

ESL and content teachers' collaboration

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Abstract

This paper reviews the earlier studies to synthesize the benefits and challenges of ESL and content teachers' collaboration and discusses Amanda's recent experiences of collaboration in a middle school in the Southeastern U.S. Previous studies document the collaborative benefits (DelliCarpini, 2018), which include teacher learning, increased ESL students' participation, and strengthened professional partnerships. However, ESL and content teachers' collaboration has yet to become a routine teaching practice in the U.S., particularly in secondary mainstream classrooms, because of the reported challenges (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018), such as teachers' incompatible personalities and beliefs (Arkoudis, 2003), conflicting schedules (Percy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016), inconsistent administrative support (Villa, Thousand, Nevin, Liston, 2005), and the ESL teacher's relegated role compared to the content teacher (Ahmed Hersi, Horan, & Lewis, 2016). In order for ESL and content teachers' collaboration to be a pathway for equitable learning outcomes for ESL students, educational stakeholders, namely content teachers, ESL teachers, and school administrators, need to share responsibility for planning for and teaching ESL students. This begins with school administrators who can foster a culture of collaboration, and content and ESL teachers who can take steps to build and strengthen collaborative partnerships. More specific recommendations are discussed in the conclusion.

Keywords: ESL, content teachers' collaboration, benefits and challenges, the United States public schools

Building a pathway for ESL and content teachers' collaboration

The population of ESL students continues to increase at rapid rates in the United States (U.S.). In response to this growth, federal mandates require that ESL students participate in mainstream classrooms, and more

recently, stipulate that these students master content in English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies while simultaneously learning English (Kibler, Walqui, & Bunch, 2015). This placement in mainstream classrooms poses challenges for content teachers who may not have taken teacher education coursework or received adequate professional training to know how to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students (Rubinstein-Avila & Lee, 2014). This also poses challenges for ESL teachers who may not feel their professional role is respected or validated in mainstream classrooms (Percy, 2018). If teachers overcome these challenges, they can collaborate to provide equitable learning opportunities for ESL students.

Therefore, this paper reviews the literature on ESL and content teachers' collaboration to synthesize the benefits and challenges of such collaboration. Previous studies document the benefits of collaboration (DelliCarpini, 2018; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Percy, 2018), which include teacher learning, increased ESL students' participation, and strengthened professional partnerships. However, ESL and content teachers' collaboration has yet to become a routine teaching practice in U.S. public schools, particularly in secondary mainstream classrooms, because of the reported challenges (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018), such as teachers' incompatible personalities and beliefs (Arkoudis, 2003), conflicting schedules (Percy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016), inconsistent administrative support (Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005), and the ESL teacher's relegated role compared to the content teacher (Ahmed Hersi, Horan, & Lewis, 2016). Building on this prior research, we discuss the benefits and challenges in light of Amanda's recent experiences as an ESL teacher working in collaboration with content teachers at a middle school in the Southeastern U.S.

The benefits of collaboration

Research on ESL and content teachers' collaboration reports teacher learning as one reported benefit (Baecher, Rorimer, & Smith, 2012; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Giles, 2018, 2019; Martin-Beltrán & Percy, 2014; Percy, Ditter, & Destefano, 2016). Framed by a sociocultural learning perspective, learning is not linear where the partnership immediately produces teachers' learning; rather, conceived as complex and dynamic, teacher learning focuses on the practices of both teachers and recognizes how the teachers' previous knowledge, experiences, and multiple identities influence their collaborative practices and ultimately the actual teaching activity (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Johnson & Golombek, 2016). Through this lens, ESL and content teachers' collaboration can be a "mediational

space” (Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014, p. 5; see also Giles, 2018) where teachers “co-construct knowledge” (Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014, p. 1; see also Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016) by working together to serve ESL students. This learning can help content teachers become more aware of the ESL students’ language needs in the mainstream classroom and bolster the ESL teacher’s role within the school community (Giles, 2019; Giles & Yazan, in press).

