

Collaboration to Support ESL Education: Complexities of the Integrated Model

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The purpose of this study was to explore current practices of collaboration between English as a second language (ESL) and elementary classroom teachers and provide evidence-based recommendations on how to enhance collaborative professional relationships that support the instruction of English Language Learners (ELLs). A qualitative research methodology was employed to explore current practices as well as educational resources used by four ESL teachers as they worked to foster collaborative relationships with classroom teachers. Data collection methods included (a) interviews with ESL teachers reflecting on their beliefs and practices, (b) structured observations of ESL and elementary teachers in classrooms, and (c) analysis of professional planning artifacts (e.g., daybook plans, lesson plans, professional readings, and instructional resources) to document participants' practices in ESL education. Findings revealed that ESL teachers negotiated collaboration based on a desire to work together and a belief that a cohesive educator team is important in ESL education, however, these ESL teachers encountered barriers such as a lack of training, technology, and tools to facilitate collaboration and limited time to do so. This resulted in limited and informal, surface-level collaboration. Implications of the findings relating to best collaborative practices are discussed.

Le but de cette étude était d'explorer les pratiques de collaboration actuelles entre les professeurs d'anglais langue seconde (ESL) et les enseignantes et enseignants au primaire et de fournir des recommandations concernant la façon d'améliorer les relations de collaboration professionnelle en soutien de l'enseignement aux apprenantes et apprenants de la langue anglaise (ELLs). Une méthodologie de recherche qualitative a été employée pour explorer les pratiques actuelles et les ressources didactiques utilisées par quatre professeurs d'anglais langue seconde (ESL) dans un effort pour encourager les relations de collaboration avec des professeurs de classe. Les méthodes de collecte de données ont notamment été (a) des entrevues avec des professeurs d'anglais langue seconde exprimant leurs croyances et décrivant leurs pratiques, (b) des observations structurées de professeurs d'anglais langue seconde et d'enseignantes en enseignants au primaire en classe et (c) l'analyse d'objets de planification professionnelle (par ex. journaux, plans de cours, ouvrages professionnels et matériel didactique) afin de documenter les pratiques des participants en matière d'enseignement de l'anglais langue seconde. Les conclusions ont révélé que les professeurs d'anglais langue seconde négociaient la collaboration en fonction d'une volonté de travailler ensemble et d'une croyance voulant qu'une équipe pédagogique unie soit importante pour l'enseignement de

l'anglais langue seconde, mais en se heurtant toutefois à des obstacles tels que le manque de formation, de technologie et d'outils pour faciliter la collaboration ainsi que le peu de temps disponible pour y arriver. Le tout a produit une collaboration limitée, informelle et superficielle. Les implications des constatations relatives aux meilleures pratiques de collaboration font l'objet d'une discussion.

KEYWORDS: ESL teachers, elementary classroom teachers, collaboration, integrated model

Introduction

In Canada, the growing number of English Language Learners (ELLs) in elementary schools underscores the need for effective pedagogical support in an evolving global landscape (Cheng, Klinger, & Zheng, 2009). Contemporary ELLs have language learning needs that are often supported through a complement of in-school professionals including English as a second language (ESL) teachers, classroom teachers, educational resource teachers, coaches, ESL consultants, and administrators. Often, educators are challenged to collaborate to create a cohesive educational plan that best addresses the multimodal learning needs of 21st century ELLs (Gallagher, Fisher, Lapp, Rowsell, Simpson, McQuirter Scott, Walsh, Ciampa, & Saudelli, 2015).

Collaboration in ESL education holds potential for consistency and efficiency in pedagogical planning for ELLs and supports ELLs' needs through targeted instructional strategies. During a time of transition within the province of Ontario and away from the pull-out model of ESL instruction to an integrated approach, this study provides a timely account of complex collaborative practices among ESL teachers and other educators.

Literature Review

Educators of English Language Learners in Ontario

Within Ontario school districts, schools with a large ELL population are designated as site schools with one or more full-time ESL teachers on staff (Van Viegen Stille, Jang, & Wagner, 2015). Schools with smaller ELL enrollments have itinerant ESL teachers who rotate among several different schools within a school district. Regardless of the number of ESL teachers assigned to a school, collaboration is encouraged between ESL teachers and classroom teachers to provide ELLs with developmentally appropriate task accommodations (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], 2008a). Specifically, the OME's (2008a) *Supporting English Language Learners: A Practical Guide for Ontario Educators Grades 1 to 8* highlights the importance of integrated literacy instruction by stating that, "all teachers—across all content areas—are teachers of both language and literacy" (p. 2). As ELLs' literacy skills develop, both ESL

teachers and classroom teachers are responsible for utilizing this resource (referred to as “*STEP* Guide”; OME, 2011) to accommodate curriculum expectations for ELL students’ language proficiency development (OME, 2007).

Often, the process of accommodating curriculum expectations begins with ELLs undergoing an initial assessment conducted by the ESL teacher (OME, 2008a). This assessment profiles ELLs, documents students’ prior schooling experiences, and places the ELLs’ *STEP* Guide performance (OME, 2011); this information is used as a guide to target instruction. Over the course of ELLs’ progression through school, ESL teachers communicate with classroom teachers regarding the oral, verbal, and writing proficiencies of ELLs. ESL teachers support ELLs’ vocabulary development through organized literacy-based activities, assist students with reading and writing assignments developed by the classroom teacher, and co-plan activities in relation to the ELLs’ observable language behaviours (OME, 2011).

