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CHAPTER 18

POWER DIFFERENTIALS**Pseudo-Collaboration Between
ESL and Mainstream Teachers**

Nelson Flores

One of the challenges of teacher collaboration is that it is sometimes interpreted differently by those viewed to be in a position of power as compared with others perceived to have less power. Corrie (1995) documented such a dynamic and argued in her research that, in many instances, what was called collaboration by those in a position of power was actually *pseudo-collaboration* that served to mask power differentials between the parties involved.

A few scholars have explored the presence of pseudo-collaboration, a hindrance to true collaboration, in team-teaching situations between English as a second language (ESL) and mainstream teachers (Arkoudis, 2003). This chapter seeks to expand on such prior work by documenting the challenges of one high school's attempt at implementing collaborative team teaching between an ESL teacher and mainstream teachers. In particular, it explores power relations that emerged between mainstream teachers and the ESL teacher, and shows that what mainstream teachers interpreted as collaboration was a pseudo-collaborative relationship from the perspective of the ESL teacher, which prevented her from effectively advocating for her students.

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PSEUDO-COLLABORATION BETWEEN MAINSTREAM AND ESL TEACHERS

Educators interested in creating more collaborative, team-teaching relationships between ESL and mainstream teachers must challenge instances of pseudo-collaboration that may undermine the educational services provided to English language learners (ELLs). These power relations are particularly important to recognize because it is often common for ESL teachers to have a much lower authority status in schools than mainstream teachers (Arkoudis, 2003). In a survey of secondary school teachers, Reeves (2006) noted that most mainstream teachers did not value professional development in ESL, implying a lack of respect for the methodologies in which ESL teachers are trained. In addition, in a qualitative study of an innovative approach to improving collaboration between ESL teachers and mainstream teachers, Duke and Mabbott (2000) found many condescending attitudes on the part of mainstream teachers toward ESL teachers. The perceived inferiority of ESL teachers and the knowledge they have to offer to mainstream teachers can present a great challenge to the collaboration between the two. In many cases, ESL teachers' expertise may not be valued, and these second-language acquisition specialists may not be able to effectively meet the needs of ELLs.

To illustrate this power dynamic, Arkoudis (2000) described how the collaboration between an ESL teacher and a science teacher transpired. She found that the difference in subject status between science and ESL in the larger school culture created an imbalance of power; the ESL teacher was constantly placed in the position of deferring to the expertise of the science teacher. Unfortunately, the expertise of the ESL teacher was undervalued, despite that fact that she had more years of teaching experience. Arkoudis attributed this phenomenon to the larger social and political context of education and argued that:

While science is an academic subject, the status of ESL as a subject is questionable. ESL is clearly not a traditional academic subject in the same sense as science. Indeed, in many secondary schools... ESL does not exist as a separate discipline area, but as part of the English curriculum. (p. 62)

In other words, secondary schools categorize teachers by academic subject, and ESL is not treated as a separate subject. This in turn subordinates the ESL teacher to teachers with a *real* academic discipline. Subordination is a considerable challenge to collaborative team teaching and must be addressed directly in order to create truly collaborative relationships between ESL teachers and mainstream teachers.

In order to further explore the phenomenon of pseudo-collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers, what follows provides empirical evidence of the power relations that emerged between an ESL teacher and three mainstream teachers at one New York City high school. It chronicles the cooperative activities between an ESL teacher and a science teacher, where the power relations were very apparent, and the same ESL teacher's relationship with both a math and a social studies teacher, which appeared to be more collaborative though pseudo-collaborative in the end. The reporting of this evidence is not meant to argue against implementing collaborative team teaching in ESL but rather hopes to unpack the characteristics of pseudo-collaboration in order to challenge these power relations.

PSEUDO-COLLABORATION IN A SCIENCE CLASSROOM

Based on interviews and analysis of face-to-face and online planning meetings, there was much evidence to support the idea that the science collaborative team-teaching situation was pseudo-collaborative. A description of a regular team-teaching day according to the ESL teacher was as follows:

The most common pattern that comes to mind is maybe an [introductory activity] usually decided by [the science teacher], and we'd discuss it, and then we'd get into the lecture. Now the lecture usually [the science teacher] would deliver, and I would chip in every now and then. There'd be questions that students would ask, and depending on which teacher they're asking, the teacher would answer back or say it's not part of the lesson; we'll get to that later.

In this interview, the ESL teacher describes a dynamic where the science teacher is calling the shots, and she is taking a backseat and following his lead. An administrator who observed the class confirmed this dynamic:

In the classroom, it was the content teacher dominating while the ESL teacher was taking not a back seat but her presence wasn't as strong as the content teacher, which if it's going to be collaborative team teaching, it should be both teachers.

