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Shannon M. Pella

CSU, Sacramento, pella@csus.edu

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## **Exploring the Impact of Teacher Collaboration on Student Learning: A Focus on Writing**

Shannon M. Pella, Ph.D.  
*California State University-Sacramento*

Teacher collaboration is widely viewed as an effective way for teachers to develop the types of instructional practices that support student learning (Marrongelle, Sztajn, and Smith, 2013; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Coherent and effective writing, for a variety of purposes and audiences, are critical student learning outcomes needed to participate in the global economy (Wagner, 2012; 2008; Gee, 2000). Writing is also a focus of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, Literacy in History, Science and Technical Subjects, and the Next Generation Science Standards, which all require students to develop disciplinary academic language (Bunch, 2013; Hakuta, & Santos, 2013). Research that is located at the intersection between teaching and learning writing and teacher professional development suggests that the learning contexts, designs, and activities of teacher professional development, specifically those that include teacher collaboration can powerfully influence how teachers appropriate knowledge for teaching writing (Pella, 2015a; 2015b; 2012, 2011; Lieberman, & Miller, 2008; Lieberman, & Wood, 2003; Grossman, Valencia, Evans, Thompson, Martin, & Place, 2000; Sperling & Woodlief, 1997). Furthermore, there is a persistent need to uncover and describe connections between instructional strategies for teaching writing and student learning outcomes, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (Ball, 2006; O'Neill, Murphy, Williamson, & Huot, 2006; Jones, Jones, & Hargrove, 2003; Hillocks, 2003; Huot, 2002; Murphy, 1997; Banks, 1993; Smith, 1991; Durst, 1990). The primary aim of this present study was to seek connections, if any, between teacher collaboration, the development of instructional moves for the effective teaching of writing in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms, and students' writing skill development. The following research questions were addressed: (a) What, if any, instructional moves were developed through teacher collaboration and enacted in the classroom? (b) What, if any, student learning outcomes were connected to the instructional moves that originated in the collaboration and enacted in the

classroom? Instructional moves under examination in this study are those that are specifically related to teaching and learning writing.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Historically, teacher education programs and American “factory–model schools” offered little time for teachers to spend working together to develop curriculum, plan lessons, discuss teaching strategies, and assess student work in authentic ways (Darling-Hammond, 2006). More recently, teacher collaboration has taken hold as way to engage teachers in professional development (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Through practice-based collaboration teachers can share experiences, concerns, and grow their knowledge for teaching. Teacher collaboration models vary in the degree of systemization. In other words, the collaborative structures might follow a more rigid design and set of protocols or be more dynamic and flexible depending on the social context in which they are situated e.g. who is leading the collaboration and the purpose and goals of the work. Participatory action research methodologies offer collaborating teachers the opportunity to design the contexts and protocols in which they operate, select methods for instructional design, student work analysis, and decide how and where to disseminate findings from the collaboration. This present study drew from the theoretical frameworks that support situated learning in inquiry-based communities of practice and participatory action research because both offer opportunities for teachers to build agency and affect change.

### **Situated Learning in Inquiry-Based Communities of Practice**

Professional learning community models that are contextualized, or situated in classroom practices may promise a more authentic and generative learning experience for teachers, particularly as teachers seek to broaden their pedagogy to be more responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students. According to Darling- Hammond (2006),

Teachers need to know how and when to use a range of practices to accomplish their goals with different students in different contexts. And given the wide range of learning situations posed by contemporary students—who represent many distinct language, cultural, and learning approaches— teachers need a much deeper knowledge base about teaching for diverse learners than ever before and more highly developed diagnostic abilities to guide their decisions (p. 304).

For well over a decade, proponents of a paradigm shift in teacher-professional development have posited that inquiry-based professional learning communities

can be effective contexts for teachers to develop their knowledge *in practice for practice* (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). As teachers investigate teaching and learning in classroom contextualized, inquiry-based communities of practice, they engage in socially situated learning. In other words, knowledge that is co-constructed in the context of a particular discourse community is influenced by the views of the participants in that community. As such, learning becomes deeply connected to the context, or situation within which the learning took place. According to Lave and Wenger (1991), participants in a socially situated “community of practice” construct knowledge from their interactions with other people, the environment, and raw materials that are introduced into the community. From this perspective, learning in a community of practice becomes a social process that integrates the situation with the activities of knowledge construction.

Social learning theory, as outlined by Wenger (1998), positions learning as social participation, proposes that learning is fundamentally experiential and social, and defines learning as the “realignment of experience and competence, the ability to negotiate new meanings, and the transformation of identity” (p. 226-227). For teachers, “professional development experiences are particularly effective when situated in a collegial learning environment, where teachers work collaboratively to inquire and reflect on their teaching... [are] situated in practice, focused on student learning... [and] embedded in professional communities.” (Whitcomb, Borko, & Liston, 2009, p. 208). These characteristics of learning, as inherently social, are evidenced in studies of teacher knowledge growth that were developed in constructivist learning contexts, often referred to as social learning networks (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). Additionally, teacher-learning models that are designed to include opportunities for collective participation, active learning, content focus, coherence, and duration are widely viewed by the literature on teacher education to be models “worth testing” (Desimone, 2009). Collective participation is integral to school based collaboration structures that value the local knowledge of the teacher. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2003) described local knowledge as “Both what teachers come to know about their own knowledge through teacher research, and what communities of teacher researchers come to know when they build knowledge collaboratively” (p. 45). Teacher collaboration can be further enhanced by participatory action research approaches, which invite participant input into the design and modification of the collaborative learning model.

### **A Participatory Action Research Approach to Teacher Collaboration**

The three broad stages of action research include inquiry, action, and reflection (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, 2005; Lewin, 1947). Participatory action research involves research participants in each of those stages, as collaborators in the design and modification of the learning model (Mackenzie, Tan, Hoverman, & Baldwin, 2012). Participatory action research approaches capitalize on the expertise of those whom the research concerns, enabling teachers to co-construct their own agendas for research, and maintain ownership over the process (Isreal et al., 2005). There are many ways that teachers, as research participants, can participate in the co-construction of new knowledge. In participatory action research models, where the research model is designed locally, “Participants own the research and acquire knowledge that enables them to apply research results in their own communities in the ways that they wish” (Wilmsen, 2008, p. 5). Teachers often participate in education research, yet authentic participation in research is when participants share in how the research is “conceptualized, practiced, and brought to bear on the life world... to be true participants, they must participate in setting the agenda for the inquiry, participate in the data collection and analysis, and have control over the use of outcomes and the whole process” (Tandon, 1988, p. 13 as cited in McTaggart & Curro, p. 29).

