# CONSTRUCTING TEACHER IDENTITY IN TEACHER COLLABORATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A TEACHER OF CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE ENGLISH LEARNERS?

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## ABSTRACT

Research calls for practice-based inquiry where language teachers conduct exploratory action research to transform their pedagogical practices to impact student achievement. This study builds on the research in practitioner inquiry, teacher collaboration, and teacher identity to investigate how a seventh-grade English Language Arts (ELA) teacher (Heather) constructed her identity as she collaborated with an ESL teacher (Amanda) to plan for and teach ESL students in a collaboratively taught ELA classroom. Our qualitative inquiry included data gathered from two collaborative cycles with three semi-structured interviews, two collaborative planning sessions, fieldnotes of the collaborative teaching sessions, and two reflective journals authored by the ELA teacher. The findings illustrate that Heather constructed her teacher identity as a novice teacher with surface-level understandings of ESL students and a limited knowledge about how to plan for the ESL students in her classroom. Collaboration did not disrupt her deficit student perspectives nor did this partnership pave the way for Heather's renewed understandings about how to teach ESL students in the ELA classroom. Collaboration, instead, provided Heather access to Amanda, whom Heather positioned as an experienced content teacher who could make the content accessible to ESL students.

## KEYWORDS

**English as a second language, practitioner inquiry, qualitative exploratory case study, teacher collaboration, teacher identity, teacher responsibility**

## HOW TO CITE

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***Highlights***

- *A qualitative exploratory case study explored teacher identity construction in a collaborative partnership between an ESL and ELA content teacher.*
- *The ESL teacher served dual participatory roles as the researcher and the ESL teacher.*
- *The ELA teacher constructed her teacher identity as a novice teacher with surface-level understandings of ESL students.*
- *Collaboration did not disrupt the ELA teacher's deficit student perspectives nor did this partnership pave the way for Heather's renewed understandings nor lead her to position herself as a teacher of ESL students.*

## INTRODUCTION

Recent research calls for practice-based inquiry where language teachers conduct exploratory action research and engage in collaboration to transform their pedagogical practices (Rebolledo et al., 2016; Uştuk and Çomoğlu, 2019) with the aim of improving student achievement. This teacher-led approach often rejects top-down mandates for professional development and creates reflective opportunities (Uştuk and Çomoğlu, 2021) for teachers to 'understand why things are the way they are and to imagine and enact ways to make them better' (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2005: 43–44). Despite calls for increased action research, there are few known studies where teachers attempt to answer this call for bottom-up professional development where teachers pursue and participate in opportunities for their own learning outcomes. This is most likely because teachers favor practice over research and/or lack the knowledge about how to conduct academic research about their own practice (Dikilitaş and Griffiths, 2017; Hanks 2017). In response to this

call, the current study explores how a practicing English as a second language (ESL) teacher worked to provide equitable educational opportunities for linguistically diverse students through a collaboration with an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher in a U.S. middle school. No known studies report the influences of ESL teachers' collaboration on content teachers' beliefs or assumptions related to working with ESL students. Thus, our current study investigated how a seventh-grade ELA teacher constructed her professional identity as she collaborated with an ESL teacher to plan for and teach ESL students in a collaboratively taught ELA classroom.

## Teacher Identity Construction in Teacher Collaboration

The teacher identity research in language teacher education has concluded that becoming a teacher means and requires constructing a professional identity as a teacher (Barkhuizen, 2017; Varghese et al., 2016), and teacher learning and teaching practice are informed by that professional identity (Reeves, 2018; Yazan and Lindahl, 2020). Research also converges on the finding that every time teachers make instructional decisions and take action, they agentively construct and enact an identity. Acknowledging the multiplicity of definitions available for teacher identity, for the purpose of the current study, we define teacher identity as 'teachers' dynamic self-conception and imagination of themselves as teachers, which shifts as they participate in varying communities, interact with other individuals, and position themselves (and are positioned by others) in social contexts' (Yazan, 2018: 21). We locate teacher learning in a collaborative relationship between an ELA and an ESL teacher and conceptually assume that such professional learning in a small community would include negotiation and renegotiation of professional identities.

