“You’re Not an Island”: A Middle Grades Language Arts Teacher’s Changed Perceptions in ESL and Content Teachers’ Collaboration

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Abstract

Building on previous studies of ESL and content teachers’ collaboration, this qualitative case study relied on Davies and Harré’s positioning theory as a theoretical lens to examine the influences that collaboration between an ESL teacher and a language arts teacher had on the language arts teacher’s approach to planning for and teaching ESL students. Data collection included three audio recorded semi-structured interviews, two video recorded collaborative planning sessions, two reflective journals written by the language arts teacher, document analysis of the created lesson plan documents, and field notes. The findings showed that the language arts teacher changed her perceptions about the content teacher’s role, lesson plan design, and her views about ESL students while working in collaboration with an ESL teacher. These findings implicate the potential for ESL and content teachers’ collaboration to be a space to challenge the content teachers’ accepted notions about language instruction for ESL students and highlight the ESL teacher’s strengthened role in the collaborative partnership. Further, this study warrants further exploration into ESL and content teachers’ collaboration in middle school content classrooms.

Keywords: middle school, English as a second language students, teacher collaboration, positioning theory

Introduction

The call to teach both content and language to English as a second language (ESL) students generates opportunities for ESL and content teachers’
collaboration in content classrooms throughout the United States (Kibler, Walqui, & Bunch, 2015; Peercy, DeStefano, Yazan, & Martin-Beltrán, 2016). Yet, despite the potential to become a viable solution for ESL students’ content and language learning, ESL and content teachers’ collaboration has not become the teaching norm in content classrooms in large part because of the content teachers’ lack of preparation in working with diverse learners (Rubinstein-Avilá & Lee, 2014) and the ESL teacher’s relegated professional status and roles in the content classroom (Ahmed Hersi, Horan, & Lewis, 2016; Arkoudis, 2003; Creese, 2002; McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010).

Consequently, there is a need for researchers to examine ESL and content teachers’ multiple and complex roles because these roles ultimately influence how teachers engage in collaboration (DelliCarpini, 2018; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). Such analysis is particularly needed in the middle grades because collaborative practices are fundamental to effective middle level schools (Association for Middle Level Education, 2010). Moreover, middle level scholars have recently called for increased attention to the needs of diverse learners (Graham, Wenzel, Linder, & Rice, 2018; Hurd, Harrison, Brinegar, & Kennedy, 2018), and prior research has highlighted the isolation of ESL teachers in middle grades (Virtue, 2005, 2010). Furthermore, analyzing how ESL and content teachers’ collaboration influences the content teachers’ perceived roles sheds light on the possibility for collaboration to be a potential space for content teachers to reimagine and renegotiate their teaching practices. As the content and ESL teachers engage in collaborative planning and teaching, they ultimately work together to provide equitable learning outcomes for ESL students in the content classroom (Giles & Yazan, 2019; Peercy, Martin-Beltrán, Yazan, & DeStefano, 2017).

ESL and Content Teachers’ Collaboration as Professional Development

Previous research on ESL and content teachers’ collaboration reports that this teaching partnership can be a space for content teachers’ professional development in planning for and teaching ESL students (Baecher, Rorimer, & Smith, 2012; Giles & Yazan, 2019; Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014; Peercy, Ditter, & DeStefano, 2016; Peercy et al., 2017). The outgrowth of this collaboration can ultimately contribute to favorable ESL students learning outcomes (Giles & Yazan, 2019; Gladman, 2015; Spezzini & Becker, 2012).

In engaging in collaboration to promote professional growth, content and ESL teachers learn from each other’s expertise as they use shared tools (e.g., technology and rubrics) (Baecher et al., 2012; Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014; Peercy et al., 2016). That is, content teachers can better understand ESL students’ language needs in the content classroom (Giles & Yazan, 2019), recognize how to scaffold the content material appropriate to the ESL students’ language needs, and develop new ideas related to ESL instruction (Peercy et al., 2016, 2017). ESL teachers can also learn age-appropriate strategies for students and refine their understandings about sustaining collaboration in the content classroom (Peercy et al., 2016).

In addition to teachers’ professional development, earlier work also shows that ESL and content teachers’ collaboration can influence ESL students’ learning outcomes positively (Giles & Yazan, 2019; Gladman, 2015; Spezzini & Becker, 2012). This collaborative partnership can increase students’ participation because ESL students perceive teachers’ collective effort in accomplishing a shared teaching goal (Giles & Yazan, 2019; Gladman, 2015). Additionally, ESL and content teachers’ collaboration can contribute to higher graduation rates, specifically when students participated in a summer reading program in which ESL and content teachers worked together to provide equitable learning opportunities for ESL students (Spezzini & Becker, 2012).

