Content AND language teaching? How do New Zealand teachers support students learning English as an additional language?

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English language instruction for students in New Zealand learning English as an additional language is moving from specialist language (ESOL) classrooms into the mainstream. Increasingly, secondary curriculum teachers are urged to take responsibility for language learning within their subject areas. How are curriculum teachers responding? What is the impact on ESOL teachers? What is the nature of the professional engagement between language and content specialists?

This paper considers secondary teachers’ beliefs about their additional role as language teachers by qualitatively analysing complementary data sets: one from interviews with seven individual curriculum teachers; and one from a focus group of ESOL teachers. Results suggest that while curriculum teachers maintain a strong sense of their role as disciplinary experts, they underestimate the expertise involved in teaching language. This is exacerbated because ESOL lacks a formal curriculum, and qualifications for teachers of English language learners are not mandatory in secondary schools. The disparity between teachers’ subject status and roles undermines the success of professional collaboration.

Keywords: English language learners; secondary curriculum teachers; teacher collaboration; ESOL
Introduction

The New Zealand Curriculum was rewritten and published in 2007. There is a clear expectation that by the time it is fully implemented in 2010 all teachers will have assumed responsibility for teaching the disciplinary language and text forms of their subject (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 168). The curriculum further states that while attention to language is important for the learning of all students, it is essential for students learning English as an additional language (EAL students). This requirement for all teachers to teach language raises issues about the roles of both curriculum teachers and specialist English language (ESOL) teachers. Until recently, there has been clear demarcation between the teachers’ roles. ESOL teachers teach EAL students general academic English to the point where students are considered ready to join a mainstream class. Once these students join the mainstream, ESOL teachers might give subject-specific language support, otherwise, students focus their attention on acquiring content knowledge in preparation for national assessments. It is unusual for curriculum teachers to have studied how students learn through an additional language, and it is equally unusual for ESOL teachers to be specialists in a curriculum area. Consequently, it is not clear how secondary teachers will manage to combine language and content in their teaching.

New Zealand is not unique in encouraging all teachers to integrate literacy instruction; most English-speaking countries have experienced a rise in non-English speaking migrants and refugees, and plan interventions in schools to ensure an equitable education for EAL students. Recent language acquisition research has indicated that secondary school-aged EALs require both explicit and extensive exposure to disciplinary-specific language if they are to bridge the five to ten year gap in academic language proficiency between their linguistic skills and those of their English-speaking peers (Cummins, 2000). To support adolescent learners to match the academic language skills of their English speaking (EL1) peers within the 5 year duration of secondary schooling, mainstream teachers must share responsibility for the linguistic as well as the subject content of their classes (Ministry of Education, 2007). Given that secondary teachers are trained as and expect to be subject specialists, they may not feel confident in the dual role of subject and language teacher (Arkoudis, 2003). Despite encouragement by government, state or local education departments to establish partnerships between language specialists (ESOL teachers) and their mainstream colleagues, uncertainty persists over how to manage the process of collaboration to achieve the best outcome for EAL students (Creese, 2000; Davison, 2006). Educators must consider how adolescents can be supported most effectively to learn a new language in school, what skills their teachers need to learn, and what systems schools need to put in place.

The purpose of this article is to present the current situation in New Zealand: how secondary school curriculum teachers approach language teaching in the context of their mainstream (non-ESOL) classes; how secondary school ESOL teachers see their changing role; and how both sets of teachers view the prospect of increased professional development and teacher collaboration.
Two bodies of research contribute to understanding this topic. The first relates to how language learners can be taught English in the context of their curriculum classes, and the second relates to how teachers manage the process of sharing language teaching expertise. This paper then analyses the experiences of New Zealand secondary school teachers within this international context.

**Approaches toward teaching language learners in mainstream classes**

A major concern for ESOL teachers in secondary schools is: what language forms, text structures and lexis do students need to learn for maximum academic value? Historically, mainstream teachers have enjoyed a defined syllabus with learning objectives at each curriculum level to guide teachers’ instructional choices. In contrast, New Zealand (like many other countries) has no language curriculum to provide ESOL teachers with shared and consistent language goals. Instead, teaching English in schools to speakers of other languages (TESSL) has defaulted to a continuum of approaches depending on the learners’ language proficiency and the resources and knowledge-base of the teacher (see Figure 1). At one end, ESOL programmes emphasise ‘general’ language with little or no alignment to wider curricula (suiting new learners of English). At the other end, the focus is on curriculum content, with little additional emphasis on students’ language development, suiting students approaching the language proficiency of EL1 classmates. Research suggests that secondary EAL students most benefit from an approach where there is a coordinated focus on both content and language (Walqui & van Lier, 2010).

