Benefits and Challenges of Co-teaching English Learners in One Elementary School in Transition

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Abstract

This article reports the findings of a case study centered upon the implementation of a co-teaching model in an elementary school with a mixed (EL and non-EL) population. In the co-teaching model examined, ESL teachers were embedded in the general education classroom, collaborated on instruction, and taught in cooperation with general education teachers. In addition to presenting the outcomes of the examined co-teaching model, the article outlines several key conditions for the successful application of this model to various teaching environments.

Two decades ago, Southside Elementary was a school in conflict. Having recently received an influx of Latino students, the school and the town surrounding it were experiencing an identity crisis, and the white, middle class families whose children attended Southside were leaving in droves. Those who stayed complained that their native English speaking children were not being served in the schools and demanded that something be done about 'those' children who didn't speak English. In fact, some veteran teachers at Southside Elementary believe that the charter school created around that same time was in direct reaction to the incredible increase in the number of Latino students attending the traditional public schools in this small, rural town.

However, today in 2011 Southside Elementary is a model of culturally responsive teaching that seeks to serve all students. Grounded in a philosophy of service, the entire school is committed to addressing the needs of its diverse population. Currently, Southside Elementary attracts some higher socioeconomic students from the surrounding towns, ironically by offering a dual language program in which all students study for half their day in Spanish. In addition to the dual language program that serves mostly heritage language speakers of Spanish and native English speakers, the school is also committed to the concept of co-teaching.

In a co-teaching model, ESL teachers are embedded in the mainstream classroom. Within the field of ESL, co-teaching has become popular over the past 10 years. Recently, several authors (Abdallah, 2009; Hayes, 2007; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008, 2010) outlined how co-teaching could be implemented with ESL students. However, there are few actual accounts of how co-teaching is implemented school-wide with English learners (ELs) in mainstream classrooms.

What Co-teaching Is and Is Not

Cooperative teaching, or co-teaching, is an instructional model originally developed for students in Special Education. In this model, teachers collaborate on instruction and teach in cooperation with each other. Ideally, in a co-teaching model both teachers carry similar weight in the classroom; they are truly equals in instruction. Co-teaching is a natural evolution of the inclusion movement and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), which stressed the education of children with special needs within the mainstream classroom. Given that mainstream teachers could not be expected to be experts in Special Education, the experts went to the students with disabilities in their classrooms. As originally envisioned co-teaching is "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space." (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 2)

There are four basic tenets of co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995). The first requires that co-teaching include two professionals in the field of education. While paraprofessionals and other aides certainly add to the instruction going on in any classroom, co-teaching is characterized by the fact that there are two fully certified teachers in the classroom. Second, teachers involved in co-teaching deliver substantive instruction. In other words, teachers are not teaching to the lowest achieving students in the classroom. Third, co-teaching involves a diverse group of students. Co-teaching was designed, at its core, to more fully integrate students with special needs into the mainstream classroom. Finally, co-teaching is delivered in a single space. Again this aspect of co-teaching emphasizes the inclusion of diverse students. This feature is important because it emphasizes that even individualized instruction should take place in the larger classroom as opposed to separating students. Cook and Friend (1995) also wrote that the rationale for co-teaching lies in its inherent flexibility. Co-taught classrooms, they argue, can increase instructional options for all students, improve program intensity and continuity, reduce the stigma for students with special needs, and increase support for teachers.

Co-teaching generally follows several classroom iterations. These include a variety of ways of implementing co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995) including teacher/floater, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, station teaching, and team teaching. Each of these models has advantages and disadvantages. In the teacher/floater (or teacher/assistant) model, there are two teachers in the room, but one teacher takes on a clear leadership position usually with the co-teacher floating around the room or assisting other students. The obvious disadvantage to this model is that it automatically puts one teacher in an inferior position. However, if this model is used in conjunction with another more power balanced model it can serve a greater purpose. The teacher/floater model provides opportunities to pull small groups for immediate, unplanned reteaching or special instruction.

In parallel teaching, the teachers will teach the same content at the same time in different parts of the room. It has the advantage of lowering the student-teacher ratio, like many co-teaching models, and allows teachers to plan together but teach independently. The challenge to this model is aligning the instruction to the point that students are getting essentially the same content but still allowing teachers the flexibility to teach within their own comfort zone. This model can be especially problematic in situations where the content is more specialized and

challenging for ESL teachers who are not content area specialists (e.g. math, science, social studies). This model can also create more noise than some teachers are comfortable with.

