



## Breaking Down Borders in Collaboratively Designing and Teaching an Integrated ELL/SOC Learning Community

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## ABSTRACT

In this article, two community college faculty members (ELL and Behavioral Sciences) discuss their experience collaboratively developing a linked English language learner (ELL) and sociology learning community course. Their discussion begins with the factors that led to their teaming up as co-teachers and then to their collaborative process of developing a fully integrated curriculum that supports students in using sociological concepts to reflect on their immigrant experiences. Particular attention is given to a high-stakes essay assignment they developed and how they leveraged their different strengths in scaffolding student learning and writing through integrated assignments and collaborative feedback to support students in writing this challenging essay. To illustrate the connections between theory and practice, this discussion of their collaboration is framed against the findings of a faculty-led research review on best ELL practices that paved the way for a major ELL program reform at the community college where they teach.

## INTRODUCTION

*I am a girl, grown up in a middle-class family in a small town of Nepal. I originally belong to the society where many people of my age are suffering from gender inequality, child marriage or “Bal Bibah”, untouchability or a cast-based discrimination system, dowry system, poverty and so on. Although I am from such social location, I feel myself lucky because my parents sent me school for my education. Due to lack of education, my parents did not find good opportunities at works and they decided to send me to school for my bright future that changed my way of living. I finally came to the USA a few months ago for the education and the good health facilities which has reshaped my life.*

---Intro paragraph to an essay by Sabita, learning community cluster student

The power of centering student stories and experiences in the curriculum has been well documented (Weinstein, 1999; Tang et al, 2019). Student stories and experiences are full of knowledge, assets, perspectives and aspirations that present rich material for deeper learning. The challenge facing the college professor is how to support students in using those stories and experiences to engage with deeper learning in their discipline. Both learning communities and community-based learning have been identified as two high impact practices that foster deep learning; however students from groups historically underrepresented in higher education, like English language learner (ELL) students, are least likely to be afforded access to these opportunities (Kuh 2008).

In this article, we – Jeff (ELL) and Aurora (Behavioral Sciences) – discuss our collaborative process in designing and teaching a place-based ELL/SOC learning community at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) that supports students in deep learning. To illustrate the connections between theory and practice, we frame the discussion of our collaboration and teaching against the research findings of a BHCC research review of best ESL practices that paved the way for an ELL program reform and was just getting started at BHCC when we began our collaboration. Our discussion is organized into five parts:

Section 1: Instructor matching and collaboration

Section 2: Collaborative and integrated curriculum design and implementation

Section 3: Scaffolding student learning

Section 4: Collaborative feedback and assessment

Section 5: From integrated assessments to further integration of curriculum

We began collaboratively developing our ELL/SOC learning community in the fall of 2016, just as the AANAPISI sponsored ELL Program reform at BHCC was beginning (see Ellenbird, Shute, Naggie, & Puente, this issue; Lambert, Lin, & Ismatul Oliva, this issue). One of the first steps of this ELL Program reform was a faculty-led research review of best ELL practices. Jeff was part of that team of six faculty and staff members at BHCC that carried out this review (see Ellenbird's section in Ellenbird, Shute, Naggie, & Puente, this issue). Over a period of four months, the team reviewed over 30 articles and books on best practices for teaching ESL and then synthesized and organized those findings into four key findings, each supported by an inventory of specific asset-based practices. The first key finding - Institutional Support - addresses exactly the kind of collaboration that we were embarking on.

#### Four Key Findings from BHCC Research Findings on Best Practices for Teaching ESL<sup>1</sup>

- Institutional Support: ELL students succeed when they are supported by all faculty and staff and there exists close collaboration between content faculty and ESL faculty.
- Student Perceptions: ELL students succeed when they see their ESL teachers and the ESL Department as advocates, supporters and a resource.
- Teacher Attitudes and Approaches to Learning: ELL students succeed when instruction is based on students communicating and negotiating meaning rather than on their demonstrating knowledge of the standard language.
- Curriculum: ELL students succeed when the curriculum is driven by challenging academic content through linked content classes and other classes that support students in 1) making personal connections between academic content and their lived experiences and 2) entering into the academic life of the college.

Evidence points to the benefits of cross-disciplinary collaborative teaching for ELL students. Studies have documented better academic outcomes and/or higher retention rates for college students enrolled in classes collaboratively taught by ESL faculty and content faculty than for those enrolled in stand-alone ESL classes (Boland et al, 2018; Song, 2006; Booth, 2009; and Fogarty et al, 2003). In community colleges these collaborations and/or co-teaching partnerships have been identified as a best practice for ESL programs (Razfar & Simon, 2011; Fogarty et al, 2003; MacNeill, 2014; Kibler et al, 2012). Research also documents the positive impact on student performance and engagement from the student perspective (Gladman, 2014). Much of the research attributes the positive outcomes of faculty collaboration to increased student engagement with challenging academic content and gateways it provides students into the academic community and credit bearing courses. Kibler et al (2012) write, "Rather than isolate students from college-level work by placing them in ESL language courses to "perfect" their English, this set of innovations (integrating language and academic content) finds imaginative ways to immerse students in authentic experiences with academic content while also supporting their linguistic development" (210-211).

