Strengthening Co-Teacher Partnerships Between ENL and Content-Area Teachers

by

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August 10, 2025

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A capstone project submitted to the Department of Education, Languages, and Instructional Design of The College at Brockport, State University of New York in partial fulfillment of the requirements for MS. Ed. in TESOL

Table of Contents

Abstract

Various institutional and instructional barriers impact co-teaching partnerships between English as a New Language (ENL) and content-area teachers. Despite the mandate by New York State Commissioner's Regulation Part 154 for integrated instruction through co-teaching, implementation often defaults to a push-in model that lacks shared planning, parity, and clarity of roles. Drawing on positioning theory and sociocultural theory, this project examines how factors such as role ambiguity, limited co-planning time, divergent teaching philosophies, and lack of professional development hinder effective collaboration and reduce equitable learning opportunities for English language learners (ELLs). A comprehensive literature review highlights the ways in which power dynamics, scheduling conflicts, and administrative decisions affect the success or failure of co-teaching partnerships. In response, this project presents a professional development workshop designed for ENL-content area co-teaching pairs. The session includes activities to identify co-teaching models, distinguish content and language objectives, and utilize a collaborative planning tool that fosters shared decision-making and instructional equity. The workshop concludes with a reflection and goal-setting activity to support ongoing growth. This project offers school districts a replicable framework to strengthen co-teaching relationships and improve outcomes for ELLs through sustainable, collaborative practices.

Keywords: co-teaching, English Language Learners, ENL, content-area, collaboration, professional development

Chapter 1: Introduction

English language learners (ELLs) continue to be one of the most academically marginalized groups in U.S. schools. To promote equitable access to academic content and English language development, New York State Commissioner's Regulation Part 154 mandates integrated services for ELLs through collaboration between English as a New Language (ENL) teachers and content-area teachers. In theory, these collaborative partnerships should allow both teachers to draw on their distinct areas of expertise to meet the diverse needs of ELLs in inclusive classroom settings. However, in practice, this model is often inconsistently implemented and lacks the structural and instructional supports needed for success. I seek to understand what institutional factors, such as administrative support, scheduling, and planning time, and instructional factors, such as personal teaching philosophies and role equality, shape the success or failure of co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers.

New York State Commissioner's Regulation part 154 requires English language learners to receive both stand-alone and integrated services, the latter of which should occur in content-area classrooms through collaboration between the ENL teacher and general education teacher. These integrated services are meant to ensure that ELLs have equitable access to academic content while developing English proficiency. While many educators recognize the potential benefits of co-teaching, including improved academic outcomes and increased inclusion for English language learners (Bauler et al., 2019; McTigue et al., 2023; Tasdemir & Yildirim, 2017; Whiting, 2019), there are persistent systemic barriers. These barriers include limited time for co-planning, lack of administrative support, ambiguous and unequal teacher roles, and inadequate professional development on co-teaching (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Giles & Yazan, 2023; Kibler et al., 2024; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019).

Additionally, Baran and Demirkasimoglu (2024) and Whiting (2019) discuss the importance of administrative leadership and professional development to maintain effective co-teaching partnerships. Their research found that tensions often stem from differences in teaching philosophies, inconsistent communication, and limited opportunities for training. While school leaders frequently believe that adequate training is provided, classroom teachers report that current professional development opportunities rarely address the specific challenges of co-teaching (Babinski et al., 2024; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019).

Over the past three years working as an ENL teacher, I have observed challenges in implementing the integrated service model required by New York State Commissioner's Regulations Part 154. My school district encourages co-teaching partnerships during these instructional times, however, I have found that co-teaching partnerships do not always occur. As a result, a push-in model transpires where the ENL teacher is isolated with his or her ELL students, is ill-prepared for the class due to no co-planning, and may appear to be more like an aid than a teacher. This not only adversely impacts the ENL teacher, but the ELL students too. I have found this not only happens to myself, but other ENL teachers in my school district as well. Despite isolated efforts to promote collaboration, including professional development requests to our multilingual department, ongoing district-wide support has been minimal. As myself and other ENL teachers experience these challenges, I am curious as to why this occurs, which is why I seek to understand not only the barriers of co-teaching partnerships, but also the conditions in which this collaboration can be successful.

As schools increasingly serve multilingual learners, it is essential to understand how institutional and instructional frameworks can either support or obstruct collaborative partnerships. A deeper exploration of co-teaching models and challenges can help inform district

policy, guide professional development, and improve outcomes for English language learners, who remain one of the most academically disadvantaged groups within U.S. schools. The purpose of this project is to explore and address the institutional and instructional barriers that affect co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers. Building on the findings of the literature review in Chapter 2, I designed a professional development workshop, which is described in Chapter 3. This 90-minute session offers ENL-content area co-teaching pairs the opportunity to reflect on co-teaching models, distinguish content and language objectives, and collaboratively plan instruction using a shared planning tool. Each element of the session is grounded in research and designed to foster equity, clarity, and collaboration.

By equipping co-teachers with practical strategies and shared planning tools, this project seeks to create more effective and equitable co-teaching relationships that better serve English language learners. Ultimately, co-teaching should not be a model of compliance, but of collaboration, where both teachers' voices are valued, and all students have full access to rigorous, language-rich instruction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks and reviews the literature on co-teaching partnerships between English as a New Language (ENL) and content-area teachers in mainstream classrooms. Effective co-teaching models can significantly enhance the educational experiences of English language learners (ELLs) by integrating both language development and content instruction (Bauler et al., 2019; Bauler & Kang, 2020; Whiting, 2019). However, multiple instructional and institutional barriers limit the effectiveness of these partnerships (Giles & Yazan, 2023; Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024).

In this chapter, I will first explain two relevant learning theories: positioning theory and sociocultural theory. While positioning theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991) focuses on the dynamics of power, roles, and identity that emerge in co-teaching relationships, sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction, shared tools, and collaboration in the construction of knowledge. Next, I will review the literature on common challenges and promising practices, focusing on themes such as instructional and institutional barriers, overcoming challenges, and instructional practices that promote ELL success.

Theoretical Frameworks

Positioning Theory

Positioning Theory (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991) is a social framework that explores how individuals construct identities, relationships, and power dynamics through their interactions in specific social contexts. Rather than viewing roles as static, positioning theory focuses on how individuals assign and take on positions in real-time communication, based on perceived rights, responsibilities, and social norms. The theory is composed of three fundamental aspects: positions, the rights and duties individuals adopt or are assigned, storylines, which are the

broader narratives shaping the interaction, and speech and other acts, which are the communicative behaviors that make these positions (Felix & Ali, 2023). Within this framework, identity is seen as fluid and negotiated, shaped by the ways people position themselves and others within different contexts. In educational settings, positioning theory helps reveal how teachers' identities, power relations, and collaborative roles are continuously constructed through ongoing interactions and discourse.

When considering ENL-content area co-teaching partnerships, positioning theory offers a critical lens for understanding how teachers negotiate authority, expertise, and instructional responsibilities. In many co-teaching settings, ENL teachers may be positioned both implicitly and explicitly as subordinate to content-area teachers, particularly when language support as seen as supplemental rather than integral to instruction (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Bauler & Kang, 2020). These positionings are reflected in everyday decisions about lesson planning, classroom leadership, and instructional style. When ENL teachers are constantly positioned as assistants rather than co-instructors, their professional identities and contributions may be marginalized, perpetuating unequal power dynamics. This framework explains how institutional and instructional barriers, such as role ambiguity, are reinforced through discourse, highlighting the need for intentional dialogue, critical reflection, and structural supports to affirm the equal status and expertise of both ENL and content-area teachers in collaborative partnerships.

Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural theory posits that cognitive development is fundamentally shaped by social interaction and cultural context. Vygotsky further argues that through engagements with caregivers, peers, educators, and the broader community, individuals internalize cultural tools, such as language, symbols, and problem-solving methods, that mediate

and guide higher-level thinking. A key concept in this theory is the Zone of Proximal Development, which describes the space between what a learner can do independently and what they can accomplish with the support of a more knowledgeable other. Unlike developmental theories that emphasize fixed stages, sociocultural theory asserts that learning is dynamic and deeply influenced by the cultural and linguistic context in which it occurs (Cherry, 2024). In classroom settings, this means that learning is most effective when it is socially mediated and scaffolded through meaningful interactions with others.

In co-teaching partnerships with ENL and content-area teachers, sociocultural theory explains how collaborative teaching practices support both student development and teacher learning. When teachers co-plan and co-deliver lessons, they engage in reciprocal scaffolding, where each serve as a more knowledgeable other. ENL teachers bring expertise in language acquisition and cultural responsiveness, while content-area teachers contribute subject-specific knowledge (Babinski et al., 2024; Babinski et al., 2025). These partnerships create opportunities for shared meaning-making, collaborative problem-solving, and mutual professional growth. From a sociocultural perspective, effective co-teaching is not just about instructional practices, but also fostering the social processes that enable learning for both educators and students.

