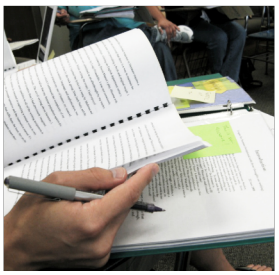
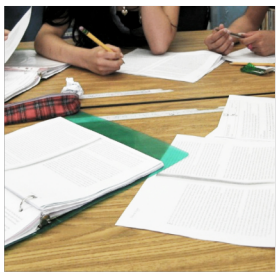
STORIES OF IMPACT



THE ON-SITE WORK OF THE NEW YORK CITY WRITING PROJECT



ELAINE AVIDON, EDITOR

NYCWP

Stories of Impact:
The On-Site Work of the New York City Writing Project

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FOREWORD

Marcie Wolfe
Executive Director, Institute for Literacy Studies
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In 1981, funding from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education enabled the New York City Writing Project to create a new role for teachers: "on-site teacher consultants (TCs)." Carla Asher and I created this new position and were the first teachers to hold it. We entered high schools on behalf of the Writing Project and worked with a critical mass of teachers across the curriculum to incorporate writing into their classrooms. We worked with teachers individually and led year-long after-school seminars modeled after the Invitational Summer Institute. These were new roles in New York City—Carla and I were no longer classroom pedagogues, nor were we supervisors or college faculty. We needed to invent our new identities. Some years later, Joseph Check (2002) described this role as "bridge professional," but at the time we just saw ourselves as using what we knew as teachers to try to get more writing done in schools.

Fueled by passionate commitment and delusional self-confidence, we developed knowledge in the work as we did it. We immersed ourselves in writing theory and practice, trying to articulate and apply some core pedagogical principles in our work with teachers across the curriculum. No one we worked with could possibly have thought of us as experts; for me, it was a delightful surprise any time a teacher reported that something we had developed together had worked well in his class.

Carla and I were on-site TCs for three years. In the roll of time from 1981 until now, close to 60 New York City K–12 teachers have enacted the same role in a program that has continued unabated for 30 years. In those initial years, when it was just the two of us, and later, when there were 10 or more on-site TCs in schools throughout the city, we shared the work that we developed in Friday meetings at Lehman College. As Ed Osterman (2008) describes in his NWP monograph, in such meetings on-site TCs read and learn together. They share their concerns and the stories of their daily realities in different schools. They keep careful files of meetings with teachers and materials they develop. The TCs' materials and documentation are evidence of how our explicit

knowledge of teaching and learning with writing developed in collaboration with teachers in NYC schools, often cross-pollinating from school to school after a Friday meeting. Some of this excellent work appears in this collection, in chapters that both describe and interrogate the effect of NYCWP on-site TCs' work with teachers and in schools.

On-site TCs build and traverse many structures as bridge professionals, but only some of these structures are explicitly about the theory and practice of teaching writing. On-site TCs also travel between schools and communities, between K–12 and the university, between youth culture and canonic education, and between and among teachers whose experience of the same students can be markedly different. On-site TCs sometimes bridge the perspectives of school administrators and teachers. They can move in one week from two days in a maelstrom of chaos to another two days in the peaceful thrum of a functioning school, understanding that each environment has its own potential for meaningful work with students and its own set of intractable realities.

Thus our work with writing has been guided by a great deal of tacit knowledge that has accumulated over time without being explicitly named. The chapters in this collection, while focusing on the teaching of writing, shed light on this tacit knowledge as well, so we learn what it takes to become part of a school's fragile ecosystem while at the same time seeking to influence its approach to literacy and to teacher professionalism. I feel privileged to have worked alongside the NYCWP's on-site TCs and to have watched their work develop over time.

I also feel privileged to have known and collaborated with Elaine Avidon over my lifetime in the NYCWP. Many of her best and most famous qualities were brought to bear on her stewardship of this project. Between the lines in every piece is the imprint of Elaine's powerful and uncompromising intellect, sensitivity to the TCs' work, keen vision as an editor, and dedicated pursuit of a goal.

Finally, none of this work would have been possible without our colleagues at the National Writing Project, who fund and guide our programs and evaluation research. The NWP has grown the professional practice of our on-site TCs through annual meetings and through opportunities to lead or participate in special programs. Over time, the NWP has crafted careful models of facilitation that extended our own work

and from which we continue to benefit. Our work in New York City schools is stronger as a result of the NWP's support and its fostering of a national dialogue about teaching writing. All of us at the New York City Writing Project are grateful to the NWP many times over for the network of committed writing educators that they have built and nurtured, for the core NWP staff who have both cheered us on and challenged us, and, of course, for publishing this collection.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Elaine Avidon, Editor

The work of a Writing Project teacher consultant is constant. At each corner is a request, a question, an idea that requires exploration. In response, TCs provide the needed professional support. They do what needs to be done—they listen, gather resources, locate the questions that allow the teacher to see for himself. So it is something of a miracle that the TCs and Writing Project leadership team gave their precious time to write for this book, which could not have happened without their substantial effort. Thank you to Barbara Batton, Joe Bellacero, Debi Freeman, Felicia George, Diane Giorgi, Lona Jack-Vilmar, Alison Koffler-Wise, Julie Miele, Nancy Mintz, Linette Moorman, Gina Moss, Ed Osterman, Grace Raffaele, Laura Schwartzberg, and Susannah Thompson. And a special shout-out to Amanda Gulla who, in the early days of this project, in addition to being one of the writers, served with me as a co-leader.

Thank you to the National Writing Project for its encouragement and support, particularly to Joye Alberts and Elyse Eidman-Aadahl for recognizing the importance of the stories the NYCWP TCs had to tell and for their assistance along the way. It was with funds from an NWP Urban Sites mini-grant that we were able to put in place structures to sustain and complete the writing of these narratives. The NWP also gave us Elizabeth Radin Simons, former teacher, administrator, and consultant—and the wise editor of several NWP publications. In her living room and by email, Liz patiently supported my work with this collection, sharing and demonstrating her skills as an editor. She was my teacher.

Thank you to the team at the New York City Writing Project and the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College: to Sondra Perl and Richard Sterling, two of the founding directors of the NYCWP who got me started on Writing Project work, and to ILS Associate Director Anne Campos for her encouragement and involvement in the project's early stages. Nancy Mintz, who was the NYCWP director while the book was being written, gave us the idea of "impact" and sacrificed precious Friday meeting time to work on the book. More thanks are due to the ILS support staff, particularly Ellen Halpin and Ashleigh Cassemere-Stanfield, for all the details they so astutely addressed.

Thank you to Jan Gallagher for taking this project through its final steps toward publication, and to Jane Higgins, current Director of the New York City Writing Project, for bringing this project to completion.

Finally, thank you to Marcie Wolfe, director of the ILS, former director of the New York City Writing Project, and, over these past twelve years, a co-conspirator in the leadership of Lehman's Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. There are few people whose thinking I respect more. She is a valued colleague and a savvy leader and teacher.

INTRODUCTION

Foundations of the On-Site Work of the New York City Writing Project Teacher-Consultants

Elaine Avidon

> I like to think that I have two eyes that I don't have to use the same way. When I do educational work with a group of people, I try to see with one eye where those people are as they perceive themselves to be. I do this by looking at body language, by imagination, by talking to them, by visiting them, by learning what they enjoy and what troubles them. I try to find out where they are, and if I can get hold of that with one eye, that's where I start. You have to start where people are, because their growth is going to be from there, not from some abstraction or where you are or where someone else is.
>
> Now my other eye is not such a problem, because I already have in mind a philosophy of where I'd like to see people moving. It's not a clear blueprint for the future but movement toward goals….
>
> —Myles Horton[1] (1990, pp. 131–132)

When we enter a school or classroom as New York City Writing Project teacher consultants (TCs), we have in mind the broad possibilities for writing and reading in that place. Yet we begin (whenever we can) with the individuals who choose to work with us, building relationship with teachers and administrators focused on their concerns and hopes for themselves and their students. Thirty-plus years of providing literacy

[1] I thank Cecelia Traugh for introducing us to the work of Myles Horton and many others in her capacity as founder and director of the Teaching and Learning Inquiry Study Group at the Institute for Literacy Studies.

professional development in the NYC schools has taught us that, if our work is to have an effect on teaching practice and student learning, paying close attention to *how* we work with teachers is as important as the literacy ideals and goals we promote.

About This Book

In 2004, in response to New York City's recurring attempts to restructure its vast school system, the New York City Writing Project began to reexamine its school-based[2] literacy professional development activities from the perspective of impact. In addition to a formal research study of how our site-based efforts contribute to teacher practice and student writing outcomes (Campos & Peach, 2008), the Writing Project's director, two associate directors, and 13 on-site TCs began collecting stories and artifacts from their daily work with teachers and administrators in the city's elementary, middle, and high schools.

The intent of this effort was to articulate for ourselves and others what we knew experientially—the value and potential of professional development in writing and reading across the curriculum that (1) is situated in long-term relationships with teachers formed around their work and (2) views the agency of each teacher as a key component of these professional relationships. *Stories of Impact*, begun in earnest in 2007, is one result of that effort.

The chapters that follow, grounded in the day-to-day realities of professional development in urban public schools, make visible the small but skillful acts of "good workmanship" (Berry, 1981, pp. 275–281) that comprise the craft of working alongside one's colleagues over a sustained period of time. Each narrative demonstrates the importance and complexity of being responsive to the particulars of context, place, and person; of allowing teacher and TC time for the slow altering of ideas this work often demands, and of the negotiation not just of ideas but of standards, which this work is so

[2] The terms *school-based, site-based,* and *on-site* will be used interchangeably to describe the work of Writing Project TCs who work directly and over time with school practitioners in their schools and classrooms.

often about. The writers also portray what they must grapple with and rethink as Writing Project TCs given the data-driven accountability that determines much of what goes on in our city's schools and classrooms.

Though several of the chapters focus on a TC's work with one teacher, an on-site TC in a given year has as many as 10 to 20 such relationships in one or two, or occasionally three or four, schools. Some of these relationships are more intense than others. An on-site TC also regularly meets with administrators, as do the Writing Project's directors. Sometimes the TCs' school-based consulting is enhanced by a concurrent Writing Project inservice course the TC leads at the school or by a workshop series for a district's or region's administrators. In the best of circumstances, the teachers who collaborate most consistently with the on-site TC become models for and teachers of their colleagues. They participate in our Invitational Satellite and Summer Institutes, lead workshops in their schools, and co-lead the inservice training. Some become full-time TCs, learning and relearning the work of school-based teacher support.

Who We Are, What We Know, What We Continue to Learn

History of the NYCWP's On-Site Consulting

In the fall of 1981, two New York City high school English teachers were released[3] with the support of funds from a federal grant, from their classroom teaching positions to work full-time for the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP).[4] Carla Asher and Marcie Wolfe, participants in the NYCWP's first Invitational Summer Institute (1978), became our first school-based TCs, each dividing her week between two schools, working with teachers from across the curriculum that had chosen to take part in the after-school Writing Project inservice graduate course offered at their schools. The fifth day was spent at the NYCWP office at Lehman College with the project's directors, Sondra Perl

[3] The New York City public school teachers who are "released" each year to the NYCWP by the New York City Department of Education (DOE) maintain their DOE salaries and salary rank and are paid by the DOE.

[4] The release of Asher and Wolfe to serve as on-site TCs was made possible by funding from a three-year federal grant awarded to the NYCWP by the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE). In this school-year program, called the Writing Teachers Consortium, the NYCWP would work with a critical mass of teachers in four targeted high schools each year. The goal was to integrate writing across the curriculum, thereby reforming instructional practice and improving student outcomes through a two-pronged approach: (1) 60 hours of after-school seminars in the teaching of writing held each year at each school for 20–25 teachers and (2) on-site assistance from NYCWP TCs released from their teaching positions.

and Richard Sterling, developing resources, reflecting on the work of the previous week, and planning for the upcoming weeks.

Asher and Wolfe embodied the National Writing Project (NWP) belief that the best teacher of a teacher is another teacher. In addition to their knowledge of writing pedagogy and classrooms, as urban teachers themselves, they brought to their new roles a fierce loyalty to and respect for city kids and teachers. Their accomplishments set the standards and boundaries of our school-based work for years to come.

By September 1984, with the completion of the federally funded grant, the site-based model Asher and Wolfe developed in their three years as TCs in the schools was adopted and funded by the NYC Board of Education.[5] The project was also expanded. Additional Writing Project teachers were released to serve as TCs. Instead of spending one year in a school, a TC would now remain in the same school for three years. Since that time, despite multiple shifts in the governance and organization of the of the city's public schools system, in any given year between 10 and 15 Writing Project TCs can still be found working directly with teachers four days a week, each within one or two or more city schools. On Fridays, the TCs all still report to the Writing Project office in the Bronx. To date, over 65 NYCWP teachers have served their colleagues in this TC role, a few for two or three years, most for five-plus years, and several for 10 years or more.

[5] When the FIPSE grant ended in 1984, the NYC Board of Education assumed the costs of the program and doubled its size. The experience of the three FIPSE years suggested that spending one year in a school and then moving on was insufficient for the ambitious changes we hoped to effect. For the post-FIPSE phase, we convinced our partners at the Board of Education, senior administrators whom we had kept involved in and informed about the program, that the model required three years of work in each school (Wolfe, 2002).

Our Original Model of On-Site Consulting

For close to 25 years, three components of our site work existed side by side:

1. The presence of an on-site TC two days each week, whose job is to plan lessons and projects with teachers, team teach, recommend and provide resources, encourage the publication of student writing in anthologies and displays, and organize peer dissemination of good practice throughout the school;
2. Direct work with the schools' administrators, focused on their educational goals; and
3. On-site after-school seminars in the teaching of reading and writing for teachers from all disciplines.

Though the specific focus area of the inservice courses differed,[6] in practice they were always modeled after the NWP Summer Institute. Participants had opportunities to write, work in a small writing group, read and respond to professional and research literature from the field, and share demonstrations of their writing practices. A key feature of the school year inservice was teacher talk—a time where course participants described and discussed what they were trying in their classrooms. The on-site TC worked predominantly with teachers taking the after-school seminar. Anyone in the seminar had the option of enrolling for Lehman College graduate credit[7] or receiving a small stipend provided by the school district. Anyone could request classroom support from the TC.

Until 2007, the funds for professional development in New York City were controlled by—depending on the year and terminology in use—a central district, region, or network administrator. A school might request the on-site services of the Writing Project through its central administration, or the district or region or network might offer or

[6] Over the years, in addition to a Basic Writing Project inservice/graduate course, the TCs developed courses on Reading/Writing Connections; I-Search; The Academic Essay; Writing, Reading, and Standards; Language Diversity; and Literature Across Cultures.

[7] Tuition was a college contribution, but participants did have to pay Lehman College application and campus facilities fees amounting to several hundred dollars. Those taking the course for graduate credit had additional requirements to meet the college's graduate criteria.

recommend the WP to several of the schools in its jurisdiction. Once the connection was initiated, a contract was negotiated.

To lay the groundwork for the contract, whenever possible, we offered hands-on presentations of our work. We wanted those who would potentially form partnerships with us—both central and local school leaders—to understand not just what we offered but also how we worked. Nancy Mintz in chapter 10 provides an example. One bottom line was that teachers had the choice of whether or not to work with us. They could not be mandated to take the courses we offered or to have the TC in their classrooms.

Changing Times, Changing Contexts: Varying the Original Model

In 2002, when New York City's mayor took control of the city's schools, the first of what became recurring school restructuring efforts was initiated. One constant across these efforts has been the gradual disappearance of comprehensive middle and high schools. In their place are small schools accountable not only for their teacher pedagogy and student performance, but also, since 2007, for the management of their annual budgets. At this writing, funds for professional development in most of the city's schools, small and large, are in the hands of individual school principals. For us, this has meant that contracts for our work are negotiated school by school, year by year, in a climate of limited funding and standardized testing benchmarks on which schools, principals, and now teachers are evaluated.

Fortunately, most of our contracts with schools are still year long, though occasionally they cover only one day rather than two days per week of on-site work. But all aspects of our model have become more tenuous. Because individual schools have limited funds, on some occasions we have contracted for site work that is less than a year or sometimes on a monthly basis as in the situations described by TCs Barbara Batton and Susannah Thompson in chapter 11. In each of these instances, and sometimes when a school has had a high number of new teachers, we have agreed to consult with teachers who were mandated to meet with us. But just as with the teachers who choose to work with us, we attempt to build the mandated consulting relationships from the teachers' interests and concerns (see Miele, chapter 6). Usually, though not always, this emphasis serves to transcend any early tensions and initial resistance.

Another loss resulting from placing professional development funds in the hands of individual schools has been the NYCWP's multiple session 10–15-week after-school inservice courses, where time made it possible to consider theory as well as practice. Although several schools from the same network or that share a building have on occasion pooled their funds to subsidize an inservice course, the fees for these courses are more than most schools, small or large, can afford. Instead, because we believe that teachers must, at a minimum, experience the writing and reading strategies we offer as well as share with one another how they have adapted these strategies for their classrooms, we have opted for common preparations periods and short-term focus or study groups. In several of the small schools, we have either offered or been invited to help structure and lead regularly scheduled school-wide professional development (see chapters by Miele, Osterman, and Raffaele). In each of these forums, when time allows, we continue to place professional readings alongside the literacy practices we introduce. Without time to grapple with the theory and research that support these practices, teachers too often grasp at a strategy without taking hold of the broader ideas on which the strategy rests. What gets lost is the opportunity to weave these methods into a coherent literacy practice.

When the school culture respects professional development and we have returned year after year, our work has clearly benefited from the small school trend and has taken hold across the staff. More difficult have been the short-term contracts in which teachers have been assigned to work with us. In these circumstances, TCs have been challenged to rethink their approach. Sometimes this challenge has resulted in more modeling of practice. Always it has called on TCs to seek every opportunity to bring teachers together, even when it seems impossible to do so. Along the way, we have had to relinquish our agendas to meet teachers where they are, at the same time identifying what is negotiable and what must not be (see Batton, Osterman, Schwartzberg and Thompson). Our allegiance is both to a school's improvement and to teacher growth, but never at the expense of working respectfully with the teacher. TCs cannot be placed in a position that makes them either evaluators or supervisors of other teachers (see chapter by Jack-Vilmar). We will not work in a teacher's classroom unless we also have regular, protected times for meetings with the teacher outside the classroom. Nor does it make sense to attempt repeatedly to work closely with teachers who clearly do not want to work with us.

The Stance and Practice of the On-Site TC: Beliefs, Values, Standards, and Tensions

> Change doesn't happen instantly through mandates or directives, no matter how well intentioned or well planned those may be. Teachers, like students, learn differently from each other. One kind of professional development doesn't suit all. So we must respect the teacher as a professional and encourage each teacher to say what he/she needs, when he/she wants support, and in what form.
>
> —Ed Osterman (Chapter 8 of this book)

As former classroom teachers working with new and experienced teachers, we begin with the view that it is a privilege to enter another teacher's workspace. We know that, if our efforts as TCs are to influence teacher practice and student performance, it is imperative that teachers experience themselves as active agents in an ongoing professional development process. Individual teachers must have the opportunity to choose and structure how they will participate in this professional relationship. It matters, in other words, how the professional development work is conceptualized, how the focus of the work is negotiated and determined (often within a context of competing school realities), and how the teacher and TC engage each other within this relationship. Because this consulting work is not formulaic, because we respect the diverse ways in which teachers learn and in which change occurs, it also matters how we, as school-based TCs, are provided for in our own professional community—how and to what degree of constancy our school work is both supported and interrogated.

Values and Beliefs

Our school-based consulting embodies a dual set of beliefs—those of the NWP and those of the Institute for Literacy Studies (ILS), our home agency. The NWP's core principles (see box) provide a framework for the content and practice of our work. As Writing Project participants and now as teachers of teachers, we know full well the leadership and reform potential of teachers. We therefore understand the importance of working, in each school we enter, toward a "reflective and informed community of practice" (n.d.). We do not assume that there is a single source of knowledge about

writing or a right way to teach writing, though we recognize that "… some practices prove to be more effective than others." Therefore we seek out forums where teachers will have "frequent and ongoing opportunities… to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically" (National Writing Project [NWP], n.d.).

From the ILS we bring to the practice of our consulting a set of values that provide a foundation for our daily collaborations with teachers: Trust in the capacity of teacher and student; belief that work can be transformative for all; and a commitment to education as a source of equity, access, and social justice. The ILS Mission statement reads:

> In fulfilling our mission we seek to collaborate with and learn from teachers, administrators, parents, community leaders, and students. Four interrelated values inspire and infuse our work: commitments to human capacity, social justice, the power of democratic communities, and transformative work for all persons. We see these values, as well as our mission, as in keeping with CUNY's commitment to intellectual achievement for the public good (Institute for Literacy Studies [ILS], n.d.).

From these perspectives, we argue for the *how* of our teacher support work as well as for its content.

<u>Our Process Is as Important as the Subject Matter</u>

> … you can have the most creative, compellingly valid, educationally productive idea in the world, but whether it can become embedded and sustained in a socially complex setting will be primarily a function of how you conceptualize the implementation-change process.
>
> —Seymour Sarason (1996, p. 78)

Sustaining the effect of professional development is oftentimes tenuous regardless of how powerful or useful the instructional approach is. However, several factors, including

leadership, time, respect, and choice—all fragile commodities in a high-stakes-test-driven system—can change this scenario. On our side are the values and beliefs we bring to our consulting work, which call for an agreed-upon framework of collaboration; the tangible commitment of central and school leadership to the endeavor; and the opportunity for school staffs to choose to work with ideas and approaches we bring out of their own professional interests and needs. When schools allow for these components, the literacy and learning practices we propose not only have become part of the fabric of individual teachers' pedagogy (see Bellacero, Freeman, Koffler-Wise, and Moss), but also, have become embedded school-wide (see Miele, Osterman, and Raffaele). When these components are not present, and particularly when our support has been imposed on a team or grade group (see Osterman, Batton, and Schwartzberg) without taking their preferences into account, the palpable resistance we meet will take its toll, even though we may influence the teaching of a few.

The *how* of our consulting is also conceptualized as broadly inclusive, interweaving its educational purposes with the political and human values of our home institutions, the ILS and the NWP. Of course, each classroom is its own complex culture, layered with meaning and history. What we see when we first enter a teacher's classroom is surface. What we attend to—"the patterns & interpretations used to organize meaning" (Achinstein & Barrett, 2004, p. 719)— is shaped by our personal and professional lenses, by the conceptual angles of our viewpoints. Working from the premise of teacher and student capacity, we initially use our time to come to know teachers within their classroom and school contexts and to locate a foundation on which we can build. How we "organize meaning," in other words, influences the actions and activities of our site work and what we achieve.

Competing Realities: Process vs. Pressures for Immediate Results

> We must rethink professional development—not as a way to fill teachers' heads with new and innovative ideas that may come and go, but rather as an approach that builds on teachers' professionalism and encourages their intellectual activity.
>
> —Sonia Nieto (2001, p. 18)

In a school culture defined by numerical indicators of progress, our slower-paced long-term work can seem at odds with a teacher's or school's purposes. Public education's focus on measurable outcomes compels schools to give precedence to product over process. Schools have little choice but to demonstrate results, and teachers, particularly new teachers, want to comply. Within this environment it is no surprise that teachers look to the TC for answers and solutions, for expertise, and we do have ideas to offer. So when a math teacher wants a better way for his students to review for their final test (see Bellacero) or a science teacher complains about having to read his advisees' journals (see Raffaele), these moments become opportunities for collaboration and literacy learning.

But in addition to providing teachers across the curriculum with tangible approaches to strengthen student writing and reading, we also want teachers to recognize the multiple and multimodal interests and literacies their students already possess. Teachers who are able to build from these strengths will offer their students expanded ways to engage subject matter and participate in the process of their education (see Freeman). Sometimes, though, this stance requires a transformation of outlook as well as practice. It requires a teacher's growing understanding and broad vision of student capacity and of literacy teaching and learning. And this we believe, though not immediately visible or measurable, can have long term effects for both teacher and student (see Bellacero, Miele, and Moss).

Ours is not a professional development of quick repair. Though we want teachers to have the requisite tools of an improved teaching, we offer and model strategies and approaches not as hammer and nail but as clay: as matter to be fashioned, its properties and potentials needing to be understood. And that takes time.

The Teacher-TC Relationship

> …When we enter the landscape to learn something, we are obligated, I think, to pay attention rather than to constantly pose questions. To approach the land as we would a person, by opening an intelligent conversation. And to stay in one place, to make of that one, long observation a fully dilated experience. We will always be

> rewarded if we gave the land credit for more than we imagine, and if we imagine it as being more complex even than language.
>
> In these ways we begin, I think, to find a home, to sense how to fit a place.
>
> —Barry Lopez (1992, pp. 36–37)

As outside consultants, we have the obligation to learn the potential as well as the concerns of both teachers and schools. Just as in any ongoing association with places or persons, our understanding of what we observe will continue to evolve as the relationship itself develops. The reward for us is an informed platform from which we can begin to co-construct with teachers what the work will be about, what its contours will be. In such instances, when we offer structures or strategies (double-entry journals, science reading logs), share text types and genres (dialogues with authors, the writing of arguments), or model and co-lead classes (on reading poetry, on writing the constitutions of imagined cities), teachers, moving at their own pace, will try out what we suggest. They will begin to play with, adjust, improve, and even discard these approaches as they make them their own.

In this book, TC Debra Freeman takes us inside her work with an experienced teacher:

> Our one-on-one meetings were filled with descriptions of students and classroom moments. Margie was always full of ideas. I quickly understood that one way to support her would be to slow her down. So I asked questions: "How will you begin? Why are you doing this, and why this way? What are you hoping for? What do you want students to be able to do in the end?" And, always: "What are you worried about?" What drove our conversations sometimes was what Margie wanted to rethink, to reshape for the next day. At other times, it was the endless questions that emerged as we pored over her students' writing. Margie positioned herself as a learner and a teacher, and I tried to work within and alongside her ideas.

Freeman demonstrates how we can pay attention to understand a teacher's strengths, struggles, and resistance. As we do, the teacher, both as an individual and as a participant in a particular educational community, becomes our informant. What we learn, what the teacher teaches us, makes it possible for us to work simultaneously with what exists and with where the work can move—with what Myles Horton (1990) refers to as the "is" and the "ought" (p. 131). The "ought" is envisioned both from the teacher's perspective and from our own.

Starting from where the teacher is does not mean that we set aside our knowledge or intentions. As TC Julie Miele indicates in her chapter in this book, what matters is how we use what we know:

> Often, the teachers press me for direction, for simple strategies, the magic bullet that will fix everything. While I do offer a few options and suggestions to meet their immediate needs, I take these questions and use them to frame and motivate the work that a new teacher and I do together. I turn their questions over to form the basis of our inquiry into teaching.

So TC and teacher allocate time to think together about the work of teaching. Within these conversations, TCs move with care, respecting the boundaries defined by the teacher as they simultaneously invite her to shape and reshape the content of her craft. In this professional conversation, teachers and TCs are continually learning about and from one another, laughing, commiserating, disagreeing, suggesting. The TC tries always to make room for the *a-ha* or for some small learning, for what the TC or the teacher does not yet know. This professional relationship formed around work, around change, is different from a friendship, yet it involves trust, comradeship, and intimacy.

To engage in such work requires a willingness to scrutinize one's own practices and assumptions. The discipline involves letting another person be a learner and simultaneously being a learner oneself (see Bellacero and Osterman). When the professional relationship is dialogic, when the exchange is reciprocal, both teacher and TC can be changed (Gulla, 2003).

Fridays at NYCWP: The TCs' Professional Community

Since 1981, when Asher and Wolfe began consulting in the New York City schools, the NYCWP has protected one day each week for the TCs to meet together. These Friday meetings provide regular and ongoing occasion to extend our knowledge of writing and literacy pedagogy as well as to study our practice as TCs (see Moorman's contribution in this book and Osterman, 2008). Within this safe yet academically rigorous and reflective professional community, we receive the support necessary to meet the ever-changing needs of individual teachers and schools (Wolfe, 2002). To remain vibrant beyond its early years, this professional community has required tending. Careful sets of hands have introduced new and alternate ways of working, moving the group forward while preserving and building on its traditions and practices.

The person-by-person nature of how we work with teachers is rarely easy. As TC Joe Bellacero writes in this book, "There is no continuum of teacher development laying out with neat linearity the steps that I can follow…." The pressure we sometimes feel to help teachers improve their practice can too easily lead us to impose our expertise apart from the particular teacher's knowledge and context: his history, his students; their classroom, school, and community. Fridays remind us that, in such instances, agency remains with the TC. The work itself can become an object, a thing to be done as demonstrated. While teaching formats may be altered, their substance is not. The potential for sustained growth that we hope for diminishes.

If, as Moss writes in her chapter, "…the work of a Writing Project TC adjusts itself to reflect each individual," TCs need time to step back and take stock to move ahead effectively. In addition to planning workshops and developing new materials or revising existing ones, each Friday TCs write about and reflect on what is taking place in our schools and with the teachers with whom we consult. This documentation serves as a record of our efforts and a space in which we have supported and learned from one another. Over the past 10 years, to deal with the changed context of the city's schools as defined by No Child Left Behind, we have needed to think together about how to hold true to our values and serve teachers and administrations given the pressures they face. We have had to find ways to take the best from the resulting mandates—as with the Common Core State Standards—and link them to responsible literacy teaching and learning practices.

Our shared writing has also been, in the hands of the NYCWP's leadership, a source for identifying issues and concerns in need of further exploration. Questions that have arisen, related to either subject matter or our practice, have become inquiry studies. To further our own content learning and thereby enrich our consulting, we have engaged in extended studies of such wide-ranging matters as race, difference, and diversity; language diversity; reading in the disciplines; quantitative literacy; and, more sporadically, technology (as George discusses in this book). We have also studied matters of practice, addressing such questions as, How do we help teachers shift their perspectives from a deficit view of students to a more positive view? When do we wait and when do we push? How do we help teachers and administration recognize inquiry as a way to deep learning (moving beyond functional literacy)?