Alternative co-teaching involves two teachers as well, one with a small group and the other with a much larger group (i.e. a 25/75 percent split). While this model can be quite useful in providing extra or specialized instruction for ELs who may need additional time to further develop their language skills, it carries with it the danger of allowing students to be marginalized from the majority of other students.

In the station-teaching model, teachers work with smaller groups to present content at separate locations in the same room. This model requires more planning on the teachers' part since they must know in advance how they will split up the content. It can also give inexperienced co-teachers a greater comfort level since they will be working with smaller groups of learners. If feasible, there can also be an independent workstation where students work on their own. This new group can give students the opportunity to truly help each other with limited involvement by the teachers. There are disadvantages to station teaching as well. The levels of noise and activity are increased with station teaching. Also, teachers must decide how often to change stations. This group switching can limit the total number of minutes spent on content, and can impact teacher timing and pacing since each teacher must teach their content within the same amount of time. Finally, with station teaching there is the danger of creating homogenous groups in which students are routinely separated into high and low achieving groups.

Whereas many iterations of the co-teaching model involve teaching separately, team teaching is seen when both teachers are teaching together, at the same time, working with the same content. When many people think of co-teaching, this model is the one that pops into their heads. However, this iteration is the most difficult to successfully implement because of the high level of mutual trust and commitment on the part of both teachers. It is very easy for teachers implementing this model to unconsciously fall into a teacher/floater model without realizing it.

Selecting appropriate co-teaching models is not an easy task, as seen in the examples from Southside Elementary. However, it is critical that the choice be seriously considered and not something to be rushed into. Teachers may need to experiment with different models before settling on one. Co-teaching is not putting two teachers together and asking them to work together with no common preparation time. Co-teaching is not using an ESL teacher as a floater for only the ESL students. Co-teaching is not one teacher entering another teacher's classroom without the power to influence instruction. Co-teaching is not the act of taking a qualified teacher and re-forming him/her into a teacher's aide. Finally, co-teaching does not replace other ESL services for students who are beginners and need more individualized instruction in addition to help in their mainstream classes.

Additionally, co-teaching does not have to happen every day in every class. In fact, with the limited number of ESL teachers in schools, it would be almost impossible to implement co-teaching on a daily basis in a particular class. Hence, when implementing a co-teaching model, it is imperative that the whole instructional environment be taken into consideration. School administrators are realigning important school resources, and this process can never be taken on in a superficial manner.

Does Co-teaching Have a Positive Impact on Instruction?

This question is difficult to answer. Within the field of Special Education, where the majority of research has been completed, the answer to this question would be 'yes and no'. In Murawksi and Swanson's 2001 meta-analysis of co-teaching research, they found that the strongest positive impact of co-teaching was on reading/language arts. They also found a moderate effect for co-teaching on mathematics. However, of the 39 studies they began with, only 4 studies met their criteria for meta-analysis. Scruggs et al. (2007) found that there were teacher benefits and student benefits seen in instances of quality co-teaching, but did not find that classroom instruction had substantially changed as a result of co-teaching. In their meta-synthesis of qualitative research they noted that there seemed to be a threshold level at which students with disabilities were positively impacted by a co-teaching model. For the ESL field, we would want to ask about a minimum level of English proficiency at which co-teaching might be more effective. However, we could also argue that most ELs spend the majority of their academic day in the mainstream classroom anyway, pulled for ESL services for only a small portion of their day.

In their review, Vaughn, Elbaum, Schumm, and Hughes (1998) reported that co-teaching seems to have a positive impact on reading achievement. They also found a positive relationship between co-teaching and more positive social relationships for students in Special Education. This finding was confirmed by Austin (2001) who found that co-teachers in Special Education and General Education see co-teaching as an overall positive with some challenges. Austin also noted that, even though no explicit evidence was provided, the teachers involved in co-teaching felt that co-teaching contributed to higher academic outcomes for students with disabilities. It is important to note that these studies do not include large-scale, long-term research. Additionally, these studies are done with the Special Education population, not an ESL population. Hence it is difficult to attempt to transfer these data to the ESL classroom.

