measuring the program’s effect on student performance, specifically math and reading achievement, and compare it to that of students in non-cotaught student teaching settings and contexts where there is a single licensed teacher. The study’s results bode extremely well for using the co-teaching model for the student teaching experience as not only did students in cotaught settings perform better than those with a single licensed teacher, but they also did better than their counterparts in classrooms where a “sink or swim” student teaching approach was present (Bacharach et al., 2010). Due to such positive results, the university has, since then, officially taken on a student teacher program based on the principles of co-teaching and strongly recommends that other student teacher programs do the same.

### 2.3 CONTEXT OF THE LANGUAGE ASSISTANT IN THE MADRID BILINGUAL PROGRAM

LAs that participate in the Madrid bilingual program could be placed in public schools ranging from early childhood education to upper secondary, but the majority of assistants are assigned to primary and secondary schools throughout the region of Madrid. LAs are to work 16 hours per week and it is the responsibility of the school to decide how to distribute those hours. Commonly, LA schedules are made up over four days, either Monday to Thursday, or Tuesday to Friday. According to the Language Assistant Handbook for 2021-22, LAs are expected to carry out the following duties (Consejería de Educación, Universidades, Ciencia y Portavocía de la Comunidad de Madrid, 2021, p. 76-78):

- Always address students in the target language.
- Help teachers plan activities and lessons and provide linguistic support in the classroom, cooperating and following their instructions at all times.
- Work with small groups of students alongside the teacher.
- Encourage students to use the target language to increase their degree of interest and motivation.
- Provide a model of correct usage of grammar, pronunciation and intonation in the target language.

- Encourage participation in training initiatives and in the learning and teaching of languages, and develop creative classroom resources.
- Prepare classroom material related to cultural aspects of their country.

As cultural ambassadors, they should foster an interest in culture and customs of their countries of origin. With this in mind, they may be asked to:

- Prepare presentations, activities or workshops focusing on their culture, history, geography and customs with the purpose of bringing the reality of their country closer to their students.

On the other hand, since Language Assistants are not teachers, they should not:

- Take sole responsibility for the whole class. If specific speaking tasks with smaller groups are organized, Assistants must carry out these activities in an adjoining space to ensure that the teacher in charge is always available and able to supervise the group.
- Supervise or discipline students on their own. They should inform the teacher in charge of the problem so that it can be dealt with accordingly.
- Take part in the designing and drawing up of the yearly curricular programme. The teaching staff is responsible for this task.
- Be expected to take on the role of a translator. Assistants provide language support to teachers and help their students improve their communicative competence in a second language.
- Prepare, write or correct exams, tests or assessment activities.
- Take part in meetings between families and members of the teaching staff.
- Supervise the playground during recess or the school canteen at lunch time.

If the previous guidelines are taken into account, all of the models of co-teaching established by Cook and Friend (1995) are at least feasible. According to the information cited above, among the responsibilities of the LA are to “help teachers plan activities and lessons...”, “work

with small groups of students alongside the teacher” and “prepare presentations, activities, or workshops...” (p. 76). It also highlights that, since LAs are not certified teachers, “if any specific tasks with smaller groups are organized, Assistants must carry out these activities in an adjoining space...” (p. 77). The conditions of co-teaching and the role of the LA overlap in terms of the teacher and LA collaborating outside the classroom, the LA working with small groups inside the classroom and the LA taking on more of a lead role. For instance, if the teacher and the LA plan activities together, then any type of co-teaching could be used. Also, the specific mention of small groups “in an adjoining space” means that station or alternative teaching could serve well for that kind of work to take place. Moreover, if LAs are expected to prepare lessons on their own occasionally, one teaching, one assisting, could be a potential way to carry out this task. Finally, co-teaching has been specifically recommended as a strategy that favors the working relationship between the LA and teacher (Calderón, Diaz, & Durán, 2020; Codó & McDaid, 2020; Fernández Vavlerde, 2020; Leal Copos, 2020; Sánchez & Vasco, 2020) or between native English teachers (NETs) and local English teachers (LETs) teachers (Liu, 2008).

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

On an international basis, perhaps there might not be a context exactly the same as the one with the LA in the bilingual program of Madrid. Eligibility requirements, profile, cultural factors and class subject, to name a few aspects, can all contribute to the uniqueness of each working relationship between a native speaker and a local teacher. Nevertheless, perhaps what every context does have in common is the fact that two people are physically together in the classroom working towards a shared goal: to enhance the quality of students’ learning through said partnership. With that said, looking into the research, both theoretical and empirical, can provide insight that is essential to integrate LAs into education more successfully.

In her theoretical study, Liu (2008) argues in favor of adopting a co-teaching approach in the context of Chinese primary schools between NETs and non-native English teachers (NNETs). The author notes that it has been difficult satisfying the high demand for NETs since English

became a mandatory subject in 2001. Therefore, eligibility requirements have become more flexible so that native speakers with any educational degree can be admitted into the program. Ideally though, NETs with an educational degree would be preferred. As a result of employing NETs without a teaching background, there have been various documented cases where this has led to an overall poor quality of English teaching. Interestingly, the author states that, in some cases, this is even overlooked by the fact that NETs are native speakers, which serves as a sort of “window dressing” (p. 104) for schools. Thus, NETs’ mother tongue is believed to be the most important factor when it comes to teaching instead of pedagogy.

The author contends that co-teaching can remedy this problem and improve the teaching quality of NETs who can learn that which they lack from NNETs who would serve as mentors because they do have the background and the experience. However, in order for this to work, Liu (2008) cautions that co-teaching should not be blindly adopted, and that very careful consideration must be given towards factors like student characteristics, classroom space and teacher preferences, before carrying out co-teaching. The author suggests that a particular order of co-teaching models be followed; (a) One teaching – One assisting; (b) Alternative Teaching; (3) Station Teaching; (4) Team Teaching. The reason for this order is that it not only gradually gives the NET more teaching responsibility over time, but it also is progressive regarding the working relationship between the NET and NNET. Therefore, the NET can begin by taking on a more secondary role so that they can be mentored by the NNET, and as the NET becomes more skilled, they can take on a more active role. Also, this order gives both the NET and NNET time to get to know each other and build a relationship before they tackle more challenging co-teaching types, such as team teaching, which requires the most time, coordination and knowledge of and trust in each other’s skills (Thousand, et al., 2006).

