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The Experience of Co-Teaching for Emergent Arabic-English Literacy

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Abstract

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Keywords

Early Biliteracy, Dual Language Programme, Co-Teaching, Translanguaging, Scaffolding, Linguistic Ethnography

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The Experience of Co-Teaching for Emergent Arabic-English Literacy

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In this paper we explore teachers' experiences of co-teaching within a new bilingual (Arabic/ English) model in public Kindergarten schools in the United Arab Emirates. The main objective was to understand teachers' experiences with intercultural teaching for biliteracy in this context. We interviewed six pairs of co-teachers. These co-teachers represent six of the nationalities of teachers working in public Kindergartens in Abu Dhabi, thereby representing a cross-section of the cultural context of teaching in the reformed public schools. The data highlight teachers' varied co-teaching practices and point to aspects such as classroom management and translanguaging as aspects of classroom practice which are enhanced by co-teaching. Teachers' experience of co-teaching and well-formed co-teaching relationships can contribute to the development of sound pedagogical practices while a lack of administrative support can create conditions which are not conducive to co-teaching. The data also show that supportive bilingual scaffolding and flexible translanguaging are seen as effective components of co-teaching to support emergent biliteracy.

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Introduction

When the government of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), announced a “New School Model” (ADEC, 2010a) for state schools in 2010 as part of its major reformation of state schooling, one major innovative component was the introduction of English as a medium of instruction for half of the school day, alongside the existing medium and national language of Arabic. Recognizing that this shift from teaching through Arabic alone to teaching through Arabic-and-English represented “a monumental step” (ADEC, 2010b) for the country, the education council’s Director-General saw the need to spell out the reason: “This new approach to education focuses on creating bi-literate students, which means students will be able to understand, speak, read and write in both English and Arabic” (UNESCO, 2011). The task of beginning to create a biliterate future population of native Arabic-speaking Emiratis would be initiated through the use of English as a parallel medium of instruction alongside Arabic in every state school classroom from Kindergarten onwards, and co-teaching was the means through which to implement this at Kindergarten level. Co-teaching was intended to develop children’s Arabic and English skills through having Arabic and English teachers jointly plan and teach classes (ADEC, 2012). Whereas Math and Science had been taught through the medium of the native tongue in the past, henceforth they would be taught in English from Kindergarten.

This move towards teaching for biliteracy from Kindergarten warrants investigation for several reasons. First, a significant shift in teacher culture occurred with the “New School Model” which saw thousands of Anglophone international teachers entering early years’ classrooms that had hitherto been the domain of Arabic-speaking teachers from the Middle

East (Dickson, 2012). The reorientation that this has wrought in schools' linguistic and pedagogical landscapes is worthy of investigation in itself. More specifically, the new approach provides a novel setting for investigation into the process of simultaneous biliteracy development in the early years, a topic that is garnering increasing interest within early childhood education. The small body of extant research tends to focus primarily on contexts of emergent Spanish-English biliteracy (August & Shanahan, 2006; Escamilla, Hopewell, Geisler & Ruiz, 2007; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005), two languages which are linguistically similar in terms of directionality, alphabet and structure, albeit that Spanish is a Romance language and English a Germanic language. A smaller portion of the literature focuses on emergent biliteracy in linguistically distant languages, mainly Chinese and English (Weiyun He, 2006; Zhang & Guo, 2017). Only a small handful of studies deal with emergent Arabic-English biliteracy, two languages which are also linguistically distant. (See for example, Saiegh-Haddad & Geva, 2009; Tibi, Joshi, & McLeod, 2013). Moreover, the economic prosperity of this oil-rich country allowed for two fulltime teachers, one Arabic-speaking and one English-speaking, in each Kindergarten classroom, as well as an Arabic-speaking classroom assistant in some cases, a situation not generally afforded in other global contexts.

Furthermore, many of the studies of emergent biliteracy in general focus on acquisition in informal settings rather than in the more formal setting of a structured school system, as is the case in this study. Few studies focus on the *process* rather than on the *product* of biliteracy development, and investigation into the process of early biliteracy development from the teachers' perspective in particular is an under-researched area. In light of the foregoing, this study focuses on teachers' perceptions of co-teaching for biliteracy in the early years of the implementation of school reform in Abu Dhabi, for as Fullan (1991, p. 117) classically observed, "change in education depends upon what teachers do and think – it is as simple and complex as that."

State School Kindergartens in the UAE

In the UAE, state schooling is generally open to Emirati children only; expatriates must attend private schools. Kindergarten is optional, and Emirati children are enrolled in KG1 from the age of four and move on to KG2 at the age of five, before entering Grade One in Elementary school at the age of six years, when compulsory schooling starts. Typically, in Kindergarten classrooms in the dual language new state school system in the capital city and emirate of Abu Dhabi since 2010, an Arabic Medium Teacher and English Medium Teacher work together as co-teachers. This contrasts with the approach in elementary schools where, from Grade One onwards, an Arabic Medium Teacher (AMT) is responsible for teaching children their first language, Arabic, as well as Islamic Studies and Civics. The English Medium Teacher (EMT) has primary responsibility for teaching English, as well as Mathematics and Science. Other subjects such as physical education, music, art, and computer science are usually taught in Arabic.

