Caught Between the Push and the Pull: ELL Teachers’ Perceptions of Mainstreaming and ESOL Classroom Teaching

James Whiting, Ph.D.
Plymouth State University
Abstract

Seventy-one ELL teachers working in low-incidence settings were surveyed on their experiences teaching in both mainstream and ESOL classrooms settings. Responses showed a looming gap between the ideal of mainstreaming ELLs in a co-teaching model and the reality consisting largely of one-on-one push-in tutoring. Data reveal an overwhelmingly negative perception among participants toward working in the mainstream classroom in such conditions. The work in the mainstream classroom, although not without benefits, is work that leaves these teachers in a professionally disadvantaged position, one with a secondary status, both implied and real. This research has implications for ELL teachers, teacher educators and policymakers within an educational climate that promotes mainstreaming of ELLs.

Keywords: ELLs, Co-teaching, Mainstreaming, Low-incidence, Push-in instruction, Pull-out instruction

Background

The number of English Language Learners (ELLs), also referred to recently as emergent bilinguals, in schools across the United States has steadily increased over the past two decades. With the growth in the number of ELLs new questions have been raised about how best to meet their educational needs. One answer that has been increasingly accepted, at least in theory, is that ELLs’ language, content, and social skills benefit best from staying in the mainstream classroom. In addition, with the advent of No Child Left Behind (2002) there was an increased demand for accountability for learning outcomes. This increase in accountability led in turn to additional mandates to educate ELLs within the mainstream classroom rather than in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)-only settings. As McClure & Chanmann-Taylor (2010) note, despite this growing trend to keep ELLs in the mainstream classroom, there is relatively little research that examines the benefits of teaching ELLs in the mainstream classroom rather than in an ESOL setting.

Mainstreaming: The Ideal of Co-Teaching

Despite this lack of empirical data, the push toward mainstreaming has led to embracing a model that has brought the ELL teacher into the mainstream classroom as a co-teacher. There has been considerable writing that extols the benefits of the co-teaching ideal (Bell & Walker, 2012; Creese, 2006; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Zehr, 2006). In this model the ELL and the mainstream teachers collaborate on teaching both the mainstream and ELL students. In spite of this strong backing from supporters of mainstreaming, this co-teaching model brings with it a host of challenges on the different roles and responsibilities of each teacher. Research has highlighted the potential power dynamics at play when two teachers teach together in the same room (McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010), and also shown that this model can be time-consuming and requires buy-in from both teachers (Arkoudis, 2006; Friend, 2008). In addition, research (Abraham & Chumley, 2001; Harper, de Jong, & Platt, 2008; Harper & de Jong, 2009; Bell & Baecher, 2012) has pointed to the problematic nature of ESOL teaching in a climate that privileges mainstreaming...
models of push-in instruction, and devalues work with ELL students by trained ELL specialists, in an exclusively ELL setting.

Mainstreaming in Low-Incidence ELL Settings

The research on co-teaching has focused on high-population, high-incidence school settings. ELLs are found in both high- and low-incidence settings. “Mainstreaming” here refers to an ELL doing the same work as the non-ELL students in the class, with appropriate scaffolding and support. The students in this research were mainstreamed. In low-incidence settings, “mainstreaming” often means the ELL teacher works individually with his or her students in the mainstream classroom, for at least part of the day. This can take on different aspects but often boils down to the ELL and the ELL teacher sitting side by side while the mainstream teacher teaches the class. In this model the ELL teacher is supposed to scaffold and work one-on-one at the same time as the main lesson is being taught. Although co-teaching has been examined as a means of achieving mainstreaming mandates, there has been comparatively little recognition or research on this push-in “tutor” model of mainstreaming in low-incidence schools. The current research examines the experiences and perceptions of ELL teachers who work within this model, and compares them with their perceptions about pulling ELLs out of the mainstream classroom for work in the ELL space.

Research Question

What do ELL teachers in low-incidence settings think are the pros and cons of working with their students in the mainstream (push-in) and ELL (pull-out) classroom?