Participatory action research methods are grounded in the belief that authentic and generative transformations in perspectives and practices are more likely to occur when research participants are in control of the design of their own learning (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995). Furthermore, by engaging people who are most directly affected by the issue being investigated, participatory research challenges dominant views of research that situate the research process outside the realm of everyday actions. Ideally, the research process is generated by community needs and results in improved circumstances at the local level. (Kapoor & Jordan, 2009, p. 233).

According to Kindon, Pain & Kesby, (2007),

Participatory action research is collaborative research, education, and action used to gather information to use for change on social or environmental issues. It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it. [Participatory action research] is driven by participants rather than an outside sponsor, funder or academic (although they may be invited to help). [It] offers a democratic model of who can produce, own and use knowledge, is collaborative at every stage, involving discussion, pooling skills and working together, is intended to result in some action, change or

improvement on the issue being researched. [Participatory action research] involves recurrent stages of planning, action and reflection, followed by evaluation (p. 2).

In this present study, participating teachers engaged in sustained collaboration for one year in a structure grounded in the conceptual frameworks of participatory action research. The six teachers engaged in the collaboration to determine if their instructional designs made an impact on student learning. The participants in this present study sought the support of an outside academic (author of this present study) to conduct a second layer of research, studying their processes, the products of their work, and the impact, if any, on student learning. The participating teachers sought the help of this researcher, who is grounded in the fields of writing research and teacher professional development to uncover whether or not the collaborative work, e.g. the student writing analysis, instructional designs and supports developed, had any impact on student writing.

There is a paucity of research that describes the impact of teacher collaboration on student learning (Yoon, K. S., Duncan, T., Lee, S. W. Y., Scarloss, B., & Shapley, K.. 2007). However limited, a body of evidence supporting this relationship does exist (Goddard, Goddard & Moran 2017; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015; Vangrieken, Dochy, Raes, & Kyndt, 2015). This present study seeks evidence-based connections between what the teachers developed in their collaboration, enacted in their classroom instructional practices, and student learning outcomes. Clear causal connections were not sought through the design of this present study. Instead, uncovering a relationship between what participating teachers designed and taught, and what students learned, was a worthwhile undertaking to inform the literature and practicing teachers.

## Methods

This study explored the connections between teacher collaboration and students' learning outcomes primarily focused on students' writing. A mixed methods approach was employed based primarily on qualitative data analysis which drew from participating teachers' analyses of their students' learning as well as the independent data analysis of the principal investigator (author of this present study).

## Research Design

*Timeline, participating teachers, and administrator.* The study began in August 2018 and continued through June 2019. The six teacher participants were all teachers of freshman (ninth grade) English in a comprehensive high school in northern California. Years of teaching ranged from two to sixteen. Two of the teachers were in a co-teaching, inclusive practices setting assignment where

students with disabilities made up approximately one-fourth of their class population. The other four teachers taught in general education classes, which reflected the diversity of the school site. All six teachers voluntarily engaged in both the on-going sustained collaboration, as well as the study of their collaboration. The school principal had previously taught English in an urban high school with a great deal of teacher collaboration and he was committed to developing a collaborative culture at this school site. Improving student achievement through teacher collaboration was his priority since his inception in 2015 and he organized funds to pay for substitute teachers so participating teachers could use full workdays to collaborate. He also made sure funds were available to pay for any work outside the contractual workdays including after school and weekend collaboration time. It is unlikely that the sustained collaboration would have been possible without the vision and support of the school principal.

**Curriculum.** The collaboration was situated in a two-year process of voluntarily piloting four units of study from a new curriculum. The curriculum was Common Core State Standards-based and included an alignment to and focus on the 2012 California English Language Development Standards. Although teachers agreed to follow the basic structure and use the texts and lessons in the curriculum, they were not required to follow it with absolute fidelity. Participating teachers were actively engaged in learning the curriculum, as well as adding to and modifying it in order to capitalize on the assets and meet the needs of their specific student populations. Therefore, the curriculum itself, though soundly designed, was not the focus of this study. Instead, the teachers' collaborative development of ways to use the curriculum in their classrooms, based on their students' assets and needs, were the main foci of data collection and analysis.

**Setting and students.** The students in participating teachers' classrooms reflect the rich diversity of California's urban centers. Each classroom reflects the schools' cultural diversity: 19% African American, 0.8 Native American or Alaska Native, 26 % Asian, 3% Filipino, 31% Hispanic or Latino, 2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 12% White. Approximately 65% of students are socio-economically disadvantaged, 10% are English Learners, 4% are Foster Youth and 12% are Students with Disabilities. Few students in the classrooms of participating teachers scored proficient on the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASP) for English Language Arts (ELA) in grade 8. None of the 86 students whose essays were analyzed scored proficient on the CAASP/ELA in 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Collaboration cycles.** The process included three main cycles of collaborative participatory action research in fall, winter, and spring. Additionally, there were regular bi-weekly collaboration meetings throughout the year to check in, discuss student learning, design lessons and activities together and to support

one another. The three main cycles of action research involved a systematic analysis of student writing. In the fall teachers collected writing samples from an on-demand writing assessment. Together, they normed the scoring rubric and assessed the writing of 86 focal students. The focal students represented the cultural and linguistic diversity of the student population and were all considered novice in writing and in literacy more broadly. Participating teachers scored the students' essays, discussed what they noticed across each of the focal students' writing and determined their foci for instruction as a result. In the winter, they shared and discussed writing from a curriculum embedded, instructionally supported writing task. In this writing, students were supported by the classroom instruction of the teachers through lessons that were developed in collaboration. In the spring, teachers compared scores from a second on-demand writing assessment to scores from the fall assessment. Although participating teachers drew their own conclusions based on their collaborative analysis of student writing, they sought the help of the author of this study to support their work by conducting a second layer of empirical data analysis.

### **Data Collection**

The documentary data that informed this study included field notes from over eighty hours of collaboration meetings and sixty-five observations of participating teachers. Teacher created artifacts numbered 167 total documents and included: reformatted texts, lesson handouts and graphic organizers, gallery walk and group activities, PPTs, images, videos, questions, writing prompts, sentence frames, and mentor texts- all created by participating teachers. Regular member checks with teachers were conducted through classroom visits, email communication and scheduled meetings. Discourse analysis was conducted for three focus group sessions in November, February and May. Student writing samples from compatible fall and spring on-demand writing assessments were compared each assessing the same Common Core Writing Standards and evaluated based on a consistent set of rubric criteria. Student writing was also collected from two instructionally supported writing tasks in October and June. Student responses to a survey were collected at the end of the school year. The survey contained six questions on a Likert scale and four open-ended questions. The student survey sought student self-reports about their confidence levels and literacy skill development, specifically connected to their English class.