![Figure 1. A continuum of approaches used to teaching English language in secondary schools](image)

Traditional approaches to teaching language arose from teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). This subject was taught in countries where English was not a dominant language and focussed on teaching learners increasingly complex grammatical structures in isolation from specific subject matter. Beginning in the 1960s, sociolinguistic studies placed greater emphasis on the function of language as a tool for interaction, and teaching approaches became less behaviourist and more communicative (Richards, 2002). Nonetheless, when either of these methods was applied in a secondary class, the ESOL teacher determined the subject matter context used as a backdrop for the particular form, function or interaction. New Zealand ESOL teachers still use EFL methodology to teach new EAL students, and devise topical studies to highlight particular language forms or interactions without necessarily considering curriculum content (Franken & McComish, 2003).

Research in the field of systemic functional linguistics has redefined language in a Vygotskian manner as a social construction shaped by users for a particular (disciplinary) purpose (Halliday, 2007; Knapp & Watkins, 2005; Vygotsky, 1962). This casts doubt on whether generic language or a prescriptive set
of grammar rules can possibly be taught when language forms must vary in order to achieve a particular purpose. Instead, language is co-constructed by members of disciplinary communities to reflect subject-specific ways of thinking (Coffin, 2006; Schleppegrell, Greer, & Taylor, 2008).

Janzen (2008) provides an overview of research into teaching EAL students in the curriculum areas of history, mathematics, English and science reflecting this perception of subjects as discourse communities. She reveals how patterns of thinking specific to each discipline are reflected in particular language structures and text forms, and notes that EAL students need to learn these linguistic forms to engage in disciplinary discourse, so curriculum teachers need to recognise and teach disciplinary language. Unfortunately, Janzen’s study does not offer models of how teachers might develop and share skills for integrating language and content. In response to this view of language, as well as the pressing need for students to simultaneously learn language and subject matter, decontextualised approaches to teaching language have been reconsidered and new approaches implemented to develop complementary skill sets in individual teachers.

Adjunct approaches require the ESOL teacher to apply language skills to other curriculum areas. For example, one simulated adjunct model illustrates how a teacher skilled in TESSOL and social studies implemented an integrated programme for her learners (Brinton & Jensen, 2003). This is a challenging model for schools with diverse curricula and few ESOL teachers, many of whom may lack cross-curricular expertise.

Content-based approaches (including sheltered instruction) represent models approaching the balance-point in figure 1 where simultaneous subject and language objectives are maintained. These aim to ensure that EAL students do not learn language at the expense of subject matter, or neglect language development in favour of an exclusively content-based programme (Davison, 2001; Mohan, 2001; Stoller, 2008). Examples of content-based programmes that are successfully underway in the USA are the Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocol (SIOP) and Quality Teaching for English Language Learners (QTEL). Both are built on the principle that EAL students require cognitive challenge balanced with intensive and extensive scaffolding into academic language use. Both offer extensive professional development (PD) to build the language teaching expertise of curriculum teachers (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2008; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). Both approaches depend on teachers developing the skill to recognise language features and language demands of their discipline. A similar approach, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) is followed in Europe, although Coyle notes that teachers still struggle to resolve their “dilemmas of professional collaboration” (2007, p. 556).

The challenges of collaboration: How teachers manage the process of sharing language expertise
Given that individual secondary teachers are seldom equally skilled in teaching language and a curriculum area, collaboration between mainstream teachers and their ESOL colleagues seems a feasible process for balancing language and curricular teaching.
Seminal studies by Arkoudis (2003), Creese (2002) and Davison (2006) provide examples of partnership between ESOL and mainstream teachers. Arkoudis maintains that it is not enough to legislate for collaboration when teachers have no experience in crossing the boundaries of their disciplines. She argues that mainstream teachers and ESOL teachers hold “incommensurate epistemologies” (2003, p. 161). Mainstream teachers assume the authority of their traditionally respected and clearly defined curricula, whereas ESOL is a relatively new and trans-curricular subject with teachers who lack the status of their mainstream colleagues (Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995). In countries where there is no educational mandate for collaboration, the status of ESOL may be even lower than Arkoudis (2005) and Creese (2006b, 2010) report. Moreover, mainstream teachers and administrators in secondary schools may be unaware of the specific language and pedagogical skills held by ESOL colleagues, and thus underestimate the extent to which teacher collaboration could benefit EALs’ learning. When there is a power imbalance between teachers, it is difficult for them to construct programmes where language and curriculum learning are equally valued. Arkoudis suggests that teachers across these areas need to engage in dialogue to better understand each other’s perspectives. This is a challenge when ESOL teachers lack curricular and “epistemological authority” (Arkoudis, 2005, p. 168).