Participants and Methodology

A group of ELL teachers in one state were surveyed anonymously (Appendix A) on their perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of pushing ESOL instruction into the mainstream class or pulling out ELLs for work in the ESOL classroom. The survey, administered through SurveyMonkey, was placed on a state-ESOL listserv for TESOL professionals. The listserv has 632 subscribers. Of 107 employed ELL teachers in the state, 66% responded and completed the survey (see Appendix B for survey responses). These 71 respondents were generally well-trained and experienced ELL teachers -- 48% held graduate degrees in TESOL, 93% were licensed ESOL teachers in their state and over 75% had 10 or more years teaching ELLs. 38% of respondents worked with elementary-level students and nearly a third worked with students at different age levels, elementary through high school. Nearly 40% of the teachers taught in more than one school building. The survey contained both quantitative and open-ended qualitative questions (Dornyei, 2003). Written responses to the qualitative questions were recursively coded and grouped into emerging key themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These key themes and patterns of response are reported in the Data section of this paper.
Data

Push-in: Drawbacks of the Mainstream Classroom

The data show that 78% of the respondents did at least some of their work with ELLs in the mainstream classroom. This work in the mainstream classroom is mostly done with fewer than three students, and often one-on-one. Only 24% of these respondents describe their work in the mainstream classroom as co-teaching.

The data indicate that ELL teachers believe that working in the mainstream classrooms with a tutor model can actually adversely impact students’ learning, primarily by increasing student anxiety and embarrassment. The respondents also indicated that this instructional model of push-in instruction for ELLs raises issues of control and autonomy, and professional identity for the participants, as well as logistical issues and the problem of ill-defined responsibilities.

Student Embarrassment

Participants were asked to list pros and cons of working in the mainstream classroom. A consistent theme that emerged is the perception that for some students, it is embarrassing to sit next to a teacher and makes the student self-conscious, which negatively impacts his or her ability to learn. Participants noted that “older students are ‘shamed’ that you are there to help and everyone can see,” and “they may feel self-conscious (esp. at middle school level) having me there.”

It has long been acknowledged that language learning can be fraught with anxiety and the greater this anxiety, the greater the likelihood that learning is negatively impacted. As one teacher put it, “Students miss pull-out because my ELL room is a less risky environment where they can take bigger risks without being concerned about their English-proficient peers.”

It is not hard to imagine ELLs, newly arrived in the United States, wanting to fit in with their peers, and feeling self-conscious and anxious about having a teacher attempting to assist them with the classwork, sitting next to them during a class. One participant summarized this view by saying, “They don't always want their friends to see they are getting the help.” With their native-speaker peers sitting nearby and within earshot, the respondents indicate that students can be unwilling to practice or use their English and ask for help.

One participant summarized the phenomenon, writing, “The ELLs can feel marginalized when I am in the classroom. This may be mostly a social issue, but at times it impacts the students' attitude and effort.” Research (Baker, 2007; Strong, 1983) has confirmed this influence of social and interpersonal factors on language learner motivation.

Loss of Autonomy and Professional Identity

The issue of autonomy is apparent in the responses to the significant question of who determines what work the ELL teacher does with the ELL in the mainstream classroom: just 22% reported that they, the ELL teachers, determined this work. Although 61% report planning together with the mainstream teacher, this ideal of co-planning is belied by an overwhelming pattern that looks very different. The feeling that the ELL teacher largely gives up control over what work is done with ELLs in the mainstream classroom is indicated in responses such as this from one participant who noted, “I feel restricted when I am in the classroom. I cannot do the types of lessons
I would like to do . . . I do not feel that I really teach in this setting,” and another who noted that in the mainstream classroom, “I am doing more assisting than teaching ... sometimes I am just sitting and listening.”

These responses and others like them suggest that when the ELL teachers enter the mainstream classroom to work with their ELLs, their control over their own work is diminished and often their status too. Numerous respondents noted this shift in status that came with working in the mainstream classroom. “I often feel that I’m treated as a paraprofessional rather than co-teacher.” One participant noted that working with ELLs in the mainstream classroom made her “feel like an overpaid tutor”. These comments from teachers who hold licenses and have had graduate training suggest there is a strong emotional cost for ELL teachers who work in the mainstream classroom with their ELLs.

In the mainstream classroom their own professional knowledge is viewed as less important than that of the mainstream teacher, whose zone the ELL teachers needed to enter in order to work with the students they shared. Such ELL teachers believe that when they enter the mainstream classroom, they become, in the eyes of some of these teachers, aides, paraprofessionals, or tutors, working in service to the classroom teacher, who is seen as the central professional, and of that teacher’s curriculum.

