



## Creating a safe space: Co-teaching as a method to encourage learning and development in the Higher Education classroom

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores how co-teaching within a higher education classroom environment can be used as a 'safe space' for students and tutors to develop their pedagogical skills through connections, conversation, peer learning and inclusivity. Offering the opportunity to provide a safe space for students and academics can prove to be a crucial experience to promote expressiveness, creativity and hone various communication skills. It allows students engage with their thoughts without fear of derision when discussing a topic that is new, or they are initially unsure of. This can evoke confidence to actively participate where in traditional circumstances they may abstain. Simultaneously, this method can be effectively used for academic tutors, particularly those new to the role, to practice new teaching techniques, activities or assessments with the full support of a secondary colleague to ensure that the required learning objectives are met. This reflective analysis addresses three essential aspects that enhance learning and make the co-teaching opportunity unique; how co-teaching offers support for additional non-specific learning objectives; the notion of the 'safe space'; and building relationships. These factors work together to reassess a sense of power sharing, and the development of a new culture. The notion of co-teaching may evoke different perspectives from varying standpoints, and also does have some potential drawbacks. Yet, by taking a fresh look at the method and the unique opportunities for learning that it brings, there lies a potential to reinvigorate the higher education classroom environment in the light of changing approaches to digital and non-classroom learning.

**Keywords:** Co-teaching pedagogy, safe space, inclusive learning, diversity, learning tool

### Introduction

As practice within higher education institution (HEI) classrooms continues to develop, considering ways to engage students effectively can offer opportunities to expand upon, and make the most of, conventional classroom activities. In particular, the delivery method of co-teaching can be of immense importance when adopted (Cook and Friend, 1995). Although, this might not always be possible for every class within every HEI, for a number of reasons, including timetabling, class sizes, budgeting, etc., it does offer a supremely valuable experience within the classroom environment.

We often think of the typical university lecture or seminar as a place where knowledge is either imparted or guided through facilitation from an 'expert' to a learner. In many ways, this mirrors the traditional teaching style that is commonplace from schools to colleges (Reece and Walker, 2006), and the continuation of this delivery method in the HE setting can, and does, enable successful learning. However, the question of 'what is actually being learned?' needs to be asked. It is one thing to impart facts, figures or theories that students will apply in written or practical assessments, however it can be argued, more so now in an increasing digital and less personable age, that these could also be acquired to a substantial extent from a textbook, website or other resource independently accessible to the learner. What is it that the classroom can uniquely offer that a TED talk, YouTube video or other resource cannot? It is the answer to this question that will continue to validate the role of the classroom in HE in this changing age, with the suggestion that this answer lies in what can be an underutilised method to enhance learning: co-teaching.

In this critical reflection, I offer a new approach to co-teaching in the HE classroom environment using my own experience; creating opportunities for the development of all. Although some of the suggestions and reflections in this account reflect examples of what is considered to be good pedagogy in general, these techniques can be embellished and enhanced within the co-teaching environment for the benefit of all participants, whether tutors or students. I will outline three unique areas that can be revised using this approach; the concept of co-teaching as a platform for the attainment of additional, non-specific, learning objectives; the notion of the safe space; and the impact on relationship building. In essence, co-teaching can reform the practicalities of power sharing both between tutors, and between tutors and students. This approach has implications for changing the culture of the classroom, and the following comprises a framework to revise the methods of facilitation in the HE environment.

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**Co-Teaching: Embedding additional non-specific learning opportunities**

What exactly does it mean to co-teach? As the name suggests, this is providing a *cooperative* learning environment where primary delivery takes place from more than one tutor (Cook and Friend, 1995). Alongside the delivery of subject-specific material from more than one perspective or teaching/learning style (Fleming, 2005), co-teaching can provide tutors and learners alike with an opportunity to express themselves in a way that might not otherwise be available in a traditional lecture or seminar-based environment. By having more than one tutor present, it allows for a guided facilitation of larger groups, and enables a range of professionals to contribute their unique strengths within the learning environment. Whilst the conception of 'learning styles' has a number of critics, with the theory being largely debunked in recent scholarship (Rogowsky, Calhoun and Tallal, 2015; Antoniuk, 2019; Furey, 2020), the conception of trying to compartmentalise learners as having one of a limited number of 'styles', whilst restrictive and somewhat unrealistic (Furey, 2020), does however acknowledge that not all learners absorb information or participate to the same levels or in the same way as others. The practice of co-teaching is a platform that can increase a variety of teaching and learning approaches through utilising the expertise of more than one tutor in the room and, therefore, support individuals in their own way of engaging with the class. Thus, from that perspective, the term 'learning styles' will be used throughout as an expression of understanding that every individual has their own embedded preference or predisposition to learn, and the co-teaching methodology, with a 'safe-space' oriented philosophy, can offer opportunities to enable all to participate and gain something from a session in their preferred method of engagement.