Learning Communities at BHCC date back to the College's origins in 1973 and were scaled through a 2007 Department of Education Title III Strengthening Institutions Grant, a 2012 Gates Foundation/Achieving the Dream Catalyst Fund Grant, and a 2016 Department of Education Title III AANAPISI Grant. Learning communities are thematically organized around culturally relevant content that engages reflective, experiential and interdisciplinary learning. Each LC is grounded in core academic and student development outcomes that include reflection and self-assessment, critical thinking, integrative communication, intercultural knowledge and cohort learning. The model includes LC Clusters that link two or more courses around a common academic theme, big idea, career pathway, and/or community-based project. Since 2007, many ELL courses have been linked to introductory courses in other departments such as behavioral science, English, and business. With the 2019 launch of the revised ELL Program at BHCC, most final-level ELL classes are now taught as 9-credit LC Clusters, with the ELL class (6

credits) meeting for 5 ½ hours a week and the discipline class (3 credits) meeting for 2 ½ hours a week. Student supports, including peer mentoring and success coach advising, are integrated into the ELL LCs. Co-teachers are expected to integrate the content of their courses, though they co-determine how and to what extent to do this and how to determine the grades for their respective courses. There is extensive support for faculty who teach LCs, such as professional development and paid time for collaboration and mentoring. Faculty are encouraged to develop co-teaching learning communities, but there is no formal process for assigning co-teachers. Instead faculty are expected to seek out collaborations with their colleagues and then together submit a proposal for new learning communities to a Learning Community Think Tank that is comprised of faculty and success coach advisors.

## Jeff

*Co-teaching with Aurora was my first experience in collaborative teaching. I had only just recently begun teaching at BHCC and was still trying to figure out my way, but the idea attracted me. I had two reasons for wanting to collaborate and co-teach a LC cluster. The first reason was for my students. At that time, students in ELL classes did not receive any transferable credit, and many of my students saw my class as a gate-keeper that was preventing them from getting into the courses and credits they needed for the degrees they were seeking. I believed that by linking my class to a content class, the students would not only get well-earned college credit, but they would also be more motivated. My other reason was for my own personal interest. For me, teaching is a way to engage with big questions and challenging content, and I have always taken a content-based approach in my teaching. Working with a content teacher in a content course was a way to bring a deeper engagement with content and learning, both for my students and for myself.*

## Aurora

*After having taught anthropology and sociology courses for over 20 years, co-teaching a ELL and cultural anthropology learning community in the early 2010's was a turning point for me. The LC professional development (PD) provided by BHCC gave me a chance to learn about backward design, outcomes driven curriculum, deeper learning approaches and learning community pedagogies and practices. This learning allowed me to rethink the way I delivered my lessons and reevaluate my assessment methods. According to Saga Briggs (2015) "Deeper learning is the process of learning for transfer, meaning it allows a student to take what's learned in one situation and apply it to another." Before, I had approached my 101 level courses with the goal of cramming 12-16 chapters of content, or roughly one chapter a week, and I grappled with the amount of lecture time necessary to cover the essential concepts I thought were necessary. But the PD training and my ELL faculty partner pushed me to question that single-minded focus and helped clarify what I wanted to deliver in my lecture, as well as what I wanted as outcomes for my essay assignment or examination prompts. I began creating assessments that focus on the application of sociological concepts to student's personal experiences and that incorporate observations of their family and communities. I received feedback from my ELL faculty partner on the kinds of essay prompts or instructions I had been providing and began to put into practice scaffolding the work to ensure better outcomes. Co-teaching was my process of deeper learning in that it allowed me to apply the learning from my PD trainings to a new teaching context.*

## SECTION 1: INSTRUCTOR MATCHING AND COLLABORATION

### BHCC RESEARCH FINDINGS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING ESL<sup>1</sup>

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSET-BASED/ACCELERATED VS. DEFICIT-BASED/REMEDIAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING ESL	
ASSET-BASED / ACCELERATED	DEFICIT-BASED / REMEDIAL
Non-ESL faculty and staff have an understanding of L2 learning and see the ESL program as partners.	Non-ESL faculty lack understanding of L2 learning and blame the ESL program for not adequately preparing ESL students.

Finding a good teaching match can be a scary proposition. A former director of Learning Communities at BHCC often talked about the difficult task of matchmaking and negotiating amicable separations between co-teachers. Asking a teacher to co-teach with you can set you up for rejection. In some ways, it is much safer to stay at home in your own classroom where your life is predictable. Like entering a relationship, co-teaching can be an intimate experience that exposes your dirty laundry and can entail a loss of control as you are no longer the one in charge. But it also opens up opportunities for learning from your teaching partner. Like a relationship, it can help you bloom.

