

## **COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: A FOCUS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the growing need to rethink the ways in which professional development is provided for those who teach English language learners. It documents the two-year experience of a team of seven elementary school educators (mainstream, ESL, speech clinician, paraprofessional) who participated in a newly designed professional development project to provide best practices for these learners in their school. Resulting comments by these educators reflect increased personal growth, professional success, and a renewed commitment to a more collaborative approach to professional development that is long-term, site-based, and student-focused.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Like many teacher educators in the field of second language, we have, over the years, received numerous and often frenzied requests from school districts around the state to 'fix the problem' of their English language learners (ELLs). The proverbial 'three-hour ESL in-service' on a day devoted to staff development seemed a popular choice. Anxious to help, we would make our forays into school auditoriums, libraries, or cafeteria spaces set up for such efforts and then leave these sites wondering how effective these 'sage on the stage' workshops had really been. Though the material and resources offered were sound and our own knowledge base grounded in research, we questioned how productive for the long-term this mode of staff development really was. How likely were these teachers to continue processing what they had learned, implement a new strategy or idea, assess and reflect on the outcome of doing so, and then re-enter that professional development cycle with their colleagues? More importantly, were our efforts likely to improve student learning outcomes, the real purpose for staff development? Our own understanding of best practices for staff development ran counter to those one-shot approaches, and seeking U.S. Department of Education funds for teacher development to implement a new strategy for long-term work with teachers seemed to be an avenue worth exploring. Research on cooperative learning and effective staff development pointed to very focused and contextualized opportunities for teachers to work together to create their own settings for professional growth. We wanted to work with small, inviting within-school teams of seven to begin a process of study and conversation about their work that would last two years. Thus the team members had an opportunity to work collaboratively in addressing the needs of their ELLs; and we had an opportunity to support their efforts and observe on a micro level the challenges they faced and the rewards they reaped.

This article documents the ways that a team of educators worked within this professional development model to rethink the ways in which they offered instruction to English language learners in their elementary school. It lays out our professional development philosophy as well as the educators' thoughts regarding it. It describes the collaborative instructional efforts they made, the individual changes in practice they reported, and the

bureaucratic and administrative features that either enhanced or impeded the collaborative relationships they tried to establish.

No examination of our project can begin without touching upon two important issues that not only highlight the need for a new kind of professional development but also reflect the under preparedness of many teachers to address the needs of a culturally and linguistically diverse population - the impact of the changing demographics in our schools and the implementation of No Child Left Behind education policies.

## **CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS**

We know that the changing demographics of American schools have been a fact of life for several decades now. During the period between 1995 and 2005, the national growth rate of K-12 limited English proficient students was 61% while the overall growth rate for all students enrolled in public schools was 2.6% (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students, 2006.) Particular areas of states – urban communities, for example – can no longer claim to be the sole school districts impacted by linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. From 1999-2005, there was a 29.57% increase in the national enrollment growth of ELLs in rural districts (communities of less than 25,000) as compared to 4.45% in non-rural districts (ELL Student Enrollment, 2006). Regions of the United States that have never had to be concerned with students' language needs at school – in particular the Midwest and South - show significant gains in Latino and African student populations.

In Minnesota, during the '95-'05 period, ELL growth was 161%, *outpacing* the national growth trend significantly, while the state total K-12 enrollment *decreased* by 6.5% (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2006.) There are over 60,000 ELLs currently enrolled in Minnesota schools, representing more than 110 different language groups. While a majority of our ELLs reside in the general metropolitan area, a significant and growing number can be found in our smaller cities and rural communities around the state.

The impact of increasing numbers of second language learners (ELLs or English language learners) on teachers ill-prepared to meet their needs is substantial in many communities (Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004). One key report on the preparedness of K-12 teachers to work with English language learners notes that only 27 percent of teachers are prepared to do so (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). Clearly those states with high populations of English language learners historically demonstrate a more prepared teacher force – yet even in those locales, significant numbers of teachers have yet to meet what have been identified as necessary skills for the task (Gándara, Maxwell-Jolly, & Driscoll (2005).

