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article excerpt (written by Jon Nordmeyer)

COLLABORATION

In order to integrate language and content, ESOL and general education teachers can work together to plan, teach and assess in ways that support ELLs; and this cooperation should be intentional to be effective. A key to effective collaboration is that it is not seen as "pedagogical imperialism." If ESOL teachers observe ways to connect English and another subject, and then share them with a colleague, the issue of "curricular ownership" needs to be considered carefully. Suggestions should serve as examples rather than mandates. Otherwise, a science teacher, for example, might feel an ESOL teacher is being prescriptive or presumptive in explaining the language dimension of his or her science class. Once teachers have built professional relationships and developed a shared vision for how ELLs fit into the school community, collaboration can support ELLs in a number of ways.

First, ESOL and mainstream teachers need to be able to develop units and lessons that include appropriate language and content objectives, integrating content standards with students' linguistic needs. As mentioned above, the new integrated language standards from WIDA and TESOL provide valuable tools for teachers working together to serve ELLs. Common planning time is essential for this type of collaboration, and administrators need to see the value in providing this structure. However, some ESOL teachers are spread across many grade levels or even across different schools. In this case, email or electronic curriculum mapping can be useful tools for connecting teachers.

Second, in addition to support for co-planning, ESOL teachers also need skills in co-teaching, and the ability to play different instructional roles so they don't always default to the "teaching assistant" model. For example, two teachers may complement each other with mini-lessons, activity centers or parallel teaching. To do this, ESOL teachers need not only an understanding of language teaching but also an awareness of how to collaborate effectively in another teacher's classroom.

Third, teachers need to collaborate on assessment. Identifying individual students' academic language proficiency in each content area will help teachers to develop appropriate linguistic expectations and accurate content assessments. ESOL teachers need to communicate assessment data on ELLs to colleagues, and find ways to work together on formative assessments. For example, two teachers can evaluate student work collaboratively, providing the student with useful feedback on both language and content learning.

To promote both integration and collaboration, ESOL teachers may be involved in staff development. Many administrators recognize the value of ESOL teachers as on-site resources who understand second language acquisition, cultural dimensions of school and how to support ELLs and their families, so ESOL teachers are sometimes asked to provide professional development for colleagues. It is important to recognize that this approach is not without challenges. Teaching English is one thing, but training colleagues to teach ELLs is another process altogether. Even though ESOL teachers have expertise in language teaching, they may lack knowledge of specific content areas or may not have experience with teacher training. In many cases, these

challenges are compounded by ESOL teachers' lack of professional status within the school community or a school culture that does not promote collaboration.

There are some important caveats to keep in mind. If ESOL teachers are asked to provide direct professional development, they need the training and resources to do this effectively. Unfortunately, many "off the shelf" teacher-training programs do not provide adequate training for trainers. Also, when schools purchase staff development materials that do not reflect the cultural context of the school, it takes extra time to develop workshops for colleagues: time which ESOL teachers may not have. There are many ways to facilitate professional development, and ESOL teachers may be more effective starting with a co-planning, coaching or co-teaching role than a traditional in-service training role.

Research on Second Language Learning

What does research tell us about learning a second language?

- Learning a second language is a process with developmental stages. Not all learners will go through the stages at the same rate.
- Becoming proficient in the social aspects of the second language is easier and occurs much faster than becoming proficient in the academic demands of the language. Academic language requires higher thinking skills, more sophisticated vocabulary, and the ability to articulate one's thoughts and opinions.
- Factors that greatly impact learning a second language in school are:

Motivation, natural ability, native language proficiency (especially literacy skills), personality, learning style, work ethic, study habits, and support from home.

- Young learners do not acquire a second language more easily or faster than older students. While very young students may develop more native-like accents and more accurate pronunciation, research shows that students aged 9-14 are actually more efficient learners of a second/foreign language.
- A solid grounding in the mother tongue has a direct impact on success in second language learning. Students should be encouraged to continue the development of literacy skills in their native language while learning English.
- A second language is best learned in real contexts and for real purposes. Language skills should not be taught in isolation.
- Effective instruction takes place when language acquisition is an integrated, multi-faceted experience in the language rich environment of the mainstream classroom.
- Current research in learning styles shows that adaptations teachers make to differentiate instruction for ESOL students can benefit all students. Activities that are good for ESOL students are good for all learners.
- The principal motivation for learning a language is the need to communicate.
- Emotions affect language learning; those of us who have tried to speak a new language know it can be alarming. Creating a safe encouraging environment is important; too much stress can slow the learning process.

