Stumped by Student Needs: Factors in Developing Effective Teacher Collaboration

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Abstract

The article discusses underlying issues in the collaboration of teachers to better address the needs of students who traditionally fail in public schools. Building on a theoretical foundation that considers a variety of factors that typically limit in-school collaboration, the article examines the case of three high school teachers who struggle to work with second language learners who are not functionally literate in either their first or second language and find themselves at great risk of academic failure. Attempts at collaboration among these three teachers are described and both favorable and detrimental cultural, structural, logistical, and personal factors are examined within each of the relationships. Implications for professional development are suggested.

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Given our increasing awareness of the diversity of our students' needs and legal pressures to care about their test scores, it appears that calls for teachers to seek out each other's insight and expertise to fill in the gaps where their own knowledge and experience are lacking has become all the more urgent. Arguably, these calls for greater teacher collaboration would be loudest where the distance between what students need and what schools are designed to provide is greatest. Where students are most likely to fail would also be where collaboration would be most urgently needed.

Although one can point to a number of demographic subgroups that are seen to be struggling disproportionately academically, there is considerable evidence that Hispanic English language learners, as a whole, score lower on standardized achievement tests than other students (NCES, 2007). While this subpopulation is extremely diverse and standardized test scores can be attributed to a number of different factors, it does appear that our schools struggle particularly with ELLs who enter U.S. high schools with low reading skills in their first language (Short & Boyson, 2012). In many cases high school teachers do not have the expertise in basic literacy development and second language acquisition to be able to correctly identify some of their students' root struggles and adjust their content instruction accordingly.

In other words, many teachers are stumped by some of the particulars of their students' needs and would benefit from working with others who have learned and seen what they have not. At the same time, there is a substantial body of research pointing to numerous cultural, structural, and personal obstacles that keep teachers from effectively collaborating with each other to pool together their resources and knowledge to best

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address the needs of their students (David, 2009; Horn, 2006; Leo and Cowan, 2000; Little, 2003).

The purpose of this case study is to examine how in one school these factors intersect to help or hinder the collaboration of teachers who admit to having enormous difficulties meeting the extraordinary needs of their students and would greatly benefit from working with others.

Theoretical Framework and Related Literature

This study bases itself on two fundamental concepts that have been documented in the literature. On one hand, there is evidence that high schools in general inadequately address the needs of a substantial student body, including many English language learners, that is not proficient in certain basic academic skills (Pinkus, 2008). Collaboration has been identified as a principal means for teachers to better address the needs of these students (Houghton, 2001). Here Little (1990) proposes a framework for conceptualizing the spectrum of purposes and degrees of interrelatedness of teacher collaboration. Furthermore, the literature suggests a number of factors that are critical for such collaboration to be implemented effectively (DuFour & Burnette, 2002; David, 2009).

Collaboration to Address the Needs of Underserved Students

One of the underpinnings of this study relates to how high schools do not cater to the basic literacy needs of many of their students. The academic difficulties of many ELLs with little prior schooling, in particular, are largely attributed to the importance of literacy skills in the first language for continued academic learning in the second language (Allender, 1998; Collier, 1995; Krashen, 2001). A key theoretical construct

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here is Cummins' (1991) notion of cognitive transfer, through which knowledge gained in the first language contributes to learning in a second language. Thus a literate language learner will develop second language reading skills by transferring what s/he has mastered in the first language. Conversely, a lack of literacy skills in the first language makes it more difficult to learn to read in a second language.

High school teachers, however, generally do not have the expertise in lower-level literacy skill development to be able to tailor their instruction to students in such situations (Padron, Waxman, Brown, and Powers, 2000). This, it is suggested, is often compounded by a view of differences in educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds as amounting to deficits relative to the situation expected from most students (Nieto, 2009). A mismatch between teaching approach and learning need thus becomes equated with a lack on the part of the student.

In order to address these gaps in instruction and expertise, a number of authors have pointed to collaboration as a way for teachers to pool together their insights, knowledge, and efforts (Houghton, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001). Epstein (1995) proposed to this effect a model of overlapping spheres of influence, whereby a student's education is directly affected by different aspects of life that ought to act in concert to be most appropriate and effective. By approaching a student's education with a perspective that goes beyond the own field of expertise, curricular area, and classroom approach, the teachers may be able to adjust their practices to the actual needs of their students.

