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Co-Teaching in the ELA Classroom: Content Teacher and ELL Specialist

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Co-Teaching in the ELA Classroom:
Content Teacher and ELL Specialist

A Quantitative Research Project

By
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ED 696
Degree of Master of Science
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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Introduction

For over twenty years I have been a teacher of English Language Learners in the Moorhead Area Public Schools. The method of instruction for our language learners has been a pull-out model. ELL students that qualify for services are taken out of the mainstream classes and into a small group setting. Once in this setting, the certified ELL teacher instructs the students using the four language domains; reading, writing, listening, and speaking. With no set curriculum, EL teachers are charged with building their instruction in a way that supports the classroom content curriculum. When these students are pulled out for small group instruction they are most often missing classes such as social studies or science. Of course, depending on their level of English proficiency, they may be missing other classes as well.

In the spring of 2022, a colleague approached me with an interest in doing some co-teaching. She had previous co-teaching experience in another Minnesota district. I must admit at first I was a bit hesitant. My only experience with co-teaching had been initiated by administration with no choice given to the teachers who were to be working closely together. Many times, I had seen the content teacher actually teaching the lesson and the certified special education or ELL teacher working as a paraprofessional in the classroom. As an experienced teacher, this is not something I was interested in getting into. I wanted to make sure that we were both fully committed to being true co- teachers in a fifth grade ELA classroom. In the interest of working on what is best for students, I committed to doing a book study over the summer and investigating what our situation could look like. We analyzed the models and strategies in a book entitled *Co-teaching That Works* by Ann Benninghof. After working together over the summer completing a book study, then presenting our findings to administration, we decided to go forward and plan for co-teaching ELA during the 2022- 2023 school year.

This study will attempt to look at the most productive way to serve English language learners within a middle school setting. Particularly looking at the middle school level when reading scores and

language acquisition scores tend to stagnate. This research will delve into the opportunity to have two highly trained teachers within the classroom co-teaching English language arts with a focus on language development and compare that to the experience of students leaving the classroom each day for their pull-out EL instruction. How can thoughtful, intentional co-teaching impact academic success of ELL students?

Brief Literature Review

It has been my experience that teachers are placed into or have the best of intentions to start co-teaching, but one professional often ends up appearing to be the aide, or assistant. With time and budgetary concerns taking precedence, how can a true co-teaching situation be implemented with fidelity? Current research places an emphasis on a consistent common planning time for both teachers. Along with that, open and honest communication are of utmost importance when two teachers are working together in the same classroom. Two areas to work on strengthening include: “(1) team members’ ability to bring up problems and tough issues, and (2) team members’ ease to ask other members for help” (Hackett 2021, 119). These areas require a relationship in which both members feel comfortable and confident in sharing their ideas and concerns. Cook and Friend go so far as to call a co-teaching situation a “professional marriage” (Cook 1995).

Along with a positive rapport and dedication to common planning time, the use of different co-teaching models contributes to the success of the co-taught classroom. Cook and Friend identified five separate models to use in the classroom in the mid-1990s. Later, Anne Beningof expanded upon those models to include seven co-teaching models (2020). The most challenging, though successful model is what Cook and Friend referred to as “team teaching”, while Beningof refers to this model as the “Duet” model. For both authors, this is the most challenging model because it requires the highest level of collaboration and time to plan. Though there are several models, and they are referred to in different ways, most co-teachers go back and forth between several models: even in the same lesson/ day. Once their comfort level grows, there tends to be a model or two that becomes relied upon more. A true

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co-teaching situation relies on common planning time, an open honest relationship between the teachers and the use of intentional modes of instruction.

Statement of the Problem

Particularly at the middle school level, student ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 scores begin to plateau or even drop. The gap between high achieving students and those that struggle becomes more apparent in the regular classrooms. Moving from an elementary model to that of a middle school certainly impacts these test scores. Removal of students from content classrooms for language support during key content instruction will impact English language development. How can we as classroom teachers and specialists work together to bridge these inequities?

Purpose of the Study

In our program to support ELL students, they are often removed from the content class to attend small group classes with the specialist. Would putting in the work to build a true co-teaching English Language Arts classroom truly benefit the language acquisition of our ELL students? Ideally, remaining in the classroom during the school day would cut down on lost instructional time, reduce the stigma of needing to leave for additional services, build rapport with more adults as well as classmates and, of course, improve English language proficiency.

Research Question(s)

This study is driven by the researchers desire to pave the way for students to connect their heritage language to their target language as efficiently and as accurately as possible. After two decades of teaching using the pull-out and transition check-in models, the opportunity to conscientiously and deliberately develop a co-teaching model that works for ELL students led to asking this question. How do ELLs' reading skills and language acquisition in a co-taught setting compare to that of ELLs in a pull-out setting?

Definition of Variables.

This research will look to compare ELL students' language proficiency in a co-taught classroom to those in a pull-out model. Variable A will be the students receiving instruction in the pull-out small group classroom. Variable B will be the students in the co-taught classroom under the direction of the content teacher and the ELL specialist. Their progress will be measured using an Oral Reading Fluency (ORF), ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 data and a speaking test modeled after the WIDA speaking test (using the same rubric).