The theme that ELL teachers cede control – whether in the event or in the planning, as one teacher noted, “I usually do what the teacher decides” -- is exacerbated by the fact that 25% of the respondents reported that the determination of where they work with their students, in or out of the mainstream classroom, is decided by the administration, without their input. That is, these teachers have limited or no control over their placement in a setting that they view as contributing towards the diminishment of their professional status and others’ respect for their knowledge.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the data show that ELL teachers overwhelmingly take a dim view of working in the mainstream classroom. When asked to choose where to work with their ELLs, not one of the respondents indicated they would choose to work in the mainstream classroom, if given the choice. Perhaps because as one participant noted, “I feel restricted when I am in the classroom. I cannot do the types of lessons I would like to do” and because of the belief that in this setting, as others noted, “the ELL teacher's time is not being effectively used” and “I do not feel that I really teach in this setting.” Perhaps most unsettling for these teachers are a sense of dislocation and lack of a clear purpose: one participant described this, among a list of the drawbacks of her work in the mainstream classroom, as “not being sure of my role while in the classroom.” In general, in the mainstream classroom, a distinct pattern emerged of ELL teachers perceiving themselves as the second fiddle, less empowered and taking their cues for instruction from the classroom teacher.

Less Focused Instruction

Numerous respondents noted that a key drawback of working in the mainstream classroom was the mainstream emphasis on content and the subsequent inability to provide the ELL with targeted, intensive instruction. “ELL's don't receive as much focused teaching in language areas where they are weak,” one participant noted. These teachers reported that between the need to listen to the mainstream teacher and other limiting factors like having to work around the mainstream teacher’s lesson and pacing, there was little opportunity to provide comprehensible input for students. These teachers felt their teaching opportunities were constricted in the mainstream classroom and that their ELL’s did not get their needs completely met. “Students get
far less intense ELL services, I am more like a para in the classroom [and] … students seem to make less progress.”

**Challenging Logistics**

Adding to the mix is the frustration many respondents noted with the physical logistics of attempting to work with their ELLs in the midst of the mainstream classroom filled with competing voices and stimuli, an environment, as one participant noted, where there is “limited space to work with ELLs if they have not understood the lesson.” Many noted an additional challenge of working one-on-one in the mainstream classroom: “I often feel I’m disturbing nearby students.”

**Ambiguous Responsibility**

Respondents noted that the presence of the ELL teacher in the mainstream classroom can raise the question, “Who is responsible for the ELL’s education?” As one participant noted flatly, “The mainstream teacher doesn't have to worry about providing excessive accommodations for the ELL while I'm in the room.” Another said that when the ELL teacher is in the room, “teachers do not have to concern themselves with making the lesson accessible to the ELL.” The mainstream teachers are allowed to feel that the ELL student is ‘taken care of’ and their attention can be directed elsewhere. Or as one respondent noted when discussing the push-in instructional model, “Teachers . . . feel that the student is the ESOL teacher's responsibility and they take a less involved role in the ELL’s instruction.” This raises the question of what happens to this ELL once the ELL teacher leaves the room. Does the classroom teacher then switch gears and refocus attention to all students in the room?

Responses highlight the gulf between the reality of the low-incidence, push-in tutor model and the co-teaching ideal. All these factors lead to a perceived sense of collective diminishment in this learning dynamic, for ELL teachers and students alike. An environment that engenders embarrassment or shame, frustration, and fear of disturbing the work of the mainstream teacher and students, is far from optimal for anyone involved. The ELL teacher takes on a secondary, less-professional status, and the ELL student is stymied and anxiety-ridden, the two hushed in the corner or huddled close together to limit the surrounding distractions and not disturb the “real” work of the mainstream classroom.

**Push-In: Benefits of the Mainstream Classroom**

However, despite the misgivings about the effectiveness of mainstream classroom push-in instruction and their own role within it, a number of benefits were reported that accrue to both the ELL teacher and the ELL by working in the mainstream classroom. For the ELL teacher these include the knowledge of the mainstream classroom, its dynamic, its curriculum, and the mainstream students themselves. As with the critical responses to mainstream settings, the comments that speak of these benefits below have been chosen as representative of patterns of thinking among respondents.

For the ELL the respondents saw benefits largely centered around two facts. First, the ELL doesn’t miss mainstream class-time work. Second, by not being pulled out for instruction, the ELL is seen as a member of the classroom and this may, therefore, boost self-confidence for some
students. This seeming contradiction with the drawbacks reported above suggests that this is a complex, nuanced situation, in which one size does not fit all.

Knowledge of the Mainstream Classroom

For the ELL teacher the ability to take the pulse of the mainstream classroom appears to be one considerable benefit of this model. As one respondent noted, “Staying on top of the classroom curriculum . . . I have a good feel for what is being taught and what the assignments are.” The respondents noted that their work in the mainstream classroom, besides affording the opportunity to see the curriculum firsthand, also gave them a sense of the class itself. “I get a view of the tone and tempo of the classroom and can change/adapt my out-of-class tone/tempo to help the student adjust/function in that particular setting.”