The abovementioned positive learning outcomes for teachers and ESL students have not been realized without challenges. Scholars discussed the ESL teacher’s marginalized role within the collaborative partnership, which is exacerbated by scheduling conflicts (Peercy et al., 2016) and a content-specific emphasis in the school curricula (Ahmed Hersi et al., 2016; Arkoudis, 2003; Creese, 2002; McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). The ESL teacher’s role is marginalized further when the ESL and content teachers have different epistemological and pedagogical beliefs pertaining to students’ learning (Arkoudis, 2003) or the content teacher undermines the ESL teacher’s professional expertise. The ESL teacher becomes the “less proper” teacher or at least less important than the content teacher in the secondary content classroom (Creese, 2002, p. 606). The ESL teacher’s lack of content knowledge and differences in race and ethnicity could further
contribute to the ESL teacher’s professional relegation (McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). Despite their marginalized role, the ESL teacher’s persistence, perseverance (Arkoudis, 2003), and agency (Giles & Yazan, 2019) can work to strengthen and ultimately sustain the collaborative partnership with content teachers.

Because ESL and content teachers’ collaboration can contribute to teachers’ professional growth and ESL students’ learning opportunities, it is important to examine the dynamic and complex interactions between ESL and content teachers during their collaboration. Recent work reported on ESL and content teachers’ collaborative interactions mainly in elementary school settings (Ahmed Hersi et al., 2016; Peercy et al., 2016, 2016, 2017). Fewer studies investigate ESL and content teachers’ interactions in secondary middle school classrooms (see Arkoudis, 2003; Creese, 2002; Giles & Yazan, 2019).

In light of earlier work that reported the content teachers’ limited training and experiences planning for and teaching ESL students and their role in contributing to the ESL teacher’s relegation, this study focused on the content teacher’s changed approaches to planning for and teaching ESL students in a middle grades language arts classroom. Therefore, we need further exploration into secondary content teachers’ multiple interactions with ESL teachers as they collaborate to plan for and teach ESL students in content classrooms. Such exploration could provide a portrait of the dynamic roles that content teachers assume in collaboration, which ultimately gives a more nuanced understanding of collaboration in middle level schools.

**Theoretical Framework**

This study used positioning theory as a theoretical lens to examine the dynamic positions individuals assume in their interactions. Davies and Harré (1990) used **position** as a metaphor for a person’s attributes made relevant in and through conversations. This notion rejects the fixed notion of role to emphasize a person’s dynamic, unstable, and multiple positions, which constitute and are constituted by discursive practices. People’s multiple positions show the “ever-shifting patterns of mutual and contestable rights” as individuals engage in social interactions (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999, p. 1). These positions and acts together create a storyline that describes a person’s interpersonal relationships within a particular discourse.

Davies and Harré (1990) distinguished between reflexive and interactive positions. Reflexive positions describe how a person positions oneself and make visible a person’s views and beliefs; these reflexive positions lead the individual to act in certain ways and engage in specific practices (Davies & Harré, 1990). Additionally, interactive positions are how one person positions another, which can be mutual or contested. As such, people continuously negotiate these positions in and through conversations (Davies & Harré, 1990).

As applied to this study, positioning theory provides a lens for analyzing the multiple ways in which the language arts teacher positioned herself, the ESL teacher, and the ESL students in collaboration. The language arts teacher’s reflexive positions refer to how she internalized her own responsibilities in teaching language and content to ESL students in the content classroom. These responsibilities help illuminate the language arts teacher’s beliefs about collaboration and working with ESL students. At the same time, the language arts teacher interactively positioned the ESL teacher and ESL students as she collaborated to plan for and teach ESL students with the ESL teacher in the content classroom.

**Methodology**

The current investigation was a case study that used qualitative data collection methods (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and coding techniques (Saldaña, 2013) to examine a language arts teachers’ reflexive and interactive positions. More specifically, the current study addressed the following research question: How does the ESL and language arts teachers’ collaboration influence the language arts teachers’ approach to planning for and teaching ESL students in the content classroom?

**Research Setting**

Located in the southeastern part of the U.S., Starcreek Middle School had, at the time of the study, witnessed a recent growth of ESL students. During the 2017–2018 school year, the total number of ESL students was forty-one. Students qualified for ESL services if they made a qualifying score on the World Class-Instructional Design Assessment (WIDA) Screener (4.9 or below) or the annual WIDA’s Access

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1 All names of people and places are pseudonyms except for Amanda, this manuscript’s first author. The Institutional Review Board granted research approval (Reference #17-OR-002). All participants voluntarily agreed to participate in this study and signed an informed consent form.
for English Language Learners 2.0 Assessment (4.7 or below). ESL students received a fifty-five minute class period of language instruction through a pull-out instructional model taught by Amanda (Author 1), the school’s ESL teacher, in a separate classroom daily. Therefore, the ESL students received the majority of language and content instruction in the content classroom. Average content classrooms comprised twenty-five students.