## Data Analysis and Preliminary Themes

The data analysis process was conducted in four phases, which included the seven processes of data analysis suggested by Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Teddlie, C. (2003) in their framework for analyzing data in mixed methods research.

**Phase 1. Qualitative analysis: Data reduction and display.** Qualitative data: field notes from over eighty hours of collaboration meetings and sixty-five classroom observations, teacher-created artifacts totaling 167 documents, discourse analysis from three focus group sessions, email communication, scheduled meetings, and on-going member checks, were reduced into summaries and reflective memos. A traditional qualitative data analysis process, the “Content analysis and analytic induction method” (Merriam, 2003), was employed by coding instances of phenomena and identifying patterns. Data display charts served to “organize key ideas that allowed for conclusion drawing and verification” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11). Data display charts allowed for multiple layers of triangulation in the first phase of analysis. The preliminary themes that emerged from this initial phase of data analysis included the confirmation that the collaboration resulted in shared practices. Those shared instructional practices were focused around teaching students to integrate source material into their writing, which required close and careful reading, attention to vocabulary, and discussion of the source material.

**Phase 2. Quantization of qualitative data: Reduction, display and transformation.** Qualitative data were quantized: 172 student sample essays from on-demand writing assessments and 120 student sample essays from instructionally-supported writing tasks. All essays were scored using the same Common Core State Standards-based rubric. The scores were calculated, displayed and transformed into short narratives. Additionally, 224 student surveys with four open-ended survey questions were also quantized and transformed into narrative descriptions to allow for comparison with all data from qualitative analysis (Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Teddlie, C. 2003). See Appendix: Table 1 *On-Demand Writing Assessment*, and Table 2 *Instructionally Supported Writing Task*. See also Appendix: Table 5 *Open-ended Survey Responses* for more information. Results from this second phase of data analysis uncovered two themes: there was growth in students’ writing from fall to spring and students reported increased confidence, which they attributed to classroom instruction. Furthermore, the scores from the instructionally supported writing tasks were higher than the scores from the on-demand writing assessment, suggesting that instruction positively impacted the quality of students’ writing.

**Phase 3. Quantitative data analysis and quantization of quantitative data.** Two hundred and twenty four student responses to six Likert scale questions were calculated, displayed in tables, and transformed into narrative descriptions (i.e.,

qualitized; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). See Appendix: Table 3 *Student Survey Responses: Likert Scale* for more information. Students' responses to the Likert scale questions showed a high percentage of self-reported improvement in reading, writing, group collaboration, speaking and listening, presenting, and confidence in self as a student. Furthermore, students connected their academic growth and improved confidence to what they learned in their English classes.

**Phase 4. Qualitative data analysis: Correlation, comparison, triangulation, consolidation, and integration.** All data from the previous three phases of analysis were analyzed to confirm or discount persistent themes. The "Content analysis and analytic induction method" (Merriam, 2003) was repeated. By noting regularities, patterns, explanations, and connections, the following strategies encouraged the quality and internal validity of the data: (a) checking for representativeness, (b) checking for researcher biases, (c) triangulating across data sources and methods to confirm emerging findings, (d) getting feedback from participants via "member checks," and (e) examining the "unpatterns" in the data by following up on surprises that emerged along the way and investigating the meaning of outliers (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A threshold for trustworthiness was established through prolonged engagement with the project, regular member checking, and the ongoing comparison of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Although clear causal links were not sought or evidenced, findings from the cumulated four phases of data analysis suggested a positive relationship between teacher collaboration and student learning.

## Findings

Findings are separated into three sections: *Instructional Moves*, *Student Learning Outcomes*, and *Connections* in response to the two research questions: (a) What, if any, instructional moves were developed through teacher collaboration and enacted in the classroom? (b) What, if any, student learning outcomes were connected to the instructional moves that originated in the collaboration and enacted in the classroom? Instructional moves under examination in this study are those that are specifically related to teaching and learning writing.

## Instructional Moves

Participating teachers identified three instructional foci for the academic year:

1. Teaching students to integrate source material into their writing
2. The close and careful analytic reading of source material, including attention to new and unfamiliar vocabulary
3. Supporting students to engage in respectful academic discussions

The initial focus: to support students to integrate source material into their writing, was determined after collaboratively analyzing students' writing from a fall on-demand writing assessment. The analysis was focused on 86 students from each of the six teachers' classes. Using a standards-based rubric, participating teachers divided the essays, scored them, debriefed the scores and shared the patterns that they noticed throughout the scoring process. The most noteworthy pattern discovered by participating teachers was that the 86 focal students' body paragraphs did not contain appropriately selected evidence from the source material of the writing assessment. When students did include evidence from the texts to support their positions, the evidence was not clearly introduced or explained. Thus, the instructional focus for the year, determined collaboratively and as a result of analyzing student writing, was to design lessons to support body paragraph development, which included the integration evidence from source material into writing. In order to select appropriate evidence from the texts and explain how that evidence supports their positions, students first have to fully comprehend the evidence and the source material as a whole. Therefore, the instructional focus was broadened over the course of several planning meetings as participating teachers' plans included a focus on close and careful reading and discussion of the source material including attention to new and unfamiliar vocabulary.

Teaching and learning writing out of context, and as simply a set of formulas has been a subject of dispute by researchers and practitioners alike (Wiley, 2000; Birkenstein & Graff, 2008). Instead, the notion of writing as thinking, from sources, experiences, as part of a process, and contextualized with an intended audience and purpose, is widely viewed as an effective foundation to teaching and learning writing (Graff & Birkenstein, 2014; Hillocks, 2011). The teachers in this present study considered close reading and discussion of texts, as well as the low-stakes writing that occurred while reading and discussing the texts, to be critical aspects of writing instruction. Low-stakes writing (Elbow, 1997) is writing for which there is no evaluation or assessment. Low-stakes writing in the context of this present study included annotating texts, margin notes, quick writes, journaling, informal poster creation and gallery walks. Instead of isolating and separating reading and writing into two separate categories, participating teachers developed lessons that integrated close reading, low-stakes writing, discussion and a focus on vocabulary. Furthermore, instead of waiting to support students to write at the end of a reading activity, or set of reading activities, participating teachers built targeted opportunities for low-stakes writing throughout the process of close reading, vocabulary support, and discussion, in support of the culminating writing task.

