9-2012

A Culture of Collaboration: Meeting the Instructional Needs of Adolescent English Language Learners

Felice Atesoglu Russell
Kennesaw State University, frussel3@kennesaw.edu

A Culture of Collaboration: Meeting the Instructional Needs of Adolescent English Learners

Felice Atesoglu Russell

TESOL Journal Special Issue on Teacher Collaboration

Accepted Version

April 23, 2012

Abstract

This paper details a study that focused on the supports that enabled an English Language Learner (ELL) facilitator to contribute to a culture of collaboration between the ESL and language arts departments to more effectively meet the instructional needs of English learner (EL) students in one culturally and linguistically diverse high school. Three important findings that emerged from the data were (1) the importance of a supportive leadership context for inclusion of ELs and the ELL facilitator's work, (2) schoolwide supports for ELs, and (3) collaboration and influence of the literacy team. The contributions of the ELL facilitator to the culture of collaboration between the ESL and language arts departments are described. The structures and organization of the school context that contributed to this collaborative work to meet the instructional needs of ELs are also analyzed. The importance of these findings to both research and practice are discussed.

A Culture of Collaboration: Meeting the Instructional Needs of Adolescent English Learners

An increasing number of students whose primary language is not English are populating high school classrooms. These second language learners bring with them a set of special needs for teaching and learning, especially for mainstream content area teachers, who may have little or no specialized training for meeting these needs. While there is not yet extensive empirical work focused on how mainstream content teachers typically teach English learners (ELs) or how they learn to more effectively teach these children in mainstream classrooms, scholars have begun to address the importance of linguistic knowledge for mainstream classroom teachers (Fillmore & Snow, 2000; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008; Walqui, 2000). These scholars argue, mainly on theoretical grounds, that teachers need to provide rigorous, content-rich academic coursework integrated with language development strategies to meet the instructional needs of ELs.

This push for mainstream teachers to teach all students high-level content, including all levels of ELs, creates a challenging instructional environment. Most mainstream teachers have little professional preparation for teaching ELs content, let alone the linguistic knowledge to effectively meet the academic language development demands that ELs require. English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers are often called upon to be the experts in their buildings (Brooks, Adams, & Morita-Mullaney, 2010) and charged with the task of meeting the instructional needs of ELs both in their ESL classes and in mainstream classes. This leadership responsibility of ESL teachers can include developing capacity in mainstream teachers to more effectively meet the instructional needs of ELs in content classrooms.

The role of teacher leadership in developing teacher capacity has the potential to influence mainstream teacher practice in a way that is authentic, embedded in the culture and

context of the school, and ongoing (Cobb, McClain, Lamberg, & Dean, 2003). This paper details

a study that focused on the supports that enabled an English Language Learner (ELL) facilitator[1]

to contribute to a culture of collaboration between the ESL and language arts departments to

meet the instructional needs of ELs in an inclusive high school setting. This analysis highlights

the ELL facilitator's ability to enact teacher leadership through her advocacy for ELs in the

mainstream and her content expertise in second language acquisition within a collaborative

school culture. Building on recent research that highlights the potential of collaboration between

ESL teachers and mainstream teachers to contribute to both the development of teacher

leadership and improved student learning (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010), this analysis focuses on

the following research questions:

1. What supports enable the ELL facilitator to contribute to the development of a culture
   of collaboration to meet the instructional needs of ELs?

2. How does the structure and organization of the school influence this culture of
   collaboration?

In this paper I describe and analyze the supports for the ELL facilitator's work and the

collaboration between the ESL and language arts departments within one high school. I focus on

how this ESL teacher/ELL facilitator enacts leadership to influence the instruction of ELs in

mainstream content classrooms through her collaboration with the ESL and language arts

departments. The structures and organization of the school that influence this collaborative work

are also analyzed. Specifically, the way the school uses common structures for instruction across

---

[1] This school district had a cadre of ELL facilitators. These facilitators were typically ESL
teachers that had .3 release time from their full-time ESL teaching positions, to work with
mainstream teachers with the goal of improving instruction for ELs.

content and classrooms, and how the school is organized to meet the needs of ELs in the

mainstream are used as a framework for understanding collaborative efforts.

<div align="center">Framing the Problem</div>

The approach that I used to analyze this culture of collaboration and the supports that

enabled teacher leadership relies on sociocultural learning theories and takes into account the

interdependence of individual and social processes (Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, &

Goldsmith, 1995; Vygotsky, 1978). In particular, I rely on communities of practice (Wenger,

1998) as a lens for understanding the interactions between the ESL and language arts

departments as these teachers develop mutual shared goals, surrounded by a supportive

leadership context. As teachers and leaders engage with one another with the express purpose of

more effectively meeting the needs of ELs in the mainstream, it is possible that they will make

changes to the instructional practices used in their classrooms and school-level supports for ELs.

