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Collaborative Literacy Work in a High School: Enhancing Teacher Capacity for English Learner Instruction in the Mainstream

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Collaborative literacy work in a high school: enhancing teacher capacity for English

learner instruction in the mainstream

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Abstract

As more English learners (ELs) are included in mainstream content classrooms at the secondary level, the need to understand how teachers collaborate to meet the particular instructional needs of ELs is essential. This paper presents findings from a qualitative case study that investigated the collaborative work that engaged a group of literacy teachers over the course of a school year in one culturally and linguistically diverse high school. The ongoing collaboration of the mainstream language arts teachers and English as a second language teachers is examined, including the role of an English learner facilitator/ESL teacher in supporting teacher professional learning and inclusion. The contributions and collaboration of this literacy team are described and analyzed. How this collaborative work provided opportunities to grapple with meeting the instructional needs of ELs and the inclusion of both ELs and ESL teachers in the mainstream curriculum are discussed as well as implications for the field.

Keywords: teacher collaboration; English learners; inclusion; mainstream

Collaborative literacy work in a high school: enhancing teacher capacity for English

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Public schools in the United States are becoming increasingly diverse with a growing

percentage of English learners[1] (ELs) each year. ELs accounted for 9% of the population over

age five in 2010 (Pandya, McHugh, and Batalova 2011). Between 1990 and 2010 the EL

population in Washington State experienced growth over 209% (Pandya, McHugh, and

Batalova). In 2010, Washington State was among the top ten states with both the highest growth

rate and largest EL populations (Pandya, McHugh, and Batalova), with the EL population

concentrated in particular geographic areas within the state. School districts in Washington State

reported as high as a 15% increase in ELs between 2007 and 2009 and as many as 102 first

languages (Deussen and Greenberg-Motamedi 2008), with even higher percentages of English

learners concentrated in individual schools. These dramatic changes in EL populations in

Washington State, across the United States, and globally in English-speaking countries (e.g.

Canada, Australia, United Kingdom) are having a profound impact on the instruction of

adolescent students. Many high schools in the United States are grappling with this shift in

student population, realizing that many of their mainstream content teachers have not received

adequate preparation for teaching such a linguistically diverse student population. Promising

practices include building a culture of collaboration (Russell 2012) to more effectively meet the

instructional needs of ELs in culturally and linguistically diverse high schools, as well as the

inclusion of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers (Peercy and Martin-Beltran 2011) in

the context of mainstream teaching of ELs.

There has been a movement in the literature to make connections between professional

development focused on culturally responsive teaching (Johns 2009, Claire 1998), informed by

research on the instructional needs of adolescent ELs in classrooms (Walqui 2000, 2006); however, less is known about how high school content teachers learn about effective instruction of ELs in the context of their work and in their classrooms. Furthermore, while there is a growing body of scholarship on what pre-service teachers need to know and be able to do to teach in linguistically diverse settings (Villegas and Lucas 2002, Athanases and de Oliveira 2009, Brisk 2008, Darling-Hammond and Bransford 2005, Lucas, Villegas, and Freedson-Gonzalez 2008, Sleeter 2001, Zeichner 1993, de Jong and Harper 2005, Achinstein and Athanases 2010), less is known about how practicing teachers learn to develop the skills and knowledge that could have a direct impact on the ELs they teach. Hakuta (2011) calls for research that focuses on enhancing mainstream teachers' capacity to teach ELs and the development of professional communities within schools. This research fills a gap in the literature and addresses urgent concerns in the field through an investigation of the collaborative process that engaged a group of teachers in one high school with a focus on meeting both the language development needs of ELs, as well as providing access to mainstream language arts content.

Background literature

The approach used to analyze this collaborative work and the subsequent teacher professional learning relies on sociocultural learning theory and takes into account the interdependence of individual and social processes (Rogoff et al. 1995, Vygotsky 1978). I use sociocultural learning theory as a lens for understanding the interactions between the ESL and language arts departments as these teachers developed a professional community. In addition, this analysis draws from literature related to teacher professional learning and collaboration.

Research indicates that there is a need to better understand how mainstream content teachers are supported in their professional learning and the instruction of ELs (Knapp et al.

2005). This research addresses this gap in the literature and provides specific examples of how collaborative literacy work led to teacher professional learning. For the purposes of this analysis, teacher professional learning is defined as changes in teachers' participation in both collegial and classroom contexts with the goal of more effectively meeting the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse students in their mainstream content classes.

Current literature attempts to understand how the professional learning of teachers might inform their work in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. A recent study (Johns 2009) examined a professional development approach that relied on peer coaching of culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995) with a particular focus on the academic advancement of ELs in California. Teachers reported that their participation transformed their practice and perspectives relating to primary language instruction. By situating the learning in teachers' classrooms through the support of an instructional coach with expertise in the instruction of ELs, the teachers were able to implement instructional strategies to meet the needs of their students.

Furthermore, ESL teachers are a potential untapped resource for the mainstream teachers' learning, if all parties can begin to visualize teachers with specialized expertise as *collaborating partners* rather than individuals with sole responsibility for "fixing" second language learners. ESL teachers are often called upon as the language experts in their buildings (Brooks, Adams, and Morita-Mullaney 2010) and can be instrumental in the capacity of a school to meet the needs of ELs. In order to do this work well and to have an impact, research suggests that both ESL teachers and mainstream teachers need to recognize the expertise that each brings to the collaboration, as well as the need to broaden the network of resources that exist within the school in order to positively impact instruction for ELs across the school setting (Peercy and Martin-Beltran 2011). These authors suggest that it is impossible to do the work of educating ELs alone

in one's classroom and argue that by doing more collaborative work, teachers come to think of collaborative work as critical when it comes to meeting the needs of ELs. Considering the content demands for ELs in high schools today, it seems unrealistic to expect ELs to rely solely on their ESL teacher for support.

