Co-teaching to foster
Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC):
How can co-teaching benefit Classroom Interactional Competence?

EVA ALCALÀ ARXÉ

ESCOLA LLORIANA

evalcar1@gmail.com

LAURA COMALLONGA

ESCOLA LLISSACH

laura@escolallissach.cat

MARIA SALA

ESCOLA LLISSACH

marias@escolallissach.cat

MARIA GALERA

ESCOLA LLORIANA

mgalera3@xtec.cat

"Having two teachers leading a classroom opens up many opportunities for students as well as for teachers" (Trites, 2017). At the same time, the class becomes a safe, inclusive and equitable learning environment.

According to Walsh (2006), Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) "refers to those features of conversations between the teacher and the students (and among students) which produce high quality interaction and create 'space for learning' of the L2" (p. 19). This allows teachers to make conversational adjustments in order to ensure understanding, achieve participation and help learners' extend and improve their utterances.

This paper deals with the outcomes of an experience carried out by four teachers who wanted to analyse if co-teaching (in three modalities) and the use of CIC strategies provided students with more opportunities to produce good quality output in L2.

"Dos maestros liderando el trabajo de clase ofrece muchas oportunidades a los estudiantes y a los maestros" (Trites, 2017). Asimismo, la clase se convierte en un ambiente seguro, inclusivo y de aprendizaje equitativo.

Según Walsh (2006), la competencia de interacción en clase (CIC) "se refiere a aquellas características de las conversaciones entre maestros y alumnos (y entre alumnos) que producen una interacción de alta calidad y crean un 'espacio de aprendizaje' de la L2 (p.19). Esto permite a los maestros realizar ajustes conversacionales para asegurar la comprensión, conseguir la participación de los alumnos y ayudarles a mejorar sus producciones orales.

Este artículo habla de los resultados de una experiencia llevada a cabo por cuatro maestras que querían analizar si el uso de la co-docencia (en tres modalidades) y las estrategias de competencia de interacción en clase podían proporcionar a los alumnos más oportunidades para producir interacciones de calidad en L2.

KEYWORDS:
Co- teaching; inclusive; planning; responsibility; respect; support; Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC).

PALABRAS CLAVE:
Co-docencia; inclusivo; planificación; responsabilidad; respeto; apoyo; competencia de interacción en clase (CIC).

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1. Introduction

An honest look at most of the Foreign Language classes in high schools reveals the difficulty of getting all the students to produce good quality output in L2 due to the increasing diversity found in the classrooms. Added to this difficulty is the complexity and rigidness of the schools' organization, where teachers are assigned to classes according to their expertise and schedules are printed.

In this system, students with learning difficulties are not taken into consideration well enough. Occasionally, they may leave the class and attend other classes when their classmates are learning content considered to be too difficult for them. On other occasions, they may receive additional support inside the same class by another teacher, which is known as a co-teaching approach. "School organization often assumes that co-teaching is simply placing two teachers in the same classroom while hoping this new relationship works well for themselves and the students" (Nierengarten and Hughes, 2010).

Although this presents an opportunity to create an inclusive classroom, there is a more effective and productive way to introduce co-teaching. "Co-teaching involves two or more certified professionals who contract to share instructional responsibility for a single group of students primarily in a single classroom or workplace for specific content or objectives with mutual ownership, pooled resources and joint accountability" (Cook and Friend, 2016).

Co-teaching can be put into practice by using one of the following six models (Cook & Friend, 2004):

- **One teach, one observe**. With this approach, co-teachers decide in advance what type of observational information must be collected during the session and how. Afterward, teachers analyze the information together.

- **One teach, one assist**. Using this strategy, one teacher takes responsibility for the entire session while the other provides discreet assistance to students as needed.

- **Parallel teaching**. Co-teachers divide the class in two groups and simultaneously teach the same information. This allows a closer supervision and more opportunities for interaction between students and teacher.

- **Station teaching**. In this co-teaching model, teachers divide content and students. Each teacher can teach a part of the lesson at independent stations or rotate between groups of students.

- **Alternative teaching**. This technique allows one teacher to take responsibility for a larger group of students while the other works with a smaller group.

- **Team teaching**. It requires the strongest partnership between teachers to develop this approach. In team teaching, both teachers share the instruction of students at the same time.

Bearing this in mind, our teaching practice was designed to be conducted by team teaching.

According to this, the teachers who implemented the task gathered together before the session and carefully designed several activities to make students perform all four communication skills, created support materials that would help with L2 productions, decided the time for each task and agreed on how students would be assessed.

