Coteaching and Other Collaborative Practices in the EFL/ESL Classroom

Rationale, Research, Reflections, and Recommendations

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CHAPTER 21

COTEACHING AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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This chapter describes a changing role for English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers and considers how schools can implement a more collaborative approach as ESOL teachers move from isolated language teachers to integrated language specialists. It outlines how one department redefined itself and then established structures to integrate a new role for ESOL teachers within the larger school community.

This professional evolution raised questions among ESOL teachers who held differing perspectives on their role, and motivated teachers to develop new skills, attitudes, and knowledge in order to implement a collaborative approach to serving English language learners successfully. For some veteran teachers, in particular, it challenged a prevailing notion that teaching ESOL means working with students rather than colleagues.

OUR CHANGING CONTEXT

The Shanghai American School (SAS), in Shanghai, China, is the second largest international school in the world, and one of several serving the diverse expatriate community in Shanghai. More than 350 faculty mem-

bers, including 18 full-time ESOL staff members, teach 3,000 students in prekindergarten through high school across two campuses. A private, nonprofit school, governed by a board of directors and accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, SAS has a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum, which offers high school students a choice of International Baccalaureate and Advanced Placement courses. More than half of SAS students hold passports from the United States and Canada. While over 30 home languages are represented, the nonnative English speaking student population at SAS is primarily composed of Chinese and Korean speakers. At SAS, the authors each served in dual roles of ESOL teacher and K-12 Coordinator on their respective campuses.

The ESOL program at SAS is based on a sheltered immersion model, in which all students take the same core curriculum and are taught using sheltered instructional approaches in all classes (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2000). Twenty percent of students enrolled at SAS also receive ESOL support: in the form of content-based language development classes, in-class support or both. The rapid growth of our school's enrollment (doubling from 1,500 to 3,000 students in 10 years) mirrored the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Shanghai expatriate community. An effort by the ESOL department to redefine *mainstream* by honestly describing our student population resulted in roughly sixty percent of our students being identified as *English language learners*, with a wide range of English proficiency levels. Since every SAS classroom had bilingual learners, this necessitated a new understanding of how ESOL teachers could serve as resources for all teachers within our school community.

In the field of K-12 TESOL, collaboration has become a more common practice in the past decade, and there is a growing recognition of the role that language plays in all classes. "Viewing language teaching as an integrated process rather than a discrete discipline introduces new ways of engaging with colleagues. Collaboration across subject areas not only supports student learning but also facilitates professional growth" (Nordmeyer & Barduhn, 2010, p. 7). Our student demographics, along with the trends of integration and collaboration in K-12 education, provided the need for our faculty to rethink our approach to serving English language learners (ELLs) and the opportunity to redefine the role of the ESOL teachers.

TWENTIETH VERSUS TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MODELS

We recognized that teachers were operating with two different views of ESOL. The twentieth century model of ESOL (Figure 21.1) reflected a traditional medical perspective, which placed responsibility on the ESOL
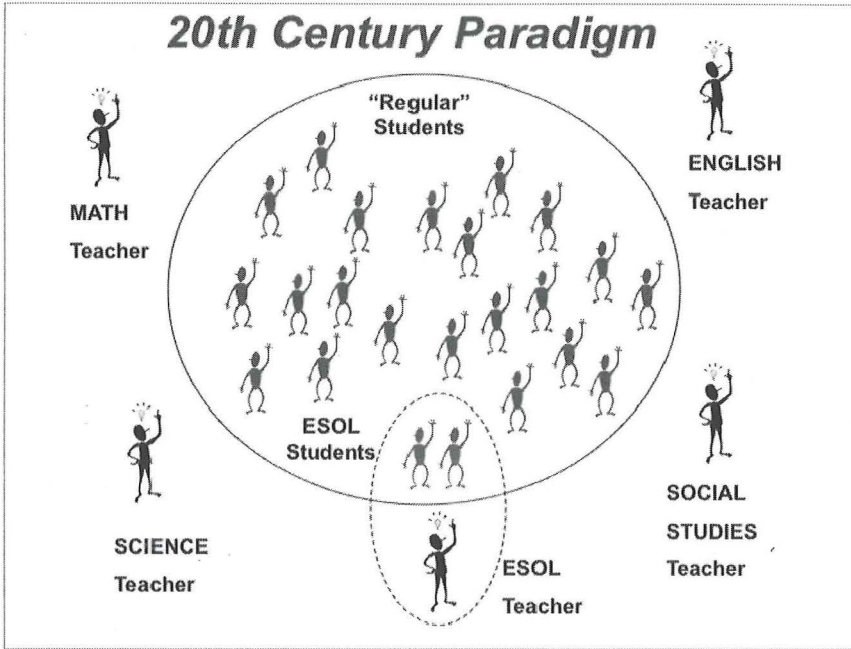
Figure 21.1.   Twentieth century model of serving English Language learners.