In addition to the responsibilities assumed by classroom teachers in planning, facilitating, and assessing learning tasks for their ELLs, teachers observe, monitor, and assess the language development of ELLs in the classroom by using the *STEP* Guide’s outlined descriptors (OME, 2011). These descriptors are used to accommodate or modify classroom tasks in accordance with plans that have been co-constructed with ESL teachers. Classroom teachers can engage with other educators to form an ESL support system that is focused on appropriate educational goals. In addition, educators who are culturally reflective in their practice use language-conscious teaching, “which occurs when teachers are cognizant of students’ language proficiencies and can understand the linguistic challenges they face in the classroom” (Meyers, 2004, as cited in Baltus & Belhiah, 2013, p. 91). It should be noted that the pull-out model is still used under certain circumstances by ESL teachers such as with ELLs who are working at a lower *STEP* level (OME, 2011), or when ELLs do not have literacy skills in their first language. The majority of ESL instruction in Ontario now occurs through the integrated approach in which the ESL teacher supports the ELL as they engage with pedagogical tasks within the classroom.

Collaboration between ESL Teachers and Classroom Teachers

Research investigating the benefits of integrating ELLs within the classroom to support and develop their literacy skills has resulted in some misconceptions related to ESL instruction (Meyers, 2006). According to Meyers (2006), these misconceptions include that “language learners can develop linguistic and academic proficiency without specialized supports; equity for English Language Learners is assured; all teachers are ESL teachers” (p. 31). For all teachers to support ELLs, it is important for collaboration between ESL teachers who have the tools to provide individualized support, and classroom teachers who spend the greatest amount of time with ELLs.

Teacher collaboration is defined as communication between educators with the scope of enhancing student success and can range from informal to structured and deliberate (DelliCarpini, 2014). OME documents recommend collaboration between educators working with ELLs, “ESL/ELD and Special Education teachers need to work collaboratively to design an appropriate program for English language learners” (OME, 2008b, p. 19). For meaningful collaboration to occur between ESL teachers and classroom teachers, sharing students’ goals, which have been derived from a common framework, is advantageous. Van Viegen Stille et al. (2015) found that the shared vocabulary relating to ESL instruction included in the *STEP* Guide (OME, 2011) has aided teachers in co-planning from a common framework of reference.

Literature on the topic of ESL instruction stresses the importance of teacher collaboration between classroom teachers and ESL teachers. Over a decade ago, Meyers (2006) advocated for a whole-school approach including educational professionals, such as literacy coaches, resource teachers, and educational assistants, to support the needs of ELLs. More recently, Maxwell (2013) states that ESL teachers must advocate for collaboration by acting as mentors for their colleagues by facilitating collaboration with classroom teachers to support ELLs. Baltus and Belhiah (2013) call for enhancements to collaborative practices by relying on the ESL teacher’s role as a resource within the classroom, including, “learning about ESL methods and materials, modifying the curriculum and exchanging vital information about students’ abilities and progress” (p. 111).

Teachers can collaborate in a myriad of ways to meet the individual learning needs of their ELLs; professional learning can enhance collaboration. For example, recent research (Premier & Parr, 2019) describes the spontaneous professional learning that teachers engage in to support ELLs. These researchers reported, “ongoing professional learning, through ongoing dialogue with colleagues about students, teaching practices, resources and assessment” (Premier & Parr, 2019; p. 66) as frequent collaborative practices. In addition, collaboration between ESL teachers and other educational professionals has the potential to encourage cooperative planning of developmentally appropriate pedagogical tasks. Moreover, when pull-out practices are minimized, ELLs benefit from forming social relationships with their peers, context-specific learning, and feelings of inclusion and competence (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010).

Barriers to Collaboration

Despite the benefits of teacher collaboration in the ESL setting, a multitude of heuristic challenges impede collaborative efforts. Arkoudis’s (2006) research attributes the marginalization of ESL teachers to problematizing meaningful collaboration between ESL and classroom teachers. Underlying assumptions held by educators can also affect the nature of collaboration. For example,

Davison (2006) found that when a dichotomy of expert and novice is assumed between collaborating educators, the resulting collaborative planning is superficial in its aims. In addition, educators' different communication, pedagogical, and instructional goals may pose obstacles to collaborative efforts (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010). Educators need to view each other as a community of professionals working together for the benefit of ELLs and when this occurs, the resulting collaboration is authentic in its scope and outcomes. Risko and Bromley (2001) argue that the act of collaborating, "reduces role differentiation among teachers and specialists, resulting in shared expertise for problem solving that yields multiple solutions to dilemmas about literacy and learning" (p. 12). Knowledge and experience have the potential of impacting the authenticity of collaboration depending on the alignment of perceived goals and benefits that teachers attribute to collaboration.

Limited common planning time available to educators is another barrier to collaboration. In tackling some of these scheduling challenges, Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) suggest that educators, "engage in ongoing, regularly scheduled collaboration" (p. 10) by setting aside designated time for planning and debriefing, which must also be supported by administration to be successful (Davison, 2006). Simply, professional collaboration in addressing challenges associated with ESL instruction potentially can create authentic, ongoing, and supportive relationships between educators to support ELLs (Russell, 2012).

Ultimately, the purpose of this current research project was threefold: to illuminate how ESL teachers describe collaboration and their opportunities for collaboration, the support (or lack thereof) that they receive to create collaborative environments, and how ESL teachers collaborate with in-school educators to use resources (digital and/or nondigital) to enhance ELLs' oral and written language as they acquire English skills. The following two research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: What are the current practices of collaboration between ESL teachers and classroom teachers? Specifically, how is collaboration supported and promoted?