### **No Child Left Behind**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has increased pressure on schools to meet achievement goals for all subgroups of learners, requiring that individual teachers as well as schools take responsibility for the achievement demonstrated by English language learners – a direct contrast to the historical practice of leaving this work exclusively to ESL and bilingual specialists. How are schools responding to the growth of English language learners, given federal of accountability requirements for the achievement of all children? Clearly this task has fallen to in-service education. While most pre-service teacher preparation programs

require some attention to the needs of English language learners, a focus on these students is generally limited within an already tight curriculum (Lucas & Grinberg, 2007). Veteran teachers, who have not had such preparation, comprise the vast majority of the teaching staff of impacted schools. Staff development then becomes the single most important component in bringing ELL students to full learner status. And sustained, long-term, collaborative models of staff development hold the best chance of supporting mainstream teachers in their efforts to meet both the content and language learning needs of their students.

### **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A WAY OF THINKING WHOSE TIME HAS COME**

There is new interest and increased support for “generating professional knowledge for teaching” (Hiebert, Gallimore, & Stigler, 2002). The consensus among researchers is that staff development yields the best results when it is long-term, school-based, involves the collaborative process, and focuses on student learning (Clark, 2001; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Lampert, 2001; Tellez & Waxman, 2006). A paradigm shift, as described by Sparks & Hirsch (1997), is clearly at work, one that has teachers constructing their own paths towards integrating new knowledge and practices into their teaching, rather than receiving new methods or programs through traditional in-service models.

As teacher educators, we drew on our sense of what might be an ideal environment for in-service professional development. Our plan focused on small teams of staff members working together in what we believe is a natural marriage between the need for teachers to be part of a learning community as they explore best practices in serving English language learners and the improvement of their teaching such that student achievement itself is enhanced. The project brought together teams of teachers (seven individuals who were mainstream, ESL, special staff, and paraprofessional), from eight schools, to spend two years addressing the needs of bilingual learners at their school site, and putting into practice the kind of instruction that might positively affect student achievement. Schools were chosen in order to obtain a balance in terms of region (urban, suburban, and rural) and population representation (ethnicities/language groups). We looked for a level of willingness, energy, and commitment from both the building principal and the school, and included those schools which had been identified as needing improvement in learner outcomes for ELL students.

The following underlying philosophy guided the process and grounded the project for the work ahead.

- **Student-focused:** Personal and team-based professional development will help educators provide effective learning experiences for English language learners in their schools.
- **Site-Based:** Small teams of seven comprised of teachers and paraprofessionals work together to solve problems that are specific to their schools.
- **Collaborative:** Team members represent a variety of instructional roles (grade-level teacher, ESL teacher, paraprofessional bilingual staff) to ensure integrative and long-term solutions.
- **Professional:** Substantial release time and financial support are provided for team members who commit their time and effort to this initiative.
- **Individually rewarding:** School-site team members identify individual goals for professional development and work toward those goals
- **Long-term:** Each team meets regularly for two years to foster a long-term approach to problem solving and community building, creating a school action plan that provides direction for change.

Teams worked together as a large group during two summer institutes and three two-day sessions during each academic year, in addition to their own monthly on-site meetings at their schools. Each team developed a school action plan that would drive their efforts at improving English language learner achievement, resulting in several long-term goals agreed upon by all participants. Action plans were designed at the start of the first year and reviewed again at the start of second year to reflect on progress and examine whether or not adaptation was necessary.

Each team member developed an individual Professional Action Plan at the beginning of the process to map a course for professional self-development. They identified their individual needs and the steps they wanted to take to meet them. Professional Action Plans included steps to connect with communities, readings around a particular theme or topic, courses in students' languages, the gathering of resources, peer observations, or a strong focus on particular areas of curriculum.

The project provided a framework through graduate coursework and professional consultation by experienced teacher educators in the fields of K-12 ESL and bilingual education. Grant funding was available for substitute teachers to cover monthly meetings, academic year meetings, and team leader work days, as well as books and other resources. A small yearly stipend was also included as professional pay for time spent outside of the normal school day.

### **Choosing a Focal School**

For purposes of this article, we highlight one focal school team out of eight school teams in the two two-year cohorts. While we use the experiences and voices of individual members on this team, we found that their perspectives and thoughts on their work were representative of their role groups (mainstream, ESL, special staff, paraprofessional) across the eight schools. The leadership exhibited by this school principal also offered us unique insights into the critical role of principals in school improvement (DuFour and Berkey, 1995; Porter and Soper, 2003).

We carefully examined the collaborative efforts and personal writing put forth by this one small team of teachers who worked with us over a two-year period. We watched the team members come together as a professional learning community that was directed toward improving teacher understanding of and ability to address English language learner needs. This intense focus on one elementary school provided us a window into the struggle that takes place in many schools working with second language learners.

