



**“Can I Ask a Question?”
ESOL and Mainstream Teachers Engaging
in Distributed and Distributive Learning
to Support English Language Learners’
Text Comprehension**

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The population of U.S. schools has shifted dramatically in the past two decades to include many more linguistically and culturally diverse learners (Calderón, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011), while the teacher population has remained largely White and monolingual, with limited connections to immigrant communities (Howard, 2006). Among the many changes diverse learners have brought to U.S. schools is the increased need for the teaching force to understand how to teach English language learners (ELLs) effectively (de Jong & Harper, 2005). One solution to supporting ELLs has been an increase in English to speakers of other languages (ESOL) specialists “plugging in” to grade-level mainstream classrooms (de Jong, Harper, & Coady, 2013; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010) so that they can benefit from

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interactions with English-dominant peers as well as content instruction in English (Frattura & Capper, 2007). The inclusion of ELLs and ESOL specialists in mainstream classrooms is a relatively new phenomenon, and many researchers, policy makers, and practitioners are interested in how collaborating teachers learn and work in a variety of settings.

The goal of this qualitative study was to explore teacher learning through the co-construction of specialized knowledge and practices between ESOL specialists and mainstream teachers as they collaboratively planned, taught, and reflected on lessons. Although previous research has demonstrated that collaborative interactions among teachers can provide a meaningful forum for professional growth and development (e.g., Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2014; Peercy, Martin-Beltrán, Silverman, & Daniel, 2015; Zellermyer & Tabak, 2006), relatively little is known about the kinds of collaborative interactions teachers experience and the ways in which these interactions contribute to change in teachers’ practices (Little, 2002, 2003; Webster-Wright, 2009). Because recent studies of teachers in U.S. classrooms have revealed that many new and preservice mainstream teachers admit to feeling inadequately prepared to teach ELLs (Durgunođlu & Hughes, 2010; Molle, 2013), it is critical that teacher education and other professional development activities are built on a better understanding of how to support collaborative learning and work between classroom teachers of ELLs and ESOL specialists. Furthermore, increased linguistic demands generated by new content standards, such as the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), make it even more critical for all teachers to be well positioned to support ELLs across content areas.

The data we examine here emerged from the second year of a 3-year federally funded cross-age peer tutoring (CAPT) reading intervention designed to support vocabulary development and reading comprehension of ELL kindergartners and fourth graders who worked in little buddy–big buddy pairs to read researcher-created texts with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics themes. In this study, we explore the following research questions: How did elementary classroom teachers and ESOL specialists in a CAPT reading intervention study engage in collaborative planning, teaching, and debriefing to support students’ comprehension of texts? How did the teachers’ collaboration affect the ways the teachers both talked about and engaged in their practices with ELLs?

Conceptual Framework

As the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010) takes effect in classrooms across much of the United States, there has been a shift to emphasizing explicit vocabulary instruction and increased use of informational texts. For ELLs, the challenges of working with text are even greater because of the cognitive and linguistic demands inherent in reading in another language, in which one’s familiarity

with vocabulary, syntax, and relevant background knowledge may be less accessible, creating difficulty in ELLs' reading comprehension (e.g., Lesaux, Koda, Siegel, & Shanahan, 2006). However, if teachers know how to support ELLs through reading strategy instruction, first language (L1) support, and culturally responsive instruction, ELLs are more successful at comprehension and learning from texts (Calderón et al., 2011; Carrell, Pharis, & Liberto, 1989; Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). We argue that collaborative work between grade-level classroom teachers and ESOL specialists can support teachers in teaching linguistically demanding texts to ELLs.

This study is grounded in sociocultural theory (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1991), which has conceptualized learning as dynamic activity co-constructed across individuals (Gee, 2012; Johnson & Golombek, 2003; Lave, 1996; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This conceptualization of learning is often referred to as "distributed" learning (Johnson, 2006, 2009; Putnam & Borko, 2000), because the process of internalizing new knowledge is not an individual activity but rather a social one that occurs as learners interact with one another and other artifacts within particular social, cultural, and historical contexts. From this perspective, learning is distributed because it is "stretched across" (Lave, 1988, p. 1) multiple people, texts, and tools. Although previous research has framed and examined teacher learning as *distributed* (e.g., Elbaz-Luwisch & Orland-Barak, 2013; Zeller Mayer & Tabak, 2006), it has not previously examined teacher learning as *distributive*, which we argue expands our understanding of learning to the ways that opportunities for learning are connected across multiple settings and actors.

Greene, Dillon, and Crynes (2003) are among few scholars who discuss the concept of distributive learning, which they define as involving the use of technology "to provide instruction in a manner that does not require the learner to be present with an instructor" (p. 190). Although we do not focus on the use of technology, we draw on this construct to conceptualize sharing ideas among and across multiple participants in ways that create new affordances for learning. By distributive, we mean learning can occur in ways that are not limited to time and space boundaries. In other words, Teacher A's suggestion may impact Teacher B's practices not only once but on multiple occasions, and not limited only to when Teachers A and B interact. Additionally, Teacher B might tell Teacher C about what she discussed with Teacher A, which then impacts Teacher C's practices, although Teacher C never interacted with Teacher A about that topic directly. Drawing on the collaborative interactions of teachers in their coplanning and coteaching as they participated in this study, we illustrate instances of teachers' distributed and distributive learning. Specifically, we explored how the teachers in this study appropriated opportunities to reconsider their practices as they coplanned, cotaught, and debriefed with colleagues about the experiences they shared supporting ELLs' literacy development as they participated in the CAPT study.

Methodology

Context of the Study

The data examined here were part of a larger 3-year, federally funded intervention study in which we explored both student and teacher learning as they participated in a CAPT program aimed at strengthening the vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension skills of kindergartners (“little buddies”; LBs) and fourth graders (“big buddies”; BBs) in three elementary schools with large ELL populations in a busy metropolitan area in the mid-Atlantic United States. This study focused on kindergarten and fourth grade because they are two critical transition years in literacy development (August & Shanahan, 2006), and the age difference between these two grades is ideal for cross-age learning. In kindergarten, children must establish a foundation of background knowledge of vocabulary, which is crucial for early literacy development (Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007). In fourth grade, students move from learning to read to reading to learn, and many students experience decreased motivation to read as they encounter more difficulty in text and may struggle academically (Chall, 1996; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990).