Finally, Fridays have been a time to prepare and share cumulative reviews of practice, one of the inquiry processes developed by Patricia Carini and teachers at the Prospect Center and Archive for Children's Work (see Himley, 2002; Strieb, Carini, Kanevsky, & Wice, 2011). We have used Prospect's Description of Work inquiry process to study our work as well as to look closely at teachers' journals and at student work. As TCs we do all of this—and there is never enough time—in order to better understand what we do and how we do it and to address the multitude of questions we bring with us at any given moment (Osterman, 2008).

Why Stories of Impact

In 2007, when this work was first proposed, it was framed as stories of success. The TCs' response was a polite uproar of objection. Success, they explained, now belonged to the narrow measures of school accountability that obliterated nuance and difference. Later that school year, Nancy Mintz, then the director of the NYCWP, suggested "stories of potential" as an alternative. Gradually "potential" became "impact," and we returned to the inquiry work we had done in 2004–2005 around the ideas of impact and evidence. As we often do at the NYCWP and the ILS, we began our study using the Prospect "Reflection on a Word" inquiry process (Avidon, 2000; Carini, 2010). As a community, we sought to understand the meanings we associated with the ideas of impact and evidence. Here, from the notes on that reflection, is a bit of what we said about impact (Avidon, 2004):

> Impact is about contact, a relationship... is often reciprocal… will have outcomes, consequences; make an impression, yield a result, leave its imprint, a footprint, leave its legacy... But that imprint/legacy is not necessarily visible, at least not immediately…. Impact is unpredictable no matter how much we attempt to make of it a clear matter of cause and effect, of law (scientific).

Impact was an idea the TCs could live with and attempt to document. Because ours is a school system at odds with itself—on the one hand are innovative small schools like those Miele, Osterman, and Raffaele write about in this book, continually defining and refining their pedagogy; on the other are the narrow student accountability measures used to determine principal removals and school closures—this documentation has served to strengthen our resolve. The drive toward predictability has not always welcomed the emergent qualities of our professional development practice. Yet as we rethink our work—as we always do—we remain committed to the values, beliefs, and practices that inform our stance as Writing Project TCs.

The 12 chapters that follow are divided into four sections:

Part 1, One-on-One Consulting Work: These six chapters by experienced and new site-based TCs are about the NYCWP's one-on-one consulting work with experienced and new teachers.

Part 2, School-wide and Region-wide Work: The three chapters in Part 2 center on our professional development efforts with the staffs of two small high schools and with the principals of several schools that have an on-site TC.

Part 3, Changing Times and Changing Contexts: In this extended section, five writers describe and analyze the impact of the test-driven contexts within which the NYCWP works.

Part 4, Support for Site-Based Teacher-Consultants: The two chapters of Part 4, written by a former director and a former associate director of the NYCWP, focus on their experiences providing support for the school-based TCs.

We share these 12 stories of collaborations and partnerships—most successful, a few less so—during this time of educational innovation and stringent accountability to demonstrate why the kind of professional development offered by Writing Project TCs must continue—why it is essential to work respectfully as colleagues and co-learners over time with new and seasoned teachers in their professional arenas.

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NWP Core Principles

"Teachers at every level—from kindergarten through college—are the agents of reform; universities and schools are ideal partners for investing in that reform through professional development.

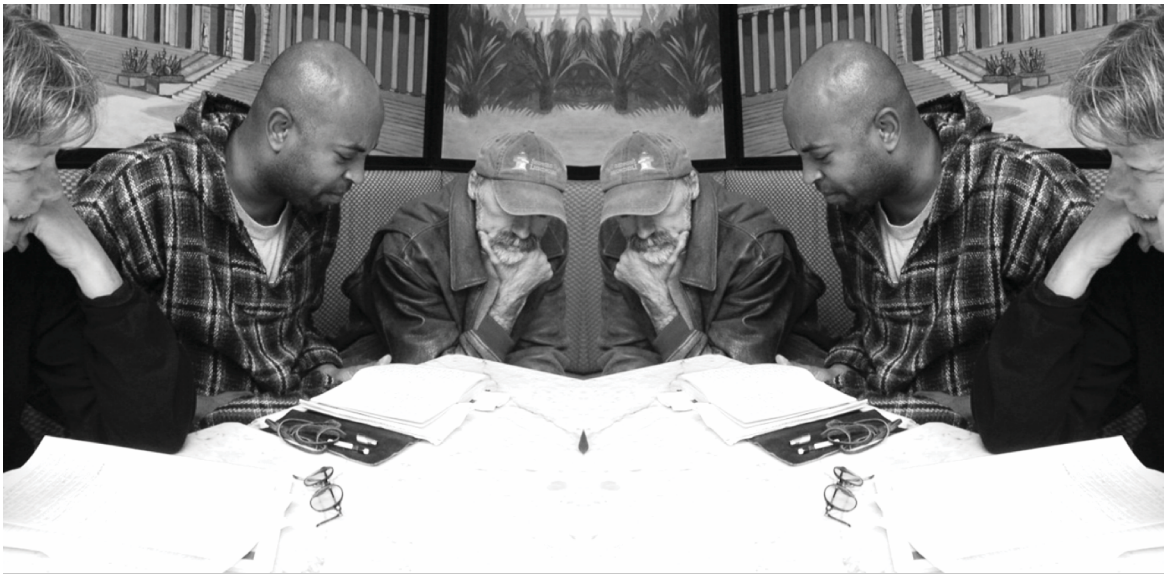
"Writing can and should be taught, not just assigned, at every grade level. Professional development programs should provide opportunities for teachers to work together to understand the full spectrum of writing development across grades and across subject areas.

"Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing. Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically.

"There is no single right approach to teaching writing; however, some practices prove to be more effective than others. A reflective and informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop comprehensive writing programs.

"Teachers who are well informed and effective in their practice can be successful teachers of other teachers as well as partners in educational research, development, and implementation. Collectively, teacher-leaders are our greatest resource for educational reform."

(National Writing Project [NWP], n.d.)



PART 1. ONE-ON-ONE CONSULTING WORK WITH INDIVIDUAL TEACHERS

CHAPTER 1

A Story of Hope and Collaboration: The Power of Writing Project Work Alongside an Experienced Special Needs High School Teacher

Debra Freeman

> I believe writing must begin in students' lives and be generated for real audiences.
>
> —Linda Christensen (2003, p. 6-9)

It was June 2006 when Margie Segal, a veteran special education teacher with whom I had been collaborating for a year and a half, shared the news that two-thirds of the special needs students in her collaborative team teaching (CTT; now called ICT, or Integrated Co-Teaching)[8] sophomore English class had passed the New York State standardized English Language Arts Regents Examination on their first try. The consistent use of informal writing, reading, and writing-to-learn approaches and the ways we purposefully connected formal writing and the mandated curriculum to students' lives and cultures had paid off. What Margie helped her students accomplish had everything to do with our shared know-how—Margie's of the needs of special education students and mine as a site-based New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) teacher-consultant (TC). What follows is the story of how we brought our knowledge to each other and, together, holding our belief in student capacity at the forefront, we worked to defy the general assumption that special needs students have neither the ability nor the stamina to do well on standardized assessments.

[8] The CTT (now ICT) model pairs a content area teacher and a special education teacher for the purpose of co-teaching a mix of students with and without IEPs in the general education classroom to meet the instructional needs of all learners. The special education teacher provides expertise in differentiated instruction to meet the instructional needs of her students. (http://schools.nyc.gov/Academics/SpecialEducation/programs/environment/ict.htm)

Background

The events described here took place at the Riverside High School for Information and Media Arts (RHS), a large[9] vocational high school serving students interested in journalism, law, media, photography, printing, and the visual arts. Originally opened in 1925, the school is remembered for training, apprenticing, and licensing students for work in the printers' union. Two turn-of-the-century printing presses still remain in the front lobby to mark this history. In spring 2004, RHS was designated a failing school—a school under registration review (SURR)—for its low graduation and attendance rates and its poor performance on the New York State standardized math exams administered two years prior to the current principal's tenure.

Margie and I began working together in spring 2005, during the second semester of my first year as a TC at the school. Margie, who had spent much of her educational career advocating for special needs students and their families, was an experienced special education teacher who had recently returned to full-time teaching. Now in my ninth year as a TC for the NYCWP, I had been an English teacher in a large vocational high school in Brooklyn, New York, where a Writing Project inservice course had been offered after school each semester. In the courses I attended, I encountered both practices and pedagogy that aligned with my belief that the work of teaching was rooted in equity, intellect, and hope. During my years as a classroom teacher, the NYCWP became my learning community. When I became a full-time TC in 1995, I was determined to share what I had learned with the teachers and administrators with whom I would collaborate.

Building Trust: Year 1 at RHS

I began my work in RHS in fall 2004, when the school's principal, who had experience with Writing Project work as both teacher and administrator, requested a full-time TC. I would work four days each week at the school and, as is our tradition, spend Fridays at Lehman College with my Writing Project colleagues.

On my first day at RHS, I was introduced to the English department chairman, who also had taken a Writing Project course while a teacher. Together, the principal, assistant

[9] RHS has more than 1,900 students and 140 teachers.

principal, and I decided that I would focus my work in the English department with teachers who were searching for ways to engage students and improve their writing. The teachers' habit of sharing ideas among themselves would be the place from which I would build. I had my beginning.

Midway through that year, the principal agreed to fund a NYCWP on-site inservice graduate seminar, and I invited the assistant principal to co-facilitate the course with me. Aligning with a school leader who was also his teachers' supervisor was a risk, but, in this instance, it worked, because many of the teachers who signed on were hired by him and trusted him. The seminar provided a safe venue for teachers to share their work and develop a common language around writing instruction.

In this first year, I had time to plan with teachers, to demonstrate writing approaches, and to team teach in interested teachers' classrooms. Afterward, we debriefed: What did we notice in the students' writing, and what could we build upon? The discussions I had with many of the English teachers took place in the public space of the department, so they attracted more teachers. They asked if I would offer them planning time or "do what you did in her class in mine?" This interest matters because Writing Project TCs do not go into a teacher's classroom unless invited by the teacher. By the end of the year, I had worked in the classrooms of over 20 teachers, most in the English department.

Finding Margie: Beginning the Collaboration

The first extended conversation I had with Margie Segal, a CTT teacher working in several English classes, took place in December of that first year. We were in the school's teacher center, and Margie overheard a conversation I was having about journal writing with a teacher of a distracted freshmen class. Margie expressed interest in using journals with her students. The next thing I knew, we were meeting on a regular basis, entering into a collaboration that would last for years.

The work I write about here occurred during the spring 2005 term and throughout the following year—years 1 and 2 of my six-year tenure as a Writing Project TC at RHS. We were two experienced educators with very different abilities who made time to work regularly with one another—to learn from and teach each other.

In one of our first consulting conversations, I asked Margie to describe what happened when her students were assigned a writing task. She spoke of what she noticed. Her concerns were not unusual: Students were disengaged when writing; they worried about how long the writing had to be and whether it was going to be collected. She described students' difficulties getting started, many of them convinced by years of negative feedback that they couldn't spell, construct sentences, or organize their writing in ways satisfying to themselves or to their teachers. In truth, a lot of what the students did write was underdeveloped, brief, and mechanically of poor quality. "I want to find a way to teach writing with a focus on what the kids do well," Margie told me. I responded by talking about the value in providing time for students to write about what matters to their hearts. Later, Margie told me that, at that moment, she knew she'd found a work partner.

The opportunity for this work to take hold would happen in the ninth grade English CTT class that Margie team taught with Erin, a young English teacher with whom I was also consulting. For Erin, my presence was an occasion to learn new ways to engage her students. For Margie, it was an opportunity to enact her belief that good pedagogy includes content relevant to students' cultures and lives, explored in meaningful ways. For me, it was a chance to work with a like-minded educator whose regard for her students and their academic and emotional struggles complemented mine. It was also a chance to work differently. Margie did not need a mentor; she needed someone who shared her belief in students' capacities and potential and who would help her to articulate this belief coherently in her practice.

Planning

Margie took part in the Writing Project inservice graduate course I co-taught with the English chair that spring and participated in every NYCWP course taught at the school thereafter. Each course exposed her to approaches that made sense to her. In our one-on-one consulting meetings, I helped her transfer what she understood instinctively from the course to her practice. My work with the newer teachers often kept me away from Margie's classroom, even though I wanted very much to be there. The fact was that she needed me less; there were no fires to put out in her classroom. Therefore, our work together was primarily in the courses and in planning time.

In the year and a half I describe here, we tended to meet several times a week, usually for a full 45-minute period, usually in the teacher center room or the English office. Our one-on-one meetings were filled with descriptions of students and classroom moments. Margie was always full of ideas. I quickly understood that one way to support her would be to slow her down. So I asked questions: "How will you begin? Why are you doing this, and why this way? What are you hoping for? What do you want students to be able to do in the end?" And, always: "What are you worried about?" What sometimes drove our conversation was what Margie wanted to rethink, to reshape for the next day. At other times, it was the endless questions that emerged as we pored over her students' writing. Margie positioned herself as a learner and a teacher, and I tried to work within and alongside her ideas.

Building a Community of Writers: Writing Matters

> I chose to do this [journal writing] because I wanted students to feel "free" to write and I knew they would only feel that way if they felt safe and interested.
>
> —Margie Segal (2005a, n.p.)

In spring 2005, Margie exposed her ninth grade students, new to high school and armed with years of negative labels, to memoir, writing-to-learn approaches, reader response, and informal writing. She did so in the belief that this immersion in informal writing would improve their writing ability, build their confidence, and strengthen the classroom community. Then the skills they were developing could be applied to more formal, on-demand writing tasks. As Elbow (1997) asserts, in doing "lots of low stakes writing, students are much less liable to be held back by fear or inability to put what they know on paper when they come to high stakes writing" (p. 6). This principle guided our work, spoke to what we knew, and helped us to design work for students. Our intention was to build a community of writers who cared about their writing. On our end, we would keep expectations visible and high, and we would attempt to make the experience memorable.

We worked together on a series of assignments Margie would later call "Writing Matters." For Margie, journal writing had to have a focus. For the introductory assignment, students wrote about themselves as writers. Because Margie worried that

students might not know how to start, we came up with several prompts that students could use as a way into the writing.

Margie's skill as a teacher was evident in everything she did. Here she writes about how she used music to support the writing as well as to build community and broaden cultural awareness:

> The students always react with a lot of tooth sucking and groaning when the jazz or classical music comes on. I always promise them that there will be writing sessions with "beats," but I insist that I will only play instrumental, no lyrics. This is because I want the words to come from them, their heads…not the words on the CD. I always play hip-hop and R&B for our writing special celebrations. I also write on the board, "NOW PLAYING: (artist name and little bio here)."
>
> It is funny to see some students quietly jotting onto a piece of paper, "Miles Davis, McCoy Tyner, Mozart, Satie," etc. I never said, nor do I believe, that all of our instruction must begin and end with their culture exclusively. It is a give and take, open doors, open minds, open hearts. I hear them, they know it; they hear me, I know it; and eventually we kind of listen and learn from each other. I must admit, it could result in a truncated lesson on dangling participles or proper use of semicolons, but that is a chance worth taking. (2005, n.p.)

Life Without Parole

In the summer of 2005, a seven-part series, "Jailed for Life after Crimes as Teenagers," was published in the *New York Times* (Liptak, 2005). As soon as I read the series, I thought about using the provocative stories with Margie's students. I thought of isolating the stories into separate texts along with excerpts from the commentary embedded throughout the series. I saw this series as an opportunity to introduce

reading- and writing-to-learn approaches to help with comprehension. The readings would give students time to react, raise objections and questions, and connect to issues in the assigned literature I knew they would be reading. When I got back to school, I invited Margie and Erin to the Teacher Center and presented the idea to them. Margie got it right away. Together, we designed a unit we called Life Without Parole (LWOP), using materials from the *New York Times* series; a text that the class was planning to read, *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers; and two *New York Times* editorials by Bob Herbert (2005, 2005).

Writing Matters would continue, and this work would ask students to use writing as a tool for thinking, questioning, and analyzing challenging text. It would be our opportunity to experiment with the notion that, if we introduced challenging nonfiction texts relevant to our students' lives, the fact that the texts were above the students' presumed reading level might matter less. If our instincts were right, students would and could capture evidence to support a position, just as required on many of the state exams.

Margie and I worried about the complexity of the *New York Times* texts, but they provided a real-world connection to the department's mandated novel, *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers. We knew that some students would struggle with the readings, but we also knew that the scaffolding and support we would provide would get students through it. We began planning.

I had other reasons for introducing these texts, and Margie knew it: to prove that our kids *could* engage in complex texts (that they themselves would argue were too hard or boring for them) if the content was compelling enough. Margie and I talked for hours. Our planning grew from these conversations, from knowing how deeply the students would connect to the injustice. However, even with such a compelling subject, much would depend on what we would ask students to read, how we would invite them to write, and how we encouraged them to express themselves. Margie would later tell me:

> One reason I signed on was to find more ways to make students come alive. I also wanted to expose them to some expository writing that they could understand and

> get excited about. This unit was exactly that. It would bring expository writing into the classroom that students could read and respond to.

The students read excerpted stories of the seven teenagers from the seven-part *Times* series first. They were drawn in. They made connections to their lives and to the life of the protagonist in *Monsters*. They worked in groups to identify evidence that would determine whether justice was served in LWOP. Next, we introduced a selection of quotes taken from the editorial comments strewn throughout the *Times* series. These excerpts represented a range of viewpoints. While one of the articles' interviewees spoke out vehemently against LWOP because it left teens in limbo (they would be better off on death row where they would get attention and court dates), another pointed to it as a humane alternative to the death sentence. As we expected, the language in these text excerpts proved problematic. Though the excerpts were short, we had not provided vocabulary support as we had with the lengthier and highly provocative stories of the teenagers' lives. I suggested that students work collaboratively to categorize the excerpts. Margie, recalling a similar activity we had done in our inservice seminar just weeks before, loved the idea. We were hoping that, if students had the opportunity to work together to make meaning, it would break open the language a bit. I wasn't in her class that day, but Margie reported back that the collaboration worked nicely for a few of the groups who separated some of the more one-sided or callous remarks from the humane ones. However, many of the students wanted to know what the words meant first.

Since these text excerpts proved to be a challenge for the students and required Margie to do a lot of rephrasing, she worried that we may have pushed them too far. I encouraged her to notice what was happening. The students were not turning off or shutting down because of the challenge. Instead, they were asking questions because they wanted to understand.

Fortuitously, during this unit, two articles by Bob Herbert, an op-ed writer for the *New York Times*, appeared in the paper: "Blowing the Whistle on Gangsta Culture" (2005), in which he denounced black people for sabotaging their own destinies, and "A New Civil Rights Movement" (2005), in which he decried the dearth of black leaders. Margie used this opportunity to bring LWOP and Writing Matters together. The pieces opened the

door to writing "essays with attitude" (Christensen, 2000). Herbert provided us with two stellar examples of position papers that readily complemented the literary, informational, expository, and visual texts that students had been responding to for months. Here was the way to bridge all of it and for the result to be the kind of writing we wanted them to shoot for—the essay! Writing Matters and LWOP had created that bridge.[10]

Not once did Margie or I consider that the students might not be able to analyze and react to the text; we had every confidence in their abilities and knew that low-stakes writing would help them to think and wonder. This confidence guided our work and spoke to what we knew.

At the end of the LWOP unit, one student wrote, "Life in prison is still life. Why should a killer live?" Margie brought this response to the class, and students reacted with responses such as:

> "I agree with this. Because I believe that, too. If a person kills someone, they should not be living on the earth."
>
> "I disagree because when a person kills someone, maybe after he talk with someone who can help him, this could be a change. The killer may turn to be a good person."
>
> "Are you whacked? The killer only dies once. Let him suffer in prison for a long time. Prison is a bad place to be."

[10] Students took great umbrage with Mr. Herbert's aspersions on rappers and wrote fired-up reactions. One student, horrified, crumpled up the paper and threw it across the room. She called the writer racist, said she wouldn't listen to another word. When Margie assured the student that Bob Herbert was black and showed her his photo, she hesitated. Then she picked up the paper, flattened it out across her desk and continued reading. What she wrote made us all very proud. She let Mr. Herbert ("Bob") know, in no uncertain terms, that he was making a big mistake. Many other ethnic groups have gangs and increased crime in their neighborhoods too, she pointed out. Her response to Herbert—her essay—was published later that year in *Open Minds,* the school's literary magazine.

> "I agree. It's an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. You take a life, then you lose your life."
>
> "What if they make a mistake … Then an innocent man dies. Prison is better. At least, if they prove the person innocent, he can go home to his family."
>
> "The victim never gets to go home. What about their family?"

In addition, the students also readily drew the themes of injustice into their discussions of Walter Dean Meyer's *Monster*. The work we were doing and that students were doing was clearly preparing the students for the statewide standardized English and history Regents exams.

> Passing the Regents (in history and English) relies on the type of reading and writing students did throughout the LWOP series. The actual topic of juvenile offenders was interesting to students, so we were able to get their attention. I don't think this would have been possible had we tried to present articles and materials about the economy or the subjects they will encounter on the Regents. Using high interest material as a "bait" works far better!
>
> —Margie Segal (personal communication, 2005)

Writing that asks students to discuss their intuitions, identify and summarize evidence to back a position, and unpack informational texts by annotating and questioning them goes beyond the minimal skills needed to pass the Regents. But what I have come to understand over my years in the classroom, and because of my work with Margie, is that the low-stakes writing we asked the students to do to figure out what they knew (or did not know), when placed alongside academic tasks, benefited the students in the long run.

LWOP was a huge hit.

The English Regents Exam Draws Closer

It was the last semester with this group of students, and the Regents English Language Arts exam was looming. Several teachers said they wanted to close the year with a poetry unit, and Erin and Margie liked the idea. I suggested that the poetry be paired with prose (nonfiction) texts, the way it is done on the exam. We would engage students in the thinking involved in comparing and contrasting a set of texts and drawing from them a common theme. One important difference in the way we would introduce this concept—and that would not be on the exam—was that we would choose readings about what students valued as a point of entry.

> We needed pieces that touched on themes that would be meaningful to students: as teenagers, as urbanites, as immigrants, as African Americans and as Hispanics.
>
> —Margie Segal (2005, n.p.)

Using ideas to which students could relate gave us the best chance of drawing them in, just as the stories in LWOP had. When they wrote, reacted, grappled with ideas, and learned to isolate evidence in the texts to expand a point, they did so around a topic that mattered to them. We chose *identity*, and the topic engaged them. They spoke of their own experiences with discrimination and family continuity, shared charged emotions, and offered up questions for discussion and clarity.

Crafting Thesis Statements

Margie and I wondered if what we planned would help students craft thesis statements that reflected the message or theme in each work. Would the process for students to arrive at and produce mutually agreed-to "controlling ideas" about race, identity, and familial relationships work?

Margie's classroom recollections inspired our consulting conversations. I'd ask what was happening. Margie would describe how she circulated the room, asked questions, checked progress, and pushed students to revise and thereby expand their controlling ideas. I helped Margie to see that, though this process would be messy and take longer, the students could do this work, and so could she. Taking

students inside the process for crafting, providing evidence for, and then revising controlling ideas did prove to be an uneven process.

Margie recalls, "We read and discussed the pieces, and the students created posters in groups to identify themes, find quotes as evidence, and make inferences." I was there the day the students presented their posters. I watched the students timidly identify their controlling idea and the evidence they found to illustrate it. I could barely hear them, but the room was quiet, and every student's eyes were on the presenters. I saw high-performing, actively engaged, soft-spoken sophomores.

For this piece of work, Margie and I sat together every day to discuss what happened during the day's lesson, how the students were reacting, what questions were coming up, and how to proceed. One day Margie was flushed when she approached me. She had a look of pure joy and relief.

> Sit, I have to tell you what happened today. So I told the kids, "Okay, so now we are going to write an essay based on the work we have been doing and you can choose any two texts to compare or contrast." Well, there was an explosion! The kids screamed, "Essay? What essay?" In that moment all of their old fears about formal writing reappeared.

Margie smiled as she shared the rest of the story. She brought the class together, saying, "Look around the room. You've done the hard part. You are so ready to get started!" The students quieted. Margie reminded them of the essay writing that they had done: essays for LWOP, letters to the principal, and position papers in response to *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert. The skill involved synthesizing a big idea from two texts, something Margie and I both saw value in far beyond the test. The work students had done was about responding to literature, ideas, current issues, and historical documents thoughtfully, critically, and reflectively. When Margie shared this story with me, she was delighted that she had helped her students to see their potential. The students would have their day with a six-hour exam. Whether they passed

it or not, they would have faced it down. Their confidence was a result of balancing Margie's ideas with ways I offered her to transform those ideas into practice.

Therefore, when most of the special education students passed the state's standardized English Language Arts Regents exam a year ahead of time—something many of their mainstreamed peers had not accomplished—we celebrated.

Extending the Work

As was our way, Margie and I shared our activities with others in the English department who showed interest. This practice often led to folks grabbing up the materials to try them out in their classrooms. But what often got lost when that happened were the rich conversations in which Margie and I engaged throughout the planning process and after the lessons. So many questions and ideas emerged as we pored over student writing. Such conversations were critical for both of us. Unfortunately, without these conversations, and especially when teachers treated the activities they tried out as isolated tactics, the activities often fell flat.

As test pressure mounted, the disappointment many teachers felt in the writing their students produced created a divide in the English department. Most classes at RHS included special needs kids. Even though teachers knew what Margie and her students had accomplished, under the weight of the tests, many worried that personal and low-stakes writing would not adequately prepare students for the high-stakes exams they needed to take. They therefore continued to work with the five-paragraph essay format.

Conclusion

In the three years that followed, I continued to work with teachers in the English department on writing instruction, lesson and unit planning, and unpacking the language of the Regents statewide tests. The latter helped me to understand the less visible issues with which teachers were struggling. Was the struggle really about ridding a paper of "I" or about personal versus academic writing, as they openly said it was? Or was it about what happens to teachers under pressure to bring up a failing school's scholarship numbers?

More than ever, I believe writing—the kind that does not show up on exams explicitly – needs to be introduced in classrooms often and across disciplines so that kids can meet requirements. Writing, along with connecting the curriculum to what students knew, cared about, and lived, had everything to do with why the majority of Margie's special education students passed the state-mandated assessment with only one or two in-class experiences with the actual exam.

Reflections

In my experience, I am often asked to work where the need is greatest—with inexperienced or struggling teachers. But Margie, well read in literature and all aspects of nonfiction texts and media, with years of teaching experience under her belt, needed to learn, too. Margie taught writing by instinct. However, that theory was not yet shaped into a coherent classroom practice. This is what I helped her to do.

What happened with Margie's special needs students speaks to the need for experienced teachers to have an ally—a consultant and confidante who understands both the teacher's beliefs about teaching and the role of writing in literacy development.

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CHAPTER 2

Rekindling the Spark: Building a Working Partnership Between a Veteran Teacher-Consultant and a Veteran Math Teacher

Joseph Bellacero

> Education is what happens to the other person, not what comes out of the mouth of the educator. You have to posit trust in the learner.
>
> —Myles Horton (1997, p. 131)

Tom is tired, and he's worried.

He's been teaching middle school math for 16 years, and his lessons are on automatic pilot. I hear him telling others that he would quit teaching if he had any idea of what else he might do. To me he says, "I've lost the spark."

His school, Robert F. Wagner, Jr., Secondary School for Arts and Technology, and the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) have entered into a three-year partnership to improve student writing by introducing writing-to-learn activities in all academic disciplines. The principal is uncomfortable with what he sees as slippage in the amount and quality of the writing being produced. My site director feels that, with 34 years of teaching and 10 years of experience as a Writing Project teacher-consultant, I will have the kind of standing with staff that will open them to change. The principal will pay for me to consult on-site three days a week and co-facilitate a 25 hour inservice—an after-school workshop series each semester for interested staff members. To show his commitment to the program, the principal has agreed to participate in the first workshop series and allow me to introduce the NYCWP in a two-hour all-staff workshop on the professional development day before school begins.

It is during this workshop that I notice Tom, a math teacher, who sits among others from his discipline. The body language of his fellow math teachers suggests they see little to

be gained from a workshop on journals—only Tom is fully focused. I break the staff into small groups and move them among four stations, having them use journals in different ways in response to tasks with poetry, social studies, technology, and math. By the end, Tom is cautiously interested. "I have to think about differentiating tasks when I come to a topic in math," he writes on his reflection sheet. He adds that he wants "to *see* how other teachers implement this in an actual class."

What follows is the story of how Tom and I nurtured that cautious interest into a project that reawakened his pleasure in teaching as it refocused my understanding of the importance of process. It is just one of the many individual stories that made for a measurable change in the writing culture of the school, but it illustrates how productive relationship-building can achieve real change.

In the weeks after this workshop, I was not invited into Tom's classroom nor asked to plan with him, but we did talk regularly, with the conversation often veering to his disillusionment with teaching. Still, I sensed something underneath this feeling—a love for the students and a desire to find a way back to the excitement and pleasure the work used to bring him. By the end of the school year, working together, we had found it.

Finding a Way In

The way my work begins is almost always the same: I lean around the corner of a cubicle, into a classroom door, or over the shoulder of a paper-grading teacher to say, "Hey, what's going on?"

Today, I've pulled Tom away from something—research on the Internet, grading student papers, preparing a lesson, or another of the myriad tasks that take up a teacher's non-classroom time. I feel his hesitation; he doesn't want to be rude, and he may get something out of our talk, but the stuff he's doing is important, too. We are now five months into the school year; I have been in his classroom several times, but we have not done any planning together. Watching him in the classroom, I see clearly that he likes the kids and they like him, but he spends a lot of his time saying, "Shhhhhh." That's the teacher he is, but not, I think, the one he wants to be.

Tom has been participating in the after-school graduate course I have facilitated on-site. One thrust of the course is to participate in and examine writing-to-learn strategies. The other focus involves crafting an individual piece of writing and exploring our personal writing processes. Tom has recently finished a memoir about his father. It's a lovely bit of writing capturing the moment the two them understand each other as adults. He is happy with the piece and intrigued by how I managed to motivate him to write and to gently guide him through revision. Still, today he wavers on giving his time to me.

