

Pushing Back Against Push-In: ESOL Teacher Resistance and the Complexities of Coteaching

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As U.S. school districts struggle to address persistent achievement gaps between increasing numbers of English language learners (ELLs) and their native-English-speaking counterparts, many districts are moving away from segregative models like pull-out to implement more collaborative approaches such as coteaching, or push-in. In contrast to pull-out, coteaching has been lauded for its good intentions of creating an inclusive educational environment by coordinating the expertise of grade-level teachers and teachers of English to speakers of other languages into single coteaching settings. Using ethnographic and arts-based approaches to research, this study adopts a critical perspective that challenges this unproblematic presentation of coteaching as a panacea for educating ELLs. Additionally, the study examines the potential for performance-based focus groups (Boal, 1979) to cultivate dialogue and coalition building among coteachers of ELLs. Data from the study suggest that coteaching is a complex social act influenced by hierarchical relations of power and status in the school setting. Performance-based focus groups reveal that language, race, and ethnicity also are implicated as important social factors in the coteaching enterprise. In the context of these demographic and instructional trends, this study offers timely insight into the challenges, complexities, and possibilities of coteaching, with clear implications for pedagogy and professional development.

doi: 10.5054/tj.2010.214883

As English language learners (ELLs) continue to represent the fastest growing student population in U.S. public schools (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006), many

districts are moving toward more inclusive instructional programs that place ELLs in “mainstream settings as early and as fully as possible” (Platt, Harper, & Mendoza, 2003, p. 105). For many schools, this means a move away from pull-out approaches whereby ELLs receive English language development instruction in a setting removed from the mainstream classroom in favor of push-in, or coteaching, models whereby English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) teachers work alongside their grade-level counterparts in the classroom. Despite the lack of empirical research on coteaching in ESOL, there is significant evidence to suggest a recent trend toward inclusive practices in English as a second language (ESL) education (Pardini, 2006; Platt et al., 2003; Zehr, 2006). Recent symposia (such as the American Educational Research Association’s) and preconvention institutes (such as TESOL’s) at professional education conferences serve as indicators of the current momentum surrounding coteaching and collaboration in ESL educational circles. Popular practitioner texts have also contributed, with *Teaching Tolerance*, *everythingESL.net*, and even TESOL’s *Essential Teacher* all publishing pieces in recent years.

To date, however, most research on coteaching in ESOL settings has occurred in international contexts (Arkoudis, 2003, 2006; Creese, 2005, 2006; Davison, 2006; Gardner, 2006), with very little carried out in the United States (York-Barr, Ghre, & Sommers, 2007). Much of what has been done presents the power-neutral instructional and economic benefits of bringing language and content teachers together while ignoring the complex historical imbalances between ESOL and grade-level content knowledge and instructional expertise, authority, and power (Arkoudis, 2003). Without addressing the historical marginalization of ESOL students, their teachers, and ESOL instructional goals, coteaching runs the risk of being relegated to another best practices mandate (e.g., Reading First, No Child Left Behind) that is enthusiastically implemented with good intentions but fails to provide any substantive or lasting educational improvements (Harper, de Jong, & Platt, 2008; Menken, 2008).

Borrowing from the special education literature, coteaching can be defined as two or more educators sharing instructional responsibility for students assigned to the same classroom (Villa,

Thousand, & Nevin, 2008). The actual implementation of coteaching as an instructional practice may vary depending on local contexts, but researchers have identified a range of models frequently used in the classroom (for a full discussion of these models, see Friend & Cook, 2007). Despite the lack of research on coteaching in ESOL settings, the approach seems to be predicated on the premise of fostering language and content development for ELLs in the most inclusive and efficient manner possible (Creese, 2005; Davison, 2006). Our goal has been to document coteaching between ESOL and grade-level teachers¹ as it takes place in the southeastern United States, a region that has quickly embraced this instructional model (Scott, Johnson, Lacker, & Wlazlinski, 2008) for a variety of reasons. Among the most significant include a recent and dramatic increase in the numbers of ESOL students (Wortham, Murillo, & Hamann, 2002); limited human and material resources to address this population's needs; increasing federal accountability pressures; and a historical wariness to maintain models that seem to overtly imply racial, linguistic, and other forms of segregation (McKay & Freedman, 1990; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Ovando & Collier, 1998; Platt et al., 2003). Also important is that, in an era when dwindling school budgets are under scrutiny, coteaching appears as a cost-saving opportunity by eliminating the need for additional classroom or teaching spaces required by pull-out approaches. We have analyzed findings from two regional studies, one that took place in the context of a series of focus groups with new bilingual teachers in the area (a majority of whom were ESOL teachers) and an ethnographic approach to understanding the lived classroom reality of one pair of ESOL and grade-level teachers. Through our collaborative inquiry, we hope to illuminate the complexities of coteaching relationships and discuss their implications for the TESOL field.

How do coteachers experience the qualities of the push-in model? Do some ESOL teachers in the United States embrace the push-in model while others push back? We begin with a case

¹Much of the literature on coteaching uses the terms *mainstream*, *regular classroom*, and *subject-area* to identify the teachers with whom ESOL coteachers are working. In this article we use the term *grade-level teacher* in an attempt to move away from terms that position ESOL teachers as peripheral or irregular in comparison to their colleagues.

example from Carmen,² a bilingual ESOL teacher born in Argentina who highlights a struggle for language rights—both the students’ and her own—within her coteaching context.