The CAPT program was taught during the regular English language arts (ELA) block and was supplementary to the students’ regular ELA curricula. The research team developed eight text-based lesson sets, which included a mixture of narrative and expository texts centered around the themes of caring for the environment and measurement.

Lesson types. The CAPT program consisted of two types of lessons (see Table 2 for a summary of lesson topics, text types, and focal vocabulary words), teacher-led lessons and buddy-led lessons, which the research team designed based on previous work in the following areas: (a) work that shows the positive impact of peer interaction on ELLs’ vocabulary development and reading comprehension (Martin-Beltrán, Tigert, Peercy, Silverman, & Guthrie, 2014; Topping, Peter, Stephen, & Whale, 2004; Wright & Cleary, 2006); (b) research that demonstrates ELLs’ growth in learning through a variety of pedagogical supports, including opportunities to negotiate meaning in L1² (Hite & Evans, 2006; Samway & McKeon, 1999), repeating and paraphrasing (Long, 1996), simplifying syntax (Bailey & Butler, 2003), using nonverbal supports (Echevarría, Powers, & Short, 2006; Gersten & Geva, 2003), and defining vocabulary (Bailey & Butler, 2003); and (c) scholarship that has provided a rationale for the importance of supporting vocabulary development and reading comprehension for ELLs (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2008; Gersten et al., 2007), who benefit from additional support related to comprehension of content. The curriculum for both lesson types provided teachers with a script that they could follow and adapt as they engaged students in the CAPT lessons.

Teaching vocabulary and reading comprehension. Members of the research team used *Words Worth Teaching* (Biemiller, 2010) and *The Educator’s Word Fre-*

quency Guide (Zeno, Ivens, Millard, & Duvvuri, 1995) to choose four focal words for each text. In teacher-led lessons, kindergarten and fourth-grade students learned the definitions of the four focal words and teachers prepared them for their cross-age buddy lessons. The intent of fourth-grade teacher-led lessons was to explicitly teach focal vocabulary, to help BBs comprehend the story, and to engage BBs in practicing how to use vocabulary and comprehension strategies with their LBs in the cross-age lesson. The purpose of the kindergarten teacher-led lessons was to provide LBs with exposure to the focal vocabulary and main ideas in the texts prior to the time they spent engaging in paired reading with their BBs.

When K–4 pairs came together in buddy-led lessons, BBs read aloud to LBs using the vocabulary and comprehension strategies developed within the program. After reading the text, cross-age pairs engaged in various activities and games to apply what they had read in the text. In both lesson types, ESOL specialists frequently plugged in with their mainstream classroom colleagues to provide additional instruction and support during lessons.

Teacher participation. In this qualitative study, we focus on the opportunities for teacher learning through ESOL–mainstream teacher collaboration that occurred at one elementary school, Kennedy Elementary (all names are pseudonyms), in the second year of the intervention, 2012–2013. Eleven educators from Kennedy Elementary participated in the study (see Table 1). As we explain in the following, in this study, we focused on the collaborative interactions of two fourth-grade teachers with their ESOL counterparts.

Table 1
Participating Teachers

Name	Role
Bella	Fourth Grade
Carmen	Paraprofessional
Catherine	Kindergarten
Geoff	Kindergarten
Helen	Kindergarten
Kelly	ESOL Specialist
Kyleen	ESOL Specialist
Roberta	Special Educator
Stephanie	ESOL Specialist
Tamara	Fourth Grade
Ursula	Paraprofessional

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection included video and audio data from CAPT teacher meetings and lessons, field notes from observations of CAPT lessons, and audio-recorded interviews with teachers. We began our examination of Kennedy teachers’ learning by engaging in interpretive analysis (Creswell, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994) of observational field notes and transcripts from video and audio data from five 60-minute weekly teacher meetings led by the first author, which were held throughout the 2-month duration of the CAPT intervention.

The purpose of the teacher meetings was multidimensional and included providing support to teachers regarding how to implement the curriculum during intervention, gaining their insights about how their students were interacting with and learning from the curriculum, and asking them about their own learning experiences as they worked with the curriculum. During these meetings, teachers discussed strategies, challenges, opportunities, and experiences teaching the texts from the CAPT intervention. We examined and transcribed 375 minutes of video from the five teacher meetings, recursively moving between transcripts and video data as we coded.

After our initial examination of the data from teacher meetings, we examined field notes from the full data set of 42³ teacher-led lessons at Kennedy (see Table 2) and found that fourth-grade teacher-led lessons contained more rich examples of teachers’ collaborative interactions, because the kindergarten ESOL specialist was not present during the teacher-led kindergarten lessons. Furthermore, because of the emphasis in fourth-grade teacher-led lessons on preparing the BBs to lead LBs through the texts, fourth-grade teacher-led lessons provided greater evidence of how teachers supported one another and students in working with the texts. We therefore further narrowed the pool of teacher-led lessons to the 21 fourth-grade lessons in the data set and used field notes to identify five lessons that evidenced a high degree of collaboration between teachers during the lesson or that demonstrated how collaboration had an impact on instruction. We then closely analyzed 338 minutes of video data from these lessons, using audio and field note data from the lessons as supporting evidence, returning iteratively to each of the data sources. For the purposes of more deeply understanding teachers’ perspectives on literacy and language learning, we drew on one additional data source: interview data from audio-recorded and transcribed 45- to 60-minute interviews with three of the focal teachers (Bella, Tamara, and Stephanie), conducted near the end of the CAPT intervention.

