

## **DYSFUNCTIONAL MANAGEMENT IN THE NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION: REPORT OF AN ACTUAL ESL MEETING**

**by Ms. X, Tenured ESL Teacher, PS 00, Harlem**  
(revised 10/25/17)

*The following report by an ESL teacher in Harlem provides a window into the continuing effects in New York City of neoliberal school reforms first instituted by Mayor Michael Bloomberg. The name of the school and its stakeholders have been redacted, but the text is otherwise very nearly the same as this teacher's actual report on an "ELL Monitoring and Support Visit" that occurred at her school on 10/19/2017.*

*Apparently based on incorrect test score information, Ms. R, the "Senior ELL Compliance and Performance Specialist" assigned to her school, directed that Ms. X's entire instructional program be reorganized. Ms. X later learned that only the principal has the authority to make such changes. Ms. X believes that this meeting, though perhaps an extreme case, was not an isolated abuse of power but an example of systemic mismanagement by the NYCDOE under neoliberal policies dating to 2003 and still mostly in effect. Ms. X also believes that making such stories public can be an effective strategy for building stakeholder resistance to such abuse. --Constance L. Benson, 11/1/17*

PRESENT: Ms. X, ESL Teacher  
Ms R, Senior ELL Compliance and Performance Specialist  
Ms. Y., Principal  
Mr. Z, AIS Teacher and Test Coordinator

### **SUMMARY**

As indicated in memos and supporting documents appended hereto (see Appendix A), the agenda of the 19 October ELL Monitoring Support Visit was to discuss the school's compliance with City and State ESL requirements. It was unclear who was chairing the meeting, but Ms. R directed it, during which she flipped through a 13-page compliance rubric provided to the school before the meeting (see Appendix A). However, Ms. R frequently digressed from the agenda and devoted approximately 40% of the meeting time to instructional comments unrelated to the agenda and prompted by what she could see around her in my ESL resource room, where the meeting was held. Ms. R found no substantial violations of compliance and stated orally that the school's compliance is "good."

However, her inferences about my instructional methods and program, which were not on the meeting agenda and were apparently based on her informal visual observations of my resource room, were unrelentingly negative. At one point, I said "I thought this meeting was supposed to be about compliance." Ms. R replied curtly, "You have to be prepared to discuss instruction at all times." With no orderly process in the meeting, Ms. R was permitted to alternate between compliance issues enumerated in the rubric and instructional issues which were not on the agenda.

In fact, I was quite prepared to discuss instruction, but was not given an opportunity to explain the pedagogical rationales behind my carefully designed ESL program. Ironically, it was Ms. R who was unprepared to discuss instruction, since she had not reviewed any of my lesson plans, had not observed any of my lessons, was not familiar with the needs of the students I service, did not ask to see the list of levels and ESL mandates of my students, and did not ask about the pedagogical rationales that informed the design of my program.

Most remarkably, Ms. R made no effort at collegial dialogue and expressed annoyance whenever I responded to her comments, making it clear she viewed her role to be that of giving instructional directives and mine that of deferring to them. As a result of this authoritarian format, Ms. R expounded at length about my instructional program and I had little opportunity to correct even factual misstatements, much less provide needed context and information about the needs of my students and pedagogical considerations that have informed the design of my program. The most egregious factual misstatement occurred after the meeting, when Ms. R told the principal (as I learned from the principal) that none of my students passed the NYSESLAT, when in fact three (10% of my ELL population) did pass, one student advancing two levels. These are respectable outcomes for a high poverty school.

On the basis of this one-way communication, Ms. R determined that I should stop pulling two ELLs out of a 12-1-1 class and instead should push into this class with three additional ELLs from other classes. This plan was dictated without consulting either me or the teacher of the 12-1-1 class. Ms. R also directed me to draw up similar plans for pushing into other classes, instead of pulling out students into my resource room. Thus, with no informed discussion of the rationale for my pull-out program, and no opportunity for me to provide meaningful input, Ms. R summarily directed that my entire program be reorganized.