Fundamental to this study and the way the data is analyzed is a framework of types and degrees of teacher collaboration suggested by Little (1990). Four kinds of

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collaboration are proposed. On the least involved end of the spectrum, *Storytelling and Scanning* involves largely opportunistic interactions that allow teachers "to gain information and assurance in the quick exchange of stories (Little, 1990, p. 513)." Slightly more developed is what is termed *Aid and Assistance*, wherein "teachers carefully preserve the boundary between offering advice when asked and interfering in unwarranted ways in another teacher's work (Little, 990, p. 515). *Sharing* is a more involved form of collaboration where, in addition to advice, actual materials and instructional ideas are exchanged as a matter of course. Finally, the most collaborative form is conceptualized as *Joint Work*, which is defined as "encounters among teachers that rest on shared responsibility for the work of teaching" and involves "collective conceptions of autonomy (Little, 1990, p. 519)."

Critical Factors for Teacher Collaboration

Various authors have emphasized obstacles and requisites for successful teacher collaboration. One overarching set of issues relate to the culture of the school. Indeed, as David (2009) points out, collaboration among teachers is by no means obvious, and goes against established individualistic approaches to teaching. In her study of professional communities among high school staff, Horn (2006) concluded that teachers who did try to collaborate often found themselves lacking in shared meaning. Furthermore, a lack of common views on the teacher's role constituted a common central obstacle. The terms that were being used meant different things for each collaborator, thus causing misunderstandings that would abruptly stop whatever problem-solving process had been initiated. Horn (2006) points to a lack of common views on the

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teacher's role as a central obstacle. Here Du Four and Burnette (2002) find that collaborative protocols and explicit goals are necessary for teams to be effective.

In addition, two logistical factors are identified as crucial for effective collaboration. David (2009) and DuFour and Burnette (2002) emphasize the importance of providing teachers with adequate amounts of common planning time. Leo and Cowan (2000) point more generally to collaborative structures that include physical proximity between collaborators and the time and space in which to meet on a regular basis. It follows that while optimal schedules will not lead to effective collaboration unless a collaborative culture and team structures are in place, not giving teachers reliable time and space would limit the interactions between teachers who are ready to collaborate.

Furthermore, several authors have underlined the importance for partners to have a common collaborative purpose. David (2009) suggests that common lessons and student tasks can serve as a substantive focus for meetings between teachers. In her study of high school teachers, Little (2003) found that topics for discussion were not meaningful to all participants, thus undermining the purpose of the collaboration. She observed that "accounts are time-compressed, fleeting moments commonly interspersed in a dense trajectory of dialogue (Little, 2003, p. 61)." The danger is that discussions of instruction are not presented in the context of a purposeful problem-solving process, but as vague 'off-the-cuff' storytelling that is unlikely to allow teachers to walk away with a sense of professional learning.

Similarly, Horn (2006), Yap (2005), and Duke (2006) found that those teachers who collaborated most effectively viewed disclosing and discussing instructional problems as the central reason to meet and that their conversations ended with attempts at

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solving each other's problems rather than merely providing reassurance. By focusing interactions on data the problem-solving purposes of collaboration remained central.

Successful collaboration also depends on interpersonal dynamics. Horn (2006) observed that teachers' ability to collaborate was limited by a lack of mutual trust that effectively kept colleagues from giving and accepting constructive feedback to help solve each other's instructional problems. According to DuFour and Burnette (2002) collaboration is made more difficult by a tendency for teachers to work alone due to a perceived need to protect their territory and withstand external influences on their practice.

The literature thus presents several types of factors that are likely to facilitate or impede the establishment of effective teacher collaboration. The ultimate hurdle for any school aiming to establish collaborative practices among its teachers, then, is to convince them that collaboration can and will help them in their work and to ensure that such collaboration is indeed feasible in terms of procedures, focus, space, and time.

