RESEARCH ARTICLES

Team Teaching at the University Level: Differing Views on a Soft CLIL Approach

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This study examines the experiences of two university teachers who attempted team teaching at the university level for the first time. Team teaching was conducted on a voluntary basis for two classes of first-year students (N=32) at a private university. Using a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, the goal of the team-taught portion of the course was for students to improve their English communication and academic writing skills through learning content related to gene editing and autonomous warfare over a 5-week period. Both teachers had advanced degrees in TESOL and worked together in a way that was appropriate for a Soft CLIL approach. Classroom observations and interviews with the teachers revealed challenges including disagreements over teacher roles, content selection, and content instruction. Through reflective practice, the teachers became aware of the benefits of team teaching for professional learning in terms of acquiring new content areas and CLIL techniques such as translanguaging and scaffolding. These findings may have practical implications for other university language teachers who are considering a team-based Soft CLIL approach.

Keywords: team teaching, Soft CLIL, reflective practice, post-secondary, tertiary level

Team teaching is a collaborative teaching approach that involves two or more teachers working together to deliver instruction to students. While team teaching is a common practice in Japan's secondary education, its implementation at the post-secondary level is not as widespread. This raises the question of what motivates university teachers to collaborate for class instruction. In the European context, the implementation of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has been a compelling reason for team teaching, as it may require both a content expert and a language expert to effectively teach subject courses in a foreign language (Lasagabaster, 2018). However, what happens when both teachers are language instructors? This paper aims to address this question by exploring the experiences of two university English language teachers attempting a team-taught CLIL approach for the first time. To begin, I review the literature on team teaching at the post-secondary level and provide a brief overview of the principles of a "Soft" CLIL approach. After introducing the methodologies for this study which includes thematic analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews, I present the contrasting experiences of two language teachers and highlight the challenges and opportunities that resulted from their team-teaching collaboration. By examining their differing views, this research aims to shed light on the complexities of collaboration and Soft CLIL implementation in higher education. It also seeks to illustrate how the teachers' professional growth and positive outcomes for their students appeared to result from their collaboration,

while also drawing attention to conflicts that can arise between co-teachers when attempting to balance personal connections with professional responsibilities.

Literature Review

Team Teaching in Higher Education

Team teaching, as the term is commonly used, denotes two teachers teaching in the same classroom at the same time. In the context of CLIL and EMI (English Medium Instruction) at the post-secondary level, team teaching usually refers to collaborations between a content lecturer and a language lecturer in which the abilities of the team members complement each other so that "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts" (Lasagabaster, 2018, p. 401). This style of team teaching is sometimes called *collaborative interdisciplinary team teaching* (CITT). Lessons conducted in a CITT style are typically content-driven, part of the subject curriculum, and tailored to the particular academic majors of the students (Gladman, 2015). Collaboration in CITT is also said to be easier than team teaching in purely language classes, as each teacher possesses their own expertise in either the content or the language, reducing the perceived threat of an additional authoritative figure in the classroom. In some cases, the language teacher may use their knowledge of communication to act as intermediaries between the content teacher and the students, helping them to understand the content teacher's arguments (Kondo et al., 2020). Additionally, allowing students to see two instructors exchange opinions can serve as a positive model for learning; it highlights that it is acceptable to have differences in perspectives and even proficiencies on a given subject (Ikegashira, 2021).

In this way, team teaching has been identified as a valuable approach not only to improve students' understanding of the course content but also to foster critical thinking and collaborative skills. The lower student–teacher ratio, in addition to providing students with more one-on-one time with teachers, can also help address students' varied abilities and preferred learning styles (Gladman, 2015). For instructors, team teaching has been shown to have a positive effect on ongoing professional development (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Tisdell & Eisen, 2000), both in terms of developing and improving teaching methods (Gorsuch, 2002) and for creativity (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). The team-teaching situation can also provide participating members with a supportive environment or "community of practice" (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Olson, 2021) that helps teachers to overcome academic isolation and continually develop as professional educators (Baeten & Simons, 2014). From a socio-constructivist perspective, one of the main tenets of team teaching is to share experiences and encourage dialogue that leads to greater reflection and improved learning outcomes (Lasagabaster, 2018). When this reflection is systematically carried out through regular debriefing sessions, it evolves into reflective practice—a deliberate, organized, and action-driven process focused on refining professional practice (Schön, 1987).

