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COMMON CORE COLLABORATIONS FOR THE SAKE OF ELLs

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Over a decade ago, Morse (2000) suggested that through collaboration, "educators will recognize they are not alone in searching for new modes of human exchange," noting as well that "rejecting collaboration is not an option" (p. xi). The complex challenges that English language learners (ELLs) and their educators encounter on a daily basis with the implementation of new learning standards calls for a collaborative approach to instruction so teachers are better able to pool their talents and resources and offer the best possible learning experiences to ELLs. More specifically, the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS)—what the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are called in New York State— require students to perform various academic tasks, such as to: (a) comprehend and analyze complex texts that are frequently well above the reading ability of English learners, (b) write across multiple genres in response to fiction and nonfiction selections, (c) engage in academic conversations across the content areas, (d) support written and oral arguments by citing text-based evidence, and (e) conduct research projects using multiple print and nonprint resources. Considering these as well as other challenging undertakings that are benchmarks of the CCLS, teachers and school leaders should explore every avenue for collaborative conversations concerning best practices for ELLs.

Many academic expectations appear daunting and may be readily dismissed as being beyond the capability of ELLs. Yet, the CCLS provide a framework for back-mapping and acceleration—that is, using the CCLS document to identify target goals and build foundational skills while helping ELLs make reasonable progressions toward meeting grade-level expectations. For example, Juanita, who is a transitioning-level ninth grader, is expected to "develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns" in her writing (New York State Department of Education, 2011, p. 58). Keeping this expectation in mind, consider the parallel expectations for this Standard in previous grades, and go back as far as needed to pinpoint appropriate goals to meet Juanita's current level of writing proficiency. Through back-mapping, a teacher might initially focus on building skills related to fourth-grade expectations—"to provide reasons that are supported by facts and details" to meet Juanita's needs (p. 28). Going multiple grade levels below offers an entry point to the Standards that is manageable and leads to success for the learner. The ultimate goal, however, would be to accelerate Juanita's progress by addressing essential skills across the grade span from fourth grade to ninth grade.

In light of these challenges, the implementation of the CCLS could be recognized as a unique opportunity for collaboration on multiple levels: to foster a shared mission and vision for diverse learners, to have in-depth conversations about Standards-based teaching and data-driven instruction, to share

instructional practices, to align curricula, to foster a student-centered approach to teaching, and to find new ways to promote effective professional learning (Dove, Honigsfeld, & Cohan, 2014; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2014).

DuFour (2002) defined a professional learning community (PLC) as collaboration of educators, school leaders, parents, and children who work together to identify best practices, implement them in the classroom, collect outcome data, and analyze results in order to improve the teaching-learning process. When presenting low-cost yet highly effective instructional changes teachers can implement to enhance instruction for all learners, Schmoker (2009) included teacher collaboration as one such strategy. Based on the successful outcomes of the PLC movement, "authentic teams build effective curriculum-based lessons and units together—which they routinely refine together on the basis of common assessment data" (p. 527). In addition to assessment data, the CCLS also provide a foundational framework for teacher collaboration. As Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) concluded, "[C]ollaboration . . . encourages teachers to move beyond reliance on their own memories and experiences with schooling and toward engagement with others around important questions of teaching and learning" (p. 892); Danielson (2009) also noted that "[I]t's through conversations that teachers clarify their beliefs and plans and examine, practice, and consider new possibilities" (p. 1). Extensive research on both PLCs and teacher collaboration supports our notion that effective and successful implementation of any new initiatives, such as the CCLS, cannot happen without systemic collaboration. In this report, we present a ten-point framework of activities—both instructional and noninstructional—for collaboration around the CCLS based on our close to decade-long research and fieldwork.

Collaborative Core Practices

Many teachers find engaging in ongoing professional dialogue with colleagues who share common concerns and experiences to be among their most rewarding professional experiences. Most teachers agree, however, that while informal interactions keep teachers connected, they are not enough to support sustained, professional collaboration. For successful and enduring collaboration—especially with the CCLS in mind—formal structures and procedures must be developed, implemented, and maintained. Such formal collaborative practices may have a more or less direct instructional or noninstructional focus, as we discussed in greater detail in *Collaboration and Co-Teaching: Strategies for English Learners* (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010), *Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner: Grades K–5* (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2013), and *Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner: Grades 6–12* (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2013).

Collaborative instructional activities described here are joint planning, curriculum mapping and alignment, parallel teaching, co-developing instructional materials, collaborative assessment of student work, and co-teaching. Collaborative noninstructional activities are joint professional development, teacher research, preparing for and conducting joint parent-teacher conferences, and planning, facilitating, or participating in other extracurricular activities. The following section highlights key information needed for select collaborative activities as they pertain to aligning both instructional and noninstructional activities to the CCLS.

