http://doi.org/10.35847/ESuh.5.3.4

Research Article

The Case for Collaboration: Aligning ES(O)L and Developmental Literacy to Increase Adult Immigrant Students' College Access and Preparation

Emily K. Suh, Texas State University

Abstract

Adult English language instruction is the fastest growing segment of U.S. adult basic education population. Supporting adult emergent multilingual students through English as a Second Language or English for Speakers of Other Languages classes, referred to here as ES(O)L, and developmental literacy programs presents a "wicked problem" for many community colleges. This article compares literacy standards and instruction across adult ES(O)L and developmental literacy contexts in six Texas community college systems. Colleges held loosely shared organizational goals but lacked sufficient leadership, structure, and time for goal enactment. Through a systems theory lens, the article explores colleges' potential to become learning organizations supporting adult multilingual students' college transition.

Keywords: English as a Second Language, English for Speakers of Other Languages, developmental education, systems theory, standards alignment

Adult English language learners are among the fastest growing segment of U.S. adult education, particularly in community colleges, where this population is typically comprised of older adult students (Janis, 2013). Unlike second generation immigrants or Generation 1.5 students who attend U.S. K-12 schools, adult-arrival immigrants frequently begin formal education in adult education English as a Second Language (ESL) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs. With regard to adult education, in many states, the label "ESL" primarily refers to Title II-funded adult basic education programs, i.e., programs providing basic literacy and mathematics instruction to students aged 16 and over. While "ESL" focuses on basic language and communicative skills, "ESOL" designates student tuition-funded, advanced non-credit bearing college courses that support students' academic language proficiency for college-level reading and writing tasks similar to developmental literacy programs. However, these naming conventions

The author is grateful for to James Dyer, Barrie McGee, and Dr. Emily Miller Payne for their assistance with data collection. This study was funded by a grant from the Texas State University Research Enhancement Program.

Correspondence: Emily.suh@txstate.edu

are by no means standard across colleges or states. Therefore, to avoid confusion, I note the following about my terminology: to reflect the range of labels for the type of academic preparatory English language acquisition classes that are the focus of this article, I use "ES(O)L" as a blanket term to refer to the programs and classes examined in this study. However, when discussing existing scholarship, my use of "ESL" or "ESOL" reflects the literature cited. Finally, I refer to the students enrolled in both types of classes as multilingual adult students. For these students, streamlining linguistic and academic support is a matter of equity and offers a unique opportunity for innovative adult education programming and instruction.

Like other adult learners (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020), multilingual adult students often possess vast life experiences and motivations to learn. Many hope to earn a college degree to increase their economic stability, to support children learning in American schools, and to participate in their communities (Almon, 2015), but they can experience multiple barriers including lengthy preparatory coursework to achieve college-level English language proficiency. Complex course sequences, challenges with providing and filling advanced ESL sections, and lack of alignment between adult ESL and ESOL (when the two exist as separate programs for adult basic education and college academic preparation) and other college-preparatory programs can make it difficult for colleges to support even the most ambitious and committed multilingual adult students in their transition into college (Suh, 2018; Tucker, 2006).

In this article, I examine alignment between ES(O)L and developmental literacy at six Texas adult education sites. Although these sites varied in their terminology, I use "developmental literacy" to refer to the first English course into which students enter as they transition from ES(O)L into college English courses, such as first-year composition, which are not designed with the primary purpose of supporting multilingual students' language acquisition. I explore how ES(O)L instructional practices align with college-level academic expectations and outline ways adult educators can collaborate with college faculty to support their multilingual adult students. After highlighting challenges facing adult ES(O)L and developmental literacy programs, I explore innovative collaboration of faculty at one college that held shared organizational goals but insufficient leadership, structure, and time to enact these goals. I conclude by discussing the potential for colleges to function as learning organizations (Senge et al., 2012) that can effectively support multilingual adult students across programs.

These operational definitions guided the study:

- Alignment: shared instructional practices and learning outcomes between two discrete college programs
- Developmental literacy: Within the larger umbrella of developmental education, these preparatory courses offer integrated reading and writing skills for students who are considered under-prepared for college; the majority of such programs were designed for monolingual English-speaking students and do not attend to issues of language acquisition; earned credits in these programs are non-transferable and not applied to matriculation
- English as a Second Language/English for Speakers of Other Languages, also referred to as ES(O)L: Classes offering English language instruction for emergent multilingual students; earned credits are non-transferable and not applied to matriculation; instructional focus is on supporting the acquisition of an additional language; colleges often offer multiple leveled classes ranging from pre-print

skills to advanced language support; this study examined advanced classes at each research site

- Instructional alignment: Teaching practices related to specified instructional standards; documented/observed through document analysis, observation, or instructor self-reporting
- Learning organization: An organization that constantly evolves to solve problems, clarify and deepen its shared institutional vision, and apply mental models (Roth & Senge, 1996; Senge, 1990)
- Transition: Exit from pre-college preparatory courses, such as ES(O)L, and enrollment in financial aid-eligible courses leading to transfer, degree, or diploma

Lack of Alignment Within a Complex System: A Targeted Literature Review

Nationwide, multilingual adult students requiring English language or academic support begin in one of two pathways at most community colleges: some advanced ES(O)L courses that are designed to prepare multilingual adult students academically for college are housed within adult basic education while developmental literacy, as a type of developmental education, falls under the college's degree and diploma-granting division although these developmental courses are not eligible for graduation requirements. Some colleges attempt to regulate students' pathway based on first language or previous formal education, but many multilingual adult students transition from one pathway to another based on personal preference rather than institutional policy, and students have expressed frustration over having to navigate complex course sequences (Suh, 2018). Indeed, course naming conventions between ESL, ESOL, and developmental literacy can further compound students' complicated transition from ES(O)L to degree programs. Students' reasons for self-selecting out of an ES(O)L program can vary, including dissatisfaction with the course sequence, financial incentives (developmental courses are eligible for financial aid), or the desire to identify as college students (Suh, 2016).