However, teacher collaboration is not without several challenges. These include the time required for effective collaboration, teacher positioning, increased workloads, and inadequate or non-existent administrative support (DelliCarpini, 2021). One of the primary challenges lies in the unclear delineation of roles to be played by each member of the team (Baeten & Simons, 2014). In many cases, teachers' differing interpretations of their roles can lead to conflicts and tensions that negatively impact the learning environment. In any given team-teaching partnership, teachers also need to settle differences in opinions regarding lesson planning and preparations, content selection and instruction, and grading and assessment, to name just a few.

Although CLIL itself may function as a guideline for some of these issues, such as in CITT, collaboration between two TESOL professionals requires deliberation over how to handle content while not necessarily having a degree or claim to expertise in a given academic subject (DelliCarpini, 2021).

The present research is therefore a unique opportunity to examine how two language teachers collaborated in a university language course. The fact that the course was explicitly designated as a Soft CLIL course and that the two teachers are foreigners in a Japanese context also adds a unique dimension to the study. Before moving on, however, it is important to differentiate and define Soft CLIL as an educational approach.

Differentiating and Defining Soft CLIL

One simple way to differentiate the alphabet soup of educational approaches (EMI, CBI, and CLIL, among others) is to ask *who* is teaching the content, and in *what* context. In EMI, it is usually the academic subject teacher who is teaching a subject (other than English itself) in a country where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English (Macaro, 2018). For example, a Turkish mathematics teacher teaching mathematics in English to students in Turkey. Here, the focus is primarily on learning the content. In Content-Based Instruction (CBI), it is usually the language teacher who is teaching the content, and the majority of the population of the country in question speak English as their L1. For example, a native English-speaking language teacher teaching content in English to migrant students in the United States. The focus here is primarily on learning the language. CLIL, by contrast, is defined as "a dual-focused educational approach in which *an additional language* [English] is used for the learning and teaching of both content *and* language (Coyle et al., 2010, p. 1; emphasis in original). "Hard" CLIL follows its original European model where academic subjects are taught in English by non-native content teachers and give little or no language support (similar to EMI), while "Soft" CLIL is taught by native or non-native language teachers with more focus on language learning (similar to CBI) (Ikeda, 2013).

Although there have been reports of Hard CLIL implementation in Japan in recent years (e.g., Takasago, 2021), it may still be too ambitious for many Japanese subject teachers to teach through the target language due to a lack of language proficiency or systematically employed language-teaching assistants (Izumi, 2022; Ikeda, 2013). This has resulted in Soft CLIL becoming the de facto norm in Japan (Ikeda, 2019) as it can be implemented relatively easily (Tsuchiya & Pérez Murillo, 2019; Ikeda, 2019). And while there is no one prescriptive model of CLIL to be strictly followed, there are some general guidelines that researchers and practitioners apply in implementing the approach.

Soft CLIL, in simple terms, is content-based language teaching on the principles of the "4Cs" (Ikeda, 2022). The aim is for learners to engage in thought (Cognition) about a given subject matter (Content) while learning and using the target language (Communication). There is an emphasis on developing intercultural understanding and gaining an awareness of self and social other (Culture) through the study of the content (Coyle et al., 2010). The approach also embraces multimodal input which encompasses not only text but also a variety of other forms of media, such as audio, video, apps, maps, and data, to create a diverse learning environment that caters to different learning styles and fosters a deeper understanding of alternative perspectives (Ikeda, 2019, 2022). In this way, the approach is said to provide intellectually interesting topics, cognitively engaging activities, and contextually authentic situations to use language, including the flexible use of students' first and second languages in the

classroom (often referred to as "translanguaging"; see, e.g., Lin & He, 2017).