The personal writing included a Professional Action Plan developed by each team member which recorded their goals for the two-year process, seven reader responses based on individually selected readings, and a summary reflective piece in which team members were asked to reflect on perspectives and changes that might have occurred over the course of the two years.

The following questions guided our examination of their written work, providing a framework for what we observed and noted from our conversations with team members:

- 1) What types of collaborative instructional efforts emerged over the course of the two year project between ESL and mainstream teachers?
- 2) What kinds of individual changes in practice as well as professional changes have occurred for each of the participating team members?

3. What bureaucratic or administrative features enhanced or impeded professional relationships and/or collaboration?

### **JAGUAR ELEMENTARY: DESCRIPTION/DEMOGRAPHICS/GOALS**

Jaguar Elementary is a K-5 school in a semi-rural area of a large Midwestern state. The school has a total enrollment of 570. While the district itself reports that 14 percent of its school-age students are English language learners, Jaguar Elementary has 23 percent ELL enrollment. The proportion of poverty in the school (measured by free or reduced school lunch enrollment) is 54 percent. The team that was formed for the project consisted of two grade-level/mainstream teachers, three ESL teachers, one paraprofessional (a Somali speaker) and a speech clinician. One grade-level teacher was a veteran of over twenty-five years; the other had taught for seven years. Two ESL teachers held dual licensures in elementary education and ESL; the third had an ESL license and complete fluency in Spanish. As a team, they examined their own site, using the Minnesota Quality Indicators as a reference point, building upon their own knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their school's ability to address the needs of its ELLs. Their resulting school Action Plan consisted of three major goals:

- 1) To increase ELL family involvement for student learning
- 2) To promote and foster the academic language proficiency of ELLs
- 3) To disseminate information to other staff members

The unique viewpoints of the mainstream teachers, ESL teachers, paraprofessional, and speech clinician on this team, explain many of the struggles that take place within elementary school contexts where the issues of placement, curriculum, instruction, and assessment are concerned. Results reported below reflect the thoughts and perspectives of each role group.

#### **1. What types of collaborative instructional efforts emerged over the course of the two-year project between ESL and mainstream teachers?**

##### ***Mainstream teachers***

At Jaguar Elementary, collaborative efforts occurred initially within the team when two grade-level (mainstream) teachers and two ESL teachers specifically took steps to work together. The mainstream teachers set up consistent collaboration with the ESL teachers, consciously setting aside planning time to do so. They were thoughtful, careful, and raised continuous questions about what they do and why. Grade level teachers began to integrate language objectives into their teaching in a systematic way, a practice that was new to them. Doing so led to further conversations with their ESL colleagues to be sure that appropriate language objectives were being used. Collaborating with another individual brought new challenges -- as one teacher indicated, "Being the classroom teacher, I had to give up some control." One interesting outcome was viewing "their students" with another teacher, as the ESL teacher worked directly in the classroom in an instructional capacity. One mainstream teacher reported that focusing on the needs of the learners instead of thinking about "what I need to do" was a positive outcome of the collaborative process. Her comment was representative of many mainstream teachers: "*Working with an ESL teacher and planning for academic learning through language is powerful.*"

### **ESL teachers**

While the ESL teachers were working closely in classrooms with specific classroom teachers, they were responsible at the same time for remaining in contact with the classroom teachers who were part of their assigned “pull-out” instructional load within the school. At Jaguar, since the ESL teachers worked by grade-level groupings, this could mean that they had 2-3 additional classrooms they worked with as they brought children out for instruction in the ESL classroom setting. In describing specifically their collaborative efforts, the ESL teachers developed a positive stance toward co-teaching, and were enthused by the development of strong relationships with a mainstream teacher, relationships that went beyond the typical fast-paced on-the-fly consultations that typify contact between mainstream and ESL teachers. They described a delicate balance in offering their ESL expertise, respecting the prior knowledge and experience of veteran teachers while at the same time building professional relationships with them.

*"This is the part of team teaching that gets interesting, as we negotiate between ideologies, comfort levels, and possible pressure from other teachers at the grade level to have some sort of uniform outcomes, whether it be real or perceived."*

The ESL teachers on the team were in the unique position to be reaching ELLs through both the collaborative process as well as the traditional pull-out model – to observe their practice in two very different professional and contextual situations.