Liu concludes by stating that the success of co-teaching relies not only on a positive disposition towards and genuine trust in the approach itself, but also support from school management and fellow teachers in terms of “pre-semester preparation, instructional planning and administrative support,” (Liu 2008, p. 113). Pre-semester preparation entails the true integration of the NET into the school as an equal member of the staff. The NET should arrive to the school a week early and use the time before classes commence to acclimate to a culturally different environment, take part in a general orientation and meet with

cooperating teachers to acquire essential context, such as past student performance, pedagogy, goals and issues to name a few. Instructional planning refers to the regular and necessary planning sessions that take place so that the NET and NNET are indeed working collaboratively. It is also mentioned that both members “have a say in instructional planning and contribute to the writing of integrated teaching plans,” (Liu, 2008, p. 114). Lastly, the school administration has a vital role to play ensuring that both NETs and NNETs have sufficient time to meet on a weekly basis to plan classes, that they teach to no more than two different primary grade levels and that they can take advantage of social opportunities to build a relationship outside of the classroom.

Another theoretical study carried out by Herbert and Wu (2009) provides a discussion on the debate that has existed around “native-ness” and language teaching. Although native teachers have perhaps been traditionally considered as superior to non-natives due to their authenticity in terms of language and culture, according to the authors’ research, this appears to be inaccurate. Native teachers are not always ideal; they possess certain drawbacks. Interestingly though, these drawbacks are the strengths of non-native teachers. For example, despite the native serving as a perfect model of the language, a non-native is a more realistic model of what students can achieve. Furthermore, since non-native teachers have already learned the language, they can empathize with students and use the mother tongue when necessary. In reality, the NET and LET each have distinct advantages and disadvantages, so the question is not which is the better English teacher, but rather how together each compensates for where the other lacks. Thus, these authors assert that a debate is counterproductive and should be shifted to an approach that highlights the distinct benefits that are possible from these two figures working jointly in the classroom. They also consider that, unfortunately, the misconception that native is best has, to an extent, jeopardized NET/LET co-teaching relationships in East Asian contexts.

To explore in more depth the effect of this misconception, the authors present a review of East Asian programs and highlight the difficulties and challenges faced by NETs and LETs working together in the classroom. Regarding the perspective of NETs, one of the problems encountered was that they felt isolated in schools in large part because they did not speak the local language, which made socializing and participation in meetings difficult. Another



problem was that their hours were too thinly distributed across grade levels and NETs felt this impaired their ability to get to know students. As for LETs, apparently, they either felt incompetent with regard to their role as English teachers or developed a feeling of resentment towards NETs. This occurred because LETs interpreted the addition of a NET to the classroom as a sign that they themselves were not enough to teach effectively. Thus, a more qualified person was needed to compensate for their shortcomings. In some cases, this feeling of insufficiency led to resentment because LETs saw firsthand how their equally qualified, but higher paid counterparts were unable to manage students due to their inability to communicate in the local language and were forced to call on LETs for assistance.

Both sides deemed a lack of communication to be a difficulty, as well as classroom management, except that NETs claimed students were difficult to control while LETs perceived this as a teacher problem as opposed to a student one. Perhaps most importantly though were the cultural clashes that occurred. NETs struggled with teaching methodology in East Asian settings, which to them is heavily based on textbooks, memorization and examinations. Concerning students, although NETs describe them as “friendly” and “hardworking” (Herbert & Wu, 2009, p. 59), they are also “passive, unwilling to ask questions and reluctant to discuss ideas,” (Herbert & Wu, 2009, p. 59). However, the authors explain that this is simply a cultural misunderstanding. Students are not accustomed to western teaching approaches that aim to create more active and communicative classroom environments. To them, asking questions could be interpreted as wasting peers’ time, which can lead to embarrassment. Also, answering questions posed by the teacher is associated with seeking attention, which is negatively viewed.

After their review of programs that have faced difficulties, Herbert and Wu (2009) detail a program in Taiwan that has seen a great deal of success implementing a co-teaching scheme with NETs and LETs. It is called the Fulbright Taiwan English Teaching program, which is run between the U.S. Fulbright Foundation and Yilan County Bureau of Education. NETs are primarily United States citizens who have a university degree, which may or may not be in education. Despite the fact that a teaching background is not a requirement, the selection process is still competitive. The program begins in July, a month before schools begins, with an orientation that both the native speakers and local teachers attend. It consists of

familiarizing the native speakers with Taiwanese culture and the local educational system that includes school visits and co-teaching modeling. Then, there are bimonthly seminars that take place during the year aimed at lesson planning and teacher cooperation. At orientation, native speakers also begin to take Chinese classes two hours a week which last the entire school year. The authors note that any effort on behalf of the native speakers to communicate with the local community in Chinese is appreciated. At the end of the orientation, both native speakers and school representatives have a say regarding placement. Although the advisory board makes the final decision, there is an opportunity for both parties to share their preferences. The program organizers are fervent supporters of co-teaching and believe it is the best approach to capitalizing on the strengths of both figures and thereby minimizing their weaknesses. According to the authors, “the pedagogical expertise of the local teacher is combined with the linguistic and cultural expertise of the native speaker,” (Herbert & Wu, 2009, p. 60).

From the start, a great deal of importance is given to native speakers and the program but because program administrators, school management and teachers sincerely believe in and benefit from it. Evidence of this is the fact that the demand for native speakers always is greater than those available. Native speakers are also paired up with local host families that help them adjust to living in a foreign country and even welcome them to share in holiday celebrations or to go sightseeing. The relationship between native speakers and local teachers extends beyond the classroom and the program genuinely attempts to integrate native speakers not only into the school, but also into the community.

What sets this program apart from others in East Asia is not that it somehow avoids the common difficulties and challenges presented in research, but rather that those involved are more prepared and supported to handle the complications that arise. The authors observed the same problems that other programs have faced such as “lack of proficiency in the local language, wide disparity in educational culture, lack of time for communication and joint planning and, occasionally, personality clashes,” (Herbert & Wu, 2009, p. 61). It appears that native speakers and teachers are not only committed to the program, but also to each other because they have been given the opportunity to forge a genuine relationship and have a strong support system in the form of a supervising panel to address issues and negotiate

solutions, bimonthly seminars that allow for ongoing training and a high level of community endorsement.

Empirical studies have been done focusing on one exclusive perspective, either that of the LA or of the teacher, while others have taken a mixed approach looking at both perspectives simultaneously. Buckingham (2018) is perhaps one of the first studies to have analyzed in detail the role of the LA specifically in the Madrid region. Teachers and LAs among the three main programs (Madrid public program, BEDA and UCETAM) were surveyed regarding their expectations and experiences of the LA role in primary education. Then, these findings were contrasted with official program documentation. Results indicated that there were not only inconsistencies between the teachers and LAs, but also between the documentation and teaching practices. An obvious suggestion for improvement was to better align theory with reality concerning the role of the LA. More importantly though, the study revealed that a reflection on what the exact role of the LA should be is needed, along with ways to make this more transparent to stakeholders, such as with formal training and better communication.