In addition, it is noted that through consistent interaction, ESL teachers and mainstream content teachers have opportunities to share and plan curriculum and assessment for ELs (Honigsfeld and Dove 2010). This suggests that collaborative school cultures can lead to improved academic outcomes for ELs because these environments encourage the ongoing interaction between ESL and mainstream content teachers. This collaborative culture, combined with a school focus on developing the capacity of mainstream teachers to meet the instructional needs of ELs provides a ripe case for analyzing professional learning. Specifically, this analysis furthers our understanding of collaborative school cultures that meet the needs of ELs.

A growing consensus has emerged regarding how to help teachers improve their skills and knowledge to better support student learning in their classrooms (Hawley and Valli 1999, Wei et al. 2009). A recent review of the literature on teacher professional learning suggests, "…the importance of sustained, content-focused professional development for changing practice in ways that ultimately improve student learning" (Wei et al., 5). Furthermore, it is argued that sustained, embedded professional learning – support provided within the context of teachers' practice – (Cobb et al. 2003) holds the most promise for meeting the needs of diverse learners. By implication, locating support for teachers in their classrooms and schools provides the situative context for enabling mainstream content teachers to develop a teaching repertoire that will most effectively meet the needs of their ELs.

This collaborative work, guided by the English learner (EL) facilitator[2] in this context, is

supported by current understandings of teacher leadership. That is, teachers with formalized leadership responsibilities are uniquely positioned to maintain connections with teaching and students, while at the same time contributing to the capacity building of teachers and culture in their buildings (Lieberman and Miller 2004). This case study highlights the role of the EL facilitator as a teacher leader within the context of Vista International High School (VIHS)[3], and demonstrates the role of the EL facilitator in contributing to the capacity of the language arts teachers to meet the instructional needs of ELs.

This paper provides a glimpse into the work of the literacy team at VIHS and highlights the collaborative work of two teachers on the team: an Advanced Placement (AP) language arts teacher[4] and the ESL teacher with the dual role of ESL teacher and EL facilitator. This case study illuminates the benefits and challenges of a unified literacy team, merging the language arts and ESL departments, within one high school. Furthermore, this paper examines the collaborative work that engaged the EL facilitator and AP language arts teacher, within the context of their work, and highlights the resulting teacher professional learning. Specifically, this inquiry focuses on the following research questions:

1. How can a literacy team, consisting of language arts and ESL teachers, support the instructional needs of ELs in the mainstream?
2. How does collaboration between language arts and ESL teachers contribute to mainstream teacher professional learning?

In this paper I describe and analyze the work of the literacy team, as well as two specific members of the literacy team, within one high school. I focus on how this collaborative work provided opportunities to grapple with meeting the needs of ELs.

Setting and context

VIHS is a small, autonomous high school on a campus with two other small high schools. The school is located in an urban district, outside a large metropolitan area in Washington State. At the time of data collection, the school enrolled 350 students with 24% white students and 76% students of color. About 70% of students qualified for free or reduced-price meals, 20% received special education services, and about 30% were identified as ELs. Most of the students of color were either born outside of the U.S. or their parents were. Students and their families came from Africa, Central America, South America, Mexico, Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. As a result there was great linguistic diversity at VIHS. The most common languages of the EL population were Spanish and Amharic.

The high school was founded when the former comprehensive high school was reorganized and VIHS opened in the autumn of 2005. A handful of teachers from the original comprehensive high school remained. These teachers were involved in the transformation of the school from a large, comprehensive to the small, autonomous school that it is now. The principal in the study year (2009−10) was the founding principal of VIHS. The staff at the school during this fieldwork consisted of one principal, 18 full-time teachers, and one part-time teacher. The principal of VIHS, Bill, was the founding supervisory leader of the school. When asked to talk about the program for ELs he responded with the following:

> We operate from a philosophy of inclusion, and so we believe that as much as possible and as much as is appropriate, students who are learning English should be included in classes with all other students and get support that they need to be able to be successful in those classes and also to continue their progress in learning English.

This intentional inclusion of ELs in mainstream classes as much as possible throughout the school day highlighted the supervisory leadership's stance on equity for linguistically diverse students.

This framework guided the principal's decision-making and influenced his ability to engage teachers at VIHS in meeting the needs of ELs. In particular, at VIHS the focus was on supporting both mainstream content teachers and ELs in the process of inclusion. Some structures that provided this supported included (1) the formation of a literacy team at the school's inception – as opposed to two separate departments - which included both language arts and ESL teachers, (2) a culture of peer-led professional development and collaboration regarding literacy and linguistically responsive instructional practices, and (3) a history of instructional coaching in literacy.[5] All of these structures provided a ripe setting for analyzing the collaborative work of the literacy team.

This dedication to teacher support and learning at VIHS was included in the principal's vision for the school and supported at the district level. There were ongoing commitments to creating professional learning opportunities for teachers situated in classroom practice across these administrative levels. When the district EL coordinator was presented with the dilemma of developing mainstream teacher capacity for their growing EL population, given the history of instructional coaching in the district, there was no doubt that he would seek out a way to embed the professional learning within the context of individual schools and connect that support to teachers' classroom practice – thus the emergence of the EL facilitator role.

