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Article Response 2

“Collaboration Between ESL and Content Teachers:
How Do We Know When We Are Doing It Right?”

Outline:

The article begins with background information about the study. Chris Davison was contacted by a school in Taiwan to evaluate their K-12 ESL program. The school wanted to switch to collaborative teaching for its ESL courses. Davison worked with this school for three years and developed a tentative framework for evaluating the successfulness of co-teaching ESL. She argues that collaborative teaching as a model for ESL education needs further study since it will likely become the teaching norm.

The next section of the article gives background on previous research relevant to Davison’s work. She then describes her study methodology, which consisted of questionnaires, interviews, and follow-up observations with 17 teachers in grades 1, 2, and 5. Twelve of the teachers were content area teachers, and five were ESL teachers. Davison used discourse analysis to create a rubric of sorts for judging collaborative teaching. Based on the responses, she created a framework using five levels of acceptance and participation in the co-teaching program. The five levels are: pseudocompliance or passive resistance, compliance, accommodation, convergence (and some co-option), and creative co-construction. Within each

level, four areas of teacher concern help identify the teacher's level: attitude, effort, achievements, and expectations of support.

Davison concludes by stating co-teaching partnerships are difficult, even in an ideal environment. The school in this study, for example, had plenty of resources for its teachers, multiple professional development opportunities, and clear yet flexible goals and objectives for the co-teaching program, but there were still some teachers reluctant to share their classrooms. Davison calls for more research of co-teaching ESL courses to determine if her five-level framework can be used in different types of schools and with different levels of schooling.

Comments:

I chose Davison's article because I have personal experience with co-teaching, and I wanted to learn more about co-teaching in regards to ESL. In my first and my last years of teaching, I had one course each year where almost half the students were identified as exceptional children (also called special education or learning disabled). The schools were legally required to have a special education teacher in the classroom in addition to me as the content-area teacher. However, I did not share a common planning period with the special education teacher in either school, so it was very difficult to collaborate on lessons. Like many of the teachers in Davison's article, I wanted to help all my students be successful, but it was nearly impossible to jointly plan lessons with the special education teacher. In both courses, I did all the "teacher work," and the EC teacher was just there as an extra pair of hands. I would evaluate both experiences as level two on Davison's framework. Even though we wanted to improve the situation, we did not have the time or resources to do so.

Davison's article focuses on an elementary school in Taiwan, but I think her framework to judge co-teaching efforts would work in secondary schools here in the United States. The chart gives fairly clear descriptions of teacher attitudes, which are often a better indication of how successful a program is than student test results. For example, in my personal experience, the EC teachers and I were compliant with the program, and we agreed on the need for team-teaching, but we weren't sure exactly what we were supposed to do. Like Davison says in her framework, we had an "expectation of high degree of practical and teacher-specific external professional development," because no one had instructed us on how the partnership was supposed to work. We didn't have a model of the "right way" of collaborating in the classroom. Both instances of team-teaching made me feel less in control of my classroom. What's worse is that some days, I almost felt like the EC teacher was spying on me.

Excerpts:

"Experience demonstrates that all too often collaborative teaching is seen as simply a case of another pair of hands; an attitude that 'two teachers are better than one.' In such theorisations of collaboration, teachers are simply doubled rather than differentiated." (Davison 2006)

"[R]esearch shows that incorporating language objectives into content lessons is challenging (Short & Echevarria, 1999), because content specialists immersed in the discourse of their discipline do not easily recognise the language demands of curriculum, let alone the language-learning needs and opportunities, whilst ESL teachers struggle to 'cover the content' and easily lose direction and control." (Davison 2006)

“Even in this well resourced school, where the administration was strongly supportive of collaborative teaching and provided much infrastructure, guidance and support, and where teachers were encouraged to continually renegotiate their roles, there are still clear differences in attitudes towards the whole idea of partnership.” (Davison 2006)

Questions:

1. Have you ever been in a classroom as either a student or a teacher where two teachers gave instruction? What was that experience like?
2. How might a teacher’s years of classroom experience affect participation in a co-teaching program? For example, would new teachers be more or less likely than veterans to be categorized as level one on Davison’s framework?
3. As a future ESL teacher, what are your thoughts about the effectiveness of delivering content knowledge by teaming up with a regular classroom teacher? In elementary school, you would help teach all subjects. In middle school, you would typically help teach two subjects (science and math, history and language arts). In high school, you would work with a specialist teaching in one content area. You may teach different subjects, but they would be in the same field.

Citation:

Davison, C. (2006). Collaboration between ESL and content teachers: How do we know when we are doing it right? *The International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 9(4), 454-475.