

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In today's world - where the globalization of media, business and educational opportunities, have become a dominant force - the face of English as a second language (ESL) learning continues to change to meet the needs of this new generation of students. Schools specifically focused on language learning classes only, continue to exist and assist learners in their quest to increase their English proficiency skills. Many of these schools foster traditional learning methods such as the role of the teacher as the transmitter of knowledge in teacher-fronted classrooms, and in one to one learning environments. Many utilize long-standing methods such as Grammar-translation or more contemporary methods which emphasize communicative skills. The current trends in globalization indicate an opportune time to explore new ways to meet the challenges of ESL students as they seek to improve their abilities in English. Kumaravadivelu (2006) posits that "The new millennium has brought new challenges as well as new opportunities for the profession to venture beyond methods" (p. 161).

The English-medium international school is one area where global change is challenging the TESL profession to explore new ways of responding to the challenges of teaching English as a second language. There is currently a growing movement in businesses and organizations - greatly influenced by the current trends in globalization - to expand and relocate their personnel to countries other than their passport country. It has also led to an increased demand for international schools, in order to meet the educational needs of the growing number of relocated families employed by these businesses and organizations. An ESL learning milieu of the English-medium international school that steps away from the traditional ESL methods and classroom was the focus of this study.

In response to a job opening at an international school in spring of 2010, I was hired to work with grades 7-12 ESL students. It was a position the school administrators determined would meet a goal in the school's objective to provide for the academic needs of all their students. This specific position had not been filled or even clearly defined. The opportunity for exploration of new means of providing needed ESL support to the non-native English speakers enrolled at this English-medium international school was deemed necessary. This was due to the natural constraints of time and course requirements in the student's school day. The head of the Special Needs Department (SND) and the ESL program coordinator were in agreement with my suggestion to develop the role in such a way that recognizes the uniqueness of the student population and setting. I originally proposed the concept of a four way

partnership between the ESL facilitator, content teachers, ESL students and their parents. Early on it became clear that, although most of the parents were very concerned for their student's education, they were not able to play a key role in the day to day education process. This was due to two factors. First, many of the students were living in dorm situations. Second, most of the parents - and dorm parents - themselves were not comfortable communicating in English. Although I did introduce myself to the parents via email (Appendix A) and had occasional face to face conferences, most of the effort and focus for relationship building and communication centered on the ESL students and the English/ Language Arts content teachers. Thus, a three-way partnership was envisioned. The image of an equilateral triangle best describes the resulting three-way partnership I sought to establish; a partnership established in order to assist the learner in developing skills and knowledge required to succeed academically and socially in this setting.

