REL SOUTHWEST Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest

Collaborative Framework to Support English Learner Students Instruction

About This Guide

This guide details a collaborative framework to support English learner student instruction. The resource was developed to support a pilot project with Rio Rancho Public Schools (RRPS) in New Mexico as part of the Southwest English Learners (SWEL) Research Partnership under Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Southwest, a contract funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences. REL Southwest thanks RRPS for their contributions in the development process. The resource is based on research around promising ways to provide opportunities for teachers of English learner students to collaborate, share expertise, and build capacity for implementing instructional strategies and integrating language and content across lessons.

How to Use the Guide

This guide is structured for practitioners as a framework to guide teams in collaborating across English language development specialists and content teachers to focus on supporting English learner student instruction. **The guide is not particular to a grade range or content area and should build upon existing professional development structures if possible.** It focuses on structural and process features of collaboration, implementation of collaboration through a cycle, and optional templates that can assist in planning and implementation.

A Collaborative Approach to Supporting English Learner Student Instruction

Collaboration

Research suggests that to achieve academically, English learner students must develop language while also learning academic content [Baker et al., 2014; National Academies of Sciences (NASEM), 2017]. However, many teachers across the country report a greater need for training on how best to serve English learner students by implementing strategies that focus on both language and content. English learner development (ELD) specialists, content area teachers, and other support teachers including instructional coaches, special education teachers, or gifted and talented coordinators, have an opportunity to improve understanding and capacity to serve English learner students by collaborating on planning, instruction, and assessment. Multiple education research studies have supported the notion that when teachers of English learner students have opportunities to work together, they share expertise and build capacity for delivering instruction that integrates language and content (Babinski et al., 2018; Hopkins et al., 2015; Sun et al., 2013). This collaborative framework aims to support school teams through structures for the collaboration process and by including access to example templates and resources to support this process.

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Structural and Process Features of Collaboration

Collaborations are characterized at a high level by structural features and process features, following the work of Babinski et al. (2018). These features are important for establishing norms and expectations about how experienced educators can combine their expertise to improve instruction and, ultimately, student outcomes (table 1). Teams might use table 1 as a guide to track progress around the structural and process features of collaboration.

Table 1. Teacher collaboration structural and process features

	Feature	Recommended action or practice	Task is complete	Task is in progress	Task not started
Structural	**1. Meeting time**	a. Set a regular meeting time (at least 1 time per month).	☐	☐	☐
		b. Set a regular meeting location.	☐	☐	☐
		c. Dedicate time to review the cycles of collaboration.	☐	☐	☐
	2. Group roles and norms	a. Assemble the relevant participants (within-grade teachers, across-grade teachers, and/or English language development specialists).	☐	☐	☐
		b. Identify roles (facilitator, notetaker, data manager, timekeeper, etc.) and expectations for each collaborative partner agreed upon by team.	☐	☐	☐
		c. Set realistic goals for implementing each cycle of collaboration.	☐	☐	☐
Process	**3. Communication**	a. Set a regular communication schedule.	☐	☐	☐
		b. Decide on the mode for regular communication (email, Google doc, team meetings, etc.).	☐	☐	☐
		c. Set expectations for responses in asynchronous modalities (within 48 hours, etc.).	☐	☐	☐

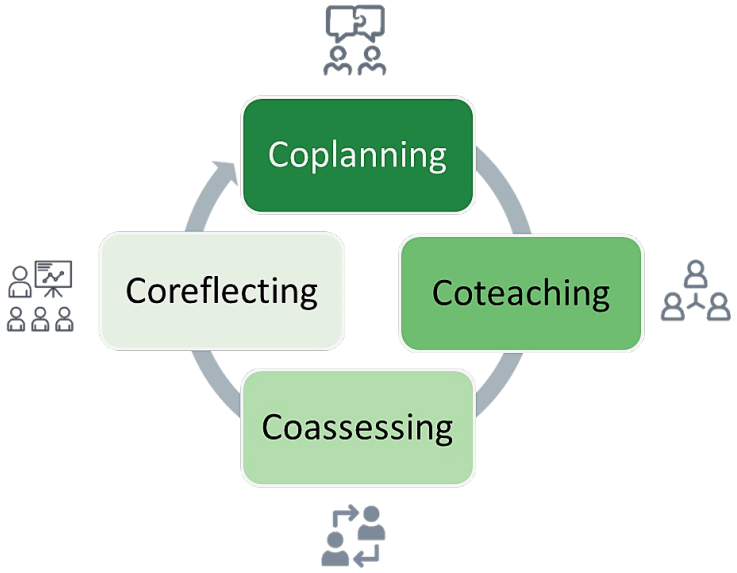
	Feature	Recommended action or practice	Task is complete	Task is in progress	Task not started
Process	**4. Relationship building**	a. Discuss participants' motivations for working in education.	☐	☐	☐
		b. Discuss participants' goals for continued professional development (identifying and utilizing additional resources related to topic, continued ways for sharing and collaboration within site, reflecting on practice, etc.).	☐	☐	☐
		c. Discuss participants' support needs from other participants to ensure that collaboration is successful.	☐	☐	☐
	5. Mutual respect	a. Ensure suggestions and contributions are approached charitably and seek value in unfamiliar ideas.	☐	☐	☐
		b. Develop a shared understanding for how disagreements will be resolved.	☐	☐	☐

