Scaffolding Through Questions in Upper Elementary ELL Learning

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Among teachers' various classroom discourse strategies, teacher questions are a powerful tool for guiding the linguistic and cognitive development of English as a second language (ESL) students (Gerstein, 1996; Gibbons, 2003). Because we do not know much about effective questioning strategies that support the growth of ESL students' thinking and language skills, the purpose of this article is to explain two successful ESL teachers' instructional practice, with a focus on their questions, specifically (a) the types of questions teachers asked and their functions, and (b) changes in students' participation and use of English oral language in classroom activities. Results show that the two teachers used different types of questions to scaffold their students' learning across a school year, and teacher questions positively affected student participation in classroom activities and language learning.

Note: All names are pseudonyms.

INTRODUCTION

Changing student demographics in the U.S. underscore the importance of providing instructional support for teachers of English language learners (ELLs). While the growth rate of ELL population in U.S. schools seems high, the number of trained teachers in ELL instruction seems relatively small. The National Center for Education Statistics (2002) reported that while 42% of teachers taught ELL, less than 13% of teachers received any training in ELL instruction. The growth of ELL population continues in U.S. schools. In 2009, 67% of U.S. public schools are reported to have at least one ELL (Keigher, 2009). This suggests that many teachers will find themselves teaching ELLs without adequate training in ELL instruction. To cope with this important educational issue, teacher educators need to find ways to help teachers build on their existing knowledge about effective instruction applicable to teaching ELLs.

Among various aspects of effective instruction, *scaffolding* is an important concept that helps us consider the context of language learning. Many scholars within the sociocultural tradition have shown that language learning is not an individual cognitive process because ELLs are more likely to succeed in learning English as a second language (ESL) when they have teachers, peers, and community members who affirm their cognitive and linguistic capacities and provide support (August & Hakuta, 1997). In classrooms, ESL students need a support structure that provides them with opportunities to learn English and use their emerging English skills in meaningful, prosocial learning contexts.

A key element of scaffolding in a classroom context is the "gradual release of responsibility" (Pearson, 1985, p. 732). Effective teachers help ELLs gain ownership in their language learning. They set instructional goals, design instructional activities accordingly, and engage ELLs meaningfully in the learning process. Effective teachers use classroom discourse strategies in daily interactions with ELLs with their instructional goal in mind, and help them learn the content and develop disposition for language learning (Laura Roehler, personal communications, 1998). As ELLs develop proficiency in English, effective teachers change discourse strategies in a manner that reflects their understanding of student progress and furthers the students' language and cognitive development. An important question is how these effective teachers of ELLs use classroom discourse strategies to gradually release their responsibility and help students take ownership in language learning.

This article focuses specifically on teacher questions among various classroom discourse strategies that effective teachers of ELLs use because the questions are powerful instructional tools for guiding the linguistic and cognitive development of ELLs (Gerstein, 1996; Gibbons, 2003). While questions are ubiquitous in instructional contexts, developing effective strategies for asking good questions is a challenging task even for experienced teachers, and we need to understand how successful teachers use questions effectively to support the

growth of ELLs' thinking and language skills. Such knowledge will help prepare thoughtful in-service and pre-service teachers in an era of increasing cultural and linguistic diversity. With that in mind, the purpose of this article is to explain two successful ESL teachers' instructional practices — with a specific focus on how their questions guided ESL students to develop ownership in language learning. I use language ownership to mean ELLs' volition to use emerging language skills to participate in class activities meaningfully and express their thoughts and ideas. Language ownership is manifested in ELLs' classroom participation and English use. To observe the connection between teacher questions and students' language ownership, I will attend specifically to (a) the types of questions teachers asked and their functions, and (b) changes in students' participation and use of English oral language in classroom activities.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT RESEARCH

Research Knowledge About Scaffolding

While scholars agree that scaffolding is important for understanding successful learning for both English-speaking students and English language learners, and that its nature is complex and multifaceted, there is a gap between the two lines of research regarding the nature of research knowledge available for improving classroom practice through scaffolding. In literacy research for English-speaking students, scholars demonstrated the importance of teachers' role in helping students gain control of their own learning in literacy acquisition. Drawing upon pioneering research conducted by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976) and other scholars (Maloch, 2002; Rogoff, 1990, 1997) who studied the role of knowledgeable others (e.g., tutor or teacher) in scaffolding, Rodgers (2005) revealed the interactive nature of scaffolding through empirical research that documented the growing control of reading words and independence in the reading process among struggling readers in one-on-one instructional settings. To provide scaffolding that leads to students' successful reading, teachers begin with careful observation of individual learners, respond thoughtfully to learners' needs, and use appropriate instructional materials (Rodgers & Rodgers, 2004).

In English language learning research, however, there is urgent need for more empirical research that demonstrates the interactive nature of scaffolding that leads to ELLs' successful language learning in classroom contexts. In extant ELL research, the term scaffolding encompasses a wide spectrum of effective instruction, from a generic term for support as found in scaffolding reading experiences (Fitzgerald & Graves, 2004) to a more-specific instructional behavior such as modeling (Walqui, 2006). These scholars conceptualize scaffolding as an instructional framework and encourage thoughtful research and practice that considers ELLs, instructional materials, and instructional procedures holis-

tically. Considering the complexity of scaffolding in instructional contexts and the importance of observing the connection between teaching and language learning to improve classroom practice for ELLs, I will frame scaffolding as an instructional strategy. I focus specifically on teacher questions, and review language research on this issue.