FROM PULL-OUT TO PUSH-IN ESOL: A CASE EXAMPLE

Carmen has been a pull-out ESOL teacher in an elementary school for 5 years in a rural area of a southeastern U.S. state that has seen exponential growth in its immigrant Latino population. When she was first hired, pull-out instruction allowed her to work directly with ELLs in her own classroom for one period a day, providing sheltered content instruction with a focus on the forms and functions of English (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). In addition to her knowledge of second language acquisition and pedagogy, in such an environment Carmen’s bilingual abilities were an asset that helped her explain difficult concepts in the students’ native language, Spanish, and nurture trusting relationships with students and their families.

Due to emphases on accountability and standardized testing since passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, Carmen, like many ESOL teachers around the country, has recently been mandated by her district to gradually replace the number of pull-out classes she instructs with the push-in model, requiring her to coteach in the same classroom with her grade-level colleagues. In these settings, ESOL teachers focus on scaffolding language and vocabulary instruction to increase ELLs’ access to the content curriculum. Ideally, coteaching is aimed at intermediate- to advanced-level ESOL students, maintaining pull-out ESOL instruction for newcomers; however, when the number of ESOL teachers is limited (as is often the case), coteaching often includes ESOL students at all levels of proficiency and becomes the only instructional model for working with ELLs. Both for Carmen and for the more “ideal pair” discussed later, local contexts did not allow for newcomers to receive additional instruction beyond the coteaching model. The following is a transcript of a dramatic performance Carmen co-created with other ESOL teachers in a weekend focus group as a way of sharing some of the challenges

²All names of people and places in this article are pseudonyms.

and complexities of coteaching as well as one reason she and ESOL colleagues are pushing back against the push-in mandate. She plays herself in a classroom with “Ms. Edna,” a grade-level teacher who does not believe Carmen should be using Spanish to assist Spanish-speaking students’ academic and language development. These performances encourage participants’ to heighten and dramatize their lived classroom experiences so that the group can engage dialogically in possibilities for change.

Ms. Edna: Good morning, class. How are you all today? Today we’re going to be learning about the planets. OK? How many of you know what the planets are?

(Student raises hand)

Carmen: Yes, Viviana?

Liliana: *No entiendo*. [I don’t understand.]

Ms. Edna: Excuse me, excuse me! NO SPANISH, please. We’re in America. OK? Therefore you cannot speak Spanish.

Carmen: She just came here from Mexico, you know, she’s new. . . .

Ms. Edna: It doesn’t matter. *(Claps hands for emphasis)* We DON’T speak Spanish in the United States of America. It’s not our OFFICIAL language.

Carmen: She’s just been here for 60 days. . . .

Ms. Edna: It doesn’t matter, ma’am. We are learning science here; we’re not in ESOL or in Spanish class. OK, let me continue.

Carmen: *(To Viviana)* Viviana, Viviana, *planetas*. That’s what it is.

Ms. Edna: *(Spoken with extreme sarcasm and condescension)* OK. So how many of you know what the PLAN—whatever that is?

Students: *¿Qué dice?* [What’s she saying?]

Ms. Edna: *(Sternly to Carmen)* Excuse me? I thought you wanted to step out.

Carmen: We're supposed to be coteaching, remember?
Ms. Edna: But you said you had to go speak to somebody.
Carmen: Not right now. I'm going to the principal because this is getting out of hand.

Carmen has participated in the Teachers for English Language Learners (TELL) program, a federally funded support network designed to recruit and retain bilingual teachers in the southeastern United States, who are in short supply in K–12 schools throughout the area. The TELL program has used performance-based workshops as a form of professional support, rehearsing participants' greatest professional challenges and attempting to perform alternative courses of action (Cahnmann-Taylor, Wooten, Souto-Manning, & Dice, 2009). The goal for these workshops has been to enhance bilingual teachers' sense of effectiveness and agency, thus promoting their retention in the field and their potential as advocates for immigrant students (Cahnmann, Rymes, & Souto-Manning, 2005). TELL teachers have reported a variety of professional challenges, but the most recurring struggles concern relationships between teachers in coteaching environments (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Souto-Manning, Dice, Cahnmann-Taylor, & Wooten, 2008).

In the case presented in the previous transcript, a grade-level colleague, Ms. Edna, disavows some of the greatest assets many ESOL teachers bring to the instructional table: the ability to connect with students' home language(s) and culture(s) and the ability to support their emerging bilingualism. Although school districts have pitched partnerships between ESOL and grade-level teachers as more inclusive than segregative pull-out models, the lived experience of these partnerships can actually reinforce the marginalization of ELLs and their ESOL teachers. The previous transcript presents a dramatization of Carmen's lived experiences as a coteacher and illuminates just one such case in which, despite heterogeneous grouping and a coteaching partnership, ELLs and their teachers can be excluded from the curriculum.

SCHOLARSHIP ON ESOL COTEACHING

Although there has been significant research on coteaching in special education contexts (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007;

Villa et al., 2008), there exists very little empirical work on coteaching among teachers of ELLs in U.S. contexts. In one of the few examples of this research, York-Barr et al. (2007) conducted a 3-year case study of coteaching in an urban elementary school in the midwestern United States. They examined teacher perceptions of coteaching as well as the model's impact on ELL student achievement on standardized assessments in reading and math. Their findings showed increased positive teacher attitudes toward coteaching each year, as well as "considerable positive academic gains in both reading and math" for ELLs (York-Barr et al., 2007, p. 323). The authors identified collaborative planning and reflection among teachers as key factors, both of which were made possible by significant and sustained administrative support in the form of additional staffing and other resources.