Research Question 2: What are the types of resources used by ESL teachers to foster collaborative relationships with classroom teachers, and how are they used?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research is social constructivism, which is rooted in the co-constructed production of knowledge through processes of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Social constructivist theory differentiates between knowledge and learning: knowledge is constructed and mediated

through social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky (1986), learning, while it may occur socially, is developed within the individual as a by-product of the knowledge accumulated in the social environment. Within the framework of social constructivism, the interplay between development and learning has been referred to as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Kivunja, 2014; Palincsar, 1998). According to Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD is the difference between what a learner can do alone at a particular point in time and the potential development of what the learner is capable of accomplishing with the guidance of a more capable other. Thus, the ZPD differentiates between, “the actual and the potential levels of development” (p. 352), and this might be applied to the social and dialectical processes of ELL instruction (Palincsar, 1998). The individual support or scaffolding provided by educators in accordance with ELLs’ level of language learning is the bridge between what learners can do independently versus what they can do with the help of a more knowledgeable other. Pedagogy that stems from a social constructivist perspective facilitates learning through collaborative tasks that require learners to co-construct knowledge (Gindis, 1999).

Vygotsky (1978) emphasized that all learning occurs within social, cultural, and historical spheres. In parallel fashion, this current research focused on the ways in which scaffolding is a social and collaborative process among ESL teachers and other educational professionals for ELLs’ literacy knowledge construction and their own professional learning. Social learning is a cornerstone of social constructivist theory, as are dialectical processes that consider language a tool to co-constructing socially shared meanings (Gindis, 1999). Broadly, this study is founded on the perspective that teaching and learning are processes situated in social interaction within a multidimensional and social framework (Hawkins, 2004). Accordingly, a qualitative approach allowed for a rich understanding of the ESL teacher participants’ personal experiences and gave participants a voice, as well as bracketed the researcher’s biases.

Method

A case study research design (Merriam, 1988) was used to explore collaborative practices among educators working with ELLs, as ESL teachers support and work with in-school teams of educators. The intent of utilizing a case study methodology was not to generalize the findings, but rather to provide insight into the current educational practices of professionals working with ELLs, and potential implications for professional development in the area of ESL education. For the purpose of this research project, inductive research methods were used to allow for trends to emerge from the research data collected (Thomas, 2006) over a period of 2 months.

Participants

Four ESL teachers (three females; one male) were involved in this project. One participant identified as having 1-year teaching experience in ESL education, while the other three participants' experience in ESL education ranged between 3 and 18 years. All of the ESL teacher participants had previous teaching experience outside of their ESL assignments. Two of these ESL teachers were part of a public school board, while the other two were part of a Catholic school board in Southern Ontario. Two ESL teacher participants had a primary-junior assignment (Lauren and Nicole; Grades 1-6), one ESL teacher participant had a primary-intermediate assignment (Grant; Grades 1-7), and one ESL teacher participant had a junior-intermediate grade assignment (Caroline; Grades 6-8). Research ethics clearance was garnered from the two school boards as well as the university committee.

The first author shadowed the teachers as they worked and engaged with other educational professionals as well as with ELLs. Observations were made with three participating ESL teachers as they worked in the classroom with various ELLs, and professional planning artifacts were collected.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semistructured interviews were conducted with each of the ESL teachers. The topics addressed in these interviews were focused on how ESL teachers describe collaboration to provide support for ELLs; opportunities ESL teachers have for collaboration and how ESL teachers are supported in creating a collaborative environment; and how ESL teachers collaborate with in-school teams of educators to use instructional resources (digital and/or nondigital) to promote oral and written language instruction with ELLs.

Three of the four participating ESL teachers were observed as they supported classroom teachers and other educational professionals who work with ESL students. These observations of classroom instruction were intended to collect information about how ESL teachers collaborate to support instruction for ELLs. The researcher spent between 1 and 3 hr observing each of the ESL teachers as they rotated between different classrooms and different schools to visit their allocated ESL students. The first author made semistructured notes using the *CIERA Classroom Observation Scheme* protocol (Taylor et al., 2004) and *CQELL* (Goldenberg et al., 2012). The code levels used on the *CIERA Observation Scheme* protocol complemented the generic lesson elements observations made on the *CQELL* protocol. These notes were then uploaded to the data analysis software NVivo 10.0 (QSR International, 2014). Emergent themes were drawn from these observations.

Copies of ESL teachers' professional planning artifacts were collected: ESL student/teacher support plans; ELL instructional strategies; unit plans; learning goals and instructional strategy plans; *STEP* Guide progress tracking forms; and sample teaching tools. Notes were made with respect to how

these artifacts corresponded with components of the *Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP)*; Echevarría et al., 2013). These notes were uploaded to NVivo 10.0 and were coded for emergent themes.

The qualitative data collected (interview transcripts, field notes with observation protocols, artifacts) were coded for emergent themes using an inductive analysis approach (Ezzy, 2002). For the field notes, the code levels used on the *CIERA Observation Scheme* protocol (Taylor et al., 2004) complemented the generic lesson elements observations made on the *CQELL* protocol (Goldenberg et al., 2012). For the artifacts, coding occurred for examples of professional collaboration in regard to lesson preparation, learning strategies used, and notes regarding how these were established. Axial coding of these data utilized the sequence of steps in thematic analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). These codes included classroom teacher collaboration, collaboration with other educational professionals, professional development, resources, and unplanned collaboration. Nodes pertaining to each theme were compiled, and direct quotes from the primary source data were used in the analyses. This systematic approach allowed for focused coding and emergence of three robust themes (Ezzy, 2002). Peer debriefers were used to establish credibility of the emergent themes. This entire inductive analysis procedure was facilitated with the qualitative data analysis program, NVivo 10.0.

Findings

As a function of the data analyses, three robust themes encapsulate the findings of the study. The first finding positions collaboration as a pedagogical tool including the ways in which ESL teachers used assessments as a collaborative tool and exemplified flexibility in the face of unpredictable time to collaboration. The second finding describes the perceived barriers impeding collaboration including a lack of scheduled planning time, a perceived misunderstanding of ESL teachers' role on the part of other educators, and lack of professional development opportunities. The third finding describes the challenges faced by ESL teachers in utilizing educational resources (digital and nondigital) to foster collaborative relationships with classroom teachers.