The participating teachers discussed their empathy toward students that receive the writing prompt for the first time after reading assigned texts or a novel. They lamented how the student has to basically re-read the text in order to take a

position responding to the prompt. The student also has to pour back through the text in order to find “evidence” to support their positions. For the student that struggles with reading, this is a process that is unnecessarily cumbersome. In their collaborative instructional designs, participating teachers decided to introduce the culminating writing prompt at the beginning of the unit of study, prior to reading the texts. They designated targeted stopping points throughout the reading to summarize, make predictions, take positions, make notes, focus on key vocabulary, and discuss issues from the texts. This way, students were prepared with a position and notes to support their positions by the time they have finished reading. Additionally, all of the students’ annotations, journal entries, quick writes, notes, graphic organizers, and other forms of low-stakes writing, served as “data banks” from which to select evidence for their culminating writing tasks (Hillocks, 2011). This does not mean that students shouldn’t return to the texts during the writing process. However, it is more efficient to return to the texts to locate and choose among previously selected evidence to use in their writing. Some of these instructional practices were already present in the curricula that participating teachers piloted. The collaboration supported teachers to unpack and discuss these approaches, adapt them, and make them work for the students in their specific classrooms. Each of the following foci of instruction: close and careful reading, attention to vocabulary, discussion, and integrating evidence from sources into writing is described below in separate sections even though in practice there was much overlap.

**Close and careful reading.** As described previously, participating teachers embedded low-stakes writing (opportunities to write without evaluation or assessment) into the close and careful reading of source material. Low-stakes writing included annotating texts, making margin notes on texts, structured note-taking, quick writes, daily warm-ups, journal entries, informal poster creation and gallery walks. The teachers identified targeted places in the texts to stop, read again, discuss, and make notes. Densely packed sentences were often stopping points for teachers to target close reading instruction. Such sentences were densely packed with punctuation, multiple clauses, academic vocabulary or other complex ideas or grammatical structures. By targeting densely packed sentences, and teaching students how to unpack the sentences, participating teachers felt they were fostering a literacy skill that could transfer to complex texts in any discipline. The following excerpt illustrates an interactive activity to introduce the process of sentence unpacking:

The teacher begins by explaining what sentence unpacking is. He explains that in the texts they will read, there are many densely packed sentences: long, complicated

sentences, packed with information that when unpacked, can be understood easier. The teacher projected the sentence: *Dogs may be considered man's best friend, but their fur brings in so much dirt that they are a nightmare to keep clean, not to mention how much dog food you have to buy.* The teacher explains that they will try unpacking this (simpler) version of a densely packed sentence first before tackling a sentence from the text. The teacher divides the sentence into three sections and asks students to discuss the meaning of each section of the sentence with a partner. The teacher thinks aloud "I am looking at this part of the sentence and figuring out what it means and rewriting it in simpler terms." Under the document camera the teacher has drawn lines through the densely packed sentence to divide it and rewrites each section interactively with his students, modeling, and prompting them to elicit ideas. The unpacked sentence is divided into three sections:

- Dogs can be good pets
- But they can be dirty
- Dog food can be expensive

Next the teacher shows kids under the document camera how to use a strip of paper to cover the original sentence and asks students to re-write the sentence in their own words, looking only at the bullet points. He elicits suggestions from the kids and they re-write the sentence together as a class: *Dogs are awesome but can be dirty and expensive.* The teacher then leads the class through the sentence unpacking process for the first densely packed sentence from the text. The teacher models how to use the strip to cover the original sentence as they rewrite the sentence on their handout. After a debrief, the students work in small groups to unpack five densely packed sentences from the text, which they share in a whole class discussion. (Observation Notes, 10-3-18).

Sentence unpacking is a way to engage in the close reading of texts. It may serve as a way to build knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and sentence construction, and to practice engaging in respectful discussion and interactions. The primary goal of sentence unpacking for participating teachers was to increase reading comprehension. Several sentence-unpacking activities were already built into the

units of study from the curriculum. Participating teachers located additional places throughout the units where they could engage students in sentence and short excerpt unpacking. Perhaps most importantly, participating teachers wanted to make sentence unpacking a transferrable skill with the assets and needs of their own particular students in mind. By the middle of the school year, teachers were asking students to identify densely packed sentences from the texts they were reading. In small groups students were asked to unpack each sentence, rewrite the sentence and then explain how their understanding of these sentences impacted their understanding of the sections of texts where sentences were located and the texts as a whole. This close and careful reading activity, along with annotating, note taking, and discussing targeted sections of texts, invited students to investigate the text at the word, sentence, paragraph, section, and whole text levels.

**Vocabulary.** Attention to academic language was a priority for participating teachers. They often noted that teaching academic vocabulary was an equity issue; that their students needed opportunities to learn to communicate with academic English. They also spoke regularly about their respect for all languages and treated academic English as one of many ways to effectively communicate. In collaboration meetings teachers regularly scanned each text for the vocabulary they would need to address in order to support students' comprehension of the source material. Sometimes they delegated this task and shared their word lists. Teachers created word walls, warm-ups, and vocabulary-focused activities. For example, a common lesson involved students in previewing vocabulary before reading and predicting what the words mean. Later, as the words showed up during reading, teachers directed students to consider their earlier predictions and discussed and recorded the meanings of the words in context. All six participating teachers used word walls and some form of the predicting and reviewing vocabulary in context activities. Several teachers went further. One teacher created a daily grammar and vocabulary warm up using words from the unit of study.

The teacher wrote on his hand-held whiteboard (about the size of a poster), a quote from the main character in the novel the class was reading: "Let me tell you that old, old, old and decrepit geometry book hit my heart with the force of a nuclear bomb." The teacher leads a discussion about what the word *decrepit* means, kids came up with synonyms like *outdated*, *run-down*, *worn out*, *over used*. Then they talked about the part of speech: the word is an adjective. The teacher then asked kids to give examples of things that are decrepit; kids said things like, "desks, houses, people." The teacher invited a student to come to the front of the class and annotate the quote, labeling the following: adjective, pronoun, article, noun,

preposition, and verbs with the help of classmates. (Observation Notes, 3-4-19).

As noted earlier, participating teachers collaboratively scanned each text and made lists of vocabulary they would address throughout the units of study. The planning process for the teacher illustrated in this example involved creating a sentence with a vocabulary word, or using a sentence or quote from a text that students were currently reading. The teacher wrote the sentence on a poster-sized white board. One student was selected to mark the sentence as classmates identified the grammar of the sentence. The vocabulary words were used in context so the students would learn the word and review parts of speech and punctuation with improved analytic reading as the ultimate goal. To wrap up the activity, the teacher turned the hand-held whiteboard around and showed students a picture that he had drawn, illustrating the vocabulary word in context. Discussion of the picture further encouraged understanding of the vocabulary term, as well as delighted the students (and observer) because the teacher is a talented artist.