It is within the interactions of the participants and their participation in a community with one

another that learning is possible. This learning is influenced by opportunities for the teachers and

leaders to engage with one another in the work of more effectively meeting the needs of ELs

through such things as involvement on a literacy team (with both mainstream language arts and

ESL teachers), collaboration and co-teaching within the context of mainstream classes,

instructional coaching, and whole staff professional development. Teachers and leaders coming

together and working towards the common goal of EL student learning can exemplify a

community of practice.

In addition to this theoretical framing, this analysis draws from three main literature

strands: (1) instructional needs of adolescent ELs, (2) school culture, leadership context, and

collaborative work, and (3) teacher leadership.

Instructional Needs of Adolescent ELs

Concerning the needs of ELs, there is a growing consensus in the literature that the instructional needs of ELs in mainstream content classrooms are different than the needs of native English speakers and attempts to meet these differing needs should be based on knowledge of second language acquisition (Achinstein & Athanases, 2009; de Jong & Harper, 2005; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Lucas et al., 2008). Others point out that the needs of secondary ELs are such that they are engaged in the "double duty" work of learning content and language (Walqui, 2006).

Experts in this area argue (Walqui, 2006) that the use of scaffolding can enable the learning of content and language in the mainstream classroom. Scaffolding strategies such as modeling, bridging, contextualizing, schema building, re-presenting text, and developing metacognition that are integrated into content classrooms can enable adolescent EL students' access to high-level content (Walqui, 2006). Drawing on notions of scaffolding can help provide guidance when it comes to the observation of content teaching with ELs at the high school level, as well as contribute to the growing body of knowledge concerning best practices for the instruction of ELs with the dual goals of language and content. In addition, it is important to acknowledge the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy – instruction that draws from and builds on the strengths of the linguistic and cultural diversity that students bring to schools and classrooms – (Johns, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1995); as well as linguistically responsive pedagogy (Lucas et al., 2008) that calls attention to the specific linguistic needs of ELs and asserts that teaching with a focus on "diversity" is not enough.

While there seems to be a growing consensus on what effective teaching for ELs in content classrooms might look like (e.g. use of scaffolding strategies, culturally responsive

pedagogy, focused on linguistic demands), we know less about how this EL-responsive instruction is enacted in practice with actual mainstream high school teachers. Moreover, we lack a nuanced understanding of *how* content teachers develop their capacity for this type of teaching. Despite this lack of empirical evidence, districts and schools continue to put resources into the implementation of programs and professional development for teachers designed to improve the achievement of ELs in content classes.

School Culture, Leadership Context, and Collaborative Work

In terms of school culture, there is agreement in the literature that recognizes the importance of the leadership context as influential to teachers' collaborative work (Coburn, 2001; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Hargreaves, 1994). In particular, administrators that are able to establish a school culture with a focus on meeting the needs of ELs can set the stage for teachers' collaborative work to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). In collaborative school cultures for ELs, "…a collective vision is developed, philosophical beliefs and values are shared, and a common purpose is articulated" (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010, p. 57). It is important to note that principals can act as a supporting context for instructional leadership work with teachers (Mangin, 2007; Taylor, 2008). How teachers in the building perceive teacher leaders can depend on how their roles are communicated to the staff as a whole and how the principal supports their work. This supporting, or constraining, leadership context can influence the collaborative culture in a building.

Collaborative school cultures can lead to improved academic outcomes for ELs because these environments encourage the ongoing interaction between ESL teachers and mainstream content teachers. Through consistent interaction, ESL teachers and mainstream content teachers

have opportunities to share and plan for ELs curriculum and assessment (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). Teacher engagement in a professional learning community is one possible way of encouraging teacher professional learning to meet the needs of ELs. Current understandings of teacher learning place much emphasis on job-embedded, collaborative professional development opportunities that are informal or formal in nature and with a focus on instructional practice to improve learning outcomes for students (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Research suggests that the collaborative work of teachers that questions traditional teaching methods can contribute to more effective instruction for a diverse student population (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). In most comprehensive high schools today, the stratification of both content teachers and students is the norm. This lack of collaboration across content areas and the tracking of students have the potential to negatively impact linguistic minority students. McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) found that the teachers in the high schools that they studied, "responded to nontraditional students by maintaining conventional routines...changing little in how they relate to their students or organize their subject instruction" (p. 19). This finding has important implications for the way ELs, often considered nontraditional because of their need to learn both content and develop English language proficiency, are likely to be taught in high schools. This reality underscores the need to develop teacher instructional capacity to more effectively meet the needs of their linguistically diverse students.