Seeing what their ELLs encounter adds to the ELL teacher’s knowledge base with which they assist their ELLs. “I find it beneficial to observe my ELL students with their peers and teachers. It gives me a clearer idea of the classroom expectations. It gives me an opportunity to observe how directions are given and how difficult listening comprehension is.”

In addition, a strong pattern emerged of participants noting the importance of seeing mainstream students in the mainstream classroom. The knowledge of academic expectations for non-ELL students appears to be very helpful for ELL teachers, guiding their work with their ELLs and giving these teachers a grade-level standard. In addition, the observation of the ELL with their mainstream peers gives these teachers additional knowledge of what the ELL can and cannot do in social interactions. One participant summed this up in noting, “I get to know their peers. I can discuss peer relations with the ELL if necessary.”

Curricular and Social Benefits

Respondents observed that for the ELL, a key benefit for staying in the mainstream classroom was not missing work conducted by the mainstream teacher. “Students have more time in their classroom which equals less interruption in their learning.” An additional benefit of having ELLs stay in the classroom is the social interaction with mainstream peers. As one participant noted, “Student doesn't feel isolated. Student picks up more language from other students. Student feels part of the group.”

For those respondents who did some of their work with ELLs in the mainstream class, 85% reported occasionally working with non-ELLs during this time. A number of these respondents saw this work with non-ELLs as having a positive impact on their ELLs. “The student can be viewed by their peers as similar to themselves. The native-speaking peers seek my assistance as well, which I feel is positive.” Indeed a number of respondents saw their work with other students, or the inclusion of non-ELLs in groupwork with the ELL, as sending to the mainstream and ELL student a message of equality. “If I serve other children needing assistance, no one is singled out as being "different"; all students regard me as a teacher who they might ask for help, [and it] lessens the stigma.”

The participants believe that not removing ELL students also delivered the message to others in the classroom, that ELLs can do the work of the mainstream classroom. One participant observed, “By not removing the students it shows both students and mainstream teacher that the students CAN do this, they just need appropriate supports and scaffolded instruction in order to
access the information.” Such a sanguine attitude assumes that such support is possible in this model, a belief that was questioned by many respondents.

In addition, staying in the mainstream classroom gives the ELLs themselves an important psychological boost, signaling that they too can handle the work of the mainstream classroom. “The students probably feel that they can remain in the classroom and complete the same work as their classmates.” As another participant noted, this window onto the academic abilities of their peers, especially as it relates to their own abilities, can give students who might lack academic self-confidence in their new language, a needed lift. “ELLs find that they are not at the bottom of the class.”

Pull-Out: Benefits of the ESOL Classroom

Nearly all of the respondents, 97%, do at least some of their work with their ELLs outside the mainstream classroom, and 21% work exclusively outside the mainstream classroom. The data show that the respondents saw several key advantages for both the ELL teacher and student to pull-out ELL instruction, including fewer distractions for the student, greater autonomy and control for the ELL teacher over the curriculum, and finally the opportunity to create a safe zone for the students in the ELL classroom.

Freedom from Distractions

The data indicate that these ELL teachers view working outside the mainstream classroom with their ELLs as an opportunity to get work done free of the mainstream classroom’s interruptions. As one teacher put it, when the student is pulled out, “the students get a much needed break from the classroom and get purely comprehensible input with little or no distraction.” Respondents repeatedly described the mainstream classroom as one filled with “distractions”, “noise” and “commotion”, where it is difficult for the ELL to pay attention and concentrate on the work at hand. One respondent, echoing the sentiments of many others, noted that when pulled out for ELL instruction, “Student picks up on information more quickly because it's quiet. Student gets a break from all the classroom commotion.”

Control over Curriculum

ELL teachers view working in their own classrooms as giving them the ability to control the curriculum, to make decisions on what and how to teach their students and crucially, the ability to individualize instruction to best meet their students’ academic needs. As one teacher explained, “I can design my lessons more freely, just depending on which skills I think the children need the most help on. I can design my own incentives, systems, and use my own teaching style with more freedom. I can decide what materials I will use and how I will approach teaching the student.” The ability to tailor instruction for the learner’s needs was consistently noted by teachers who pulled students out of the mainstream classroom. The importance of determining how and what is taught is expressed by this respondent, who described work in the ELL classroom with her students as allowing her “to be the lead teacher, planning activities myself that I think are relevant and helpful, dive deeper into subject material . . . [and have] control over curriculum and delivery of services.”
In contrast to their work in the mainstream classroom, these teachers viewed their work in their own classrooms as empowering and autonomous. For example, 69% of respondents reported that they determined the curriculum for pull-out instruction outside the mainstream classroom. They could make professional determinations of the needs of their students, to tailor the material, to determine what works and what doesn’t for their students. In other words, these teachers, working in their own classrooms, acted as teachers rather than tutors. Working in the mainstream classroom largely removed these kinds of professional decision-making opportunities for the ELL teacher, and working in their own rooms returned it to them.