Instructional Activities

Joint Planning

The purpose of a focused joint planning process—also referred to as cooperative or collaborative planning—is to allow special service providers and content-area teachers to share their expertise as they consider the Common Core expectations, discuss students' needs and the specific challenges each learner

has to overcome to meet the Common Core goals, and plan lessons or instructional units that they may deliver jointly or independent of each other. Sharing responsibility for the CCLS implementation through collaborative planning ensures that a sustained professional dialogue takes place. As a result, instruction offered by the team of teachers involved is aligned to the Standards rather than being disjointed or fragmented. Joint planning helps ensure that the curriculum is made accessible to all learners through scaffolding, tiering, or other differentiated instructional techniques. Joint planning opportunities must be part of the regular school schedule; teachers frequently identify the lack of common preparation time as a major obstacle to successful teacher collaboration.

When planning time is scarce, teachers need to develop communication strategies that consistently keep all parties informed and allow for shared decision making. Resourcefulness in planning and implementing instruction is often supplemented with creative ways to communicate with each other about students, lesson ideas, teaching strategies, and instructional materials. A shared plan book or aligned curriculum maps can serve to frame the major concepts and skills that all students must learn for a particular unit of study and assist collaborating teachers in organizing lessons. See a sample co-planning agenda in Textbox 1.

Textbox 1

Sample Common Core ELA Standards-Based Co-Planning Agenda
1. Review previous unit/lesson and student assessment data.
2. Select target CCLS and examine the sample bilingual progressions (available at www.engageny.org)
3. Determine unit or lesson goals/objectives.
4. Identify instructional procedures.
5. Differentiate instructional and assessment strategies.
6. Assign roles and responsibilities for individual follow-up planning.

Curriculum Mapping and Alignment

Curriculum planning, mapping, and alignment among classroom teachers and support service professionals are receiving increasing attention. Most maps reveal five types of information: the content (essential knowledge taught), the Standard that is the purpose in the curricular unit, the processes and skills used to teach the content, the assessment tools, and key resources used in the unit.

Jacobs (1997), Udelhofen (2005), and others have agreed that curriculum mapping is an effective procedure for collecting data about the taught curriculum in a school or district using a yearly or monthly calendar as the framework. Even when Standards-based collaboration is the ultimate goal, participating teachers may first independently map their own taught curriculum. Once such overviews of students' actual learning experiences are created, teachers can engage in a dialogue to ensure alignment and explore possible misalignments of essential knowledge and skills taught in the general education, English as a second language (ESL), bilingual, or special education curriculum. As Jacobs (1999) noted, "The fundamental purpose of mapping is communication. . . . Mapping is not presented as what ought to happen but what is happening during the course of a school year" (p. 61). On the other hand, Schmoker (2009) emphasized the need for a common, coherent curriculum with collaboratively developed assessments to ensure high-quality, meaningful, standards-based instruction: "Teachers must create maps,

by grading period, designating clearly which Standards and objectives students will learn, with ample inclusion of higher-order, critical-thinking, reading, and writing standards" (p. 526).

In our investigation of districts with an ESL curriculum, we found that there are a number of curricular options:

- A stand-alone ESL curriculum following a locally developed scope and sequence of language and literacy development;
- A stand-alone ESL curriculum following a statewide ESL curriculum framework;
- A stand-alone ESL curriculum based on a commercially available ESL program; and
- A content-support ESL curriculum based on content standards.

Developing an ESL curriculum with the CCLS in mind is expected to result in an ELA Standards-based curriculum aligned to grade-level English language arts and content area literacy expectations. If the ESL program does have a strong, purposeful connection to the grade-level ELA content through curriculum alignment, instruction in the mainstream classes becomes more meaningful for ELLs. Without such curriculum alignment, the ESL services may become fragmented, the lessons delivered in each class may become disjointed, and the skills introduced and practiced may become confusing for ELLs. Furthermore, curriculum alignment through collaborative practices allows for a wider acceptance of shared academic goals and the use of differentiated instructional strategies, materials, and activities in all general education, second-language learning, and remedial programs.

Parallel Teaching

Historically, ESL programs have been implemented in the form of a stand-alone program (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). ESL specialists tend to work with small groups in their designated classrooms, offering targeted interventions. One solution for more coordinated services is for specialists and general education teachers to establish and match the use of objectives in content lessons that are also aligned to the CCLS. Our recommendation is to use the grade-specific Standards section of the CCLS, track the Standards across two, three, or occasionally more grades, and back-map to previous grade-level expectations when working with students who need either remediation or first-time skill-building, as is the case with many diverse learners.