Collaboration as a Pedagogical Tool

ESL teacher participants regarded collaboration to be multifaceted, and to include a community of educators in addition to classroom teachers. They expressed efforts made to collaborate with educational professional colleagues as intended to support ELLs. The ESL teachers worked with classroom teachers and other educators such as resource teachers, math coaches, educational assistants, and settlement workers in schools (SWIS). Collaboration was situational and varied based on the environment, resources, and educators.

The central goal expressed by the ESL teacher participants is to support ELLs, and one strategy toward achieving this goal was to use collaboration as a pedagogical tool. Nicole talked about how collaboration is facilitated by educators when they share a physical space:

Being with somebody in a room, it just is natural collaboration. . . . If you're thinking something, and you want another brain, you can ask. And in this room, we have the coach, the two ESL teachers, and then, it used to be last year that the resource teachers would come in. So the resource teachers and the ESL teacher did a joint project where they were helping with small groups in here. Now this year, the resource teacher is working in a Grade 5 classroom with one of my ELLs, and building up his vocabulary. So she's doing small group instruction with him, and with other kids that are not ELLs, and then I'm in the classroom supporting what's happening in the classroom as well. And that just sort of happened. She's doing a group, and she was like, I'm going to take him . . . So I'd like optimizing the support. (Nicole, Interview, December 12, 2017)

Beyond the classroom interactions, other educators echoed the sentiment of connecting and working in parallel with support staff colleagues to support ELLs. ESL teachers expressed fluidity and flexibility in the ways they navigated collaboration with other educational professionals; this made collaboration unpredictable. In addition, findings from the current study highlighted a desire on the part of ESL teachers to collaborate and establish effective practices in working with ELLs that other educational professionals could employ in their absence. This is consistent with the findings of Meyers (2006), who identified that ELLs require individualized support to develop literacy skills as they are integrated into the classroom.

ESL teacher participants expressed the strongest collaborative relationships to be those with classroom teachers when there were considerations for the school site, the needs of the ELLs, presence of other educators, and the tools and time available. Thus, the nature of collaboration is contextual, and must be fluid in its application. ESL teacher participants spoke enthusiastically about the ways that they negotiated in further developing collaborative relationships with other educators. Some ESL teacher participants regarded collaboration with classroom teachers as critical and beneficial for both of them:

Collaboration, I think is essential for survival as a teacher right now. And ESL collaboration, I mean, the number of language learners that are coming into our schools it's just growing. It doesn't seem to be getting smaller. So I think collaboration is essential. I love collaborating with teachers because I feel like it's taking a little bit of stress off

of them, initially, but it's also giving them a toolkit so they're prepared the next time around. (Caroline, Interview, December 5, 2017)

Echoing this sentiment, other ESL teacher participants talked about how successful collaborative relationships with classroom teachers develop over time. Professional relationships between ESL teachers and classroom teachers that were described as authentic extended beyond situational conversations about particular events in the classroom. These collaborative relationships were rooted in a sense of minimal role differentiation between the ESL teacher and classroom teacher. Nicole experienced this type of relationship with her classroom teachers and expressed a genuine sharing of their expertise, “. . . [we are] seeing that all the kids are capable and competent and what do they [ELLs] know, and how can we [Nicole and classroom teachers] move them [ELLs] forward, instead of looking at them [ELLs] as having a deficit” (Nicole, Interview, December 12, 2017). Here, we see that knowledge and experience have the potential to impact the authenticity of collaboration depending on the alignment of perceived goals and benefits that teachers attribute to collaboration. Risko and Bromley (2001) argue that the act of collaborating, “reduces role differentiation among teachers and specialists, resulting in shared expertise for problem solving that yields multiple solutions to dilemmas about literacy and learning” (p. 12). The current study's findings are consistent with this literature as the lived experiences of teacher participants include descriptions of the commitment required for collaborative relationships to develop in order to support ELLs.

Recently, within the two school boards where this study was conducted, there was a transition from a pull-out model of ESL instruction to an integrated approach that takes place in the classrooms of the ELLs where the ESL teacher supports the ELLs as they engage with pedagogical tasks. This change in service delivery was credited by all four ESL teacher participants as a factor that facilitated a sense of authentic collaboration with classroom teachers. The original pull-out model of ESL instruction was individualized for ELLs and occurred with one ELL or a small group of same-level ELLs and the ESL teacher outside the classroom. Often, the ESL teachers used this time with ELLs to work on phonics instruction that was unrelated to the pedagogical tasks occurring simultaneously in the classroom. While the pull-out model is still used under certain circumstances, such as with ELLs who are working at a lower *STEP* level (OME, 2011), or do not have literacy skills in their first language, the majority of ESL instruction now occurs through the integrated approach. The shift from a pull-out model to an integrated approach encourages ESL teachers to be active and visible educators to all students in the classrooms.

ESL teacher participants also talked about how the integrated approach influenced collaboration with the classroom teachers to modify learning tasks for ELLs using an assessment as learning approach. Grant talked about how

assessment as learning occurred as a result of the integrated approach to ESL education:

Sometimes, you might think the student should be okay, and then we start working with them [sic], and we're finding it's a lot more of a challenge than we thought. So with the classroom teacher there, I can say, "You know, what, we've got to approach this a different way, because it's way more of a challenge than we thought. We need to try something different." And it might go the other way too, it might be the teacher that says, "This is something I think the student can do, or they [sic] might need a little bit more help than usual," and we find the student does really well. And I'd stop and say, "We can adjust this down, because they [sic] have done it, we can beef it up a bit, or move on from it." (Grant, Interview, December 7, 2017)

Other ESL teachers expressed that while they actively observed and interacted with ELLs in the classroom, there were modifications to instruction that occurred spontaneously and were facilitated by either the classroom teacher or themselves. The integrated approach to ESL education provided ESL teachers and classroom teachers with opportunities to conference before, during, and after instructional time to discuss and make necessary adjustments to support ELLs.