We used the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to identify themes and generate codes for the data. Initially, members of the research team worked independently to explore the data. We then shared our initial interpretations with one another, searching for similarities and differences in our interpretations, agreeing on major themes and initial codes, and then returning to the data set to

Table 2
Overview of CAPT Lessons and Teacher Meetings

<u>Event</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Teachers Present</u>		<u>Text Type</u>		<u>Focal Words</u>
		<u>Tamara's Classroom</u>	<u>Bella's Classroom</u>	<u>Narrative</u>	<u>Expository</u>	
Lesson 0A	Intro to CAPT Program	T	B	X		N/A
Lesson 1A ¹	Consequences of Littering	T + S	B	X		Debris, Litter, Discard, Recycle
Lesson 1B		T	B			
Lesson 2A	Steps to Care for the Environment	T	B	X		Complex, Destroy, Create, Atmosphere
Teacher Meeting 1	Planning/Debrief	T, S, B		N/A	N/A	N/A
Lesson 2B	Steps to Care for the Environment	T + S	B + S	X		Complex, Destroy, Create, Atmosphere
Lesson 3A	What Happens to Our Trash	T	B		X	Contaminate, Empty, Practical, Result
Lesson 3B		R (filling in) ²	B			
Lesson 4A	Bath Day	T + S	B + S		X	Protect, Produce, Responsible, Resource
Teacher Meeting 2	Planning/Debrief	T, S, B		N/A	N/A	N/A
Lesson 4B	Bath Day	T	T		X	Protect, Produce, Responsible, Resource
Lesson 5A	Measuring and Fashion	T	B	X		Measurement, Pattern, Apparel, Style
Lesson 5B		T + S	B			
Lesson 6A	Types of Measurement	T	B		X	Heavy, Volume, Equivalent, Exact
Teacher Meeting 3	Planning/Debrief	T, S, B		N/A	N/A	N/A
Lesson 6B	Types of Measurement	T + S			X	Heavy, Volume, Equivalent, Exact
Lesson 7A	Measuring and Construction	T	B	X		Construct, Segment, Gigantic, Modify
Lesson 7B		S (filling in)	B			
Teacher Meeting 4	Planning/Debrief	T, S, B		N/A	N/A	N/A
Lesson 8A	Measurement and Science Processes	R (filling in)	B	X		Procedure, Conclude, Determine, Decide
Lesson 8B		R (filling in)	R (filling in)			
Teacher Meeting 5	Planning/Debrief	T, S, B		N/A	N/A	N/A

¹ Lessons are indicated by number and letter: number indicates the text used, and letter indicates whether the lesson was teacher led (A) or buddy led (B).

² Occasionally, focal teachers were unavailable because of data meetings, Individualized Educational Plan meetings, professional development, illness, and so forth, during scheduled lesson times. In these cases, either Stephanie, the ESOL specialist (denoted by “S [filling in]”), or a member of the research team (denoted by “R [filling in]”) taught the lesson in place of the classroom teacher.

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explore the data further. Through this iterative process, we eventually identified the following codes: *difficulties with text*, *supporting student learning*, *change in practice*, and *distributive learning*, which we used to code the data. As we detail in the following, we found that teachers frequently engaged in collaborative interactions to determine how to support student learning in the CAPT program, and their collaborative efforts shaped the ways in which they engaged in practice.

Findings

Analysis of teachers’ interactions in planning meetings and lessons revealed two major themes in the data: (a) teachers engaged in collaborative efforts to determine how to support student learning and (b) teachers’ collaboration shaped how they engaged in their practices. With respect to the first theme, video, audio, and field note data from planning meetings revealed that the teachers built a shared understanding of how to work with the CAPT texts by identifying what students struggled with. This often meant that the ESOL specialists highlighted for their colleagues the language demands inherent in the CAPT texts that were challenging for ELLs, and this then moved teachers into discussions about how to support students in their work with the texts. Our close analysis of five CAPT lessons demonstrated that teachers’ collaborative conversations also shaped the ways in which teachers *enacted* their practices.

Teachers’ Collaborative Discussions

Identifying students’ difficulties with CAPT texts. In the first teacher meeting that occurred during lesson implementation, teachers began by discussing the second teacher-led lesson, which they had all taught earlier in the day. In Excerpt 1, Stephanie, Geoff, Bella, and Tamara work together to build a shared understanding of what had been challenging for BBs during the cross-age lesson.

Excerpt 1

STEPHANIE (ESOL): Well, I was just listening to some of [the BBs] today as they read, and they misread [when practicing with each other]. . . . I’m just wondering if they should have a little more practice just reading the book before they present it [to LBs]? . . . And then also they’re not sure about what’s the most important part.

BELLA (4TH): Yeah, yeah . . .

TAMARA (4TH): When we were talking about “what’s the most important part” [addressing the research team members], I would say for the future to [change the “What’s the most important part?” comprehension question and] maybe come up with three solid questions for comprehension. . . . Instead of saying, “What’s important?” saying, “Well, what’s going on here?”

BELLA (4TH): You narrow it down [*makes tapering motion with hands*].

TAMARA (4TH): Yeah, exactly, narrowing it down because I think they—that question [what is the most important part] is too heavy for them and so they're like, "Okay, it's" [*makes broad, sweeping motion with her arms*]*—you know.*

GEOFF (K): Free-for-all.

TAMARA (4TH): Yeah, free-for-all. Exactly.

STEPHANIE (ESOL): Really? I feel like they pick up—they just pick some *minor detail* [about what they have read and say that it is the most important part].

BELLA (4TH): Right.

GEOFF (K): Right, and that's really the challenging part, is to distinguish between—

BELLA (4TH): The big picture, the big idea.

GEOFF (K): —what is important and what is "OK, that's nice."

BELLA (4TH), *affirming and building on Geoff's comment about "that's nice"*: That's interesting, but it's not important.

GEOFF (K): Right . . .

TAMARA (4TH): I guess I'm thinking, too, like with the [BBs] that Stephanie is talking about that can barely even read this. When they're saying, "Well, what's important?" they don't know what the answer should be. It's like, just thinking of maybe some [more specific] questions that they can ask that will help guide them . . .

STEPHANIE (ESOL): They don't know how to generalize. They can't say "[The main character] was littering, he was not taking care of the environment . . ."

RESEARCHER: Do you mean to ask them some specific questions that are very specific to the text itself?