Methods

Data collection

The data used in the analysis for this paper comes from a yearlong qualitative case study and included interviews, observations, and documents to focus in on the case of the literacy team. Literacy team members included three language arts teachers, one ESL teacher, and one ESL teacher with a split position (.7 ESL teacher, and .3 EL facilitator). The language arts teachers

were responsible for teaching all levels of language arts (grades 9-12). This included the AP language arts curriculum in grades 11-12 – at VIHS all students took the high-level AP classes in those grades. The ESL teachers were responsible for the instruction and/or support of all levels of ELs (beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Interviews (N=15) were conducted at three time points across the year with teachers from both the ESL and language arts departments, as well as with the principal. These interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes each. I observed numerous literacy team meetings comprised of teachers from both departments, whole staff meetings, as well as informal teacher interactions.

Participants

The research participants had opportunities to engage in professional learning opportunities focused on meeting the instructional needs of ELs in mainstream content classrooms over the 2009-10 school year. The decision to focus support in particular areas was made collaboratively by the principal and EL facilitator. The two based this decision on a variety of factors including numbers of ELs in specific courses, departmental needs (previous instructional coaching opportunities, or lack thereof), and EL access to ESL support classes – for instance, many students enrolled in AP language arts did not have room for an ESL support class in their schedules so it made sense for the EL facilitator to spend time in the AP language arts teacher's classroom.

The research participants for this analysis include (1) the principal, (2) all members of the literacy team, and (3) a focus on Sarah, the ESL teacher/EL facilitator, and Hillary, an AP language arts teacher.

Sarah: ESL teacher and EL facilitator. At the time of data collection Sarah had 9 years of classroom teaching experience. She was a white, native English speaker, with some Spanish

language proficiency. She was one of the original teachers at VIHS and was a part of the transformation into small schools. In the year that data collection took place, Sarah had the dual role of ESL classroom teacher and EL facilitator. As a result of her EL facilitator role, Sarah was heavily involved in guiding and facilitating teacher professional learning to meet the instructional needs of ELs in mainstream content classes at VIHS. In her ESL teacher role (.7) Sarah was responsible for teaching ESL support classes (focused on the language arts curriculum), as well as ESL classes for beginners. She also had release time to work collaboratively with content teachers in her role as EL facilitator (.3).

Hillary: AP language arts teacher. In the 2009-10 school year, Hillary had been teaching at VIHS for three years. It was her fifth year of teaching. She was white and a native English speaker. Her teaching responsibilities during the year of data collection included three classes of AP language and composition (11th grade), and two classes of AP literature and composition (12th grade). Hillary was one of the teachers at VIHS that received substantial support to meet the instructional needs of ELs in her mainstream AP language arts classes. The EL facilitator spent time in Hillary's classroom on a regular basis. This was partly to support Hillary and partly to support the ELs in AP language arts that did not have room for an EL support class in their schedules.

Data analysis

Data analysis was iterative and I used memoing to process my own experience in the field including reactions, thoughts, challenges, and successes (Glesne 2006). By continually analyzing my data throughout the research project, I was able to observe and ask questions of the participants in a way that drew on my initial interpretations and analyses. I used both an inductive and deductive process for data analysis. Specifically, I developed a set of a priori codes

from the conceptual framework and literature that guided this study, as well as allowed for

serendipitous findings through a grounded theory process of open coding in which the codes

were determined based on what the data was saying (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Once saturation

of data analysis was achieved, I moved to axial coding in which codes were grouped around a

concept or based on common characteristics. Finally, I used triangulation to confirm findings,

using my field notes and journal, participant interviews, and collected documents to identify

disconfirming evidence (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Findings: collaborative work and influence of the literacy team

The literacy team included all three of the language arts teachers and the two ESL

teachers. This was the arrangement since the founding of VIHS. This structure provided this

group of literacy teachers ongoing and established time to collaborate and plan for the literacy

needs of all students – EL students, exited EL students, and native English speakers. The

literacy team met on a regular basis (usually bi-weekly) and also had extended time to plan

together every fourth Friday when students were released early and staff came together for

Professional Collaboration Time.

The organization of the language arts and ESL teachers into one working group was

intentional with the goal of meeting ELs literacy needs. In addition, the fact that the language

arts and ESL teachers had been consistent over the past several years further fostered these

relationships and led to coordinated efforts in literacy instruction. The principal described the

relationship between the language arts and ESL teachers:

> What we hoped to accomplish when we first started doing that work of those two
> teams collaborating was knowing that literacy was the first major need to be met for
> the ELL students, that we wanted to make sure that the two groups of teachers were
> working in a coordinated and consistent fashion. So it's been a lot more effective…to be
> working with students in their [ESL] support classes on the kinds of things that they're
> learning in their literature and composition classes. So it's not just, okay, we're going to

be teaching them how to speak and read and write in English, but we're going to teach them how to do those things…using the content…of their literature and composition classes.

This arrangement was an effective and powerful strategy and led to some tangible effects for ELs at the school: (1) Increased participation and success in the mainstream language arts classes (as evidenced by EL anecdotes provided by teachers, assignment and out-of-class reading completion, and class grade point average) and (2) Enhanced collaboration between the literacy teachers. For example, the close collaboration between the ESL teachers and language arts teachers enabled the ESL teachers to really support ELs in the support classes in a meaningful way. The support class was not just an add-on but an authentic support class for the mainstream language arts classes. Evidence of the spillover of the literacy team collaborative work was observed in classroom instruction – both ESL support classes and language arts classes, observed in literacy team meetings, and confirmed in interviews with collaborating teachers.