### **COMPLIANCE ISSUES**

1. Consistent with NYCDOE policy, it was determined that the HLIS form and interviews with families are currently being used to determine which new admits receive the ELL entrance test (NYSITELL).
2. Ms. R enumerated students listed in the EDAT as being “at risk” and in danger of becoming long-term ELLs: students A, B, C, D, E. and F. I wanted to point out errors in this list due to the fact that some data had not been transferred from the RLAT to the EDAT, but before I could say this, Ms. R was on to her next point.
3. Ms. R wanted to know why we only sent the LAP a couple of days earlier (10/17/17). I explained that the principal and I completed a draft of the LAP in July but it was apparently never “shared for review.” When I discovered this, I sent the report, which is still timely according to the School ELL Compliance Calendar 2017—18 of the English Language Learner Policy and Reference Guide, 2017-18, which calls for “drafts of Title III Plans, LAPs and Translation and Interpretation Plans” during the month of October.

4. The Title III document still has references to 2015 in it and needs to be updated.
5. Ms. R asked what I was going to do with the afterschool program. I said that it would not be test preparation, and before I could say more she exclaimed, "It better NOT be!" and went on to the next topic.
6. Student G should be put into the BNDC screen as SIFE for now.
7. All parent letters and parent survey forms must be copied and placed into the students' CUM files. The originals need to be returned with signatures. For new parents, this means two letters into the CUM plus the parent survey. The continuing letters, passing out letters for both NYSESLAT and NYSITELL also need the same treatment. Here Ms. R modified the rubric, imposing an additional requirement that exceeded even the "meeting target" criteria established by NYCDOE, which only requires copies (not originals) to be put into the CUMS.
8. The extra parent meeting that the ELL teacher is to have once a year with every ELL parent is to be recorded with the parent signature. If the parent doesn't attend, a phone conversation will be acceptable. But that must be recorded in writing with date and time of the phone call and meeting notes taken and sent to the parent for confirmation.
9. If a student comes in as a transfer from a NYS school, one must research what their NYSESLAT and ELA and math test scores are. These scores are in the state system and need to be transferred.
10. The RLAT "all" only needs to be printed out one time per year.
11. Ms. R asked for up to 10 CUMs and looked at four.
12. She was concerned that we had not received the HLIS form in the transfer student's CUM from a Bronx school. She asked whether we had sent for it. I replied that I was sure that the Pupil Accounting Secretary had called about it.
13. Ms. R asked what I use when I do professional development. Pauline Gibbons, I replied. Ms. R undoubtedly understood that I was referring to Gibbon's book *Scaffolding Language, Scaffolding Learning: Teaching English Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom*, arguably the preeminent text on the subject of teaching ELLs in mainstream classrooms. However, she did not acknowledge the quality of this answer, perhaps leaving others in the room unsure what to make of the exchange.
14. Ms. R indicated that the compliance binder I compiled was in good order.

### INSTRUCTIONAL ISSUES

1. Ms. R asked, "Do those dollhouses just sit there? You've had those for a long time. Do you ever do anything with them?" Before I could reply that the dollhouses are in use and are proving to be a popular and effective instructional resource, Ms. R was on to the next question.
2. "Why don't you have more student work up?" I had work for ten second and third graders on the wall, more than one quarter of all the students I teach. I did not have more because excessive administrative paperwork to date took up time that otherwise could have been spent on instruction and decorating my room. I mentioned that I also keep folders of student work, but she expressed no interest in seeing them. I said that I let my students label and decorate their folders, which gives them a feeling of ownership of their own learning. Ms. R did not want to consider this, which was apparently not one of her prescribed student-centered ideas.

