ESL Inclusion: A North Carolina Story

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Introduction

In the past decade, North Carolina has experienced a tremendous growth in the Hispanic population, from 76,726 in 1990 to an estimated 600,913 in 2004. Presently, Hispanics make up 7% of the population of North Carolina. Construction (42.2%), wholesale and retail (11.5%), and manufacturing (10.7%) are the three top areas of employment for North Carolina Hispanics. In terms of school age population, Hispanics comprised 0.3% of the school enrollment in 1985-86 (3,735 students), whereas for the 2004-2005 school year, they comprised 7% of the school enrollment (101,380 students). Though each of the 100 school districts in North Carolina has at least one Hispanic English Language Learner, there are 20 school districts which have 1,500 ELLs or more and at least an 8% Hispanic school population (Kasarda and Johnson, 2006). In these districts, English as Second Language programs are the primary instructional model used to serve the Hispanics who are English Language Learners (ELLs).

I moved to North Carolina three years ago from Colorado. The Hispanic roots in Colorado are deep and strong, so it was with trepidation that I moved to this Southern state where Hispanics are a newer population. My experience in Colorado was primarily with bilingual education programs and I was nervous about the predominance of ESL programs in North Carolina. I worried that there would not be a place for the language and culture of these newcomers to the state.

However, North Carolina also felt like a land of opportunity, an egg waiting to hatch. Schools had the potential to click into the first generation of immigrants and use all the knowledge of the field to educate Hispanic ELLs well the first time around. There was the possibility of engendering success right away and not creating a cycle of under-education from which to escape. So, with doctoral diploma in hand I applied for ESL teaching jobs in elementary schools with large percentages of ELLs.

I landed a job in an urban elementary school, West End Elementary, in a medium-sized North Carolina city. During the 1980s, West End mainly served an African-American population. In the mid 1990s, Hispanic immigrants, mostly from Mexico, began to move into the neighborhood. As of January 2007, 40% of West End students are Hispanic, 59% are African American, and 1% is Caucasian. The majority of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch (92-96%) which is a sign of the economic struggles in this neighborhood. The 2001-02 End of Grade tests showed 56.5% of West End students performing at or above grade level in reading. By the time I came to work there in the fall of 2004, 72.3% of West End students were reading at or above grade level. For mathematics, 62% of students performed at or above grade level on state tests in 2001-02, while 92% performed at or above grade level in 2003-2004 (http://www.ncschoolreportcard.org/src/). This jump in test scores seemed to indicate that instruction was improving at West End.

I arrived in the fall of 2004 with two other new ESL teachers. The previous West End ESL teachers had laid the groundwork for our new team to build an ESL program which is academically rigorous and honors students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The cornerstone of this ESL program is an inclusion/co-teaching service delivery model. It is to this model of inclusion that I devote the rest of this paper.
West End’s Inclusion/Co-Teaching Model

Traditionally at West End, ESL services were provided to ELLs through a pull-out model. Students were removed from their regular classroom into a separate ESL room for 30 - 45 minutes of instruction in either language- or content-based ESL. ESL teachers were provided adequate classrooms and sufficient materials. Nevertheless, the ESL pull-out program lived in the margins of the school environment. Classroom teachers did not know what took place in the ESL pull-out groups and did not trust that ESL instruction was rigorous enough to help students pass the End-of-Grade tests. Conversely, ESL teachers were not well-versed in the Standard Course of Study for all the grade levels they served and did not know what took place in the mainstream classrooms.

This inadequate arrangement might have continued indefinitely but a school-wide change in the daily schedule kick-started the process of ESL instructional change.

In 2002, West End Elementary changed its daily morning schedule. All classrooms were to provide literacy instruction for a 1.5 hour block of time at the same time, 9:00-10:30, each morning. The literacy block was considered sacred time – the loud speakers were silenced, there were no interruptions to instruction, and no students were to be pulled from their classroom for any reason. Each specialist (ESL, EC, art, music, PE, etc.) was assigned to a classroom during literacy block with the intention of increasing the adult to student ratio. ESL teachers were paired with teachers who had a significant portion of ELLs in their classes. At the time, the classroom teacher usually designated the ESL teacher as the instructor for a word-study or language activity at a learning center. This was the beginning of the ESL inclusion model in 2001.