While the focus on vocabulary was regular and consistent across all five classrooms, there was freedom to work within one's own teaching style. One of the ways a participating teacher described their collaboration, "it gave me so many ideas of things I could try but it did not require me to give up doing what I know works in my classroom." In the example provided, the teacher used the same vocabulary terms as all of the other participating teachers, but created his own methods for instructional delivery. At least one other teacher used a similar activity in her classroom. All teachers created word walls and engaged students in predicting and debriefing vocabulary in context.

**Respectful discussions.** In each of the close reading and vocabulary-focused activities, teachers built in opportunities for discussion with a partner, small group, or whole class. The units of study teachers were piloting directed them to engage students in discussion in certain areas of the unit. Nonetheless, participating teachers regularly added support and scaffolding to help students learn to engage in discussions. Participating teachers agreed that simply directing students to "turn and talk" or "get into small groups" would not suffice. In their collaboration meetings, teachers developed activities to support students to engage in discussions and to do so respectfully. Sentence frames for respectful discussion were modeled, practiced, and reviewed regularly as students were engaged in daily interactions with peers to discuss the readings. In order to provide more opportunities for students to discuss topics and issues from the texts, participating teachers designed activities for moving around the room in groups to write on posters (basic chart paper) displayed around the room. Referred to as "gallery walks" these activities allowed for movement as well as interaction with others. In one of the gallery walk

activities; the teacher posted prompts related to a novel that students were reading to encourage dialogue about the novel:

There were 8 pieces of chart paper posted around the classroom. On each poster was the beginning of a sentence e.g. *The (main character) of (the novel) is... because...* Kids went around to each poster and added a response to the sentence frame on each poster. Then they returned to their desks, got their notebooks, returned to the posters and selected two or three responses that stood out to them in some way. They each recorded the responses they selected in their notebooks. Students were asked to share what they recorded, whether they agreed or disagreed and why. As students heard others sharing their responses, they were encouraged to engage in a dialogue. The teacher facilitated this aspect of the class discussion but it was generally directed by the students. (Observation notes, 11-14-18).

In another classroom, the teacher encouraged discussion throughout the process of reading the novel by building in short partner reading and discussion activities:

The teacher engaged students in a short review of where they previously left off in the book. As part of the review, the teacher asks students questions about the novel's events. For the next section of the book, students are asked to read a short section of text with a partner. The teacher explains where they will stop and the two things they need to know for the discussion after the reading. Kids got up and moved to sit with a (previously determined) partner to do this section of the reading. They were given 6 minutes to read together (one student reading to the partner) and 6 minutes to discuss the topic selected by the teacher. The timer is set. After reading, the teacher reminds students what to discuss and resets the timer. During the partner discussion, the teacher goes around to the partner groups to check in and answer questions. When time is up, the teacher calls on students to answer questions. This process is repeated throughout the class period, switching partners each time. Students have multiple previously assigned partners for activities such as these. (Observation notes, 3-12-19).

In approximately sixty-five classroom observations, there was no class period without some form of student discussion. Opportunities for discussion were built into the writing process as well. Students were encouraged to share their writing in small peer groups, and through class presentations after each culminating writing task.

**Integrating source material into students' writing.** The integration of evidence from texts was the primary focus of teachers' planning and instruction.



To that end, they designed activities for students to engage in close reading, discussion, and vocabulary building activities to support comprehension of the source material. The low-stakes writing throughout the reading process generated notebooks full of quotes, page numbers, graphic organizers, responses to questions as well as text sets marked up and ready for reference during the final culminating writing task. The final writing task for each unit of study involved organizing all of the thoughts and notes into a cohesive piece of writing that would not only demonstrate writing clarity but also students' analytic reading and academic vocabulary knowledge.

Participating teachers collaboratively developed outlines, sentence starters, templates, and rubrics to increase students' body paragraph organization. Although they wrestled with formulaic approaches, they agreed that structure balanced with flexibility was advantageous. In addition to the format-oriented supports, participating teachers designed critical thinking activities to help students understand how to select appropriate evidence to support their positions, introduce and explain the evidence. They created visual, tactile, and collaborative activities in order to engage students in thinking about and discussing why and how to integrate evidence into their writing. The following example shows a teacher engaging her students in thinking critically about the source material drawn from texts to support claims:

There were eight posters total (chart paper). Each poster had a different claim written across the top. Students were given a set of excerpts from the texts, cut apart in strips of paper- this was the "evidence." In small groups, students decided which evidence matched the claims written on the posters and taped the selected evidence to the corresponding poster. They were then asked to walk around the classroom "gallery" and read each of the sets of evidence taped under each claim. As they read what their classmates decided, they noted where they agreed and disagreed. The teacher facilitated a discussion, debriefing the activity during which students were trying to convince other students that certain sets of evidence more appropriately matched specific claims. This led to a lively debate that seemed to pique interest among students. (Observation notes, 12-7-19).

In the lesson that followed, students were provided one claim and two sets of evidence that each supported the claim. They were also given a list of various sentence frames to introduce evidence into a body paragraph for example, *In (title of text), author (name) argues...* The task for students was to practice using the

sentence frames to introduce the evidence. The teacher asked students to take turns presenting their claims and introduction of evidence to the class under the document camera and the class provided feedback. In the next lesson, students were provided sentence frames for explaining their evidence e.g. *This quote means that...* and they took turns using the document camera to present: the claim, evidence, and their explanations. Their short informal presentations were a further opportunity to provide and receive feedback. During this lesson the teacher asked students to remove the sentence frame (*This quote means that...*) and she helped the students recognize that they didn't need that sentence frame in their actual writing, it was just helpful to use as a jump-start to their thinking. The opportunities to: match claims and evidence, practice introducing and explaining evidence, and discuss each others ideas, moved body paragraph organization beyond a simple formula and toward a more creative, critical thinking exercise.

Each of the four units of study that teachers adapted provided opportunities for close and careful analytic reading, low stakes writing, critical thinking, discussion, a focus on vocabulary and culminated in a final writing task in one of four genres: memoir, proposal, speech, and podcast. Each writing task contained a presentation component, which required students to present their writing to the class either in person or through audio recording (podcast). The presentation aspect of each task prompted participating teachers to design further supports to help students understand and operationalize effective presentation skills. The teachers collaboratively designed rubrics that included voice and tone, eye contact and body language, and the effective use of visuals and technology. Although the focus of the teachers' collaboration was on writing, reading, vocabulary and academic discussion, student presentations were a regular feature of the units and students engaged in a minimum of four class presentations throughout the year.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

***Student on-demand writing.*** Growth between the fall and spring on-demand writing was clear. The overall average of the rubric criteria for the fall on-demand writing assessment was a 1.63 compared to 2.01 in the spring. Scores were based on a scoring rubric aligned to Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts in grades 9-10. The rubric scores ranged from 4-1. 4=highly effective: exceeding standards, 3=Effective: meeting the standards, 2=Developing: approaching the standards, and 1=Novice: attempts the skills required. The fall scores represent novice writing skills that grew by .38 in the spring. This may seem minimal, however, if students grew at that same rate each school year, they would be proficient writers by their high school graduation. See Appendix: Table 1 *On-Demand Writing Assessment*.