Just as I'm about to suggest I might come back later, he invites me into his cubicle and we talk about what he's doing with his seventh and eighth grade math students, how it's working out, and what he wants from them that he may not be getting.

Looking to push the conversation, I open up about what a struggle math always was for me: how it put a lump of fear in my chest, how I thought I knew how to do a process until I walked out of the room or until the next problem added an exponent that the model hadn't had, and then I was lost and hurt and embarrassed and angry and wanting it all to just go away. I tell him how much I had wished I could explain these feelings to one of my teachers but never seemed to find a way to do so without looking or feeling stupid.

As Tom mulls my story, I ask where he is with his lessons. "The eighth graders have recently finished their big standardized test," he tells me. "I'm trying to think of something that will help them review for finals, will be fun, and will help me see the thin places in their learning and understanding. I'd like to precisely target the review to those problems, and maybe reach out to those students like you who need a different approach. What can we do?"

This is a pivotal moment. The teacher is asking for an answer to his challenge. As the consultant, I am always sorely tempted to say, "What you should do is…." However, experience has shown this approach to be a dead end. If we discover the answer together, it will be more effective in the short run and more likely to stay with him forever. So I think about his words, focusing on what I think is key with Tom at this stage: "fun." "Why not let them do some writing about math?" I suggest.

He tells me he already has them explaining how they got the answer, what the words mean, and why they chose one formula over another. What he doesn't say but his raised eyebrows suggest is, "Besides, what's *fun* about writing?"

"No," I say. "I'm thinking about some point-of-view writing, where they write from the point of view of the math concepts?" As I say it, something clicks in my mind. "Listen, on my way in today I stopped at a Quick Shop, and, while I was on the line to buy my pretzels, I noticed the *National Enquirer* and the *Globe* with their ridiculous articles. Why don't we have them write about math for a gossipy tabloid?"

He's skeptical.

"It'll be fun and interesting and a good way to review," I say, confidence oozing from my very uncertain pores.

As we discuss what kinds of things are in the *Enquirer*—gossip about celebrities and politicians, sensational crimes, sex, space aliens, horoscopes, recipes, and so forth—I'm reading the doubt on his face. "I'm a born-and-bred conventional math teacher," he tells me. "My teaching involves the teaching structure and format that my math teachers modeled, with the teacher in control of all the learning." He knows that my suggestion will push him far from that comfort zone.

Still, Tom has mentioned repeatedly how he loves the structure of the Writing Project workshop series, with reading, writing, and discussion making all voices in the group important. He has told me he wants his classroom to feel like that. This admission gives me a certain amount of capital with him, and I decide to spend some of it. "Look, let's see if *we* can write these kinds of articles first. If we like what we come up with, those can be our models with the kids."

Building Trust by Trusting

Lee S. Shulman (2005, pp. 18-25) argues that "professional education is about developing pedagogies to link ideas, practices, and values under conditions of inherent uncertainty that necessitate not only judgment in order to act, but also cognizance of the consequences of one's action." To Tom, I must sound like I'm clear about the value

of a math gossip magazine, while actually our work together is a model of the "conditions of inherent uncertainty." At the same time, it can also be seen as a model of "cognizance of consequences." Through my years as a teacher with the NYCWP, I have learned that writing, approached thoughtfully, can deepen learning (Mayher, Lester, & Pradl, 1983), foster self-expression (Martin, 1976), nurture critical thinking (Fulwiler & Young, 1982), lead to clearer communication, and promote democratic community. Tom has felt some of the power of writing in the workshop series and is anxious to see how it might work in his classroom. I will keep watch throughout this collaboration with Tom to see not only that the work the kids do is "fun and interesting and a good way to review," but also that the consequences of our work will be the promotion of student learning about writing and the learning of math through writing. Only if this work helps students learn will Tom feel comfortable sharing control with his students.

I have learned that when Tom, veteran that he is, talks about "fun," he is not seeking empty playtime; what he wants is to engage his students and himself in the learning. He longs for something that will shake up his classroom and spark greater learning, but the change it calls for involves risk. He needs someone to give him permission to move away from the familiar. The slow, careful process of building trust and understanding with Tom has brought me to a place where he is willing to accept my permission and my support. Tom and I, sitting together with our combined knowledge, experience, beliefs, and goals, are ready for my big question: "How can I help?"

This is not an easy way to work. There is no continuum of teacher development laying out with neat linearity the steps that I can follow in bringing Tom along some rubric from "beginner" to "expert." I must hear what he is saying and asking, find his personal strengths as well as the places where he is open to growth, give him the confidence to try another way, and then open the space to reflect on what was gained as well as what was lost in this new approach. Not only do I have to trust that he is capable of taking control of his growth; he has to feel that trust.

This kind of closeness to the person and the work, challenging though it may be, is nevertheless the most effective way to bring about change (Silin & Schwartz, 2003).

Take Risks, but Believe in the Process

Now that Tom and I are on the road, I may be uncertain where we will end up, but I am clear about the process that will be our mode of transportation. Gather information, experiment (on ourselves), anticipate problems, make a plan, read the class, make adjustments, and reflect on it all. Much of this kind of inquiry process is second nature to veteran teachers. Part of my job is to make Tom aware that he already does it.

We buy some gossip tabloids and talk about what they contain. Tom is nervous about trying to do this kind of writing and begins making excuses: "I'm not much of a writer…. I don't read this kind of paper…. Maybe we should try something else." Knowing that many of his students may feel the same way, I model ways to encourage and to release a reluctant writer from that demon internal critic.

"But that's the good thing about this," I reassure him. "No matter how bad a writer you are, your piece will fit nicely into these tabloids. Besides, you don't have to write an article; 80 percent of the space is taken up with one kind of advertisement or another. Why don't you try to come up with a personal ad—'Lonely x looking for a second variable'—or something like that?"

Tom laughs, and then decides he might be able to create an advertisement using polynomials. I tell him I will write a gossip article about angles. We will get together tomorrow to compare our efforts.

I have an idea about a headline: "Hypotenuse Caught in Love Triangle." Opening a math review book, I try to fit important terms into the story—right angle, acute angles, isosceles, bisect, ratio. It is important to show I can be mathematically correct and still tell a gossipy story. Meanwhile, Tom is creating his polynomial weight-loss system advertisement. "Multiplication Meals are wrapped in a special FOIL that maintains their freshness," he writes. "Factoring shakes come in two varieties, GCF and Two Parentheses."

We will call them mentor texts or models, but what we are really doing is discovering what can be done by doing it. Tom wants the kind of classroom where the students are engaged, and I want him to realize that it will happen best when he is engaged with the same work.

When we finish our pieces, we come together and share them. After he reads his, I ask him to explain what FOIL and GCF mean. "'First outer, inner last' is a way to remember how to multiply polynomials; GCF is greatest common factor. The kids all know this."

"Are you sure they do?"

Tom hesitates and then suggests that perhaps he should revise his piece to put in an explanation. I respond with knee-jerk agreement but then change my mind. "Let's hold off on making changes. When we get to revision, it will be good to let them see that everyone has to do it. Also, letting them help with your writing process will make them more comfortable with getting help with theirs." He agrees. We talk some more, planning a detailed first lesson and sketching out a mini-unit. He wants to be done in five lessons so he will have an opportunity to do some "real review" too. I don't try to convince him that this is going to be real review; that remains to be seen. Our planning is done; we are ready to start. We'll take it as it comes from here on.

Fanning the Spark

Tom and I show up the next day with an armful of supermarket tabloids each. In small groups, the students explore them, listing what they find. Photos, articles, puzzles, advertisements, horoscopes—they chat happily, sometimes veering off into discussions of the headlines or challenging themselves with the word games. I see Tom glowing. This is what he wants: students involved with the work, sharing their excitement with each other and with him. Twenty minutes go by without a single "shhhhh." Right on schedule, we call on the groups one at a time to come to the board and list what they've found. Watching Tom, I can see that he is impressed at their ability to analyze the genres and the themes that make up a tabloid. They even catch the salacious tone in many of the "reports." I'm glad to see him reassessing his ideas about the students' capabilities, but I am watching closely for signs that he is uncomfortable with a whole period "wasted" on non-math activities.

We plunge into second period without a moment to debrief. I am mentally chewing my nails until, midway through the period, he gives me a smile and a thumbs-up. We will keep at it for another day.

That night Tom goes to a New York State math review website and pulls out a list of terms, topics, and concepts that his students are expected to master in eighth grade. He narrows the list somewhat to make sure areas where he feels the students need extra work are prominent.

When we speak about his list before his first period, I defer to his understanding of what math is needed. In my role as thinking partner, I ask him to explain to me one by one why each of the concepts should or should not be included, knowing he will need to be clear about his choices when he asks the students to incorporate these concepts and terms into their writing.

I want him to feel confident that he can help the students understand how adding Britney Spears to K-Fed and adding +1 and –1 can both equal zero. I am certain that his students will be capable of producing the kind of writing we will ask of them, but will they actually try? I have led Tom out on a limb with his class, and I am even farther out on another limb with him. I sense that he is as nervous and as excited as I am.

The next day, Tom outlines the lesson to the class, I explain freewriting, and we instruct the students to freewrite a math gossip article that sounds like the ones they read in the tabloids. I read mine to them, and they laugh at the idea of Hypotenuse liking it "hot, 180° to be exact." They snigger at Hypotenuse being bisected by his wife, Right Angle. They see what we are getting at. Tom shares his draft of the ad for a polynomial weight loss system, so they can see that they are free to choose a genre with which they are comfortable.

Then it's time to write.

It's a bit creaky at first, with students calling us over. "I don't know what to write."

One after another they whisper the same thing. I look around, sensing the failure of an idea. I can feel Tom's rising panic and watch him fight the urge to pull the plug, but I am

somewhat encouraged to see that a few kids are writing furiously. Giving Tom what I hope is a reassuring look, I tell the class that, if they are having trouble getting started, they should forget about the math and just write a story, making it "real gossipy." Slowly at first, and then with more confidence, the pens begin to move.

When writing time is up, we ask for someone to share. Several hands shoot up. "Redbirds on Drugs," one girl reads. She goes on to explain how the St. Louis Cardinals used a power-enhancing formula to defeat the Mets in the National League playoff series. The kids think it's great. Another one reads, and another. Watching the other students, I can see them reevaluating their own pieces, beginning to consider other ways to approach the math in them.

We're relieved, knowing that we came close to losing them.

Tom suggests that, for his second class later that day, we begin by telling them not to worry about the math: "Just write like a gossip-monger." With this new freedom, the freewriting goes much better. Some students naturally put in the math based on our models; these stories are a great help when we do the sharing. All of the students have interesting pieces to share and to build on. Tom is excited again. He has begun to take control of the project, using his experience at reading a class to introduce the small changes that make all the difference.

Teacher Reflection: Where the Growth Happens

The next day, all but one or two students have brought in completed drafts. Tom places these few students who are without a piece at a table to do the writing and asks me to help them get started. While I'm doing this, he organizes the others for the peer review we had planned.

Tom explains to the students the ways they can respond to each other's pieces. "You may ask a question, make an observation, or point out a problem with the math. Let's back up a little and look at mine." Then he hands out the draft of his piece:

> It's finally here, a Polynomial Weight Loss System that delivers what you need to lose weight. Multiplication

> Meals are wrapped in FOIL that will help them stay fresh. These are designed to distribute healthy goodness. We also have Organic Subtraction Salads with delicious KCC dressing…

"I think it's good," a student calls out.

"Well, that's nice, but it doesn't help me make it any better. Try to give me specific questions, observations, or problems. Imagine you don't know the math. What could I do to help you?" He smiles at me, acknowledging that this phrasing has come directly from our writing workshops.

"You have to explain FOIL," a student calls out. "But it has to sound like it's connected to the food."

"Good, so, take a moment and try to write it out for me, to help me see what you mean."

We listen to their ideas. Julissa suggests, "*First* the *Inner* part is made, then the *Outer* is added on *Last*." Tom pounces on this proposal. "Are we happy with her suggestion?" Some see no problem, but eventually someone sees that she has the letters mixed up. "FOIL is like *oil* with an *F* in front of it—the *O* comes first. Now try the sentence again. Remember, it has to sound like it's about aluminum foil but really be helping us with the math." After the new, corrected suggestions he chooses, "*First* it locks in the *Outer* minerals, then it helps the *Inner* vitamins *Last*."

"*To* last." Carl amends, and we have our sentence. Looking ahead, a student says, "I have a suggestion for KCC." We listen to the idea. Other students suggest modifications, Tom makes a final change, and we have it.

Tom seems to be going along quite well, but suddenly he turns to me and says aloud for the whole class to hear, "Give them some suggestions." For a second, I am taken by surprise, but then I use the moment to bring student empowerment a step further. I point out how Tom had listened carefully to their suggestions as they identified problems in his piece, but in the end he made his own decisions about whether and

how to incorporate them. "You own your piece," I tell them. "Listen to what others say, and think about it, but in the end, you make your own decisions."

Next, Tom sets them to reviewing each other's work in groups of four. They take it seriously, and things slow down as each reading is carefully gone over.

"What do you mean, 'A fraction found her singing pleasing'?"

"How about if you say, 'If you are both at 45°, your angles will complement each other'?"

"I don't understand what you mean when you say, 'Mr. X and Mrs. Y planned to have trinomials so they went to Dr. Equal for advice.'"

Tom and I circulate, listening to their talk and helping with math or writing questions. Tom whispers as he passes me, "This is going to take at least three days"—two more than we had scheduled. I can't wait for the period to end so we can talk. I want to tell him that these are the very days we've been trying to get to, that this is when the learning happens. I want him to recognize that the girl who had the letters of FOIL mixed up won't make that mistake again, that she has begun her review.

In consulting, helping teachers reflect on what they have done can lead them to greater understanding of how and why those actions produced the results they did. In doing so, they learn lessons that will inform their future planning and will shape the kind of teachers they become. I ask Tom what struck him in each class. He tells me about the conversations: about the kids who needed handholding and the ones who just needed praise. He is taking his cues from the kids, responding to the needs they are able to express. He marvels that the math is coming out and developing, not just through a problem that teaches the procedure, but through a process of writing and revision that demands that they consider the concepts.

I want to cultivate in him this habit of looking at the good that occurs and trying to figure out how and why it happens; specifically, what he *did* to allow it to happen. Then I want him to cultivate the same habit in his students.

Tom's Excitement, My Frustration

For the next class, we have chosen one student's work to review together to see how strong the math is. The piece is "Hilton and Britney Go At It: 'Cuz of Dilation's Truth." I tell the class that I don't remember the math concept of dilation. To make sure the students do, Tom asks the author to explain it using the whiteboard. Annie explains that it has to do with multiplying the sides of a rectangle by a single number to keep the proportions the same while increasing the size. Using a rectangle that is 2 × 5, with an area of 10, she then "dilates" it by 2 so it is now 4 × 10 with an area of 40. A student notices that the sides are twice as long, but the area is 4 times greater. Another notices that if you square the dilator, 2, you get 4, and if you multiply the area of the smaller rectangle by 4 you get the area of the larger rectangle. "Does this always happen?" a girl asks. They try it with different numbers and it holds true. "So if we want to know the area of the larger box, we don't have to do all the sides business, do we?" another student asks. "I guess not." Tom says. "Can we express it as an equation?" Five hands shoot up, and together they decide on a formula for determining the area of a dilated rectangle. Tom seems to be taking this in stride; I'm staggered. These kids aren't only learning math; they are discovering it! They're not only having fun writing stories called "Radius and Diameter Fight for a Piece of the Pi" and "SOHCAHTOA Me"; they are having fun with the math itself.

Over the next few sessions, the student pieces begin to take shape. Marc's "Dumplings Lead to Dimplings" piece about how Mr. X and Mrs. Y planned to have a trinomial family is three long columns of equations. His group members help him get more story built around the math. Rina's "Redbirds on Drugs" gives only a nod to math, so her group helps her bring in more. Tom and I develop a grading rubric and share it with the students. As they work individually, in groups, or as a class on each piece, they find problems with the math or the writing and work to solve them. In this process, the review of math concepts happens productively but without the ego bruising that usually accompanies the error hunt.

Tom hands out his email address and gives the students a deadline for sending him their finished essays. "Well, now we'll see," he says. I think, with frustration, that he has missed the fact that we have already seen: that we have created an exercise that was "fun and interesting and a good way to review."

Tom allowed me in because he was unhappy with his teaching, yet, now that he has found such satisfaction with a process, I fear he is focusing instead on the results. Should I talk to him about this? Should I wait and hope he discovers it for himself? In my uncertainly, I choose to stand back and watch.

Growth

The pieces come in. Many are wonderful, like Circe's horoscope advice, "Level yourself to your love's angle at 45°, and then you both will be able to truthfully complement each other." Some, though cleverly written, just throw math terms at the page, as with Alice's piece: "In a nearby suburb where cats chase dogs and neighbors are always yelling and complaining lives Opposite and Hypotenuse and their child, Sine..." Tom grades the pieces while I embed them in a colorful newsletter format, ten pages of illustrated articles, advertisements, gossip, and splashy headlines. Each student receives a copy, and individual pages are posted on a bulletin board for the public. For a while, it is the talk of the school, and Tom is all aglow.

Later, I can stop holding my breath when he writes:

> Learning is just a process. It is going to be just as imperfect as the people who are involved in it. That doesn't make it a problem as much as it makes it exciting. What can be discovered next? Writing and thinking and questioning are the gifts that we can share with our students to help them see what they know and to share that knowledge with others.

Once Tom has come to understand the importance of student writing and questioning in the process of learning, our working relationship changes. When we resume working together after the summer, he comes to me *with* ideas rather than *for* them. It is important to him that he generate his own approaches. With this shift, he is happy in his teaching again.

As review time approaches, Tom plans to repeat the magazine. We discuss the process. He sets a start date and tells the students what they will be doing. The date arrives, but

the project doesn't. He shows me last year's beautiful magazine. "I can't do this," he says. "My version will never measure up to it." A flush of frustration washes over me, which Tom either misses or chooses to ignore. "But I was thinking of something else. What if I have the students in pairs choose one of the math concepts we have covered and review it with the class?"

We talk it over and decide to give the students a lesson plan outline that involves explanation, illustration, practice, a writing assignment, discussion, and an attempt by someone in the class to try a practice problem. By the time Tom and his students are finished, the bulletin board is adorned with illustrated, student-created lesson plans, and the class has reviewed each important concept led by little eighth graders, some standing on chairs to write on the board and some turning to the class and calling them together with a gentle "Shhhhhh."

What Tom Taught Me

When Tom and I began working to use writing to enhance his teaching of math, we created a process that allowed for thousands of individual and group teachable moments. It was in those moments that the learning happened. No matter what the final pieces sounded like, the project was a success. In his rejection of the magazine, I felt that Tom had failed to realize this point. But it turned out that I was the one who had to look deeper at what we had accomplished.

The math magazine was my thing—Tom would never have developed it on his own. In creating his student-as-teacher review, he had moved to take the reins in his own hands. He constructed a unit in which the students were fully engaged, the writing was purposeful, the learning was real, and there was fun. He had come to understand the value of a process that gives power to the learners and was able to risk creating one on his own terms.

Veteran teachers like Tom know their subject, know their students, and know themselves. Working alongside such practitioners presents special challenges to a professional development consultant. If I had tried to tell Tom how or what to teach, our relationship would have crumbled. The challenge was to put my knowledge

alongside Tom's experience so that our work could mature into a truly comfortable partnership. By trusting my own experience as a teacher-consultant, I was able to do that.

In the current paradigm of education as a product that can be evaluated in terms of test scores, the idea of accepting uncertainty is terrifying. How can you put money into something that seems so "squishy"? How do you sell professional development as a "journey of discovery" to a public that expects instant outcomes for its tax dollars? The answer is the same one that Tom and I found. There is no other choice. For students, teachers, and professional development consultants alike, true, sustainable growth that cannot be mandated flows naturally from combining the skills of the practitioner and the capacities of the learner in trusting, professional relationships.

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CHAPTER 3

An On-Site Teacher-Consultant and a Second-Year Teacher Learn Together

Gina Moss

The story told here is of a third-year teacher-consultant (me) and a second-year teacher (Billy) and how we grew into our work separately and together. Some of this story is about the discomfort of growth and the time, attention, and trust required to overcome a natural tendency to avoid that which unsettles us. A lot of the story is about how I came to understand the delicate balance between honoring a teacher's autonomy and professionalism and providing the kind of immediate supports that teachers, especially new ones, often need. I found that my best consulting happened within that balance, embracing and respecting the strengths and interests of a teacher by using them as the foundation from which to build. This story tells how I learned how much patience, listening, observing it takes for these strengths and interests to emerge, just as it does with students in our classrooms. So, even as we watch and listen, we are able to provide concrete instruction that can be put to immediate use without imposing on a teacher's (or student's) identity. In building the professional relationship described here, I also discovered the confidence that I needed as a teacher-consultant (TC) in my capacity to watch and listen effectively. I learned that this approach would result in development of the professionalism of the teacher. Some professional development trains teachers in an existing system, but the work of a Writing Project TC adjusts itself to reflect each individual.

From Teacher to Teacher-Consultant

In 2006, after seven years as a high school humanities and English teacher and two years out of the classroom as a full-time New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) TC in my own school, I began consulting at two schools in Queens that were new both to me and to the Writing Project. In a big system like New York City's, wheels sometimes turn slowly, and my new position was not available for the first month of school. I took

advantage of the time to shadow other, more experienced TCs in their schools. I had never introduced myself to a new school before, and I liked being able to mimic the graceful ease with which these TCs moved around their schools. In my first days at my new schools, I thrust my hand out to one teacher after another. I followed up my introduction of myself and my role as a Writing Project TC with the question I heard a colleague ask over and over: "So, what are you working on?" I discovered that it was a great way to launch a conversation and establish myself as a potential thinking partner. The teachers' responses gave me cues about how to proceed—or not.

One of my schools was an overcrowded comprehensive high school of more than 3,000 students, with large departments and class registers that routinely hit the contractual maximum of 34. The school was big enough to offer an extensive menu of classes, including seven foreign languages, technical and trade programs, and substantial attention to the arts. Despite its size, it was an easy place to work. The halls were quiet during class time, fights were a rarity, and students—for the most part—took school seriously. The congeniality of the staff was fostered by the small staff room on each of five floors and the very welcoming Teacher Center. This professional resource center was provided by the union, supported by the administration, and staffed by a veteran teacher. In it, teachers swapped classroom tips and personal stories, graded papers, and had lunch. The numerous assistant principals were just as congenial as the teachers; they frequently lunched together in the staff cafeteria.

The administration encouraged professional development, and teachers were interested in exploring new possibilities. The school subscribed to a reading program that had introduced Socratic questioning into the school culture. There was a desire to expand this approach beyond the English department and to develop a writing component that was grounded in inquiry. From the conversations around the big Teacher Center table, it sounded like innovative things were going on in classrooms.

Within this context, though, I observed traditional teaching practices and continuous test prep in many classrooms, under the pressure of New York State's high-stakes exit exams and the need to achieve school-wide statistical benchmarks under No Child Left Behind. Mindful of the four on-demand essays on the state exams, language arts teachers hammered away at the structure of the five-paragraph essay. Confined by rigid pacing calendars and standardized tests, math and science teachers introduced new

topics whether or not their students had grasped the previous ones. The space between traditional classroom practice and the interest in innovation seemed like an obvious fit for the Writing Project.

Forming a Professional Relationship with a Second-Year Teacher

I don't really remember meeting Billy. He probably responded to the flyer I put in every teacher's mailbox when I arrived, announcing my availability to meet, collaborate on lesson planning, teach demo lessons, or provide material support. One of the many young teachers who congregated around the big table in the Teacher Center, he was tall with a boyish face and a quiet demeanor. When sitting with a cluster of teachers, he listened more than he spoke; it was hard to imagine him losing his temper with a class, even as a novice teacher. Though he was not trained in special education, his program that year included a couple of self-contained special ed English language arts classes of 12 students each, as well as larger inclusion classes: team-taught classes that mixed special and general education students. Billy and I started working together almost immediately and met weekly for the entire year.

Billy was interested in establishing a standing weekly appointment with me, coupled with classroom visits. Knowing how hectic a school day can be, I like to touch base with teachers before a scheduled appointment. Each week I'd ask Billy if we were still on, and he'd confirm our meeting with a tentative-sounding "If that's okay with you" or "I guess." Most weeks, though, he'd cancel the classroom visit because they were just reviewing, just starting something, or doing something else that wasn't interesting or important enough for me to be there. I couldn't tell if he was being resistant to what I was offering, if he was unsure of himself, or if something else was being left unsaid. I could see that he needed breathing space. That understanding was enough for me to decide not to push, despite my discomfort at not knowing the underlying reason. Two years later, I asked him about his reluctance to have me in his classroom in those first months. He explained:

> I may have felt as if I did not want another adult, no matter how "friendly" he or she was, to be in the room. My first year of teaching, there was another teacher in the room with me—either a student teacher or co-teacher—an

> administrator or group of administrators, et cetera, so often that I sometimes felt as if my classroom were an attraction at the zoo. I also felt that I did not have a full opportunity to develop my teacher persona that year at all because I was so rarely left alone with a group of students that I felt were mine and mine alone. I felt constrained under these conditions, so when I finally had an opportunity to be on my own, I wanted to feel as if I had my "own" classroom and didn't need the help.

By trusting my instinct to honor his need without pressure, I earned his trust. My own desire to understand his motivation was less important, even irrelevant at that point.

Because of Billy's quiet demeanor, he was often hard to read. He'd tell me what his students were reading, and I'd prod him to think through what he wanted them to learn. Sometimes I would hear an idea lurking and reflect that back to him. When I wasn't sure what he was reaching for, I loaded him up with strategies and activities. He always scribbled furiously as we met, muttering doubts that his students would show interest. Even so, he was always willing to try out my suggestions, although he wasn't yet experienced enough to intuit the underlying concepts or extended benefits. Without access to his classroom, I wasn't able to make use of my own expertise to help him understand or to tailor our work to his students. Still, I persisted.

In hindsight, I wonder if it would have made a difference if we had looked at some long-range planning and collaborated on units instead of sticking to day-to-day strategies. As is often the case with new teachers, I was working out how to offer useful suggestions (both listening to his needs and tapping into my own knowledge) without either of us misconstruing my offerings of step-by-step strategies as the whole picture. It's tempting to feel that the job is done after stepping in with methodologies that will stabilize a shaky classroom, to be prescriptive instead of working alongside. New teachers in particular are eager to build up their repertoire of effective teaching tools and strategies, but, as important as that is, I wanted to be more than a mechanic repairing problems. In the long run, my fixes would not cultivate anyone's teaching abilities.

Working alongside a teacher meant that I intended to be a thinking partner, sharing rather than imposing my expertise. I thought about my own early days as a teacher, when the on-site TC in my school, Barbara Martz, used to visit my classroom. She would take copious notes focused on the things that had worked, usually things I hadn't noticed, and email the notes to me later in the day. These comprehensive snapshots of my classroom, presented without judgment or evaluation, enabled me to see my students' capacities and better understand myself as a teacher. This insight improved my decisions about what I asked my students to do. Barbara had guided me through what I wanted—but wasn't sure how—to do. Now a TC myself, I recognize that my job is to perceive when and how my experience and knowledge can help the teachers I work with to find their footing. By listening, prodding, offering possibilities, and then watching how the teacher responds both in conference and in the classroom, I bring a way of thinking that shapes our work and allows for each teacher's developing autonomy. Sometimes the ideas I offer take quick root, but sometimes not. My capacity to intuit a teacher's readiness (or temperament) for a next step is a vital part of my consulting work. It often feels like a hit-or-miss proposition, especially when a teacher seems resistant, but patience and persistence have usually brought me to a moment when a teacher is able to discuss, collaborate, and enter into a working relationship that will be a learning experience for both of us.

From Billy I began to get glimpses of what would later emerge. Late in the fall term, I wrote the following in my consulting journal:

> Occasionally I see a smile flicker across his face, and a little fire peeked out the day he and I talked about the larger purpose of opening up the world to kids—inner as well as outer worlds—through reading and especially the reading of stimulating literature. It may have been the first time that I heard him speak with such passion about something, and now I know it's there.

Even Billy's frustration about his students' seeming lack of motivation helped me to see his sensitivity to their struggles and understand what made him persist. My notes of our weekly meetings continued to fill with strategies I had suggested during the conference and with ideas to suggest in future meetings. However, as Billy's ability to understand

his students grew, the information and questions he brought me became more specific to his students. From students' work on independent reading, he saw that many were prepared to move on to more difficult texts (Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* and Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*). He was still seeking classroom strategies from me, but now his requests were informed by what he was observing in his classroom. Earlier, his judgments had been unilateral as the adult in authority.

Parallel to Billy's becoming more attuned to his students, I was becoming more sensitive to the precarious stability of his emerging teaching persona. This awareness enabled me to suggest strategies that assisted him in his daily struggle for survival as a new teacher without overwhelming him. My experience since then has shown me that ours was a typical beginning to a consulting relationship.

For all the changes I was witnessing, Billy still had difficulty planning beyond the day-to-day. In the conversations around the lunch table, I continued to be struck by Billy's low-key temperament. While other teachers spoke vehemently about their classrooms and personal lives, he was quiet. I wondered if his demeanor obscured the larger context for the activities in his lesson plans. Or was it just that he was a very new teacher? When we met, was I talking too much, giving him too much direction and not the sort of collaborative support that would nurture his teaching voice? His blend of disengagement and eagerness to experiment confused me. He didn't seem to believe that his students could actually be engaged by a lesson. Or was it that he wasn't sure that he was capable of engaging them?

I wanted to see Billy be more authoritative with his students even as he facilitated activities that invited their voices into the room. I wanted him to find a way to be more structured without relinquishing the relaxed personality that was his. I was concerned that students would read his low-key demeanor as indifference. But those sentiments hadn't found a way into the conversation yet because I wasn't sure that expressing them was appropriate. Instead, I waited, and I kept listening. Things take time.