**Safe Zone**

Participant responses consistently describe one of the key benefits of working with ELLs outside the mainstream classroom as providing a safe zone for ELLs, a refuge from the school, where a community and relationships could develop. A typical response from one respondent about working in their ELL classroom reads, “I can create a different environment for the students...specifically one of acceptance, appreciation, and where they can have freedom to be themselves and not be worried about comparing themselves to their mainstream peers.”

The data complement the fact that ELLs are often a marginalized population within their schools, trying to adapt to a new language, culture and learning environment, which adds stress to their lives. The ELL teachers report that pulling these students out of their mainstream classroom often provides them with a psychic break. The ELL classroom becomes a place they can go to recharge and be validated. As one respondent put it, “My individual classroom is not only a learning space, but also a refuge for many of the ELLs where they can find security and a sense of place.” The data indicate that there is a crucial learning component to this safe zone; working in the ELL classroom affords students a place where they can take linguistic and academic risks, and ask questions without fear of how they look to their mainstream peers. This fits neatly with the perceptions that the stress of the mainstream classroom can actually detract from the ELL’s learning.

Participants noted that in the ELL classroom, “The ELL student can be free to make mistakes and relax without judgment from peers,” and, “My ELL room is a less risky environment where they can take bigger risks without being concerned about their English proficient peers.” Pull-out work serves as an opportunity for ELLs to work with not only the ELL teacher but with other ELLs. In these low-incidence settings, ELLs are often isolated within their mainstream classrooms, without ELL peers. The respondents report typically pulling out more than one student, from different classrooms, with the same level of English. In such cases the work in the ELL classroom provides these students a place to meet and interact with other ELLs. As one participant noted, in working with ELLs outside the mainstream classroom she is “building an ELL community”. Respondents stressed the importance of the ELL space, which “allows the students to feel more comfortable to voice concerns or questions, as it is a small group, and with students who are in a similar situation.” As one respondent said of the ELL classroom, “students feel more at home and cared for there than anywhere else in the school.” The ELL classroom serves important academic, cultural and social functions in the lives of ELL students.
Summary of Data

The data indicate that the ELL teacher-respondents saw both instructional models, pulling ELL students out and push-in ELL instruction, as having pedagogical and psychological advantages and disadvantages.

However, the data point to three clear and key findings:

- The looming gap between the ideal of mainstreaming ELLs in a co-teaching model and the reality described by these teachers. The implied balance, and equal status, of integrated co-teaching contrasts with the reality of low-incidence mainstreaming. There is clearly a perceived contradiction between co-teaching in name, and tutoring in reality.

- The overwhelmingly negative perceptions ELL teachers have toward working in the mainstream classroom. For these teachers this work in the mainstream classroom, although not without benefits, is work that leaves them in a professionally disadvantaged position, one with a secondary status, both implied and real.

- The importance of a safe zone for ELLs in pull-out classrooms. This is a place where ELLs can work free from distractions and focus on work that is meaningful, and where ELL teachers can use their training to provide targeted instruction appropriate to their students’ needs.

Participants also noted that the question of which model is better for a given learner, might be best informed by his or her English proficiency; many noted that push-in instruction is more effective for ELLs with higher levels of English. “I work in the mainstream classroom if the students have reached an intermediate or advanced proficiency.” These teachers saw the push-in model as more effective for advanced students, and conversely the more intensive work of the ELL classroom as more effective for students with less-advanced English language abilities. As one representative comment noted, the push-in model “would not be effective for newcomers, who need some direct instruction on Basic English.”

Although these teachers were able to see some advantages of their work in the mainstream classroom, there was on the whole a distinct appreciation and support for work with ELLs in the ELL classroom, with myriad pedagogical and psychological benefits. There was a strong across-the-board belief that ELLs benefited emotionally from their time in the safety zone of the ELL classroom. The participants also saw strong pedagogical advantages for this pull-out work, noting that the work in the ELL classroom was more substantive, and targeted the ELL student’s needs. In contrast, the participants indicated that teaching ELLs in the mainstream classroom posed distinct pedagogical challenges, with many saying it was difficult to target instruction to students effectively in this environment.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

There are several ways in which both push-in and pull-out instructional models can be improved for both the ELL and the ELL teacher. These include greater collaboration between the mainstream teacher and the ELL teachers, with common planning time for both teachers,
information for mainstream teachers on the nature of ELL instruction, and discussions and agreements between ELL teachers and their mainstream colleagues on roles and responsibilities.

