

COLLABORATION BETWEEN ESL AND CONTENT TEACHERS: HOW DO WE KNOW WHEN WE ARE DOING IT RIGHT?

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Importance of this article

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- This is a scholarly article that summarizes Davison's research on teaching partnerships between content teachers and ESL teachers. She describes the background research she relies on as well as her methodology.
- As future ESL teachers, the most important information for us is in the section on the emerging framework of team-teaching. The comments and teacher quotes listed there are very insightful.

Purpose of Davison's research

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- Partnerships between content teachers and ESL teachers have not been fully evaluated because there is a lack of criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of collaborative teaching in general.
- Davison's goal was to create a framework with criteria that could be used to evaluate collaborative teaching in an ESL context.

Curriculum, not just methodology

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- Davison has published many articles on the topic of collaborative ESL teaching. She believes that for classroom partnerships to be most effective, all stages of collaboration – lesson planning, teaching, student assessment – should be based on curriculum, not just on a list of tips or tricks for teaching ESL.

Problematic nature of collaboration

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- Research into teacher collaboration tends to show that successful partnerships are few and far between and that they are very difficult to maintain.
- This can be attributed to issues of control, perceived status, and/or personality conflicts.

Why this school?

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- The study examined collaborative teaching in an English-language elementary school in Taiwan where both the students and faculty came from a variety of backgrounds.
- Davison had been contacted by this school to assess the effectiveness of the school's current ESL program and then work with teachers and school officials to integrate ESL teaching practices across the curriculum.

Study participants

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- The research focused on elementary school teachers in grades 1, 2 and 5 because they were more likely to be curriculum generalists rather than specialists.
- The participants were 12 traditional classroom teachers who were partnered with five ESL teachers.

Data collection

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- The teachers completed a short open-ended questionnaire about themselves and their opinions about team-teaching.
- Davison later conducted follow-up interviews and focused observations at the end of the year of collaboration.

Emerging framework

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- Based on the data, Davison created an emerging framework that could serve as a rubric for judging the effectiveness of teaching collaborations between traditional classroom teachers and their ESL partners.
- The framework is divided into five stages of increasing effectiveness. Each stage shares the same four areas of teacher concerns.

Levels and concerns

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- The five levels are:
 1. Pseudocompliance or passive resistance
 2. Compliance
 3. Accommodation
 4. Convergence (and some co-option)
 5. Creative co-construction
- Within each level, four areas of teacher concern help identify the teacher's level.
 1. Attitude
 2. Effort
 3. Achievements
 4. Expectations of support

Table 2 Levels of collaboration in ESL – classroom teacher partnerships

Level	Distinguishing characteristics (attitude; effort; achievement; expectations of support)
1. Pseudocompliance or passive resistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An implicit or explicit rejection of collaboration and preference for status quo (generally after a short 'attempt'); little or no real investment of time or understanding by teacher; no positive outcomes (may have been counter-productive, i.e. entrench existing negative attitudes); expectation is that 'this too will pass.'
2. Compliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A positive attitude and expressions of 'good intent'; efforts made to implement roles and responsibilities but with limited understanding of implications; informing documents seen as external and/or imposed, dealing with challenges and/or conflict in roles is seen as part of the teacher's job, but it is a source of unhappiness, frustration and stress; teachers feel defensive and besieged by conflicting demands; 'achievements' conceptualised as nonintrusive and very concrete (e.g. development of 'ESL' worksheets, adaptation of texts); expectation of high degree of practical and teacher-specific external professional development, teacher dependence on external sources of encouragement and reward.
3. Accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A positive attitude and willingness to experiment; efforts made to accommodate to perceived co-teacher's needs but conflicts/uncertainties seen as unnecessary and avoidable if 'model' is correctly implemented by teachers, only limited understanding of theoretical base of collaboration and little critical examination; achievements conceptualised mainly as strategies and techniques; expectation of high degree of programme-specific external professional development, teacher dependence on external sources of encouragement but also some signs of intrinsic rewards from developing partnerships.
4. Convergence (and some co-option)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A very positive attitude, embracing opportunities to learn from peers; efforts made to engage with co-teacher's ideas and initiate dialogue and interaction/experimentation, high degree of respect for other evident, understanding that solutions not ready-made, informing documents seen as fluid and subject to negotiation but conflicts still seen as dichotomous and requiring resolution i.e. simplifying alternatives and/or avoiding expression of contradictory views; achievements increasingly impact on content of lesson, not just delivery, but not always consistently, some co-option of other's ideas/strategies with still limited understanding of rationale and theoretical basis; increasing satisfaction from intrinsic rewards of collaboration, increasingly seeking opportunities for peer interaction; growing preference for action research and peer-directed professional development.
5. Creative co-construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A very positive attitude, collaboration normalised and seen as preferred option for ESL teaching; teachers' roles become much more interchangeable, yet more distinct, high degree of trust of other evident, responsibilities and areas of expertise continually negotiated, informing documents seen as actively co-constructed and teacher-developed, conflicts in roles seen as inevitable, accepted, even embraced, as a continuing condition which will lead to greater understanding; achievements demonstrated across whole curriculum; normalisation of teacher-based professional development such as action research and critical reflection, accompanied by extensive reading in area to extend understanding of specific theoretical concepts, possibly some formal study in each other's areas.

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Comments from level 1 teachers

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- "Someone more experienced with ESL needs to take my place." (classroom teacher #3)
- "Tell me 'how' I need to assist each student and provide me with modified versions of what is planned ... instead of giving suggestions, give complete lessons that address specific needs that are seen." (classroom teacher #3)
- "Too time consuming...schedule not suited to our needs." (classroom teacher #4)
- "It seems obvious to me that only classroom teachers with ESL training will feel comfortable in this role." (classroom teacher #3)

Comments from level 5 teachers

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- “Teaching a sheltered immersion class has been one of the most successful experiences of my career. I benefited daily from the expertise of the ESL immersion teacher.” (classroom teacher #5)
- “We are constantly trying different strategies to accommodate the various learning styles of the students in this class.” (classroom teacher #5)
- “While I feel the language needs of the ESL learners are being met...I feel the situation can be improved by nailing down the thematic units ahead of time.” (classroom teacher #5)

Conclusions & implications

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- 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.
- Even in an ideal environment, collaborative teaching can be difficult.
 - The school in this study had plenty of resources for its teachers, 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.

Excerpt 1:

Too many cooks spoil the broth?

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- “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.”

Excerpt 2:

Language demands

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- “[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.”

Excerpt 3:

Findings on teacher attitudes

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- “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.”

Question 1

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- Have you ever been in a classroom as either a student or a teacher where two teachers gave instruction? What was that experience like?

Question 2

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- 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?

Question 3

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- 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.