Co-teaching ELs at Southside Elementary School

In telling the story of how Southside Elementary School implemented a co-teaching model, including their struggles and triumphs, it is critical to share the stories that teachers, both mainstream and ESL, bring to the classroom context. Each teacher brings his/her own personal narrative to the context of the classroom, and within this context they share a mutually constructed story that becomes the narrative of their students' education.

The Site and Teachers

Southside Elementary is a K-5 elementary school in rural North Carolina that does not often make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as outlined by No Child Left Behind.   Southside has approximately 570 students, over the state average for schools of similar size.

Thirty-eight percent of the teachers at Southside Elementary have advanced degrees, well over the state average of 28%.   The school also has 8 teachers who hold National Board Certification, again over the state average of 5, and the teacher turn-over rate is below the state average. Approximately one half of the students in the school are ELs, and its student population

is over 80% minority with 75% of the entire student population receiving free or reduced lunch. The school employs 6 ESL teachers, 3 of whom are VFN, visiting foreign nationals, who are given limited work visas to work in high-need schools.   Mainstream teachers are similar to the national average, mostly female, predominantly white with a slight majority of teachers having less than 10 years of experience.

First Visit

When I first visited Southside Elementary, they had been implementing a co-teaching model for over 2 years. Directed by one teacher who had co-teaching experience, the model began as a teacher-led grassroots movement in the Kindergarten grades. Several Kindergarten teachers had teamed with 2 ESL teachers, asked permission from their principal and began co-teaching for approximately one hour each day. Other Kindergarten teachers were intrigued by this model, and the following year, more teachers followed. Within the next two years, the school moved to a co-teaching model. During my first visit they had been using this model school wide for 2 years, and in my second visit they had been implementing the model for over 4 years. In each visit, I observed classes that were co-taught by a variety of teachers, interviewed teachers and interviewed the principal. Because Southside has a relatively low teacher turn-over, I was able to interview many of the same people, including the same principal and ESL lead teacher, in both visits.

During my first visit, I observed for two days in classes that were implementing a co-teaching model and interviewed 10 teachers. In each class, teachers were seen using different models. They were not required to use any particular model but rather were free to experiment with different models that seemed to fit their instructional personalities. Some teachers were using a station model, and others were using a teacher/floater model. Finally some teachers were attempting to use a team teaching model. However, these different models were not without challenges. While all the teachers expressed a satisfaction with co-teaching, there were issues that still needed to be overcome.

All the teachers interviewed overwhelmingly favored the model, even with its challenges. They felt overwhelmingly that the co-teaching model gave them ESL support in their classes that they desperately needed, and the ESL teachers felt that it helped the ESL students feel like a true part of the room. In fact, during observations, it was nearly impossible to determine which students were ESL students and which were native English speakers because both teachers worked equally with both groups.

During my first visit I sat down with both mainstream and ESL teachers to ask about the benefits and challenges of co-teaching. All the teachers preferred the co-teaching model to the previously used ESL pull-out model. This satisfaction with co-teaching has been reported in several other studies (Friend & Cook, 2003, Gately & Gately, 2001). While most mainstream teachers appreciated having the co-teaching model, the ESL teachers expressed several concerns that have been documented in the literature on co-teaching (Austin, 2001; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Almost all the teachers agreed that co-teaching is dependent on teacher personality and the relationship between those teachers. On several occasions both groups remarked that if the teachers get along well, co-teaching will be successful. If the teachers do not get along, there is no hope for a positive co-teaching situation. This challenge came to the

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forefront when the co-teaching model went from a few teachers to many teachers. The principal particularly noted the scheduling difficulties that she faced when scheduling teachers who co-taught classes. One recurring issue was one of looping. Should ESL teachers move up in grade level with their students, or should they stay with teachers that they had already established a relationship with?

In effect, co-teaching is similar to an arranged marriage. Especially because of scheduling constraints, two people are put together to accomplish complex tasks, often without their prior approval. Hence, the quality of instruction that results from that union is often a direct result of the relationship between the teachers themselves. This tenuous relationship was best exemplified by one group of teachers at Southside. There were actually three teachers in one room, the general education teacher, an ESL teacher, and a Special Education teacher. All co-taught at the same time in one class. The Special Education teacher and the general education teacher already had a well-established working relationship when the ESL teacher came into the picture. Although the ESL teacher never reported feeling unwelcome in the class, he was clearly the outsider and, at times, felt awkward in the co-teaching model.