The broader aims of a CLIL approach include developing students' pluriliteracies and 21st-century global competencies (Ikeda, 2019). Competencies here refer to generic skills that students can apply in the real world (e.g., problem-solving skills, collaboration skills, global citizenship responsibilities) and supposedly need in response to the demands of globalization. For these reasons, Soft CLIL has been claimed to be a pedagogy capable of transforming the educational landscape (Tsuchiya & Pérez Murillo, 2019), with Ikeda (2022) going so far as to say it is "the only approach in language education that prepares younger generations for the new era" (p. 22). As Izumi and Pinner (2022) assert, however, "much more research and support at all levels is still needed if Soft CLIL is truly to help unify Japan's educational needs with the actual practice of teaching and learning" (p. 175). As such, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions.

What are the opportunities and challenges of two university language teachers attempting to team teach a Soft CLIL approach for the first time? And if any, what are the benefits for their students?

Method

Participants and Educational Setting

The participants of this study were James and Minh (pseudonyms). James was in his late thirties and a native of the UK. He had several years of experience teaching at the university level and held an MA in TESOL. Minh was in her late twenties and a native of Vietnam. She also held an MA in TESOL but had not previously taught university students. The study was conducted at a private university in the Kantō region of Japan. James and Minh team taught a compulsory first-year English class on the theme of Media and Propaganda, and students were expected to learn about these issues and engage in debates about the content. The target class was specified by the university as a CLIL course, and its specific aim was to improve the students' communication skills and academic writing ability. The content topics chosen for their team-teaching collaboration were Gene Editing and Autonomous Warfare. The teachers delivered the same lesson to two separate classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, twice per week. Each class was attended by 16 students (N=32), and the students' level was estimated by the researcher and teachers to be around B1 or B2 on the CEFR scale.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were obtained through teacher interviews and field notes from class observations. During the class, the researcher was a non-participant observer but occasionally interviewed the teachers during student work time to gain a better understanding of the lesson objectives and incidental episodes. Outside of class, teacher interviews were semi-structured and focused on the teachers' views of team teaching and Soft CLIL implementation. The interview guide was flexible, allowing for adjustments and exploration of emergent themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews were also designed as an opportunity for teachers to take part in reflective practice. Reflective practice is a valuable tool for educators to engage in ongoing self-reflection and improvement (Schön, 1987; Farrell, 2007). Through reflective practice, teachers can refine their teaching practices by identifying what worked well and what could be improved, and consider what adjustments can be made to enhance student outcomes (Farrell, 2018). Additionally, the interviews outside of class were conducted individually so that teachers could speak freely about issues they may have identified in the collaboration and may not have felt comfortable admitting in front of their teaching partner. The interviews took place in

person at the teachers' scheduling convenience, were audio recorded, and ranged in length approximately 30–60 minutes. The data from the field notes and interviews were then transcribed for thematic analysis.

Following Braun and Clarke (2021), reflexive thematic analysis consists of a six-step process: 1) reading and re-reading the data and recording initial ideas; 2) coding salient features of the data across the entire data set; 3) matching the codes to candidate themes and gathering all data associated with each candidate; 4) reviewing the themes in relation to the coded extracts and the data set as a whole; 5) refining, defining, and naming the themes; and 6) making a final selection and analysis of vivid examples and relating them back to the research question and the literature. Based on this process, the eight themes selected were: initial stances, negotiating roles and responsibilities, planning and preparations, teacher talk, lingering frustrations, benefits for teachers, benefits for students, and the boundary between professional and personal. Each of these themes is presented and discussed below.

Findings and Discussion

Initial Stances

The team-teaching collaboration took place over five weeks of classes in the middle of the semester. James was the primary teacher for the course and had already taught several classes on content related to the U.S. and Middle East earlier in the term. Minh joined as a secondary teacher, with no official approval from the department, and the collaboration was done on a voluntary basis. The main motivation for the team-teaching arrangement was Minh's interest in conducting a pilot study for her PhD project on global citizenship and competency-based education. As part of her research, Minh wanted to observe students' project- and task-based work on the content she provided, analyze their competencies, and develop effective strategies to coach students on their competency development. James, on the other hand, primarily agreed to the collaboration as a favor to Minh. In addition to helping her with her research, however, James also believed he could learn new content for teaching a sustainable development undergraduate course the following year.