3. Looking at feedback I had written to one student, Ms. R stated incorrectly that it contained an ungrammatical sentence. The student had written: "I like to play with the snowballs. I like to play with the snowman." I suggested: "I like to play with the snowballs and snowman," which is in fact grammatical. Her comment also missed the point of my feedback, which was to avoid redundancy.
4. The language objective for a lesson on my white board was to know what constitutes a sentence. Ms. R stated that was not good enough but did not say what was deficient with the objective or what would have constituted a more adequate objective.
5. I had a writing rubric on the bulletin board next to the students' work. It was pegged to the NYSESLAT rubric. Ms. R directed me to give the students copies of the rubric, apparently assuming (incorrectly) that I had not done so.
6. Ms. R opined that words printed in and around the room should have the definite article attached to them (e.g. instead of the word "closet" printed and affixed to the closet door, it should be "the closet;" "wall" should be "the wall," etc. Since there are two clocks on the wall, they should each be labelled with the indefinite article prefaced: "a clock" and "a clock" for each. Ms. R did not provide a pedagogical rationale for this directive, and I am not aware of any rationale in the ESL literature. Articles are typically provided in Spanish because they identify nouns as masculine or feminine, but there is no such rationale in English because nouns do not have gender.
7. She then asked about my feedback sheets, which had sections for "Student Name," "What you did well" and "Next steps." Ms. R asked how there could be "next steps" when finished work was being displayed on the wall. I replied that "next steps" referred to skills that could be further developed on the next writing assignment. Ms. R took that to mean that I don't have students revise their work, which did not follow logically from what I said and in fact is not the case. Before I could correct her misconception, however, she was on to her next directive.
8. Ms. R recommended developing students' listening skills by having them take notes. This reflects her background in secondary school teaching but has limited relevance for elementary school, especially for K-2 students, who are just learning how to write complete sentences.
9. Ms. R looked at one of the posters over my library: "OPEN A BOOK, GROW YOUR MIND," and said I should ask the students what this means; why is a plant growing out of the book? Thinking this was a good idea, I replied in agreement, "OK." She immediately fired back: "OK? No! It's NOT OK! You need to improve!" Earlier in the meeting, she had reprimanded me for not taking notes (which was barely possible because she was talking so fast), and saying "OK" was also a way to indicate that I was paying attention. This exchange encapsulated the punitive and condescending tone that ran like a unifying theme through Ms. R's many directives.
10. Another picture I have up is an illustration of the Little Engine that Could. Ms. R said it was highly evocative and that I should have done a lesson around it and had the students respond to questions like: Why is the smoke black? Why does the face of the engine look the way it does? I should have the students write about that topic and then place the student work around the poster. I found this idea interesting, but having just been reprimanded for saying "OK," I remained silent.

11. In this context, she said I have too many pictures up. This might have been true if all I did was use the pictures in the way she directed. But at no point did Ms. R ask me how I was in fact engaging the students with the print and art work on my walls. She did not welcome my input or provide an opening to explain what in fact I was doing with my room displays. She did not want to know about my gallery walks or what I accomplished with them, and so had no basis for determining whether I had too many pictures.
12. On my bulletin board where I have photographs of where my students come from, she pointed to a picture of two parrots and suggested that I have the students guess what the parrots might be saying to each other. In fact, the picture exhibits an important cultural feature of Ecuador. It has elicited excited discussion from my Ecuadorian students, who talk about the real parrots they have actually seen flying around their home country, and exhibiting these images elicited pride in their national heritage.
13. I mentioned that I had purchased 12 Fire Kindle tablets to enrich my library. Ms. R asked who paid for them and I replied that I paid for them out of my own pocket. (I spent \$500.00) There was general agreement about the value of educational technology. I was asked what my instructional goals were and said I was hoping to increase motivation among struggling readers and instill a love of reading. Ms. R looked at me quizzically—a wrong answer apparently. Then I tried to relate this to the school’s vision statement and four E’s: Engage, Enrich, Encourage and Empower, which I weave into my instructional program, but Ms. R became impatient and cut me off. She clearly had a preferred, stock answer that she wanted me to regurgitate, and had no interest in an authentic exchange of pedagogical ideas.
14. In reply to how I move students forward from different levels, I replied that it was comparable to finding a “just right” book for them to read and referenced Vygotsky’s “Zone of Proximal Development.” Ms. R cut me off with a groan, stating that I needed to cut out the theory and just jump to strategies. This does not make sense to me because we need valid theories of how children learn in order to know which strategies are likely to be effective and under what circumstances. My mention of Vygotsky reminded her of the time I referenced B.F. Skinner in a LAP (Language Allocation Policy) report. She told me I am “brilliant” but there is no need for theory in such policy documents. (“You are brilliant, but . . .” was a recurring comment.) I find this dismissive attitude towards reasoned inquiry consistent with the dictatorial manner in which Ms. R conducted the entire meeting—the message I got loud and clear is that she wants teachers to obey and conform, not think. It is a mystery to me how such robotic teachers can inculcate critical thinking skills in students, but Ms. R is apparently not troubled by such contradictions.
15. With no collegial discussion of the pedagogical rationale behind my program, Ms. R directed me to stop pulling ELLs out of their regular classes and instead to push into their classes. I had been pulling two students out of a 12-1-1 class and teaching them in my resource room with three other ELLs. Ms. R said that instead I should push into the 12-1-1 class and in fact bring the three other pull-outs with me. I later learned that this 12-1-1 class already has 12 students, so bringing in three more would violate federal mandates.