The ESL teachers in the group also had particular challenges and expressed frustration with the co-teaching model with regard to classroom control. There is no way to deny that the mainstream teacher is the 'home' teacher and has a significantly more powerful position in the co-teaching situation. It is up to the mainstream teacher to either share that power or not. The ESL teacher cannot go into the mainstream classroom and demand an equal position. One reason for this unequal power relationship given by the mainstream teachers is that they are ultimately responsible for test scores for all their students. More than one teacher remarked, "My name is on that test score report." The responsibility that the ESL teacher has for the students' acquisition of English is not given equal standing in the mainstream classroom.

There is no doubt that the passage of No Child Left Behind placed more pressure on schools to perform well on standardized tests. Additionally, the Race to the Top (RttT) competition increased the high stakes associated with test scores. Under RttT mandates, teacher performance will, in part, be judged based on 'student performance' (translation—test scores). According to the Center for American Progress (www.americanprogress.org), RttT funds require recipients to link student achievement and growth directly to their teachers, tie this information to the programs that prepare these teachers, and expand programs that are deemed successful under these regulations.

Southside Elementary is in an RttT state. Hence, these teachers will be held directly accountable for their students' performance on the state End of Grade tests. However, the ESL teacher will only be held tangentially responsible, as a support teacher. Southside is a lower socioeconomic status school that has struggled making Adequate Yearly Progress in each year of No Child Left Behind. It is designated as a School of Progress (60-80% of the students at grade level). The prospect of linking student achievement, as measured through test scores, with teacher evaluations is not an empty threat at Southside; there could be significant ramifications of such a policy.

Another common challenge in the first few years was choosing a model. Some ESL teachers felt that the mainstream teacher was the one who determined the model instead of both

teachers working together to choose a model. They felt that they had little control or input in what model was used. As an observer, I noticed one challenge that was not noted by the teacher nor the principal. After observing several classes, I began to ask how ESL students were exited from the program. Of course, each EL would take the English proficiency tests required by NCLB, but generally speaking ESL teachers will scaffold their accommodations and instruction to suit the English needs of ELs in their classes. With self-contained ESL, this process is easy to regulate. Generally, services will be drawn down. Instead of seeing an EL three times a week, the ESL teacher will reduce the number of pull-outs to twice a week. In a self-contained ESL class that meets regularly, the accommodations will be adjusted or the student may move to a more advanced class. However, with a number of ESL students in a mainstream class (with a variety of English proficiency levels) that does not change over a one year period of time, I asked how they adjusted instruction or accommodations to fit developing English language proficiency.

The co-teaching model is originally based on methods and practices from the field of Special Education where exiting was not so much an issue. According to the website LD Online (www.ldonline.org) learning disabilities are lifelong challenges. Hence, a student with dyslexia will always have dyslexia, although certainly instruction can be adapted to help them overcome this challenge. However, while a student with Special Needs may need accommodations for the length of his/her academic career, ELs generally progress in their English language proficiency over a one year period and need to have their instructional accommodations and curricular adaptations adjusted as they learn the language.

Generally in ESL program across the country the process of exiting from the program is well documented and systemic. ESL services are reduced or eliminated as students reach certain language proficiency goals as determined by state-approved proficiency tests. However, even if an ESL student in a co-taught class was exited and in a monitoring phase, the student could still conceivably receive the same level of ESL service since the co-teacher would be there for other ELLs still in need of assistance. Hence, while the fact that the ESL teacher serves all students in the classroom, the question of exiting can be problematic. I asked the teachers at Southside, "Was there a plan for this transition to English proficiency?" The response to this question was generally one of surprise. It was something that had not been taken into consideration in their co-teaching model. Some ESL teachers responded that they felt that an informal exit from the program was happening but not in an official, institutionalized manner. It was an idiosyncratic process that was dependent on the working relationship of a co-teaching team.

If the teachers were using homogenous grouping strategies, then the more advanced ELLs would be moved to a higher level group. Lower proficiency level ELLs would receive more intricate instructional accommodations but generally this level of accommodation happened within mixed groups of ELLs and non-ELLs.