We argue that teacher identity development in this collaborative partnership is a crucial component of learning especially when teacher learning is conceptualized as teacher identity construction (Beijaard, 2019). More directly, the ways that collaborating teachers exercise their own agency in this partnership can provide insights into the identity work they engage in during their collaborative learning partnership (Olsen, 2016). Studies emphasize that content teachers' lack of knowledge of language instruction (DelliCarpini, 2021) and the rigorous content-specific demands (Duff, 2001) in the content classroom can lead to teachers' low expectation for student outcomes and overall deficit student perspectives (Harklau, 2000; Yoon, 2008). For example, Yoon (2008) showed how three ELA teachers' beliefs paralleled their pedagogical practices related to teaching linguistically diverse students. In Yoon's study, Mrs. Taylor viewed herself as an ELA content teacher and did not assume the responsibility for her ESL students' language learning. Her perspective led her to view ESL students' language needs from a deficit perspective, which caused the students to feel invisible, powerless, and unwilling to participate in her classroom. Duff (2001) found that the content teacher's emphasis on the content standard and continuous references to pop culture in the U.S. created this teacher's assumption of a monolingual American culture that all people from the U.S. seemingly share. This meant that the content teacher did not always attend to the ESL students' language and content needs in the content classroom because the students did not understand these cultural references and/or relate to the monolingual cultural assumption. Harklau (2000) pointed out how such perceptions of ESL students create student representations, which led to different educational trajectories over the course of multiple years in public high schools and local universities for the ESL students.

The above studies demonstrated the content teacher's priority of the content standard (Duff, 2001; Yoon, 2008) and their overall unpreparedness to work with culturally and linguistically diverse students (Rubinstein-Avila and Lee, 2014). Despite the applicability of the studies' findings, all previous studies report content teachers working in isolation without the support of the ESL teacher.

## Educational Policy and Professional Development in the United States

In the U.S., equitable and equal opportunities for all students, including ESL students, have been encoded in national law (See Lau v. Nichols of 1974 and the Equal Educational Opportunity Act of 1974). Even with requirements for equity and equal educational opportunity, the early 2000s ushered in the age of standardization and accountability in response to the national concern for improved student performance in reading and mathematics. President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) into law in 2002. During the time of this study (2016–2017), NCLB was the primary educational policy in the United States. This law required all students, regardless of English language proficiency or time spent in the United States, to attain reading and math achievement as measured on standardized assessments. Educational researchers overwhelming argued that NCLB is the most restrictive educational policy in U.S. history for ESL students because this law requires ESL students to show proficiency in English on standardized assessments without having first the opportunity to learn English (Giles et al., 2020; Evans and Hornberger, 2005; García and Otheguy, 2016; Mahoney, 2017; Menken 2008). Garcia and Ortheguy (2016: 10) compared the performance on standardized assessments for ESL students to the performance of their monolingual English-speaking peers using a drummer analogy: 'one of the drummers [a monolingual English speaker typically born in the United States] gets two sticks, one for each hand, while the other [an ESL student] is forced to play with only one stick in one hand, the other hand tied behind the back'. This analogy plainly points out the inequities inherent in the law for ESL students and ultimately explains the unfairness of its stipulations for this student population.

In 2015, NCLB was reauthorized to become the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This reauthorization, however, only delegated the states as the primary constituents responsible for determining the assessment for standardization. While purportedly providing more flexibility to the states, ESSA still required that states report student performance on standardized assessments to the federal government with the understanding that student academic performance determines the amount of funding given from the federal government. This fact still expects ESL students to show similar academic and

language proficiency in English as their monolingual peers, ultimately perpetuating English-only ideologies (Giles and Yazan, 2020) and positioning ESL students as deficient learners (Ravitch, 2016). Neither NCLB nor ESSA stipulate required teacher training or professional development for working with linguistically and culturally diverse students, leaving state departments of education to determine such appropriate training.

The state of this study required no specific training in working with ESL students prior to earning a teaching certificate in any field of study. The practical implications meant that degree conferring institutions likewise did not require their teacher candidates to take courses in working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. Such limited coursework and training help explain way many teachers across the nation report feeling unprepared to work with ESL students once they begin teaching (Rubinstein-Avila and Lee, 2014). Traditional professional development consequently for practicing teachers in the U.S. is often characterized by one person or group of people making generalizations about teaching and learning usually in large group settings (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). What is *learned* rarely makes its way through the classroom door to influence the teacher's actual pedagogical practice (Smith, 2017). We contend that such learning opportunities are ineffective because they are not relevant to classroom practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Smith, 2017; Wei et al., 2010) because of their 'short, episodic, and disconnected' nature (Wei et al., 2010:1). We argue that professional development should then be content-specific (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017) and relevant to teachers' actual practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Wei et al., 2010) and take place routinely in authentic classroom environments (Bocala, 2015). We also conceive that teacher collaboration can be the most effective form of this professional development because teachers share expertise, plan lessons together, and assume shared teaching roles with the goal of impacting student achievement (Giles, 2019; Giles and Yazan, 2020).