This organization of teachers was intentional with the goal of meeting ELs' literacy needs. The literacy team was actively engaged in thinking about how to support ELs in the mainstream. Through their collaboration and coordinated efforts, the literacy team was well situated to meet the literacy needs of the ELs at VIHS.

In addition, the literacy team worked together to create their own language arts outcomes document. This rubric determined a student's placement in language arts and assisted all literacy teachers in thinking about proficiencies in language arts. Those students that met the outcomes for the particular level of language arts would advance to the next level. Those students that did not meet the outcomes would remain in the same level of language arts for the next school year. Based on the fact that this rubric was aligned with the specific curriculum used by VIHS language arts teachers, the literacy team had confidence in the usefulness of this tool in

determining placement for students. Observations of literacy team meetings and teacher

interview data confirmed the usefulness of the protocol and aided the literacy teachers in

determining placement for ELs and the teachers avoided the need to move students around much

once the school year was underway.

Inclusion was the defining feature of the EL program and influenced the design of EL

class schedules and the collaborative efforts of the ESL and language arts teachers. EL class

schedules provided these students access to the core content curriculum after they moved from

the Beginning level to the Intermediate I level. Students identified as Intermediate I, II, or

Advanced had a class schedule of entirely mainstream classes except for one period of ESL

writing support. The curriculum in the ESL writing support class aligned with the language arts

class curriculum and supported the assignments from the mainstream class. Observations

confirmed that writing support classes used similar instructional strategies and the ESL teachers

made it a priority to check-in with the language arts teachers to be sure their support classes were

on target and supportive of the curriculum and assignments from the mainstream class.

Impact of literacy team collaboration

One result of the literacy team's coordinated efforts was the fact that so many ELs were

placed in AP language arts. Not only were ELs taking the AP classes, anecdotal evidence from

teachers and academic achievement data (grade point average) indicated that they were passing

and finding success. Sarah described the overarching design of the EL program and how that

connected to how successful ELs were in AP language arts:

> …our EL students are very successful in our AP classes…it's going to extend beyond
> what is this powerful teacher doing to differentiate. It goes beyond that into how are we
> scaffolding the entire EL program in our school and have been doing it for years from
> each level so that there are common practices and structures and outcomes throughout the
> language arts curriculum and across the school that have helped the students to reach that
> level of comfort in those challenging classes. So it's…what is hard for you and what are

some strategies you're using that you are carrying with you from other experiences to help you figure out this situation and get help and negotiate the meaning.

When asked directly about student learning and growth in the AP language arts classes, Sarah noted that many of the ELs had increased confidence in their ability to complete assignments (especially essays) and improved confidence in their writing abilities. The support of the teachers and ongoing encouragement contributed to this boost in confidence and ultimately to student motivation to take control of their own learning. Sarah noted that many of these students were appreciative and grateful for the push to take on the academic challenge of an AP class and were proud of what they were accomplishing.

In terms of how the literacy team planned, the literacy teachers thought across the entire literacy spectrum from ESL specific classes, to ESL support classes, to language arts classes. It was apparent through observations and interviews that the literacy team scaffolded opportunities in language arts to support ELs and this contributed to their success. For example, when planning for alignment of vocabulary instruction for the next school year, Sarah talked about the literacy team's thinking and planning:

> …talking about editing and conventions work…a lot of EL issues of grammar and language and explicitly addressing those in all language arts classes, not just EL classes…having more of an emphasis, because that's often during the writing process we focus on revision and then editing is sort of not a focus, but we want to find a way to bring that in more explicitly. And then collaboration time between people who share students or planning common curriculum.

The literacy team was actively engaged in thinking about how to support ELs in language arts. They engaged in conversations about what the students' academic needs were and how they could collaborate to meet those needs. Inherently, this collaboration was not without its challenges, the language arts teachers did not always place their emphasis on the language development needs of ELs and often wanted ensure that what they were doing would meet the

needs of "all of their students – not just ELs." The emphasis on the language development needs of ELs typically came from the EL facilitator –she consistently brought the focus back to the needs of ELs. Her leadership in this area is what enabled the literacy team to have a consistent focus on the linguistic demands of the mainstream content class and the needs of ELs in the mainstream. While the language arts teachers did not necessarily see the linguistic demands in any given course, lesson, or assessment, the collaboration that unfolded between the language arts teachers and EL facilitator through the literacy team work is what enabled this emphasis – something that may have been lost to the language arts teachers without this consistent collaboration and interaction. What follows is a more detailed analysis of the collaborative work that engaged the ELL facilitator and AP language arts teacher and the professional learning that resulted from this arrangement.

Teacher support and collaboration in AP language arts

In this section of the paper, the analysis is situated squarely in the context of the AP language arts classroom. Specifically, the support provided by the EL facilitator to the AP language arts teacher and the resulting collaboration and professional learning are described and analyzed. The AP language arts teacher's professional learning that resulted from this collaboration with the EL facilitator will be revealed through (1) a description of the embedded support in the AP language arts classroom, (2) a focus on the co-planning and implementation of a unit on *Hamlet*, and (3) a discussion of the professional learning that resulted through collaboration.

Embedded AP language arts support

In Hillary's AP language arts classes, Sarah saw her role as a consultant and student

advocate. The purpose of her embedded work in AP language arts classroom was to support the content teacher through consulting on teaching and learning. Sarah noted:

> …she's [Hillary's] already implementing a lot of strategies that are very supportive…a lot of it's intuitive, a lot of it has been over the last two years that she's been here just with working with EL students and she's taught different levels.

That said, Sarah found multiple opportunities in the context of the AP language arts classes to influence instruction. While Sarah saw the AP language art teacher as a capable professional, there were opportunities to influence instruction through their collaborative work together, each bringing their own expertise to the table.