Second Visit

Two years after my initial visit, I returned to Southside Elementary. I was lucky enough to be able to meet with many of the same people I had interviewed before. I met with two of the same ESL teachers, 3 of the same mainstream teachers, and the same principal.

As I moved back into the classroom to observe, I noticed immediately that almost all the teachers had moved to a station teaching model. Only one pair of teachers did not use station

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teaching exclusively, and they reported using it most of the time. In most cases, the ESL teacher, the mainstream teacher, and the teacher's aide each had a small group of students, and most classes had an independent study group. ESL students were interspersed throughout the groups, but in almost every classroom the groups seemed to homogenous to give lower achieving students more support. In these classes, the ESL and mainstream teachers did not teach the same material to each group but rather adjusted the material taught to the level of the group. Southside Elementary uses a balanced reading program, and station teaching lends itself to differentiated instruction for different groups of students.

Despite the high level of differentiation in the classroom, it was difficult to observe specific linguistic accommodations for ELs in the classrooms. All students were provided with accommodations aligned to the group level; however, individual accommodations that would level the linguistic playing field did not seem to be provided. In the subsequent interviews that I conducted with ESL and mainstream teachers, this lack of individual linguistic accommodations was acknowledged but not thought to be an issue. The response was that because of the low socioeconomic make-up of the school that all the students, native and non-native speakers together, needed similar language accommodations. There was a strong sense that everyone needed accommodations.

In effect, while the instructional accommodations had the impact of a rising tide raising all ships, were the EL ships still sinking, only at a slower rate? This point is important because Abedi, Hofstetter, & Lord (2004) wrote that accommodations for ELs must be true accommodations in order to be effective. In other words, the accommodations must seek to level the playing field without providing an unfair advantage to the ELs involved. If the accommodation would benefit all in the class, then it should certainly be provided to all in the class. However, accommodations specifically designed for ELs must work to level out the linguistic burden that these students bring to the learning environment.

Educators who write about co-teaching write about the importance of shared planning time, and this one factor seems to be the single most important feature in determining if co-teaching will be effective or not. At Southside Elementary, all the co-teachers now have shared planning, and because of their blocked schedule, all the teachers on a grade level meet periodically in wide-ranging grade level meetings called Professional Learning Committees (PLCs) where they can address student issues in a comprehensive manner. After observing one such grade level meeting, I asked if students' linguistic progress was ever a point of discussion. In other words, while the teachers may be discussing Juan's content and/or reading progress, was his English acquisition progress ever discussed? The answer to this question was a 'no' that echoed in my mind for the remainder of my time at Southside. Most of the ELs at Southside, as in the country, enter as monolingual Spanish speakers in kindergarten. Hence, the majority of the lower to intermediate proficiency ELs are in the lower grades. However, unless individual EL's language proficiency is carefully tracked it is difficult to know if they're struggling in content because of language issues or other factors. When I asked if older ELs were monitored to see if they were acquiring English in a regular and expected fashion, the response was, again, 'no'.

Another new aspect of the ESL program at Southside Elementary was that all official ESL pull-out services had been suspended in favor of the school-wide co-teaching model. When I asked why this decision had been made and how it impacted lower level ELs, I was told that,

when needed, lower proficiency ELs would be pulled out during 'Plus Time', which was a remediation time in which students could be pulled in small groups for supplemental instruction. ELs were typically pulled during this time to receive focused ESL instruction. However, this additional instruction did not seem to occur on a regular basis throughout the year.

During my second visit, there was also a noticeable change in the already ESL-friendly environment at the school. Teachers, especially mainstream teachers, were even more involved in the success of their ESL students. Southside Elementary already engaged in a culturally responsive curriculum, and during my second visit this culturally engaging curriculum was even more evident. As teachers began to automatize their working relationships with their co-teachers, it was obvious that their instructional arsenal had also expanded to include more accommodated instruction. It is important to note that the teachers themselves commented on several occasions how they felt more comfortable with their co-teachers. As for the ESL teachers that I interviewed, many still liked the co-teaching model and more felt comfortable bringing their views to the teaching table. One teacher, who seemed to be sidelined by his co-teacher in my first visit, was adamant about the improvements in the co-teaching implementation over the two years. He attributed these improvements to the recently implemented block scheduling and the increased sense of belonging he had in his classroom. Perhaps the most telling outcome of this second visit was not whether or not the school would continue the co-teaching model but rather how they would improve it in the future.