Many local educational authorities in the UK encourage secondary school language and content teachers to work together to plan and deliver lessons. This is difficult as structured opportunities for planning are not timetabled and, significantly, there is no English as a second language syllabus to balance the demands of a content syllabus (Creese, 2010). This imbalance perpetuates what Creese refers to as “hierarchies of knowledge” where teaching content matter takes priority over developing linguistic knowledge (2006a, p. 193). Misconceptions about language teaching arise when teachers do not share an understanding of the role of language in learning, the nature of second language learning and other skills held by ESOL teachers. Undervaluing language specific knowledge may extend across content teachers, EAL students, administrators and even ESOL teachers. This may originate from the demands of “different institutional roles” (Creese, 2006b, p. 437) of each of these members of the school community and result in a persisting epistemological mismatch.

Limited attention has been given to “researching the process of co-planning and co-teaching and to supporting and evaluating the development of partnership between ESL/EAL and content-area teachers” (Davison, 2006, p. 454). Examining the discussions between collaborating elementary teachers, Davison’s framework describes developmental stages of teacher commitment to collaboration from minimal pseudo-compliance to advanced creative co-construction. Each phase is further divided to indicate degrees of attitude, effort, achievement and expectations of support relating to their collaboration (Davison, 2006, p. 455). These criteria provide a useful means of evaluating the success of a teacher partnership, but Davison does not claim that this is a definitive assessment tool, nor does she advise how partnerships might be created and fostered.
Research questions

In New Zealand, teachers are required by the curriculum to teach the forms, texts and vocabulary of their subject (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, subject teachers have little or no training in how secondary learners acquire a new language for and in school, and there is no policy that specifically requires or enables subject and ESOL teacher collaboration. These circumstances prompted the following research questions:

1. How do mainstream teachers in New Zealand approach language teaching in the context of their curriculum classes?

2. How do ESOL teachers in New Zealand see their changing role?

3. How do both sets of teachers view the prospect of teacher professional development and collaboration?

Methodology & procedures

Two studies were developed to answer the research questions. The first investigated the beliefs and practices of seven mainstream teachers in New Zealand secondary schools. The second investigated the roles and beliefs of seven ESOL teachers in New Zealand secondary schools. Since the object of the research projects was to explore and explain existing practices in a number of New Zealand schools, and all three questions ask “how”, the most appropriate approach was to use qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2009). The methodological approach to each study will be described in turn.

Study one: mainstream teachers

This study was part of a wider research project that used exploratory case study methodology to investigate what secondary teachers of curriculum subjects believe to be effective practice for teaching EALs within their senior classes (Yin, 1994). As the purpose of the study was to identify and analyse positive practice, seven teacher participants were purposively selected, in consultation with their principals and other professional colleagues who believed these teachers to be effective in teaching both their subject and EALs within their subject. Care was taken to ensure that the views of teachers from different curriculum areas were captured from a range of schools. This was not an attempt to gain a representative sample, but rather to “develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2005, p. 203).

Once these teachers had agreed to take part, and had complied with the university’s ethics approval process, data were gathered in four ways. Firstly, teachers completed a questionnaire relating to their length of time teaching, their own first language (L1) and any professional development and academic qualifications that might have an impact on their beliefs about teaching language learners. The second means of gathering data was through an open-ended, audio-taped interview of about one hour’s duration. During this interview, the researcher used the questionnaire to prompt participants to explore their teaching practices and beliefs. This interview was followed by one or two classroom observations at a time determined by each teacher when he or she felt that effective practices would be evident.
Finally, the teachers had an opportunity to sum up their beliefs about teaching EALs in their curriculum area in a second interview.