16. Ms. R directed me to draw up similar plans for teaching all my students using a push-in model. She said that pulling students out is not acceptable in STARS programming, which is factually incorrect. It is doubtful that I can meet all my students' mandates with a purely push-in program, but even if that were possible, I believe there are compelling practical and pedagogical reasons why it would not produce good academic outcomes. Many of these reasons were articulated in a 2010 article on the website teachers.net entitled, "The Hazards of ESL Push In." This article is included below as Appendix B.
17. I presented some of the proven, highly successful, and research-based methods that I use in my resource room at the 2013 NYS TESOL Annual Conference. This paper, "High Frequency Vocabulary: Revolutionizing TESOL Curricula," is included below as Appendix C. At the 10/19 meeting, I offered a copy of this paper to Ms. R, but she did not take it, apparently preferring to dismantle my program without first informing herself what it is and how it works. I was also invited to present an earlier version of these methods at a Region 10 professional development session for assistant principals and bilingual coordinators, which I did on April 5, 2006. Both this paper and my 2013 TESOL conference paper were very well received, but I have not had time to prepare the latter for publication.
18. Apparently based on her informal visual inspection of my resource room and incorrect data that none of my students passed the NYSESLAT, Ms. R concluded that I was in need of remedial training with QTEL, a PD workshop that I completed back in Spring 2011.
19. Ms. R said that ELLs should be moving up a level every year without exception and those who don't should be singled out for special interventions. She did not cite any city, state, or federal policy in support of this opinion, or any research. In fact, special education students in a major 2015 study took on average 5.5 years to place out of ESL, and 18% of all students in the study needed more than 7 years. The Education Week blog summarizing this research is included below as Appendix D. It is not possible to know which of these students need special interventions and which just need extra time except on a case by case basis.
20. After the meeting, Ms. R told the principal that none of my students had passed the NYSESLAT. I told the principal that is not correct and documented from the RLAT "all" report the three students (about 10% of my population last year) who passed and how far they advanced: students H and I, who moved one level from Expanding to Commanding and student J, who moved two levels from Transitional to Commanding. Ms. R deviated from the meeting agenda, which was compliance, and directed a reorganization of the school's instructional program based on incorrect data and a wholly inadequate investigation into our existing ESL program.

**What Ms. R did NOT notice or acknowledge in my classroom:**

21. In my previous school under Ms. R, I did not have a white board and she said I should have one. Accordingly, I purchased a Quartet white board with my own funds and now have it at PS 00. She did not acknowledge this improvement. We also informed her that a Promethean board is about to be installed in the room as well; she said nothing in reply.
22. She did not acknowledge the posters or the title over my hallway bulletin board featuring my classroom theme: We Are The World, taken from the Michael Jackson song. Had she

demonstrated any interest, I would have told her what a powerful experience my students have when they sing this song, what it means to them, and how they relate it to current events today.

