

Sociocultural Perspectives on Second Language Writing

Greta Vollmer, Sonoma State University

As a writer, I have strong feelings and thinking that are a part of me, and I want those things reflected in my writing so the reader can have a sense of me. If you don't express it very well, people might not get it, so . . . for me, it's important people get it.

(Leah, 11th grade English language learner)

Developing as a writer is often seen as one of the most difficult and complex tasks for a second language learner. While research on second language writing has expanded exponentially in recent years, it has for the most part situated writing as a cognitive activity focused primarily on the learner (e.g., composing processes or strategies) or the text (e.g., syntactic, lexical, or rhetorical features). Increasingly, though, the field of applied linguistics has come to consider the role of culture and identity in second language learning, developing a sociocultural theory of language acquisition that rejects the traditional dichotomy between the individual language learner and the context of learning. (See, e.g., Kern, 2000; Kramersch, 2000; Lantolf, 2000.) From this perspective, the notion of writing as a uniquely cognitive activity, situated within the individual learner and used primarily to impart information, must be revised in favor of a more complex understanding of writing as a contextually situated social and cultural practice. As Kern (2000) points out, "sociocultural approaches to literacy disabuse us of the notion that how and why we read and write is an entirely private and individual affair. [Rather] . . . reading and writing are communicative acts in which readers and writers position one another in particular ways, drawing on conventions and resources provided by the culture" (pp. 34, 37).

Writing as a Cultural Practice

Culture is not a unitary or easily defined phenomenon. Yet elusive as the

notion may be, if we view language in all its forms as social practice, then "culture becomes the very core of language teaching" (Kramersch, 1993, p. 8). This means that language teachers, in their role as cultural brokers, are often called upon to explain something that is by nature difficult to pin down. Harklau (1999) asserts that teachers must "in a sense reify their own interpretation of culture, making static something that is in constant flux, and making unified something that is inherently multiple" (p. 110). The learner's identity within a culture is not static and fixed, either. A learner may be, among other things, a student, a mother, a lawyer, a woman, a Latina, a teacher, and a concerned social activist. Sociolinguistic research has amply documented the multiple ways that we signal these identities through our speech, dress, and ways of behaving (Ivanic & Camps, 2001). What is the complex relationship between writing and the expression of these identities? This question is central to a sociocultural perspective on writing, which focuses on "the discursive construction of self" (Kramersch, 2000, p.133). In other words, writing is more than a simple transmission of information or thought—it conveys the writer as well.

The Writer's Voice: Constructing a Self

If we take identity construction to be an essential component of written discourse, we must then look carefully at texts as evidence of participation in a given culture. How do second language writers position themselves in texts, and

inside

-
- 4 New ERIC/CLL Products
 - 4 Partner News
 - 5 News From CAL
 - 6 Team Teaching: Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners Through Collaboration
-

what linguistic and rhetorical resources do they use to do so? Traditionally, composition theorists have evoked the notion of *voice* as synonymous with identity, defined as either the clear and forceful expression of opinion or as some intangible rhetorical quality that conveys the author's uniqueness.¹

Ivanic and Camps (2001) argue that voice in this sense may or may not be present in a given text, while voice as self-representation (or "positioning") is an inherent feature of any text. Writers construct themselves socially, and they do so in multiple ways. For example, they may position themselves ideationally through word choices that express values and beliefs about the topics they address. They may express themselves interpersonally by communicating a sense of their authority and relationship to the reader through, for instance, their choice of pronouns or modal markers of certainty. Finally, they may position themselves textually, adopting or resisting the linguistic features of a particular genre, setting, or task (e.g., the academic paper or the summary).² In short, writers exploit the linguistic and cultural resources available to them to define their relationship to the world they live in (Ivanic & Camps, 2001).