### Teacher Collaboration

Previous studies report the benefits of ESL and content teachers' collaborations (Honigsfeld and Dove, 2022). Teachers state the benefits of collaboration when teachers divide planning and teaching responsibilities, and when teachers work toward the shared goal of improved student learning outcomes (Giles, 2020; Giles and Yazan, 2020; Martin-Beltrán and Peercy, 2014; Peercy et al., 2016). While the collaborative benefits are documented, the benefits do not negate the challenges in collaboration, which include divergent pedagogical beliefs (Arkoudis, 2003), conflicting schedules (Peercy et al., 2016), and unequal responsibilities (Giles, 2018). The ESL teacher's perceived inferior status is also well documented in earlier studies (Ahmed Hersi et al., 2016; Arkoudis, 2003, Creese, 2002; McClure and Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). According to Creese (2002), one student viewed the ESL teacher as the less 'proper' teacher because both the ESL and content teachers explained the lesson objective differently even when the content teacher attempted to justify the ESL teacher's role to the student in the classroom. This study made clear that students can perceive the ESL teacher's relegation in the co-taught classroom. Different racial constructions (McClure and Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010), an overemphasis of the content standard (Ahmed Hersi et al., and Lewis, 2016), divergent pedagogical beliefs (Arkoudis, 2003), and dissimilar teaching styles (Creese, 2002) can worsen the ESL teacher's relegation and make sustaining the collaborative partnership much more difficult. Such studies, while clearly explaining the challenges, do not show the ESL teacher assuming a classroom role beyond that of a classroom assistant. This current study, however, is distinct because the ESL teacher in this study, also the lead researcher, must have had a planning and teaching role for the experience to involve collaboration. Such an understanding about collaboration and practitioner research is important as we now turn to discuss the study's methodology.

## METHODOLOGY

We employed an exploratory qualitative case study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016) to explore how Heather (all names are pseudonyms except for the names of the authors) constructed her teacher identity while collaborating with Amanda, the ESL teacher, in a seventh grade collaboratively taught ELA classroom in a Southeastern U.S. suburban city. Data collection methods included three semi-structured interviews, two collaborative planning sessions, Amanda's fieldnotes of the collaborative teaching sessions, and Heather's two rounds of reflective journals. To analyze teacher identity constructions in ESL and content teachers' collaboration, we focused on understanding how teachers viewed themselves, each other, and ESL students as they co-planned and co-taught ESL students, assumed multiple responsibilities, and engaged in collaboration. That understanding can provide further insights into teachers' 'dynamic self-conception and imagination of themselves as teachers' (Yazan, 2018: 21) of ESL students in relation to students, colleagues, subject matter, pedagogy, and context because we theorize teacher identity as relational. This framework included the content teacher's discursive constructions of (a) ESL students, (b) ESL instructional practices, (c) ESL teaching in the content classroom, (d) socio-educational context, and (e) the ESL teacher (see Uzum et al., forthcoming). Building on the research literature in teacher collaboration and teacher identity, our study utilized practitioner inquiry to address the following research question: How did an ELA teacher (Heather) construct her teacher identity in working with the ESL teacher (Amanda) in a seventh grade collaboratively taught classroom in the Southeastern U.S.?

### The School and Classroom Context

Starcreek Middle School was the research site of this study and served a little over 800 students during the 2016–2017 school year. Twenty-six students were identified as ESL students, which meant these students indicated an additional language on a home language survey at registration and made a qualifying score (4.7 or below) on the World-class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA)-Access Placement Test (W-APT), the initial English language proficiency assessment specified by state and district

regulations (See Table 1 for school demographic data during the 2016–2017 school year). We understand that there are more inclusive ways to speak about this culturally and linguistically diverse student population other than referring to the students as "ESL students." Such terminology does not reflect our own personal beliefs about these students. This school and district specified an ESL program model, so we used the terminology that most appropriately explained the school context, which was ESL students. All students at Starcreek were typically enrolled in four core classes (i.e., ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies), physical education, a reading strategies class, and an elective class of their choice. The ESL students took a language class taught by Amanda in place of a reading strategies class. Amanda, the only ESL teacher at the school, taught the 55-minute language class where she sought to build a learning community and teach academic language through content-related topics. Most of the ESL students' language instruction occurred in content area classrooms since ESL students had only 55 minutes with Amanda daily.

| Starcreek Middle School | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Total Students:** | approximately 800 students | | |
| **Total ESL Students:** | 26 students | **Percentage:** 3.25% | |
| | **Language** | **Total Number of Students** | **Percentage** |
| | Spanish | 21 | 81% |
| | Arabic | 4 | 15% |
| | Chinese | 1 | 4% |
| | **6th grade** | **7th grade** | **8th grade** |
| | 7 students | 14 students | 5 students |

**Table 1: ESL demographics at starcreek middle school, 2016–2017**

## The ELA Teacher

Heather reached out to Amanda because she needed help teaching Claudia, an emerging speaker of English, in Heather's seventh grade ELA classroom. Claudia was one of five of Heather's ESL students. Heather did not need assistance teaching the other four ESL students because she believed the four ESL students had enough conversational English to understand her instruction of the ELA content standards (Interview #1). The four students were not in the same ELA class period with Claudia. They were placed in Heather's three other ELA classes. Heather did not initiate this practitioner inquiry even though she expressed the need for assistance. Because of Amanda's own pedagogical beliefs about teaching ESL students and her knowledge that Heather needed assistance with Claudia, Amanda asked Heather to participate in this study. The Institutional Review Board granted research approval (Reference #17-OR-002), and Heather voluntarily agreed to participate in this exploratory case study by signing an informed consent form.