Collaborative support of individual EL needs. In Sarah's role as EL facilitator, supporting teaching and learning in this class meant connecting with the AP language arts teacher about student needs, in particular, when there was a concern about a particular student. Observations confirmed that the two colleagues conferred jointly with ELs (both students that were receiving EL services and those ELs that were technically exited) in order to more effectively meet their academic and social needs in the context of the content class. In addition, observations of conversations between Sarah and Hillary included checking-in about particular ELs after class. Sarah described what the embedded support looked like in AP language arts:

> For example, Marisol--we've been talking with her the last couple of weeks…she's an exited ELL student. She passed the EL test and all three sections of the WASL [Washington Assessment of Student Learning] last year as a 10th grader. However, she doesn't like to speak. She doubts her abilities, and she did skip a lot of her LA class last year. She has high skills but not a lot of confidence and it takes her quite a while to organize her ideas and synthesize ideas and just get it down on paper. So the pace of the class is really fast, so she's sort of--she's slowly plugging away but she doesn't trust that she's used these strategies before to organize an essay...so we talked about what do you already know that you can do that you did last year and the year before with Mr. Philips that could help you…we found a model from another student…we read it together, asked her what do you see this student doing. And she said oh, there's evidence from the text and then commentary, which she had done before. So once she put it in a framework that was familiar, then she felt more confident in going ahead and drafting.

Through this embedded support, Sarah was able to support ELs and help them to connect the academic pieces. Through her engagement with the literacy team and the language arts teachers, as well as the individual ELs themselves in her ESL support classes, she had the knowledge of where ELs were academically and what was available to them in each of the language arts classes in terms of academic scaffolds. She also learned that having two teachers with expertise (one with language arts and one with second language acquisition) was helpful. When interviewed at the start of the school year, Sarah noted the benefit of having both teachers available to confer with ELs:

> …just having two people there…and getting them on the same page…so that's really the purpose and I'd like to see that continue--and that's more, because that's a unique situation because it is a direct support model where I am working with a lot of those students. They're my students as well.

In addition to co-conferring with the AP language arts teacher in the context of the mainstream class, Sarah was also observed conferring individually with ELs in Hillary's class. As the school year progressed, I checked-in with Sarah again to see how useful she was finding individual conferring with ELs.

> I thought it was really helpful to get an insight on where students were struggling and sometimes they would share info and ask for help when they might not advocate if I wasn't there, I noticed, and that continues like within the context of my support class and students who are in that comp class or lit class where students -- oh, yeah I understand, but then they come here all panicked and freaked out and, "I need a conference immediately and I don't understand," this is what was said. So that was helpful to be able to have more info about where students were.

Having the opportunity to confer in AP language arts provided an additional opportunity for ELs to receive support from Sarah. She had an additional opportunity, in the context of the mainstream class, to learn about and understand where students were doing well or struggling with the language arts content.

Both Sarah and the ELs benefited from the arrangement of embedded support in AP

language arts. Observations revealed that the AP language arts teacher also had the opportunity to see conferences with ELs modeled by Sarah during co-conferring. Hillary learned from Sarah by observing the kinds of questions Sarah asked ELs and how she guided the conversations. Sarah often encouraged ELs to think back to the writing they had done in their ESL classes, as well as the literacy strategies they used such as how to write an introductory paragraph or a thesis sentence. By making explicit connections for ELs, Sarah was modeling for Hillary, as well as supporting ELs in the context of their AP language arts class. These co-conferences were observed across the school year and students benefited from this individualized support from both the AP language arts teacher and the ESL teacher. Students were relieved once concepts, assignments, or individual questions were clarified or answered. They also gained an improved sense of caring and support from both of their teachers, which Noddings (2005) argues as essential in the education of diverse learners. Often conferences went beyond the academic task at hand and moved into more personal topics of whether or not they had support at home for their homework or why they had missed school the week before. The students recognized that these adults were there for them both socially and academically. These findings were confirmed with interview data.

Classroom embedded consulting on instructional strategies supportive for ELs. In addition to joint conferring with students, observations revealed that Sarah made on-the-fly suggestions during class about instructional strategies. From Sarah's point of view, the support in this case was not about changing the curriculum but consulting on such topics as support for the reading of texts and the writing process, the pacing of the class, and the suggestion of instructional strategies that provided scaffolds for ELs. Observed conversations after class included such topics as what instructional strategies would be particularly supportive for ELs

(e.g. taking time for students to think before sharing, modeling proper sentence structures).

Hillary talked about the support she received from Sarah. She mentioned that she was happy to have whatever support Sarah could provide concerning the ELs in her class. Hillary pointed out that Sarah was the EL facilitator and so she had specific things in mind that she knew she needed to do (based on her role as EL facilitator). Hillary's classroom was open to Sarah whenever she wanted to come. Sarah's support was embedded in the context of Hillary's work and she appreciated the value of in-the-moment support or short debriefings after class. While she didn't frame this support as learning, observations and interviews confirmed that the support translated into professional learning – that is, changes in Hillary's instructional practice that were responsive to the linguistic needs of ELs. The fact that Hillary did not describe herself as "learning" is an interesting tension that emerged considering the data pointed towards changes in her practice consistent with notions of teacher learning. This finding suggests that teachers like Hillary do not always recognize when they are engaged in "learning" within the context of their everyday work.