**The Language Arts Teacher**

Emily was the eighth grade language arts collaborating teacher in this study and had seven years of total teaching experience. She taught ninth and tenth grades before taking her current teaching position and had been in her current role for three years. Emily double-majored in English and Spanish and had a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction. While she held teaching certification in Spanish in a different state, she reported that she did not speak Spanish regularly. She also reported that she did not have collegiate training on how to plan for and teach ESL students, nor did she have previous experience working with ESL students prior to teaching at Starcreek. Consequently, she lacked experience collaborating with the ESL teacher. Nonetheless, she collaborated with the special education teacher, but the special education teacher never shared planning or instructional responsibilities, so engaging in collaborative planning and teaching was a new experience for Emily. When asked why she wanted to participate in collaboration with an ESL teacher, she reported that she knew the reading text (i.e., *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson) was too difficult for ESL students and she would need Amanda’s help to plan activities with this text and, ultimately, help her teach ESL students in the content classroom. She taught five total ESL students who spoke Spanish (three students), Chinese (one student), and Vietnamese (one student) as their home languages.

**The ESL Teacher**

Amanda was the ESL teacher in this study. She had eight total years of teaching experience, all of which were at Starcreek. Amanda majored in English and Spanish in college and held certification in both content areas, and she wanted to use both languages to help her students learn content and English as an additional language. After completing her master’s degree in secondary education, Amanda was excited to secure a language arts position at Starcreek and, as she intended, she used Spanish and English frequently in conversations with students and parents. She transitioned into the role as ESL teacher in 2015 because she wanted to focus directly on ESL students and felt confident that she could accomplish this task. The state’s requirements for teaching ESL students allow a teacher with certification in English/language arts and/or a foreign language to teach ESL students, and Amanda held both certifications.

During her first year as ESL teacher, Amanda enrolled in a doctoral program in curriculum and instruction with a concentration in second language teaching and learning. Her education and professional experience began to solidify her personal belief that ESL instruction necessitated a shared teaching partnership between ESL and content teachers. Thus, she initiated collaboration with content teachers to promote this shared responsibility. While Amanda formally taught eighth grade language arts for five years, she did not have previous experience working with Emily because Amanda was in her first year as the ESL teacher when Emily began teaching at Starcreek. Amanda also never taught *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* as a language arts teacher, so despite her experience as a content teacher, Amanda needed to familiarize herself with the text and develop a professional relationship with Emily to sustain this collaborative partnership and promote a shared responsibility for ESL instruction.

**Collaborative Cycles**

Collaboration emerged at the beginning of the 2017–2018 academic school year when Emily expressed concerns about teaching literacy and language to ESL students in her language arts classroom. Amanda offered collaborative planning and teaching as a potential solution to Emily’s concerns. The study lasted for five months and included two collaborative cycles. The first collaborative cycle began with an interview where Amanda asked Emily to share her formal and informal learning experiences related to teaching ESL students as well as her experience collaborating with the ESL teacher. Following the conclusion of the initial interview, Emily and Amanda collaborated to plan and teach chapter one of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in the content classroom where Emily typically instructed the five ESL students. Amanda asked Emily to write a reflective journal about the collaborative teaching session and interviewed Emily another time to clarify Emily’s perceptions of her responsibilities, beliefs, and learning to plan for and teach ESL students.
The second collaborative cycle included Emily and Amanda working together to plan and teach chapter five of the same novel. After the second collaborative teaching session, Emily wrote another reflective journal, and Amanda interviewed Emily to glean additional understandings related to ESL and language arts teachers’ collaboration, teacher learning, and Emily’s perceptions about ESL students in the content classroom. While Amanda finished data collection at the end of the fall semester, she continued to collaborate with Emily throughout the remainder of the 2017–2018 school year.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection included three audio recorded semi-structured interviews, two video recorded collaborative planning sessions, Emily’s two reflective journals, document analysis of the created lesson plan documents, and field notes. Data analysis concentrated on the Emily’s words in the semi-structured interviews, collaborative planning sessions (CPSs), and reflective journals. Amanda transcribed the audio recorded interviews and the video recorded collaborative planning sessions. Then, compiling the data into a table, the researchers used in vivo codes to highlight the co-participant’s exact wording and descriptive codes to understand the conversational gist or topic as the researchers read the data during the first coding cycle (Saldaña, 2013). After collected the initial codes, the researchers organized the codes with each data source (e.g., interviews, CPSs, and reflective journals) to refine the eighty-two initial codes.