Thousands of teachers have been hired under the new school model since 2010. EMTs are mostly recruited from the Anglophone countries of the United States, Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, although there a growing number of locally qualified national Emirati English Medium Teachers working in schools (Dillon, Salazar, & Al Otaibi, 2015). While AMTs are often also of Emirati nationality, they also include expatriate teachers of Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian nationality who continue to be employed in some state school sectors, among others.

Language Context

Consideration must be given to the role of the two languages in question in the UAE context. The local language is Emirati Arabic, a colloquial version of Modern Standard Arabic (Mourani, 2004). The languages taught in schools are MSA and English. According to Badry (2004), the linguistic situation in the UAE is characterized by diglossia, where two (or more) varieties of the same language are being used alongside each other for different functions (Hanani, 2009). While the UAE is a multilingual country (Syed, 2003), Arabic is the only language with official status, but English is held in high regard as a prestige language and as a lingua franca (Charise, 2007). Therefore, Arabic is seen as a language with a high degree of religious, symbolic, cultural and social capital while English can be seen as having high social and economic capital (Badry, 2004; Bourdieu, 1991; Freeman, 2004).

Emirati children arrive in UAE public Kindergartens with spoken competence in Emirati Arabic, but often with little or no interactional exposure to Modern Standard Arabic (Tibi & McLeod, 2014), apart from watching television programs, and many of these are in English with Arabic subtitles, which they would be as yet unable to read. Similarly, early exposure to English is also limited in quantity and quality. For the small minority of Emirati children who attend nurseries (less than 5% of the Emirati child population in Dubai, according to Karaman 2011), there is some early exposure to English in nurseries, as over 90% of nursery staff are expatriate, and only 5.4% are Arabic speaking (Karaman, 2011, p. 6). Moreover, childcare within the Emirati home is often provided by housemaids with limited proficiency in Arabic (Al Sumaiti, 2012), or, indeed, in standard English.

Literature Review

Three main themes germane to investigating teachers' experiences of co-teaching in the reformed UAE state school situation will be discussed here: co-teaching as shared responsibility, relationships between co-teachers in intercultural contexts, and co-teaching in dual language contexts. The various models of co-teaching for biliteracy in early years' settings that have been reported in the literature are also explored.

Co-Teaching as Shared Responsibility

Co-teaching is often termed team teaching. Much of the literature relating to co-teaching comes from the fields of inclusive education, special education, science education, and co-teaching between researchers and teachers (Beninghof, 2012; Bianchi & Murphy, 2014; Freeman, 2004; Gately & Gately, 2001; Murphy & Beggs, 2010). Firstly, co-teaching can be identified as shared responsibility. This shared responsibility can be seen as facilitating all aspects of children's learning including collaborative planning, teaching, and assessment during an instructional time frame (Beninghof, 2012; Bianchi & Murphy, 2014; Murphy & Beggs, 2010). The aspect of planning in sharing responsibility means that planning is collaborative rather than isolated and can result in teachers changing lessons to meet students' needs, thereby improving what they can offer to the children they teach (Bianchi & Murphy, 2014). According to Murphy and Beggs "The basis of coteaching is collaboration between teachers to expand the learning opportunities available to the children" (2010, p. 26). Bianchi and Murphy (2014) emphasize the sharing and development of professional skills and knowledge, as well as a sense of togetherness that comes from mutual confidence-building as practitioners.

The literature provides concrete examples of co-teaching in practice in many different forms. Within an instructional timeframe, both teachers might alternately lead a discussion,

give directions, monitor student behavior, take responsibility for a small group, quietly collect observational data, or work with an individual student (Beninghof 2012; Murphy & Beggs, 2010). Whatever form it takes, effective co-teaching always “requires the active engagement of both educators for the entire period” (Beninghof 2012, p. 20). Moreover, Murphy and Beggs (2010) acknowledge that shared responsibility may not mean equal responsibility for all activities at all times. It doesn’t necessarily mean that co-teachers are simultaneously doing the same thing at the same time, nor does it require that co-teachers are teaching together. Effective co-teaching can be seen as a changing, flexible form of teaching (Beninghof, 2012), where co-teaching pairs design their own unique model to fit their own context, and in accordance with the needs of students, the curriculum and resources (Beninghof, 2012).

Co-teaching can be intimidating for educators, particularly in the initial stages of developing the co-teaching relationship. They may want to be told what it should look like, or how exactly to do it. However, this is not recommended in the literature; Beninghof, for example, cautions that steps for effective co-teaching cannot be prescribed in a manual, due to the multiplicity of factors simultaneously at play in the co-teaching environment. (Beninghof, 2012). In one of the few studies into co-teaching in the UAE, one teacher noted that “the effectiveness of co-teaching is dependent on each situation” (Dillon et al., 2015, p. 28). Co-teaching is complex and sophisticated and requires “a strong professional commitment and systemic supports” (Friend, 2008, p. 10).

However complex co-teaching may be, shared pedagogical responsibility can lead to significant benefits. The fact that the co-teaching environment includes more than one perspective on learning and teaching, for example, results in a more democratic and less authoritarian learning environment (Scantlebury & Murphy, 2010). The professional learning communities (PLCs) which can develop naturally when co-teaching is encouraged, show the benefit of being able to tap into “the collective creativity and wisdom of colleagues” (Beninghof, 2012, p. 23). Beninghof (2012) also points to the benefits of co-teaching in terms of differentiating instruction, in terms of designing lessons from different perspectives, providing opportunities for higher- and lower-order thinking, flexible grouping arrangements, and the benefits of shared responsibility for classroom management making hands-on learning opportunities more effective. This aspect of differentiation has particular relevance for bilingual language acquisition in the UAE context. Furthermore, it is believed that the knowledge and skills gained through co-teaching extend beyond the actual co-teaching situation, and that all students taught by those who co-teach benefit (Beninghof, 2012).