Observations of the EL facilitator's work in the AP language arts classes were triangulated through interviews with Hillary. Sarah would sit with ELs in the classroom during a mini-lesson or direct instruction and watch and see what these students were doing or not. Sarah then provided Hillary with feedback and her perceptions of student understanding. Hillary valued these observations noting that she did not always have the ability to process her own observations of students. Sarah provided the support to do this and helped Hillary think about her instruction and EL support. Hillary described how Sarah's observations might impact her thinking for subsequent instruction: "It just tells me like Nadiv's got no clue what's going on and he won't ask, so I need to go check-in with him. It gives me people to target and more specific

things to look for."

Sarah was observed successfully engaging Hillary in thinking about EL supports by beginning with individual students and their needs. Drawing on her observations of individual students and their engagement in class, she was able to encourage Hillary to modify her instruction in ways that she perceived as supportive for the individual ELs in AP language arts. Observations revealed instances in class where this occurred. For example, during one classroom observation Hillary presented a mini-lesson on what was expected with a particular writing assignment and set the students free to work independently. Sarah was watchful of EL behavior and recognized that individual students were having trouble getting started with their work. Sarah checked-in with Hillary and suggested that she pull a few ELs together and help them get started on the assignment. Sarah suggested such strategies as modeling for students what they were supposed to be doing before setting them free to work independently. Hillary then immediately implemented these instructional scaffolds and ELs were able to engage with the content and assignments more quickly.

When interviewed mid-year, Hillary referenced these kinds of instructional scaffolds (e.g., modeling, conferring, use of writing revision guides) that she was encouraged to use by Sarah. She mentioned that she really saw a difference in how ELs responded to this scaffolding. She was eager to continue the use of these scaffolds in her instruction and wished she had implemented them earlier in the school year. The next section highlights the collaborative work of the AP language arts teacher and the EL facilitator in the context of a unit on *Hamlet*.

Content teacher learning in the context of a unit on Hamlet

Another aspect of the embedded support in language arts included collaborating on the planning and implementation of a unit on *Hamlet* in AP literature and composition. Sarah used

the *Hamlet* unit for an action research project that she was completing as a part of her

responsibilities in her EL facilitator role. For her research she collected data that included student

work samples, pre and post interviews with students, and classroom observations. Here she talks

about her involvement with the unit and some of her observations:

> There was a lot of writing. There was a lot of independent writing…the text reading was
> so scaffolded, and then the writing structures were based upon structures that they'd
> already been using, like the nightly essays or the mini essay was a common structure
> throughout the year. So there wasn't confusion around new structures necessarily,
> although in the in-class essay we did do new work around…writing a good introduction
> with rationale after your thesis because that was a new piece that was challenging for
> some students…[we] co-conferred with students during that in-class essay…because they
> were new structures I think it was hard for the students…but in general I would say the
> students struggled less around like the nightly essays and the close reading. They really
> felt pretty confident about it…[they had experiences from this school year]…or the year
> before [to draw on].

Influence of the EL facilitator. Sarah's presence in the AP language arts class influenced

how the unit unfolded. Observations confirmed that through on-the-fly and classroom embedded

support, Sarah influenced how the AP language arts teacher organized instruction. Here Sarah

notes how she pushed Hillary to think about providing more time for students to discuss and talk

about the reading in class, despite there being tension concerning time for teaching the unit.

> During the reading [of *Hamlet*] I just felt this tension around students needing to have
> more discussion and talk about their ideas and respond to the text and not just
> comprehend but think about it and share ideas…I pushed Hillary at that time, let's include,
> what can we do. So we worked out, okay, we'll do 30-minute structured chair time here,
> and then she applied that at the end as well and did another one at the very end kind of on
> her own, after seeing that that was helpful for students, and so that was good. But there
> was that tension of time like she talked about...[making the time for discussion] I felt like
> that was really important.

In terms of writing instruction, Sarah collaborated with the AP language arts teacher on

ways to help students understand how to write a rationale for their *Hamlet* essays. "So we

brainstormed some ways that she could apply that in her comp class [Hillary's other AP

class]…I know she applied that…the next day." This opportunity to collaborate was helpful from

both Hillary and Sarah's perspectives. Sarah noted, "It was helpful just to have time together to

kind of learn together through the process and then think about applications in other classes,

too." Sarah pointed out the benefit of this collaborative work:

> I think that's the richness of being able to co-teach or work together in a class like that
> that so much more comes out of it. You think through things together. And that helped
> me understand a rationale. So when I'm working with students in my first period [ESL
> language arts support class], I was able today to push Adir and Hakim and Maliha…

> *EL engagement and academic success.* At the end of the *Hamlet* unit the two teachers sat

down for a joint interview that focused on the outcomes of the unit. Specifically, the two

responded to questions about EL engagement and success with the content, as well as content

teacher thinking about scaffolds and supports for teaching a complex text to a linguistically

diverse group of students. Here is an excerpt from the interview where Hillary and Sarah are

talking about how they planned and supported ELs during the unit:

> Sarah: "A lot of the unit, we did like the initial overview of what are some supportive
> strategies, and then things emerged like day-to-day."
> Hillary: "And then we would just talk as it happened and it just came out of that."
> Sarah: "Yeah, like oh, what about that or that's good."
> Hillary: "And so it was nice during readings, it's like okay, write down a note. So I'd get
> up and walk around and Sarah would get up and walk around. It was nice to have—and
> then we could also tag-team kids, like if they weren't stepping up, we could both kind of
> bring the hammer down on them."

The changes in instruction often happened in the moment and emerged from their observations

of EL engagement with the content. For example, taking the time to have students participate in a

turn-and-talk to check for understanding. In addition, having both teachers in the classroom

provided additional one-on-one support and students were able to approach either teacher when

they had questions or were not sure of how to proceed.

