

Chapter 4

Grassroots Approach to Co-teaching for English Language Learners

Maria G. Dove

Eileen Haydock was certainly tenacious. She had strong opinions about nearly anything you can imagine and had no problem expressing herself. Yet, one could not help but be drawn to her strong passion for teaching and unswerving devotion to her young students. As a trained reading specialist and experienced classroom teacher, Eileen knew much about developing her first graders' early literacy skills. She also had wonderful instincts when it came to teaching English language learners (ELLs).

If you were to step inside Eileen's class, you would observe a room filled with carefully categorized, hand-made posters, which helped her young students connect written words with their corresponding illustrations. She collected and displayed artifacts from her travels so that her first graders could better understand the world around them. Her classroom was filled with rocks, seashells, starfish, and other assorted ocean creatures. She never missed an opportunity to bring the natural world into the classroom.

As an avid progressive educator, Eileen provided many hands-on learning opportunities to the delight of her youngsters. Considering the responsive learning environment she created and provided for ELLs, there is little wonder why I chose to approach Eileen with ideas to teach English as a Second Language (ESL) lessons inside her classroom.

IN THE BEGINNING

Approximately ten years ago, ESL instruction in elementary schools was predominately provided via a pull-out model. ELLs were taken from their mainstream classrooms to a separate, usually abbreviated, classroom setting

for one to two periods a day and given lessons in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Coupled with the lack of collaboration between mainstream teachers and specialists, this practice often caused ELLs to miss the lesson material presented in their regular classrooms during their absence, and they frequently fell behind their classmates in regard to their academic achievement.

From time to time, ELLs in pull-out programs are viewed by others as different, less capable learners or lacking intelligence. They experience more difficulty becoming a part of their regular classroom community. Mainstream teachers often feel less able to develop their learning or adapt lessons for these students. They may even believe an ELL's education is best left in the hands of the ESL specialist. Sometimes these youngsters are treated as second-class citizens by their fellow students and even can become the targets of class bullies because of their weak classroom status.

FIRST STEPS

By the turn of the 21st century, class size steadily increased due to the continuing rise in our school's population. Classroom space was scarce, and many educational specialists had to vacate their teaching spaces to make way for new, grade-level classrooms. Music and art teachers started to teach from carts, which they rolled from classroom to classroom. ESL teachers were asked to *push-in* and *pull-aside* the ELLs in their regular classrooms as a space-saving measure.

This new push-in model of ESL instruction was even less desirable than its pull-out predecessor. More than ever before, ELLs felt like outsiders in their own classrooms. Groups of two to five youngsters sat apart from their other classmates and practiced language skills that were not connected to what the rest of the class was learning. In addition, the lack of space inside some of the classrooms made instruction difficult, and sound as well as movement from the mainstream teacher's lesson distracted those who were with the ESL teacher.

After completing a course on literacy strategies, I was anxious to try the newly learned ideas with my ELLs. Many of these reading strategies were more conducive to a whole-class setting in the mainstream. One strategy involved building a word wall to help young learners develop their literacy skills. Using this strategy, ELLs were exposed to reading-and-writing support the entire school day.

For the word-wall-word strategies to be effective, it simply was not enough just to display a word wall in the room. It was important to do a word wall as a part of daily instruction (Cunningham, 2000). Therefore, Eileen and I formed a team to create a word wall in her classroom. It eliminated the use of the push-in model, as we endeavored to create a new model of instruction for our ELLs.

Co-Teaching Off the Cuff

At the time, little was established in the literature concerning co-teaching as an ESL instructional delivery model at the elementary school level. Yet, after many years as an ESL teacher, I was interested in finding alternative ways for my ELLs, not only to acquire their new language skills but also to stay connected to learning in their classrooms. I went into Eileen's class and began to model word-wall lessons. After several weeks, Eileen and I developed a routine with our word-wall activities. At the beginning of each week, we introduced six new words. Eileen and I took turns directing students to write each word and to chant the spellings of new words. As the week progressed, we played word games to reinforce the words on the wall.

For the remainder of the school year, one of us led full-class word-wall activities, while the other circulated throughout the room and assisted ELLs and other students who needed support or clarification regarding what they had to do and learn. Soon enough, other first-grade teachers became curious about what we were doing. Eileen invited her peers into the classroom to view our word wall and observe some of our shared activities. In a few years' time, pairs of ESL and mainstream teachers had built word walls in every classroom in grades K-3.

DEVELOPING CO-TEACHING MODELS

Co-teaching patterns began to emerge through team-teaching practice and simple trial-and-error. Some paired teams of ESL and mainstream teachers preferred one or two classroom configurations to deliver instruction, while others experimented with a variety of ideas. Table 4.1 identifies various ESL co-teaching models.

Co-teaching Procedures and Strategies

Co-teaching literacy instruction using word walls provided the framework and established routines for learning that benefited all students in the classroom. Using the development of word walls and various reinforcement activities, both the ESL and mainstream teaching teams established certain instructional procedures that were followed on a weekly basis. These procedures made lesson planning more predictable and streamlined.