Teacher Leadership

Finally, in terms of teacher leadership, in recent years the proliferation of individuals in schools with formalized teacher leadership roles with a focus on instructional improvement has grown substantially. Teacher leaders have a potentially powerful role in supporting classroom

teachers' learning. In the accountability environment in which schools currently exist, the

principal is often called upon to play the role of key "instructional leader" (Portin, Knapp,

Alejano, & Marzolf, 2006). Given the demands of the principalship and the deep content

knowledge required, principals often deem it necessary to reconfigure the instructional

leadership work of the school across multiple staff members (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond,

2004).

Many schools and districts espouse a theory of action that these teacher leaders have the

potential to impact teacher practice in classrooms and ultimately student learning (Portin et al.,

2006; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). 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 &

Miller, 2004). Lieberman and Miller (2004) suggest that teacher leaders in formal or informal

positions can be change agents in the face of accountability and new demands. Teacher leaders

can make a difference because they:

> …can lead in reshaping the school day, changing grouping and organizational
>
> practices, ensuring more equitable distribution of resources…implementing curricula
>
> that are sensitive to diverse populations, upholding high standards for all students… (p.
>
> 12)

This implies that tapping into the resource of teacher leadership in schools experiencing an

increase in second language learners, in particular, when the teacher leader is both an advocate of

ELs and content expert in second language acquisition and development, can have positive

implications for both students and teaching.

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. A survey of mainstream teachers in New Jersey who had ELs in their classrooms but no previous training in how to teach them, revealed that mainstream teachers believed that it was the responsibility of ESL teachers to teach ELs both language skills and subject matter, to enable their success in content classes, even if they were only with the ESL teacher for a small portion of their day (Penfield, 1987). Considering the coursework demands for ELs in high schools today, it seems unrealistic to expect ELs to rely solely on their ESL teacher for support. Penfield suggests ESL teachers spend more time collaborating, advising, and consulting with mainstream teachers. Developing school cultures and instructional practices that acknowledge the need for all teachers to take responsibility for ELs will require a shift in teacher thinking. Having a teacher with expertise in the teaching of ELs take on a formalized leadership position where they have the potential to influence school culture and classroom practices has the potential to impact ELs across their school day.

Research Methods

The data used in the analysis for this paper comes from a yearlong qualitative case study of professional learning and the instruction of ELs in one culturally and linguistically diverse, urban high school. Over the 2009-10 school year Vista International High School (VIHS) enrolled about 325 students and was located in an urban school district. 70 percent of the students received free and reduced lunch benefits and 30 percent of the students were identified as ELs. The EL population was linguistically heterogeneous with the majority speaking Spanish and Amharic.

Using purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002), the research setting was selected for several reasons: (1) a district and high school context in which there was increasing linguistic diversity, (2) a high school setting where there was a focus on teacher professional learning, (3) the school was a transformed high school – it had been converted from a comprehensive high school to three, autonomous small schools four years prior to data collection. Transformed high schools are often more conducive to on-going formal and informal interaction among teachers across grade level and department as a result of their size and school culture. In addition, transformed schools frequently rely on teacher leaders as resources to accomplish school improvement goals. Using a transformed high school as a model provided a window into understanding leadership across individuals (Lee & Ready, 2007) and how the leaders of such schools harness leadership from within to meet the needs of their particular student population. While the transformed high school provided a ripe setting for investigation, it also was a limitation in terms of generalizing findings from this study to a comprehensive high school setting.

I utilized case study data including interviews, observations, and documents to illuminate the culture of collaboration present within this teacher community. Interviews were conducted at three time points across the year with teachers from both the ESL and language arts departments, as well as with Sarah, the ELL facilitator. Sarah had the dual role of ESL classroom teacher (.7 of her position) and ELL facilitator (.3 of her position). In her role as ELL facilitator, she was involved in guiding and facilitating teacher professional learning to meet the instructional needs of EL students in mainstream content classes at VIHS. The district's ELL coordinator supervised Sarah's work as an ELL facilitator. At the time of data collection, Sarah had nine years of classroom teaching experience, was one of the founding teachers at VIHS, and was in the process of completing her National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

certification in English as a New Language. The principal, Bill, was also interviewed at the beginning and end of the school year. I observed numerous literacy team meetings comprised of teachers from the ESL and language arts departments, whole staff meetings, as well as informal teacher interactions. The data provided insight into the collaborative work between the ESL and language arts departments, the supports that enabled the ELL facilitator to positively contribute to this effort, and the leadership context of the school. Data analysis was iterative and I used the constant comparative method to help me better understand what I was learning from the field and from participants along the way (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The use of grounded theory guided both my analysis and coding of the data, as well as the development of conclusions that explain my findings and ultimately answer my research questions.