teacher to *cure* the student of her language problems in a pull-out class. In this view of ELLs, students have only two options: they are either in the ESOL program and receiving treatment, or out of the ESOL program and ready to return to the mainstream classroom, where they can begin to do their *real* learning. From this binary perspective, the purpose of the core classroom teacher is to teach the majority of the *regular* students and to welcome the ELLs once they are *cured* of their English-language deficiency.

In contrast, the twenty-first century model (Figure 21.2) is built on a different view of students, which necessitates a different view of teachers' roles. From this perspective, ELLs are viewed along a continuum, on which *all* students are developing academic English proficiency. Students are seen as different *in degree* with a wide range of English proficiency, and continue to move along this developmental continuum (Freeman, 2005). As, Mohan, Leung, and Davison (2001) observed, "There is more recognition of areas of common ground: that, differences notwithstanding, both ESL learners and native speakers are learning language for academic purposes, and both groups are using language to learn" (p. 218).
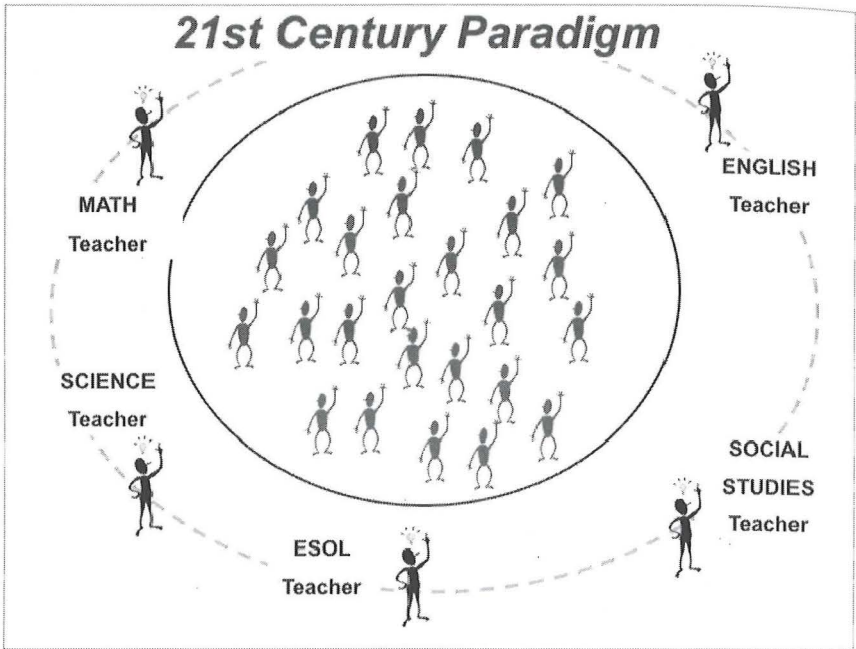
Figure 21.2.   Twenty-first century model of serving English language learners.

In the twenty-first century model, on the other hand, teachers take a collaborative and integrative approach to working with ELLs because ALL teachers share responsibility for ALL students. The ESOL teacher is an integrated part of a team working to develop both content and language, but with specific roles defined.