***Instructionally supported writing tasks.*** On-demand writing can't capture all of the writing skills that students can demonstrate with time, attention to detail, and input from class instruction and teacher support. The two writing tasks that resulted from such support showed substantial differences from on-demand writing. Although the writing tasks included instructional supports such as lessons, templates, discussion, modeling, and in-class writing time, they were nonetheless written independently by students. The average scores for fall were 2.17 and 2.73 in spring. This is significantly higher than the on-demand writing assessments. Even the fall supported writing task scores were higher than the spring on-demand writing scores, suggesting that the instructional support that students received throughout their writing process made a positive difference in their written products. See Appendix: Table 2 *Instructionally Supported Writing Task*. Both of the on-demand writing assessments (in fall and spring) were aligned to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, Writing Standard 1, "Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence." Students were given two texts to read and a prompt asking them to take a position and to use examples and evidence from the texts to support their positions. The instructionally supported writing tasks were also grounded in the standards-based writing text type and required students to draw from the texts they read together in class. All of the writing assessments and tasks followed the same basic format: they included two texts as source material and the writing prompts were structured in a compatible format and with similar language. All writing was scored with the same standards-based rubric.

It is interesting to note that the curriculum embedded and instructionally supported writing that was ongoing throughout the year was characterized by a variety of writing text types and genres. The curriculum that teachers were piloting invited students to write a memoir, create a podcast, draft a proposal, and write and deliver a speech. Although the genres varied, the instructional focus of teachers was consistent: no matter the genre, students needed to learn to draw evidence from texts and integrate evidence smoothly into their writing. The participating teachers agreed that *all* students should have access to opportunities to write in a variety of genres and text types for various audiences, purposes and in multiple modalities. These findings suggest that the instructional foci can be specific, but the instructional moves and the writing tasks for students can, and arguably should, be as varied as possible to engage students in writing for a variety of authentic purposes.

## Connections

Teacher focus group discourse and student surveys were analyzed in order to triangulate and confirm a relationship between the collaboration and the gains in student learning. For example, in the spring focus group, teachers shared anecdotes reflecting that their students' stamina and perseverance grew, that students produced lengthier writing, used more direct evidence, made clearer references to texts, better expressed their positions, and showed they understood the writing prompt, the language, vocabulary, and content of the texts they read.

These insights into student learning fit with the analysis of student writing as well as students' perceptions of their own growth. According to their responses to the Likert scale survey questions, a high number of students (64-80%) either agreed or strongly agreed that their skills improved in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, presenting, and collaborating as well as their overall growth as a student. More specifically, the high percentages of students that indicated they either strongly agreed or agreed that their skills improved as a result of their English class breaks down as follows: 80.36% improved in writing, 78.13% improved in reading, 67.85% improved in speaking and presentation, 68.30% improved in group collaboration, 69.64% improved in listening, and 64.28% of students surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement, "I feel more confident in my other classes based on what I learned in English this year." See Appendix: Table 3 *Student Survey Responses: Likert Scale* for more information.

Students' responses to open-ended survey questions further illustrated a relationship between what they were taught specifically in their English classes and what they reported learning. For example, when asked what they feel more confident doing as a direct result of their English instruction, their responses included: presentations, reading, writing, speaking, listening, social skills, collaboration and study skills. When asked specifically what they did in English class that helped them grow in these areas, students' responses fell into two main categories: Practice 80% and Instruction 15%. Combining these two categories, because they are clear indications of what the teachers designed and delivered, suggests that approximately 95% of students attribute their academic growth, particularly in writing, to classroom instruction. Establishing a causal connection was not the goal of this present study. However, there is ample evidence to suggest a positive relationship between the lessons that teachers developed in their collaboration, delivered in their classrooms, and gains in student learning. See Appendix: Table 4 *Open-ended Survey Responses* for more information.

In response to the open-ended survey questions, representative excerpts further illustrate how students articulated their reasons for their improved literacy skills. For example, when asked what they did in their English class to support their growth in writing, sample student responses included the following,

“Because of all of the writing we do in this class and advice our teacher gives us.”

“I think some writing techniques that we were showed helped me.”

“I have learned to write while I read.”

“Because we write a lot in English.”

“Doing [graphic organizers] has helped me become a better writer because I had to learn to find information and put it in my own words in a way the reader can understand.” “Vocabulary also helped me become a stronger writer because I have a large selection of words I can use to write personally or publicly.”

Responding specifically to questions about improvements they have made in reading, presenting, listening and speaking, student responses included,

“Discussing questions from articles.”

“What helped me improve as a reader was the constant learning of vocabulary.”

“Reading everyday helped me improve my reading skills and expand my vocabulary.”

“I feel confident because I did it [presentations] so many times in this class and it helped me do it in other classes.”

“What helped me gain confidence in this area is that throughout freshman year I did have a certain amount of presentations done in classes with a group or as an individual. Having lots of practice I feel more comfortable presenting in front of others.”

See Appendix: Table 5 *Representative Sample Excerpts from Student Responses to Open-ended Survey* for more information.

The survey responses from the students in this present study confirmed a relationship between what was taught and what was learned in students’ English classes. The four units that the teachers piloted were based on high interest themes: food and health, contemporary music, historical injustice, and reading and responding to the novel: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. There were many opportunities to engage students in thoughtful discussions about issues that pertained to their lives and the lives of the people they care about. Participating teachers capitalized on these opportunities and it seemed to pay off in the high level of engagement with the texts that was evidenced in the classroom observations. Throughout the instructional moves outlined earlier, there were elements of equity pedagogy present. As one of five dimensions of

multiculturalism, equity pedagogy includes a wide range of multi-modal strategies that engage students in knowledge construction.