During the interview, Sarah talked about how there was a lack of time during class to

discuss the reading. They were reading the play aloud during class and that took a full three

weeks to do. As a result, they had little time left to actually discuss the play and its meaning. At one point, at Sarah's urging, mid-way through the unit they decided to have a student-led discussion. Students planned for that by looking at their nightly essays and writing questions that they had for the discussion. They saw the discussion as useful but they found that giving students the opportunity to read the play during class was most supportive for ELs. Reading the play together ensured that the students were reading and it also enabled the teachers the opportunity to scaffold the experience by requiring specific note-taking strategies, annotations of the text, and providing the opportunity for guided reading. Hillary said:

> I see the value of doing a lot more in-class community reading instead of all of the reading at home. So doing just a little more of that, even with the easier plays that we read, we could have done a little more with that [over the school year].

While there was tension between reading the play together versus time for discussion, reading *Hamlet* together had really provided a strong foundation from which the discussion could take place. The teachers felt like the discussion had gone so well because the reading had been so scaffolded. In the past Sarah noticed that ELs did not always participate in class discussions in the same way. It was as if they were afraid to share their opinions because they did not have confidence in understanding the content of the readings. Withholding the discussion part until further into the unit and after scaffolding the reading experience provided the ELs an opportunity to really contribute.

> Sarah: "And I think that's often a problem for ELs, especially when there is discussion, they tend to believe what everyone else says and then maybe they don't believe their own ideas or trust in themselves. I've noticed that. And so maybe it might have benefitted them more to withhold a lot of that discussion initially, and that could have been part of the confidence that was higher around understanding. That glowing. I remember you described it that they were glowing, they were so excited, like Adwin and Maliha."
> Hillary: "Totally. That's awesome. They were glowing. Yup, that confidence. We did a close reading assignment around one of the – most of them picked the monologue that they memorized. And those were good. I mean they were able to read it, interpret it, find

the literary devices in it, talk about the themes, talk about the character. They had to write it in their own words, they had to translate it."

In general, both Hillary and Sarah talked about ELs' increased confidence as positive outcomes related to their collaboration on the *Hamlet* unit and this was observed in the classroom. ELs realized that they could read and discuss something as complex and intimidating as Shakespeare.

Hillary learned some things about teaching ELs in her AP class. She recognized that giving students the opportunity to read and process text during class was helpful not only to their understanding of the text, but also to their confidence in the class overall. She realized how confidence building could have a cumulative effect as the course progressed. Providing the structure where the play was read aloud gave ELs access to participation in discussion mid-way through the reading of the play. In addition, Hillary implemented instructional strategies supportive for ELs such as guided reading, turn-and talks, conferring, modeling, and writing scaffolds suggested by Sarah. She began to truly the value that these pedagogical approaches could have on her students, their motivation and confidence, and the overall tone and progression of the course.

Professional learning through collaboration

Returning to the definition of teacher professional learning, introduced earlier, as changes in teachers' participation in both collegial and classroom contexts with the goal of more effectively meeting the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse students in their mainstream content classes, Hillary had the opportunity to engage in professional learning as a result of her collaboration with Sarah. The learning that took place influenced the AP language arts teacher and observations confirmed that she was able to more effectively meet the needs of her students. Specifically, Sarah's presence in the AP language arts classroom through her EL facilitator role, contributed to the capacity of Hillary to meet the instructional needs of ELs in AP

language arts classes by providing opportunities to model instruction, offer on-the-fly strategies and support, and joint conferring with ELs in the context of the AP language arts classroom.

Sarah noted there were instructional strategies and ideas that she and Hillary discussed during their collaboration on *Hamlet* that made their way into Sarah's other language arts classes and units. These instructional strategies included providing more opportunities for guided reading, guided note-taking, and scaffolded student-led discussions. As a result, the collaborative learning that resulted from the *Hamlet* unit was influential beyond the unit itself. By taking advantage of opportunities to discuss how the unit was unfolding, the language arts teacher was able to make connections and extensions to her teaching practice at large. For instance, Hillary decided to use similar writing scaffolds for writing a rationale in her other AP language arts class. In addition, Hillary better understood the value of having students read challenging texts together in class. She stated that she would continue to take advantage of this strategy in future classes.

Through her collaboration with Sarah on *Hamlet*, Hillary was able to build on her instructional practices and try out new strategies in a supportive environment. Observations and interviews confirmed that Sarah's support throughout the entire unit enabled this sort of instructional experimentation and encouraged Hillary to attempt variations on her current practices. Specifically, Hillary was able to use classroom observations made by the EL facilitator and collaborative discussions of individual ELs as a tool for determining next steps in the unit plan. For example, Sarah was able to identify what particular ELs were struggling with (e.g. identifying literary devices) during class and then share this with Hillary. The opportunity to reflect together after a lesson and discuss individual students and their needs gave Hillary time to see her classroom, her students, and her instruction more clearly.

Nevertheless, the collaboration was not without tension points. Hillary wanted to believe that her instruction was "good for all of her students," and sometimes struggled with the idea of creating opportunities to be linguistically responsive to the needs of ELs. She sometimes resisted calling attention to practices that specifically met the language development needs of ELs in her language arts classes. Sarah was sensitive to this (even if she didn't explicitly come out and say this) and mitigated this tension by focusing Hillary's attention on the needs of individual ELs and by agreeing on the benefit of using the strategies, "with all students." While this framing can be problematic by not necessarily acknowledge the specific linguistic needs of ELs, in this context, Sara was able to draw on her expertise in language acquisition and observation of ELs in the context of the language arts class and provided Hillary with the push she needed to modify instruction, along with specific strategies to implement, while respecting where Hilary was professionally and philosophically at that point in time.