Building upon Kolb's *cycle of experiential learning* (1984) as a means to reach the individual in a meaningful and effective manner, co-teaching enables the creation of a learning environment that can appeal to a multitude of learning styles in new and unique ways (Murawski and Swanson, 2001; Lock, Rainsbury, Clancy, Rosenau and Ferreira, 2018). However, in order to facilitate this, the core principle of having students attend regularly is central to assess productive learning is taking place (Gravells, 2011). Thus, by offering a session where tutors share the space and bring their own distinctive styles can, theoretically, support with class engagement and retention of the student cohort (Cook and Friend, 1995). If individuals feel that they can connect with one of the tutors, and feel comfortable to express themselves in that learning space, then this perception can influence the likelihood of successful engagement and a willingness to return for the forthcoming sessions. Additionally, the knowledge of two (or more) persons with different expertise can allow for a wider pool of practical, relevant examples of a situation or theme to be discussed outside of those presented in the initial learning materials. For example, in one of the units I co-teach, one tutor, possessing business credentials, and myself, with a background in careers advice and developing interpersonal skills, can bring a two-pronged approach to eliciting the specialist skills from students and allow for individual expertise to offer the greatest opportunity for both active and pro-active learning.

In an age where added emphasis on employability, value for money and progression from a course in HE are just as crucial as the classification of degree awarded, co-teaching opens doors for students to ask questions, learn new approaches and gain valuable guidance on life skills from more than one facilitating voice (Bacharach and Heck, 2007). It is, therefore, an opportunity where those from industry can impart their experiences in a measured way to compliment the session, rather than dominate, overrule or re-write any prescribed session material.

**Co-Teaching: Offering a safe space for students**

The notion of the 'safe space' is not only essential to ensuring student satisfaction, but is something that can risk going unrecognised, or not thoroughly considered, in the planning and delivery of courses in higher education. Although a lot has been written recently on the co-teaching environment (Beninghof, 2020; Lock et al., 2018; Morelock et al., 2017; Rabin, 2020), the related 'safe space' concept, initially originating from a counselling and wellbeing perspective (Rogers, 1951), is a particular focus that can strengthen the development of relationships and effective learning via a collaborative approach; the notion of a 'safe space' offers participants, both tutors and students, the opportunity to explore their learning, communication skills, and ask questions in a manner less prescriptive and didactic, driven towards providing a unique experience that develops the individual participant (Bouck, 2007). Researching this concept, Flesner and Vonder Lippe (2019) make explicit that the conceptual metaphor of a 'safe space' must provide participants with an 'open' environment for students to express all perspectives. This is something that can be more easily facilitated in a co-teaching environment, particularly through offering students two voices of feedback in a classroom-wide discussion, notably when a student suggestion may not be accurate and/or controversial. In this manner, a student's participation is not dismissed but can be heard and gently reframed via feedback or, particularly in smaller group activities, tutors can spend more time with the individual discussions to encourage open and active participation from all. With larger classes, or limited session time, the use of co-teaching furthers opportunities to offer direct support to every learner in a constructive and efficient way in realising the idea of 'safe space' as a mechanism for student empowerment and deep learning (Holley and Steiner, 2005).