23. Ms. R did not notice that my word wall was composed of high frequency words based on the latest research identifying these words and their centrality in language acquisition.
24. She did not notice that the words on the word wall are accompanied by pictures and are prompts for enactments, thus engaging multiple intelligences. They are used in the Snap Words program. I tried to tell her about this, but she wasn't interested.
25. Ms. R did not acknowledge that most ELLs are displaced students who need a safe place to decompress and experience relief from the culture shock they typically experience in mainstream settings. My resource room functions as this kind of oasis for the ELLs in PS 00 and being in this space with other ELLs creates a sorely needed community where they can overcome their social isolation.
26. She did not acknowledge that beginning ELLs need to be able to withdraw and work on the rudiments of the English language. This cannot be accomplished in their mainstream classrooms where the information is pouring over them at a level far above Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Without a mini-lesson tailored to their needs, the students typically sit in silence, working on writing. There is little opportunity for verbal experimentation which ELLs require, for "interlanguage" to appear and evolve and for me to be able to address the home language elements that appear in an ELL's interlanguage to push them to the next level.
27. Ms. R failed to acknowledge my leveled library, combined with baskets of books across the content areas and my bilingual books in multiple languages: English/Spanish, English/Arabic, English/Chinese.
28. Ms. R failed to acknowledge my photos from all the different countries of the globe from which my ESL students have come, how we do gallery walks and how students have the opportunity to describe their home countries to the group using the photos as a starting point.
29. She failed to note the name places I have for each student, which are levelled according to grade and English language level.
30. I was given no opportunity to discuss with Ms. R my own experience of being an immigrant to the Philippines, my experience of culture shock and attempts to learn Tagalog in a Philippine elementary school. When I returned to the U.S. for high school and college, it was another culture shock. I was displaced and moving around the globe just as my students are. Providing a welcoming place for new arrivals to acclimate is a crucial support. Instead, the paperwork deadlines have moved to the beginning of the year, precisely when the new arrivals and classroom teachers need my support the most.

Ms. R walked through my door with very low expectations and approached me accordingly. She began with the assumption that I was inferior and resistant to learning. "I should walk in here with a tape of myself," she said, as if she repeatedly tells me the same things and I don't take them in. These detailed notes, reconstructed almost entirely from memory within a few days of the 10/19 meeting, hopefully prove that I not only listen to Ms. R but also think about what she says, something she apparently does not appreciate.

#### **APPENDIX A—EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE REGARDING 11/19/17 MEETING AGENDA**

The agenda of the 19 October ELL Monitoring Support Visit was laid out in Deputy Chancellor Milady C. Baez's 11 September 2017 email to principals and Ms. R's 28 September 2017 follow-up email to the principal. According to these documents (copied and pasted below), below), the agenda was to discuss compliance issues related to Commissioner's Regulation (CR) Part 154 and mandates for bilingual programs. This agenda was elaborated in two NYCDOE documents attached to Ms. R's 28 September email: (1) the "2017-2018 School ELL Needs Support Survey, Part I: Compliance Focus (10 pages); and, (2) the 13 page "Rubric" accompanying the survey; both documents are attached herewith.

**From:** Baez Milady (49M052)  
**Sent:** Monday, September 11, 2017 5:10 PM  
**To:** Baez Milady (49M052)  
**Subject:** ELL Compliance Support Visit

Dear Principal,

As educators, our goal is to provide a high quality education to all of our students, including our English language learners.

In order to accomplish this, the DOE continues to focus on the requirements under Commissioner's Regulation (CR) Part 154 which include the following:

- Programming of English as a new language (ENL) in STARS for all ELLs and former ELLs (who tested out within the past 2 years)
- The administration of the ELL identification process
- Timely administration of the NYSITELL, which must be completed within 10 school days of enrollment (20 school days for students with IEPs)
- Determination of SIFE status

In addition, New York State Education Department continues to mandate the opening of bilingual programs when thresholds are met (15 or more ELLs of the same language in two contiguous grades in grades K-8, and 20 or more ELLs in any single grade in grades 9-12).