Prior to her collaboration with Amanda, Heather described teaching Claudia as a "trial by fire" process. She meant she had to learn how to teach Claudia as she was in the process of teaching her (Interview #1). Her learning process was not a smooth one as she often ran to Amanda's classroom for advice. Thus, a collaboration between the two teachers emerged. When we asked Heather to elaborate on the ESL teacher's assistance, she stated:

> I think the best thing a regular classroom teacher can do is work with the ESL teacher and then from there be in constant communication and try to apply the wisdom of someone who knows what they're doing. I don't want that to sound like that's a cop out, you know, just push off the work on the ESL teacher, you know? Learning from someone who knows what they're doing I guess especially for me as a young teacher. (Interview #1)

While communication and collaboration among teachers are generally viewed as positive, Heather's reliance on Amanda throughout the school year delegated Amanda as the primary teacher responsible for Claudia's content and language instruction. Heather seemed to be justifying this delegation by constructing her identity as "a young teacher." While "push[ing] off the work on the ESL teacher" may not have been Heather's intention, Amanda bore the brunt of the workload in this partnership. Heather's lack of experience and training in working with ESL teachers (as well as linguistically diverse students) is typical of many content teachers (DelliCarpini, 2021; Rubinstein-Avila and Lee, 2014); her approach was not a sustainable one given that Amanda was the only ESL teacher at Starcreek.

## The ESL teacher

Amanda was the collaborating ESL teacher in this practitioner inquiry. She began her teaching career in 2010 at Starcreek as an eighth grade ELA teacher. Since she majored in Spanish and English in college, she often taught most of the ESL students in her ELA class. This meant that administration preferred to put ESL students in Amanda's ELA classroom because she could communicate in English and Spanish. That is, she could use her Spanish to help her students attain the ELA standards. During Amanda's tenure as an ELA teacher, there was another ESL teacher employed at the school. Amanda vividly remembers standing at her classroom entryway watching her principal at the time run quickly down the hallway toward her classroom. When he arrived, he breathlessly explained, "We got it! We got it!" as he shut the classroom door behind them. His words meant the district had approved Amanda to replace the existing ESL teacher and become the ESL/Spanish teacher. Despite the untraditional offer, she accepted and assumed the role of ESL teacher in the fall of 2015 at Starcreek. Like many other states in the U.S., this state's standards allowed for a teacher

who held certifications in either a foreign language or ELA to teach ESL students, of which Amanda held both certifications. Amanda was not surprised by her principal's offer because such conversations began as early as her second year of teaching. While not surprised, she felt unequipped to accept this position without any training related to second language teaching and learning. Her inadequate feelings and lack of certification at the time left her to admit she became an ESL teacher through "the back door." These feelings led her to enroll in a doctoral program with a concentration in Second Language Acquisition and Teaching (SLAT) that same year, where she met Bedrettin (Author #2), who became one of her dissertation chairs, colleagues, and friends. ESL and content teachers' collaboration became the topic for her dissertation because she believed such collaboration was the most productive way to work toward equitable learning outcomes for ESL students in secondary public schools (See Giles, 2019 for her dissertation research). Amanda's goal in this practitioner inquiry was to support the ELA teacher's learning and potential identity renegotiation to start conceiving and imagining herself as the teacher of ESL students who is willing to assert agency to change her practices to facilitate those students' language and content learning. Amanda's collaboration with Heather became the pilot study to her dissertation research.

| Demographics of Collaborating Teachers | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Name** | **Ethnicity** | **Years of Experience** | **Languages** | **State Certifications** |
| **Heather** | White | **1** | English + high school Spanish | English/Language Arts, grades 6-12 |
| **Amanda** | White | 7 | English + Spanish | English/Language Arts, grades 6-12<br>Spanish, grades P-12 |