With the exception of York-Barr and colleagues' (2007) case study, most of the work on coteaching has been conceptual and anecdotal. For example, in a review of one elementary school's shift from pull-out to coteaching, Coltrane (2002) unequivocally suggests, "When teachers collaborate and combine their talents, everyone benefits" (p. 6). Although we agree that collaboration has the potential to yield positive results, statements such as this obfuscate the complexities involved and ignore the fact that coteaching is often a contentious and exhausting enterprise. In fact, Coltrane's opening paragraphs depict the frantic morning routine of an ESL coteacher tracking down colleagues in order to plan "over a dozen different lessons and activities—all of which will be implemented that same morning" (p. 6). In discussing the challenges associated with coteaching, Coltrane focuses solely on functional and logistical issues such as scheduling and lack of planning time for coteachers.

Scheduling and time are serious issues that schools must grapple with, but critical questions of power, status, and conflicting pedagogies that come into play between coteaching partners may be even more important and are seldom addressed. In presenting coteaching guidelines to support ESOL and grade-level partnerships, Hoffman and Dahlman (2007) acknowledge that collaboration is not quite so simple and urge teachers to remain flexible and responsive to the dynamics of individual personalities,

school culture, and student needs. In addition to the logistical concerns previously mentioned, Hoffman and Dahlman identify other challenges such as unrealistic workloads, inadequate resources, and insufficient time for goal setting and dialogue between teachers. This recognition begins to touch on ideological concerns, including the role of school culture and relationship building among coteachers. These factors are critical if educators are to more fully understand the complexities of coteaching in ESOL settings.

Recently, scholars in international contexts have begun to investigate coteaching for ELLs from a more critical standpoint. Using ethnography of communication, Creese (2005, 2006) examined specific discourse patterns of coteachers in British secondary schools. Based on her fieldwork and interviews with teachers in the schools, Creese concludes that the grade-level teachers' discourse of transmission of grade-level content was valued over the ESL teachers' discourse of facilitation and support. Grade-level teachers and ESL teachers alike positioned ESL knowledge and roles as peripheral and secondary to subject area concerns. However, Creese suggests that ESL and grade-level teachers are under different social and institutional pressures and as a result cannot achieve all instructional aims equally.

From a professional development context, Davison (2006) analyzed the discourse and positioning of coteachers in an international English-language elementary school in Taiwan. She argues that research on coteaching and collaboration between ESOL and grade-level teachers has narrowly focused on methods and has largely neglected the processes of coplanning and coteaching and finding ways to support such processes. Davison indicates that these partnerships are often characterized by "an imbalance of authority, responsibility, and opportunities for input" (p. 456). To facilitate the theorizing and evaluation of coteaching, Davison developed a 5-stage model of collaboration that progresses from pseudocompliance to creative co-construction (see Table 1). Davison concludes by calling for "action-oriented research with built-in opportunities for critical reflection" (p. 472) to provide coteachers with the necessary time and tools for examining their partnerships.

TABLE 1. Levels of Collaboration in Partnerships Between ESOL and Grade-Level Teachers

Level	Distinguishing Characteristics
Pseudocompliance or passive resistance	Implicit (or explicit) rejection of collaboration; preference for status quo after a short trial period Little or no real investment of time or understanding No positive outcomes recognized Expectation that “this too shall pass”
Compliance	Positive attitude and expressions of good intent Efforts made to implement roles and responsibilities, but model seen as externally imposed Frustration and stress due to conflicting demands Expectation of practical and teacher-specific external professional development and dependence on external rewards
Accommodation	Positive attitude and willingness to experiment Efforts made to accommodate coteacher’s perceived needs; conflicts seen as unnecessary or avoidable if coteaching is implemented correctly Achievements seen mainly in terms of strategies and techniques Expectation of practical and teacher-specific external professional development
Convergence	Highly positive attitude, embracing opportunities to learn from each other Efforts made to engage with coteacher’s ideas and initiate dialogue and experimentation Some adopting of other’s ideas and strategies, and increasing satisfaction with rewards of collaboration Increasingly seeking opportunities for peer interaction; growing preference for action research and peer-led professional development
Creative co-construction	Highly positive attitudes; coteaching seen as preferred approach for working with English language learners Teachers’ roles are more interchangeable, yet still distinct Responsibilities and roles are constantly negotiated Teachers engage in action research and critical reflection on their coteaching

Source: Adapted from Davison, 2006.

Arkoudis (2003) investigated the planning practices of an ESOL teacher and a grade-level teacher in an Australian secondary school. Her findings also implicate power as integral in understanding coteaching relationships. In contrast to grade-level teachers, ESOL teachers were seen as owning no specific knowledge or content and, as a result, were often positioned as less important than grade-level teachers in the school community. She summarizes the problematic nature of coteaching with particular emphasis on curriculum and knowledge:

Defining the role of the ESL teacher and the ESL curriculum in this context has been difficult particularly in secondary schools. . . . Each grade-level has clearly defined knowledge and content. ESL, unlike other subjects, has attempted to arch over all curriculum areas and assist mainstream teachers in catering for the needs of their ESL and LOTE [language other than English] background students. (p. 165)

ESOL coteachers must enter, literally and philosophically, specific discourse communities in which pedagogy and subject knowledge are often viewed differently. Whereas grade-level teachers are connected to legitimate, socially sanctioned knowledge of the content area curriculum, ESOL teachers are frequently seen as delivering generic support and facilitation for the cultural, linguistic, and ethnic minorities they serve. In this sense, ESOL work is often seen within schools as strategy driven and generic (Arkoudis, 2003), with no subject-specific knowledge of its own (Creese, 2005). This positioning has a significant impact on the potential of coteaching relationships. If ESOL is only positioned within or peripheral to the mainstream curriculum, what does this say about the status and agency of ESOL teachers and their ability to effect meaningful and lasting change within such contexts?