To ensure that State mandates are fulfilled and ELLs are receiving a high quality education, the DOE will be monitoring a selected number of schools for their implementation of CR Part 154 as well as for instructional practice.

To support schools in creating high quality ELL programs and strengthen compliance with CR Part 154, representatives from your Field Support Center (FSC) will visit a select number of schools. Schools were selected for a visit based on factors including, but not limited to, their numbers of ELLs and compliance status. Your school was selected to receive a visit around your compliance practices for ELLs.

In addition, you are strongly urged to attend a 2.5-hour introductory session on the DOE's ELL monitoring plan, as doing so will further assist you in understanding the objectives of the visit. These sessions are for principals and/or assistant principals. Two other key school staff members (e.g., ELL coordinator) may attend, but only if you or your assistant principal also attends. Space is limited at each session, so early registration is encouraged. Your FSC ELL director will email you the dates and times for these sessions.

School visits will begin in October. Your FSC ELL director will reach out to you to arrange a mutually agreed upon time to meet with you at your school. We look forward to this opportunity to partner with and support you during the visit and throughout the year. Should you have any additional questions, please reach out to your FSC ELL director.



*Milady C. Baez*  
*Deputy Chancellor*  
*Division of English Language Learners & Student Support*  
 (212) 374-5103

**From:** Ms. R.  
**Sent:** Thursday, September 28, 2017 4:40 PM  
**To:** Ms. Y.  
**Subject:** 05M036 ELL Monitoring Support Visit

Dear Ms. Y.,

I hope all is well.

By now you have received Deputy Chancellor Baez' letter informing schools of the upcoming ELL Monitoring Support Visits. We are now scheduling our visits and are looking forward to supporting you with strengthening your ELL program in the implementation of both NYS Commissioner's Regulations Part 154 and [New York City policies](#). During the visit we will use the **School ELL Needs Support Survey Part I: Compliance** and accompanying **School ELL Needs Support Survey Rubric**, both of which are attached. "FAQs" are available [here](#) to help you prepare as well as provide an overview of the DOE's monitoring plan. You may also find the [Instructional and Compliance Resources](#) available on the intranet helpful.

I am available to meet with you at the following time:


Date	From (time)	To (time)
10/19/17	8:30AM	11:30 AM

If this date is not convenient, kindly provide two (2) alternate dates and times when you and your key ELL staff are available.

I am looking forward to meeting with you. Should you have any additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Please let me know if you would like to schedule a 15 minute phone call, (at your convenience), to go over any concerns you may have.

Have a good evening,  
 Ms. R.

Senior ELL Compliance and Performance Specialist (CPS)  
 Manhattan Field Support Center  
 NYC Department of Education  
 333 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room 725  
 New York, New York 10001

 **GO GREEN** - please don't print this e-mail unless you really need to do so.

**APPENDIX B: The Hazards of ESL Push In (teachers.net)**

by alison Feb 7, 2010

[https://teachers.net/mentors/esl\\_language/topic5838/](https://teachers.net/mentors/esl_language/topic5838/)

"There is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education".....The United States Supreme Court, Lau v. Nichols.

This case reaffirms that all students in the United States, regardless of native language, have the right to receive a quality education. It also clarifies that equality of opportunity does not necessarily mean the same education for every student, but rather the same opportunity to receive an education. An equal education is only possible if students can understand the language of instruction. Within weeks of this Supreme Court ruling, Congress passed the Equal Educational Opportunity Act mandating that no state shall deny equal education opportunity to any individual, "by the failure by an educational agency to take appropriate action to overcome language barriers that impede equal participation by students in an instructional program." This is an important piece of legislation because it defines what constitutes denial of education opportunities.

In a memorandum written by the Office for Civil Rights, it states: "Where the inability to speak and understand the English language excludes national origin minority group children from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district, the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students."