Although advanced ES(O)L and developmental literacy classes can share the goal of college preparation for college, they have distinct pedagogical traditions, exist in separate divisions, receive different funding streams, and are subject to different state standards and reporting bodies (Boylan, 2004; Kibler et al., 2011; Shapiro, 2012). English language learning courses focused on academic language proficiency may share several language objectives with developmental literacy programs. These programs offer reading, writing, and learning support strategies for incoming college students whose standardized test scores or other measures suggest that they would benefit from additional support to be successful in college. Recently, however, developmental education reforms have sought to align developmental courses to college-credit courses through corequisite models that shift to more advanced applications of critical thinking and writing (Kalamkarian, 2020) which may further distance them from academic preparatory ES(O)L instruction and student learning outcomes. Misaligned student learning objectives or instructional practices can produce inequitable academic and linguistic preparation for these multilingual adult students. This misalignment can occur, for example, when adult education classes do not provide the same rigorous instruction in writing for academic purposes as developmental literacy courses paired with first year composition. Such misalignment is especially concerning since some multilingual adult students may rely on these courses to prepare them for academic English if a college-preparatory ES(O)L program is not available to them. As a result, adult educators teaching the

most advanced ES(O)L courses may need to revise their instructional approaches and assignments to prepare ES(O)L students for college transition.

Alignment between ES(O)L and developmental literacy programming offers a unique opportunity to explore the innovative potential of the nation's community colleges for supporting multilingual adult students seeking a postsecondary certificate or degree. The benefits of aligning ES(O)L and developmental literacy are numerous. Alignment saves time and money as students enter degree courses more quickly. Unlike in ES(O)L, students enrolled in developmental literacy courses can receive financial aid in Texas. Additionally, reducing the required course sequence can increase student retention (Ganga et al., 2018). Despite these potential benefits, scholars and practitioners note a gap in knowledge about curricular alignment between ESL or ESOL and developmental courses (Fernandez et al., 2017; Gil, 2013; Suh et al., 2020). In an examination of the factors students attributed to their successful completion of ESL, Almon (2015) concluded that adult ESL programs should provide more explicit information about college curriculum and procedures. Jeffcoat et al. (2014) found strong alignment between learning outcomes in developmental and college-level courses; however, the researchers only examined alignment between basic writing and college-level courses and between adult basic education ESL courses within the ESL sequence. They did not compare across ESL to developmental literacy or first-year composition courses.

In one of the few studies to examine ESL and college faculty expectations for students, Johnson and Parrish (2010) found the greatest alignment in their instructional emphasis on "understanding and following written directions" (p. 624). However, less than half of college faculty felt using a dictionary or reference book was important—a skill which all of the ESL instructors reported teaching (Johnson & Parrish, 2010). Other areas of misalignment included aspects of writing and revising essays, of which less than one-third college faculty described as important but 87-91% of adult ESL faculty reported teaching. Fernandez et al. (2017) argue, "Academic and professional writing needs to be more of a focus in adult ESL classes. Types of writing taught and assigned need to reflect the types of assignments that learners encounter in community college" (p. 14). These studies examine writing instruction; however, less scholarship has examined alignment between adult basic education ESL and academic ESOL or between these programs and developmental literacy instruction, which also includes a specific focus on reading.

Further complicating this challenge, the faculty most frequently teaching adult ES(O)L and developmental literacy are often part-time or contingent instructors with limited access to institutional knowledge or authority relevant to working in and across programs with distinct but overlapping mandates and oversight (Williams, 2018). Significant institutional knowledge is disseminated through professional development, but even when invited, adjunct involvement is low—often due to teaching schedule conflicts (Reilly, 2017). When unable to access even the limited professional development opportunities offered to full-time faculty, adjuncts risk being "doubly excluded" and feeling less valued by or less committed to their institutions (Johnston & Schade, 2017, p. 15). Inclusion in conversations about institutional goals and organizational practices is a basic necessity for engaging in organizational development.

Competition for institutional resources and students represent another set of challenges to aligning adult basic education ESL and academic preparation ESOL as well as

developmental literacy programs. Supporting multilingual adult students seeking a college degree by transitioning from ES(O)L into developmental literacy illustrates the traits of a "wicked problem"—one that is persistent and only partially understood because of the interconnected nature of their complex and evolving elements (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 136). Systems theory (Senge, 1990) has been applied to explore wicked problems and institutional vision, structure, and development (Dechant & Dechant, 2010; Reynolds et al., 2006). Innovation occurs through individuals' reciprocal action and reflection within larger institutional responses to environmental complexity (Senge, 1990). For organizations to accomplish their goals, they must support learning individuals and infuse the organization with those learning practices.

Although navigating overlapping and competing systems for transitioning students from adult ES(O)L into college can present a wicked problem, the potential benefits of collaboration and the overlap through alignment between ES(O)L and developmental literacy invite institutional innovation. According to Senge's (1990) systems theory, faculty can reciprocally engage in instructional alignment and collective reflection to support students' transition. The present study asks: What efforts towards instructional alignment between ES(O)L and developmental literacy exist to support adult multilingual students' transition out of ES(O)L in Texas community colleges? What evidence exists of Texas community colleges functioning as learning organizations that facilitate student transition?

Methodology

This qualitative study examines alignment between ES(O)L and developmental literacy classes at five community colleges and one community literacy program, which provided pre-developmental literacy support, from geographically distinct areas of Texas (Table 1). Texas has a substantial multilingual adult student population (Cashiola & Potter, 2021) and significant state oversight of developmental literacy curriculum which ensured a degree of uniformity across programs and made it an ideal state in which to study alignment.

Theoretical Framework

The present study applies a systems theory lens (Senge et al., 2012) to ES(O)L-developmental literacy alignment. Systems theory illuminates organizational responses to environmental complexity (i.e., attending to a variety of objectives simultaneously; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967) and organizational adaptions to meet individual and institutional objectives (Belinfanti & Stout, 2018). Systems theory can illustrate how individuals contribute to collective goals through personal thinking and mastery, team learning, and shared visioning. These are the core individual characteristics of a "learning organization" (Senge, 2006, p. 4). System theory can also uncover how institution-level visioning and processes produce institution-wide change. In learning organizations, individuals develop personal and collective capacities for system change.