Findings

Three important findings that emerged from the data were (1) the importance of a supportive leadership context for inclusion of ELs and the ELL facilitator's work, (2) schoolwide supports for ELs, and (3) collaboration and influence of the literacy team.

The Importance of a Supportive Leadership Context for Inclusion of ELs and the ELL Facilitator's Work

A supportive leadership context for the inclusion of ELs and the ELL facilitator's work was evident and contributed to teacher collaboration that focused on meeting the needs of ELs. The principal stressed his support of an inclusive school culture:

> We operate from a philosophy of inclusion…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…to continue their progress in learning English.

This leadership support for inclusion translated into a broader school culture that was responsive to meeting the needs of ELs across the school.

ELs were included as much as possible in mainstream content classes. ESL teachers supported the Beginning ELs for half of their instructional class time, amounting to two periods a day. Beginners also took a math class (most of these ELs took Algebra I), as well as an elective class (usually art, physical education, or a computer class). Intermediate and advanced ELs were for the most part in one ESL support class (that focused on supporting language arts) and fully included for the rest of the day in mainstream content classes. 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.

The principal noted that beyond how an ELs class schedule was structured, what was most significant was how well teachers knew their students. He described this as follows:

> I think probably the hallmark of how we do our ESL program is that we just know
> our students really well; our ESL teachers know them extremely well in terms of their
> academic abilities and challenges and their language abilities.

Close relationships between teachers and students were consistently observed across the school setting. The principal also noted that Sarah, the ELL facilitator, played a role in how content teachers accessed information about ELs. Bill also highlighted Sarah's instructional coaching work with several of the content teachers, acknowledging her role in moving teacher practice through introduction of specific strategies and classroom practices to support and benefit ELs in those classes. Bill was purposeful in how he engaged Sarah in her leadership work across the

school. Bill recognized that Sarah's leadership connected to meeting the needs of ELs and

ensured that she was supported in her work. Even before the role of ELL facilitator was created,

he counted on Sarah to be a voice, advocate, and resource for meeting EL academic and social

needs at the school. Observations of interactions and meetings between the principal and the

ELL facilitator confirmed this working relationship between the two leaders: one leading as a

supervisory leader and the other leading from the teacher ranks. The principal was able to engage

Sarah in one community of practice at the supervisory level, while guiding and supporting her

work in a community of practice at the teacher level.

There was recognition by the principal that many content teachers would not be receiving

direct support from Sarah and that she could only do so much with her .3 release time. The

decision was made that during Professional Collaboration Time[2], on the early dismissal Fridays,

the focus for professional development would be on EL and special education inclusion. Bill

pointed out, "So it isn't quite as good as in classroom coaching but it's a start, and I think the

limitation is not that teachers aren't interested, it's that we can only get Sarah to do so much."

I asked Bill about how he supported Sarah in her work as an ELL facilitator and how they

negotiated what her work would be for the .3 of her position.

Sarah and I primarily develop a plan for where that support that she can offer...given the

limited time that she has available to do that, should best be directed…basically teachers

primarily in the core content areas, language arts and social studies originally and now

we've branched into science and math as well where we target that support. So

Sarah…she really develops the plan and she and I discuss it…which teachers she's going

---

[2] During the year of data collection, the district moved to early release on Fridays for the high
schools. This meant that each Friday afternoon students were dismissed early and schools had
the opportunity for Professional Collaboration Time (PCT) for two hours.

to be working with based on what we think ELs should be doing and what

classes they should be in.

The principal seemed to highly respect Sarah and her expertise, encouraging her to take the lead

on developing a service plan for working with content teachers and in content classrooms. The

work from Bill's perspective was a highly collaborative process and this was also observed

during data collection.

The principal and ELL facilitator collaborated to meet the needs of ELs through an

inclusion model and supported the content teachers that worked most closely with the majority of

the ELs in the mainstream. It appeared that there was an intentional effort to map services and

support to where the greatest need existed. Figure 1 is an extracted piece of Sarah's ELL

facilitator plan for the 2009-10 school year. This example illuminates what teacher support

looked like at VIHS in this particular year.