Under the No Child Left Behind in New Jersey, the Consolidated State Application Accountability Workbook clearly states: "LEP students enrolled in the bilingual, ESL, or English language services program shall be placed in a monolingual English program when they have demonstrated readiness to function successfully in an English-only program." If you look at what has been happening in some schools across the country today, the opportunity for ESL students to adjust to American culture and to learn English, is rapidly diminishing when it is ESL teachers who are being forced to "push in" and teach portions of a "balanced literacy" reading program which teaches to guess at words instead of actually reading them. NCLB wants ESL students to learn English while learning this curriculum, then, after one year, pass the test. Many states are crying "Foul!" recognizing that it can take as long as seven years to achieve academic proficiency in a new language.

I have been a teacher of English as a Second Language for twenty-nine years. I have literally been a voice and advocate for my students throughout the years. Working mostly in sub-standard rooms and conditions with my ESL students, I have still managed to beat the odds and succeed in teaching students of many languages, to speak, read, and write in English. Many of my former students have gone on to become doctors, engineers, lawyers, and teachers. I am

proud of the achievements of each and every one of them, and I keep in contact with many of my former students until this day. Their success is my success.

For the past twenty-nine years, I have been pulling my students from their classrooms and teaching them English in my ESL classroom. This year, the ESL Department in the school I work in, was told to "push in". To my understanding, "push in" means to go into the rooms my students are in, support the classroom teacher in whatever subject matter he or she is teaching, and to look over the shoulders of all the students in the room, not just ESL students. Naturally, I questioned this method along with my colleagues, but to no avail. I asked, along with the other ESL teachers, how this could possibly help our students acquire English any faster, and no administrator seemed to have an answer for us. They just wanted what they wanted.

Being a person of curiosity, I began researching the subject of "push in" vs. "pull out". I've discovered that no substantial research has ever been done on this subject. The interesting part of this that I did find out for myself, is that schools which have been utilizing this method, have significantly scored lower on standardized tests.

So where is this all coming from? Who invented this "push in"/"pull out" for ESL learners? Why do school administrators follow blindly without knowing or understanding the end result? Why is this being implemented at all? And lastly, why do administrators and educators go along with it?

Interestingly enough, as my research continued, a variety of culprits became clear to me. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, there has been a giant step backwards for the children it purports to help. Buzz words such as "accountability" have arisen and administrators are running scared. Unrealistic achievement targets and punitive sanctions are pushing all the "left behind" groups even further behind. Today, schools with an ELL "subgroup" are being labeled and punished for failure. "Balanced Literacy" reading programs have only succeeded in pushing test scores further down, and ESL teachers in my district are being forced to become "guided reading" teachers instead of teaching their students English first. Through my research, I have learned that this isn't about ESL at all. This is about pushing "balanced literacy" programs which are failing students around the world. ESL teachers are currently being used as extra bodies in classrooms in order to implement this "balanced literacy" agenda whose theories have fallen short. It used to be that ESL programs were being promoted to be part of the solution. Today, instead, we are being forced to be part of the problem. The demoralization of students and teachers is rampant throughout the country. This is educational malpractice in every sense of the word. What is happening in America?

How is it explained that in some suburban school districts today, they are still teaching spelling, phonics, and all the rudiments of English grammar? How is it explained that these same suburban school districts are passing the test and ESL students are achieving as well? How is it explained that reading programs in these suburban school districts have actual workbooks and REAL books (instead of dittos) for their students to read and absorb? Naturally, there is better

teaching and abundant learning happening in these schools because they are using proven methods of instruction.

Back in the day, ESL students test scores on English achievement tests weren't counted into the mainstream. ESL teachers were told to administer the test for practice, but it was clearly understood by all that there was no way the majority of these students could pass a standardized English test, as long as they were students in an ESL class. Today, these same students are being fed a steady diet of test- prep, worksheets, and other "skill building" exercises from a menu mostly reduced to reading and math. Their language- learning needs are increasingly being neglected by the marginalization of bilingual and ESL instruction, while the more advantaged students are studying art, music, and foreign languages. All the "frills" have systematically and routinely been denied to children whose test scores have become life-or-death matters for educators' careers. Ironically, No Child Left Behind, along with sub-standard "whole language" reading programs, are increasing the achievement gap, and with it, an equal chance to succeed in life.

