

# Chapter 7

## Joint Delivery and Collaboration in Transnational Higher Education: A Phenomenological Analysis

**Gloria Molinero**

*Queen Mary University of London, UK*

### ABSTRACT

*Transnational higher education (TNHE) is increasingly experiencing collaborations between faculty and specialists of English for academic purposes (EAP). Issues concerning knowledge transfer, second language practice, and contextual challenges are the main concerns initiating joint delivery (JD) programmes. This reports on research exploring the collaborative experiences of thirteen EAP specialists with a reflective standpoint undertaking interpretative phenomenological analysis. The analysis exhibits three main collaborative practices with different levels of engagement and teaching tactics: assisted-delivery, co-teaching, and lecture-seminars delivery. Friend and Cook's (2014) framework evaluates these collaborations, providing insights on approaches for optimum and organic collaborations based on co-designing, openness and adaptation, mutual learning, and a share of outcomes and responsibilities. JD enriches practice, student experience, and the collaborative stands of TNHE.*

### INTRODUCTION

Within transnational higher education (TNHE) in the Chinese context, this paper reports on a research study based on collaborations between Faculty and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) specialists. These integrate disciplinary content with academic skills and language provision—a programme we name here Joint Delivery (JD).

Two main factors helped establish JD. One was to facilitate students with a contextualised EAP (Jordan, 1997; Jacobs, 2005, 2007), embedding with this the rationale and importance of learning the skills EAP offers in its modules since its courses are often shelved as general English. A second factor

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aimed at bridging EAP with disciplinary course requirements encourage departmental collaboration and lecture partnerships in an expanding university that aspires for a cohesive setting where students can enrich their learning experience in a transnational environment.

The interest of this piece is in looking at the transformations TNHE is experiencing to accommodate world changes. From an increase in sophisticated technological advances aiding learning and the form in which information is acquired today to the overall geopolitical and environmental changes affecting students' futures, these are contained in classrooms whose purposes may need to be reconsidered.

This paper explores forms of collaboration and their dynamisms binding EAP specialists and Faculty in the JD programme. It provides insights into how EAP lecturers in TNHE understand their experiences and the implications of collaboration in practice and rethinking the role of Transnational Education (TNE) at large.

This study explores the reflective accounts of EAP specialists collaborating in Joint Delivery by analysing their narratives of their experiences and studying their construct of the JD phenomenon through Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2009) interpretative cycle and hermeneutic approach.

## **BACKGROUND**

Education has transformed quickly in approach and nature (Stensaker et al., 2012). The constant and rapid flow of students and faculty (Altbach, 2007; Ho, 2010; González-Ardeo, 2012) and technological improvements in information access have redesigned the dynamics, logistics and purpose of our classrooms with initiatives such as *blended learning* (Ehlers, 2013; Hew & Cheung, 2014), *flipped-classrooms* (Reidsema et al., 2017), and *Content Language Integrated Learning* (CLIL) (Mehisto, 2012; Evans et al., 2009). Thus shaping the overall palette of teaching practices. A palette that in TNE mixes standards and values in learning and teaching (LnT) traditions with differences in expectations between learners and teachers.

These mixed educational values were observed with the first TNHE in China in 2004 (Ennew & Fujia, 2009). Changes, adaptations and innovations are continuously taking place to meet students' learning needs. Within the TNHE context, some of these issues are denoted, for instance, in the ability to utilise and transfer skills from one course to another, others are in using English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in non-language related courses, and in general, the expectation that knowledge is centralised in textbooks and the teacher. These can affect acquiring micro-skills such as group work, peer-review, participation or taking the initiative to offer answers in the classroom without previous instruction. Experiences in pre-tertiary education, background and exposure to English can differentiate local and international students (Zha, 2013), while at the same time, both cohorts require similar academic competencies (Wang & Curdt-Christiansen, 2016).

In this EMI context, our Language Center (LC) is the pillar for students' continuation of their degrees, providing support throughout courses and levels. The LC provision focuses on the first two years where, until recently, half of the cohort continued their studies at the partner university in the UK. In recognizing some of these mixed values and issues, collaborative initiatives emerged to aid observed changes in students' learning needs developing thus; a programme that can synergise departmental teaching input and give cohesion to their learning. With this, JD evolved from an initial trial module in the first year, providing a taste of departmental literacy followed by LC-led seminars to multidisciplinary content with LC support at 3rd-4th year levels. The research finds a menu of combinations in interdepartmental

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