Before starting their collaboration, the teachers decided that James would primarily focus on the Language and scaffold for difficult vocabulary and grammar, while Minh would primarily focus on the Content and provide the concepts for the new topics, as per the CLIL framework of the course. However, James was initially apprehensive about the students' response to their collaboration, stating:

> I didn't want it to come off as team teaching.... You can never know how the students will react to a new teacher, because they expected to take my class. I tried to justify it by telling the students that Minh is an assistant to them. "She is here to help you."

Shortly after beginning team teaching, it became clear that James was not comfortable sharing the lead in instruction with Minh. James saw himself as the primary teacher, and Minh as an assistant who he "used to shed light on a topic from another point of view." Minh was aware of this and commented, "I tried to step down every time I felt he (James) tried to claim his territory."

James admitted that his prior experiences as a junior high school ALT played a significant role in shaping his perception of team teaching. Specifically, he remembered feeling like he was just a tool for delivering the content provided by the JTE, with no opportunity to showcase his own ideas or creativity, elaborating:

> Memorizing textbooks, standing at the front just waiting to be called upon... It put me off of language education. It felt very inauthentic... I was a tape recorder, not myself.

This phenomenon of ALTs feeling disenfranchised in their teacher identities and capabilities as educators is not uncommon in Japan (see, e.g., Borg, 2020; Hiratsuka, 2022). James' negative experiences nonetheless contributed to his initial hesitancy to fully embrace the concept of team teaching while working with Minh.

Negotiating Roles and Responsibilities

Given their initial stances, the negotiation of roles and responsibilities between James and Minh was a complex process that evolved over time. At the outset of their collaboration, James perceived himself as the language teacher, decision-maker, and classroom manager; Minh viewed herself as the planner, content provider, and assistant. Early on, she commented on her difficulty negotiating a more equal partnership with James:

> It's a little bit confusing and I'm trying to navigate that. At first, I expected that I would be able to do a little bit of teaching but... probably because I didn't make it super clear with James...

Minh expected to have a more active role in the class, but due to a lack of clear communication with James, her role remained limited to that of an assistant. Minh's contributions were only recognized when James did not know the answers, and, during the first few classes, she said she only felt comfortable taking over when James "looked tired."

As a novice teacher, and the instructor in charge of providing the content, Minh was passionate about the subject and wanted to spend more of the lesson time relaying information that she felt James had missed or glossed over. James disagreed with her approach, however, stating:

> I know the students, and she doesn't. It's a compulsory class and their attention spans are limited. They will lose focus. They can get annoyed if you repeat the same thing.

Minh worked hard to prove her worth as a teacher, but James was quick to assume control of the class. As a result, the team-teaching relationship often fluctuated, and their roles and responsibilities remained ill-defined.

Planning and Preparations

Planning proved to be another major hurdle for their team-teaching dynamic. Minh preferred a highly detail-oriented approach in her preparation process, showing her desire for meticulous lesson planning and strategizing. James, by contrast, was much more relaxed in his approach to planning and sometimes did not make time to go through the content provided by Minh before class. James explained, "I normally plan the content and I have tasks for them, so I don't like to have too much structure; I like it to be more on-the-fly." James confessed that he "almost had a panic attack" when Minh sent him several classes' worth of content for him at the beginning of their collaboration to not only check but also understand well enough to teach.

Early on, the difference in approaches was particularly evident in the morning class, where James sometimes felt lost and unprepared. According to Minh, he would occasionally tell her: "You do it first, I'll see how it goes, and I'll do it in the next period." In effect, this led to role reversals between classes, with Minh taking the lead and James assisting in the morning class, and James leading and Minh falling back to her assistant role in the afternoon. Although previous research suggests that role fluidity can help develop deeper collaboration in the classroom (Tisdell & Eisen, 2000), this role-switching seemed to threaten James' authority in the morning class, while also marginalizing Minh as the content provider in the afternoon.