Research and discussions on collaborative teaching touch frequently on models, challenges, benefits and strategies, but we couldn't find anything on initiating the collaboration or how to identify a good teaching partner. But despite this absence, teachers cite the importance of trust between the instructors (Seabury & Hernandez-Fulch, 2011; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2013) and having positive expectations (Seabury & Hernandez-Fulch, 2011). A survey of students enrolled in classes co-taught by ESL and content professors highlights the importance of a good relationship between teachers as a key aspect of team teaching (Gladson, 2013). And finally Mandel and Eisarman (2016) argue that the biggest challenge to co-teaching is "to find teachers who are open to learning from one another and to the possibility of adapting their approach to gain a better end product" (As cited in Tasdemir & Yildirim, 2018, p. 634). It's for this reason that it is recommended that teachers not be assigned as co-teachers (Crandall 1998), but rather be given the choice. But how do you choose?

#### Jeff

*Though I knew Aurora in passing and had even run into her a few times in my former Boston neighborhood, I didn't know her that well when she popped the question out of the blue in a chance encounter in the campus halls one day. "I hear that you are interested in teaching around immigrant experiences. Do you want to teach an ESL Sociology learning community with me?" I recall responding with a non-committal vague affirmation but, with time, the idea grew on me. Perhaps most importantly, I already had a good impression of Aurora as a friendly face whenever I encountered her in the halls or the few times on my neighborhood streets. But it was also Aurora's suggested theme of immigrant experiences that sparked my interest. It was a theme I had found to really resonate with my ELL students. I was also attracted by her idea of framing the class around the city of Chelsea, an immigrant gateway city next to Boston and the city my family had just moved to six months earlier. I saw possibilities of creating a richer, more meaningful and more challenging learning experience for my ELL students by partnering with Aurora in a shared learning community and a place-based framework. Another factor in my decision to take the plunge was the approval granted by a couple of my*

1) www.bhcc.edu/media/03-documents/ell/research-findings.pdf

more trusted colleagues. They knew Aurora and me well and assured me that we would be a good match. For me the final selling point was sitting down with Aurora and discussing our vision for the class. As we began brainstorming ideas for developing the content and defining shared essays, it became clear to me that we both had similar visions on teaching and developing a class. It was also clear that Aurora saw me as a full partner in the development of this learning community. Though it came after the decision, I knew I had found a good match when Aurora allowed me to choose the sociology textbook.

### Aurora

By the time I approached Jeff on co-teaching an ELL Sociology cluster, I already was an experienced co-teacher, having partnered with four other faculty members. In that time, I've come to consciously refrain from assuming that I must take the lead in shaping the cluster. If we have slow and deeper learning goals for students, clustering must be approached with the same slow and deeper learning goals for teachers. It starts with learning about our individual passions and how they carry over into our pedagogy. I had heard about Jeff and that he taught an ELL course thematically framed around immigrant experiences. It seemed the perfect theme for drawing out the arrival stories of ELL students, whether they were residents or international students. As an immigrant myself, I was drawn to this topic and curious about the readings he used to approach it. I wanted to get to know Jeff and learn why he was interested in immigrant experiences. That is where I learned that he also had the experience of living in another country, which meant learning to be fluent in another country. This was very important for me - the willingness to teach based on the concrete lived experience of making oneself vulnerable through living and working in another country and learning their language and culture. In exploring a possible collaboration, I shared with Jeff that I had begun partnering with community-based organizations in Chelsea and incorporating that work in my teaching. I then learned about Jeff's own background in community-based work. Through these common backgrounds and interests, we found the eventual topic of our learning community coming into focus. In some ways you can say we built the foundation for our cluster course based on our disciplines and our common intellectual and personal backgrounds and interests.

## SECTION 2: COLLABORATIVE AND INTEGRATED CURRICULUM DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

### BHCC RESEARCH FINDINGS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING ESL<sup>1</sup>

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSET-BASED/ACCELERATED VS. DEFICIT-BASED/REMEDIAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING ESL	
ASSET-BASED / ACCELERATED	DEFICIT-BASED / REMEDIAL
The learning of language and content is integrated through thematic classes and linked classes.	ESL classes are taught as stand-alone classes with unrelated content. Language must be mastered before students can move onto academic content.
Curriculum supports students in navigating the academic curriculum and entering into academic contexts, discourses and communities.	Curriculum is testing-heavy with a focus on basic skills.
Curriculum is connected to students' community and students apply what they are learning in real-world settings.	Curriculum does not connect to students' communities and learning is confined to the classroom.
Students see themselves in the ESL curriculum and content, and they are supported in making connections between their personal experiences and the academic content.	Curriculum and content does not connect with students' lived experiences.

The dominant ELL program model in community colleges across the US is a gate-keeper model, designed around isolated skill-based classes, with curriculum framed around discrete skills. It is based on the premise that students must “prove” they have mastered a sufficient level of English before they are allowed to enter credit-bearing classes. Yet much of the research on effective ELL programs supports an integrative model, with ELL classes linked to credit-bearing content classes and a curriculum that integrates language learning and academic content (Kibler et al, 2012; Bunch & Kibler, 2015; Razfar & Simon, 2011; Rodriguez et al, 2019; Fogarty et al, 2003; Booth, 2009). Mlynarczyk and Babbitt (2002) find that college students who take isolated and unrelated courses “perceive their educational experience as lacking in coherence or community.” But ELL and content classes have different outcomes, are often taught through different methodologies, and engage with content with different purposes. How do co-teachers begin to integrate an ELL class and a content class?