BELLA (4TH): Yes, [specific] to the text, text-dependent questions. [*To Tamara and Stephanie*] Is that what you're asking? Text-dependent—

STEPHANIE (ESOL): Well, I think those would help with the kids who are struggling with reading [comprehension] . . . maybe if they spend more time with the text, they'll do better when they have to teach it to their little buddies . . . then maybe as the program progresses, you can sort of back away from asking so many questions so that they become more independent. (Teacher Meeting 1)

In this example, Stephanie, the ESOL specialist, began by noting that students were having a difficult time using the "What's the most important part?" prompt that was intended to support BBs' summarizing what they had read with their LBs every few pages in the text, and she noted from her perspective as a language specialist that students needed more time with the text. Indeed, previous studies have

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documented the relationship between time spent with texts and general reading ability as well as comprehension for all readers (e.g., Brenner & Hiebert, 2010). For ELLs in particular, additional time spent with text, especially through multiple rereadings, has been linked with improved decoding, fluency, and comprehension (e.g., Blum et al., 1995). This was a theme to which Stephanie returned often, noting in an interview with the first author that when students were given more opportunities to engage deeply with text content, “they all do so much better. They do so much better when they have time to reread something. It’s amazing, the difference it makes.”

The fourth-grade classroom teachers, Tamara and Bella, agreed with Stephanie’s assertion that students were having a difficult time summarizing the text and suggested that perhaps text-specific comprehension questions would better support students, noting (along with Geoff) that the CAPT summarizing strategy question “What’s important?” might be too open-ended for students, particularly struggling readers (“can barely even read this”). Stephanie built on their conversation, first noting that one likely reason that students had a difficult time answering the prompt “What’s the most important part?” was that generalization about text was a challenging skill for students. She also agreed that more specific questions would be helpful for struggling readers and stated that over time, perhaps students would need less specific questions.

At a planning meeting a week later, the teachers continued to show concern about the fourth graders’ comprehension of the texts and ability to identify the main idea (or “most important part”; Excerpt 2). Earlier that day, the BBs and LBs had completed their fourth teacher-led lesson, preparing for their corresponding buddy-led lesson the next day.

Excerpt 2

BELLA (4TH): They’re [the fourth graders in her class] not grasping it. They’re not grasping the big picture. . . . I had to go back to the heading [and remind them that] the heading is a clue as to what that section is gonna be about. They were focusing on one little detail . . . they’re not grasping that the big idea is within all three pages. They’re just focusing on one thing . . .

TAMARA (4TH): Yeah, the big picture. . . . [If they are supposed to read] pages 1 to 3, they just look at page 3 [to state the main idea] . . . then it’s like, [students decide] “I’m gonna pick something from this page” instead of going back and really looking at pages 1, 2, and 3.

STEPHANIE (ESOL): That’s because they don’t read all the words. They don’t—they skip over so many words when they’re reading, and I think they just miss the general—

TAMARA (4TH): They skipped all the other words and they’re like, “Oh, yeah, [the answer is] 1, then.” They just, like you [looks at Stephanie] said, they don’t read. (Teacher Meeting 2)

In Excerpt 2, Bella and Tamara continued to express frustration with BBs' ongoing struggle to comprehend the text and generate the main idea. As in Excerpt 1, Stephanie brought a language-based cause to students' struggle to her colleagues' attention, stating that she had noticed that the students were not reading all the words in the text. Building on Stephanie's identification of the problem, Tamara affirmed Stephanie's assertion by providing an example from her classroom in which her students jumped to an incorrect conclusion and attributed this to students skipping over words as they read.

Taking a closer look at Excerpts 1 and 2, Bella, Tamara, and Geoff (all classroom teachers) identified a problem with students' lack of comprehension of the content, and Stephanie, an ESOL specialist, added another dimension to this by identifying specific language-based reasons that BBs were not comprehending the texts (they did not have enough time with the texts, they misread, they chose minor details as important, they did not read all the words, they did not know how to generalize). Stephanie, who was bilingual herself (though not in Spanish, the L1 of most of Kennedy's ELLs) and had a master's degree in TESOL and doctoral studies toward a world languages degree, drew on her pedagogical language knowledge (e.g., Bunch, 2013; Galguera, 2011) to highlight the kinds of language demands that texts presented for ELLs, as illustrated by her following comment in an interview:

If they're gonna read something, you have to invest a lot of time into it. . . . What I always try to do with content, I mean, with anything we read, is we read it very carefully and we read it several times, and then I check for basic understanding. . . . You just have to spend a lot of time on one text if you're going to use something that's linguistically demanding and the content is something they know nothing about.

Stephanie also noted that another important aspect of students' challenges with literacy demands both within and beyond CAPT was related to the context for literacy instruction at Kennedy. She felt that the kind of literacy instruction that ELLs at Kennedy usually received did not adequately support them in understanding content because it focused heavily on skills they would use when taking high-stakes accountability tests:

They just practice how to answer questions, which, you know, they need to know how to answer the [test] questions, but it doesn't help them improve their language skills. . . . Nothing is ever connected. I don't see that happening in the classroom where they combine different things that they are doing, and they create something with it, so that the kids are reusing the same words, practicing a certain skill, you know, that doesn't seem to happen.

Consequently, Stephanie said, students did not have opportunities to sharpen the language skills that would allow them to deeply engage with content.

Stephanie's perspective on the challenges that texts presented for ELLs was evident in many of her interactions with her colleagues. In Excerpt 3, Bella returns to the issue of students' comprehension, and Stephanie and Kyleen add to Bella's

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comments, characterizing students’ struggle with identifying the main idea as emerging from a more basic struggle to first decode the challenging texts they were reading, which was also leading students to skip over words and affecting their comprehension.

Excerpt 3

BELLA (4TH): Buddies need more support as far as understanding the big picture. Even with reading it once [all the way] through, I don’t think they’re grasping the big [idea].

STEPHANIE (ESOL): I think they’re still struggling with just decoding.

BELLA (4TH), *emphatically*: Yes [*nodding*].

STEPHANIE (ESOL): All their effort is going into decoding.