To address these challenges, the teachers sometimes held impromptu "meetings" either during the morning class or immediately afterward. These meetings

were kept brief and focused on promptly addressing necessary changes. One example of the changes made between classes was in a lesson on autonomous driving. In the morning class, the students were confused about a stage called “conditional autonomous driving” in a video shown by Minh. Minh admitted, "It’s not clear from the video what that means, so (in the afternoon class) he (James) would throw the question to me so that I can elaborate for the students.” This scenario somewhat improved as the teachers continued to work together and learn from each other. James and Minh were beginning to form a friendly relationship and James reported that he wanted to keep the information exchange comfortable and easy. He admitted, "While students were prepping in class, we would go through it (the lesson plan) very quickly." At this point, James apparently believed it would be strange to sit down and plan out a lesson, and eventually, Minh agreed that James’ improvised approach was more natural.

Teacher Talk

In any classroom setting, teacher talk can play a significant role in shaping the dynamics of the class and establishing a classroom culture (Walsh, 2011). Similar to their initial disagreements over roles and planning, James and Minh had conflicting views on teacher talk. For example, James enjoyed engaging in small talk with students before and during class, while Minh considered it a “waste of time.” During a class where James was leading class instruction, Minh felt that there were too many digressions into small talk and personal stories, and that it distracted the students’ understanding of the content. She wanted to use teacher talk more formally and strategically to introduce new concepts in the lesson. In response, James said that Minh was overthinking the classroom dynamic, reflecting:

> She (Minh) was like, step-by-step, say this... For me personally, it feels like I'm not authentic if I have to say a conversation that's planned ... It feels like acting.

In this way, the authenticity of the lessons was compromised for James by Minh’s formal planning style, and the effectiveness of the lessons was undermined for Minh by James’ relaxed and affable approach to the content.

These differences in opinion regarding teacher talk highlight the importance of finding a balance between authenticity and well-planned lessons when working under a CLIL framework. While spontaneity can lead to a more authentic classroom experience (Pinner, 2021), careful lesson planning ensures that the learning objectives are met and that language and content are appropriately integrated, enhancing learning outcomes (Coyle et al., 2010). James provided an example of how they were eventually able to achieve this balance. He described a lesson in which he was responsible for the content instruction and asked Minh about how the Vietnam War was taught in her country. According to James, at first, Minh's response for the morning class was "too much information.” He continued, “It may be authentic and natural, but it may have overwhelmed students, doing more harm than good." In the afternoon class, James changed the lesson to focus on more specific questions: "How were you taught about the Gulf of Tonkin incident? Who was responsible?" James explained that he posed these questions to the students first and then had them ask Minh. Minh was able to prepare more concise answers and James scaffolded for difficult language items. Ultimately, the two teachers agreed that the afternoon class adhered more closely to CLIL principles and was better executed than the morning class.

Lingering Frustrations

Despite striking a good balance for a Soft CLIL approach in some instances, James and Minh continued to disagree about

content instruction and their roles in the classroom. As mentioned above, James initially told Minh that she would take on more of a teaching role, but eventually James did the majority of the teaching and Minh became more of a spectator. Minh said that she felt hurried whenever she stepped into the spotlight in class, commenting: "He (James) was always reluctant to let me take center stage, telling students 'she is just here to observe.'" Minh worried that James would get angry with her if she took too long to explain concepts; even after more than three weeks of team teaching together, Minh reported her frustration, saying: "I provide the materials but I haven't gone through it with him. There are a lot of points I want to emphasize but he will go through it very quickly." Despite working through some of their issues, in the end, Minh felt that James rushes, and James felt that Minh spends too much time on a given topic.

Additionally, James had disagreements regarding Minh's content choices. Early on, for example, Minh showed a TED Talk on the topic of gene editing that James felt was beyond the students' comprehension level. And after one of their later classes on the topic of autonomous warfare, James reported that Minh spent about 20 minutes lecturing on how humans are instinctively violent, which he disagreed with due to his background studying psychology in university. James elaborated,

> As a teacher, you don't want to teach a student something you feel is factually incorrect. The compromise ended up being "let's be brief."