One of the fundamental underpinnings of establishing a positive co-teaching environment as a safe space comes from considering the caring factor when working with others (Rabin, 2020), akin to a counselling perspective. Upon first impressions, this may seem a tangential link. However, whilst not necessarily employing counselling methodologies directly, which tend to focus more on one-to-one settings, the ethos and focus on a commitment to providing the individual learner with a supportive and nurturing environment is crucial (Flesner and Von der Lippe, 2019). Whilst this caring ethos is a likely objective, whether consciously or unconsciously, embedded in the mind-set of every tutor, whether leading a classroom alone or with colleagues, co-teaching creates a potential to transform the learning environment more to that of a workshop (Ørngreen and Levinson, 2017), where participation is predisposed

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to be more spontaneous and frequent. Through this co-creative workshop format for teaching, the concept of empowering students to actively play a role in the development of a session through direct, personal, feedback promotes the emphasis on engagement, participation, discovery and experimentation. Creating a safe co-teaching environment is structurally similar to the explorative dimension of counselling methodology in its focus on process; when one has an opportunity to let thoughts out freely, developing logic and semblance through later 'joining the dots', as in a counselling session. This methodology contrasts the general perception of the formal classroom, where listening, note taking and limited activities supervised by the tutor(s) can tend to monopolise. For students, this is the opportunity to ask questions of the learning content that they may not feel otherwise capable or confident of doing so, and for tutors this is a space to further craft and hone their delivery and communication skills safe in the knowledge that support is on hand. The best way to offer this space is through co-teaching, enabling tutors, usually two or three depending on class sizes, to ensure best practice and aid one another in the process (Cook and Friend, 1995).

Another element that I feel goes under the radar is the level of comfort students feel within the classroom environment. In my own experience I have worked with students, particularly first-generation students, who have told me that they feel a sense of pressure and prestige being at university. Whilst this opportunity could, ultimately, boost their confidence via active learning and achievement, creating the conditions necessary to facilitate this is crucial. Again, originating from a counselling approach (Rogers, 1951), I have made it my personal practice to 'check in' with individuals, establishing rapport and personalized general conversation, as they enter the classroom prior to starting the 'formal' class session. This has aided in students feeling more comfortable in speaking to me and asking questions about all elements of the unit content, assessment methods and wider, general questions sometimes relate to wider university experience outside that specific session that they may otherwise felt that they were not able to do.

### Co-Teaching: Offering a safe space for colleagues

Tutors can use the co-teaching environment for their own development, and as a safe space too. For example, when introducing new tutors or lecturers into the HE classroom environment, particularly if they have come from industry or do not possess much prior teaching experience, co-teaching can enable a platform for active learning for the new tutor. By having a more experienced member of staff present to support them into the classroom environment and monitor development as they take on more complicated activities, the scope for honest reflections and pastoral care alongside a constructive approach, can aid tutors to feel confident in their role and thrive in this environment which, inevitably, benefits the students through appropriate application of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1996).

Having that safe space for myself also made me reflect on what it would be like to offer the same for the students. I co-teach a credit-bearing, first-year undergraduate (Level 4) unit, mandatory for all students on the BA (Hons) Business Management programme, concerning their *Personal and Professional Development* (PPD), where classes consist of approximately 50 students. Working with another, more experienced, co-tutor with one cohort, we agreed to specifically state that the learning environment should act as a safe space for the students, just as it does for us as tutors. Such a unit, where the emphasis is not on theories or factual recall, I considered to be a completely appropriate space for students to feel they could hone skills and try out new things. For example, developing skills such as those of importance for future employability, including delivering presentations (Hargie, Saunders and Dickson, 1994), could be undertaken to develop confidence rather than as part of an assessment, and is something students could potentially benefit from. Although a presentation did not form part of the formal assessment for the unit making this a completely voluntary exercise, some students did opt to use the space, although the vast majority did not, instead choosing just to submit the required portfolio assessment task. The feedback from those that did was overwhelmingly positive, and these reflections noted an appreciation of the space to try something without fear of getting it 'wrong', losing marks or being criticised. This act subtly enhanced the demonstrable application of one of the key unit learning outcomes: to empower individuals to self-reflect upon their professional practice. This is another crucial reason why I think the opportunity for a safe space learning environment, in the sense that students would not always be assessed whether that be formatively or summatively but offered a place to practice skills informally, would be a significant step to demonstrate a longer-term investment in the individual's wellbeing beyond skills and knowledge acquisition.