### **Aurora**

*Previously, the script I followed for collaboratively developing a learning community was to send my co-teacher a list of chapters I wanted to cover, with my ELL co-teacher then scheduling her reading assignments and pacing her topics and assignments to line up with my chapter schedule. It worked well as a good first step and we learned to be more in sync each semester. This was the extent of our collaboration. This could have been Jeff’s and my approach; however, I think we were both ready for something more.*

### **Jeff**

*Aurora and I had already determined a theme for our learning community – immigrant experiences in Chelsea -- but now we had the task of collaboratively creating an integrated curriculum. As part of our contract to co-teach this LC cluster we were paid a stipend for around 15 hours of collaboration, which supported us in meeting to plan the course. Drawing on the research and the concept of backward design, I suggested to Aurora that we begin by discussing the ending point of our classes – the assessments that mattered the most. In both of our cases, the most important assessments were essays. In my case, essays are key indicators of whether students are ready to progress into the entry level writing class in our school, College Writing 1. In Aurora’s case, essays are key indicators of whether students are able to understand and apply core principles and concepts from SOC-101 to their experiences and contexts. Because demonstrating knowledge of the content was a required outcome in Aurora’s class, it made sense for her to take the lead in developing the frameworks for these essay assignments around the target sociological concepts. With each essay assignment she wrote out an initial draft of the assignment which I then revised based on my background in assignment design.*

*With those key assessments locked down and the textbook determined, the next step was to choose the materials that would support the students in connecting the sociological concepts to Chelsea and to the students’ immigrant/international experiences. I consulted with Aurora about the key concepts the students needed to learn in SOC-101 and searched for materials that linked those concepts to Chelsea and/or immigrant experiences. My very unsophisticated approach was to simply google words such as “Chelsea”, “Massachusetts”, “immigrants” along with the target SOC content such as “social class” or “ethnocentrism”. Of course I got a million hits, but I selected an initial list of 20 articles or podcasts based on length, level of reading difficulty, authorial perspective/purpose, genre and format and perceived relevance to my students. I also strove for variety. For instance, my final selection included the speech published in the Chelsea local newspaper of a Chelsea High School valedictorian denouncing anti-Latino racism in Chelsea, a Boston Globe article about the Chelsea public school response to undocumented students and an editorial in the same Chelsea newspaper by an Arab immigrant informing Chelsea store owners about the different non-verbal gestures and norms Arabs use in public settings. I then reviewed this list of materials with Aurora and she narrowed it down to about 10 articles that best connected with the SOC content.*

### **Aurora**

*We then began selecting and developing our week-by-week readings and activities based on these major essay assignments. We had to ensure that the key SOC-101 chapters were sequenced and sufficiently covered to support students in writing the essays. Jeff covers the same chapters but creates his own activities based on his own course learning outcomes. In this way, both of us develop assignments and activities that support students in interrogating sociological concepts and applying them to their personal experiences, but in ways that demonstrate their meeting the different learning outcomes of each of our classes. What ties the assignments and activities together for our two classes is the*

*underlying sociological concept of the sociological imagination, which states that history and biography are essential to understanding society. The model we use for developing this thematic curriculum on immigrant experiences – as well as others we have since developed – is the following: We determine a theme and then ground the personal experience of the students vis a vis this theme. We then support students in learning the sociological concepts and applying them to their personal experience. We then push them to see their personal experience as reflective of larger societal and historical forces that are at play, so that the abstract concepts they are learning become concrete. This approach ensures that standards are not lowered and expectations for meeting student learning outcomes are created. As collaborating faculty, it is our responsibility to bring the students to the level to meet the standards. This is the challenge. Below is the initial essay assignment for the class.*

## ESSAY 1 ASSIGNMENT: MY ARRIVAL STORY TO THE US

In this 600-1000-word essay, you will tell and analyze your story of moving to the United States in the context of the larger societal forces of both your country of birth and the U.S.

### Organization of the essay

- a. Discuss your social location in your country of birth.
- b. Then, tell a story about your experience moving to the U.S and explain how it was shaped by your social location. You might discuss the situation of your country of birth that led to you leaving. This might include historical, social, political or economic situations.
- c. Discuss the similarities and differences between the cultural values in your country of birth and the U.S. Discuss how the different values that you bring from your country of birth can be assets in the U.S.
- d. Explain how C. Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination – or the need to study both history and biography – has deepened your understanding of your own life and the decision to come to the US.