Significance of the Study

The most prevalent model of instruction for ELLs in this district depends on them leaving the classroom for specific language instruction. Having an ELL specialist in the classroom for ELA everyday will reduce interruptions to content instruction, reduce stigma, and thus help to bridge the gap between the heritage language and the additional language of the students. Thoughtful creation of a co-teaching model with intentional focus on common planning time, a respectful, professional relationship and the use of researched based models will impact the success of our students' reading and language acquisition success.

Research Ethics

Permission and IRB Approval. In order to conduct this study, the researcher will seek MSUM's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects (Mills & Gay, 2019). Likewise, authorization to conduct this study will be seek from the school district where the research project will take place (See Appendix X and X).

Informed Consent. Protection of human subjects participating in research will be assured. Participant minors will be informed of the purpose of the study via the Method of Assent (See Appendix X) that the researcher will read to participants before the beginning of the study. Participants will be aware that this study is conducted as part of the researcher's Master Degree Program and that it will benefit his/her teaching practice. Informed consent means that the parents of participants have been fully informed of the purpose and procedures of the study for which consent is sought and that parents understand and agree, in writing, to their child participating in the study (Rothstein & Johnson, 2014). Confidentiality will be protected through the use of pseudonyms (e.g., Student 1) without the utilization of any identifying information. The choice to participate or withdraw at any time will be outlined both, verbally and in writing.

Limitations.

There will be several limitations impacting this research. These limitations include:

- The sample size of students in both variable groups.
- In both variable groups, there is a wide range of English proficiency levels. Students at lower levels tend to acquire language more quickly than those that are intermediate or advanced. This study will impact students at different levels.
- The length of time of this study is rather short when compared to the time it takes to acquire an additional language.
- The annual ACCESS testing window will potentially fall into the time set aside for the study.
- Two grade levels of students are represented; fifth and sixth grade students.
- The consistency of instruction in the pull-out ELL small groups will be more challenging to analyze and track.
- Consistent attendance and gaps in instructional time.

Conclusions

This chapter laid out the purpose of the research and the importance of supporting students as they add an additional language. The researcher, an experienced ELL teacher, has been working with students in one model of instruction for most of her career. With the prompting of a colleague, she has been working to explore the idea of co-teaching and how that could potentially impact the language acquisition of fifth grade ELL students. When students enter middle school, their scores tend to plateau or even decline. How can two teachers work together to bridge these gaps? The following chapter will look at literature that discusses thoughtful, intentional plans to create a co-teaching situation.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background and Context

Introduction

This study will look at the effects of co-teaching in a content classroom with the ELL (English Language Learner) teacher actively engaged in teaching English language arts for two class periods daily. The content classroom teacher also teams with another fifth-grade teacher and thus there are two class periods of ELA. Reading fluency and English language proficiency will be the focus of this research.

Currently the most common way to serve English language Learners in this district is through a pull-out program. That consists of ELL students leaving the content classroom to attend small group instruction with a certified ELL teacher. A few concerns that the pull-out model brings to mind include time wasted during transition time, lack of exposure to native speaking English models, content classroom time missed, lack of connection with classmates, missing out on the content by the content specialist (classroom teacher), and possibly being exposed to yet more content that may or may not be connected to core content (depending on the instructional model and ELL teacher).

Regardless of the way EL students are served throughout their school day; they are required to participate in the annual standardized test called the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. This assessment then determines a level of language proficiency and assigns each ELL student a score. Once students reach a certain level, then they are considered exited from the ELL program. If they do not attain an exit score, they will continue in the ELL program until that level of proficiency is attained. This study will look at a way for students to stay in the classroom the entire day with their language support coming to them with the ELL teacher actively co-teaching with the ELA teacher.

Body of the Review

Context

Definition of Co-Teaching

When research for the literature review began, two names kept coming up as resources for the research of many other articles, so the researcher was compelled to do some investigation for the work of Lynn Cook and Marilyn Friend. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that their work from the early to mid- 1990s was working with mostly special education and classroom teachers being the focus of their co-teaching. Having spent a good portion of her career pointing out that ELL teachers are, in fact, language specialists, not to be confused with a reading or Special Education teacher, this researcher was hesitant to consider a track meant for Special Education. However, Special Education and ELL teachers are connected as they are two specialists most often taking on the role of co-teacher in a content classroom. Cook and Friend's (1995) definition of co-teaching is as follows, "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space" (1995). This definition does not specify the specific titles of each teacher, instead refers to the adults working together in the classroom. The key part is "substantive instruction" because if a team is not careful or if the administration is arbitrarily assigning co- teachers, the likelihood of one person acting as a paraprofessional and one person being responsible for instruction is rather high. According to Cook and Friend (1995), in a true co-teaching situation both professionals are responsible for:

1. Equal distribution of responsibilities
2. How to meet student needs
3. Shared delivery of instruction; neither teacher is considered subordinate to the other (2).