Teacher Collaboration Cycles

Collaborations are conceptualized as cycles, following WIDA (2020). The collaboration process should be approached as a repetitive process involving four distinct cycles: **coplanning, coteaching, coassessing,** and **coreflecting** (figure 1). **The collaboration cycle should complement the planning and instruction already occurring in schools, building on existing professional development structures and times whenever possible for long-term sustainability**. The new or innovative element is a deliberate focus on supporting English learner instruction across school teams.

The collaboration cycles combine academic content and language instructional goals. Supporting English learner students to develop language proficiency skills in parallel to developing academic content is backed by research (NASEM, 2017; Baker et al., 2014). It is important to recognize the key role that school leaders play in this process by creating and supporting collaborative practices. School leaders in the collaborative process invest time to support teachers to build a culture and environment to have the space and time to collaborate to promote growth and learning for English learner students (WIDA, 2021).

Figure 1. Teacher collaboration framework

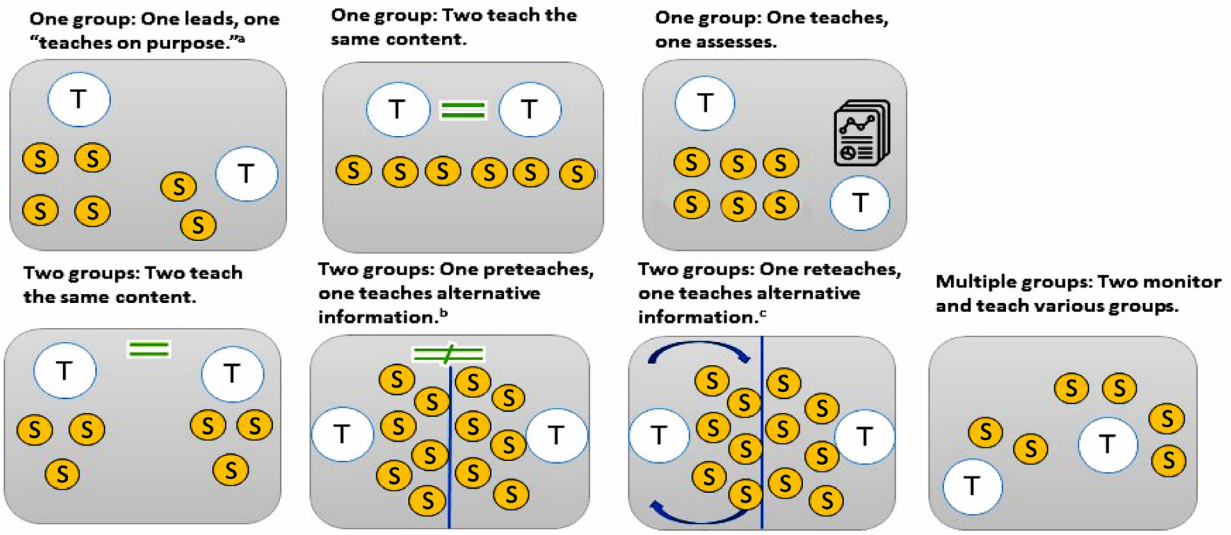


Within the **coplanning** cycle, teams can establish agreed-upon structural, and process features of collaboration to guide the process (Babinski et al., 2018). The reason for building in structural and process features is to encourage agreed upon team norms, roles, and processes for meeting and collaborating. During coplanning, language and academic content goals are determined for English learner students. At this stage, ELD specialists, general education teachers, special education teachers, or other teacher specialists can develop common language and academic goals together (WIDA, 2020). Model example 1 later in the guide illustrates a scenario where a content teacher and an English as a second language (ESL) specialist codevelop language and content goals for an upcoming science unit. Other key activities in this cycle may include reviewing instructional resources, developing lessons and materials, or discussing instructional aims to determine each teacher's role and responsibility. Within each collaboration cycle, a set of guiding questions is provided to help facilitate team planning. Example guiding questions within the coplanning cycle probe teams to think about the content and language required, what instructional approaches would be most relevant or useful, or where potential challenges occur. Example artifacts to share with

colleagues during this process include meeting agendas, meeting notes, lessons plans, or curriculum mapping.

The primary goal of the **coteaching** cycle is to ensure an equitable learning environment and full access to grade-level learning opportunities across content areas, which some English learner students may not otherwise experience (Umansky, 2016, 2018). There can be multiple models by which to facilitate coteaching (see WIDA, 2020 for features of their seven collaborative teaching models and figure 2). Within all the models, academic core content, language, and literacy goals are integrated.

Figure 2. Possible models for coteaching



Note. Figure was created by the REL Southwest author based on the teaching model description in Honigsfeld & Dove, 2019. [a] "Teaches on purpose" can include assisting individuals or small groups of students who need extra help understanding the lesson. [b] In this model, one group might focus on teaching foundational concepts while another focuses on alternative information, which may include enrichment or extension activities (WIDA, 2020).[c] In this model, one group reviews and practices concepts while another focuses on alternative information, which may include enrichment or extension activities (WIDA, 2020).