During the second coding cycle, the researchers relied on positioning theory to categorize the initial codes (e.g., language arts teacher’s reflexive positions, the language arts teacher’s interactive positioning of the ESL teacher, and the language arts teacher’s interactive positioning of ESL students). Then, the researchers analyzed the codes in each category that occurred in three or more data sources and began “theme-ing the data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 175). This practice turned the categories into theme statements (see Appendix A for the coding table), which are explained in the next section.

**Findings**

Emily and Amanda co-planned and co-taught two lessons based on the content and language standards. In the following sections, we discuss the ways Emily changed her perceptions about lesson design, her role as the content teacher, and her views of ESL students as a consequence of negotiations in collaboration.

**Lesson Design**

Emily explained that she wanted students to analyze how the author built suspense in the first chapter of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and admitted that she was “really going to need help with looking at those high level text passages and being able to help [ESL students] break down the vocabulary” (CPS #1, October 11, 2017). Because of Emily’s lack of knowledge and inexperience in planning lessons for ESL students, she shared the original student handout that had questions only with Amanda, relied completely on Amanda to adapt the lesson for ESL students, and did not offer to share responsibility in designing the lesson. During the second planning session, Emily invited Amanda to “talk [her] through” how she designed the lesson, which interactively positioned Amanda as an instructional coach during the first cycle (CPS #2, October 16, 2017). Accepting Emily’s interactive positioning, Amanda described how she divided the aspects of the chapter that built suspense into smaller segments and placed students in collaborative groups to analyze each segment separately (see Appendix B for a portion of the lesson activity). In the model, Amanda included a video to help students answer a question that relates to a Biblical allusion:

Amanda: So, I’d just pick one person from each group to write on the document, so you don’t have 25 kids trying to write on it at the same time. I just went and picked the parts that I thought they would need, and then I thought we would do one together. Now this is the story of Cain and Abel. It is a cartoon, but you can start it a minute in. [Emily starts playing the video.] I mean it’s kind of babyish, but I would start where the story is. It’s only three minutes, but you can see the gist of the whole story to understand what and how you’re supposed to answer that question. There were others that were not babyish, but it was too long for our purposes.

Emily: That’s so funny.

Amanda: I know, right? But, it has everything we would need.

Emily: Yes, it has everything.

Amanda: Right, so then to me this is the hardest one, so that’s why we’ll just go ahead and do this together.

Emily: Do it together. (CPS #2, October 16, 2017)
Emily and Amanda negotiated the activity that the students completed during the collaborative teaching session. By accepting Emily’s interactive positioning as an instructional coach, Amanda explained her choices in designing the lesson. When explaining the design, Amanda negotiated how students would write on the shared Google document, the knowledge and vocabulary that they needed to understand the chapter, the cartoon to explain the Biblical allusion, and the time constraints of the lesson. In response, Emily agreed with all of Amanda’s suggestions (e.g., “Yes, it has everything.”) and later commented in the same CPS, “This is perfect. This is exactly what I wanted them to do.” As such, Emily’s only observable action involved playing and watching the YouTube video of the cartoon as well as later adding page numbers to the quotations. In this way, Emily assumed a reflexive position as a learner, thereby learning how to plan for ESL students in the language arts classroom. The instructional coach/learner positioning created an unequal division of responsibilities for Amanda. The unequal division of labor was challenging for Amanda because she had to create the lesson from a text that she had no prior experience teaching. She had to familiarize herself with the text and design a lesson to include both content and language objectives for ESL students and for their monolingual peers without Emily’s assistance. Even though doing so added to her multiple responsibilities, Amanda navigated this challenge because she hoped it would lead to a fruitful learning opportunity for Emily.

To this end, the unequal division of labor created an opportunity for Emily to witness and learn to design lessons for ESL students. Emily discussed how she unintentionally implemented exclusionary practices that did not help the ESL students learn content or language prior to collaboration. She remarked:

I shut [ESL students] out. Not giving them tools that they needed that I could have easily given them. Like vocab words ahead of time and images so that they don’t feel lost, and that they can always have something to ground them as they’re reading. (Interview #3, December 13, 2017)

Emily admitted that she did not simplify the language or design a lesson to include language strategies. She now focused on how she could use suggested tools (e.g., “images” and pre-teaching the vocabulary) as possible language strategies.

Emily also showed that she could apply her renewed insights to create a lesson for ESL students because she took a stronger lead in the second CPS. Emily decided to create a new lesson template as she and Amanda co-planned the lesson on the fifth chapter (see Appendix B for the lesson activity). Emily stated that she wanted to focus on Dr. Jekyll’s character, Dr. Jekyll’s laboratory, and the mysterious letter in the fifth chapter. Instead of selecting difficult lines from the chapter, she created a more student-centered lesson in which students had to locate a picture to depict the element’s importance, find textual evidence to support their choice, and tell how the textual evidence builds suspense and contributes to an understanding of the chapter’s plot. Her decision to include images and design the lesson using a graphic organizer contributed to her renewed understandings about how to design lessons for ESL students.