Another benefit of content teacher and ESL teachers’ collaboration is strengthened teaching partnerships (Baecher, Rorimer, & Smith, 2012; McClure, 2012; Peercy, DeStefano, Yazan, & Martin-Beltran, 2016; Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016). When focused on a student-centered outcome, teachers start to neglect their tendency to work in isolation out of fear of another teacher’s evaluation or critique and begin to experience “high levels of trust between colleagues, the ability to participate meaningfully in collaborative dialogue with a specific outcome in mind, and deep examination of classroom practice” (Baecher, Rorimer, & Smith, 2012, p. 51). These collegial conversations and interpersonal bonds strengthen the teachers’ collaboration to where ESL and content teachers enjoy collaboration (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016) and want to listen to and implement the cooperating teacher’s ideas (Peercy, Martin-Beltran, Yazan, & DeStefano, 2017).

Additionally, ESL and content teachers’ collaboration can support ESL students’ learning outcomes (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Giles, 2019; Gladman, 2015; Spezzini & Becker, 2012). For example, in the contexts of ESL and content teachers’ collaboration, ESL students noted the teachers’ unified and collective efforts helped ESL students take a more participatory role in the classroom (Giles, 2019; Gladman, 2015). These collaborative partnerships enhanced ESL students’ relationship with their teachers because they realized that their teachers were working together for their benefit (Giles, 2019; Gladman 2015). Spezzini and Becker (2012) also reported that ESL and content teachers collaborated during a required summer reading program, and this collaboration contributed to higher high school graduation rates for ESL students.

The challenges of collaboration

The benefits are not realized without confronting the challenges in ESL and content teachers’ collaboration, such as the ESL teacher’s marginalized role, coerced collaborative partnerships, and conflicting teaching and planning schedules. A major strand in the literature on ESL and content teachers’ collaboration focuses on how the ESL teacher’s relegated

role makes collaboration more difficult (Ahmed Hersi, et al., 2016; Arkoudis, 2003; Creese, 2002; Flores, 2012; McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). Arkoudis (2003) argues that the ESL teacher's role is marginalized further if the two co-teachers hold diverging teaching philosophies (Arkoudis, 2003). Moreover, the schools' departmental structure, particularly in secondary schools, further contributes to the ESL teacher's relegated status within the school community (Arkoudis, 2003; Bell & Baecher, 2012). Such structure creates subject departments that could exclude the ESL teacher from other content teachers. If there is an ESL teacher in a secondary school, there is often only one teacher to service multiple grades and subject areas. As a consequence, the ESL teacher may struggle to become part of a department which could leave this professional on the school community's fringes with limited opportunities to share language expertise (Bell & Baecher, 2012). Lastly, ESL and content teachers can have different racial, ethnic, and language backgrounds, which can reduce the ESL teacher's expertise to solely a language interpreter or a classroom assistant, or at least less than an actual content teacher (McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010).

Coerced collaborative partnerships also are additional challenges that constrain collaborative efforts because, in such partnerships, teachers are most often forced to collaborate (Ahmed Hersi, et al., 2016; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Hargreaves, 1994; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011). The pressure to collaborate can be enforced by policy (Arkoudis, 2003) or take the form of school-based initiatives (Ahmed Hersi, et al., 2016; Hargreaves, 1994). In mandated collaborative efforts, content teachers do not always have the desire to collaborate for ESL students or understand the necessity of collaboration. This can result in the content teacher failing to recognize the ESL teacher's contribution to the mainstream classroom and/or ignoring the ESL teacher's expertise altogether (Ahmed Hersi, et al., 2016). Consequently, researchers encourage voluntary collaboration where teachers want to collaborate rather than feel forced (Davison, 2006; Hargreaves, 1994). More specifically, the "perceived value among teachers that derives from experience, inclination or non-coercive persuasion" ultimately sustains collaborative partnerships (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 192), most probably because teachers willingly engage in collaboration, and as such, see the potential value in collaboration. Davison (2006) also noted how teachers' attitudes and efforts can influence their collaborative efforts. She distinguished these stages along a continuum (e.g., pseudocompliance, compliance, accommodation, convergence, creative co-construction), which ranged from teachers who were most willing to collaborate to those who were most reluctant. Davison (2006) contended that a strict mandate to

collaborate is one reason why teachers demonstrated this unwillingness and exhibited the characteristics of a pseudocompliant teacher.