QUESTIONING THE GOOD INTENTIONS OF INCLUSION

These studies of ESOL and grade-level coteaching partnerships highlight previously neglected issues of power, knowledge, and epistemology and suggest a need for sustained, critical reflection (Davison, 2006) and dialogue between coteachers. Coteaching mandates gloss over real differences in practice and epistemology,

often leaving coteachers to make their way through these challenges on their own. Further, these mandates are often cloaked in the rhetoric of inclusion that presents coteaching as inherently leading to positive outcomes because students are not pulled out or segregated from the “regular” classroom environment.

Although we do not question the potential benefits of inclusion, we suggest a critical analysis to temper the marketing of coteaching as unproblematic and inherently good. For example, what are the actual experiences of inclusion for ELLs and their ESOL teachers, and how are they positioned in such settings? Are there space and support for teachers and students to examine how social perceptions of relevant issues, such as immigration and bilingualism, impact classroom relationships? Carmen and the ESOL students who experienced regular bouts of linguisticism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1986) and other forms of prejudice in Ms. Edna’s classroom would certainly challenge the notion that inclusion was indeed a welcoming environment. Without a critical examination of the community itself, and the broader cultural influences that shape curriculum and decisions for the community, might “inclusion” simply imply new forms of exclusion, merely moving the chairs around into different arrangements, as opposed to challenging and remaking the structure itself?

The current study contributes to an emerging line of critical inquiry into coteaching with ELLs, suggesting answers to questions posed by Arkoudis (2003) and others regarding “how we can best bring together teachers from different discourse communities and get them into sustained and productive dialogue” (p. 172). Two different coteaching experiences are explored here.

METHODS

Both authors are interested in TESOL and bilingual education and have been actively involved in research and teaching in these fields. Cahnmann-Taylor and colleagues (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009) carried out a longitudinal study between 2003 and 2009 concerning the experiences of pre- and in-service bilingual, mostly Spanish-English, teachers in the southeastern United States. Inspired by the work of Paulo Freire (1970) and Augusto Boal (1979, 1992) and the

merger between Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed, Cahnmann-Taylor shifted the structure of the focus group format, utilizing theater games and dramatic play as methods of research and for professional development. Researchers recorded these performance-based focus group sessions to identify the qualities of bilingual teachers' experiences (most of whom were assigned to ESOL, Spanish as a foreign language classrooms, or both) and best practices to support their long-term success as language and cultural brokers.

Performance-based focus groups have been discussed extensively elsewhere (e.g., Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010; Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2009), and space constraints do not allow us to go into depth regarding their format and structure here. What is important for readers to know is that performance-based focus groups involve the use of Boalian theater games and dramatic play exercises designed to elicit participants' experiences of struggle, promoting dialogue about power and agency and creating networks of support. Findings indicate that coteaching experiences, such as those presented in Carmen's case, are some of the most emotionally and professionally challenging in participants' professional lives.

Whereas Cahnmann-Taylor's (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010) understanding of the challenges of coteaching, particularly in the TESOL context, emerged from a series of performance-based focus groups that took place after school hours, McClure's (2008) work documents the lived experience of one pair of coteachers in the day-to-day practices of school life. From January to May 2007, McClure conducted 19 classroom observations that focused on the coteachers' shared instructional time and the transitions before and after the coteaching. In addition to classroom observations, McClure observed planning sessions between the coteachers and interviewed both teachers at the beginning and end of the study.

Joined together, analysis of our two studies illuminates the complex and multifaceted nature of the coteaching experience—as told by bilingual ESOL teachers in a homogenous afterschool setting and as observed during the school day in a coteaching pair's classroom environment. We present data elicited from ESOL

coteachers' performances of their lived experiences, observations of coteachers' practices, and interviews with coteachers in order to offer a complex picture of why some teachers are pushing back against the push-in model, shedding light on the nuances of compliance with coteaching policies.

The Coteaching Edict

Carmen's performance case presented earlier illuminates one of several aspects of pseudocompliance (Davison, 2006). As a bilingual ESOL instructor, Carmen is assigned to coteach in a situation where one of her two language resources is silenced in the name of English immersion. She presents her coteacher as hostile to the native language resources in the classroom and as having a clear preference for the status quo of "English only" and cultural assimilation. Later in the scene, Carmen pushes back against a coteaching mandate that perpetuates language restrictivism and monolingual norms by taking her concerns to the principal. Carmen re-created the following scene to showcase her dismay in the face of English hegemony and the principal's decision to side with the grade-level teacher and the status quo.

Carmen: *(to principal before Ms. Edna enters)* We're supposed to be coteaching. I have the same authority she has as a teacher. She treats the kids very badly. She treats ME very badly, I guess because I'm Hispanic. So can we do something about this?