Co-teaching is not simply the luxury of having two adults in the classroom to work to meet students' needs. It is a well-thought-out process in which common planning time, open and honest communication, and a voluntary desire to be in the situation. In a true co-taught classroom, students will likely not know the difference between the specialist and the classroom teacher.

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One of the co-teaching studies that had often quoted the work of Cook and Friend was from the *Journal of Research in Special Education Needs* by Vasilis Strogilos and Margaret E. King-Sears (2019). Along with Cook and Friend, these two authors compared the relationship of co-teachers to that of a professional marriage. The authors stated that co-teachers don't have to be personal friends but they must have a positive relationship and feel comfortable working together as well as making mistakes in front of each other (Strogilos, 2019). The idea of mutual respect of the co-teachers for each other and the students was viewed as a high priority. Maintaining open communication and an amicable relationship for the students was a valuable asset. These authors focused on the positive classroom environment by doing interviews of sixth grade students in a co-teaching classroom. Most of the students had a favorable view of co-teaching as they had two teachers to respond to or relate to in their class. It was noted that the students did not easily distinguish which teacher was the specialist in which was a classroom teacher. They talked about having a positive view of more than one adult in the room and the use of humor and relationship-building between the teachers and the student. Students and teachers were interviewed separately in this study and they were viewed as the stakeholders (I was wondering about any interviews with parents or communication with parents as stakeholders). This study put an emphasis on the opportunity for students to build rapport with more than one adult. It should be noted that students did point out the positive relationship that co-teachers had with each other. Another example to show that co-teaching should be voluntary and not assigned by administration. Just putting two teachers together doesn't necessarily mean they will be successful in a co-teaching situation. In the resulting interviews, students with disabilities felt more seen and heard and there was less stigma for them to be leaving the classroom or otherwise having attention drawn to them. Students without disabilities did not feel more or above students that did have disabilities because it wasn't always readily apparent which adult was the specialist and which was the content teacher (Strogilos, 2019).

Purpose of Co-Teaching

What is the ultimate goal for positive co-teaching? Cook and Friend lay these goals out as follows :

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1. Increase instructional options for all students
2. Improve program intensity and continuity
3. Reduce stigma for students with special needs
4. Increase support for teachers and related service specialists (1995).

There are many factors that contribute to the success, or lack thereof, in a co-teaching situation. Hackett et. al. (2021) found that one drawback to co-teaching that has been studied is the unequal power differential or one teacher to have a higher perceived status than the other teacher. There can also be an apprehension of evaluation when another adult comes into the classroom who is maybe more experienced or perceived to have more knowledge. Working in the same room as another adult is certainly a risk. Traditional education has been one teacher, one classroom with that teacher having the content knowledge. Certainly, there must be an openness to taking risks and allowing another person to share that power with you in a co-teaching situation. You must be seen as equal partners and not challenging each other. Hackett et al., argue that psychological safety is a key component in successful co-teaching (2020). They discussed a three-step phase to introduce co-teaching into a school situation. These phases are laid out over a year to a year-and-a-half. The authors make a case for carefully laying out a plan of exploring, pre-planning, and then finally in implementing the co-teaching situation. The teachers that they worked with ranged from new teachers to more experienced and in the end not all the teachers continued with co-teaching because of a power dynamic and other challenges related to partnerships. These authors discussed details such as classroom availability, setup and layout that could hinder the success of a co-teaching situation. Their study reinforced the idea that the relationship of co-teachers must be that of a professional relationship of mutual respect and referenced the analogy of a professional marriage (2020).

It is interesting to think about co-teaching English proficiency in other countries. There were two such studies to explore, one from the *Journal of Language and Linguistics* studies and the other from the *Pan Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics* where the authors looked at teaching English as a foreign language in the country of Iran. The first one took a look at parallel teaching where basically, the benefits of having two adults in the same classroom are the focus. They were teaching the same content at the

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same time, but it was lowering class size for the benefit of the students. In the end there was not a significant difference in the success of the students' posttests. This was a government-run school with more limited options. But putting more adults in this same classroom is not necessarily beneficial to the learning of the students no matter the system or country. More thought needs to go into the actual process and model of co-teaching (2012). The other article from the *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* looked at 41 advanced English level proficiency female students that were learning English as a foreign language. Co-teaching situations focused on the importance of writing. These teachers worked to “plan together, share teaching duties, and design all teaching processes together” (2020, 1834). The researchers stated an emphasis on common planning time and working together to design and implement writing lessons. There was a clear expectation of implementing different teaching strategies and using models in their co-teaching strategies. One group of students was taught in a co-teaching situation and the other was more traditional with one single teacher. That included 12 sessions each for an hour and a half. The study also consisted of a pre and a post test. In the end, the participants in the co-teaching situation were able to improve their writing scores more than their peers in the class taught by the single teacher. They felt that “the underlying rationale is one in which teaching a class with two teachers can first add to the variety of teaching styles, feedback giving, consultation and reviewing the teaching process that can lead to better teaching practice and also doubling the class time by increasing teacher-student interaction time.” (2020)