Additionally, ESL and content teachers' collaboration is hindered by conflicting planning and teaching schedules as well as the ESL teachers' multiple and diverse duties (Giles, 2018; Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014; Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016), which create a two-fold problem. First, without adequate planning time, ESL and content teachers cannot discuss learning objectives nor negotiate teaching roles (Giles, 2018). Bell and Baecher (2012) stated that the most common collaborative exchanges in their data were infrequent and informal encounters (e.g., e-mail conversations and brief hallway encounters). However, these informal and unplanned meetings made it more difficult to engage in sustained collaborative efforts. Second, inconsistent planning and teaching schedules can create an unequal division of labor between ESL and content teachers in potential collaborative efforts (Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016). This becomes a problem, namely for content teachers, who might feel that they bear the burden of responsibility because the ESL teacher is not available during the content teacher's entire teaching schedule to share instructional duties (Giles, 2018; Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016). In some other cases, if ESL teachers are primarily responsible for designing curricular materials in the co-taught mainstream classroom, they might feel they take on extra planning and instructional responsibilities in addition to their responsibilities to plan for and teach students in the ESL classroom, which could lead to the ESL teacher's unequal planning duties and/or teaching roles (Giles, 2019; Giles & Yazan, in press).

These challenges can be overcome when teachers share similar goals and utilize common resources (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2012; Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014; Martin-Beltrán, Peercy, & Selvi, 2012). Teachers' goals need to be student-focused and connected to the learning objectives of the lesson (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016). Martin-Beltrán and Peercy (2014) found that common tools (e.g., curriculum templates, pacing guides, rubrics) created "mediational spaces" for teacher learning (p. 5) and even helped teachers overcome the collaborative challenges (Martin-Beltrán, Peercy, & Selvi, 2012), most likely because the tools helped teachers align their lesson objectives and teaching goals (Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016). Strict curricular standards (e.g., The Common Core State Standards) were also effective tools that ESL and content teachers used in collaboration (Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2012) and could even be the catalyst that necessitates, initiates, and sustains these collaborative partnerships (Peercy, DeStefano, Yazan, & Martin-Beltrán, 2016).

Finally, school leadership is a crucial determining factor that can enhance or constrain collaborative efforts (DelliCarpini, 2018; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Hargreaves, 1994; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Russell, 2012; Samuelson, Pawan & Hung, 2012; Villa, et al., 2005; Walker & Edstam, 2013). More directly, Villa, et al. (2005) stated that “administrative support for the [collaborative] practice was the most powerful predictor of a general educator’s positive feelings toward inclusive education” (p. 43). In order for ESL and content teachers’ collaboration to produce opportunities for their professional learning and ESL students’ learning outcomes, administrators have to support yet not force collaboration (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). This support includes creating schedules that make collaboration possible so that ESL and content teachers can establish a routine for collaborative teaching (Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016) and provide the necessary resources (e.g., teacher training and materials) to bring about fruitful collaborative partnerships (DelliCarpini, 2018). Thus, the administrators’ ability to support voluntary partnerships ultimately creates a school culture conducive to collaboration (Hargreaves, 1994; Russell, 2012).