The need for dedicated, explicit collaboration between the ELL and mainstream teacher is a key component of effective push-in ELL instruction. The data show that without explicit time to plan together, the work of the ELL teacher is perceived as less effective. As one participant wrote, “Having the same plan time as the mainstream teacher is essential.”

Of course, this is more easily said than done. It requires both teachers to have a rare commodity, mutual time, available. With both sets of teachers likely already pulled in many different directions it is a challenge to make this happen. In today’s schools all teachers have considerable demands on their time; the mainstream teacher could easily have a hundred or more students in a high school setting. It is not hard to imagine the demands on this teacher’s time. Adding time to work with the ELL teacher might not rise to the top of the list. The ELL teachers too are pulled in many different directions, with multiple students spread across different grades.

What currently happens, as one ELL teacher noted, is “no common planning time, no access to pre-teach vocabulary, no time to explain how and why I am modifying the work.” In addition to the effort of trying to find the time to work with different classroom teachers, participants noted that even when there is planning time available, they encounter resistance from mainstream teachers to this additional demand on their time. “Teachers have difficulty understanding the role of an ELL teacher and will often not take the time to collaborate. The ELL teacher is seen as an aide.”

Yet if no collaboration happens beforehand between the ELL and mainstream teachers, then the ELL teacher arrives at the class to work with the ELL, with little or no idea what will happen in the class. This reduces the ELL teacher’s effectiveness considerably; there is no prep and, therefore, they are, as one participant noted, “winging it” in the mainstream classroom, watching the teacher’s lesson and attempting to modify work, teach vocabulary, and scaffold language and content, all on the fly. It is small wonder that the ELL teachers who are doing this feel that this environment reduces their ability to effectively teach their ELLs, along with the other drawbacks noted above.

Nearly every response mentioned the significance of missed classroom work when an ELL is pulled out. Regardless of which class is missed, and avoiding the discussion of which class is more important, one way to address this concern would be to schedule at least one period of the day for each ELL to receive pull-out instruction, in a time period where they are not missing academic work; perhaps this is a study hall period or a silent reading period. It should be within the school’s ability to ensure that the ELLs who are in mainstream classrooms also have a period of time to work with the ELL teacher, when they won’t miss academic mainstream classroom work. This time should not be the student’s lunch, recess or ‘special’ period. Working with the ELL teacher should not be seen as taking away a period the student looks forward to and which other students get.

Aside from logistics, the question of missing work raises the question of why the mainstream classroom work is seen as the more important work, the work that cannot be missed, and why the ELL classroom work is perceived as taking away from the central work of the school. Not one participant challenged this paradigm, or stated explicitly that for ELLs the work in the ELL classroom is of equal or greater importance compared to the mainstream work. One participant alluded to this inequality when noting “the main thrust” is always on classroom work as the ELL “needs to keep caught up.”
The strange phenomenon of a trained teacher with secondary status in the mainstream classroom raises the question of the long-term professional consequences of this environment. Why do trained professionals continue to accept such conditions? Clearly such a situation negatively impacts their work with their students. Some of that is likely unavoidable, as the mainstream class is a space that belongs to the mainstream teacher. However, there should be explicit work done to lessen the diminishment of the ELL teacher in the mainstream classroom and allow him or her to contribute to their students’ learning as fully as possible.

What might this work look like? To begin with, administration should facilitate trainings and frank discussions on what the ELL teacher actually does. It seems that a first step is to demystify the work of the ELL teacher for the mainstream teacher, who is likely untrained in working with ELLs. To the mainstream teacher, the work of the ELL teacher might look like the work that a paraprofessional does with students. It is the job of the school administration either through specific workshops or trainings to facilitate this relationship.

Administration typically sets the tone in a school, and could promote the idea that all teachers are responsible for ELLs’ education, and that these students are not just the responsibility of the ELL teacher. This kind of message does not exoticize the ELLs but sees them as an integral part of the school fabric.