Case Study

The study concerns the collaborative practices of three teachers at the pseudonymous Urban High School (UHS) who were working with a sub-population of students that teachers and administrators characterized as being difficult to teach, and examines what was detrimental or favorable to their collaboration. The three teachers were selected because they taught the ELL students who were considered to be have the lowest literacy skills in both English and Spanish based on staff recommendations and diagnostic test scores. Each teacher taught one or two classes of 9th and 10th grade English language learners who had recently immigrated from Latin America, were

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reading in Spanish below a third grade level, and were generally considered by school staff to be at risk of failing academically. Because of their low reading proficiency in Spanish, these students also took a Spanish literacy class. This lack of confidence in the students' ability to succeed in high school may in many ways be a confirmation of the teachers' acknowledged lack of expertise in addressing the kinds of literacy skills they were struggling with and a perspective that views students' educational backgrounds in terms of relative deficits rather than strengths (Nieto, 2009).

All three teachers were veterans of the school. Ms. Gomez, who, like many of her students, was originally from El Salvador, was in her sixth year at UHS and taught Spanish literacy to both classes, and ESL to one. Mr. Harris was in his third year at UHS and was the ESL teacher of one of the two classes. Mr. Flores was also originally from Latin America, had been at UHS for five years, and taught pre-Algebra to both classes.

During the time of the study, the school was implementing structures for teacher collaboration. The previous semester teachers had met on a bi-weekly basis in teams comprising colleagues who shared the same students. Due to logistical difficulties and disenchantment on the part of staff, the policy was currently on hold. Teachers also met regularly within departments and in grade level teams.

Site Selection and Methodology

UHS was selected because it was the local high school with the largest proportion of English language learners and because of its history of enrolling students who had only recently moved to the U.S. The case study focused on the teachers who taught the academic courses of those ESL students with the lowest proficiency levels.

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In order to examine the factors that affected collaboration between these teachers and the effect their possible collaboration had on instruction, a variety of data were collected over the course of one semester. The teachers were interviewed and all thirty-one meetings between any of the three were observed, as were a total of eighty-three lessons. Initially, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the teachers around their views on the needs of their students, the institutional culture of the school, and the use of universal standards, as well as on their views regarding the purpose, forms, and feasibility of collaboration. Further unstructured interviews were undertaken throughout regarding their ongoing teaching and collaboration. Finally, a group interview was conducted with Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris about their collaboration. Interview data were coded according to themes related to the culture and policies of the school; the support teachers were given; how and why they collaborated; factors they saw as conducive or detrimental to collaboration; and the effect collaboration had on their instruction. Notes were taken of all meetings and conversational segments were identified by topic. Topics and types of collaboration were then coded. Here the typology proposed by Little (1990) was used which presents four types of teacher interactions that, she suggests, range from fairly uninvolved to highly collaborative and interdependent. While they are discussed in the review of the literature, from least to most interdependent these are labeled as Storytelling and Scanning, Aid and Assistance, Sharing, and Joint Work.

Finally, classroom instruction was observed and all references to collaboration with one of the other teachers or their classes were noted according to a consistent protocol. Further triangulation and cross-referencing was made between collaborative

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meeting data and classroom observation notes to establish whether there was any explicit effect of collaboration on instruction. Member-checking was performed with each of the three teachers throughout the research process.

The initial data analysis demonstrated that two of the three one-on-one relationships involved actual collaboration. Only those will therefore be examined here. These two varied considerably in their frequency and effect. While Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris developed a pattern of frequent meetings that had an effect on instruction, Mr. Flores worked little with either of the others. Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris met a total of 28 times, or an average of seven times a month. In contrast, Ms. Gomez met only three times with Mr. Flores and Mr. Flores and Mr. Harris did not meet at all.

The Three Teachers as a Subculture

Horn (2006) suggests that shared meaning and a shared conception of the teacher's role are requisites for establishing a collaborative school culture. Leo and Cowan (2000) add that a shared perspective on student learning is also key for effective collaboration. A central question in the case of the three teachers, then, is to what extent they did in fact share a concept of their own roles as teachers and of collaboration, and how this fit in with the overall view promoted by the school.

