



**Joint Efforts for Innovation:  
Working Together  
to Improve  
Foreign Language  
Teaching in the  
21st Century**

**Dolors Masats, Maria Mont  
& Nathaly González-Acevedo (Editors)**

## **A book for the curious and passionate 21<sup>st</sup> century language teachers and teacher trainers.**

Tired of reading about the wonders of technology enhanced project-based learning but not knowing where to seek inspiration to start to adopt this teaching approach? A team of in-service teachers, teacher trainers, pre-service teachers and researchers have worked together to present a simple, engaging and practical book to offer fellow education professionals stimulating ideas for their teaching practice.

### **Joint efforts for innovation: Working together to improve foreign language teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century** offers:

- Inspiring classroom projects and innovative teaching experiences.
- A compilation of digital tools and resources for the foreign language classroom.
- Pioneering proposals to open up the classroom doors.
- Problem-solving and inquiry-based tasks that promote team work.
- Honest reflections from practitioners on their classroom practices.

This book includes

- accessible examples of teacher-led classroom research small-scale studies.
- calls for teachers to do research in their classrooms.
- personal accounts on the importance of school internships for pre-service teachers.

This book is an invitation for practicing teachers and teacher trainers to be creative and to develop learning skills, literacy skills and life skills.

Are you ready to become an innovative 21<sup>st</sup> century educator?



**JOINT EFFORTS FOR INNOVATION:  
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## Co-teaching

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### Introduction

Co-teaching (also known as push-in arrangements) is a methodology that emerged in the USA in the late 1960s as a means to ensure that as many mainstream students as possible could follow regular lessons and would not suffer segregation (Peery, 2017a). The practice consists in assigning a team of two teachers the shared responsibility of planning and implementing lessons in a classroom and of monitoring and assessing the work of students. Co-teaching is based on the premise that “when teachers with different areas of expertise and skill work together, they can individually tailor learning better for all their students” (Ferguson, Desjarlais, & Meyer, 2000: 3). As the initiative seeks to create more inclusive classrooms, teams are typically composed of a class teacher and a special education teacher. In schools in Catalonia, though, the methodology is quite popular to teach young children English. In this case, the general education teacher and a specialist in teaching English as a foreign language work together. Co-teaching presents many benefits, among which we could highlight that (a) lessons are more attractive and creative because they have been designed by two teachers who support and complement each other, (b) lessons are less teacher-centred and rely more on group work and on experimental hands-on tasks, (c) in the classroom there are more opportunities for one on one interaction between the teachers and the learners and (d) learners benefit from the extra support they receive and from the fact that teachers can create parallel classroom dynamics.

When co-teaching is done well, it offers benefits for both, students and teachers. When not done properly, it can be confusing and frustrating for all parties involved. Therefore, teachers need to negotiate how they would organise teaching before they actually start working together.

Cook & Friend (2004) propose six forms to organise co-teaching: (a) one teacher teaches and the other observes; (b) one teacher teaches and the other monitors and supports students; (c) the two teachers teach simultaneously the same contents to two groups of students from the same class; (d) each teacher teaches part of the content to a group of students from the same class and then they switch the groups and teach the same contents again; (e) one teacher is in charge of teaching a large group of students and the other one a small group, both from the same classroom; and (f) both teachers teach simultaneously the same contents to the same group of students.

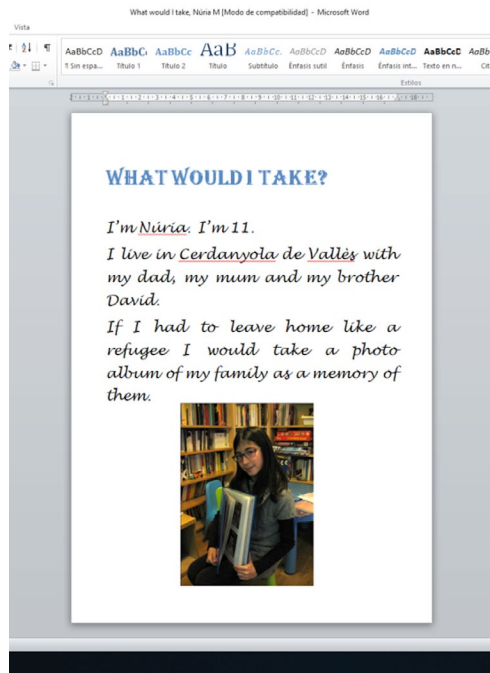


Figure 1. Example of a student's response to a personal question in a co-taught project on social conflicts

The objective of this paper is to reflect upon my personal experience as a co-teacher in a Catalan school.