But it is also the job of the ELL teachers themselves to clarify how their work is different from work done by paraprofessionals, as they interact daily with colleagues. This work actually should begin in teacher preparation programs, especially those training ELL teachers who might work in low-incidence settings. Prospective ELL teachers could benefit from leadership training, and this training should include strategies for working with mainstream teachers (Baecher, 2012; Whiting, 2012). In addition, programs for mainstream teachers could include strategies for working with ELLs. Finally, regarding the third main finding, the existence of the ELL classroom as a safe zone. It would seem that as schools push for mainstream instruction for ELLs, this safe zone for ELLs will be lessened or lost. It is, therefore, imperative for these students, many of whom have already experienced the psychic disturbance of changing cultures, schools, countries, and languages, that this space not be lost. Are there ways to expand the safe zone for these students? Can the mainstream classroom become a safe zone for ELLs? Can the whole school? If so, it requires work and commitment from all teachers, mainstream, ELL and otherwise, as well as from school administrators.

There are some limitations to this research. The participants were self-selected, that is, only teachers who chose to participate did. In addition to reporting the teachers’ own experiences, the views of the students’ experiences are as reported by the ELL teachers. The current study did not include administrators, mainstream teachers, families or the students themselves. Future research would examine the perspectives of these other groups, and compare them with the data reported here. Further, the data could be deepened by observations of these teachers in both mainstream and pull-out classroom settings, coupled with a close examination of student achievement scores.

The present situation, particularly in low-incidence settings, is one in which comparably trained professionals are nevertheless often working uneasily together and separated by wide gaps in expectations. A better understanding of how these educators see these gaps will help to close them.
References

Abraham, P., & Chumley, J. (2001). Portrait of the ESL teacher: Survey data from elementary schools in Massachusetts. *The Teacher Educator, 36*(2), 87-101.

Arkoudis, S. (2006). Negotiating the rough ground between ESL and mainstream teachers. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 9*(4), 415-433.

Baecher, L. (2012). Pathways to teacher leadership among English as a second language teachers: Professional development by and for emerging teacher leaders. *Professional Development in Education, 38*, 317–330.

Baker, W. (2007). Social, experiential and psychological Factors Affecting L2 dialect acquisition. In *Selected Proceedings of the 2007 Second Language Research Forum*, M. Bowles et al. (eds.), Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project, 187-198.

Bell, A. B., & Baecher, L. (2012). Points on a continuum: ESL teachers reporting on collaboration. *TESOL Journal, 3*(3), 488-515.

Bell, A., & Walker, A. (2012). Mainstream and ELL teacher partnerships: A model of collaboration. In A. Honigsfeld & M. Dove (Eds.), *Coteaching and other collaborative practices in the EFL/ESL classroom: Rationale, research, reflections, and recommendations* (pp. 15–25). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Basics of qualitative research. (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Creese, A. (2006). Supporting talk? Partnership teachers in classroom interaction. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 9*(4), 434-453.

Dornyei, Z. (2003). *Questionnaires in second language research: Construction, administration and processing*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Friend, M. (2008). Co-teaching: A simple solution that isn’t simple after all. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 2* (2), 9–19. doi:10.3776/joci.2008.v2n2p9-19

Harper, C. A., de Jong, E. J., & Platt, E. J. (2008). Marginalizing English as a second language teacher expertise: The exclusionary consequence of No Child Left Behind. *Language Policy, 7* (3), 267-284. doi: 10.1007/s10993008-9102-y
Harper, C. A., & de Jong, E. J. (2009). English language teacher expertise: The elephant in the room. *Language and Education, 23*(2), 137-151.

Honigsfeld, A., & Dove M. A. (2010) *Collaboration and co-teaching: Strategies for English learners*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

McClure, G., & Cahnmann-Taylor, M. (2010). Pushing back against push-In: ESOL teacher resistance and the complexities of coteaching. *TESOL Journal, 1*(1), 101-129.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, 20 USC §§ 6301.

Strong, M. (1983). Social styles and the second language acquisition of Spanish-speaking kindergartners, *TESOL Quarterly, 17*(2). 241-258.

Whiting, J. (2012). Teacher-leaders in low-incidence settings: Implications for pre-service leadership training, *New Hampshire Journal of Education, XV*, 28 – 32.