Co-Developing Instructional Materials

When teachers collaborate with students' needs in mind, their attention may be focused not only on creating CCLS-based lesson or unit plans together but also on developing instructional materials, resources, graphic organizers, in-class and homework assignments, and assessment tools that make meaningful connections to the students' out-of school lives, background experiences, linguistic and academic abilities, and potentials (which can only be realized through high expectations for all). There are many instructional resources already available that can be adapted for diverse students, and teachers' own pre-Common Core materials are also well worth considering. As researchers ourselves, what we suggest is considering the three Rs when working on CCLS-aligned material development: rigor, relevance, and research-informed! Engaging students in both rigorous and challenging academic tasks that are relevant to their college and career readiness needs is a must and is well supported in the literature (see Daggett, 2011, and the Rigor/Relevance Framework, a tool developed by the International Center for Leadership in Education at http://www.leadered.com/rrr.html). Goldenberg and Coleman (2010) remind us not to forget about decades of research-based best practices in the TESOL field that support

the type of scaffolded, differentiated instruction that will help ensure academically and linguistically diverse students' success.

The possibilities of joint ELA Standards-based and content-based material development are as diverse as the lessons taught in the classrooms. Some examples include:

- Group Investigation Role Cards, some of which are completed with sentence starters or language frames;
- Lab Report Outline and its scaffolded version with appropriate adaptations;
- Document-Based Analysis template with partially completed sample answers; and
- List-Group-Label and Photo Sorts, as well as other hands-on activities that require time spent investigating resources on the Internet and preparing materials such as printing, sorting, cutting, and pasting for students to use in class.

Collaborative Assessment of Student Work

A powerful collaborative activity that ESL specialists and general education teachers engage in is sampling and carefully examining representative work by diverse students. Langer, Colton, and Gott (2003) suggested the use of rubrics within a framework of collaborative conversations and inquiry. Specifically, they proposed that participating teachers focus on both students' strengths and challenges and identify appropriate strategies to respond to patterns of learning difficulties. Using a protocol, members of teacher-study groups analyze student work, offer credible explanations for student-performance levels, explore promising strategies to implement, and plan interventions. Once each teacher follows the collectively determined steps, new data are collected from the student, and the performance is assessed. This cycle is repeated, as teachers reflect on their students' learning and their own growth and needs.

In our work, we found it helpful to customize the protocol of examining student work by focusing on the challenges of specific students. For example, in order for teachers to jointly review the work of ELLs, we developed a protocol called Sampling Work by English Language Learners (SWELL) (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010) as a guide for teachers as they examine students' language, academic, cultural, and social-emotional development. See Textbox 2 for the entire protocol adapted for Standards-based ELA instruction for academically and linguistically diverse learners.

Textbox 2

Protocol for Sampling Student Work
1. Academic Language/Linguistic Development
    a. What stage of second-language acquisition is evident?
    b. Which academic language features has the student mastered and been able to use systematically?
    c. What are two or three prominent linguistic challenges the student's work demonstrates?
    d. Other comments:
2. Disciplinary or Content-Based Academic Needs
    a. What are two to three examples of successfully acquired ELA or content-specific knowledge
       and/or skills?
    b. What are some noticeable gaps in the student's prior knowledge?
    c. What are some gaps in the student's new ELA skills and discipline-specific knowledge attainment?
    d. What ELA domain-specific subskills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) does the student need
       to work on?
    e. Other comments:
3. Cultural Experiences and Challenges
    a. In what way are the student's cultural experiences reflected in his or her work?
    b. Is there any evidence that the student was struggling with cultural misunderstandings or
       misconceptions?
    c. Other comments:
4. Social-Emotional Aspects of Learning
    a. Is there evidence of motivated, self-directed learning in the student's work sample?
    b. Has the learner been engaged in the task?
    c. Is there evidence of task persistence?
    d. Is there evidence of being engaged in cooperative learning (peer editing, etc.)?
    e. Other comments:

Adapted from Honigsfeld & Dove (2010).

Co-Teaching as a Framework for Sustained Teacher Collaboration
    Co-teaching frameworks have been presented for special education inclusion models (Friend & Cook, 2007; Murawski, 2009; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008), as well as for English learners (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010, 2012). In our work with ESL teachers and their general education colleagues, we have documented seven co-teaching arrangements, which we refer to as co-teaching models. In three of these models, both teachers work with one large group of students. In three additional models, two groups of students are split between the two cooperating teachers. In one final model, multiple groups of students are engaged in a learning activity that is facilitated and monitored by both teachers. Each of these configurations may have a place in any co-taught classroom, regardless of the grade level taught or the ELA standard targeted. We encourage our readers to consider both the advantages and challenges of each and pilot various models in their classes to see which ones allow them to respond best to the students' needs, the specific content being taught, the type of learning activities

designed, and the participating teachers' teaching styles and own preferences (see Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010, for a detailed discussion of each model):

1. One Group: One Lead Teacher and One Teacher "Teaching on Purpose"
2. One Group: Two Teachers Teach Same Content
3. One Group: One Teacher Teaches, One Teacher Assesses
4. Two Groups: Two Teachers Teach Same Content
5. Two Groups: One Teacher Pre-Teaches, One Teacher Teaches Alternative Information
6. Two Groups: One Teacher Re-Teaches, One Teacher Teaches Alternative Information
7. Multiple Groups: Two Teachers Monitor and Teach

During any of the above co-teaching configurations, the partnering teachers share the responsibility for planning instruction, implementing the lessons, and assessing student performance and outcomes. In a co-taught classroom, all students participate in CCLS-driven ELA or content-area lessons. When learning groups remain heterogeneous, students have the opportunity to work with others who have various academic capabilities and academic English language fluency.