Language Research on Teacher Questions as a Scaffolding Strategy

Two lines of research suggest the importance of teacher questions in language learning. First, robust empirical evidence on classroom discourse has been built around the issue of how teacher questions affect student learning in general education classrooms. Second, ESL research on language learning and teaching indicates that there are specific types of teacher questions that can promote ESL students' disposition for learning and language development.

The role of teacher question

Research literature on classroom discourse helps us understand the centrality of teacher questions in student learning. In their seminal work on classroom discourse in Great Britain's Abraham Moss Centre, Edwards and Furlong (1978) argued that the heart of teaching is to bring students to "the teacher's world of meanings" (p. 104). Although a classroom is a busy place with a constant stream of talk, it is the teacher who initiates questions, evaluates students' responses, and guides them explicitly or implicitly toward his or her instructional goals (Edwards & Furlong; Edwards & Mercer, 1987). Because teacher questions have specific directionality for bringing students' conceptual knowledge toward teachers' intentions, their primary function is to reconceptualize student thinking and understanding (Cazden, 1988).

The reconceptualizing power of teacher questions has been carefully documented by reading researchers. Decades of reading research studies demonstrate that teacher questions are essential in guiding developing readers to comprehend texts successfully: Teacher questions help young readers draw upon background knowledge related to the key ideas of a text and use comprehension strategies (e.g., summarizing, clarifying) to process and monitor what they read (Au, 1979; Au, Mason, & Scheu, 1995; Palincsar, 1982; Pearson, 1985; Pearson & Duke, 2002; Pearson & Raphael, 2003; Pressley, 2006). More importantly, teacher questions can help transitional and fluent readers (including bilingual readers) to think more deeply about the texts around them, and to transform their reading experiences into actions (Orellena, 2001). This powerful role in students' cognitive and reading development suggests the importance of examining teacher questions as a key to understanding effective instruction.

The nature and characteristics of effective ESL teacher questions

The concepts of comprehensible output in second language research offer an overarching framework for conceptualizing effective teacher questions that promote ESL students' language learning. Swain (1985, 2000) argues that ESL students need dialogic opportunities to use their emerging language skills and confirm whether their language knowledge is comprehended by their interlocutors. Her argument implies that teacher questions should encourage interaction among ESL students as well as reflection on their own language knowledge. This line of research highlights the importance of teachers' discourse strategies in supporting ESL students' language learning. Effective teacher questions need to create opportunities for ESL students to develop linguistic and conceptual knowledge and practice their emerging English skills in meaningful learning contexts.

Wong-Fillmore's pioneering work on teacher talk (1982, 1985) is critical to understanding the variety and directionality of effective teacher questions for ESL students. Based upon analyses of classroom discourse to "examine the types found in actual language samples collected in classrooms" (Wong-Fillmore, 1982, p. 146), she illustrated various types of teacher questions that seemed to have resulted in promoting ESL students' language learning. For example, teachers asked, "Who can tell me what that word means? (Wong-Fillmore, 1985, p. 36)," "What is 6 divided by 2? (p. 38)," and "What does an inventor do? (p. 39)" These questions suggest different instructional goals for teachers and learning opportunities for students. Directionality in teacher questions gives us a glimpse of a teacher's intention to reconceptualize student thinking toward her instructional goal, as depicted in the following serial teacher questions: "What does a mayor do? Who is our mayor? Is our mayor a man or a woman?" (Wong-Fillmore, 1985, p. 40). Thus, findings from Wong-Fillmore's work imply the role effective teacher questions can play in reconceptualizing ESL students' thinking and developing their knowledge about English language and thinking skills.

The contributions of teacher questions on ESL students' learning are well documented by Gibbons (2003). Based upon analyses of the development of scientific discourse of 8- and 9-year-old ESL students from two classes in a poor urban Australian school, she compiled examples of teacher questions that afforded ESL students the opportunity to elaborate on their oral language in science classes, make meaning out of texts, and coconstruct academic discourse. She further showed that teacher questions are contingent upon students, and teacher questions can bring qualitatively different outcomes in student oral language.

In summary, effective teacher questions can bring positive educational outcomes. Specifically, research literature on ESL classroom discourse suggests that effective teachers of ESL students use questions to engender text com-

prehension and conceptual development. Considering that ESL students' proficiency may change over time, effective teachers reformulate and refocus their questions based upon their understanding of what ESL students know about English language demonstrated in classroom participation and use of English oral language. In this sense, teachers are working with a moving target. To make a necessary link between teacher questions and ELLs' learning, what we need to know, then, is (a) how do effective teachers scaffold their students' learning through questions across a school year, and (b) how do effective teacher questions affect the development of student ownership in learning English?

METHOD

Background Information: Schools, Teachers, and Learners

This study is drawn from 3 years of classroom observation (1997–2000) that were part of an ESL portfolio assessment project within the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA). During these 3 years, I documented instructional practice of Meredith, an effective ESL teacher. I observed students' improved performance by the end of the school year as all students made reading gains by at least one grade level, and they liked coming to the class. The data presented in this paper are from one particular year (1997–1998) when Meredith and another ESL teacher, Nina, were coteaching upper elementary (Grades 4–6) ELLs.