It is necessary to reveal that team-teaching was really successful for most of the entire session until learners had to write in L2. As a result of some students lack of knowledge in English due to their learning difficulties, teachers spontaneously approached two other co-teaching modalities named parallel and alternative teaching.

As far as Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC) is concerned, this article tries to demonstrate the importance of the **quality of educational dialogue** (Mercer, 2004) and which strategies can be used by teachers in order "*to adjust to their learners' developing FL competence and include the students in the conversation*" (Escobar Urmeneta, 2019, p. 38). These teaching strategies were categorized by Walsh (2006) as the following:

- the use of **learner-convergent language**, which implies the use of strategies to catch and maintain learners' attention and ensure understanding;

- the facilitation of **interactional space** in order to promote active participation in the co-construction of the lesson;

- the **'shaping'** of learner contributions to help learners extend and improve their utterances.

Focused on the three approaches of co-teaching and the CIC strategies mentioned above, the activity aimed to:

- **ensure students' understanding** of instructions and activities in English by providing them with several tools and steps to complete the tasks successfully;

- **achieve students participation** by involving them in their own learning process and becoming 'problem solvers' rather than 'information receivers';

- **foster students' productions in L2** through the interaction between teacher-student and student-student.

As said before, an accurate and well-planned team teaching approach benefits everyone involved because:

- teachers working together **increase their mutual trust and commitment**, which can in turn set an example to students;

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- **teachers receive valuable feedback** from their co-teachers and it provides opportunities for professional growth;

- **lessons can be more dynamic and creative** since co-teaching makes it easier to conduct hands-on activities;

- students are exposed to more teaching strategies, methods, and a **more positive and inclusive learning environment**.

Many schools are undertaking co-teaching without putting the important components into place for success. They are putting two teachers in the room in an "arranged" marriage, with no time for teachers to get to know one another, to learn how to co-teach, and to establish norms, goals and expectations that both can embrace (Murawski, 2019, p.2). Without all these essential components co-teaching may prove particularly challenging in some contexts. Some of the problems that may arise as a result of co-teaching include:

- teachers not accepting the idea of sharing the classroom and want to stick to the traditional teaching methods;

- teachers failing to plan brought about by teachers not wanting to co-work together as it requires more hours for them along with more preparation;

- one of the co-teachers not being well prepared and failing to deliver instruction;

- the challenge of noise where different activities are taking place in the same room and where noise levels become distractingly high.

Co-teaching should not be seen as negative but a positive way for teachers to work on their strengths and weaknesses. Together, as a team, they can create a successful learning and teaching environment.

Context

The implementation took place in a school with 260 students in total: 45 students in pre-school, 138 in Primary, and 77 students in Secondary. A feature of the school is the lack of immigration with only 5% of students coming from other parts of Spain, Europe and, rarely, Asia and Africa. The majority of families are mostly Catalan speakers.

The school level of English is from medium to advance[1]. Students normally have 4 hours of English per week and some of them take extra-curricular classes to increase their level of English. The school provides these classes by using the ClipClap methodology[2] from the age of 3 to 6.

CLIL experiences first started in the school in the 2015-2016 school year, mainly promoted by the teachers involved in the GEP (Grup Experimental Plurilingüe, as it was called when it first started). Since then teachers started to design English materials and unit lessons more oriented to promote students' interaction. After receiving the GEP certification in 2017, the school allowed two English teachers to continue studying and they enrolled in a *Master's degree in Foreign Language Education by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.* In this context, these two English language specialists decided to invite two other teachers from another school who were also enrolled in the same Master's degree to implement an activity named *Models as feedback* with 1st ESO students. The students' level of English varies from A1 to B1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). There were 18 students involved in this lesson, 12 of them were girls and 6 were boys. Their families mainly belong to the middle and higher-middle classes, with an average to good socio-cultural standard and where Catalan is the predominant language of students. It may also be said that 4 students (20% of the class) suffer from severe learning difficulties or emotional and mental blocks. Therefore, the aim of the activity was not only to help students improve their writing by using models but also to prove how important is co-teaching in the creation of a safe, inclusive and equitable learning environment for all students.

> **"Co-teaching should not be seen as negative but a positive way for teachers to work on their strengths and weaknesses. Together, as a team, they can create a successful learning and teaching environment."**

Method

The natural occurring data analyzed in this article come from the implementation of a task cycle called *Models as Feedback*, a technique studied by Cánovas (2017). The study of this technique as part of the Genre-Based Pedagogy and the reflection on classroom interaction and language learning, were the pillars of the content that the group of the four teachers who carried out this experience dealt with in the sixth Module of the Master's degree in Foreign Language Education by the Universitat Autònoma

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de Barcelona. The co-teaching modalities and the CIC strategies used by the teachers during the implementation were presented in the seventh Module of the same Master's course and they became the main focus of study and analysis of this article. The procedure carried out can be described as follows:

Before the implementation:

- Joint planning of the activities taking into account the academic language demands (conventions and main lexical and grammatical features) and the learners' needs.