### Jeff

*A preliminary integration of our learning community was complete and we taught our learning community for the first semester, each with our own partially integrated syllabus. But with each succeeding semester, our syllabuses became more and more integrated until, by the fourth semester, we finally settled on a single fully integrated syllabus for the learning community. But that is a story for a later section.*



## SECTION 3: SCAFFOLDING THE LEARNING AND ASSIGNMENTS

### BHCC RESEARCH FINDINGS ON BEST PRACTICES FOR TEACHING ESL<sup>1</sup>

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSET-BASED/ACCELERATED VS. DEFICIT-BASED/REMEDIAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING ESL	
ASSET-BASED / ACCELERATED	DEFICIT-BASED / REMEDIAL
Scaffolding is used to support students in engaging with challenging academic content.	ELL students are seen as incapable of engaging with challenging academic content.

Despite the research cited in the preceding section around the benefits of integrating content and language through linked courses and content- and language-integrated curriculum, there's still a perception that the still-developing English proficiency of ELL students leaves them incapable of engaging with rigorous academic content. Though we disagree with this conclusion, it is true that ELL students face unique challenges in engaging with academic content due to the greater linguistic demands as well as the text complexity, assumed background knowledge and academic language of much of the content.

For ELL students in college introductory content courses like the cluster course we were teaching, the course textbook often presents the perfect storm for ELL students, with its inherently disjointed and ultra-concise format. For this reason, scaffolding is key in supporting students in engaging with the high-level content of the textbook. One initial step is to carry out a materials analysis to determine what language learning is needed to support students' understanding of the textbook. (Crandall, 1998). A textbook analysis can be very detailed and may include examination of the vocabulary, grammar patterns, language functions and passage sequencing (see Reynolds, 2010). Based on this analysis, the ELL teacher can design learning activities that support students in understanding the textbook.

#### Aurora

*As content faculty, my focus is on teaching content in my discipline and on my students demonstrating the learning that has occurred. I assume that my students must read and comprehend because they know I will assess their learning. I assume that they will read the 30-plus pages of readings per chapter, or otherwise they will not be able to respond to the assessment and demonstrate that they have learned the concepts. Though my assessments usually require written responses or oral presentations, I never considered the way students go about writing and reading. I was interested in the product, not the process.*

#### Jeff

*From the beginning of our planning, I saw that supporting my students to read, engage with and apply the concepts from the sociology textbook would be a primary challenge. Though Reynolds (cited above) presents a comprehensive materials analysis, my analysis of the SOC textbook was more limited in scope. Though I had chosen the textbook based on its better organization and formatting – such as use of white space, more accessible language and minimal use of cultural allusions – I also saw that the academic language and assumed cultural knowledge would make it a difficult read for my students. My first step in planning out my lessons around the textbook was to determine what gaps or challenges students would have in understanding the textbook and to plan activities to address those gaps and challenges. Because I suspected that some of my students would have little experience reading textbooks, I planned an initial lesson at the beginning of the semester reviewing with the students the textbook genre and, more specifically, how the SOC textbook was organized. Facilitated through paired interactive activities, I had the students identify how the chapters were organized: the learning objectives were stated at the beginning, a brief vignette opened each chapter, and each chapter included insert boxes and a summary section. Students also analyzed how sections were*

organized into major and secondary sections, how to identify key points, and how to interpret words in bold, text in the margins and other indicators of key concepts. Then, before assigning chapter sections from the textbook, I would review them and identify vocabulary or terms that would be challenging for the students. Though textbooks will often provide additional explanation for concepts the authors predict will be confusing, these predictions are based on the assumed reader being a native speaker raised in the US. ELL students are more likely to stumble on cultural references embedded in the text or idiomatic phrases. By conducting this analysis, I was able to identify challenges in the materials and then preview them with students before they were assigned to read them.

In addition to this pre-reading support, I also plan assignments and activities for students to complete both while reading and after reading the textbook. Because students will better comprehend challenging texts when applying active reading strategies, I assign a “guiding questions” handout each time I assign a textbook section reading.

### Guiding questions for better understanding the text

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Preview the assigned sections of the textbook. Then do the following:

1. Identify key concepts and ideas for each section
2. Based on your preview, write 4 guiding questions to help you understand key concepts for each section.
3. Then as you read the section, answer your guiding questions using your own words.

The act of identifying questions and searching for those answers supports students in better engaging with the textbook concepts, and the completed handout provides a support for them when they discuss the textbook section during the following class. For that post-reading discussion I put students in groups of three and assign each group a concept from the textbook reading to review and then explain to the class. After 10-15 minutes of discussion and interrogation of the text, each group reports back to the class on their assigned concept with directions such as these below:

### Group discussions of the textbook reading

Directions: Discuss your assigned concept with your partners. Then report back to the class.

1. Explain the concept in your own words.
2. Discuss the example in the textbook that is used to explain the concept.
3. Use your own example to explain the concept

These pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading assignments and activities are all ways in which students are supported in engaging with the textbook content both independently and collaboratively in a recursive way, with each engagement building on the preceding one and leading to a better understanding of the textbook section.