All three teachers identified as priorities student needs that were not addressed by the school as a whole and that seemed to demonstrate both a negative perception of the school's orientation and a deficit-focused view of the students they worked with. For Mr. Harris, these needs were "multi-tiered and multi-layered," involving great academic difficulties because of what he considered to be inadequate prior schooling and social-emotional challenges due to a frequent lack of support at home. Ms. Gomez, for her part,

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pointed to academic expectations that the students had no chance of meeting and, therefore, a lack of motivation in school. Mr. Flores also pointed to students' low academic levels, as well as to what he summarily generalized as issues of self-esteem. The teachers agreed that the standards that were mandated by the school were inappropriate for their students. Mr. Flores noted the following: "Standards are very rigid—it is not something that could be applied to our reality. Basically, these standards are for the mainstream high school kids—not for us." In a similar vein, Mr. Harris asked, "can we assume that this is a high school, so we have high school standards and that students who come to us who have only had two years of education in El Salvador are going to reach the standards?" Ms. Gomez, for her part, saw the inadequacy of standards as an additional source of pressure on her. For her "one of the challenges is knowing a lot of people have these expectations for these kids, and me as a teacher knowing that they are not going to be able to reach them." While the three teachers, then, shared a perspective on their overall roles, they agreed that it was at odds with what the school promoted. In some ways, they formed a united subculture that, however, conflicted with the greater school culture they were to be a part of.

However, there was a divergence in views on collaboration. Mr. Harris thought that all types of collaboration were useful, but saw logistics as a major obstacle. He did find being able to share information about common students to be valuable. He proposed the following:

It's really important to have three people sit down and discuss where the student is emotionally, socially, who they're hanging out with, and talk about that. There's a

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lot of stuff going on in the classroom—we can't always stop the class and talk to

the students about it, but at least we could talk to these teachers.

For Ms. Gomez, teacher collaboration at UHS was useful, but limited by logistics, a

frequent lack of purpose, and often by personal issues. Mr. Flores' view was the most

dire. Indeed, he felt that there was no one for him to productively collaborate with.

Same-subject teachers, he thought, could not work with him because their student levels

were too different. Other teachers who shared the same students were not adequate

collaborators because they did not have a common subject area to focus on. Meetings

with them, he thought, were "just informative, just a way to share information about

students, but so far it's nothing else than that."   This view seems especially significant as

it seems to reflect divisions that are established as obvious within our school structures.

Indeed, we tend to group teachers, students, and classes, by grade level and subject area.

Thus Mr. Flores was a 9th grade Math teacher, being therefore grouped with either 9th

grade teachers or math teachers. Insofar as he felt he had little to share with other 9th

grade teachers because of the specific situation of his students, with other math teachers

because of the low-level skills his students had not yet mastered, nor even with other

teachers of these exact students because they did not teach math, he was indeed isolated

and had little possibility for collaboration.

While the teachers had a common understanding of their role and their students'

needs, they agreed that their views were in conflict with those of the school. Regarding

collaboration, there was a noticeable divide between Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris, on one

hand, and Mr. Flores, on the other, regarding the usefulness of teacher collaboration.

Gomez-Harris

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Reviewing data from interviews, meetings, and classroom observations, the collaboration between Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris benefited from factors proposed in the literature. These positive conditions in turn enabled the teachers to strengthen their relationship over time and draw on it to inform and ultimately connect their classroom instruction.

Collaborative Subculture and Favorable Logistical Factors

In terms of their own subculture within the school, they held common views on the needs of their students, the appropriateness of universal standards, and their roles as teachers. Both thought collaboration could be beneficial. While the culture of the school might not have been optimal for teacher collaboration as a whole, the subculture that connected these two teachers did.

In their interviews Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris pointed to the importance of favorable logistics in allowing them to have a consistent working relationship. Both teachers had a double planning period right after their lunch break, so they were able to meet regularly and were rarely rushed for time. This way, Ms. Gomez explained, "I felt relaxed and I thought, Ok, I'm ready to plan." Furthermore, it was understood that Mr. Harris spent his free periods in the lounge which was used by few teachers. The two thus had a convenient place to meet and Ms. Gomez knew where to find Mr. Harris when she wanted to initiate an unscheduled meeting. According to Ms. Gomez, "When I was done with the morning class and I was thinking about what I needed to plan for the next day— knowing that he was available allowed me to talk about it."