Breakthrough #1: A Shift from "He and I" to "We"

In January, Billy decided he'd like his special education classes to read *Night* by Elie Wiesel (1960). He chose to start with visual images of the period to help contextualize

the book for the students. The following week he came to me with an idea to use Nazi propaganda posters to provide context, but he wasn't sure what to do with them. I suggested he have pairs of students choose which poster they wanted to respond to and then look for details in the posters that conveyed emotion and mood. I explained that this tactic would provide students with a framework for looking critically at several posters, evaluating them as they monitored their reactions. Asking students to choose a poster for themselves would also give them some agency in the lesson. This approach made sense to Billy, and he liked the prompts I suggested:

1. Describe what you actually see: design, colors, font, images. What is suggested? What mood is conveyed?
2. Look at any text that is there. What do you notice? Is it long or short? Is the text conveying commands, questions, or information? Does one word or phrase leap out at you? Is there anything unusual? Familiar?

This lesson plan was a turning point in our work together. Billy had come to me with an activity as well as a conceptual outcome in mind. He'd gathered enough experience with teaching with writing in the previous few months that he was now reaching for a framework and structure, rather than a prescription. He could see how the prompts fit into his goals.

For the first time, Billy asked me into his classroom. He was interested in having help facilitating the segment with the posters. In the classroom, he prodded his students to talk about favorite TV commercials first and what made them work. Billy then held up first an American and then a German poster, and the class noticed details and speculated on the message. Students or pairs of students were then invited to select one poster, observe details, and comment on the impressions that were created. This time, Billy had taken my suggestions and made them his own. He intended to follow up the next day with a whole-class discussion.

Breakthrough #2: Persistence and Connections

A few days later I bumped into Billy in the stairwell, and I asked him how the follow-up went. He replied, "Oh, we moved on. I really wanted to get back to the book." My

immediate reaction was disappointment. I had hoped that, with his emerging grasp of our bigger picture, he'd understand that this activity was a way to help students learn to connect the dots of the world, that they were capable of seeing connections between disparate things, and that these things could be farther and farther afield as the year progressed. In this way, a broader reach can also become a deeper reach. It threw me that he had seen this activity as a diversion, a little break from the "real work."

At the same time, I had a hunch that I had an opening to continue the conversation, that he'd be able to make the connection if I prodded him. I didn't want to let it go, so I asked another question: Did any of the discussion of the propaganda posters trickle into the discussion of the book? He told me that, a few days later, they had encountered a scene that described an SS officer in a way that students had been quick to connect to one of the posters. My persistence and instincts led him to realize what the students had gained from the propaganda lesson, and we talked briefly about the importance of visualization in order to maintain and enhance engagement with a text. It felt to me like a big step forward in Billy's capacity to see how parts function together to make up a more expansive whole. I started to realize that my question had helped him to this realization more than a suggestion could have. It was a watershed moment for me as well. I knew that I had invited Billy to recognize that curriculum as a whole can be greater than the sum of its multifarious parts. He began to grasp a broader sense of curriculum, to perceive something about the nature of teaching without my having provided him with the perception. I had heard his readiness to come to this understanding and had asked the question that brought it to the foreground.

Until that point, for all we had accomplished, Billy had not recognized successes where I did. Like so many new teachers, he still had a relatively concrete view of curriculum. Things that felt tangential to him, like breaks from the routine and not "real" teaching—these things, my experience told me, were places where students were able to expand their intellectual reach. Rather than being a hiatus, they were intrinsic to the work of the class. At those times, students were asked more about what they were thinking than about what the teacher or author was thinking. The benefits of this approach were not yet apparent to Billy, as a second-year teacher.

I hoped that Billy would recognize that playful classroom strategies such as the activity with propaganda posters are not merely entertainment, but powerful teaching tools as

well. Such activities were, in fact, proving to be wonderful examples of the kinds of things Billy was "supposed to do" in stimulating the young people in his charge to think for themselves. I thought back to the volumes of notes Barbara Martz had sent me about my classroom and how she saw my students working hard to expand their knowledge when I had not noticed, and how valuable that insight was to me as a relatively new teacher.

Spring Term and a Graduate Course

During the spring term, I co-facilitated an introductory Writing Project inservice graduate course at the school. Billy enrolled. In the context of this course, he and 15 of his colleagues joined with a group of teachers from the second high school where I worked to take a close look at how writing could become a more integral part of their classroom practice. Teachers in the course kept teaching journals as a way both to reflect on their experiences using writing in their classrooms and to experience the unique effect of thinking on paper. They worked on a piece of their own writing with a writing group, read professional literature, and participated in the sort of classroom strategies Billy and I had been talking about all fall.

Billy's teaching journal was another way I came to know him as a teacher. His description of his students, which he continued to revise in his writing group, showed me something of himself.

> This week, the first of the new term, I found myself growing frustrated and encountering the same problem: How do I involve all my students when they have such a range of abilities? Some students are very bright and can handle a lot of responsibility. Some are bright but lazy or poor workers. Some have terrible skills and cannot do anything on their own. Some can't read or write—and find every excuse not to.

In another entry in his teaching journal, Billy wrote that he "never realized how challenging teaching could be, even after you've already made all the typical first-year mistakes." Despite his resistance to keeping a journal, the writing brought him

perspective. Stepping back to look at the work Billy and I did together over the course of that year opened my perspective also; as a result, it helped me to grapple with the nature of my work. I saw my own story in the reflection of his story, which in turn helped me to develop my capacity as a TC.

Breakthrough #3: Collaboration Takes Time

The course gave additional structure to my work, as the teachers I worked with now had their own experiences to think through, not just my descriptions. My conferences with Billy focused increasingly on adapting the ideas from the seminar to his particular classroom objectives. At the beginning of March (New York City high schools lose nearly three weeks of classes during January and February to state exams and a winter vacation), he came to me for help in guiding his students to write essays about Wiesel's *Night.* He wanted these essays to be personally meaningful and, at the same time, help students develop their understanding of how to organize a piece of expository writing. Neither of us thought that the standard five-paragraph formula would accomplish both goals. Again, Billy invited me into his classroom, both to provide feedback to him and to be a second teacher available to conference with students. I began visiting his fifth-period class regularly, a small group of ninth grade special education students.

The students in the class had begun to develop tolerance for open-ended questions through some of the activities he had introduced from the course, and Billy had made use of these questions as springboards for informal writing. It felt right to him to take it further, and I suggested using their questions to write an academic essay. He was starting to seek help in developing his own ideas; however, this was a big step. I offered to help him teach the first lesson. I suggested we team teach at the start, since he was used to eliciting questions from his students. We teased out their most pressing questions about the text and asked them to compose them on sentence strips. We then arrayed the strips on a large table where the class could browse and invited them to "Steal a question!"

Next was the segment that was new to Billy, so I took over the facilitation. I guided students through some writing prompts adapted from Peter Elbow's (1998) loop writing activity, which Billy had encountered in the course. First, we all wrote—Billy and I wrote, too—about why we had chosen the questions we picked and discussed this writing with

a partner. Next, I steered the class through several of Elbow's "loops."[11] Billy and I shifted back to team teaching as we read our writing to each other in order to model active listening (Gendlin, 1978; Perl, 1980), another strategy Billy had learned in the course. We invited the class to notice what we did and didn't say to each other. The students were very quick to point out how positive the comments were and how much we stuck to the writer's topic. The next step was for students to read what they had just written to each other and use the same response mechanism. These pieces of writing were then extended and revised into more substantial essays.

Billy guided his students through their revisions and was content with the final products. His listening posture was developing, parallel to the development of my own. There were still plenty of struggles, but, because he had been conscious of his students' thought processes and incremental steps in developing an extended piece of writing, his teaching became more closely attuned to what was accessible to them, leading to better scaffolding. His definition of success became more nuanced, and he was able to see the learning that was taking place along the way. I watched Billy find his teaching legs as I found my own way into this delicate work, learning to negotiate the interplay between my inclination to hold back and my mission to work alongside teachers, listening for their needs and helping to find ways to meet them.

Listening carefully is subtle. When I enter a conversation by saying back what I have noticed in the classroom, the teacher is able to be an active member of our work together, rather than a recipient of directives or criticism. Making the conversation collaborative opens the door for me to add my expertise with respect for the teacher. Over time, as teachers become more attuned to their own students, they evolve a teaching stance suited to their own dispositions. In addition to enhancing their repertoire of classroom strategies, their capacities as reflective professionals also grow.

[11] (1) Write down obviously wrong answers, misconceptions, and lies—both real and imagined—about the topic. (2) Make a list of all the people you can think of who might be able to help with answers. (3) Write down all the possible answers you can think of.

From Coaching to Working Alongside a Colleague

Later in the year, Billy decided to tackle *The Color of Water* by James McBride (1996) in his self-contained special education classes. It's a tricky book, with two distinct narrative voices telling subtly parallel stories. He was interested in using jigsaw groups to move faster through some of the chapters and keeping the door open for students to pose questions. One day, he organized the class into an "instant debate" (yet another strategy from the course) where students form teams and argue, on the spot, a debatable point. By his account, the class was a very lively one, and the students were captivated by the points that came up. His journal entry on this day reads:

> I was not sure how I wanted to end the class after we had our instant debate. I didn't feel it was important to judge the debate and award a winner and loser. We had a brief discussion about the most important points raised during the period…. As we continued to read, we looked back at places in the text where these issues came up again and again…. I believe this day helped shape the unit into a more powerful study.

His students came to see the ideas in the text from a broader perspective; likewise, Billy could see his classroom from a broader perspective. When we met, he now routinely brought me his ideas rather than asking for mine, and his pleasure at having some confidence showed up in smiles and a firmer tone of voice. When I reminded him how that lesson on *Night* that used visuals continued to inform the class discussions for the rest of the book, he recognized other moments when similar connections emerged in his teaching. From these responses, I could see that he was looking at his curriculum design from an expansive view. He was teaching ideas, not discrete lessons; he expected success in whatever form was available to his students. In his final reflection for the course, he wrote:

> Maybe it seems like it's so much work for so little gain…or maybe it only seems like so little gain. I guess things have to be measured relatively. I won't expect a student who can't read to be able to write much. But what about those

> who can? I guess it hurts just to know that there are kids who need so much help and I am only able to do so much. I will not be satisfied until all my students do well, which means I won't be satisfied. That's okay.

Despite Billy's persistent doubts about his students' capacities, he had come to the recognition that progress is individual and therefore often does not conform to a teacher's own hopes.

This commitment was evident in the confidence with which he brought his ideas to our meetings. Our work had progressed from planning individual lessons to perceiving the lessons' interrelationships to sequencing material into conscientiously scaffolded units. Billy's initial quietness had forced me to tune into him with both subtlety and acuity. The changed nature of our consultations was evidence of my progress in the delicate interplay of listening and prodding, of clutch and gas, judiciously disengaging while a teacher gets his own sense of things (clutch pedal down, gears shifting), balanced with the gentle feeding of an appropriate amount of fuel. Like driving, though it feels intuitive, this process is informed by a solid base of knowledge.

Coda

The next year, Billy and I didn't work together nearly as much. He'd occasionally ask me if I had some time for him, and we'd kick some ideas around. Mostly, he was reaching out to vet some new idea or to think things through together. Toward the end of the year, he came to me with a pressing question. "I see other teachers giving their students handouts with questions," he started, "and I've been wondering if I should be doing that too. But I'm not a worksheet kind of teacher, asking recall questions. Is that okay?" Knowing the creative and thoughtful activities he brought to his classroom, I suppressed the temptation to give him a big hug and asked instead, "Do you think they would be able to answer questions if you asked them?" He thought so, and I reassured him that they were doing just fine. For me, knowing to respond with a question rather than advice was evidence of my growing ability to listen to and coax teachers to hear themselves so that they can find their own footing.

A year later, Billy enrolled in one of NYCWP's Institutes, and the ideas he encountered there appeared in our consultations. By the time he came to me about the high-stakes essay he wanted his ninth graders to write, they had already done so much exploratory writing that he knew they were ready for him to push them toward a solid, formal draft. He has become an adept listener, attuned to when to push, hold off, move ahead.

As for me, I found more confidence in my instincts as a TC and confirmed how important it is for teachers to have someone who's really listening to what they need. It might be stating the obvious, but it's worth noting that the learning curve of a professional developer can be seen in the trajectories of the teachers who have worked with her. Only part of my story is about a new teacher becoming a little less new. It's really about a relatively new TC discovering—or uncovering—and establishing her identity. It's about learning how to be patient over time. The progress that each of us made was not apparent to me at the time, but became visible only as I wrote about it. This act of reflection has brought me both tolerance for the discomfort that comes in the early stages of a working relationship and confidence that makes me better able to help teachers become better at what they do.

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CHAPTER 4

In the Basement: Crisis and Possibility in a New Teacher's Classroom

Alison Koffler-Wise

Both new-to-the-job on-site teacher consultants (TCs) and novice teachers struggle with the task of adjusting to the demands of their work. For both, this struggle may concern not only classroom content, but the complexities of negotiating a troubled school system and the often painful intricacies and vulnerabilities of human interaction. In this piece, I'll zero in for a close-up look at a crucial morning in the work of a new teacher and a new consultant—a somewhat younger and less experienced me—in the late fall of their year of working together.

New Consultant, New School

As I maneuver carefully down the iron steps of the elevated train, I sling my daypack onto my back. I'm loaded down with books, handouts, things I think might be useful for the teachers I'm working with as an on-site TC at a small high school in the Bronx. As I'm shouldering this weight of books and papers, I'm also carrying the collective wisdom of the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP): the collaborative learning and problem-solving with my fellow TCs at our Friday meetings, the workshops I've taught and co-taught over the past year, the courses I've taken with the NYCWP in my own days as a classroom teacher. I'm also carrying my newness on the job and a pit-of-the-stomach nervousness that I'm learning to deal with as I get acquainted with all of "my" schools. As an on-site TC, I'm "embedded" in several schools where I work alongside teachers to improve the teaching of reading and writing and provide staff development on literacy tailored to each place's unique needs. My job is, as it turns out, not only to support the teaching of reading and writing but to support the teachers I work with on their journey to becoming the best teachers they can be. I am often awed by the scope of this work, how those of us who work in the classroom must be alert to so much—not just the content and how we deliver it, but ourselves, our students, the constant interplay of a myriad of interactions—and to respond with thoughtfulness and humanity.

This school is in a neighborhood of the working poor whose citizens struggle to find jobs, housing, and a better life; they fight to get their children safely through school and keep them off the streets. In all, it's a neglected part of the city; residents consider themselves successful when they can afford to leave. The school building stands at the top of a hill rising above the tenements around it like a cathedral towering over a feudal town. Its architecture speaks of hope and uplifting, of education as a secular yet sacred right. The streets around me are relinquishing a steady stream of kids of various ages, drawn to the building as to a magnet; it's a clear, late fall day, and hope is in the air. I think about this atmosphere as I enter, noting the elaborate, grubby stonework of the façade, the quotation about law and learning engraved above the crumbling doorway, and the Depression-era WPA murals in the lobby, covered with an afterthought of protective glass.

The Context of the Work

I was introduced to the principal during a short meeting with her and Nancy Mintz, the NYCWP director at the time. I have the impression that this principal doesn't understand the inquiry-based teaching model of the NYCWP but she is always glad to have another hand on board to help out and improve student performance. The school's shaky test scores put it in danger of being closed down, as part of the school chancellor's initiative to weed out "bad" schools based on their progress in English language arts (ELA) and math and on their yearly report cards, so the stakes feel high. This building was once one big high school, one of the ones shown on TV as beset by problems—violence, low graduation rates, poor attendance. The new small schools opened in the old building with much hope and fanfare, with the promise of renewed academic achievement and higher test scores. The small schools are still struggling to succeed and to help their students pass the battery of standardized tests that stand between them and the world. My work here as a TC is to "help improve literacy practices." If "literacy practices" are not improved, if test scores are not raised, my school will be on the road to being closed down. I sigh as I trudge up the hill.

I push open the heavy front door, sidestep the metal detector, and say hello to the safety officer at the front desk. Another safety officer is running a buzzing wand down the legs of a male student, while a thin stream of kids files through the metal detector, into the lobby and up the stairs. Students are laughing and yelling. The broad expanse

of the lobby fills with them: cliques of girls, talking and waving; some boyfriend-and-girlfriend pairs, hip to hip and lost in their own world; a pride of young guys dawdling their way up the stairs as someone hollers at them to hurry up and take off their hats.

I chug up the stairs after them. My school is on the first floor. On the four other floors of the building are different schools, each with its own character and culture. As I walk the hallway, kids are entering the classrooms and settling down. The class sizes are still large, at the outside edge of the legal limit of 30 or 34 students. Teachers stand by the doorways to their rooms, greeting the students as they come in. Other staff members and safety officers roam the halls, calling, "Get to class!" In this aging building, with limited resources, the school struggles to create order, a supportive culture, a vital learning environment. My principal has insisted on making sure that the bulletin boards are hung with student work covered with plastic to demonstrate pride and success. The walls are painted a hopeful blue and yellow, but the overall effect is still somewhat forlorn.

In the room that serves as teachers' lounge and dean's office, I roll my coat up and stuff it into a cubbyhole, wondering, as usual, "Is this safe?" This is the room where I do most of my consulting with teachers; the building is short on quiet places where people can sit down and talk. Other teachers come in to mark papers and eat lunch. Often, we all have to get up and leave when Roberto, the new young dean, brings a bunch of students in for mediation. I say hi to Dave, who's taken off his leather jacket and is putting on a blazer and tie. I feel pretty comfortable talking to him, and we've bounced around a few ideas. I've offered to come into his class sometime, but he hasn't taken me up on it. I wonder momentarily if that's a failure on my part, but I push the idea aside, reassuring myself with the feeling of easy good will I get from him. I say something to Miranda as she sweeps into the room, laughing mid-sentence as she looks through the cubbyholes for Xerox paper. She's a dramatic, quick-witted woman, and I get the impression that she's good in the classroom, but she makes me uneasy when she tells mean jokes about the kids. I sense this is the gallows humor of those who work hard and under stress—I've heard friends who are emergency room workers make the same kind of jokes—and I instinctively want to plead, "Please don't say that stuff in front of me." I know such a response wouldn't be constructive. I'll have a chance to talk to her again later. I smile again at everyone and go down to find Jane.

As a new TC, I am thinking hard about working with all these people I've met. Is this teacher interested in working with me? Should I suggest planning a lesson or a classroom visit? How far can I go glad-handing into another's personal space? Is he welcoming this conversation? How strongly should I push this idea? Is there tension in the air? Does her body language say *back off*? Are they crying wordlessly for help? Am I reading the situation correctly? Sometimes I feel that I'm doing great. Other times I feel like I'm not doing enough. Always I am keenly watching this unspoken dance of connection.

In the Basement

Jane is a fellow, a member of the NYC Teaching Fellows program, which has provided New York City public schools with over 16,000 new teachers within the past ten or so years. The young teachers who emerge from the program make a two-year commitment to working in the city's struggling schools. This is Jane's first year in the classroom. I began talking with her casually during the first week of school, and I've been consulting with her since then, meeting with her a couple of times a week. I've shared some Internet resources with her; we've done some lesson planning and talking about classroom management. Jane says she's been incorporating many of the strategies we talk about into her classroom practice, getting her students writing in their journals, experimenting with ways for them to use writing as a way of thinking things through. We have talked a lot about how to make writing an integral part of each classroom day. I've been hoping that she would let me visit her classroom as a co-teacher or friendly observer; she's been a little evasive, though, and I've been careful about not pushing too hard.

Jane is full of energy, and she wants to make more than the two-year commitment that her program requires of her. Both her mom and dad are teachers, she's told me, and she sees her work here not as a way station to bigger and better things, but as the beginning of a career. With her curly russet hair and fair, fragile skin, she doesn't look much older than the students she's teaching. Each morning, she bucks the traffic to make it in early to work; each evening she is busy with the full load of graduate courses her program demands as well as her own classes to plan and papers to grade. She attacks these tasks with a perky determination. She also does set painting, she tells me, for a local theater group.

Today will be the first time that she's invited me to visit her classroom. Yesterday she surprised me by asking me to drop in to watch her teach the group that, as she says, she has "the most problems with." Eager to seem supportive and infinitely flexible, I told her that I'd be glad to be a friendly observer; we could talk afterwards about what I saw and strategize together about next steps. I'd wondered momentarily about asking to see her lesson plan but was afraid of sounding too "critical," so I dropped the idea. I'm quite anxious to have her see me as a supportive ally working alongside her and not as someone come to pass judgment on her. From what she's said about this ninth grade ELA group, it sounds like she's having classroom management problems. I'm here to work with teachers on literacy, but so often other things come into play. As I head downstairs, I review the conversation in my mind, wondering if I handled it right.

Jane's room is in the basement, down two warm, pool-smelling flights of stairs, into a broad low-ceilinged area graced with dim lighting and open ductwork, rimmed with classrooms and offices. The walls are battleship gray. I push open the door to her classroom, which also serves as the music room: a corridor-like space where the students' desk-chairs are arranged on a series of low steps—not an ideal place to work. I wonder why they've placed Jane, a brand-new teacher, so far from colleagues and help.

The bell rings, and the kids come charging in. It's obviously quite a big class of ninth graders. Jane has made an effort to arrange the chairs all on one side of the stretched rectangle of the room, but it's hard for her to get the students seated. While she attempts to gently herd some of them toward their seats, more kids are pelting down the stairs to mill around just outside the door. The bell rings. Jane goes to the doorway to urge that group of students to come in. She manages, by dint of gentle verbal prodding, to encourage most of them into their seats with the others. "Get your books," she says. Some students open and riffle through their daypacks, some don't move, and some pop up and rush for the steel bookcases on the far side of the room. I remember that Jane is doing sustained silent reading (SSR) with her class, and I see that her intention is to get the students settled with their self-chosen books. Some of the kids seem to have brought their own books, but others are picking through the array of classroom books as though for the first time. After about ten minutes, some students are reading quietly, but several are talking behind the bookcases; one little guy is spinning around, feet in the air, on top of an unused teacher's desk in the far corner; two fellows cruise in late, hallooing to their friends; and a boy and a girl in one corner

are throwing papers at each other. Jane keeps moving from place to place, trying, in her soft-spoken way, to get them settled. Meanwhile, time is passing. It's tough for the kids who are focused on reading to stay focused, and others seem to be treating this as hang-out time. I'm wondering if this chaos happens every day. The number of students who are actually engaged in reading is dwindling, and Jane seems at a loss as to what to do next. She's losing more of the class moment by moment. From my desk by the wall, it's painful to watch. My mind is clicking away with things to say to her as I take some notes: how she might set up rituals to start the class promptly, ways to make the students feel the importance of this special reading time, how she can build up her students' stamina for long periods of silent reading. I'm sure that there are kids here who have never felt the pleasure of quietly getting lost in the world of a good book, and Jane is going to have to create the conditions that will permit that to happen.

I wonder to myself if it would be all right to intervene a little. I'm inwardly cursing myself for not having talked with her about her plan. I want to help, but I don't want to undermine what authority she has here. I don't know what she wants to do next. I catch her eye and ask her as she comes by. She's not sure, a guided freewrite perhaps? She's had success with them before. She seems distracted, half-focused. What topic? I'm not certain what her goals are for the day. A moment of silence. I'm not sure if my presence is making things better or worse for her, if she's uncertain, resentful, or wanting help. I risk jumping in. "Have them write about *the me nobody knows*," I suggest, improvising and well aware of the dangers of improvisation. It is, though, a prompt that has worked well for me in my own classrooms, and I know that we've talked about guided freewrites many times in our planning sessions. Jane nods her head. She steps to the front of the room, and I notice she's standing a little straighter. Jane tells the kids to settle down, not worry about their spelling or grammar, and get started. She tells them to write *the me nobody knows* at the top of the page, and when she says, "Go," they should quickly, quickly write whatever they think should come after it. If they get stuck, they should go back to the prompt and then take off again in another direction. The kids have five minutes to write. One, two, three, go! Jane begins to circle the room, gently nudging the students to begin. I wonder if the kids will follow her instructions. Plans B, C, and D are already running through my mind, but the room is already a little more quiet.

Taking my cue from Jane, I, too, walk quietly around. Most kids have at least picked up their pencils, and some are writing rapidly, their heads bent to the task. One boy puts his pencil down as I walk by, crosses his arms and queries, "Suppose I don't want to tell you about me?" I'm not sure if it's a genuine question, if he's wasting time, or if he is leery of me, testing the stranger in his room. I say, "That's OK. Tell us whatever you want. And it doesn't matter how you begin." He looks up at me sideways and reaches for his pencil; it seems to be a satisfactory answer. Jane and I circulate about, looking quietly over kids' shoulders, stepping back to gauge the energy in the room. I'm delighted to see that most are busily engaged. Whatever her struggles may be, Jane must have done some good work here to get the kids writing with some regularity and feel comfortable doing it. The kids seem to know what to expect, and it's obvious that they have experienced some prior success with low-stakes writing.

The five minutes are up. Jane tells the young writers, "Stop!" and asks them if they want to share. Kids raise their hands. Obviously they've shared their work with each other before and enjoy doing so. I'm pleased and surprised to note how many students want to participate and to see that they all are eager to listen to each other. Though I'm thinking that Jane needs to do some work with classroom management and keeping her class organized and structured, obviously she's gotten her students to love this ritual of listening to others' work. If she can establish this kind of focus and attention here, I think eagerly, she can certainly get her students positively involved in the task of silent reading.

At Jane's behest, the sharing of stories begins. However halting or confident each student's performance is, the listening kids remain quiet. Each reader receives a notable amount of attention and respect. The kids seem willing to be open and vulnerable in their writing; clearly Jane has been successful in creating safe space for this sharing. Martine has written about her love for her baby brother. José tells about how being the leader of a dance troupe helps him deal with his anger. Mike, the boy who didn't want to tell about himself, unreels a darkly funny story about being picked up by the police. Phil's freewrite reveals that being the class clown hides how sensitive and easily hurt he is. The room hums with poignancy and a fierce listening, as each kid stands up to share. There's a ringing sense that something real is happening here. We all applaud, for ourselves and for each other—even the ones who haven't shared their writing, listening on the periphery. The kids are, for this gleaming moment, no longer an amorphous,

unruly mass, but *authors*, brimming with passion and potential. Everyone in the room is keenly aware of this moment. There's a second more of clear silence, and then the bell rings. Jane's students hoist their daypacks and leap to their feet, laughing, talking, and poking each other in the ribs with that wild, gleeful, and quicksilver mutability of ninth graders. They hurry off to their next class, whooping and hollering like a galvanic force of nature.

In the quiet after they've left, Jane and I have a whole period to debrief. She's focused on rearranging the chairs and picking up stray papers, tossing them into the trash. I'm bursting to get her attention, to tell her some of the positive things I saw happen today and some of the ideas I have for making SSR work for her class. I'm feeling excited and upbeat. I'm thinking about how she can adjust the timing of activities for this class. I want to remind her about all the little good things I saw happen, things that she can build on. I want to emphasize what's going well here and how she can build on it. She's created a class environment where the seeds of good writing are being planted, I'm thinking excitedly. With a little planning, she can do the same with silent reading. But what I want most to say is how I saw her students grab onto the opportunity to express themselves, how beautiful and strong their writing is, how this class has reaffirmed for me that positive change can arise from telling the truths of our lives and that helping kids experience this truth-telling is a powerful part of our work as teachers. I want to remind her how such guided freewrites can be an important first step for her students on the road to all kinds of writing success. I want to tell her that with the caring and consistent effort that she already shows, she'll be able to turn this class around. The good stuff that's clearly starting to happen with their writing can also happen with their reading!

"Can I ask you something?" Jane says before I have a chance to start. "Am I the worst teacher in the world?"

I look at her. She's tense and teary-eyed, and I'm aware that it's costing her a lot to ask me this. I think of the moments I've had in the classroom when I was a new teacher and felt like an utter failure and of the moments of doubt I still have as a new TC. I think of all the time, thought, and energy it takes to teach. I look at her, hoping that she felt the power of the kids' writing and that she sees how great they can be when given a space where they can shine. I hope she knows that she can build on this power and move her

students on to increasing levels of accomplishment in writing and in reading. I'm hoping she can feel the good that happened here today, the successful moments as well as the failures. I'm also hoping, ruefully, that the trust we've built hasn't been broken, that she'll continue to work with me. Maybe, in this painful moment, there are possibilities unfolding. Maybe, in this neglected classroom in a neglected corner of the city, potential may blossom. I think of how Jane is struggling along so gamely and with so little help. I think of the complicated, barely acknowledged web of emotion and action that connects us all.

"No, honey," I tell her with a hug. "You are way and by far not the worst teacher in the world."

Coda

One sunny afternoon a few years later into my life as a consultant, I find myself with two other TCs outside the National Council of Teachers of English conference at the Javits Center in Manhattan, lugging the unwieldy materials from our presentation and trying to hail a cab. Someone calls my name and I turn around. There's Jane; I haven't seen or heard from her for quite awhile, but there she is, smiling ear to ear, her curly hair blowing in the wind. She's teaching at another school, she says; she's at the conference with colleagues; she loves her students; she has them writing up a storm, she says, and she's glad to be in the classroom. She's stayed beyond her program's two-year commitment, and she's still working in an inner city school. "You never know how things will turn out," she tells me. "No," I say, looking into her glowing face, "you don't. But this work is full of surprises and quite often the surprises are very good."

CHAPTER 5

The Role of the Teacher-Consultant in Mentoring New Teachers

Julie Miele

> Listening to the inner teacher [offers] an answer to one of the most basic questions teachers face: How can I develop the authority to teach, the capacity to stand my ground in the midst of the complex forces of both the classroom and my own life?
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> —Parker Palmer (1998, p. 32)

New teachers coming into education today face a growing body of pressure and expectations: new understandings of teaching and learning, increasing mandates from local and national government, new measures of accountability, and more nuanced tenure and certification requirements. Given these conditions, it is important that new teachers grow into their craft swiftly and articulately, as their jobs literally depend on it. The New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) offers collaborative ways of working with educators that provide a foundation for professional development with new teachers, who require a broad spectrum of support as they journey into this vocation. Through a description of my work with three new teachers at Sunset Park High School, I argue that, in addition to working with new teachers on writing instruction, Writing Project teacher-consultants (TCs) must support new teachers to articulate their values and intentions, shape an authentic teacher identity, connect with larger communities of teachers, and grow into positions of leadership and influence.

