

# Supporting Our Teacher Colleagues Through Structured Collaboration

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*Summary: This study investigated the challenges mainstream teachers in British Columbia (B.C.), Canada, face in serving emergent bilingual and multilingual (EBM) students in their classrooms. The core objective of my research was to assess the effectiveness of a modified version of the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) in enhancing teachers' self-efficacy when serving EBM students. My study encompassed the analysis of quantitative survey data and qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews, collaborative planning and debriefing sessions, and written reflections. The study indicated to improve EBM students' educational experiences, urgent changes are needed so that teachers are prepared and supported to better serve EBM students in class.*

*Keywords: SIOP, Teacher collaboration, Inclusive education, Teacher self-efficacy, Equity in Education*

## Introduction

The number of students enrolled in school in Canada with a home language other than English has continued to rise. In September 2023, there were 76,091 EBM students in the public and independent schools in BC, 6,886 more than the year before (BC Gov News, 2023). In many school districts in the Lower Mainland, the EBM student population is significantly larger. For example, 60% of the students speak a language other than English at home in the Vancouver school district (Vancouver School Board, 2022). Many young students arrive in kindergarten with little or no developed English language proficiency.

Current educational reforms emphasize equity, requiring a shift in addressing historical inequalities in Canadian education. Equity moves beyond equal treatment to ensuring access and removing barriers for historically disadvantaged groups (Ng, 2003). EBM students face challenges beyond nationality, ethnicity, language, and religion, including adapting to new environments and employment barriers (Vertovec, 2007), making them highly vulnerable to poor academic outcomes (Li et al., 2021).

A key factor in educational inequity for EBM students is mainstream teachers' lack of preparation to support linguistically, culturally, and racially diverse learners (Coady et al., 2016; Gilman & Norton, 2020; Li et al., 2021). Many struggle due to insufficient training, and some hold misconceptions about EBM students' learning abilities (Coady et al., 2016). Teacher education programs inconsistently require coursework on cultural and linguistic diversity (Li et al., 2021), often lacking depth in literacy engagement and identity affirmation (Cummins et al., 2012). Furthermore, EBM training frequently oversimplifies language acquisition, perpetuating misconceptions such as the belief that mere exposure to

English suffices for proficiency (Webster & Valeo, 2011). Faez (2012) also noted that teachers report low self-efficacy in meeting EBM students' needs, highlighting their inadequate preparation for diverse classrooms.

My research has investigated whether the modified SIOP model can positively impact teacher self-efficacy when combined with collaborative efforts. The results of my research shed light on the potential of collaborative work to support mainstream teachers and to improve the educational experiences and outcomes for EBM students, who often face unique challenges in language acquisition and content comprehension.

## Methods

The primary objective of my study was to investigate the potential of integrating a modified SIOP model into the collaborative planning and teaching processes involving three mainstream and one EBM teachers to improve teacher self-efficacy through a six-week Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle. Following Langley et al.'s (2009) principles for testing changes, the PDSA framework was employed for a targeted examination of the proposed hypothesis, as illustrated in Figure 1. PDSA is an iterative process that facilitates empirical investigation and contributes to enhancing theoretical understanding (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Two research questions guided this study:

- How does the implementation of a modified SIOP co-teaching model, specifically between EBM teachers and mainstream teachers, impact the self-efficacy of mainstream teachers in serving EBM beginners in Grade 2 and Grade 5 classes?
- How do three mainstream teachers and one EBM teacher