KYLEEN (ESOL): I agree with the decoding thing, because some of the words . . . they can’t decode it, the big buddies. Then they just sort of guess anything and just say it, and then they move on. Of course, the little buddy doesn’t get the word either because the big buddy just sort of skipped over this. Unless you’re there, when they get to that word and correct them on it, or help them to try to pronounce it better or just give it to them, then they just skip right over it. (Teacher Meeting 2)

Here Bella stated that students needed “more support” to aid their comprehension, and Stephanie and Kyleen added nuance to students’ comprehension difficulties. Aware of the additional language demands that reading texts in English presents for ELLs, they noted that students needed more time with the texts so that they could first meet the basic demands of decoding them. This co-construction about students’ difficulties with the texts created an opportunity for shared understanding among the teachers regarding the kinds of supports students needed for working with challenging texts, which we examine next.

Supporting student learning from CAPT texts. Teachers’ conversations in which they identified students’ struggles with the CAPT texts led to conversations about *how* to support student learning. In Excerpt 4, Stephanie took the teachers’ ongoing discussion about students lacking comprehension of text content (“the big idea”) a step further into discussion of how to assist students, returning to a suggestion she had made the previous week about students’ need for extended time and practice with a text.

Excerpt 4

STEPHANIE (ESOL): If I had to teach that [text], I would spend a lot more time with the text. I would do activities with the text where they have to find information or answer questions. We’ve noticed with the fourth graders, when we do spend a significant amount of time with the text, and we read it several times, and we do *many* different things with it, then they begin to feel confident and they can

talk about what they've read. It just takes them a while. It takes time to process.
(Teacher Meeting 2)

The notion that struggling readers needed more time with the text resurfaced again at a later meeting as the teachers thoughtfully considered the balance of student and teacher talk in the lesson and struggled with how to give the fourth-grade students more responsibility in the buddy lessons, while also adequately supporting their comprehension.

Excerpt 5

BELLA (4TH): Well . . . I think that [lessons are] too much teacher led. Too much teacher talk creates a dependency that's not good for them, and the objective is [the buddy-led lessons] will be student led and not teacher led. We [are supposed to] become the facilitators. We just pop in when we're needed.

STEPHANIE (ESOL): That's great, but the problem is—I still think that some kids are doing incredibly well—but the kids who are struggling readers, they really do need more support because as much as they struggle, if they can't read the work, they will not be able to do the work. I think some of our kids need a lot more support because when they're reading to their [little] buddies they skip over words, they say the wrong word, and it doesn't improve because they're reading [the text] one time, and then you're done with the buddy lesson and you're on to something different. I think from that perspective, they should spend more time with whatever text they're reading.

TAMARA (4TH): That's what's hard about it. Where is that happy medium [for teacher support of students in the lesson]? . . . For this population [ELLs], it's kind of like they might need a little more support . . .

STEPHANIE (ESOL): As ESL [English as a second language] teachers, we've seen the kids who've been left alone to struggle, and they're the ones who will not test out of ESL because—

KELLY (ESOL): Yeah, if the material is not differentiated so that they can't access the content and learn the vocabulary and the concepts, then they're not going to, but if they have the articles or the books that are in the lower level, or if they have repeated readings over and over [that supports their comprehension]. If it's too hard, it's just too hard, and they don't get it. (Teacher Meeting 4)

In Excerpt 5, Bella raised a concern about too much teacher talk during buddy lessons, and Tamara noted that she also struggled with how to balance her support of fourth-grade BBs with ceding control to students in the buddy-led lessons. Their ESOL colleagues responded with specific issues that could be problematic with giving too much control to BBs. Stephanie noted that struggling readers need more time with the text as well as the types of problems that insufficient teacher support can create (long-term ESOL status). Kelly added to the conversation about teaching challenging texts by suggesting specific instructional strategies for ELLs, such as differentiation, reducing the difficulty of the texts, and providing additional time with the texts.

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Another strategy for supporting student learning that emerged in teacher interaction was L1 support. For instance, Tamara, who had no prior experience teaching ELLs, told her colleagues about the benefits she was discovering for some buddies when they supported one another in Spanish:

Excerpt 6

TAMARA (4TH): One of my students came to me today, Juanita. Her little [buddy] is in Ms. [A's] class and she's a newcomer and very shy. I thought Juanita was a great buddy for [the newcomer] because Juanita can speak Spanish, and she's an excellent student. She [told me], "My [little] buddy's starting to come around." [Laughs] I said, "Good!" She was like, "Because I was speaking to her in Spanish, and I was asking her some questions," and whatever. I'm like, "Yes!"

For Tamara, the value of buddy pairing based on shared L1 was reinforced as relationships and comprehension grew (for detailed discussion of buddy interactions, see Martin-Beltrán, Daniel, Percy, & Silverman, 2013; Martin-Beltrán et al., 2014), and her interactions with colleagues provided an opportunity to discuss and examine student growth. That Tamara was new to teaching ELLs and had a forum in which to examine and discuss the importance of L1 support for student learning was noteworthy because teachers inexperienced with teaching ELLs may discourage L1 use, working from the belief that students will not learn English if they are not required to adhere to “English-only” policies in the classroom (e.g., de Courcy, 2007; de Jong, Arias, & Sánchez, 2010).

How Collaboration Shaped Teachers' Practices

Earlier, we shared findings from teachers' discussions in their weekly debriefing and planning meetings regarding how the texts in the CAPT program created a struggle for comprehension as well as the ways in which teachers used their collaborative conversations as a stepping-stone to generate ideas for how to support student learning. An important further outcome of these conversations was evidence that teachers' collaborative discussions shaped their practices. In these instances, an insight or suggestion from a colleague could serve as a gateway to changing a teacher's instructional approach.

In the first teacher meeting, Tamara mentioned a suggestion from Stephanie to gradually release responsibility for using the CAPT vocabulary strategy from the teacher to the students. Specifically, Stephanie had suggested an initial teacher-led modeling of how to teach the first focal vocabulary word in the teacher-led lesson with BBs, followed by guided practice of using the strategy with the second word, and independent practice with the strategy for the third and final words, which gave students more opportunities for language output. As Tamara explained to her colleagues, this suggestion resulted in an important modification to her practice in the teacher-led lessons.