Path to the Writing Project

In 1999, I began teaching English at a large New York City high school where over 4,000 students were entrusted to a faculty of more than 200 teachers. It was a school

with few structures in place for teacher development, and mentoring for new teachers was non-existent.

When I stepped into the classroom, the values that brought me to teaching and everything I had studied about being a teacher disappeared. I was overwhelmed by the immediate demands and day-to-day work of a teacher. Like so many new teachers I meet in my work today, I struggled to accept and embody the authority that comes with teaching. I labored over lesson plans and curricular decisions, and I turned to whomever I could for support as I strived to engage kids in work that was authentic and meaningful. Colleagues in my department generously shared their ideas and materials. Then, two months into my first year, I discovered the NYCWP.

Debi Freeman, the on-site TC at my school, invited me to join an inservice graduate course she was teaching after school. Although I signed up hoping to learn new ways to get my students to read and write, what I discovered was far greater. Every Wednesday afternoon that year and the next, I was able to share my teaching and my writing with new teachers who encountered issues similar to my own and with veteran teachers who provided insight, guidance, and, at moments, hope. The readings, discussions, and writing forced me to confront my assumptions about teaching and learning and to refine my purpose as an educator. I later became part of the larger Writing Project community, through which I could engage with teachers across the city. Within a couple of years, I began co-coordinating inservice courses at my school.

Developing a Teacher-Consultant Identity

It is no surprise that, 12 years after I began my career, I am a Writing Project TC myself, working almost exclusively with new teachers. In 2007, I began as the on-site TC at two new high schools in New York City: one a mid-sized school with 1,100 students, in its fifth year; the other a small school with about 300 students, in its second year. The founding principal of the larger school, the Queens High School of Teaching, Liberal Arts, and Sciences (QHST), had been a Writing Project participant when he was a teacher.

My first year as a TC brought great insights quickly. One moment stands out. Early in the school year, during an initial visit to a self-contained special education classroom, I

watched a new teacher speak to students in ways that closed rather than opened opportunities for expression. In a follow-up conversation with the teacher, I asked how she thought the lesson had gone. My intention was to tease out her motivation and to help her think more deeply about the impact of her approach; when she responded, "I thought it was fine," I was unprepared. I did not know how to navigate this discussion. I began to share things I thought she had done well in the class, and then I shared some of the things I thought we could explore in our work together. The look on her face quickly turned from attentive and interested to a mix of defensiveness and disagreement. She straightened in her chair, and what followed was a volley of comments that highlighted the disconnect I had created.

This experience forced me to step back and re-evaluate my approach. I realized that, just as I had in the classroom, I needed to cultivate trust and collegiality rather than simply expect it would exist. I had not built a relationship with this teacher; nor had I created a meaningful enough context in which we could have this tenuous discussion. I did not ask her what her concerns were, and it wasn't until much later that they became clear. She was a new teacher; at this point in her career, she was most concerned with maintaining order in her classroom. I failed to recognize this; I failed to remember how vulnerable one feels during the first few weeks of teaching.

Sunset Park: Purpose & Context

In fall 2009, with the support of the principal of QHST, now a regional school leader for the NYC Department of Education (DOE), I became a full-time[12] Writing Project TC at Sunset Park High School (SPHS), a new school in Brooklyn whose mission and structure were modeled on those of QHST. Although new, Sunset Park High School comes with a unique history, as it was born out of 38 years of community advocacy. Until 2009, Sunset Park had no community high school, and its residents were forced to travel outside of their neighborhood to attend high school. Hence, SPHS is the first high school that the community has had. It is housed in a new building, constructed by the DOE to match the school's organizational structure and vision. SPHS functions as one high school with

[12] I spent Monday through Thursday each week at Sunset Park and Fridays at the NYCWP, where I prepared materials; thought through ideas and approaches with TC colleagues; and, as part of a TC study group, explored and read about developing teacher leadership.

three semi-autonomous small learning communities. The instructional vision of the school is to provide an inclusive environment where all students can learn. Toward that end, SPHS maintains a structure of collaborative team teaching, where classes are co-taught by content teachers, special education teachers, and English as a second language (ESL) teachers. At the time, the school served approximately 750 ninth and tenth graders. It was slated to grow to its capacity of 1,500 students in four years.

The decision to bring the Writing Project full-time to the Sunset Park was strategic and purposeful on the part of the school's principal, Corinne Vinal. Her intention at SPHS was to build a professional learning community centered on a set of values which aligned almost seamlessly with those of the NYCWP: literacy across the curriculum, democratic community, collaboration, and equity of voice. As a classroom teacher, Corinne had participated in Writing Project inservice courses and worked with an on-site TC, so she was familiar with our professional development practices. She deliberately contracted with the NYCWP Writing Project for a TC, as our ways of working with teachers and of building culture and community within schools matched the vision of SPHS. Because SPHS was a growing entity, professional development and growing teacher-leaders were top priorities; consequently, my work as a TC was defined more broadly than focusing on writing instruction, as I worked to support the school's evolving needs.

Defining My Role at Sunset Park

I came to SPHS as a Writing Project TC who had mentored roughly 20 teachers in two years, provided writing and literacy professional development support through workshops and inservice courses for two faculties, and worked within the culture of small learning communities. At Sunset Park, where 40 percent of the faculty were new teachers, my work, in addition to supporting writing across the content areas, was to mentor the new teachers, help the leadership team build capacity among the entire faculty, and support the ongoing professional development needed to grow a school. We knew from the outset that these three elements of my work would be vital to the school's growth. Because each small learning community would ultimately function as a small school, it was imperative to support teacher leadership so that our teachers could take on leadership roles within their own communities.

In two years at Sunset Park, I mentored roughly 26 of the school's 51 teachers. I was assigned to new teachers as their official DOE mentor to fulfill a New York State requirement tied to their license; first-year teachers were required to work with me. However, teachers knew that my role, although required by the state, was non-evaluative and non-judgmental; although our work was tracked in an online system,[13] its content was confidential.

Groundwork: Coming to Know Each Teacher

Given that teachers are required to work with me, I make it a priority to build a trusting, collaborative relationship so that they see me as an ally and a partner in their own work. This relationship building entails a great deal of looking and listening, a lot of coming to know each individual teacher. At the beginning of the year, each new teacher and I begin with a questionnaire that I have developed to form the basis of our initial discussions. I deliberately do not give the questionnaire to teachers until we meet for the first time; we fill it out together. I ask about history, schooling, degrees, certification, and any other information that might inform our work. As we speak, I ask about intentions and goals: why they came into teaching, what they hope to accomplish, what they want for their students. We talk about fears, preliminary concerns, or things that teachers anticipate might be issues for them. I ask questions to understand more deeply the roots of these concerns. My purpose is to uncover why each teacher works in the ways she does so that I can better provide support alongside her, within the context of her self and her intentions.

Following these initial conversations, I check in several times after the teachers have taught their first few classes. I ask how things went and let them know that I am there if they need anything. Then I wait. I let a few days pass, sometimes even a week, before I visit their classrooms. I do not carry a notebook on this first visit. I sit and watch. I take in the environment, the teachers' tone and presence, their sense of authority, the kinds of work they assign, and the way they connect with students. I am trying to get a picture of each particular teacher and what that teacher is trying to create. By the time I see the

[13] The DOE's Mentor Tracking System exists to account for a teacher's mentoring experience. The system requires mentors to log the date and duration of mentoring interactions as well as the type of interaction. Options provided by the system include things such as conference, classroom visit, co-planning, co-teaching, modeling, inter-visitations, and so on. Although a teacher development continuum is available on the system, its use is optional.

teachers next, the questions come naturally. Without prompting, they each begin to ask for support of one kind or another. Some want to tweak lessons before they teach them again; some need help with logistics like when to take attendance or how to seat students; some need help negotiating how to work with a co-teacher; some need a cheerleader as they recount the days or week; and others need sheer empathy, a witness to simply sit with them while they cry, as the immensity of the task of teaching settles in. These beginning moments remind me that, as a TC working with new teachers, I must wear many hats as I support both the instructional and emotional needs that characterize this very difficult year.

Shaping Identity, Growing Networks, and Creating Space for Leadership

In the beginning of the year, I am asked a lot of questions; the most common is "What do I do when a student…" followed by a litany of conundrums: doesn't listen, curses me out, refuses to work, is late, doesn't do the homework, walks out of the room without permission, insults another student, tells me they hate my class, claims the work is too hard, and so on. The list goes on. These are the most difficult questions because the answers depend not on me, an external source, but on the teachers—on their sense of themselves as teachers and professionals and on their intentions for their practice; yet rarely are these things clear for the new teacher.

Often, the teachers press me for direction, for simple strategies, for the magic bullet that will fix everything. While I do offer a few options and suggestions to meet their immediate needs, I take these questions and use them to frame and motivate the work that we do together. I turn their questions over to form the basis of our inquiry into teaching.

Ellen: Learning to How to Be in the Classroom

During one of our weekly meetings, Ellen, a first-year science teacher, confided that she was struggling with one of her classes. Although Ellen's understanding of her content was impeccable, and though she was preparing thoughtful inquiry-based lessons for her four classes, she was finding that one of her ninth grade classes had become difficult to engage and manage. I asked Ellen clarifying questions to get a more exact sense of her experience of the class. I asked her to describe the content of some of her lessons and

the activities. I asked her about the size of the group, students' academic abilities, and the number of students designated as ESL or special education. I asked her about time of day this class meets, the social dynamics of the group, and students' attitudes toward and aptitudes in science. I asked some questions to get her thinking about *why* this particular group might be acting out in this way. We talked briefly about this issue, unpacking a few sources of misbehavior: the need for attention, disinterest in the subject, difficulty controlling impulses, peer pressure, and so on. Then we made a plan. I gave Ellen several chapters from *Principles of Classroom Management* (Levin & Nolan, 2000) to read; she promised to read them for our next meeting, and I promised to visit this particular group before then.

When we met again the next week, we began by discussing the sections of the chapters that resonated for Ellen. In particular, she was drawn to a chapter that discussed the concept of "teacher power bases," the sources from which teachers draw respect in the classroom. We discussed the author's suppositions and identified the kinds of power that Ellen felt she could and could not wield. We began to talk about teacher authority—what her perceptions of authority were and what her students' expectations of a teacher might be. We then combed through the more practical chapters and looked for management practices that Ellen felt she would like to try, things that sat comfortably with her and that she felt she could assimilate into her personality naturally. We put the others aside for later review.

I then shared the descriptive notes I took during my visits to her class, and we analyzed the kinds of behavior we were seeing, the kinds of responses Ellen provided to students throughout the lesson, and the instructional activities she asked them to complete. Then we came up with an action plan.

In the weeks that followed, Ellen and I worked on addressing the issues we were seeing with a three-leveled approach. First, Ellen agreed to try some of the strategies outlined in the readings and to be conscious about noting results. Second, we worked on tightening the structure of the class. I shared sample student activity guides[14] that I had

[14] Student activity guides are handouts, pamphlets, or worksheets designed by the teacher to guide students through a particular lesson. They generally include any instructions or reference material students need for a lesson, with reading selections, graphics, charts, or table. They also provide space for students to complete classroom activities or writing

collected from my previous schools. We talked about how these guides could help structure students' experience in the class, thus minimizing distraction and disruption, as she could embed readings, diagrams, and space for notes directly onto the guides. Third, we created a schedule of inter-visitations with the agreement that observing other teachers in action would inform how Ellen understood the idea of teacher authority. Since my purpose was to have Ellen see a range of possible ways to wear her own authority, ways to *be* in the classroom, I was purposeful in selecting teachers who would represent that range. I selected teachers across content areas, genders, and management styles. I choose teachers with demeanors that ranged from stern to gentle and quiet to performative and theatrical; teachers who addressed behavior issues with direct statements, humor, or simple body language; and teachers who structured lessons in ways that prevented management issues from arising in the first place. Before the visits, we chose two lenses through which we would view the classrooms, both related to Ellen's problem of practice: *How does the instruction support student engagement?* and *How does each teacher respond to and redirect student behavior?* After each visit, we discussed what stood out to each of us on the visit, formulated responses to our two lenses, and began to identify the ways in which our discoveries might inform Ellen's practice.

In the weeks and months that followed, Ellen's work with this class began to shift. She developed activity guides that were thoughtful and focused; they kept kids on task and accountable for their work; in fact, her guides surpassed and replaced all of the models I had given to her. She implemented various practices for assigning and assessing "do-nows," and she added a daily "cool down" activity that would allow her students to synthesize and reflect on their learning at the end of the period. This last strategy gave her the opportunity to take the pulse of what her students really absorbed each day, thus enabling her to better address their needs in future lessons. She experienced success with many of the management strategies she tried, and she grew more patient, more able to anticipate what students would do and more able to respond in a way that worked to the benefit of the class.

Ellen made great strides with this group, but she did not turn them around completely. About midway through the year, she realized that this group would remain *the*

assignments. The purpose of these guides is to give students the materials necessary to be successful during a lesson, to support students with learning disabilities, and to hold students accountable for their work.

challenge of her first year. She accepted that there was no easy solution, and she acknowledged that she might not discover any solutions at all that year. Ellen began to see that the process of shaping a teacher identity and a sense of authority in the classroom takes time and that the only thing to do was to keep it at. She developed the faith that, with time, she would grow more comfortably into her teacher self. The next September, when Ellen entered her second year, she came to find me one day, beaming. "I wanted to tell you," she said, "that it's completely different this year. Something clicked over the summer, and suddenly everything we talked about made sense. I realized 'I can do this.' You have to come see." A few weeks later, I visited her class and was amazed to see that she was not kidding. She had changed. Everything about her demeanor spoke of experience and authority—her body language, her tone, the look on her face, even her voice. In response, her students were attentive, focused, and on-task.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker Palmer (1998) writes that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." He writes:

> By *identity* I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self.… [I]dentity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human.… By *integrity* I mean whatever wholeness I am able to find within that nexus as its vectors form and re-form the pattern of my life. Integrity requires that I discern what is integral to my selfhood, what fits and what does not. (p.13)

My work with Ellen was about unearthing this sense of identity, helping her to sort through all of the possible ways of *being* in the classroom. In Palmer's terms, this work allowed her to develop the integrity she needed to teach not from external sources, but from her own inner sense of authority. By doing the work of her own inquiry, by questioning and then searching for answers and models, by sorting her findings and

matching them to her own understanding of who she was and who she wanted to be, Ellen came into her own, and she began to "author" her own work. Palmer (1998) writes:

> Authority is granted to people who are perceived as *authoring* their own words, their own actions, their own lives, rather than playing a scripted role at great remove from their own hearts.… Authority comes as I reclaim my identity and integrity, remembering my selfhood and my sense of vocation. Then teaching can come from the depths of my own truth—and the truth that is within my students has a chance to respond in kind. (p. 33)

As Ellen developed her capacity to *author* her work and to integrate her identity and her work into an authentic teacher self, her work in the classroom, as well as that of her students, shifted. The next year, Ellen continued to grow. She became a teacher-leader, working with the school leadership to support her grade team, a group of six ninth grade teachers. She also become a partner, or content mentor, to a new teacher with whom I was working.

Melissa: The Difference between Being Perfect and Being Effective

When the year began, Melissa, also a first-year science teacher, was experiencing many of the issues Ellen had experienced the year before. She was working to manage the many demands of a science class: organizing content, safeguarding materials, developing resources, and preparing students for a state exam. She, too, was embarking on her journey of learning how to be in the role of teacher. While in Melissa's class, I noted that her lessons were very teacher-centered; she talked rapidly and packed a tremendous amount of content into a short period of time. She was doing most of the work, and, as a result, the students withdrew into off-task behavior. In our next meeting, we discussed some of these issues. As I usually do, I asked questions to get at the heart of some of the issues. What surfaced was Melissa's desire to succeed, specifically to be a perfect teacher. She wanted so much for her class to be thoughtful and engaging and for her students to learn everything they needed to know that she had inadvertently taken on the totality of this responsibility. We teased out Melissa's

understanding of what it meant to be a "perfect" teacher, and we explored the difference between being perfect and being effective. I encouraged Melissa to see her students as partners in this endeavor, to invite them into the process of learning. I suggested some inquiry-based activities such as anticipation guides, K-W-L charts,[15] and writing prompts that would help students connect the content to their experience and knowledge. These strategies would create a space for greater student expression.

Together, we decided that it was time to visit other classrooms. Immediately, Melissa expressed an interest in seeing Ellen. During our visit, Melissa noted Ellen's organization and the structure of her lessons; she noted her calm demeanor, the slow pace at which she spoke to the class, the way she simply stopped and said "I'll wait" when talk erupted. She even noted the tone in Ellen's voice and the subtle yet authoritative look on her face that spoke of inner authority. I shared some of Ellen's activity guides, and I asked Ellen to meet with us, to talk with Melissa about the ways in which she plans her units and lessons. She did so immediately, and, within a week, Melissa had begun implementing many of our suggestions. On subsequent visits to Melissa's class, I noted that her essential questions were posted much like Ellen's and that she now began her lessons with inquiry activities that allowed for much more student voice. She gave students time to write, to share, and to generate their own questions about the content. She developed a unit plan, using the template Ellen had given her, and she created a set of activity guides for the week. She organized her content into smaller parts, spoke more slowly, and stopped when talk erupted with a stern "I'll wait." She even incorporated a "cool down" reflection period that matched Ellen's.

As Melissa began to experience more success, she became more open to feedback. Wanting to be the perfect teacher had served her well. She managed to navigate everything that she had learned in four months, discerning what was useful, what was not, what worked for her, and what did not. She made deliberate, purposeful choices, and, by mid-year, everything coalesced. When I entered Melissa's room, the scene

[15] An anticipation guide is a pre-reading activity often used at the beginning of a lesson or unit to help students begin thinking about the central issues and questions. The guides generally ask students to answer a quick set of 5–10 questions, which form the basis of classroom discussion and serve as an entry point into the content materials. K-W-L is a pre-reading activity that asks students to generate a list of things they **K**now and **W**ant to know about a particular topic. Once the lesson or unit concludes, students return to the list to note what they have **L**earned. See Daniels, Steineke, and Zemelman (2007) or Daniels and Zemelman (2004) for descriptions and application ideas.

appeared completely different. Her students were reading textbooks, pointing to and analyzing diagrams, watching film clips or videos, writing in their notebooks, creating maps, or working through experiments. They were doing most of the work in the classroom as Melissa watched and guided them, now more of a facilitator than a lecturer. She appeared comfortable and confident. Most importantly, she was connected to, engaged with, and listening to the kids.

Laura: Growing Teacher Leadership

When I began working with Laura, a ninth grade English teacher, I knew immediately that she was a natural. Within her first few weeks as a teacher, she demonstrated breadth of content knowledge, thoughtful planning, a capacity for classroom organization, and an appreciation for the many dimensions of her adolescent students. During my first visit to Laura's class, I found that there were few, if any, "new teacher" issues that needed intentional work. Much of what caused her frustration was simply the newness of the role of being a teacher—an issue I knew would subside in time. As Laura eased into her work in the classroom, I realized that what she needed—and wanted—was a thinking partner, someone to push her thinking, to introduce her to new ideas, new practices, and new resources that she could bring to her English classroom.

Although new to teaching, Laura was ready to be challenged and to meet the limits of her potential. She was highly committed and determined, and it became clear to me in the first few months of the year that Laura would emerge as a leader within the school. From this point on, I began to see Laura not as a new teacher whose individual classroom practice I would support but as a teacher-leader whose classroom practice could have an impact on the work of other teachers throughout the school. This reframing led me to make different decisions in my work with Laura. Not only would I work to support her in her own growth as a first-year teacher, but I would also continually strengthen her leadership qualities. Toward that end, my goals became to develop Laura's classroom practice so that her teaching could serve as a model for others; to expose her to professional texts and resources; and to slowly fold her into professional development work, both at SPHS and in the larger education community.

Throughout her first year, Laura and I worked toward each of these goals. We co-planned lessons, developed methods of annotation, introduced a variety of reading response strategies, and incorporated perspective writing and gallery walks into her lessons. We designed a unit that taught students to read and work in literature circles. Laura borrowed books about literacy from the resource library I had developed and kept in my office. During our weekly meeting time, we discussed research on the teaching of English and brainstormed ways to incorporate the ideas she was gleaning from the texts into her practice. As a result, Laura's classroom became a laboratory of sorts. She was trying out the new ideas we had developed together, and I had begun using her classroom as a model for other new teachers.

By February of her first year, Laura was identified as a potential grade team leader. The principal and I invited her, along with a few others, to attend a retreat we had designed for developing leaders in our school. By June, Laura had agreed to be a grade team leader the following year, responsible for a team of eight ninth grade teachers. That same June, Laura participated in an on-site workshop series that I taught, experiencing the work of the Writing Project more deeply. Later that month, she and I began to work together with a team of school leaders and teachers to plan and facilitate the professional development that would usher in our incoming faculty of 25 teachers.

The following year, Laura and I continued to meet periodically to discuss and plan her current English units, to select texts for the classes she would teach next year, and to share resources. In addition, I continued to support her as she negotiated her new role as grade team leader. Like Ellen, Laura continued to be a live action mentor, someone who is actively teaching and able to provide a model for incoming teachers. I continued to take my new teachers to see Laura. She and I co-planned and co-facilitated planning meetings with two new English teachers. In April 2011, Laura presented a unit of study at the NYCWP Teacher-to-Teacher Conference; my role was to help her structure and prepare her presentation. During the workshop, I was present to work alongside her as a co-facilitator and to support her as she began to make her work and her role as a teacher-leader more public in the larger teaching community.

Conclusion

My role as a Writing Project TC has taught me that working with new teachers requires negotiating multiple realities. TCs must have one eye on the present and the practical and one eye on the long term or the possible. New teachers have immediate needs we can address and questions we can help them grapple with and answer. In the box, I have provided a list of practical resources important for TCs to have on hand—things that can help teachers navigate the concrete aspects of first year teaching. But many new teachers also require less concrete resources: gentle and active listening, and a space free of judgment where they can express their needs and fears, try on new identities, and continually shape and reshape their professional selves and their work.

Other teachers need something different: the opportunity and space to grow into leadership roles. New teachers who do not necessarily struggle in their first year need to be connected to networks of teachers and to the larger education community, where they can find additional support, discover new ways to refine their craft, and create opportunities to demonstrate and share their best practices publicly. The Writing Project is an ideal space for this work, as these possibilities lie at the heart of our work. It is imperative—particularly in these times in education when a tremendous number of new teachers are entering the field, often with few experienced or veteran teachers in schools to serve as models—that the work of Writing Project TCs be not only to support teachers' work with writing, but to support the entirety of teachers' classroom practice and to develop teachers' capacity for leadership.

It is important, also, that we continue to meet teachers where they are and to move them toward their greatest potential. Whether they are struggling or masterful, we must come to know individual teachers—their strengths, needs, and capacities for growth—and move each one toward wherever that teacher needs to go in order to be stronger and more prepared to enhance the learning and the lives of students.

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Things for TCs to Keep on Hand

- Readings on a range of instructional topics:
  - Classroom management
  - Literacy
  - Approaches to teaching reading
  - Approaches to teaching writing
  - Inquiry instruction
  - Questioning practices
- School policies and procedures
- Model lesson and unit plans, preferably from experienced teachers in the building and, if possible, representing a range of styles
- Model curriculum maps
- Curriculum templates and frameworks used at your school, and, if possible, supplementary readings about them
- State and Common Core standards for each subject area
- A collection or binder of strategies and protocols for classroom use
- Readings on teaching—especially pieces about first-year teaching and motivational works
- Copies of Ellen Moir's Phases of First-Year Teaching (1990)
- A professional library with resources and readings relevant to the needs of your teachers and your school
- Extra classroom supplies: construction paper, scissors, glue sticks, sticky notes, etc.
- Non-perishable snacks like breakfast bars, nuts, or berries. New teachers often skip meals.
- A box of tissues—at all times
- Chocolate—also at all times!

CHAPTER 6

Conflicting Roles in New York City: Writing Project Teacher-Consultant and Department of Education Mentor

Lona Jack-Vilmar

When describing my work as an on-site teacher-consultant (TC) with the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP), I often include the word "mentor"—experienced colleague and collaborator—to capture the multiple ways I work with teachers. For me, "mentoring" entailed mutual learning. It meant working collegially, serving as a critical friend who is both a thinking partner and a mirror. But that changed in 2006, when the new principal at Ralph Bunche Academy (RBA), a well-established, small, progressive "second chance"[16] public high school where I had worked on-site as a NYCWP TC for three years, asked me to become the official New York City Department of Education (DOE) mentor of a first-year teacher. That experience forced me to redefine the boundaries of my work as a TC as well as to reassess what it means to mentor a new teacher in the changing landscape of professional development in the DOE.[17]

Mentoring with a New Twist

I met Fabienne at a "meet and greet" on the first day of school. As we chatted informally, she learned about my role as a TC, and I learned that she would be teaching a class on world literature. Fabienne invited me to visit her class, and I gladly accepted. From our initial conversation, it was clear that we both saw analyzing the socio-economic, political, and cultural landscapes of the world through literature as a way to

[16] RBA is a public alternative high school for students who were not successful (academically, socially, or emotionally) in at least one other New York City public high school. Students who transfer to RBA have an opportunity, in a nurturing environment of smaller classes and strong academic and emotional support, to earn a high school diploma and move on to an appropriate next step.

[17] In 2002, Mayor Bloomberg took over control of the New York City public schools by dismantling the New York City Board of Education and centralizing control through the newly established DOE. Each school's professional development program, particularly for new teachers, had to comply with the agenda designed by DOE.

help students understand their own social and political realities. We agreed that who tells the story, what they choose to tell, and how they tell it are important to students' understanding of the intersection of literature and history.

In mid-September, the principal asked me to serve as Fabienne's official new-teacher DOE mentor. The principal explained that I would basically be doing what I was already doing as a Writing Project TC—working with Fabienne on pedagogy to help her become a better teacher. It seemed a reasonable request. Although I was told about the time commitment and paperwork that went along with the position, no job description was presented, and no discussion of the expectations RBA administrators had for the "official mentor" role took place. Being new to the role of official mentor, I made the common beginner's mistake of not exploring any of these issues further. Accepting what was said at face value, I agreed to mentor Fabienne for the DOE in addition to my work with her as a Writing Project TC.

Several factors influenced my decision to say yes. I saw mentoring Fabienne as an opportunity to model for RBA staff what it means to support a new teacher and help her integrate into the school-wide community. I thought about my own isolation during my first teaching assignment in a New York City high school. As a new teacher, I had craved guidance, support, and community; I would have welcomed the presence of a mentor. Another aspect was Fabienne's eagerness. Although Fabienne didn't say it explicitly, and though we were from completely different backgrounds, I suspected that the fact that we were both women of color mattered to her. We were able to discuss sensitive and complex issues about power, privilege, race, and class that were important to development of the curriculum—issues that more than likely would not have been discussed had we not shared this common identity. Finally, there were the time benefits. Agreeing to be Fabienne's official mentor would afford me the opportunity to do the work that I valued as a Writing Project TC with the benefit of guaranteed additional time to collaborate.

Nevertheless, I was uneasy about the role and wondered what else "official" might entail. In addition to providing support, the position required the maintenance of a record-keeping structure for accountability to the city and state departments of education. While I was not thrilled about the idea of an additional layer of paperwork, this responsibility felt manageable. I never imagined the conflicts and challenges that

would emerge as a result of this "official mentor" role in the ensuing months. The supervisory and evaluative position into which the administration tried to put me could have compromised my role as a TC who works alongside teachers.

When Fabienne learned I was to be her official DOE mentor, she was both happy and relieved that she did not have to work with a mentor with whom, as she put it, "I have no prior experience and might not be able to connect with."

Benefits of Increased Time Together

Initially, the role of official mentor was a formalization of what I sought to do all along as a TC—to work consistently and intensively over time with individual teachers. Fabienne and I spent at least two or three hours together each week, including one 75-minute prep period, my weekly visit to her multicultural literature class, periodic after-school debriefing sessions, and our extensive email conversations.

On Thursday mornings during her 75-minute prep, I would find Fabienne sitting at her desk in her cramped classroom, sometimes with a troubled look on her face. I knew that she had been having some struggles with her asthma, so I typically began our meetings with a wellness check-in: health, emotional state, teaching highs and lows. She talked and I listened, probing her gently, getting her not only to unload but to peel off some of the layers of things that troubled or challenged her. Allowing Fabienne time to name out loud what she was grappling with—students' indifference and rudeness, their complex and challenging lives and lifestyles, official paperwork, and the unending staff meetings—was essential to her well-being. As a TC and a former classroom teacher, I believe that recognition of the teacher's identity is powerful affirmation. It says, "Hey, I see you. I recognize what you are going through, and it does matter, because *you* matter."

On these mornings, as we spoke, I would begin removing chairs that were still perched on top of desks, picking up loose-leaf paper balls, and retrieving abandoned markers lying on the floor. I was modeling the importance of tidying up one's classroom, making it welcoming to students. Then something would segue us back to Room 632, and our planning meetings would begin.

Fabienne and I worked together in several different ways. Sometimes she had very specific and straightforward questions. How should a short film or video excerpt be used to support a literary text? What writing activities can we use to introduce this topic? How do we structure activities so that students see the relevance of a character's life in a *favela* in Brazil to their own life and then begin to pose questions? What would be a good companion piece for the short story "1937" from Danticat's *Krik?Krak!?* Fabienne's approach to teaching multicultural literature was to introduce media, including film, music, and art, to help her students access the worlds depicted in the texts through multiple entry points. Building on her approach, I suggested that, for each geographical area considered, a companion nonfiction piece be used alongside the fiction text. She immediately began to implement the idea. Other times, we planned how to integrate a writing component into each aspect of the unit of study. In the case of a viewing of film or video, for example, there was always a pre-viewing and post-viewing writing activity: sometimes a set of prompts, at other times a freewrite. We also researched and examined materials and then made decisions about what would work best for the lesson. We discussed ways of scaffolding lessons that required students to master complex ideas or high-level skills; we looked at student work, identifying what could be addressed through a mini-lesson and what would best be communicated in an individual writing conference. As we revisited the curriculum, my role as critical friend to this new teacher was to remind her that themes and threads, as well as long-range goals and outcomes, were important to consider when planning.