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Purpose and Focus

Mr. Harris and Ms. Gomez generally discussed instruction, reporting on their practice and planning aloud. Mr. Harris explained how the main purpose of their interactions was "to share ideas, what we each do in our classes, what works well." Their meetings were thus consistently given a focus and a practical purpose. Since they taught the same subject area (literacy, whether in English or Spanish) to the same students, they had substantive topics to collaborate around. Ms. Gomez explained that she would "look at the activities" Mr. Harris "would come up with to help mw think about what to do in class."

Both described how their meetings would focus on experiences, ideas, and plans related to lessons. Ms. Gomez confirmed the benefit of these instruction-oriented conversations by explaining, "It was the first year I was teaching the literacy group, so getting your [Mr. Harris'] ideas and giving mine worked out well." Meetings focused on instruction, thus presenting a structural factor conducive to collaboration.

The teachers reported that their collaboration tended toward the more interdependent and effectual of the categories defined by Little (1990) and concerned students and instruction. They focused more on the Sharing and Joint Work forms and less on Scanning and Storytelling and Aid and Assistance. Furthermore, their collaboration covered a variety of topic areas. According to them their collaboration allowed them to work together as much as possible. Ms. Gomez pointed out that they shared information about students, but that most interactions focused on instruction. Both emphasized how they used books with stories in English and Spanish. Realizing

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that their students had the opportunity to be exposed to the same texts twice, once in each language, Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris planned parallel lessons and shared insights.

Mr. Harris described this instructional process as follows:

"You [Ms. Gomez] would start a chapter and you would discuss a story and then I would follow a day or two later. It was great because it just kept rolling. Every time we finished, you guys started a new chapter and I could come back to you and say, 'How is it going? What have you done so far?' So it was really just sort of seamless, in a way."

Both teachers were encouraged by the obvious impact that focusing on the same texts had on their students' learning. Ms Gomez stated: "I think the kids benefitted from it—just being able to understand the stories in their own language first and then they come to you [Mr. Harris], with the feeling that they could talk about it." Mr. Harris agreed, adding the following: "It's so huge for them, to be able to look at a story in English that was quite dense and start saying, 'Mister, I know that story, I know what happens, I know the characters, I know the problem.' It was a boost for them."

As they worked with the same students and as both saw basic literacy skills as an urgent need, sharing instructional ideas had a concrete focus. Mr. Harris explained thinking that "they're working on the same stories, so there's always an immediate need—I have to talk to her." In this case the collaboration was about sharing strategies regarding similar skills with the same students. Mr. Harris explicitly connected this to Cummins' (1991) view on cognitive transfer as a benefit of bilingual education. He suggested the following: "We're providing them with skills that they need and I see them

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just kind of soaking it up in Spanish literacy class and we try to transfer and use these same skills in English class and I see improvement."

Because this sharing of ideas had an impact on instruction, the coordination of aspects of their teaching was a logical consequence. Thus, for instance, upon exchanging information on the needs of a student with low literacy skills in Spanish, they developed a joint instructional strategy. Mr. Harris explained, "With students like him we need to discuss what is our battle plan—maybe right now everything in Spanish, in a month do things in English." Sharing information thus led to joint strategizing and planning.

Most significantly, this led to joint lesson planning. Ms. Gomez explained how the pacing of every unit became jointly planned to take into consideration what each could cover in class so their lessons remained in sync. What resulted were linked lessons, as though they were branches of one commonly taught course. Mr. Harris explained, "for me, it would affect my routine because I would enter the classroom knowing they would see the title and picture of a story on an overhead and be able to tell the story." The increasing interdependence of the collaborators led to an interdependence of their respective courses.

This was confirmed by observations of collaborative meetings. Notes from each meeting were separated into segments defined by topic and by type as defined by Little (1990). Eighty-three of the 207 segments were coded as Sharing. Storytelling and Scanning accounted for 62 segments. Joint Work, the most collaborative type, appeared in 58 segments. Aid and Assistance, however, played only a minimal role with four segments (see Table 1).

