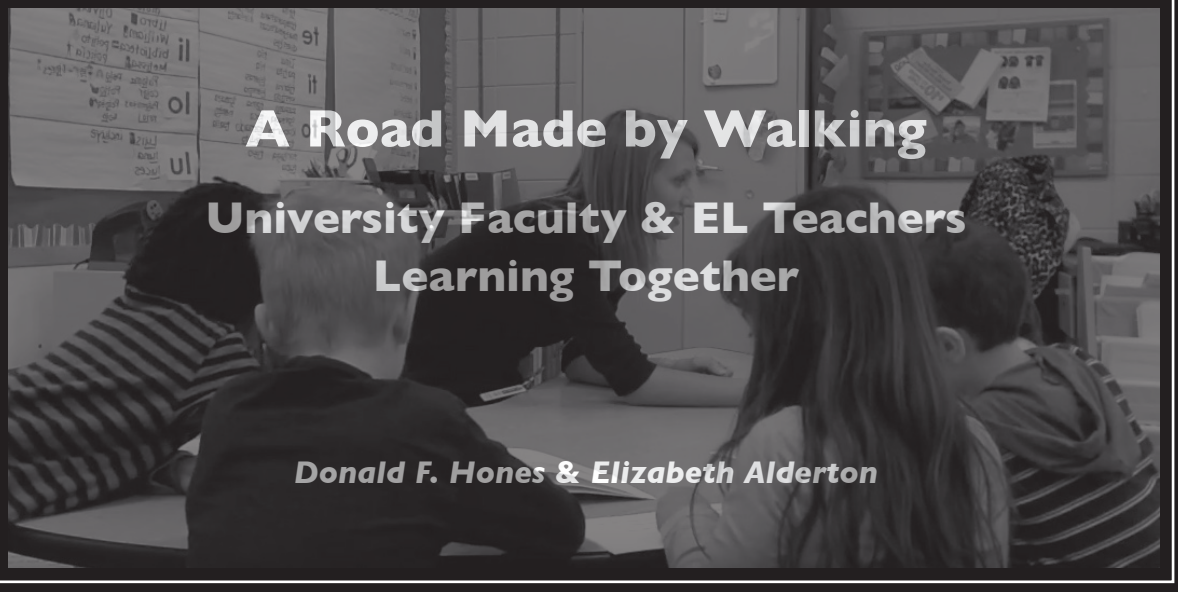

A Road Made by Walking

University Faculty & EL Teachers Learning Together

Donald F. Hones & Elizabeth Alderton

Introduction

Se hace el camino por caminar/One makes the road by walking.

Antonio Machado

You have to know what the English Language Learner's strengths are. I work really hard to build on what they already know in order to get to a new place. I think a lot of teachers forget to do that.

Katie Corson
bilingual kindergarten teacher

The visual aspect, seeing it in person is so important. I can lecture about it, but unless I can make it concrete for my students it really doesn't have the same impact.

Elizabeth Alderton
teacher educator

One of the pressing issues facing public schools in the United States is the challenge of providing a quality education to English Learners (ELs). By 2011 the number of non-native speakers of English in the nation's classrooms had reached 10% of the overall student population, and in some schools that percentage is much higher (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

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Photographs accompanying article are by Elizabeth Alderton.

According to the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE, 2014), the challenges facing these students and their schools are many:

> A difference in language is the first thing that sets ELLs apart from their native English-speaking peers. Nearly 80% of ELLs come to school speaking Spanish as their first language, while the remaining 20% come from more than 400 different language backgrounds. In addition, ELLs are more likely than their English-proficient classmates to live in poverty, reside in large urban settings, and have parents with low levels of formal education. ELLs also tend to be enrolled in schools struggling with low academic performance and placed in less-demanding courses. (NCEE, 2014)

School districts, pressured by the guidelines of No Child Left Behind, hired more EL teachers. However, programs implemented often consist of pull-out or push-in models: In each case, the EL teacher works with a small number of students, in the hallway, in a small room, or in the back of the class.

Although the pullout model can have the benefit of providing learners with safe one-on-one or small group instruction that lowers their anxiety and thus their affective filters (Goldenberg, 2008; Harklau 1999), longitudinal studies have shown this model to be the weakest in terms of academic preparation over time (Collier & Thomas, 2012).

Studies suggest that the push-in model can be more effective by increasing opportunity for ELs to interact with native English-speaking peers to develop social language and maintain access to important academic content in the classroom (Abdallah, 2009; Theoharis, 2007).