The implementation of co-teaching is not without challenges, however, including issues around interpersonal communication and collegial relationships (Murphy & Beggs, 2010, p. 32). The relationship between co-teachers has been identified as a major factor in the successful development of co-teaching relationships (Beninghof, 2012; Gately & Gately, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Malian & McRae, 2010; Murphy & Beggs, 2005). When dedicated time is given to relationship building, practice-sharing, learning experiences, co-planning, and co-reflection, this can enhance the relationships between co-teachers (Bianchi & Murphy, 2014; Dillon et al., 2015).

Support or lack thereof at the school leadership level might mean, for example, that Professional Development (PD) is provided to help develop co-teaching skills and attitudes, or not. School-level decisions could also lead to the allocation of sufficient or insufficient planning time (Friend, 2008; Hargreaves, 2007). Teachers have also reported a dissatisfaction with the process of engaging with co-teaching due to “poorly defined role descriptions, lack of clear expectations from administrators, and frustrations with implementation issues” (Gately & Gately 2001). Given the multinational teaching cadre in the UAE, with 200 nationalities teaching in schools (personal communication, MOE), a particular challenge of co-teaching in

the UAE context may be intercultural communication, and the literature on this will be discussed in the following section.

Relationships between Co-Teachers in Intercultural Contexts

Beninghof (2012) concludes that personal characteristics such as flexibility and open-mindedness can lend themselves to the development of effective co-teaching relationships. However, in the UAE Kindergarten context, it has been found that pedagogical styles, educational background and cultural background are often different between individuals in co-teaching pairs (Dillon et al., 2015; Shaban & Ismail, 2013).

Gately and Gately (2001) note that teachers working together in co-teaching relationships move through a developmental process which can begin with fumbling interaction to collaborative relationships. They identify eight components of the co-teaching relationship as interpersonal communication, physical arrangement, familiarity with the curriculum, curriculum goals and modifications, instructional planning, instructional presentation, classroom management, and assessment. They further divide the developmental stages into beginning, compromising, and collaborative. Taking interpersonal communication as an example, communication is often guarded and careful at the beginning stage. The compromising stage involves negotiation, while the collaborating stage involves open communication and interaction. The developmental process of co-teaching relationships is important to consider when exploring the cultural context of particular settings.

When viewed in a positive light, intercultural teaching settings allow participants to draw on each other's funds of knowledge as accumulated bodies of knowledge which are necessary for human functioning and wellbeing (Hornberger & Link, 2012; Moll, 1992). They can be seen as implicit resources which can be incorporated meaningfully into classroom practice to enhance learning for students. In a co-teaching context with a non-native and native teacher, each one brings their own cultural funds of knowledge which can be utilized for the greater good.

Despite this, co-teaching in intercultural settings can be challenging, and Balanyk's study in the UAE highlights cultural differences "as a source of conflict between foreign native English-speaking teacher and local English teachers as well as between foreign teachers and local students in these contexts" (2012, p. 34). His exploration of the discourse between these teachers show that what appears to be cultural difference are actually differing educational discourses, and he suggests that teachers may find it useful to explore the differences and similarities in their educational discourses (Balanyk, 2012, p. 35). Balanyk's (2012) comprehensive review of the international literature in this area shows that a range of intercultural communicative problems have been reported in the team-teaching context. In Japan, for example, differences in perceptions of what constitutes good classroom practice may lead to disagreements between local and foreign English teachers (Butler, 2005). In Hong Kong, non-native teachers' lack of understanding of the students' culture may lead to an inability to build relationships with their students which can ultimately result in classroom management problems (Ma, 2012). In China, students may have a negative view of western teachers because they tend to emphasize communication rather than linguistic knowledge, and students often feel they learn more in classes taught by Chinese English teachers (Liu & Zhang, 2007). Bailey and Osipova (2016) also report cultural contrasts between French and American teachers where French teachers were seen as more strict and American teachers were seen as being more interested in students being happy and having a good time.

Co-Teaching within Bilingual/Dual Language Education

Dual language education programs “use two languages for instructional purposes throughout the duration of the program, and they aim for bilingualism, biliteracy development, academic achievement in two languages, and positive cultural understanding” (Freeman, 2004, p. 2). Freeman (2004) highlights dual language programs as having a “language-as-resource” orientation, where languages are seen in an additive manner as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be overcome, as in subtractive bilingualism. As public Kindergartens in the UAE are available only to one population, Arabic-speaking Emirati children whose teachers use English as well as Arabic in the classroom, then they are offered a “one-way developmental bilingual education” (DBE) program (Freeman, 2004).

DBE programs support the development of the student’s primary language as well as the target language through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL; Marsh, 2012). In order for DBE programs to be successful, high-quality implementation is key (Cummins, 2000; Hanani, 2009; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Freeman (2004) mentions that well-implemented DBE programs can go a long way to addressing national language needs, something which is of clear relevance to the UAE as the goal of producing a bilingual and biliterate population is seen to be a vital component in securing the nation’s continuing participation in the global economy (Hanani, 2009). Effective implementation of a DBE model involves teachers clearly understanding their students’ content and language strengths and needs by working together to design a coherent program to facilitate learning, with clearly articulated objectives that align to expected learning outcomes, and a knowledge among educators about how languages are acquired over time (Freeman, 2004). Bailey and Osipova highlight one teacher’s view of the importance of the commitment of teachers to the DBE program, “because they ultimately are the ones who inspire student commitment, teachers’ interactions are perhaps amongst the most critical” (2016, p. 193). Similarly, Curdt-Christiansen and Sun note that the success of bilingual programs depends on devoted teachers, as well as a text-rich curriculum (2016).