> This type of integration of language and content does *not* mean that ESOL teachers are becoming obsolete, or that all teachers need to be English teachers. On the contrary, elementary classroom teachers and secondary content teachers are *still* primarily responsible for teaching the grade-level curriculum, but they need to do it in ways that make that content accessible for ELLs.
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> ...
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> Likewise, ESOL teachers are *still* the ones responsible for teaching English. Especially in the case of students with beginning English proficiency, intensive English language development is critical and ESOL teachers need to meet this need. However, ESOL teachers need to consider how they can also connect language development with content learning. (Nordmeyer, 2008, p. 38)

COTEACHING AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We recognized this shift in the role of ESOL teachers at our school and explored how to add a dimension of reciprocal professional growth to the process of coplanning and coteaching. Such an integrated role can be difficult to define and is often complicated by labels such as *coach, mentor, teacher-trainer,* or *professional developer.* However, as a professional learning community, our ESOL teachers needed to move beyond the false dichotomy of serving as either *peer* or *mentor.* In this new role, we considered coteaching as professional development, both for ESOL teachers and non-ESOL teachers. Collaboration that only benefits students but does not foster professional growth is a lost opportunity.

We saw professional learning as a welcome byproduct of collaboration to support students; this helped to create additional incentives for colleagues to coteach with ESOL teachers. For example, coteaching provided evidence for teachers' performance evaluation portfolio. At SAS, all teachers must demonstrate professional growth based on a set of standards for teacher evaluation. One standard addresses differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students, and in particular, differentiating by English proficiency level. This provided a particularly salient connection between professional development and coteaching: a chance to immediately apply principles of teaching ELLs in an authentic context. By embedding professional learning in our day-to-day work, growth was contextualized, relevant, and hopefully sustained. By directly serving student needs through coteaching and building professional development into ongoing collaboration, ESOL and core teachers worked together to accomplish both goals.

As ESOL teacher-leaders, we tried to promote the importance of coteaching as a form of professional learning by developing a schoolwide plan for professional development to serve ELLs. This plan presented the rationale that English is the language of instruction at our school and all students must have access to the same curriculum. It also proposed that ELLs need support in learning grade-level content while developing academic English proficiency, and that ESOL teachers cannot do this job alone. Two key ideas to this view of serving ELLs are:

1. The entire school community must take responsibility for all its students, and
2. Professional development is essential in creating educational opportunities for all students admitted to our school.

With enthusiasm, we worked as K-12 ESOL coordinators to promote this new role for our ESOL department and our school's administrative

team. Collaboration seemed to be a win-win situation, benefitting ELLs with increased support and helping teachers through on-site, relevant professional development. Coteaching as embedded professional learning is also supported by the National Staff Development Council (2001) *Standards for Professional Development*: "The most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing teams that meet on a regular basis, preferably several times a week, for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving" (Learning Communities section, para 2).

As the ESOL department teacher leaders, we recognized challenges. First, coteaching to support ELLs was still largely viewed as a special interest project of the ESOL department. Second, teachers and administrators in the different divisions varied in both their understanding and enthusiasm for increased collaboration and their viewing coteaching as professional development. Third, we needed to generate buy-in from the school community, starting with the ESOL teachers in each division. We initially focused on working within the ESOL department to develop skills and knowledge of coteaching while asking principals to work with their ESOL team to put the plan into action in each division.

MAKING MEANING AS A DEPARTMENT

As a department we reached a crossroads. Some teachers were excited to collaborate more, some felt uncomfortable that their job description seemed to be changing, and others were confused about expectations. To facilitate a discussion of how to move forward as new department, we used an intentional, structured process called the Future Protocol (Murphy, 2008) from *School Reform Initiative*. The protocol was designed to help us to envision and articulate a shared future.

- First we described the present as the past ("We used to ...").
- Next, we articulated and imagined the ideal future ("Now we ...").
- Finally we described the next steps as completed actions ("We implemented ...").

We read and discussed articles about change, collaboration, and the impact of coteaching on student achievement. In the ensuing discussion, it emerged that the ideal future of the ESOL department varied widely. The first round of the protocol's conversation articulated that some teachers did not want to expand their roles to provide professional development for their colleagues. Differing views of the department's future included, "more emphasis on direct student support and less on teacher training," "know what is expected of me everyday," and "no distinction between me and classroom teachers." Some teachers wanted to be left

alone with their ESOL students while others wanted to dive into the twenty-first century paradigm.

As K-12 coordinators, we tried to clarify the new role of an ESOL teacher at our school by creating new Standards and Benchmarks specifically for ESOL teacher portfolio-based performance evaluation. We built on the most relevant descriptors from the current standards for teachers and specialists used at SAS, all rooted in the work of Charlotte Danielson. These draft standards and benchmarks were then refined with input from the entire K-12 ESOL team on a wiki as another step in the evolution of the ESOL teachers' understanding. The new standards defined the dual roles of English teachers and language integration specialists through coteaching and helped to provide clarity to the ESOL teachers, and just as important, to administrators (see Table 21.1).