Zehr, M. A. (2006). Team-teaching helps close the language gap. *Education Week, 26*(14), 26-29.
Appendix A

Participant Survey

1. How many English Language Learners do you work with?
   a. 1-3
   b. 4-7
   c. 8-12
   d. 13-18
   e. 19+

2. What grade level do you teach?
   a. Elementary
   b. Middle School
   c. High School
   d. At more than one level

3. How many schools do you work in?

4. Where do you work with your ELLs?
   a. In the mainstream classroom
   b. Outside the mainstream classroom
   c. Both in and out of the mainstream classroom

5. If you provide services in the mainstream classroom, how many of your ELLs do you work with in this setting?
   a. 1-3
   b. 4-7
   c. 8-12
   d. 13+

6. If you provide services in the mainstream classroom, is this work one-on-one or in a small group?
   a. One-on-one
   b. Small Group

7. If you provide services in the mainstream classroom, do you work with non-ELLs as well as ELLs?
   a. Yes
   b. No
c. Occasionally

8. If you provide services in the mainstream classroom, would you describe your work as co-teaching?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. If you provide services in the mainstream classroom, who determines the work you do with your ELLs?
   a. I do
   b. The cooperating teacher does
   c. We determine together

10. If you provide services in the mainstream classroom, how many mainstream classrooms do you work in?
    a. 1-2
    b. 3-5
    c. 5+

11. Could you list one or two pros and cons for yourself, the ELL and the mainstream classroom teacher, of working with your ELLs in the mainstream classroom?

12. If you provide services outside the mainstream classroom, how many ELLs do you work with in these settings?
    a. 1-3
    b. 4-7
    c. 8-12
    d. 13+

13. If you provide services outside the mainstream classroom, do you have a dedicated space for ELL services?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Depends on the school and other factors

14. If you provide services outside the mainstream classroom, is this work primarily one-on-one, small group, or whole class?
    a. One-on-one
    b. Small group
    c. Whole class
15. If you provide services outside the mainstream classroom, who determines your curricula?
   a. I do
   b. The cooperating teacher does
   c. We do together

16. Could you list one or two pros and cons for yourself, the learner, and the cooperating teacher, of working outside the mainstream classroom with your students?

17. Who determines whether you work in the mainstream classroom or outside it?
   a. I do.
   b. The cooperating teacher does.
   c. The administration does.
   d. The cooperating teacher and I decide together.

18. Given the choice, would you prefer to work inside or outside of the mainstream classroom with your ELLs?
   a. Inside
   b. Outside
   c. Depends

19. If you answered "Depends", what factors affect your preference of where to work? (rate the choices below)
   a. The student
   b. The cooperating teacher
   c. The age and grade level
   d. The student's English proficiency
   e. The subject area

20. What job title best describes your position?
   a. Teacher
   b. Paraprofessional
   c. Administrator

21. Is your position full-time?
   a. Yes
   b. No
22. What is your highest level of education?
   a. High School
   b. Some College
   c. BA
   d. MA
   e. MA +

23. What is your training in TESOL?
   a. None
   b. Have taken some classes in TESOL
   c. Have a TESOL certificate
   d. Have a graduate degree in TESOL

24. Do you have an ELL license or endorsement?
   a. Yes
   b. No

25. Number of years teaching ELLs:
   a. 1-2
   b. 3-5
   c. 6-10
   d. 11-15
   e. 16-20
   f. 21+

26. Number of years teaching in general:
   a. 1-2
   b. 3-5
   c. 6-10
   d. 11-15
   e. 16-20
   f. 21+

27. Your gender:
   a. Male
   b. Female
## Appendix B

### Responses to survey

Of 107 licensed teachers in the state, 71 (66%) responded to the survey.

All numbers below are in percentages.

### CLASSROOM

| Category                                                      | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Respondents who work exclusively in mainstream               | 3          |
| Respondents who work at least partly in mainstream            | 78         |
| Respondents who work at least partly in mainstream and consider their work as co-teaching | 24         |
| Written response rate of those who work at least partly in mainstream (Questions 11 and 16) | 84         |
| Respondents who work exclusively in pull-out                  | 21         |
| Respondents who work at least partly in pull-out              | 97         |
| Written response rate of those who work at least partly in pull-out (Questions 11 and 16) | 79         |

### CURRICULUM

| Category                                                      | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| For mainstream class, mainstream teacher determines curriculum | 16         |
| For mainstream class, ELL teacher determines curriculum        | 22         |
| For mainstream class, teachers determine curriculum together  | 61         |
| For pull-out class, mainstream teacher determines curriculum   | 3          |
| For pull-out class, ELL teacher determines curriculum         | 69         |
| For pull-out class, teachers determine curriculum together    | 27         |

### PREFERENCE

| Category                                                      | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| ELL teachers’ preference to work in mainstream classroom      | 0          |
| ELL teachers’ preference to work in pull-out                  | 30         |
| ELL teachers’ preference depends on other factors             | 69         |