Nicole described how she blended the integrated approach with the pull-out model to create an environment that promoted assessment as learning with some of her ELLs. For example, Nicole discussed when a student took responsibility for his learning:

I have a student in Grade 7 . . . and I will say, okay this day, when you have French, because he speaks Creole, so he's doing really well in French, I'm going to come, and I'm going to say to you, "How are things? Where are your needs?" so it's that metacognitive piece. So, "Tell me what you're finding that is a challenge right now, and that's what I'll help you with." So, the last time it was geometry. Because he'd come from Haiti, and there, they didn't have a lot of instruction in geometry, so he didn't know a lot of that vocabulary, so therefore we were able to go, and we were able to talk about what that was, and what the words were, and how I could help. (Nicole, Interview, December 14, 2017)

This is an example of the trust that was developed in the relationship between the ESL teacher, the classroom teacher, and the ELL as a result of the integrated approach. Nicole had knowledge of the student's strengths and was not concerned that withdrawing the student from French class would hinder his learning in this particular subject. Nicole encouraged the ELL student to take responsibility for his own learning. She maximized her time and encouraged him to consider areas in which he required individualized

support. Additional factors contributed to this collaboration, such as the fact that the ELL student was older (in Grade 7) and was working at a higher *STEP* level (OME, 2011). As she reflected, Nicole highlighted the important balance between a pull-out model and the integrated approach to effectively support her ELLs:

They do need to still be in the classroom though, even if they're just being engaged in a conversation, or sitting there and listening to conversational norms. So that's why taking them out and put them into a class all by themselves really isn't effective, cause they're not immersed. [It's like] French immersion, that kind of thing, they're not immersed in the English language, they need to have that as well, so it can't be full pull-out, or even half a day, it's just a little bit here and there. (Nicole, Interview, December 14, 2017)

This quote is evidence of Nicole's commitment to ensure that her ELL was integrated in the social sphere of the classroom while using her pedagogical and ESL knowledge to establish a sound educational approach. These decisions are rooted in the trust and accord that she has with the classroom teacher as well as the French teacher to establish a routine that benefits this ELL.

Barriers to Collaboration

A prominent research finding reflects the challenges experienced by ESL teachers in fostering collaborative relationships as well as utilizing educational tools with ELLs. These challenges include a lack of scheduled planning time, perceived misunderstanding of ESL teachers' role, and lack of professional development opportunities for ESL teachers.

The ESL teachers expressed that there was not enough of their time dedicated to each school site, which resulted in infrequent classroom visits and a lack of scheduled meetings with classroom teachers. When asked about practices of collaboration with classroom teachers, ESL teacher participants said that there is a mutual will to collaborate, but the time to do so is insufficient.

Finding a balance between informal collaboration and scheduled meetings to discuss the academic progress of ELLs was a struggle experienced by all ESL teacher participants. They carried the responsibility to meet Ministry of Education mandates to complete required documentations for ELLs with classroom teachers, however, they felt apologetic about scrounging for opportunities to meet and complete these tasks that consumed classroom teachers' time. ESL teacher participants expressed creative ways for finding windows of time to meet and plan with educational professionals

such as before or after school. Grant talked about the condensed time to collaborate with classroom teachers:

It's something that we kind of have to create, in our daily schedule. And I think the challenge is, not taking from the students' time, so, a lot of times it can be like I mentioned, recess times, lunch times, before/after school. And it might be, instead of an hour for a whole month, it might be 15 minutes touch base. (Grant, Interview, December 7, 2017)

The challenges this created were logistical as ESL teachers often commuted between various schools and were not available to meet with classroom teachers. As well, during these before and after school times, classroom teachers often had other tasks to complete during these times.

The ESL teacher participants spoke about the barrier in regard to collaborating with the dream of having time budgeted into their days to collaborate with other educational professionals:

I try to invite myself to those collaboration meetings [laughs], because then you can put an ESL perspective on the table . . . I do a lot of my meetings unofficially. . . . But, we have schedules of things that we need to meet, like accommodations checklists, and modifications, and making sure their *STEP* continuum, their Observable Language Behaviours are updated, and that's done in collaboration with the teacher. But there isn't really time set aside for it . . . I knew when certain teachers had preps, . . . and it's unofficial. And I always am apologetic for using their time, because I know that that prep time for them is so precious. But . . . in the end, it's beneficial for both of us, because I can do a lot to help support them. I might co-teach a lesson, and they might get some time through that, or I might, you know, plan a lesson based around something that they're working on so that they don't have to plan that lesson, and now they have time to do something else. (Caroline, Interview, December 6, 2017)

In creating a collaborative ESL environment, another barrier experienced by ESL teachers arose from a perceived misunderstanding of their role on the part of other educational professionals, particularly classroom teachers. Participants talked about some of the misunderstandings on the part of classroom teachers associated with the transition to an integrated approach:

There's still this mindset of, "I have a language learner in my class, can you just take them [sic] and teach them English?" And you're kind of like, "Yeah, that . . . it doesn't really work like that." And I think part of that comes from, like I said, when you have nine schools, that's kind of what you're doing, right? You're walking in on a situation, you're like, here's this one little person in a classroom of

30; I can't come here every day, so I'm seeing them once in 10 days. I'm going to pull them and try to do as much as I possibly can. I think we're getting away from that now, but it still exists. (Caroline, Interview, December 5, 2017)

ESL teachers talked about clarifying their role of supporting ELLs in the classroom to classroom teachers to facilitate dialogue and commence collaboration. This was a necessary first step to eradicate the misunderstandings that were expressed and to develop collaborative relationships with classroom teachers.