Yet, attention remains focused on an English as Second Language (ESL) teacher working one-on-one or in small groups in someone else's room. In both the pull-out and push-in models, the regular classroom teachers tend to do nothing to change their teaching to more effectively support all learners in the classroom (Reynolds, Jiao, Nolin-Smith, & O'Brien, 2012). Where a co-teaching variant of push-in could help support all students, the equal sharing of teaching and assessing responsibilities between the general educator and the EL professional is seldom found in our schools (DelliCarpini, 2009; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2012).

A parallel divide between regular education and EL is common in the teacher preparation programs at the university level. Where EL or bilingual teacher preparation programs exist, they often reside on the margins of the elementary or secondary teacher licensure programs.

Such is the case at our university. Although we have had 16 years of Title VII and Title III grant support for the preparation of teachers to work successfully with EL students, our educational efforts have been limited mostly to those individuals interested in licensure in ESL or bilingual education.

The vast majority of the teachers licensed at our institution graduate with very little knowledge of how to work successfully with EL students. The need to

prepare all teachers for work with special needs students has been addressed by a full department of special education faculty. Yet, in ESL and bilingual education we have only two faculty members, despite the continuing need to prepare all teachers for a growing population of culturally and linguistically diverse students.

This is made clear with our state requirements of an edTPA for our student teachers. Academic language is an aspect of this student teaching assessment that is particularly hard for many of our general education students to grasp, yet it is fundamental to understanding how to support the achievement of EL students and clear that it needs to be explicitly addressed in courses aimed at all pre-service teachers (Chamot, 2009; Cummins, 1980).

Teacher collaborations are proven strategies for helping students with diverse backgrounds, such as ELs, to achieve academic success (Bell & Baecher, 2012; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). A collaboration between university faculty and ESL and bilingual teachers in area schools would, we felt, best serve the needs of our pre-service teachers as well as the needs of the schools and school districts in our service area.

The EL Teacher/ Education Faculty Collaboration

Realizing the continuing need to promote academic success for EL students, support EL and bilingual professionals in the field, and prepare all pre-service teachers for their work with culturally and linguistically diverse students, a collaborative program was developed between content area education faculty at our university and EL and bilingual teachers in area school districts. Participants were recruited to the project as a professional development opportunity.

Faculty members who applied represented expertise in the areas of social studies, language arts, reading, and mathematics. All of the teacher participants were graduates of our licensure program with varying years of teaching experience. Between 2012-2016, 10 faculty members worked with 12 classroom teachers in these collaborative projects.

The stated goals of the projects have been to share faculty content knowledge and EL teacher expertise in the schools and enhance curriculum and instruction courses at the university to include a stronger emphasis on working successfully with EL students. The university faculty involved have participated in group meetings and shared readings, including the texts *Making Content Comprehensible for English Learners: The SIOP Model* (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013), *99 Ideas and Activities for Teaching English Learners with the SIOP Model* (Vogt & Echevevarria, 2008), and *Collaboration and Co-Teaching* (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). The university faculty have also shared reflections on readings and their experiences in the field in online discussions and also in partner meetings in the classrooms of collaborating teachers at least twice each semester. The university faculty have in addition responded to questionnaires and submitted yearly reports.

Through a process of participant observation and narrative inquiry the dialogues between three teachers and three university professors are represented below (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2010; Hones, 1998). The partners share their experiences with this collaboration as well as their insights regarding the directions schools and teacher education need to undertake to promote the achievement of non-native speakers of English.

Three major themes emerge in these narrative dialogues. In the first, Katie Corson, a bilingual kindergarten teacher, and Elizabeth Alderton, a professor of language and literacy, focus on strategies to make connections between teachers and bilingual students and their families.

In the second dialogue, Alma Cendejas Ruiz, a bilingual fourth grade teacher, and Ava McCall, a professor of curriculum and instruction, discuss the importance of their collaboration for developing social studies knowledge among children while developing language objectives and academic vocabulary awareness among pre-service teachers.

In the third dialogue, Judy Mehn, an elementary ESL teacher, and Michelina Manzi, a professor of language and literacy, highlight the importance of their collaboration for building school and university partnerships and the need for preparing all teachers to successfully co-teach.