School context

Meredith and Nina taught at Spring Valley Elementary School, which was located in a midwestern university town. The school provided rich learning opportunities for pre-service teachers, as a professional development school (PDS) of a neighboring university, until the school closing in 2003 due to the district's restructuring efforts to adjust to the districtwide low student enrollment. Because the school attracted students from other schools in the district, it became the target of restructuring. When the research took place, the school housed approximately 200 students ranging from kindergarten through fifth grade. The students were mostly children of university graduate students from around the world, and they represented approximately 35 countries and 30 languages. Because a substantial number of new students arrived with a native language other than English, there was a high proportion of ESL students in the school. Luckily, there was a vibrant ESL program in the school, and Meredith and Nina were two of three teachers in the ESL pullout program.

In a general sense, Spring Valley Elementary had a school culture that fostered an "additive" perspective of learning English (Cummins, 1986). When

new students with limited English proficiency arrived at the school, it was common to find teachers who tried to match the newcomers with proficient English speakers from the same native language background. Staff members encouraged proficient English speakers to translate English into their native languages for their new friends until their English language skills were better developed. Teachers also utilized parental support in helping ESL students learn. They invited parents of ESL students to come into their classrooms and share their cultural heritage. In so doing, teachers worked to help ESL students feel proud of their cultures and languages.

Staff members' attitudes toward student cultures and languages were also appreciative. In the hallway, the school had a year-round display of flags from countries around the world. Teachers often mentioned that the flags reminded them of the school's diverse student body, and they cherished the special opportunity to teach students from diverse cultures. I was told that most teachers made a voluntary choice to stay in the school. In addition to appreciating student cultures on a daily and weekly basis, the school also held an annual celebration organized by a team of teachers and parents. The event usually included dance and music performances, as well as food tasting. Parents and students shared their cultural expertise with the teachers and among themselves, and teachers learned about the meanings of dance and music from students' various cultures. Thus, the annual celebration raised teachers' awareness of and encouraged them to appreciate diverse world cultures.

ESL teachers and learners

Meredith and Nina were veteran teachers. Although they had both been teaching for over 25 years at the time this study was conducted, they enjoyed being in the role of the learner, and their interests in learning and expanding their working knowledge led them to participate in various professional development activities with teacher colleagues and university researchers. One such activity was a portfolio assessment project, from which I collected data for this research report. For the project, the teachers participated in monthly research conversations with university researchers. During that time, they planned their ESL curriculum for a group of focus students and reflected on their own teaching in light of research literature that the university researchers read with them. They also stayed after each class to respond to my questions regarding their teaching and students, which offered them opportunities to reflect on their own teaching throughout the year.

The focus group of students Meredith and Nina chose to study were nine students ranging from fourth to sixth grade. The students came from six different countries—Botswana, China, Kenya, Korea, Malaysia, and Pakistan—and were readers and writers in their native language schools before they came to the United States. At the beginning of the school year, most of the students'

English proficiency was low. When we began the study in the fall, six students had resided in the U.S. for less than 6 months, and the remaining three between 2 and 4 years. The students received a pullout ESL instruction for 40 minutes per day, 4 days a week, and spent the rest of the day in the regular classroom.

Instructional context: Writer's workshop

Meredith and Nina chose to incorporate a writer's workshop into the ESL curriculum because the workshop format provided opportunities to create student learning portfolios and observe students' language and literacy development (Calkins, 1991; Graves, 1983). They began instructional planning by reading research articles about the writer's workshop. One of the first professional references they explored included "A Description of the Writing Process" and "A Writing Program: Grades One Through Six" from a book on process writing (Nathan, Temple, Juntunen, & Temple, 1989).

The writing activities in Meredith's and Nina's class involved various genres of writing from cinquain to fiction writing. During writing activities, students were given large blocks of time which usually spanned more than one class period. After completing each writing activity, students shared their written work with their peers and ESL teachers. During the second semester, all of the students chose written work to include in their individual portfolios. They revised their written work by themselves, with their peers, and with their teachers. Initial and final drafts were clipped together for entry into the portfolio.

Data Collection and Analyses

Research focus and questions

The focus of this study is to understand how teacher questions, among various classroom discourse strategies of teachers, lead to ELLs' ownership in language learning. As mentioned earlier, I use language ownership to mean ELLs' volition to use emerging language skills to participate in class activities meaningfully and express their thoughts and ideas. By using the concept of language ownership, I highlight the importance of ELLs' agency in language learning process. I posit that language ownership is manifested in ELLs' classroom participation and English use. To observe the connection between teacher questions and students' language ownership, I studied the following two research questions:

1. How do effective teachers scaffold their students' learning through questions across a school year?

2. How do effective teacher questions affect the development of student ownership in language learning?

Data collection

I conducted instrumental case studies — examining "a particular case mainly to provide insight into an issue" (Stake, 2000, p. 437). I judged the effectiveness of the two teachers based upon their students' performance on the Qualitative Reading Inventory (see research findings to Question 2 in this paper) and made weekly observations of their 45-minute instruction for the group of intermediate ESL students and of their teaching reflection after each class. Observations were recorded through notes and audio and video recordings. I also recorded monthly project meetings. Data used for analyses came from at least six data sources: (a) observation notes and audio and video recordings from general and ESL classrooms, (b) student assessment results, (c) student oral language samples, (d) student work samples from school and home, (e) teacher reflections, and (f) observation notes and audio recordings of monthly project meetings.