Again, and again articles emphasized that in a successful co-teaching situation there cannot be a subordinate position of the specialist in the classroom. Both teachers must be seen as equals. In some classrooms looked at in these studies, the students truly did not know which adult was the specialist and which teacher was the content teacher. The article entitled, “‘You're not an Island’: A Middle Grades Language Arts Teacher’s Changed Perceptions in ESL and Content Teachers Collaboration”, the author discusses what each co-teacher is able to bring to the table. Obviously the content teacher has specific knowledge of that area. In this article, there was an EL teacher that supported the English language arts. The content teacher in this article had the perception that the EL students were not the hardest working

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and even considered them lazy. But after taking time to work with the EL co-teacher and see how she had modified and adapted assignments and curriculum, the content area teacher changed her perception when she gained further understanding. That teacher was able to share with the content teacher strategies that were successful for ELL students, but then in turn also benefited the native speakers. "You prioritize student choice and responsibility. She incorporated strategies to help ELL students access the lesson content and accomplish language objectives without changing the text or watering down the curriculum" (2020).

Co-Teaching Models

One of the key components of co-teaching is working to be seen as equal partners; not engaging in a power dynamic that places one teacher (often the content teacher) in a higher perceived status. In order to accomplish this, there are several models of co-teaching that have been explicitly defined by Cook and Friend (1995). These models include:

1. One teach, One Assist: both teachers are present, but one takes the instructional lead while the other walks around to assist.
2. Station Teaching: content is divided and set up in several stations around the room. Students move from one teaching station to the other, perhaps with individual work time as one station.
3. Parallel Teaching: both teachers are teaching the same content in small groups at the same time.
4. Alternative Teaching: one teacher (usually the specialist) takes a predetermined group of students (usually the target group; SPED, EL, low readers, etc.) to work in a smaller group.
5. Team Teaching: an equal share of the instructional load. Teachers work together to deliver instruction in tandem. (5-8)

This is not to say that one co-teaching model is decided upon and used exclusively. Several models may be used by co-teachers in a week, or even in an instructional day.

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Cook and Friend's models were defined in the mid-1990s, but their influence is evident in more recent research. When working to develop our co-teaching plan, we studied the work of Anne M. Benninghof (2020). In the book, *Co- Teaching That Works*, the author lays out seven different models for co-teaching.

1. Duet: Similar to team teaching- both teachers deliver instruction and are involved in the entire instructional process.
2. Map and Navigate: both teachers involved in most of the instruction; content teacher takes the lead as far as planning.
3. Adding: one teacher is seen as more of the leader while the other adds occasionally.
4. Transforming: one teacher takes the lead while the other adapts, modifies (during instruction)for the students that need
5. Complementing: Two focuses, content teacher on the content, specialist on supporting the content through small groups with the targeted students.
6. Readiness Groups: students are placed in ability groups and instruction is scaffolded or extended depending on their level of readiness
7. Mixed-Readiness Groups: Similar to readiness groups, however, the grouping is heterogeneous (p. 101-102).

Benninghof's models have been expanded from the previous models, as students such as ELLs and special education students have become the focus of intentional adaptation of teaching practices, more detail has been added to account for their unique needs. It is also evident that the growth of the field of co-teaching has become an important focus.

Theoretical Framework

In the 1970s, Larry Selinker used the term "interlanguage" which refers to the language acquisition of a person learning a second language. According to Selinker, interlanguage is a "separate linguistic system based on observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a

target language norm” (Hummel, 2014, p. 65). It theorizes that the first and second languages are connected by a sort of bridge. The more of the target language that is acquired, the stronger that connection becomes. Two important things to note; first that the interlanguage of the learner is in a dynamic state, it is constantly evolving and changing. Secondly, that the idea of interlanguage is systematic, it is not a state of confusion, but instead makes sense to the learner based on systemic rules of the heritage language and how they connect (or do not connect) to the target language. For example, certain grammatical rules on the student’s first language may be applied to the target language. Selinker also found that occasionally second language learners reach a plateau and certain grammatical features “appear to ‘fossilize’ or remain permanently fixed as non-native-like structures or sounds” (Hummel 2020). That is to say that some features of the heritage language may remain a part of the student’s interlanguage, preventing them from becoming truly fluent in the target language.

For the intermediate ELL students being served in a co-taught classroom, the focus is on connecting the two languages and strengthening their interlanguage on the road to second language fluency. The ELL specialist being engaged in the daily content instruction means that ELL students do not need to leave the classroom to attend small group language instruction. There is no wasted transition time. The focus of the teaching is to maintain and strengthen the connection between two languages. There is no separate standalone curriculum for the students to be responsible for learning. The co-teachers can focus on direct instruction in the content for clarity in students’ second language acquisition thus working to prevent plateaus or fossilization in the study of the target language.

Research Question

This study is driven by the researchers desire to pave the way for students to connect their heritage language to their target language as efficiently and as accurately as possible. After two decades of teaching using the pull-out and transition check-in models, the opportunity to conscientiously and deliberately develop a co-teaching model that works for ELL students led to asking this question. How do

ELLs' reading skills and language acquisition in a co-taught setting compare to that of ELLs in a pull-out setting?