A case study conducted by Codó and McDaid (2020) also researched both the LA and teacher perspectives focusing specifically on three LAs at a secondary school in Barcelona. Although the focal point of their study was based on the experience of one particular LA, they used the experiences of the other two working at the school to provide more context and to draw more accurate conclusions. They also interviewed teachers and regional program administrators and reviewed relevant program documentation and social media data. Amongst their findings was that problems can arise when schools base their expectations of new LAs on previous ones. Due to the unskilled nature of the job, that is, neither a teaching degree nor experience is needed to become an LA, schools will likely find a wide range of profiles. What happened at this school was that the previous LA surpassed what was expected of him, which led to a general disappointment when the current LA underperformed but had not failed to carry out the duties of his role. The authors also found that the LA was perceived as the one primarily responsible for ensuring that the role was successfully carried out, instead of a joint effort where both the teacher and LA contribute to finding a way that works for each of them. This implied a more demanding commitment to the school than what was advertised in the job post, which also helped cause the disappointment.

Another dual perspective study is that of Carless (2006); however, the context was primary schools in Hong Kong, and rather than LAs, they were NETs. The objective of the study was to measure the impact of team-teaching between NETs and the LETs on three aspects: students, innovative teaching and professional development. Generally, there were more positive effects of team-teaching when it came to students, but this was not the case for the other two areas. Concerning students, NETs were content because they felt they had a positive influence on them, which was transmitted by their enjoyment and enthusiasm in class. LETs agreed stating that it was interesting to have a native speaker in class, which motivated students to learn and provided a more authentic environment to use the language. They also mentioned natural benefits that result from a dynamic of team-teaching, which were (Carless, 2006, p. 332):

- There is more opportunity to cater for diverse learning needs and support the weaker students because there are two teachers in the classroom.
- It is less boring for the pupils because there are two teachers to swap roles.
- Team-teaching creates more variety.
- Pupils may be more attentive because there are two teachers in the classroom.
- Learners are exposed to more English when the NET is there, the presence of the NET makes us less likely to switch to the mother tongue.

Despite these positive aspects, there were certain drawbacks with regard to students less proficient in English. Some LETs expressed their concern for these students because it was difficult for them to communicate with the NETs. Since they are unable to understand the NETs and express themselves in English, they consequently end up creating a negative association with NETs, which can be very detrimental to their learning of the foreign language. Nonetheless, the overall impact on students was perceived as positive and the author, from his own classroom observation, highlighted that, when team-teaching was present, classes became more student-centered and monitoring was more efficient due to the lower student-teacher ratio.

As to the impact that team-teaching had on teachers in terms of innovative teaching and professional development, findings suggest that there was little, if any, success with regard to LETs modifying their teaching to become more innovative or to fostering their professional development. At best, team teaching led LETs to reflect on more communicative approaches to teaching rather than lessons centered around the textbook and drilling. In some cases, innovative teaching took place during team-teaching sessions, but once LETs were on their own, they felt more comfortable reverting back to more traditional ways of teaching. Also, at times the NET and LET did not quite achieve innovative teaching entirely because the LET was not convinced of its effectiveness. Similarly, the effect of team-teaching on professional development was minimal or unclear. Although training was included, some LETs questioned its usefulness or simply did not have time to attend the training and reap its benefits properly. However, some LETs mention synergies that resulted from working with another person such as the fact that more ideas can be developed and that teachers learn from each other through team teaching and co-planning. Furthermore, it provides LETs with an opportunity to improve their English. Conversely, other LETs said that success really depends on the relationship between the NET and LET. If it is not a good match, then it becomes a burden. Thus, it is a bit like a lottery in that there is no middle ground. Moreover, if both do not agree on objectives, the partnership fails to be productive. Additionally, LETs frequently commented that working together with someone else is time consuming. Lastly, there was evidence that indicated that LETs were reflecting on their teaching practices, but the degree to which this led to professional development is unclear.

The author concludes that teachers involved in team-teaching should have background in English Language Teaching (ELT) methods, as well as specific training related to team teaching. Success depends on teachers' disposition towards the partnership and on their interpersonal skills, stressing that of compromising. He also recommends that a contingency plan be in place for when conflicts are to arise, this being a natural and probable result of two teachers working together in this context (Carless, 2006).

One study centered solely on the perspective of teachers in Madrid is that of Ordóñez Dios and Polo Recuero (2020). The goal of their research was to analyze teacher perceptions of the

role of the LA, specifically in physical education (PE) class. To accomplish this, they looked closely at the following areas (p. 77):

- Teachers' knowledge about the roles attributed to the LA under current regulations and official documents.
- Teachers' co-working experiences with the LA in PE.
- The extent to which the LA roles and tasks are really fulfilled in PE lessons.
- Main reasons that may hamper the use of this figure in PE lessons.
- Overall teacher assessment on the utility and convenience of having the LA in PE lessons.

The authors found that half of the teachers surveyed claimed to either be completely unaware of or know very little about the specific duties of the LA. However, as teachers gained more knowledge about LA functions, the working relationship improved. Consequently, it was reasoned that knowledge of the role of the LA leads to more positive and productive experiences. Another finding was that, according to teachers, the cultural contribution of the LA was perhaps not as present in PE class as it should be, especially since this is explicitly mentioned as one of the primary roles of the LA in official documentation. Lastly, a considerable majority of teachers did not find the LA role to be very helpful or to add value, which the authors attribute to the LA's lack of content knowledge and experience working in PE class. The authors suggest that the profile should be modified to include teaching background as a mandatory component.

The work done by López-Medina and Otto (2020) is similar to Buckingham's (2018) in that it compared LAs' interpretations of their role in the bilingual program of Madrid to official documentation so that solutions to make better use of the LA figure could be found. When compared to the results of Buckingham (2018), it appeared that LAs' perceptions of their role coincided more with official documentation in terms of functions related to language and culture. However, there were still areas where LAs somewhat misinterpreted their role, such as teaching to an entire class of students, assessment and discipline. Therefore, there are still

some aspects of the role that LAs do not fully comprehend even though there was indeed improvement related to the LAs' perceptions of certain duties.

Also from the perspective of LAs, Litzler (2020) analyzed and categorized the difficulties mentioned in teaching portfolios, which was a requirement of the Master's degree program (Bilingual and Multicultural Education or International Education) they were enrolled in at the time. The program is called Teach & Learn in Spain and is run by Instituto Franklin, who has partnered with charter schools located throughout Madrid. Participants spend nine months working as LAs in these schools. The purpose of the teaching portfolio was for LAs to reflect deeply on the theory of their studies with the reality of their teaching experience. Findings led to the classification of four major problem areas: (1) teaching methodology, (2) discipline and classroom management, (3) communication and (4) English.