I think that more people are open to having you come into the classroom, as long as they understand what you're doing. I think a lot of people are like, "Are you evaluating what I'm doing, are you going to report to someone . . . that I'm not using all the strategies that I should be using, or I had a bad day?" . . . If you can communicate to that person, "I'm here to support you. And this is what I can do for you." And I think that's where I have found most of my success when I have had resistance, in collaboration . . . And so then you're more welcome into the classroom . . . it kind of opens more doors, once they see what you're actually doing is helping not only the language learner, but helping the teacher and helping other students in the class as well. (Caroline, Interview, December 5, 2017)

The ESL teacher participants described how they often interacted initially with ELLs to determine their needs, and then they shared their resources and knowledge to demonstrate how classroom teachers might implement them. Once classroom teachers understood that the purpose of the ESL teachers' work was not to be critical of their teaching practices, classroom teachers began regarding the ESL teachers as nonthreatening and knowledgeable colleagues. Overcoming this hurdle was an important step to building collaboration from a foundation of mutual respect for the knowledge and experiences that each educator could contribute.

ESL teacher participants talked about how their theoretical knowledge and ESL-specific instructional strategies translate to the practical knowledge they imparted while developing collaborative relationships with other educational professionals. The ESL teachers expressed a gap in the professional development opportunities that are available to encourage and support collaboration. Caroline said, "There's never really been a beneficial, sort of like, this is a resource or, this is some PDs specifically for you [as ESL teachers]." All four ESL teacher participants talked about the emphasis placed on professional development (PD) opportunities in the curricular areas of math and language instruction, and the lack of an ESL focus on educator collaboration within these areas.

Caroline attributed the lack of awareness of the support that ESL teachers provide to a lack of focus on collaborative workshops (with classroom teachers) in ESL education. She was hopeful that increasing collaboration with educational professionals would heighten awareness of the importance of the roles of ESL teachers and would, in time, translate to the availability of PD opportunities. In the absence of PD opportunities, Ministry of Education documents, such as *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom* (OME, 2005), were used to structure the pedagogical direction given by ESL teachers, and collaboration occurred in implementing these policies when working with ELLs in the classroom. In light of the limited PD for ESL teachers, Caroline talked about how the ESL team was compelled to collaborate and create their own independent PD resources and share these among all the ESL teachers.

Educators' Challenges in Utilizing Resources in ESL Instruction

All four ESL teacher participants talked about collaborating with classroom teachers to share resources for ELLs. Caroline, Nicole, and Lauren sought to supplement ESL-specific resources to accommodate the unit plans that classroom teachers had designed. Initial planning at the start of a unit was essential for ESL teachers to see the envisioned unit progression that classroom teachers had in mind. From this baseline, ESL teachers could then find resources that could aid ELLs in achieving the curriculum expectations and support their literacy development.

ESL teacher participants distinguished that the resources necessary for ELLs were dependent on the *STEP* level (OME, 2011) that the ELLs were working at. ESL teachers' beliefs about infusing ELLs' preexisting literacy skills given their developmental level of literacy knowledge in English aligned with the goals of *Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English Language Learners in Every Classroom* (OME, 2005):

They're thinking in their first language, so just let them write it in their first language, and then, we'll worry about translating it after. And giving the kids the freedom to do that I think is a huge strategy. Like, "Oh, I'm allowed to do that?!" And some of them will resist for a period of time, but then they actually think, okay, this is going to help me. (Caroline, Interview, December 5, 2017)

Caroline talked about motivating ELLs to use their first language to show literacy competency, boost their motivation, and make ELLs aware of their strengths and literacy skills.

ESL teacher participants made some limited use of technology as a resource in working with ELLs. Grant talked about taking a Chromebook to every one of his assigned classrooms to help with translation as well as to provide visuals for ELLs. This was consistent within the observations of

all four of the ESL teacher participants, as technology was used either as a translation device or to provide visual images.

A frequently mentioned digital resource that ESL teachers used to collaborate and share resources with other educational professionals was the Google drive. Grant talked about an ESL-specific resource folder:

It's a [Google] drive that's shared with our ESL team. We can see initial assessment, parent resources, Ministry docs, some slideshows. These are ways of supporting students. So that would be something we would collaborate with the classroom teacher on, helping them with the tips. And the reality is, for me at this school, I'm here twice a week, between 3-4 periods, the classroom teacher has that student for the rest of that time. So, it is a lot of sharing, shared resources. We worked together, with the scope and sequence to distinguish between the different *STEPS*, the different levels. Our schedule is on the [Google] drive. (Grant, Interview, December 7, 2017)

Caroline talked about using the Google drive for sharing documents and co-creating resources. She noted how she was substituting physical copies of learning materials with electronic copies on the Google drive:

If they [classroom teachers] have a quiz or a test they're going to be giving, they can send that to me in [the Google] drive, I can make a copy of it, alter it for the language learner, share it back, and it saves me driving all over. I find using [the Google] drive has been amazing for myself, and I think for supporting teachers that I don't get to see all that often. And it's also great for sharing resources, like I shared this graphic organizer with three teachers here, even though it was in Persian, I did one in Arabic and then I shared it with, and said, "Add onto it as needed." (Caroline, Interview, December 5, 2017)

Caroline talked about a collaborative relationship with a classroom teacher that occurred virtually on the Google drive. Rather than arranging time to meet in person, Caroline and the classroom teacher began by developing a skeleton of a unit plan. From there, Caroline took the initiative of creating leveled activities to support the ELL in the class, as well as other learners who required literacy accommodations. In the process, Caroline developed an ongoing bank of resources that she was willing to share with other teachers:

The beautiful thing about [the Google] drive is, once you kind of get it organized, um, it's there for you. So next year, I don't necessarily have to do that again, I can just pull it out and add or adapt what I need to do. (Caroline, Interview, December 5, 2017)

Lauren also utilized the Google drive as a tool to help her provide instant and meaningful resources to classroom teachers. She talked about the benefits of

accessibility by being able to draw on any resources she had saved on Google drive to supplement ELL instruction.