### **My experience: Co-teaching for three years**

I have worked as a general teacher and as an English teacher in various schools in Catalonia. The school I currently work in as an English teacher is next to a Faculty of Education and has always hosted student teachers. Three years ago, a colleague of mine, a class teacher, experienced co-teaching with a university trainee teacher during her internship at our school and she then proposed we could repeat the experience and pair up to form a team. She argued that this methodology offers kids a chance of receiving extra exposure to language and provides us, teachers, with more time to cater for the diverse needs of our students. I was easily persuaded to become a co-teacher. Among the different teaching methods we use, the one that we have been practising more often is known as “one teaches, one assists”: One of us leads the instruction while the other moves around helping students, especially the ones with special needs (autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, language disorder...). In our schedules we refer to this shared

time as the “English Project” (EP), although only the English teacher, me, uses English to communicate with children. Their class teacher addresses them in Catalan, as she normally does when I am not present.

At my school we adopted the project-based learning (PBL) approach to teach curriculum contents long ago, because, as Mont & Masats (2018:94) suggest, we believe that “projects that are structured through goal-oriented tasks offer a great opportunity to integrate learning as a social practice (collaborating, co-constructing knowledge, communicating, developing critical and creative thinking, etc.) and as a means to favour the development of life skills (leadership, social skills, initiative and flexibility).” Students engage with projects with their class teachers and, once a week, I join them and develop part of the ongoing class project in English. English is taught three times a week in slots of sixty minutes. Two of the English lessons students have with me are focussed on the development of their communicative skills, the third one, English Project, is the one I share with their class tutor. We follow the same procedure with all grades. I teach a total of six groups with six different class teachers. Projects are always connected and related to ongoing social issues, science, art or children’s interests.

Some of the projects we’ve co-taught include:

- Refugees
- The Ocean Clean-up
- Friendly Cities
- Climate Change and Global Warming
- Andy Warhol
- Art Detectives at Fundació Tàpies
- Our School Natural Surroundings

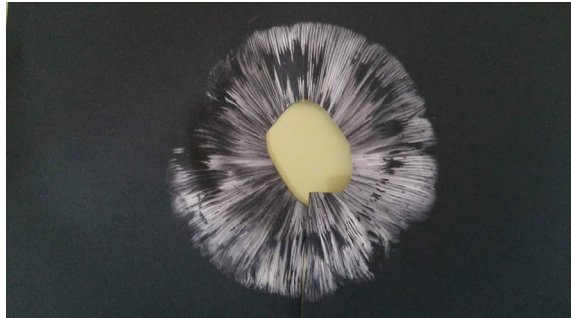


Figure 2. Spore print from the project “Our School Natural Surroundings”

When we started, none of us knew much about this teaching method, but with time, we have developed our personal style, which we try to improve project after project. Here I would like to share my reflections so that other teachers can benefit from what we have experienced.



## **Strong points, things to improve and key issues to consider for guaranteeing success**

As teachers we need to observe our practices from a critical viewpoint to be able to progress and improve. In the next few pages, I will reflect upon the best features (strong points) all our projects have in common, then I will focus my attention on those aspects we need to improve, and finally I will consider those aspects all co-teaching proposals must include to guarantee success.



Figure 3. Students taking part in the project entitled “Our School Natural Surroundings”

### ***Strong points***

1. - Having two more hands (and ears and eyes!) is a great support for students with special needs, for those kids who experience some sort of learning difficulty or just have different learning styles. Co-teaching offers class teachers an excellent opportunity to spend time observing their students. As the class is conducted in English, they act as assistants most of the time. They take advantage of the situation and can assess and observe their students closely, something difficult to do when leading a lesson or a class.

