

Co-teaching in the ESL Classroom

BY ANDREA HONIGSFELD AND MARIA DOVE

The authors explore the transferability of co-teaching models and techniques from the field of Special Education to that of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). They review five possible co-teaching configurations and offer suggestions on avoiding potential pitfalls. They conclude that co-teaching can (a) become an effective support for inclusive practices to accommodate the needs of diverse English Language learners; (b) help all students meet national, state, and local standards; (c) establish a vehicle for creative collaboration between English as a Second Language (ESL) and mainstream teachers.

“Creative collaboration flourishes when everyone understands that great ideas generally emerge from a democratic process of throwing all ideas (good and goofy) into a pot where they tumble and merge, collapsing and reforming into something often completely unexpected and new” (Snead & Wycoff, n.d.).

Teacher collaboration must have intrigued educators ever since the Little Red School House expanded to include more than one teacher. Even though most schools are still considered to follow the early 20th century model of “Cells and Bells” (Nair & Fielding, 2005) with most teachers working in isolation in their own classrooms, we



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believe that for the sake of our students, there is a place and time for creative collaboration among all teachers.

Co-teaching is traditionally defined as the collaboration between general and special education (SPED) teachers for all of the teaching responsibilities of all of the students assigned to a classroom (Gately & Gately, 2001). This definition has frequently been expanded to allow the collaborative partnership between a mainstream teacher and a service provider or specialist other than a SPED teacher, such as a remedial math teacher, a reading specialist, a teacher of the gifted and talented and, more recently, the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher. The purpose of this article is to explore how co-teaching can (a) become an effective

support for inclusive practices to accommodate the needs of diverse English Language Learners (ELLs); (b) help all students meet the national, state and local standards; and (c) establish a vehicle for creative collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers. In addition, we also share practical tips on how to implement an effective co-teaching model to differentiate instruction for ELLs.

To date, limited resources are available concerning co-teaching between ESL and mainstream educators. Often, educators working with special-needs children, at-risk youth, ELLs, or gifted students look to borrow possible program models and ideas from a related field. Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles (1997) outlined five possible co-teaching models for the inclusive classroom to illustrate ways special educators and their mainstream colleagues might collaborate. We have adapted these five models to illustrate ways in which they could be applicable to the ESL context.

Co-teaching Models

(1) One Group: One Lead Teacher and One Teacher “Teaching on Purpose”

The mainstream teacher and the ESL teacher take turns assuming the lead role, while the other teacher “teaches on purpose.” This approach provides the teachers an opportunity to give short (1-5 minute) mini lessons to individual students, pairs of students, or even a small group of students. Teaching on purpose may focus on a unique language need or take the opportunity to pre-teach or re-teach a concept or a skill.

(2) Two Groups: Two Teachers Teach Same Content

The students in the class are placed in two heterogeneous groups; each teacher works with one of the groups. By learning in smaller groups, ELLs experience additional opportunities to interact with each other, listen to their peer models, volunteer responses, or receive feedback from the teacher.

(3) Two Groups: One Teacher Re-teaches; One Teacher Teaches Alternative Information

Teachers assign students to one of two groups, based on their language proficiency levels,

knowledge, or skills for target content. During this type of flexible grouping arrangement, students are assigned to their groups on a temporary basis. As the topic and skills that are addressed change, so does group composition.

(4) Multiple Groups: Two Teachers Monitor/Teach

Creating multiple groups allows teachers to facilitate and monitor student work simultaneously as they work on a designated skill or topic. At the same time, selected students can receive instruction targeting their unique needs. Learning centers, learning stations, and guided reading groups also can be incorporated into this model of co-teaching.

(5) One Group: Two Teachers Teach the Same Content

Two teachers are directing a whole class of students, and both teachers are working cooperatively and teaching the same lesson at the same time. For example, a mainstream teacher presents a lesson, and the ESL teacher interjects with examples, explanations, and extensions of the key ideas. The ESL teacher can provide strategies to assist the students in better remembering and organizing the information that was presented.

How do Co-taught Classes Support Inclusive Practices to Accommodate the Needs of Diverse English Language Learners?

