



Benefits of collaboration between the ESOL Teacher and the Library Media Specialist

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With class sizes, administrator expectations, and general workloads increasing, ESOL teachers can feel overwhelmed. This article describes the benefits that ESOL teachers may experience when collaborating with school library media specialists (LMSs) regarding the differentiation of instruction, collaborative planning of lessons, technology integration, and student relationships.

Keywords: School libraries; teacher collaboration; IEL students; English language learners (ELLs)

Introduction

The ESOL teacher has many of the same roles as traditional classroom teachers:

instructor, manager, guardian, leader, social worker, psychologist, coach, servant, and learner (Howard, 2015). In addition, the ESOL teacher must cope with a variety of

unique issues specific to the needs of multinational students who differ in academic ability, native language, language proficiency levels, exposure to technology, emotional needs due to culture shock or political environment, and cultural expectations.

Particularly in the era of class size waivers, in which an ESOL teacher may have many more than the “maximum allowed” number of students on his/her caseload, the job can feel overwhelming at times.

The ESOL teacher, however, has a potential advocate and helpmate, one that s/he may not have considered approaching—the library media specialist (LMS). The LMS can help the ESOL teacher juggle daily demands through methods such as co-teaching, technology assistance, and co-assessment (Bogel, 2009; Johnston, 2013). Our article seeks to describe the synergy that can be achieved between the ESOL teacher and the LMS with discussions regarding pupil-to-teacher ratios, differentiation of instruction, collaborative planning of lessons, technology integration, and student relationships. We discuss what research states about high-quality teacher-to-LMS relationships as well as the personal experiences of the authors, both of whom collaborated numerous times over the years in which they worked together at Sprayberry High School in Marietta, Georgia. We consider our partnership to have been successful, rewarding, and downright fun, and we are honored to share some of the highlights of our eight-year-long working relationship.

Reduction in Pupil-to-Teacher Ratio

Since the Great Recession of 2008, K-12 class sizes have continued to rise. Many states, including Georgia (GADOE, 2012) have sought waivers, or “Flexibility Resolutions,” to No Child Left Behind requirements; unfortunately, one of the waivers

frequently implemented is a dismissal of the maximum number of students that can be placed in an ESOL classroom. In 2007-2008, the teacher-to-student ratio was 1:11 for K-3 classrooms; 1:14 for grades 4-8; and 1:18 for 9th-12th grades (GADOE, 2007). With the applicable waivers for districts across the state, teachers can expect to add at least five students to the generally accepted class sizes for an ESOL class. This is due greatly to the fact that the waiver numbers are based on district averages for class sizes (GADOE, 2007).

Fortunately, the LMS can help the ESOL teacher slash the teacher-to-pupil ratio in half. Every time the ESOL teacher brings his/her class to the library and involves the LMS in a lesson, this presents an opportunity for the students to utilize the assistance of another adult to answer questions about content, technology, or language. Thus, this promotes further opportunities for incorporating Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP®) components such as target language interaction and individualized scaffolding (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008). Research supports the idea of the ESOL teacher collaborating with specialists in the building in this manner to help increase English language learner (ELL) students' language, literacy, and social needs (Hersi, Horan, & Lewis, 2016). Most libraries have a paraprofessional or clerk; these individuals can also be invited to join in the lessons as another friendly adult who can answer questions. Similarly, in middle and high schools, some students may be assigned to the media center for one period per day as library aides; these students can also serve as valuable helpers to ELLs during lessons, acting as a one-on-one buddy or walking among all students, answering questions as needed.

Differentiation of Instruction

As noted above, the LMS can help provide additional person-power when ESOL classes visit the library. A more specific application of this is the added differentiation of instruction (Parrott & Keith, 2015) that can occur when two certified educators work together to benefit ELLs. By incorporating the various models of co-teaching, the ESOL teacher and LMS are able to employ various models when working with the ELLs. For example, the ESOL teacher can divide the class into two groups, and the LMS can work with one group on Topic A while the ESOL teacher remediates the second group on Topic B (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). The library can be set up in stations through which the ELLs rotate; some stations (such as those requiring computer-based work) can be self-guided by the students, and others can be staffed by the LMS and ESOL teacher. Instead of differentiating to one small group at a time, while leaving the rest of the class to work individually, the LMS can help the ESOL teacher provide individualized instruction to more students simultaneously. Since all people are unique, the LMS may explain things differently than the ESOL teacher and provide another bridge to understanding for ELLs (Peirce, 2008). Of course, both the LMS and ESOL teacher are busy individuals, so such collaborations should be planned together in advance to ensure a productive, meaningful environment.