In this situation, the ESL teacher was delegated into a secondary role in which she would help students with group work but contributed little during whole class discussion. The same inequitable power dynamic was also evident in the curriculum planning time of the two teachers. While

the science teacher claimed that planning disagreements were openly discussed and compromises reached, the ESL teacher provided another story, which depicted the science teacher as always having the upper hand and not being receptive to the input she gave. This description of events was verified by transcriptions of online chats the two teachers had as they were planning the week's lessons:

ESL teacher: I have been doing a little looking around on the WWW for ideas on how to get Ss to understand the diffusion, osmosis and active/passive transport, and there was one quick experiment involving an egg in water. (Maybe salt water.) I'm thinking for the 10th graders for that one, but maybe for the 9th graders when they get to that topic too.

Science teacher: It's good you looked. We did osmosis in the lab, so we won't do it again in class. Did you find any images of budding, etc?

ESL teacher: No images of budding. What was the osmosis lab?

Science teacher: Onion skin in a wet mount slide. They observed and drew the image. Then we added a salt solution, which caused the water to diffuse out of the cell. And finally we washed off the salt with more water solution and the cell returned to the prior shape. This was a 3-week lab. I'd like to stick to the topics I sent you earlier for this week. OK?

It was clear from this interaction that the mainstream teacher had all of the power in determining the subject topics and would not consider the suggestions made by the ESL teacher. In addition, his tone at the end suggested that the topic was no longer open for discussion, and they indeed move on to the next topic, with the ESL teacher deferring to the Science teacher's decision.

The previous interaction was not an isolated phenomenon. Another example can be found from the transcription of Internet chats from another day:

ESL teacher: I disagree with one of your suggestions. I think it's important to mention the nucleolus ... the nucleolus is important for students to go back to later on when we introduce the concepts of reproduction. Can't leave that one out.

Science teacher: Just let it go and things will be fine. If the kids can figure out there is a nucleus, cell membrane, and

cytoplasm, I will be very happy. Don't bring in the nucleolus ... that's the level that the students need to be at. Anything further is unnecessary ... do you trust me on the nucleolus?

ESL teacher: Sure.

Once again, the ESL teacher was put into the position of deferring to the science teacher without any evidence that the science teacher even considered what she was saying.

While the science teacher never discussed any of these interactions in his interview, he did mention that he believed the ESL teacher lacked content knowledge and advocated more content training for ESL teachers. The issue for the science teacher was that the ESL teacher was not qualified to express opinions about the content because she was not trained in the content area; his statement suggested he saw a role for the ESL teacher in providing information on how to effectively deliver the lesson and how to meet the language needs of ELLs. However, the ESL teacher stated that even her ideas of how to deliver lessons were often-times not seriously considered:

If I were to ask [the science teacher] what is it about this teaching strategy that has proven effective in the past, and his stock answer is, "This is how it's done. This is how it's always been done so we're going to do it." And to me, that reasoning is lost on me ... I don't base teaching decisions on what's been done in the past ... I wasn't successful at finding a language to talk back and understand his reasoning in terms of pedagogy.

Even in terms of pedagogy, the science teacher still did not seriously consider her input, and she still felt powerless to effect change.

PSEUDO-COLLABORATION IN MATH AND SOCIAL STUDIES

As opposed to the science classroom where pseudo-collaboration was apparent, in the math and social studies classrooms power relations were much more subtle. The dynamic that emerged in the math and social studies classrooms appeared to be in stark contrast to the one that had emerged in the science classroom. Describing an average day in math class, the mainstream teacher noted:

We split up our lesson plan which is simple to do because it's usually examples, and then the group work, and the do now, so [the ESL teacher] can do maybe the debrief and the [introductory activity] and group work, and I'll go over maybe two or three of the examples. We always make sure that there

is not just one person standing around and the other person doing all of the work. The students know that they have two real teachers.

The ESL teacher confirmed this teaching dynamic by adding the following:

The minilesson either [the math teacher] or I take it over. We sort of switch. I'm not really sure what the pattern is. And then we have some example problems that we then show or model, and we switch on that.

The same dynamic was evident from discussions with both the social studies teacher and the ESL teacher. They both noted that they divided the work up in terms of delivering the lesson and stressed to the students that they were both the teachers in the classroom. In addition, the ESL teacher noted that she had a better rapport with these two teachers than the science teacher, particularly when they disagreed, something that the social studies teacher seconded:

We work real well together. Sometimes we don't get to sit down the way we need to. Sometimes things happen; we get here, and we'll [be] right on the same page with each other ... I think that for the most part, I think both of us are very respectful toward the other and what the other has to offer when the other one makes recommendations.