Reaching All Students and Parents

Elizabeth Alderton & Katie Corson

It was early April in northeast Wisconsin and the wind still packed an icy chill as we approached the elementary school. Outside, a twenty-foot high pencil welcomed visitors at the school doors. Inside, guests were welcomed in English and Spanish, as this school hosts a dual language program

Collaboration to help learning at all levels: students, K-12 teachers, university faculty, and future teachers.

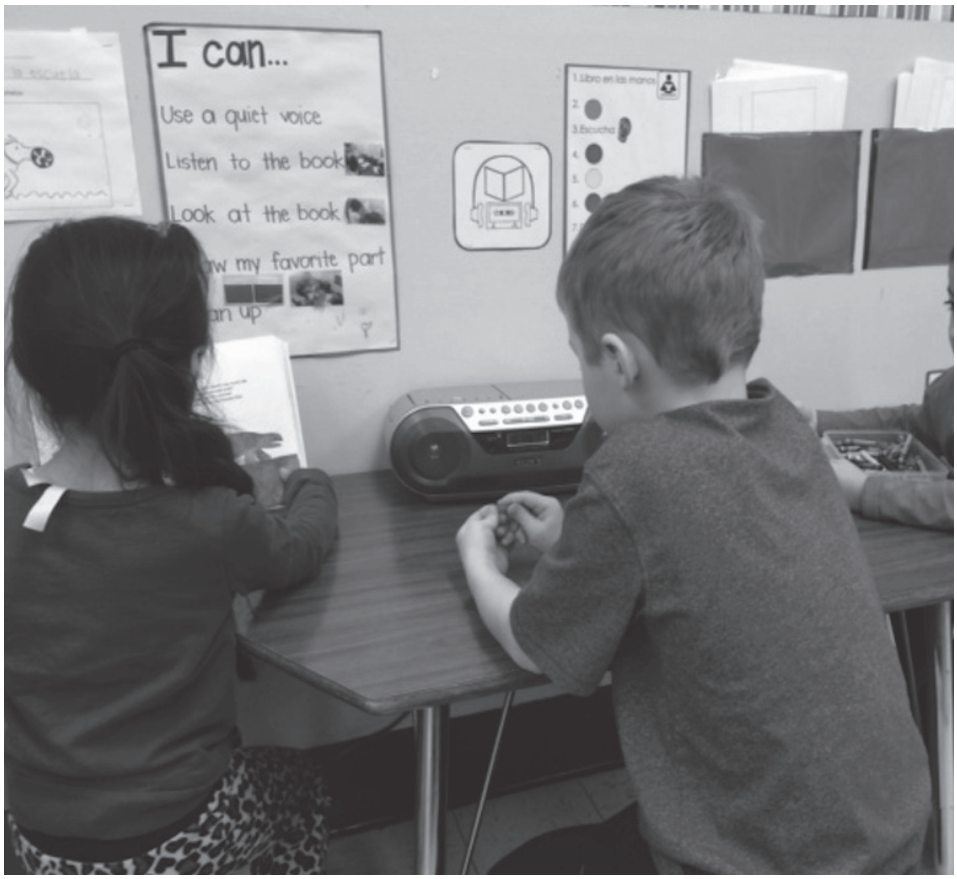
Proceeding down the hall and entering the bilingual kindergarten classroom, one noticed the variety of print in both languages on the walls, cognate charts, the alphabet, animals, all in English and Spanish. The room was comfortable, colorful, and divided in a way to allow space for multiple activities.

Katie Corson, a second-year teacher still energetic at the end of the school day, invited us to sit down on two comfortable boxes that also store books. Elizabeth Alderton, an equally energetic faculty member from the department of language and literacy, greeted Katie with a warmth and familiarity that comes from a successful collaboration. They readily shared ideas with each other and the excitement they had for their work together was contagious.

I asked Katie, "When you were taking classes with us at the university, you said, 'All students should learn how to work with ELs.'" Can you tell about how you are sharing that knowledge with Elizabeth, who works with all students?"

KATIE: Elizabeth gave me a list of resources and she also opened my eyes to blogging. Parents are technology-driven, as are our students, and having the resources online for the parents is huge. The kids will come in and say "We sang our song last night, you have it on the blog." They are bringing what they learn into the home and parents are feeling more a part of it, whether they speak that language or not. The parents love it because they have access to the songs that their kids are singing, and activities they can do at home.