Instructional Barriers of Co-Teaching Partnerships

Co-teaching between English as a New Language (ENL) and content-area teachers is an essential component of integrated instruction for English language learners (ELLs), yet its implementation is often hindered by persistent instructional challenges. While policy mandates, such as New York State Commissioner's Regulation Part 154 (New York State Education Department, n.d.a), emphasize shared accountability for ELLs, research reveals a disconnect between policy and practice (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Giles & Yazan, 2023; Whiting, 2019).

Specifically, unclear teacher roles, inequitable responsibilities, and conflicting instructional philosophies undermine the potential of co-teacher partnerships. This section examines the instructional barriers that frequently emerge in ENL-content area partnerships and explores how these obstacles impact collaboration and the quality of instruction delivered to ELLs.

Misunderstandings of teacher roles obstruct successful collaboration in ENL-content area partnerships. In their mixed method study of 43 teachers including 12 ENL-content area teams, Bauler and Kang (2020) found five persistent barriers to co-teaching, including the lack of clarity of the roles of teachers, noting that 54% of teachers described the content-area educator teaching the whole class while the ENL teacher assisted students. Similarly, in a qualitative study conducted by Giles and Yazan (2023), they investigate how a seventh grade English language arts (ELA) teacher constructed her identity as she collaborated with an ENL teacher. Findings show that the ELA teacher designated the ENL teacher as the primary educator responsible for the learning of ELLs. In another qualitative study by Vintan and Gallagher (2019), four ENL teachers were interviewed and observed to explore their current practices of collaboration with elementary classroom teachers. Findings show that the teachers identified barriers to collaboration, including misunderstanding of the ENL teachers' role by the classroom teachers and articulated the need for clarifying their role to classroom teachers in order to support ELLs' learning. Likewise, 71 ENL teachers were surveyed on their experiences teaching in both mainstream and English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classroom settings. One major finding amongst teachers was the ambiguous responsibilities and roles of teachers in a mainstream classroom, posing the question of who is responsible for the ELLs? ENL teachers were appointed the responsibility when present in mainstream classrooms, but were concerned for ELLs in their absence (Whiting, 2019). Research consistently demonstrates that unclear roles

between ENL and content-area teachers hinder effective co-teaching partnerships, which leads to unequal responsibility for English language learners' instruction. Despite New York State Commissioner's Regulation Part 154 stating that "all teachers are teachers of ELLs" (para. 1, New York State Education Department, n.d.b), ENL teachers are often left with the responsibility of ELLs in the mainstream classroom, highlighting the urgent need for clearly defined roles and shared accountability to ensure equitable and effective support for ELLs in integrated classrooms. Through professional development opportunities, both ENL and content-area teachers can gain greater insight on their defined roles in a co-teaching setting.

Instructional barriers, particularly the inequality of teacher roles, have been widely identified in research as a key factor undermining effective collaboration between ENL and content-area teachers. In a qualitative study conducted by Baran and Demirkasımoğlu (2024), through interviews with 37 teachers and four school administrators in a private primary school on their experiences with co-teaching, the study identified three sources of conflict – most notably, the perception of English language teachers as assistants rather than instructional equals. One teacher articulates:

> My co-teacher sees me as a nanny. My duties are assigned by my co-teacher, not by my administrator. My co-teacher is a retired teacher. Since she did not know this system and worked as a teacher in the traditional approach for many years, she does not accept that I am a teacher. She does not give me any work in class and only gives me the paperwork. (p. 67)

This perception weakens the foundational principle of shared accountability in a co-teaching model and can hinder ENL teachers from implementing linguistically responsive instructional strategies. Positioning theory helps explain these dynamics by illustrating how ENL teachers are

discursively positioned as subordinate through daily interactions, while sociocultural theory reveals how this inequality disrupts the collaborative processes necessary for shared learning and instructional development.

The unequal roles often observed between ENL and content-area teachers may stem from the ways school leaders perceive and structure collaborative teaching responsibilities. In a national survey lead by Kibler et al. (2024), 1,933 leaders of multilingual or English learner (EL) programs of secondary schools in 1,933 school districts were given questionnaires regarding the prevalence and use of collaborative practices of teachers of English language learners. Findings yield only 62% of leaders describing ENL teachers treated by students and adults as having equal status as content-area teachers. Further highlighting the inequality of teacher roles is the study conducted by Whiting (2019) in a survey of 71 ENL teachers on their experiences in mainstream and ESOL classroom settings. One major finding amongst teachers was the lack of autonomy. As 61% reported planning with the classroom teacher, only 22% reported they are given the autonomy to determine work for ELLs, and are often treated as paraprofessionals. These findings suggest that school leaders play a significant role in shaping how teaching roles are perceived and enacted. When leadership structures maintain hierarchical distinctions between ENL and content-area teachers, it not only limits teacher collaboration and autonomy, but it also affects the quality of instruction and support provided to English language learners.

The unequal status of ENL and content-area teachers is not only evident in professional dynamics but is also enacted in daily classroom interactions and reinforced by student perceptions. In a qualitative study, two teachers, a kindergarten and ENL teacher, were interviewed and observed to explore the division of labor and collaborative practices of the co-teaching pair. Results of the study reveal the co-teaching pair consistently used the co-teaching

model of one-teach and one-assist, placing the ENL teacher in a subordinate role (Peercy et al., 2017). Similarly, in a study conducted by Tasdemir and Yildirim (2017), four English language instructors were interviewed to shed light on the characteristics of collaborative teaching. Findings illuminate how students often compare teachers in collaborative settings, and designate one teacher as the main teacher. These instructional barriers highlight the status inequality between ENL and content-area teachers, revealing the marginalization of ENL teachers as assistants. These findings align with Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural theory by emphasizing how status differences between teachers shape the social interactions students are exposed to, ultimately influencing their access to language-rich learning opportunities. This unequal status undermines collaboration and quality of instruction, demonstrating the need for clearer expectations and stronger administrative support to ensure equitable and effective collaboration. As for teachers, it would be best to use a co-teaching model that supports equal status and shared instructional leadership, such as one group: two teach the same content (Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.).

Divergent teaching philosophies and instructional styles also act as major barriers to effective co-teaching partnerships. In a qualitative study by Meskill and Oliveira (2019), two teachers, one chemistry and one ENL in a suburban high school in northeastern New York, were observed, recorded, and briefed to see the impacts of a professional development, which focused on preparing high school teachers to ensure the success of ELLs, on their co-teaching partnership. The results of the study demonstrate that the two teachers developed expertise in three areas: a focus on content and language, smooth integration of modalities, and formative assessment. When attending to content and language, both teachers began with differing professional visions, and their focus shifted over time to prioritize *both* language and content.

The authors highlight that not all co-teaching partnerships have the same success as the pair studied due to differing pedagogical views. Similarly, in a study conducted by Peercy et al. (2017), two teachers, a kindergarten and ENL teacher in a Title I school in the mid-Atlantic area, were investigated on their collaborative practices in their co-teaching partnership, focusing on their shared teaching goals and tools to facilitate collaboration and the division of labor. Findings show that both teachers shared teaching goals and were "on the same page" (p. 223). The ENL teacher highlights the difficulty of co-teaching in a classroom where both teachers have differing teaching views, particularly in a teacher-centered environment. Likewise, Bauler and Kang (2020), emphasize differing teaching styles as one of the persistent barriers in their study of 12 ENL-content area teams. Additionally, in Baran and Demirkasımoğlu's (2024) study of the co-teaching experiences of 37 teachers and four administrators, a source of conflict of co-teaching identified by both teachers and administrators was differences in teaching philosophy. Explained by one administrator on the differing personalities of teachers, "This is not because of the system, but related to teachers' characters" (p. 68). This highlights the personal differences between teachers in a co-teaching partnership, leading to conflict in collaboration.

Differences in teaching styles and philosophies frequently act as a barrier to effective co-teaching between ENL teachers and content-area teachers, often leading to conflict or imbalance in instructional roles. While some partnerships succeed through shared teaching goals or professional development, others struggle when educators hold differing pedagogical beliefs. Drawing on sociocultural theory and positioning theory, such differences in teaching can be understood from the ways teachers' beliefs and experiences are socially constructed through interaction and institutional norms. These differences are shaped by the tools, histories, and social contexts teachers bring to the co-teaching space, as well as how teachers position

themselves, and others position them, in ways reflected by expertise and perceived authority, which impacts how they collaborate and make pedagogical decisions.

Institutional Barriers to Co-Teaching Partnerships

Effective co-teaching between ENL and content-area teachers is essential to meeting the academic and linguistic needs of English language learners. However, research reveals that institutional barriers frequently undermine the success of these collaborative partnerships (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Kibler et al., 2024; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019). These barriers are systemic in nature and extend beyond the classroom, often stemming from school-wide structures and policies that fail to support meaningful co-teaching (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Peercy et al., 2017). Factors such as limited common planning time, fragmented scheduling, lack of professional development, rigid curriculum demands, and inadequate administrative support have all been identified as persistent obstacles. The following sections synthesize key findings from recent studies that explore how these institutional barriers negatively impact co-teaching effectiveness and equity of instruction for English language learners.