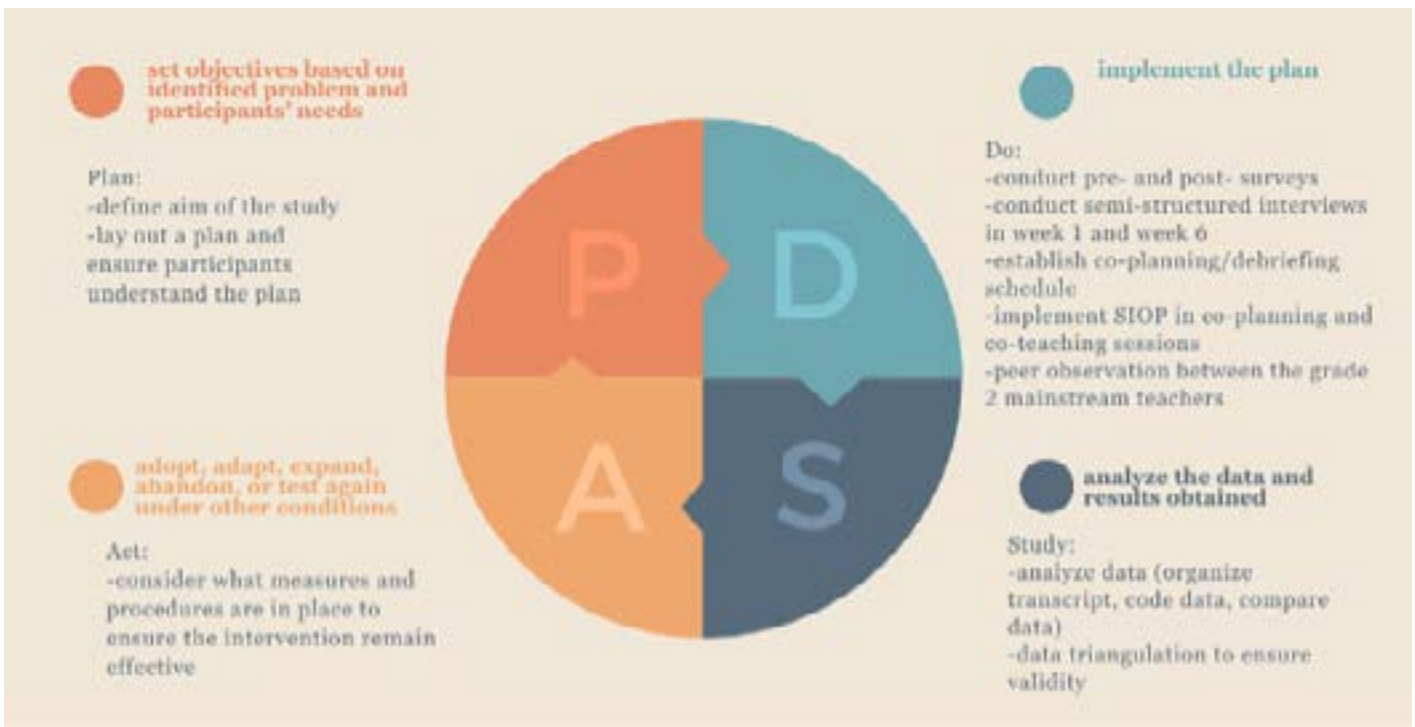


Figure 1 The PSDA Cycle for the Six-Week Implementation of SIOP

perceive the implementation of the modified SIOP model?

My study employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing surveys and semi-structured interviews with four teacher participants, including one EBM teacher and three elementary mainstream teachers (see Table 1). Participants were purposefully selected based on their experience working with EBM students. Pre- and post-surveys were administered in the first and last weeks of the study, respectively, with the survey instrument adapted from Fu and Wang (2021). This Likert scale-based survey (1-never to 5-always) described participants' perceived efficacy across four subscales: assessment and evaluation of EBM students, accommodation of EBM students' learning needs, implementation of teaching strategies for EBM students, and proficiency in linguistic knowledge.