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Table 1. Gomez-Harris: Distribution of Segments by Topic and Form of Collaboration

| Least Collaborative Form						Most Collaborative Form	
Scanning/ Story-telling	62	*Aid and Assistance*	4	*Sharing*	83	*Joint Work*	58
Instruction	13	Instruction	3	Instruction	51	Instruction	42
Students	44	Students	0	Students	16	Students	1
Other	7	Other	1	Other	16	Other	15

Figure 1. Gomez-Harris: Forms of Collaboration, Proportions of Types
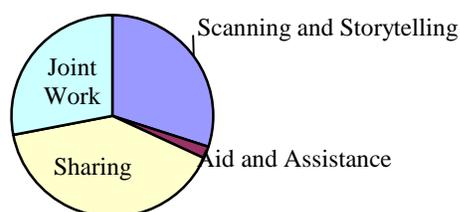
Overall, the teachers most engaged in those types of collaboration where they were acting as equals. The form that entailed an explicit difference in hierarchy, Aid and Assistance, was practically not engaged in. While Scanning and Storytelling and Sharing differ in the deliberation and extent of the collaboration, they both involve the exchange of information and together accounted for more than two thirds of the total. This trend toward exchange of information among equal partners also led to considerable Joint Work, where sharing evolved into planning and common decision-making.

Similar variations were found among topics addressed. Tallying up the segments for each topic, Instruction was the most prominent, with 109 segments out of 207, followed by Students with 59. Other topics were the focus in 39 cases (see Figure 2).

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Figure 2. Gomez-Harris: Topic Area in Proportion to Total Number of Collaborative Segments
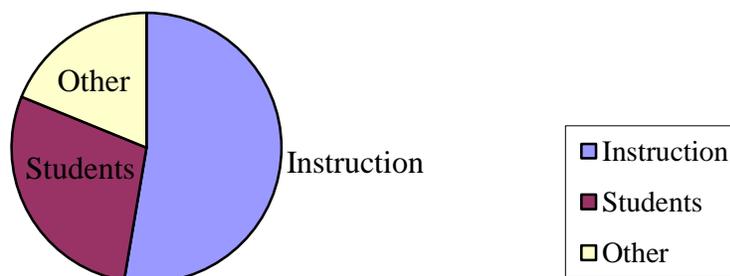
This focus on students and instruction was confirmed by the meetings themselves. Indeed, as shown in Table 1, meetings features all four types of collaboration and covered various topics. Furthermore, whereas Storytelling and Scanning was the preferred form much of the time, Sharing and Joint Work together covered most of the interactions. While Storytelling and Scanning largely dealt with student issues, Sharing and Joint Work focused mostly on instruction. The collaboration was thus multi-form, highly interdependent, and addressed a variety of central topics.

Favorable Personal Factors

Personal factors were optimal as well. In fact, Mr. Harris saw these to be most crucial in determining the success of collaboration. According to him, "ultimately, it is relationships and personalities that matter for whether or not we collaborate rather than the specifics of what we have to collaborate on." Their mutual affinity was based largely on two things they saw in one another. For one, they liked each other on a personal basis. Just as importantly perhaps, they respected each other as educators. Mr. Harris mentioned how he had always liked Ms. Gomez as a person. She, for her part, thought,

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"One thing I definitely felt with Harris is that he's not intimidating." They found each other approachable, making the initial phases of their collaboration easier. Ms. Gomez explained to Mr. Harris, "I find it easy to talk to you. I feel that you respect what I know and maybe I have some strengths that you can use and I totally feel that you know a lot more about other areas that I can gain knowledge to use in my classroom."

The other aspect was their mutual respect as educators of literacy students. Mr. Harris pointed out to Ms. Gomez during the group interview, "Those kids rely on you like students don't rely on other teachers." She in turn referred to how he made his students "feel accepted—and you [Harris] live in the same neighborhood as they do. And for some of these kids who get harassed by other Latinos who've lived here longer, they love your class. And you talk to them and take the time for them." Their mutual respect as people blended into their respect as educators.

Mr. Harris hinted at a noteworthy additional factor. Discussing his conversations with Ms. Gomez and the bilingual social worker about students' needs, he explained, "Outside of the three of us there really wasn't any support. And I mean that's it." To this, Ms. Gomez nodded vehemently. The teachers were bonded by a sense of mission they felt others did not share. This sense of isolation added a camaraderie that may have contributed to strengthening the relationship.