The ESL teachers reported that they began to focus more on language objectives, and that they began to specifically align their work with that of the classroom teacher. One of the benefits of such collaboration is the fact that both instructors plan and conduct instruction that reinforces, complements, and extends each other’s efforts. ESL teachers reported that they were specific and direct in communicating language objectives with their students. Interestingly, working with a mainstream teacher has made them better pull-out teachers: they describe themselves as more familiar with the content, rhythm, and themes of the mainstream classroom. They recognize the challenge of building relationships with complete classrooms, rather than working with small groups of students typical of traditional ESL instructional practice. A telling comment by an ESL teacher describes the dual-edged sword of the new directions taken:

*"Having once been the only ESL teacher in my building with a small little room and 40 pull-out students, I am amazed at how far we have come. Some days I miss the autonomy and solitude of closing my door, doing my own thing and letting the classroom teachers worry about content curriculum. I do not, however, miss the limited progress my students made, or the disconnect between myself and the rest of the staff. I love getting to know my students in their own classrooms, in a community setting. I really enjoy teaching academic content and sharing their excitement as they learn about the world around them. I feel that my students are making greater progress in an inclusion setting."*

### **Paraprofessional**

The paraprofessional on this team (and, as it turns out, on each of the teams) found that consistent and challenging work with a team of individuals had a profound impact on their roles as well as on their feelings about their work. The paraprofessional became a team member in a meaningful way – she moved beyond a role as a peripheral staff member in her school to a more integrated position. The paraprofessional at Jaguar became an expert

in her own right, regarding culture and language, and was able to share knowledge and insight over the course of the project. She facilitated communication with families in new and creative ways, ways that served to bring communities and school personnel together.

### **Speech Clinician**

Jaguar Elementary was fortunate to have a speech clinician on its team, one who was committed to learning about English language learners in order to improve her work with them. Through her work with TEAM UP, she focused on informing herself, then began to inform others within the school about the complexity of making decisions regarding language learning and learning disabilities. She found ways to initiate more collaborative endeavors with mainstream teachers within her school, discussing the type of classroom material for ELLs that could help reinforce content through speech instruction focused on language needs. It is important to note that speech clinicians often have much wider contact with other district personnel in special education. For this individual, it was an opportunity to share her newfound knowledge and perspectives beyond the school setting.

## **2. What kinds of individual changes in practice as well as professional changes have occurred for each of the participating team members?**

### **Mainstream Teachers**

The mainstream teachers, in reflecting on their orientation toward ESL instruction prior to working with the TEAM UP project, reported being happy to have ELL students removed from the classroom for ESL pullout. Collaborative experiences changed their perspectives, resulting in their working to implement language objectives with a lesson-planning framework. Their readings and discussions about the complexity of language learning helped them to realize the implications of the distinction between social and academic language. They reported increased knowledge concerning the cultural backgrounds of students, and described themselves as using more effective instructional strategies to increase comprehension (acting, drawing, pictures, songs, movement, visuals, etc.). They recognized the value of thematic instruction and the ways in which it builds, reinforces, and sustains both language learning and academic content learning. At the same time, they became increasingly aware of the conflict between grade level material and what ELLs can do when they are still developing skills in both oral and written language. The grade-level mainstream teachers reported a more nuanced appreciation for alternative assessment, and report recognizing the value of ongoing formative as well as summative assessment. Comments in their final written reflections were illustrative of changes in both perspective and attitude, as they began to view themselves as learners as well as teachers.

*"I've become more purposeful in looking [not only] at what I teach, but also at the language in what I teach."*

*"I have learned to take a step back and think about what prior knowledge students need to have in order to be successful in a unit or lesson. I have learned how important it is to make lessons as visual as possible and that all students benefit from it. I have learned that all assessment doesn't have to take place at the end of each unit and doesn't have to be a paper pencil test. I have learned that strategies that benefit ELL learners benefit not only students in poverty, but also white middle class students. I have learned that honoring students' cultures and backgrounds adds to a classroom community. I have learned that having differences in race, culture, socioeconomic status and religion is beneficial to all students and that they can have meaningful discussions about those very topics."*

### ***ESL Teachers***

ESL teachers offered unique insight into this process of collaboration to better serve English language learners. They became more focused on academic language objectives, and became more confident in their role as language specialists. As a result, they were less peripheral to the instructional process, offering experience, insight, ideas to the team process. Team members came to rely on them for their experience with English Language Learners and their communities. The ESL teachers developed stronger identities as leaders and over the course of the two years were able to exert influence on administrative and structural decisions such as schedules, clustering, and instructional options.