(Ms. Edna enters and she and the principal talk socially for a minute or two, laughing together as two close friends would)

Ms. Edna: They talk about me, she and the students. I don't even know what they're saying. I don't think that's polite.

Carmen: That's not right; we are not talking about you. *(To the principal)* You know she's telling them off all the time, not to speak in their own language. That's the only language they know.

Ms. Edna: We ARE in the United States.

Principal: Right, we are in the United States.

Carmen: I would like you to go to school in Spain or somewhere and see if you can speak the language in one month or two.

Principal: But, maybe that's the way to learn, to SUFFER.

The following performance highlights the powerlessness many ESOL teachers feel regarding coteaching mandates. The opening

lines are performed by Leila, who, acting as the voice of a district administrator, delivers the edict “from above” while standing on a chair. Raising the action from floor level was intended to convey the teachers’ perception that such policy mandates often emerge from an invisible and thus unapproachable authority with power over their lived experience. Leila’s district mandate is followed by a scene between an elementary school principal and Misha, playing the school’s ESOL teacher. In this scene, the principal is handing down Misha’s schedule in what is presented as an overwhelming litany of tasks and responsibilities. Discussion and analysis of the performance follows the transcript.

Voice of District Mandate:

(Standing up on a chair to present the coteaching edict) Starting in the 2007–2008 school year, the school district will increase our ESOL teachers in collaboration classrooms by twofold. All teachers will need to teach in the home-room, as many classes as they can.

Principal: Misha, ESOL teacher, come in here, it’s time to design your schedule. You’re going to be teaching starting from 7:15 until 2:15. *(As directions are handed down, Misha responds as a marionette, whose strings are being pulled and manipulated from above)* You’re gonna have two segments of first graders, two segments of second graders, one segment of third graders, then you’re gonna see your fourth graders, and then you’re gonna have your fifth graders from 1:00 to 2:15. Besides, once a month you’re going to ride the bus. You’re going to ride the bus during dismissal. You’re going to take those kids, you’re going to ride the bus and meet the bus driver. Your planning time is going to be from 2:15 to 2:45. Also,

you need to be available to translate and to take care of parents when they come to school and they have questions. Remember, you're supposed to cooperate with the teachers, coteaching with them.

Observing teachers:

(In agreement) This is so true!

Misha: Yes, Ma'am. *(Misha is still hanging around.)*

Observing teacher:

You are dismissed!

This performance illustrates several issues the teachers identified as critical to understanding their coteaching experiences. The first regards teachers' self-perceptions of powerlessness. Rather than being active participants in designing and selecting the pedagogical approaches they will carry out, the teachers instead are recipients of a mandate for coteaching; they are the puppets that will implement decisions made by those in positions of power. The edict handed down by Leila conveys a sense of finality and authority, with little opportunity for teachers to resist or even respond. This aligns with Hargreaves's (1994) notion of "contrived collegiality," whereby teachers are assigned into collaboration either against their will or without being consulted (p. 195). From this perspective, collaboration is not only compulsory but also highly predictable and controlled. According to Hargreaves, such mandated collaboration lacks creativity and enthusiasm at best, and at worst inspires unproductive relationships mired in hostility, resentment, and tension. Such approaches fail to capitalize on opportunities for critical partnerships presented by coteaching.

When the group decided to portray Misha as a marionette, whose strings (i.e., body and mind) were controlled by institutional and administrative directives, they conveyed a deep sense of powerlessness regarding policies that affect instruction. In this way, the teachers began, in a Freirian sense, to name their world—identifying and articulating the inequitable power relations that constrained their efforts and exposed the ESOL push-in mandate as a disciplinary practice that controls the mind and the body (Foucault, 1979). As the principal handed down the schedule, Misha responded in a lifeless fashion, jerked this way and that from multiple coteaching responsibilities to extra duties such as riding the bus, working with parents, and translating. This aligns with

discussions of the many roles that ESOL teachers play in their schools, often to the point of burnout (Olsen, 1997). Although the performance used humor and dramatic license to present the scenario, the scene resonated with teachers in the audience as a realistic experience. As the facilitator questioned the group to gauge how realistic this scenario was, many participants resoundingly affirmed that it was quite real and one they had encountered themselves. In a follow-up interview, Leila expanded on this issue, expressing her concerns regarding state and district expectations for coteaching:

At the district level, they're trying to get ESOL teachers to do coteaching more and more. Last year they were saying they wanted you to do as much [coteaching] as you can, and when it came to this year they said we want you to do *at least* one more. So if someone was doing five "collabs" already, they had to do six. The idea of coteaching with six different teachers is just absolutely overwhelming, and it almost makes me want to puke! All of this in the context of no training or support for *how* to do it.

This approach assumes that coteaching partnerships are unproblematic and that ESOL and grade-level teachers are ready-made to collaborate with one another. This neglects suggestions from the literature that these partnerships take time and require voluntary teacher commitment and reflection (Davison, 2006) that can either be ignored or nurtured through professional development.