After twenty-nine years of teaching, I know from experience that looking over a students' shoulder, or "guided reading", can in no way help my students successfully acquire English. We are the "highly qualified professionals" in the methods of teaching a second language, and these methods have been proven time and time again, to work. I do not in any way accept the rhetoric that I have not done my job. I am, frankly, tired of the finger-pointing and accusations that ESL teachers, along with others, have been forced to listen to. We have a job to do. We are the experts at language acquisition. We, as ESL teachers, must be the advocates for our students who cannot express themselves. We must take affirmative steps to rectify this "push in/ pull out" debate. THIS is the American way!

**APPENDIX C: High Frequency Vocabulary: Revolutionizing TESOL Curricula**  
paper presented to the 2013 NYS TESOL Annual Conference, White Plains, NY, November 15-16, 2013. Downloadable from: <http://constancebenson.com/esl-teacher-portfolio.php>

#### **APPENDIX D: How Long Does It Take ELLs to Develop English Proficiency?**

By Corey Mitchell on August 7, 2015 10:24 AM

[http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning-the-language/2015/08/study\\_how\\_long\\_does\\_it\\_take\\_el.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning-the-language/2015/08/study_how_long_does_it_take_el.html)

A study of seven high-poverty districts in the Seattle metropolitan area found that it took nearly four years for elementary school-aged English-language learners to develop English proficiency. Researchers from Regional Education Laboratories Northwest tracked nearly 18,000 language-learner students in some of the lowest-performing school districts in Washington State. The districts are participants in the [Road Map Project](#), a cradle-to-career program that aims to close the opportunity gap for low-income and minority students.

The question of how long it takes ELLs to develop English proficiency is on the minds of most educators because proficiency is "linked to academic success in other content areas," the researchers wrote. But they also point out the ongoing debate about what language proficiency means and how it's measured.

The longitudinal study presents findings on the numbers of years it took for ELLs to achieve a grade specific score on the state's English-language proficiency assessment. The participating students began kindergarten between the 2000-01 and 2007-08 school years and entered a Road Map Project district elementary school at any time between the beginning of kindergarten and the end of 5th grade.

On average, it took the students 3.8 years to reach English proficiency. But over the course of the study, almost 20 percent of students did not score high enough on the state exam to be reclassified.

The study produced a host of findings, including:

Girls, at 3.6 years, achieved reclassification faster than boys at 4 years.

Students who spoke Arabic, Amharic, and Korean as their first language took less time to achieve reclassification than the group average, while Samoan and Spanish speakers took longer.

English-learner students took less time to achieve reclassification in schools with high percentages of ELLs, racial/ethnic minority students, and students eligible for federal school lunch programs.

Hispanic students, at 4.2 years, took longer to achieve reclassification than students of other races and ethnicities. Asian students, at 3.4 years, took less time.

Students eligible for special education took an average of 5.5 years to develop English proficiency, compared with 3.7 years for their peers in general education.

ELLs who entered a Road Map district school in 2nd through 5th grades with high English proficiency took longer to achieve reclassification than those who entered with low proficiency. Researchers suspect this is the case because the more advanced ELLs receive less instructional support from teachers and aides.

Between 2005 and 2013, the state of Washington witnessed a 70 percent growth in the number of English-language learners. Nearly a quarter of the state's ELL students are enrolled in the Road Map districts—Auburn, Federal Way, Highline, Kent, Renton, Seattle, and Tukwila. More than half of the ELL students in those districts fail to graduate on time.

The study did not examine factors such as home language literacy, education background, and parent education levels. Researchers also had to work around missing or incomplete data, including some information on initial English-language proficiency levels and program exit dates.

[English-language Learner Proficiency Study](#)