She also came to the realization that students needed to work in collaborative groups with each group member assuming a certain task. She stated, “I can make my groups so that there are three people in a group. I can just adjust the groups. That way everybody is in charge of one job” (CPS #3, October 25, 2017). By putting students in mixed ability groups, she sought to open up spaces for students to learn from each other. She also put each student “in charge of one job” so that all students in the group had to contribute. This attempted to prevent one student taking the lead, while the other students did not contribute. In this way, all students, including ESL students, had to take an active part in accomplishing the lesson objective. By allowing the students to select images and textual evidence as well as write explanatory statements, she prioritized students’ choice and responsibility. She incorporated strategies (e.g., student groups, images, graphic organizer for writing) to help ESL students access the lesson content and accomplish language objectives without changing the text or watering down the curriculum.

Moreover, Emily felt more confident in designing lessons for ESL students. When asked about her renewed understandings about lesson design for ESL students, Emily responded:

It’s been very positive because it gave me a new perspective on how to look at our lessons specifically together. It was just a positive way to approach these students without fear of messing up their learning in my class or destroying a relationship because they don’t understand me. It’s just been very positive. (Interview #3, December 13, 2017)
Emily’s words suggest that the collaborative experience was “positive” because she learned a “new perspective on how to look at our lessons.” She used “our lessons” to signify that she continued to see lesson design as a collaborative effort with Amanda. She understood that she could incorporate these strategies even if the student did not speak the same language (e.g., “they don’t understand me”). Hence, she felt confident in developing lessons that met the ESL students’ need for content and language.

Through her observation of Emily’s change, Amanda refined her understanding about planning and designing lessons with Emily and other content teachers. She realized that Emily appreciated an ESL teacher who shared planning responsibilities with her, which strengthened her willingness to offer to create lessons despite the division of labor. Second, she began to realize she needed to leverage her position as a lesson designer and instructional coach to verbalize the reason she included specific strategies in the lesson. In the first cycle, Amanda explained how she created the lesson. However, her rationale for including the language strategies (e.g., visuals, scaffolded instruction, collaborative groups) was missing. Moving forward, Amanda decided to use a lesson planning template (see Appendix C) in her future collaborative interactions with Emily and other content teachers. This template would help her draw content teachers’ attention to both language and content objectives and articulate her rationale for language strategies.

The Content Teacher’s Position

Emily also developed increased insights about her role as the content teacher while working in collaboration. Emily initially positioned herself as a content teacher in her work with ESL students, stating “I am a teacher of language arts” (Interview #2, October 25, 2017), and “I was able to bring knowledge of my content standards, class text, and the ultimate objectives to the conversation” (Reflective Journal #1, October 19, 2017). Specific references to “language arts,” “content standards,” “class text,” and “ultimate objectives” signify that Emily thought that the content objectives were her most important contributions to the collaborative sessions.

Such strong content teacher positionings show that she did not initially conceptualize her role as a language teacher of ESL students. In essence, Emily envisioned her role as “a teacher of language arts” because she did not know how to create assignments for ESL students. Emily’s acts during the first co-teaching session corroborated her content teacher’s position. In explaining teaching roles, Emily commented, “Like you knew to go check on [the ESL students], and I knew to go to check on the other students” (Interview #2, October 25, 2017). Here, Emily saw Amanda’s responsibility to be working with the ESL students in the content classroom while her responsibility was working with the “other students,” which did not include ESL students. This phrasing solidified her beliefs that she was the content teacher, and Amanda’s responsibility involved planning for and teaching ESL students.

By the final interview, Emily gradually understood that her content teacher positioning needed to include language, and she also needed to serve ESL students in the content classroom. When asked about the content teacher’s role in helping ESL students learn content and language in the final interview, Emily shared the following insights.

Emily: Ultimately it’s both our jobs, that’s in our job description to do both. And you can’t teach content and language alone if it’s both of our jobs. You should do it together. And it would be terrifying for me to do that by myself. I don’t know, even if I know the language they speak, that doesn’t help me teach the English language any better.

Amanda: Can you elaborate on what you mean by it’s both our jobs?

Emily: [The ESL teacher] is not responsible for every single standard. We could pick together if we had time to sit down and pick what things we could reinforce in this room what is already happening in the ESL classroom. That would be a better use of your time other than taking a shot in the dark about what we’re trying to do.

Amanda: What would be a better use of time?