Once the data had been collected, they were transcribed and entered into NVivo 8, a qualitative software package. Data were coded and analysed for emerging themes according to the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). One theme that arose from the wider study of how mainstream teachers support language learning within their curriculum area was: “Collaborating between mainstream and ESOL teachers”. This emergent theme was an area of interest to the researcher who then decided to look more closely at this aspect of supporting EAL students. Since collaboration is a theme that has been studied in several international contexts (Arkoudis, 2006a; Creese, 2010; Davison, 2006), the researcher was interested to contribute to this understanding by investigating the beliefs of ESOL specialists alongside those of curriculum teachers in order to sketch a picture of what happens in New Zealand (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

**Study two: ESOL teachers**

ESOL teachers at five secondary schools in a major urban region of New Zealand participated in the research. The seven participants had been part of a regional professional learning cluster for between 3 and 15 years, and were known to one another. They were accustomed to meeting three to five times per year. Few of the ESOL teachers had an official job description, and those who did felt that it did not reflect the scope of their role. Their varied responsibilities included serving as: head of department, dean of international students, full-time or part-time ESOL teacher, or ESOL and mainstream English teacher. Participants also had varied backgrounds in specialist training for TESSOL or Applied Linguistics. Four held graduate or postgraduate TESSOL qualifications; and the others had no specialist ESOL training, but had evolved into their position from a primary, EFL, or special needs teaching background. Four had trained as teachers of the English curriculum (rather than gaining TESSOL qualifications).

Data were collected by a questionnaire and a focus group interview. The questionnaire requested: information about the nature of the teachers’ training and length of time spent as an ESOL specialist; perceptions of role changes in schools; and descriptions of what their ideal role might be. Subsequently, the seven ESOL teachers participated in a focus group interview conducted as a semi-structured discussion following the main points from the questionnaire. After each question had been discussed in full, a note-taker read back the notes to enable participants to make corrections or additions, as well as to confirm the record’s accuracy. Member-checking in this way allows maintenance of group dynamics and empowers participants to check the validity of the record (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Notes were later coded for salient themes. The main categories were determined by the research questions that the participants were asked on the questionnaire and in the interview; subthemes also were identified regarding roles, subject matter and curriculum, and collaboration.
**Limitations**

These studies sought the opinions and self-reported experiences of a small number of teachers so the results cannot be generalised to all teachers. Nevertheless, their perspectives offer a rich snapshot of teachers’ beliefs that raise challenges for how schools approach students learning English as an additional language. Their perspectives also reflect the trends noted in earlier studies of New Zealand ESOL teachers (Franken & McComish, 2003; Ministry of Education International Division, 2002).

As ESOL teachers, all participants were also known to the researcher. Morgan suggests that the focus group is a useful methodology when a study ‘involves researchers who are more actively involved with the participants and their concerns” (Morgan, 1996, p. 149). This relationship may have predisposed teachers to participate in the study and speak freely, but it also places particular responsibility on the researcher to treat negative findings with respect. While endeavouring to interpret teachers’ views fairly, it is important to acknowledge the interpretive nature of the study.

**Results**

The research questions provided the main categories used for analyzing these data. Nonetheless, subthemes emerged.

*How do mainstream teachers approach language teaching in the context of their curriculum classes?*

The case study mainstream teachers conveyed various degrees of confidence in their ability to meet the language learning needs of the students in their curriculum classes. Most were confident that their expertise as curriculum teachers would adequately support English language learners in their classes. This teacher’s comments were unusual:

> [it] is a huge thing, especially for me because I’m not trained in English, and definitely not trained in ESOL, but ... it’s such a need, in every class that you teach (Mainstream teacher).

This teacher and one other actively sought out their ESOL specialist for advice and guidance. Interestingly, these two participants had undertaken a degree of training as teachers of language across the curriculum. One mentioned needing to open her “toolkit of strategies from teachers’ training college” and the other was currently engaged in TESSOL education. These (most linguistically knowledgeable) teachers of the group expressed the least confidence in their ability to meet the needs of their EAL students. Conversely, they also displayed the most linguistic awareness in their planning and teaching.

In contrast, most of the others did not actively seek support from their ESOL colleagues. In fact, they were not entirely certain what their ESOL colleagues did. They felt that using a range of subject-specific teaching approaches ensured learning for all the students in their classes, including the language learners. When questioned further about what good pedagogy might look like for EALs, the teachers identified general approaches that fitted the delivery of their subject, such as teacher-student interaction, multiple opportunities to engage with course content, and the use of clear instructions. The
teaching practices identified aligned to content-pedagogy, or the preferred ways of transmitting content knowledge in their disciplines. In some cases, these overlapped with language teaching practices such as providing opportunities for group interaction. In others, preferred subject practices contrasted with research into educational linguistics, such as teacher-centred and individual activities. The most common belief was that EALs needed time, an inclusive empathetic environment, and practice to catch their English speaking classmates.