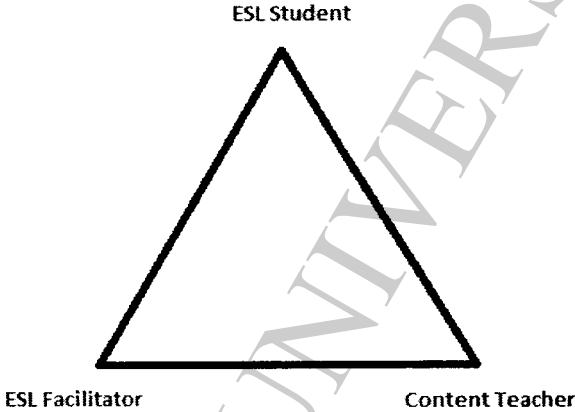


Figure 1. Three-way collaborative relationship

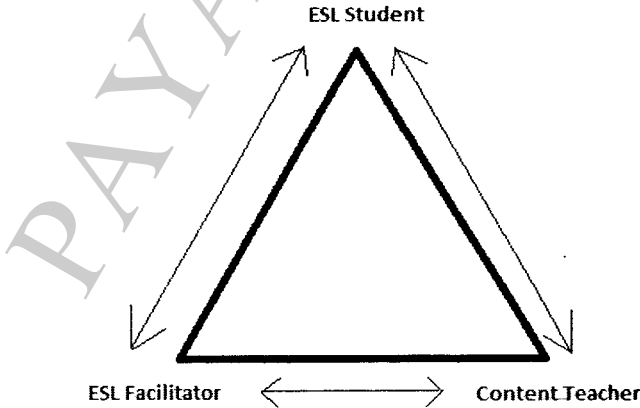


Figure 2. Three-way Communication

The ESL learner must learn academic topics in a language other than his mother tongue. This dilemma can be overwhelming - for both the student and the content teacher. But in partnership with the ESL facilitator, the student has a resource and advocate for their language needs, and the content teachers have a resource and support person to reinforce what is happening in the content class. The content teacher and the ESL facilitator would ideally not look at the students as “my” students but rather as “our” students. All three parties: students, content teachers and ESL facilitator would have a common goal, with each member assuming responsibility to see that the student reaches their highest academic ability. This could only be achieved by a close collaborative relationship between the content teacher and the ESL facilitator. Each professional provides the expertise the other lacks. For the ESL facilitator, it involved receiving guidance as to what materials and topics the content teacher felt the student needed support with within the content class. The content teacher, in turn, could rely on the ESL facilitator to support her efforts and provide the scaffolding that the learner needed to succeed in the content class. For the student’s part, they needed to work closely with both their content teachers and the ESL facilitator - taking an active role in communicating what assignments were due and the areas they were having difficulty, as well as what was beneficial to their development in English proficiency.

This three way relationship would require each partner to actively communicate with the others. This model of a three way relationship is often found in other service oriented settings. The environment I am most familiar with - having been Registered Nurse (RN) in the United States - is the trend in western medical settings which emphasizes patient-centered care. Under this system, there is ideally a three way working partnership between the doctor, nurse, and patient. In these cases the doctor works in their area of medical expertise, and the RN works within her nursing care expertise. Both are reliant on the patient to provide input into his signs, symptoms and medical issues. Paramount to successful patient care is communication between all parties. This also rings true for this effort to provide ESL student-centered ESL support.

In looking at international schools, it quickly becomes clear that they have their own unique set of objectives which defines why they exist. Yet despite the many varieties of English-medium international schools, they all have one thing in common: a very diverse student body. These schools are generally populated by three categories of students. The first are students who are native English speakers living in a host country. The second category, are non-native English speakers from countries other than the host country. Both of these groups are often the children of ex-patriots (expats) who are working in the host country. The third group, are national students whose first language is that of the host country. These students’ may be children of nationals who consider it prestigious and advantageous to enroll their children in an English-medium international school. They may also be children with dual citizenship, due to having an expat and a national citizen as their parents.

International schools vary in their ESL programs based on the vision and purpose of the school. Some schools are geared toward non-English speaking students, and ESL takes a prominent role in the curriculum and methods implemented. These schools may have a sheltered program designed to meet the needs of their ESL learners. A

sheltered program generally has two tracks. All content courses - such as science, maths, and English - are taught in English. But, the ESL students are separated from the native English speaking students. Ideally, the courses for ESL students are taught by content teachers who have been trained in teaching English as a second language (TESL) method. Other school programs involve taking students out of core classes for an hour on some days for one to one tutoring or small class instruction in ESL. These are referred to as "Pull Out" programs. The English medium international school in this study was willing to look into new ideas and concepts to meet the language learning needs of their ESL students. The goal of this study was to develop a program in the English-medium school that moves away from the traditional - and standard - one teacher plus students teaching/learning method. The method described in this study moves toward a cooperative, collaborative effort in which the content teacher, the ESL facilitator, and the student are working together to facilitate the students' development of English skills in the academic setting.

Returning to the earlier patient-centered model of treatment, I would like to borrow a frequently used medical abbreviation. It is "p.r.n." (from the Latin "pro re nata") which is an abbreviation meaning "when necessary." It can also be used for "as circumstances require" or "as needed." It is traditionally used to indicate when certain prescriptions are to be used. In this emergent study, I desired to offer support to the ESL students and to the content teachers on a "p.r.n." basis, or "as needed." Scaffolding was to be given as dictated by the circumstances. In other words, the needs and circumstances of the ESL learners themselves determined the direction of how class time would be utilized. As for the content teachers, it would be their own felt needs in regard to the ESL students in their class that would influence their communication and utilization of the ESL facilitator as a resource.