During data collection, there was no evidence of technological tools for ELLs such as apps or websites being used. ESL teacher participants expressed a lack of resources and knowledge as barriers to utilizing technology in their instruction to support ELLs. Caroline talked about navigating new technological applications through trial and error, and banking useful resources for future use. Other barriers were expressed, such as discontinued use of the apps, severance of the trial version of the apps, and lack of funding to purchase apps for students. Overall, instructional technology was used infrequently, and when it was implemented, it was often for translation purposes or to provide ELLs with visuals.

Discussion

Collaborative teaching practices have been advocated for the teaching profession for decades (Davison, 2006). Collaboration in education has the potential of offering educators a support system and a wide breadth of pedagogical methods to mitigate the learning needs of diverse language learners in an otherwise isolating professional environment. In particular, when ESL teachers/itinerants and classroom teachers collaborate, there is potential for consistency and efficiency in pedagogical planning of targeted learning strategies for ELLs. Effective collaboration between the ESL teacher and the classroom teacher can be a strategy to support ELLs' academic needs. It is imperative for research to explore the current practices as well as opportunities for collaboration within ESL education from the perspective of the educators in the field to provide a framework for future directions.

Commitment to collaboration with the goal of supporting ELLs underscores a key feature of authentic pedagogical relationships. The ways in which ESL educators discussed current practices positioned the structure of collaboration as occurring on an individualized basis and negotiated between educators. An integrated educational approach in ESL education requires collaboration to develop and support consistent pedagogical practices for ELLs. One finding from the study was a desire on the part of ESL teachers to cocreate and establish effective practices in working with ELLs that other educational professionals could employ in their absence. This is consistent with the findings of Meyers (2006), who has identified that ELLs require consistent, ongoing, and individualized support as they are integrated into the classroom in order to develop literacy skills. The recent adaptation of the integrated model of ESL instruction in schools across Ontario may contribute to setting up the conditions for positive experiences of collaboration with ESL teachers. As ESL teachers work with many ELLs within several different schools, collaboration was regarded as a means to develop effective strategies to support both ELLs as well as classroom teachers. The synergy generated

during collaboration between classroom and ESL teachers holds the potential for creating tailored education plans for ELLs.

Collaboration is espoused but often overlooked by teachers, administrators, and policymakers as a pedagogical strategy. Time is a valuable commodity in the teaching profession, and while educators have a desire to collaborate, juggling numerous responsibilities leaves few opportunities for the time required for collaboration. This study has explored avenues for collaboration in ESL education, as well as the perceived barriers to collaboration by ESL teachers. This investigation is timely because professional collaboration in addressing challenges associated with ESL instruction has the potential for creating authentic, ongoing, and supportive relationships between educators to support ELLs (Russell, 2012).

The ESL teacher participants struggled to find time to collaborate with other educational professionals. They discussed feelings of guilt associated with taking too much of the preparation time allotted to classroom teachers to collaborate with them as this time is limited on a daily basis. Participants mitigated these feelings after witnessing the positive and time-saving results of collaboration in planning for ELLs. Overall, ESL teacher participants expressed a desire to collaborate, and took initial steps to facilitate collaboration with educational professionals, but they expressed that they had not been provided with sufficient resources for deep-rooted and authentic collaboration. Informal collaboration such as hallway conversations occurred more frequently than formal or scheduled collaboration. This was attributed to a lack of concurrent planning time allotted for educators, as well as ESL teachers traveling between several different schools and not having the possibility to be present at each school before or after instructional time. In addition, ESL teachers were not always scheduled to be in a classroom during the instructional time that ELLs required the most support. While ESL teachers said classroom teachers were aware of their schedule, it was not always possible for instructional activities to be rearranged around the ESL teachers' schedule. These instances were examples of conditions that are not conducive to collaboration—ESL teachers were physically present but were not able to support instruction.

The current research project suggests ways of synergistically combining professional collaboration opportunities between classroom teachers and ESL teachers. These include scheduled time to meet and assess progress of ELLs, as well as co-plan next steps. Collaboration that incorporates designated time for co-planning in combination with co-assessment is beneficial in combining the teaching and content expertise of both ESL teachers as well as classroom teachers. Encouraging classroom teachers as well as ESL teachers to attend professional learning opportunities specifically targeted around ESL topics is a strategy for developing awareness about effective ESL pedagogical practices, as well as emphasizing collaboration among educators to foster

ELLs' learning success. Functional collaboration should be flexible and fluid in terms of the professionals (e.g., classroom teachers, principals, support workers, educational assistants) involved to support ELLs. ESL teacher participants in this research project recognized that collaborating with educators within as well as across the other school boards may expose them to innovative practices that they had otherwise not considered.

This research project also focused on documenting the types of digital and nondigital resources used by ESL teachers to foster collaborative relationships with classroom teachers and to support their ELLs. The ESL teacher participants and classroom teachers used a digital platform (i.e., Google drive) as a repository for resources and as a means to work collaboratively in documents. The educators did not select technological resources to use in their pedagogy to provide individual support or scaffolding in accordance with ELLs' level of language learning. Moreover, technological platforms such as apps on tablets were not used to promote pedagogically sound ESL instruction.