Key activities associated with the coteaching cycle include embedding ELD supports into general education classroom lessons, engage both English learner and non-English learner in language-learning activities, and reinforce ELD targets during the ELD specialists' instructional time. Sample guiding questions center on the student's reactions to the instructional approaches or student contributions to the lessons. Lesson plans, instructional materials, or student work samples are examples of artifacts of practice that might be shared during a coteaching cycle meeting.

The purpose of the **coassessing** phase is to evaluate the effectiveness of the instruction approaches, promote students' learning, and provide feedback to both students and teachers (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2007). A report using systematic, rigorous What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) standards found that formative assessments were linked to positive effects on elementary school academic achievement, on average, across 19 studies (Klute et al., 2017).

The coassessing cycle is cyclical so that ongoing data collection present opportunities to reflect on English learner students' academic learning, as well as their linguistic and socioemotional developmental (WIDA, 2020). Within the collaboration cycle, the focus is on implementing formative assessments so educators can understand where instruction was successful and where improvements can be made. The formative assessment process occurs through key activities like gathering student progress toward the learning goals identified in the coplanning cycle or summarizing or tracking the strategies applied. The guiding questions educators can be asking within this cycle focus on progress toward goals in instruction, application of new learning with students, and what can be reported back to collaboration partners for feedback or discussion. Artifacts shared within teams for the coassessing cycle include achievement descriptors for proficiency levels where teachers are aiming for students to level up on their ELD assessment, planned future formative assessments, and artifacts from student assessment responses (notes, completed tasks).

The last cycle in the collaboration process, **coreflecting,** allows teams to engage in conversations about what is working (or not) as teachers implement various instructional strategies with English learner students. Key activities in this cycle may include reviewing assessment data together or discuss which aspects of the structural or process features they find most supportive and talk through ways to make improvements for the next cycle. This is also a place where various modes of instruction (in-person, virtual, hybrid) can be discussed in terms of sharing ideas and best practices and considerations around student equity and inclusion (WIDA, 2020).

Sample guiding questions include how assessment findings inform the team, how the collaboration process might be improved for the next round, what else would be useful to know or include, and whether the expertise of all team members is being utilized. The agenda and format for coreflection may vary depending on the expertise of the team. Example artifacts from coreflecting include the agenda from co-reflecting activities, asynchronous team check-ins about progress toward goals, reflection questions and answers, or teacher logs or meeting notes. Table 2 provides additional detail on each step of the cycle of the teacher collaboration framework, key activities, and guiding questions.