Taking Ownership

As a K-12 ESOL department we needed (a) to deepen our understanding of the new ESOL Teacher Standards and Benchmarks and (b) to identify areas of strength we shared. We completed an individual teacher self-assessment at a K-12 department meeting. Each teacher considered the

Table 21.1.   New ESOL Teacher Standards and Benchmarks

Performance Area A: Planning and Preparation
- Demonstrate knowledge of current trends in ESOL and professional development
- Demonstrate knowledge of the school's ESOL program and the core grade-level program
- Demonstrate knowledge of students
- Plan the ESOL support program (Pull out and Push in) integrated with the overall school program

Performance Area B: Instruction and Assessment
- Motivate and engage all students in meaningful learning and growth
- Differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students
- Define learning expectations and provide timely evaluative feedback on individual student performance
- Integrate the use of technology in instruction and learning goals

Performance Area C: Delivery of Service
- Use appropriate assessment techniques to measure and report student learning
- Collaborate with teachers in the design of instructional units, lessons and assessments
- Engage colleagues in reciprocal professional learning

Performance Area D: Professional Responsibilities
- Coordinate work with counselor and other instructional specialists
- Participate in a professional learning community
- Engage in personal professional development

standards, one by one, and reflected on his or her own practice. We used a green light (*I am proud of this*), yellow light (*I am working on this*), red light (*I am concerned about this*) reporting format.

Using an online survey allowed us to immediately view our responses together as a group. It was clear that some areas were more comfortable for us, whereas others were more challenging. Taking a snapshot of our department was an immediate and tangible illustration of how we were in the process of changing our practice. It was reassuring to see that we had many areas that we considered strengths, and we identified areas to work towards for other goals.

While most teachers welcomed clarification of a new role, challenges remained in the form of perceived or real roadblocks to true collaboration. From both newer and more experienced teachers we heard many of the same complaints: it was impossible to truly collaborate because they lacked time or planning structures, collaboration couldn't happen if there were challenging relationships to navigate, and coteaching couldn't happen if there wasn't support from the administration. Some teachers expressed frustration that accountability varied from division to division, and a small but vocal minority in this group simply said, "Just let me shut my door and teach kids English."

Over the remainder of the year, most teachers embraced their new role and acknowledged they had the initial support they needed, although questions remained about implementation. This group of ESOL teachers continued to develop skills, create resources, share coteaching activities that worked, and plan with administrators how to expand coteaching within each division.

One way we attempted to implement coteaching—and simultaneously commit to continuous improvement—was to develop a *menu* of options to offer the mainstream teachers with whom we collaborate (see Figure 21.3). This menu defined the possibilities for collaboration in practical terms and grouped them into coplanning, coteaching, and coassessing strands. We presented this as a variety of choices and invited teachers to *order* from the menu as a way of taking tasks off their plate, instead of simply adding more to their list of things to do. By documenting and sharing what worked in the past, through the menu we also showcased successful teaching partnerships. Teachers could recognize specific examples of ways they collaborate with an ESOL teacher on the menu. As a next step, we customized this menu to reflect different student and teacher needs in each division.

Lessons Learned

Many of our colleagues welcomed the evolution of the ESOL department; others declined greater involvement of an ESOL teacher in their

ESOL DEPARTMENT

COLLABORATION

A menu for supporting ELLs

Starters: Co-Planning

- **Finding materials** - For history or science, the ESOL teacher can locate a short story, non-fiction text or image related to a particular topic, then write up a guide sheet with vocabulary list and comprehension/inference questions
- **Creating materials-** For social studies or language arts, the ESOL teacher can create graphic organizers and other scaffolding materials
- **Language objectives** - When doing long-term planning for a unit, the ESOL teacher may be able to suggest a specific language focus area
- **Pre-reading** - The ESOL teacher can preview a chapter or text to compile a vocabulary list, to highlight any potential language challenges, and plan teaser/sponge questions to access prior knowledge relevant to the text
- **Assessments-** plan for a variety of assessments or suggest alternative performance assessments accessible to ELLs
- **Task analysis-** Mainstream teacher gives a lesson plan (or the instructions for an assignment) to ESOL teacher, who does a task analysis. It's one way to flag "hard to see" difficulties and determine which supports might need to be created.