All the teachers appreciated that a focus on vocabulary, particularly subject-specific terms, was of value to learners; two also reflected on the challenge posed by high frequency words with subject-specific meanings. In other respects, they were unclear about the language demands of their discipline. One remarked that she did not undertake explicit language instruction such as deconstructing multisyllabic words because the class would not like it. Most teachers believed that language teaching related to teaching arbitrary grammatical rules, and could not see the relevance of this to their subject areas.

The concept of literacy appeared to confuse the curriculum teachers in my study and parallels the results of a study on US teachers involved on the Reading First programme (Harper, de Jong, & Platt, 2008). The New Zealand Ministry of Education has implemented the Secondary Literacy Programme nationwide, with a view to lifting the academic reading and writing proficiency of secondary learners (Ministry of Education, 2004). The term literacy has been widely used in schools, and curriculum teachers have learnt generic strategies to support students’ reading and writing. This has “reinforced the notion that ELLs’ linguistic and cultural needs are either indistinguishable from those of native speakers, or irrelevant to their schooling” (Harper, et al., 2008, p. 274). As a consequence, the teachers commented that most students in their senior classes had literacy issues and they all benefited from the same approaches. One or two also linked EAL students with failing EL1 readers (de Jong & Harper, 2005; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

The subject specialists all overlooked the significance of the EAL students’ bilingualism, and how this linguistic expertise might advantage these learners. Teachers spoke of “allowing them” or “ignoring situations when” EALs used their first language (L1). One teacher remarked: “I have been advised that it is better to place EALs in separate groups,” which suggests that any underpinning language acquisition theory was outside her own knowledge. She appeared confident that this specialist knowledge was not something she herself needed to acquire in order to do a good job teaching EAL students in her class.

These data signal either that the curriculum teachers did not appreciate that there was a distinct body of knowledge about teaching EAL students, or that they did, but did not feel that it had significance for them.

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1 English language learners- used synonymously with EAL students in this paper
How do ESOL teachers see their changing role?

Most teachers agreed that their most important duty was Teaching ESOL as an independent (though not a curriculum) subject; six teachers ranked this as top priority and one ranked it second. There was also consensus on the importance of Assisting ESOL students to manage mainstream subjects and Pastoral care of ESOL and international students. Two other roles featuring within the top five were: Liaising with mainstream teachers, (which aligned with the current management position held by four of the teachers); and Planning or co-teaching with mainstream teacher, which none reported they had yet done in practice. The two teachers who trained as primary school teachers regarded Briefing teacher aides to support teaching EALs was their most important role. Others considered that it was the job of specialists, not paraprofessionals, to teach EAL students. When asked to describe role changes, ESOL teachers unanimously affirmed that their original job of developing academic language proficiency in students from a range of linguistic backgrounds, teaching ESOL, was diminishing as teaching became ‘more assessment driven’.

They believed that the requirement to prepare students for national assessments limited their flexibility to design programmes that would methodically develop language learning. Unlike their colleagues teaching foreign and community languages—who have curricula to guide and validate practice—ESOL teachers’ core expertise seemed to have been reshaped into a support role. However, ESOL teachers did not appear to regret the absence of an ESOL curriculum but appreciated the freedom to design programmes that fitted individual learner needs: ‘I wouldn’t like too prescriptive programmes which may limit teachers’ freedom to do what is best for each student’.

Nevertheless, this flexibility to teach language appeared constrained by wider curriculum demands. Teachers reported spending increasing time on supporting students to manage the language demands of curriculum subjects. ESOL teachers taught classes comprising EAL students with varying English language proficiency and at different levels across the curriculum. The ESOL teachers expected to encounter a range of proficiency within their classes but different curricular expectations within one class challenged their teaching:

You look at the students in your class with ESOL unit standards at level two. Then you need to look at your students at level one and work with them. There’s a lot going on.
You can feel schizo – doing different things with different people.