In a co-taught classroom, ELLs learn mainstream content along with their monolingual peers. When learning groups remain heterogeneous, ELLs are given the opportunity to work with students who have various academic capabilities and English language fluency. This is in contrast to remedial or ESL pullout programs, in which ELLs are either grouped with youngsters who are struggling readers and writers or have no English language proficiency.

ELLs have different needs than do remedial students. An ESL program should enhance student understanding of English while learning classroom content, as well as offer English-proficient peers to serve as language models. In our view, these are some of the basic

ingredients of a successful ESL co-teaching model. Within a mainstream classroom, an ESL teacher can demonstrate strategies during a co-taught lesson, and the classroom teacher can continue to use the same strategies with ELLs when the ESL teacher is no longer present. Often, the exchange of ideas between teachers allows for more risk taking and the use of innovative strategies on the part of each teacher to benefit all students in the classroom.

Planning is an important factor in a successful co-teaching program. It gives teachers the opportunity to divide lesson preparation tasks and modify class work, textbooks, and homework assignments so that all students can take part in the learning process. The ideal co-planning structure provides ESL and classroom teachers time to meet on a weekly basis to plan activities and strategies based on the curriculum and state standards. The proper amount of joint-meeting time can help educators review, select from, and shape a variety of co-teaching models into well-organized, productive academic programs for ELLs. However, many school districts are unable to schedule adequate time for ESL and mainstream teachers to meet during the school day. For this reason, we urge collaborating teachers to agree upon a feasible model and experiment with its practicability: a model of instruction in which one teacher leads and the other assists or teaches on purpose may prove to be an effective approach to co-teaching. Having one teacher lead and the other assist students during a lesson requires less planning time and coordination between the teachers involved. As trust and mutual respect for each teacher's ability build, this model can be executed simply with rewarding results for both students and teachers. It is most successful when both the ESL teacher and the classroom teacher share the responsibility of taking the lead role. In this way, both teachers' individual talents can be used to benefit the students.

Parallel teaching is another co-teaching method that may be implemented successfully even if less-than-adequate planning time is available. In this teaching environment, the class is divided in half heterogeneously, and each teacher delivers instruction using the same content to one part of the class. This type of small-group instruction benefits ELLs because

they can obtain more individual attention. Furthermore, activities are easier to manage, and more students are able to participate when the teacher-student ratio is lower.

Some co-teaching teams have opted to use an eclectic model of instruction. This works best when the ESL and mainstream teacher have an established rapport with one another and their teaching styles are able to accommodate much flexibility. A team that has similar instructional and disciplinary styles will have less difficulty navigating the use of different co-teaching models. However, others work best using established routines and well-defined expectations.

Establishing a Vehicle for Creative Collaboration between ESL and Mainstream Teachers

When planning time is scarce, teachers need to develop communication strategies that consistently keep all parties informed and allow for shared decision making. Ideas regarding planning and implementing instruction are often supplemented with creative ways to communicate with each other about students, lesson ideas, teaching strategies, and supplementary materials. A teaching log can serve to frame the major concepts and skills that all students must learn for a particular unit of study and assist the ESL and the classroom teacher to organize lessons. We offer the following templates that mainstream teachers and their ESL colleagues can utilize as they exchange key ideas about their instructional plans (see figures 1 and 2)

Meeting National, State, and Local Standards

Teacher collaboration provides the necessary venue for meeting national, state, and local standards with ELLs. ESL specialists are trained to design and implement lessons utilizing national and state level ESL standards (if available). Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL 2006) revised its standards to include language development both for social and academic purposes:

Standard 1: English language learners communicate for social, intercultural, and instructional purposes within the school setting.
Standard 2: English language learners

communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of language arts.

Standard 3: English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of mathematics.

Standard 4: English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of science.

Standard 5: English language learners communicate information, ideas, and concepts necessary for academic success in the area of social studies.

Many states have published their own set of ESL standards in recent years. For example, New York State ESL Performance Standards (2004) establishes clear guidelines for teachers regarding the expectations for their students' language and literacy development (see figure 3).

Performance indicators aligned to each of the five standards specify the measurable skills ELLs need to develop. ESL teachers are best equipped with strategies to address the varied linguistic needs of their students, but they cannot do it alone. Conversely, mainstream educators are most well versed in content-specific, grade-appropriate learning standards. Their daily lesson planning must include goals and objectives that help all their students master the required content-based material. Most mainstream educators, however, have limited training in second language acquisition or pedagogy. Collaboration between these two groups of teachers helps ensure that English language learners have access to the mainstream curriculum and language instruction that helps them stay in school and develop (a) socially by interacting with their peers in English and (b) academically by demonstrating adequate yearly progress in the various content areas (Wertheimer & Honigsfeld, 2000).