My consultations with Fabienne were stimulating and gratifying. We discussed the range of issues that often come up in such one-on-one TC-teacher meetings—students' resistance to writing, their struggles with or lack of interest in reading, classroom management, and how to plan effective lessons and identify appropriate resources and materials to support students' learning and engagement. We spoke often about the politics of teaching culturally diverse literature. I supported her in developing low-stakes writing[18] (Elbow, 1997) assignments that encouraged students to connect to similarities of the human experience and to explore the contexts that shape the various lenses and worldviews through which the texts approached an experience. Writing-to-learn

[18] "The goal of low-stakes assignments is not so much to produce excellent pieces of writing as to get students to think, learn, and understand more of the course material. Low-stakes writing is often informal and tends to be graded informally" (Elbow, 1997 p. 5).

prompts that asked students to make a personal connection or share a relevant experience, passion, or interest hooked students during the pre-writing phase well before they interacted with the text to be considered.

Using her artistry as a poet, Fabienne lured students who "spit rhymes"[19] or wrote raps into the world of academic writing. Following our conversations about the need for writing rituals and routines, the daily freewrite was instituted. Students regularly shared their guided freewrites and celebrated their own creativity and that of their classmates. Writing prompts were always designed to prime students for upcoming topics. Once students found a way into this writing, many surprised themselves with the depth and thoughtfulness reflected in their own writing. I too was often struck by students' insights and the rich conversations that took place in the corner classroom on the sixth floor.

Fabienne's passion for the subject matter was infectious, so her literature classes became popular at RBA. Her students rarely complained about writing, and many of September's reluctant writers moved from struggling to compose one or two lines to writing one or two full paragraphs by the end of the school year.

What a luxury for both of us to have that chunk of time that included both in- and out-of-class time, as well as after-school debriefing meetings! The official mentor role provided the protected time to develop a collaborative relationship, so that meeting outside of the mandated required mentor-mentee time commitment had become the norm.

Consequences and Challenges

Because of my official role with Fabienne, I had less time for consultations with other teachers. In the five years that I had worked at RBA as the Writing Project on-site TC, I could spend at least an hour with five and sometimes six different teachers on each of the two days I was in the school. The officialness of mentoring Fabienne added regularity and more time to our schedule, as it required us to meet two or three hours a

[19] A term used in hip-hop to describe the art of being able to verbalize rhymes spontaneously without having to write them down.

week. But the schedule challenged my consultations with other teachers. In order to fulfill the mentoring commitment, I had to dedicate most of my Thursdays to Fabienne, which made it difficult to work deeply with more than a few additional teachers.

Emerging Boundaries and Role Clarification

That year I was working with a number of teachers new to RBA. The consulting was productive, but I found myself grappling with some tough questions around boundaries in my work with Fabienne. Fabienne was just a few years older than some of the students she was teaching. In my experience, it was not uncommon for young teachers to have to navigate the social dynamics between being a pal and being the adult in charge. Fabienne struggled to grasp the importance of being an adult role model for her students. Among the issues that kept coming up were inappropriate dress, knowing the tone and stance to assume when having a difference of opinion with a student, and remembering she was a teacher and facilitator and not a student's pal. Although these issues were not directly about the teaching of reading and writing, they were significant nevertheless, as they could impair Fabienne's effectiveness in establishing a functional classroom community. As I witnessed Fabienne's resistance to the boundaries she felt were imposed by the RBA professional community, I became aware of some of my own boundaries as a TC.

I was having a tough time establishing the parameters of the tough work that I love. Of course I believe it important to work with the whole person. However, sometimes it is hard to know what interventions are acceptable for TCs to make and which are inappropriate—what interventions serve to grow a teacher's pedagogy and which might interfere with that purpose. As I sat down to write in my consultant journal one Friday morning at the Writing Project in preparation for our TC "go round," a question posed to me the day before by RBA's assistant principal (AP) appeared in the first line of my reflection— "Do you see what she is wearing?" I wanted to say "Yes, I'm uncomfortable with what's she's wearing today, but what she is wearing is not the focus of my work with her." I wanted to say, "What does that have to do with me?" I was disturbed by the AP's question. Why couldn't she, as Fabienne's supervisor who is also a female, address this sensitive issue of appropriate attire with Fabienne? But I did not say this. Addressing this concern was certainly not how I understood or was led to understand the role of mentor. Then again, there was never any established standard or role

definition for this "official mentor" role. Now the implications were clear: As official mentor, I was suddenly responsible for addressing what a teacher was wearing or not wearing!

Then there were the behavior issues. Fabienne was not setting boundaries with her students, not enforcing certain rules—a display on her part of an overall laxness regarding these practices. I was disturbed by what was reported about Fabienne's behavior but witnessed none of these things myself. I could not see any positive outcome of me confronting Fabienne about hearsay. This was not the case, though, when students in Fabienne's class broke safety rules while I was present. I remember being in Fabienne's class one Thursday when a student decided to open the window more that the allotted one inch and then lean against it rather than sit in his seat. I promptly got up, invited the student to take his seat, and then pulled the window back down to what was required and safe. At the end of class, I explained to Fabienne why it was not okay for the student to stand there, even though he was actively engaged in the class. We discussed the rules, safety issues, and possible consequences of such rules not being followed. In that case, I responded to something I had witnessed and was in fact able to model an appropriate response and discuss it with Fabienne.

Although I had a wonderful relationship with Fabienne, discussing non-pedagogical infractions would threaten everything we built. I did not want to lose Fabienne's trust—to lose what was allowing her to let me inside her teaching to help her grow. Entering a person's teaching is fragile even when it goes well. I already saw the wall Fabienne could build around herself when she felt challenged—yet, as her thinking partner, I challenged her teaching all the time.

I never talked to Fabienne about these matters. Instead, as when I picked up papers from the floor, I tried to be a model. As a TC, I relish the opportunities to model behavior. I wanted to be a real mentor and not ruin what we had built by entering this nebulous zone of addressing issues of inappropriate dress and non-professional behavior. That was the AP's role; after all, she was Fabienne's supervisor!

Resistance

In mid-February, Fabienne posed a question that further complicated my dual role as TC and her new-teacher mentor. She asked, "But why can't I just teach?" As a teacher at RBA, she was required to serve as advisor to a family group.[20] The family group structure was put in place as a way of attending to and supporting the whole student and his or her academic as well as social and psycho-emotional needs. Family groups were a mainstay of RBA and part of what defined the school as an alternative to the academic settings students had previously experienced at large, traditional high schools. For Fabienne, family group was a distraction that took her attention away from her literature classes and the literature teacher she aspired to be.

Her question transported me back some 23 years to my own first teaching assignment. Recently returned from the Peace Corps armed with naiveté, idealism, a healthy dose of enthusiasm, and no experience or formal training to work in a classroom, I entered the world of teaching. While I did have the required academic credits to get a provisional license to teach high school English, I was soon to realize that it was not enough. It took just a few days to learn that the 11th grade students I'd been assigned lacked not only a passion for literature but also some of the essential basic skills. I too posed questions very similar to Fabienne's. Why can't I just teach English literature? Why can't I just do the job I was hired to do? Although the context of our questions was different, the foundations were similar. We both had expectations about teaching that were not panning out in the reality that we were living as new teachers. As a new teacher, I had no mentor, official or otherwise, to tell me that I had to deal with who my students were and what they brought with them—or didn't bring with them—to the classroom. Because I did not know what else to do, I ignored my classroom reality. Instead, I tried

[20] Family group is an advisory class, typically consisting of a group of approximately18 students to whom a teacher is assigned as advisor. Students meet in their family groups two to three times a week with the same advisor for the duration of their enrollment at RBA (approximately two to three years). In addition to his or her classes, each RBA teacher is responsible for one group. Family group advisors maintain all of their advisees' academic and attendance records and have numerous responsibilities, including serving as liaison between students and their core subject teachers, intervening when there is a problem, and maintaining transparent communication lines between the school and advisees' parents or guardians. Advisors help students develop an individual academic plan and register for classes; they also monitor students' progress with their portfolio-based assessments.

to live out my fantasy of being able to entice my students to a delectable feast of literature. Each evening, I whined about the students' limitations that were getting in the way of my teaching them.

I don't think I fully acknowledged or even understood until years later the social and political reality with which I was confronted. What my students brought to the classroom was drastically different from what I expected. I was unable to see what they did know and did not have the benefit of a mentor to help me grow into a teacher who could recognize and build from what my students brought to their learning experiences. Like Fabienne, I didn't fully grasp the scope of my responsibility as a teacher. As teachers, we cannot ask students to check parts of themselves at the door because it is not convenient or comfortable for us to deal with those complicated aspects of who they are.

Now, both as a Writing Project TC and as Fabienne's official DOE new-teacher mentor, I was struggling with how to help her grow into this knowledge so critical for her to be successful in the classroom.

I recognized that, in my dual role, I needed to help her grasp the responsibilities that came with her acceptance of a teaching position at RBA. But I also could not ignore the complexity of facilitating family group. Being an family group advisor is a challenge for a seasoned teacher, so for a new teacher it can be overwhelming and emotionally draining. I often wondered why new teachers at RBA were not assigned to work with a more experienced family group advisor before being assigned a family group of their own.

Navigating the Challenges

Fabienne was committed to her own personal growth as an English teacher. She easily accepted feedback about the literature classes and would begin almost immediately to revise a plan or address whatever issue or challenge surfaced, as long as it was related to the literature class. By contrast, Fabienne did not equate being an family group advisor with teaching. She insisted that she was not trained to be an family group advisor, since she had no degree in social work, psychology, or counseling. Given that family group was so critical to students' academic success at RBA and that Fabienne was

so committed to social justice and the transformative power of world literature to help students define their own struggles, her stance toward family group confused me. The family group structure was designed to provide students a third space[21] where they could negotiate their differences and identify and develop their voices to become academically successful.

Although Fabienne knew when she accepted the teaching position that, like all staff at RBA, she was expected to be a family group facilitator, she had no real idea of what that entailed. Family group advisors' commitment to their advisees went well beyond academic concerns and sometimes well beyond the official school day. Training to be an family group advisor happened on the job, with a sprinkling of professional development during the school year. Even with additional support provided by the administration—one-on-one meetings with an initially supportive AP, work with an experienced family group facilitator, and participation in family group professional development workshops—Fabienne continued to resist the opportunity to grow into the role of family group advisor.

Interestingly, even though I was the official mentor and this issue was a matter of pedagogy, I was not asked by the administration to intervene in the family group struggle with Fabienne. Perhaps because of my own distance from the AP and new principal, I never challenged this gap. My ability to work with Fabienne, to better understand her struggle with family group and therefore support her, was further complicated by an unspoken tenet at RBA that family group was a closed community—a confidential and private time between family group advisors and their students. So it was a place where, regardless of my official mentor role, I did not have access to what was actually occurring. Perhaps I could have insisted more that Fabienne allow me to help with her family group advisees, but my respect for RBA's stance toward family group inhibited me from pushing into what seemed to be sacred space. Fabienne avoided any conversations that had to do with family group and did not invite me to visit her family group class, although I offered.

[21] As Moje and colleagues (2004) describe it, the first space is home and community, the second space is the workplace, and the third space is a neutral space—a place for discussions, support, and community building that do not take place in the first and second spaces. A third space is particularly critical for the social, emotional, and academic development of students at a school like RBA.

As the year progressed, Fabienne continued to dismiss family group as having anything to do with the teaching identity that she was trying to carve for herself. Fabienne's attitude eventually began to take a toll on her relationship with the AP, and they were often at odds. My role as mentor and TC now took on a new dimension. In all my years as a TC, I had never been placed in such a position. On several occasions, I became a mediator: on the one hand, encouraging Fabienne to voice her concerns about family group and, on the other, helping the AP think about how to approach Fabienne about the family group issues. At the request of the school's union representative and with agreement from both the AP and Fabienne, I agreed to serve as a mediator at an end-of-year meeting where they both aired their issues. I worked very hard not to take sides and to help each hear the another about family group: the AP's hopes for Fabienne as a facilitator and Fabienne's confusion about the role and how to get support when the group was not going well. The results were positive; that fall, Fabienne returned to school more open to family group. In fact, for the first time she invited me into her family group, so I was also able to help her set up rituals and routines much as she had for her literature classes. That changed everything.

What I Learned

Working with Fabienne as a mentor and on-site TC, I played multiple roles, some of which were new to me. The TC role was relatively uncomplicated. The mentoring role, however, was challenging and forced me to confront some issues around boundaries that I had not had to deal with in this way in previous years.

In retrospect, I learned four valuable lessons. First, I realize now that when the administration attempted to thrust me into what seemed more of a supervisory role, I should have clarified my role, insisted that supervision was their responsibility, and, most importantly, worked with them to figure out how to handle the situation. Instead, I was silent.

Second, reflecting back, I see now how I could have used my knowledge of entry into new communities and my knowledge of family group to help RBA administrators reach out to Fabienne and model how to create a non-threatening space where she could take needed risks to run a functional group.

Third, working with Fabienne reminded me to trust my instincts as a TC—to act out of my convictions, which are embedded in a solid foundation of core principles around mentoring and teacher support, even when it may seem that my instincts are butting up against contrasting ideas about how to mentor effectively. To help Fabienne see the narrow boundaries she set for herself as a teacher necessitated that I step out of the boundaries that I imposed on myself based on my traditional TC role.

Fourth, I have learned that mentoring is not only about pushing and expanding boundaries; it is also about carefully negotiating those boundaries. Mentoring as a Writing Project TC is about mutual learning—sharing my knowledge as an experienced TC with the interests and knowledge of the teacher. It is about navigating relationships so we can free ourselves to inspire the teachers with whom we are so privileged to work to envision the possibilities of teaching and learning next to each other.

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PART 2. SCHOOL-WIDE AND REGION-WIDE WORK

CHAPTER 7

The Role of the Writing Project Teacher-Consultant in the Evolution of a School-Wide Coaching Team

Ed Osterman

One of the biggest challenges for administrators and teachers in schools undergoing reform is coordinating the multiple initiatives that emerge each year. Amid calls to improve students' standardized test scores and rethink the ways in which school data can be used to improve teaching and learning, there have also been efforts to create professional communities within schools to nurture the changes so many hope to see. For several years, I collaborated with a group of coaches at a small public high school in New York City. As we strived to build a school community in which professional development was an essential feature, we also sought ways to carefully introduce new initiatives without overwhelming teachers. In the process, I found National Writing Project values and practices to be flexible, necessary, and critical tools that were more important than ever in the current data-driven climate.

On-Site Work Before the Coaching Team Was Formed

In 2001, I began working twice a week as an on-site Writing Project teacher-consultant (TC) at Bronx International High School, a NYC high school that is part of the Internationals Network for Public Schools.[22] The school served an entirely immigrant population of about 350 English language learners. Students collaborated in small heterogeneous groups of mixed cultures and language backgrounds. The 27 teachers were divided into five instructional teams, each team working with the same group of 65–80 students for an entire year.

[22] The Internationals' pedagogical approach to educating English language learners is based on five major tenets: (1) heterogeneity and collaboration, (2) experiential learning, (3) language and content integration, (4) localized autonomy and responsibility, and (5) one learning model for all—the model for adult learning mirrors the model for student learning.

Prior to my arrival at Bronx International, I worked as a New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) TC for over 25 years in a variety of public high schools with teachers of all content areas. In my work, I was guided by certain values. Chief among these are:

- A respect for teacher knowledge, interests, and experience;
- An acknowledgement of how context influences teachers' work;
- A commitment to collaboration;
- An understanding that change takes time;
- A belief in the benefits of reflecting on one's work; and
- The conviction that patience and trust are key to building collegial professional relationships.

These values emerged from my daily work as well as from participation in the NYCWP's Friday TC meetings and in the Teaching and Learning Study Group at the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, where our site is housed. In each of these forums, we studied our practice as professional developers (Osterman, 2008) by documenting our work in schools and engaging in a systematic study of this work alongside professional literature about school reform, social change, and professional development.

In my initial years at Bronx International, I knew it would take time to win the respect and trust of teachers. I grounded my work in the classrooms of teachers who expressed interest in collaborating with me or who were participating in the after-school NYCWP inservice graduate seminar I coordinated. Though there was a consultant from another professional development organization serving the school on a regular basis in these early years, and though we were friendly, we seldom collaborated. To a degree, I worked independently.

A Coaching Team Develops

Although it was a small high school, Bronx International had been rich in professional development support since its opening in 2001. With each successive principal, the professional development group grew in number, and an elaborate coaching structure evolved. By 2006, in addition to myself, there were two others from outside agencies

who were on site one or two days a week: Nancy Dunetz, a language specialist who taught for many years in another Internationals school in the network, and Marc Siciliano, an experienced science teacher who was now an independent coach. In addition, an English teacher, Suzanna McNamara, and a math teacher, Jesseca Long, both full-time faculty members, were released from one instructional period each to support new teachers.

This group of coaches, as we came to be called, began to meet on a regular basis in 2006. We met monthly through 2010, after which our meetings became more intermittent due to scheduling difficulties among the part-time coaches. In addition to those of us doing teacher support work, administrators, including the principal, moved in and out of the group. At our meetings, each of us shared the progress of our work with particular teachers and the instructional teams to which we were assigned. We set professional development goals for the school based on what we had seen and experienced in classrooms and the feedback we had received from teachers during the year.

Our coaching team varied in experience. While Nancy and I were recent retirees from the New York City Department of Education, Suzanna and Jesseca had taught for less than 10 years. Nancy, Suzanna, and Jesseca had taught predominantly English language learners (Nancy was president of the local TESOL chapter); Marc and I never had. I had done professional development work for over 30 years, whereas this was a new responsibility for Suzanna and Jesseca. Though we all valued constructivist, experiential learning, we sometimes diverged in other beliefs or ways of working. For example, Marc was committed to developing an outcome-based assessment system in the school, whereas Nancy and I were concerned about the effect of outcome-based assessment on what gets taught and how curriculum is designed. When we began meeting, some of the other coaches objected to the detailed note-taking I did; they preferred notes reflecting final decisions and devoid of names or opinions. Over time, I promoted meticulous note-taking so that there would be some historical record of the professional discussions and decisions that led to particular school activities or structures.[23]

[23] At Bronx International, note taking became a collaborative responsibility at both coach and team meetings. The notes varied in detail, but were regularly done on the spot by coaches and teachers and posted on Google Docs. The value of detailed note taking as a regular activity for a school or organization was modeled for me years ago by Cecelia Traugh, former ILS director of research, at both ILS and NYCWP meetings at Lehman College.

Interestingly, such notes also enabled the coaching team to plan the next stages of staff-wide work. For instance, several times Suzanna used the notes to remind us of why we made a particular decision or to identify instructional needs, such as differentiation or scaffolding, that staff had repeatedly requested be addressed in our school-wide professional development sessions.

Coach Team Question: How Does Teacher Growth Occur?

As we planned staff-wide activities and shared the work we were each doing with individual teachers, a key question emerged time and time again: How does teacher growth occur? As the person in the group with the most varied and extensive experience in professional development, I often shared particular stories from my TC work in other schools, stories reflecting the need for patience and the importance of providing different entry points for teachers. I mentioned the experienced English teacher who wasn't interested in my help but who months later stopped me in the hall to show me student papers based on an idea we had casually discussed walking to the parking lot one day. I tell about a history teacher who never had time to meet with me until Regents examinations were redesigned a year later, necessitating that her students learn how to write document-based essays. These stories were most valuable, I think, for Suzanna and Jesseca, who were sometimes frustrated when teachers were not immediately receptive to their ideas.

In 2006, our coaching group was gripped by a sense of urgency. This was the year prior to the publication of the first New York City school report cards, an accountability structure used to rate schools and principals. Test scores were published, and schools received grades, based partially on the percentage of students who passed all five statewide content area Regents exams after four years of high school. This standard presented a considerable challenge for our teachers, since studies have shown that it usually takes five to seven years for most students learning the English language to acquire academic literacy (Cummins, 1981; 2000; Collier, 1989; McKay et al., 1997; Thomas & Collier, 1995, 2002). Under the pressure of accountability and a desire to support the principal, the coaches wrestled with finding a solution to this challenge. Some coaches maintained that students would acquire academic literacy in English more quickly if we found a way to persuade every teacher to use the instructional practices we advocated. Caught up in the fervor of the discussion, I found myself

entertaining ideas about determining benchmarks for teachers to attain in a particular time frame, repressing all I had come to know from my years with the Writing Project and my prior consultant experiences in schools: Genuine change occurs over time within a school culture in which teacher knowledge and expertise is valued and colleagues feel safe enough to take risks when they need or want to, not because timelines are imposed.

The Coaching Team Plans Together: The School Snapshot

In fall 2006, with these concerns and questions in mind, Joaquin Vega, the principal, suggested we take a "snapshot" of the school's instructional program. Each coach would spend a day with one team looking at instruction through a series of predetermined lenses. By focusing on the team, we would be able to see what individual children experienced as they went through the day. Then we would be better able to identify team and school needs.

Initially we had mixed reactions to the principal's proposal. One coach was not comfortable observing with evaluation: "That's not our school culture." Another coach, frustrated by a few teachers who resisted integrating experiential approaches into their instruction, latched onto the principal's idea, hoping that these teachers might be more open to professional development if it clearly emanated from an administrative proposal. I preferred to be invited into teachers' classrooms, and the snapshot proposal felt like a mandate that might be threatening to teachers. But the coach team wanted to support the principal, who had just been promoted after two years as our assistant principal. If nothing else, we agreed, the results might help us identify the most appropriate professional development activities for our staff. Despite concerns, I let go of my resistance and held some of my values in abeyance. I had learned, both from my experiences in other schools and from our Friday NYCWP meetings, the value of being flexible in collaborations with other organizations and within schools. Though I would never demand that teachers adopt particular instructional approaches within a specific time frame, I believed we could find common ground to initiate some changes that would benefit both students and teachers.

Designing this snapshot activity was one of our coaching team's first major collaborations, and we planned with particular care. We identified five lenses to guide

our looking, all important to our school: language development, use of reading and writing, differentiation of materials for varied reading or language levels, student engagement and collaboration in groups, and interdisciplinary links. Each of us was assigned a team. We assured teachers in advance that these were not official observations, but merely random "snapshots" of one day on each team. We agreed to provide teams with an overview of what we saw and to talk privately about the visit afterward with any interested teacher.

The School Snapshot and Its Repercussions

On a Wednesday in November, each of us moved from class to class taking notes on what we observed. We wrote summaries of what we saw, striving to be descriptive. I deliberately phrased any instructional concerns I had as questions, hoping a speculative tone might prompt a discussion about practice among the teachers on the team I observed.

Before discussing what we saw with the teams and individual teachers, we coaches shared our notes and came to consensus about two points. First, we wanted to emphasize to the staff that we saw a lot of extraordinary teaching, full of commitment and skill, utilizing a range of valuable strategies. Second, the snapshot did provide a somewhat comprehensive instructional overview of the school on a typical day. Trends and gaps became easily visible. Across all of the teams, interdisciplinary work was limited, as we expected, and language development was often narrowly perceived as vocabulary review. It was apparent, too, that some teams were stronger in some areas than others.

With these informal data in hand, the principal and some of the coaches felt we needed to identify specific instructional goals for each team to address. Ideally, these instructional goals would anchor the coach's ongoing work with that team in subsequent months. Each coach would identify three possible areas of need for the team he or she observed and share these suggestions with the team, along with the summaries, at the next staff meeting.

I suggested we close the staff meeting with written reflections. The administrators and some other coaches felt there would be no time; oral reflection would be enough. But I

pushed. I reminded the group that writing gives people a chance to collect their thoughts before speaking, making it likely that we'd hear comments from more teachers. Besides, I added, reflective writing is a good model for classroom instruction, particularly for English language learners who might need a moment to figure out what they want to say in English. The coaching team was convinced (see box).

Our monthly professional development meetings are 90 minutes long. On this occasion, the teams met separately for the bulk of that time. In the final 15 minutes, staff gathered to write reflections both on the experience of being observed as a team and on the summaries and goals coaches identified. They shared excerpts orally. Some teachers cited "the value of noting what is working and what is not across the team." Others appreciated "…having objective eyes, someone who sees the larger picture on a team." A few were silent. The writing and sharing of these reflections provided the principal and coaches with useful information. Three of the teams were open to exploring their coach's proposed goals. Two teams, mine among them, seemed resistant.

The principal had assigned me to observe a team that included three teachers who made very limited use of the school's professional development services. When I shared my notes with the team, the three rejected the instructional needs I identified. They emphasized that too many students came to class unprepared; too many had poor study habits. Eager to be responsive to the teachers, I rephrased their concerns as a possible instructional goal: "How can a team help teenagers to acquire the habits of a high school student?"

For the rest of the year, I worked exclusively with this team. While there were some scattered positive accomplishments, particularly with the English teacher, who shared many of my beliefs, the team never embraced the question of study habits; after all, it was my suggestion and did not emerge from the teachers. I was working outside my value system, and the team's response confirmed my view that you cannot impose change.

Taking a school snapshot is a valuable idea, depending on what one does with the informal data it produces. We tried to use the snapshot activity to promote more targeted work between teachers and coach, but it became apparent that some teams

needed more time to think about the coach's observations or identify their own instructional goals. Moreover, I had not, as Barry Lopez (1990) says, "…tak[en] up residence in a place" (p. 32). I had no prior history with this team and knew all along that they didn't trust me.

As the year went on, it was clear that the principal was determined to move resistant staff members forward in a supportive but deliberate manner. However, the more coaches discussed this issue, the more unsettled we became. How *does* one work with resistant teachers? My experience told me that teaching can be hard and stressful and that dropping features of one's instructional repertoire in favor of others is always a risk. Teachers need to believe that changing how or what they do will be worth the effort, that something valuable will be gained in the process. That realization can take time. The snapshot activity and the follow-up were inconsistent with what I knew and valued about the need for time and patience.

A Fruitful Next Step: Peer Intervisitations

Following the snapshot activity, Suzanna and an assistant principal who was on the team at that time suggested we revive peer intervisitations, which had occurred sporadically in previous years. I agreed, knowing how much teachers often trust and learn from their peers. At International, while teachers on the same team moved easily and informally in and out of each other's classrooms, they rarely observed a colleague on another team. We proposed this idea to teachers, hoping that, through such visits, they might broaden their instructional repertoire or, at the very least, reflect on their own teaching.

We decided to root these initial observations within disciplines, believing that it would be easier for teachers to adopt an approach carried out by someone who taught the same content area and faced similar challenges. We asked one outstanding teacher in each discipline to volunteer to be observed by four or five colleagues. On a given day all, say, English or social studies teachers were freed up to visit a particular colleague during one or two specific class periods, with the administration arranging for coverage as needed.

To make this a useful experience, we established a protocol for the visits. Prior to each visit, teachers met with the colleague to be observed. The colleague told the group

what the class would be doing that day, what had happened beforehand, and what he or she would like them to notice. The teacher being observed also provided a focus question for the observing teachers to address, something on which he or she wanted feedback. For example, Liana, a history teacher, wanted colleagues to consider this question: "To what extent did the final project—the creation of a political cartoon—enable students to fully demonstrate what they had learned from reading the texts at the work stations?" In addition, to guide what teachers might look for during a lesson, coaches supplied specific prompts organized around the lenses we employed for the snapshot activity. We asked teachers to write informal responses after their visit.

Following all the visits, content area teachers discussed the experience at their monthly content area meetings. Coaches facilitated these meetings, using a protocol to focus the conversation and ensure feedback. Often teachers were enthusiastic about what they saw and asked practical questions. Liana told me she was a bit disappointed that her colleagues weren't more critical. I pointed out that, no matter how one attempts "to frame the looking," teachers will often take away from a lesson what interests or serves them. It takes repeated opportunities over time to acquire the ability to give critical but supportive feedback. At this juncture, staff had not yet developed the confidence or acquired the language to question practice with one another.

As a result of the warm response to peer intervisitations, the other coaches realized we did not need to be solely responsible for providing support; teachers had each other as resources. A Writing Project value about professional development was reaffirmed: The best teacher of teachers is often another teacher. Since that time, peer intervisitation has become a regular feature at the school, and teachers have adopted practices they have seen other colleagues carry out successfully with students.

Coach-Led Workshop Series on Special Themes

In previous year-end reflections, teachers had identified three critical instructional needs: assessment, language development, and differentiated instruction. We decided to address these issues through a series of workshops. As we considered this possibility, coaches shared varied perspectives regarding purpose and structure. For Jesseca and Suzanna, the two classroom teachers who were also part-time coaches, practicality was essential. The workshops had to offer something teachers could put into immediate

practice to benefit students. "Teachers need some things they can use quickly. Kids need some things now!" Marc, the science coach, took a more philosophical stance: "Must professional development always be immediately practical? Can't it be about developing a shift in thinking?" I understood and agreed with both perspectives, adding that such goals need not be mutually exclusive: "Theory *can* be engaging. You can use an instructional approach to demonstrate theory in action. It's the *way* you do it that matters. Besides, when professional development is ongoing, there is room for both." We were honestly grappling with what the workshops ought to be, wondering how we might reconcile the always-present immediate needs of teachers and their students alongside the larger goals of developing a professional stance toward learning and thinking and of creating the kind of professional community all of us—administration and coaches—wanted to promote. It's this balance that the Writing Project always strives to attain.

We offered the faculty a choice of participating in one of three workshop series to be held during staff meeting times. We envisioned these workshops as being repeatable each year so that, over time, teachers could experience the full range of offerings. Workshops met five times over a couple of months; each session ran ninety minutes.

Pairs of coaches designed and facilitated each series. Since none of these workshops focused on reading and writing, my areas of expertise, the principal asked me to co-facilitate the language development workshops with Nancy, who had a deep understanding of sentence and text structures as well as the oral issues that challenged English language learners. Initially, I was tentative as co-facilitator. Because Nancy had the content knowledge, I was less sure of myself on the floor. Nor were our work methods compatible. Nancy liked open dialogue and would follow ideas teachers raised, even if it meant dropping what I might consider a strategic prompt. I too value dialogue, but within a carefully planned and focused workshop structure. At our Friday Writing Project TC meeting, the NYCWP director reminded me that I was an experienced workshop facilitator and urged me to voice my own beliefs about language and literacy when appropriate. Eventually, Nancy and I found a balance. The final session, in which the teachers each presented how they had adapted a workshop activity, revealed that they all had acquired either a new awareness or a strategy for integrating language instruction into their content.