Conclusions

This chapter takes a look at the components, characteristics, and models that compose a successful co-teaching situation between a content teacher and specialist. Under current planning in the researcher's district, the method of serving ELL students is a pull-out model in which students are taken out of the content class and taken to a small group setting. Here they are either exposed to a separate stand-alone curriculum, or some sort of core content support. In order to strengthen support for English language development and the strength of ELL students' "interlanguage", this study will focus on how a co-teaching situation could potentially impact academic success.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

This study is intended to determine the effectiveness of a co-teaching model compared to a more traditional method of pulling students from the regular classroom into a smaller setting. The research will delve into serving ELL students in the content classroom with the language arts teacher and the ELL specialist in a well thought out, intentional practice of co-teaching. This will allow the students to further improve reading skills and language acquisition.

Research Question

This study is driven by the researchers desire to pave the way for students to connect their heritage language to their target language as efficiently and as accurately as possible. After two decades of teaching using the pull-out and transition check-in models, the opportunity to conscientiously and deliberately develop a co-teaching model that works for ELL students led to asking this question. How do ELLs' reading skills and language acquisition in a co-taught setting compare to that of ELLs in a pull-out setting?

Research Design

The experimental design of this study includes two variables. The control group that will remain in a pull-out ELL model with an ELL instructor. Students in the co-taught class will receive their reading and language instruction in one location with two teachers working in collaboration. The baseline data will include an ORF (Oral Reading Fluency) and a speaking assessment based on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. The researcher will keep a daily journal to record the co-teaching models used along with details of co-planning with the cooperating teacher.

Setting

This study will take place in middle school located in a suburban area of northeast Minnesota. According to the 2020 US Census, the population of this community is 44,500 people. The demographic breakdown includes the population in the town where this school is located, it shows residents identifying

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as 86% White, 6.5% as Black or African American, 4.7% Hispanic or Latino. Healthcare and agriculture are two of the main industries in this area. The city in which the study will be conducted is located on a border with a neighboring state. With the neighboring city, the population grows to just over 170,000 residents.

Between the neighboring cities, there are two public universities as well as one private college. In the city where the study will be completed, there are four elementary schools, one middle school, one high school, an alternative learning center as well as a career academy included in the public school system. There are just over 7,000 students enrolled in this school district. 66.9% of the students are White. 11.9% of the students are Black. 3.1% of enrolled students are American Indian or Alaskan. 1% are Asian and 10.4% Hispanic or Latino. 6.6% of the students in this school district are categorized as English learners. 20% of students have IEPs. 37.7% of the students are eligible for free or reduced lunch.

Participants

Participants in the study will consist of 38 fifth and sixth graders in a middle school setting. Twenty five of the students are in fifth grade, while there are thirteen in sixth grade. 47% of the participants are female and 52% are male. Three of the students have an active IEP. One out of the 38 participants is on free or reduced lunch. Heritage languages of the ELL students include: Albanian, Arabic, Kurdish (2 dialects), Liberian English (Pidgin), Somali, Spanish and Vietnamese. ACCESS levels for these students range from a 1.5 overall on the WIDA Screener (entering) to a 4.4 on the ACCESS test (expanding).

Sampling.

These students have all been identified as ELL and are currently enrolled in ELL classes in the middle school. Twenty of the students are in the co- taught class, while the remaining 18 participate in a traditional pull-out ELL group. The co-taught class will be taught by the researcher and a 5th grade classroom teacher. Pull-out students will continue in their current classes taught by a certified ELL instructor who is the partner teacher to the researcher.

Instrumentation

In this study, the instrument for collecting data will be an individually assessed ORF and a speaking test based on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0. The research study will take place close to the window of the actual yearly ACCESS administration, however, the return of that data does not occur until late in the spring semester. A recorded test, similar to the one students take on the ACCESS test will be administered.

The data will measure reading fluency with the ORF. English language acquisition will be measured by a speaking test based on that of the ACCESS test.

Data Collection.

The ORF for all students will be the baseline as a reading score. The recorded speaking test will provide a baseline for the English language development. The testing will be administered by the researcher with assistance from an ELL colleague as well as a reading instructional coach. Differences between the pre and posttest will be the focus of the data collection.

Data Analysis.

Oral Reading Fluency will be measured using a running record. The pre-test will be compared to that of the assessment given at the end of the four-week study. The researcher will analyze the accuracy of each student when reading a passage as well as the rate of words read each minute.

The speaking portion of the assessment will measure English language development. Students will respond orally to a prompt which they will record. Language usage will be assessed according to the rubric from WIDA's oral language development. These assessments will attempt to determine if one teaching method carries more validity than the other. The focus will be on co-teaching and if it is, in fact, more beneficial to students' reading and language development than the pull-out instructional method.

Research Question(s) and System Alignment.

Table 3.1.