Parting Words

Woodrow Wilson once said "I not only use all of the brains I have, but all I can borrow." His acknowledged reliance on others may fit our co-teaching context as well. We are confident that once they have tried it, many teachers will welcome the opportunity to collaborate

regularly, even co-teach in the same classroom for several periods a day to be able to borrow from each other, to share wisdom about teaching, to experience complex situations together, to reveal insights about instructional planning, to show skills of delivering a lesson, and to meet challenges and enjoy rewards of helping a new generation become integrated into the fabric of the classroom and the school community.

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Figure 1. Planning templates**Mainstream Educator**

Day	Aim Big Idea	Key Activities	Assessment

ESL Specialist

Type of Co-teaching	Language and Content Modifications	Notes on Individual Students

Figure 2. A Bird's Eye View of the Curriculum

Content Area: _____

Teacher: _____

September	Key Ideas	Language Goals
Week 1		
Week 2		
Week 3		
Week 4		

Figure 3. NYS ESL Standards

Standard 1: English for information and understanding refers to the competencies and knowledge of English that students must obtain in order to communicate effectively in social and academic settings. Students learning English as a second language learn, use, and reflect on English language and concepts from the core content areas, such as social studies, sciences, and mathematics. The organization of information and the ability to explain the relationships among pieces of information (in forms such as cause and effect, chronological order, problem/solution, comparing and contrasting, and interpreting) form the essential concepts in Standard 1.

Standard 2: English for literary response, enjoyment, and expression requires that students develop the knowledge and skills of English to read and understand rich literature that ranges from classical to contemporary, and includes works representing a variety of cultures. Students are required to present oral and written interpretations of literature, and write works of literature of their own. Through Standard 2 students gain an understanding of literary concepts such as genre, plot, setting, character, point of view, theme, and other literary elements. Students become familiar with and competent using strategies in English such as predicting, previewing, reviewing, and purposeful listening to increase comprehension and meaning of text in English.

Standard 3: English for critical analysis and evaluation develops students' abilities to read, write, listen, and speak in English to analyze and evaluate texts and issues. Students learning English are required to consider divergent perspectives on oral and written texts and evaluate texts and interpretations of texts, using a variety of criteria. Students develop an understanding of the impact of personal and alternative points of view and use English to form, present, and defend their own positions on significant issues, both orally and in writing. To meet Standard 3, LEP/ELLs are expected to take an experience, text, or idea, and question it from a variety of critical perspectives. These viewpoints are informed by the students' cultural background and their experiences as newcomers to the US.

Standard 4: English for social and classroom interaction outlines the skills and strategies, both in and out of school, that LEP/ELLs must master to communicate effectively in English. The focus of Standard 4 is to develop the competencies students need to engage in functions such as negotiating, explaining, participating in discussions, following and providing directions, and requesting and providing assistance in English. The indicators in Standard 4 apply to an array of meaningful and authentic communicative contexts, from informal social situations to formal academic situations.

Standard 5: English for cross-cultural knowledge and understanding articulates the components of acquiring a "second culture" in both a social and academic context. Interactions and knowledge that are subsumed under Standard 5 are designed to help LEP/ELLs entering the United States to be successful in their new host culture. Standard 5 validates and builds on the cultural background of the individual student, promotes articulation and exchanges of ideas and assumptions across cultures, and provides a context in which the student can explicitly and implicitly acquire knowledge and understandings that facilitate the process of acculturation. Teaching to Standard 5 requires an awareness of the dimensions of culture by ESL teachers, bilingual teachers, and other educators of LEP/ELLs. These dimensions include the varieties of cultural practices, norms, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that fall under the general descriptor of "American." In addition, attention to Standard 5 heightens the contribution cultural diversity makes to classroom instruction and interaction. Education under Standard 5 does not promote a list of cultural "facts" or "do's and don'ts," but, rather, encourages an exploration of the facets of culture, the student's own as well as the cultures of others, and how culture is manifested in words, actions, and learning.