Emily: Working with the ESL teacher, you’re not an island. (Interview #3, December 13, 2017)

Emily’s conceptualization of her responsibility changed as a result of collaborating with Amanda. She started viewing herself as a co-teacher of ESL students with Amanda. Her words (e.g., “we could pick together” or “what we’re trying to do”) suggested a teaching partnership in which both
teachers planned and taught content and language in the content classroom. Furthermore, Emily viewed her work as complementary to the instruction that was taking place “in the ESL classroom.” She believed her role as the content teacher should be to come alongside Amanda with this shared goal of teaching ESL students. That is, she saw working in collaboration with Amanda as the most effective way to meet the ESL students’ language and content needs in the content classroom.

**Perceptions of ESL Students**

Lastly, Emily began to change her positions in relation to ESL students during collaboration. Emily initially positioned ESL students as unmotivated, and she did not set high expectations for them in the content classroom. When asked to describe the benefits of collaborative teaching and planning, Emily explained:

I think the benefits are that I have a better understanding of these students. I don’t think they’re just lazy. I think they’re doing all they can do because I’ve now seen [an ESL student] do work. I know he can do things, so it’s a benefit for me to have a different perspective on my students. I don’t believe they’re lazy, but when they only show me those things, I don’t get to see anything else. It’s good to see a different side of them.

(Interview #2, October 25, 2017)

Emily witnessed a change in the ESL student’s behavior as the students were working on the handout. She now saw the ESL student’s participatory processes rather than focusing solely on the product (e.g., the student’s (in)completed handout). Emily acknowledged how her previous positioning of ESL students influenced her expectations and pedagogical choices related to ESL students. Emily continued to refine this “different perspective” as she collaborated with Amanda.

When asked to further describe Emily’s perceptions of ESL student outcomes as a result of collaboration, Emily insisted:

Emily: Oh, man, yeah, the ESL students were immediately perked up. Like fully engaged, like, Miss [Amanda] is in here; I must pay attention she’s watching me, so they were just more engaged with you in there and had less of a reason to make an excuse because something was too hard because you hold such a standard for them. So, there’s no way that the ESL students were going come in my room and try to get out of doing the work because they knew you were in here and that wasn’t an option.

Amanda: Can you give me a specific example of a student?

Emily: Okay, so [the ESL student’s name] typically slouches in his chair and says, “I don’t know how to do this. I don’t know. I don’t know. I don’t know.” That’s his patent phrase. He may have said it once, but then every time we walked by he looked like he was actually trying, and he didn’t use that “I don’t know” as a way of not doing the assignment. He looked like he knew what to do.

Amanda: I think, too, part of that, is when he did not know what to do. I asked probing follow up questions so that he could articulate an answer. Then, I was able to confirm his answer.

Emily: Yes, you gave him confidence. He lacks the confidence to take steps to get to the right answer. (Interview #3, December 13, 2017)

Emily saw increased student participation because of Amanda’s shared teaching responsibilities. She credited Amanda’s “high standards” for ESL students as the reason for the ESL student’s changed behavior. Emily also saw that Amanda asked the ESL student “probing questions” in an effort to help the student articulate his thoughts without just giving him the answer. In doing so, Emily believed this gave the ESL student “confidence.” Emily saw an example of how to move past the ESL student’s stated confusion (e.g., “I don’t know”) and help the student find the appropriate answer. She also understood that ESL students can master difficult texts when the lesson contains strategies to help them access the content and language.

Although Emily began to see ESL students from a new perspective, she still relied on Amanda to help ESL students in the content classroom. She also did not understand how to assess ESL students more equitably because she did not see beyond the ESL student’s completed handout, and in doing so, she assumed that ESL students mastered the content and language objectives. Emily awarded the ESL students a satisfactory grade just because they completed the assignment. However, she did not understand that the students’ task completion did not necessarily mean
that they mastered the language and content objectives.

Discussion

This study used positioning theory as a theoretical lens to explore how the ESL and language arts teachers’ collaboration influenced the content teacher’s approach to co-planning and co-teaching ESL students in the content classroom. The findings are consistent with earlier work on ESL and content teachers’ collaboration in that teachers’ collaboration can be a space for the content teachers’ learning (Giles & Yazan, 2019; Peercy et al., 2016, 2017). ESL and content teachers’ collaboration was a mediational space in which Emily and Amanda negotiated planning and teaching responsibilities. The instructional coach/learner positioning created an unequal division of labor for Amanda during the first cycle, which proved challenging for Amanda. However, the instructional coach/learner position created space for Emily to witness how to design lessons that included language strategies. In doing so, Emily learned tools, such as visuals, graphic organizers, scaffolded instruction, and methods to differentiate instruction (e.g., constructing mixed-ability student groupings). As a consequence of Emily’s learning, Amanda refined how to approach collaboration with content teachers through a lesson planning template (see Appendix C). This template would help Amanda mediate discussions with content teachers related to the inclusion of language objectives.