Research has widely identified a lack of common planning time as a persistent institutional barrier to effective co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers. Bauler and Kang (2020) identified no planning time as a main challenge to co-teaching. By the third year of the study, 87% of teachers identified no planning time as a significant challenge. Similarly, in Vintan and Gallagher's (2019) qualitative study of four ENL teachers working collaboratively with content-area teachers, participants identified a lack of scheduled planning time as a barrier to collaborative relationships, noting "there is a mutual will to collaborate, but the time to do so is insufficient" (p. 79). In another study of 1,933 leaders of multilingual or EL programs, investigating the prevalence and use of collaborative practices of teachers of ELLs,

findings explained many challenges to collaborative practices, including scheduling collaboration time (Kibler et al., 2024).

This barrier to collaboration can also be seen in a study conducted by Peercy et al. (2017), where a co-teaching pair, one kindergartner and one ENL teacher, were interviewed and observed on their collaborative practices. Findings highlight the need for common planning time as both teachers mention having to figure out instruction "on the fly" (p. 224) when co-planning was unable to occur. Research reveals that the lack of common planning time is a pervasive institutional barrier that significantly hinders the effectiveness of co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers. When teachers are not given adequate time to plan collaboratively, instructional decisions are made spontaneously, limiting opportunities for intentional integration of language and content. This not only strains co-teacher relationships but also compromises the quality of instruction provided to ELLs, ultimately impacting their academic achievement and equitable access to learning. These findings highlight the critical role of administrators in scheduling and prioritizing common planning time to support effective collaboration for co-teaching partnerships. From a sociocultural perspective, common planning time serves as a space for collaborative mediation, where co-teachers can jointly construct knowledge, align instructional goals, and scaffold one another's expertise. These are critical processes for supporting language development and equitable access to academic content for English language learners.

Scheduling conflicts have consistently emerged in research as a key institutional barrier to effective co-teaching partnerships. In Bauler and Kang's (2020) study, one persistent barrier identified was scheduling constraints, with ENL teachers expressing concern working with multiple grades, teachers, and curricula. ENL teachers within the study worked with a minimum

of three classroom teachers, in different grades and/or content areas, with some ENL teachers working with up to eight different teachers. Peercy et al. (2017) explored the collaborative practices of an ENL-content area co-teaching pair where findings highlight the scheduling conflicts of the ENL teaching. Both teachers describe the inconsistency in the ENL teacher's schedule, such as being present for different subjects and being present for only a few days within the week. The ENL teacher notes being pulled for different tasks, such as assisting with student testing, as a reason to her inconsistency. Both teachers articulate the need for a consistent routine in order to carry out successful co-taught lessons. Scheduling constraints may appear differently, such as in Whiting's (2019) study of 71 ENL teachers' experience in mainstream and ESOL classroom settings. Findings show that 25% of teachers have no autonomy over their schedule, such as where and who they work with, explaining that administrators decide without any input from the ENL teacher. In fact, research consistently identifies scheduling conflicts as a major institutional barrier that disrupts the consistency and effectiveness of co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers.

ENL teachers frequently face fragmented schedules, a lack of input in scheduling decisions, and competing responsibilities across multiple grades and classrooms, making it difficult to sustain meaningful collaboration. This pattern highlights a pressing need for administrators to involve ENL teachers in scheduling decisions, as well as prioritizing consistent co-teaching routines. Without structural changes that support predictable collaboration, both teachers and ELLs risk facing unorganized instruction and diminished learning outcomes. When considering a sociocultural perspective, these disruptions to co-teaching routines hinder the collaborative mediation necessary for student learning, as consistent interaction between teachers is necessary to scaffold language and content effectively. When ENL teachers are excluded from

scheduling decisions, the social contexts that support the co-construction of knowledge and equitable language development are weakened.

As evidenced in research, a lack of professional development is another institutional barrier that hinders the effectiveness of co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers. Vintan and Gallagher (2019) found that all four ENL teachers explained there is a lack of professional development opportunities available to support collaboration. One teacher articulated the lack of awareness of the ENL teacher's role by the content-area teacher is a result of a lack of collaborative workshops with classroom teachers. In contrast, Babinski et al. (2024), examined the impact of a professional learning program on 29 ENL teachers' use of collaboration with classroom teachers. Results yield the professional learning program had a statistically significant positive impact on how ENL teachers collaborated. However, the authors call attention to the limited professional development opportunities that include both classroom teachers and ENL teachers to increase collaborative practices that support the learning of ELLs in the classroom. Baran and Demirkasımoğlu (2024), found almost all teachers argued the need for in-service training and workshops about co-teaching to enhance their understanding and implementation.

There is consistent evidence in research demonstrating that insufficient professional development is a major institutional barrier to effective co-teaching between ENL and content-area teachers. To foster successful co-teaching partnerships, school leaders must prioritize sustained, collaborative professional development that include both ENL and content-area teachers. Without intentional training, co-teaching remains unequal and ineffective, ultimately disadvantaging English language learners. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the role of collaboration, scaffolding, and shared tools in the co-construction of knowledge, all of which are

fostered through professional development. When ENL and content-area teachers engage in joint training, they develop shared understandings and practices that support mutual engagement and dialogic instruction, which are key elements for effective co-teaching and language learning.

Curriculum constraints represent another institutional barrier to effective co-teaching, as identified in research on ENL and content-area teacher collaboration. In Bauler and Kang's (2020) three-year long study of 12 ENL-content area teams, teachers argued curriculum constraints as one of the persistent barriers to co-teaching. ENL teachers mention having to work with multiple curricula across various grades and content areas, while content-area teachers highlight the rigor and pace of state curriculums as a frequent barrier, noting the challenge of keeping up with the pacing calendar, making it difficult to adapt and modify the curriculum to provide scaffolds to ELLs. Classroom teachers argue that by working collaboratively with ENL teachers, they will be unable to cover all the curriculum for the academic year. Similarly, in Baran and Demirkasımoğlu's (2024) study, teachers highlighted the intensity of the curriculum as a source of conflict between teachers, noting that there was not enough time to get through the material. Additionally, classroom teachers mentioned their English language co-teacher counterparts were detached, or lacking knowledge, from the general curriculum. In another study surveying 71 ENL teachers' experience in the ESOL and mainstream classroom setting, results showed that ENL teachers found challenges in keeping up with the curricular pacing of lessons in content-area classrooms. They argue this caused limited opportunities to provide comprehensible input for ELLs, feeling as though they were not completely meeting their needs (Whiting, 2019).

Curriculum constraints are a widely documented institutional barrier to co-teaching, and ENL and content-area teachers struggle with pacing demands, curricular alignment, and the

challenge of differentiating instruction for ELLs. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of scaffolding learning within a student's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which requires intentional instructional supports tailored to learners' needs. When rigid curricular pacing prevents ENL and content-area teachers from adapting lessons collaboratively, it limits their ability to provide the scaffolds necessary for ELLs to access and internalize academic content. Without structural adjustments to curriculum pacing and support for collaboration, co-teaching partnerships risk downplaying language instruction and limiting access to content for ELLs. Schools must adopt flexible instructional models, such as two groups: one pre-teach, one teaches alternative information, or two groups: two teach the same content (Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.), that allow teachers to adapt pacing and scaffold instruction without sacrificing curricular goals.

Administrative barriers also emerge as a significant institutional challenge to effective collaboration between ENL and content-area teachers. In Bauler and Kang's (2020) study, teachers describe being randomly assigned by administrators to any-subject matter period in year one, causing anxiety over roles and responsibilities. However, in year two and three, teaching placements were more intentional, allowing teachers to collaborate more effectively, even with other constraints, such as limited co-planning time. Similarly, in Whiting's (2019) study of 71 ENL teachers' experiences in the ESOL and mainstream classroom, 25% of teachers reported that administrators determine where and who they work with without the input from the ENL teacher. Having limited or no control over their placement, ENL teachers argued this undermined their professional status and diminished others' recognition of their expertise. These findings suggest that when administrators make placement decisions without teacher input, it disrupts co-teaching effectiveness by creating uncertainty and limiting opportunities for purposeful

collaboration. The lack of shared decision-making also reinforces power imbalances, positioning ENL teachers as subordinate and devaluing their professional expertise. Administrative barriers significantly hinder effective co-teaching by limiting intentional teacher placement and shared decision-making. While intentional scheduling improved collaboration in later stages of Bauler and Kang's (2020) study, the overall trend reveals a lack of administrative structures that facilitate sustained, equitable co-teaching.

Administrative decisions and support also shape the communication and training structures necessary for co-teaching success. McTigue et al.'s (2023) survey study of 150 school leaders found that 48% of school leaders provided support to promote collaboration to some extent. However, there was a significant absence among school leaders to explicitly acknowledge themselves as contributing to the potential success of collaboration. In another study of 37 teachers and four school administrators' practices of co-teaching, results highlight the style of school administrators as a source of conflict between co-teaching pairs, noting issues such as lack of support from administration, favoring certain teachers, and insufficient flow of information. One teacher articulates:

> Administrators absolutely do not help us. Some teachers are favored. The old teachers are always right. While new teachers are constantly questioned, old teachers' requests are immediately accepted. There is discrimination. (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024, p. 69)

Additionally, participants of the study describe teachers' expectations from school administrators, such as providing in-service training for co-teaching, creating clear expectations and responsibilities, and carefully selecting co-teaching pairs (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024). To foster successful co-teaching, school leaders must move beyond passive support and take an active role in creating systemic structures that prioritize strategic pairing, role clarity, and shared

planning time. Without deliberate administrative action, co-teaching partnerships remain fragmented and ineffective, leaving English language learners underserved. Positioning theory underscores how these administrative actions shape teacher identities and perceived authority. When ENL teachers are excluded from decision-making or denied support, they are positioned as secondary, which undermines their professional agency and hinders effective collaboration.