Plan Implementation	Plan is being followed as written
Coaching	Working with Science teachers Liz (Biology) and Matt (Science 1 long-term sub for Katie) on supportive structures and processes; next coaching cycle with Liz will focus on use of academic language to demonstrate thinking/comprehension of science content. Will continue with Matt on supportive structures and general EL support strategies. When Katie returns from maternity leave in late Nov. will continue coaching cycles with her building on last year's work.
Co-teaching	Work in Hillary's AP Comp & AP Lit class once weekly to support & collaborate with Hillary and stay current on student progress and challenges which informs work with some of these ELs in their P. 1 ESL support class & helps monitor those who have been mainstreamed due to senior schedule.
Consulting	Available for consultation with mainstream teachers and ESL colleague
On-going support	Weekly ELL Facilitator meetings offer opportunities to consult and confer with colleagues; Liz & Sarah will participate in district-led Science/ESL Study Group to work on collaborative planning for Biology text use & possible ESL scaffolds.

Figure 1. Excerpt from Sarah's ELL Facilitator Plan for the 2009-10 School Year

The principal saw Sarah as a teacher leader and expert on ELs within the context of

VIHS. He highlighted her ability to work seamlessly with mainstream teachers and with the

language arts teachers as a member of the literacy team. In enacting her role as ELL facilitator,

Sarah was supported by the principal because he recognized her expertise. As a result, Sarah was

able to tailor her role into one that she felt comfortable with and mainstream teachers accepted

her teacher leadership role. These conditions contributed to the ELL facilitator's ability to

influence collaborative work between the ESL and language arts departments.

Schoolwide Supports for ELs

There was recognition across staff members that schoolwide supports for ELs played a

role in meeting ELs individual needs. Meeting the variety of individual EL needs was a focus of

the school staff. The supports put in place at VIHS were strategic in that they focused on

inclusion and meeting the needs of all learners in the context of mainstream content classrooms.

Schoolwide supports for ELs included (1) common organizational and instructional practices,

and (2) aligning ESL program design and supports for teachers. These supports emerged from

the data as significant to the overall experience for ELs in this inclusion context. The principal

reported that the impact of staff sharing common practices and developing an awareness of what

was happening in each other's classrooms contributed to student engagement in content classes

and a positive school culture focused on learning and school in general.

Common organizational and instructional practices. One of the biggest themes that

emerged from the data over the course of the school year was the significance of common

organizational and instructional practices. Teachers ubiquitously talked about structures and

practices that were not only present at VIHS and in their classrooms, but also the fact that these

were helpful for student learning. Many of the participants identified these common structures

and practices as significant to EL success in content classes. It seemed that the longer a teacher

was at the school, the more familiarity and comfort they seemed to have with these common

structures and practices. This was corroborated with observations, interviews, and document

analysis. Once a teacher had the opportunity to go through a school year and become more

familiar with these structures and practices, they would be more likely to point to these

organizational and instructional features as assets to EL learning.

       I observed myriad common instructional strategies and scaffolds in both ESL and

language arts classrooms. I triangulated these observations with teachers' descriptions of

practices supportive for ELs: conferring one-on-one with students, modeling instruction, use of

the meeting area, gradual release of students for independent practice, personal think time, turn

and talk, common reading strategies, common notetaking strategies.

       Aligning ESL program design and supports for teachers. How the EL program was

structured for the 2009-10 school year, and ultimately EL class schedules, directly influenced

teacher classroom embedded support. Resources to support content teachers were funneled

towards supporting critical areas and influenced support in language arts.

       The literacy team had implemented the use of language arts outcomes as a tool for

assessing student growth in language arts and was in their second year of AP (Advanced

Placement) language arts for all. As a result, more ELs participated in the upper level language

arts classes. These intermediate and advanced ELs did not necessarily have an ESL support class

due to their senior year schedules. In an effort to support the AP language arts teacher, Sarah

spent part of her ELL facilitator time embedded in two of the AP language arts classes with the

highest percentage of ELs. Her role in the AP classroom was to support both the ELs and the

language arts teacher.

Developing teacher capacity to meet the instructional needs of ELs in the critical area of AP language arts was strategic. The idea seemed to be that if ELs were going to be in mainstream language arts classes, those content teachers responsible for teaching the majority of ELs needed support. The data did not reveal much resistance to this support. In fact, the content teachers receiving the support all reported an acceptance and thankfulness for the additional resources. The collaborative school culture played a role in how teachers perceived support for instruction.