The "Ideal Pair" and the Need for Dialogue

In addition to the performance-based focus groups with bilingual ESOL teachers, this study also examines a fifth-grade coteaching partnership between an ESOL teacher, Donna, and her grade-level partner, Monica. As White, middle-class, monolingual speakers of U.S. English, this pair's relationship differed significantly from the relationship of the bilingual coteachers who were paired with monolingual English-speaking colleagues. In addition to sharing the same ethnic, linguistic, and gender identities, Donna and Monica had voluntarily agreed to coteach with one another and both considered themselves to be progressive educators willing to try new approaches in their teaching. Like many schools in the

southeastern United States, Linch Elementary, where the pair worked, has experienced more than a 400% increase in the number of ELLs over the past 10 years. In Donna and Monica's fifth-grade classroom, 7 of the 22 students are ELLs. Although conflicts based on race, language, and power were not as central to these two teachers' professional identities as they were for many of the bilingual coteachers, the partnership struggled with other issues that resulted largely from a lack of critical reflection and dialogue.

At midyear, Monica described their coteaching partnership as "successful, but just going through the motions." Her tone did not suggest a negative characterization, more a matter-of-fact statement that conveyed her sense of general satisfaction with their efforts but also her recognition that they were missing out on many opportunities afforded by their collaboration. For example, although the pair's preference was for team instruction, whereby they would share instructional responsibility, "playing off of each other's teaching," in reality their practice was quite different. Based on research observations and field notes, a typical lesson followed one of two formats: one teacher would lead instruction while the other circulated through the room attending to questions and making sure students were on task, or they would engage in parallel teaching, each working independently with a heterogeneous group of students. The teachers rarely interacted with one another to draw on the specific language development expertise Donna brought to the classroom. For example, while Monica led discussions during their reading of a historical novel, Donna primarily attended to behavioral and management issues, making sure students were paying attention and following along in the text. There were only a few occasions when Donna focused on strategies for scaffolding language learning, such as preteaching vocabulary and rephrasing question stems to facilitate student comprehension (Gibbons, 2002).

Near the end of the school year, both teachers independently identified their coteaching relationship, according to Davison's (2006) model, as falling under accommodation, a phase characterized by a positive attitude toward coteaching and a willingness to experiment with the model. Although both teachers generally exhibited positive attitudes toward coteaching, we

identify their partnership as more closely aligning with compliance, for several reasons. Both teachers identified the rationale for coteaching as being mandated, or “because the district said so,” as Monica bluntly stated. As a result, they never articulated their own understanding of the potential of coteaching and simply plowed ahead with good intentions. Additionally, there was little evidence of efforts to experiment and develop their craft as coteachers; their coteaching rarely ventured from the two instructional formats discussed previously. Finally, both experienced stress and frustration, as expressed by concerns regarding a lack of candid communication, professional identity, and whether coteaching was the best approach for educating ELLs at the school. After a particularly frustrating class during which all seven of the ELLs in the class failed the weekly vocabulary test, Donna related these concerns:

I just feel like I’m not giving them as much as they need. Sometimes I feel like I’m failing them because I can’t give them the direct attention and focus on language that I was able to do in pull-out. I love being a part of their content learning in class, but sometimes I question what we’re doing here. It can’t be as simple as pull-out is bad and coteaching is good. Coteaching is great in many ways, but I need to recover some of what was lost in this push to coteach. . . . I miss the close relationships I built with my students in the small pull-out settings.

These were consistent concerns for Donna throughout the study. She recognized that coteaching created opportunities to directly support ELLs’ content learning, but she questioned the mandate and resisted identifying pull-out as being bad. She also felt that at times her efforts to support ELLs’ language development were diluted, indicating that one of the potential dangers of push-in appears to be ESOL instruction being subverted for a more incidental and indirect system of support. This, coupled with the fact that she spent most of her day entering multiple teachers’ classrooms to provide ESOL instruction and support, contributed to Donna’s concerns of losing a sense of her professional identity as an ESOL teacher.

Regarding their efforts at communicating and reflecting on how their coteaching work was going, both teachers acknowledged a

lack of common planning time as a major obstacle. However, Monica added that from her perspective, lack of time was only one element of their struggle. She also felt like the pair lacked the support to engage in candid dialogue with one another, even regarding minor frustrations that seemed to hold their relationship back. In an interview near the end of the school year, she discussed this concern in relation to a 3-week period during the spring when no coteaching took place at all, because Donna was required to administer the state-mandated English language proficiency assessment to all of the ELLs she served. Responding to how this impacted their efforts, Monica commented,

I feel like we've been OK at communicating, but really we're just [talking] about surface-level stuff. There were definitely some frustrating things that I never communicated directly to her . . . like the ACCESS [proficiency assessment] testing stuff. It seems like we really need a more structured opportunity to check in with each other and talk about what we're doing . . . in a way that helps us move forward, beyond just who's going to teach what. We just haven't had that. As far as the ACCESS testing, whenever we were making lessons I just didn't count on her for about 2 or 3 weeks because I knew she would be tied up with that. And if she came in, that was great. But the inconsistency was certainly frustrating.

From her perspective, Donna also felt as if the pair never addressed some of the underlying issues regarding their coteaching goals. She attributed this to the fact that their coteaching partnership, although voluntary, actually began the first day of the school year with no collaborative training or time to map out mutual goals and expectations. In a follow-up interview she reflected:

I think one of the big issues with that [critical reflection] is that we just had to launch into things at the beginning of the year. I mean, we took some time to talk about how things would work, but you know how crazy the beginning of the year is. . . . And while we [ESOL teachers] had some professional development before school started, she [Monica] wasn't a part of it. I think that was a major problem all along. . . . Why classroom teachers wouldn't be a part of the training is beyond me!