In the first-person narratives of bilingual authors such as Eva Hoffman (*Lost in Translation: A Life in a New*

continued on page 2

continued from page 1

Language, 1989, Dutton) and Andre Codrescu (*The Disappearance of the Outside*, 1990, Addison-Wesley), Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) found a rich source of evidence for the ways in which language learners both lose and reconstruct their identity in the second language. The authors delineate the stages of initial loss, including a loss of linguistic identity, a loss of the “inner voice,” and a loss of their first language. Hoffman offers one of the more eloquent expressions of this linguistic journey:

I wait for that spontaneous flow of inner language which used to be my nighttime talk with myself. Nothing comes. Polish, in a short time, has atrophied, shriveled from sheer uselessness. Its words don't apply to my new experiences; they're not coeval with any of the objects, or faces, or the very air I breathe in the daytime. In English, the words have not penetrated to those layers of my psyche from which a private connection could be processed. (Hoffman, as cited in Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p.165)

Recovery of voice also has multiple stages. Two of these—the appropriation of other voices and the emergence of one's new voice—seem particularly evident in written discourse. These narratives, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argue, are about “a profound struggle to reconstruct a self” and, therefore, do not represent language acquisition *per se* (to use the traditional metaphor) but rather “participation” in the sense of “contextualization and engagement with others” in a larger social context (p. 174).

It is not necessary to look only to accomplished writers to document the representation of self in second language writing. Maguire & Graves (2001) found evidence of multiple positions—as autobiographical self, authorial self, and discursive self—in the journal writing of three 8-year-old English language learners. Each child set forth distinct and multiple positions as a writer, establishing complex relationships to American culture, schools, their religion (Islam), their teacher, and their families. In another context, Kramersch (2000) analyzed college students' summaries of a short story (“Crickets” by Robert Olen Butler) to examine their use of personal histories, American discourse on immigration, and various genre conventions to construct very different texts and shifting narrative stances within those texts. More importantly, she found that the subsequent classroom dialogue, in which students discussed their texts and the linguistic choices they had made, allowed these writers to articulate and reflect on the relationships their words created among themselves, their texts, and their readers. In other words, they were able to “mak[e] explicit their authorial or discursive selves” (Kramersch, 2000, p.149). These studies offer ample evidence that across genres, ages, language groups, and learning contexts, second language learners use writing to create and recreate themselves, drawing upon a variety of linguistic, textual, and cultural resources to do so.

The Writing Classroom: The Constructed Self

Understanding second language writing as active participation in the construction of a discourse identity offers a very different view of second language writers from the more typical deficit perspective, which sees them as developmentally weak and their texts as riddled with errors. But just as writers construct themselves textually, sociocultural theorists point out that the context in turn constructs the writer. Harklau (2000)

offers vivid examples of the ways in which the same language learners were viewed in radically different ways as they moved from high school to a community college context, and the subsequent impact that this shift in context had on their academic performance and on their investment in learning. Harklau (1999) also warns of the danger of relying on “received representations of culture” (p.127) in the writing curriculum and consequently pigeon-holing students as representatives of a given culture. She points out that writing assignments often reinforce one-dimensional “travelogue” representations of culture or insist on simplistic my country/your country dichotomies that enforce polarization and a sense of otherness in students. Vollmer (2000), for example, found that some teachers who espoused a writing workshop approach with free choice of topics at the same time restrained and constricted student writing by ascribing them the sole identity of immigrant from which to develop their topics. Thus, we need to recognize not only the ways in which student writers seek to construct a new identity—and multiple identities—in a second language, but also the ways in which classroom practices and assignments may assume and enforce restrictive identities for the writers.

Implications for the Teaching of Second Language Writing

Clearly, we must acknowledge the slipperiness of some of the concepts set forth by sociocultural theory. There is no easy agreement on what is meant by social identity, the self, or even culture. Yet reconceptualizing writing as social practice offers tantalizing glimpses of the potential role it can serve in second language learning. As in Kramersch's (2000) study, students increase their control over written discourse when they become aware of the interpretive contexts for their texts and develop a metalanguage from which to analyze these contexts. Ivanic and Camps (2001) argue that this sort of critical awareness offers second language writers the means to “maintain control over the personal and cultural identity they are projecting in their writing” (p. 31). In addition, this understanding might allow them to creatively select and recombine the discursive voices they encounter:

Learner-writers can discuss the aspects of voices they encounter in source texts that they would like to adopt and those they would like to avoid. [Critical awareness raising] can focus on helping [them] find ways to word their meanings with which they feel in harmony culturally and personally. (Ivanic & Camps, 2001, p. 31)