Yet the role of the ESL teacher requires stepping delicately. They reported doing more of the adjusting, as they were the teachers going "in" to other classrooms, entering someone else's territory, separate and unique classroom cultures. They often reported on the "chameleon-like" nature of their work, having to adjust to the unique and varied personalities inherent in an elementary teaching culture. ESL staff at a school are in a position to see their learners over a long period of time witnessing both their triumphs and their struggles. ESL staff at Jaguar appreciated the added opportunity to see the richness of their students' learning experiences when they were collaborative instructors with the mainstream teacher.

As they reported in their writing, the ESL teachers developed individual areas of interest within education: writing, brain-based learning, white privilege, family literacy development, culture. They pursued these interests when choosing readings or finding a "niche" for themselves within their team. Just as the grade-level teachers began to attend to language, the ESL teachers began to be mindful of content. They used content material in their teaching and realigned their work to address content standards as well as language standards. The increased focus on content helped them to understand that non-fiction material is key in building prior knowledge with ELL students. Finally, the ESL teachers extended their professional conversations beyond their buildings to educators within and beyond their districts. They were asked to consult with other teachers in their district through district in-service, and presented their efforts at state-wide professional conferences.

### ***Paraprofessional***

The paraprofessional on the Jaguar team reported experiences very similar to the paraprofessionals on each of the other teams in the cohort. As a Somali speaker of English as a second language, she often reflected on her own language learning experience, relating it to what she saw happening with her students. The native English-speaking paraprofessionals became aware of the nuances of immigrant and refugee life as they began to read and explore with their team members the strengths and challenges of adaptation to a new land and the school experience.

The paraprofessionals acquired a professional vocabulary with respect to language learning and education, and as their experiences grew, they reported feeling an increased comfort level when speaking in both small and large groups. The bilingual paraprofessionals felt freer to use their first language in classrooms with students, and reported being involved in classroom activities in a more systematic, purposeful way. Information that seemed directed to the classroom teachers or the ESL teachers, we found, often found its way, or "trickled down" to the paraprofessionals. They reported feeling more respected by staff, and we noted definite personal as well as professional growth throughout the term of the project.

### **Speech Clinician**

The role of the special educator, in this case the speech clinician, in the team effort was one that we could not have predicted. As she continued to be exposed to new knowledge about ELL students, she reported that she was now realizing the fundamental differences between language difference and language disorder. Along with the paraprofessional, the speech clinician was present for each and every discussion that involved “big picture” issues such as assessment and placement, as well as the micro aspects of classroom instruction. Her knowledge of the curriculum within particular grade levels grew, and she used mainstream curriculum to inform her own “pull out” work with students. Information about and resources on specific cultures resulted, in this case, in the speech clinician integrating multicultural material and Spanish language material into her own work, generally that of diagnosis and remediation of language difficulties. She changed some referral forms to better address students’ needs, and cautioned mainstream teachers to look for other interventions for ELL students. Most notably, she took it upon herself to reach beyond her team and her work at Jaguar Elementary. In conversations with other individuals through established connections in the community (family members, minister, and school board members) she tried to correct misinformation about language learners. Her strong belief in continuing to learn as a professional was reflected in the following quote:

*“When we make our lesson plans, we should also think ‘What students can I learn more about today?’ Only when we continue to educate ourselves will we really continue to educate the students we work with every day.”*

### **3. What bureaucratic or administrative features enhance or impede professional relationships and/or collaboration?**

The collaborative process does not occur in a vacuum. Even when both the opportunity for and the intent of individuals to establish collaborative practice are in place, there are often several factors that are likely to affect the outcome. What can enhance opportunities for educators to development relationships around their teaching? Our work with the elementary school teams has made one thing very clear: a supportive, enthusiastic principal, with strong curricular knowledge, is at the heart of the process. It also helps, as it did in the case of Jaguar, to have a principal who possesses a competitive fire – a desire to push her staff to new efforts, and to have her school represented well within the district. The team had the ear of their principal, and she was in attendance at several of the project course workshops, wanting to inform herself of the issues and options for working with English language learners. The school district, in this case, was supportive and tolerant of grass-roots change, and the team took a proactive stance in inviting key district players to meetings. Rather than waiting to be led, the team offered professional development to administrators within the district, and took advantage of a district-level structure in place for specialists to meet – ESL, Special Educators, for example. This opened doors for collaboration and cross-fertilization. Clearly the Jaguar team had an optimal environment in which to move in new directions – an energized, committed team, a proactive principal, district interest, and three ESL teachers who were leaders.