Emily and Amanda’s mediational process was not realized without challenges. Amanda had to assume the brunt of responsibility during the first cycle. In addition to her own workload, Amanda assumed increased responsibility when collaborating with Emily, and then she designed the lesson based on the content and language objectives without Emily’s assistance. Even though Amanda experienced challenges, she believed that doing so would contribute to Emily’s renewed understandings.

The findings also corroborate earlier studies that suggest collaborative teaching partnerships can increase ESL students’ participation (Giles & Yazan, 2019; Gladman, 2015). Emily learned how her own exclusionary practices (e.g., a long, difficult text) might contribute to ESL students’ seeming lack of participation (e.g., incomplete student handout). She began to refine her understanding that students may not be completing the assigned task because they needed language strategies (e.g., visuals, graphic organizers) to help them access and master the content standards. She began to see how Amanda’s increased expectations for ESL students created a more fruitful classroom environment.

These findings also provide an alternative teaching role for the ESL teacher than previous work that reported the ESL teacher’s relegated support role. Amanda took a lead role in planning for and teaching ESL students in the content classroom. This lead role opened up spaces for Emily’s renewed understanding in regard to her approach to lesson design, her role as the content teacher, and her ESL students’ views. Thus, this study highlights how an ESL teacher’s strong content knowledge (Arkoudis, 2003; Giles & Yazan, 2019) can work to level the playing field so that the content teacher begins to understand the need for language strategies and work to include them in designing lessons. Amanda’s previous experience as a content teacher and her relationship with her colleagues enabled her ability to assume this lead role.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study is limited to the language arts teacher’s changed positions and does not discuss the ESL teacher’s changed positions in detail. This decision related to the study’s purpose to explore the language arts teachers’ changed perceptions in collaboration with an ESL teacher. An additional study might examine the ESL teacher’s changed positions and/or learning in collaboration with a content teacher. Another limitation relates to the study’s duration, which spanned one academic semester (i.e. five-month). Additional time and data would help examine Emily’s continued changes in collaboration with Amanda. Similarly, this study is limited to one content teacher’s perceptions at Starcreek and did not include other content teachers’ perspectives which might have strengthened the study’s quality. Future studies might examine additional content teachers (e.g., mathematics, social studies, and science) to corroborate this study’s findings across multiple subject areas.

Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion

This study urges educational stakeholders to adopt more collaborative models for ESL instruction. Such collaborative models will require administrators to create schedules for teachers to engage in collaborative efforts and recognize collaboration as
professional development in light of the potential teacher learning opportunities (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). This is particularly salient in middle level settings where the field has called for schools to provide ample common planning time for teams of teachers (Cook & Faulkner, 2010; Mertens & Flowers, 2003). This recommendation will also require ESL and content teachers to cross the boundaries of their subject areas. Likewise, ESL teachers need to be willing to learn the content and able to make suggestions pertaining to how to design lessons that include language strategies (Giles, 2018). The ESL teacher may also have to bear the burden of responsibility to sustain collaboration when working with teachers with limited training and experiences related to ESL instruction.

In conclusion, this study affirms the tremendous potential in content and ESL teachers’ collaboration to influence content teachers’ positionings concerning the content teacher’s role, lesson design, and the ESL students in the content classroom. With continued collaborative efforts, all stakeholders would work together to promote equitable educational outcomes for ESL students in middle level schools across the U.S.

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### Appendix A. Coding Table

| Relevant Categories with Selected Initial Codes | Emerging Themes | Data Exemplars |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| **LA Teacher’s Reflexive Positioning**        |                 |                |
| • Feels unequipped to teach ESL students      |                 | “I feel can run to Amanda’s room and she’ll help me. I don’t necessarily know if I’m doing an effective job at what I want.” (Interview #1, September 27, 2017). |
| • Insufficient training                       |                 |                |
| • Teacher of communication                    |                 |                |
| • Takes responsibility                        |                 |                |
| • Application of language strategies          |                 |                |
| **LA Teacher’s Interactive Positioning of Amanda** | Lesson Design Approach | “I want to co-teach more! I know her time is so limited because of her responsibilities at the school, but I think the ESL students felt more comfortable and more willing to work because she was co-teaching the lesson.” (Reflective Journal #1, October 19, 2017) |
| • Clone the ESL teacher                       |                 |                |
| • ESL teacher as a LA teacher/lesson creator |                 |                |
| • ESL teacher as a friend                     |                 |                |
| • ESL teacher has good rapport with students  |                 |                |
| • ESL teacher has multiple responsibilities   |                 |                |
| **LA Teacher’s Interactive Positioning of Students** | Lesson Design Approach | “They already trusted her so much, that when they saw us working together in my room, I think they felt more comfortable with me as their teacher, too. I think this speaks to the impact Amanda has had building relationships with her students.” (Reflective Journal #2, November 10, 2017) |
| • ESL students lack focus                     |                  |                |
| • See what ESL students can do                |                  |                |
| • ESL students as strugglers                  |                  |                |
| • ESL students finished the task              |                  |                |
| • Completed the work                          |                  |                |
| • Struggle with a big block of text           |                  |                |
| • ESL students participating                  |                  |                |
| • Reading is a struggle                       |                  |                |
| • Students need to take ownership             |                  |                |
| • Working on assigned task                    |                  |                |
Appendix B. A Selection from the Student Handout/Lesson Activity Created during The First Cycle

