

New Beginnings: Leadership Support for the Integrated ENL Initiative

by Carol Wertheimer and Andrea Honigsfeld

Closing the achievement gap for ELLs has always been a challenge for educators—classroom teachers, ESOL specialists, and school leaders alike. When the *Blueprint for English Language Learners Success* (NYSED, 2014) was published last year, many administrators across New York State started to think about how this document could support their advocacy and leadership work on behalf of ELLs. As the Blueprint notes, “All teachers are teachers of English Language Learners,” and it reinforces the need for sustained collaboration among all stakeholders. The forthcoming changes to the Commissioner Regulations Part 154 (CR 154) provided a further impetus for school leaders and teachers to examine instructional program design and leadership practices.

In the spring of 2015, the Executive Leadership Institute (ELI), a not-for-profit organization, responded to these changes in New York State by hosting a book study on *Collaboration and Co-Teaching: A Leader’s Guide* (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2015), as one possible way to initiate and sustain the dialogue about ELLs’ needs among school leaders. The study participants were a group of New York City school and district administrators gathered to discuss how teacher collaboration and co-teaching can be an effective framework for integrated English as a New Language (ENL) practices to support ELLs’ academic, cultural, and linguistic development in the context of the K–12 ELA and content area curricula.

The study format allowed participants to raise critical questions and explore possible answers in a collegial, highly engaging, and safe environment:

- How do we find teachers in both the elementary and secondary levels with the appropriate certifications?
- How do we find teachers who can plan together, collaborate on shared decision making, are held accountable to each other as well as to the students, and can share the everyday responsibilities for each and every student in their classroom?
- To whom, and how, do we provide professional development for the teachers indicated in CR Part 154?
- With the new CR Part 154 mandate, how do we provide the necessary 90 minutes of integrated instruction for former ELLs who are entitled to receive this teaching?
- How do we provide the appropriate planning time for the teachers?

As participants explored each chapter of the book, they identified their conjectures and discoveries and engaged in an exchange of prior experiences—both successes and challenges—with co-teaching for ELLs, as well as plans and preparations already in place for the coming school year. While it was evident that even more questions could be raised, the overall shared conclusion was that the co-teaching collaborative model is going to be a powerful framework for instruction.

Co-teaching between a general education teacher and an ESOL teacher can be challenging but with the support of the administration it becomes a unique collaboration benefiting the educational community. Co-planning, co-differentiating, and co-delivering instruction, as well as collaboratively assessing student growth to meet individual needs, creates a positive effect on both the teacher and

the student. As teachers and administrators work together, a shared vision develops of how instruction will go and what the expected outcomes are. An outgrowth of this vision is trust, one that the *Framework for Great Schools* promotes, in which school staff, parents, students, and administrators value each other (<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/schools/framework/default.htm>).

It emerged as a shared belief that administrators must not only schedule common planning time for the general education and English as a second language teacher, but also should communicate frequently with both parties, ensuring that all teachers have adequate resources, planning time, and professional development opportunities.

While inclusion classes, referred to as integrated co-teaching (ICT), are widespread, co-teaching to support ELLs is not new to New York City public schools. As one administrator pointed out, her school has been using the co-teaching collaborative for several years and has established a school culture that prioritizes this model. Not only does it benefit the students, she noted, but also it encourages teacher leadership as ESOL teachers open their co-teaching classroom to share language and literacy development strategies. Another administrator remarked that the changes to CR Part 154 enable her to ensure that students who have tested as Proficient on the NYSESLAT not only receive testing accommodations for two additional years and additional help before or after school, but also must be serviced for an additional 90 minutes during school.

As the school year begins, the ELI continues to provide research-standards-based professional development for all New York City and New York State school supervisors and administrators to better meet the needs of ELLs.

References

Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M. (2015). *Collaboration and co-teaching: A leader's guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

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