

TESOL teachers have the expertise: Teacher leadership for school-wide English learning

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Summary: TESOL teachers have long been asked to provide professional development to their colleagues in order to support language development in the general education classroom without the training to do so. Teacher Leadership for School-Wide English Learning (SWEL) provides TESOL teachers with the training they need to feel confident and well-equipped to share their knowledge of language acquisition and pedagogy.

Keywords: teacher leadership, peer coaching, consulting, collaborative teaching

Asking language teachers to deliver professional development (PD) to colleagues is not an anomaly, nor is it new. In fact, TESOL International (Valdés, et al., 2014) acknowledged such requests were commonplace in schools that serve Multilingual Learners (MLLs). The paper reiterated earlier work that stated, “there is a clear need for the examination of promising approaches and implementations that can guide them [ESL teachers] in taking on the roles of experts, advocates, and consultants” (TESOL, April 2013). Inherent in each of these expanded roles, many of which are not in the minds of students who pursue their credentials to teach MLLs, is a need for training in andragogy. Enter Teacher Leadership for School-Wide English Learning (SWEL), a model designed to fill in the training gaps so language teachers have a road map for PD delivery and support of their colleagues who do not have a background in teaching language.

Illustrating this point, my co-author of the book *Teacher Leadership for school-wide English learning*, Dr. Michelle Benegas, came across the following post while scrolling through her Facebook feed.

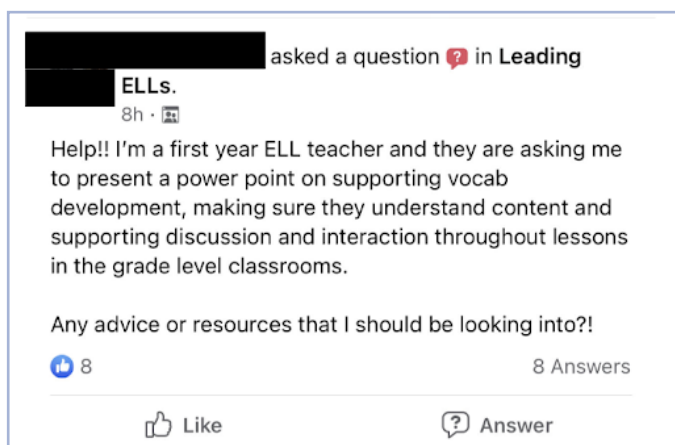


Figure 1: New teacher request for support

The teacher who posted this question was clearly in a panic. No doubt they had successfully completed a teacher education program in second language teaching, but the idea of instructing their colleagues on how to support vocabulary development, make content comprehensible, and create a classroom environment that supports active dialogue was an entirely different request. A background in K-12 TESOL training generally focuses on pedagogy but does not address andragogy (practices proven effective for teaching adults). Furthermore, this teacher was asked to train colleagues, likely many of whom have more teaching experience. Was the culture among teachers, and how they might respond to a first-year colleague leading a training, considered? What about best practices in professional development that impact instruction? Despite myriad questions, the underlying message is that the knowledge of the language teacher needs to be scaled so that language teaching happens in every classroom.

SWEL coaches as teacher leaders

While there is no one agreed-upon definition of teacher leadership, SWEL prefers to use one provided by Wenner and Campbell (2017): SWEL coaches are “teachers who maintain PreK-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom” (p. 140). This definition is important because many of the language teachers asked to provide PD to their colleagues are teachers of record for most or all the school day. The distinction is also important because research indicates that a culture of egalitarianism, or the belief that all teachers are equal in their skills and knowledge, is common among teachers (Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p. 151). While this ethos creates solidarity among teachers, it may also inhibit a willingness to trust colleagues who become leaders. For example, when a teacher becomes a full-time instructional coach, they are