The Study: Perspectives from an ESL teacher

Given the reported collaborative benefits and challenges, we will now discuss them in light of Amanda’s experiences as an ESL teacher in a suburban middle school in the Southeastern U.S. Amanda began teaching in 2010 and has been the ESL teacher at Starcreek Middle School (pseudonym) since 2015. Prior to assuming her current position as the ESL teacher, Amanda taught English/language arts for five years at Starcreek. The state regulations where Amanda teaches allow for an ESL teacher with teaching certification in either an additional language and/or English/language arts to teach ESL students; Amanda holds both certifications. Therefore, when offered to teach ESL at the beginning of her sixth year of teaching, Amanda was eligible.

Starcreek has witnessed a growing population of ESL students since Amanda began working as an ESL teacher. During the 2017-2018 academic school year, there were forty-one ESL students and forty-three recently exited ESL students with the entire student population totaling eight hundred and twenty-three. The projected number of ESL students for the 2018-2019 school year is seventy-five ESL students and sixty-two recently exited ESL students. Students qualify for language services if they make a qualifying score (4.9 or below) on the World-class Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA) Screener. Students are enrolled in an English/language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics classes with English-only

instruction regardless of their score on the WIDA screener. ESL students continue to receive language services taught by Amanda in one fifty-five-minute class period until they make an exiting score (4.8 or above) on WIDA's annual Access for English Language Learners 2.0 language assessment.

We argue that ESL instruction must be a shared responsibility among all members of the school community (Athanasas & de Oliveira, 2008; de Jong & Harper, 2005; de Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013), and therefore, we envision ESL and content teachers' collaboration as a pathway in promoting this shared responsibility. Given this belief, collaboration emerged from Amanda's desire to initiate a shared collaborative partnership as well as the content teachers' stated challenges in working to plan for and teach ESL students in the mainstream classrooms. Amanda has collaborated with content teachers across all grades (e.g., sixth, seventh, and eighth grades), but for this discussion, we concentrate on her most recent collaborative efforts. In 2017-2018, Amanda collaborated with an academic team of eighth grade English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies teachers during each academic semester, which lasted five months. Content teachers agreed to participate voluntarily by signing a consent form, were informed that they could decide not to participate at any time, and assured that their (non)participation would not affect Amanda's professional relationship with them in any way. Collaboration included three audio-recorded interviews, four video-recorded planning sessions, two video-recorded co-teaching sessions, two audio-recorded viewing sessions, and two reflective journals with each collaborating content teacher.

A synthesis of our most recent work on ESL and content teachers' collaboration shows that collaboration can generate increased opportunities for ESL and content teachers' learning, ESL students' participation, and strengthened collegial partnerships. Given these benefits, ESL and content teachers' collaboration has resulted in the ESL teacher's reconceptualized role within the school community at Starcreek. Nonetheless, we admit that these successes have not been achieved without challenges, specifically, the teachers' conflicting schedules and the content teacher's misconceptions about ESL students. We argue that the challenges have not been insurmountable, and Amanda's agency was crucial in initiating and sustaining these collaborative efforts. We will now discuss the benefits and challenges in the next section.

Findings and Discussion

ESL and content teachers' learning

Our work shows that teacher learning opportunities were not limited to language supports only; rather, they were extended to include informal assessment strategies, technology, differentiated instruction, and scaffolding techniques. For example, Amanda helped the mathematics teacher create a vocabulary graphic organizer to teach content-specific vocabulary related to geometry. The graphic organizer included four squares for each vocabulary word. She provided the definition, a diagram, an example, and a justification statement for each word. Amanda scaffolded the justification statement so that the students learned how to write sentences that would explain why each word was important to geometry. After this discussion, Amanda helped the mathematics teacher use Kahoot, an online game-based learning program, to assess informally students' progress in learning the vocabulary. Previously, the mathematics teacher had not taught the vocabulary through scaffolded instruction and reported that she had never used Kahoot as a formative assessment tool. In collaboration, she learned to pre-teach vocabulary, scaffold students' justification statements, and use a formative assessment tool to assess students' vocabulary knowledge.