**Table 2: Demographics of collaborating teachers, 2016–2017**

## The Collaborative Cycles

This study took place during the spring semester during the academic year, 2016–2017. In the two collaborative cycles, Heather and Amanda collaborated to plan for and teach Claudia based on the content and language standards for ELA (Please see Table 3 for a list of the collaborative process). The first collaborative cycle began with an interview where we asked Heather to describe her training, previous experiences teaching ESL students, and working in collaboration with an ESL teacher. A collaborative planning session followed this introductory interview where Heather and Amanda planned a lesson exploring the theme in the first few chapters of *When My Name was Keoko* by Linda Sue Park. After we planned the lesson together, Amanda wrote fieldnotes of the collaborative teaching experience and asked Heather to record her thoughts in a reflective journal. The second interview concluded the first cycle and began the second one where we clarified responses in Heather's reflective journal, sought to explore collaborative learning experiences, and ideas for the second collaborative lesson. The second cycle continued similarly as the first cycle with the addition of a second poetry lesson where Amanda experimented with Spanish-English bilingual texts of poems in the collaboratively taught ELA classroom. The cycle and study culminated in a final interview where Heather reflected on the entire collaborative process.

| The Collaborative Process<br>Academic School Year: August 4, 2016 – May 24, 2017 | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Data Method** | **Medium** | **Date** |
| **First Collaborative Cycle** | | |
| Interview #1 | Audio-recorded | April 12, 2017 |
| Collaborative Planning Session #1 | Video-recorded | April 19, 2017 |
| Co-Teaching Session #1 | Fieldnotes | April 19, 2017 |
| Reflective Journal #1 | Journal entry | May 3, 2017 |
| **Second Collaborative Cycle** | | |
| Interview #2 | Audio-recorded | May 3, 2017 |
| Collaborative Planning Session #2 | Video-recorded | May 9, 2017 |
| Co-Teaching Session #2 | Fieldnotes | May 12, 2017 |
| Reflective Journal #2 | Journal entry | May 12, 2017 |
| Interview #3 | Audio-recorded | May 17, 2017 |

**Table 3: The collaborative process, 2016–2017**

## DATA METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The data for this qualitative study included three semi-structured interviews, two collaborative planning sessions, fieldnotes of the collaborative teaching sessions, and two reflective journals authored by Heather. We created a framework to analyze how Heather was discursively constructing (a) ESL students, (b) ESL instructional practice, (c) ESL teaching in the content classroom, (d) socio-educational context, and (e) the ESL teacher. How she viewed her professional identity as an ELA teacher in relation to this framework helped us gain insights into her identity as a teacher of ESL students at Starcreek Middle School. During the first coding cycle, we deductively analyzed the data using this framework. Four hundred and fifty-four in vivo and descriptive codes emerged to help us understand the collaborative process during this first cycle. During the second collaborative cycle, we refined our initial codes and examined

the codes for patterns that fit within our analytic framework. During the last coding cycle, we turned the patterns into theme statements. The theme statements are the subheadings in the findings, which will be explained in the next section.

## Findings

Heather constructed her teacher identity as a novice teacher with surface-level understandings of ESL students and a limited knowledge about how to plan for the ESL students in her classroom. Collaboration did not disrupt these deficit student perspectives nor did this partnership pave the way for Heather's renewed understanding about how to teach ESL students in the ELA classroom. Collaboration, instead, provided Heather with access to Amanda, whom Heather positioned as an experienced content teacher who could make the content accessible to linguistically diverse students. Such collaboration made it easy for Heather to designate Amanda, the ESL teacher, the primary teacher responsible for the content and language instruction of ESL students in the ELA classroom. Below we present each finding with illustrative examples from the data analysis.

### Novice Teacher with Surface-Level Understandings of ESL students

Heather had no training or coursework related to working with culturally and linguistically diverse students as part of her undergraduate teacher education program. When asked in the second interview to describe ways she related to ESL students, Heather cited examples of diverse characters from literature, explaining:

> We're reading *When My Name Was Keoko,* and the focus is on Asian culture. I've gotten to pause when we're reading and talk about… this is a good example of their culture, you know, talking about how this is different from our culture, and then pulling in my experiences from my own personal travel overseas, talking about here's a funny story of when I went here that just illustrates a difference in culture. I'm trying to make the kids aware. I feel like that's a major theme that we've looked at in studying the novel. Look at different cultures and different people groups. (Interview #2).

Heather's description of culture and people groups lumped all people not from the United States into one large group of "different". Such a dichotomy was made clear through her references to "their culture" and "different from our culture," which served to highlight Heather's assumption about how people from the United States should speak and act. She created a category for people who were from the United States and suggested that there was one singular culture that represented all those from the U.S. Similarly, she lumped the Asian cultures into one category, conveying the message that all people who identify as Asian must have had similar experiences to that of the book character, Keoko, who is a fictional young woman who lived during Japan's occupation of Korea during WWII.