The most frequent issue commented on by LAs was teaching methodology. In terms of cooperating teachers, LAs described their methodology as traditional and teacher-centered because they did not observe much self-directed learning take place and also because classes were heavily focused on using the textbook. Thus, LAs perceived a lack of meaningful learning. Another factor related more to the allotment of LA working hours than methodology is that LAs felt they were too thinly distributed as a resource. Their opinion was that they were working with too many classes and too many teachers to be able to do their job effectively. LAs also expressed their own lack of knowledge on how to teach those with special educational needs or immigrants. They wanted to or felt obliged to but did not receive guidance from the school on how to do so. Although not related directly to differentiating instruction for those with special educational needs, it is worth mentioning that some LAs claimed that some teachers made racist comments in reference to immigrant students.

The second most common problem was discipline and classroom management. LAs seemed to struggle with children talking, getting out of their seats, along with other disruptive behaviors, and then the teacher's reaction to these. Also, LAs considered that the general classroom noise was higher than in their home countries. Additionally, LAs were "shocked to observe that many teachers resorted to 'yelling' to call their groups to order, normally in Spanish, a practice that disrupted the flow of activities in the classroom," (p. 58). One LA

stated that they would have liked more assistance from the teachers regarding discipline and sometimes was left alone in the classroom. Other LAs had difficulties concerning student motivation in extracurricular activities. They attributed the lack of motivation to the fact that there was no grade associated.

Communication also proved to be a challenge for LAs. According to them, they would have liked to receive more information from both teachers and the school administration. One LA claims to have arrived to school on the first day to find out that no one had expected them. Another two LAs stated that they did not receive their class schedule on the first day either. Yet, Litzler (2020) mentions that the most common challenge was coordination or planning with cooperating teachers. If an LA works with many teachers, it is very difficult to find a time to communicate, let alone plan, during the week that coincides with both the teacher and the LA. This is even further complicated if the teacher views collaboration as time consuming or that the benefit does not outweigh the cost of the time investment (Carless, 2006). Furthermore, teachers themselves have indicated that they have little available time to meet with LAs to plan (Fernández & Halbach, 2010). According to the LAs, this lack of communication made it difficult for them to do their job because it was based more on improvisation rather than carrying out a pre-established plan. It must be stated that poor communication was not perceived as intentional but rather a result of poor organization. There were not many specific examples where communication was a problem documented by the LAs in their portfolios apart from two. On one occasion, the teacher did not feel comfortable telling the LA that she would prefer that the 3-year-olds move more in class but refrained from telling the LA who would have been more than happy to adapt her teaching. Another example deals with an LA going to just one specific class a week. Due to an inability to plan the class, the teacher would always take the lead and thought the LA was not comfortable teaching, while the LA thought the teacher did not want her leading any activities. Although these breakdowns in communication occurred, LAs also stated that, with time, communication improved.

The last major problem related to English, specifically the English-only policy LAs are to employ while at the school, the existence of varying levels of proficiency in a class and students lacking confidence when speaking in English. With regard to the English-only policy,



the reported problems range from the teacher speaking in Spanish for instruction or for discipline, students having difficulty understanding, LAs themselves fatigued from always having to resort to using English and that certain school staff did not speak English. Concerning levels of proficiency, LAs observed differences in classes notable enough to merit commenting on them in their portfolios. A few also stated that the overall levels were low. Finally, some LAs noticed that those students who lacked confidence needed time to adjust to an environment where they learned through a foreign language and were reluctant to speak due to pressure felt from their peers.

The author makes recommendations in response to the difficulties encountered by LAs. First, there should be more flexibility in terms of the English-only policy since LAs reported that it was challenging at times for all those involved to refrain from using the mother tongue. Flexibility also has a role to play regarding clashes in teaching methodology for both the LA and teacher. More dialogue is needed to achieve a balance where the LA's knowledge or experience of teaching is taken into consideration without ignoring that of the teacher. Concerning discipline and student behavior, the author suggests that LAs become familiar of the Spanish context before experiencing it for the first time in the classroom. To address the issue of communication, the author again suggests that LAs be informed early on about what they will realistically expect on a day-to-day basis along with very specific ways they can have a positive impact in the classroom.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

From the literature, numerous problems result from two people teaching together in a classroom, which demonstrates the complexity and delicateness of this working relationship in programs that combine native speakers with local teachers. Research shows a common difficulty is related to the ambiguity of the LA role. The lack of detail means that it is open to interpretation; therefore, a general failure to meet the expectations of both teachers and LAs is likely to happen (Codó & McDaid, 2019; López-Medina & Otto, 2020; Buckingham, 2018; Ordóñez Dios & Polo Recuero, 2020).

Another challenge relates to the profile of the LA, or perhaps the considerably diverse nature of it. To incentivize the LA offer, a common practice is to allow candidates with any educational degree to apply to the program. Also, the recruitment of native speakers disregarding pedagogical knowledge has contributed to participants coming from a wide range of backgrounds. Although not always the case, the absence of teaching qualifications has negatively impacted the LA-teacher relationship and/or students' learning (Carless, 2006; Codó & McDaid, 2019; Liu, 2008; Ordóñez Dios & Polo Recuero, 2020).

The restriction of or the inability to speak the mother tongue has also proved to be problematic. In East Asian contexts, the ability to speak the local language is viewed positively because it provides various advantages such as facilitating integration into the school and community, helping to build rapport with students as fellow language learners and making a more efficient use of class time using the local language to clarify doubts or to elaborate (Carless, 2006; Herbert & Wu, 2009). Thus, if the native speaker cannot speak the local language, these aspects are harmed. In Madrid, LAs are obligated to always address students in the target language. Apart from the benefits previously mentioned of speaking the local language, LAs have expressed that exclusively speaking in English can become exhausting and at times can make things more complicated rather than facilitate them (Litzler, 2020).

Communication and collaboration are other areas that complicate the working relationship. There seems to be a general lack of communication present in program settings (Herbert & Wu, 2009; Litzler, 2020). Regarding collaboration, teachers find it time consuming or simply do not have enough time to do it (Carless, 2006; Litzler, 2020). Some have even admitted that they are not entirely convinced of this form of innovative teaching that involves two figures in the classroom (Carless, 2006). Apart from this, the distribution of the LA's/native speaker's hours across grade levels is another factor that makes collaboration difficult. Various studies (Carless, 2006; Herbert & Wu, 2009; Litzler, 2020; Liu, 2008) have found that the distribution is too thin, that is, there are too many groups and too many teachers for the LA/native speaker to attend to effectively. This lack of continuity hinders the chances of being able to collaborate and teach together successfully.