Perhaps more importantly, though, a sociocultural perspective allows written discourse to become the means to explore social identity, what Harklau (1999) terms “cultural inquiry through writing” (p. 125). Learners can use writing to question representations of culture or to question their role as narrator/author in a new cultural context. In this sense, second language writers become “border crossers” (Kramersch 1993), a journey that is never easy, as Hoffman and many others have noted. Kramersch explains that “the realization of difference, not only between oneself and others, but between one's personal and one's social self, indeed between different perceptions of oneself can be at once an elating and deeply troubling experience” (1993, p. 234). But if we understand writing as a medium through which language learners attempt to understand and

eric/cll partners

American Association of Teachers of German
American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese
American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence
Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
Japan Association for Language Teaching
Linguistic Society of America
National Association for Bilingual Education
National Capital Language Resource Center
National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education
National Network for Early Language Learning
Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages
Southwest Conference on Language Teaching
Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

eric/cll staff

Joy Peyton Director	Craig Packard User Services Coordinator
Jeanne Rennie Associate Director	Laurel Winston Acquisitions Coordinator
Bronwyn Coltrane Information and Outreach Coordinator	Lisa Biggs Administrative Assistant
Sally Morrison Webmaster and Technology Coordinator	

The *ERIC/CLL News Bulletin* is published semiannually by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics and is mailed free to U.S.-resident members of ACTFL and TESOL. Individual copies will be sent free on request. We regret that we cannot honor requests for multiple copies. This issue and past issues are available at our Web site at www.cal.org/ericccl/news. This newsletter is in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated without permission; appropriate credit should be given to the original source. Please address comments or questions to the *News Bulletin* editor:

Editor	Tel: 202-362-0700 x238
ERIC/CLL News Bulletin	Fax: 202-363-7204
4646 40th Street NW	E-mail: eric@cal.org
Washington DC 20016-1859	Web: www.cal.org/ericccl

This publication was prepared with funding from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Library of Education, under contract no. ED-99-CO-0008. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of ED, OERI, or NLE.

control the shifting perspectives in their lives, to express and explore new identities, and to position themselves in new ways, writing in a second language becomes a powerfully motivating and potentially transformative force. Leki (2000) has noted that second language writing research will most certainly “expand upon identity issues” (p. 107) in the coming decade. For a writer like Leah, the 11th grader quoted at the beginning of this article, this could mean increased opportunities to communicate a sense of herself as well as a greater understanding of the linguistic and cultural resources she has to explore those possibilities.

Notes

1. This definition of voice has been extensively critiqued as being imbued with cultural assumptions of individuality and creative expression which are problematic in second language contexts. For a thorough discussion of the concept of voice in second language writing, see the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, Special Issue on Voice (2001, Volume 10, 1-2).
2. Atkinson (2001) expresses concern about the “looseness of such taxonomies” and calls for caution in their use as a research tool and in pedagogical applications (p. 114).

References

- Atkinson, D. (2001). Reflections and refractions on the JSLW special issue on voice. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10, 107-124.
- Harklau, L. (1999). Representing culture in the ESL writing classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language learning and teaching* (pp. 109-135). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Harklau, L. (2000). From the “good kids” to the “worst”: Representations of English language learners across educational settings. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34, 35-67.
- Ivanic, R., & Camps, D. (2001). I am how I sound: Voice as self-representation in L2 writing. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 10, 3-33.
- Kern, R. (2000). *Literacy and language teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kramsch, C. (2000). Social discursive constructions of self in L2 learning. In J. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 133-153). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lantolf, J. (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Leki, I. (2000). Writing, literacy and applied linguistics. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20, 99-115.
- Maguire, M. H., & Graves, B. (2001). Speaking personalities in primary school children's L2 writing. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35, 561-593.
- Pavlenko, A., & Lantolf, J. (2000). Second language learning as participation and the (re) construction of selves. In J. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 155-177). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Vollmer, G. (2000). *Classroom contexts for academic literacy: The intersection of language and writing development in secondary ESL classrooms*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.

new products

Foreign Language Teaching: What the United States Can Learn From Other Countries

I. Pufahl, N. C. Rhodes, & D. Christian; 2000; \$7.50

This new publication reports the findings of a 3-month exploratory study that collected information about foreign language education in 19 countries. It includes a discussion of eight core methodologies, strategies, and policies that language educators in other countries consider essential to success and features practical recommendations for how these findings can inform U.S. foreign language education policy and practice.