While Heather's stated intention was to "make the kids more aware," her intention fell short in actuality because she only offered to tell a "funny story" to the students in the class. What constitutes a "funny story" might be interpreted differently among different people even within a similar culture, notwithstanding different cultures. Second, newcomers to the U.S. and perhaps other ESL students may not even understand her story at all depending on the students' English language proficiency. Students also might mistake her attempt at humor as ridicule or a harsh joke. She concluded that her "experiences from [her] own personal travel overseas" worked to illustrate her own cultural awareness, yet it was doubtful that her own narrative achieves her stated goal because her words might only represent a small group of people rather than promote cultural sensitivity and awareness.

The excerpt also illustrates how Heather positioned ESL students through a deficit lens. For instance, Heather described Claudia, one of the ESL students in her seventh grade ELA class, as speaking "broken English" (Interview #1). Due to the student's beginning level of English, she could not express her own academic intelligence in ways that Heather could recognize and legitimize. For example, in the first collaborative planning session, Heather stated that she wanted students to write a thematic paragraph based on the first chapter of the book. Amanda suggested that Claudia complete an assignment on the theme because this was the stated content objective. Heather questioned, "Can she do that?," doubting Claudia's ability to understand the theme simply because she could not communicate the content in English (CPS, #1). Amanda emphatically responded, "Of course, I will make a graphic organizer, and she can write the theme in Spanish and English. I will create something." (CPS #1). By offering language strategies (e.g., graphic organizer with bilingual supports), Amanda rejected Heather's deficit perspective to showcase the student's strengths. In Amanda's mind, the graphic organizer with sentence frames would articulate visually what was expected of Claudia (i.e., the content objective), and the use of Spanish afforded the student an opportunity to show her understanding of the content in the language that she best understood. To this suggestion, Heather responded, "If she can do that, that would be great. So today she can work on that" (CPS #1). The phrase "if she can do that" illustrates that Heather doubted Claudia's academic abilities. She also assumed Amanda would create this graphic organizer immediately so that the student could work to complete the ELA assignment "today." Heather's expectation of an immediate ELA assignment showed her disregard for Amanda's schedule even though Amanda ultimately created the assignment in time for the student's ELA class. Had Amanda not created the assignment in time for class, Claudia would have sat in the ELA class without an assignment accessible to her language and content needs.

### ESL and Content Teachers' Collaboration

Even after the first cycle, collaborative planning and teaching did not disrupt Heather's strong deficit perspective of ESL students. After Claudia and the other ESL students used the graphic organizer to write the thematic paragraph, they still struggled to meet Heather's expectation of the content objective because Heather continued to explain that Claudia could not "do all the assignments" (Interview #1). During the second collaborative planning session, Ashely created the graphic organizer as Heather watched, so that Heather could learn the process Heather stated that Claudia "[didn't] have to do

every poem" because Heather continued to doubt Claudia's abilities (CPS #2). In response to Heather, Amanda insisted, "If we can find them, we should. I'll keep looking. So yeah, if you'll send me a list of the poems, I mean that's not hard to find at all. We'll just do a bilingual side by side version of each poem" (CPS #2). Amanda's statement reflected her own belief that she and Heather should work to ensure that Claudia could access the poems in Spanish, comparable to her monolingual peers.

In addition to comprehending the poems, Heather wanted students to identify poetic devices (e.g., rhyme scheme, alliteration, repetition) as they read the poems together in class. Likewise, Amanda continued to insist that Claudia could achieve the same content objective even if she showed her mastery of the content in Spanish. Amanda explained this expectation for the content and language objectives in the next exchange:

> *Amanda*: I might say examples of alliteration. She can follow along easier so for language I might pick words that she might need to know… like year, ago, so… She can look across and put it in Spanish, amor, because love is his reason behind the poem. So she's learning vocabulary words as well. I mean she's learning language too by being able to look at the bilingual text. So, I mean she's learning with the bilingual side by side version.
>
> *Heather*: Okay, that's amazing. How do you know how to do all that? Did you do this for all your ESL students when you taught language arts? Can I do anything to help?
>
> *Amanda*: Um… I don't think so. I'm good. I'm pretty much done now. What I was thinking, I'm gonna go back in and put… because I don't know the words. I don't know how to say all of the poetic devices in Spanish. I've always said them in English, and it's been a while since I learned the Spanish word. I've never used it, so I've forgotten it. If I saw it, I'd remember obviously, but right off the top of my head, I don't know them. So you're planning on giving her this tomorrow?
>
> *Heather*: Yeah, if that's okay. (CPS #2).