One ESOL teacher described herself as a ‘jack-of-all-trades’ because of the pressure to support curriculum learning in the role of an adjunct teacher. Most ESOL teachers reported feeling proficient in identifying language demands in a number of subjects: ‘I try to get them to do subject related words’ and ‘I have an ESOL…. class where I try to give them what I think they need in other classes’. Some ESOL teachers were not always confident of mediating complex aspects of content in senior curriculum areas: ‘Students can bring questions (to us)… With the general level one science I can help, but after that it gets hard. But convincing them that the language is important is difficult.’
Another theme that emerged was the pressure placed upon ESOL teachers to prepare EAL students for literacy standards based on the English curriculum, particularly at NCEA level two. *Literacy* posed a different challenge for ESOL teachers than for their curriculum colleague because this term had an additional meaning in New Zealand which impacted upon the ESOL teachers’ role. One of the prerequisites for all secondary students to gain university entrance at the time of this study was attaining four reading credits and four writing credits derived from the English curriculum. These credits are termed ‘literacy standards’. Since ‘literacy standards’ are designed to assess native speakers of English largely in literary contexts, they presented a significant barrier to EAL students. Consequently, many ESOL classes are sheltered English classes where students focus on preparing to meet the ‘literacy standards’ rather than systematic support for language development. ESOL teachers remarked: ‘We are always doing assessments … but there’s not a lot of time to do language,’ and, ‘You have to do all that with one class [language ‘curriculum’, English curriculum and content curriculum]. There’s a lot going on in class with those three things’.

The emphasis on passing the ‘literacy standards’ provoked mixed responses from the ESOL teachers depending on their understanding of L1 and L2 language acquisition and their experience in teaching the English curriculum:

I am primary trained so I’m good at teaching literacy but it’s difficult to teach literature

Now we are teaching courses that mainstream English teachers have been trained to teach.

This teacher acknowledged that he was not a trained English (curriculum) teacher yet he felt confident that his skills in teaching primary learners to read and write (L1 literacy) in their first language were sufficient background for teaching secondary bilingual learners. He did not consider that demands on secondary EAL learners might require different specialist skills. Finally, he spoke as if gaining ‘literacy’ skills were synonymous with acquiring an additional language. This lack of distinction between first (literacy) and second (bilingual literacy) language acquisition was an unexpected area of confusion. Most schools represented by the teachers had participated in the Secondary Literacy Programme, yet even ESOL teachers did not necessarily differentiate between first and additional language acquisition.

**How do both sets of teachers view the prospect of increased professional development and teacher collaboration?**

Only three of the fourteen teachers in the study reported any form of collaboration. Most of the ESOL teachers described how they would like to share their expertise with mainstream colleagues either in collaborative teaching or through providing professional development. However they recognised that this might be problematic when teachers don’t share the same metalanguage:

The initial assessment of students is huge but how do we tell teachers what students need. It is hard to give information without using jargon (ESOL teacher)

The mainstream teachers had a similar impression that sharing information about a student’s language proficiency would be a problem. However, most of them did not seek information about students’
language levels as they felt that a student’s linguistic ability was not as useful to them as knowing about students’ subject knowledge:

What is the point of getting that (language) information... if you get someone like me that comes along who says “Well I don’t care what level they are at, I’m not ESOL trained, it doesn’t matter.” I have to try and figure out what level they are at for this subject (mainstream teacher)

In addition to this, ESOL teachers felt that their colleagues did not understand the process of acquiring an additional language, which could have severe repercussions for the placement of and support for EALs:

Alarming the correlation is that because their English is not good then they are made to join the non-achievers and behaviour problems (ESOL teacher)

Some teachers are a bit inflexible.... Some (English) teachers set essays or books that are way too hard but are not willing to accept (my) alternatives (ESOL teacher)

Nor do curriculum specialists necessarily understand the role of their ESOL specialist colleagues:

We liaise over assessing ESOL students. I’m not sure what they expect of me. Some say, “When are you going to be a real English teacher?” (ESOL teacher).

One made a list of roles that an ESOL teacher would play in an ideal world:

Provide PD related to teaching English language learning. Guidance in understanding issues in learning English language skills. Help to set teaching and learning objectives that include language learning in the curriculum. Provide profiles of individual ESOL students (family, cultural background, English language proficiency etc). Be acquainted with the curricula of mainstream subjects in order to help ESOL students with their problems or prepare them for these subjects. Have more time to involve all ESOL students in extracurricular activities (ESOL teacher).