This publication can be ordered online at the CALstore—www.cal.org/store—or by calling (toll-free) 800-276-9834.

New ERIC/CLL Digests

Digests are short reports that synthesize current research, review the literature, describe teaching methods and program models, and offer practical ideas for teachers and others. The following ERIC Digests are available at <http://www.cal.org/ericcl/digest>.

- Discourse Analysis for Language Teachers
- English Language Learners With Special Needs: Effective Instructional Strategies
- Integrated Skills in the ESL/EFL Classroom
- Language Teaching Methodology
- Spanish for Spanish Speakers: Developing Dual Language Proficiency
- Teaching About Dialects
- What We Can Learn From Foreign Language Teaching in Other Countries

To order free print ERIC/CLL Digests, mail one self-addressed stamped (55-cent) business-sized envelope for every five Digests to

ERIC/CLL
CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS
4646 40TH STREET NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20016-1859
1-800-276-9834

New Resource Guides Online

Resource Guides Online provide descriptions of and links to resources on a variety of topics in language education. These new Resource Guides are available on our Web site at www.cal.org/ericcl/faqs/rgos/.

- Creating Web-Based Language Learning Activities
- English Language Learners With Special Needs
- Language Policy and Planning
- Second Language Teaching Methodology

partner news

Center for Research on Education, Diversity & Excellence

First National Conference for Educators of Newcomer Students
Washington, DC
September 2002

The conference is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA, formerly OBEMLA); the Center for Applied Linguistics; and CREDE.

www.cal.org/crede/newcomer.htm

Practitioner Brief #3, Some Program Alternatives for English Language Learners

This brief highlights specific features and conditions of newcomer programs, transitional bilingual education, developmental bilingual education, and two-way immersion.

www.cal.org/crede/pubs/PracBrief3.htm
202-362-0700 x218

Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages

NECTFL Annual Conference
New York, New York
April 18-21, 2002

For more information, contact
www.nectfl.org
nectfl@dickinson.edu
717-245-1977

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

TESOL's 36th Annual Convention and Exposition
Salt Lake City, Utah
April 9-13, 2002

For registration and program information, contact
www.tesol.org/index.html
514-228-3074

VISIT ERIC/CLL AT THE TESOL CONVENTION

Exhibit Booths #1009 and #1011

partner news

The National Capital Language Resource Center

NCLRC has recently added two new resources to its Web site:

- *Russian for Russians* provides Russian heritage speakers with materials and training to assist them in developing literacy in Russian.
- *Portfolio Assessment in the Foreign Language Classroom*, a Web-based tutorial, guides teachers in creating and implementing a standards-based foreign language portfolio assessment system tied to their own curricula.

NCLRC will hold the following Summer 2002 Institutes in the Washington, DC area:

- **June 24-25** Foreign Language Teacher Education
- **June 25** Oral Proficiency Assessment
- **June 26-27** Teaching Learning Strategies in the Foreign Language Classroom
- **June 28-29** Teaching with Technology in the Foreign Language Classroom
- **July 1** Teaching and Learning Strategies-Arabic K-12

For details on NCLRC resources or institutes, visit www.cal.org/nclrc or email nclrc@gwu.edu.

IMMERSION DIRECTORY UPDATE

During the course of 2002, ERIC/CLL will be updating the *Directory of Total and Partial Immersion Language Programs in U.S. Schools*. We will be contacting all programs listed in the current directory to request updated information. **Please do not send us updates at this time;** we need to collect your information in a specific format so ask that you wait until you hear from us.

However, if you know of a foreign language immersion program that is **not listed in the current directory** (www.cal.org/ericcll/immersion), we would love to hear about it. Please send contact information for the program (contact person, telephone number, email address, postal address) to Ms. Lisa Biggs, Immersion Directory Candidates, ERIC/CLL, 4646 40th Street NW, Washington, DC 20016 or lisa@cal.org.

news from cal

Second National Conference on Heritage Languages in America

The Second National Conference on Heritage Languages in America will be held October 18-20, 2002, at the Sheraton Premiere Hotel, Tysons Corner, Virginia, close to Washington, DC. The conference will seek to further the aims of the Heritage Languages Initiative, a national effort to develop the non-English language resources that exist in our communities.