Chapter 1—Story of the Door

Directions: As we read the story together, we will read like detectives looking for clues. We will ask: What is happening? What do you want to know more about? What is strange or weird? These clues will help us put the story together as we read.

Now, that we have read chapter 1 together, each group will take one part of chapter 1 will analyze.

| Example |
|----------------|
| But he had an approved tolerance for others; sometimes wondering, almost with envy, at the high pressure of spirits involved in their misdeeds; and in any extremity inclined to help rather than to reprove. “I incline to Cain’s heresy,” he used to say quaintly: “I let my brother go to the devil in his own way.” In this character, it was frequently his fortune to be the last reputable acquaintance and the last good influence in the lives of downgoing men. And to such as these, so long as they came about his chambers, he never marked a shade of change in his demeanour (Stevenson 3-4). |
| What type of people does Utterson enjoy spending his time? Why? |
| There is a biblical allusion to Cain and Abel. Who is Cain? What does Utterson mean by “I let my brother go to the devil in his own way”? |

| Group 1 |
|----------------|
| His friends were those of his own blood or those whom he had known the longest; his affections, like ivy, were the growth of time, they implied no aptness in the object. Hence, no doubt the bond that united him to Mr. Richard Enfield, his distant kinsman, the well-known man about town. It was a nut to crack for many, what these two could see in each other, or what subject they could find in common. It was reported by those who encountered them in their Sunday walks, that they said nothing, looked singularly dull and would hail with obvious relief the appearance of a friend (Stevenson 4). |
| What does it mean that Utterson’s feelings/affections are like ivy? |
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
Chapter 5 Incident of the Letter

We are detectives searching for clues to build a case report which describes Dr. Jekyll’s laboratory, Dr. Jekyll’s appearance/character, and the important letter.

As we read chapter 5, each of you will look for and mark clues to describe ONE of the following.

Highlight the one you choose:
- Dr. Jekyll’s appearance and character
- Dr. Jekyll’s laboratory
- The mysterious letter (include information from Dr. Jekyll and from Mr. Guest)

After we read, you will:
1. Locate one Google image that you think BEST describes your part (the character, the lab, or the letter).
2. Choose one piece of evidence from the text that you think is important in building your case report about Dr. Jekyll.
3. Write one sentence explaining the importance of the picture and piece of evidence.

ON YOUR OWN

| Google Image | Textual Evidence | How do the picture and evidence help us build our case? |
|--------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| (Stevenson #). |                  |                                                        |

When you finish, you will share your information with your group so that each group member has information about each aspect of chapter 5 “The Incident of the Letter”. Make notes in the table below and be prepared to share with the class.

WITH YOUR GROUP

| Aspect in the story | What I learned? |
|---------------------|-----------------|
| Dr. Jekyll’s appearance and character | • |
| Dr. Jekyll’s laboratory |            |
| The mysterious letter |          |
Appendix C. Lesson Planning Template

| Lesson                      | Co-teaching Model                                                                 | Content Teacher’s Role | ESL Teacher’s Role | Comments |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------|
| **Beginning:**              | ☑ One Lead-one assist<br>☑ Two teachers, same content<br>☑ One teach, one assess<br>☑ Preteach-teach<br>☑ Reteach-teach<br>☑ Multiple groups |                        |                    |          |
| (e.g. warm up, review, preview of lesson) |                                                                                     |                        |                    |          |
| **Middle:**                 | ☑ One Lead-one assist<br>☑ Two teachers, same content<br>☑ One teach, one assess<br>☑ Preteach-teach<br>☑ Reteach-teach<br>☑ Multiple groups |                        |                    |          |
| (e.g., student practice, check for understanding, individual work) |                                                                                     |                        |                    |          |
| **End:**                    | ☑ One Lead-one assist<br>☑ Two teachers, same content<br>☑ One teach, one assess<br>☑ Preteach-teach<br>☑ Reteach-teach<br>☑ Multiple groups |                        |                    |          |
| (e.g. exit slip, closing, assessment) |                                                                                     |                        |                    |          |

Found in Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018, p. 44