In contrast, few mainstream teachers explicitly acknowledged that the ESOL staff might have expertise that they needed to learn. The mismatch in teachers’ expectations was apparent when they did. One mainstream teacher believed that it would benefit her EALs to be withdrawn from her class and receive language instruction in small groups, whereas, in line with current research, the ESOL teacher resisted that idea, attempting to provide her colleague with the skills to include these learners as part of a mainstream class (Echevarria, et al., 2008):

We’re supposed to work together, but that becomes quite difficult, because ...she wants me to do the work, but then I want her expertise to help me with that work, and so we clash a little bit there (mainstream teacher).

The two teachers had different expertise and had not worked out a way to share this for the benefit of their learners.

A mainstream HOD of a department with large numbers of EAL students approached collaboration from a structural level. He and his senior ESOL colleague experimented with different kinds of timetabling so that EAL students would either have extra subject lessons during ESOL time, or the ESOL teacher would be present in his class to work with the learners. Nonetheless, despite his
appreciation of the ESOL teacher’s work, he viewed her not as an equal collaborator but in a supporting role. The nature of their relationship was revealed when he described her as “an aide” in his class.

Our head of ESOL actually sat in my... classes... probably about a third of that class were classed as ELLs, ... and so it was really just having that extra teacher aide support. And I would teach the class effectively and when they were busy doing their work, the ESOL teacher would go around and help out those students that needed the ESOL support: definitions, words, those sorts of things. Just everyday language terms ....

The mainstream teachers often spoke warmly of their ESOL colleagues as individuals yet did not readily see how working with the ESOL department could benefit their EALs. They were confident that the pedagogies used within their curriculum classes would enhance curriculum learning and benefit language learners at the same time.

Implications for policy
This study raises several issues about how teachers might best collaborate for the benefit of English language learners that bear further investigation. It highlights the fact that many teachers – both ESOL and mainstream- are unfamiliar with how EAL students learn in an immersion context. While it might have been expected that curriculum specialists had little understanding of language acquisition, I was not expecting comments that betrayed ESOL teachers’ unfamiliarity with TESSOL principles. Their chequered body of knowledge appeared to reflect the paths ESOL teachers had taken to acquire their current positions and schools’ limited understanding of the language needs of EAL students. Only three of the seven participating ESOL teachers had undertaken any specialist TESSOL training, consistent with an earlier study showing that only half of ESOL school teachers held TESSOL qualifications (Ministry of Education, 2002). This was a disturbingly small proportion of the group and has serious implications for the ESOL teachers’ practices, status and the messages they are perpetuating about learning an additional language. In contrast, all curriculum teachers held at least a bachelors degree in addition to their teaching qualification.

The New Zealand Graduating Teacher Standards state that as part of their professional knowledge teachers should “have content and pedagogical content knowledge for supporting English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners to succeed in the curriculum” (New Zealand Teachers Council / Te Pouherenga Kaiako o Aotearoa, 2007). However, while teacher education institutions promote course that attend to ‘diversity’, there are few courses devoted to sharing the linguistic knowledge required if a teacher is to successfully teach content and language. It is possible for student-teachers to complete teacher education without coherent instruction in how to meet the needs of their EAL students. In her review of initial teacher education, Kane emphasised that: “There is a notable absence across all graduate profiles of explicit reference to graduates having knowledge and understanding of working with students for whom English is a second or subsequent language” (Kane, 2005, p. xv), and, “There is an absence within all but very few conceptual frameworks of any reference to second language learners and the needs of new immigrants as a particular feature of the New Zealand
educational context” (Kane, 2005, p. xiv). A lack of requirement for teachers of EAL students to undertake appropriate teacher training appears to be an issue shared internationally (Stoller, 2008).

Almost half of the ESOL teachers were primary trained. One repercussion of primary trained teachers holding secondary ESOL positions was visible in these participants’ eagerness to devolve ESOL instruction to teacher paraprofessionals or aides. This practice indicated that primary trained teachers in particular believed that teaching EAL students was a support task that could be undertaken by a person without a specialist education. It also suggested that they did not consider there to be an attainable specialist body of knowledge about teaching ESOL outside L1 literacy skills. This perception was shared by a number of the curriculum teachers who suggested that good curriculum teaching was sufficient to support language learners (de Jong & Harper, 2005), and that ESOL teachers were synonymous with teacher aides. Curriculum teachers holding these beliefs might not seek help from ESOL colleagues, being unaware that they don’t know about language learning. Another complicating factor is that almost all secondary teachers in New Zealand use English as a medium for instruction. It is therefore easy to understand how a subject teacher might perceive that they know all they need to about the English required of their subject area. The ESOL teachers in this study were loath to disabuse them of this belief and may therefore be complicit in their own lack of status.