Another way the LMS can help support instruction for ELLs is s/he can purchase books, e-books, audiobooks, databases, language-learning software, and subscription websites tailored to their needs (Melillo, 2007). For example, many ELLs process English-language materials at a very low reading level until their language proficiency increases. Many books on their reading level are tailored toward younger students, so

the subject matter may not interest the students, or the books appear to be for young students and the ELLs are embarrassed to read them (Hadaway, Vardell, & Young, 2002). The LMS can order high-interest, low-reading-level books (known as Hi/Lo in library vernacular) for the media center's collection so that students have exciting books to check out when they visit (Morin, 2013). The LMS can also pull books or electronic resources for the ESOL teacher that align to specific Lexile levels, Fountas & Pinnell letters, or curricular standards. In addition, the LMS can take an active role in the differentiation of instruction by acting as a co-teacher or small group leader, under the direction of the ESOL teacher. By collaborating in advance, the two educators can determine each person's role.

Technology Expertise

Most school library licensure programs offer classes that provide extensive training in technology integration and troubleshooting. Chances are, the LMS at any given school has at least an above-average awareness of emerging technology tools (e.g. coding/computational thinking, PowerPoint alternatives, web design, Web 2.0 sites, makerspaces/engineering/robots) and an understanding of common technical problems that may arise when teachers integrate technology into their lessons (Johnston, 2013). Some ESOL teachers may be leery of or feel uncomfortable with educational technologies; they can reach out to the LMS for help (Morin, 2013). For example, the ESOL teacher can instruct the students on a lesson's topical content and ask the LMS to teach the students how to use a particular technology tool to demonstrate mastery of that standard (Hoppe, 2013). When there is only one ESOL teacher in a school building, the LMS can become a great resource for new ideas of

ways to integrate technology into teaching. Librarians can act as keys to technology integration for initiatives such as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), Google Apps for Education, or 1:1 initiatives (Kuzo, 2015) while implementing best practices such as the Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework into instruction (Mishra & Kohler, 2006). Sobel and Grotti (2013) note that TPACK can “be particularly valuable to librarians, who are heavy users of technology, and can provide a structure that can help librarians to critically examine technologies being considered for integration” (p. 255).

The LMS can also learn from the ESOL teachers, many of whom are very technology savvy. Since the LMS has such a centralized job, working with many teachers, administrators, and students across the school, the LMS can benefit from technology-knowledgeable ESOL teachers and in turn suggest innovative programs and techniques to others around the school. Due to time constraints and the physical layouts of schools, teachers often become very departmentalized or grade-level focused, and the LMS can help serve as a bridge between the ESOL teacher and other personnel.

Synergistic Partners

While working together, the LMS and ESOL teacher may discover some mutual benefits to their partnership. For example, the LMS may have familiarity with the language, culture, etc. of specific ELL(s) with whom the ESOL teacher is struggling. Kelly previously worked at a school that had a high concentration of students from China, Japan, and Korea and thus brought to Sprayberry a solid background of the needs of newly immigrated students from those countries. The LMS, when working with the ESOL population, becomes exposed to different languages and cultures; this in turn

helps him/her choose materials for the library that accurately reflect the student population. At Sprayberry, Kelly now worked with many students from Brazil and thus learned more about that country's culture and the Portuguese language. As the ELL population observes this synergistic partnership and grows comfortable interacting with the LMS, the ELLs not only gain another advocate but begin to actively seek out the LMS as another adult resource (Adams, 2010). The LMS and ESOL teacher can work together on shared initiatives such as grant writing for materials like software or headphones that can benefit all students who visit the library. Since the LMS works with most departments in the school, s/he can let the ESOL teacher know what other departments are doing. For example, by observing the accommodations that special education teachers utilize for their students, the LMS can suggest these ideas to the ESOL teachers, whose students may benefit from similar accommodations. The ELL population is unique and requires teachers with specialized training, and while good teaching for native speakers is not necessarily good teaching for ELLs (Harper & de Jong, 2004), all educators can benefit from collaboration with and observation of successful teachers in their schools. The LMS also can assist teachers of advanced placement or honors courses with a new technology or with the implementation of project topics related to the ESOL teacher's curriculum. The LMS may suggest authentic or problem-based assessments (Bogel, 2009) to the ESOL teacher that s/he might not have considered that may aid in showing student growth and mastery.