Research Question(s) Alignment

Research Question	Variables	Design	Instrument	Validity & Reliability	Technique (e.g., interview)	Source
How do ELLs' reading skills and language acquisition in a co-taught setting compare to that of ELLs in a pull-out or transition setting?	IV: Co-Taught Class IV: Pull-Out Class DV: ORF/ Speaking Test	Quasi-Experimental	Oral Reading Fluency Speaking Test ACCESS	All students will be assessed in a pre and post test.	Assessments Reading Fluency English Language Development	Middle Level ELL students participating in two different models of instruction.

Procedures

There will be two groups of students. One group will be participating in the traditional pull-out method of instruction for ELL students. The other group will be working in a grade level classroom with two teachers working together: one fifth grade classroom teacher, one ELL specialist. Over a span of four weeks, students in the pull-out class will continue with their predetermined schedule and participate in regular small group instruction. Students in the co-taught class will receive instruction from both the classroom teacher and the specialist in the same location. Teachers will intentionally work to use specific, researched models meant for a co-taught classroom. The co-teachers will work to plan together, build on their positive rapport and professional relationship as well as use a variety of teaching strategies and models for co-taught classrooms. The researcher will keep a daily journal of classroom observations, interactions and strategies used.

Ethical Considerations

Students participating in this study will not see any disruption in their daily school schedule or routine. School leadership and parents will be informed and given detailed information about the study. There will be no risk of harm, physical or psychological, to participants.

Conclusions

Reading and language development scores of middle level students are at risk of stagnating or dropping. This study is intended to investigate the advantages and or disadvantages of two professionals working together to support ELL students transitioning from elementary school to middle school. In the next chapter the results of this study will be presented and discussed.

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Chapter 4

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to determine the optimal way to serve English Language Learners in a middle school setting. In our current school setting, the method of instruction for our language learners has been a pull-out model. ELL students that qualify for services are taken out of the mainstream classes and into a small group setting. In the small group setting, the instructor works with the students on the four domains of language; reading, writing, listening and speaking. There is no set curriculum for these students, instead the ELL teachers work to support the core content by pre- or re- teaching vocabulary and/or concepts. When these students are pulled out of the classroom, they typically miss core instruction in social studies or science. There are also special circumstances for the newest learners of English. They have the potential to miss other classes as they acquire social English.

The idea to co-teach came from a colleague that had experience in another district. The two of us came together, did work over the summer and presented a plan to the administration. The plan started as a way to combine the skills of a reading teacher with those of a language specialist. In doing so, one goal was to eliminate passing time between the classrooms and build a more cohesive class to engage learners in language acquisition. Another goal was to boost the reading and language skills of the students as they often tend to stagnate at the middle school level. This research presented the opportunity to have two highly trained teachers within the classroom co-teaching English language arts with a focus on language development and compare that to the experience of students leaving the content classroom each day for their pull- out ELL instruction.

Results

Research Question: How do ELLs' reading skills and language acquisition in a co-taught setting compare to that of ELLs in a pull-out setting?

Data Collection: This study explored the relationship between the service delivery model of ELL students in the regular classroom as compared to those in a pull-out model. All students were given a

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beginning and an ending ORF (Oral Reading Fluency) and a speaking test. The ORF is a one minute timed reading of passages specific to the grade level and point of the school year. It is only for fluency, there is no comprehension component. The speaking test given to students was modeled after a test that they are familiar with. Each year on the ACCESS for ELLs 2.0, the students are assessed with a speaking component. The ELL team at this school created a common formative assessment to align with that test. Those scores were used to capture the oral language fluency of our students. The study was performed over a four week period beginning the last week of March. The time of the study was adjusted to allow for the maternity leave of the researcher's co-teacher. The time was also modified to allow for the administration of the annual ACCESS for ELLs 2.0.

The participants of this study were all either in fifth or sixth grade. There were a total of eighteen students in the pull-out classroom. Twelve of those students were male, six were female. In that group, there were five 5th graders and thirteen 6th graders. (However, at this time, none of the 5th graders in this group have returned their consent forms.) This group of students worked with a certified ELL teacher for their regular routine. There was no collaboration between that ELL teacher and the researcher as far as what was taught to these students. There was also no collaboration about the methods of instruction. Students' 2022 overall ACCESS scores in this group ranged from 1.8 to 4.3. That means student English proficiency ranged from "entering" to "expanding". Figure 4.1 below shows the range of language proficiency as explained by WIDA.

Students in the co-taught class were all fifth graders. There were twenty students in total. Twelve students were female and eight were male. ELL students in the co-taught class ranged from a 1.5 to a 4.4 on the WIDA ACCESS test. That is to say that there was a range of English language abilities categorized as "entering" up to those in "expanding".

Figure 4.1

By the end of each of the given levels of English language proficiency' English language learners can...