Perhaps the challenge common amongst every program that includes native speakers working with local teachers in the classroom is interpersonal, which includes underlying beliefs, culture and personality. Tensions or clashes are bound to happen when two people, one a foreigner and the other a local, are placed in a context that is different for one of them. The incorporation of a native speaker into a local teacher's classroom can, albeit unintentionally, instill feelings of incompetence and resentment with the local teacher (Herbert & Wu, 2009). Furthermore, since we are a product of our own culture, teaching practices abroad will likely differ from ours and thus, seem inadequate if not approached with an embracing attitude. The research has found that clashes between the LA/native speaker and teacher are frequent with regard to teaching methodology, classroom management, student participation and assessment (Carless, 2006; Herbert & Wu, 2009; Litzler, 2020). In terms of personality, there is always the possibility of a mismatch; a pair of people whose personalities are simply not compatible and make it difficult to bring about a harmonious relationship. If this is to occur, it is perhaps even more problematic because of the nature of the working relationship that compels them to work together daily. Unless reconciliation has proven to be unlikely due to whatever reason, both people are bound together for the school year. Sometimes the best solution is to reassign the LA to another teacher and this measure should be included in the contingency plan (Herbert & Wu, 2009), but it should be the last resort and priority should be given to reconciling rather than withdrawing. Therefore, this specific type of collaboration warrants strong interpersonal skills for it to be successful. In this sense, the interpersonal factor can be just as beneficial as it can be detrimental. On one hand, both the native speaker and local teacher can develop their interpersonal skills by striving to achieve a relationship based on respect of the other's culture and personality, ultimately leading not only to a healthy partnership, but also to a positive influence on students. On the other hand, a lack of flexibility and close-mindedness can seriously undermine the partnership, which could also negatively affect students.

To sum up, the problems detailed thus far are (1) ambiguity of the LA role, (2) LA profile, (3) inability or restriction to speak the mother tongue, (4) communication and collaboration and (5) interpersonal factors. In order to address these issues, the following proposal is based on various guidelines and recommendations to make the most of this innovative teaching partnership in the region of Madrid. It will center around aspects including co-teaching

principles, good teaching practices in bilingual settings, mentorship, reflective practice, mother tongue policy, administrative support, interpersonal skills and training.

## **5. GUIDELINES & RECOMMENDATIONS**

As previously mentioned, the purpose of this section is to provide practical solutions to the most common challenges faced by LAs and teachers alike in co-teaching relationships. At the same time, it serves as a justification for co-teaching with LAs by stating the distinct advantages and benefits that can result from this innovative partnership. The guidelines and recommendations are based on the findings obtained from the bibliographical research.

### **5.1 CO-TEACHING PRINCIPLES & GOOD PRACTICES IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

One of the main issues present in LA-teacher collaboration is the ambiguity of the LA role, which leaves it up to interpretation. However, if we consider the numerous classroom formats involved in co-teaching and that a more student-centered approach to teaching in bilingual contexts is more effective than a teacher-centered one (Short et al., 2010), the role of the LA can become less ambiguous. On one hand, the classroom configurations provide the framework or organization of the physical space along with the role of each educator. With each co-teaching type, both educators have a specific responsibility. On the other hand, since students in bilingual settings need to be more active in their learning to develop proficiency in the language, the LA role, like the teacher's, should be bi-directional so that they interact and communicate with students in a meaningful way. Students should not only interact with the LA/teacher, but also with each other. This implies that there should be an authentic need to use the language to communicate, to achieve some purpose or to complete a task. With this in mind, the presence of two educators in the classroom can greatly facilitate student learning. Firstly, students will benefit from a lower student-teacher ratio. They will have more personalized attention and more opportunities to practice using the language. Furthermore, oral production can be better scaffolded in terms of modeling. Before students are to take part in some activity where they are expected and encouraged to speak in English, the LA and

teacher can model this conversation beforehand, which will give students a clearer idea of what to do.

## 5.2 MENTORSHIP & REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

The diversity of the LA profile has also complicated working relationships and it seems that having an educational background and/or teaching experience would facilitate things. Madrid is not the only case where native speakers without a foreign language teaching background are admitted into the program as it also occurs in East Asian contexts. Although perhaps preferable, it does not seem that eligibility requirements will become stricter in this sense in Madrid, at least not in the near future. However, this challenge does not have to be and is not always an indicator of the program's success. It is possible that many LAs arrive to Madrid without ever having stepped foot in a classroom before. They may lack both an educational background and teaching experience, while also be completely unaware of Spanish culture and the educational system. Perhaps their top priority is not teaching, and the program serves as a vehicle for them to spend a year living an adventure abroad. Whatever the case, they are partly here to do a job and the cooperating teacher has a crucial role here acting as a mentor not only to help the LA adapt to the job, but also to the community. It could be argued that traveling to and working in a foreign country can be intimidating and overwhelming. This presents a good opportunity to forge a strong bond with the LA by providing them with a support network to ease the transition into their new surroundings.

If the program in Taiwan mentioned earlier is considered, it may not be realistic to copy in Madrid, but it can nonetheless serve as inspiration. For instance, it is improbable that a month-long orientation be organized in July in which teachers accompany LAs as they become familiar with Spanish culture and the educational system. This would interfere with vacation time, represent a huge financial cost and be a difficult undertaking to organize considering the number of LAs and teachers that would be involved. However, what would be realistic would be to conduct periodic training sessions and seminars for both LAs and teachers to attend. Perhaps not as frequently as the bi-monthly ones in the Taiwan program, but ongoing joint training sessions led by co-teaching experts or language assistant veterans could be very helpful for LAs and teachers. Another lesson to be taken from the Taiwan program applicable

to the Madrid context would be the formation of a panel composed of members that represent LAs and teachers respectively whose purpose is to oversee the co-teaching relationships. Just as is done in Taiwan, they could visit schools to see the LAs and teachers in action, provide feedback, help solve any reported problems and even model themselves good co-teaching practices. Furthermore, the panel's observations from visiting schools could feed back into the training sessions since difficulties found in one school could be extrapolated to others in the Madrid region. Thus, training sessions could be relevant and useful for participants because the topics would be based on data collected from schools.