Winsler, Diaz, Espinosa, and Rodriguez (1999) found evidence that children who experience high-quality experiences in both the L1 and L2 within truly bilingual school environments make significant gains in the L2 while maintaining the L1. Recent research has advocated for bilingual early childhood care and education programs being systematically incorporated into government-funded initiatives and programs (Bailey & Osipova, 2016; Castro, Paez, Dickinson, & Frede, 2011; Kersten, Rohde, Schelletter, Steinlen, 2010). In much of the literature related to dual language education, for example in the context of two-way instruction in English and Spanish in the United States, it is often one bilingual teacher who is responsible for implementing both language programs, where one pedagogical challenge that may arise is the potential repetition of content risking that children may tune out in one language or the other (Bailey & Osipova, 2016). However, much remains to be known about the most effective forms of DBE, and Bailey and Osipova note that “pedagogically sound approaches to language immersion in the early years require far more research and policy attention” (2016, p. 199).

Research Question

In light of the lack of research into the process of fostering emergent biliteracy in Arabic and English, and in view of the new dual language school model in the UAE, we seek to explore, in this paper, teachers’ experiences of bilingual co-teaching in state Kindergarten classes. In particular, we investigate the activity of co-teaching for Arabic-English biliteracy that are emerging within this context, in light of the linguistic, professional and cultural funds

of knowledge (Moll, 1992) of the international mix of teachers who now teach within the linguistically re-engineered school system. We seek to understand how dual language teaching is interculturally negotiated and co-constructed in this context and uncover how far teachers view and navigate co-teaching as shared responsibility.

Context

Both authors worked in dual language contexts in Ireland at the beginning of their teaching careers. Anna's interest in the area of co-teaching came about while she was working as a Head of Faculty in a kindergarten operating the New School Model. Her time in that school with eighteen classes "doing" co-teaching in a variety of ways sparked her interest. Kay's interest in co-teaching came about through supervising teacher candidates in kindergarten classrooms during the ADEC reform period and mentoring teacher candidates in negotiating their linguistic and pedagogical identities during that time. Kay has worked in teacher education for many years now and engages in research in various aspects of language-in-education. Anna came directly to teacher education from her experience in kindergarten.

Methodology

This study is informed by linguistic ethnography which adopts an interpretive approach to examining the actions and words of research participants within their sociocultural context (Copland & Creese, 2015). According to van Lier (2000), Kramsch (2002) and Blommaert (2010), the ethnographer is concerned with ecologies and seeks to "relate language use to its physical and social environment, and the affordances this environment provides" (Cook, 2011, p. 437). Thus, in this study language is viewed as a phenomenon negotiated in daily interactions between participants. Ethnographic studies are usually based on observational and interview data. The data presented in this paper are derived from focus group interviews with research participants, and are part of a larger ethnographic data set which also includes videotaped lesson observations, although the observational data do not form part of the present paper which draws upon rich interview data alone.

Research Participants

There were twelve teacher participants in the study – six Arabic medium teachers (AMTs), and six English medium teachers (EMTs). The EMTs were from Ireland, the U.K., South Africa, and Canada. The AMTs were from the U.A.E. and Egypt. Informed consent was obtained for all participants, and ethical approval for the study was obtained from the researcher's university, as well as from the educational authority. Pseudonyms are given to all participants. Table 1 shows the wide range of teaching experiences across the teachers and schools. The range of teaching experiences is between 2 years and 19 years. The range of co-teaching experience in the UAE is between 0 years (in this case, approximately 6 weeks) to 8 years.

Table 1. Profile of teachers interviewed

Name	Grade level taught	School	Nationality	AMT or EMT	Years of experience teaching	Years of experience co-teaching
Dawn	KG1	School A	U.K.	EMT	4	1
Eman	KG1	School A	Egypt	AMT	4	4
Joanne	KG2	School A	Canada	EMT	9	3
Muna	KG2	School A	Egypt	AMT	2	1
Mary	KG1	School B	U.K.	EMT	3	3
Fatima	KG1	School B	U.A.E.	AMT	4	4
Louisa	KG2	School B	U.K.	EMT	9	5
Sara	KG2	School B	U.A.E.	AMT	8	8
Tania	KG1	School C	South Africa	EMT	19	0
Jana	KG1	School C	Egypt	AMT	7	0
Faye	KG2	School C	Ireland	EMT	11	0
Hessa	KG2	School C	Egypt	AMT	14	0

We sent an invitation to all public Kindergarten schools in Abu Dhabi within a 20km radius of the researcher's university. Three Kindergarten schools were selected, based on accessibility and availability. In the three selected schools, the school leadership were asked to suggest four participants, and they were then approached by the researcher to join a focus group discussion.