Amanda created the graphic organizer so that Claudia had the opportunity to read the parallel bilingual poems in both Spanish and English. As Heather watched Amanda create the graphic organizer, she exclaimed that the assignment was "amazing", and she wondered if Amanda did this for her ESL students when she taught ELA. While not answering her question, Amanda admitted that she did not know how to say all the poetic devices in Spanish because she had never used them and wanted to know when Heather planned to use this lesson activity. Like the previous lesson, Heather wanted Claudia to complete this graphic organizer tomorrow in class. Heather did ask if she could "help" Amanda with the assignment, although Amanda shut down Heather's offer by saying, "I don't think so. I'm good". Had Amanda given Heather the opportunity to co-create the assignments, she might have also created potential learning opportunities for Heather to construct future lessons for ESL students. When Amanda reflected on this missed opportunity, she felt pressure to create the assignment immediately. She stated, "I'm going to have to do it all anyway. And then, teach this to Claudia. I might as well do it because Heather can't" (Fieldnotes). Amanda's statement reflects her belief that Heather did not have the ability to create the assignment. This statement also reflected Amanda's frustration with Heather's inability to create the assignment as well as the expectation to create the assignment immediately. The academic school year ended on May 25, 2017, so Heather and Amanda were also running out of time at this point in the year. Amanda, however, never voiced these frustrations to Heather, and instead stated, "I'm good", during the collaborative planning session, which constrained the opportunity for Heather to learn how to create assignments for ESL students in the ELA classroom.

When asked to describe her own learning, Heather stated, "I think I have learned that she's [referring to Claudia] able to do more than I think she can" (Interview #3). Claudia's performance did challenge Heather's deficit assumptions about the student's ability to master the content objective. However, we argue that Heather's statement alone was insufficient to disrupt such deficit perspectives completely because Heather did not change her pedagogical approach in practice. That is, we did not observe changes in Heather's teaching practice during the period of the study. She did not work to include more culturally responsive practices, which is an enactment of her professional identity. For instance, during the period of this study, Heather continued to plan lessons as if there were no ESL students in her classroom Thus, there was not enough evidence to suggest that ESL and content teachers' collaboration disrupted Heather's deficit perspectives of students, and hence, she did not conceptualize her teacher identity identity as a teacher of ESL students.

## The Impact of the ESL Teacher

Even though collaboration did not appear to change Heather's deficit perspectives of ESL students during the period of this study, Heather began to position Amanda as a language expert, ELA teacher, curriculum designer, and a "safe haven" for ESL students. Such descriptions began to bolster Heather's perception of the ESL teacher in the content classroom, and more generally, the entire school community. Heather noticed Amanda's impact on the ESL students' learning opportunities in the ELA classroom, even early in the first cycle. Heather admitted, "I've almost let you determine her English/language arts curriculum this year" (Interview #2). In this comment, Heather acknowledged that Amanda served as both the ELA and ESL teacher to Claudia. In the final interview, Heather praised Amanda's ability to build relationships with her students so that they would feel comfortable at school in the following:

> I see kids come into your classroom… I feel like Claudia and I have a good relationship. She likes me and gets along with me. But I know that your room is a haven for her. She's always saying Miss Amanda, Miss Amanda, and I'm like yes, you can go to Miss Amanda. So I think that's the best thing about what you're doing. And then just all the curriculum that you've designed and modified for these kids. (Interview #3)

Heather's description of Amanda highlights her perception of Amanda's relationship with students and her identity as an ESL

teacher who is committed to students' learning of language and content. More specifically, she explains that Amanda is a relational teacher who creates safe environments for her students and attends to the language and content needs of her students in her classroom, so much so that the students would rather be in Amanda's classroom rather than Heather's classroom.