According to Banks and Banks (1995), equity pedagogy “challenges teachers to use teaching strategies that facilitate the learning process. Instead of focusing on the memorization of knowledge constructed by authorities, students in classrooms where equity pedagogy is used learn to generate knowledge and create new understandings” (p. 153). Throughout the lessons on reading, writing, listening, speaking and presenting, teachers built in opportunities for students to think, discuss, and write critically about the issues in the texts. Several of the instructional strategies outlined in this present study have been suggested by the literature as effective strategies for teaching writing in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. These include: extended opportunities to write, explicit instruction in the conventions of texts, making connections between the texts and students’ own lives and experiences, active reading and responding to texts, direct instruction, modeling and scaffolding, an immersion experience in the topics of the texts; including speaking and listening opportunities, and engaging students in higher order thinking and authentic and meaningful writing (Ball, 2006). Participating teachers collaborated for over 80 hours to produce approximately 167 artifacts that included support and scaffolding for critical thinking and discussion of texts. Several writing lessons were format-focused and attended to the organization of writing. Other writing lessons were thinking-focused and students were engaged in marking the texts where ideas resonated with them, graphically representing ideas in relation to other ideas, discussing topics and debating themes and issues generated from the texts. The data from this study is clear: that the participating teachers collaboratively designed lessons that focused on reading, writing, and discussing texts. Those lessons were enacted in all of their classrooms and made a positive impact on students’ learning and improved confidence in various literacy practices.

### **Limitations**

There are inevitably uncontrolled variables that could have been associated with growth in student writing outcomes. The curriculum that teachers were piloting was high interest and focused on reading and writing. It provided many research-based and focused strategies to support students to develop academic language and reading and writing skills, beyond what the teachers created in their collaboration. Additionally, the six teachers spent a lot of time discussing and refining their management and relationship-building approaches during the collaboration time. The relationships that each teacher built with students might have been quite impactful for student growth and yet this was not measured in the present study. Furthermore, the brain development process itself in adolescents

aged 13-15 could account for more developed thinking over the period of nine months, which may have accounted for improved writing.

The writing scores themselves could be a source of contention. Participating teachers scored the focal students' writing to determine the areas of need and instructional foci for the year. However, as the principal investigator and author of this study, I scored each of the essays independently, in order to remove the need for inter-rater reliability. In so doing, I removed all identifiers from the essays and held myself to a high standard of ethics and integrity. However, I cannot fully account for any implicit bias that I could not control because the two on-demand writing assessments were designed with different content and writing prompts so as I scored them, I knew which were fall and which were spring. I worked hard to remain objective and scored each essay as closely to the rubric as possible. Nevertheless, even if we completely discounted the data from students' writing scores, the fact remains that the students themselves reported improved writing and increased confidence, which they attributed to the instruction they received in their English classes. Causal claims cannot be made. However, evidence suggests that because the instructional foci were determined in the collaboration meetings, and the on-going enactment of the instructional strategies were aimed at supporting students to read, write, discuss, and think critically, there is a positive relationship between teacher collaboration and student learning outcomes.

## **Discussion**

Paid collaboration time is built into the contract and salary schedule of the teachers in this present study. Schools in their district end one hour early every Thursday in order to provide teachers time to engage in grade level, department, or full site collaboration. The participating teachers explained that they primarily use this time to check in with their grade level and/or department teams, to resolve logistical issues, make announcements, plan and discuss school events, and share student concerns. Although they value these things and appreciate their weekly meetings, the teachers agreed that one hour per week is not nearly enough time to negotiate the theories that support teaching and learning or to design and develop instructional practices or curricula. On the other hand, six-hour release days, provided multiple times per year, afforded opportunities for teachers to analyze students' writing, discuss students' assets and needs, design lessons, and operationalize the theories that support literacy instruction.

The school site funded substitutes so teachers could meet during the school day and teachers were paid for the time they spent collaborating outside of the contractual workday. The principal supported the funding for collaboration because he wholeheartedly shared the teachers' mission: to improve the confidence and the literacy skills of the school's culturally and linguistically diverse students. The

funds allocated for the collaborative work were a fraction of what the site had spent in previous years to hire outside consultants or send teachers to trainings. Schools that elect to use outside professional development providers can still benefit from on-going teacher collaboration. Sustained collaboration can promote the application of new concepts to practice and may prevent the new ideas from being shelved along with the materials and binder that they came in.

Although teachers in this study were not in absolute lockstep with each other, and each had their own unique teaching style, they did enact shared practices in their classrooms that they continue to discuss and refine through collaboration. Six months after the study was completed, the participating teachers still collaborate regularly, using student writing data from fall and spring to inform their teaching practices. In October 2019, findings from this study were communicated to the rest of the English department as well as to the history and science departments at the school site. These conversations about collaboration focused on student writing made a positive and generative impact. For example, findings from this study inspired the history department to analyze 120 focal students' writing from a Fall 2019 on-demand writing assessment with plans to compare these scores to an instructionally supported writing task in Spring 2020. Furthermore, a shared language and a common set of rubric criteria for writing arguments across the science, history and English departments has been developed and is beginning to be used across disciplines. A History teacher reported that when he told his students that their Science, English and History teachers were all using the same language and rubric criteria for writing arguments, one of his students remarked, "Its about time!"

The dissemination of findings from this study, specifically findings that suggested a positive relationship between shared practices for teaching and learning writing and students' learning outcomes was a catalyst for an emerging focus on writing across the disciplines. It is clear from the literature that more research is needed across various study designs to connect teacher collaboration to student learning outcomes, arguably with research participants actively involved in setting the agenda for the inquiry and participating in the research process. Any research design that seeks to make connections between teacher collaboration and student learning is necessary and needed to fill a widely recognized gap in the literature. However, studies particularly useful to practitioners are those that document and describe effective collaboration structures and sustainable supports and the instructional practices that are developed in the collaboration and enacted in classrooms. Studies are also needed that can capture and describe the tasks, assessments and instruments that the teachers use to determine how their instruction impacts student learning. Access to current and robust research findings from all research design paradigms, including participatory action research designs, is an



imperative for practitioners and school administrators to develop collaboration models that fit their school contexts, assets, and the needs of their unique school communities.

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## Appendix

Table 1  
*On-Demand Writing Assessment*

Assessment Criteria	Fall '18	Spring '19	% Change
Introduction	1.68	2.17	+22%
Thesis	1.67	2.04	+18%
Body Paragraph Organization: Topic Sentence	1.77	2.15	+17%
Body Paragraph Organization: Evidence from sources	1.73	2.10	+17%
Body Paragraph Organization: Analysis	1.67	2.0	+16%
Counterclaim and Rebuttal	1.54	1.83	+15%
Conclusion	1.70	2.0	+15%
Academic Language/Tone	1.49	1.82	+18%
Conventions: Grammar, usage, mechanics	1.44	1.65	+12%
Total Rubric Score	1.63	2.01	+18%

N=86 Focal Students, 172 total writing samples

Table 2  
*Instructionally Supported Writing Task*

Assessment Criteria	Fall '18	Spring '19	% Change
Introduction	2.34	2.25	-20%
Thesis	2.25	3.12	+27%
Body Paragraph Organization: Topic Sentence	2.27	2.94	+22%
Body Paragraph Organization: Evidence from sources	2.20	2.79	+21%
Body Paragraph Organization: Analysis	2.14	2.73	+21%
Counterclaim and Rebuttal	2.11	2.70	+21%
Conclusion	2.14	2.72	+21%
Academic Language/Tone	2.05	2.67	+23%
Conventions: Grammar, usage, mechanics	2.03	2.67	+23%
Total Rubric Score	2.17	2.73	+20%