Data Collection

Once we identified the teacher participants, the first author conducted focus group interviews were conducted in 3 school settings with 12 co-teachers. Four group interviews were conducted with co-teaching pairs, and although small in number, these interviews provided rich data to illuminate the activity of co-teaching for biliteracy in this context. Due to the arrangements made by each school, in Schools A and C, all four teachers (two co-teachers from KG1 and two co-teachers from KG2) were interviewed together, while in School B, the two co-teachers from KG1 were interviewed separately from the two KG2 co-teachers.

The interviews were semi-structured, in order to ensure consistency across interviews, while also allowing flexibility for participants to raise any additional areas that they wished to. Interview questions were formulated based on themes arising from the literature review, and asked participants about administrative support, planning, models, approaches, challenges, and their overall attitude towards co-teaching in the context of the New School Model (See Box 1). Interviews were conducted in English.

Data Analysis

Interview recordings were transcribed by a research assistant and checked by the first author. All transcripts were imported into NVivo 11 qualitative software. Two levels of coding were conducted. First, categories to organize the data were developed based on the three literature review headings (co-teaching as shared responsibility, relationships between co-teachers in intercultural contexts, and co-teaching in dual language contexts), which represented topics of primary interest. The researchers used emergent coding to organize data within each category into sub-themes, in accordance with the literature and following qualitative analysis processes. Differences in coding, though few, were resolved through

discussion and the development of consensus between the first author and the research assistant. The results presented here reflect the three major themes and are supported by verbatim quotations from the teachers who were interviewed for this study.

Box 1: Guiding questions for focus group interviews

- How long have you been teaching with ADEC at KG level (or any other level)?
- Have you engaged in co-teaching before?
- How is co-teaching in your school supported?
 - o in terms of planning time
 - o administrative support
- What models of co-teaching do you use across subject areas?
 - o English/ Arabic
 - o Mathematics
 - o Science
 - o Islamic Studies
 - o Civics
 - o Art
 - o Music
- How do you see your role as a co-teacher changing across the subject areas?
- Does your role as a co-teacher change depending on how you plan or how the lesson unfolds?
- How important do you see planning when you are working with a co-teacher?
- What aspects of planning are most important?
- What is your opinion of the dual language model with children this age?
- Can you describe your approach to developing biliteracy among young children?
- What do find are the biggest challenges you face in terms of co-teaching a literacy lesson?
 - o Time management
 - o Curricular outcomes
- Do you think student outcomes in literacy improve as a result of co-teaching?
 - o What evidence do you have?
 - o Have you seen improvements in other subject areas?

Findings

The findings are clustered into sub-themes and are discussed under the three main themes that frame this study: co-teaching as shared responsibility, relationships between co-teachers in intercultural contexts, and co-teaching within a dual language model. The findings are then interpreted in the “Discussion” section that follows. Transcription from the interviews in this section is verbatim to provide authenticity, but without pauses and fillers. As the co-teachers include both proficient and less proficient speakers of English, some quotations may appear here are in non-standard English.

Co-Teaching as Shared Responsibility

An important element in shared responsibility is shared management of children, and this emerged frequently as a theme in the focus group interviews. For example, EMT Mary (School B) mentions that teaching her KG1 children would be a near-impossible task if she was in sole charge of the class, in terms of behavior management. “For an English teacher,

there's like no control, so you have to have the Arabic teacher there." AMT Eman (School A) also mentions that co-teaching can help with classroom management. She says of her co-teacher, "Sometimes when she is in the circle, and she's teaching them, I can sit on the table, I can take notes of the students, how are they participating." She continues on to say "Who is naughty in this circle? Who's like – you know, everything, all observation, so it's very nice." EMT Dawn (School A) mentions shared responsibility for managing learners whether she is the lead teacher or the co-teacher, saying "I'm there supporting, and keeping an eye on the center [...] I want to ensure that she's being able to have her focus group without being interrupted, and then tomorrow when we have English it is reversed."

Shared responsibility encompasses mutual support. Mary also mentions that she enjoys having someone to talk about the children with: "Yeah it's nice to share things with, so if someone does something that's really good, it's nice to go to EMT Fatima and tell her 'look what they've done in English' and she would do the same to me." On the other hand, EMT Joanne (School A) mentions that in her previous school there was not a sense of shared responsibility, and she was often left alone to teach Maths in English without the support of the AMT. "That would be the time the Arabic teacher would decide, 'Oh it's Maths, I'm going to have tea,' which made it really hard for me." In School A, AMT Muna responds that "especially like Maths concepts, they need to explain, you know." She shows an awareness of the children's learning being a shared responsibility, rather than taking responsibility only for the subjects they teach.

A second key aspect of shared responsibility to emerge from the data is co-planning for learning. EMT Louisa (School B) mentions that she and AMT Sara plan together on the same document "Yeah, it's the same document, so you've got to work with the co-teacher to do it, it's very rare that we split Arabic and English." EMT Joanne mentions that "I wish we had more planning time together." She says that the administration in their school makes having a shared responsibility difficult because "they work very much separately, so there's different standards and different ideas of how to do things, which makes it kind of difficult sometimes." She also complains that there is little time allocated for planning "between what they are supposed to give us for PD, and what we are supposed to do with them." EMT Faye (School C) corroborated this when she commented that "we definitely need more time after school to sit down with your co-teacher and make your resources and put more effort into your planning – they do stay after school for 2 hours twice a week, but they have other things to do." EMT Tania (School C) concurs when she says, "there's no time to plan like, I want to put displays out, but we rarely have time, like now they're gone for PE and that's the only time."