- Joint planning of the timing devoted to put the activities into practice with the students. Two sessions through to see. (**Figure 1**)

- Joint creation of the teaching materials and the language support for the students.

- Reflection on the co-teaching modalities and classroom interactional strategies that were going to be used in order to achieve the goals.

- Anticipation of possible teacher-class conversations

During the implementation:

- Implementation of the planned activities making use of different conversational adjustments and strategies to ensure understanding, achieve students' participation and foster students output in L2.

- Use of two different co-teaching modalities; most of the activities were planned to be conducted using the team teaching modality but a different decision was taken at the stage where students had to write the argumentative letters on their own. A group of four students were struggling with the task and the teachers spontaneously approached a second co-teaching modality named parallel teaching in order to help these students with learning difficulties.

The devices employed for the data collection were a video camera to record to overall perspective of the class and the teachers' mobile phones to record the moments of interaction in small groups, in pairs or individual student-teacher interaction.

After the implementation:

- Reflections of the group of teachers after analyzing the video recordings and the notes taken during the implementation, considering whether the co-teaching modalities adopted and the classroom interactional strategies used worked out successfully or they couldn't accomplish the goals.

- Assessment of the teachers' instructional choices and the students' outcomes in order to reach conclusions using a SWOT analysis[3].

Three video excerpts were selected and transcribed for a detailed analysis based on their representativeness of the type of interaction carried out, the strategies used by the teachers and the co-teaching modality involved in the activity. The CIC-based classroom observation checklist proposed by Escobar Urmeneta (2012) was used in order to analyse the CIC strategies used by the teachers.

Writing Task Circle

1. INTRODUCING THE TASK:

Brainstorming
Ss look at **images** 1 and 2 about using technology in class and reflect on them guided by the teacher (**teacher class conversation 1** led by students).
T provides students with a link to join **Answer Garden** app. Ss answer the question from Answer Garden by giving the opinion about using mobile phones in class.

2. WRITING TEXT 1

T asks Ss to write an argumentative letter to the Headmaster of the school using a given frame (**Letter structure**).
Ss are provided with **language support** (target textual traits) and a **PPT presentation**, which will guide them on their writing production.

3. COMPARING TEXTS

Ss pair up and compare their productions with the **model** text by filling in a **grid**.
T guides them by reading the sentences out loud and helping them with the language.

4. ANALYSING THE DIFFERENCES

T elicits the differences between the students' texts and the model text. (**T- class conversation 2**)
T highlights/underlines/circles the target textual traits in the **model** text displayed.

5. WRITING TEXT 2

Ss rewrite their **argumentative letter** taking into account the grid comments and the previous analysis.

6. WRAP-UP

T makes Ss reflect on the task and the difficulties found during the process (**T- class conversation 3**).
T also makes Ss aware and congratulates them on their capacity of writing an argumentative letter in L2.

Figure 1. Writing Task Cycle Activities[4]

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Outcomes

The preliminary analysis of the data collected showed evidence of the different techniques and resources used to accomplish the main objectives established for the lesson, which were to ensure understanding, to achieve participation, and to foster students' output in L2.

The team of teachers devoted some time to check that students knew the main objectives of the lesson, as well as to make clear the instructions and steps to achieve them successfully. Teachers complemented their words by adding body gestures and facial expressions to their utterances to help students understand. In many cases one teacher led the task and the others accompanied the leader's words with either gestures or provocative sounds.

Thus, the team guaranteed equity. Therefore, all the students were included in the lesson and had opportunities to participate, even if that meant to create a small group of low-performing students to cater for their needs. Moreover, during the writing task, students were assisted by the team teachers at all times.

Regarding students' oral productions, the team focused on shaping their contributions. Therefore, teachers made the most of all opportunities to extend and promote the learners' utterances, even when they were not closely related to the topic of the lesson.

Team teaching is delivered to check that students have understood the instructions given to write the final conclusions. One of the teachers leads the conversation and asks students questions to ensure understanding of the instructions, whilst two other teachers accompany her utterances with hands and body movements in order to provide students with clues to answer (**lines 1-15**).