Table 2. Cycles of the teacher collaboration framework, key activities, and guiding questions

Cycle	Cycle step purpose	Context	Key activities	Guiding questions
Coplanning	Develop appropriate plans for pursuing content and language goals.	Educators-only shared meeting	✓ Identify language and content goals for all students. ✓ Identify evidence-based resources designed or adapted specifically for English learner students' language and content development. ✓ Review evidence-based instructional resources aligned to goals for English learner students. ✓ Develop lesson and materials. ✓ Discuss instructional aims and determine each teacher's role and responsibility.	• What is the content to be taught? • What features of the content might be more challenging for our English learner students? • What instructional approaches can be utilized? • What specific English language development (ELD) goals can be served by these approaches around this content?
Coteaching	Convey key content and language lessons.	Likely in separate instructional settings, with students (see seven WIDA collaboration models; WIDA, 2020)	✓ Embed language development supports into the general education classroom lesson. ✓ Engage English learner students and non–English learner students in language-learning activities. ✓ Reinforce ELD targets in any English language specialist's instructional time.	• How do we respond to students' experiences with these instructional approaches? • In what ways can we draw on the contributions students make during lessons?
Coassessing	Evaluate effectiveness of instructional approach(es).	Likely begin in separate settings, sharing findings face-to-face or asynchronously	✓ Summarize or track the strategies applied. ✓ Gather information about students' progress toward learning goals.	• What was I able to do in my instruction? • Were the students able to apply their new learning? • What did I see that I want to report back to my collaboration partner(s)?

Cycle	Cycle step purpose	Context	Key activities	Guiding questions
Coreflecting	Examine assessment data and collaboration process critically.	Educators-only shared meeting	✓ Review student assessment data. ✓ Review the structure and process features of collaboration. ✓ Consider improvements for the next collaboration cycle.	• How do our assessment findings complement or inform each other? • How can the collaboration process be improved? • What other information would be useful to know during the upcoming cycle? • Am I bringing all my relevant expertise to the relationship?

Planning Time
Ideas for Structuring the Collaboration Cycle

The collaboration guide is designed to be used over time so that even though table 2 above might look like the guide for a single meeting, in fact it will typically be used with *coplanning* on one day, *coteaching* on another, and *coassessing/coreflecting* on a third day or a third and fourth day, as table 3 shows more concretely. The collaboration cycle is intended to be integrated into existing routines for planning and instruction. Table 3 outlines an example of how a **single iteration of the collaboration cycle** could proceed. As a reminder, the collaboration framework is a cycle, meaning that the example below can be replicated from week to week across content.

Table 3. Example planning cycle of the teacher collaboration framework

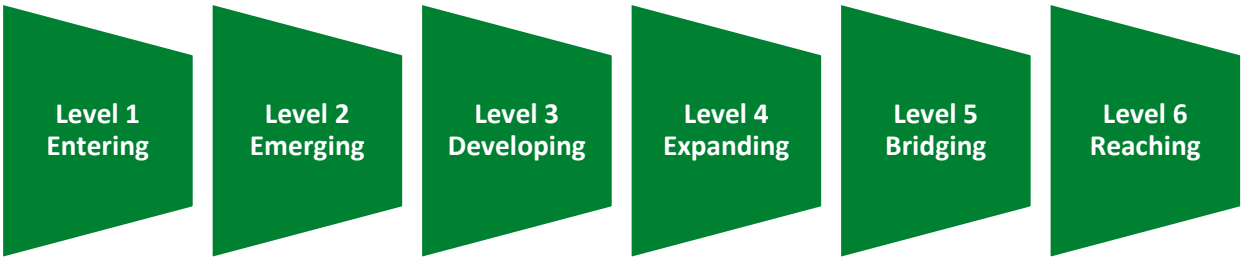
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	The following Monday
The social studies teacher and English language specialist hold a face-to-face (virtual) meeting to share and align on content and language goals, identify instructional resources, and plan for modes and responsibilities for instruction **[coplanning].**	During a social studies lesson, the general education classroom teacher presents key content vocabulary. She checks off items in the log about the strategies used. **[coteaching]**	During the once-weekly ELD meeting, the English language specialist prepares and plans strategies to address general academic vocabulary, including small-group supports and drawing connections to other ELD goals. She checks off items in the log about the types of questions student(s) posed. **[coteaching]**	Separately, the social studies teacher and English language specialist review their logs and any formative assessment or recollections gathered about student(s) to gauge effectiveness of instructional approaches. They email each other the results of this review in an agreed-upon format. **[coassessing]**	The social studies teacher and English language specialist meet face-to-face (virtual) to discuss assessment outcomes and consider potential improvements to their approach. The teachers plan the next collaborative lesson. **[coreflecting and coplanning]**