The ESOL Teacher as Temporary Substitute or Classroom Assistant

The performance-based focus groups highlighted additional tensions experienced by ESOL coteachers, including moments when “co” actually became “substitute,” “teaching” meant “assisting,” or both. In this first performance, Ana, the bilingual teacher, entered “Ms. Trina’s” fourth-grade classroom during the science period. As Ana arrived, the following scene unfolded:

Ana: Hi, Ms. Trina.

Ms. Trina: Hi, how can I help you today?

Ana: I’m here to do our coteaching class!

Ms. Trina: Perfect! Perfect! You know what, I have the textbooks and materials over there. You need to cover the solar system. You know I’m behind in my work, so I’ll just be here checking my e-mails. If you need something, let me know, please.

Ana: (*Looking frustrated but getting straight to the work*) OK. Kids, we’re doing the solar system. (*Shifts to Spanish*) *El sistema solar, el sistema solar.* (*Shifts back to English*) The solar system.

This performance came to a close with the observing ESOL teachers nodding in agreement. We underline the shifts in person from first to second—where Ms. Trina’s language use further separates *I* and *you* as Ana tries to reinforce the *we* part of collaboration. This scene, in which Ana is handed the instructional reins as her grade-level colleague takes a break to catch up on her work, reflects a common experience of being treated as a convenient substitute rather than as a collaborator and professional peer. In a follow-up interview, Leila, one of the TELL teachers, explained that for her, this approach to coteaching perpetuates the notion that ESOL teachers are solely responsible for “catching up” ELLs on classroom material.

The following transcript reveals a somewhat opposite concern. Rather than being asked to take over classroom responsibilities entirely, here ESOL teachers portray themselves as often being treated like glorified teaching assistants, asked to do errands assigned by the grade-level teacher rather than be treated as a professional peer. Although Dina, performing as the grade-level teacher, starts off using the first person plural *we* (e.g., “We’re doing

X," "We're gonna cover Y"), the underlying tone is one of someone clearly in command simply informing the ESOL teacher about her low-skill, low-status assigned duties, which include photocopying materials and working with a small group in the corner.

ESOL teacher: *(To her cooperating grade-level teacher upon arrival)* Hi, Ms. Dina!

Ms. Dina: *(Launches into orders)* OK, here's what we're doing. We're gonna cover, our lesson's gonna be about seals today. I've written up all the vocabulary. If you will take this and make copies for the entire class, and when you come back after making copies, Yvette, Allen, and John and you just go over to that corner over there to review vocabulary, and then you come back to me.

ESOL teachers observing this performance shouted, "That's so true!" and "Especially if it's your first year." One ESOL teacher added, "I have tenure, and I've *still* got these problems. I've been teaching 10 years!" Thus, some ESOL teachers perceive their relatively low status as a permanent part of their identity as professionals in the school.

DISCUSSION

Revisiting Davison's (2006) 5-stage model, we find that all participating ESOL teachers in our combined analysis fit varying aspects of the lowest two stages—pseudocompliance and compliance—with none reaching experimentation, interaction, and critical reflection as laid out in the later stages of accommodation, convergence, or co-construction. Our data yield a powerful, albeit somewhat dismal, picture of coteaching, in which ESOL practitioners largely felt inhibited from doing their best to assist ELLs with language and content development and had low perceptions of themselves as legitimate, important professionals at their school sites.

Teachers either performed and/or were observed in situations where they were restricted from using their greatest assets, including their native language fluency and their abilities to focus on the complexities of second language acquisition. They were asked to take on super teacher duties—going above and beyond

the everyday challenges of teaching, roving from room to room, teacher to teacher, with little to no administrative support for time or resources to develop multiple periods of collaborative practice. It is no surprise, then, that some ESOL teachers found themselves in coteaching situations in which they were treated as either a teacher's substitute or a teacher's assistant, rather than as a full-fledged collaborative peer. Even in the best of our participants' experiences, we observed Donna and Monica's working solution to largely center on working independently, side by side, reducing student-teacher ratios but never deeply experimenting with ways to address students' complicated language and content needs in a collaborative, creative, or critical manner.

Data from these different contexts confirm that coteaching is a complicated, multidimensional endeavor. For Carmen, Misha, and other bilingual coteachers participating in the professional development workshops, power relations figured prominently in their performances of coteaching experiences. Further, these power relations were mediated by language, ethnicity, and perceptions of their professional identity as ESOL teachers. For Donna and Monica, for whom the power between them was of little concern, challenges centered around the need for officially supported dialogue and reflection. They both expressed the desire to communicate more directly and frequently with one another, but found themselves at a loss for time or a supportive framework to guide their efforts. Although all participants experienced different challenges in their partnerships, they all resisted the notion that coteaching is a simple and neutral endeavor and confirmed the need for sustained dialogue and support as they worked to collaboratively develop their coteaching.