Furthermore there is a spontaneous switch of roles when a fourth teacher (TEA4) decides to go deeper into how to write a conclusion (**lines 16, 25**). The new leader tries to elicit more elaborated answers from students to ensure a total comprehension of the task. At the same time, she gives students support by adding gestures, that have been previously used to referred to key words.

In addition, the use of learner-convergent language is taken into account as shown in **Excerpt 1**. Teachers applied a set of teaching techniques and strategies to make themselves understood while speaking. During this brief conversation, the teacher uses short utterances and keeps her explanations short and to the point (**lines 20-24**). TEA4 also accepts clarification requests and encourages students to participate.

One more strategy arises when the teacher points to the keywords and phrases written on the blackboard to help understanding (**line 24**).

Excerpt 1

1	T1:	Ok. One argumentative. Argument sorry. For.
2	T2:	[showing thumb up]
3	SS:	And one against.
4	T1:	Ok. **What about step 3**?
5	SS:	[raise their hands]
6	T3:	[using gestures 'creates a circle with the hands']
7	T1:	Alba. Do you remember?
8	ALB:	Write the conclusion?
9	T1:	Come on. Come on.
10	T2:	[using gestures 'creates a circle with the hands']
11	ALB:	Write the conclusion.
12	T2/3:	[nodding]
13	T1:	Summarizing idea. Yeah?
14	ALB:	Yes.
15	TEA1:	Your supporting ideas. Great. So we are gonna …
16	TEA4:	Excuse-me. [turning to TEA 1] In the conclusion. **What will you write in the conclusion?**
17	ALB:	Ok.
18	TEA4:	Cause first you write an argument for [puts her thumb up] and an argument against. [putting her thumb down]
19	ALB:	Yes.
20	TEA4:	**So you can repeat them in the conclusion?**
21	ALB:	m:::
22	TEA4:	Or **what are you gonna write in the conclusion?**
23	ALB:	What you. What do you think about this?
24	TEA4:	Exactly. So your **your idea about it**. Yes? If you are more:: for [pointing to the words written on the blackboard] or:: [putting her thumb down].
25	ALB:	Against.
26	TEA4:	Against. Then you have to choose…

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Excerpt 2

```
1   TEA1:   Can you please find an idea
            against? supporting idea against
            [putting her thumb down]

2   SS:     [raising hands]

3   TEA1:   Ok. m:::: There. Ok

4   STU:    m:: I think using mobile phone
            is bad because we use it for
            che: chatting.

5   TEA1:   Ok.
            Using mobile phone is bad.
            Ok.

6   TEA2:   Inés has a very good one.
            Come on.

7   INE:    I believe that using technology
            is negative because students use
            it it very much.

8   TEA1:   Very good Inés.
            That's super. Very good.

9   TEA2:   [looking and smiling at Inés]
```

The team co-teaches and one of the leaders asks students to give specific examples on the topic. Students have their answers already written on the worksheet, so they rapidly come up with an answer (**lines 1-5**). Alongside, one of the teachers (TEA2) has been co-teaching alternatively to a small group of low-performing students, who have made an effort, with the alternative teacher assistance, to elaborate a suitable example about the issue.

In **line 6** we can observe how the teacher (TEA4) praises Inés (a low-performing student) by recognising her work. Then, she proposes Inés to say her answer to the rest. Inés' statement reveals the result of the parallel teaching. After that, the teacher who leads the task praises Inés in an exaggerated way conscious of her hard work (**line 8**). Finally, Inés receives a broad smile from the teacher who has been supporting her, as a signal of approval and satisfaction (line 9).

Excerpt 3

```
1   TEA1:   What is this?
            I introduce myself.
            Can you introduce yourself?
            [turning to a boy]

2   TEA2:   Guillem.

3   GUI:    Guillem.
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```
4   TEA1:   Guillem.
            Can you introduce yourself?
            To the rest of the class.

5   GUI:    m::::: my name is Guillem.
            I have twelve years old.

6   TEA3:   [starting to cough loudly]
            I have? [coughing loudly again]

7   TEA1:   What happened here?

8   TEA3:   [still coughing]

9   TEA1:   My name is Maria and I'm thirty
            eight and you?

10  GUI:    I AM twelve years old…

11  TEA4:   grea:::t

12  GUI:    And I go to year one of ESO and I
            want to explain you my opinion of
            are the mobile phones allowed in
            the class?

13  TEA1:   Excellent. Very good Guillem.
```

The teacher makes sure that students understand the meaning of *introduce oneself*, so she asks a boy in the group to do so (**lines 1-4**). Guillem starts introducing himself, although his speech is interrupted when another teacher coughs loudly aiming to make the student aware of his grammatical error (**line 6**). She (TEA3) repeats Guillem's error and continues coughing. Then, the first teacher introduces herself in order to provide Guillem with the correct grammatical structure (**line 8**). At that point, the boy states his unfinished utterance successfully and goes on with his statement, adding more complex structures (line 12). Finally the teacher praises his effort and correctness (**line 13**).