Recommendations for Improvement of the Model

When I left Southside Elementary after the second visit, I offered recommendations to the staff and administration. First and foremost, I recommended that students' level of English language proficiency be taken more into consideration when discussing their academic progress. Southside Elementary implemented an excellent teacher collaboration system through their PLC meetings and common planning shared by co-teachers. However, discussions of English language proficiency were being left out in favor of generalized discussions about academic progress. While I do not recommend that the discussions concerning academic progress be minimized, including the students' English proficiency progress can enhance these discussions.

Additionally, I recommended that ESL pull-out not be abandoned completely. There is a time and a place for intensive, language-based instruction for ELs that is strategically different than that given to native English speakers. Especially as young ELs are developing literacy, they do not have the extensive battery of social English that we depend on in order to teach beginning literacy. One ESL teacher I interviewed commented that she missed being able to provide more linguistic supports, especially in the area of vocabulary development and syntax. Seeing this situation mostly in the upper elementary grades, she said, "These kids are not getting the scaffolding they need in a co-teaching situation."

Is Co-Teaching the Right Model for a Particular School?

There are many factors that will influence the outcome of this discussion, and perhaps the most important factor is that it should be a discussion among all stakeholders involved. In the

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beginning stages of Southside Elementary's foray into co-teaching, the grassroots nature of the program helped to contribute to its success. Several teachers agreed to try the program. They went to their administration for support, and they then implemented the program the following year. When other teachers saw their success, they wanted in. Administration was happy to oblige requests, but as co-teaching became the rule rather than the exception, other teachers were not as happy. They were given opportunities to transfer to a new school in the district, and this reduction in teachers gave the principal opportunities to hire new teachers under the assumption that they would be engaged in co-teaching.

Another critical consideration in deciding to implement a co-teaching model has to do with the number of ELs in a school. Southside Elementary is almost 50% ESL. There is little doubt that co-teaching would be at least feasible in this school. Having so many ethnic and linguistic minority students creates a tipping point at which teachers must become more culturally sensitive and explore every instructional option. However, if a school or district is not so rich with ELs, co-teaching may not be the optimal model.

Another danger noted in the research (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007) is the issue of 'loading' particular classes with a majority of high needs students. Historically, ELs attend high-need schools in high-poverty districts. As evidenced by the situation at Southside Elementary, almost every student in the school could be seen as a high-need student, EL or not. When principals are exploring co-teaching options, there is a tendency to place larger numbers of ELs in particular classrooms to make co-teaching more feasible. When these placements also include native English speakers who are high-need students, a lose-lose situation is created. Essentially, this becomes a class where each student demands twice as much from each teacher in the room.

Other teachers believed that money spent on professional development for mainstream teachers would be a better investment than the time and resources put into co-teaching. Still other teachers feared that implementing a co-teaching model would take away from their individual times with ELs (alone or in small groups). In fact, Southside Elementary has eliminated their ESL pull-out program in favor of a complete co-teaching model.

What makes co-teaching successful? There are several 'must haves' on this list and research indicates that the two strongest predictors of success tend to be shared planning and administrative support. Perhaps the strongest factor in the success of co-teaching is collaborative time to plan, and this conclusion is supported in other research (Austin, 2001, Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). In all instances in which teachers I interviewed did not have a shared planning time, co-teaching was a failure. In the first years of co-teaching implementation at Southside Elementary, the teachers did not have shared planning time. However, the administration of the school made sure that this shared time was available in subsequent years. Currently, all co-teachers (ESL and Special Education included) have shared planning time with their General Education mainstream teachers. In some cases, this sharing of lesson planning means that mainstream teachers are meeting with 2-3 other teachers, but it is still considered essential for the success of the program.