Whitton and Langan (2019) suggest that a co-teaching environment can also further the development of a tutor's teaching style through supportive facilitation providing a more varied range of activities for learners to engage with. By establishing the concept of the safe space as a workshop for active experimentation and no fear for when plans do not work as intended, the use of more 'playful' (Mercer et al., 2017) and active methods, like role play, informal quizzes and networking-like approaches, can enhance the experience for the students and support tutors in developing their imaginations for activities and classroom management skills. As an example, my colleague and I suggested a large class split into teams to see which could develop and produce the best paper aeroplane within a set time. This was an unorthodox, and relatively competitive, way of allowing students to experience pressured decision-making, co-operation and handling challenges, simulating some of the working environments they may face in the future. Although it is unlikely that the task will be the same in future employment, the concepts of team-building and producing results were imparted in a manner more spontaneous and requiring active participation. Without the safe space concept established, students may have questioned the point and purpose of the practical activity, without experiencing the fundamental points that they practised through undertaking the activity. My colleague and I were challenged with keeping excitement and engagement levels under control, which was a tremendous learning experience for us. Again, this is how co-teaching in a safe space can benefit all participants when implemented with thought and care for the development and wellbeing of everyone involved.

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**Co-Teaching: Building relationships**

Reflecting on my personal experiences, the academic year of 2018-2019 was my first full year teaching on a course with formal assessment strategies. Coming from a previous background in careers advice, which included some brief blocks teaching in Secondary, Further and Higher Education, I knew I was ready for the challenge but at the same time was very apprehensive. Although being familiar with teaching a large group of people, in some cases those from postgraduate courses where the learners were already much older and wiser than I, I still felt a different kind of pressure given that the structure here at the university was much more formal and I was now part of the recognised teaching team, rather than a teacher in training or an independent tutor. Whether subconsciously or explicitly, this brought with it a larger sense of responsibility to 'get it right' and I feel that had I not have had a more experienced tutor be there to support, guide and, when necessary, take the lead, I would not have had the confidence in myself to know I was teaching the material in the 'correct' way, or that the students would be equipped to pass the assessment requirements of the units in question. It was from these early sessions that I realised that there is no one, singular, 'correct' way, but many different ways to effectively stimulate learning.

Although the official requirements in the staffing of these units was to have two tutors with equal responsibilities in the delivery of the course content, and it was not the case that I was being 'supervised' or assessed by a mentor, having someone there did provide that sense of active learning *in action* and the debrief *on action* at the end of the session, following Schon's (1983) model of reflection, which really helped me to feel that I was making progress and able to learn from constructive feedback. At times I opted to take the lead for the whole session, with agreement with the other tutor, to see how I would fare for when the time came to be a solo tutor. This provided a considerable level of confidence, particularly when gaining mostly positive feedback from the more experienced co-tutor. In this respect, the co-teaching classroom environment for me, as a tutor, acted as a perfect 'training ground' where I was able to attempt new things, perhaps get things wrong and have the more experienced tutor 'steer the course back on track'. Whilst this did happen on occasion, I felt that these instances did reduce significantly when getting into the second term.

One of the fundamental elements of the PPD unit is to support students develop skills to establish positive relationships in the professional environment. Lock et al. (2018) observe that the use of co-teaching can serve as an implicit method to actively demonstrate professional integrity, respect and furthering good relations in a work environment through observation and emulation of the dynamic between the co-tutors in the classroom, thereby serving as an example of how to work together, build rapport and sustain a positive environment when the co-teachers work well together. Although this might not always work out to be the case, depending on the approach to co-teaching and colleagues from the individual (see Drawbacks section below), if this were a 'mission objective' then this could potentially support tutors new, or reluctant, to co-teaching through a requirement to demonstrate professionalism via direct or indirect observation to aid the non-specific learning that will benefit the long-term development of students within the HE experience.

Progressing into the second year of teaching in the 2019-2020 academic cycle, and gaining a significant level of experience from my opportunities in the co-teaching environment, I was able to share these experiences with one of my peers. In another PPD class, I teach alongside a newly recruited tutor finishing a PhD, with little practical experience in the classroom. It has been my role and responsibility to aid, support and develop the confidence and skills of this tutor, whilst being on hand to challenge them to take ownership of the learning environment and further classroom management techniques, establishing each tutor as equals in the process (Morelock et al., 2017). Given that this is an area I still wish to continually improve, as a relatively new tutor myself, this has been a mutually rewarding element of on-the-job learning in an environment which is supportive, but has also had some very challenging students that have been difficult to engage. Having that support has been useful in helping bringing individuals back to task, but also to see someone else develop in that element of the role with me, as the comparatively 'experienced' one having to step up out of my comfort zone to set an example for the new tutor to emulate, has been both challenging and rewarding.

