Introduction

There are several definitions of the concept of team teaching. At its most basic level 'it has meant simply that two or more teachers accept responsibility for the same group of students' (Ennis 1986: 5). Another definition, (under an alternative phrase cooperative planning and teaching or CPT) is that 'in its pure form [it is] a fully matured form of partnership where the partners share equally the responsibility for student learning, the development of appropriate instructional strategies and the evaluation of the learning that has occurred’ (Henri 1991: 11).

The situation I will describe fits easily into the first, looser, definition but is for the moment far from the highly developed version described in the second. Other definitions allow for different types of teams, for example cooperative versus hierarchical teams. Cooperative teams reflect an equal partnership, with no designated leader, whereas hierarchical teams have a designated leader who ‘has the ultimate responsibility for guiding the team and for decision-making’ (Centre for Vocational Education, 1977: 8). The version of team teaching I will describe is one using hierarchical teams.

With regard to necessary qualities for team teaching, there seems to be reasonable consensus. These qualities include at least mutual respect, trust and adaptability, but preferably also ‘enthusiasm, imagination, confidence, intellectual honesty, and a desire to improve professionally’ (Centre for Vocational Education, 1977: 7). One writer, Sturman (1992: 145), also adds ‘good humour’.

Background

Although team teaching has been in existence since at least the 1960s or early 1970s, it has only begun to be used in my situation from this year, 1996.

My ‘situation’ is the library of the Northern Territory University, where I am one of a small team or branch know as Research and Information
Services (or RIS). This branch includes among its responsibilities educating staff and students to make maximum use of the library and its resources. Most people in the branch liaise with a particular faculty. Each year, especially at the start of semester, individuals may be called upon by their faculty members to provide:

- general library tours,
- tailored tours (focussing on a particular section or aspect of the library and possibly also including use of relevant indexes),
- formal hour-long tutorials on library resources in a given subject area,
- instruction in the use of particular databases.

In addition to these activities, the RIS branch offers a number of sessions in an Information Skills program. This program includes general tours and introductory sessions on using the catalogue, using the most popular databases, and searching on the Internet. The library publicises these sessions widely, and they are open to any staff member or student. Apart from orientation tours, numbers are limited to around twelve per session, as sessions are held in the university’s pc labs.

1996 is only the second year the NTU library has run an extended Information Skills program. Previously, we ran general tours, and informal sessions on the catalogue and on databases. All sessions were held in the library, with usually very small numbers of students attending. Although there was an extensive checklist for library staff taking general tours, any staff members giving instruction in catalogue or database use planned it themselves, and this planning was generally quite informal.

In 1995 we had the services of an Information Skills Coordinator in our branch. This person, a very experienced teacher as well as librarian, gradually began to work a shift in our self-concept, so that we began to regard ourselves more as legitimate teachers or trainers than we had before (at that stage, there was only one other qualified teacher in the branch). The Information Skills Coordinator was happy to help any of us with ideas for lessons in areas in which we had not previously taught, and encouraged us to make ‘proper’ lessons plans.

For 1996 the Information Skills Coordinator drew up a timetable for a program of ‘Library Orientation and Information Skills Workshops’. As mentioned above, apart from general tours, all sessions were to be held in the pc laboratories. Since we could expect up to twelve students in the laboratories, and since we had already had experience of technological problems affecting our sessions in the library, it was suggested that we ‘grab a buddy’ to help out in the laboratory sessions.

So, the library’s team teaching began with the idea of having someone as a backup or ‘gopher’ who would principally be responsible for helping to log in computers or to reboot them when someone seemed ‘stuck’. We did not even discuss the idea - one person simply wrote his or her name against a session they felt confident to take, and another added theirs beside it.
Choosing partners

Generally, people chose to work with someone with whom they felt very comfortable. Only in a few cases was there some 'negotiating' for a backup team member. Branch members were all encouraged to take sessions, but no-one was obliged to do so, nor was anyone obliged to be a leader rather than a backup person. This was a good approach, especially in the light of an article by Sturman (1992: 143) describing the reluctance and even hostility of teachers in Japan who had both the concept of team teaching and their team members imposed on them. I had one experience as a backup team member; for the other sessions I was a leader.

Although the teaming arrangement for the sessions was originally conceived as being quite hierarchical, this varied according to the makeup of particular teams. Primary responsibility was usually assumed to rest with the person who had first volunteered for a session. Joint planning did not necessarily involve more than both team members together looking at the room beforehand, or working out what aids, if any, to take along. In some teams though there was a more even distribution of responsibility in the sense that one person would lead a first session, but in the second session positions would be reversed. In some cases, less confident staff members may have felt they could take a session once they had seen how someone else managed it. Again, some teams divided responsibility by taking turns during the one session.