N=60 Focal Students, 120 total writing samples

Table 3  
*Survey Responses Likert Scale*

My **READING SKILLS** have improved this year

Freshman (n=224)*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	26.79%	51.34%	19.64%	1.34%	.9%

My **SPEAKING** and **PRESENTATION SKILLS** have improved this year

Freshman (n=224)*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	24.55%	43.30%	25.89%	4.91%	1.34%

My **GROUP COLLABORATION SKILLS** have improved this year

Freshman (n=224)*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	25%	43.30%	23.21%	5.36%	3.13%

My **LISTENING SKILLS** have improved this year

Freshman (n=224)*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	26.34%	43.30%	24.55%	3.57%	2.23%

My **WRITING SKILLS** have improved this year

Freshman (n=224)*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	33.48%	46.88%	15.63%	2.68%	1.34%

I feel more confident in my other classes based on what I learned in English this year

Freshman (n=224)*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	27.23%	37.05%	28.57%	4.91%	2.23%

\*N =224 is 71% of the total freshman of the six participating teachers. Confidence Level 99% Confidence interval of 4.62.

Table 4  
*Open-ended Survey Responses*

Q1. Reflect on your English class and give at least one example of something you feel more confident doing:

25% Presentations
23% Writing (annotating, taking notes, gathering information for essays)
21% Speaking in class (participating in group discussions, partner, whole class)
15% Reading
13% Social Skills: listening to others, helping others, making new friends
8% Collaboration: Working in groups, collaboration, team work, sharing ideas
4% Study Skills: Completing assignments, earning better grades, asking questions, completing projects, improving in other classes
1% Language and Conventions: Grammar, spelling, vocabulary

Q2. Why do you feel more confident doing this? Be specific about what you did or learned in your English class that helped you gain confidence in this area:

Themes	Sample Response
80% Practice*	“We did this a lot in English class”
15% Instruction	“Taught me methods and strategies”
5% Effort:	“Because I made the effort”
1% Other	“I lost weight and that was a big insecurity for me”

\*Practice: 80%

- Practice: Writing (23% of the practice responses)
- Practice Reading (22% of the practice responses)
- Practice: Giving presentations (22% of the practice responses)
- Practice Collaborating: working with others: getting to know more people/made friends/working in groups (18% of the practice responses)
- Practice Speaking and Listening (in partners, groups and whole class) (15% of the practice responses)

Total Responses 161



Continued:

Table 4

*Open-ended Survey Responses*

Q3. Please give at least one example of something you did in English this year that helped you improve as a READER:

Themes	Sample Response
80% Practice*	Reading every day*
17% Instruction	Annotations, notes, journals, vocabulary
3% Collaboration:	Working in groups, discussions, presentations

\*Practice: 80%

- Independent reading: Silent Sustained Reading (SSR) 10-15 minutes per day (70% of Reading every day responses)
- Reading books as a class (18% of Reading every day responses)
- Reading the texts/ articles (10% of Reading every day responses)
- Reading aloud (2% of Reading every day responses)

Total Responses: 167

Q4. Please give at least one example of something you did in English this year that helped you improve as a WRITER:

Themes	Sample Response
54% Practice	“lots and lots of writing”
42% Instruction	“annotations, notes, journals, quick writes, vocabulary
2% On-Demand Writing	
2% Listening	

Total Responses: 168

Table 5  
*Representative Sample Excerpts from Student Responses to Open-ended Survey*

Q1. Reflect on your English class and give at least one example of something you feel more confident doing:	
Category of Response	Sample: Excerpted Student Responses
Presentations	“I feel more confident in doing presentations. I can speak clearly, answer questions and make eye contact with the audience”
Writing	“I feel more confident when I am assigned an essay or a writing project”
Speaking/participating	“I’m more outgoing” “I feel more confident talking to people about different things”
Reading	“Reading out loud to the class” “I can read faster” “I feel confident in taking notes from articles and annotating”
Social Skills	“Talking to others, making new friends”
Collaboration	“I feel more confident working with other people and being able to share opinions and agree to disagree”
Study Skills	“My effort in my work”
Q2. Why do you feel more confident doing this? Be specific about what you did or learned in your English class that helped you gain confidence in this area:	
Category of Response	Sample: Excerpted Student Responses
Practice: Presentations	“I feel confident because I did it so many times in this class and it helped me do it in other classes”

	“What helped me gain confidence in this area is that throughout freshman year I did have a certain amount of presentations done in classes with a group or as an individual. Having lots of practice I feel more comfortable presenting in front of others.”
Practice: Writing	“We write a lot”
Practice: Speaking/participating	“I feel more confident doing this because we talk a lot to other people in this class”
Practice: Reading	“We do it everyday”
Practice: Social Skills	“I met a lot of good friends this year and they gave me confidence to talk to other people”
Practice: Collaboration	“Because I’ve done it more frequently”  “Being able to work with other people had improved my communication skills and looking at the world in a different perspective”
Instruction: Something the teacher did/created	“I feel confident in this [taking notes and annotating] because I was taught how to take better notes”
Effort: Study Skills	“Because I have been putting more effort into my work then before”
Q3. Please give at least one example of something that you did in English class this year that helped you improve as a READER:	
Category of Response	Sample: Excerpted Student Responses

Practice	<p>“By reading a lot like when we have SSR or when we read books as a class”</p> <p>“Reading everyday helped me improve my reading skills and expand my vocabulary”</p> <p>“Reading good books”</p>
Instruction: Something the teacher did/created	<p>“Analyzing the text”</p> <p>“What helped me improve as a reader was the constant learning of vocabulary”</p> <p>“Discussing questions from articles”</p>
Q4. Please give at least one example of something that you did in English class this year that helped you improve as a WRITER:	
Category of Response	Sample: Excerpted Student Responses
Practice	<p>“Because we write a lot in English”</p> <p>“We also wrote a speech which helped me when writing about an argument. We had a lot of argumentative essays”</p>

<p>Instruction: Something the teacher did</p>	<p>“Because of all of the writing we do in this class and advice our teacher gives us”</p> <p>“Taught me methods/strategies”</p> <p>“Helped me fix my mistakes”</p> <p>“Made me think”</p> <p>“Gave us a rubric”</p> <p>“I think some writing techniques that we were shown helped me”</p> <p>“I have learned to write while I read”</p> <p>“Reading a speech gave me experience and ideas of how a speech was written”</p>
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Total Responses: 165