There are multiple indicators of change capacity, or adaptability to meet organizational objectives. For instance, the organization must respond to environmental complexity and manage resulting organizational complexity (i.e., the number and interconnections of organizational elements; Schneider et al., 2017). Complexity can be internal (i.e., specialization) or collaborative (i.e., between multiple organizations). Leadership skills including strategic planning, team development, and cultural competence are essential for managing college system complexity (White &

Weathersby, 2005). Developing organizational complexity also requires investment from the learning organization and its individual members (Belinfanti & Stout, 2017). Members must possess agency and access to resources for change. Ability to articulate organizational goals reflects reflexive thinking, another change capacity indicator. Senge et al. (2012) apply systems theory to envision school systems change; systems theory can also illuminate the challenges community colleges face in supporting the nation's growing adult multilingual population seeking to transition.

Data Collection

In Texas, ESL refers to free Title II-funded adult education classes while ESOL is a tuition-based academic program preparing students for degree. However, like in many states, not all Texas community colleges or programs offer both ESL and ESOL; thus, many students depend upon ESL programs focused on basic language acquisition support or workforce readiness for academic language preparation. In this study, sites were selected based on their reputation for high-quality ES(O)L programming, regardless of whether or not a site offered academic language classes focused on college preparation (i.e., English for Academic Purposes, Intensive English programs, etc.). Five sites were housed within community colleges and one within a community literacy program. The community literacy site was included because it offered the most advanced ESL classes available in the community college's service district. As previously noted, for clarity across sites, I refer to the study's English language acquisition courses and programs as ES(O)L to acknowledge the shared focus on English language acquisition despite the varied naming conventions and programmatic structures that existed at the different colleges. However, I specify between ESL and ESOL in my discussion of Gulf College to emphasize the existence of both programs at the college and to illustrate how the college worked within this complex, wicked context to support multilingual adult students' transition into college. Finally, in keeping with the state of Texas' English as a Second Language Content Standards for multilingual adult students, I refer to the standards guiding language acquisition instruction as Texas ESL Standards (see Table 3).

Data collection included observations in 12 ES(O)L classrooms, six developmental literacy classrooms, and four literacy study centers which offered tutoring in reading, writing, and some additional disciplinary subjects. Importantly, Gulf College's six developmental literacy classes were coded by the institution as College Composition based on state mandates for corequisite courses. However, because faculty assessed the students as being underprepared for traditional composition learning objectives, instructors modified the class to focus on developmental literacy support through metacognitive (Paulson & Mason-Egan, 2007; Pressley, 2002) and affective instruction (Paulson & Armstrong, 2010).

Observations were recorded in a structured observation protocol (Creswell & Creswell, 1994) targeting classroom practices, instructor language, and assignments. The protocol included comparison of observations with state standards and alignment between six developmental literacy and ES(O)L instruction. My research team and I conducted 23 interviews and seven focus groups with faculty and administrators. Interviews and focus groups followed a semi-structured protocol to maximize responsiveness to emerging themes (Kallio et al., 2016). Over 71 hours of observation and interview/focus group data were collected (Tables 1 and 2). Relevant documents including syllabi and instructional material were also collected for triangulation.

TABLE 1: Data Collection by Site

Institution	Number of Observations *(Total Time Length)*	Number of Faculty Interviews *(Total Time Length)*	Number of Focus Groups *(Total Time Length)*
BAJA COLLEGE	4 (720 min)	6 (280 min)	1 (31 min)
BORDERLAND COLLEGE	– (canceled due to Covid)	3 (134 min)	1 (61 min)
COMMUNITY SUPPORT	4 (660 min)	4 (183 min)	1 (49 min)
GULF COLLEGE	6 (339 min)	—	2 (116 min)
PANHANDLE COMMUNITY COLLEGE	5 (780 min)	5 (226 min)	2 (90 min)
STAR COLLEGE	2 (455 min)	6 (172 min)	—
TOTAL	24 (2954 min)	23 (995 min)	7 (347 min)
GRAND TOTAL			71 hrs 36 min

TABLE 2: Faculty Discipline and Institution

Institution Institution	Participant Participant	Institutional Role (Discipline, If Applicable) Institutional Role (Discipline, If Applicable)
BAJA COLLEGE		
	Esther	Administrator, Developmental Education
	Jane	Administrator, Adult Basic Education including ES(O)L
	Lee	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Renee	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Rhonda	Adjunct, ES(O)L
BORDERLAND COLLEGE		
	Diana	Full Time, ES(O)L
	Dr. Dora	Administrator, ES(O)L
	Jimmy	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Monica	Full Time, ES(O)L
	Raquel	Administrator, ES(O)L
	Yolanda	Full Time, ES(O)L and Developmental Literacy
	Zach	Full Time, Developmental Literacy

Institution	Participant	Institutional Role (Discipline, If Applicable)
COMMUNITY SUPPORT		
	Dawn	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Eileen	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Ellen	Administrator, ES(O)L
	Karen	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Rose	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Tracy	Adjunct, ES(O)L
GULF COLLEGE		
	Amal	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Natalie	Full Time, Developmental Literacy
	Nina	Full Time, ES(O)L
	Regina	Full Time/Administrator, Developmental Literacy
	Valerie	Full Time/Administrator
PANHANDLE COLLEGE		
	Amanda	Full Time, Developmental Literacy
	Amy	Full Time, ES(O)L
	Dr. Lopez	Full Time, Psychology (corequisite with Developmental Literacy)
	Heather	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Jacob	Tutor, Developmental Literacy
	Jennifer	Full Time, Developmental Literacy
	Karen	Full Time/Administrator, Developmental Literacy chair, formerly ES(O)L Chair
	Lois	Tutor, Developmental Literacy
	Lora	Administrator, ES(O)L
	Melissa	Full Time, Developmental Literacy
	Scott	Administrator, ES(O)L
	Sonia	Advisor, ES(O)L Program
STAR COLLEGE		
	Donna	Adjunct, ES(O)L
	Dr. Jeni	Full Time, ES(O)L
	Julie	Administrator, Developmental Literacy
	Shannon	Full Time, Developmental Literacy
	Sofía	Administrator, Student Success Lab
	Tammy	Adjunct, ES(O)L