Information about the conference will be disseminated on a regular basis through the *heritage-list* listserv. To subscribe, contact Scott McGinnis at the National Foreign Language Center (smcginnis@nflc.org; 301-403-1750 x18). To check for updates on conference registration and content and to read about the Heritage Languages Initiative, visit www.cal.org/heritage.

SIOP Training of Trainers Institute

The Center for Applied Linguistics and the California State University at Long Beach will conduct an intensive 3-day institute on the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model for teaching content to English language learners. Participants can become SIOP trainers for school districts and schools of education. The institute will be held at the Long Beach campus June 6-8, 2002. Visit www.cal.org/SIOPinstitute or email Justine Hudec (justine@cal.org) to receive a registration brochure.

Why Reading Is Hard (Video and Viewers Guide)

This video helps teachers understand why reading words and text can be hard for many students, both native and nonnative speakers. Viewers will come away from the video better able to observe their students' reading and to choose appropriate instructional strategies. The viewers guide provides discussion questions and learning activities, outlines and supplementary materials for using the video with study groups and classes, the complete video transcript, a glossary, and a bibliography of resources for further study. Order from CALstore (www.cal.org/store) or Delta Systems Co., Inc. (800-323-8270).

CAL Online Store

On March 4, 2002, the Center for Applied Linguistics inaugurated its Web store. Online shopping at CALstore makes all CAL publications and products, including those produced by ERIC/CLL, easily and quickly accessible. You can visit the CALstore at www.cal.org/store.

New Products From the National Center for ESL Literacy Education

- Issues in Accountability and Assessment for Adult ESL Instruction
- Assessment With Adult English Language Learners
- Family Literacy and Adult English Language Learners
- Professional Development and Adult English Language Instruction
- Uses of Technology in Adult ESL Education
- Civics Education for Adult English Language Learners (Resource Collection)
- Online Resources for Promoting Cultural Understanding in the Adult ESL Classroom

These and other NCLE resources are available on NCLE's Web site at www.cal.org/nclc.

Team Teaching: Meeting the Needs of English Language Learners Through Collaboration

Bronwyn Coltrane, Center for Applied Linguistics

Do we have enough cut-outs for the jacket activity? Oh, good. We can finish that today, then. . . . Is Ms. Robinson here yet? She'll be working with a sub this time. I'm sure plans are in the room. . . . Hi Susan, we definitely need to go over the directions for the revising worksheet, I don't think they all got it yesterday. . . . No, that's fine, we can suggest some topics from last year that worked well and then have them work with a partner to decide.

During the last moments before the school day officially begins, Georgia Portocarrero, teacher of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), hurries down the hallway and into a first-grade classroom. After going over the day's lesson with the teacher there, she heads to a kindergarten classroom to discuss a supply list, then stops at a second-grade classroom to review potential project topics that students will discuss in class. This constant rush of brief meetings continues nonstop until the bell rings, at which time she has discussed over a dozen different lessons and activities—all of which will be implemented that same morning.

This bustling morning routine is typical at Viers Mill Elementary School in Silver Spring, Maryland, where for the last 7 years ESOL and mainstream teachers have implemented a model of instruction for K–2 students based entirely on collaborative team teaching. Rather than pulling intermediate- and advanced-level English language learners out of their classrooms for separate instruction, the ESOL and mainstream teachers work together to develop lessons and activities that are effective for all students, then co-teach these lessons within the context of the regular classroom. Like other educators who have implemented this model to serve English language learners, the teachers at Viers Mill have found team teaching to be extremely effective in spite of the challenges inherent in any team-based effort.

The teachers at Viers Mill are not alone. In recent years, a variety of programs, institutions, and even indi-

vidual teams within schools have experimented with many different collaborative teaching models in order to find new ways to meet the needs of English language learners. Team-teaching programs exist at all levels of education: Bilingual or ESOL teachers are teamed with mainstream teachers at the elementary level (Sakash & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995; Wertheimer & Honigsfeld, 2000); high school ESOL teachers team with content-area teachers to teach both subject content and English (Anstrom, 1997); there are even teams of ESOL and social science teachers at the community college level (Gee, 1990). There seems to be a common thread across these variations of team-teaching programs: When teachers collaborate and combine their talents, everyone benefits.