These workshops presented new possibilities for collaboration. Teachers learned with and from colleagues who weren't on their teams. Coaches with different visions had to negotiate ways to plan and facilitate together. I realized that Nancy had introduced me to specific strategies for integrating language instruction with content, and she acknowledged that she had come to appreciate and rely on my workshop plans. When we collaborated again a year later, we revised what we did and worked comfortably together.

Coaching Team Promotes Teachers Teaching Teachers

By fall 2008, a community of learners was emerging in the school. At the same time, while our faculty remained relatively stable, several of Bronx International's most experienced teachers moved on to new positions or new schools. It was evident, early in the school year, that a good number of the first-year teachers who replaced them were struggling with how to support our English language learners in the reading and comprehension of text. Though this has always been a staff concern, it became more dramatic that year.

Theme-Based Teacher-Led Workshops

Coaches decided that reading comprehension had to be the focus of professional development. Three of us collaborated on the design of the initial full-staff workshop. To frame the year, we invited teachers to think, write, and talk about themselves as readers. From my years in the Writing Project, I had come to trust the validity of teachers looking first at their own learning experiences to identify what they might need to do for or with students.

We agreed to structure subsequent meetings around ways to support students prior to, during, and after reading. Each meeting would include an experiential workshop and whole-group reflection at the end. All of these demonstrations would be facilitated independently by a content area teacher or by a team of coach and teacher. By brainstorming what we had seen in classrooms recently, we were able not only to call on two or three of our remaining experienced teachers, but also to invite a second-year science teacher and a first-year history teacher to demonstrate approaches we saw them use to support reading.

Acknowledging how much teachers learned from each other, we believed it was essential for content area teachers to demonstrate practices they had used successfully with students in our school. In addition, each would be using content area material, thereby highlighting the varied kinds of texts students encounter across disciplines. Coaches helped teachers prepare their demonstrations. Jesseca, the math coach and our strongest math teacher, agreed to demonstrate how she taught students to visualize a word problem prior to solving it.

Jesseca asked me to help her think through her presentation. "I know you are uncomfortable with math. Your reactions will help me to anticipate what I might need to say or do." Jesseca guided me through the same process she used with students. As we read each math problem aloud, I sketched on paper what I believed was being described in words. She then asked a few key questions, enabling me to distinguish between important and irrelevant details. Seeing that her approach worked for me, we then discussed how she might frame the activity and timed everything out. I was supporting her workshop but also providing a model for how she might, in turn, coach other staff members through their demonstrations.

Though these 45-minute workshops did not provide ample time for discussion, reflection sheets indicated that math and science teachers, in particular, were pleased to see their content areas represented in literacy-based workshops. More important, we not only provided a way for staff to experience exemplary instructional approaches currently used within the school, but also helped to build the leadership skills of the presenting teachers.

Team Meetings with an Instructional Focus

Team meetings were envisioned partly as an opportunity for teachers to share student work or present curriculum periodically for peer feedback, learning from each other in the process. Too often, however, such plans were jettisoned by pressing guidance and administrative matters. That year, the principal requested that each team, in collaboration with the team coach, devote five of its meetings to addressing an instructional goal that had emerged during the year. The coach and team would collaborate on how to carry out this focus: demonstrating strategies, sharing student work, and reading professional articles. The choice of topic and activity were open, but

it was mandatory that teams set aside particular meeting dates to tackle an identified instructional need. Notes from these meetings had to be posted on Google Docs. By asking teachers on a team to target one instructional need to work on with the support of a coach, the principal was, in essence, revisiting his previous plan for following up on the snapshot activity a few years ago. However, this time *the team* identified its instructional need and, in collaboration with a coach who was already working with them, designed how to implement its study.

What Coaches Learned—and the Challenges That Remained

We are now focusing staff-wide professional development on a couple of key themes, allowing a year or two to explore particular areas of instruction or curriculum in depth. Though we sometimes had to address Department of Education priorities, the themes we identified reflected teachers' input. Regardless of the topic, after a series of whole-staff workshops, classroom implementation occurs only if there is sustained support through coach-teacher partnerships and through discipline- and team-based meetings. Teachers often need to see or experience a particular instructional approach more than once before they acquire the courage to try a new pedagogical tool or embrace a different way of thinking about curriculum. Once teachers *are* interested or curious, it can be daunting for them to figure out by themselves how to adapt a new approach so that it supports students' thinking and serves the content area's demands. Therefore, most teachers need time to warm up to a new idea. Once they do, they welcome collaboration with a peer or coach to help them think through how to implement a new strategy or develop a different stance toward learning.

By this time, at Bronx International, coaches were working efficiently as a team. Jesseca, in a new leadership role in the school, was in charge of professional development. After conferring with coaches and staff, she would create a yearly calendar for faculty activities and set agendas for each coach meeting. Having an agenda in advance helped each coach to come prepared with ideas and materials. We also learned to divide up responsibilities. Not every coach needed to be involved in planning an upcoming workshop, and different coaches could lead different staff activities.

Of course, challenges remained. It was difficult to find extended time to reflect on our roles as coaches. Though we regularly discussed our consulting experiences, we rarely

presented specific aspects of our work to one another. Nor was there time for formal presentation of a knotty consulting situation that we all might learn from. It was also a luxury to read and discuss a scholarly article. I shared one on content area literacy, but we were unable to make professional reading a regular feature of our work together. Unfortunately, my coach colleagues did not have the benefit of Fridays at the Writing Project.

Final Thoughts

Through our collaboration, the coaching team helped build an increasingly reflective and supportive professional community in the school. To do this, we received consistent support from the three principals who led Bronx International from 2001 to 2010; each secured ongoing funding for this work and preserved time within the day's schedule for formal professional development activities. As a result, we figured out ways to serve the interests of the principals and the Department of Education without sacrificing our beliefs about the importance of respecting and listening to teachers.

Change doesn't happen instantly through mandates or directives, no matter how well intentioned or well planned those may be. Teachers, like students, learn differently from each other. One kind of professional development doesn't suit all. So we must respect teachers as professionals and encourage them to say what they need, in what form, and when they want.

In fall 2010, the principal asked each team to conduct an inquiry around an instructional need. To support teachers in this endeavor, the coaching team, under Jesseca's leadership, designed and modeled a whole-school inquiry around the broad theme of writing, a topic of interest to staff. We conceived this inquiry as an opportunity for teams to acquire a process they could replicate and conduct independently. The model the coaching team designed was successful, and, in the spring semester, each team replicated the model by conducting inquiries with coach support. Each team inquiry progressed through several stages: selecting a focus, based on formal and informal data; reading research; identifying an instructional intervention; determining pre- and post-intervention assessments; carrying out the intervention over a series of weeks; and reflection. During the last two days of the school year, each team presented its inquiry to the rest of the staff in one-hour workshops. Each workshop included an experiential

element, references to research, and student work. For two days, the faculty listened and responded to three successive one-hour workshops, all of which were collaboratively designed and facilitated by the teachers on the team. In many ways, these two days seemed to be the culmination of a journey the coaches and the faculty had taken together.

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Infusing Writing into Staff-wide Activities

Although individual consulting remains the primary means through which teachers change instructional practice, teachers experience the power of writing when it is repeatedly used at faculty meetings and workshops. Writing and sharing responses to a prompt at the start of a teacher meeting provides a transition from the classroom and stimulates the discussion and activities that follow. By writing reflections at the end of a meeting, teachers privately convey to facilitators what they experienced and what may need to come next. As a NYCWP TC, I modeled such practices, giving teachers a glimpse of what could happen for students in a classroom when writing is used in such ways. At Bronx International, coaches learned to frame or conclude activities with a call to write, however briefly or informally.

CHAPTER 8

Small Steps: A New Teacher-Consultant Builds a Writing Project Community in a Small High School

Grace Raffaele

My first year as an on-site teacher-consultant (TC) for the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) was at a small high school with strong administrative support for the work of the Writing Project. Although I understood from my own experiences as a teacher the potential of what the Writing Project has to offer, as a new TC who was also new to the school, I was unsure of myself and of where the work I was doing would actually lead. So I paid close attention to how I made myself visible to staff, taking small steps and forging individual relationships with teachers. Looking back at this first year, I now recognize that the cumulative effect of those initial small actions made it possible in my second year to expand the work across the staff and support teachers in broadening the ways they used writing in their subject areas.

Background

After 15 years in the world of advertising and print production, I shifted careers and became a middle school English teacher. In 1996, my fifth year of teaching, through a program funded by a DeWitt Wallace Foundation grant, NYCWP TC Nancy Mintz began spending two days each week at my school. Nancy's presence over the next four years, along with the courses and workshops offered by the Writing Project, transformed my practice (Mintz & Stein, 2000). Nancy's presence as a listener and eventually a classroom partner made it possible to merge the student-centered practices I was learning in graduate school with my everyday reality: an overcrowded traditional school in a working-class New York City neighborhood where I taught sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, most of whom were bilingual English language learners.

After 16 years in the classroom, I joined the group that had helped shape me as a teacher and became a full-time NYCWP TC.

Flushing International High School and the Writing Project

Flushing International, now one of 18 schools in the nationwide Internationals Network for Public Schools, enrolls only students who are English language learners and who have been in the U.S. for four years or less. The school has students from 35 countries speaking 20 different languages, which can be heard throughout the day both inside and outside of the classrooms. Learning takes place in small communities and is viewed as an active and collaborative process. The school's 30 teachers and 400 or so students are divided into teams of five or six teachers who work with the same students in content area classes and small advisory groups. Teachers on a team have common prep time to plan interdisciplinary curriculum and discuss how to address the students' social and academic needs in their advisory groups. Although each team has a licensed English as a second language (ESL) teacher, students are not grouped by language or language level, and there are no separate ESL classes. All teachers are viewed as language teachers, though most speak only English.

Prior to becoming Flushing International's founding principal, Joe Luft, a long-time high school teacher and a Writing Project participant, taught history in New York City and Washington, DC. Joe brought a Writing Project perspective to his work. He valued student voices, the use of informal writing to support learning, and the power of revision and rewriting. Therefore, in 2004, when Flushing International High School opened, he knew that he wanted the Writing Project's presence for his teachers. From day 1, Joe supported writing by example, not by mandate. He used Writing Project practices in staff meetings, often starting them with a focused freewrite and asking teachers to write reflectively at the end. He encouraged teachers to attend the Writing Project's Satellite Invitational. In fall 2007, Joe contracted with the Writing Project for a full-time TC and a spring term after-school workshop series. I became that consultant.

Year 1: Entering a Like-Minded Space

In September 2007, at the first staff meeting before school opened, Joe introduced me as a TC who would be present four days a week. He introduced me as a new staff member and not just a visitor or occasional support person. He talked about how the Writing Project had been instrumental in his own work with English language learners. I then facilitated a one-hour introduction to myself and the work of the NYCWP. I asked

teachers to write about their own writing experiences and feelings about writing. We made lists of the kinds of writing students were doing and the questions teachers had about their students' writing. These questions were my first window into what writing was happening in the school and what was missing.

That day, because the Writing Project works from the interests and needs of teachers and schools, it was hard to be specific about what I would actually *do* for teachers. However, during that introductory hour and a few days later in a letter to the staff, I proposed multiple ways that teachers could participate in this work on writing and literacy. I explained that I was available for planning lessons or units, looking at student work, joining in class activities, bringing technology into the classroom, and providing resources. I emphasized that the work could look different depending on the teacher.

As a classroom teacher, I had always had a schedule, lesson plans, and students in the room. I entered Flushing International with none of these. I represented a new program in the school and was uncertain about my first steps. Writing Project TCs pride ourselves on openness and flexibility. As a new TC, I was nervous. Still, I was walking into a place that was welcoming and familiar, as it was structured a lot like the school where I had been teaching. My first job was to listen to the needs and desires of this specific community—to get underneath the questions about students' writing the teachers had asked at that first meeting.

The focus at Flushing International was on teaching students with a range of abilities through collaborative interdisciplinary activities, regardless of students' language proficiency. Although I did not have a strong ESL background, I had worked in a school with diverse learners and was quick to read the recommended literature that informed the Internationals' work as well as to visit classes so I could see the core principles[24] in action. I was honest with the principal and teachers I spoke to about wanting to learn from them as well as to share what I knew about writing in the classroom. Much of what I read about the Internationals schools' philosophy and observed at the school echoed Writing Project ideas and beliefs. Teachers were committed to knowing each student as an individual and as a learner. Students were encouraged to share their experiences, to

[24] See http://internationalsnps.org/about-us/internationals-approach/

look at what they were studying from multiple perspectives, and to make real-world connections. Questions were encouraged as part of the process of learning, and lots of writing was already going on.

All of this was going to make for a congenial segue for my work in the school. My previous experience teaching humanities in a project-based school meant that some of my own work could be shared. I began that first year at Flushing International knowing that possibilities existed, even if I did not yet know exactly where or with whom I would work. The principal did not follow up his introduction with instructions about which teachers to work with or which classes to visit. He trusted me, as a TC from the Writing Project, to find those places or let them find me. We had had meetings early on, even before I met the staff, to discuss his goals and expectations for my work at his school. While his hope was that students would become more proficient writers, he recognized that this would be a long-term goal and not one that would be visible solely through test scores. For now, he wanted to see more writing going on in a wider range of subject classes. He believed that encouraging more writing would lead to producing better writers, and he trusted the open-ended methods of the Writing Project as a way to achieve that goal.

Building Trust from a Strategic Location

Joe had a remarkable ability to balance beliefs with necessity. He grappled with having little or no available classroom or office space for an on-site TC. I was given a desk and bookshelf in one corner of a busy room that was home to a vital organ of the school—the copy machine. Teachers at Flushing International relied heavily on materials they prepared themselves, often at the last minute and occasionally hampered by machine breakdowns. Without my realizing it, Joe had given me a position of importance both physically and philosophically. I was, as he stated with some apologies, "simultaneously at the heart of the school and in the heat of the battle."

What I saw in those first few weeks was teachers pressed for time and dedicated to creating meaningful activities for their students. As the copier did its work, the teachers talked with one another about what they were planning. When the machine failed, I was there to help. I was also there to join their conversations about the work. It was not unusual for people to casually ask me what I thought or if I had any ideas. Sometimes I

did, and other times I offered to get back to them. From this vantage point, I found two teachers who wanted to meet more regularly and two others who wanted to collaborate on a specific project they thought could benefit from some writing. As the school year got under way, I was able to make a schedule for myself, with a few meetings with teachers and class visits slotted in as well as regular times to meet with the principal. The rest of the time would be spent listening and conversing at the copy machine or in the hallway. The work had begun.

Impromptu Conversations

The beauty of being next to the copy machine went beyond a newfound ability to troubleshoot its mechanical quirks and breakdowns. I was indeed at the hub of the school. I therefore was in a position to see many teachers on a daily basis, even if only for a short hello. Teachers would often sit at one of the computer workstations in the room, and their murmurs of pleasure or concern provided me with opportunities to talk with them about their work or just laugh or lament along with them. Those impromptu conversations were going to be important to the long-term work, even though I did not know it at the time.

When Jordan, a ninth and tenth grade science teacher in his third year of teaching, moaned about reading his advisees' journals, we began a conversation, first about what the journals were for and what he was already doing and noticing, and then about how to manage the journals. I was able to talk about some of my own experiences with journals and ways I had grappled with many of the issues he named. Jordan visibly relaxed after this conversation, and he left the hectic work area smiling.

I had shared my expertise, in a way I could not have predicted, at a moment that mattered for one particular teacher. Jordan started to invite me to his class to see an activity in progress or help students with hands-on technology. We worked well together, but only intermittently. I mainly listened, usually unsure of how I was helping, if at all. It would take two years of small forays into his work before Jordan asked me to plan a specific unit with him. In this case, the continued small talk was an important, though long-term, bridge to more sustained work.

Jordan was one of about seven people out of the staff of 30 with whom I worked in that first year in this impromptu way. There was an art teacher who wanted students to write a poem before creating a three-dimensional homage to someone or something important to them, history and humanities teachers who wanted me to join them in the classroom during revision conferences and writing workshop days, another art teacher who wanted help giving students background knowledge about myths before creating a cultural myth mural, and a literature teacher who wanted help planning literature circles. Which teacher I met with depended on a certain amount of serendipity; choices were often made on the spur of the moment.

Tucked in Room 300, at the end of the hall, was another casual space for teachers to gather and work. Most of my scheduled meetings with teachers took place here, but, because the room was a public space, these conversations would often spill over into other impromptu conversations. Lily, the drama teacher, used this room as a work area whenever her shared classroom was occupied. At one point, she told me about a series of skit-authoring projects her students had been working on and her concern that they stay engaged for the next round. Something told me more writing was not the answer here. I was reminded of Pat Wasley's book, *Kids and School Reform* (Wasley, Hampel, & Clark, 1997), in which Wasley mentions the tension between "routines and repertoire," referring to the delicate balance between doing some things on a regular basis so students are comfortable with them while also being innovative to keep students interested. Lily was already using writing to help students draw out material for their acting. So I suggested she give students a chance to act without a script. "Why not try out improvisation and have them perform without a written script for a change of pace?" With her characteristically exuberant laughter, she turned to another teacher in the room and said, "I can't believe the writing consultant is telling me *not* to have the students write!"

Despite my small quarters, my reach was great that first year because the school was small and there was such open communication among all the staff members. The message that went out was that I was not forcing any agenda on anyone. *I was not telling teachers how to teach writing.* I was available to listen and to think together with them; many times, though not always, what we came up with involved some writing. As more and more people started to say, "Can we talk for a bit?" I realized that these impromptu relationships "counted" as part of the work of the Writing Project. Out of

what the teachers were saying, in both planned and impromptu meetings, I could draw on my own teaching stories, experiences, or materials as resources—but only when they connected to what teachers were doing. I did not want to be perceived as an expert, but I did come with a certain amount of expertise.

Beyond the School Day: The Course and a Conference

In the spring of that first year, I facilitated a 20-hour NYCWP on-site after-school workshop series for interested staff focused on writing-to-learn strategies. Six staff members, from diverse subject areas including science, math, and the humanities, participated. The course provided a place for teachers to write and reflect on their own work with students. We explored ourselves as writers to better understand our student writers. I also encouraged teachers to attend the annual NYCWP Teacher-to-Teacher Conference, and four did so. Both professional development opportunities, the course and the conference, gave teachers a way to be a part of the work I was doing even if they could not meet with me during school hours. Both helped to begin building a core group of teachers who would understand writing and literacy from a Writing Project perspective.

At the End of Year 1

Year 1 was a time for sowing seed. I worked mostly with individuals and small groups of teachers, taking advantage of impromptu moments to build trust and lay the groundwork for other teachers to see possibilities for us to work together. When describing the work of the Writing Project to a visitor, Anthony explained that the Writing Project "germinated within and across teams, so Grace doesn't have to talk to everyone, but her work gets around to everyone." This helped me understand that there was a ripple effect taking place, so that even where I did not think I was working, the work was happening.

Year 2: Three Goals

At my end-of-year meeting with the principal, he acknowledged that a lot more writing was going on in a variety of subject areas. That had been our main goal for the year. We talked about pushing that envelope and listed three goals for the coming year: (1)

broadening the types of writing going on, (2) focusing school-wide professional development on writing, and (3) eventually—over the longer term—helping students succeed on the written parts of state assessments.

Broadening the Types of Writing Going On

At Flushing International, writing was clearly embedded in language learning. Writing in English or in a student's native language was used to demonstrate academic knowledge. Students took notes, wrote personal stories, responded to literature, wrote observations, and described processes. Most of this writing was academic in nature. In short supply was creative writing. Students rarely wrote poems or fiction. Nor did they experiment with other voices or points of view, write informally to learn, or write in graphic or comic form. The exclusion of writing that was not defined as academic came from teachers' deep concern for the short amount of time their English language learners had to master academic reading and writing in order to succeed on high-stakes assessments. Most did not know that having students write in a range of genres could actually support academic writing. While American-born students may have had the gates of creative forms of writing opened to them in their elementary or middle school years, many of Flushing International's recently immigrated students did not have the benefit of those writing experiences. For them, writing, and in particular writing in English, was purely an academic task.

I started with the teachers with whom I planned more regularly and who had some experience with the Writing Project. Erin and Virginia knew how important it was for student writers to feel ownership of their work, express themselves in a variety of writing forms, and share their writing with peers. They did not view poetry or fiction as luxurious diversions, but rather as another space in which students could develop the confidence they needed in order to be willing to approach the difficulties of academic writing. I encouraged these teachers to make time for these experiences in their curriculum, and we did some planning together.

Erin's students wrote futuristic short stories and then created comic strip versions of those stories. Virginia's students wrote poems and made poetry books as well as VoiceThreads, online slide-show-like presentations combining images, text, and

voiceovers. Both teachers noticed that many students who had previously been reluctant to write were more eager to put words on paper.

I was pleased to help Erin and Virginia find a place in their work for writing they valued. But how was I going to help someone like Toni, a new teacher who wanted my advice on "how to teach the five-paragraph essay"? Toni wanted her students to write an essay about the qualities of a hero based on a hero in their own lives. I reached back to my own work. Having had great success with students inventing their own characters, I suggested combining the imaginative with the academic. We worked on using students' creativity within the essay format by having them invent heroes. Toni was amazed at how invested students were in all parts of the project, including the essay, and, quite honestly, at how much fun they had.

When Toni first approached me, I had been unsure of how to help. As she talked and I listened, I realized her question was not about how to teach the five-paragraph essay; she had done a good job of teaching the form. What she struggled with was how to get students meaningfully involved in this writing. What I offered Toni was a way into the essay that gave students control as they invented their own heroes; it was also a way to demonstrate what she had taught them about the essay.

Toni was a new teacher with high hopes, and I tried to build from her strengths. After our successful collaboration, I was disappointed that she did not continue to seek me out. Yet she became an advocate for the work I could do, often suggesting that other teachers find me when they were stuck for ideas or unsure of how to incorporate writing into their work.

Writing as the Focus of School-wide Professional Development

At the start of my second year at Flushing International, the principal asked me to join the newly formed professional development (PD) committee, a group composed of one volunteer teacher from each team that was responsible for planning and facilitating the bi-monthly PD staff meetings. That committee, which included Erin and Virginia, would become another key to spreading the work school-wide and serve as a catalyst for reaching other teachers.

Most of the writing done at Flushing International was high stakes—meaning it was graded, was part of a project, or was shared orally in full-class presentations. Writing was being used—albeit in many lengths and forms—to demonstrate what students knew. Even the reflective writing in students' end-of-semester portfolios was high stakes, as it had to be in a specific essay format and was shared aloud with members of a portfolio presentation panel. Like Jordan, teachers were having students keep journals in their advisory groups, but few, if any, were using journals in course work. Writing was not used as part of the messier learning process. The responsibility teachers felt for improving students' academic writing was preventing them from engaging students in other writing forms.

After several discussions in the PD committee about our hopes for student writing and a study of the kinds of writing students were currently doing, I proposed the idea of low-stakes writing. The PD group read Peter Elbow's 1997 article, "High Stakes and Low Stakes in Assigning and Responding to Writing," where Elbow explains that ungraded, limited-audience writing raises students' comfort level with writing, helps them clarify their ideas on a topic, and gives us, as teachers, a chance to see their thinking without the cloudiness of unnatural or convoluted language forms. The committee members were immediately taken by the idea that we could focus on writing without making any big changes in what teachers were already doing and without adding to their grading work load. They were particularly intrigued by the idea that low-stakes writing to learn could look different for different teachers, even within one discipline. After proposing low-stakes writing, during the rest of the discussion I was mainly a listener. The two committee members who had participated in Writing Project Institutes were the ones to point out, through our discussion of the Elbow reading, how this low-stakes work could support the higher-stakes writing students struggled with.

That fall, we launched a semester-long series of twice-a-month one-hour professional development sessions for the entire staff, each session co-led by members of the PD committee. We started with reading the Elbow article and identifying the kinds of writing already being done across the school. We then asked teachers to speculate about what other writing students could be doing to engage with the work in their classes. Several sessions were devoted to introducing and demonstrating the practice of annotating texts. Most teachers already had students do what they called "text coding," which meant putting question marks, exclamations, or underlines as they read.

Annotation would expand on those "codes" and make students' questions and reactions more explicit, but with equally low stakes. Teachers were regularly encouraging students to experiment with oral language as part of the process of learning English, so doing the same with writing was not a huge leap of faith. We were developing a comfort level with a wider range of writing activities in all subject areas. Well, almost all.

Respectful Reluctance

Teachers regularly pursued and questioned new ideas outside of PD meetings. I hoped this would be as true with the writing PD. In the case of the math teachers, the questioning took the form of a productive but mild protest. The math group asked me to attend one of their discipline meetings to talk about their perception of low-stakes writing. They were concerned that, if students did the amount of written responding, questioning, and connecting we were suggesting, they would never get to the math concepts they needed to learn. The teachers were willing to have students annotate word problems for the math ideas but did not see how teasing out each student's understanding of the non-math vocabulary would help. But wait! The PD committee didn't mean you had to do *all* of this responding *all* of the time! I gave the example of a word problem with the words "curb" and "sidewalk" in it. If students new to English didn't understand these words as they connect to straight lines, wouldn't it affect their understanding of the math? That one was easy. More difficult was to help them see value in more extended written forms of discourse in math. I explained that the forms of low-stakes writing we were suggesting, such as journal entries, exit slips, or peer responses, could happen only occasionally and still be a huge support not only to students' learning but also to the teachers' awareness of how their students were doing. The point was thinking on paper for teachers to *read*—not grade. A smile-accompanied joint "Ohhhhh!" seemed to signal that the meeting had come to a positive end.

These sighs of relief helped me realize how important that meeting had been. As I continued over the course of the semester to touch base with these math teachers, it became clear that they were slowly but surely embracing this work. By the end of the year, they were able not only to tell people, but also to *show* people, how low-stakes writing had improved some students' ability to understand and perform math functions. Even the most vehement skeptics had become a vocal supporters!

Working with Teams

Teaching teams at Flushing International met weekly and always had busy agendas. Therefore, just as I did with individual teachers, I waited for the right opportunities to arise.

One of these opportunities was the sustained silent reading (SSR) class, which students had built into their programs twice a week for one hour each. As a teacher, I had done extensive work in developing independent reading periods and using writing with reading. Therefore when, because of scheduling conflicts, I was asked to take on two SSR periods for one cycle, I said yes. Using low-stakes writing to support reading in the context of an independent reading program was just the opener I could use to start attending a few team meetings. I offered, and several teams were interested. At each of these meetings I shared materials I had used and offered to adapt them to fit the needs of the team. However, a lot of my work in this area was not just about the writing. I was both a knowledge resource for structuring the SSR class activities and a materials resource for making books available for these classes. I began to visit other teachers' SSR classes to "join in the fun of reading" with their students and to model mini-lessons. Periodically I organized the book carts that went from class to class and helped order new books when money was available. Some of the students thought I had more to do with reading in the school than with writing—and that was OK with me!

Looking Back and Forth at the End of Year 2

As year 2 came to a close, I looked again at what leads to deeper or extended work: small conversations, patience, waiting, listening, offering, sitting by the copy machine, and taking on opportunities that presented themselves. Keeping communication open and individualized allowed me to work with a variety of people and personalities and allowed teachers across the subject areas to enter into the work. Sometimes, even if a teacher did not return to work directly with me, the teacher carried on the work.

I learned also how much context matters: Teachers at Flushing International were used to being reflective; teachers and administrators viewed themselves as learners; and the school's leader, the principal, trusted his teachers, trusted the work of the Writing

Project, and was trusted by the staff. These factors had a definitive impact on what the teachers and I were able to accomplish over my first two years at Flushing International.

What TCs know from being teachers is immensely valuable as long as we share it respectfully and when other teachers are ready. The Writing Project changed my own teaching because of its ability to balance the ideal with the real, to meet me in my classroom and not in some other or imposed reality. It was important for me to continue to take this stance in my work as a TC.

Students at Flushing International High School were now using writing to think, to learn, to create. Teachers were more comfortable with using the many forms of lower-stakes writing we had explored: writing that was not graded but functioned as part of the learning process. As the second year came to a close, Virginia pointed out that students were writing so much more for their state exam essays and expressing more ideas than she had seen before. She recognized that the many forms of writing students were doing throughout the year contributed to this progress and that our work was leading them toward a higher level of success in many ways. Because we embedded the low-stakes work and increased the range of writing across the school, students and teachers had ground on which to build. From this base, students would be able to approach the more formal academic text types with the stamina and sense of agency they were developing in this writing-rich environment. The support for writing that teachers also felt— in their teams, in their disciplines, and in the individual work we could do together——gave them confidence in the belief that, the more students wrote, the better writers they would be.

The small steps we had taken together were paying off. We were building a community of learners—teachers as well as students—who saw writing as an integral part of the learning process. The coming year would be a larger step in the growth of writing at Flushing International. But the steps we were about to take could not happen without the earlier ones. If my steps continued to be small, they would most likely be more confident and cover more territory.

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CHAPTER 9

A Writing Project Study Group for Principals: Supporting the Work of On-Site Teacher-Consultants

Nancy Mintz

Thirty-plus year of providing inservice professional development in New York City's public schools has taught the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) the importance of involving administrators in our efforts. School leaders who recognize the complexities of teaching writing and who value writing as a tool for learning content across the curriculum have successfully collaborated with the Writing Project's on-site teacher-consultants (TCs) as thinking partners, developing powerful literacy communities in their buildings. As a National Writing Project site, we have continually offered forums designed to strengthen administrators' capacities as literacy partners and, more recently, as instructional leaders in their schools. Over the years, collaboration with principals has made it possible for TCs to broaden their roles and become catalysts for school-wide change, as described by Ed Osterman and Grace Raffaele in this collection and by Stein (2002).