Not only can the teacher serve as a mentor to the LA, but the LA can be of great benefit to the teacher in terms of reflective practice. This exercise is considered to be fundamental for the professional development of teachers (Griffiths 2000; Akbari 2007; Killen 2007; Conley et al., 2010; Jacobs, 2011). In his book, Richards (1996, ix) explains that reflective practice is "initiated and directed by the teacher because it involves instructors observing themselves, collecting data about their own classrooms and their roles within them, and using that data as a basis for self-evaluation, for change, and hence professional growth". Teachers can take part in reflective practice on their own, but it can be enhanced considerably if carried out with others, such as fellow teachers or, perhaps even better, the LA. Working collaboratively with an LA will likely make the teacher justify their teaching decisions. This is especially beneficial because teachers teach in isolation and are rarely observed by someone else, at least in the context of Madrid. The LA then can be a great source of information to use for improvement because, in essence, they are like a student, but one that can later communicate to the teacher how the class went. They can provide teachers with a very rich perspective of their teaching. Tremarco (2014) documents his experience with a teaching assistant in a university writing course that resulted to be very helpful for his own reflective practice. The routine they followed on a regular basis consisted of the following (Tremarco, 2014, p. 30-31):

- We discuss the aim of the day/course pre-class
- We discuss the type of class with regard to their strengths and weaknesses
- We discuss how to overcome weaknesses and/or exploit strengths
- We carry out the class, with regular consultations on how things are going

- We make any appropriate changes that need to be made
- We conduct an after class discussion in a mode similar to that of Firestone (2014) above
- We plan and implement the changes for the next class/course

The author describes the insight shared by the teaching assistant as “invaluable” (p. 32) because it was an evaluation of the teaching from the perspective of another educator with a shared context that made reflective practice not only easier, but also more meaningful. Although the LA is not a teaching assistant and may lack pedagogical knowledge, the LA nonetheless has a perspective that teachers do not have the luxury of having. When teachers teach, they do not know how they are perceived, unless they record themselves teaching and later watch the recordings. There are disadvantages to this though that include people behaving differently in front of a camera and student privacy (Tremarco, 2014). Moreover, watching video recordings of classes could be very time consuming. Thus, it seems that co-teaching with an LA could be one of the most effective ways to acquire valuable input needed to improve as a teacher through reflective practice. However, it must be noted that even though there is great potential for reflective practice with the help of an LA, its success is very much dependent on the relationship between the two.

### 5.3 MOTHER TONGUE POLICY

The inability or restriction placed on LAs regarding speaking the mother tongue is another aspect that has proven problematic. From the literature presented, an “English-only” policy only seems to exist in Madrid. What is more is that it is viewed as a privilege in East Asian contexts and is believed to have a legitimate place in foreign language teaching. Prohibiting the use of the mother tongue ignores the fact that it is used to learn the foreign language, and albeit a selective and careful use of the mother tongue is important, it is a language learner’s point of reference for comprehension. If an LA is never allowed to speak in the mother tongue, this could present certain difficulties. For instance, establishing rapport with less proficient or very young learners who cannot hold a conversation in English becomes a significant challenge. This can become even more complicated and even harsh if the

emotional factor is taken into account. If a young learner for example is crying as is a common occurrence in primary schools and seeks consolation from the LA, any attempt to converse in the foreign language is likely to be ineffective. In this sense, it seems inhumane not to address the student in their mother tongue. It must be remembered that languages should never become a barrier to building a relationship with students and prohibiting the LA from speaking the mother tongue could cause this to happen. Also, sometimes the use of the mother tongue is simply more practical than trying to come up with different ways to express something in the foreign language. Moreover, if students are aware that the LA is also learning a language like they are, it could raise their language awareness of Spanish and create more solidarity since there is a common link between the LA and them. Despite all that has been said to this point, it must be stated that the proposal is not to employ a careless use of the mother tongue but rather a judicious one. Students need to have abundant exposure to English in order to learn it, but there will most likely be times, though few, where the best option is to use the mother tongue.

#### 5.4 ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

The literature has shown that the administration has a vital role to play to address problems like a lack of communication and a lack of time to collaborate. Support from school management is crucial because they are in charge of creating the schedules. They need to be sensitive and cater to the inherent needs of an LA–teacher partnership, primarily in terms of having time to coordinate and plan outside of class. Just because LAs have 16 hours to fulfill does not mean that these hours have to be during class time. Perhaps an hour or two a week could be assigned specifically to planning with cooperating teachers. For example, the principal or deputy head teacher could substitute once a month to free up time for the LA and cooperating teacher to plan. If LAs are supposed to coordinate with teachers, then they cannot be expected to do this, at least very effectively, during class time; this has to take place outside of class.

Another very important consideration is to limit the distribution of LA hours to two primary grade levels, thereby reducing not the only the number of levels to teach, but also potentially the number of teachers to work with. This way LAs can devote more effort to both the



teachers and students they are assigned to and avoid the problem of being spread too thin. Lastly, school management, as well as teachers, should be mindful and look for opportunities to plan that present themselves such as field trips, in-school workshops or activities like theater. There are likely to be unplanned occasions where both the LA and teacher find themselves free. These moments could be taken advantage of to coordinate.

## 5.5 INTERPERSONAL SKILLS & TRAINING

It has been demonstrated how interpersonal factors like underlying beliefs, culture and personality can cause tensions between the LA and teacher and hinder their relationship. These aspects are at the foundation of the LA-teacher partnership. They should be addressed explicitly from the beginning to prevent assumptions from being made and so that there is transparency and open communication from the start. Both LAs and teachers should take part in training prior to working together that addresses cultural relativity and sensitivity to raise awareness that the way a person does something is neither the only way, nor is it the correct way; it is just one of probably many ways to do it and each way is as equally valid as the other. Cook and Friend (1995) have created a discussion guide (see Appendix 1) that includes some of the most important topics that co-teachers should discuss before working together and throughout the school year. They include instructional beliefs, planning, parity signals, confidentiality, noise, classroom routines, discipline, feedback and pet peeves. In the same line, Gately and Gately (2001) have also identified various topics that need to be addressed by co-teachers to foster a truly collaborative relationship. Their components include interpersonal communication, physical arrangement, familiarity with the curriculum, curriculum goals and modifications, instructional planning, instructional presentation, classroom management and assessment. However, Gately and Gately (2001) go into more detail stating that development in these areas consists of three stages, which are the beginning stage, compromising stage and collaborating stage. They have created co-teaching rating scales (see Appendix 2) that ask co-teachers to reflect on their own development within each area to track their progression more accurately and to identify how to continue improving towards the collaborating stage that consists of “open communication and interaction, and mutual admiration,” (p. 42). Although these tools were meant for general education and special education teachers, many of the components closely reflect what

happens between an LA and a teacher in the classroom. Therefore, these tools can serve as a solid starting point for LAs and teachers to develop their interpersonal skills, which is an essential element of a healthy and productive co-teaching relationship.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study set out to determine the key factors that are responsible for an inadequate integration of the LA into the Madrid bilingual program. To identify these problem areas, bibliographical research related to native speakers and bilingual contexts was carried out. Then, guidelines and recommendations were developed to demonstrate how to capitalize on the opportunities that this valuable educational asset presents for both students and teachers. The main conclusions include the following:

- co-teaching principles and good practices in bilingual education can better define the role of the LA in the classroom;
- open and ongoing communication and collaboration coupled with joint training sessions can improve teaching quality, not only of the LA, but also of the cooperating teacher;
- changing the policy applied to LAs from English-only to a predominantly English, sagacious Spanish one can facilitate the LA role;
- thorough and rigorous support from administration and school management can increase the chances of a successful and productive LA-teacher relationship.