4-5		ELP Level 1 Entering	ELP Level 2 Emerging	ELP Level 3 Developing	ELP Level 4 Expanding	ELP Level 5 Bridging	ELP Level 6 Reaching
COUNT	LISTENING	Process recounts by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Matching oral words and phrases to content-related pictures or objects Identifying the topic in oral statements 	Process recounts by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Classifying time-related language in oral statements (<i>e.g., present, past, future</i>) Connecting the context of narratives (<i>e.g., the who, what, when, & where</i>) to illustrations 	Process recounts by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying the beginning, middle and end in oral retelling of a text Following tasks and directions retold by peers 	Process recounts by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sequencing events or steps based on oral reading of informational text Recognizing the language of related genres (<i>e.g., news reports, historical accounts</i>) 	Process recounts by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying related information from multiple sources presented orally Recognizing the key historical, scientific or technical language used in a mini-lecture 	Process recounts by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying the overall structure (<i>e.g., chronology</i>) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in oral presentations Differentiating similarities and differences of information presented through multimedia and written text

<https://wida.wisc.edu/sites/default/files/resource/CanDo-KeyUses-Gr-4-5.pdf>

In this study, the researcher analyzed the beginning ORF scores and speaking tests of both the pull-out and co-taught groups with the same scores at the end of the research window. Figure 4.2 shows the ORF score results for the co-taught group at the beginning and end of the study. As can be seen in the charts, the change in scores was not in the positive direction. Students that originally scored in the “Well Below Average” category at the beginning was 6.3%. By the end of the study, that score had grown to 40%. Those scoring in the “Below Average” went from 43.8% to 53.3%. Finally, the largest difference was the “Average” group that went from 50% done to 6.7%. None of the students in the co-taught group were in the “Above Average” range either at the beginning or the end of the study.

Figure 4.2

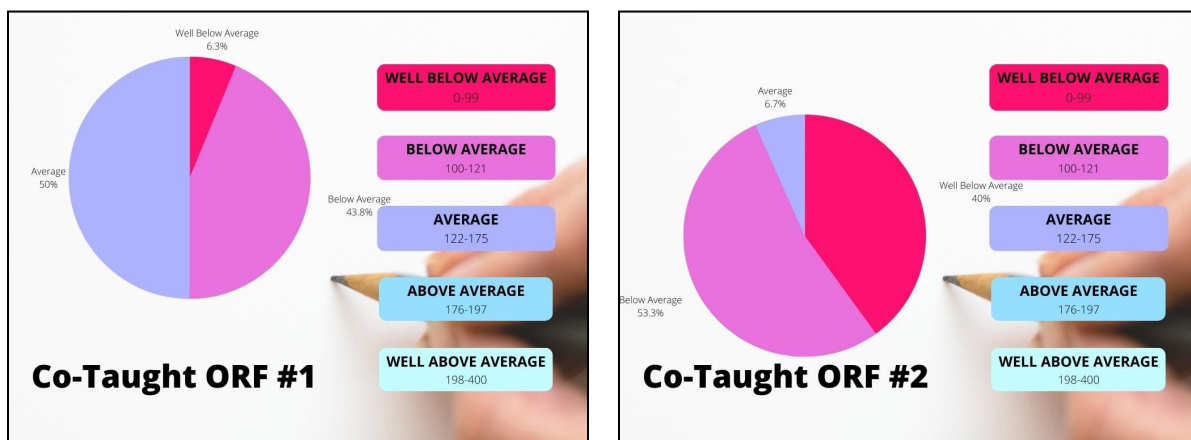
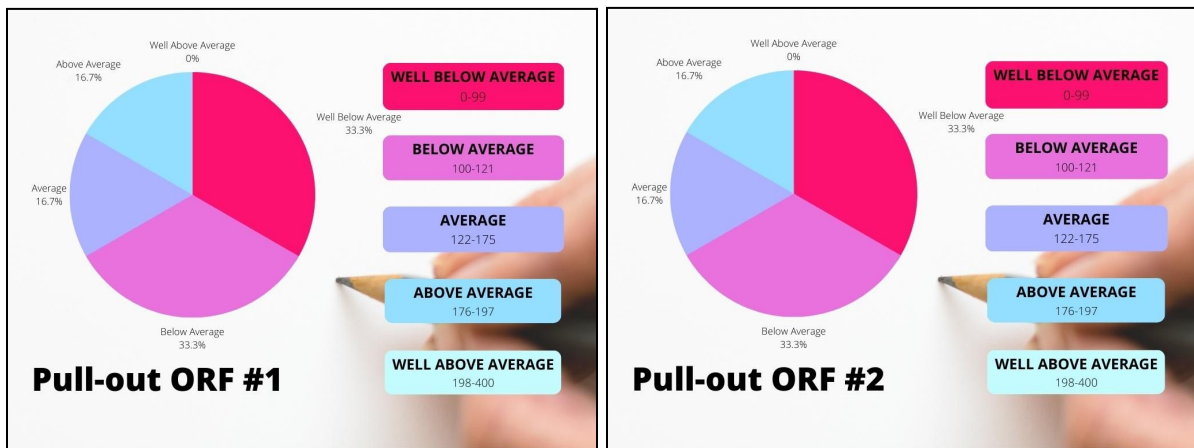


Figure 4.3 shows the results of the ORF for the pull-out students. As is shown in the data, the scores of these students had little to no difference from the beginning to the end of the study. Those in the “Well Below Average” stayed steady at 33.3%. Scores in the “Below Average” range were 33.3% while those in the “Average” category held at 16.7%. There was one student that did score above the average in the pull-out class. It should be noted that all of the students (with their consent forms returned) were sixth graders.