Data Analysis

I applied reiterative thematic analysis (Clark & Braun, 2014) to observational and interview data. *A priori* codes derived from Texas Adult English as a Second Language Standards and College and Career Readiness Standards related to the language domain of reading (Table 3). Standards had similar language, but concepts not shared across both sets of standards were separately identified (i.e., the instructions, "You're going to need paraphrase skills: you can use the headings that you created" were coded as Paraphrase [ES(O)L]).

After selecting observation vignettes and participant language to conceptualize dominant themes, the data were recoded through constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This confirmed the fit of coded segments to evolving understanding of instructional alignment and program collaboration. I applied systems theory analysis (Senge et al., 2012), incorporating organizations' *guiding ideas*, *innovations in infrastructure*, and *relevant theories, methods, and tools*. Three graduate assistants supported coding validity checks. At least two researchers examined data during each phase, discussing coding discrepancies until resolution.

Finally, institutional narratives captured alignment between instruction and interdepartmental awareness of instruction and standards. Narratives highlighted examples of and potential for innovation and existing misalignment due to decision makers' divergent perspectives.

TABLE 3: Alignment of Reading Standards Language

Overlapping Area	Texas ESL Standards Language	College and Career Readiness Language
Focus on Genre, Purpose	Read, comprehend, and use increasingly complex print and digital texts for a variety of purposes Identify and evaluate an author's purpose and arguments	Compare and analyze how features of genre are used across texts Use effective reading strategies to determine a written work's purpose and intended audience
Focus on Identifying Ideas, Hypotheses, Author's Purpose	Identify the central ideas or hypothesis and supporting details	Identify explicit and implicit textual information including main ideas and author's purpose Use text features to form an overview of content and to locate information
Focus on Evaluating Purpose, Arguments for Evidence	Evaluate print and digital texts using criteria to determine…reliability and credibility Read to critically analyze information and make connections to interpret authors' purpose and viewpoints	Analyze and evaluate implicit and explicit arguments in a variety of texts for the quality and coherence of evidence
Focus on Inferring Meaning, Intent, Values	Identify, analyze, and evaluate an author's implicit and explicit assumptions	Make evidence-based inferences about a text's meaning, intent, and values
Implementing Strategies	Implement a variety of reading comprehension strategies (e.g., predicting, inferring, comparing, and contrasting) and know when they are appropriate to use	Use effective reading strategies to determine a written work's purpose and intended audience
Focus on Inferring Meaning, Intent, Values	Paraphrase accurately and summarize information from texts	Apply a variety of strategies to determine the meanings of unfamiliar words and phrases

Findings and Discussion

I contextualize the findings with relevant literature to amplify the voices of ES(O)L and developmental literacy faculty serving transitioning students. To answer the first research question, I examine instructional alignment between adult ES(O)L and developmental literacy across research sites. To answer the second question, I introduce Gulf College as a narrative summary of one college faculty's efforts to align ES(O)L and developmental literacy instruction. I then return to the collective data to illustrate colleges' loosely articulated alignment goals and the limited resources available for their achievement. I also point out shared opportunities for innovation through additional collaboration.

Instructional Alignment: Loosely Overlapping Standards and Goals

The most advanced levels of English language instruction for multilingual adult students can serve a similar function as developmental literacy courses in preparing students for college. The state of Texas has two sets of related but distinct standards for ESL and developmental education (Table 3). This study examined alignment between these standards and alignment between standards and instructional practice for evidence of shared system goals.

The thematic analysis of instructional alignment between the ES(O)L and developmental literacy programs across the sites uncovered limited instructional alignment efforts; however, there was evidence of instructional adherence to relevant standards which themselves had substantial overlap. Instructional practices corresponded to every focus area, suggesting basic alignment between ES(O)L and developmental literacy at each site (Table 4); however, the majority of observed alignment occurred by happenstance rather than intentional efforts to support multilingual adult students' transition.

TABLE 4: Reading Standards Implementation in ES(O)L and Developmental Literacy Courses

Instructional Foci by Reading Standard	Instructional Examples
Focus on Genre, Purpose (28)	
ES(O)L Instructional Examples (19)	Instructor asked students to describe a picture and predict why the author was writing the piece (ES[O]L Observation)
Credit-level Instructional Examples (9)	"Having them understand different forms and information" (Developmental Literacy Instructor Interview)
Focus on Vocabulary, Grammar Knowledge (93)	
ES(O)L Instructional Examples (65)	"Instructor went through the difficult words with students, helped them come to their own definitions regarding their personal experiences – i.e., students' understanding of the word 'rattled' via their knowledge of rattlesnakes and their experience of the physical effects of fear or anxiety. Instructor would frequently question students' knowledge of a word, getting them to think more deeply about the definition." (ES[O]L Observation)
Credit-level Instructional Examples (28)	"He is 'curt' That might be a new word for you. So curt means he doesn't really want to discuss it with you, he just wants to tell you and go on"(Developmental Literacy Observation)