Noninstructional Activities

Joint Professional Development

All teachers may benefit from participating in joint professional-development activities based on the CCLS either at their school, within their district, or outside their own professional environment. If they attend external, off-site training programs together, they have an open forum to share their experiences with Standards-based instruction, voice their concerns about the challenges the CCLS pose for diverse learners, and get feedback and responses from both colleagues who may be working at other school districts and from the course leader or workshop facilitator. Upon returning to their schools, teachers have the opportunity to share the information they gained both formally and informally with their colleagues. When they transfer the new information to their own practice and implement the new strategies in their own teaching, not only are they developing new skills, but also are sharing these skills and their own classroom results with colleagues who did not attend the same training. When teachers train together, the benefit is even greater, since they are able to support each other in their endeavors in the classroom.

The collaborative professional-development practices that yield the most effective partnership and team building between specialists and their general education colleagues have the following common elements:

- Regular, work-based opportunities to reflect on and use to improve instruction;
- Shared topics of interest;
- Team membership and participation based on self-selection; and
- Focus on teachers' instructional practices and students' learning.

Possible forms of collaborative professional development activities include collegial circles, peer observations, and collaborative coaching or mentoring.

Teacher Research

When teachers engage in classroom-based practitioner research, they may do so individually or collaboratively, using a number of different formats. Working in research and development (R&D) teams, participating in collaborative inquiry groups, and engaging in collaborative action research or lesson studies are examples of being engaged in job-embedded explorations. One suggestion we have for teachers to use in collaborated research is that after they review research related to the selected

instructional approach they anticipate will support ELLs, they jointly plan and implement Common Core-aligned lessons based on the approach, assess their own (and each other's) growth, and evaluate the student outcomes. When teacher discussion groups or collegial circles elect to engage in more in-depth explorations, they may decide to form collaborative inquiry groups. In these alliances, they may investigate an overarching concept (such as the teaching-learning process or second-language acquisition patterns) or choose more specific topics that deal with diverse learners' instructional needs (such as using effective note-taking strategies).

Yet another way to engage in research is by participating in a community of practice (Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003), which builds on the "idea that practitioners and researchers should work together to co-construct knowledge as part of a common enterprise, rather than through separate endeavors" (p. 275). The most common outcome of such a partnership is the development of a professional community, how researchers and practitioners establish and sustain a long-term professional relationship, and, as such, explore educational issues embedded in their daily practice.

Preparing for (and Conducting) Joint Parent-Teacher Conferences

When ESL specialists and general education colleagues compare academic performance, linguistic development, and participation in their respective classes, they may observe that the same student responds to instruction quite differently in different settings. When teachers write progress reports and quarterly, semiannual, or annual report cards based on collaboratively reviewed student work samples, portfolios, and test scores, multiple perspectives are included. Such collaborative effort is beneficial in assessing students' linguistic and academic progress, as it leads to providing a clearer picture of areas of strengths and needs for both teachers and families.

Planning, Facilitating, or Participating in Other Extracurricular Activities

Breiseth, Robertson, and Lafond (2011) suggested a number of strategies for family engagement, including communicating with parents about school matters, inviting them to school events, and encouraging them to take on leadership roles. We have found that when teachers jointly prepare for and facilitate parent outreach and family engagement initiatives, as well as other community-based activities, collaboration among all stakeholders is enhanced. Informing parents about the CCLS through a parent workshop or through a collaboratively designed newsletter are examples.

Conclusion

The implementation of CCLS may continue to present challenges to all teachers, although our experience is that more and more general education teachers and ESL specialists are becoming well versed in the six shifts of ELA instruction—Developing Informational and Literary Texts, Knowledge in the Disciplines, Staircase of Complexity, Text-Based Answers, Writing from Sources, and Academic Vocabulary—embracing the bilingual progressions as a way to make the CCLS accessible to ELLs, and starting to use the scaffolding tools available (August, Staehr Fenner, & Snyder, 2014; Expeditionary Learning, 2012). One additional shift is in order, however: teachers need the time, opportunity, and systemic support to engage in collaborative practices that help them grow their professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), enhance their knowledge and skills regarding the CCLS, and respond more effectively to ELLs' needs.

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