Data analysis

Constant comparative method and analytic induction were used to analyze data (Charmaz, 2000; Glazer & Strauss, 1967; Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). I adapted Charmaz's iterative coding procedures (i.e., line-by-line coding, generating action codes, and focused coding). I made detailed notes during each classroom observation. After each observation, I keyed my observation notes into a computer and expanded on them while listening to audiotape recordings. While I reviewed my expanded observation notes, I conducted two levels of analyses. At the first level, I focused on the degree of teacher responsibility represented in teacher questions and the characteristics of each question in instructional contexts. I then divided teacher questions into three types — coaching, facilitating, and collaborating (see Appendix A). At the second level of analysis, I looked for an overarching theme that best represented the main instructional goal of each of the three types of teacher questions across the school year. To reduce the likelihood of inaccurate interpretation, I considered multiple perceptions (Stake, 2000); for example, I shared my analyses with other researchers through ongoing data analysis conversations, and used their feedback to re-examine the accuracy of my interpretations.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Findings to Question 1:
Three themes in teachers' scaffolding through questions

Sharing teacher expectations

Among the three types of questions (coaching, facilitating, and collaborating), teachers used coaching questions—mostly between the beginning of the school

year and just before the Christmas break—to share their expectations for build-ing a supportive classroom community and learning goals with students. The characteristics of coaching questions included to help students monitor their own thinking and utterances, give commands, add more information, remind students of what they need to do in class, help them think about the focus of a class activity, summarize, and model a class activity (see Coaching Questions in Appendix A). For example, while students and teachers were developing should-do lists for authors during the presentation of student-conducted inter-views, Jandi, one of the female students in the class, shared her idea in a whole group. Nina, one of the teachers then asked, "Jandi, can I add something to your idea?" In this example, the teacher listened to the student's idea, and upon identifying a need for expansion of the idea, asked for permission to do so. In other words, teachers seemed to use coaching questions to guide students toward the instructional and behavioral objectives they have set for them. The role of coaching questions was similar to telling, but it allowed students to exert a small degree of ownership through their responses.

One aspect of asking coaching questions was to assess students' knowledge of key words in a text and understanding of what they learned; this specific type of coaching question was observed throughout the year. An example comes from October 23rd when Nina introduced a guided reading text entitled, "Tidy Raccoon and Untidy Owl." She asked students to guess the meaning of *tidy*. She added that it was what she and I were doing just before the class began. She then explained the meaning of tidy. After explaining the meaning of untidy, she added that *un-* is a prefix. She asked the students to think of other words that began with the prefix. When Nina asked the students to guess the meaning of *un*, Unisha responded that it meant not. Yoon said, "unhappy." And Chul said, "uncomfortable." After a few students shared words with the prefix, Nina and the students read the story. As shown in this example, Nina used coaching questions to help students understand key words of the text.

Deepening student understanding

Teachers used facilitating questions to deepen student understanding about English language, text comprehension, and communicating while maintaining a supportive classroom learning environment. The characteristics of facilitating questions were to invite student input, help students deepen their understand-ing of vocabulary or text comprehension, help them articulate or elaborate on what they said, encourage student interaction, seek students' opinions, or vali-date students' creative language use (see Facilitating Questions in Appendix A). An example comes from January 21st when Meredith asked "why" questions to Chul while the class was reviewing what happened in the story *Noisy Nora* (Wells, 1997):

Meredith: What happened in the story so far?

Chul: She make[s] lots of noisy[e].

Meredith: Why?

Chul: Because she think[s] they may hear her.

Meredith: Yes, you are right. Nora's family did not pay attention to her.

Yeum: I agree with Chul…Her mother…She was noisy…She left.

Meredith's "why" question in the above example pushed Chul to move beyond recalling and summarizing the story. He had to make an inference from the text and communicate his thoughts to the teacher. Meredith then provided positive feedback on Chul's response which seemed to inspire Yeum, the shyest student in the class, to share his comments using his emerging English skills.

Classroom observations showed that teachers used facilitating questions more frequently after the Christmas break. Characteristics of facilitating questions suggested a median level of teacher responsibility among the three types of teacher questions. For example, teachers asked students if they wanted to add more to the should-do lists for the author and the audience. By inviting students' input to make the class lists more complete, the teachers encouraged active participation and thinking in the activity as well as greater ownership in the learning process. In this sense, the teachers acted as facilitators of students' successful learning. In another example, Meredith asked, "Did you say 'rest'?" after a student said, "winter rest is longer here" to describe a difference between his U.S. school and the school he attended in his home country. Meredith recast the student's sentence by saying, "winter break is longer here." After she asked the facilitating question, she added a compliment, "I like that." The student's word choice may be an example of overgeneralization because the student overextended the conventional English meaning of rest, but Meredith seemed to highlight the student's creativity in his language use as a way to encourage and facilitate active participation in the learning process.

Engaging students in sharing

Teachers used collaborating questions to have dialogues about personal experiences with students throughout the year (see Collaborating Questions in Appendix A). For example, while waiting for students to arrive at the beginning of a class hour, Meredith asked those present, "Did you like the special presentation on rocks in Michigan yesterday?" The question was open-ended and necessitated students' responses. If students did not respond to the teacher's question, the teacher had to find a new way to continue the conversation. Teachers and students needed to collaborate in order to continue the conversation initiated by such questions. Equally importantly, the question focused on students' experiences, which seemed to create opportunities for students to

share their ideas, considering that they possessed background knowledge of the topic under discussion, practice their developing oral language skills, and exercise their ownership of learning. Thus, collaborating questions represented the least degree of teacher responsibility among the three types of teacher questions and the highest level of student ownership in their own learning process.