## Aurora

*A concrete benefit from clustering with ELL faculty is the knowledge and certainty that the students in the class have read the assigned textbook material. The assignments created by an ELL faculty partner provide this evidence. I can even take the students' responses to their ELL assignments and use them as a jump off point in my lecture in Sociology 101. I also am able to get Jeff's feedback on concepts that students are having difficulty comprehending so that I can tailor my lessons to reinforcing the concepts, creating more examples or interrogating students' own responses or ideas that were written up in Jeff's class.*

## Jeff

*But our students needed more support than just with reading the textbook. Reading and writing are connected but they also tap into different processes. The essay assignments that Aurora and I had developed were more demanding than those that I used in my stand-alone ELL classes. They had more steps embedded within them, they required an understanding of challenging content and they required analysis and critical thinking in applying the content. Having our primary assessments – the essay – in place and defined through backward design was key in supporting the students in writing them. That allowed us to start scaffolding these assignments from the very beginning, when students read the textbook sections that directly addressed the content they needed to apply in these essays.*

*As an ELL instructor, I know that students understand a text better if they are required to produce something while reading it or after reading it. Doing something (or interacting) with the reading engages active reading, which in turn leads to better understanding. Consequently, I often assign short graded 100-200-word writing assignments (analyses) to accompany a reading assignment. These analyses are always assigned with a prompt I develop that requires the student to engage with what Aurora has identified as the most important content in the assigned textbook section. These short analyses which the students write are, in turn, used to scaffold their writing of the essays. For example, our first essay assignment requires the students to apply the "sociological imagination" to their own analysis of their arrival story to the US in the concluding paragraph of their essay. The sociological imagination is introduced in Chapter 1 of the textbook. Knowing that students will later need to apply the concept in their essays, my prompt for their analysis requires them to apply the sociological imagination to themselves in a more basic application. Subsequent readings also are accompanied with analysis prompts that address components of the essay. Then the students are encouraged to use their analyses in writing their essays. In this way, the students have already started writing their essays before they have even seen the essay assignment.*

*Below are the homework assignments for my ELL class that are designed to scaffold and support the students in writing the first draft of the essay assignment profiled earlier in this article.*

**Homework for Sept 12 for ELL-103**

- Read Ch 1: Textbook p. 2-20
- Answer your guiding questions for textbook p. 13-19
- Analysis: Review the meaning of “social location” p. 3 in the textbook and then write a 100-150 word paragraph that responds to the following prompt. Explain the concept of “social location” in 1-2 sentences in your own words. Then explain what your social location is.

**Homework for Sept 19 for ELL-103**

- Copy and paste the text of your immigrant story on the “About Me” page of your E-Portfolio.
- Read textbook p. 40-44, 56-61
- Complete guiding question handout for the above sections
- Analysis: Write a 100-150-word response to the following prompt: Review the list of US values on p. 56-57 in the textbook. Choose one value from the list of ten values that you believe is also a core value in your country of origin. Give an example or explanation that shows the importance of this value in your country of origin. Then, identify a core value in your country that is not on that list (it could be the opposite of one of those values or something completely different.) Give an example or explanation that shows the importance of this value in your country of origin.
- Bring an umbrella in case it rains during our tour of Chelsea

**Homework for Sept 26 for ELL-103**

- Reading: Myths and facts about immigrants and immigration (Handout from class or click on link below.)
- Analysis: Choose one myth from the reading above that you believe is commonly believed in the US. Then write a 100-200-word paragraph in which you analyze this myth. First, identify which myth you are analyzing. Then, explain where you have seen this myth expressed in the US. Then summarize in 1-2 sentences the facts about this myth as stated in the article and what opinion they support. Finally, identify any questions or vocabulary terms you have after reading the section on this myth.
- Analysis: Review the concept of “the sociological imagination” p. 2-3 in the textbook and then write a 100-200-word paragraph that responds to the following prompt. Explain this concept of “the sociological imagination” in your own words and what Henslin means by the “connection between history and biography.” Then identify a cultural value that you hold and discuss how it connects to your cultural history and your cultural biography.

## Aurora

*When a concept, a text or an experience is presented and analyzed through different disciplinary perspectives, it can blur the borders between the two disciplines so that the learning becomes intertwined and iterative. That learning is the magic of a learning community cluster that we want students to experience.*

*These essays are the key assessments for determining if our students have met the SOC-101 learning outcome that “students examine the impact of social & cultural factors on the self, and on individual and group behavior.” As content faculty, I frame these assignments so that they require students to apply sociological concepts and perspectives to their own stories and experiences, and it is my responsibility in evaluating those final essays to determine if they have met that outcome. But it is through working with my ELL faculty partner that students have the opportunity to engage with these concepts multiple times through close reading of the textbook, written analysis assignments and class activities that allow them to apply concepts to concrete and personal experiences. Therefore, the writing of the first draft is actually the product of earlier assignments created by Jeff which serve as the first stage for writing the essay. This is how we scaffold the learning for the students and support them in completing the higher stakes assignments, such as writing the major essays.*