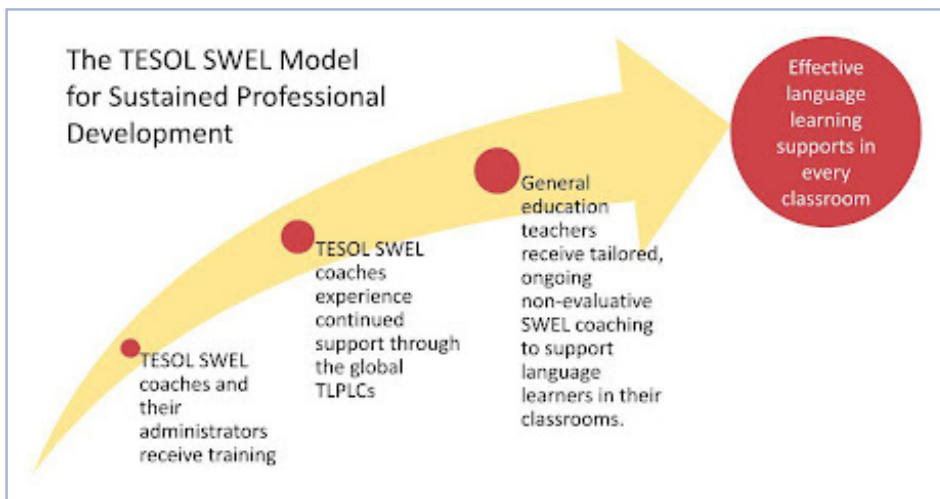


Figure 2. The TESOL SWEL model for sustained professional development

sometimes viewed as administrators rather than peers, which disrupts the culture of egalitarianism. This can impede the development of trusting, collaborative relationships between teachers in schools with traditional hierarchies (Wenner & Campbell, 2017).

SWEL coaches enact teacher leadership through the delivery of PD and peer coaching to their colleagues. The [TESOL SWEL Certificate Workshop Series](#) is designed for language teachers who already have the pedagogical knowledge to support language learning as well as for their building administrators. Because participants are already well-versed in language instruction, we can focus training on how to support colleagues' knowledge of language development, build trusting relationships, and peer coaching as well as the principles of adult learning and effective PD. SWEL coaches are also introduced to the psychology of change, given that the ultimate goal of SWEL coaching is to change instructional practices so that MLLs are better supported across the school day.

Meeting the parameters of effective professional development

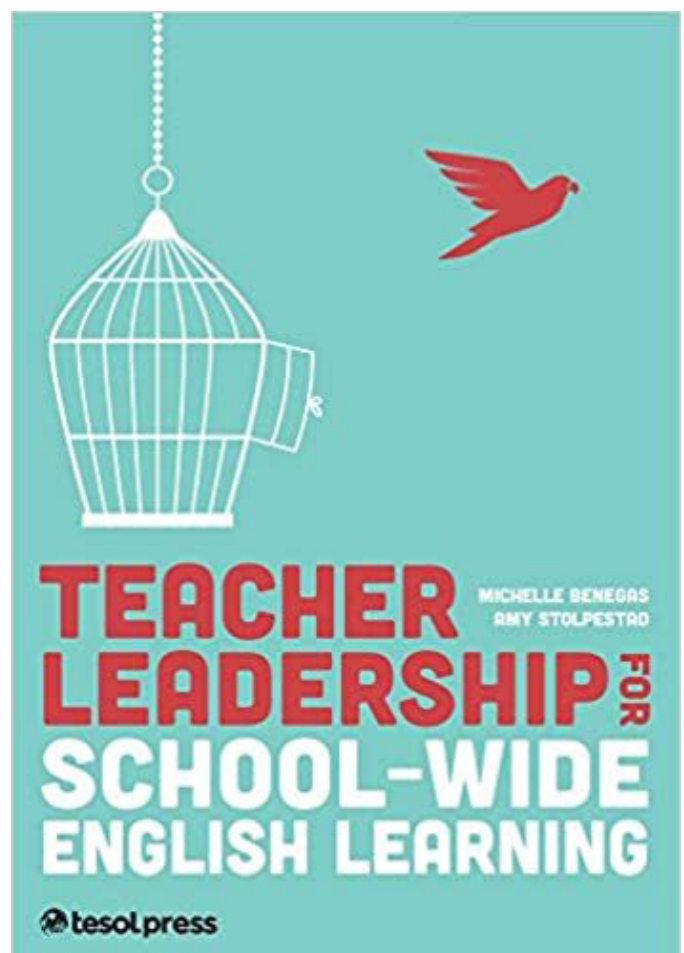
Research has helped us to better understand the qualities of teacher PD that result in actual implementation. Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) noted that, if change is to occur, PD efforts must be context-specific, sustainable, and include some form of coaching. These qualities serve as the foundation of the TESOL SWEL Model. As teacher leaders, SWEL coaches are empowered to make PD decisions informed by their knowledge of the school context and its MLL community. Embedded within their schools, they are also well positioned to ensure that efforts to support colleagues' application of language teaching strategies are sustained over time. Finally, the TESOL SWEL Certificate Workshop Series provides them with techniques for engaging in non-evaluative peer coaching (or consulting, as some of our partner districts prefer to call it) in one-on-one or small group settings.