ELIZABETH: We were talking about communicating with parents. You have that triad of school, home and students, and there are such cool things going on in Katie's classroom that finding ways to share it at home really builds support. She is so creative, has so much energy, so much to share. What I can take back to my 6-12 pre-service teachers are examples of how child-centered rooms can be. Somehow, when we get to grades 6-12 it often becomes more teacher-centered. I can say, it works in kindergarten, why wouldn't it work in the upper grades? At the same time I can give them the statistics of how we turn kids off from school in the upper grades. Finally, I bring back ideas about how second language learning happens, and how they have to make changes and differentiation if they have ELLs in their classrooms.



Students have objectives or "I can" statements availabke to them in the classroom to help them understand what they are able to do, which is then brought back to the higher education setting as a result of the collaboration.

Katie and Elizabeth wanted to show the blog that they had developed that students and parents could access. We moved to the front of the room, and Katie projected the blog onto the Smartboard. The pages were in Spanish and English, and I was shown the song that the students had practiced in class and that they shared with their families at home. I asked them, "How do we expand this the knowledge, this understanding of the importance of language and culture, to all teachers?"

KATIE: You have to know what ELs' strengths are. I work really hard to build on what they already know in order to get to a new place. I think a lot of teachers forget to do that. With all of my students being second language learners in either Spanish or English, I work hard to use words that have cognates in both languages, I work hard to use words that have visuals, words they use at home and words they hear me use every day. If they don't have that foundation they will never get to where you want them to be.

ELIZABETH: Having opportunities like this for other faculty is very important. I think you learn so much just being in the classroom again. The SIOP model helps as well, and elements such as the focus on interaction.

KATIE: I think students need to see what it is like working with EL children. Whether seeing short videos, or even better, to spend the whole day in a classroom, a classroom where the instruction is in Spanish, and you can get a sense of how hard it is to learn in your non-dominant language.

ELIZABETH: The visual aspect, seeing it in person is so important. I can lecture about it, but unless I can make it concrete for my students it really doesn't have the same impact.

Skills for All Teachers of ELs

Ava McCall* & *Alma Cendejas Ruiz

Ava McCall has spent a lifetime working with children and teachers in the area of social studies. Her commitment to social justice, immigrant, and refugee concerns has led her to earlier collaborations with Hmong American teachers and

the development of a Hmong curriculum for the elementary grades.

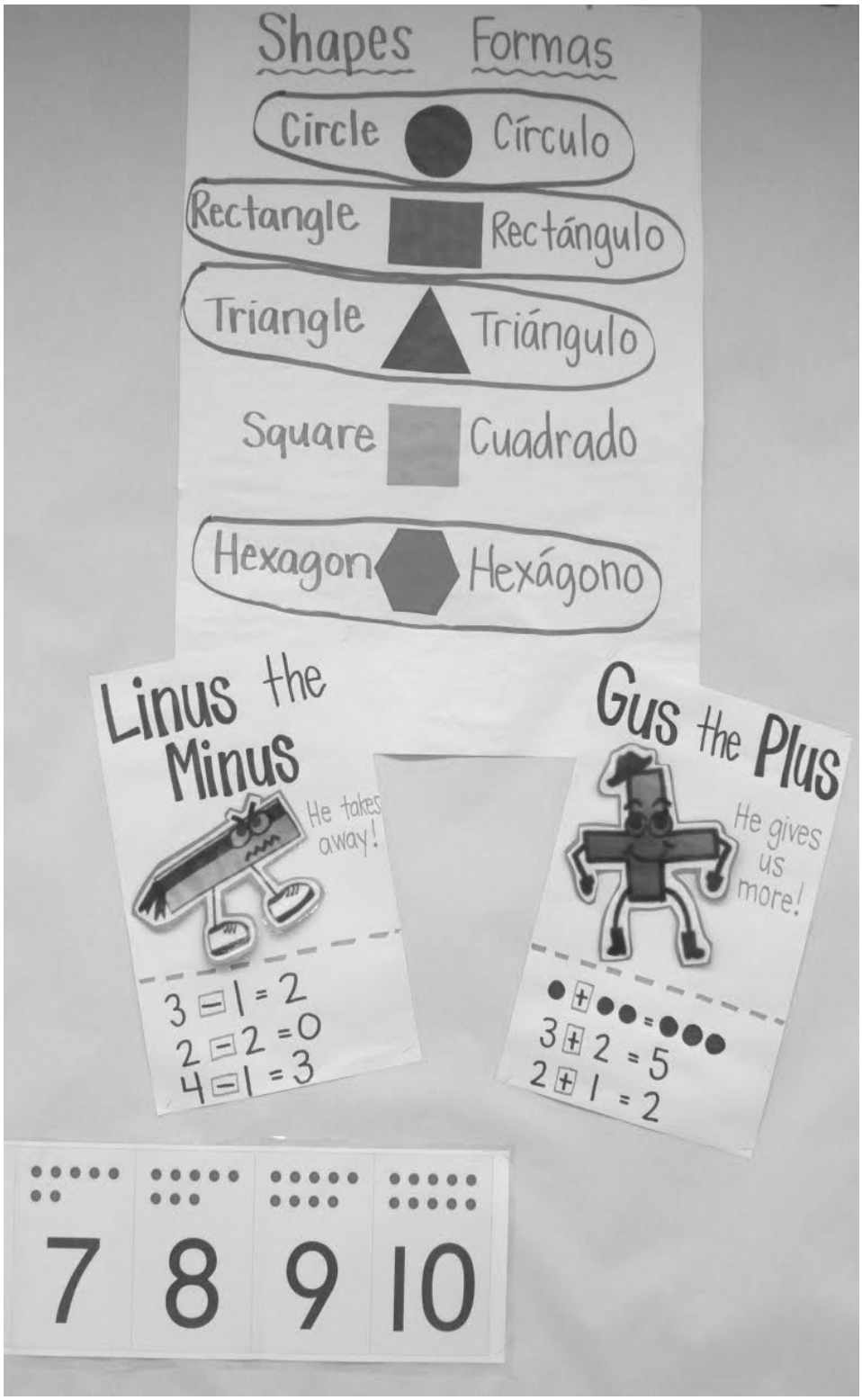
Alma Cendejas Ruiz came through our university's EL and bilingual education program with prior experience as a preschool teacher, and in her current fourth grade classroom she was a natural. Her classroom was a lively, warm place, filled with a feeling of mutual respect. Alma had helped Professor McCall with many ideas and strategies that all teachers can practice with ELs. Among these was the focus on providing all students with the content and language objectives each day that make academic vocabulary explicit.