**Power Sharing in co-teaching environments: Developing a new culture**

Co-teaching enables the individual student to engage with the tutor/teaching style of preference and gain maximum value from the classroom environment. As the interest in university courses continues to grow, with more applicants applying (UCAS, 2019), a real issue regarding service delivery may be prevalent. In units where the objective is to encourage small groups of students to work together and form a viable, researched and unique ideas, there are two central pillars for assessing student development, the first is to deliver the knowledge of skills for the students to use, and the second is to raise awareness of the personal, transferrable skills that they are using in the endeavour, whether working with each other or with external parties. My approach to develop skills, thought processes and decision making, from a coaching background more than a business career, is centred on my experience as a reflective practitioner. This is counter to the equally valid approach offered by the other tutor, who, from a business perspective, offers a more direct, action-focused and fact orientated mind-set. In essence, this is an opportunity for students to learn from either *reflective style* or a *pragmatist style* (Honey and Mumford, 1982), or both, giving students scope to learn constructively from a method that resonates more clearly for the individual.

Having two tutors share 'power', which is then further disseminated to students, can more effectively aid to manage and facilitate the active development of smaller groups, thereby creating a comfortable environment where students can feel empowered to express themselves in ways that they may have felt, whether through assumption or observation, were not feasible in a typical

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classroom environment. Hence, the focus on the individual's development, growth and opportunities to express themselves lean more to the nurturing nature of a counselling ethos and this is why its use in a co-teaching environment can develop a safe space for all participants. Whilst this approach may not be feasible, or appropriate, for every class within a HE course, offering this opportunity in at least one unit may see significant results in the active learning of all participants (Rabin, 2020).

Tutors can support each other to recover the situation in the worst case, and expand on their skillset and confidence in the best. In turn, this allows the student the sense of freedom to volunteer engagement where in other cases when such an environment is not always assumed, they would not. Essentially, the opportunity allows learners to take a risk, and apply themselves directly, therefore learning through experience, actively, rather than passively (Van Der Stuyf, 2002). Using such a *scaffolding* approach between two, or more, tutors, they are able not only to entice pro-active student development of knowledge, but also their own. This practice facilitates the tutors to enable themselves to give students a better experience as, for all, it is an opportunity to find best practice, re-affirm learning has taken place, both directly and indirectly, and help all achieve *self-actualisation* (Maslow, 1954). In actively partaking in this open learning environment, the power dynamic shifts to being more equal between tutor and tutor, and tutor and student, breaking preconceived boundaries of authority and allowing all to grow in the way they wish to explore.

Using the Brookfield (1995) 'Four Lens' model of reflection, and my existing experiences of delivering sessions in the co-teaching environment, it can be clearer to see where and why co-teaching in a safe space environment can be beneficial, as Table A highlights below:

**Table A:** The use of Brookfield's (1995) Four Lens model to reflect on the use of co-teaching and providing a safe space for tutors and students

Lens	Description/Reflection	Evidence in Practice
Autobiographical	I have found the co-teaching opportunities to be very valuable for my own learning as a teacher relatively new to the role. Having the opportunity to practise skills, styles and activities whilst having a more experienced tutor on hand was useful in developing my confidence and, conversely, to now be able to offer this opportunity to another new teacher is has been very beneficial to both.	Attempting to deliver a practical approach to networking activities, in a kinesthetic style (Fleming, 2005), was new to me, and having a tutor who had already facilitated this prior was useful first for me to observe, and then to deliver in practice.  Moving into my second year of teaching, being able to offer a new tutor a safe space to learn and offer constructive feedback has supported role as a coach and mentor and as a tutor.
Students	Students have been able to use some of their guided learning time to explore how they learn and to develop some transferable, employability skills in the relevant units.	Students have been offered a space to openly practise crucial skills that can aid them with assessments in other units and also outside of the classroom – such as delivering presentation skills. Those who participated provided positive feedback for the opportunity to receive feedback on performance.
Colleagues	Offering a safe space to new tutors, and sharing responsibilities with equally experienced peers, can share good practice, experimenting with different teaching and learning styles and supporting one another by sharing examples from personal practice/wider experience to better emphasis the teaching/learning content.	Working with another tutor in this current academic year, both come from different professional backgrounds. Whilst I come from a careers guidance/coaching and skills development-based approach, my colleague comes from a business-focused and entrepreneurial background. Given the wide-reaching course content, both can complement one another in sharing real-life examples from previous experience to compliment the course material.
Theoretical	Research into the value of co-teaching has demonstrated the far-reaching benefits of working together and offering a high-quality learning environment for students. In particular the work of Cook and Friend (1995) and their subsequent	The opportunity to co-teach with both experienced and non-experienced tutors has provided the opportunity for one, if not, both tutors to learn new ways of thing, teaching and reflecting as a result of the safe, shared, space to develop new approaches. At the same time, allowing