Taking shared responsibility for children's learning also includes learning from each other. EMT Mary notes that she has learnt much about second language teaching from her co-teacher: "I've learnt a lot from Fatima ... in terms of teaching as well, teaching EAL, so I'm seeing the things that she's doing, and I'm thinking 'Okay, can I adapt that within my teaching,' and it was the same with Eman last year, I learned a lot." EMT Dawn and EMT Joanne mention the benefit for the children of seeing two teachers from different cultures interact. EMT Joanne believes that children don't usually witness intercultural interaction, suggesting that "They don't know how to interact with another person, because they don't see that, but they see the way I interact with her and she interacts with me, and so then they're learning to interact with each other." She and EMT Dawn see this as a benefit for the children's emotional and social skills. This also mentioned by EMT Mary (School B).

Relationships between Co-Teachers in Intercultural Contexts

Rapport is another key element in effective co-teaching in any context, but especially so in an intercultural context, and the co-teachers in this study believe that building mutual

rapport is essential for successful co-teaching. EMT Louisa (School B) mentions that “I kind of feel like if you build a relationship, then you kind of know what each other are going to say or do, and you don’t need to do repetition.” She also mentions that “it doesn’t work if there is no relationship, and that takes times and almost a commitment to that person, that you’re going to be flexible, you’re going to work hard for them. Yeah, it’s got to be there, whoever you work with.” AMT Sara, her co-teacher, says something similar “But you know how to make it successful is the commitment between each teacher, good planning, effective plan and good relationship, if these three elements don’t match, then it won’t work.” EMT Louisa also says that her co-teacher’s English competence is of benefit to them as a team, as she herself does not speak Arabic. “I think for me, I’m really lucky that Sara is really confident with English as well, you know if I were with another teacher who wasn’t confident, then that would have an impact on how well the co-teaching would go.” EMT Tania (School C) also says “I think it’s nice to work with your co-teacher, to get along with, I know people like in some schools where one teacher taught and the other walks out there’s no relationship between the two and I think that makes a big difference with co-teaching.”

EMT Louisa also mentions that when they both use Arabic and English together, “it kind of shows that you kind of value each other’s languages.” Her co-teacher AMT Sara concurs when she says, “This is the both important languages, they are both equal, there is no preference or priority.” In School A, EMT Dawn and EMT Joanne’s above comments in relation to interpersonal interactions are also relevant here, in the sense that the co-teachers’ interaction acts as a model for young children to follow.

Co-Teaching within Bilingual/Dual Language Education

Given that a primary focus of the present study is on teaching for biliteracy, teachers’ insights into the development of children’s language and literacy through co-teaching are of paramount concern in the present study. For example, EMT Joanne (School A) observes of her Kindergarten class that “the first thing that they do is listen for new language, and then they start to talk, so the most important thing for them to be doing is to be immersed in the language and speaking. And even for I think some of these kids in Arabic, they’re not getting a lot of Arabic at home, because their nannies don’t speak in Arabic.”

The special nature of biliteracy development was recognized by at least one of the co-teachers. EMT Faye (School C) believes that co-teaching and biliteracy development are two separate things, stating that “I think they’re even 2 totally different things co-teaching and or biliteracy you can still have good co-teaching environment but then I think the environment of biliteracy is a whole different element then that has to be brought.” It is not easy, and demands a lot of time. “It’s very good but it’s very time consuming with planning for like every centre needs to be made now,” she says. Faye also believes that co-teaching for biliteracy is very unevenly implemented across schools, and suggests that “if they really want biliteracy to take off, like it just it seems kind of some schools are doing, some schools aren’t doing, some classes are doing, everyone’s kinda doing it different.”

Careful consideration needs to be given to the role of translation in a co-teaching approach to biliteracy development, the teachers suggest. EMT Mary mentions that when stories are read, it is important not to directly translate everything. She recalls that, during the previous semester “they almost like ignore what I’m saying and wait for the Arabic.”

EMT Louisa (School B) mentions that the Vice Principal prefers them to read a story in Arabic one day and the English version the next day, but that they use their judgement in this. “If we’re confident that the kids are going to understand the story, so we do a page in Arabic, a page in English,” she says. Her co-teacher, AMT Sara, goes on to explain the benefits of reading a story in this way:

First of all, its expanding their knowledge, expanding their vocabulary word, secondly they will understand the example-the story, the environment of the story itself, I will do one page and then maybe they didn't going to understand what she's going to say, then there will be complete in the second page or third page which is in Arabic, and then it will make them think "Oh-h that's what happen in the previous page," it will make them think and pay attention, and this is what we want, their brain works. And then when it is said in English, they will already know it, they know it, it will become easy, "Ah, I know what will happen, I know it."

EMT Louisa and AMT Sara (School B) explain how they see English and Arabic as simply literacy, together. EMT Louisa says "we did that a lot, like yesterday they went to fire station, so we let them all draw what they've done and then Sara and I will just move amongst them and try and get them to put English and Arabic on to the same work." She continues to explain the benefit: "Because if they don't know the word, they'll go to Sara and write in the Arabic and they'll come to me and try to explain meaning through the picture, so they learn words in Arabic and they learn words in English, so it's nice." EMT Louisa doesn't think that a strict separation of languages is what is needed. Rather, she says "I think if you follow the half English, half Arabic, you've kind of isolated the languages."