Focus on Identifying Ideas, Hypotheses, Author's Purpose (33)	
ES(O)L Instructional Examples (20)	Class collectively brainstormed the main idea after reading a passage together (ES[O]L Observation)
Credit-level Instructional Examples (13)	"I have readers' notebooks.... It's an opportunity to talk about genre, audience, purpose" (Developmental Literacy Instructor Interview)
Focus on Evaluating Purpose, Arguments for Evidence (20)	
ES(O)L Instructional Examples (10)	"We open the textbook and discuss the purposes and reasons for another type of essay, and what they might look like, look at some examples, go through, judge those, and learn how to critique those" (ES[O]L Instructor Interview)
Credit-level Instructional Examples (10)	Instructor asked comprehension questions building to a main idea for the reading (Developmental Literacy Observation)
Focus on Understanding Information/Ideas in Writing (31)	
ES(O)L Instructional Examples (25)	Instructor provides detailed step-by-step instruction on how to write a summary (ES[O]L Observation)
Credit-level Examples (8)	Highlighting important details and marking in the margin (ES[O]L Observation)
Focus on Inferring Meaning, Intent, Values (11)	
ES(O)L Instructional Examples (9)	Instructor offered explicit instruction in annotation and summary leading to essay outlining (ES[O]L Observation)
Credit-level Instructional Examples (2)	Instructor expects students to "be able to make inferences" (Developmental Literacy Observation)

Observed ES(O)L instruction targeted foundational aspects of reading skills (Table 4). For example, one Panhandle ES(O)L class focused on identifying ideas, i.e., finding and paraphrasing the main idea from short portions of text. In the developmental literacy class, however, students held a detailed discussion moving from identifying ideas to inferring character motivations in a short story. Throughout, the instructor demonstrated applying basic reading skills to complex literacy tasks. Differences in instructional genre and purpose similarly illustrated increasing task complexity in developmental literacy. While ES(O)L students predicted author's purpose based on a single image or aspect of the text, developmental instructors expected students to understand "different forms and information," applying predictive skills to multiple genres and text types.

Vocabulary development also exemplified overlapping standards and differing levels of instructional explicitness. ES(O)L instruction embedded more frequent, richer vocabulary support. In a Baja ES(O)L class, the instructor, Renee, paused mid text-to-text connection to ask students about unknown vocabulary in what appeared to be a well-established classroom routine. Developmental literacy vocabulary instruction was similarly integrated into other literacy tasks, but some developmental instructors also believed students would simply absorb vocabulary through extensive reading. Shannon, a developmental instructor, expected students to passively acquire vocabulary in context while annotating philosophy and anthropology texts. Although some of variation in expectation may be attributed to individual instructor training or pedagogy, their perspectives were representative of a general division between ES(O)L and developmental literacy instructors.

This focus on disciplinary literacy tasks was another notable area of alignment. Across the colleges, instructors discussed and were observed

referencing literacy tasks in other college classes. Like Shannon's introduction to college-level texts in the developmental course, Karen introduced information students currently enrolled in ES(O)L would encounter after transitioning, "So if they go to college, [they know] what a syllabus is, how to read it, how to interpret that information." Shannon similarly explained rubrics. In interviews and classroom observations, ES(O)L and developmental instructors alike recognized students' interest in college and drew connections to coursework. This shared instructional emphasis on preparation for future postsecondary education aligned with both the Texas College and Career Readiness Standards (developmental literacy) and adult English as a Second Language Standards.

Potential as Learning Organizations

Instructional alignment between adult ES(O)L and developmental literacy requires support from individual faculty who view themselves as part of a larger system with common goals. However, even when faculty collaborated across programmatic silos, the study uncovered no evidence of the large-scale, institutional commitment of a learning organization (Senge et al., 2012). In answering the second research question, I introduce the narrative case of Gulf Campus. Through a systems lens, I then contextualize my analysis of the data across all sites summarizing study-wide evidence of limited engagement and highlighting potential for developing learning organizations.

Gulf Campus: A Collaborative Model

Gulf College is a medium-sized campus on the outskirts of a large metropolis. During fall of 2018, Gulf enrolled 12,550 degree-seeking students, over 70% of whom identified as racial minorities. At Gulf College, multilingual students seeking English language acquisition instruction could enroll in either Title II-funded ESL classes or a non-funded, more advanced ESOL sequence focused on workforce readiness. However, because many of the students enrolled in ESL and ESOL classes were interested in college graduation, administrators created a corequisite pairing of the advanced ESOL class and first-year composition. Gulf was the study's only site to include composition. Such a pairing allowed students to take the college literacy course while still enrolling in an ESOL support class. Modeled after the Community College of Baltimore County's Accelerated Learning Program (ALP; Adams et al., 2009), this corequisite program enrolled student cohorts in both Gulf's most advanced level of ESOL and a class focused on developmental literacy skills. Although the developmental class held a composition prefix, instructors realized that the students would not yet be successful in a traditional composition course and modified the class to include traditional developmental literacy class scaffolds and supports (Paulson & Mason-Egan, 2007) and align with developmental literacy objectives (Paulson & Armstrong, 2010). Four instructors taught in the two sections of the corequisite pairing per term. The program had just experienced instructor turnover: Amal, an adjunct, was hired to teach one of the advanced ESOL classes shortly after the term began.

Gulf faculty described several benefits of their collaboration that reflected the emergence of a learning organization (Senge, 2006). Valerie and Regina, the chairs of ESL and developmental literacy respectively, collectively designed the model and course calendar and taught the classes. Because of her late hiring, Amal had limited time to familiarize herself with the model but described Valerie as a "mentor" who shared materials and answered questions. Amal felt that teaching the same course as Valerie strengthened their collegial relationship; she also described their disciplinary conversations based on their advanced degrees in

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. Valerie similarly referenced ongoing collaborations with the English chair. All four instructors appreciated their informal communication, demonstrating the collaboration's knowledge development and management (Senge et al., 2012).

Faculty also appreciated cross-departmental planning to "come up with the best scenario, and what's going to give success to our students. That's our top priority" (Valerie). Collective discussions to modify instruction and expectations for students illustrated their reflexive practice (Senge et al., 2012). This collaboration also impacted their teaching. In an ESOL lecture on summarizing main ideas, Amal highlighted connections to thesis statement instruction in the paired composition class. Similarly, Regina and Valerie referenced ESOL instruction aligned with both Texas ESL and Career and College Readiness Standards, such as providing explicit grammar instruction. This collaborative and intentional integration demonstrated the faculty's shared vision which is essential to forming the mental models of the challenge they are addressing and the tools at their disposal (Senge et al., 2012).