Discussion and implications for practice

Content teachers in today's high schools—those who teach science, mathematics, English/language arts, social studies, and other academic subjects—typically have no special training in working with this student population, have a lot of learning to do, to develop a repertoire of pedagogical skills that make them successful with their ELs (Hakuta 2011). This case study provides an example of a high school that has focused its efforts on the inclusion of ELs, as well as the inclusion of ESL teachers within the literacy curriculum. Through a supportive leadership context and the use of an EL facilitator/ESL teacher in a leadership role, collaborative efforts between the ESL and language arts departments were strengthened. This collaboration and development of a professional community relied on the interdependence of individual and social processes. Sociocultural learning theory (Rogoff et al. 1995, Vygotsky

1978) helps us to understand how targeted professional learning opportunities for the AP language arts teacher and the ongoing, collaborative work of the literacy team created occasions for teacher learning through a social and collaborative process.

In particular, there are several lessons revealed through this case study that provide implications for practice: (1) Provide opportunities for mainstream content teachers to develop their linguistic content knowledge through classroom-embedded professional development, support, and collaboration concerning curriculum and assessment for ELs, (2) Include ESL teachers with the mainstream language arts teachers on a literacy team, and (3) Advocate for principal support of collaboration between ESL and mainstream language arts teachers and a school vision of inclusion when it comes to meeting the needs of ELs. Nevertheless, it is important to be cautious in the interpretation and generalizability of these findings, as this was simply a case study of one high school; however, the insights revealed through this analysis can provide a starting point for additional research in this area, as well as a glimpse into the possibility of the inclusion of both ELs and ESL teachers.

Specifically, in this case study, the AP language arts teacher received classroom-embedded support from the EL facilitator and was able to try out new instructional strategies and practices as a result of their collaboration that she otherwise might not have been exposed to or willing to try out on her own. Honigsfeld and Dove (2010) argue that this type of collaboration can play a substantive role in supporting the instructional needs of ELs. This teacher was provided with opportunities to develop her *linguistic content knowledge*. This form of professional knowledge takes into account the specific language demands necessary for completing an academic task in a content area, while in a format that is accessible. The AP language arts teacher observed in this study provided evidence of using linguistic content

knowledge when she successfully engaged her ELs in challenging content. Furthermore, by including the ESL teachers with the language arts teachers on a literacy team, the mainstream teachers enhanced their capacity for teaching ELs by drawing on a broader network of resources (Peercy and Martin-Beltran 2011). The literacy team relied on this network of resources as they collaborated on curriculum alignment and EL assessment across the language arts and ESL support classes to determine individual EL needs – both academic and social. This attention to individual, as well as collective, EL needs increased students' sense of teacher caring, enabled teachers to track EL progress, and provided EL access to rigorous content classes. Often, if ELs find themselves in rigorous content classes, they (and their teachers) receive little support – a sink or swim model. If the content course is a "sheltered" course, intended exclusively for students learning English, the rigor of the course is often dubious in quality (Dabach and Callahan 2011). The case presented here, supports both ELs and ESL teachers as they are included within the mainstream fabric of the school.

While it is not possible for all high schools to have ESL teachers with release time for serving in EL facilitator roles, this research provides an illustrative example of what took place in one high school, and sheds light on the importance and benefit of merging the ESL and language arts departments. This arrangement of staff holds promise for meeting the literacy needs of ELs across the high school setting, through the collaborative and aligned work of literacy teachers in the building. High schools teachers often resist changes in practice that impact the instruction of their content (McLaughlin and Talbert 2001), unified literacy teams in high schools have the potential to encourage literacy teachers across disciplines to confront and master the new instructional work that their increasingly linguistically diverse school population demands (Cobb et al. 2003).

In contexts where merging the ESL and language arts departments is not feasible, these findings hint at the need to encourage pre-service and practicing teachers of ESL and language arts to recognize the benefits of collaborative work in literacy, even in the absence of formalized school structures. The need to provide supportive structures for all literacy teachers in a building to collaborate is evident. As the key leaders and visionaries of their schools, principals can play a role in this work by supporting inclusive practices for ELs and ESL teachers (Mangin 2007). In addition, pre-service teacher education programs can begin to address this need through coursework that emphasizes the connections between literacy skills in ESL and language arts.

The findings from this study suggest that productive problem solving and collaboration in high schools necessitates a continuum of teacher development and support at multiple levels. This includes teacher preparation, induction, master teachers, and teacher leaders. To develop a culture of collaboration (Russell 2012) across content areas and departments that is inclusive of ELs instructional needs and supportive of collaborative practices in high schools requires intentional professional development opportunities and ongoing, school-embedded support.

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Endnotes

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[1] English learners (ELs) are those students whose primary language is other than English and whose English language skills impair learning in the new language.

[2] The English learner program at VIHS was called the "ELL" (English language learner) program by research participants and by the school and district. There are references throughout the data corpus to the ELL program, classes, students, teachers, and facilitators. For the purposes of this analysis and for consistency of terms, I use the term English learner (EL).

[3] All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

[4] The Advanced Placement (AP) program is a curriculum sponsored by the College Board and offers standardized courses to high school students. The courses are recognized as equivalent to undergraduate courses in college.

[5] The school district, in which VIHS was located, had a history with instructional coaching, specifically with literacy coaching. Many of the teachers at VIHS had the opportunity to participate in this literacy coaching work in the past. The district valued school-based professional development embedded in teachers' daily work.