



Success Indicator IN16: Instructional team members regularly engage in co-teaching and cross-curricular planning to promote development of language and literacy across the content areas. (5893)

Overview: Teachers of ELs need a firm grasp on both content within their discipline and knowledge of how to provide supportive learning conditions for this population of students (August, Estrada, & Boyle, 2012). School and district leadership must prioritize effective EL instruction (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011), and “create and sustain systems of support for classroom teachers to [enable them] to work effectively with EL students” (Elfers & Stritikus, 2014, p. 338). Classroom teachers need professional learning experiences that are content-focused, sustained, coherent, involve collective participation, and provide for active professional learning (Desimone, 2009). Co-teaching and cross-curricular planning are job-embedded professional learning activities that can enhance teacher expertise in working with ELs and create conditions that promote EL language and literacy within content areas.

Questions: How can co-teaching and cross-curricular planning foster ELs’ language and literacy development across content areas?

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School leadership must build a culture of collaboration and community to signal the expectation that everyone shares responsibility for EL achievement (August et al., 2012). Isolated supports for ELs and reliance on language teachers will likely not promote EL success, particularly given recent shifts to more rigorous academic standards (Santos, Darling-Hammond, & Cheuk, 2013). In order for professional development (PD) experiences on academic language and literacy to be effective for content teachers, they should be job-embedded, introduce teachers to EL scaffolds and strategies that are aligned with discipline-specific language functions and structures, provide coaching, and afford plenty of time for reflection during implementation (Master, Loeb, Whitney, & Wycoff, 2012; Santos, et al., 2013). Co-teaching and cross-curricular planning offer job-embedded opportunities for teachers to collaborate together to implement PD strategies to enhance EL learning.

Co-teaching. Co-teaching is the collaborative partnership between general/content teachers and English language (e.g., ESL) teachers (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008). Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) offer a range of models for co-teaching partnerships between content and language teachers that provide for different grouping structures. Some models involve both teachers working with the same group of students (both ELs and mainstream students). For example, in one model one teacher takes the instructional lead while the other circulates throughout the room assessing targeted students using observations, checklists, and anecdotal records. Other models involve the two collaborating teachers working with different groups of students within the same classroom; students can be grouped heterogeneously (e.g., each group consisting of both ELs and non-ELs) or homogeneously (one group containing ELs and the other with non-ELs). Selection of a co-teaching model involves consideration of the type of content being taught, teachers’ styles and preferences, and the types of learning activities being implemented (Dove



& Honigsfeld, 2010). Co-teaching should not involve one teacher providing all the instruction while the other “helps,” or the language teacher working only with ELs while the content teacher works only with mainstream students (Davison, 2006; Long Island RBE-RN, 2015). Ideal collaboration between language and content teachers “requires the integration of content-based ESL teaching and ESL-conscious teaching; that is, systematic planned language development, not just the inclusion of ESL students in the ongoing activities of the mainstream classroom” (Davison, 2006, p. 457).

Co-teaching partnerships between language and content teachers help keep ELs socially connected to mainstream students, and avoid fragmented service delivery and the interruptions required by pull-out services (Frattura & Capper, 2007). While few studies have examined the impact of co-teaching partnerships on EL learning, some elementary case study research suggests that co-teaching models in which language and general education teachers collaboratively plan and teach to provide integrated and inclusive EL services can dramatically improve student outcomes (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008). Ongoing, regularly scheduled collaboration is essential to overcoming some of the instructional, organizational, and communication challenges of co-teaching (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

Cross-curricular planning. Cross-curricular planning can provide another sustained support structure for teachers of ELs. Teachers need robust disciplinary knowledge, an understanding of their disciplines’ linguistic demands, and the pedagogical expertise to design and teach well-scaffolded lessons for ELs (Walqui, Koelsch, & Hamburger, 2010). Cross-disciplinary teams (language and content specialists) can consider together the unique uses of language within content areas, and design instruction that helps students make sense of different language uses (Santos et al., 2013). Teachers can work together to develop lessons and learning tasks, try them in the classroom, and return with student work to analyze the lesson’s impact and refine as necessary (Santos et al., 2013). Adolescent ELs may further benefit from cross-disciplinary school-wide teams that include the EL specialist, content teachers, counselors with expertise in EL needs, and key administrators. These teams must have a common planning time and regularly meet to align curriculum, plan cross-disciplinary projects, and monitor student progress data (Rance-Roney, 2009).

Cross-curricular planning and co-teaching models can create a culture of collaboration among school staff and enable interdisciplinary partnerships that can foster rigorous language and content instruction that enhances EL outcomes. The potential benefits of this collaboration are illustrated in a New York state program combining visual arts and language instruction:

Visual arts and ESL teachers can best serve schools and students by collaboratively planning cross-curricular units of study. Students in this type of program experience complementary teaching and learning in different classrooms simultaneously. Teachers can also co-teach to further blend the subject areas and standards in one lesson, and work together to help facilitate student learning in their respective area of expertise. An art and ESL class can be designed and instructed by educators who teach together in one classroom or who take turns working with the same class to implement the different aspects of the interdisciplinary curriculum...If co-teaching and/or mixing is possible within a school structure, it is an ideal approach to offer the students in one class the opportunity to receive instruction from two collaborating teachers and learn through a balanced educational program. (NYSED Office of Bilingual Education and Foreign Languages Studies, 2010, p. 12)

Unfortunately, many teachers report not having adequate time to engage in collaborative planning and co-teaching. Administrators must be willing to creatively allocate sufficient time within the school day to accommodate professional conversations among teaching teams (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). School administrators can further facilitate co-teaching cross-curricular planning work by requiring (and participating in) high-quality PD for all staff, supporting voluntary co-teaching partnerships, establishing common expectations, and reinforcing shared accountability for EL outcomes (Long Island RBE-RN, 2015).

References

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Resources

For many practical tools and strategies for co-teaching and cross-curricular planning for teachers of ELs, see:

Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M. G. (2010). *Collaboration and co-teaching: Strategies for English learners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Long Island Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (2015). *Co-teaching and collaboration for teachers of ELLs: The role of administrators*. Retrieved from http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/bilingual-ed/co-teaching_for_administrators_web_version.pdf

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