This school has historically been geared toward meeting the academic needs of English speakers, either native born or high proficiency non-native English speakers. It has as an academic goal, the preparation of its students to continue their post-graduate studies in English medium universities. This goal lends itself to the establishment of a high academic standard. It is in this setting that I developed a role geared toward meeting the needs of seventh through twelfth grade ESL students. Despite the fact that these ESL learners had generally high proficiency levels in English the need for support arose from the challenges involved in the area of academic English. They lacked some of the skills required for success in tasks involving academic reading, speaking, listening, and writing – all of which are paramount to success in school.

Traditionally the ESL teacher teaches her students English through the content material, and separate from the mainstream class; or she teaches language learning content in pull-out classes. In this current study, the developed role focused on supporting the work done in the content classes through scaffolding. The ESL facilitator provides scaffolding to the students, based on content class tasks and skills they are struggling with. Interactions between the ESL facilitator and the ESL students normally take place within a small ESL classroom, where class sizes are typically three or four students. The classes were scheduled each week, during what would normally be the ESL students' "study hall" period. The focus of these ESL classes was twofold. First and foremost was as-needed "p.r.n." language support -

utilizing the students' content class materials and assignments, as provided by the content teacher and the students. This allowed the students the opportunity for recycling, recalling and retelling the content materials to the ESL facilitator, as they explained the "whys" and "what's" of the work they were doing in the content class. It also ensured that our time was spent supporting what their most relevant needs were.

In addition, due to the small number of students in each ESL class, the ESL facilitator was able to work individually with each learner on areas that they did not understand or on tasks they didn't know how to do. By providing this individualized step by step instruction, and practice in carrying out the skills required in the content class, the learners were building confidence and ability that would allow them to accomplish these tasks more independently in the future. When content materials were not available, the focus in the ESL class shifted to areas where the ESL facilitator had observed errors in the students' work; such as in essay writing, grammar points, idioms, and vocabulary.

Non-native English speaking students studying in an international English-medium school face many challenges in their mainstream content classes: math, science, social studies and English/language arts. Academic English exposes some of the unique educational needs that non-native English students face. There is a need to identify and address the learning gaps these students have. In this international school setting the ESL students are expected to take all standard content classes to meet the graduation requirements. This limits the students' time to be able to develop their English language skills outside the content classes. This particular international school recognized these unique problems, and desired to provide support to the students and classroom content teachers - in the form of an ESL facilitator. This ESL facilitator role provides pedagogical support to the content teachers and ESL students as an extension of a well-developed Special Needs Department (SND) for this 10 year old international school. In the past the school had tried to meet the needs of the secondary school ESL students, but had been understaffed. ESL personnel also had to fulfill multiple responsibilities, such as administering a more extensive ESL program for the larger population of ESL elementary students.

1.2 The Goals of the Study

This study recorded the development of this new adjunct-pedagogical ESL support role that utilized scaffolding techniques and explicit instruction as indicated to meet the needs of these unique students in the English-medium international school setting. It was an emergent study in which the process was recorded and analyzed as it unfolded.

The main questions to be answered in this study revolved around the validity and usefulness of the concept of the three-way relationships model that included the ESL facilitator, content teachers and ESL students. Would this three-way partnership enhance the students' learning processes in the area of academic English? Would it make a difference in the lives of the subjects of this study, or would the learning levels for the students and teaching methods for the teachers be the same - with or

without this support? I wanted to answer the questions “Can the role of ESL facilitator”:

1. Assist ESL students to:

- Improve their specific academic skills.
- Can this role help the learners improve their academic English skills by focusing on their specific needs and circumstances in such a way that they would not have been met if the role did not exist?
- Increase their confidence as autonomous learners and members of the school community.

2. Develop a positive cooperative working relationship with the content teachers which would lead to better and more relevant support and teaching methods directed at the ESL students.

- Will this role support the efforts of the content teachers as needed by developing a collaborative partnership with a mutual goal to help the learners succeed in ways that would otherwise not occur if the role did not exist?

3. Encourage the opportunity for professional growth for the ESL facilitator in developing conceptual views of teacher autonomy and self-efficacy.

- How does the focus of cooperation and collaboration between the content teacher, ESL facilitator, and student impact the decision-making, planning and self-efficacy of the ESL facilitator?

