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Integrated English as a New Language: Challenges and Solutions

by Maria G. Dove and Andrea Honigsfeld

There is much concern among ESOL, grade level, and content area teachers since the changes to the New York State Commissioner's Regulations Part 154, which govern programs for PK–12 English language learners (ELLs), have taken effect. The revised regulations have established integrated services in English as a new language (ENL), in which much of the instruction for ELLs takes place in general education classes. Educators throughout the state are filled with apprehension about this shift in practice.

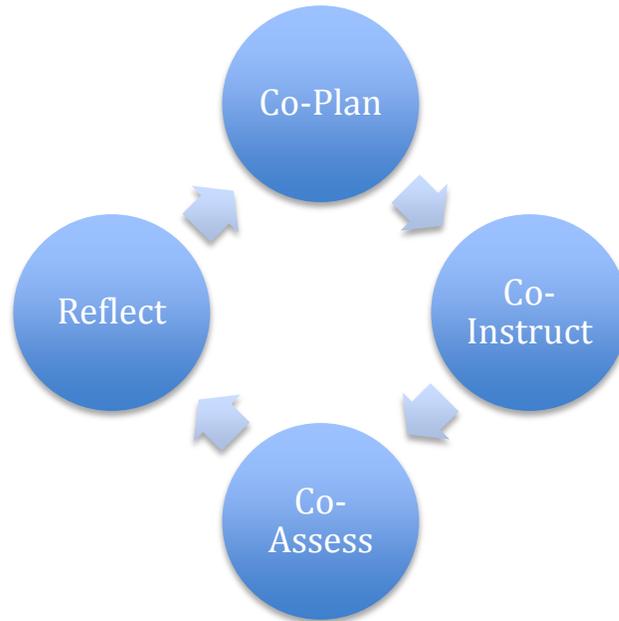
There are many misgivings among teachers about several issues: configuring classes for co-teaching, the changing roles and responsibilities of ESOL teachers, having to learn the content of multiple subjects or at multiple grade levels, and dealing with reluctant co-teachers, among other concerns. We recognize that there are a multitude of challenges connected with these evolving instructional practices, and as a result we have been collecting teachers' questions about how to enhance teacher collaboration and provide integrated instruction for English learners. In this article, we respond to the most frequently asked questions about the teaching challenges in implementing and maintaining an integrated service delivery of instruction for ELLs.

Challenge #1: Time Factors

In order to provide an integrated ENL program, adherence to the instructional cycle of co-planning, co-instruction, co-assessment of student work, and reflection is vital for program success. This adherence is such a critical requirement, in fact, that without it integrated ENL will most likely be doomed to failure.

Co-teaching in and of itself is not a “magic bullet”—an all-encompassing assurance of the academic achievements of ELLs. Instead, the success of an integrated ENL program rests on opportunities for regular, ongoing teacher collaboration. Though teachers need time to plan instruction, assess student work, and reflect on effective class instruction in addition to co-taught instruction, as shown in Figure 1, the most identified obstacle to this instructional cycle is a lack of time.

Figure 1. Instructional Cycle for an Integrated ENL Program



Teachers often share with us that there is no scheduled time within the school day to conduct co-planning or review assessment data as a team. First and foremost, if you are co-teaching and do not have planning time with your co-teacher, know that there is no substitute for face-to-face planning. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you advocate with your administrators for more co-planning time.

In addition to scheduled planning time, we offer in Table 1 a co-planning routine that can make the most of the limited time that co-teachers have available.

Table 1. Routine for Co-Planning Success for ESOL Teachers

<p>Organization (Conducted together)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree on a collaborative platform; consider how you will communicate with your co-teacher, e.g., email, Google Docs, Dropbox, text message • Have available the same curriculum guide/map, scope and sequence, pacing guide, instructional modules, texts, and other required materials
<p>Pre-Planning (Conducted separately)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preview upcoming content; explore needed academic language; check for grammatical patterns for instructional focus • Identify language objectives; necessary prior knowledge and skills; grouping strategies; individual/group resources and activities, and ways to scaffold and differentiate instruction
<p>Co-Planning (Conducted together)</p>

Either using your agreed-upon platform or your face-to-face time, identify and finalize content and language objectives, the building of prior knowledge, differentiated practice activities, formative and summative assessments, co-teaching variation, each teacher’s roles and responsibilities, and needed materials

Post-Planning

(Conducted separately)

From your agreed-upon roles and responsibilities, complete lesson planning and gather and prepare needed materials

Challenge #2: Roles and Responsibilities

ESOL teachers in integrated co-taught ENL classes are experiencing an identity crisis. In the past, stand-alone classes for English language instruction were mostly driven by curriculum for language acquisition. In the co-taught class, ESOL teachers must now develop both knowledge of the content being taught while figuring out what to teach and how to teach ELLs in the general education class. Lack of experience with teaching co-taught classes and an inadequate differentiated curriculum has placed many ESOL teachers in the role of teacher assistant or aide. As a remedy, varied roles and responsibilities for each teacher in the co-taught class need to be developed and nurtured to establish equity and parity within the co-teaching team (Table 2).

Table 2. Co-Teaching Roles and Responsibilities

Grade-Level/Content Co-Teacher	ESOL Co-Teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome ESOL teacher to share classroom space • Display both teachers’ name on the door/in the classroom • Identify content objectives • Support ESOL teacher’s understanding of the content • Develop teaching routines with the ESOL teacher • Negotiate how to configure the class for co-taught instruction • Use pronouns “we” and “our” when expressing expectations for students • Include ESOL teacher in the grading and decision-making process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share assessment data, proficiency levels, and abilities of ELLs • Identify language objectives • Differentiate the content, process, and/or product for learning tasks • Support grade-level/content teachers’ understanding of ELLs • Develop teaching routines with the grade-level/content teacher • Facilitate both whole-class and small-group instruction • Ensure rigorous instruction and opportunities for speaking, writing, reading, and listening • Keep lines of communication open

Consider as well developing daily or weekly instructional routines that can facilitate co-taught lessons.

Ongoing Challenges

There are many ongoing challenges that teachers will continue to face during this period of transition to an integrated model of instruction for ELLs. We invite you not to suffer in silence or argue against the changes that have taken place but rather to shine a light on each challenge and work together with administrators and colleagues to find workable solutions that will benefit everyone.

Dr. Andrea Honigsfeld and Dr. Maria Dove have been collaborating as writers in education for over 10 years. Andrea is professor and associate dean and director of the doctoral program in the Division of Education, Molloy College; Maria is associate professor and coordinator of Graduate Education TESOL programs in the Division of Education. Their research focuses on integrated instructional practices for English learners.

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