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	research highlights the importance of self-development in the role.	students to be active participants in the process empowers them to actively engage and ensure a valuable learning platform exists for all.
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In a related study, Rabin (2020) demonstrated that tutors describe significant positive changes to their classroom environment from adapting a co-teaching approach, which, again, helps to emphasise the difference and value this teaching method can bring to all participants if utilised with care, establishing objectives for the staff and the students and applying good practice with integrity. From my own experience of creating a “safe” environment for co-teaching, working with a vast range of other tutors, each with their own styles and temperaments towards co-teaching, I have supported the process to establish positive working environments that offer a care-orientated, safe, space for individuals to thrive, and this has been reflected both in terms of direct student feedback and levels of engagement and achievement from necessary unit assessments.

**The drawbacks of co-teaching**

Like any method of working, co-teaching might not be the best approach in every scenario, and there are also some practical considerations, unique to every institution/course to warrant its inclusion or extended use. Initially, it might not be possible in every classroom environment, or every unit. Sessions delivered in a lecture theatre can make it difficult to warrant a co-teaching approach, at least in a sense of providing a value-added approach for the students, since this traditionally involves overly large numbers of students in attendance to primarily listen to a theme or topic, and that format can somewhat restrict the participative element of student engagement as opposed to the classroom setting. Additionally, some seminar sessions may also be required to be facilitated in large numbers, so a team of at least two tutors may be necessary for health and safety purposes, with less flexibility in determining the delivery elements of sessions. However for at least one unit in every level of any course, I truly believe that students should be encouraged to expand their skills, challenge themselves and be coaxed to come out of their comfort zone, taking a chance to showcase their skills and qualities with the knowledge that it is safe to do so. Boonstrom (1998) challenges the concept, suggesting that the learning environment should not be comfortable as a means to push students to actively engage due to the uncertainty or unpredictability that a safe space would remove. I disagree. Deliberately making a learning environment challenging or uncomfortable might dissuade some from attending in the first place, and only cater to a select number of students who may have a predisposing for being in a tense or pressured environment to learn effectively. Fear and insecurity are bad starting points for learning, so by offering a safe space for all to learn in their own way, co-teaching increase opportunities for tutors to work with different groups using the appropriate learning styles to stimulate all., whilst maintaining boundaries and a structure for the session to operate in (Flesner and Von der Lippe, 2019). What my own model adds to this picture is its explicit emphasis on safe space as a mechanism for building resilience and explorative playfulness in co-teaching in the interest of learner empowerment.

There are also logistical and staffing constraints that might inhibit options for co-teaching opportunities. Whilst this is largely dependent on the individual institution, some course offerings, especially those at full or over subscription, may not be in a position to offer the co-teaching environment, or, on the flipside, may offer just the right opportunity to enable two (or more) tutors to facilitate a larger group. Providing that there are adequately sized classrooms and facilities to support larger scale sessions, then this could be an alternative to ease timetabling constraints and a range of other issues when delegating activities in a workload model. Despite this, there are obvious implications with regard to budgets of HEIs to provide the staff, resources and opportunities for learning for both tutors and students. The impact on class sizes is a consideration that has to be taken into account. If a class is too small then it might be difficult to justify the use of two tutors to facilitate (Murawski and Swanson, 2001). Yet if the class is too big then two tutors might barely be able to co-ordinate before being able to broach the notion of providing a suitable working environment for students and themselves to also consider the development of their practice alongside the delivery of the taught material.