Central Features of a Successful Team-Teaching Program

Integration Instead of Isolation

Like many schools that have implemented team teaching as part of their ESOL program, Viers Mill uses this model to help integrate, rather than isolate, English language learners. These students are not separated or singled out at any time during instruction, yet they receive the additional language support they need from both the regular classroom teacher and the ESOL teacher. Students work cooperatively with peers during the course of the school day, and these natural classroom interactions serve to foster their English language development. Because learners are not pulled out of their regular classrooms for ESOL instruction, they are able to participate fully in lessons that incorporate grade-level content, rather than focus only on their English language development.

A Process Approach to Writing

Modeled on a writer's workshop concept, each team-taught lesson at Viers Mill focuses on the process of writing. Instructional units may focus on a specific writing genre, such as informational writing, and individual lessons incorporate activities such as brainstorming, drafting, revising, and editing. These

activities are carried out in groups that include both English language learners and native English speakers. According to Portocarrero, "ESOL students' writing skills have improved significantly since the program was implemented, and best of all, our students aren't afraid to write" (personal communication, January 2002).

Curriculum Aligned With Standards

Within the context of the writer's workshop, teachers are able to integrate language instruction with county-level reading and language arts objectives rather than focus on a separate ESOL curriculum. English language learners also receive content-area instruction along with their peers, with mainstream teachers using scaffolding techniques and other modifications that have been modeled by the ESOL teacher to make the content comprehensible for all students.

Consistency Across Grade Levels

Team teachers work collaboratively with other teams in Grades K–2 to ensure that their lessons and teaching strategies are consistent for students as they progress from one grade to the next. For example, the revising stage of the writing process might be introduced by the team teachers in kindergarten, then expanded to include more sophisticated strategies as learners move on to first and second grade.

Major Challenges: Schedules and Planning

Inger (1993) suggests several elements that are critical to the success of any collaborative teaching model, including school-level leadership that supports cooperative work; material support; time for teachers to meet within their daily routine; and adequate training and assistance for teachers. Without these elements, teacher collaboration becomes quite a challenge. Other difficulties may include not having enough ESOL teachers to work with mainstream classrooms or resistance from teachers who would prefer not to teach in a team. For the team-teaching program at Viers

Mill, the major challenges have stemmed from difficulties in scheduling and finding time for teams to develop lesson plans together.

Scheduling becomes more complicated as a program expands, particularly when each ESOL teacher is teamed with a number of different mainstream teachers. There are many scheduling issues to consider, including how students' lunch schedules are arranged and whether or not team teachers' planning times coincide. Various teams also need to meet together by grade level to discuss long-range plans and to ensure that all grade-level curricular goals are being met. This additional planning time may not be built into the teachers' daily schedules, which can make it particularly difficult to find time to meet.

While special education teachers have been working in collaborative teams and team-teaching with their mainstream colleagues for years, the model is relatively new to many ESOL programs. As with any shift in program structure and implementation, moving to a team-teaching model has its pitfalls. At Viers Mill, teachers have found that being flexible and open to trying different solutions is extremely important. For example, some teams meet on certain days after school to plan, have set times to discuss lessons over the phone from home, or are able to do some planning and sharing of ideas via email. As Portocarrero points out, "This model is not perfect. There *is* no such thing as a perfect model. You have to be open to trying new solutions, and they don't always work for everyone. It is continually a work in progress" (personal communication, January 2002).

Benefits for Students and Teachers

Prior to implementing a team-teaching model, Viers Mill's ESOL program was based on a pull-out model in which English language learners were removed from their regular classrooms to receive specialized instruction with an ESOL teacher for approximately 45 minutes each day. Because teachers felt that these students were being isolated from their peers and were not being exposed to the same curriculum as mainstream students, they decided to try team teaching instead. The model began on a voluntary basis; teachers could choose whether or not to participate. As

teachers and administrators began to see the positive results of team teaching, they decided to implement this model in all primary classrooms.