*Before teaching with my ELL counterparts, I did not think of creating lower stakes learning activities to scaffold the learning needed for completing these demanding and higher stakes essay assessments. It was only after I observed how my ELL counterparts created reading/ writing/speaking activities that engaged with the reading and writing processes around the content that I understood the need to scaffold activities and scaffold the learning towards the higher stakes essay assessments.*

## SECTION 4: COLLABORATIVE FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT

CHARACTERISTICS OF ASSET-BASED/ACCELERATED VS. DEFICIT-BASED/REMEDIAL APPROACHES TO TEACHING ESL	
ASSET-BASED / ACCELERATED	DEFICIT-BASED / REMEDIAL
Assessment uses multiple measures of student academic performance.	Assessment involves heavy use of timed testing and single placement test scores.
Fluency is prioritized over accuracy.	Accuracy is prioritized over fluency.

*Before I read about Sociological Imagination, I was thinking that I just married a man who was living in US. And it was mostly according to wish my family. But after reading about sociological imagination, I think the journey to USA in more social context. The reason my dad wanted me to marry a permanent resident of USA was more than a family matter. He wanted me to be here because he wanted me to see in the place where I can be a self-made woman. He thought even a nurse, my future will be better in USA than in Nepal. Coming here, I will not die untimely because of fear of society. I had heard before coming here that there are nice health care plans in US so that you need not to die not getting proper treatment. Perhaps, a dream of making more money and getting better health facilities may have further encouraged me to accept the offer by my father and relative to marry him and come to USA. Therefore, my journey to USA was largely shaped by my history and biography.*

---Concluding paragraph to the essay by Sabita profiled at the beginning of this article

The research is clear that effective ELL curriculum emphasizes meaning over form and fluency over accuracy (Shapiro, 2011; Raufman et al, 2019; Mlynarczyk & Babbitt, 2002) In other words, instead of requiring students to demonstrate mastery of the English language, we should require our ELL students to use the language to engage with critical thinking and deeper learning, such as Sabita does above in finding a connection between her story and the sociological imagination in her concluding paragraph. Though it contains errors and unconventional language use (that will be addressed as she continues with her content courses), Sabita's essay and concluding paragraph concretely demonstrate her ability to apply the sociological imagination by setting her personal and family choices within a larger social context. These are the critical thinking and deeper learning skills she will need to draw on and further develop as she progresses into college credit classes.

In the preceding section we discussed how the analysis assignments helped scaffold the essay assignments. In this section, we discuss the roles of multiple drafts in scaffolding the assignments as well as our collaborative method of providing feedback and assessing the essays.

## Jeff

*Because we prioritized content over form, Aurora and I have developed a system of providing feedback on student essays that focuses on content alone at the initial stages and then focuses on content as well as structure and language at the later stages. The students write three drafts for each of their essays, with the first draft getting feedback from Aurora and the second draft getting feedback from me, and both of us evaluating the final draft. The rationale for Aurora addressing the first draft is that Aurora is the content expert and the initial focus is on content.*

## Aurora

*Co-grading drafts and providing feedback in three stages was another way to scaffold and deepen student learning and help them develop their knowledge and skills. In my case, I expect the first draft to demonstrate emerging or minimal knowledge and ability to apply concepts and lessons. I interrogate the ideas they are presenting and assess whether these ideas reflect the lessons and concepts we have covered. Through my feedback I then push students to concretely demonstrate the knowledge of the sociological concept or clarify how they are applying this knowledge. It is Jeff who evaluates the second draft to assess whether students have responded to my recommendations and then push them in ways that further improve the essay according to his ELL learning outcomes. In evaluating the final draft, I continue to assess whether students are demonstrating knowledge of the sociological concepts and applying them. However, what is visibly apparent is that as a result of the feedback and recommendations from Jeff, the essays have become more clearly written, coherent and structurally sound.*

*It is important to note that we independently grade the final essay. I grade it using a rubric based on my sociology outcomes while Jeff uses one based on his ELL outcomes. We then share our grades with each other and average them to determine the final grade for the essay. The test then is how close our individual grades come to each other. Because we each focus on different outcomes, we accept that our individual grades will differ, but also have agreed that the difference should not exceed an acceptable range. If our two grades do not fall within that range, then we meet to review the essay together to discuss and reassess our evaluation until one or both of us have agreed on revising our grade so that the difference falls within that range. Over the past few semesters that we have tried this system of co-grading, it is evident that the number of students whose initial grades are beyond the acceptable range of difference has gone down. We see that we are becoming more and more in sync with assessing. Maybe this reflects an internalizing of each other's outcomes while still keeping at the forefront our own disciplinary learning outcomes. There is a mutual trust and respect that each of our academic lenses is essential and valued equally.*