There was an apparent disconnect between the potential that digital resources hold for ELLs to be motivated and engaged in learning, and the current practices of using digital tools in ESL education. The findings indicated a lack of professional training for educators on how to use various technological applications for pedagogical purposes. Technology was used infrequently, and when it was implemented, it was often for translation purposes only. Based on these findings, it may be useful for school boards to curate apps used by educators and adopt a centralized portal to create consistent use of technology in ESL education. Administrative support for integration of technological resources is necessary.

Conclusion and Implications

The most salient finding is that educators have the desire to collaborate but, most times, have limited resources to support them in developing consistent collaborative practices. Consistent with the results of the present study, Baltus and Belhiah (2013) find that teachers express the ongoing need for instructional resources from the Ministry of Education to assist in the planning of curriculum modifications for ELLs. Implications for facilitating collaboration would be to connect educators working with ELLs across the province to develop flexible tools that can be adapted and utilized in ESL education. Such resources and tools might be shared digitally in a repository or provincial site. ESL teacher participants in this research project recognized that collaborating with educators within as well as across the other school boards may also expose them to innovative practices that they had otherwise not considered. ESL teachers can engage in collaboration with other educational professionals in unique ways, depending on context, the needs of the

ELLs, the presence of other educators, tools, and time available. Therefore, resources are needed that support a model of collaboration that is contextual, flexible, and adaptive in its application.

Effective collaboration must be prioritized by all members of the collaborative relationship and supported by administration. This administrative support might involve additional time built into educators' schedules to meet and plan effective support strategies, or to offer ESL-specific PD opportunities for both ESL teachers as well as other educators who work with ELLs. Furthermore, curriculum mapping with ESL-specific focus is an important process of collaboration between ESL teachers and classroom teachers, as well as collaboration in all aspects of creating educational plans for ELLs, including goal setting, assessment methods, and co-planning of learning activities. Thus, emphasis on collaboration must be prioritized not only by educators, but also by administration within school boards to allow for this synergy to occur.

An important finding of this project was that some surface-level collaboration occurred in relation to the use of technological platforms in ESL education. The implication that this finding has for practice is to seek ways for educators to collaborate on integrating technology in instruction in ways that promote critical thinking and problem-solving to guide students to meaningful learning with technology (Kivunja, 2014). Implications for facilitating collaboration in practice would be to connect educators working with ELLs across the province to develop flexible tools that can be adapted and utilized in ESL education. Such applications might be shared digitally in a publicly accessed repository.

Research indicates that it is imperative that technological tools chosen by educators provide ELL students with immediate feedback to prevent them from making schematic integrations of incorrect responses (Cumming & Draper Rodriguez, 2013). In this way, ELL students gain an awareness of when errors are made and are able to apply this new learning in the future. As well, this research project did not document any inquiry-based learning opportunities for ELLs. Inquiry-based learning approaches incorporate several skills and competencies, including critical thinking and active problem-solving (Kivunja, 2014). Taking into account the specific needs of ELLs, inquiry-based learning opportunities, both digital and nondigital, hold potential for the development of language learning driven by students' individual interests. Educators need to have the tools and training to collaborate and incorporate inquiry-based instruction.

Technology holds potential for educators to maintain ongoing collaborative relationships by allowing classroom teachers to share updates about ELLs' progress in the absence of ESL teachers. Uploading student work samples, or anecdotal notes about teaching strategies on a shared platform, such as a Google drive folder, would help ESL teachers stay up to date on strategies used by the classroom teacher. In this way, collaboration would

be more fluid despite the intermittent classroom presence of itinerant ESL teachers.

The conclusions based on this research suggest that education researchers, practitioners, and policymakers should give greater consideration to the diversity within collaborative relationships in ESL education. Due to limited resources to facilitate collaboration, informal meetings dominated the most frequently used methods of collaboration among ESL teachers and other educational professionals. ESL teachers are mandated to collaborate with classroom teachers to review and document ELLs' assessment data. Aside from this, limited time, teaching resources, and professional learning opportunities are available for ESL teachers to collaborate with other educational professionals to discuss and plan for ELLs' learning outcomes.

To promote collaboration, other areas must be prioritized and mandated, such as curriculum mapping with an ESL-specific focus (OME, 2005); goal setting for, as well as with, ELLs (OME, 2007; 2008b); and co-planning and developing instructional resources among educators. Participants in this research project concurred that it was beneficial to utilize the *STEP* resource (OME, 2011) to facilitate collaboration as educators have a common vocabulary, aided in creating unified goals that aligned within the ELLs' ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). This also contributed to the creation of cohesive educational goals. School district support staff might consider how to facilitate collaboration intended for the long-term success of ELLs, rather than providing educators with immediate resources to address situational concerns.

The findings of this project reveal the state of current collaborative practices among educators, as well as the opportunities to strengthen collaboration among ESL teachers and other educational professionals. Social constructivism is rooted in the co-constructed production of knowledge through processes of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). This theoretical position was present in the findings, particularly in the approaches used by ESL teachers to facilitate collaboration with other educational professionals. ESL teachers emphasized the benefits of collaboration when educational professionals were hesitant to collaborate, both for teachers as well as for ELLs. ESL teachers also used familiar language derived from Ministry of Education resources (e.g., OME, 2011) to guide collaboration for planning and evaluation of ELLs, thus situating the tools of collaboration within the social and cultural practices of ESL education.

There is value in documenting ESL teachers' experiences with respect to how they create successful collaborative opportunities in ways that feel authentic without overstepping the boundaries of educational professional colleagues. ESL teacher participants passionately talk about collaboration with their education partners and the resulting educational progress made by ELLs. This research project has raised recommendations about how administration can encourage voluntary collaboration in ESL education, and how educators can be further supported in their collaborative practices.

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