Overcoming Barriers

Despite well-documented institutional and instructional barriers that hinder effective co-teaching between ENL and content-area teachers, research has shown that these challenges are not insurmountable (Babinski et al., 2024; Meskill & Oliveira, 2019). Many educators actively engage in strategies to overcome such barriers, particularly through professional development opportunities and through the demonstration of resilience and flexibility in teaching. High-quality professional learning opportunities equip teachers with the tools and shared frameworks necessary for successful co-teaching, while adaptive teaching behaviors, such as modifying roles, negotiating planning routines, and adjusting instruction in real time, further enhance their ability to meet the needs of English language learners. This section explores how professional development and teacher adaptability serve as powerful tools for addressing the challenges that often impede co-teaching, ultimately improving instructional collaboration and learning outcomes for ELLs.

Professional development opportunities can play an essential role in overcoming both institutional and instructional barriers to effective co-teaching, fostering improved collaboration and shared instructional practices between ENL and content-area teachers. Meskill and Oliveira (2019) examined how one co-teaching pair was impacted by a professional development initiative, which focused on preparing high school teachers to support the academic success of

ELLs. Findings reveal the co-teaching pair gained expertise in three areas: attending to both language and content, excellent integration of modalities, and formative assessment, ultimately improving their co-teaching partnership and increasing learning outcomes for ELLs. Similarly, in a survey study of 29 ENL teachers from 29 elementary schools within three districts, Babinski et al. (2024) explored the impacts of a professional learning program on teachers' use of evidence-based instructional strategies, collaboration with classroom teachers, and the incorporation of ELLs' cultural wealth into the classroom.

Results yield a statistically significant positive impact of the professional learning program on ENL teaachers' collaboration processes. ENL teachers were more likely to adopt an intentional framework collaborating with classroom teachers to enhance their instruction for ELLs. Likewise, Babinski et al. (2025) investigated the impact of a year-long professional learning program on 39 kindergarten and first grade classroom teachers, and 106 English language learners. The professional learning program focused on supporting English language learners' language and literacy skills, including evidence-based practices, a collaboration model, and strengths-based instructional approach. Results of the study show a statistically significant positive impact on the teachers' collaborative planning and processes with their ENL teachers. Additionally, there was a statistically significant positive impact on the language and literacy learning of ELLs whose teachers participated in the professional learning program.

Professional development has consistently shown to enhance co-teacher partnerships, ultimately benefiting English language learners. High-quality, sustained professional learning leads to improved collaboration between ENL and content-area teachers, adoption of evidence-based practices, and measureable gains in learning outcomes for ELLs. Sociocultural theory also explains how professional development acts as a mediated learning tool for teachers, providing

shared cultural and instructional tools that scaffold teacher collaboration within their zone of proximal development. These findings underscore the need for school and district leaders to prioritize and invest in sustained, collaborative professional development programs for both ENL and content-area teachers. Doing so not only equips teachers with the tools to co-teach effectively, but also directly contributes to closing achievement gaps for ELLs.

Despite the presence of institutional and instructional barriers, many teachers demonstrate resilience and flexibility in their co-teaching practices to support collaboration and meet the needs of English language learners. Bauler and Kang (2020) highlight how teachers developed resilient practices despite constant barriers to co-teaching. These resilient practices include co-teaching in certain content areas, such as writing, science, and social studies, negotiating different roles and expertise, and the full inclusion of ELLs, providing language supports for all students regardless of the level of language proficiency. Similarly, in Vintan and Gallagher's (2019) study, teachers demonstrated flexibility in the face of persistent barriers, such as unpredictable collaborative planning time. Using collaboration as a pedagogical tool as a means to enhance instruction and support for ELLs, teachers demonstrated flexibility by adapting their instructional roles and strategies based on the needs of students in the moment, available resources, and real-time classroom dynamics. Likewise, Peercy et al. (2017) underscores the importance of flexibility in a co-teaching dynamic. Despite persistent barriers, such as inconsistent planning time and testing disruptions, the co-teaching pair restructured their schedules multiple times, adapted lessons "on the fly" (p. 224), and developed shared instructional goals and tools, such as a lesson planning tool, to support meaningful co-teaching.

As demonstrated by research, co-teachers who exhibit resilience and flexibility, such as adjusting roles, adapting instruction in real time, and negotiating shared goals, are better

equipped to overcome persistent institutional and instructional barriers. Flexible co-teaching practices require teachers to continually reposition themselves in relation to one another and their students, as supported by positioning theory. Additionally, sociocultural theory supports these findings by emphasizing that such co-constructed practices, like shared tools and negotiated roles, emerge through social interaction and serve as scaffolds that enhance instruction within teachers' and students' ZPD. These findings suggest that fostering adaptable co-teaching practices can mitigate systemic challenges, leading to more equitable and effective instruction for English language learners. Therefore, school leaders should intentionally cultivate professional cultures that value and support teacher adaptability as a means to increase learning outcomes for ELLs.

Promoting ELL Success Through Instructional Practices

As schools seek effective ways to support English language learners in mainstream classrooms, research increasingly points to co-teaching as a powerful instructional model for promoting student success (Goddard & Kim, 2018; Bauler et al., 2019; Bauler & Kang, 2020). Co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers have been shown to enhance instructional practices, particularly through differentiation, shared expertise, and language-rich collaboration, while also improving academic and social-emotional outcomes for ELLs (McTigue et al., 2023; Tasdemir & Yildirim, 2017; Whiting, 2019). This section examines the instructional strategies and student learning benefits that emerge from effective co-teaching partnerships, highlighting how collaboration between educators can promote more inclusive, equitable, and responsive teaching.

Research has identified a range of instructional practices and positive teaching outcomes emerging from co-teacher partnerships that effectively support the learning of English language

learners in mainstream classrooms. In a large-scale study conducted by Goddard and Kim (2018), 1,623 elementary teachers across 95 elementary schools were surveyed on their collaborative practices and their reported use of differentiated instruction. Results of the study demonstrate a positive statistically significant connection between teacher collaboration and their reported use of differentiated instruction, indicating that teachers who participate in collaborative practices were more likely to differentiate instruction. Similarly, in a survey study of 150 school leaders by McTigue et al. (2023), results show that 64% of school leaders believed co-teaching would result in greater student learning to great extent or to a very great extent, with 53% noting that two teachers can provide the group with more differentiated instruction. Because differentiated instruction is essential to the success of English language learners, co-teaching partnerships provide a valuable framework for implementing this approach effectively.

In addition to this instructional strategy, co-teaching partnerships offer teachers a way to share tools and knowledge with one another, boosting the learning of ELLs. Bauler and Kang (2020) highlight how some co-teaching teams strengthened by year three of the study, as teachers share their expertise and learn from one another. One content-area teacher explains:

> My ENL teacher is wonderful to work with. We constantly collaborate on assignments and topics which need to be taught. She reminds me of language modifications we need to make so that all of the students, ENL as well as general, can have more access (p. 347).

Similarly, Peercy et al.'s (2017) most notable results describe the co-constructed learning of the co-teaching pair. Both teachers shared their expertise and bounced ideas off one another to create an effective co-teaching partnership that addressed both language and content. While the ENL teacher helped break down language, the classroom teacher helped connect language with the developmental and cognitive needs of the students. In another study of an ENL-content area co-

teaching partnership, the authors sought out how the collaborative practices of the pair were impacted by a professional development program. The results of the study demonstrate how both teachers shared their expertise with one another to create an effective co-teaching partnership, in particular attending to both content and language. Both teachers began with differing professional visions, but shifted their focus overtime to incorporate both content and language instruction. The content-area teacher explains after collaborating with the ENL teacher, she now considers not only the content she teaches, but how to present it and the language used (Meskill & Oliveira, 2019).

Research demonstrates that co-teaching partnerships promote the use of differentiated instruction and foster the co-construction of expertise between teachers, ultimately enhancing instructional quality and supporting the academic success of English language learners. These findings are grounded in sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process. Co-teaching fosters shared construction of knowledge through collaborative dialogue, scaffolding, and joint problem-solving, allowing teachers to mediate language and content in ways that enhance English language learners' access to instruction. These findings suggest that co-teaching is not only an instructional model, but a pedagogical asset that enables teachers to draw on one another's strengths, adapt instruction, and create more inclusive, linguistically responsive learning environments that enhances equity and achievement for ELLs.