Excerpt 7

TAMARA (4TH): This was [Stephanie's] idea. . . . When we go through the [vocabulary] strategy, we'll model [the vocabulary learning strategy], and then we allow them to do it. . . . We modeled, maybe the first [focal word] . . . and then the second [focal word] we did as a whole group . . . but then by the third and the fourth word we had them kinda do it with their buddies⁴ . . . so they can really get used to what it's like to talk to your [little] buddy. . . . Because [without this modification] it just, it was a *lot* of talking [by the teacher in the teacher-led lesson] [*Laughs*].

RESEARCHER: [A lot of talking] from you, you mean?

TAMARA (4TH): Yeah. [Stephanie] was like, "How about we have them—?" I'm like, "Great! Let's go!" Ever since then, we've pretty much done the same thing. Model, and then allow them to go ahead and do it. (Teacher Meeting 1)

The purpose in having BBs model the vocabulary strategy during the teacher-led lesson was twofold: to reduce the amount of teacher talk and to prepare BBs to work with their LBs by giving them a chance to practice their BB roles ahead of time. In doing so, Tamara was echoing a concern that Stephanie voiced often: Stephanie felt that students, particularly ELLs, needed more opportunities to produce language and that too much teacher-fronted instruction did not help students learn academic English.

Tamara's use of Stephanie's suggested strategy was evident during all three of the focal lessons we analyzed from her classroom, including the lessons in which Stephanie did not plug in. We share the following example to illustrate how this practice looked in a teacher-led lesson.

Excerpt 8

TAMARA (4TH), *to her class*: Now, there's a picture up here. I'm going to have a person—since I just modeled it, I'm going to have a person model it for the class, and then we're going to break out in partners, and we're going to listen to you as you make predictions based on the next picture. OK. How about Travis? Come on up. (Lesson 1A)

For the duration of the program, Tamara continued to engage BBs in modeling how they would introduce new focal words in the lesson to their LBs. Each time, she modeled the first focal word herself, then engaged students in guided practice, and finally asked two students to independently model the final two focal words for the class. She made this purpose explicit to her students during a lesson in which Stephanie did not plug in: "Instead of me standing up here and talking to you, I'm allowing you all to have the opportunity to try it out, OK? Go ahead. Explain the word to your partner" (Lesson 2A).

Thus, even when other colleagues were not present in the room, the teachers' collaborative efforts had a distributive impact on teachers' practices. As evidenced

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in the preceding example, Stephanie and Tamara’s collaboration on the previous teacher-led lesson encouraged Tamara to continue to use the strategy of guiding students through the process of modeling BB actions for the class, although Stephanie was not coteaching with her in that lesson.

Stephanie’s collaboration with the other fourth-grade teacher, Bella, took a different form than her coteaching with Tamara. Stephanie’s suggestion to Tamara regarding minimizing teacher talk and increasing students’ opportunities for language output by giving students the opportunity to model instruction had occurred at the outset of the program and was evident in Tamara’s first lesson that we chose for close analysis (Lesson 1A, Excerpt 8). Although Stephanie also plugged in with Bella during early CAPT lessons (Lesson 0, Lesson 1A), it did not appear that she had recommended this approach to Bella. In the first lesson we chose for close analysis from Bella’s classroom (Lesson 2A), teacher talk was predominant. During this lesson, Bella read the entire book aloud to her students, spending 20 minutes of the hour-long lesson reading aloud from the text, with minimal student input (e.g., students repeated single words when prompted). Bella also spent a significant amount of lesson time directing students to different portions of the text and supporting materials, setting up her slides, and managing students’ attention.

In the teacher planning meeting later that same afternoon (see Excerpt 1), the teachers discussed the challenges of helping the fourth graders comprehend the text in this lesson (Lesson 2A) and the previous teacher-led lesson (Lesson 1A). Bella agreed that her students struggled to read and to identify the main idea and important details. She noted that she liked the idea that Tamara had just shared in the meeting regarding Stephanie’s suggestion (see Excerpts 7 and 8): to require BBs to take charge of part of the lesson.

Excerpt 9

BELLA (4TH): I like the idea of letting the kids do [the CAPT vocabulary strategy] part of the lesson. Let them say it, then model it. The question is, are they going to do it with their buddy tomorrow? That’s going to be the key. (Teacher Meeting 1)

In the subsequent lesson we chose for close analysis from Bella’s classroom,⁵ it appeared that Stephanie’s suggestion had a distributive impact on teacher learning, as her suggestion for gradual release of instruction made its way from Stephanie, to Tamara, to Bella, to Bella’s students. Bella’s use of Stephanie’s suggestion reduced the amount of teacher talk in her lesson and enabled students to practice reading as they would during the buddy-led lesson. Bella first explained the approach to students and then guided them through the text by calling on students to take turns reading the text aloud to the class and applying the CAPT vocabulary and reading comprehension strategies as they would use them the next day with their LBs. In Excerpt 10, a student reads part of the text aloud to the class, then Bella prompts the class to recall the reading comprehension strategy they would use with their

LBs; finally, Bella turns control over to students to work in pairs to practice the strategy as they would the next day with their LBs.

Excerpt 10

BELLA (4TH): All right, here we go. I want you to practice with the person next to you. I want you to practice reading it aloud and stopping. When you come to your [focal vocabulary] word what are you going to do? You're going to use the [vocabulary] strategy.

STUDENT, *reading text aloud to class*: Earth Day is celebrated in 180 countries. This is a good thing because people all over the world need to learn to work together to protect our Earth. International Earth Day is on the first day of spring, March 20th or 21st.

BELLA (4TH): OK, and we stop here and we apply the [CAPT reading comprehension] strategy, OK? What's the question? What do we ask our little buddy?

STUDENT: What's the most important part?

BELLA (4TH): What's the most important part? OK, I want you to discuss. I'll give you 30 seconds to discuss the most important part of what we read so far. OK? (Lesson 4A)

Stephanie plugged in to Bella's classroom during this lesson, and we observed that not only did it appear that what Tamara shared about her learning from Stephanie in the previous teacher meeting impacted Bella's approach to the lesson but Stephanie also provided important in-the-moment scaffolds as the lesson unfolded to help students grasp the concepts in the text. In Excerpt 11, she works with Bella to support students' understanding of the United Nations, which was mentioned in their text.