Lock et al. (2018) establish that not all co-teaching endeavours are necessarily positive, as another key notion revolves around the individual practitioner’s approach to power-sharing, both with another colleague and then going further to recognise the students as having equal status in a classroom-based power dynamic. For some, used to being seen as an ‘expert’ and ‘leader’ of a class, a culture change to empower a fellow colleague and the wider student body could perhaps prove to be a divisive issue, and one that causes conflict with a preestablished working style, or belief system. According to Morelock et al. (2017), additional issues regarding course and lesson ownership can arise between teaching teams if the purpose or function of the session is not clarified prior to delivery. Additionally, from the student perspective, how to present this new framework of classroom etiquette to them may also pose initial challenges. What are the students’ expectations of the classroom? Do they expect to be passive recipients of a ‘service’ or would they feel that their course has more intrinsic and explicit value by an added dependence on their active participation? For some, making a transition to a session, if not a whole course, that utilises a safe space model, particularly where co-teaching is involved could prove to be a political process before it becomes a practical one if there are any reservations regarding experimentation with the function of the classroom in higher education.

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Finally, this issue of resourcing is becoming a more precarious issue for a lot of HEIs. As the interest in university courses continues to grow, with more applicants applying (UCAS, 2019) then a real issue regarding service delivery may be prevalent. In these instances, the priority on delivering the agreed service may take precedence over what could be considered the 'value added' notion of using the classroom as a safe space for development of skills and aptitude alongside the core content for learning. It is also conceivable that some subject areas might not be conducive to that environment, particularly when there is a level of information, fact or detail that requires recollection for learning or wider practical use in the work place.

### Conclusion

Using the co-teaching approach as a service delivery method in HE is a very valuable tool when used in the correct context for a worthy purpose. If used purely to duplicate the number of tutors in a room then it serves little purpose, creating more cost or resource issues for the institution. However, when purposefully utilised with the specific intent to provide learners (and tutors) with an opportunity for development and growth in a safe space, co-teaching is immeasurably valuable for development beyond imparting subject-specific knowledge or skills. Although not necessarily conducive or practical in every class or learning environment, having at least one session per-week, as demonstrated in the PPD unit, creates a safe and practical environment for the development of transferrable skills development and raising the confidence of all participants, which in turn can reflect well on an institution's visible commitment to the longer-term success of its graduates.

As well as supporting students to explore their skills and confidence, lecturers also can openly develop practice through direct and instant feedback from a peer during practice, and create the space to experiment with different activities and learning styles as a means to develop a dynamic skillset as a tutor. The development of the relationship between the tutors and, conversely, offering an equal learning opportunity to the students, seeing all as participants in the learning experience, can greatly alter the power sharing dynamic of the environment to a more neutral boundary and facilitate transparent and wholesome learning.

Moving forward, the concept of co-teaching can also translate into the virtual learning environment. Having an increased emphasis on blended learning and a digital presence in higher education, classes, particularly with larger volumes of attendees, can also benefit greatly from a co-teaching experience. Not only can having more than one tutor present to deliver, monitor and answer on-going questions, reliving a little bit of the pressure that can be associated with a newer, or different, method of delivery for teaching personnel unfamiliar with the opportunity, but it can also foster the development of professional relationships, power sharing and supporting students to engage within agreed boundaries in the learning space (Kelly, 2018). Co-teaching in the virtual learning environment can, potentially, offer just as rewarding an experience for students who, having access to more than one tutor, can ask questions, gain insights and experience an increased number of teaching and learning styles to enhance their experience and development. This area could prove to a rich pool for future reflections as it becomes more commonplace in HE delivery methods.

Co-teaching, therefore, as a learning tool, can aid with the development of verbal and non-verbal communication (Hargie et al., 1994), and uses the unconscious knowledge to allow both students and tutors to devise and implement strategies to appreciate what is being taught. This, in turn, brings into awareness the transferable nature of skills that can be applied outside of the classroom, providing the clear rationale and theoretical framework for having a co-teaching method implemented in conjunction with offering students a safe space for learning and wellbeing in an otherwise competitive, pressured and challenging learning environment.

### Biography

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