This potential for teacher learning in collaboration is consistent with previous studies on ESL and content teachers' collaboration (Baecher, Rorimer, & Smith, 2012; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018; Giles, 2018, 2019; Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014). Our work extends this earlier research to highlight the fact that ESL and content teachers' learning includes more than providing ESL students with language supports only in the mainstream classroom; thus, Amanda's continued collaboration with the mathematics teacher will continue to generate additional opportunities for teachers' learning to serve ESL students in mainstream classrooms.

Increased ESL students' participation

Our work also demonstrates that ESL and content teachers' collaboration creates opportunities for ESL students' increased participation in the mainstream classroom. More specifically, we observed that teachers' actions in collaboration enhances (or constrains) possibilities for ESL students' participation. For example, in working with the science teacher, Amanda noticed that the science teacher mostly lectured during the first collaborative teaching session, which consequently limited opportunities for ESL students' participation in the mainstream classroom. ESL students reluctantly spoke when the content teacher questioned them directly, and

they did not volunteer to participate by raising their hands. During the second collaborative cycle, Amanda suggested a turn-and-talk as an alternative to the content teacher's direct question and answer method during instruction to create spaces for discussions in student pairs. She also used sentence frames to help students initiate the conversation and encourage students to incorporate content-specific science vocabulary words into their discussions. As a result, Amanda's suggestion increased ESL students' participation because all students engaged in a conversation with peers in relevant and appropriate ways. In doing this activity, the content teacher reported that he noticed all students' increased participation, and consequently, he wanted to continue using these types of activities to generate more discussions in the science classroom.

This impact of teacher collaboration on student participation parallels earlier studies that found that teacher collaboration creates opportunities for increased ESL students' learning outcomes (Giles, 2019; Gladman, 2015; Spezzini & Becker, 2012). Our work extends this earlier finding by specifically analyzing ESL and content teachers' lesson design and teaching acts at the micro level.

Strengthened collegial partnerships

Another theme evident in our work was that ESL and content teachers' collaboration strengthens collegial partnerships and is strengthened by professional relationships previously built or established. Both the English/language arts and social studies teachers had been teaching at Starcreek for three years, and they reported that Amanda was the only ESL teacher they had worked with during their teaching careers. Informal collaboration with the English/language arts and social studies teachers emerged in 2015. At this time, the social studies teacher was beginning her teaching career and stated that she viewed Amanda as a resource to better serve ESL students and someone who helped her acclimate to her new teaching role. On the other hand, the English/language arts teacher had previous teaching experience in a high school but relied on Amanda to help her transition into her role as a middle school English/language arts teacher at Starcreek. Additionally, the English/language arts teacher frequently asked for Amanda's help teaching ESL students in the mainstream classroom. When asked why they chose to participate, both teachers cited Amanda's friendship and her willingness to help as their initial motivations for participation, even while both teachers reported that they learned strategies to teach ESL students more effectively in the mainstream classroom. Amanda's relationship with both teachers extended beyond her professional role as ESL teacher, and these interactions continued to thrive

in collaboration.

In addition to Amanda's experience with the English/language arts and social studies teachers, she relied on her professional relationships already established in collaborating specifically with the mathematics and science teacher. Drawing on her previous experience as an English/language arts teacher, Amanda taught with both the mathematics and science teachers on an academic team. Starcreek divides content teachers in academic teams, which consist of an English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies teacher. Amanda was on the same academic team with the mathematics teacher three out of the five years during her tenure as an English/language arts teacher, and she taught on the same academic team as the science teacher for one year. Both the mathematics and science teachers reported that they willingly engaged in collaboration with Amanda because they trusted her and knew she would fulfill her commitments; thus, their decision to participate was mostly likely based on their past experiences working with Amanda as an English/language arts teacher because there was no history of collaboration with the ESL teacher prior to Amanda assuming the role of ESL teacher. For this reason, our work reports that not only does ESL and content teachers' collaboration strengthen collaborative partnerships, but this collaboration initially emerges and is strengthened by preexisting professional relationships between colleagues.