One key aspect of collaborating questions was to understand students' views of learning in the class. An example comes from April 23rd when the two teachers helped the students understand the procedures of student portfolio interviews. The teachers asked students to choose three pieces (best piece, favorite piece, and a piece that needs improvement) from entries in their learning portfolios:

Nina: What is our best piece?
Eno: I learned about how to describe things.
Nina: [You mean] learning how to describe characters.
Meredith: Can I call them made-up stories? (Meredith writes it on the board, and Nina asks the students what else they did in class)
Yoon: Listening tape, we drew ourselves. It was in my folder…interviewing our friends. And the list, we had stories about raccoon. And we wrote words. You wrote the words. One was about balloons. One person went up to the sky and he…..
Nina: Did you say your learned new words?
(Meredith writes "new word meanings" on the board)

Findings to Question 2:
The effect of teacher questions on students' language learning

Considering that teacher questions were one of the scaffolding strategies used for instruction, I examined the effect of teacher questions on student learning through overall student reading gains and their participation in class activities.

Student reading gains on QRI

The ESL teaching practice of Meredith and Nina was successful based on student performance on the Qualitative Reading Inventory (QRI) (Leslie & Caldwell, 1995). The reading assessment included both expository and narrative reading passages per each grade level and an examiner's data entry form. The assessment format involved an examinee reading a passage and answering follow-up reading comprehension questions about the text. Due to the test format, the QRI required knowledge on phonetic rules, vocabulary, and syntax as well as reading comprehension. Meredith and Nina administered the QRI at the beginning and end of the academic year of 1997–1998.

QRI results demonstrated that students made progress in their reading level, as shown in Table 1. Out of the nine students, one gained 7 grade-reading levels in a year by moving from pre-primer to the sixth-grade level. Two students gained 5 grade levels, another student 3 levels, two students moved up 2 levels, and three students advanced 1 grade reading level within a year. Interestingly, the three students who gained one year growth in QRI had lived in the U.S. longer than the students who made greater reading gains.

Table 1. ESL Student Performance on Qualitative Reading Inventory

Student	Initial (1997)	Final (1998)
Chul	First Grade	Sixth Grade
Eno	Pre-Primer	Sixth Grade
Jandi	Third Grade	Fourth Grade
Jian	Third Grade	Fourth Grade
Khalid	Third Grade	Fourth Grade
Manis	First Grade	Fourth Grade
Unisha	Second Grade	Fourth Grade
Yeum	Primer	Second Grade
Yoon	Primer	Fifth Grade

Student participation in classroom activities

Analyses of teacher questions show that Meredith and Nina provided scaffolding to promote student participation in classroom activities, and their attempts seem to have brought qualitatively different outcomes in the way students engaged in the class discussion between October and March. In mid-October, when students completed interviews of their peers, students shared their findings in class. On this particular day, Chul presented his interview of a classmate, and a couple of his peers and teachers gave comments. At that time, Chul's presentation seemed rather crude as he read the questions and simple answers. Furthermore, even though the floor was open for comments, only two students volunteered to talk, and their comments focused on Chul's posture and his use of because.

However, students' conversation around Chul's presentation on school comparison in early March shows a very different student participation structure, as the students asked for clarification and elaboration from Chul. He began his presentation by reading his written piece on school comparison (Appendix B). When he was done, students applauded, and they began asking questions:

Eno: I have comments about yours. I think the daily schedule was different, but I think it change by [should be changed to] "daily schedule are different" because it's now.

Chul: I thought I was in there because I were in there and I am not in there so.

Eno: I think you are still in there so schedules are …I think so.
Chul: Anybody has comments or questions?
Jandi: I liked the way you read out loud.
Jin: I liked the way you put the paper down.
Unisha: I have a question about the desk? When you said the desk was out of something and rock?
Chul: One kind of thing [desk] is made of woods.
Unisha: What's that?
Chul: Just like the kind of desk in front of Spring Valley School, and rock desk means there we have this much and this much rock, and then we can use it to desk? Also we make art things and we sit down there, and we make something.
Nina: Ah.
Chul: Mrs. Swanson?
Nina: Chul, I am not sure if I understand about the wood desk. You were thinking of wood in front of Spring Valley School.
Chul: Spring Valley School…at the front of the apartment there is some wood desk and the table.
Students: Oh, bench.
Chul: Just like that. Color is different.
Nina: Now, I understand.
Meredith: That was a great question, Unisha. I had the same question in my mind. I am glad you asked.
Chul: Mrs. McNeill?
Meredith: I think you did a great job of explaining to us so many different things that were different in your two schools. And again, you did a great job of main idea, and then explaining the details. So thank you.

After Meredith and Nina commented on Chul's presentation, Manis and Yeum, two shy students in the class, participated in the class discussion.

Manis: I want to know more about school marks.
Chul: I think the school mark was like this (Chul draws his Korean school emblem). This is green color brighter than this. And then we have kind of like that.
Yeum: What is that?
Chul: We have school name.
Eno: Is this flag by English or by Korean?
Meredith: Can you do it in Korean for us? (Chul writes it in Korean on the chalkboard.)
Meredith: I think this is very special.