When I was hired in 2004, I was pleased to hear that ESL services were provided in an inclusive setting. My background was special education, so no one had to sell me on the idea of inclusion for English Language Learners. The West End ESL program has evolved over the past five years to emphasize inclusion throughout the day, and to support some very successful co-teaching relationships with classroom teachers. ESL teachers are no longer assigned certain topics to teach. Instead we collaborate with classroom teachers and share responsibility for several areas of instruction. Below is a table which attempts to show how this looks when there are 180 ELL students and 3.5 FTE for ESL instructors.
Table 1 West End Elementary ESL Inclusion Model, 2006-2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Block</th>
<th>Liz</th>
<th>Irene</th>
<th>Sofia</th>
<th>Caroline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00-11:00</td>
<td>Co-teach 4th grade literacy block with Ms. Jones</td>
<td>Co-teach 3rd grade literacy block with double class</td>
<td>Co-teach 2nd grade literacy block with double class</td>
<td>Newcomer Pull-out, 3rd-5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inclusion KG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00-12:00</td>
<td>More 4th grade literacy inclusion Lunch</td>
<td>1st grade Small group inclusion literacy</td>
<td>2nd grade Push-in – math</td>
<td>KG Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-3:15</td>
<td>1st grade Push-in math</td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch &amp; Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2nd grade Small group inclusion literacy</td>
<td>1st grade Small group inclusion literacy/Push-in-math</td>
<td></td>
<td>KG Pull-out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th grade – Push-in math</td>
<td>3rd grade Push-in math/literacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5th grade – Co-teach writing workshop Plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows four different types of services that we provide: co-teaching, small group inclusion, push-in assistance, and pull-out groups. Each model is described briefly below.

Inclusion looks different in every classroom. In some classrooms, we call the inclusion “co-teaching.” This most often is when we routinely plan with the teachers and share the teaching responsibilities in the classroom. For example, Sofia routinely teaches the writer’s workshop mini-lesson in her 2nd grade inclusion class. Irene routinely instructs a guided reading group with her third grade ESL inclusion class. With this model, ESL teachers are instructing English-only students as well as ELL students. Within the co-teaching framework, Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2004) describe 4 different instructional structures: supportive, parallel, complementary and team teaching (See Appendix). In our co-teaching classrooms, we shift between these different structures depending upon the curriculum we are teaching.

In some classrooms, we call the model “small group inclusion.” For this model, the classroom and ESL teacher may briefly consult on the curriculum or the ESL teacher may receive the classroom teacher’s lesson plans. Then the ESL teacher plans a lesson specific to her ESL small group. The ELL students receive the same content on the lesson in the classroom but with an ESL twist. For example, I work in a 2nd grade classroom during their word study/spelling time. The teacher and I usually speak briefly on what types of words our groups need next. She also fills me in on any areas
where she notices the students may need some extra attention. Then I plan a week of word study lessons with an ESL twist which usually entails more visuals and vocabulary development. I work mostly with a small group of ELLs though my group may include a few English-only students.

Next, there is push-in assistance. The mainstream teacher plans and delivers the instruction and the ESL teacher assists all students to make sure that they understand and can perform the task. The ESL teacher can provide extra scaffolding and accommodations to the assignment so ELLs can succeed with the mainstream curriculum.

Lastly, we provide pull-out services for two groups of students: newcomers in grades 3-5 and kindergarten students. The 3-5 newcomers are usually in their first year of instruction in US schools, so they are provided 1-2 hours daily of intensive English instruction. This newcomer instruction follows the same literacy pattern as mainstream classrooms (reading workshop, writing workshop, word study) but materials and activities are adapted to the Novice Low – Novice High language levels of the newcomers. Kindergartners are provided 30-40 minutes of English instruction with a theme-based ESL curriculum. Inclusion and pull-out are not either/or options. Most schools will have some need for a few pull-out groups.

If we picture the various delivery models at West End on a continuum of inclusion, it would look like:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less Inclusive</th>
<th>More Inclusive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pull-out</td>
<td>Co-Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push-in</td>
<td>-supportive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance</td>
<td>-parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group Inclusion</td>
<td>-complimentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Consultation for advanced ELLs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1

The purpose of this extensive description of the service model is to show how ESL services have become enmeshed in the mainstream instruction of the school. We rarely use our ESL classrooms for instruction, rather, you find us in one of the 30 classrooms throughout the school. I would argue that this type of inclusive model serves to bring ELL students away from the margins and into the heart of mainstream classroom instruction in three main ways.