Name (pseudonyms)	School Role	Reasons to be Included in the Study
Amy	Gr.2 Mainstream teacher	Close to 10 years of classroom teaching experience; open-minded; a critical thinker; passionate about inclusive education.
Betsy	Gr.2 Mainstream Teacher	Over 25 years of classroom teaching; experiences with teaching EBM students in her class; experiences working and co-teaching with EBM teachers; proactive educator in different settings
Carol	EBM teacher	Over 10 years of EBM teaching experiences; strong language teaching background; has completed SIOP training; easy to work with; open-minded; supportive
Dana	Gr.5 Mainstream teacher	Over 20 years of classroom teaching experience; open to new learning; never co-planned and co-taught with EBM teachers; interested in learning about co-teaching between EBM and mainstream teachers;

Table 1 Participants of the PDSA Study at Taylor Creek Elementary (pseudonym)

Weekly co-teaching and co-planning times for implementing

the SIOP framework were scheduled. The initial co-planning session followed the modified “Coffee Talk” (Collaborative for Learning and Educational Equity, n.d.) protocol to facilitate conversations between mainstream and EBM teachers. The modified Coffee Talk protocol involved introducing a lesson plan, sharing thoughts, suggestions, and questions in a group, and collaboratively finalizing the plan within approximately 25 minutes. Subsequently, meetings from weeks 2 – 5 began with a short debriefing of the co-planned and co-taught lesson, followed by a discussion on a new lesson plan. Each lesson was prepared by the EBM teachers with some SIOP components (language objective, interactive activities, building background knowledge and comprehensible input, etc.) and modified by mainstream teachers during the meeting to improve the quality and applicability. Factors such as narrowing learning content goals, time management, grouping, and making lessons relevant to the curriculum were suggested to revise the lesson plans.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants before and after the study, and audio recording was employed during co-planning sessions. Additionally, notes were taken during co-planning and debriefing sessions to refine lesson plans, and memos were written to document incidents and emotions. The first interview, conducted in the first week, focused on teachers' perspectives on EBM education at the school. In contrast, the second interview, conducted over the subsequent three weeks, sought feedback on the study's intervention and how the collaboration process impacted their self-efficacy in serving EBM students. Data security measures included encrypted, password-protected devices and adherence to ethical considerations.

## Results

Overall, the alteration in self-efficacy scores exhibited minimal change across the four teacher participants (see Table 2). The overall shift remained relatively modest.

	Pre-survey	Post-survey	Percentage Changed
Amy (Grade 2 Teacher)	3.58	3.67	2.5%
Betty (Grade 2 Teacher)	3.38	3.54	4.7%
Carol (EBM Specialist)	3.58	3.38	-5.6%
Dana (Grade 5 Teacher)	2.83	2.88	1.8%
All Participants	3.34	3.36	0.6%

Table 2 Quantitative finding: Individual Mean Score and Overall Mean Score

Four themes emerged as a result of triangulating evidence from the three sources of data— interviews, co-planning and debriefing sessions and surveys (See Table 3).

Research Questions	Themes	Indications
How does the implementation of a structured SIOP co-teaching model, specifically between EBM teachers and mainstream teachers, impact the self-efficacy of mainstream teachers in serving EBM learners in Grade 2 and Grade 5 classes?	Theme 1: Variations in the Impact of the Modified SIOP on Teacher's Self-Efficacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grade 2 teachers reported an increase (Amy and Betty)</li> <li>Grade 5 teachers reported no increase (Dana and Carol)</li> </ul>
How do three mainstream teachers and one EBM teacher perceive the implementation of the modified SIOP model?	<p>Theme 2: All Teacher Participants Acknowledged the Benefits of Collaboration</p> <p>Theme 3: Teacher Participants Shared Different Impact of the Modified SIOP Model on Their Approach to Support EBM Students</p> <p>Theme 4: Time, Relationship Building, Shared Philosophy and EBM Resources were Fundamental Factors Contributing to Successful Co-planning and Co-teaching</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sharing ideas about teaching strategies</li> <li>Planning and practicing the strategy with colleagues</li> <li>Understanding your co-teacher better</li> <li>Feeling supported</li> <li>"The process reminded Amy, Betty and Carol to use the strategies they already knew in their daily teaching"</li> <li>Dana started to change her introduction and learned to scaffold for her EBM students, discuss challenges, seek advice, and share resources from and with Carol</li> <li>Allocated time, but not too often</li> <li>Good relationship with co-teachers</li> <li>Shared teaching style and philosophy</li> <li>Having resources (support EBM)</li> </ul>