Excerpt 11

BELLA (4TH), *to a student reading aloud from the text to the class*: Stop, do you know what the United Nations are? Does anybody know who the United Nations are? Do you know?

STUDENT: The people that protect us.

BELLA (4TH): Who are they?

STEPHANIE (ESOL), *interjecting*: Well, what is a nation?

BELLA (4TH): Right.

STUDENT: A nation, like a whole bunch of people.

BELLA (4TH): OK, give me an example of a nation . . . [*addressing a student*] where are you from?

STUDENT: Oh, yeah. Like El Salvador is a nation.

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BELLA (4TH): That would be a nation. (Lesson 4A)

As we see in this excerpt, Stephanie provided support for students’ comprehension by breaking down Bella’s more complex question (“Who are the United Nations?”) and checking for vocabulary knowledge (“What is a nation?”). Building on Stephanie’s supports, Bella continued with this simplified line of questioning (“Give me an example of a nation”), and she helped students to personalize the concept of nation (“Where are you from?”). In the teachers’ first planning meeting (see Excerpt 1), Stephanie, Bella, Tamara, and Geoff had discussed narrowing down broad questions to make them accessible for the students when they struggled. This exchange during coteaching shows how Stephanie was able to collaborate with Bella in applying this approach when it was needed to support student learning and is representative of a strategy that Stephanie frequently used: checking and supporting student comprehension of text before engaging them in activities that required more complex language production, such as questioning and supporting LBs as they read their texts together and engaged in activities that required application and synthesis of what they had read.

Later in the same lesson, we noted another example of how collaborative instruction by Bella and Stephanie was used to support students’ understanding of text. Bella reminded students about “good buddy behaviors” and asked them to elaborate on what this would look like with their LBs the next day. Stephanie, aware that the difficulty of the text they would read the next day would present challenges for some of the BBs and their LBs, encouraged students to consider how they could make use of extralinguistic features (pictures) and less text-dense features (headings, titles) to identify the main idea in the text if they, or their LBs, were struggling to do so.

Excerpt 12

BELLA (4TH): OK, so, reviewing: Don’t forget tomorrow with your buddy you’re going to go through your [comprehension] strategy. . . . You want to make sure the book is in front of them, OK? Don’t forget, follow the checklist. Read for me, Roberto [from the checklist], read for me what else are we supposed to do?

STUDENT: Read with excitement.

BELLA (4TH): Yes, get that excitement in your voice, OK? Be excited about what you’re reading.

STUDENT: I forgot to add, encourage your buddy to keep reading.

BELLA (4TH): OK, yes.

STEPHANIE (ESOL), *to Bella*: Can I ask a question?

BELLA (4TH): Yes.

STEPHANIE (ESOL), *to the class*: If you’re doing the most important part

[one of the prompts in the CAPT reading comprehension strategy], what happens if you can't really remember what the most important part is? What are you going to—?

STUDENT: Go back and reread . . .

STEPHANIE (ESOL): What's one thing that you can look at so you don't have to reread the whole two or three pages? What do you look at?

STUDENT: Go back and look at the pictures.

BELLA (4TH): OK.

STEPHANIE (ESOL): The pictures, and what's another important text feature that will help you with the main idea? Evan?

STUDENT: The heading.

STEPHANIE (ESOL): The heading, very good. Right? You can use the heading and turn it—use your own words to explain it if your buddy's having trouble. Yes.

STUDENT: And the title.

STEPHANIE (ESOL): The title, yes.

BELLA (4TH): Absolutely.

STEPHANIE (ESOL): Because sometimes your buddy doesn't know and you need to kind of help them. (Lesson 4A)

Stephanie's interjection (initiated with "can I ask a question?") came at the end of the lesson, as the students were preparing to answer questions about the main idea of the text. Thus her reminder served as a support for students regarding how to engage with the text as they worked in their teacher-led lesson that day and was also intended as a scaffold for the next day, when they would meet with their LBs and would be responsible for helping their LBs to comprehend the text. Embedded in her support ("what happens if you can't really remember what the most important part is?") were previous teacher conversations and experiences about the difficulties students had with identifying the main idea (Excerpts 1–3), making clear the dialogic nature of the teachers' opportunities to collaborate in meetings and in lessons as they considered how to teach the CAPT texts.

Discussion

Questions regarding how to support ELLs instructionally as they engage with difficult texts have been an important part of a larger discussion about supporting the specific literacy needs of ELLs to catch up with English-dominant peers for some time (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006; Harper & de Jong, 2004; Lesaux et al., 2006). The call for more research into effective practices for making content

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accessible to all learners is only going to intensify as ELLs are more frequently placed in mainstream classrooms and content demands increase in difficulty.

As evidenced in these data, when classroom teachers and ESOL specialists have the opportunity to come together to support ELLs, they are able to form a more nuanced understanding of ELLs’ learning experiences and needs, and this teacher learning circulates among teachers in distributed—and *distributive*—ways. As we explain in more detail in what follows, collaboration led the teachers in this study to engage in learning in *distributed* ways through shared social interaction but also to expand their learning in *distributive* ways, outside of the time and space boundaries of their immediate interactions about their teaching.

Mainstream teachers often noted that students struggled with the content and did not sufficiently comprehend the CAPT texts. Their ESOL colleagues shaded in this description with details regarding linguistic factors that contributed to students’ comprehension difficulties and stepped in with specific supports before, during, and after lessons occurred. The shared experiences of planning, teaching, and debriefing about lessons gave the teachers common ground on which they could critically examine students’ learning. Adding to their common understanding was the fact that all teachers participating in the CAPT program (mainstream teachers, ESOL specialists, and other supporting teachers, such as the special educator and paraprofessionals) taught the same lessons as their colleagues, both within and across grade levels, and had the opportunity to experience how both kindergartners and fourth graders participated in the lessons. This created another layer of common ground on which teachers could compare their experiences, explore student learning, and try different approaches to supporting student success. Thus the CAPT program’s structure created opportunities for distributed learning through shared teaching experiences, paired with shared time for planning and debriefing, which were a powerful way for teachers to carefully explore and co-construct an understanding of student learning and to consider alternative ways to better support ELLs’ understanding of the CAPT texts.