The Heart of the Mainstream Classroom

*The Standard Course of Study and High Expectations*

Hands down, the strongest argument for inclusion is that it provides ELLs access to the Standard Course of Study at their grade level. For example, in Ms. Jones’ fourth grade class, we have four English Language Learners who arrived in US schools last year. These students are learning English while they analyze differences between genres, such as historical fiction, fantasy fiction, biographies, and haiku poems (English Language Arts Standard 3.01). They are taught how to make inferences, draw conclusions, and make generalizations as well as the particular language which goes with these higher-order thinking skills (English Language Arts Standard 2.05). They learn the nuances of the English language by studying homophones, synonyms, homonyms and
multiple meaning words (English Language Arts Standards 1.04). The thinking and literacy skills of the fourth grade curriculum drive the instruction. It is my job as the ESL co-teacher to scaffold the language so that the students understand the concepts of the lessons. The ELL students continually show that they are up to the tasks of the 4th grade curriculum when given appropriate language accommodations.

Missing grade-level content is a significant issue for ELLs and another strong argument against pulling ELLs out of class for ESL services. The standards-driven curriculum with high stakes testing allows no down time in classrooms. ELL students cannot be pulled from class without robbing them of crucial content instruction.

The inclusion model also supports high expectations and heterogeneous groupings of students. This is in contrast to a pull-out model, where homogenous pull-out groups can lead to lower levels of questioning, less demanding curriculum, and more restricted types of learning activities (Oakes, 2004; Slavin, 1987; Wheelock, 1992). In the mainstream classroom, students vary by life experiences, ethnicity, interests, abilities, and English proficiency to name a few. Yet, all students are expected to reach grade level standards or above.

**ELL Voices and Culture in the Classroom**

John Clegg (1996), in his introduction to *Mainstreaming: Case studies in integrating ESL students into the mainstream curriculum*, wrote:

> It has often been commented that the underlying premise of such teaching [pull-out models] is that the child’s lack of fluency in English is a deficiency which must be remedied before she is allowed to play her full part in the school. The child must change to suit the school, not vice versa. (p. 3)

In contrast to Clegg’s scenario, a well-implemented inclusion model adds the voices and cultures of English Language Learners to conversations in the mainstream classroom. The school does change to suit the needs of the English Language Learners.

One day my attention was captured by an intense conversation between two students. Sancho, a native Spanish speaker, was resting his chin on his hand, listening intently while Kade, a native English speaker, was explaining something. Kade is a very verbal, descriptive, opinionated fellow. I eavesdropped for a while until Kade noticed me. He explained, “I was telling him all about H-E-L-L, you know, about how you have to be good so you don’t go there.” From what I heard, Kade was giving him a very colorful description of the devil, flames and all sorts of agony. Sancho, then began adding what he knew about the topic. He explained how the devil was actually a fallen angel, along with Lucifer and some others. Kade was impressed. He thought he knew all there was to know about H-E-L-L.

When ELL students are considered a full member of the classroom, their voices come out in many ways. One thing that naturally happens is that the classroom adapts to all levels of English. Kids work hard to understand each other because they are curious about each other’s lives. Different levels of English are accepted, but it does not go without some adjustments. One day, Ms. Jones paired students up for a spelling test. A newer English Language Learner, Patricia, was paired with a native English speaker, Tyree. Tyree rolled his eyes, harrumphed and made it clear that he was unhappy with this partner. I asked why he did not wish to work with Patricia. He thought for a minute, and said, “I cannot understand her very well, so it’s hard for the spelling test.” This was an honest problem and fortunately, easily solved. I sat by the pair and stepped in when Tyree needed help understanding a word. Once again, with appropriate language assistance, all students are able to participate in classroom activities.
Within mainstream classrooms, there are many opportunities to enhance the curriculum with resources relating to the culture and language of ELLs. All students in Ms. Jones’ class were intrigued with *La LLorona: The Weeping Woman* (Hayes, 1987), *Family Pictures: Cuadros de Familia* (Garza, 1990), *Iguanas in the Snow: Iguanas en la Nieve* (Alarcón, 2001) and many other books with Latino main characters. When books are bilingual, Ms. Jones reads the English and I read the Spanish. This is a treat as all students enjoy hearing both languages. Books in Spanish are available for independent reading as well.

We also often use the native language during word study. Each week, we study one word pattern in English. For example, we may focus on a particular suffix, such as –*ly* (English Language Arts Standard 1.02). Students generate a class list of words with that prefix. Figure 2 shows an example class list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adding the suffix - <em>ly</em> to a word changes its meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quickly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2*

We then draw comparisons to how words are formed like this in Spanish: rápidamente, lentamente, frecuentemente, afortunadamente, raramente, diariamente. Our ELLs can make the connections between –*ly* and –*mente* and understand the English suffix lesson better. To further enhance understanding, we might also call attention to how many of these words are English-Spanish cognates (eg. frequently/frecuentemente). We make these types of comparisons between English and Spanish often: how writing the date looks different in both languages, how months are capitalized in English but not in Spanish, how adjectives go in front of the noun in English but after the noun in Spanish. These metalinguistic conversations carry interest for both ELL and native English speakers, and serve to bring the Spanish language into the mainstream in an ESL school.