Collaboration and Influence of the Literacy Team

The literacy team was an influential group of teachers at VIHS. From the beginning of VIHS the language arts and ESL teachers comprised a collaborative group called the literacy team. This organization of teachers was intentional with the goal of meeting ELs' literacy needs. 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 ELs, that we wanted to make sure that the two groups of teachers were
> working in a coordinated and consistent fashion…it's been a lot more effective… [for the
> ESL teachers] to be working with students in their support classes on…things that they're
> learning in their literature and composition classes…it's not just…teaching them how to
> speak and read and write in English, but…teach them how to do those things using the
> content…[from] their literature and composition classes.

The principal noted that this arrangement was an effective and powerful strategy and had led to some tangible effects for ELs at the school. The close collaboration between the ESL teachers and language arts teachers enabled the ESL teachers to really support ELs in the ESL support class in a meaningful way. The ESL support class was not just an add-on but an authentic support class for the mainstream language arts classes.

In terms of how the literacy team planned, the teachers considered the entire spectrum of literacy classes. This included classes from beginning ESL classes to AP language arts classes. It was apparent that the literacy team intentionally scaffolded opportunities in language arts classes to support ELs and this contributed to their success. The ELL facilitator played an instrumental role in this work by consistently focusing the literacy team's efforts squarely on EL needs.

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 class, they were passing the class and finding success. Sarah described the overarching design of the ESL program and how that connected to how successful ELs were in AP language arts:

> …our ELs are very successful in our AP classes. And so it's going to extend beyond what is this powerful teacher doing to differentiate…into how are we scaffolding the entire ESL program in our school and [we] have been doing it for years from each level so that there are common practices and structures and outcomes throughout the LA 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. It seemed that 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 themselves for what they were accomplishing.

When planning for alignment of vocabulary instruction for the next school year across ESL and language arts, 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 ESL classes…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. Observations of literacy team meetings confirmed this focus on ELs. Sarah played an instrumental role in keeping the needs of ELs in the foreground, consistently focusing and refocusing the conversation to include the language development needs of ELs throughout the literacy curriculum. In addition, Sarah was embedded in the AP language arts classes on a weekly basis (see Figure 1) through her ELL facilitator work. As a result of this collaborative work with Sarah, the AP language arts teacher implemented instructional strategies

that she otherwise would not have. Hillary, the AP language arts teacher, described the strategy

of using community reading of the play, *Hamlet*:

> 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].

Sarah remained close to the action of teaching and learning in language arts through both

of her roles: ESL teacher and ELL facilitator. Sarah's work in AP language arts as a support

teacher was mainly to monitor ELs in the context of the content class. Being physically

embedded in the content classroom provided Sarah with all kinds of information including what

content ELs were learning, what instructional needs the ELs had, and what supports would be

helpful for ELs back in the ESL support class.

Regarding her work as an ELL facilitator in the AP language arts classes, Sarah saw her

role as consultative. This was based on her assessment that the AP language arts teacher was

already skilled in meeting the needs of ELs in her content classroom. She described this as

follows:

> So for Hillary…not much coaching really, it's more supporting and consulting as
>
> needed…the purpose is to stay current on the class curriculum in areas of student struggle
>
> and language issues to address in the ESL support class, because I work with some of
>
> those ELs from those classes in one of my support classes, but also there are a number of
>
> students who I need to monitor because they've been mainstreamed but they're still ELs
>
> because we couldn't fit everything in with their senior schedule. And so I wouldn't see
>
> them and be able to monitor their language progress otherwise.

In this way, Sarah stayed informed of the curriculum in both of the AP language arts classes (AP

Composition and AP Literature) and had an opportunity to check-in with her ELs in the context

of their language arts classes. She also was able to observe several of the students outside of her

ESL support class. Hillary agreed that this second set of eyes in the AP language arts classes was

helpful for her instruction:

> … 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.

This type of collaboration was confirmed through observations of the AP language arts teacher

and ELL facilitator in the context of the AP language arts classes. Sarah made it a point to make

on-the-fly suggestions related to scaffolding instruction or meeting the needs of individual ELs

in the class. Through this collaborative work the teachers were able to better support ELs in the

mainstream.

Ultimately, the literacy team was influential in that they led the work of EL inclusion at

VIHS. The collaboration between the ESL and language arts teachers heavily influenced the

literacy work at the school. As a result the literacy team was able to come to Professional

Collaboration Time, grade-alike advisory teams, or cross-content team meetings with a particular

lens and focus on literacy that included a focus on the literacy needs of ELs. This was in part due

to Sarah's teacher leadership and influence on the literacy team. Sarah's classroom embedded

work as an ESL support teacher in language arts classes and her "consultative" work as an ELL

facilitator within the literacy team both played a role in guiding the work of the literacy team

members. This collaborative work across the ESL and language arts departments led to

scaffolded opportunities in language arts that supported ELs and contributed to their academic

success.