AVA: I observed Alma teach a social studies lesson on one of the regions in the United States. She taught the lesson in Spanish, which I do not speak. However, because she used many visual aids, gestures, and some of the Spanish words were similar to English, I could follow the main ideas in her lessons. She modeled important practices in ESL/bilingual teaching: setting objectives for her lesson, defining vocabulary words, using visual aids, asking students to process verbally what they were learning with a partner or small group, using graphic organizers for students to record their learning, and completing research projects in small groups.

Back in my own classroom, I added content objectives to my syllabus and made time at the beginning of each session to explain the objectives to the students so they knew what I wanted them to learn by the end of class. Also I show and state the vocabulary at the beginning of each class session, and check that students understand the meaning of the vocabulary before we begin class activities. I invited students to explain as much vocabulary as they were able and I built on their ideas to make sure everyone had an understanding of the vocabulary we used during the class session.

Alma, what was the most beneficial thing about working with an education faculty member, especially in terms of her background in social studies?

ALMA: Being a first year teacher, I found all the resources that Dr. McCall shared with me to be very helpful. She shared units that she herself created, aligning them to our state standards. I also used websites that she recommended, www.wisconsinhistory.org, for example, to implement in my teaching. I also enjoyed having Dr. McCall come to observe my teaching and the bilingual program. I teach social studies in Spanish and it was great to discuss the strategies and methods that I use and how I can implement it when I teach English as well. We have discussed lesson plans and she provided me the "big idea" of each standard and not just activities that I can use in the classroom. I feel that my students understood the bigger picture of a lesson because of how well she communicated with me with lesson ideas.



Throughout the classroom visuals show literacy in both languages.

What do you believe all pre-service teachers should know about working with EL students?

ALMA: I believe that all teachers should know that each child is creative and learns in a different way. You should not assume that the students have the background knowledge of any content area and teach them all from the bottom. I believe that teachers should keep in mind that students should be challenged academically and also in their listening, speaking, writing, and reading domains. Teachers should include realia, pictures, and TPR in their teaching to help get the lesson across. Overall, students are imaginative and creative, they are willing to learn if they have someone who is setting goals for them and praising them for all of their accomplishments, no matter how small.