The relationship that emerged from the two collaborative team teaching experiences here appeared to be much more egalitarian than in the science classroom. Both teams of teachers were treated as equal in their respective classrooms, and all teacher contributions were respected.

While these collaborative relationships were more equitable, there was still evidence of privileging of the mainstream teacher over the ESL teacher. One theme that emerged was that the mainstream teachers believed team teaching worked with the ESL teacher because all teachers agreed philosophically. They related this would not be the case if there were significant philosophical differences. As the social studies teacher noted:

It wouldn't work. I mean we'd still come to work to do our job but it really wouldn't work. I wouldn't like it actually. I wouldn't want to team teach anymore.

The math teacher expressed a similar sentiment concerning teaching skills when she stated:

You know I wouldn't choose to work with another person unless it was necessary. Given the fact [the ESL teacher] is very easy to work with and is very competent and works very hard has minimized the amount of communication that we need. I really appreciate it. So I don't know if I would be able to team-teach if it was with somebody who didn't have that overall skill set.

Both of these highly supportive teachers expressed that the only reason they felt positive concerning team teaching was because the ESL teacher did not challenge their teaching style significantly. The implication of this is that should she or another ESL teacher significantly challenged their style, the power dynamic might change considerably in favor of the mainstream teacher. Although these team teaching situations were more collaborative than with the science teacher, power still remained in the hands of the mainstream teachers who felt entitled to dismiss the ESL teacher should she begin to seriously challenge their perspective as mainstream teachers.

The decision-making superiority of the mainstream teachers was confirmed in interviews with the ESL teacher. Although she gave high praise to these teachers, she expressed sentiments similar to her science team-teaching situation. With the math and social studies teachers, when there were disagreements over content, the ESL teacher oftentimes felt unable to disagree because she was not a content area specialist. In addition, she noted that she sometimes still felt unable to teach the class in the way she thought was best, a sentiment that neither the math or social studies teacher expressed. One example she gave was:

With [the math teacher] I think she would say things like, "Oh well, that's not on the Regent's exam" or in the classroom when students ask, "What's the difference between a hexagon and a heptagon?" like today, and her answer was, "Did I ever talk about heptagon? No? Ok ... then go home after school and look it up on the computer." Now I know that's her way of managing time constraints, but ... that's not exactly me.

The ESL teacher, although having serious reservations about this time-management approach, did not mention her misgivings to the mainstream teacher because she felt the mainstream teacher knew how to pace the curriculum better than she did, even though she felt the pacing was inappropriate for her ELLs. In short, the ESL teacher, while feeling more empowered in these two team-teaching situations and treated as an equal in terms of presenting the lesson and planning the lesson, still showed evidence of deferring to the mainstream teachers and not expressing her opinion in certain situations, a sign of pseudo-collaboration and not true collaboration.

IMPLICATIONS

In theory, collaborative team teaching provides ELLs access to high quality content instruction that has been made comprehensible by the ESL teacher and the mainstream teacher working together as a team (Clegg,

1996). Yet, as demonstrated by the collaborative practices of these teachers, true collaboration can oftentimes remain an elusive goal. The challenges of developing true collaboration indicate the need for more professional development for ESL and mainstream teachers on how to effectively work together and the need to make them more aware of the risk of falling into a pattern of pseudo-collaboration. Mainstream teachers and ESL teachers cannot simply be paired up and left to their own devices. Instead, strategic and rigorous training in collaborative practices as well as support in implementation of team-teaching approaches must be provided.

Yet, the fact remains that in many school contexts, including the one described above, ESL teachers are not seen as having equal status to mainstream teachers, and it indicates that professional development is not enough. This is especially true at the secondary level, where content expertise is seen as the most valuable characteristic of teachers. All educational institutions serving ELLs require a school-wide effort that challenges the commonly held idea that content expertise is more valuable than expertise in ESL methodology. Until the expertise of ESL teachers and mainstream teachers are seen as equally important, barriers to true collaboration between ESL and mainstream teachers will persist. In short, collaborative team teaching in ESL will not be effective without a challenge to larger discursive constructions of what makes a *real* teacher.

One way to challenge this privileging of content over second language development is to make this dichotomy less apparent in the organization of teacher education and teacher professional development. During teacher preparation and professional development, ESL teachers should receive more content knowledge while mainstream teachers should receive more training in ESL methodology. Perhaps then, ESL teachers may feel more confident in their status in the classroom while mainstream teachers will have more appreciation for the expertise that ESL teachers bring to the table. This greater appreciation of what the other brings to the table may avoid some of the power dynamics observed in this study and make disagreement less of a one-sided relationship in favor of mainstream teachers. This change in teacher development can open up the road to true collaboration, which would then shape classrooms where the needs of ELLs are at the center of instruction.

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