2. - It is a constant challenge for me, for my level of English and for my knowledge of other field subjects. I'm constantly recycling what I know and learning new words, new sayings or idioms and new concepts every day! It helps me grow as a teacher.

3. - It is a great thing to be two teachers working together. We gain double of



expertise and experience and our students benefit from it. Our lessons are richer in contents compare to when we teach them as two different subjects.

4. - English is taught as part of a school project and we do not need to create artificial or complicated context for getting students to use this language. Everyone knows, from the very first day in the school year, that once a week their English teacher and their class teacher will work together so that they can develop a project through English. In the English lessons they are also more motivated than in the past because they see an end to the development of their communicative skills.



Figure 4. After learning the importance of fungi, children made white bread

5. - English is no longer the focus of instruction in class. It becomes a tool to discover, to learn and to do things. Kids are supposed to improve their proficiency in English by using the language to acquire knowledge of very different, real and current fields of study and they manage to do so!

### ***Things to improve***

1. - The relationships with my co-teachers have to continue growing in confidence. Sometimes they repeat in Catalan some of the concepts we have worked together because they are uncertain about whether the kids have understood what we've been doing. I do not think that is positive.

2. - Class teachers need to become aware that teaching through English is not the same as teaching through Catalan or Spanish. Scaffolding language is important to help children understand field knowledge, so we need to plan our discourse and activities which serve as language support to access knowledge.

3. - We need time, not only for planning contents, preparing resources, designing assessment tools and establishing rules to control behaviours or guide students. We also need time to carefully define our roles and responsibilities and agree on what we allow our students to do. We should not improvise how to act when students do not want to work with others, do not do their homework or do not bring their classroom supplies. We do not have time to plan joint meetings and end up discussing these issues during the last five minutes of staff meetings, or along the corridor when we move from one classroom to another or when we are on duty at the playground!

4. - During the time devoted to what we call the English Project I am the instructor but sometimes I feel like a class assistant. Children are engaged in their class projects for many hours a week, but I am just with them for an hour. I miss most of the things they do and cannot witness how the project evolves between my lessons. I've tried to persuade my colleagues to schedule co-teaching differently, but I have not succeeded yet.

5. - It is difficult to find authentic content materials and resources foreign language students can understand. The BBC website contains good videos and texts for language learners (see, for example, this [video](#) or this [recipe](#) on how to make bread). I should have extra time to sit in front of the computer to search for good videos and texts.



Figure 5. Children need to order sentences to classify living creatures

6.- The time allocated to co-teaching should be added to the three hours devoted to English in the national curriculum. As it is done during one of these three weekly hours, students have less time to learn English through the use of literature (through stories, role plays, comics, songs, chants, poetry, etc.) or through activities that allow them to use English in social contexts.

## *Key issues for guaranteeing success*



Figure 6. The English teacher supporting students' work

1. – English teachers need to be trained to teach content knowledge through English. Being a keen and enthusiastic teacher, fluent in English, is not enough to teach children specialised field knowledge in a foreign language.

2. - Class teachers should be fluent in English and have some knowledge on the teaching of foreign languages.

3. - Co-teachers need time together to plan, discuss, search for materials, assess students, share their views on the development of their lessons, etc. Not knowing what to do for the next lesson is frustrating, scary and counterproductive.

4. - Co-teachers should base their professional relationship on mutual trust. Both should have an equal status, share responsibilities and ensure their partner has enough time and space to teach efficiently.

### **Concluding remarks**

In a regular lesson, co-teaching is a very good method, particularly to cater for diversity: when working with students with special needs, with different learning paces and various learning styles. Two teachers in the same class guarantee that students receive more individual support than in regular classrooms. As children with difficulties are taught in their regular classrooms, they feel better and more confident when facing new concepts or conducting new activities. When children observe their teachers sharing their lessons and experience the benefits of learning with two teachers in the same room, they gain confidence in what they can do and become more receptive to challenges (Peery, 2017b). If co-teaching is done properly, if the two teachers complement each other, they can easily create a shared positive learning environment.



Figure 7. Students' scale-model of their ideal town, as the final product of their project on "Friendly Cities"

See how they present their findings at: [https://youtu.be/I7fDdbP4Y\\_0](https://youtu.be/I7fDdbP4Y_0)

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