EMT Faye highlights that "the children will naturally translate for you like they'll answer in English if they say something in Arabic like they try to translate it in Arabic for you which is great that they're getting the idea of the differences in the language." On the other hand, when teaching discrete literacy skills, these are taught separately. For example, EMT Joanne (School A) states that phonics are taught a little bit differently to other aspects of literacy. She says

We usually teach a story together and then she'll teach a letter and I'll teach a letter on the carpet at the same time, but usually our centers, because we have such defined centers and we rotate them through, often she's doing a center that's her letter and I'm doing a center about my letter [...] but that's really the only way that you can teach the phonics is to have it be a little bit separate.

The "new school model," as noted at the start of this paper, saw a shift from Arabic to English as the medium of instruction in Science and Maths. In terms of teaching Maths, EMT Mary (School B) states that co-teaching is helpful for this, and draws on her co-teacher to explain concepts for the children: "Definitely for Maths, because Maryam can explain a lot of it for me, they needed to begin with, maybe they want it to be explained and a lot of the time it's explained in Arabic and in English to understand for the future." EMT Louisa (School B) says something similar:

It depends on the concept, if it's something they're going to really struggle with in terms of vocabulary, like when we are introducing concepts like weight, in Maths or length, and especially when we run through addition and subtraction and then I kind of have to rely on Sara with the vocabulary to get them going, but once we are into it, then I do it with them myself, we tend to do small groups, and Sara backs me up, she tends to work with my kids who are really, really struggling.

Louisa also makes a similar remark about Science:

Yeah, yeah, Science once again, science normally is at the same time as Islamic, so normally I'm on my own, but once again if the vocabulary is tricky, so we often drag in time before we split into science and Islamic, we'll do a quick 5-minute introduction to the whole class, and Sarah will help me with the vocabulary and then I'll take my group off, and the other half will stay to do Islamic.

EMT Joanne (School A) mentions that "Maths is different than literacy, we have separate times, but the Arabic teacher – if they're wonderful Arabic teachers, like we have here, they'll stay."

Mary suggests that the two languages can be mixed "once they get to an understanding where they have the comprehension of both languages." EMT Dawn sees it as more complex than that, however: "I think it's confusing on an English level to teach them the writing because its forward and backward, so it would be like teaching Korean kids, because I had a co-teacher in Korea, so it was different, because it was a lot easier for them to learn in both the languages."

Other Linguistic Themes

There were some other linguistic themes from data reported in section 4.3 above:

Literacy versus biliteracy

EMT Faye recognizes that biliteracy development is different from monoliteracy development. Bauer and Gort (2012) maintain that biliteracy "must be understood as a special form of literacy that is distinct from the literacy experiences and processes of monolinguals" (p. 2). It seems, however, that this was not well understood in the school system, with EMT Faye noting that there was uneven implementation across schools.

Input flood

The data shows that co-teachers recognize the need to provide a flood of comprehensible input in both languages. The provision of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985) by the co-teachers is seen to be central to language acquisition. Indeed, the quality and quantity of input in both MSA and English is paramount for young Emirati learners who are not exposed to standard Arabic or English in the home (Karaman, 2011), a point made by EMT Joanne.

Readiness for immersion

The reformed school system in Abu Dhabi, as we have seen, has embraced a very early immersion model of second language learning (Gallagher, 2011), wherein children were to be taught Math and Science through the medium of English from Kindergarten onwards. However, the evidence from this study indicates that teachers are not able to implement such full immersion at this early stage in children's second language acquisition. The EMTs needed the linguistic input of the AMTs to begin Math and Science lessons and topics, to ensure understanding of key concepts.

Discussion

The purpose of this exploratory and descriptive study is to explore teachers' experiences of co-teaching within a dual language model in an intercultural context. This exploration seeks to understand the meanings and activities of coteaching for 12 Kindergarten co-teachers, paired as one Arabic-speaking and one English-speaking, and based on focus group interviews conducted in three schools.

Two areas were highlighted by teachers as being particularly helpful aspects of co-teaching. One was the availability of two teachers to engage in classroom management, including behavior management and note-taking for assessment purposes. The other was the availability of the AMT to support the EMT in teaching the content areas of Science and Maths, the two subjects which are taught in English as a second language. Both of these point to the enhanced ability of co-teachers to be responsive to the needs of their learners, due to the affordances offered by having two professionals working together (Beninghof, 2012; Freeman, 2004). When these affordances are harnessed within co-teaching partnerships, there are opportunities for increased teacher agency. Murphy and Beggs (2010) tried to ensure that their study on co-teaching facilitated social capital and agency, by building trust and openness, and "discussed changing power relationships with the co-teachers: they were going to work in a non-traditional way in the classroom" (Murphy & Beggs, 2010, p. 15). The AMT remaining with the group during Maths or Science time can be seen as working in a non-traditional way within the classroom in this context, if the view is taken that each teacher is responsible for teaching specific subjects, as was the traditional way in schools in the UAE. Despite the official policy that students in KG1 and KG2 would be taught by teachers working collaboratively to ensure that students meet the learning outcomes in all subject areas (ADEC, 2014), it is clear from the interview data that this was not the understanding of all teachers in all schools.

Whether it was because they had the most experience in co-teaching, or because they believed that they received strong school support for co-teaching, or because of personality or other factors, EMT Louisa and AMT Sara, seemed to have developed effective ways of sharing responsibility within their intercultural relationship. They had had time to develop innovative ways of facilitating the needs of learners in their classrooms. They clearly value each other's linguistic, cultural and professional contributions, as shown in the excerpts from the interviews. Beninghof reminds us that "teachers who collaborate with colleagues develop instructional ideas that are more effective for students" (2012, p. 23). Their flexible classroom practices are based on continual planning and reflection and provide a solid base for them to refine their practices.