The data presented here foreground the problematic way coteaching is often pursued and adopted by state and district administrators as a disciplinary and pedagogical practice, with little regard for coteachers' situated experiences or the relationships required therein. With the handing down of an all-too-often dizzying schedule (multiple coteaching assignments, bus duty, translation requests, etc.), all participating coteachers expressed their concerns that inclusion for inclusion's sake seemed to be

winning out over moderation and resources for thoughtful planning. Teachers commented that although there are considerable differences in how these mandates are actually carried out at the individual school level, there exists an overall pressure for everyone to increase his or her coteaching efforts. This can be interpreted as an institutional attempt to reach Davison's (2006) final stage of coteaching, which normalizes collaboration as the preferred model. Unfortunately, the implementation experienced by most participating coteachers in our studies only occurred at a policy level as a mandate. It lacked a clear framework with a real commitment to material and intellectual resources, as well as the necessary time and space to support teachers' dialogue and critical reflection.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Davison (2006) suggests that for coteachers to reach dynamic levels of collaboration, they need to engage in "action research and critical reflection" (p. 472) with one another. Based on our experiences with coteachers in this study, we agree with Davison and recommend performance-based professional development as one creative approach for facilitating dialogue between coteachers. Conflict, tension, and personalities are all essential aspects of theater and important factors that influence the process and outcomes of any collaborative effort.

Participating in the performance-based workshops, ESOL coteachers in this study were able to articulate and physically perform some of their greatest challenges, creating networks of support for problematic situations in their coteaching partnerships. They created an environment in which they practiced deep listening and encouraged risk-taking among the group, as evidenced by the sharing of painful scenarios the teachers experienced in their real teaching lives. This is also evidenced by the shared laughter during and after performances. Although we are still writing and investigating the connection between performance group work, parody, and actual change, we have documented how such strategies have "yielded important solidarity-building through the open expression of the otherwise dangerous, taboo, and unspeakable" (Cahnmann-Taylor & Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 129).

It is critical to note here that our work with the TELL coteachers was done within the safe space of a like community, that is, the grade-level partners with whom they were collaborating were not present. We recognize the key role that this initial step played in creating facilitative conditions for dialogue and collective development. Within safe spaces, participants spoke the unspeakable, giving language and experience to the taboos of racism, linguisticism, and other forms of prejudice they encountered. We acknowledge that this work may not have been possible or may have been substantially altered if their coteaching counterparts had been present from the beginning.³

We see the role of a safe space as pivotal for all participants. For example, grade-level teachers who find themselves coteaching with ESOL teachers for the first time may need space to think through and make sense of the challenges of sharing teaching space, instructional responsibilities, planning time, and other logistical issues that arise when a second teacher works in the same classroom. The same applies for ESOL teachers who, for example, may find themselves working in environments that do not embrace heritage languages or share goals for full bilingualism (as was the case with Carmen). The key is to acknowledge that in order to realize the full and unknown potential of coteaching, this work must evolve beyond the confines of safe spaces and discipline-specific communities. Failing to do so stalls coteachers' efforts at the individual psychological level and lacks the action Boal (1992) advocated as necessary for changing structures that allow oppressive environs to persist. We submit that, in the end, this collective action must be the goal. Altering relations can only happen when coteaching partners engage one another directly to work through their individual challenges as well as to reveal and address the systemic conditions that uphold the status quo.

³As Boal (1979, 1992) designed Theatre of the Oppressed activities, he encouraged them to take place in relatively homogeneous groups in which members could sympathize with one another's stories rather than simply empathize with a different person's experience. Although we believe that working in homogenous groups, such as we did with the bilingual teachers, can have clear advantages (creating a safe space to explore shared issues, promoting sympathy, and galvanizing a peer support network), we wonder about opportunities that may only be presented when this work is done with those who have different roles, statuses, or interests. We welcome opportunities to work at the other end of Davison's (2006) continuum, experimenting with our methodologies and exploring ways that coteachers can co-construct powerful dialogues in the same shared space.

In light of the continued emphasis on collaboration and coteaching, we propose that teacher education programs have a significant role to play in preparing all preservice teachers—ESOL and “regular” classroom teachers alike—to collaborate with other adults in their schools. In many programs, particularly special education and to some extent ESOL teacher education, there exist deliberate attempts to incorporate collaboration into the curriculum, encouraging preservice teachers to reach out to parents and community members as well as their grade-level teacher counterparts. The problem here is that these efforts are almost always done within the confines of segregated certification areas. Even as preservice teachers begin to develop a conceptual understanding of collaboration, they seldom have the opportunity to experience it across disciplines. In short, the partners that are expected to collaborate in the future actually never get together during this critical time of exploring and thinking through what it means to collaborate with other teachers. We envision colleges of education that bring these different preservice teacher communities together, providing opportunities for dialogue.

Finally, as school districts continue to pursue coteaching of ELLs, teachers and administrators need to pay close attention to the rhetoric of good intentions that surround coteaching (e.g., the inclusion versus segregation binary, collaboration as inherently good, increased exposure to authentic English language use). Examining those good intentions alongside coteachers’ actual lived experiences may facilitate accessing the real provisions necessary for realizing partnerships that nurture personal and professional development as well as create responsive learning environments for students. Additionally, collaborative approaches whereby coteachers engage in working across disciplinary, linguistic, and cultural differences to better understand their colleague’s perspectives may serve as a model for the students in their diverse classrooms.

We acknowledge the need to develop a conceptual understanding and explore the unique implications of collaboration in safe spaces, but we reiterate that it is not enough for teachers to simply examine and reflect in isolation. Coteachers must engage in dialogue together for the explicit purpose of taking direct action to change their teaching partnership for the better. Based on our work, we offer

performance-based focus groups as one approach for articulating the challenging aspects of coteaching partnerships, fostering dialogue and relationship building. By being given additional opportunities to articulate and work through the challenges of coteaching—both separately and together—ESOL teachers and their grade-level colleagues can push best practices forward.

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