Student Relationships outside the Classroom

One of the most fun byproducts of the ESOL teacher collaborating with the LMS is the relationships that can be formed outside of the ESOL classroom. When the ESOL

teacher brings pupils to the library frequently, they get to know the library staff well, which gives the students access to other friendly, helpful adults in the building (Carlyle, 2013). Depending on how a school structures its ESOL programs, some students may be with their ESOL teacher for much of the day, so providing these students with comfortable contact points outside of the ESOL classroom may make them feel more connected to the school culture. The students may come to feel that the library is their “second home” and can use its facilities outside of class time or begin participating in library initiatives like book clubs or reading incentives. As noted above, some middle and high schools have student library aides; ELLs can be placed in these positions to gain English proficiency and confidence as well as provide a friendly face for other ELLs in the library. Bordonaro (2006) observed similar librarian/ELL relationships in her institution’s library, noting that:

The ESL students described how they used the library as a study hall for both individual and group work, as a repository for both academic and recreational material, as a place to receive instructional assistance from librarians and other students, and as a social center for both planned and unplanned socializing. Connecting all of their self-described uses of the library was the desire on the part of the participants to improve their English language skills. Participants viewed the library as a place that affords them an opportunity to improve their English in the four language skills areas: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. (p. 520)

The Model in Action

Stacey has served as the Intensive English Language (IEL) teacher at Sprayberry in Marietta, Georgia for over 10 years. She works with newly arrived students who speak a variety of languages (frequently Portuguese, Korean, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Farsi) and serves as their primary instructor for core classes until they gain enough proficiency on the ACCESS test to move into less intensive ESOL and/or traditional high school classes. Kelly, before becoming a college professor, worked at Stacey's school as the LMS. The two collaborated frequently and co-taught and co-assessed numerous lessons, using programs such as Biteslide, PhotoStory, Weebly, SpiderScribe, and PowToon. Stacey, as a technology innovator, frequently discovered promising emerging technologies to use with her students; similarly, Kelly often asked Stacey's classes to be the "guinea pigs" for new programs or initiatives that she wanted to try.

Stacey worked with school administrators to place some ELLs in the library as student aides; Kelly then helped those students with language and social skills (Bordonaro, 2006) and personally witnessed these students blossom in the role. One former student, Hong (a pseudonym) stated, "Working in the library helped me to improve my English and feel more confident about speaking to others." Before Hong's experience working in the library, Hong was frequently bitter and angry and did not want to be around people. Kelly's prior experience at a school that had a large percentage of students from Korea, Japan, India, and Pakistan helped her to establish relationships with students from similar backgrounds at Sprayberry. Kelly enjoyed getting to know the IEL students and with Stacey's simultaneous encouragement, pulled some of them into

library activities such as Reading Bowl and Read Across America (Dr. Seuss' birthday celebration). Kelly and Stacey frequently co-authored grants and made purchasing decisions together, such as headphones with attached microphones (to listen to read-aloud databases and practice speaking via Web 2.0 tools); books that supported curricular needs; and non-English-language materials. Although Kelly has now taken a job in higher education, Stacey continues to collaborate with the current LMS at Sprayberry and involve her students heavily in library initiatives.

Conclusion

ESOL teachers have jobs that are difficult but rewarding. One of the core tenets of a LMS's job is to reach out to other educators to build collaborative, collegial relationships that increase student achievement. It is the hope of the authors that ESOL teachers and LMSs will consider working with each other if they have not yet done so. ESOL teachers may find that they have willing allies just down the hall who will champion, befriend, and help to instruct the ELLs, and the LMSs may find themselves greatly enriched by their experiences with both the ESOL teachers and the ELL students. In addition, student achievement may increase in the areas of reading, speaking, writing, and listening (Bordonaro, 2006) because of the combined efforts of these educators working together.

For those ESOL teachers and LMSs who are already working together—congratulations! You are to be commended for your willingness to utilize available resources and personnel for the benefit of your students. We challenge you to take your relationship to the next level by examining further ways in which you can benefit each other and ELL students; presenting together about your successes at ESOL and library-

related conferences; sharing your strategies with teachers, administrators, and school board members; and submitting your best practices to practitioner- and research-focused professional journals.

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