But where did they struggle? What were issues that they faced over the course of the two years that make their personal professional development efforts more difficult and their school action plan tough to implement? Team members noted that having the ear of the principal was indeed a double-edged sword. They reported being perceived by their colleagues as among the “chosen few” within the school. The structure and model of this professional development project, one that works with a small critical core of professionals for an intensive time period, was new to them and other staff needed to accept both the premise and the practice that resulted from such efforts.

In the egalitarian culture of elementary schools, any singling out of individuals or groups is often seen as threatening (Walker, Edstam, & Stone, 2006). The elementary school culture generally reflects the desire for an equal division of resources -- students, materials, release experiences. An in-service opportunity offered to a select group was not always met with open arms. Staff resistance to change was evident, even at a school such as Jaguar. Individual teachers resisted hearing about new efforts developed by their colleagues, and school-wide changes suggested by the team in terms of structure or instructional/assessment practice were sometimes met with resistance. Team members continued to report on a tendency for staff to focus on the English language learner as the source of the problem.

Time is always a challenge. The lack of it needs little amplification in the world of education, as teachers are unanimous in describing it as a major impediment to achieving their goals. The mainstream teachers, ESL teachers, paraprofessional, and speech clinician on this team were no different. To a person they valued the time provided by the project, which, through funding of substitute teachers on a regular basis, allowed for the teachers to have extended opportunities to work together to change practice.

The structure of the elementary school brought about several challenges for professional development and change in practice, as blocks of instructional time for different specialists (art, P/E, music) often dictated school schedules and the windows of opportunity available for collaborative practice. Difficult conversations had to take place about whose needs were really taking precedence - teachers' or students'? Answers usually came only when the staff as a whole was willing to 'think outside the box' and use creative and innovative ways to manage both time and structure.

Finally, as is so often discussed when instructional practice for ELL students is examined, the large shadow of testing is always present. It impacts planning, scheduling, instruction, curriculum, general school culture, and the theme of testing and tests was often evident in the teachers' writing about their work. So often the Jaguar team talked about the ways in which testing drove curriculum and schedules, affected instructional time, had a negative impact on getting to the real questions of what English Language Learners knew and could accomplish at school. NCLB policies had bearing on every instructional and curricular decision.

## **CONCLUSION**

Preparing teachers to work effectively with English language learners is part of the national teacher education agenda. Professional development for practicing teachers, "in-service education," is now believed to be most effective when it combines a wide range of continuous, collaborative experiences that provide for an exploration of issues together with opportunities for communication that address specific problems within a school. Research has shown that an inquiry-based model of staff development sets the stage for teachers being part of a learning community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Feimer-Nemser, 2001; Hopkins, 1987; Leiberman, 1986; York-Barr, Ghery, & Sommerness, 2007). Several components characterize effective staff development (Claire, 1995; Tellez & Waxman, 2006; Walker, Edstam & Stone, 2006, 2007) when the goal is to improve learning outcomes for English language learners:

- Small group of staff from the same school;

- Systematic recognition of this group as the “go to” staff for ESL issues and including them in staff development initiatives;
- Selecting as a team leader an individual who is an integral part of the school;
- Commitment by individuals to the work;
- Inclusion of different role groups (mainstream, ESL, paraprofessionals, social workers, speech clinicians, community liaison, special education staff);
- Time to meet, discuss, reflect over the long term;
- Focus on both content and process;
- Emphasis on developing collaborative relationships and practices at many levels, across and between teachers, roles, and positions;
- Opportunities for reading, writing, and receiving feedback;
- Access to a variety of materials, resources; and
- Principal support and meaningful connection with other administrators (ESL coordinator, special education coordinator) within the district.

Educators at Jaguar Elementary reported great satisfaction at the challenge and the professional growth they experienced as a result of working toward common goals with a small group of colleagues over a period of two years. They read, wrote, discussed, and deliberated their ideas and their perspectives. Best of all, they created a learning community of their own. They reported a sense of both personal growth and professional efficacy. The components noted above were all an integral part of their staff development experience, occurring within the context of their own elementary school where they practiced their craft with real learners, in actual classrooms.

Though no longer ‘officially’ participating in the TEAM UP teacher development project, the individuals who took part in this professional development experience are still active leaders within their school and within their district. They continue to serve as ELL advocates in their different role group capacities and are participating in other school-based professional learning communities that reflect what we know is best practice for professional development. These professionals thus pass on the wisdom of their experience and what they have learned. As teacher educators, we feel privileged to have worked with them.

## **AUTHORS**

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