Modeling Opportunity: Example Script to Demonstrate Implementation

The following scripts are examples of ways in which the collaborative framework has been incorporated into different aspects of teacher collaboration around identifying language and content goals, reviewing instructional resources together, developing lessons and materials for students, or discussing methods for distributing instructional aims among participants.

Context: An early elementary content teacher is developing a science lesson with an ESL specialist for students who are levels 1, 2, and 3 in WIDA proficiency (figure 3, modeling example 1).

Figure 3. WIDA English language proficiency levels



Source: WIDA, 2021, p. 3.

Modeling example 1: Identify language and content goals for common students—Phase 1

ESL teacher	Content teacher

Tell me what you are thinking about for the next unit on matter. Which science standards are guiding instruction?

Students will need to understand the properties of matter and will have to plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials by their observable properties.

Review instructional resources: Phase II

ESL teacher	Content teacher

That sounds great. This is a good opportunity for student inquiry and offers students various ways to engage with the content. Let's get started by identifying what vocabulary students will need in order to access the content and meet the objective. Do you want to get started by sharing what you think are the key science words to be able to understand the content and meet the objective?

They will definitely need words to describe properties of matter including category terms such as color, texture, hardness, and flexibility.

That is helpful. Because those are all descriptive words, we can use pictures, objects, and models to help students visualize the words. Are there any other content words that students need to be able to show their understanding of the content?

Well, students also need to know examples of the different specific characteristics within each of those categories.

Most English learner students will know words to describe color and hardness, but it would be useful to teach some descriptive words for texture and flexibility. Let's brainstorm what some of those words would be.

Great point. How about we choose two each for both of those categories? How about for texture we teach "smooth" and "rough?" For flexibility we can teach "flexible" and "rigid." That way, we can help students see how the words "flexibility" and "flexible" are related. And we can use pictures and examples to demonstrate those characteristics.

Now let's think about some general academic words or phrases that will be useful for this objective. What will it look like when students understand the properties of matter?

Usually, I ask students to work with a partner to observe, describe, and categorize a set of objects. That way I can assess how they put their understanding into words and actions.

In English language development, we have been working on comparing and contrasting. Students can apply that language here in the classification process. They may need support, however, in justifying their classification. Working with a peer partner in breakout rooms will be helpful for students to have a model of the language to explain their grouping, but let's provide a written example of the language students can use to justify their classification that students can refer to as needed.

Developing lesson and materials: Phase III

Content teacher | **ESL teacher**

We will have to think about what resources and materials we can use. I have some presentations that we can use with examples for some of the properties of matter. Usually, I provide students with some objects to observe, describe, and then categorize with a partner. If we were to adapt this for a virtual setting, we could ask students to collect 10 objects around their house to use for the classification activity.

That sounds good. How about we add some pictures to the examples to help students visualize the properties. I will add the property words with pictures to our class word wall as well as work with students to add words to their student glossary. Students can draw from these tools.

Content teacher | **ESL teacher**

I think we have identified some of the key language that will be useful for this objective. The introduction of the key words and partner language activity will be helpful to support the English learner students in the class. If you want to do the introduction activity to present the concept of properties of matter, then I can take over to teach the descriptive words using visuals and examples.

Yes, that sounds fine to me.

For our level 1 students, I can do additional reinforcement activities in my small-group session with them to practice the vocabulary that we mentioned to describe the properties of matter.

Appendix
Teacher Collaboration Example Templates and Resource

Depending on a teaching team's size, instructional setting, grades and English proficiency levels of students served, content areas, respective expertise, and other factors, collaborating educators may determine that it would be useful to adopt other tools that can more concretely structure their collaborations or apply also to other collaborations (for example, in grade-level teaching teams). While piloting this resource with Rio Rancho Public Schools (RRPS) in New Mexico, REL Southwest examined artifacts of authentic teacher collaborations in a variety of contexts, including teaching teams who worked together in person and others who collaborated asynchronously.[1] In this appendix, templates are provided that were inspired by RRPS artifacts that educators using this guide can adopt and adapt to suit their purposes.