Inevitably, having larger groups of students, being in a less familiar working environment, and feeling the pressure of 'performing' (even in front of a chosen colleague) meant that we put more effort into planning our sessions. Since we changed partners or alternated leader and backup roles with the same partner, we were also being exposed to different teaching approaches or styles. We are a supportive branch and have often informally explained or demonstrated for each other aspects of new technology, usually on a one-to-one basis, but until this year we have rarely observed each other in a teaching situation. Thus, even in our basic, hierarchical version of team teaching we were able to benefit from the support of another colleague and from observing and being observed. Cotterall et al (1990, p. 84) call this continuous in service.

Whether teams consisted of firm friends or were simply arrangements based on convenience, we began to discuss or plan more together once we had experienced working together and begun to reflect on the experience. More planning began to occur when we had finished our sessions on the catalogue or on a single database (sessions with we were all very familiar) and moved on to more advanced sessions such as the comparison of databases. At one of our regular branch meetings I raised my concern that peoples' interpretation of the content of some of the later sessions might be different. The discussion that followed resulted in a consensus regarding the content of these sessions.

Coming up to sessions on the internet for beginners and for researchers, we began to discuss more specific details again. Taking a turn as 'team leader', for example, I prepared a draft lesson plan which I showed to my teaching partner for comment. Since we work in very different subject areas, I also suggested that he might contribute ideas for
addresses of useful internet home pages for the handout I was preparing. As expected, he willingly obliged, and both students and I were fascinated by the sites he suggested.

We were thus discussing primarily with our team member but also among the whole branch, realising the benefits of sharing our ideas. Generally we would discuss and evaluate sessions on the way back to the library after a session. In the case of different teams teaching the same content on a different day, we ‘compared notes’ before and after sessions. We also decided to have a follow-up evaluation session towards the end of the program.

The benefits of team teaching are many, for both the teachers and students involved. Since trying this approach this year I have enjoyed observing my colleagues and exchanging supportive comments. I have felt a growth in mutual respect and trust, which for me has meant a growth in confidence.

In the backup role I first played, my partner said immediately that I should feel free to add any comments or clarifications during the session, which I did. I was interested to compare her approach with what I’d have done in the same situation. Similarly I was pleased when leading a team that my colleague added comments to a point I had made.

It has been said (Knights and Sampson 1993: 306 and Centre for Vocational Education 1977: 8) that team teaching can lead to greater dynamism in a class, and that sometimes teachers will dare to try an idea with a partner that they wouldn’t try on their own (Cotterall 1990: 85). I have yet to experience this, though I can imagine it happening over time. I have found the experience has helped me to reflect on my way of approaching topics and has opened up new possibilities.

My experience has been that students have responded well to the team teaching approach. They benefit from exposure to different teaching styles, and from receiving more individual attention. This was particularly evident in our introductory Internet sessions. Again they benefit from having a second person who can reword or otherwise reinforce the other teacher’s explanations.

At our evaluation session everyone who had participated in the team teaching experiment agreed that it had been useful and that we’d definitely like to try it again. In fact, since in 1997 the library will have a dedicated room for training, equipped with up to twelve pcs, the team teaching approach will continue!

**Conclusion**

Henri (1991: 3) says that in team teaching effective change takes time, and that one should ‘expect significant change to take a minimum of two or three years’. Ennis (1986: 8) says that because teaching has traditionally been based on one teacher or tutor per group of learners, ‘attempts to use new and alternative models need to be tentatively implemented and carefully observed ... the intention is that [the] team
teaching process will be refined and improved in the light of continuing experience’.

It is my guess those of us who have tried team teaching will happily try it again, that those who did not try it will at least be prepared to take on the role of a ‘helper’ or ‘buddy’ next time, and that our teams will become less hierarchical. We have also talked of compiling lesson plans of all branch members, so this may mean more time and attention given to lesson planning, both individually and in teams. I believe that despite its almost accidental beginning, continuing with and developing more fully the team teaching approach will promote our maturing self-concept and add to the range of benefits we have been able to see for ourselves.

Questions for discussion

1 What are the advantages and disadvantages of team teaching in your educational setting?

2 In the light of your own experience how would you define team teaching?

3 Explain under what circumstances team teaching will work best.