As SWEL coaches provide on-going PD and coaching to

their colleagues, they also receive sustained support through TESOL SWEL's Teacher Leadership Professional Learning Community (TLPLC). SWEL coaches are invited to attend TLPLCs with other SWEL coaches from a variety of contexts. These online interactions allow them to share ideas, act as thinking partners to one another, and continue their learning about peer coaching. We have found that the cross-pollination that occurs between teachers is both inspiring to SWEL coaches, as well as useful in maintaining consistent efforts to support instruction for MLLs (see Figure 2).

An overview of the SWEL certificate training workshop series

TESOL International offers three workshops that make up the full SWEL Certificate Workshop Series. The first of these workshops is titled Contextual Language Instruction: An Anti-Oppressive Approach to Language Learning. Participants in SWEL Workshop 1 spend time examining how to avoid teaching English in a way that risks the loss of home language and/or culture. The second workshop,



SWEL Professional Development, focuses on the qualities of effective professional development, facilitation, and andragogy. This workshop is built around PD Plans (Benegas & Stolpestad, 2020) that address teacher skills, knowledge and dispositions that participants are encouraged to tailor to fit the needs of their schools. These PD Plans make up the bulk of chapters 4-6 in *Teacher leadership for school-wide English learning* and are accompanied by an index of resources that SWEL coaches are invited to use at their own professional discretion. Finally, the third SWEL workshop is SWEL Coaching, with a specific focus on change management, one-on-one coaching techniques, non-evaluative peer

support, building trusting relationships, and active listening. School administrators are invited to participate in portions of this final training, as their support of the work is critical to its successful implementation over time.

Conclusion

We prefer to view SWEL coaching as a strategy for reaching strategic plan and/or school-improvement goals rather than a stand-alone initiative. As such, SWEL coaching can be used in tandem with other PD programs for language learners and differentiation such as SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol) (Vogt, et al., 2016) or GLAD (Guided Language Acquisition Instruction) Strategies; as a mechanism for implementing an equity initiative; or as a systematic support for launching new curriculum with an eye toward making it accessible for MLLs. SWEL coaches are empowered to lead in their schools to ensure that the PD teachers receive is sustainable in accordance with what we know results in effective teacher practice, thereby scaling their knowledge of language instruction. The federal grant work at Hamline University, which served as the seeding ground for SWEL, demonstrated statistically significant changes in the use of practices that support MLLs in classrooms with teachers who worked with a SWEL coach (Peterson, K., 2022, p. 7). The result is a collaborative teaching team that works to ensure MLLs can meet their full potential in every classroom (see Figure 3).

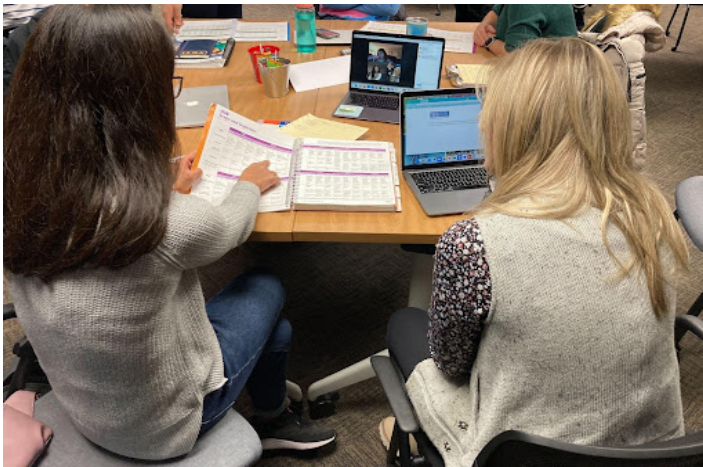


Figure 3: SWEL coaches and their general education colleagues collaborate on word study preparation.

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