**Staff Development for ESL & Mainstream Teachers**

Inclusion is also powerful for continual staff development. ESL teachers model ESL techniques in mainstream classrooms every day. Classroom teachers watch and try the techniques themselves. Most noticeably, we have observed teachers emphasize vocabulary, connect to background knowledge, seek out materials that represent the students’ cultures, encourage oral language, give sufficient wait time, and call attention to idioms and multiple meaning words.

Fortunately, this exchange goes both ways. ESL teachers benefit greatly from watching classroom teachers address the individual needs of students and teach grade-level curriculum. I have learned about literacy assessments, leveled texts, interactive read-alouds, guided reading techniques, and the classroom curriculum. Last week, my fifth grade math class was beginning a unit on probability. The students were to construct a probability line and select examples for each probability statement. Figure 3 shows an example of a probability line.
Impossible
Pigs Fly

Unlikely
The President will visit our class

Maybe
It will rain today

Likely
We will go to recess

Certain
End of Grade Test

Figure 3

Expressing degrees of a quality (i.e., size, temperature, certitude) is a core ESL concept but I had never used this probability line activity. I watched the students debate the likelihood of various events and realized what a strong language and math lesson this was. I am continually learning new ideas from talented mainstream teachers.

As classroom and ESL teachers learn more about each other’s fields, the quality of instruction for ELLs improves. The more teachers who are comfortable and competent teaching ELLs, the more ELLs are embraced in the mainstream of the school. There is a shared responsibility for the education of ELLs.

One Size Does Not Fit All

Yet, no instructional model is without its drawbacks and an inclusion model can be problematic for several reasons. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction hosts listservs for ESL teachers and coordinators where the topic of inclusion has come up several times. While some teachers explain how they manage a successful inclusion program, others point out the disadvantages. The quotes below from the North Carolina ESL listservs point to some of the drawbacks:

• There are just simply not enough ESL teachers to go around to support every regular teacher in need throughout every mainstream classroom. (Oliveira, C., 5/3/2006)
• Inclusion can so easily become a watered down, ineffective means of instruction. ESL teachers end up doing what most teacher assistants can do. The students get no concentrated language instruction and end up with a lot of missing bricks necessary for literacy. (McLaughlin, J., 11/22/2006)
• The problem I have is with space, noise, and distractions. (Clayton, M. 10/26/2006)
• It does not work if you are only in the classroom for a short period of time one or two days a week- it needs to be daily and it needs to be a collaborative effort. (Fichter, K., 5/4/2006)

I have heard two other criticisms consistently. First, inclusion often means that an ESL teacher works with Native English speakers as well as ELLs. This can be problematic for ESL teachers with large caseloads of ELLs and limited time. Secondly, not all classroom teachers are enthusiastic about sharing their classrooms. Similarly, not all ESL teachers wish to give up control of their small groups and ESL curriculum.

An inclusion-only dogma is not likely to work and may not best serve the needs of all ELLs. At West End, inclusion is the foundation of the ESL program, yet there is still room for pull-out for certain groups and situations.

Implications for Middle Schools

Inclusion as Preparation for Middle School

This article has described the development of an inclusion model of ESL education at one elementary school. The question remains as to how this elementary ESL inclusion model prepares
ELLs for their years in secondary school. I consulted with middle school ESL colleagues to consider this question.

A well-implemented ESL inclusion model at the elementary school level lays the groundwork for success in middle school in several key ways. First, at the elementary level, ELL students learn grade-level content from the Standard Course of Study and acquire the academic language of the various disciplines. The high expectations of the elementary mainstream classroom translate well to middle school core content classes. The elementary inclusion model guarantees that ELL students will arrive to middle schools with exposure to and instruction in the SCOS of previous grades.

Secondly, the ESL inclusion model at the elementary school sets up a “no-excuses” mindset. Regardless of language level, an ELL student participates in the regular classroom instruction. ESL inclusion teachers may scaffold the instruction, but gone are the days when the ELL students spend their classroom time drawing pictures until they have learned enough English to participate. This “no-excuses” model segues well to middle school. As one middle school teacher said, there is less “coddling” in middle school than in elementary schools. Students are expected to take responsibility for their learning and do the assigned work, regardless of language level.