The ELL facilitator played an influential role in the literacy team's collaborative work. Her formalized teacher leader role positioned her in a way to infuse a focus on EL needs within the language arts curriculum. Ongoing communication and collaboration between the ESL teachers and language arts teachers contributed to the instructional scaffolds that enhanced EL academic success in language arts.

<div align="center">Conclusions and Importance</div>

In this particular high school, the principal's vision of inclusion for ELs in mainstream content classes set the tone for acceptance of ELs across the school. This inclusive leadership philosophy was coupled with a strong collaboration between the mainstream language arts teachers and the ESL teachers that formed the literacy team. The literacy team was an influential and respected group. These features were critical to providing effective EL services and enabled schoolwide academic supports for ELs, in particular within language arts and ESL classrooms. This culture of collaboration enabled the teachers and leaders at VIHS to work productively with one another to meet the needs of ELs in the mainstream. The culture of the school was one that placed high value on collaborative work. Problems of practice related to inclusion of ELs in the mainstream were addressed through collaborative efforts to better understand the needs of particular EL students and were reinforced by a supportive leadership context (Mangin, 2007). Utilizing communities of practice as a lens helped to unpack the collaborative work that engaged the teacher and leaders by focusing the analysis on this EL-focused community at VIHS and highlights the development of mutual engagement of the participants across the school year.

The ELL facilitator emerged as a critical individual within this culture of collaboration. She seamlessly moved between her collaborative work with the principal, language arts teachers

on the literacy team, and other mainstream content teachers. As an ESL teacher with a

formalized leadership role as an ELL facilitator, she was situated and supported in a way that

enabled her to influence academic supports for ELs and contribute to the staff's feelings of

collective responsibility for meeting the instructional needs of ELs. Through her positioning as

both an ESL teacher and ELL facilitator, she developed into an effective teacher leader as a

result of how those at VIHS perceived her contribution and valued her leadership role. The ELL

facilitator was able to move between multiple communities of practice at VIHS in her work with

various groups of teachers (e.g. literacy team, science teachers) and with the principal.

The findings from this study suggest that teacher leaders, such as the ELL facilitator in

this school, can act as "institutional agents" – that is, as individuals with relatively high

institutional status who are in a position to provide institutional and social support, in addition to

whatever technical support they may offer (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The ELL facilitator did so by

advocating for the needs of ELs across the high school; at the same time that she offered specific

forms of support for addressing the particular instructional needs of ELs in content classrooms.

This notion of teacher leaders acting as "institutional agents" augments how we conceptualize

teacher leadership and its ability to influence teachers' work in the context of increased

accountability and new demands (Lieberman & Miller, 2004)—in this case, the expectation that

mainstream content teachers be responsible for the instruction of ELs in a school and district

with a growing EL population. This advocacy work of ELL facilitators can encourage the entire

school community to be more intentional in how the needs of ELs are met outside of the ESL

classroom.

While the transformed high school provided a ripe setting for understanding this

particular phenomenon, it also was a limitation in terms of generalizing the findings to a

comprehensive high school setting. Specifically, it is possible that in a comprehensive high

school setting it might be more challenging for an ELL facilitator to be so effectively positioned.

What this study does is provide a glimpse into one particular case, where lessons can be learned

concerning what is promising.

As more ELs enter high school content classrooms, the supports that teachers receive

focused on the instruction of these students will play a role in the outcomes for these learners.

This paper builds on the existing scholarship on the instructional needs and challenges of

teaching secondary ELs (Gold, 2006; Walqui, 2000), and illuminates the potential of

collaboration and supports that enable an ELL facilitator to contribute to meeting the needs of

ELs in high schools. This analysis provides rich data and an example of how collaboration

between the ESL and language arts departments, when situated in a supportive school culture

and leadership context, can lead to practices that are receptive to the inclusion of ELs.

Opportunities for ELs to be successful in high school are often limited (Gold, 2006) as a

result of programs and instructional strategies that are incongruous with their needs. The intent

of this research is to provide an example of what is possible as schools and districts grapple with

how to serve this growing student population.

<div align="center">The Author</div>

Felice Atesoglu Russell is an assistant professor of TESOL at Kennesaw State University. Her

research focuses on the professional learning of teachers and the instructional needs of culturally

and linguistically diverse students. She has worked extensively with teachers, teacher leaders,

and administrators and was a middle and high school teacher in Portland and Seattle.