Additionally, providing professional development for both ESL and mainstream teachers is essential. Administration cannot assume that having an ESL teacher in the classroom will take

care of all ESL issues. It is essential that the mainstream teacher understand the concepts and theories of second language acquisition so that the instructional accommodations that the ESL teacher is trying to put in place make sense to everyone. For example, some mainstream teachers have the belief that the EL student's native language should never be used in the classroom; English immersion is the best way to learn language. Yet, in the field of bilingual education we know that it can be helpful to use the student's native language in class. If the ESL teacher is able to give some native language support in the class, it can aid in the EL student's acquisition of English. However, if the mainstream teacher is not familiar with the research behind this practice, s/he may not be receptive to using it in the classroom. By the same token, the ESL teacher must make efforts to learn as much of the content as possible. This content and methodological knowledge is essential in all grade levels, even those where the content is seen as relatively simplistic (i.e. kindergarten). The mainstream teacher may be using well-researched methodologies to teach a particular concept or skill, and the ESL teacher should be kept abreast of these developments so that s/he can integrate ESL instructional accommodations as effectively as possible.

As mentioned previously, co-teaching is akin to an arranged marriage, and both partners need pre-marital counseling of sorts.   There are several 'getting to know you' forms and surveys that can act as springboards for both teachers. These starter documents allow both teachers to get to know each other from both personal and professional standpoints. Mainstream teachers also need professional development in second language acquisition and curriculum adaptations. ESL teachers often need content refreshers, especially if they are working at the middle and/or high school levels.

Pre-implementation professional development is essential for the successful implementation of a co-teaching model. When Southside Elementary began their co-teaching model, it was basically with little or no professional development or preparation, but there were only two classrooms implementing the model, and the teachers themselves chose to co-teach together, which automatically helped ease the transition to a co-teaching model. Additionally, one of the teachers already had co-teaching experience. In schools that have decided to implement co-teaching, teachers should be placed together each with some input on the placement and then have some time to go through an official 'getting to know you' period. Austin (2001) found that some teachers would prefer to have paid summer planning time, but none did. Examples from Southside Elementary showed that teachers often have differences in teaching style, classroom management, and personality that only come out when they are in conflict. Completing checklists and comparison surveys can help teachers address these differences in a more structure manner as opposed to the classroom environment itself.

Administrators can go a long way in helping to alleviate the problems associated with co-teaching models. While the impetus for the co-teaching model implemented at Southside Elementary began with a handful of teachers, the continued success of the model would not have been possible without the support provided by the principal and her administration. In this case, the principal practiced a collaborative leadership model to help ensure that co-teaching could be done in a way that benefitted both students and teachers. When necessary, she was able to step aside and let the teachers make some critical decisions (e.g. Do we loop or not?), and when necessary she was able to make important decisions that, while not always popular, were

essential to the success of the program. (i.e., the school's philosophical shift to the co-teaching model). When the school decided to become a co-teaching school it was the principal who spearheaded the transition by helping teachers who did not want to co-teach secure a job at a new elementary being opened in the district. Additionally, when hiring new teachers, the principal makes it clear to prospective applicants that the school follows a co-teaching model, thus trying to ensure that all new faculty members who come to Southside Elementary know they will co-teach.

Conclusions

In an informal survey of North Carolina ESL teachers (done via listserv), many teachers expressed a dislike for co-teaching. Comments from the teachers included issues from having the right number of ELs to make co-teaching feasible to complaints of being relegated to the position of teacher's aide. Most complaints centered on the power issues that seem to be always present in a co-teaching model. Additionally, some ESL teachers commented that it is more effective to provide professional development for a mainstream teacher than to deal with the logistic difficulties of co-teaching. This attitude is especially true in counties with smaller numbers of ELs. In these instances, schools often share ESL teachers, and co-teaching is not really a viable model. Hence, co-teaching is not without controversy or difficulty. However, studies indicate that when co-teaching is well implemented and provided with adequate administrative support (Austin, 2001), it can be a successful model with good teacher support. My work with Southside Elementary supports this conclusion. In as much as this population may be predisposed to supporting co-teaching since they have all consciously made this choice, the lower rate of teacher-turnover is an indicator of their continued support of co-teaching.

Research has found that co-teaching supports many social and academic aspects of the classroom (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005). In my visits to Southside Elementary all the teachers involved preferred the co-teaching model to the pull-out model traditionally used in elementary schools. They feel that mainstream teachers learn more about ESL methodologies and strategies and that ESL teachers are able to help ELs take advantage of mainstream instruction. However, it is important to reiterate that there is very little research in the ESL field with regard to co-teaching as most of what we know about co-teaching comes from the field of Special Education.

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