Co-teaching not only enhances instructional practices but also leads to improved student learning outcomes, particularly for English language learners. In a study conducted by Bauler et al. (2019), a co-teaching pair, one ENL and one first-grade teacher, were interviewed and observed to explore how their collaborative practices fostered writing development in a linguistically diverse class. Findings demonstrate that when both teachers provided opportunities

for talking and sharing, as well as modeling of academic language and partner talk, students were able to mimic their partner talk dialogue, as well as provided useful peer feedback on each other's writing. Similarly, in Bauler and Kang's (2020) study, results yield 83.3% of teachers indicated all students collaborated more when in a co-teaching environment. Other prominent results show 62.5% of teachers noting English language learners increased dialogue in the classroom, as well as 58.3% found improved writing for English language learners in a co-taught classroom. In another study of 71 ENL teachers' experiences in both the ESOL and mainstream classroom, teachers identified benefits to student outcomes when collaborating in the mainstream classroom, most notably not missing content in the mainstream classroom, as well as being seen as a member of the classroom, ultimately boosting their confidence (Whiting, 2019). Likewise, Tasdemir and Yildirim (2017) explore the characteristics of collaborative teaching through interviews of four English language teachers. The teachers highlight the benefits to collaboration, arguing it enriches the learning experience of students by incorporating various teaching styles, techniques, and personalities. McTigue et al. (2023) found 64% of school leaders believed to great extent or a very great extent that co-teaching would result in greater student learning.

Across multiple studies, research shows that co-teaching not only fosters increased collaboration and language-rich instruction, but also leads to measurable improvements in English language learners' writing, oral language use, confidence, and engagement. These findings align with sociocultural theory, which posits that learning is mediated through social interaction and language use. Co-teaching creates linguistically rich environments where English language learners engage in dialogue, peer interaction, and modeled practices, supporting both their cognitive development and language acquisition within their ZPD. These findings underscore the argument that co-teaching is a pedagogically powerful model that enhances

academic and social-emotional outcomes for ELLs by creating inclusive classrooms where students are both supported and empowered to participate meaningfully in their learning.

Summary

Using the research presented, it is evident that co-teaching between ENL and content-area teachers holds significant potential to support the academic and linguistic success of English language learners. However, a range of institutional and instructional barriers continue to limit the effectiveness of these partnerships. Issues such as inconsistent scheduling, lack of planning time, unequal teacher roles, and insufficient professional development all contribute to fragmented collaboration and reduced instructional quality. Moreover, school leaders often fail to include ENL teachers in decision-making, further marginalizing their professional expertise. Despite these challenges, research also highlights the resilience and flexibility of many teachers who are able to foster more inclusive learning environments through shared planning, co-constructed tools, and adaptive strategies. To fully realize the benefits of co-teaching, schools must invest in equitable structures, professional learning opportunities, and collaborative cultures that promote shared responsibility and linguistically responsive instruction for all learners.

Using the research as evidence, a professional development workshop for ENL and content-area co-teachers prior to the start of the academic year is essential to support more equitable and effective co-teaching partnerships. The goal of this workshop is to build shared understanding of co-teaching models, clarify the distinctions between content and language objectives, and equip teaching pairs with practical tools to align their instructional goals. The session would include an overview of various co-teaching models, allowing participants to reflect on which model best fits their instructional context. Teachers would then engage in activities to differentiate between content and language objectives, followed by collaborative

planning time to apply a co-teaching planning tool designed to foster alignment in instructional strategies, role distribution, and student supports. This professional development not only encourages mutual learning and shared accountability but also lays the groundwork for sustained, high-quality co-teaching that promotes academic and linguistic success for English language learners.

Chapter 3: Description of the Professional Development

Research in Chapter 2 has demonstrated that the success or failure of ENL-content area co-teaching partnerships is shaped by intertwined institutional factors, such as limited or inconsistent common planning time, fragmented schedules, insufficient collaborative professional development, curriculum pacing pressures, and uneven administrative support (e.g., Babinski et al., Kibler et al., 2024; 2024; McTigue et al., 2023;), and instructional factors, such as unclear and unequal teacher roles, subordinate positioning of ENL teachers, and divergent teaching philosophies (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Bauler & Kang, 2020; Meskill & Oliveira, 2019). These conditions regularly push teams toward last minute, one-teach/one-assist arrangements that marginalize ENL expertise and reduce opportunities to integrate language and content in planned, differentiated ways. In response, I propose a targeted professional development workshop – *Bridging Expertise: Strengthening ENL-Content Area Co-Teaching Through Models, Objectives, and Planning Tools* – paired with a collaborative co-planning tool that fosters shared decision-making, parity, and integration of language within content instruction. The goal of this professional development, which is created for ENL-content area co-teaching pairs in grades Kindergarten through 12, is to equip teachers with a sustainable collaborative planning tool that could be used year-round to ensure equitable teaching roles, shared decision-making, and explicit language supports for English language learners.

Agenda of Events

The *Bridging Expertise* professional development workshop will take place on September 2nd, 2025, during the Buffalo Public Schools' required Superintendent Conference Day, where all teachers in the district are required to partake in professional development opportunities prior to the start of the academic year. The training will be held in the cafeteria of an elementary/middle

school and is open to Kindergarten through 12th grade ENL and content-area co-teaching pairs across the district. This single-session professional development will last approximately 90 minutes, allowing teachers to engage in both guided learning and collaborative planning, and will be facilitated by myself (ENL teacher).

The session follows a sequenced agenda designed to address persistent institutional and instructional barriers to successful co-teaching partnerships, specifically the lack of common planning time (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Peercy et al., 2017), role ambiguity and inequality (Kibler et al., 2024; Whiting, 2019), the absence of professional development (Babinski et al., 2024; Vintan & Gallgher, 2019), and divergent teaching styles (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Meskill & Oliveira, 2019). Teachers will begin by reviewing the persistent barriers that will be addressed and why co-teaching should be used as a teaching model. Then, participants will engage in a gallery walk of seven co-teaching models (See Appendices B, C, D, E, F, G, & H) where they will take notes on a co-teaching model hand out (See Appendix A) with their group. Afterward, participants will review content and language objectives and engage in writing their own content and language objectives (See Appendices I & J).

Next, I will explain the purpose and key components of the collaborative planning tool where co-teaching pairs will then co-construct an actual lesson using the planning tool (See Appendix K) that reflects shared decision-making, clarity of roles, and explicit language supports, that could potentially be used in the upcoming academic year. Afterward, participants will individually reflect upon their teaching, such as their strengths, needs, routines, and preferences, to share with their co-teacher in order to build trust and align teaching practices/styles (See Appendix L). Lastly, participants will individually complete an exit ticket

(See Appendix M) on what changes they will make to their co-teaching partnership, what supports they still need, and any remaining questions they may have.

The intended outcomes of this professional development are for teachers to identify and apply co-teaching models, distinguish content and language objectives, and use a collaborative planning tool to align instruction and goals. With these intended outcomes, co-teaching pairs will have gained knowledge on the various co-teaching models, fostering more equitable roles and shared responsibility when correctly applied, making both teachers' expertise visible and shared when distinguishing content and language objectives, and creating a dedicated co-planning space by using the collaborative planning tool.

Gallery Walk of Co-Teaching Models

The first key activity of the professional development is a gallery walk of the seven co-teaching models, which invites participants to explore, compare, and reflect upon various collaborative models. Each model will be displayed on a poster (See Appendices B, C, D, E, F, G & H) and hung around the cafeteria. With a group, participants will use their co-teaching models hand out (See Appendix A) where they will write the description of the model, advantages, challenges, and what the model is best used for. These models are based on the work of Dove and Honigsfeld (2010) and are intended to disrupt the common default model of one-teach/one-assist, which research consistently associates with role inequality and the marginalization of ENL teachers (Kibler et al., 2024; Whiting, 2019). Studies have shown that when ENL teachers are positioned as subordinate, their expertise in language development is underutilized, and their professional status is diminished in the eyes of both students and colleagues (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; McTigue et al., 2023; Tasdemir & Yildirim, 2017).

By engaging in the gallery walk, teachers are encouraged to reflect on their current practices, identify which models they commonly rely on, and consider alternative structures that allow for shared instructional leadership to improve the outcomes of students. This activity also directly addresses role ambiguity, a barrier frequently cited by co-teaching pairs who are unsure of how to divide instructional labor (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Giles & Yazan, 2023; Peercy et al., 2017; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019). As participants interact with each model during the gallery walk and annotate strengths, limitations, and opportunities for use in their specific content areas, they begin to build shared vocabulary for collaboration. This reflection fosters mutual understanding of how roles can be flexibly and equitably negotiated depending on lesson goals, which is a necessary shift for establishing parity in co-teaching relationships. Ultimately, the gallery walk promotes critical dialogue, challenges status-based assumptions, and provides a foundation for intentional co-teaching model selection.