In this example, there is a seamless flow of conversation among all the students around the content of the presentation. The class conversation shifted:

Eno's comments on Chul's use of past tense in one of his sentences and
    Chul's explanation of his choice of past tense, to
Chul's invitation for comments and questions, to
Jandi and Jian's comments on Chul's posture and clarity of his reading, to
Unisha's clarification question on wooden desk, to
Nina's clarification question on wooden desk, to
Meredith and Nina's comments on the content of Chul's school
    comparison, to
Manis' question for elaboration on Chul's Korean school emblem and
    Chul's drawing as a response to the question, to
Meredith's positive, concluding comments on Chul's presentation and
    the class discussion.

The changes in the class discussion involve not only student participation structure but also the depth and breadth of linguistic information in student questions and responses. This time, teachers were not in the center of the classroom conversation. They were collaborators sharing equal responsibility for participating in the classroom community. Although the students' English skills were not fully developed, they participated meaningfully in class discussions, which suggests that they developed ownership in language learning.

DISCUSSION

This research focused on analyses of Meredith's and Nina's questions, and it revealed how they gradually released responsibility to promote the development of student ownership in language learning. They used coaching, facilitating, and collaborating questions to achieve their instructional goals. Coaching questions were used to share their expectations for building classroom community and learning goals with students. Facilitating questions were used to deepen student understanding about English language, text comprehension, and communicating. The main instructional goal of using collaborating questions was to have dialogues about personal experiences with students throughout the year as well as to understand students' views of learning in the class. An examination of student performance on reading gains and student participation and use of English oral language in classroom activities across the school year shows that the two teachers successfully achieved their instructional goals. With that note, I would like to discuss a few important relevant issues.

First of all, I would like to highlight the fact that my main interest lies in developing a line of pragmatic research directly applicable to pre-service teacher

education for those who will encounter ESL students in their future classrooms. Understanding the world of teaching is a very complicated task, and focusing on what teachers do in classrooms may only be the tip of the iceberg. I also understand that there is a significant body of research literature that emphasizes the importance of studying lost opportunities in classroom discourse (e.g., Hall, 1998). However, I believe it is important to show pre-service teachers images of good teaching, focusing on what good teachers do and how their instructional practice contributes to positive educational outcomes in children's learning (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). With that pragmatic purpose in mind, I have decomposed effective ESL teaching practice (borrowing a term from Grossman's 2006 work on professional training), identified teacher questions as one essential component that we need to understand more thoughtfully, and hope in the future to be able to use my findings to prepare strong preservice teachers of ESL.

One of the key features of effective instruction that Meredith and Nina shaped together for their ELLs is strength-based instruction — instruction that builds upon ESL students' strengths. They did not focus on what the students could not do in class. While building the students' language and literacy skills and helping them understand how to participate in classroom conversations, they commented on what their students *could* do. This gave me an impression that, in the beginning of the school year, they gave compliments on every little thing they could notice, such as using clear voice during presentation or taking a risk to volunteer to talk. Their choice of instructional activities also built upon students' strengths. For example, noticing that students love to chat with each other, Meredith and Nina frequently began the class with a collaborative conversation on what they did on the previous day or weekend or during school break. They developed a classroom activity capitalizing on students' disposition for talking. The same pedagogical principle applies to the student interview at the beginning of the year, and the later comparison between the school students had attended at home and their U.S. school. Meredith and Nina helped their ELLs develop language and literacy knowledge and skills using their disposition for sharing and learning. I believe it would be very helpful to examine how teachers of ELLs in various language programs across the nation use their students' strengths to meet student needs and provide effective instruction. This is especially important because there is such a scant research base on effective classroom instruction for ELLs (van Lier, 1998).

I strongly believe that as researchers enter classrooms to understand teaching, it is important they hold their judgment about what counts as good instruction for ESL students, as it takes time to understand teachers' psychological insights. Because understanding English oral language is challenging even for intermediate ESL students, when giving instructions on a new class activity, ESL teachers use repetition to ensure students' understanding of the activity.

For example, one of the teacher questions was, "Did I understand quick writing?" On that day, prior to introducing a new activity to the students, Meredith asked if they knew what quick writing was. After Meredith finished giving instructions for the activity, Nina then asked the clarification question, "Did I understand quick writing?" and repeated what Meredith had said. Such repetition on what to do can make newcomers to the classroom feel that the teachers' instructions are redundant. However, repetition proved to be a helpful instructional strategy, as it turned out that students often did not understand what they were expected to do. Without understanding the task at hand, students cannot do their best to demonstrate what they know about language, defeating teachers' good instructional intentions.

Considering the chronic shortage of teachers who have received training in ESL or bilingual education, another important educational issue is teacher capacity building through professional development. For example, in the last 3 years less than 13% of teachers with limited English proficient (LEP) students received 8 or more hours of training on how to teach LEP students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002, p. 43). Across the nation, teachers often find themselves teaching ELLs without fully understanding the strengths and characteristics of the students or what instructional strategies might work for them. In such circumstances, school administrators are more likely to create an ESL track—in which ESL students are placed in one classroom until they develop proficient English—to cope with the national and local pressures of high-stakes testing and to manage limited human and physical resources in the school system. To avoid unintended negative consequences of the ESL track (see Valdés, 1998) and promote ESL students' school success, we need to find creative ways to provide professional development opportunities for ELL teachers. One way to provide professional development opportunities is through creating a national database on effective ESL instruction. Reading Classroom Explorer (http://www.eliteracy.org/rce/) is one such example that serves teachers of reading. I believe national organizations could take a lead in this effort.