Lastly, the elementary ESL inclusion model prepares ELLs to navigate in a culturally diverse school. ELL students are not segregated by their ethnicity or language, so have many opportunities to develop cross-cultural relationships. Students are not “pulled-out” to receive special ESL instruction, so have not developed the stigma of being different or inferior. The social climate of inclusion in elementary school lays the groundwork for positive ethnic and academic identities, and respectful cross-cultural relationships in middle school.

**Bringing ESL Inclusion Models to Middle School**

ESL inclusion is a model that has taken hold in elementary schools in our district, but middle school ESL teachers are more tentative with the idea. I would argue that there is a strong justification for experimenting with inclusion at the middle school level. In *Learning and Not Learning English*, Guadalupe Valdés (2001) tells the story of four ELL middle schoolers and their sub par education. One of the biggest challenges these students face is becoming trapped in what Valdés calls the “ESL ghetto” (p.145). This ghetto consists of limited interaction with native English speakers, ineffective language-based ESL classes, and limited access to the mainstream curriculum. She makes several recommendations for improving the education of ELLs in middle school:

- ELL programs must be school-wide initiatives for which all teachers are responsible
- Schools must find ways to end the isolation of immigrant students
- Students must be given access to the curriculum while they are learning English
- ESL courses must be designed to develop academic English (pp.148-153)

An inclusion ESL model addresses each of these recommendations and may serve ELLs well in middle school.

Currently, North Carolina is training middle and high school teachers in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol –SIOP (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2004). This model includes 8 instructional components which are intended to make content comprehensible for ELLs while they are still learning English. The SIOP is intended for intermediate level ELLs. This sounds like a beautiful opportunity for inclusion and co-teaching at the middle school level. SIOP classes could contain a mix of ELL and native English students. The ESL teachers could share her/his expertise in language, and the classroom teacher could share his/her content expertise.
Last Thoughts

Co-teaching and inclusion require change in the mindsets of ESL and mainstream teachers. It requires more time and effort on both teachers’ parts. Teachers may ask themselves if such a change is worth the effort. Consider the following story.

Last week, during 5th grade writing workshop, students were composing essays about what they could do to improve their lives. While some students took off writing right away, some ELLs worked on filling in a bubble map with ideas, examples and supporting details. Gerardo arrived in US schools this year so his bubble map was modified to include a main idea and six examples. Figure 4

![Bubble Map](image)

Figure 4

As Gerardo was thinking, his neighbor was offering many ideas. “You could say be nice to your mom or do your homework.” Gerardo replied, “I already nice to my mom. I already do my homework.” He asked me about how to phrase some of his responses which gave me an opportunity for some direct English instruction. From this bubble map, he too can write an essay of how he would improve his life. When his bubble map was complete, one of the tougher leaders of the 5th grade boys came over to the table. He asked me, “Did he write that in English?” I nodded. Then, the boy turned to Gerardo and asked if he could read it. He read the words, smiled and said, “Man, I couldn’t do the candy thing. I love candy.” Gerardo and the boy talked about candy and then moved onto the idea of no TV.

Whenever these types of learning activities and conversations occur in inclusion classrooms, I can say without a doubt that the effort is worth it. ELL students are participating in the classroom academically and socially. Their language and academic needs are being met in the mainstream classroom. What is more, their voices are being heard and the whole class is enriched from the experience.
References


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Fichter, K. “Re: the numbers game.” Online posting, 4 May 2006, eslteachers@lists.dpi.state.nc.us


McLaughlin, J. “Re: Several Questions.” Online posting, 22 November 2006, lepcoordinators@lists.dpi.state.nc.us


Oliveira, C. “Re: the numbers game.” Online posting, 3 May 2006, eslteachers@lists.dpi.state.nc.us.


Appendix

Approaches to Co-teaching

Supportive Teaching
One teacher takes the lead instructional role and the other teacher rotates throughout the class working with individual students.

Parallel Teaching
The two teachers work with different groups in different sections of the classroom. Usually, the groups are randomly divided and the same curriculum is taught. This allows for smaller groups of students which can benefit everyone.

Complementary Teaching
One teacher delivers the main lesson and the second teacher may do a demonstration or add comments which enhance the instruction.

Team Teaching
The two teachers plan, teach, assess and take responsibility for all the students in the classroom.

Adapted from:

Note: Marilyn Friend suggests six models for co-teaching. These include:
1. One teach, one observe
2. One teach, one assist
3. Station teaching
4. Parallel teaching
5. Alternative teaching
6. Team Teaching.