This investigation possesses a number of strengths. First of all, the literature included is relatively recent and takes into account perspectives of both LAs and teachers making the analysis a relatively accurate account of the current state of LAs in the Madrid bilingual program. Secondly, a combination of research with the same context of Madrid along with some outside of the region provides a more complete representation of settings with native speakers and local teachers. Additionally, the study has not only identified the challenges faced by those involved, but it also has proposed solutions to address these challenges, which could be applied to contexts outside of Madrid. Lastly, the researcher has substantial

experience as an LA himself having worked at every educational level in various public and charter schools, as well as a university, all within the Madrid region. Therefore, the firsthand experience and context he has acquired have been crucial when synthesizing the research and elaborating guidelines and recommendations. Moreover, there is a genuine desire to improve the LA-teacher relationship from having encountered the difficulties posed by research himself. In this sense, the proposed solutions are not only practical, but also put forward with a sincere wish for improvement.

However, the study is not without weaknesses. One is that there currently is not a vast amount of research related to the topic of LAs. Amongst the little research that is available, LA and teacher perspectives are examined, but there is even less that consider the perspective of students. Another weakness is also a strength previously mentioned. Although the researcher's personal involvement as a LA in Madrid has been an advantage, it also has been a challenge. Maintaining an objective stance on the topic and not letting personal experience influence the research in a subjective manner has been a trial.

Regarding future lines of research, those that acquire more information from the people involved in bilingual programs with native speakers and local teachers, especially students, would likely illustrate more clearly the impact of the LA. Also, it may be interesting to determine if there is a link between teaching practices, specifically teacher-centeredness, and a successful or unsuccessful integration of the LA. This approach to teaching might be challenging when working with an LA because instruction can be one-sided rather than co-teaching, severely limiting the LA's participation. Perhaps it could be argued that student-centeredness and group dynamics allow the LA to participate more actively and freely.

It may be appropriate to conclude with a strong statement. The LA is not a human dictionary. He or she is an opportunity to take advantage of because the possible benefits for the bilingual program are far-reaching with their presence. However, their pedagogical potential can only be unlocked if they are cared for and treated like a real and necessary part of the school, an element just as equal as a student or teacher.

## **7. REFERENCES**

- Akbari, R. (2007). Reflection on Reflection: A Critical Appraisal of Reflective Practice in L2 Teacher Education. *System*, 35(2), 192-207.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2006.12.008>
- Bacharach, N., Washut Heck, T., & Dahlberg, K., (2010). Changing the Face of Student Teaching Through Co-teaching. *Action in Teacher Education*, 32(1), 3-14.  
[https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/ed\\_facpubs/1](https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/ed_facpubs/1)
- Buckingham, L. R. (2018). Defining the role of language assistants in the bilingual classroom. *Tecnología, Ciencia y Educación*, 9, 38-49.
- Calderón, M., Diaz, M., & Durán, C. (2022, Feb. 9). *Co-working with the Language Assistants* [Conference session]. Good Practices in the Bilingual Classroom, Instituto Franklin-UAH and Subdirección General de Bilingüismo y Calidad, Alcalá de Henares, Madrid, Spain.
- Carless, D. (2006). Collaborative EFL teaching in primary schools. *ELT Journal*, 60(4), 328–335. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccl023>
- Codó, E., & McDaid, J., (2019). English language assistants in the 21st century: Nation-state soft power in the experience economy. *Language, Culture and Society*, 1(2), 219-243. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lcs.00017.cod>
- Conley, L. et al., (2010). *Becoming a Teacher*. Pearson.
- Consejería de Educación, Universidades, Ciencia y Portavocía de la Comunidad de Madrid: General de Bilingüismo y Calidad de la Enseñanza. (2021). *language assistant handbook school year 2021-2022*.  
<http://www.madrid.org/bvirtual/BVCM050476.pdf>.
- Cook, L., & Friend, M. (1995). Co-teaching: Guidelines for Creating Effective Practices. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 26(3). <https://doi.org/10.17161/foec.v28i3.6852>
- EPIK: English Program in Korea. (2013). *Eligibility*.  
<https://www.epik.go.kr:8080/contents.do?contentsNo=48&menuNo=275>
- Escuelas Católicas Madrid. (2013). *Auxiliares de Conversación*.  
<https://www.ecmadrid.org/es/auxiliares-de-conversacion>
- Fernández Valverde, M. (2022, Feb. 10). *Small Group Work in ESL Lessons. How to Implement a Center-Based Methodology in the Primary Classroom with the Support of the Language Assistant* [Conference session]. Good Practices in the Bilingual Classroom, Instituto Franklin-UAH and Subdirección General de Bilingüismo y Calidad, Alcalá de Henares, Madrid, Spain.

- Fernández, R., & Halbach, A. (2010). Analyzing the situation of teachers in the CAM bilingual project after four years of implementation. In Y. Ruiz de Zarobe, J.M. Sierra & F. Gallardo del Puerto (Eds.), *Content and Foreign Language Integrated Learning: Contributions to Multilingualism in European Contexts* (pp. 241-264). Peter Lang.
- Gately, S.E., & Gately, C.J. (2001). Understanding coteaching components. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33(4), 40-47.
- Griffiths, V. (2000). The Reflective Dimension in Teacher Education. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 33(5), 539-555.
- Herbert, P. & Wu, C. H. F. (2009). Cultural diversity in the classroom: Shortcomings and successes of English co-teaching programs in East Asia. *Zeitschrift für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht*, 14(1), 55-64.
- Hong Kong Education Bureau. (2022, 19 February). *Recruitment of Primary NETs*. <https://www.edb.gov.hk/en/sch-admin/admin/about-sch-staff/net-scheme/recruitment-primary-net.html>
- Jacobs, M., Vakalisa, N. C. G. & Gawe, N. (2011). *Teaching-Learning Dynamics*. Pearson.
- Killen, R. (2007). *Teaching Strategies for Outcomes-Based Education*. Juta.
- Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme. (2015). *Eligibility*. <http://jetprogramme.org/en/eligibility>
- Leal Cobos, D. (2022, Feb. 9). *Good Practices in the Coordination of Language Assistants* [Conference session]. Good Practices in the Bilingual Classroom, Instituto Franklin-UAH and Subdirección General de Bilingüismo y Calidad, Alcalá de Henares, Madrid, Spain.
- Liu, L. (2008). Co-teaching between native and non-native English teachers: An exploration of co-teaching models and strategies in the Chinese primary school context. *Reflections on English Language Teaching*, 7(2), 103–118.
- Litzler, M. F. (2020). Native English Speakers in Madrid's Classrooms: Difficulties Reported by Assistants. *Tejuelo* 31, 47-76. <https://doi.org/10.17398/1988-8430.31.47>
- López-Medina, B., & Otto, A. (2020). Language assistants' expectations towards their role and main functions: The case of Madrid's bilingual schools. *Porta Linguarum*, 33, 95-109
- National Association for Co-teaching. (n.d.). Retrieved May 20, 2022, from <https://icoteach.com/#:~:text=Co%2DTeaching%20is%20not%20a,Cook%20%26%20Friend%2C%201995.>