The teachers who had less experience in co-teaching and who reported less visible school support seemed to be less sure of the effectiveness of their practices. Any effective practices among these teachers, particularly the teachers in School C, seemed to come about as a result of trial and error, and an openness and flexibility to try new strategies within their partnership, rather than through support offered by the school leadership. There was a lack of clarity in the school about what was required of them, they said, and unclear ideologies behind language policy "can make it difficult for schools to offer a consistent language education curriculum for language development" (Curdt-Christiansen & Sun, 2016; Tollefson, 2002). This view is of particular relevance if teachers are viewed as language policy-makers within their classrooms while they accept and challenge the policies that are handed to them by administrators (Pennycook, 2002; Skilton-Sylvester, 2003). Dillon (2016) notes that while educational language policy may be present at the macro level, it can be difficult to implement at the micro level due to a lack of awareness or a lack of training. Professional development was offered by the education authority in the area of co-teaching in the early years of curriculum reform. However, since 2013 at least, there had been no professional development

in the area of co-teaching, while the emphasis shifted to differentiation and assessment. Some teachers and schools have addressed their own needs in the area, similarly to Freeman (2004), but in the absence of appropriate professional development for co-teaching skills or intercultural communication it is possible that many teachers lack the knowledge and skills needed to promote their students' language development in the DBE context. This concern has been previously highlighted by Dillon et al. (2015) in a similar context. Curdt-Christiansen and Sun (2016) refer to a number of studies that raise issues about the adequacy of PD for teachers in DBE and other bilingual settings. For the teachers in this study who were less confident about co-teaching, as well as for their school administrators who were not seen to be supportive, awareness raising around biliteracy policies as well as professional development around co-teaching for biliteracy would be beneficial.

Finally, the teachers interviewed mention translanguaging as an important aspect of co-teaching in the dual language context, although they do not use this term. Translanguaging, according to Garcia (2009, p. 140) is "the act performed by bilinguals of accessing different linguistic features or various modes of what are described as autonomous languages, in order to maximize communicative potential." Similarly, according to Palviainen, Protassova, Mard-Miettinen, and Schwartz, (2016), parallel monolingualism or total language separation is not seen as helpful by the co-teachers in this study, as children can end up passively waiting for a translation to their L1, although the principle of one person, one language works well in other settings. The straightforward repetition of content in two languages (Ferguson, 2003) is not seen as effective by teachers in this context. Although the teachers in this study saw the need for providing discrete phonics instruction in both languages in small-group situations, well-developed supportive bilingual scaffolding (Hornberger & Link, 2012) such as reading a story in two languages without directly translating each page, or facilitating children's abilities to translate and paraphrase for their peers, were seen as effective strategies for facilitating emergent biliteracy in this context. These practices can be seen as flexible translanguaging approaches where languages are in a functional interrelationship with each other (Velasco & Garcia, 2014). These translanguaging approaches were seen as most effective by the teachers who seemed to have a more well-developed collaborative co-teaching relationship (Gately & Gately, 2001) and therefore where the teachers were in a functional interrelationship with each other.

Limitations and Conclusions

There are limitations to this exploratory and descriptive research. As the focus of the present study was on the joint experience of teaching dyads, we decided to interview them together in pairs. However, a possible limitation of the study lies in the fact that the teachers may have felt inhibited in their responses. Further research could see them interviewed separately to compare their experiences within the dyad. Further research could expand the number of schools and include a greater number of teacher interviews, to see what new insights might be generated. In addition, an exploration of the educational backgrounds of the co-teachers could be conducted, to gauge if factors such as teachers' own experiences of bilingual learning impacted their attitudes towards co-teaching for biliteracy. Other avenues of research include longitudinal studies to see if teachers' co-teaching practices and relationships change over time, so as to delineate stages of development as a co-teacher. On another level, the impact of professional development interventions on co-teaching could be evaluated. Another line of research could measure children's attainment in both content and language learning outcomes under different models of co-teaching.

The task of beginning to create a biliterate future population of native Arabic-speaking Emiratis has been initiated through the innovative large-scale implementation of co-teaching,

using English as a parallel medium of instruction alongside Arabic in every state school classroom.

This research has added to the body of knowledge in light of the lack of research into the process of fostering emergent biliteracy in Arabic and English. There is a gap in the literature regarding the process of engaging in co-teaching. Teachers' experiences of bilingual co-teaching in state Kindergarten classes shares commonalities with other studies which focus on the importance of shared responsibility, including classroom management.

The evidence from the three schools in this study points to a lack of clarity in the understanding of and lack of consistency in the implementation of co-teaching for biliteracy. In order to support the language policies enacted by teachers in their classrooms, teachers interviewed highlighted the need for planning time to be allocated as co-teaching is a complex and challenging endeavor.

The linguistic, professional and cultural funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992) brought by the international mix of teachers who now teach within the linguistically re-engineered school system brings a new dimension to the study of co-teaching. We now have a deeper understanding of how dual language teaching is enacted in intercultural settings and how it is viewed, navigated and co-constructed. This points to the increased awareness of the utility of translanguaging, an advantage unique to this context.

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