## Jeff

*Our collaborative approach to giving feedback not only benefits the students but has benefited me. I've always prided myself on being a student-centered teacher. But Aurora has pushed me to expand my understanding of student-centered teaching through the discussions we have had about evaluating student essays. My training in language learning has biased me in focusing on the language and form at the expense of content and meaning. I also suspect that Aurora's multilingual background leaves her less bound to language orthodoxy and better able to interpret meaning across linguistic differences. When discussing early drafts, she would often refer to ideas in the student essays that I had over-*

looked in determining my own assessment and response to the essay. This attention to the students manifested itself in the comments she wrote on student drafts, often framed as questions, that demonstrated a real desire for the students to express themselves and to push them to deepen their analysis. Her comments reflected a real engagement with students' ideas, whereas my comments were usually more directive and general in nature. It was from working with Aurora that I stopped writing comments like, "Develop this paragraph more" and started providing more specific and engaged comments like, "Explain how your family influenced you in coming to the US." Co-teaching with Aurora has helped me move from a more deficit-based approach to providing feedback – giving general directives – to a more asset-based approach to providing feedback that values student ideas and encourages deeper engagement. Below is an example of our collaborative process of giving feedback on a student essay.

#### **Aurora's comments on 1st draft**

- Background of your family being refugees from political turmoil in Congo and living as refugees in Tanzania was a good start to your story. Provide more details; how did your family survive within the refugee camps? How did people get skills or find ways to be relocated? How did your family manage?
- Tell more of a story of how you landed in the US? How did your family manage this? Connect this to the refugee story you have begun. You need to provide clearer explanation as well on why your family originally moved - and if it has something to do with your father working for Belgians?
- Growing up in the refugee camp, what were the key values your parents taught you? Why were these values uniquely Congolese? Would growing up resilient - constantly wanting a better life be also reflective of some of the values listed as American values? Highlight these areas.

#### **Jeff's comments on 2nd draft**

Vicky, This is a good 2nd draft. You have improved your explanation of your social location and your reasons for coming to the US. Well-done! But you could better focus your discussion on values as assets. And in your conclusion you need to introduce the sociological imagination and use it to analyze your story.

To do:

- You discuss many values that your family taught you, but you should focus and elaborate on only those that have become assets to you in the US. How are they assets? Review Professor Bautista's comments.
- Review the meaning of sociological imagination in the textbook. Then revise your conclusion by introducing and explaining the concept. Then connect this concept to your story. How has your social location helped make you who you are today?
- And finally, make revisions based on the comments I have posted in the margins and language errors I have marked.

## SECTION 5: FROM INTEGRATED ASSESSMENTS TO FURTHER INTEGRATION OF CURRICULUM

Though we already had agreed on a shared theme, collaboratively developed three essays, and chosen common content, our two courses were still only partially integrated. In this section we discuss our move towards further integrating our classes that ultimately resulted in a single syllabus and shared grade for both classes.

### Aurora

*After four semesters of co-teaching together, Jeff threw down the challenge to move to a common syllabus and assign the same final grade for both his ELL class and my Sociology class. Surprisingly I was the one who needed to think about it. This learning community curricular model reflects the highest level of integration (Smith et al, 2004) and has been presented as the idealized model in our readings and discussions of learning communities at BHCC. Submitting a single grade based on a joint syllabus for each class of a learning community cluster indicates the degree to which the student has met the outcomes of both classes. I had to grapple with the idea that the work being done in Jeff's ELL classes was as equally important and relevant to students as was reaching the learning outcomes in Sociology. I had to stop and reflect and actually review his syllabus. It was clear that his assignments all demonstrated learning of the Sociology learning outcomes and concrete evidence of learning. I had to be confident that this was happening. Similarly, I had to consider whether my own assignments – low stake multiple choice quizzes, chapter assessments – supported Jeff's ELL student learning outcomes. I realized that these quizzes were also assessing reading comprehension skills. My discussion board posting assignments and in-class writing assignments supported their writing skills. And our final oral presentation assignment met both Jeff's ELL communication learning outcomes and my own sociology learning outcome of applying sociological concepts to personal or societal observations and experiences. From these observations and reflection, I saw that the borders between our classes were not so rigid as separate syllabuses and grades would suggest, and I agreed to this final step of integration.*

### CONCLUSION

We titled this article “Breaking Down Borders” because we wanted to challenge the notion of a rigid disciplinary border separating Sociology and ELL with unique discipline-specific pedagogical approaches. By teaching our respective classes through a learning community model, we break down the traditional barriers between teaching ELL (with its dominant emphasis on form, interactive teaching methodologies, skill-based class activities and no transferable college credit) and sociology (with its dominant emphasis on content, lecture-based methodologies, critical thinking activities and transferable college credit). Approaching the teaching of ELL and Sociology as a learning community allows us to complement each other's areas of specialization and individual strengths and has had a positive impact on our teaching and our student learning.

Our satisfaction comes from witnessing students successfully meet the outcomes of our courses. There is also that satisfaction that comes from working to improve our craft as teachers and being responsive to the needs of our cluster faculty partner, which includes supporting and challenging each other's professional growth. The joy of teaching however comes from getting to know our student's own personal stories, journey and experiences as they learn to apply lessons in sociology and analyze interconnections between their personal experiences and larger societal structures and issues.



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