- Ordóñez Dios, A. F. & Polo Recuero, B. (2020). Teacher perceptions on the role of language assistants in bilingual physical education. *Pulso*, 43, 75-97.
- Mathew, P., Mathew, P., & Peechattu, P. J. (2017). Reflective practices: A means to teacher development. *Asia Pacific Journal of Contemporary Education Communication Technology*, 3(1), 126-131.
- Richards, C. J. & Lockhart, C. (1996). *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sánchez, A., Vasco, R. (2022, Feb. 10). *Coordinación docente-auxiliar: dentro y fuera del aula* [Conference session]. Good Practices in the Bilingual Classroom, Instituto Franklin-UAH and Subdirección General de Bilingüismo y Calidad, Alcalá de Henares, Madrid, Spain.
- Short, D., Vogt, M. E., & Echevarria, J. (2010). *The SIOP Model for Teaching Science to English Learners*. Allyn & Bacon.
- Thousand, J.S., Villa, R.A., & Nevin, A.I. (2006). The many faces of collaborative planning and teaching. *Theory into Practice*, 45(3), 239-248.
- Tremarco, J. (2014). Reflective Teaching and the role of Teaching Assistants. *Kagoshima University Education Center Annual Report*, 11, 27-33.  
<http://hdl.handle.net/10232/22629>

## 8. APPENDIX 1: Questions for Creating a Collaborative Working Relationship in Co-teaching

Topic	Questions
Instructional beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are our overriding philosophies about the roles of teachers and teaching, and students and learning?</li> <li>• How do our instructional beliefs affect our instructional practice?</li> </ul>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When do we have at least 30 minutes of shared planning time?</li> <li>• How do we divide our responsibilities for planning and teaching?</li> <li>• How much joint planning time do we need?</li> <li>• What records can we keep to facilitate our planning?</li> </ul>
Parity signals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will we convey to students and others (for example, teachers, parents) that we are equals in the classroom?</li> <li>• How can we ensure a sense of parity during instruction?</li> </ul>
Confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What information about our teaching do we want to share with others?</li> <li>• Which information should not be shared?</li> <li>• Which information about students can be shared with others?</li> <li>• Which information should not be shared?</li> </ul>
Noise	What noise level are we comfortable with in the classroom?
Classroom routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the instructional routines for the classroom?</li> <li>• What are the organizational routines for the classroom?</li> </ul>
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is acceptable and unacceptable student behavior?</li> <li>• Who is to intervene at what point in students' behavior?</li> <li>• What are the rewards and consequences used in the classroom?</li> </ul>
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the best way to give each other feedback?</li> <li>• How will you ensure that both positive and negative issues are raised?</li> </ul>
Pet Peeves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What aspects of teaching and classroom life do each of us feel strongly about?</li> <li>• How can we identify our pet peeves so as to avoid them?</li> </ul>

## 9. APPENDIX 2: The Coteaching Rating Scale (Special Education Format)

Respond to each question below by circling the number that best describes your viewpoint:

	<b>1: Rarely</b>	<b>2: Sometimes</b>	<b>3: Usually</b>
1. I can easily read the nonverbal cues of my coteaching partner.	1	2	3
2. I feel comfortable moving freely about the space in the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
3. I understand the curriculum standards with respect to the content area in the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
4. Both teachers in the cotaught classroom agree on the goals of the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
5. Planning can be spontaneous, with changes occurring during the instructional lesson.	1	2	3
6. I often present lessons in the cotaught class.	1	2	3
7. Classroom rules and routines have been jointly developed.	1	2	3
8. Many measures are used for grading students.	1	2	3
9. Humor is often used in the classroom.	1	2	3
10. All materials are shared in the classroom.	1	2	3
11. I am familiar with the methods and materials with respect to this content area.	1	2	3
12. Modifications of goals for students with special needs are incorporated into this class.	1	2	3
13. Planning for classes is the shared responsibility of both teachers.	1	2	3
14. The "chalk" passes freely between the two teachers.	1	2	3
15. A variety of classroom management techniques is used to enhance learning of all students.	1	2	3
16. Test modifications are commonplace.	1	2	3
17. Communication is open and honest.	1	2	3
18. There is fluid positioning of teachers in the classroom.	1	2	3
19. I feel confident in my knowledge of the curriculum content.	1	2	3
20. Student-centered objectives are incorporated into the classroom curriculum.	1	2	3
21. Time is allotted (or found) for common planning.	1	2	3
22. Students accept both teachers as equal partners in the learning process.	1	2	3
23. Behavior management is the shared responsibility of both teachers.	1	2	3
24. Goals and objectives in IEPs are considered as part of the grading for students with special needs.	1	2	3



### 10. APPENDIX 3: The Coteaching Rating Scale (General Education Format)

Respond to each question below by circling the number that best describes your viewpoint:			
1: Rarely	2: Sometimes	3: Usually	
1. I can easily read the nonverbal cues of my coteaching partner.	1	2	3
2. Both teachers move freely about the space in the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
3. My coteacher understands the curriculum standards with respect to the content area in the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
4. Both teachers in the cotaught classroom agree on the goals of the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
5. Planning can be spontaneous, with changes occurring during the instructional lesson.	1	2	3
6. My coteaching partner often present lessons in the cotaught class.	1	2	3
7. Classroom rules and routines have been jointly developed.	1	2	3
8. Many measures are used for grading students.	1	2	3
9. Humor is often used in the classroom.	1	2	3
10. All materials are shared in the classroom.	1	2	3
11. The special educator is familiar with the methods and materials with respect to this content area.	1	2	3
12. Modifications of goals for students with special needs are incorporated into this class.	1	2	3
13. Planning for classes is the shared responsibility of both teachers.	1	2	3
14. The "chalk" passes freely between the two teachers.	1	2	3
15. A variety of classroom management techniques is used to enhance learning of all students.	1	2	3
16. Test modifications are commonplace.	1	2	3
17. Communication is open and honest.	1	2	3
18. There is fluid positioning of teachers in the classroom.	1	2	3
19. I am confident of the special educator's knowledge of the curriculum content.	1	2	3
20. Student-centered objectives are incorporated into the classroom curriculum.	1	2	3
21. Time is allotted (or found) for common planning.	1	2	3
22. Students accept both teachers as equal partners in the learning process.	1	2	3
23. Behavior management is the shared responsibility of both teachers.	1	2	3
24. Goals and objectives in IEPs are considered as part of the grading for students with special needs.	1	2	3