How will this concept of a collaborative ESL facilitator – an effort to move away from an independent ESL classroom - impact the facilitator’s concept of teacher autonomy?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study, as mentioned before, lies in the changes that are occurring in our world due to globalization. There is an increase in movement of individuals and families from one country to another due to new work and educational opportunities. With these opportunities come the challenge and benefits of becoming more proficient in English; English is often the language utilized in many international businesses and organizations. There are also many non-native English students - desiring to study in English-medium universities - who consider English-medium elementary and secondary schools a way of preparing academically for English-medium universities.

In addition, the current trend in education - especially in the teaching of ESL - is a move away from the traditional teacher fronted classroom towards a more student centered focus that seeks relevancy for the learner. Core to the development of this

role, was the desire to explore this concept of student centered education. As a student centered and collaborative role, the desired role outcome is to provide “p.r.n.” support to the ESL learner and to the content teacher. There are many international schools around the world - as well as schools in English speaking countries - that are trying to meet the educational needs of non-native English speaking students. Therefore, this study may reveal a way to assist other venues in reaching that goal.

The concept of three-way collaboration between the ESL facilitator, content teachers and ESL students opens the door to accomplishing numerous goals in assisting ESL learners to succeed in the mainstream class of a formal educational setting. When considering English-medium education for ESL students, it does not matter if you are looking at elementary, secondary or university levels. In all these cases the primary goal is to assist the ESL learner to grow proficient in the English language, while learning content subject material. There are many traditional methods that are generally utilized to support the ESL learner in these settings. These programs - such as “sheltered” and “pull out” - rely on the concept of one teacher per one class. Often this system lends itself to an ethos that promotes the image of the teacher as the giver of knowledge and the student as a receiver. These ESL classes are taught as self-contained subjects utilizing their own curriculum, texts and work books. There is often little effort to ensure overlap or transfer from the ESL class to the subject content classes in the school.

The triangular relationship model explored in this study steps away from the traditional view of the one teacher –one class model. The model promotes the concept of content teachers and ESL facilitators collaboratively approaching the task of assisting ESL students to succeed in the English medium academic setting. It is a joint effort between themselves and the ESL students. The primary goal is the students’ acquisition of academic English, as well as the content related to the subject area.

Often ESL students move and transition multiple times during their school years. These transitions lead to gaps in learning which, in turn, cause the student to fall behind in the formal education setting. As content teachers and ESL professionals work together in their areas of expertise they can jointly identify these gaps, and work to provide the support that will enhance the learners’ ability to catch-up and succeed in the mainstream content class. This “p.r.n.” technique looks at the individual student’s needs based on the content teachers observations in the classroom, and the learners own content class work. The ESL facilitator can then respond to the language related issue.

A second goal and benefit from this relationship is the exposure of some of the unique needs of ESL students in their content classes. This can lead to a deeper understanding on the part of the content teachers as to the challenges that ESL students face as they experience dual acquisition of academic English and academic content in their classes. The relationships can also inform the ESL facilitator of the content class curriculum goals and topics, thus providing guidance as to appropriate methods and strategies to support the content class goals.

A third goal and benefit that may be facilitated in this tree-way collaborative role is that it promotes the sense of community as native English speakers study alongside

non-native English learners. As they work together on learning tasks, and engage in lessons together it will break down cultural barriers and encourage a sense of belonging for all students. At the same time, these ESL learners have a smaller group of peers in this model's ESL class. In this smaller group, the ESL learners can more readily relate and learn from each other.

The “prn” technique can be beneficial in assisting the learner to transfer the knowledge, skills and experiences gained in the ESL support class to their academic subject content class. It facilitates the transfer of scaffolded tasks and strategies utilized in the ESL support time to their content class learning. By utilizing content assignments and topics as the basis of the ESL support the work becomes immediately relevant. The learner can see the application and meaning of the learning in an authentic way. They are then able to apply the learning to future content class assignments. Collaboration and communication between the disciplines promotes transportability of strategies.

When the involved teachers communicate with each other about what is happening in their classroom it can inform all parties of problems, gaps, alterations needed, and even successful techniques. With better awareness of the unique experiences and challenges the ESL student faces in the academic setting, teachers can seek to incorporate ways of bringing the ESL student's own life and past experiences into the classroom.