Based on this shared conceptualization, Gulf's developmental literacy instructors highly valued their faculty peers. Realizing that some developmental literacy assignments and expectations were beyond their corequisite students' current abilities, the developmental instructors looked to their counterparts who taught beginning adult ESL or ESOL courses focused on college preparation, particularly to integrate reading instruction into their developmental literacy class. This also demonstrated faculty's interdependence, an essential learning organization characteristic (White & Weathersbee, 2005), and a level of managed complexity—"the ability to see larger systems and forces at play especially where complex and 'messy' problems are concerned, and to construct public, testable ways of expressing those interrelationships" (Senge et al., 2012, p. 16).

Gulf instructors also encouraged students to utilize campus resources, including the tutoring center and online course documents. Shared expectations and reminders between the classes further solidified their alignment. Regina described jointly addressing "not just the calendar, but guidelines. These are just some things that we anticipate will make a coreq situation be more effective." This emphasis on building a system of resources and the team's relationship was evidence of their shared mental model (Senge, 1990) and, according to Regina, "maintain[ed] the integrity of our working relationship." Based on initial collaboration over the "model calendar" of scaffolded, thematic assignments, the group planned to next address collective assignment design.

Despite these achievements and the potential for increased collaboration, Valerie acknowledged alignment was "a challenge and a work in progress." The group included two department chairs with significant administrative duties and an adjunct whose teaching schedules at multiple institutions made meetings difficult. There were no resources to support their work or pay Amal for collaboration. As a result, the group lacked opportunities to recalibrate their instruction as the term progressed. Lack of collaboration with other faculty, mentoring, and prep time negatively impact student learning, graduation rates, and likelihood of transferring from a two-year to four-year institution (Murray, 2019). The negative effects of under-supporting adjunct instructors are particularly concerning given the academic aspirations of multilingual adult students transitioning into developmental literacy courses.

Limited resources for ongoing collaboration and communication were challenges facing programs in the study and illustrated the continued need for reflexive thinking to solve their wicked problem. Yet such collaborative critical reflection improves the practice of community college teaching (Brookfield, 2002). Formal and informal learning with colleagues drives individual and organizational learning (White & Weathersbee, 2005). Without dialoging and processing time, faculty had limited ability to sustain change. Indeed, time was perhaps the most necessary resource colleges could have provided. Valerie also expressed frustration over limited administrative direction. This was echoed by Natalie and Regina's concerns that the composition course was not as intense as other sections because students were "not ready" without intensive language support from ESOL. Thus, faculty struggled to align within and between programs. Despite these challenges, the team remained committed to the corequisite, believing they could better support multilingual adult students through it.

Study-wide evidence of limited engagement or collaboration. Amongst the study sites, the four-person team of Gulf faculty best exemplified the potential of a college to become a learning organization in support of transitioning multilingual adult immigrant students. Overall, despite clear evidence of overlap in adult ESL and developmental literacy standards and instruction, ES(O)L and developmental faculty had little to no direct or sustained interaction with each other across the study's other five sites. Borderland ES(O)L faculty officed on a separate campus and could not name their developmental counterparts. Star College instructors had little to no understanding of the other program's standards or instruction.

Panhandle ES(O)L and developmental literacy reported that they did not hold shared meetings or engage with faculty from the other program. Instead, they depended upon a single faculty member, Karen, who served first as department chair in ES(O)L and then in English. (At Panhandle, ESL and ESOL classes were offered by the same department.) Melissa, a developmental literacy instructor, explained her program's pervasive belief, "Karen knows [about ES(O)L], so we have a resource if we ever want to know something, we can go to her and say, 'What do we do about this?' and she has an answer." This assumption that Karen was the conduit between the programs and that additional, or structured, collaboration was therefore unnecessary represents a mental model that commonly impedes school improvement: "Before you change the rules, you must first look to the ways that people think and interact together" (Senge et al., 2012, p. 25). Melissa only contacted ES(O)L if a student came without adequate preparation: "We usually don't have much crossover [with ES(O)L because students] ... come over to us, and they're ready for our classes." Panhandle's faculty were typical in this regard. Programs demonstrated some evidence of standards alignment, but few had actual collaboration, and many faculty and administrators appeared ignorant of the complexities involving transition at their college let alone how to support multilingual adult students' transition.

Study-Wide Evidence of Collaboration Opportunities

None of the observed colleges invested at the institutional level in instructional alignment; however, their loosely articulated organizational goals and individual faculty efforts suggest the potential for these and other colleges to become learning organizations. Such a transformation necessitates supporting individual learning and applying it to institutional learning. Senge et al. (2012) distinguish between generative

(i.e., concept creation) and reflective thinking (i.e., concept revisioning and connecting to the institutional mission to expand and support processes). These types of thinking are essential to generating new ideas and reflecting upon their utility and adaptability for achieving institutional goals. Senge et al. also identify three elements of organizational learning: *guiding ideas*, *theories/tools/models*, and *innovations in infrastructure*. In this section, I report findings across the corpus of colleges related to generative and reflective thinking.

Deciding "who has to drive it." Leadership and a guiding theory are essential to generative and reflexive thinking (Senge, 1990). Supporting the transition from ES(O)L to college of multilingual adult students requires strong leadership to develop and disseminate the strategic plan. Regina described the dilemma of "Who has to drive it?", establishing consensus on the standards for the paired classes and the team's decision making,

> The truth is I have students who are not ready for 01 [the developmental literacy class]…. That's the reality of it, so it would be ridiculous if I said, 'Let my class be the one [to determine the learning objectives for the collaboration].' That would be ridiculous. So, I think there are elements of the ESOL class that have to drive the direction of 01 to a certain point.

Natalie, Gulf's other developmental literacy instructor, concurred, "I think those are some things that we can collaborate [on] when we do that next year." Natalie offered the example of a shared text, "It can be 'Hey, I want them to read this for my class.' And if we agree that we can split that reading between the two classes, we have this variety of texts that can count."