Resources like these can be especially useful if collaborative teaching teams face challenges to scheduling time to engage in each step in the collaboration cycle, to coming to an agreement about respective commitments and responsibilities, to juggling large numbers of students served, or to other events that could arise.

Teacher Collaboration Site and Resources

The REL Southwest website houses the collaboration guide and a series of three short training modules focusing on vocabulary instruction drawn from a What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) *Educator's Practice Guide on Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School* (Baker et al., 2014). In addition, a supplementary slide deck on informal and formative assessment of vocabulary learning is located on the website.

Coplanning to Facilitate Use of Instructional Strategies

Template for synchronous team check-ins. This template is designed to support educators' use of the 2014 What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide, *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*, in their teacher collaboration cycles. That practice guide includes four high-level *recommendations* about serving English learner students, each of which is accompanied by several *implementation steps* to make those recommendations concrete and actionable. For educators interested in simultaneously supporting their English learner students' access to academic content as well as rich vocabulary, this template offers a resource bridging the research-based recommendations in the practice guide to the interactive, cyclical components of the teacher collaboration process, which can be applied during the coplanning stage of the collaboration cycle. In particular, this resource could be used to support the third and fourth key activities listed in the body of this document under the coplanning stage:

- Review evidence-based instructional resources aligned to goals for English learner students (which can be found in the 2014 practice guide).
- Develop lesson and materials (as the "next planned use" of a given practice guide recommendation).

[1] REL Southwest sincerely thanks the participating teachers and administrators in RRPS for their engagement with this work and for offering their artifacts as a basis for our template development.

Student grade levels and English language proficiency levels	*Content areas of focus*	*Academic vocabulary targets*
Rec. 1: Teach a set of academic vocabulary words intensively across several days using a variety of instructional activities.	**Have you used this recommendation before?** **Which implementation step(s)?**	**Next planned use:**
Rec. 2: Integrate oral and written English language instruction into content-area teaching.	**Have you used this recommendation before?** **Which implementation step(s)?**	**Next planned use:**
Rec. 3: Provide regular, structured opportunities to develop written language skills.	**Have you used this recommendation before?** **Which implementation step(s)?**	**Next planned use:**
Rec. 4: Provide small-group instructional intervention to students struggling in areas of literacy and English language development.	**Have you used this recommendation before?** **Which implementation step(s)?**	**Next planned use:**

Continuous Cycles of Coteaching

Template for asynchronous team progress tracking and planning

Potential running agenda items

Meeting Notes			
Focal step(s) in the coteaching cycle (circle one or more):			
Coplanning	**Coteaching**	**Coassessing**	**Coreflecting**
1. What is our collective goal for this step?			

Meeting Notes
2. What needs for learning vocabulary do we see in our students?
3. What specific needs do we see in our English learner students?
4. What is our individual goal for a takeaway from this step?
5. What artifacts do we want to produce and preserve as we pursue that goal?
6. What strategies are you currently using that you believe work well to teach vocabulary (and what is the research evidence supporting those strategies, if you are aware if any)?
7. What resources do you absolutely love that you use? What resources can we add?
8. How can we bring the discussion of supporting English learner students and specifically vocabulary to our backward planning discussions? When?
9. Suggestions for measuring and assessing student progress.
10. Action steps from meeting Start date: Each team member will provide: Common commitments: Collective Instructional objective:
Additional resources: [Links to teacher reflection logs, ideas for activities, lessons, games, etc.]
Next meeting date/time/location:

Sample teacher reflection log for teachers complete after coteaching, to scaffold discussion during coreflection

Teacher	Dates	Activities	Assessment goals and results	Comments
Ex. Teacher 1	[date]	Vocabulary assessment tree map, vocabulary sorting activity, vocabulary definitions	Goal was for students to use target vocabulary words correctly in sentences; 70 percent of students achieved this goal during the week.	Providing students extended time to work in partners to work on vocabulary assessment tree maps was useful for students. Some students struggled with the -ly suffixes.

Idea for activities, lessons, games, and so on

Teacher	Activity, lesson, or game	Materials and resources
Ex. Teacher 1	Flipgrid: Have students define a vocabulary word, draw a picture of the word, and describe what their picture is about.	Flipgrid, Chromebook, paper, markers

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