

4

How Do You Support Collaborative Instructional and Assessment Practices for ELLs?

Do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born in another time.

—Hebrew proverb

Richard J. Taibi, Principal, J. Harvey Rodgers School (former), Dorothy L. Bullock School, Glassboro, New Jersey, presents the outcomes of a pilot initiative:

The benefits of collaborative practice amongst educators are numerous and well documented, with one of the most important being collective ownership of student achievement. This ownership is of particular significance when working with our English language learners. As the majority of their instructional day is spent with

teachers other than an ELL specialist, systemic routines must be established to ensure that the ELL specialist(s) and classroom teachers regularly review formative data and plan accordingly, using each other's expertise to design high-quality instruction. After all, we know that "it takes a village to raise a child!"

This collective ownership is a concept that has been successfully piloted at the J. Harvey Rodgers School (in Glassboro, NJ), and has resulted in significant social-emotional, oral-language, and literacy growth amongst our kindergarten ELLs. Our approach to achieving collective ownership has consisted of the following initiatives:

- *The inclusion of classroom teachers in professional learning routines that are typically only provided to the ELL staff. These routines encompass districtwide collaborative meetings/book studies and have helped us to ensure that the classroom teacher is applying research-based, best practices for our ELL students.*
- *Monthly one-on-one collaboration time between the ELL specialist & classroom teachers for planning and data review. A substitute teacher is provided for this formalized routine so that the two teachers can focus on developing content area or literacy instruction with the needs of our ELL students in mind. This planning time is in addition to any grade-level or team meetings or informal collaboration routines.*
- *The development of systemic "push-in" routines throughout our 60-minute guided reading block. During this time, the ELL specialist provides direct small-group instruction that includes guided reading, the development of schema, and vocabulary support. These practices are designed as both pre-teaching and follow-up support that is directly aligned to content area instruction. This activity is in addition to any instructional routines provided by the classroom teacher.*
- *Last (but not least) are ongoing collaboration, data review, and support in the form of walkthroughs with the building administration. This ongoing dialog has resulted in the establishment of best practices and has helped to ensure a learning environment where all teachers (and all students) are supported! (personal communication, July 21, 2014)*

How do we know what to teach English language learners (ELLs)? How can we make sure that our instruction is effective with them? How do we ascertain if they grow linguistically, academically, and socially as a result of our instruction that takes place in the classroom? The teaching-learning cycle becomes even more complex when students have to simultaneously master content and language, while they are also adjusting to a new culture and deciphering new norms and customs in their school and communities.

ESSENTIAL KNOWLEDGE

We have experienced a shift in English as a second language (ESL) or English language development (ELD) instructional and assessment practices in