Gomez-Flores

The collaboration between Ms. Gomez and Mr. Flores was less meaningful and subject to less favorable factors. The teachers met a total of three times during the semester. Once was accidentally in the parking lot of the school and the two other encounters involved administrative duties. The teachers' lack of shared views regarding

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collaboration kept them from developing a common collaborative subculture. Logistically it would not have been easy for them to meet on a regular basis and their interactions did not have an obvious purpose. Ultimately, they also did not seem to particularly like each other.

Lack of a Collaborative Subculture and Unfavorable Logistical Factors

While Ms. Gomez saw collaboration as potentially beneficial, Mr. Flores had a negative view that might have kept him outside of any collaborative culture. Indeed, he was vague when asked about the purposes of collaboration. He thought that "since we teach either different subjects or different students there isn't much we can do together." Again, this view seems very much in line with the kinds of divides inherent to the structures of schools and the ways teaching roles are defined. If teachers are to view cross-disciplinary collaboration around the global needs of specific students as valuable, then this aspect of our educational culture needs to be addressed. Stated more plainly, teachers need to see how their courses overlap in order to find reasons for and ways to work together on instruction. Mr. Flores did, however, think that collaboration could serve the sharing of information on "how students are doing emotionally." Collaboration, then, was viewed as beneficial for understanding students, but not for improving classroom instruction.

The two teachers did not have a common planning period, although they could have met over lunch. Mr. Flores, however, tended to remain in his classroom at all times and the teachers' classrooms were located on different floors and wings of the building.

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Limited Purpose and Focus

The working relationship between Mr. Flores and Ms. Gomez was also limited in the scope of topics discussed and in the forms taken by the interactions. Both teachers described Storytelling and Scanning as the only form they engaged in, and student issues as the only topic they addressed. Ms. Gomez explained the following:

> At times we talked, but because of the subject matter it was more about the students, about the emotional and personal problems they were having. So I felt like I was able to talk to him about the students, but I guess not making connections with what was going on in class.

Fittingly, both pointed to sharing concerns for the same students as the only factor conducive to their collaboration. For Ms. Gomez, the knowledge that Mr. Flores cared about the same students created a bond. Indeed, she explained: "We share a relationship with the students. This is special. Flores had a really special rapport with them, where he was their role model and the things he told them meant so much. I have a special rapport with them too." Ms. Gomez respected Mr. Flores for his relationship with his students.

Nonetheless, the lack of instructional purpose was certainly detrimental to the establishment of an ongoing collaboration between the two teachers. While they may have had information to exchange, their interactions never involved anything that might have had a tangible impact on their instruction.

The three only meetings between the teachers occurred in the first month of the school year. When they did meet, they engaged in Scanning and Storytelling most of the time (in 12 segments out of 15) and in Joint Work some of the time (in three segments). They did not engage in Aid and Assistance or Sharing. When the form was Scanning

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and Storytelling they always focused on students (see Table 2). They never discussed instruction. Students were talked about but not jointly worked or planned for. Instead, Joint Work centered on administrative duties they had been assigned to fulfill together. The more significant topics were addressed in the least collaborative form. The collaboration was limited when the teachers had a choice, and only involved working together when they had to.

Table 2. Gomez-Flores: Forms of Collaboration, Types, and Topics

Forms of Collaboration	Topics for Collaboration	Number of Segments
Scanning/Storytelling		12
	Student Information	6
	Student concerns	6
Aid & Assistance		0
Sharing		0
Joint Work		3
	Administrative concerns	3

Unfavorable Personal Factors

Ms. Gomez mentioned more personal issues as well when trying to explain the difficulties she had in collaborating with Mr. Flores. Particularly, she pointed out what she saw as his general marginalization within the school that, she thought, was detrimental to collaboration. She explained:

> I felt like Flores didn't really feel a part of the school and I think when he would hear teacher collaboration—let's get together and plan—I don't think he felt comfortable. I think he was more comfortable planning his own things. I guess I felt that he really didn't feel connected.

She also mentioned "his personality" and "his classroom structure" as obstacles. She explained: "Although I was able to talk to him about students, as far as classroom

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structure went we were very different. And he was able to get subject matter across, but I wouldn't be able to teach in that class structure. Even about students, we didn't talk a lot because of our personalities." Despite having common students to talk about, incompatible personalities and differences in instructional styles made collaboration unlikely.