As we consider the nature of professional development activities for teachers of ELLs, it is important to make knowledge flow seamlessly across contexts. One of the ways to facilitate knowledge flow is to begin with teachers' questions. Teachers and researchers possess different types of knowledge (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). Unlike researchers, teachers' knowledge is context specific. Professional development activities need to provide teachers with opportunities to decide on areas they want to study and develop the type of knowledge they can use in solving practical problems in their classrooms. It is equally important to make knowledge flow among teachers across instructional contexts such as bilingual teachers, teachers of ESL programs, and other teachers who work with a small group of ELLs. Because these teachers work in different instructional contexts, it is very helpful for teacher educators to under-

stand aspects of good teaching that can work in all contexts and that are unique to each instructional context.

Increasing linguistic and cultural diversity creates unavoidable educational challenges to teachers, school districts, policymakers, and community members nationwide. Because challenges are a part of human existence and provide opportunities to understand our realities in a new way, we need to keep our hearts and minds set on solving these challenges together.

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APPENDIX A
Characteristics and Examples of Coaching, Facilitation, and Collaborating Teacher Questions

Teacher questions are based upon instructional goals implicated in the questions and the degree of teacher authority that emerged during data analyses. Coaching questions represented the highest degree of teacher authority, and collaborating questions the lowest degree.

COACHING QUESTIONS

Characteristics	Example	Context
To help students monitor their own thinking and utterances	Is that what you wanted to ask? (100697)	While the class developed interview questions, the teacher asked students to read back their suggestions for an interview question, and then asked this question.
To add information	Jandi, can I add something more to your sentence? (101397)	Students were developing should-do lists for authors and audience.
To give commands	Jandi, can you read author's should-do list? (101597)	After students shared their ideas about what authors should do during a whole-group presentation
To remind students what they need to do	Did you tell your audience that you are talking about a second interviewee? (101597)	Unisha was introducing her second interviewee to the class without informing her audience about her subject shift.
To assess students' knowledge or understanding	Does anyone know about quick writing? (102097)	Before a teacher introduced a new activity
	What is another word for library? (102097)	After a teacher read a book during the quick writing activity
	What are the shapes called? (102397)	After a teacher asked students to fold a paper twice and make four spaces

COACHING QUESTIONS continued

Characteristics	Example	Context
	Does everyone have an idea of what a raccoon looks like? (102397)	After the class talked about physical characteristics of a raccoon
	Can you guess what *tidy* means? (102397)	A teacher was introducing a new unit "Tidy Raccoon and Untidy Owl."
	Do you know what Ronald's plan is? (110697)	After reading a part of the story, the teacher asked this question to check if students understood the gist.
	Why do we want to do that? [teacher interview about Thanksgiving] (111997)	After the teachers explained to the students the teacher interview they were about to model
	Is there any question about what a *comment* is? (030498)	After the teacher explained her continued behavioral expectations for the presentation to the students
	What do I mean by that? (041598)	After a teacher asked the students to think about audience, one of the two foci, during editing
	Do you have any questions? What else do we look for when we edit? (041598)	After a teacher asked the students to think about audience and length as the two foci during editing
To clarify student or teacher utterances	Is this a way of telling your friends that you thank them for what they did? (101397)	Meredith asked a student who just explained what *appreciate* means.
	Did I understand quick writing? (102097)	After Meredith explained to students what quick writing was, Nina asked a question and articulated what she understood.

COACHING QUESTIONS continued

Characteristics	Example	Context
To help students think about the focus of a class activity	What is the pattern of the book? (102097)	After a teacher read a book for a quick writing activity
	Can you think about what a topical sentence is? (102397)	After one teacher talked about a topical sentence, the other teacher asked the students this question.

FACILITATING QUESTIONS

Characteristics	Example	Context
To invite students' input	Is there a question you would like to ask your friends? (100697)	After Nina explained the interview activity that students would conduct, she asked the students to think about questions they wanted to use for the interview.
	Do you have more to add on the list? (101397)	After the class developed should-do list
	Is there anything else you want to add? (041598)	After the class revisited why they needed to consider the length when choosing a written piece for peer editing
To support text comprehension and articulation of ideas	What happened in the story? Why? (012198)	Upon reading aloud Noisy Nora, a teacher asked the students to summarize the story they heard and asked a follow-up question after a student said, "she makes lots of noisy" as a one-sentence summary of the story.
To help students deepen their understanding	Can you think of another word that begins with *un*? (102397)	After a teacher explained that *un* in *untidy* is a prefix and what it meant.
	Can you guess what the author wanted to tell us by having the title of the story as "Neat Raccoon and Untidy Owl?" (103097)	After a teacher distributed a story to the students and asked them to read the first page