Furthermore, we found that teacher collaboration also had a *distributive* effect because it had an impact on teachers’ practices even when teachers were not actively collaborating in the same space. That is, the effects of teachers’ collaboration can reach across temporospatial boundaries, such as the impact that Stephanie’s suggestion to Tamara had for Tamara’s instruction, even when Stephanie was not present in the classroom (Excerpt 8), and on Bella’s practices, as Bella appropriated and modified this strategy in her own instruction (Excerpt 10). This understanding of teacher learning as distributive adds to previous investigations of teacher learning and development through collaboration, which have focused on the development of community among teachers, and co-constructed interactions between teachers. Generally, this work has examined the impact of those interactions on the teachers directly involved in the collaborative interactions (e.g., Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Little, 2002; Martin-Beltrán & Peercy, 2012; Peercy & Martin-

Beltrán, 2012). This study broadens the scope of possibility for teacher learning and development from co-construction by exploring the impact of collaboration beyond the time and space boundaries of the original participants and situations. This has important implications for examining and fostering teachers' collaborative learning and needs further investigation, as we discuss subsequently.

Implications

The findings from this study point to the need for several areas of additional investigation. First, if we are to adequately prepare teachers to teach challenging content to ELLs, which is undoubtedly an issue facing teachers in the era of CCSS (see Kibler, Walqui, & Bunch, 2014; Peercy, DeStefano, Yazan, & Martin-Beltrán, in press), we must equip them with the necessary tools. We therefore need further research on the struggles that teachers and their students encounter when engaging with demanding texts (for one example, see Peercy, Martin-Beltrán, Yazan, & DeStefano, 2014) as well as research on factors that support teachers in successfully engaging their linguistically and culturally diverse learners in such work.

We argue that at least two kinds of initiatives will assist teachers in the work of scaffolding ELLs to access demanding content. These include the opportunities to collaborate with colleagues before, during, and after classroom instruction and ongoing professional development that is directly tied to their classroom instruction, experiences, and needs. Further research on successful (and unsuccessful) attempts at supporting teachers' collaborative efforts and field-based professional development as they work with challenging new curricula is therefore also needed, and especially important are studies that examine the relationship between various ways of supporting teacher learning and student outcomes. As previous work has illustrated, despite increased initiatives for coteaching from educators, few studies have specifically linked teachers' collaboration to their practices or student achievement gains (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). A better understanding of teacher collaboration will require deeper examination of how teachers create a shared understanding of student needs and instructional goals, exploring questions such as the following: What knowledge is shared, and how is knowledge shared, between ESOL specialists and mainstream teachers? How do these teachers create a shared understanding of instructional goals and moves? As ESOL specialists and mainstream teachers collaborate over time, what kinds of changes in practice and student participation can be observed in classrooms? How does teacher learning occur in both distributed and distributive ways? More detailed studies of collaborative engagement among teachers—and resulting changes in teacher practice—will go far in informing the field's understanding of how collaborative professional development opportunities support teacher growth and will add to theory building in an area that has thus far been undertheorized.

It is not only the development of in-service teachers that requires further attention, however. We also must explore how to better prepare preservice ESOL and

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mainstream teachers for the demands of using challenging curricular materials with ELLs, and how they might support one another in doing so. No longer can ESOL specialists and classroom teachers work independently, unaware of their colleagues’ daily instruction, goals, and planning. Instead, their coordinated efforts are necessary to scaffold ELLs as they strive to access content, across all content areas. It is therefore necessary for teacher educators to explore how teacher education programs are and should be positioning teachers to meet these demands, through preparing them to collaborate with colleagues as well as by supporting mainstream teachers’ awareness of ELLs’ specific linguistic strengths and needs and assisting ESOL teachers in identifying the strategies, skills, and language needed to access content in mainstream classrooms.

Conclusion

One of the positive aspects of teachers’ experiences in this study was that teachers with different specializations, strengths, orientations, and background knowledge participated together in the same instructional event, experienced student learning within the space of that shared occurrence, and reflected together on what students struggled with—and what they learned. This gave teachers a common set of experiences around which to build a shared understanding of how to support students, thus setting groundwork for shaping the teachers’ thinking, their practices, and, most important, their students’ opportunities for greater academic success. We believe that this study serves as an important foundation for future work exploring how to support teachers and students as they participate in a new era of reform-based instruction and learning.

Notes

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¹ Rather than separately instructing ELLs by pulling out of the grade-level classroom for a short period of time or providing a separate class for ELLs, in plug-in models, the ESOL specialist joins the mainstream teacher in a collaborative approach to teaching. There are several models for plug-in instruction (e.g., Haynes, 2007; Patel & Kramer, 2013), with each teacher taking on a variety of possible roles. The most successful plug-in instruction includes collaborative planning by the teachers (Martin-Beltrán & Percy, 2012; Percy & Martin-Beltrán, 2012).

² The CAPT program encouraged pairing buddies based on their L1 so that they could negotiate meaning in their L1 together. Spanish was the L1 of the majority of Kennedy students designated as ELLs. The program also provided a Spanish–English bilingual gloss for the four focal words in each lesson and drew students’ attention to Spanish–English cognates when relevant.

³ This reduced pool from a total of 54 possible lessons was due to video/audio quality or instances in which a teacher was absent, and a member of the research team taught the lesson in his or her place.

⁴ Here Tamara was referring to her fourth graders' classmates. In teacher-led lessons, her fourth graders worked with another fourth grader, role-playing that they were BBs and LBs, so that each fourth grader could practice what he or she would need to do in the buddy lesson the next day to help guide LBs.

⁵ The next teacher-led lesson that Bella taught was Lesson 3A, but owing to our interest in teacher collaboration during lessons, the next lesson in the data set for this study is Lesson 4A.

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