Table 3 Findings from Qualitative Research

### Theme 1: Variations in the Impact of the Modified SIOP on Teacher's Self-Efficacy

Over the six-week period, teacher participants reported a modest increase in their self-efficacy in serving EBM students. However, they acknowledged the benefits of structured collaboration guided by the modified SIOP framework.

### Theme 2: All Teacher Participants Acknowledged the Benefits of Collaboration

Participants identified the following benefits: structured collaboration facilitated professional dialogue, allowing teachers to learn from one another, exchange ideas, and reflect on their instructional practices.

### Theme 3: Teacher Participants Shared Different

### Impact of the Modified SIOP Model on Their Approach to Support EBM Students

Some teachers confirmed the modified SIOP model acted as a reminder to intentionally use the strategies that they have already known more often in their daily practice. The intermediate teacher started to make changes to the introduction of her lesson and value more of her EBM teacher partner's ideas and feedback.

### Theme 4: Time, Relationship Building, Shared Philosophy and EBM Resources were Fundamental Factors Contributing to Successful Co-planning and Co-teaching

Two participants identified critical areas for professional growth, including improving whole-class instructional strategies for EBM teachers and addressing the challenges faced by EBM students beyond second language acquisition. Participants also emphasized the importance of time, relationship building, a shared instructional philosophy, and accessible resources in effectively supporting EBM students.

## Discussion

Connecting the findings with existing literature offered nuanced insights into the evolving nature of teacher self-efficacy when working with EBM students. Klassen and Chiu (2010) argued that teacher efficacy can be measured broadly or in specific areas; measuring specific skills helps pinpoint teachers' challenges and provides practical guidance on supporting their growth. This level of specificity is valuable for conducting a subsequent PDSA cycle and guiding school leaders and policymakers in designing targeted supports. Marzano et al. (2019) suggested that when teachers collaborate, they bring collaborative strengths to tackle specific challenges unique to their school settings, making them highly effective problem solvers. Continuous effort in sharing ideas and practicing strategies with colleagues can lead to bigger growth in teacher self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). However, pedagogical-content knowledge is essential for teacher efficacy (Shulman, 1987). Implement strategies introduced and practiced almost immediately thereafter, promote growth in pedagogical language knowledge (Ollerhead, 2018). To support sustained growth in self-efficacy, schools should allocate dedicated time and spaces for teachers to engage in meaningful collaborative activities (Ahmed Hersi et al., 2016). While schools can foster and encourage regular opportunities for teachers to connect and communicate with each other (Keefe et al., 2004), simply setting aside time for teachers to associate does not ensure that meaningful collaboration (Marzano et al., 2019). Instead, schools can facilitate regular collaboration with an intentional structure, such as teachers can showcase useful resources they have discovered or created (Clarke, 2007). Such collaboration extends beyond surface-level interactions

and fosters a mechanism for on-going professional learning that benefits both teachers and students.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study suggested the critical need for systemic improvements in teacher education, professional development, and collaborative frameworks to better support mainstream teachers in serving EBM students. While the

modified SIOP model showed some benefits, its impact on teacher self-efficacy varied, underscoring the complexity of collaboration across diverse demographics, teaching styles, or school environment. Key factors such as time for structured collaboration, shared teaching philosophy, teacher relationship played a crucial role in shaping teachers' experiences. To effectively meet EBM students' unique linguistic and cultural needs and ultimately promote equitable and enriched educational experiences, policymakers, school administrators, and higher

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