While the above dialogue certainly positions Amanda in favorable ways and highlights the impact of the ESL teacher on the collaborative experience, Heather also reinforces our earlier claims that she never attended to the needs of ESL students in her classroom regarding language, content, or any other related need. Rather, she continued to assign Amanda as the primary teacher responsible for the ESL students in the ELA classroom. By this assignment, Heather renounces her own responsibility to teach all students in her own ELA classroom. In addition, Heather's assumption that Amanda "modifies curriculum" suggests that she failed to distinguish between content and language constructs, essentially stating Amanda made easier or "watered down" the content standards. Overall, such descriptions exemplify further that Heather had no knowledge about nor did she learn through collaboration how to make the ELA content accessible to the ESL students in her classroom and serve to reiterate the fact that Amanda assumed all the planning and teaching responsibilities for the ESL students in the ELA classroom.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The teacher collaboration under scrutiny in this practitioner inquiry was initiated to ultimately support a newcomer ESL student's learning of content and language, representing access to education, which is protected by a federal law. When Amanda designed the inquiry, her goal also included helping Heather learn how to work with ESL students or at least question the ideologies around culturally and linguistically diverse student populations. However, Heather did not seem to have engaged in that learning which would support renegotiating her identity as a teacher who is also responsible for devising strategies to make the content accessible to Claudia and focusing on her language development. One reason for that would be time constraints which were reported by previous studies, too (Giles, 2018; Peercy et al., 2016). That is, the collaboration was not planned before the semester started. Rather, it emerged due to Heather's challenges to work with Claudia. Also, as a beginning teacher, Heather might have had a steep learning curve with numerous new tasks and roles to serve as part of her induction and socialization. Adding ESL on top of that might have been even more challenging given that she never took any courses on how to work with ESL students in her undergraduate teacher education program, which is a dire issue, in and of itself, in the state's (secondary) teacher education curriculum and policy. Learning to serve ESL students within the bounds of the collaboration timeline might not have been her priority and having Amanda to rely on for the preparation of ESL-friendly activities seemed to be a more desirable course of action for her. One conclusion we can reach from examining this collaboration is that professional learning and change in teaching practice is unlikely to occur immediately, and it might take longer or more sustained collaboration with novice teachers to learn and start renegotiating their professional identities to imagine ESL students as part of their responsibility. On the other side of the collaboration, Amanda expected Heather to assert agency and contribute to the preparation of lesson materials or prepare those materials by herself. and ask Amanda for feedback. Amanda seemed to be experiencing some tension in her identity as well. That is, on one hand, as a former ELA teacher with extensive experience with ESL students, Amanda hoped that her enacting and modeling the identity of an ESL teacher would encourage Heather to become more agentive, creative, and strategic in finding ways to support Claudia. On the other hand, Amanda needed to prepare those lesson activities and materials because Heather immediately needed them to differentiate her teaching for Claudia. Neither Amanda nor Heather had the time to let Heather experiment with or try out creating such materials herself.

Additionally, Heather seems to be grappling with the well-entrenched pedagogical-language ideology that assumes common language as the ultimate prerequisite for the learning of academic content (Uzum, Yazan, and Avineri, 2022). That is, pointing out the student's beginning level English proficiency, Heather seemed to feel helpless and powerless when working with Claudia as a culturally and linguistically diverse student. Although that feeling led her to consult Amanda, the resulting collaboration did not suffice for Heather to question that ideology much. The fact that Amanda could prepare learning materials in Spanish for Claudia looked the most desirable strategy, and Heather went with it. However, at the same time, that strategy might have reinforced a misconception Heather that is common amongst teachers who work with these students: "if I don't speak ESL students' language, I can't teach them." Those two ideologies inform Heather's dynamic construction of what an ESL student is capable of doing, what their needs are, what instructional strategies content-teachers can devise to support their learning, and what content-teachers need to do when working with ESL students. This construction, we argue, provides a basis for her professional identity as a teacher of ESL students who can cater to their academic needs to keep learning language and content concurrently (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Morgan, 2004; Reeves, 2009).

Although the collaboration between Amanda and Heather did not yield the outcome that Amanda, as the leader of this practitioner inquiry, hoped for, Heather observed Amanda work with Claudia and saw that it was possible and practical to support ESL students' learning of content. It is not explicit in her commentary or interaction with Amanda, but Heather must know that without Amanda's help in this collaboration, Claudia could easily become invisible and inaudible in Heather's class. Focusing on the benefits of Amanda's support, Heather missed the point. That is, within the school context, Amanda was positioned as the go-to person with a panacea when it came to ESL students. This positioning was based on all the time, energy, and expertise that Amanda invested in working with teachers to support ESL students' learning. However, likely due to the ideological compartmentalization of subject matter teaching in the middle school (Arkoudis, 2003; Giles, 2019), the borders around what ('kind' of

students) each teacher is responsible for are maintained by the teachers. That is, all ESL students were considered students that Amanda was responsible for and Heather did not assert any agency to learn how to work with ESL students. Content-area teachers cling to their subject-matter identities only and are reluctant to renegotiate their professional identity to include supporting ESL students (Rubinstein-Avila and Lee, 2014). Heather constructed her teacher identity in relation to that ideology or secondary school culture. She viewed herself as an ELA teacher who is supposed to call Amanda whenever she needed help with the ESL students. As discussed earlier, this dominant view in the school exacerbated Amanda's identity tension. Although she hoped the collaboration would contribute to content-area teachers' emerging self-sufficiency to work with ESL students, it ended up reinforcing her dominant positioning as the only person who can serve ESL students in the school.

Amanda used practitioner inquiry to initiate and examine a collaboration with a content-area teacher which she viewed as the best way (a) to not only support ESL students in the content-area classes (b) but also help teachers learn new strategies to work with ESL students and claim a professional identity as a teacher of language and content. Even though the collaboration reported on in this practitioner inquiry did not entirely accomplish those goals, the study helped Amanda, and the reader via this paper, understand the complexities involved in a novice ELA teacher's professional identity in relation to serving ESL students.

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