Figure 4.3



*Scores used in this data are representative of students that have returned their consent forms.

The second data point for this research was looking at the oral language fluency of the students. The speaking assessment was a common formative assessment developed by the middle level ELL team to measure speaking growth that would give a glance at progress between ACCESS tests. The team assigned a number value to each category with which to score the students that would be similar to that of the ACCESS test.

The scores for both the co-taught and pull-out classes are shown below. Figure 4.4 shows the scores as orange for beginning assessment, teal for ending score.

Figure 4.4



*Scores used in this data are representative of students that have returned their consent forms.

In both the co-taught and the pull-out class, many of the scores either stayed the same or rose slightly. There was one student in each group that went from either a 1.5 or 2 up to a 3. Not surprisingly, these were the students that were the newest English learners. Often these are the students that are moving from learning social language into grappling with more academic English concepts. Students in this situation tend to rapidly acquire oral language skills in order to function in the school. In each group of students, two students' speaking scores declined over the study period. The other scores stayed the same or grew slightly.

Chapter 5

Implications for Practice

Action Plan

Upon completion of this research, it was discerned that the implementation of co-teaching did not have the impact on reading fluency that was anticipated. In fact, the ORF scores of the students in the co-taught class as a whole declined from students being mostly in the “average” category, to more students falling into the “below average” category. The students in the pull-out class had scores that, for the most part, stayed the same. (The researcher would like to add the results of the 5th grade pull-out students, but needs to get consent forms back.) This leads the researcher to believe that co-teaching alone to improve student reading fluency is not the answer. These results may be indicative of a deeper systemic issue. This year there was a school wide movement away from small group reading instruction into whole group word study. Perhaps, as a school, there needs to be a deeper understanding of quality tier one instruction for all students. The researcher and co-teacher are anxious to look at other data points such as the ACCESS test, MCAs, NWEA and ORF of all students in order to determine plans for the future.

On the other hand, the speaking scores, for the most part, either stayed the same or went up slightly for both groups of students. If the researcher and her colleagues had not already done a writing CFA, perhaps that would have been a better measure of the students growth during the research period. However, the researcher wanted to include an aspect of both receptive and expressive language skills in the research process. ORFs and speaking assessments are two data points. As educators, the ability to look at multiple data points is essential to gaining a better understanding of where student abilities lie.

Beyond this study, the researcher is eagerly anticipating the 2023 ACCESS scores. This is an ELL specific assessment that looks at the language domains and measures growth from year to year. Data from that test will give a greater range of scores and information about how successful our foray into co-teaching has truly been. The team will have more complete language acquisition information in order

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to compare the two groups of students. The ACCESS testing window ended just before this study commenced and the school will not receive preliminary scores until the end of May. At that time, the researcher and other colleagues will dig into the information to glean data about the value of pull-out and co-teaching models.

Moving forward means the teachers will take what they have learned and work on improvements for the next school year. As this school has shifted into the Science of Reading, teachers were instructed to move away from small group reading instruction and move toward whole group word study instruction. As a consequence, students spent less time reading. It only seems natural that their fluency would decrease. The goal is to continue the co-teaching model next year with modifications to the overall plan. Returning to the original thought of organizing reading and language focused small groups are at the forefront. Throughout the course of this year, a variety of guests have observed in the co-teaching classroom. Overwhelmingly, the staff members and administrators have been complementary and encouraging about the work they have seen happening. There are many advantages to having two teachers in the classroom. All students were exposed to more diverse ways of learning language. There was no time lost for ELL students with transitions from the classroom to the ELL teacher's room. Parents (both native and non English speakers) expressed appreciation for the co-teaching model. With some changes to implementation, there is a high likelihood that the success rate of fluent readers and speakers in a co-taught class will grow over time.

Plan for Sharing

Over the next few weeks, the researcher, co-teacher, principal and administrator will meet to discuss plans for the ensuing school year. At that time, the researcher will share data from this study. Even before the completion of this project, the school principal shared his desire for more co-teaching to be implemented in the school. It was suggested that perhaps the other ELL teachers in the building at least consider working in a co-taught situation. Hopefully, moving forward, the value of co-teaching partnerships will remain a priority in the school's vision.

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The researcher will also work to share this information with her PLC (Professional Learning Community). The Middle Level ELL PLC meets once a month or so to tackle district directed activities. As a team, they have worked to create several CFAs (Common Formative Assessments) in order to discern the best ways to improve student learning in their language acquisition. The information from this action research will help drive discussion about the best model that can be implemented in order to drive student achievement.

Along with sharing at the PLC level, the researcher would also be open to discussion with the elementary ELL team in the district. Historically, mainly because of the differences in schedules, the elementary and middle school ELL teams have remained separate. Because of the number of grade levels at the elementary schools, co-teaching may be less of an option. When elementary ELL teachers are responsible for working with students in kindergarten through fourth grade, their time to collaborate is limited. However, sharing this information and having discussion may be beneficial to students at the elementary levels.