This suggested the benefits of dialogue and generative conversations to promote consensus. Regina and Natalie were sensitive to students' needs and the importance of a shared vision for innovative but uniform changes. In a learning organization, dialogue between team members facilitates individual in-depth contemplation for changing assumptions and behaviors (Senge, 1990). The Gulf team had not yet engaged in this work, but they recognized a need for it.

Bolstering fledging collaborations. The research sites demonstrated varied interest and ability to foster generative and reflexive thinking. Esther, a Baja College district administrator for developmental education and ES(O)L lamented,

> If you're not taking your time, you can't be building that quality program…. I had a dream that if I could put all of the partners together in one room and I could host a summit…but [right now] nothing is coherent. Come on we have the same goals! You have to coordinate it.

This spoke to Baja's need for a guiding idea or shared program-level vision. Esther believed faculty held shared goals but were unable to rally: they lacked a model to coordinate their efforts.

Learning with and from other programs. Team learning occurs in relationship to individual and organizational learning and is a key discipline for transformative organizational learning (Senge, 1990). Star College developmental and ES(O)L faculty shared professional development: an ES(O)L-led writing training and a developmental-led reading training. Tammy, an ES(O)L instructor explained, "We were at loggerheads more, and now I think we're recognizing, we have the same struggle and we want the students in our class… [to] have the best." Shannon was similarly enthusiastic:

> We were hoping that we could… collaborate with them—maybe even team teach that would be great…. That one meeting, you know, we are all sharing things, and I could hear from those instructors how thankful they were to hear some of the things that we were doing.

Faculty valued this formal cross-training and collaboration. Shannon appreciated the increased visibility of the other programs' assets, what Senge et al. (2012) describe as "arranging a group of

scattered elements so they function as a whole by orienting them all to common awareness of each other, their purpose and their current reality" (p. 116). Ultimately, however, Star lacked an articulated alignment model and therefore did not tap its full organizational learning potential beyond the team of ES(O)L and developmental literacy faculty.

Final Reflections

This is only a study of instructional alignment: a small component in the necessarily larger examination colleges' potential as learning organizations. A more comprehensive future study could examine advising, tutoring, and other forms of student support as well as student outcomes. Data collection was also dependent upon faculty's self-reports of engagement within and across programs. Despite these limitations, the findings illuminated instructional alignment efforts at six sites of adult ES(O)L and developmental literacy to explore how community colleges can function as learning organizations. Texas-mandated ESL and developmental literacy standards present a unique opportunity to examine institutional alignment between ES(O)L and developmental literacy to solve the "wicked problem" (Rittel & Webber, 1973, p. 136) of supporting multilingual adult students' academic and career goals across college divisions. Despite substantial overlap in ES(O)L and developmental literacy standards, colleges engaged in varying levels of cross-departmental efforts to transition students with only loosely shared organizational goals and insufficient leadership, structure, and time.

The majority of ES(O)L and developmental literacy faculty are adjuncts (Twombly, 2005). With their varying professional development, training, and previous experience, these instructors supporting the most marginalized students are in danger of marginalization themselves (Curtis, 2014; Johnston & Schade, 2017). The intentional collaborations observed at Gulf filled an important pedagogical need while elevating the status of ESL, ESOL and developmental faculty among their institutional peers. Yet no faculty or institutions held a clearly articulated mission guiding their collaboration or support for students across programs. More than simply pairing courses, a learning organization approach to alignment would articulate a larger goal for intentional collaboration and establish institutional supports for leveraging individual learning and development.

When adult educators understand the increasing language and literacy expectations facing their students, they can scaffold instruction to better align ES(O)L and developmental literacy programs. Senge et al. (2012) describe team learning as a "discipline of practices designed… to get the people on a team thinking and acting together" (p. 115); institutions can become learning institutions that solve difficult problems through continuous dialogue and collaboration. The present findings demonstrate the opportunity and potential for individual and institutional efforts to respond to complex problems as opportunities for rethinking our very system for serving students.

References

Adams, P., Gearhart, S., Miller, R., & Roberts, A. (2009). The accelerated learning program: Throwing open the gates. *Journal of Basic Writing, 28*(2), 50-69. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43443881

Almon, C. (2015). College persistence and engagement in light of a mature English language learner (ELL) student's voice. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice, 39*(5), 461-472. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2013.850757

Belinfanti, T., & Stout, L. (2018). Contested visions: The value of systems theory for corporate law. *University of Pennsylvania Law Review, 166*(3), 579-631. https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2709&context=facpub

Brookfield, S. D. (2002). Using the lenses of critically reflective teaching in the community college classroom. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, *2002*(118), 31-38. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.61

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1992). *Ecological systems theory*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Boylan, H. R. (2004). *Forging new partnerships: Adult and developmental education in community colleges*. CAAL Community College Series Working Paper 8. Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy.

Cashiola, L., & Potter, D. (2021). *Increases in Long-Term English Learners (LTELs) in Texas*. Houston Education Research Consortium. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614658.pdf

Clark, V. & Braun, V. (2014). Thematic analysis. In A. C. Michaels (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research* (pp. 6626-6628). Springer.

Curtis, J. W. (2014). *The employment status of instructional staff members in higher education, fall 2011*. American Association of University Professors. https://www.aaup-foundation.org/sites/default/files/files/AAUP-InstrStaff2011-April2014.pdf

Dechant, K., & Dechant, L. (2010). Using systems theory to conceptualize the implementation of undergraduate online education in a university setting. *Organizational Management Journal, 7*(4), 291-300. https://doi.org/10.1057/omj.2010.38

Fernandez, R., Peyton, J. K., & Schaetzel, K. (2017). A survey of writing instruction in adult ESL programs: Are teaching practices meeting adult learner needs? *Journal of Research and Practice for Adult Literacy, Secondary, and Basic Education, 6*(2), 5-20.

