It is the last day of the quarter and the two teachers in the classroom appear to be in the middle of a synchronized instructional dance. Eva, the fourth-grade teacher, is seated in a chair at the back of the room with the students gathered on the carpet in front of her. As Eva reads aloud to the students from Patricia Polacco’s Babushka’s Doll, Leila, the English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) teacher who coteaches with Eva during this daily literacy block, hops up from her spot on the carpet and comes to life as Babushka’s doll. Perched at the edge of a desk, Leila transforms herself into the doll on Babushka’s shelf, mimicking her every move as Eva reads the story. Eva tells how the doll begins to swing her legs, and Leila points to her own swinging them back and forth. For the remainder of the story, Leila performs as a live version of the magical doll from the story, using pantomime and facial cues to accentuate key events and clarify vocabulary terms. In a matter of moments, she has brought the story to life and provided real-time visual scaffolding to the oral reading of the text.
DEMOGRAPHIC AND INSTRUCTIONAL TRENDS

The scene above comes from a year-long case study of two coteachers in a fourth grade classroom in the southeastern United States, a region that has experienced tremendous growth in its English language learner (ELL) population since the mid-1990s (Hamann & Harklau, 2010). Recent data confirm that southeastern states in the United States continue to experience some of the fastest growth rates of ELLs. For example, South Carolina, the state with the largest percent increase between 1998 and 2008, experienced an increase of more than 800% in its enrollment of ELLs (Batalova & McHugh, 2010). Unfortunately, academic achievement has not paralleled this demographic growth. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that Latino students, who represent the majority of ELLs, have a dropout rate of 27% compared with 7.3% of their White counterparts (as cited in Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004).

Facing these realities, grade-level teachers with little or no professional development in second language instruction (Antunez, 2002) struggle to create teaching practices that support the language and content development needs of the ELLs in their classrooms. As a result, many districts have turned away from pull-out models that remove ELLs from the mainstream classroom and are implementing more inclusive and collaborative approaches like coteaching between ESOL teachers and grade-level teachers. In this study coteaching is conceptualized as an instructional practice where two or more educators share instructional responsibility for students assigned to the same classroom (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008).

While the notion of collaborating to meet the needs of ELLs is not a new one (Nunan, 1992), coteaching for ELLs in U.S. public schools is relatively unexplored in empirical studies. With the exception of recent work by Honigsfeld and Dove (2010) and McClure and Cahnmann-Taylor (2010), most of the empirical work examining coteaching has occurred in international contexts (Arkoudis, 2006; Creese, 2005; Davison, 2006; Gardner, 2006; Glazier, 2004). While these studies have established a significant baseline on coteaching ELLs, findings from international settings cannot necessarily be mapped onto the U.S. context without further inquiry. Given the unique reality of the U.S. context resulting from the shifting demographic landscape and the prevailing climate of accountability, the lack of empirical work on coteaching in U.S. schools constitutes a significant gap in our knowledge regarding how to best educate ELLs. Consequently, this case study aims to address this gap by documenting how coteachers collaborate to support language and content learning for ELLs in a fourth grade classroom in northeastern Georgia.
Table 19.1. Site and Participant Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Westside Elementary Percentage</th>
<th>Eva &amp; Leila’s Class Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/reduced lunch</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eva
Leila

| Years teaching       | 3                              |
| Education             | BS Elem. Ed.                   | MS Ed. TESOL                   |
| Languages             | English                        | English, Arabic                |

CONTEXT AND METHODS

Westside Elementary School (WES) is a medium-sized neighborhood school in an urban district in northeast Georgia. Table 19.1 provides key demographic data for the school and the fourth grade classroom where this study took place. Eva, the fourth grade teacher, and Leila, the ESOL teacher, cotought a 2-hour literacy block every day.

Data Sources

Data for this study were collected mainly from ethnographic field notes, transcripts from interviews and Coteaching Inquiry Group meetings, and documents and artifacts. Beginning in October 2008 and ending in May 2009, the author conducted weekly classroom observations in Eva and Leila’s classroom that generally lasted 2 hours. To provide a framework for reflection and analysis, the author and the coteachers created the CIG and met several times during the year to discuss issues the teachers were facing as well as patterns noticed from observations. This idea was in direct response to Davison’s (2006) assertion of the need for coteachers to spend time together reflecting on and breaking down their coteaching experiences. All CIG meetings took place in Eva and Leila’s classroom at WES and generally lasted 2 to 3 hours.
COTEACHING ELLS AT WESTSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

At WES, Eva and Leila drew on a number of instructional resources and coteaching arrangements, one of which was team teaching. According to Friend and Cook (2003), team teaching is defined as both coteachers being responsible for the planning and instruction for all students. They add that team teaching may involve a number of different arrangements, from alternating the teaching of minilessons to taking turns in leading discussions. Leila and Eva reported that although team teaching required significant coplanning to coordinate their lessons, it was their preferred approach to coteaching.