A further benefit of “prn” support for the learner is that it encourages learning autonomy. The student is responsible to bring assignments and projects from the content class to ESL class. These students are more apt to learn and reapply the skills in the future, if the lessons are in response to their own learning gaps. When using their own content class essay as the source for teaching material they are more likely to recognize the value and relevance of the learning and transfer the lesson. As the learners recognize the value of taking initiative and of seeking ESL support they are able to make the connection between this pro-active initiative and positive results in the content class. As they increase in confidence in their abilities they will be motivated to continue to develop autonomous learning strategies.

Another key benefit of collaboration and co-operation between content teachers and ESL professionals is that often content teachers are not trained or equipped to support ESL students. In order for ESL students to learn, the input must be comprehensible for them. The ESL professional can provide this needed support as a resource person and consultant. The content teacher needs a toolbox of strategies that will assist them in making their content subject matter comprehensible to the ESL students, while still keeping the needs of their other students in mind. The ESL facilitator can help the content teacher to develop the tools in a meaningful and useful way that relates directly to their context. The concept of the ESL facilitator as a “prn” resource for the content teachers takes a “bottom-up” approach. Rather than such top-down mandates as required seminars or the use of pre-designed courses, “prn” seeks to provide the guidance and support that the individual content teachers desire. It aims to meet felt needs of the teacher in her circumstances, thus having more potential to produce changes in the content class teacher's beliefs and classroom practices in regard to ESL students. The following scenario demonstrates this concept. The content class teacher

perceives their ESL student is experiencing learning problems and seeks input from the ESL professional. The ESL facilitator suggests strategies that might assist the learner and explains what issues may be occurring such as learning gaps, word order confusion, or lack of schema. The content teacher utilizes the suggestions and notices improvement. In the future this teacher is more likely to draw on this experience than on what she heard at a seminar. This also encourages the teacher to be more observant of all her students, and to take action accordingly.

Collaboration and communication are essential to supporting the diverse linguistic needs of ESL students in the academic environments. This triangular relationship considers the unique learning needs of students as well as building a professional partnership between content class teachers and ESL facilitators.

1.4 Definition of Terms

As needed assistance: Refers to the concept of providing support to ESL students and content teachers according to their specific needs as related to the content courses.

Autonomy in learning: Refers to self-managing one's learning with the ability to think and act critically and independently.

Collaborative Approach: Refers to the three main stakeholders in this study- ESL students, ESL facilitator, content teachers- working together in order to reach common goals in assisting the learners to improve academically.

Content class room: Refers to required classes in the typical Secondary school setting. This includes but is not limited to English, math, science and social studies.

Content Teachers: Refers to the teachers responsible for teaching classes such as math, science, social studies or English.

Emergent Study: Refers to a study based on a working plan. The plan establishes who, what and where of the study and how long it will take place. This allows the researcher to understand the situation, participants and interpersonal dynamics as the events occur. The emergent nature allows a model of change that emphasizes that uncertain conditions and unknown factors will likely affect the results of a project.

English-medium: Refers to a term used to indicate that English is the language of communication used in the particular international setting.

ESL Facilitator: Refers to an ESL practitioner who strives to create and develop learning opportunities for ESL students.

International school: Refers to a primary or secondary school which is geared toward meeting the educational needs of international students studying in a country other than their passport country.

IPT : Refers to a series of standardized, nationally normed testing instruments for students in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 According to the developers, Ballard & Tighe, the tests are designed for quick and accurate evaluation of students' oral language, reading, and writing proficiency levels in English.

p.r.n.: Refers to a medical abbreviation meaning "when necessary" (from the Latin "pro re nata", for an occasion that has arisen, as circumstances require, as needed). In the case of this study it is used interchangeably with 'as needed'.

Scaffolding: Refers to a term that is used to refer to the provision of support to learners by such means as simplified language, teacher modeling, visuals and graphics, cooperative learning and hands-on learning.

Self-efficacy: Refers to an individual's belief in his own ability to successfully carry out behaviors to reach a particular goal.

Teacher Autonomy: Refers to the ability to develop appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes for oneself as a teacher, in cooperation with others.

Three way collaborative relationship: Refers to the three-way relationship between facilitator, content teachers and learners. All three participants play a vital role in enabling the ESL student to develop proficiency and autonomy.