Main dishes: Co-Teaching

- **Small group work** - While class is working on projects or research in pair or small groups, teachers divide the groups so each teacher consults with half the students (perfect for debate)
- **Consultant** - While groups are working on a project, they can visit a "mini writing center" in one area of your class to get feedback on their text. Or one teacher sits in the hall, and students come out one by one to re-tell a plot or historical event, or to practice a speech.
- **Vocabulary expert-** while students are working/reading, both teachers circulate and respond to raised hands by giving "instant / impromptu" vocabulary lessons

Just Desserts: Co-Assessing

- **Co-assessing presentations** - Two teachers use the same rubric to evaluate oral presentations. Can focus on separate criteria or double up and moderate scores
- **Co-assessing writing-** Two teachers use the same rubric to evaluate a writing sample OR ESOL teacher can assess language (spelling, grammar, mechanics) and the other can evaluate content (organization, ideas, evidence).
- **Writing Process Check-in** - require students to come to the Writing Center to have their thesis statement checked before they can continue with their essay or research project
- **Co-creating assessments-** creating a mix of assessments over the course of a unit/semester that are beyond paper & pencil (ie- one oral presentation, a written work, in-class writing, at-home writing, speeches, etc.)
- **Co-writing rubrics-** make a rubric, create "models" that meet different levels of the rubric

What's cooking?

Side Dishes: On the spot collaboration

While one teacher is lecturing/explaining...
...the other teacher can be taking notes on the board/LCD

While one teacher is giving instructions orally...
...the other teacher can be modeling instructions or writing them on the board

While one teacher is handing out papers...
...the other teacher can be clarifying feedback or giving a new task

While one teacher is facilitating a silent activity...
...the other teacher can be reading aloud with a small group in another space

Adapted from Murawski & Dieker (2004)

Figure 21.3.   Collaboration menu.

classes. Obstacles included curricular ownership, lack of trust, unwillingness to change, or perhaps most frequently, lack of time to implement collaboration. We learned that is important for ESOL teachers to keep the following challenges in mind:

- Expectations for collaboration must be balanced with the reality of mainstream teachers' jobs. For example, a creative suggestion for differentiation from an ESOL teacher may not always be practical for a science teacher who has 80 students.

- Non-ESOL teachers' main responsibility is teaching their curriculum to students. While mainstream teachers are often willing to collaborate and may agree that developing language skills will help students to accomplish classroom tasks, at the end of the day they ultimately need to focus on their subject.

Accepting this prioritization of needs helps ESOL teachers to approach coteaching realistically.

Progress continues steadily. The entire ESOL department does not unanimously share the viewpoint of the twenty-first century model; however, many SAS ESOL teachers have moved their practice further along the continuum of collaboration. As ESOL coordinators, we have offered workshops during professional development in-service days, attended by mainstream and ESOL teachers eager for new strategies to improve student learning and to facilitate collaborative conversations in a professional learning community. Additionally, the elementary division established a schedule that allows ESOL teachers and mainstream teachers weekly time to collaborate, coplan, and coteach. Finally, middle school teams have engaged in curriculum mapping, articulating the writing and language focus for each unit, and inviting ESOL teachers to coteach more consistently and intentionally. Building on momentum, teachers are energized and empowered to continue the evolution of a more collaborative and integrated role for ESOL.

CONCLUSION

As our ESOL department evolved, we recognized that making the transition from isolated language teachers to integrated language specialists required attention to intentional steps of the process. After identifying and defining our new role and seeking input from the stakeholders, we worked actively with administrators to develop solid infrastructure and systems on which to build a more inclusive professional learning community.

Our program continues to develop, but as a result of this intentional change process described above, ESOL teachers no longer focus exclusively on a small percentage of students who are *in the ESOL program*. Instead, they collaborate with mainstream colleagues to intentionally scaffold, coteach, and assess the academic language skills and essential con-

tent knowledge that all students deserve. In the process, we are engaging in reciprocal professional growth, which engages both ESOL teachers and their colleagues in meaningful collaboration.

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