ESL teachers' reconceptualized role

An outgrowth of the abovementioned benefits is the ESL teacher's recontextualized role among the school community at Starcreek. All content teachers reported that ESL and content teachers' collaboration changed their perception of the ESL teacher's role, specifically in working with content teachers in the mainstream classroom. With previous ESL teachers, the content teacher only engaged in infrequent and informal collaboration, explaining that they had never worked with the ESL teacher to plan for and teach ESL students in the mainstream classroom. After collaborating with Amanda, they now conceptualized the ESL teacher's role as a more active role in the classroom, which includes content knowledge in addition to language instruction.

As such, our research describes how ESL and content teachers' collaboration can bolster the ESL teacher's role rather than exacerbate the ESL teacher's relegation; this finding is distinct from earlier studies that discuss the ESL teacher's relegated status in teacher collaboration (Ahmed Hersi, et al., 2016; Arkoudis, 2003; Creese, 2002; Flores, 2012; McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). This finding highlights the complex role of Amanda's professional relationships in initiating and sustaining

collaboration with content teachers. Her already established professional relationships helped her initiate collaboration with people who trusted her and whom she trusted. These collegial relationships also partly enabled her to start collaborative partnerships with other teachers because she drew on these past experiences with her colleagues. Given her former experience as an English/language arts teacher and her current role as the ESL teacher in the same school, Amanda relied on her background as a content teacher as well as her knowledge of second language teaching and learning. Both experiences influence the content teachers' opinions that an ESL teacher's responsibility should include content and language; their opinions contribute to the ESL teacher's strengthened role in the school community.

Inconsistent planning and teaching schedules

The benefits described above have not been experienced without navigating the challenges. The first challenge was dealing with conflicting planning and teaching schedules, which were never completely overcome. Amanda served ESL students across three different grade levels, which prevented her from engaging in collaborative efforts beyond the established co-teaching sessions. Teaching schedules at Starcreek were arranged so that ESL students receive language instruction in the ESL classroom when the content teachers had planning periods. Amanda could not simultaneously instruct language in the ESL classroom and plan with content teachers. This meant that planning with content teachers had to take place before or after school hours. Her ability to meet with the content teachers before or after school depended on the content teacher's availability, which was not always reliable. It also meant that Amanda often did not have a break during the school day because she used this time to co-plan and co-teach with content teachers in the rare instance where both teachers had similar planning periods.

For example, Amanda and the science teacher tried to schedule a planning session unsuccessfully three times. On the third attempt, the science teacher informed Amanda he was not available before or after school to meet. Amanda then volunteered to plan with the science teacher during her ESL class period because there was not another available time; hence, Amanda had to ask a teacher to watch her ESL class while she planned with the science teacher. In this instance, Amanda struggled internally because she felt like she was neglecting the ESL students in the ESL classroom. Her obligation and loyalty to her students conflicted with her desire to collaborate with the science teacher. This was never completely resolved. In subsequent planning sessions with the science teacher, however, Amanda admitted this struggle to the science teacher who eventually agreed

to meet with her on Friday afternoons after school; nonetheless, this did not work for every planning session because there were at least two additional sessions when the science teacher could not meet on Friday afternoons. Amanda consequently had to miss her ESL classes in order to collaborate with the science teacher.