In response, Minh said, "James thinks war is always bad, so students will also think war is always bad." It seems that Minh intended to delve deeper into the complexities of the matter and start a discussion, while James aimed to present the material in the most straightforward manner possible for the students. For successful CLIL implementation, it is important to balance providing students with comprehensible input and allowing them to develop their higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), such as analyzing and evaluating social issues that do not necessarily have a "correct" answer (Ikeda, 2022). HOTS tasks encourage students to engage in critical thinking and deeper learning, but also require careful scaffolding (Coyle et al., 2010) that was not often incorporated into the lessons.

Overall, the primary frustrations among teachers appeared to stem from inadequate planning and a lingering sense of being unfulfilled in their initial roles as "content expert" and "language expert" under the CLIL framework. Nonetheless, after five weeks of team teaching, there were some positive outcomes.

Benefits for Teachers

Professional learning was a significant benefit for both James and Minh. Despite occasional disagreements about the content, James admitted that he learned a new topic that he could incorporate into a unit for his upcoming sustainable development course. Furthermore, Minh was more technologically savvy than James, using a variety of apps, interactive slides, and other ICT tools in the classroom that he had not used before. James learned how to incorporate these alternative forms of input and make his classes more multimodal, in line with the CLIL approach (Coyle et al., 2010). For Minh, participating in team teaching was an opportunity to develop her skills as a novice university teacher. She learned a variety of CLIL techniques, including how to scaffold for task-based learning and how to adapt authentic articles to fit her students' language levels.

Additionally, compared to their individual teaching practices, their team-teaching approach provided more opportunities for reflective practice. As noted above, reflective practice involves critically analyzing and evaluating one's own teaching methods and strategies. By reflecting on

what works well and what needs improvement, teachers can continually develop their skills and knowledge in their field (Farrell, 2018). According to James and Minh, reflecting on their experiences through interviews was beneficial, but their collaboration itself was a key driver behind their growth as teachers. This suggests the potential of team teaching as a vehicle for professional development, providing opportunities for teachers to learn new skills, gain exposure to different teaching styles, and engage in reflective practice as a team.

Benefits for Students

The team-teaching approach also appeared to benefit students in several ways. Generally speaking, by having two teachers in the classroom, students are able to receive a more well-rounded education, as the teachers' individual strengths and areas of expertise can complement each other to provide a more comprehensive learning experience (Gladman, 2015). James reported that the students expressed feeling more supported in their task-based activities and group work in their reflection papers, which had a positive impact on their ability to grasp the class material. With two teachers available, students received more personalized attention tailored to their specific needs and learning styles. In particular, they were appreciative of Minh's individual coaching sessions, where she met with students outside of class to guide them in thinking through issues and forming arguments for class debates.

The students also had two types of support for their language learning needs. In line with translanguaging practices, James sometimes used Japanese in class for encouragement or praise, and occasionally for examining vocabulary. On the topic of gene editing, for example, James asked the students: "Should autism be edited out of the human genome? Some say that it's not a disability." He then asked students what the word for autism is in Japanese, and they answered: "*jiheishō*" (自閉症). After writing it on the board, James pointed out that the kanji literally mean "close (off) oneself disease," which may have negative connotations that are not present in the English word. Conversely, Minh, as an absolute beginner in Japanese, provided a different type of support in the classroom: The students were forced to use their English with her (sometimes called "pushed output"; see Swain, 1985), which likely had added benefits in terms of language immersion and fluency development.

James and Minh's complementary approaches may have been particularly beneficial to students in the learning process, as well. James had a "soft touch" when it came to helping struggling students, as he would readily engage in small talk and offer support in a non-threatening way. This approach aligns with research that suggests that building positive teacher–student relationships can have a significant impact on student learning outcomes (Roorda et al., 2011). James' approach may have created a safe environment wherein students felt comfortable to express their thoughts, ask questions, and seek assistance. Minh's more challenging approach, on the other hand, encouraged students to step out of their comfort zones and develop their critical thinking skills, which are important for academic success and beyond (McPeck, 1981). By presenting students with intellectually demanding tasks, Minh's approach may have fostered the development of higher-order thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and intellectual autonomy, helping to prepare them for the rigors of academic life and future professional challenges. Consequently, this combination of support and challenge or "*ame to muchi*" (飴と鞭, literally "candy and whip" in Japanese) has been shown to lead to increased student motivation and engagement (Stipek, 2002).