Ganga, E. C., Mazzariello, A. N., & Edgecombe, N. D. (2018). *Developmental education: An introduction for policymakers*. Community College Research Center, Teachers College, Columbia University. https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/doi/10.7916/D8MD0BD8

Gil, A. C. (2013). *Community college English composition instructors' perceptions regarding the college writing readiness of ESL students* (Publication No. 3608813) [Doctoral dissertation, Barry University]. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* Aldine Publishing Company.

Janis, T. (2013). The community college: Bridge or roadblock to higher education for US adult immigrant English-language learners? *Research in Comparative and International Education, 8*(2), 149-165. https://doi.org/10.2304%2Frcie.2013.8.2.149

Jeffcoat, K., Weisblat, I. A., Bresciani, M. J., Sly, R. W., Tucker, M., Herrin, B., & Cao, L. (2014). Exploring alignment of community college students for preparedness and achievement of basic skills. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *38*(1), 5–23. https://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2010.492744

Johnson, K. A., & Parrish, B. (2010). Aligning instructional practices to meet the academic needs of adult ESL students. *TESOL Quarterly*, *44*(3), 618–628. https://doi.org/10.5054/tq.2010.230742_2

Johnston, K. M., & Schade, J. (2017). Building community and institutional loyalty through faculty development. In R. Fuller, M. K. Brown, & K. Smith (Eds.), *Adjunct faculty voices: Cultivating professional development and community at the front lines of higher education* (pp. 15-22). Stylus.

Kalamkarian, H. S. (2020, March 3). *Exploring characteristics and outcomes of English learners in community colleges*. Paper presented at the League for Innovation in the Community College Annual Conference. Seattle, WA.

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A-M., Johnson, M., & Kangasniemi, M. (2016). Systemic methodological review: Developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 72*(12), 2954-65. https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031

Kibler, A. K., Bunch, G. C. & Endris, A. K. (2011). Community college practices for U.S. educated language minority students: A resource-oriented framework. *Bilingual Research Journal, 34*, (2), 201-222. https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2011.597822

Knowles, M. S. (1968). Andragogy, not pedagogy. *Adult Leadership, 16*(10), 350-352, 386.

Lawrence, P. R., & Lorsch, J. W. (1967). Differentiation and integration in complex organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 1-47. https://doi.org/10.2307/2391211

Merriam, S. B., & Baumgartner, L. M. (2020). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. John Wiley & Sons.

Murray, D. S. (2017). The precarious new faculty majority: Communication and instruction research and contingent labor in higher education. *Communication Education, 68*(2), 235-245. https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2019.1568512

Paulson, E. J., & Armstrong, S. L. (2010). Postsecondary literacy: Coherence in theory, terminology, and writing. *Journal of Developmental Education, 33*(3), 2-9. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ942870.pdf

Paulson, E. J., & Mason-Egan, P. (2007). Retrospective miscue analysis for struggling postsecondary readers. *Journal of Developmental Education, 31*(2), 2-13.

Pressley, M. (2002). Metacognition and self-regulated comprehension. In A. E. Farsrup & S. J. Samuels (Eds.), *What research has to say about reading instruction* (3rd ed., pp. 291-309). International Reading Association.

Reilly, T. F. (2017). Taking stock: Creating a professional development matrix. In R. Fuller, M. K. Brown, & K. Smith (Eds.), *Adjunct faculty voices: Cultivating professional development and community at the front lines of higher* education (pp. 23-30). Stylus.

Reynolds, T., Murrill, L. D., Whitt, G. L. (2006). Learning from organizations: Mobilizing and sustaining teacher change. *The Educational Forum, 70*(2), 123-133. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131720608984883

Rittel, H.W.J., & Webber, M.M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sci, 4*, 155–169. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01405730

Roth, G. L., & Senge, P. M. (1996). From theory to practice: research territory, processes and structure at an organizational learning centre. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 9*(1), 92-106. https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/09534819610107349/full/pdf?title=from-theory-to-practice-research-territory-processes-and-structure-at-an-organizational-learning-centre

Schneider, A., Wickert, C., & Marti, E. (2017). Reducing complexity by creating complexity: A systems theory perspective on how organizations respond to their environments. *Journal of Management Studies*, *54*(2), 182-208. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12206

Senge, P. (1990). The leader's new work. Building learning organizations. *Sloan Management Review* 32, 7–23

Senge, P. (2000). *"Give me a lever long enough ... and single-handed I can move the world"*. In The Jossey-Bass reader on educational leadership, 13–25. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Senge, P. M. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization*. Currency.

Senge, P. M., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., & Dutton, J. (2012). *Schools that learn (updated and revised): A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. Currency.

Shapiro, S. (2012). Retention of English learner students at a community college. In Y. Kanno & L. Harklau (Eds.), *Linguistic minority students go to college: Preparation, access and persistence* (pp. 220-253). Routledge.

Suh, E. K. (2018). Counting backwards toward the future of community college immigrant students: Conceptualizing generation 1 learners. *Basic Writing e-Journal, 15*(1), 1-41.

Suh, E. K. (2016). Language minority student transitions. *Journal of Developmental Education, 40*(1), 26-28. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1152254.pdf

Suh, E. K.., Dyer, J., McGee, B., & Miller Payne, E. (2020). To, through, and beyond higher education: A literature review of multilingual immigrant students' community college transitions. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice,* 1-17. http://doi.org/10.1080/10668926.2020.1841045

Tucker, J. T. (2006). *The ESL logjam: Waiting times for adult ESL classes and the impact on English learners*. National Association for Latino Elected and Appointed Officials Educational Fund.

Twombly, S. B. (2004). Looking for signs of community college arts and sciences faculty professionalization in searches: An alternative approach to a vexing question. *Community College Review*, *32*(1), 21-39. https://doi.org/10.1177/009155210403200102

White, J., & Weathersby, R. (2005). Can universities become true learning organizations? *The Learning Organization, 12*(3), 292-298.

Williams, T. (2018). *College leadership: Leadership factors influencing the professional training of adjunct instructors at a two-year college* (Doctoral dissertation, St. Thomas University).