Discussion

The outcomes described in the previous section show that the teachers' use of CIC strategies, such as paraphrasing, exaggerating intonation, making gestures, etc. in conducting the different tasks made it possible for a high percentage of students to use English exclusively or almost exclusively as the language of instruction and communication in class.

The three video excerpts show clear examples of the teaching strategies categorized by Walsh (2006) and described in the introduction of this paper. The teaching strategies and techniques analysed in detail in the previous section worked as an essential tool to provide students with more opportunities to produce good quality output in L2, which was one of the main goals planned. Evidence collected from the video excerpts also show how the team of teachers co-taught to achieve the objectives mentioned in the introduction.

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Firstly, all students understood the instructions and the steps to follow even though the activities could not be finished due to a lack of time. The CIC strategies used as well as there being four teachers in class ensured that all students (individually or in small groups) could be assisted when necessary. Hence, alternative teaching arose to help a group of low-performing students understand the task and create opportunities to produce in L2. Therefore, the team created an inclusive classroom where all students could have the same opportunities to complete the task successfully.

Secondly and related to students participation, the excerpts analysis shows how teachers guided their answers by providing them with questions related to the steps and the tasks instructions. Through the process of asking and answering questions the teachers made it clear that students were to get involved in their own learning process and become problem solvers rather than information receivers.

The third goal related to fostering students' productions in L2 was achieved through the interaction between teacher-student, teachers-students and student- student. Evidence shows that the atmosphere was inviting and the teachers' proposals were well received by the students. The co-teaching modalities employed by the teachers made possible the shaping of the large number of learners' contributions in L2.

Finally, after the implementation, the four members of the team agreed that team teaching was successful because there was a brain *in four bodies*. This meant that teachers shared responsibility for planning, creating the materials and delivering the same instructions. In this experience, the teachers also gathered together before the session to carefully plan the goals, the activities and the most suitable teaching strategies and techniques in order to foster interactional competence. Other aspects arranged in advance by the team of teachers were the specific materials to support students' productions and the assessment criteria to be taken into account.

Conclusion

This paper has shown how co-teaching can be successfully implemented in a Foreign Language classroom and the benefits, for both teachers and students have gained. Whereas teachers grew in professional satisfaction, students received more individual attention and felt secure to participate and produce output in L2.

In order to foster *quality interactional competence* teachers planned and instructed together. They used different conversational strategies to ensure understanding and promote students' participation. Three co-teaching modalities were implemented in the classroom, team, parallel and alternative teaching.

Related to "Decret 150/2017, de 17 d'octubre, de l'atenció educativa a l'alumnat en el marc d'un sistema educatiu inclusiu", schools must ensure equity and cohesion among their students. Taking this into account, co-teaching is a promising approach to consider as it embraces the increasing diversity in the school. It is, however, a practise that requires much attention, investment, resources and energy, which are the essential components of effective team teaching.

As an emergent need, not all teachers know how to deal with diversity and some of them need more training to co-work and share responsibilities in the classroom. Administration's role is significant and essential to help schools cope with this circumstance. That is why it must provide human resources, teacher training, and support when planning and scheduling the co-taught classes.

We would like to highlight that when students experience their teachers working together, they understand the power of respect and develop a sense of empathy amongst peers. These are essential ingredients that future citizens need to understand and work with individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives.

To conclude, we are aware that our analysis comes from two sessions and the sample of participants in the study is small. Even so, would co-teaching be enough to foster cohesion in bigger groups? Therefore, the question is ***how can we create a future citizen project which aims to promote cohesion?*** The answer will come from further studies in this field. ∎

Notes

1 In accordance with the results obtained from la Prova d'avaluació de 6è de Primària, an average number of 69,66% primary students have obtained medium-high to high level from 2014-2018.

2 Clip Clap English for kids is a comprehensive method based on the motivation of the students, stimulating them through games, songs and stories.

3   SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

4 To access the highlighted teaching materials, contact the author.

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Appendix

Figure 2. The team of teachers checks that students understand the next activity.

Figure 3. One of the team teachers helps and encourages a lower performance student.

Figure 4. The teachers shape and reshape students' contributions.