Distinguishing Content and Language Objectives

Another core activity in the professional development session is the explicit distinction and construction of content and language objectives, an instructional strategy that addresses multiple co-teaching challenges identified in the research. Within the session, I will first make distinctions between content and language objectives, providing a handout of verbs to use when creating both types of objectives (See Appendix I). Participants with then individually construct their own content and language objectives using sentence frames on a hand out (See Appendix J) and share them with their co-teacher, where they will receive and provide feedback, making adjustments as needed. Distinguishing these objectives makes both teachers' expertise visible and essential. While the content-area teacher ensures alignment with discipline-specific standards, the ENL teacher contributes critical knowledge of language acquisition and scaffolds

needed for English language learners. As noted in the literature, this type of shared planning emphasizes instructional equality and disrupts the frequent perception of ENL teachers as peripheral supporters (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024, Whiting, 2019). When language objectives are embedded in lessons, role ambiguity is reduced, because both teachers have clearly defined, discipline-specific contributions to make (Kibler et al., 2024; Vintan & Gallagher 2019).

The research underscores that the integration of content and language goals enhances differentiation, allowing lessons to address varied linguistic proficiencies and academic needs simultaneously (Goddard & Kim, 2018; Meskill & Oliveira, 2019). This differentiation is essential not only for equitable instruction but also for improving student outcomes, particularly among ELLs whose success relies on access to both content and language learning (Peercy et al., 2017). By guiding participants through real examples, a verb bank, and structured practice using sentence frames, this activity equips co-teaching pairs with the tools to align their instruction, provide their shared expertise, and intentionally support all learners.

Collaborative Planning Tool

The most essential activity in the professional development session is the introduction and guided use of the collaborative planning tool, which operationalizes the pedagogical shifts encouraged throughout the workshop. I will first begin by explaining the purpose and key components of the planning tool. Participants will then co-construct an actual lesson with their co-teacher using the collaborative planning tool (See Appendix K) to potentially use in the upcoming academic year. A persistent institutional barrier identified in the literature is the lack of common planning time for ENL and content-area teachers, a challenge that leads to fragmented or last-minute lesson planning and increases the likelihood of defaulting to unequal

teaching roles (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Kibler et al., 2024; Peercy et al., 2017; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019). This planning tool directly addresses this issue by offering a streamlined, shared space for co-planning, enabling teachers to engage in structured decision-making even during brief or informal planning interactions. Rooted in Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory, this tool promotes mediated collaboration where teachers co-construct meaning and develop instructional plans through social interaction, negotiation, and mutual reflection, which are practices essential for effective co-teaching partnerships (Goddard & Kim, 2018; Meskill & Oliveira, 2019).

This tool prompts co-teaching partnerships to align content and language objectives, ensuring that instruction is purposefully designed to meet academic standards while also supporting ELLs' language development, a strategy shown to enhance differentiation and student achievement (Peercy et al., 2017). This tool also requires teachers to explicitly define their instructional roles and co-teaching model choice, therefore confronting role ambiguity and reducing the risk of ENL teachers being positioned as assistants (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024, Whiting, 2019). Furthermore, the tool includes fields for key vocabulary, language supports, assessments, and materials, embedding linguistic scaffolds into the planning process from the beginning rather than as an afterthought. In this way, the collaborative planning tool serves not only as a practical organizer but also as a framework for equity, ensuring shared responsibility, visibility of expertise, and thoughtful integration of language and content in every co-taught lesson.

Reflection of Teaching Practices

The final activity of the professional development session invites co-teaching pairs to engage in a partner communication and reflection exercise, designed to foster open dialogue

about their collaborative dynamics, teaching styles, and expectations moving forward. Within this activity, participants will individually reflect upon the questions in a hand out (See Appendix L) regarding their teaching practices, strengths, areas of improvement, routines, preferences, goals, and addressing differences/challenges that arise within the partnership.

Afterward, teachers will share with their co-teacher, with the goal of building trust and clarifying their working relationship. This activity is grounded in research identifying divergent teaching styles and philosophies as a significant instructional barrier that can disrupt co-teaching partnerships (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Bauler & Kang, 2020; Meskill & Oliveira, 2019; Peercy et al., 2017). When educators hold different assumptions about instructional priorities, classroom roles, or the purpose of co-teaching, misalignment can lead to misunderstandings, uneven workload distribution, and strained relationships. By creating structured space for partners to reflect on their own roles, positionalities, and beliefs, this activity helps surface these differences in a constructive, proactive manner.

Closing Activity

The final material used in the professional development session is an exit ticket (See Appendix M), which asks participants to individually reflect on what they have learned and commit one specific change they will implement in their co-teaching practices to improve collaboration and student outcomes. This written reflection also prompts participants to identify any remaining questions they have and any additional supports they feel are necessary to continue applying the session's tools and strategies effectively. By asking teachers to set an actionable goal and articulate their ongoing needs, the exit ticket supports self-directed growth while also providing the multilingual department with data to inform future coaching or follow-

up sessions. It reinforces the notion that co-teaching is a process of continuous learning, where improvement depends on both personal commitment and institutional support.

Each activity embedded in the professional development session is carefully designed to address the institutional and instructional barriers to effective co-teaching partnerships identified in the literature. The gallery walk of co-teaching models confronts role inequality and ambiguity by broadening teachers' understandings of their collaborative options beyond the one-teach/one-assist model (Kibler et al., 2024; Whiting, 2019). The objective writing activity promotes instructional equity and supports differentiation by requiring both teachers to bring their expertise into the lesson planning process (Goddard & Kim, 2018; Peercy et al., 2017). The collaborative planning tool creates a shared space for aligning content and language goals, assigning instructional roles, and embedding language supports, while overcoming the persistent challenge of limited planning time (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019). The partner communication and reflection activity addresses philosophical differences and builds trust between co-teaching partners (Meskill & Oliveira, 2019), while the exit ticket promotes reflection and planning for continued growth. Collectively, these materials and activities offer a sustainable framework for improving ENL-content area co-teaching partnerships and increasing equitable access to rigorous, language-rich instruction for English language learners.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore the institutional and instructional factors that impact co-teaching partnerships between English as a New Language (ENL) and content-area teachers. Though New York State Commissioner's Regulation Part 154 mandates integrated services, including co-teaching, the realities in schools often reflect fragmented implementation. ENL teachers are frequently treated as assistants rather than equals (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Kibler et al., 2024), collaboration time is minimal or absent (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Peercy et al., 2017), and professional development that supports these partnerships remains scarce (Babinski et al., 2024; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019). To investigate this problem, the research question was posed: What institutional and instructional factors shape the success or failure of co-teaching partnerships between ENL teachers and content-area teachers? This research examined existing literature on key challenges and effective strategies, ultimately leading to the design of a professional development workshop and collaborative planning tool to enhance co-teaching partnerships.

Summary of the Reviewed Literature

The literature reviewed revealed that co-teaching success is undermined by multiple institutional and instructional barriers. Institutionally, lack of common planning time, inconsistent scheduling, insufficient professional development, and weak administrative structures emerged as dominant themes (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Kibler et al., 2024; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019). Instructionally, challenges such as unequal teacher roles, role ambiguity, and divergent teaching philosophies consistently impede collaboration (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Peercy et al., 2017; Whiting, 2019). Drawing on positioning theory and sociocultural theory, the professional development session "Bridging Expertise: Strengthening ENL-Content

Area Co-Teaching Through Models, Objectives, and Planning Tools" was designed to address these challenges by providing tools and structures for shared decision-making, role clarification, and meaningful integration of language and content instruction.

One key takeaway the emerged from the research is that inequality of teacher roles is a major instructional barrier. ENL teachers are frequently positioned as subordinate to content-area teachers, which undermines collaboration and marginalizes their expertise, leading to imbalanced responsibilities in the classroom (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024, Kibler et al., 2024; Whiting, 2019). The co-teaching models gallery walk within the professional development directly addresses this issue by introducing a range of co-teaching models that promote shared instructional leadership. By learning about and selecting from equitable models, co-teachers are encouraged to move beyond the common and problematic one-teach/one-assist model, affirming the instructional value of both partners. Additionally, the content and language objective writing exercises incorporated in the professional development were designed to make both teachers' expertise visible and equal, directly challenging traditional power dynamics and addressing role ambiguity.

Another key takeaway from the research is the absence of common planning time, which is a pervasive institutional challenge. As teachers reported having to figure out instruction right on the spot due to lack of common planning time, this often lead to fragmented instruction and diminished outcomes for English language learners (Bauler & Kang, 2020; Peercy et al., 2017; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019). The collaborative planning tool introduced in the workshop directly addresses this issue by offering a streamlined and structured format for co-planning lessons that align both language and content goals, and making role responsibilities explicit, all of which

reflect sociocultural mediation and promote equity in instruction, while facilitating productive planning even when time is limited.

Divergent teaching philosophies impede co-teaching practices is another key takeaway from the presented research. Differences in teaching styles and pedagogical beliefs often cause tension and misalignment between ENL and content-area co-teachers (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Bauler & Kang, 2020; Meskill & Oliveira, 2019). To address this, the professional development includes a partner reflection and communication activity that prompts teachers to openly discuss their instructional preferences, routines, and expectations. This intentional dialogue fosters mutual understanding and trust, laying the groundwork for pedagogical alignment and more coherent instruction.