References

Achinstein, B., & Athanases, S. Z. (2009). *Mentoring for equity: Focusing new teachers on English language learners*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Conference.

Brooks, K., Adams, S. R., & Morita-Mullaney, T. (2010). Creating inclusive learning communities for ELL students: Transforming school principals' perspectives. *Theory Into Practice, 49*(2), 145-151.

Cobb, P., McClain, K., Lamberg, T., & Dean, C. (2003). Situating teachers' instructional practices in the institutional setting of the school and district. *Educational Researcher, 32*(13-24).

Coburn, C. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 23*(2), 145-170.

de Jong, E. J., & Harper, C. (2005). Preparing mainstream teachers for English-language learners: Is being a good teacher good enough? *Teacher Education Quarterly, 32*(2), 101-124.

Dove, M. G., & Honigsfeld, A. (2010). ESL Coteaching and Collaboration: Opportunities to Develop Teacher Leadership and Enhance Student Learning. *TESOL Journal, 1*(1), 3-22.

Fillmore, L. W., & Snow, C. E. (2000). *What teachers need to know about language*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine de Gruyter.

Gold, N. (2006). *The high schools English learners need*: The University of California Linguistic

    Minority Research Institute.

Grossman, P., Wineburg, S., & Woolworth, S. (2001). Toward a theory of teacher community.

    Teachers College Record, 103(6), 942-1012.

Hargreaves, A. (1994). Collaboration and contrived collegiality *Changing teacher, changing*

    times: Teachers' work and culture in a postmodern age. New York: Teachers College

    Press.

Harper, C., & de Jong, E. J. (2004). Misconceptions about teaching English language learners.

    Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 48(2), 152-162.

Honigsfeld, A., & Dove, M. G. (2010). *Collaboration and co-teaching: Strategies for English*

    learners. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Johns, J. (2009). *Abriendo caminos: Peer coaching of culturally relevant pedagogy for teachers*

    of adolescent emergent bilinguals. Paper presented at the American Educational Research

    Association.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant

    pedagogy. *Theory into Practice, 34*(3), 159-165.

Lee, V., & Ready, D. (2007). *Schools within schools: Possibilities and pitfalls of high school*

    reform. New York: Teachers College Press.

Lieberman, A., & Miller, L. (2004). *Teacher Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lucas, T., Villegas, A. M., & Freedson-Gonzalez, M. (2008). Linguistically responsive teacher

    education: Preparing classroom teachers to teach Englih language learners. *Journal of*

    Teacher Education, 59(4), 361-373.

Mangin, M. M. (2007). Facilitating elementary principals' support for instructional teacher
leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 43*(3), 319-357.

McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2001). *Professional communities and the work of high
school teaching*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Penfield, J. (1987). ESL: The regular classroom teacher's perspective. *TESOL Quarterly, 21*(1),
21-39.

Portin, B. S., Knapp, M. S., Alejano, C. R., & Marzolf, E. (2006). *Roles, responsibility, and
authority of school leaders: Patterns in current research, theory, and practice*. Seattle,
WA: University of Washington Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy and The
Wallace Foundation.

Rogoff, B., Baker-Sennett, J., Lacasa, P., & Goldsmith, D. (1995). Development through
participation in sociocultural activity. *New Directions for Child Development, 67*, 45-65.

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. (2004). Theory of leadership practice: A distributed
perspective. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36*(1), 3-34.

Stanton-Salazar, R. D. (2011). A social capital framework for the study of institutional agents
and their role in the empowerment of low-status students and youth. *Youth Society, 43*(3),
1066-1109.

Taylor, J. E. (2008). Instructional coaching: The state of the art. In M. M. Mangin & S. R.
Stoelinga (Eds.), *Effective teacher leadership: Using research to inform and reform* (pp.
10-35). New York: Teachers College Press.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. In M. Cole, V. John-
Steiner, S. Scribner & E. Souberman (Eds.), *Mind in society* (pp. 79-91). Cambridge,
MA: Harvard.

Walqui, A. (2000). *Access and engagement: Program design and instructional approaches for immigrant students in secondary school*. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics.

Walqui, A. (2006). Scaffolding instruction for English language learners: A conceptual framework *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, 9*(2), 159-180.

Wei, R. C., Darling-Hammond, L., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). *Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the U.S. and abroad*. Dallas, TX: National Staff Development Council.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

York-Barr, J., & Duke, K. (2004). What do we know about teacher leadership? Findings from two decades of scholarship. *Review of Research in Education, 74*(3), 255-316.