Summing up the Collaborative Relationships

The collaboration between Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris was far richer than the one between Ms. Gomez and Mr. Flores. Significantly, the first pair saw their relationship as addressing student needs and instruction—the two areas that all teachers had seen as the foci for successful collaborative work. Their collaboration benefited from a number of favorable factors. While there were weaknesses in the collaborative culture of the school as a whole, the two found a subculture of their own where collaboration was seen as desirable and useful. Furthermore, compatible schedules and ease of location provided for favorable logistical factors. Structural factors were conducive as well, since the teachers developed and maintained a purpose and focus for their increasingly interrelated collaboration. Finally, the two teachers liked and trusted each other personally.

The relationship between Mr. Flores and Ms. Gomez, however, did not benefit from the same factors. Mr. Flores was not committed to collaborating, in part because he did not see how it would help him in his teaching given that no other teachers shared both his students and his instructional content area. Schedules made it more difficult for them to meet. On a structural level, their relationship touched upon student concerns only— and not upon instruction—and therefore had a limited purpose. Finally, Ms. Gomez did not view Mr. Flores as favorably as she did Mr. Harris.

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Conclusions and Implications

Collaboration allowed Ms. Gomez and Mr. Harris to essentially develop a two-section course that seemed to address the needs of the students, but that had not been designed programmatically by the school. In a way, their collaboration allowed for a fine-tuned day-to-day instructional planning process that differed from more blunt, decontextualized curriculum design. In this way, the study demonstrates how the sharing of instructional practice described in the literature on teacher collaboration can be extended to the level of course design (Houghton, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Gomez, 2001).

Moreover, the collaboration, focused as it was on the perceived needs of a particular population, brought about a form of bilingual education with the specific goal of focusing on those literacy skills the students needed to develop in both languages. Thus the collaboration led to a joint literacy class that was taught bilingually in order to maximize student knowledge and prepare them for aspects of life and schooling in English. Through their collaboration the two teachers thus developed a course that specifically focused on those literacy skills Padron et al. (2000) suggest are typically not addressed in high school classrooms.

Whereas the teachers, like much of the staff, displayed a general deficit focus when discussing the needs of their students, their bilingual course structure provided an additional emphasis on students' strengths. By doing this, the teachers in many ways confirmed what Cummins (1991) states with respect to cognitive transfer. The power of Mr. Harris' and Ms. Gomez' work in this regard was that they seemed to have arrived at this not out of an abstract commitment to the principles of bilingual education, but

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because their collaboration made it the most effective way to teach their students how to read and write.

Furthermore, the case study highlights the difficulties of collaborating across content areas, of convincing teachers that academic skills fundamental to math and language arts, for instance, are closely related. As it is, the potential for collaboration between Mr. Flores and the two teachers of language-related courses was significantly hampered by the fact that the teachers did not see how collaborating across disciplines could benefit their instruction. This in turn confirms the more general finding in the literature that shared meaning among teachers is a requisite for successful collaboration (Horn, 2006). This would be an area for teacher educators and school administrators to focus on, confirming the importance for schools to promote common views on the purpose and need for collaboration through professional development (David, 2009; Du Four & Burnette, 2002).

For collaboration to be effective, various favorable factors had to intersect. The collaborators had to be joined by a common understanding of essential issues and a shared belief that collaboration would benefit them. They had to know how to work together and develop adequate procedures. They had to approach the process with instruction in mind, focusing conversations on what they were doing and planned to do so that they could leave their meetings with a sense of having helped themselves as teachers. Finally, they had to like and trust each other.

The implication for professional development aimed at veteran as well as new teachers is that the implementation of collaborative practices requires conceptualizing a composite of different factors that each have a crucial role to play. A school would be

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hard pressed to effectively implement collaboration unless the need for stepping out of the traditional teacher isolation and working with others is shared by all and common educational priorities are clearly identified. If these conditions are indeed put in place through professional development, teachers require time and a convenient place to meet regularly, and procedures with which to do so. To be successful, collaborating teachers need to approach their interactions with a steady focus on their mutual classroom practice. Finally, schools ought to consider trust and affinity among potential collaborators as something that needs to be established and developed in order for all these conditions to lead to effective collaborative practices.

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