Like many educators who have implemented a collaborative team-teaching approach, teachers at Viers Mill agree that the benefits far outweigh the challenges. ESOL teacher Rebecca Vasquez, who has been a part of the program at Viers Mill since it began, says

"Team teaching requires a lot of time and commitment, but it's worth it—because of the many benefits for the students."

that team teaching "requires a lot of time and commitment, but it's worth it – it's definitely worth it, because of the many benefits for the students" (personal communication, January 2002). This sentiment is echoed by many others at Viers Mill who have found that they truly enjoy learning from their colleagues and are able to expand their expertise and find new ways to reach all of the students in their class, regardless of language or cultural differences.

The benefits of team teaching have been well documented. Researchers have noted that collaborative teaching models in general "can result in a shared commitment to systemic school reform leading to higher achievement and greater multicultural understanding" (Sakash & Rodriguez-Brown, 1995, p. 1). Wertheimer and Honigsfeld (2000) assert that team teaching in an ESOL program ensures that students' needs are met more adequately than in programs where learners are separated for instruction. Some of the major benefits of team teaching in an ESOL program are described below.

High Expectations of All Students

In team-taught classes, English language learners are exposed to the same concepts and instruction as their native-English-speaking peers. As a result, teachers may expect all students to progress and to master the same skills, while English language learners are

provided with daily support for language development to meet those expectations.

Shared Resources

Because they plan lessons and activities collaboratively, both mainstream and ESOL teachers derive many benefits from team teaching. These include an opportunity to share ideas and perspectives, as well as the chance to pool resources such as instructional units and lesson materials they have developed for their classes.

Integration of All Students

Team-taught classes include both English language learners and their native-English-speaking peers, so this model has many social benefits for the students. ESOL students learn in a language-rich environment that does not isolate them from their peers. For native-English-speaking students, team teaching provides an opportunity to interact with students from other cultures. In addition, team teaching exposes both English language learners and native-English-speaking students to a variety of teaching styles and strategies and reduces the student-teacher ratio so that all learners receive added support during lessons and activities.

Challenging Content-Area Instruction

Team teaching can be a very effective way for ESOL teachers and teachers in content areas such as U.S. history or biology to work together to ensure that instruction is comprehensible yet includes high-level concepts that are vital to students' development in content-area studies. Content-area teachers, who are specialists in a specific area, teach alongside ESOL teachers who have the ability to ensure that input is comprehensible to learners. This combination of skills has the potential to provide English language learners with high-level instruction and ensure that they do not fall behind in their content-area skills while they learn English.

Conclusion

As more and more educational institutions incorporate various models of team teaching in programs that serve English language learners, we may be able to determine which models are best suited to particular schools, departments, or student populations.

In a 1993 report, the Council of Chief State School Officers indicated that state

continued on next page

Team Teaching

continued from page 7

directors of bilingual programs consider team teaching at the secondary level to be a promising practice, and it would seem that the educators who have worked in team-teaching models on a variety of levels would agree.

For Viers Mill Elementary School, team teaching has resulted in significant gains in student achievement, as measured by both formal and informal assessment tools (Portocarrero & Bergin, 1997, p. 9). Perhaps more importantly, students are able to learn alongside their peers following the grade-level curriculum, while teachers have the rare opportunity to combine their talents and efforts to help students achieve academic success.

References

Anstrom, K. (1997). *Academic achievement for secondary language minority students: Standards, measures, and promising practices*. Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education.

(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED417596)

Council of Chief State School Officers. (1993, July). *A concern about limited English proficient students in intermediate schools and in high schools*. Washington, DC: Author. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED364111)

Gee, Y. (1990). *An ESL adjunct class for Asian American studies*. Unpublished manuscript. Glendale, CA. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED352812)

Inger, M. (1993). *Teacher collaboration in urban secondary schools* (ERIC/CUE Digest No. 93). New York, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED363676)

Portocarrero, G., & Bergin, J. (1997, March). *Developing literacy: A co-teaching model using readers' and writers' workshop*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, Orlando,

FL. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED414740)

Sakash, K., & Rodriguez-Brown, F. (1995). *Teamworks: Mainstream and bilingual/ESL teacher collaboration* (Program Information Guide No. 24). Washington, DC: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. Retrieved December 11, 2001, from <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/ncbepubs/pigs/pig24.htm>

Wertheimer, C., & Honigsfeld, A. (2000). Preparing ESL students to meet the new standards. *TESOL Journal*, 9 (1), 23-28.