Finally, the occasional fluidity of the teachers' roles was a departure from the

traditional "sage on the stage" model (King, 1993). James, for example, not only lectured but also acted as a "guide on the side," facilitating class debates and asking Minh questions about the content. Minh also demonstrated a willingness to admit when she did not know the answer, which, in turn, allowed students to not know and encouraged them to take ownership of their learning. Minh furthermore encouraged students to critically engage with the content by presenting opposing views to the information James presented to students. This willingness to challenge each other and offer different perspectives likely reinforced in the students the idea that learning is a collaborative process. Their team-teaching dynamic, in this way, seemed to create a model learning environment; this approach, consistent with CLIL principles (Coyle et al., 2010), appeared to not only encourage students to think critically, but also to take responsibility for their own learning and develop the skills necessary for future academic and professional success.

Professional or Personal?

James and Minh were acquaintances and had a working relationship when they first began team teaching. Over time, their interaction deepened and eventually developed into a friendship. While this allowed them to develop a closer relationship and strengthened their educational partnership in some respects, it also created challenges in terms of maintaining a level of accountability in their collaborative work. Minh admitted that the informal nature of the friendship made it difficult for her to make formal demands of James, especially regarding her research. Similarly, formal changes in their teaching methods may have been difficult because the teachers had fallen into comfortable routines. This problem is not limited to James and Minh's experience and has been discussed elsewhere in the literature on team teaching (e.g., Pearce & Oyama, 2019). It therefore seems crucial for those considering team teaching to attempt to strike a balance between professionalism and building personal relationships. By establishing clear expectations and boundaries, teachers can ensure that their collaboration remains productive and effective, while also maintaining a positive and supportive relationship outside of the classroom.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of two university teachers who attempted team teaching a Soft CLIL approach for the first time. Based on reflexive thematic analysis conducted on data from teacher interviews and field notes, the findings showed that both teachers faced problems due to a lack of flexibility, conflicting expectations, and disagreements regarding content selection and instruction. James, the lead teacher, was often unwilling to relinquish control and allowed Minh to co-teach only as a gesture of goodwill towards her research project. James was initially opposed to team teaching because of his past experiences as an assistant language teacher. Additionally, the study found differing views on class preparation, as James did not like to over-plan, while Minh preferred to plan in meticulous detail. Moreover, in class, both teachers felt that the presentation and discussion of the content were one-sided, with one teacher taking the spotlight and the other feeling left out. This led to competition at times, and the agreed-upon roles of the teachers were sometimes reversed. These challenges made it difficult to effectively co-teach the course and often caused tension and dissatisfaction on both sides.

Despite lingering frustrations, however, James and Minh were able to find benefits in terms of professional learning. Minh, as a novice university teacher, learned a variety of CLIL techniques from James and gained confidence in her teaching skills. Similarly, James learned new content areas and how to incorporate other forms of input

to make future classes more multimodal and aligned with a CLIL approach. In the end, their team teaching seemed to provide a good balance of support and challenge for students and a more well-rounded learning experience than perhaps possible in a solo-taught course. The teachers also developed a close friendship through their collaboration, but this presented challenges in maintaining accountability and making formal changes to their approach. These findings underscore the importance of striking a balance between professionalism and personal relationships to ensure team teaching is effective.

The present study was exploratory and preliminary in nature and was limited by the lack of data collected directly from students. The findings and conclusions should therefore be taken with caution. The voluntary nature of the team-teaching arrangement and the fact that both teachers were non-Japanese in a Japanese context may also add a unique dimension to this study, but also limit its generalizability. It is nevertheless hoped that the findings and practical implications of the study may serve as a basis for future research and suggest some of the benefits and challenges that team-taught Soft CLIL has for university language classes. Despite the differing views and attitudes of the two teachers, their partnership seemed to result in a more comprehensive educational experience for their students, with added benefits for their own professional development. By engaging in team teaching and reflective practice, teachers can better understand their students' learning needs and adjust their teaching approaches to optimize student success.

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