The last key takeaway from the literature is that professional development plays a critical role in overcoming barriers. As a lack of professional development has been found to be a persistent institutional challenge to effective co-teaching partnerships (Babinski et al., 2024; Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Vintan & Gallagher, 2019), targeted, collaborative professional development has been shown to statistically improve co-teaching practices, teacher collaboration, and student learning outcomes (Babinski et al., 2024; Babinski et al., 2025; Meskill & Oliveira, 2019). The “Bridging Expertise” professional development session was designed with these findings in mind. By focusing on co-teaching models, content and language objectives, and shared planning tools, the sessional provides both theoretical grounding and practical strategies that teachers can apply immediately. It also models the very collaborative practices it seeks to instill, creating a scaffolded, socioculturally informed space for teacher learning and growth.

In conclusion, the findings of this research emphasize that improving co-teaching partnerships requires intentional, theory-driven interventions that addresses both institutional and instructional barriers. By equipping teachers with a shared planning tool, guided reflection, and models for equitable collaboration, schools can better fulfill the promise of integrated instruction and improve the academic outcomes for English language learners.

Implications for Student Learning

The findings from this research have significant implications for student learning, particularly for English language learners who rely on integrated instruction to access both academic content and language development. When co-teaching partnerships are equitable, collaborative, and well-structured, ELLs benefit from lessons that are differentiated, language-rich, and cognitively engaging. Studies by Goddard and Kim (2018) and McTigue et al. (2023) demonstrate that collaborative teaching practices lead to increased use of differentiated instruction, which is an essential approach for meeting the diverse needs of ELLs. Additionally, Peercy et al. (2017) and Bauler et al. (2019) highlight how effective co-teaching creates opportunities for modeling academic language, peer interaction, and responsive feedback, all of which promote both language acquisition and content mastery.

Vygotsky's (1978) SCT further reinforces the importance of these practices by emphasizing that learning occurs through meaningful social interaction and mediation within a learner's ZPD. Co-teaching structures that include shared planning, mutual scaffolding, and aligned content and language goals foster the kinds of interactions that support both language development and cognitive growth (Cherry, 2024). When both teachers contribute their expertise, one in content knowledge and the other in language acquisition, students are more likely to engage in dialogue, participate in collaborative tasks, and access complex academic

material (Whiting, 2019). Ultimately, improving co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers enhances the quality of instruction ELLs receive, leading to greater academic achievement, increased confidence, and more inclusive learning environments.

Implications for Teaching

The literature underscores the need for a shift in how co-teaching is conceptualized and enacted in classrooms serving English language learners. When ENL and content-area teachers engage in equitable partnerships that include shared planning, defined roles, and mutual instructional responsibility, teaching becomes more purposeful, collaborative, and responsive. The research shows that many teaching pairs position ENL teachers as assistants, or default to the one-teach/one-assist model due to unclear expectations, lack of training, and insufficient planning time (Baran & Demirkasımoğlu, 2024; Whiting, 2019). However, through targeted professional development and the use of collaborative planning tools, such as the one presented within the “Bridging Expertise” professional development session, teachers can move beyond this default and implement co-teaching models that promote equality of instruction, alignment of content and language goals, and greater differentiation (Goddard & Kim, 2018; Kibler et al., 2024; Peercy et al., 2017).

From a sociocultural perspective, teaching is not just an individual act, but rather a socially mediated process in which both teachers learn from one another through dialogue, shared tools, and negotiated meaning (Cherry, 2024). This implies that when co-teachers have time, structures, and training to collaborate meaningfully, their instructional practices become more integrated and reflective of their combined expertise. Positioning theory also highlights that when ENL teachers are treated as equal contributors, their professional identity and instructional impact are boosted. As a result, teaching becomes more dynamic, inclusive, and linguistically

responsive to better serve all learners, particularly ELLs who depend on both language-rich and content-embedded instruction.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the professional development session and collaborative planning tool proposed provide a strong foundation for improving co-teaching partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers, they represent only an initial step toward systemic change. Future research could examine the long-term effects of this professional development model on both teacher practices and student outcomes. For instance, a longitudinal study tracking how co-teaching pairs implement and sustain equitable practices throughout the school year would offer valuable insights into the effectiveness and durability of the collaborative planning tool and training. Additionally, studies might explore how the use of specific co-teaching models (e.g., One group: Two teach the same content, or Two groups: One pre-teaches, one teaches alternative information) influence instructional quality and ELL achievement across various academic subjects.

Another important direction for future research involves examining how co-teaching practices differ across grade levels, content areas, and school contexts. It is possible that ENL-content area co-teaching partnerships in early elementary classrooms function differently than in secondary discipline-specific classes, such as science or social studies, where rigor of content and instructional pacing may vary. Similarly, school demographics, such as the proportion of ELLs, access to resources, or community language backgrounds, may impact how co-teaching is implemented and perceived. Comparative studies across different settings could offer a better understanding of the conditions that enable or hinder effective collaboration. Lastly, as teaching philosophies and interpersonal dynamics were identified as a significant barrier to effective co-

teaching partnerships, future research might investigate strategies for matching co-teaching pairs based on instructional compatibility or the impacts of coaching models the guide teams through reflective practices. These areas of inquiry could strengthen the understanding of how to build sustainable, equitable co-teaching partnerships that fully support English language learners.

Final Thoughts

Strengthening co-teacher partnerships between ENL and content-area teachers is essential to implementing New York State Commissioner's Regulation Part 154 integrated service model and to advancing equitable outcomes for English language learners. There are a variety of institutional and instructional barriers, such as lack of common planning time, role ambiguity and inequality, inconsistent administrative support, fragmented schedules, insufficient professional learning, and divergent teaching styles that continue to undermine the effectiveness of co-teaching partnerships across schools. To address these challenges, the literature was translated into a practical response: a targeted professional development session and a collaborative planning tool, designed to foster equitable roles, shared decision-making, and purposeful integration of language and content instruction. When co-teaching partnerships are strengthened through structured collaboration and mutual recognition of expertise, ELLs are better positioned to thrive academically and socially. Moving forward, school districts must invest in sustainable systems that prioritize collaborative planning, ongoing training, and leaderships support for co-teaching partnerships. Ultimately, this work argues that improving co-teaching is not supplemental but foundational. It is how districts move from policy to practice, how teachers grow as professionals, and how English language learners gain the instructional opportunities they deserve.

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Appendix A

Gallery Walk Hand Out

Co-Teaching Model: _____ _____ _____	Description:
Advantages	
Challenges	
Best Used For	

Appendix B

Gallery Walk Poster: Co-Teaching Model 1

One Group: One Leads, One "Teaches on Purpose"

Description: One teacher leads instruction while the other provides intentional support (e.g. scaffolding, feedback, clarification, mini-lessons). Roles should rotate to promote parity and shared responsibility.

Advantages: Supports ELLs with real-time scaffolds and feedback, enables monitoring and responsive teaching

Challenges: Risk of unequal planning or helper roles if not rotated, may not fully develop students' language without intentional support

Best Used For: Short direct instruction (5-10 minutes), activating prior knowledge, and demonstrating a strategy

(Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.)

Appendix C

Gallery Walk Poster: Co-Teaching Model 2

One Group: Two Teach the Same Content

Description: Both teachers co-lead instruction, each bringing their strengths to present content and language support simultaneously. They model dialogue, varied strategies, and multiple modalities to enhance comprehension.

Advantages: Rich, multi-modal instruction for diverse learners, allows division of roles (content focus vs. language/literacy support), models academic dialogue and thinking processes

Challenges: Requires detailed co-planning and content-language coordination, smooth transitions and nonverbal cues are essential, takes time to build comfort with shared roles and strategies

Best Used For: Joint direct instruction, strategy modeling (problem solving, think-alouds), content-language integration

(Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.)

Appendix D

Gallery Walk Poster: Co-Teaching Model 3

One Group: One Teaches, One Assesses

Description: One teacher leads the lesson while the other circulates to assess student learning, language use, or engagement, while using checklists, rubrics, or anecdotal notes.

Advantages: Enables authentic assessment of ELLs' language and content learning, provides valuable data to inform future instruction, allows targeted observation of students or teaching strategies

Challenges: May appear unbalanced if one teacher consistently leads, requires collaborative planning to ensure shared instructional responsibility, should be used strategically and not over-relied upon

Best Used For: Observing student dialogue, language use, and engagement, formative assessment during group or partner work, gathering data to adjust instruction or differentiate in future lessons

(Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.)

Appendix E

Gallery Walk Poster: Co-Teaching Model 4

Two Groups: Two Teach the Same Content

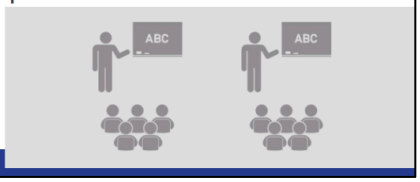
Description: The class is split into two groups (by content level, language proficiency, or heterogeneously), with each teacher instructing the same content using different materials, strategies, or pacing.

Advantages: Lower student-teacher ratio allows for more individualized support, increases student participation and risk-taking, supports differentiation based on language or academic needs

Challenges: Requires careful planning and coordination of materials, needs strong classroom management and mutual trust, potential for noise distraction when both groups are active

Best Used For: Differentiating instruction by proficiency or learning style, teaching the same skill using different methods (e.g. modeling vs. hands-on), rotating groups so students learn from both teachers' approaches

(Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.)