FACILITATING QUESTIONS continued

Characteristics	Example	Context
To help students articulate and elaborate	Can you explain a little more? (103097)	When Eno suggested, "working with us" on audience's should-do list, Meredith asked him to elaborate.
	What do the leaves look like? How can you find out about the names of the leaves? (102097)	After a teacher showed students the leaves that she collected during her weekend camping trip
	Can anybody say that in your own words? (111997)	After a teacher explained to the students that the teachers would model an interview and defined *modeling*
	Yeum and Chul, what did you change in your drafts? What do you mean? (022598)	While students were expected to edit their own written pieces on school comparison, a teacher asked two students to explain what they changed in their drafts. After Yeum said, "we are changing sentences to the above question," a teacher asked Yeum a follow-up question to elaborate.
To support text comprehension and articulation of ideas	Do you have any other ideas? (030498)	A teacher asked the students if they had a good time of St. Patrick's Day and then asked a series of questions after a student shared a summary of what he saw.
	What did he do? Can anybody tell me what the leprechaun was sharing with you? So what is his country? Do you all know where Ireland is? Was he doing a special kind of dance? Do you remember what the dance was called? What does it mean when he said there's gold inside us? (031898)	

FACILITATING QUESTIONS continued

Characteristics	Example	Context
To encourage student interaction	Do you have any comments for Khalid? (101597)	After Khalid shared his interview with the whole class
	Do you have an answer to Yeum's question? (103097)	After Yeum asked what *neat* meant
	Jian and Manis, do you have anything? (012898)	While students and teachers discussed the differences between their home schools and U.S. schools, Nina asked this question to two students who did not share their ideas with the class.
	Did you help each other? (022598)	During editing, a teacher asked this question to a pair of students who were coediting their written pieces.
	Is there anything else you want to share about St. Patrick's Day? (031898)	After students summarized what they saw on St. Patrick's Day
To find out students' opinions	Is anyone interested in going to the library? (102097)	After a class discussion on what the leaves that she brought from her weekend camping trip looked like, a teacher asked the students where they could find such information.
	Is there anything else we should look at when we make our choices? (041598)	After a teacher asked the students to think about audience and length as the two foci when deciding which written piece to edit from their portfolios
To validate students' creative language use	Did you say *rest?* (012806)	When a student said, "winter *rest* is longer here" as a difference between his U.S. school and the school in his home country, a teacher said "winter *break* is longer" to summarize what he said. Immediately after, she asked this question and added the comment, "I like that."

COLLABORATING QUESTIONS

Characteristics	Example	Context
Conversation starter	How are you? (10097, 100897)	At the beginning of a class
	Did you like the special presentation on rocks in Michigan yesterday? (101597)	At the beginning of a class hour, a teacher asked this question to the students already in the classroom.
	Can you tell me what you did on the weekend? (102097, 110397, 030498)	At the beginning of the class when students returned to school after a weekend or Halloween
	Where are you going to go during the university break? (022598)	At the beginning of the class during a week before the university spring break
Sharing personal artifact	Do you know why I have a cup from Minnesota? (022598)	Near the end of class, as students edited their writing, a teacher asked this question while pointing to a cup in the classroom.
Reflecting on learning and teaching	Which piece is your favorite? Which piece did you not like? Which piece shows your best work? (042309, 042798)	During student portfolio interviews at the end of the school year, teachers asked these questions to understand students' views of learning in their classroom.

APPENDIX B
Chul's Written Text Used in Oral Sharing

This is my picture of my school. I have a playground at other side. This are…
is a learning place. We have kind of pond…and rocks, flowers, statues, and
we also have…we can also grow vegetables. And….How is school different? In
Korea, my school is different than Spring Valley School. The school is named
Gye-ha. I will tell you about it. The school teachers in Korea are different than
the teachers at Spring Valley School. In Korea, we have Teachers' Day for one
of holiday. That day, the teachers are at school just for a little of time. And
students give thanks letters and flowers. Every student give letters and flow-
ers to all the teachers in the school there have been teachers. Sometimes we
give teachers the gift. Some classes have surprise parties for teachers. Discipline
style is different because Gye-ha School's teachers make long time to exercise
or clean restroom than we had wrong thing, but Spring Valley School teachers
talk or give letters to parents when I have wrong things. Other different is how
many of teachers are in each class. In Gye-ha, we have one teacher in each class.
The buildings are different. Each school has a birthday party. On that day, we
don't have class. The playground is different. Spring Valley School playground
is grass, but Korean ground is a little bit sand[y]. Spring Valley School build-
ing is new and [consists of] one [building], but my Korean school has new one
and old one. Field trips are different. Transportation is different. Spring Valley
School field trips are also use school bus. But Gye-ha School field trips we walk
or use subway. We take most of day, the morning and afternoon at field trip.
Korea has special places that we take pets and we make electronic things. We
sowing the seeds. Most students like these special places. My favorite thing is
to make electronic things. Daily schedules were different. At Gye-ha School,
we had class on Saturday, but at Spring Valley School, we don't have the class
on Saturday. At Gye-ha School, each grade ending time is different. But Spring
Valley School each grade ending time is the same. At Gye-ha School, each grade
ending time is different. But at Spring Valley, everyday the ending time is the
same. For example, at Monday, we end at three o'clock and Tuesday, we end at
four o'clock…Like that. Lunch time is different. For example, at Gye-ha School,
we eat at twelve o'clock. But at Spring Valley School, we eat at 11:30 like that.
Gye-ha School has learning place. At there, we take care of the vegetables and
make art things, and we have statue on grass, and wood desk and rock desk.
Also we have a little bit little pond rocks on it showing different things and
rocks. Teachers, buildings, field trips, daily schedules are different. And Gye-ha
School has special classes, and Gye-ha School has a learning place. Also we have
school mark. And as you can see, Gye-ha School and Spring Valley School is dif-
ferent.