Content teachers' misconceptions about ESL students

Another challenge Amanda faced in collaboration was the content teacher's misconceptions about ESL students. The most common misconception stemmed from the content teachers' failure to see the difference between academic and social language. This is a common challenge in working with content teachers to plan for and teach ESL students in the mainstream classroom (DelliCarpini, 2018; Harper & de Jong, 2004). The content teachers reported that most of their ESL students possessed high levels of conversational English, and the teachers struggled to understand the ESL students' need for language supports in the mainstream classroom. This also led to additional misunderstandings as content teachers categorized ESL students like any other struggling students, which included but was not limited to students in special education (Giles, 2019). This misunderstanding hindered collaborative efforts because the content teachers did not always see the necessity for collaboration, and therefore, they tended to reduce Amanda's language suggestions as strategies that would work for all students (Harper & de Jong, 2004). This challenge was partly overcome by Amanda's content knowledge. For example, in working with content teachers, Amanda played an active part in creating lessons for content teachers based on the content standards. As she created these lessons, she incorporated language strategies (e.g., sentence frames, language simplification, differentiated reading texts, and paragraph scaffolds). However, she did not always clarify why she incorporated these language strategies, which could have led to content teachers' more informed language distinctions. As a consequence, it was not uncommon for the content teachers to say they did not learn language strategies in collaborating with Amanda. They would then justify this (non)learning by reiterating the ESL students' high levels of conversational English and state that the ESL students did not need specific language supports in the mainstream classroom.

The ESL teachers' agency

A crucial determining factor in resolving the above mentioned challenges was Amanda's agency in sustaining the collaborative efforts with content teachers. Duff (2012) defines agency as "people's ability to make

choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation” (p. 417). In her collaboration with content teachers, Amanda made choices in various ways, beginning with her decision to initiate collaborative efforts when ESL and content teachers’ collaboration was not the teaching norm at Starcreek. She also decided to remain flexible with content teachers’ schedules even when doing so conflicted with her professional obligation and personal convictions to teach ESL students in the ESL class period. Furthermore, she created many lessons based on the content and language standards for the content teachers believing that they would eventually see the necessity and value for ESL and content teachers’ collaboration. Her perseverance and agency ultimately sustained the collaborative efforts even when the challenges were not always overcome.

Amanda’s agency, however, was not based solely on her decisions and actions in collaboration with content teachers. Instead, her agency was “socioculturally mediated,” which means that her “capacity to act” was also influenced by contextual factors including institutional constraints, micro and macro policies, and social relationships that reinforced Amanda’s ability to enact agency (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). In this way, Amanda’s previous experience as a content teacher at Starcreek and her professional relationships with teachers, students, and administrators opened up space for her to exercise agency in her efforts to collaborate with content teachers. This previous experience and professional relationships supported and fueled Amanda’s decisions throughout the collaborative process.

Conclusion and future directions

Thus far, we have illustrated the benefits and challenges experienced in ESL and content teachers’ collaboration through Amanda’s experiences at a middle school in the Southeastern U.S. ESL and content teachers’ collaboration warrants creating a space for building professional relationships, which cannot be manufactured instantaneously or forcibly. Fruitful collaborative partnerships that lead to teacher and student learning outcomes cannot be cultivated in one single day; nonetheless, the school community, namely, content teachers, ESL teachers, and school administrators need to take steps to begin this cultivation. The entire school community must understand the necessity for ESL and content teachers’ collaboration and be committed to providing equitable learning outcomes for ESL students in theory and in practice. This begins with school administrators fostering a culture of collaboration, creating schedules conducive to collaboration, and providing resources for ESL and content

teachers. Further, content teachers must be willing to work with ESL teachers, which means relinquishing complete control of the mainstream classroom and sharing planning and instructional responsibilities with ESL teachers. This also means that content teachers need to understand ESL students' need for academic language and content as well as learning about how to incorporate language strategies into lessons in the mainstream classroom to help ESL students access and master the content standards. Similarly, the ESL teacher needs to be willing to learn the content in order to help content teachers utilize these language strategies effectively. This might involve creating lessons for content teachers so that content teachers can better conceptualize how to use language supports in the mainstream classroom.

Our research also is just one example of collaboration between ESL and content teachers; hence, we call for additional studies on collaboration, particularly in secondary schools, to verify Amanda's experiences across multiple studies. More in depth and sustained studies on collaboration additionally might shed light on alternative ways to navigate the challenges and continue to benefit from collaborative efforts with content teachers in mainstream classrooms across the U.S.

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