Team Teaching

Scholars have suggested that ELLs, especially in the upper elementary grades and beyond, are faced with the increasingly challenging task of simultaneously developing English proficiency, mastering content knowledge, and developing academic literacy (Echeverria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Gibbons, 2002). When Leila and Eva engaged in team teaching, they were often able to address these challenges, effectively scaffolding each other’s verbal instruction and content concepts. They were also able to attend to procedural aspects of instructional tasks. Examples of this are seen in the opening vignette in this chapter and are further evidenced below.

Team teaching for Leila and Eva always occurred during writing instruction in the last hour of the day. Typically, one of the teachers would lead a minilesson while the other actively supported the lesson using the interactive whiteboard to pull up images or color-code pieces of text on the screen. The teachers were quite effective at playing off of each other’s instruction in what Eva referred to as tag teaming back and forth to add concrete examples or to help clarify what had been said. One lesson on descriptive writing illustrates this tag teaming. Eva, the grade-level teacher, started the lesson by asking the class “Who can tell me what a sensory detail is?” As hands went into the air, Leila jumped in (TAG!) from her position back at the whiteboard and offered to Eva and the class, “Maybe we should review the five senses first. Who can name one of the five senses?” As students generated a list of the five senses, Leila was calling on students, and Eva was now at the whiteboard (TAG!) writing down student responses and quickly drawing appropriate body parts next to each one (an eye for sight, a nose for smell, and so on).

When I asked Leila to comment on this example of team teaching, she indicated that she simply realized “in the moment” that revisiting the five senses would help ELLs with the ultimate task of incorporating sensory
details into their own writing. Additionally, while Leila confirmed the researcher’s perception that tag teaming was largely unplanned and improvisational, she also offered a different perspective. She attributed her willingness to jump in more frequently as being directly related to having planned together with Eva. In her words, “having a better sense of where the lesson was going and what the final task would be” was critical and helped Leila decide what types of instructional support and scaffolding ELLs would need.

**Validating Language and Culture Through Coteaching**

While team teaching encouraged collaborative sequences like tag teaming that effectively scaffolded students’ participation in academic tasks, it also allowed the teachers to develop lessons that capitalized on the collaborative possibilities afforded by coteaching. During the last quarter of the year, Leila and Eva developed an extended poetry unit that exemplified effective coteaching for ELLs. The unit addressed key content concepts in language arts and also provided meaningful opportunities for students to develop their language skills in ways that validated their linguistic and cultural resources in the process. Further, in planning the unit, both teachers expressed interest in making the project more creative than typical poetry units that explore a variety of poetic forms and culminate in an individual poetry portfolio. Leila, who has experience as a photojournalist, suggested incorporating photos into the project. Further discussion quickly led to the idea of connecting the project to students’ families and thus, the Multicultural Family PhotoPoetry Project was born.

To begin the unit, the teachers took turns leading minilessons to cover basic characteristics of a variety of poetic forms (haiku, free verse, sonnets, and others). They also shared examples of their own poetry, collaboratively wrote a poem with the whole class, and led an outdoor nature walk to collect artifacts to use in writing haikus. One of the assessment products of the unit involved individual student contributions to the class’s multicultural, multilingual alphabet book. Students were each assigned a letter from the alphabet and were asked to talk with their families to come up with a couple of words for their letter that were important to them and their families in some way (e.g., *Amigos* for “A”). Students were then given time in class to choose one word and develop a poem for that word. Students were told they could write in English, their native language, or to write bilingually; however, emphasis was placed on paying attention to the conversations they had had with family members. Students worked individually on their poems and conferenced with both teachers while crafting their work.
As the poems began to take shape, Leila worked with students to stage photos that captured the tone and meaning of their poems. One highlight of the project occurred towards the end as the class was filling in some of the letters that still needed a poem. The perennial issue of alphabet books, the letter X, was immediately solved when Eli volunteered to compose the poem for X. Eli wrote about *Xi Zon Bing*, a Taiwanese card game that his family plays around Chinese New Year (see Figure 19.1). This was a significant event, as Eli was the only Asian student in the classroom and seldom had the opportunity to see his language and culture represented in significant ways. The authenticity of the project was further manifested at the annual Community Poetry Picnic when the students shared a digital version of their alphabet book with families and community members.