Students, particularly ELLs, benefitted from the routines because they could predict what was expected of them and readily participate in the mainstream setting. Table 4.2 illustrates how we instituted a lesson-plan pattern

Table 4.1

<i>Model Type</i>	<i>Model Description</i>
One Student Group: One Lead Teacher and One Teacher <i>Teaching on Purpose</i>	The mainstream and ESL teachers take turns assuming the lead role. One leads while the other provides mini-lessons to individuals or small groups to pre-teach or clarify a concept or skill.
One Student Group: Two Teachers Teach the Same Content	Both teachers direct a whole-class lesson and work cooperatively to teach the same lesson at the same time
Two Student Groups: Two Teachers Teach the Same Content	Students are divided into two learning groups; teachers engage in parallel teaching, presenting the same content while employing differentiated learning strategies.
Two Student Groups: One Re-teaches; One Teaches Alternative Information	Flexible grouping provides students at various proficiency levels with the support they need for specific content; student group composition changes as needed.
Multiple Student Groups: Two Teachers Monitor/Teach	Multiple groupings allow both teachers to monitor and facilitate student work while targeting selected students with assistance for their unique learning needs.

Table 4.2

<i>ESL Co-Teaching General Plan: Grade 1</i>					
<i>Days</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>
Literacy Instruction	Introduce new word wall words	Reader's Workshop	Word Wall Activity	Writer's Workshop	Word Wall Activity
Co-Teaching Strategy	One Lead Teacher and One Teacher <i>Teaching on Purpose</i>	Two Teachers Monitor/Teach	One Lead Teacher and One Teacher <i>Teaching on Purpose</i>	Two Teachers Monitor/Teach	One Lead Teacher and One Teacher <i>Teaching on Purpose</i>

that specified what literacy activity and accompanying co-teaching model would be applied according to the days of the week.

Why Did Co-teaching Capture the Faculty's Attention?

Our practice affirmed that good partnerships fundamentally help educators support one another when they have a common goal. Today's classrooms have many different challenges, and working with a colleague to meet those challenges is far superior to working in isolation, as teachers frequently do (Blase & Kirby, 2009).

Classroom teachers must often put forth much effort to maintain high expectations for all students, especially for ELLs who may not be able to participate fully in general classroom activities. Co-teaching allowed our ESL and mainstream teachers to share responsibility and lighten the workload in order to differentiate instruction for their students. Our co-teachers modified and adapted classroom and homework materials. Together, they furnished the necessary literacy strategies ELLs need to meet with academic success.

According to Zwart, Wubbels, Bergen, and Bolhuis (2007), much has been written describing the advantages of reciprocal peer coaching for in-class professional development. Peer coaching is a strategy for educators that facilitates the discussion of shared teaching practices. It also promotes cooperative interaction among teachers to ensure quality instruction for all students. A peer-coaching opportunity is often created when co-teaching relationships are established. When teaching teams systematically attempt new lesson ideas, they are better able to provide insight to each other through shared observations and reflections.

Co-teaching lessons can form favorable conditions for ESL and mainstream teachers to learn new problem-solving strategies and classroom management techniques. Teachers frequently feel not only supported in their instructional efforts but also share an equal responsibility to help all students succeed. For our co-teaching teams, working cooperatively eliminated the *your versus my students* mentality. Both teachers on each team were able support each other to include all students in the learning process. In this way, there were common goals set and a sense of mutual accountability in achieving those goals.

HOW TO GET STARTED WITH GRASSROOTS CO-TEACHING

If you are interested in making an innovative change such as co-teaching, here are some basic ideas to help you get started:

- *Begin from where you are.* In this case, ESL teachers have already been working inside the general education classrooms. Both the mainstream and ESL teacher agreed to change *how* they delivered instruction. You may wish to start by reflecting on all existing and potential collaborative practices.
- *Spread the word.* Let colleagues know *how* you are working differently in the general education classroom. You may also want to informally share some of the strategies you have implemented with administrators.
- *Showcase the results.* When other teachers viewed the word-wall activities, they too wanted to participate in building a word wall for their classrooms. Showcasing helps others learn *how* it could be accomplished.
- *Build trust.* According to Fullan (2001), the most important factor common to every successful change is the development of strong relationships, which foster meaningful cooperation. Creating trusting relationships is *how* you can build a co-teaching partnership.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Much time and attention must be focused on the success of the co-teaching team's collaborative relationship. However, other professional affiliations are also necessary to sustain a co-teaching plan. Grassroots co-teaching requires a combination of direct teacher leadership as well as cooperation from key decision-makers.

After co-teachers have developed partnerships with one another, they then must establish partnerships with all administrators who can lend their support in terms of the scheduling of classes, the development of necessary resources, time for joint lesson planning, and the careful placement of ELLs in general education classrooms.

REFERENCES

- Blasé, J., & Kirby, P. C. (2009). *Bringing out the best in teachers: What effective principals do* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Cunningham, P. M. (2000). *Phonics they use: Words for reading and writing*. New York: Longman.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M. G. (2008). Co-teaching in the ESL classroom. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 74(2), 8–14.