Partnerships and Co-Teaching

Michelina Manzi & Judy Mehn

Research on best practice illustrates that content teachers and EL teachers need to work as equals in classroom settings, each contributing their knowledge and skills to support all students (Delli-Carpini, 2009; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). Although co-teaching may be a stated goal of the push-in model, in actual practice it is much more common to see the EL teacher reduced to a glorified aide in the back of the room (or, in one local case, in the cloak room).

It seems clear that the best way to address this need is to prepare all teachers to work as co-teachers. In the collaboration between Michelina Manzi and Judy Mehn this concept began to take on real life. Michelina, a language and literacy professor with years of teaching, including cross-cultural and family education experience, engaged three of her classes of undergraduates in an elementary school setting. Students learned to incorporate strategies for ELs into individual and small group reading sessions with students. Several grade level teachers participated.

The success of this project was due in part to the preparatory work done by Judy Mehn, an experienced EL teacher who goes into several classrooms each day and who has built bridges with her grade-level colleagues while she models effective practice with small groups of EL students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Michelina, what have your university language and literacy students learned through this experience?

MICHELINA: My students are more aware of the needs of new language learners, the value of modeling to be inclusive of EL children, as opposed to leaving it all to the special language teacher. They use more pictures, varieties of language descriptions, much modeling (which is not that easy to instill whether they are working with EL children or not), the value of having similar language speakers available to EL language learners, the basic language and learning needs of children who come without English to the local public school.

Judy, I have seen your daily schedule and the amount of classroom visits you make. The push-in model that is often implemented, when it relies on an EL teacher to work separately from the grade level teacher, seems to have its limitations. What are your thoughts on co-teaching?

JUDY: The benefit of co-teaching comes with the modeling of instruction and the balance of teaching practices in the classroom that allow students to progress in language when teachers work as a team. For example, The EL teacher may offer language support to whole group instruction by creating word banks on the board as the classroom teacher is speaking to the whole group. The word bank would include specific academic vocabulary words that the students will need to understand and refer to during independent work time. Sometimes I help to create or find visuals needed for specific lessons, and sometimes the classroom teacher adds more to his/her lesson based on my input of what needs to be added. The great thing about co-teaching is the opportunity for the classroom teacher to carry over the knowledge of how to support the EL the rest of the school day.

How do you go about co-teaching, considering the number of classes that you visit?

JUDY: The other piece of the co-teaching practice is time spent collaborating. To work as a team, a game plan has to be set. With the number of teachers I have recently been assigned to, I have not figured out how to collaborate consistently with all of them to the extent that I want to. However, when the language needs are prioritized, I do my best to take the most time to collaborate before and after school with the classroom teachers who have the ELs with the highest language needs. Co-teaching allows time for the classroom teacher to become familiar with how the language abilities can be matched to the classroom lessons, and also proves to drive more focused instruction for both the EL and classroom teacher. Building relationships has been a powerful experience when collaborating with classroom teachers on a personal and professional level.

What has it been like working with Judy in a project of this scale, involving so many undergraduates and elementary classrooms?

MICHELINA: Judy and I met frequently at her school and she came into my classroom and provided some instruction for my students. She is very generous and I've learned a lot from her. I had all of my students in three classes engage in one-on- one tutoring at the elementary school, implementing best practices. The reflections from students were all very positive. In fact, they loved the mini placements best of all in each class. Thanks to Judy, the grade level teachers at the school were all part of the program and were also helpful.

If we are talking about an inclusive classroom, what are the benefits of co-teaching for all?

JUDY: The added bonus of co-teaching is that non-ELs in the classroom may also benefit from the best practices offered through the language supports given during whole group instruction. Non-ELs may also benefit during small group instruction when the EL teacher rotates a center or workshop station. I feel co-teaching is successful when the students do not know that I am an EL teacher, but consider me just another teacher in the classroom. I have found students tend to have more respect for me in the area of classroom management in co-teaching environments.

Themes and Outcomes in the Faculty-Teacher Dialogues

These three dialogues of collaboration between university faculty and EL and bilingual teachers suggest many positive

outcomes for individual participants, schools, and university programs. These include increased use of technology to improve parent-school communication, support for building academic vocabulary and reading strategies for children, redesigned curriculum in pre-service courses to include issues related to ELs, and professional development opportunities for university students, teachers, and professors.