**Celebration and Hesitation**

This project was successful on many accounts. From a coteaching perspective, team teaching allowed the teachers to effectively trade off between leading minilessons and supporting each other’s instruction. Additionally,
by incorporating their specific talents the teachers were able to extend the unit in creative ways. Connecting the alphabet book to students’ home language and culture emerged largely because Eva wanted to do more than the typical poetry portfolio. Similarly, Leila’s photography expertise moved the students’ poems from two-dimensional texts to multimodal works of art that were brought to life with color and images of the students themselves. It is critical to note that both teachers mentioned that knowing they had the support of the other was a key factor in taking some risks with this project and extending their work.

By all accounts, Leila and Eva enjoyed coteaching together. Although coteaching required significant planning on their parts, in interviews and in final written reflections both teachers indicated they would like to continue coteaching with one another in the future. In addition to agreeing that it was the most effective approach for working with ELLs, both Leila and Eva also recognized coteaching as a form of ongoing professional learning. For Leila, team teaching was like “performing in the presence of a colleague,” and for her this was a major motivator to be prepared and to develop “well thought-out and prepared lessons.” Eva added, “I think we both prefer teaching the whole group—when we had the time to plan, our teaching was more fluid. And too, you learn a lot about your teaching when you’re coteaching at the same time with someone.”

Despite their preference for coteaching, both teachers expressed some frustration and disappointment that they attributed to elements in the broader sociopolitical context in which they were teaching. Equally important, both also independently cited lack of common planning time as their greatest barrier to developing their practice. In closing, it is critical to discuss how these factors impacted Eva and Leila’s work together, as examining these factors may provide insight into how to best support and sustain coteaching models for ELLs.

Regarding the school, district, and state positions on coteaching, Leila and Eva agreed that there was an obvious contradiction between the glossy institutional rhetoric surrounding coteaching and the reality that they lived out as coteachers. School and state documents officially promoted coteaching as the preferred approach for working with ELLs (Georgia Department of Education, 2008); however, few tangible resources were provided to help coteachers fully realize the model. For example, formal improvement plans at both the district and the school level emphasized “increasing instructional time by limiting interruptions, expanding the ESOL push-in model, and supporting collaboration between classroom teachers and ESOL teachers” (WES, 2006, p. 14). However, when asked about training and professional development, neither Eva nor Leila indicated that they had received any professional
development on coteaching, nor were they granted any common planning time to facilitate their collaborative work.

CONCLUSION

Much of what Leila and Eva experienced throughout the year is congruent with current literature on coteaching. As in many studies of coteaching in special education contexts (Murawski, & Dieker, 2004; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007), lack of institutional support in terms of resources and professional development were key factors impacting Leila and Eva’s ability to implement coteaching to the degree they would have liked. Beyond these logistical elements though, the teachers described needing time to develop their coteaching beyond just planning lessons, more from a relational perspective. In final interviews and written reflections, the teachers discussed the role of the CIG sessions in meeting this need. Their responses confirm the value of such an approach:

I’ve never been able to really talk with Leila [outside of the CIG meetings] where we are not using all our time to just plan this or that for tomorrow. Our group meetings really allowed us to deal with some of the interpersonal issues that come up when you’re sharing a classroom. (Eva)

I would say the biggest benefit [of the CIG meetings] is that we were able to kind of step away from the actual teaching and offer each other feedback. I really don’t know what my other coteachers thought about having me in their classroom all year but I know what Eva thought because we shared it in this group! So I felt like we were able to take more risks that way with each other because we were more comfortable. (Leila)

Regardless of the format employed (such as parallel, team, or other arrangement), coteaching is a collaborative instructional practice that, at the core, is about human relations. It involves two teachers navigating the process of sharing instructional space, resources, decision making, and practices and how that process translates into teaching and learning experiences with diverse students. As indicated in the teachers’ comments about the role of the CIG, coteachers need an explicit framework or process to facilitate critical reflection and dialogue on their practice. The CIG meetings provided that framework for Eva and Leila. School districts considering coteaching and other collaborative practices for working with ELLs need to recognize coteaching from a relational perspective as well as an instructional one.

The practice of coteaching holds great promise as an instructional model for facilitating language and content development for ELLs, as
well as for promoting creative and nurturing professional partnerships for coteachers. Indeed, ESOL and grade-level teachers have much to learn from one another. Finally, as ESOL teachers work more in mainstream classrooms, there exists the opportunity to change the perception that ESOL work is merely support work on the periphery of teaching and learning in schools. In addition to the direct benefits to students and teachers, coteaching partnerships that are supported by a framework for dialogue and reflection have a significant opportunity to positively impact whole-school culture regarding ESOL teachers, students, and knowledge.

REFERENCES


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