Appendix F

Gallery Walk Poster: Co-Teaching Model 5

Two Groups: One Pre-Teaches, One Teaches Alternative Information

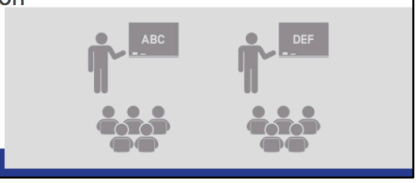
Description: One teacher works with a small group to pre-teach key vocabulary or background knowledge, while the other engages the rest of the class with extension or enrichment activities. Groups then reconvene for the main lesson.

Advantages: Builds confidence and preparedness for students needing support, allows for targeted differentiation of content and vocabulary, strengthens comprehension before exposure to grade-level material

Challenges: Risk of stigmatizing students if grouping is not flexible, requires balance to ensure equal access to rigorous instruction, must consider both language and content proficiency when grouping

Best Used For: Front-loading vocabulary and key ideas, picture walks, text previews, or graphic organizers for comprehension, supporting small groups before whole-class instruction

(Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.)



Appendix G

Gallery Walk Poster: Co-Teaching Model 6

Two Groups: One Reteaches, One Teaches Alternative Information

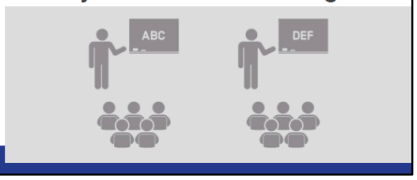
Description: Students are split into two groups: one receives targeted reteaching or intervention, while the other engages in enrichment activities or explores alternative content. Based on formative assessment data, this model offers flexible, needs-based support.

Advantages: Provides timely intervention based on formative assessment, supports differentiated instruction in small groups, helps ELLs master key content and skills

Challenges: May require more than two groups to meet all needs, risk of labeling if grouping is not flexible and intentional, time required for reteaching and enrichment may differ by group

Best Used For: Immediate review of misunderstood content, small-group instruction tailored to students' academic and linguistic needs, reinforcing disciplinary or literacy skills before moving forward

(Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.)



Appendix H

Gallery Walk Poster: Co-Teaching Model 7

Multiple Groups: Two Monitor and Teach

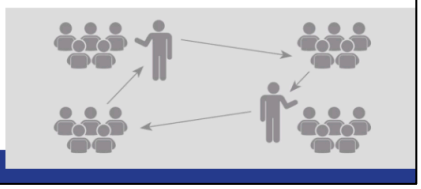
Description: Students rotate through flexible learning stations where both teachers either lead mini-lessons or circulate to monitor progress, clarify concepts, or provide differentiated support. This model allows for high customization of instruction based on students' needs.

Advantages: Promotes engagement and interaction through varied tasks, supports all four language domains (reading, writing, listening, speaking), ideal for tiered instruction and differentiation

Challenges: Requires strong organization and clear directions, students may feel rushed or distracted during station transitions, risk of labeling if groups are always homogeneous

Best Used For: Learning stations, guided reading/writing, or collaborative problem-solving, hands-on tasks and peer learning, mini-lessons that rotate by skill, strategy, or language proficiency

(Dove & Honigsfeld, n.d.)



Appendix I

Verbs for Content and Language Objectives Hand Out

Verbs for Content Objectives	Verbs for Language Objectives
Identify Solve Investigate Create Select Draw conclusions about Hypothesize Distinguish	Listen for Write Define Retell Compare Summarize Rehearse Persuade

Verbs for Content Objectives – Bloom's Taxonomy	Verbs for Language Objectives
Knowledge: list, identify, memorize, locate, label, define, match, name **Comprehension:** recall, summarize, explain, rephrase, demonstrate **Application:** compare, contrast, predict, classify, categorize, apply, make, solve **Synthesis:** build a model, compose, construct, combine, elaborate, create, design, test, predict, infer, hypothesize, invent **Evaluation:** recommend, justify, defend, support, select, choose	**Reading:** preview, read aloud, skim, identify, explore, find specific information **Writing:** summarize, list, create sentences, write, contrast, classify, record, state and justify **Listening:** role play, identify, listen, recognize, point, show, follow directions **Speaking:** discuss, name, ask, answer, explain, tell, repeat, respond, pronounce, state, summarize, use **Vocabulary Development:** define isolated words, define words in context, find words and construct meaning

Appendix J

Create Your Own Content and Language Objectives Worksheet

Directions: Using the sentence frames and verbs for writing content and language objectives handout, create one content and one language objective for one of the following topics. Check your work with your co-teacher for feedback and revise if needed. (5 minutes)

ELA: Identifying theme	Social Studies: American Revolution
Math: Determining slope	Science: Examining weather and climate

Sentence frames

Content Objective: Students will be able to _____ by _____.

Language Objective: Students will _____ in order to _____.

Appendix K

Collaborative Planning Tool

General Information

Lesson Title / Topic _____

Unit / Module _____

Date(s) _____

Grade Level _____ **Subject** _____

Class Period Length _____ mins

ENL Teacher _____

Content Teacher _____

Additional Partners / TA _____

Student Snapshot

# Students	# ELLs	Proficiency Levels	IEP/504 Considerations	Notes
_____	___	_____	_____	_____

1. Content Objective(s)

Students will _____ by _____.

Write in student-friendly language below:

Standards addressed: _____

2. Language Objective(s)

Frame Options:

- Students will _____ using _____.
- Students will use _____ to _____.

Write in student-friendly language below:

3. Chosen Co-Teaching Model (circle / check)

☐ One Group: One Leads, One "Teaches on Purpose"
☐ One Group: Two Teach the Same Content
☐ One Group: One Teaches, One Assesses
☐ Two Groups: Two Teach the Same Content
☐ Two Groups: One Pre-Teaches, One Teaches Alternative Information
☐ Two Groups: One Reteaches, One Teaches Alternative Information
☐ Multiple Groups: Two Monitor and Teach

Why this model for today?

4. Instructional Roles & Lesson Flow

Map the lesson phases. Name concrete actions so both teachers lead instruction.

Time	Learning Activity	ENL Teacher Actions	Content Teacher Actions	Grouping	Materials	Scaffolds/Differentiation
Opening: ____ min						
Beginning: ____ min						
Middle: ____ min						
End: ____ min						
Closing/Assessment: ___ min						

5. Key Vocabulary & Language Supports

List Tier 2-3 academic terms essential to the lesson.

Term / Phrase	Introduced (When?)	Support Type (visual, gesture, L1, word wall, frame)	Lead (ENL / Content / Both)
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

6. Materials Checklist

☐ Text(s) / Excerpts
☐ Adapted / Leveled Text
☐ Visuals / Slides
☐ Graphic Organizers
☐ Manipulatives
☐ Sentence Frames
☐ Word Bank / Glossary (L1?)
☐ Technology (devices / applications): _____
☐ Other: _____

7. Assessment Strategy (Content & Language Evidence)

Plan how you'll know students met BOTH objectives.

7a. Formative Check(s) During Lesson

When? What Students Do	Content Evidence Collected	Language Evidence Collected	Who Records?
_____ _____	_____	_____	ENL / Content / Both
_____ _____	_____	_____	ENL / Content / Both

7b. Exit Ticket/Assessment (End of the lesson)

Content Success Criteria: _____
Language Success Criteria: _____

Artifact to Review (exit slip, paragraph, oral recording, labeled diagram, etc.):
_____

8. Reflection / Next Steps (Complete After Teaching)

Quick Ratings
Alignment of Content & Language: ☐ Strong ☐ Partial ☐ Needs Work
Role Clarity: ☐ Clear ☐ Mixed ☐ Unclear
Student Access (ELLs engaged w/ content?): ☐ High ☐ Some ☐ Low

Evidence Takeaways
What did students *understand* (content)? _____

What language did students *use successfully*? _____
Where did students *struggle* linguistically? _____

Adjustments for Next Lesson

Support Needed (check & describe):
☐ More common planning time
☐ Materials (adapted text / visuals)
☐ Data on proficiency levels
☐ Admin scheduling support
☐ PD follow-up: _____

Appendix L

Communication and Reflection Hand Out

Directions: Take a moment to reflect on these questions. Jot your answers down then discuss your responses with your co-teacher. The purpose of this task is to build trust and clarify your working relationship with your co-teacher. You will have 10 minutes.

- What strengths do I bring to co-teaching?
- What areas do I need improvement?
- What are my goals for our co-teaching partnership?
- How do I prefer to plan and communicate?
- What are some classroom routines I use often?
- What do I hope my students gain from our collaboration?
- How do I want us to navigate differences?
- How will we reflect and improve our practices together?

Appendix M

Exit Ticket

Directions: Reflect upon these questions and write your response.

- What is one change you will make to your co-teaching partnership to improve your collaboration and outcomes for students?

- What supports do you still need?

- What remaining questions do you still have?

Appendix N

Presentation Link

https://voicethread.com/myvoice/thread/31208019