Importance of Enriching EL Student Experiences in Schools

All of the participants in this collaboration spoke to the importance of enriching the experience of ELs through collaboration with university professors and their students. In Katie Corson's classroom, parents have become more involved in their children's studies with the support of a bilingual blog. In Alma Cendejas Ruiz's classroom, social studies curriculum has been enriched. Alma notes the benefits of this collaboration:

> I teach social studies in Spanish and it was great to discuss the strategies and methods that I use and how I can implement it when I teach English as well. We have discussed lesson plans and she provided me the "big idea" of each standard and not just activities that I can use in the classroom. I feel that my students understood the bigger picture of a lesson because of how well she communicated with me with lesson ideas.

In classrooms in Judy Mehn's school, children have received one-on-one support for reading from a phalanx of pre-service reading teachers. Over four years of collaborative projects, over four hundred EL students have benefited from the presence of a content area faculty person supporting their learning in the classroom.

Curricular and Instructional Changes Better Prepare All Teachers

At the university, professors have redesigned their curriculum and pedagogy to emphasize content and language objectives, building academic vocabulary, connecting to students' background knowledge, and utilizing visuals, realia, and many opportunities to interact in a student-centered classroom.

Katie Corson expressed well the importance of this knowledge that pre-service teachers can gain from these curricular changes:

> I think students need to see what it is like working with EL children. Whether seeing short videos, or even

Another view of classroom visuals showing literacy in both languages.

All students benefit from various groupings and strategies used to support ELs.

> better, to spend the whole day in a classroom, a classroom where the instruction is in Spanish, and you can get a sense of how hard it is to learn in your non-dominant language.

Over 400 undergraduate pre-service teachers have benefitted from curricular and instructional changes implemented by faculty, based on insights gleaned from experiences in EL and bilingual classrooms in the public schools.

Professional Growth Benefits All Participants in a Collaboration

All of the participants involved in these faculty-teacher collaborations have spoken of the professional growth they have experienced through the opportunity. They have been challenged to rethink instruction and curriculum design, as well as, in the case of university faculty, the role of languages other than English in the classroom.

Others have taken this collaborative effort further to present jointly at conferences and to discuss coauthoring journal articles. In this way the reach of these projects has been extensive, far beyond the immediate impact on the collaborating partners.

Recommendations

The success of these projects encourages us to promote more partnerships between higher education faculty and EL and bilingual teachers in the schools. Thus far, we have had only college of education faculty involved. Our colleagues in departments such as mathematics, English, history, and chemistry remain an untapped source of both content knowledge as well as pre-service teacher preparation. We need to find ways to engage those colleagues as well, especially those who work extensively with pre-service teachers.

Research on the needs of a growing number of EL students in U.S. schools underscores the urgency of preparing all pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills to work effectively with EL students (Lucas & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). The faculty partners involved in our collaborative projects have reported how simple changes, such as writing language and content objectives on the board or focusing on academic vocabulary, have made a great impact on the understanding of classroom teachers, teacher candidates, and their K-12 students. Skills are enhanced when teacher education students have the opportunity to actually work in school settings tutoring children.

Yet, the complexities of second language acquisition as well as the cultural challenges facing newcomers are not topics that can be covered quickly or easily. Two options are present: To develop a course for all pre-service teachers, focused on effective practice with EL students; or to illustrate in our practice at the university a model of co-teaching, involving content area faculty and EL and bilingual faculty. In effect, we should practice what we preach.

This brings us to a final recommendation: All pre-service teachers should be prepared with the knowledge and skills to co-teach in settings that value the contributions of both a content area teacher and an EL teacher. There is much to be gained from such a focus: benefits for EL and native speaking children, as well as an enriched professional atmosphere for all teachers in a school. EL teachers should not be confined to roles in the back of the classroom. Grade level and EL teachers have much to learn from each other and much to share.

In the university classroom, we can begin by pairing faculty who can address content as well as language acquisition needs. We can find ways to continue to build partnerships between pre-service teachers and EL students in school settings. If we wait for school districts to develop true co-teaching partnerships on their own, we may wait a long time.

Rather, we can present school districts with teachers who are prepared with the skills and knowledge to do the hard work of making an equal partnership work. When the universities prepare such teachers, co-teaching will have a better chance of implementation in public school classrooms.

It is hoped that one day all new teachers can walk into their first classrooms realizing, in the words of Michelina Manzi, "there is no difference between EL strategies and what I teach now" (Manzi, 2014). Together with their linguistically diverse students, parents, and colleagues, such teachers will be ready to make a new road by walking it.

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