Most of the curriculum teachers in my study appeared to be confounded by the question of what ESOL teachers actually know and do in a school. Things do not appear to have changed much since Siskin’s ESL teacher remarked:

“A lot of people believe that I do nothing. You’re not in a real department; what do you do?”
(Siskin, 1994, p. 7)

One of the reasons for this may be that ESOL is one of the few areas without a national curriculum. Furthermore, it is “a subject without a content” (Christie, 2004, p. 16). Other studies have shown how significantly teachers align with and gain prestige from belonging to a curriculum area (Biglan, 1973; Grossman & Stodolsky, 1995; Oolbekkink-Marchand, 2006). The reverse appears to be true for ESOL teachers. Nationally, ESOL teachers have petitioned government departments for a curriculum which would enable them to provide EAL students with systematic instruction in acquiring a new language (and simultaneously validate their expertise). Nonetheless, the ESOL teachers in this study did not feel that an ESOL curriculum was a pressing need- valuing their current flexibility to design and adapt programmes to suit particular learners instead.

The situation is compounded when school managers do not insist upon hiring fully trained ESOL teachers. Although the New Zealand Qualifications Authority requires international students to be taught by teachers with TESSOL qualifications, and the Ministry of Education has instigated scholarships to promote TESSOL courses, if my study is in any way indicative, there are still significant numbers of secondary school managers that believe that qualifications in the areas of special needs, primary education or English curriculum will suffice for teaching language learners. School
managers must appreciate that all EALs have the right to trained specialist teachers of English language. This should not be merely the privilege of International fee-paying students. The effect of hiring non-specialists is that they are unlikely to take the lead in instigating professional development about language learning, as despite attending in-service courses and other language PD, they lack the professional confidence and expertise to lead mainstream. ESOL teachers need to be confident language specialists, not part-time teachers or aides hired for convenience. Schools need to require specialist qualifications of their ESOL teachers and, if necessary, to prioritise supporting ESOL teachers to attain these.

Schools in other countries are required to provide opportunities for ESOL and curriculum teachers to work together (Arkoudis, 2006b). Working together may take the form of structured opportunities for planning and co-delivering lessons; or regular professional development opportunities for curriculum teachers to gain specialist knowledge about language teaching (Echevarria, et al., 2008; Walqui & van Lier, 2010). The Ministry of Education offers scholarships for curriculum teachers to undertake TESSOL education, but their uptake each year is limited- possibly because the curriculum teachers do not appreciate the impact such courses might have on their EAL learners; or possibly because they feel they have ‘done literacy’. The confusion between literacy and language learning is a complicating factor in New Zealand compared to regions where a coherent language-specific PD programme like SIOP or QTEL is offered. Although timetabled opportunities for collaboration or team teaching would not be a silver bullet, this process would provide “a more systematic and cohesive professional development model beyond the simple extension of good practices… to coordinate the efforts of both ESL and regular classroom teachers” (He, Prater, & Steed, 2009, p. 3). A mainstream teacher in my study regretted that his timetable no longer allowed him to work with his ESOL colleague. Yet, had these teachers been provided with regular timetabled opportunities instead of having to manipulate the timetable themselves, their relationship may have developed into a more balanced collaboration.

There has been extensive study about what curriculum teachers need to know about language (Mohan, 2001; Swain, 1996; Walqui & van Lier, 2010; Wong Fillmore & Snow, 2000), but less about how they might acquire this knowledge. My study adds the following perspective from a New Zealand context. The New Zealand Curriculum expresses the admirable desire for teachers to integrate content and language teaching in their classes however this cannot be achieved without specialist teacher training to ensure that both ESOL and curriculum teachers understand what is involved in combining two disciplines. For consistent implementation, teacher education facilities need to formalise the knowledge about language acquisition necessary for teachers need to know and require it. Schools need to prioritise the employment of teachers who have this expertise and be prepared to structure opportunities for teachers with this expertise to apprentice those without.

This paper has explored the opinions of secondary ESOL and subject teachers about how to meet the Ministry of Education’s remit that all teachers must teach the language of their curriculum area (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 16). In order for teachers to manage this task and learn to work
together, it will be necessary for them to perceive each other as equal partners, with skills of commensurate importance to their learners.

References