In 2005, the NYCWP was invited to be a part of a pilot program with a small group of high schools from one of the city's 10 Department of Education school regions. [25] The program included a monthly Writing Project study group for principals whose schools would be receiving the services of a NYCWP on-site TC one day a week for the entire school year. The seven two-hour workshop sessions of the study group were designed to enhance the principals' support of the TCs' literacy work in their schools and serve the principals in their role as instructional leaders responsible for the development of professional learning communities in their buildings. This chapter focuses on the

[25] In September 2003 (the first year of mayoral control of the New York City schools), NYC's 32 community school districts and seven high school superintendencies were consolidated into 10 large geographic regions, each headed by a regional superintendent who answered to the newly created Department of Education.

decisions we made in shaping this study group and on what we learned as we worked to integrate a number of agendas— ours, the principals', and the school region's—into a cohesive whole.

Background

As the director of the NYCWP, I designed and co-facilitated this administrative study group. The Writing Project TCs who were part of this pilot effort and could have co-led the group with me already had full schedules. Each TC, in addition to working in the participating schools one day a week, was running two 20-hour workshop series for teachers from the selected schools. They were also working as TCs in other regions throughout the city. I saw my participation with the principals as a way to support the on-site TCs who were in the schools Monday through Thursday and at the NYCWP meeting each Friday. Working directly with the principals would provide me with a more specific understanding of the needs of their schools and the pressures they were facing as educational leaders in the climate of testing and accountability inspired by No Child Left Behind. By sharing what I learned with the TCs when we met at the NYCWP each Friday, I would be able to offer the TCs insights and specifics they could draw on to be successful in their schools.

At our Writing Project site, when sufficient funding is available, our tradition has been to co-lead our study groups and inservice courses. We all prefer to work collaboratively. I asked Ed Osterman, an experienced TC and former NYCWP associate director, to help me facilitate this group of administrators. Ed, who was still working on-site in schools part time, had a more current understanding of the issues administrators and teachers were facing on a daily basis. He also had access to current teacher assignments and student work.

Context

The initial design for the pilot program was developed with the region's deputy superintendent for high schools, who was responding to the requests of high school principals for professional development that would address writing in the content areas. He and the region's high school literacy coordinator had targeted some of the small new schools to be involved in the pilot. All were in the Bushwick section of Brooklyn, an

economically struggling area of the city, and had a high percentage of struggling learners. Most of the schools were in their third year of operation, adding a grade each year, and their students were going to be taking the state's English language arts (ELA) exam and global studies exam for the first time. The passage rate on these exams, the ELA exam in particular, is a major accountability measure for both the state and the city. Schools' scores determine whether they will be placed on review, labeled in need of improvement, or eventually closed. The region's agenda was clear: These schools are our weakest, and we need you to help them develop a literacy program that will lead to successful test scores.

Participation as a Choice

Although the region had targeted some schools, I felt it necessary and respectful to proffer an invitation to these administrators personally. A region might mandate participation, but I knew from experience that administrators forced into the program were not likely to provide the support crucial for success. Principals, like teachers, need to be actively involved in the design of their professional development program. They need to understand how we work and be sure that what we are trying to accomplish coincides with their goals. The deputy superintendent, understanding this tenet, agreed to set up an extra meeting with all of the principals interested in being a part of the program, not just those the region had pre-selected. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce principals to the NYCWP and the type of work we would be doing with their teachers if they chose to participate.

It was one of those amazing moments that always catch me by surprise but shouldn't really. I did not have to convince the principals of the value of the program, since almost every one of them had taken a Writing Project graduate seminar when he or she was teaching and had worked with one of our on-site consultants, some for a number of years. There was lots of laughter and sharing of stories about consultants they had worked with. The few who knew nothing of our work seemed open to beginning. One principal who had been involved with the NYCWP over several years as a teacher asked to have her school included in the program. She was an experienced administrator in a successful school in Queens, one that, in June 2006, would be recognized by *U.S. News and World Report* as one of the top schools in the country based upon the number of students taking College Board advanced placement exams. The region agreed,

recognizing that her experience and understanding of the work would be helpful to the new principals and thus enhance the success of the program. This expectation turned out to be accurate. This principal's willingness to ask questions, talk about her doubts, and share her successes helped to create a safe space for others to share and solve problems without fear of censure.

Although many of the principals had participated in Writing Project professional development as teachers, they were now wearing different hats. Their responsibility for raising test scores loomed large. They recognized that writing was not only key to passing test scores but also essential to college readiness. They spoke openly of being unsure about how to make writing happen school-wide. At the regional level, the deputy superintendent and literacy coordinator believed, as we did, that writing needed to be integrated across the curriculum as a tool for thinking and learning as well as for representing students' learning and thinking. Again, the principals shared their limited sense of how to make this happen.

This introductory meeting also provided insight into the nature of this group. The principals appeared to like each other and could be playful, but there was clearly a sense of competition in the room. Four of the newest principals had been meeting regularly with the high school literacy specialist during the prior year. It was this group with added members—six principals of small schools in Bushwick and the one from the Queens school—that eventually became the study group. In addition, the region's high school literacy coordinator occasionally attended the meetings.

Goals for the Study Group

Ed and I identified goals for the principals and for ourselves based on the goals set for these schools by the region, the needs of the principals that we gleaned from this introductory gathering, and our intention to encourage a partnership between the principals and their on-site TCs. The principals, to understand their role as instructional leaders of literacy, had to recognize the literacy strengths and weaknesses of their schools. They needed opportunities to look at their schools critically and articulate for themselves and for the TCs what they wanted for their schools in terms of writing instruction. We wanted the sessions to model how writing could be used to learn content and concurrently provide the principals with strategies and ways of working

they could use with their own staffs to foster a teacher learning community where all voices and views were heard and respected. Our objective was to equip the principals with enough of a knowledge base that they could envision how the Writing Project TC in their school might work with them as a thinking partner to develop and institute a cohesive literacy plan focused on the inclusion of writing in all subject areas across the curriculum.

Each of the seven sessions of the study group would have to be relevant to the nature of the schools involved and offer something that was both practical and useful for the principals' work with staff. We needed the principals to understand that our work with teachers in schools has typically been by invitation rather than by mandate, so they would need to invite teachers into the work rather than insist that a teacher work with the TC. However, just as importantly, the sessions had to be enjoyable so the principals would be sure to return each month.

At this point, we had the information we needed to plan the first few meetings. We trusted that the content and focus of the remaining sessions would evolve as the principals further articulated their issues and concerns around the teaching of writing at their schools.

Supporting Literacy Instructional Leadership through Writing

Ed and I are sitting at a conference room table at East Brooklyn Congregations Bushwick High School for Public Service. The table is loaded with sandwiches, salads, and soft drinks provided by the school's principal. It is already 2:20 p.m. We were to begin at 2:00 p.m., but we are the only ones here. We look over our plan and realize we will never get through it. What were we thinking? Over the next ten minutes, the principals arrive. We observe the banter and gentle kidding as each person enters. We use the rest of the session to work on what it means to be a literacy instructional leader and reconnect the principals to themselves as writers.

Driven by their insecurity and concerns about how to make writing happen in their schools, we committed ourselves to modeling writing at each session. Food, lateness, collegiality, and time to write all became regular features of our sessions.

Writing to Build Community and to Model Staff Development

During the session, we used writing and sharing to build community and to model ways the principals could make writing a part of their school culture. It was our goal to write at least twice at every meeting, and for the most part this writing happened. Focused and open freewrites provided opportunities for the principals to write and share as learners in the same way they would need to provide opportunities and supports for teachers if they wanted them to develop their knowledge and implement approaches that would lead to writing-intensive classroom practices.

Starting a meeting with a focused freewrite shaped by a question gives people time to settle in and begin thinking about the focus of the day. At the first study group meeting, for instance, we used postcards with provocative images alongside the question: "How does this picture reflect your role as an instructional leader of literacy?" The image was a hook, and the short time given to write a response promoted spontaneity. When the principals talked about their written responses, we learned a bit more about obstacles they perceived as instructional leaders and about their hopes, doubts, and questions. Several of these were shared across the group:

- How can reading and writing for pleasure and for learning happen with greater regularity across my school?
- How do I get teachers to buy into my writing initiative?
- Who is easy to move? Who isn't?
- How can I facilitate an exchange of ideas among the teachers at my school?
- How do I invite teachers to participate in the development of a literacy plan that goes beyond basic skills and incorporates academic rigor?

We also used a second focused freewrite at that session to reconnect principals to the complexities of writing and teaching writing—as a way to connect their experiences of writing with learning, composing theory, and classroom practice. Ed asked the group to write about a time when writing—personal or professional, now or in the past—came

easily or a time when it was difficult.[26] Before asking group members to share what they'd written in pairs, Ed asked the group to talk about the process of writing this short piece. "What was it like to do this writing? What did you do and think from the moment I gave the prompt to the time I asked you to stop?" The discussion that followed allowed Ed and me to say back to the group what we heard them saying and make some points about composing and about teaching. For example, some said that they didn't have any trouble getting started, since the prompt provided them with options. One principal mentioned that the writing flowed easily because she was able to visualize the scene and re-experience the emotion. These responses allowed us to talk about the importance of providing students with choices when designing writing assignments and about individual composing processes and genre preferences. Throughout the sessions, we used this type of reflection not simply to help people understand what they knew but also as a way to connect what they gave us to composition theory (Avidon & Perl, 1981).

Open freewrites: In other sessions, we began with open-ended freewrites and a reminder to group members that they should not censor their thoughts, as this writing would not be shared. The room would get quiet in fits and starts as people got comfortable. Ed and I always wrote as well. This writing allowed us time to focus our own thoughts while modeling a strategy that could be used when working with teachers and students. Writing and sharing together also ensured that we would be accepted as members of this learning community rather than being perceived as experts.

Sometimes, again to connect the writing to learning and teaching, we asked what it was like to write in this manner. The principals talked about how writing provided a transition from the school day and enabled them to reflect on particular events. At these moments, we reminded them of the ideas that came up in previous sessions about the need to infuse literacy practices across the curriculum. We suggested that one way to do so was to use and model literacy practices at staff meetings. We made room for the principals already doing this kind of work to share their knowledge. Victor told us about asking his staff to write about how a meeting has gone or about a professional

[26] An open-ended prompt of this type is one we have been using in the first session of our Basic Workshop series since 1981. It is designed to get people writing and sharing their personal experiences with writing. Asking people to write and share their process allows facilitators to make connections to writing theory and classroom practice.

development or school event, but he said he did not do this on a regular basis. Cathy mentioned that she opened staff meetings with oral reading. In the beginning, she had selected the texts, and now teachers did. Providing opportunities for sharing their practice as school leaders is essential in working with principals, since they don't often get time to share ideas and ways of working with colleagues.

Using writing in these ways modeled for the principals ways they could begin the process of developing a culture of literacy across disciplines and infuse writing in all aspects of school life. It was important for them to realize that they had to take the lead if they wanted to shift instruction across the curriculum.

Writing to Build Thinking Partnerships

Writing-to-learn strategies: At each session, we modeled writing-to-learn strategies. We also devoted one focused session to looking at how these strategies could be used across the curriculum. We used a chapter taken from John Bean's *Engaging Ideas* (1996), a text written for college professors, as the basis for this work. We chose Bean's work because it is rich in usable and practical ideas easily adaptable to the high school classroom and because texts geared to college faculty can help to make ideas and approaches more acceptable to high school teachers.

Writing/drawing to learn: Sometimes, rather than writing, we used drawing or mapping. In the second session, we wanted the principals to look closely at what was happening in their schools with writing and literacy. We thought that a visual representation would help them to notice more clearly and with fresh eyes what was already in place, what was working, and what was missing. This process would help them to articulate a vision for change, which they could share with each other and with their TCs. Ed had mapped the literacy locations at the school in the Bronx where he was currently working as a TC, and we used his visual map as a model. Ed explained his map, and I modeled responding to the map by adding what I saw and asking questions.

The principals had 15 minutes to draw their maps. We provided a handout of prompts,[27] as we regularly did to help them think through the task, and we let them know that they were going to share their maps with each other.

The activity generated lots of talk. The principals were curious about what was happening in the other schools. Though we suggested for the sake of time that they share their maps with a partner, they choose to share with the whole group. They were interested in feedback from their colleagues. Here again was an opportunity for the principals to work in partnership with each other to solve problems and share their knowledge and expertise.

We discovered that the principals, even those who were not versed in literacy practices or who had doubts about their own knowledge about how to teach writing, were able to identify the places in their building where good literacy practices were happening, where they were missing, and where they needed to articulate expectations more clearly. Each could identify particular teachers whose work with literacy could serve as a model for colleagues. Each could name content areas where strong literacy teaching resided and where it did not. It was clear that content area classrooms were places where more reading and writing needed to occur; science classrooms in particular were singled out. Here was an area where the goals of the school region, the principals, and the NYCWP clearly aligned. The principals also noted that journals were being used in many classrooms but wondered whether teachers read and responded to them. Were the journals being used to move students toward more formal writing like essays and reports? They noted that there was not enough one-on-one feedback happening in classrooms. This finding led them to ask how to encourage and train teachers to use writing conferences to teach writing.

Our goal was to set in motion the collaborative process between TCs and principals that we knew was necessary for real change to happen. By providing the principals with knowledge of practical writing-to-learn strategies and by helping them look at their schools critically, we began a process that could lead to a successful collaboration.

[27] Where are the centers of literacy activity in your building? Where are their regular opportunities to write? Where is independent reading going on? Where is writing thriving? Who is promoting it? Where isn't it happening? Who is blocking it? Where are the places that collaboration among staff exists? Where is student work displayed? Shared? Looked at? Where are the centers of technology use? Who is using it? Where is it used to support composition?

Principals were encouraged to share their maps with their TCs in order to collaboratively develop a strategic plan for the work that they wanted to accomplish over the course of the year.

Supporting Academic Writing: Looking at Student Work and Teacher Assignments

Testing and accountability were always the 800-pound gorillas in the room. Once the principals had some of the writing-to-learn ideas under their belts, they jumped quickly to what really mattered to them as administrators—getting struggling students to pass the state ELA and global studies exams. It is one thing to get teachers to use informal writing to aid students in learning content, but students also needed to express that learning in clearly written formal essays. What the principals wanted to know was how to build content area teachers' capacity to teach this type of test writing.

The irony here is that the Writing Project has always worked with teachers across the curriculum, in each instance emphasizing the importance of formal and informal writing in the subject areas. However, our attempts sometimes met with resistance. Too many administrators and subject area teachers thought of writing as the bailiwick of the ELA teacher. Writing in science or history, for instance, was viewed as a distraction, as time taken away from the content that needed to be covered. Now, with the press for accountability prompted by No Child Left Behind, the administrators were more than interested in seeing writing happen in the content area courses.

The shift from using writing to learn content to essay writing is a big one, and we knew that it would be difficult to tackle in two-hour sessions that met monthly for one school year. We made the decision to devote three sessions to academic writing. Our intent was to look at student work in a way that would help the principals move away from a deficit model to discover what students were able to do and what they needed to learn. This finding, we believed, would then lead to looking at how teachers shaped their assignments and how lessons could scaffold toward well-written student essays. Ultimately we wanted the group to begin to articulate a set of criteria for what makes a good writing assignment; these criteria could then be used to start conversations with their TCs and their staffs.

For the first of these three sessions, Ed and I decided to start with looking at a piece of student writing from a content area classroom. We wanted the principals to determine what the student was able to do as a writer and think about what kinds of lessons needed to be designed in order to move the student forward. Because we did not want to put anyone in the position of defending a student or a teacher, we deliberately selected writing that was not from any of the participants' schools. We chose a fairly well-written science essay by a ninth grade ESL student that we assumed would allow the group to name what the student could do and think about what needed to come next. We also would share the teacher's assignment and the lessons that led up to the final piece.

This first session of the three was the hardest; we were unprepared for the negativity in the room. To initiate using student work, we asked the principals to begin by describing and not evaluating the student's science essay, focusing first on what the student was able to do. Even though the writing was not from their schools, looking at the work brought all of the anxiety these principals had about student writing to the forefront. All they could notice was what had been done poorly. The piece was so like the writing of their own students that it made concrete how far the students were from becoming proficient writers who could easily pass state exams and be considered college ready. Perhaps they were reminded of how much their personal success as school leaders was tied to the success of their students on these exams.

As difficult as it was, the session did raise some interesting questions. If literacy is the responsibility of all teachers in the school, how is this responsibility shared? What kind of writing—genres and skills—can be introduced at each grade level, and how do these build vertically? These questions were good places to start in-school conversations. The on-site TCs could work with teachers to develop some answers that would work for their students.

At the two following sessions, we focused on an area where the principals could have more control: teacher assignments. The group began to develop criteria for good writing assignments; the criteria could be used as a starting point for teacher discussion. We had the principals look at assignments from three different content areas to discover the strengths and limitations of the assignments. The group examined the role of the instructional leader in helping teachers to create good writing assignments. We also

went back to Bean (1996), looking at the assignment guidelines he suggests to see if they could be adapted for the principals to use with staff. We used Bean's guidelines as well as the criteria the group created collaboratively. The conversation was rich, and many of the ideas that were brought to the table had the potential to become the basis for future work with this group.

In retrospect, we made the mistake of starting with the student work and diving into the use of a descriptive protocol, a process that was far removed from how educators are used to looking at student writing. The focus on discovering what makes a good writing assignment that students can complete successfully would have been enough—an eye-opener for the principals. In fact, looking for strength was most helpful to them, since they often worked one-on-one with teachers, typically starting an examination of assignments and units of study by noting strengths.

Supporting Leadership, Strengthening the Partnership

We were clear about our goals in terms of developing a working partnership based upon a team approach between the administrator and the on-site TC. We knew that, no matter what we did, it would not necessarily lead to increased test scores within the first year, but it would set the groundwork for change to occur in the following years. We needed to make sure that the principals felt that what we were doing was heading in the right direction so that the region would continue to pay for our services. Using these sessions to model ways to work with staff and build a learning community—a leadership skill that principals often overlook due to pressures to produce increased achievement scores—was simply a part of the way we planned and facilitated all sessions.

We found that it was necessary to make what we were doing explicit. For example, although the content of each session was different, the design was similar. At each session, we provided a folder that included the agenda, notes from the previous meeting, the material we would be using during the session, and an end-of-session reflection sheet, which unfortunately did not always get completed. At each session, we began with freewriting or a writing prompt, allowing participants to transition into the room and accommodating those arriving late. Then we reviewed the notes from the last session and framed the day's work together; this work always included hands-on activities and lots of reflection and processing as to how to use what the group was

doing with staff back at school. As we framed each session, we made our planning transparent so the principals could see how we scaffolded each meeting based upon the feedback we had received from them. By making all of this explicit, we hoped we were creating a way for the principals to organize staff meetings that would include writing as a regular feature and would provide opportunities for teachers to share ideas and learn together—in essence creating a writing-intensive environment and a learning community that honored the voices and expertise of teachers.

Working with principals in this way changed the nature of the relationship between TCs and administrators. It greatly enhanced the design and success of our program. Included in the folder at the first session were specially prepared handouts delineating how NYCWP TCs work on site; during sessions, we often discussed ways for principals to make use of the TCs' expertise. I also periodically visited each school and met jointly with its principal and TC to help them solve problems and to offer suggestions.

TCs were now viewed by their principals as thinking partners, people they could rely on to offer suggestions and ways of working that would assist in achieving the literacy goals of the school. TC were invited to attend, and often facilitate, the principals' cabinet meetings, which in one school became a study group focused on content area literacy. Having all the members of the administration understand the work of the TC eased entry into classrooms and presented a consistent message to teachers.

As the NYCWP director, this work was an additional way that I could be intimately involved in the day-to-day work of the consultants in these schools. I did, as I had hoped at the start of this work, become a conduit for sharing information. I knew I could rely on these principals for additional information on the changes that were constantly occurring as the NYC Department of Education's reorganization measures began to take hold. This information was a tremendous help to me in running other aspects of our inservice program. For example, the shift from school districts to regions changed the way we had to invoice for our services. Service providers like the NYCWP were often left out of the information loop.

The Value of a Principals' Group and What We Learned

On the surface, our approach to working with principals is similar to the way we approach working with teachers. We ask people to write. We honor and respect the knowledge that is in the room. We listen carefully to what is being said and use it to make connections and theory points about writing instruction and classroom practice. We strive to create a community of learners where people feel free to voice their ideas, ask questions, express doubts, and share classroom practice.

However, working with principals is different from working with teachers. Principals today are both educators and business managers; they are barraged by external pressures and educational mandates that they may not believe in but must implement. They are responsible for the entire school community, and their leadership skills need to be recognized in the work that we do with them. They, too, need opportunity to share their successes and feel comfortable enough to voice their doubts, ask their questions, and use each other to help solve problems without fear of reprisal from the region or district. We found that, although principals are often called to regional meetings, in these public forums they rarely can talk honestly with each other. New principals in particular feel that more experienced principals and the regional leaders are judging them.

Whether we have an extended period of time or just a few sessions with administrators, it is important to be clear about the goals for the work. We need to be aware of and integrate the specific goals set by the district that hired us and make room for the goals that the administrators have set for themselves. The key is flexibility. Our ability to shift gears on the floor or rethink agendas as we plan will guarantee a successful session or series. If we are able to continue to meet for an extended period of time, we need to constantly learn from the group. It is a reciprocal arrangement. Listening carefully, watching the room while people write and respond to each other, observing the ways in which people physically react to new ideas, saying back what we hear so that participants can clarify and build on their ideas, finding ways to make theory points—all of the subtleties of good facilitation come into play. As school leaders, administrators have a skill set that needs to be recognized. At the same time, we are modeling facilitation in hopes of adding to this skill set.

This work with the principals coincided with the work all of our TCs were doing during our Friday meetings at Lehman. As part of our National Writing Project local site research grant, we were trying to name for ourselves what made our work in schools different from that of the myriad of other literacy professional development organizations vying for city contracts. As we worked together to explicitly name the work we do in schools, we began to use the term "writing-intensive classroom," which then expanded to "writing-intensive school." The work in this New York City region confirmed my belief that, if the work is to spread throughout a school, the principal needs to be the one who creates the environment that provides opportunities for teachers to learn together and express their ideas openly. Who better to make that happen than a Writing Project whose core belief is that the best teacher of teachers is another teacher?

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PART 3. CHANGING TIMES AND CHANGING CONTEXTS

CHAPTER 10

Negotiating the Challenges: Working in the World of High-Stakes Testing and Reduced Budgets

Barbara Batton, Diane Giorgi, Amanda Gulla,
Laura Schwartzberg, and Susannah Thompson

To be effective within the culture of the New York City schools requires the Writing Project (NYCWP) teacher-consultant (TCs) to be both flexible and inventive. She must listen and learn as well share her knowledge and ideas. In this chapter, four experienced teacher consultants reflect on their actions and the decisions they made as they, like the teachers and administrators they encountered, negotiated the challenges of mandated curriculums and the demands of increased testing and quantitative accountability.

The first narrative comes from Diane Giorgi, who was the TC in a large comprehensive high school with a long history of engagement with the NYCWP but was experiencing the challenges of the changed climate. Susannah Raphael-Thompson, the second narrator, worked in a new configuration, a consortium of five small middle and high schools with which she had limited time. In the third and fourth stories, Laura Schwartzberg and Barbara Batton describe their work in two elementary schools where the teachers and administrators assigned to work with them, though by-in-large interested in the Writing Projects' offerings, faced competing priorities, in one instance the mandated curriculum, in the other multiple professional commitments. In the four narratives that follow, each taking place in very different educational settings, we see each TCs resourcefulness and adaptability, as well as her successes and dilemmas.

Diane Giorgi: A Two-Year Journey

Diane Giorgi, after a five-year hiatus, returned to Tower High School where she had previously experienced a successful consultancy. Although the school had a long history of work with the NYCWP, Diane now found herself in a changed atmosphere. A number of veteran teachers had retired and were replaced by brand new teachers; many of the

remaining veterans were struggling and dispirited. Diane's work in this school was in many ways the traditional NYCWP model—a multi-year, two-day-a-week consultancy in a large traditional high school. Diane writes:

> My re-entry to Tower did not go as smoothly as I hoped. I was taken aback by the new curricular directives that seemed to hang over just about every aspect of teaching and learning, no doubt driven by data indicating that the school was not meeting its annual yearly progress goals. Of particular concern were the falling graduation rate and the drop in reading and math scores. To "help" the school catch up, teachers were now being evaluated on how well they followed Department of Education mandates. There were regulations on what to teach and how to teach, ranging from the structure and pacing of lessons to the physical arrangement of classrooms. For the first time in my memory, significant pockets of faculty were expressing negative attitudes about the students' ability to learn and in their own capacity as instructors to change with the times. It was evident that I could not pick up where I had left off; I would have to begin anew to establish a presence and gain credibility among the large staff.
>
> The work began slowly. Despite walking the hallways and stopping by departmental offices to introduce myself to anyone who would listen, few teachers seemed interested in opening their classrooms to me. To make matters more difficult, funding was unavailable that fall to run an after-school inservice workshop series, a centerpiece of our consulting work.
>
> Fortunately, things began to pick up a bit in December. I connected with a small cadre of first- and second-year teachers and set about developing collaborative relationships with them, one teacher at a time. But I still

> felt like an outsider and determined to search for alternative ways to grow the work and reestablish myself as a visible and trusted colleague at the school. That's in part how I came upon the notion of facilitating a whole-school curricular fair where colleagues could share practices and celebrate the solid but largely unrecognized work going on in classrooms throughout the building. Curricular fairs were not new for me. I had helped to organize a few small-scale fairs at other schools. Each time, I had witnessed a positive effect on school culture and teacher learning, so I was confident that a fair might work well at Tower.

Diane surveyed the teachers and found that many were interested in participating in the fair. But when she approached the principal with the idea of an "exemplary practices" fair, to her dismay, the school's administration rejected the idea. One assistant principal even asked, "But what if the work the teachers produce is no good?" Diane did not give up, though. She merely tabled the idea and focused on expanding her work with teachers, facilitating department meetings when she could, and even managing to fill a spring-term inservice workshop series with 25 teachers once the funding became available. Diane's work continued to grow over the school year. In her words:

> Happily, the Writing Project was invited to return for a second year of consulting and my days on-site were busier than ever. However, I continued to hold on to the idea of a fair, and, after Thanksgiving brought up the subject once more, this time with a new name for the event. Perhaps the word "exemplary" had been a sticking point, so instead I suggested a more neutral, less evaluative title: "A Celebration of Teacher and Student Work." Maybe the name change did the trick or my timing was right, but the principal and several assistant principals warmed to the proposal, and I received the go-ahead I had been hoping for.

> In all, 24 teachers presented at that first fair. Indeed, the fairs became a twice-yearly school tradition in January and June, and I continued to note the goodwill and collegiality that each fair engendered. Even some math teachers, skeptical at first, joined in.
>
> Following each fair, I wrote individual thank you notes along with an invitation to collaborate. Rosa, a science teacher who responded to this invitation, had displayed graphic organizers written by students in her tenth grade class. Her objective was to have her students develop their lab reports into extended essays, and she asked me to work with her on this. Together, we designed a series of scaffolded lessons that culminated in the students writing three-page essays on Newton's Second Law of Motion. She taught the physics, and I taught the writing. Rosa was so pleased with the results that she chose to present this unit of work at the next fair.
>
> My collaborations with Rosa led to work with other science teachers. Each fair became a catalyst for growing and sustaining collaborations, and each display was measurable data denoting this.

Despite the cool reception Diane encountered at first, she drew on her extensive TC skills and strategized her two-day-a-week contract time by locating multiple entries into the work: seeking out teachers, listening to them, forging relationships, facilitating meetings, and negotiating an after-school seminar. It took time. In the second year and after, by renaming the curricular fair, she accomplished a school-wide breakthrough. Through her patience and persistence, Diane was able to slowly build her work with teachers and her credibility with administrators, ultimately organizing an event that sparked cross-disciplinary conversations and built morale.

Susannah Thompson: Finding Possibilities in a New Structure

In the climate of less money and less time, Susannah Thompson faced the challenge of both a new structure for consultancy and limited time. In 2008, The City University of New York's School Support Organization (CUNY SSO) established the Writing Initiative in five middle and high schools to help students struggling with writing. In each school, teachers and administrators, with support from the NYCWP TC, were to identify a cohort of students needing support. The teachers working with this group of students would become a Writing Initiative Team. The TC was then to develop with the Writing Initiative Teams pre- and post-intervention assessment tests, to work with each team to evaluate the data resulting from the pre-assessment in order to determine student needs, to provide strategies that would address the students' needs, and to model and support the use of these strategies. The work was to be accomplished in only one day a month, 12 days a year of consulting time at each school. NYCWP Director Nancy Mintz wisely negotiated with the leadership of CUNY SSO to add four cross-network workshop forums that would bring together the teams of teachers from all five of the schools. Susannah was the lead TC for the initiative and was the site-based consultant in three of the schools.

Foundational to TC work is establishing relationships with teachers, building trust for their work together. So the first question in looking at the Writing Initiative structure centers on how Susannah bonded with the teachers. The cross-network meetings lasted three hours, but Susannah often stayed another hour with interested teachers. On-site team meetings had about half an hour of work time, so she grabbed 10- to 15-minute informal meetings when she could and often stayed after school for one or two hours. Susannah explains how, even in these short bursts of time, she created relationships and worked with teachers to build practice:

> I believe the more powerful bonding (surprising given how few times per year I was in any one building) occurred because the Writing Project offered a very different kind of professional development than most teachers had access to: ours was less formulaic. And because I generally began

by observing and listening, I may have attained a level of trust. (Several of the teachers continued to stay in contact, one or two years later.)

A challenge equal to that of developing trust was designing work for the very limited meeting time – to compress the work that would normally have been done in a longer after-school workshop series or course into smaller pieces that could be worked into the school day. At one of my schools, we used chunks of this time to look at student work, assess students' learning needs, and talk about strategies and activities that might begin to address some of their writing struggles. Because these were the only times when I could gather each team, it was also when I modeled particular strategies. It is always important for teachers to experience specific practices in order to have a tangible sense of how to use them in their own lessons, including how to address issues and questions that might arise in connection to new activities. Even though it was not always possible to do more extensive hands-on work with the teachers, I was able to provide a taste of what was possible in their classrooms and to offer some space and time for deeper discussion about student writing.

At one team meeting, we modeled the use of "text-on-text" writing to demonstrate the power of this form of "low-stakes" writing to help the reader connect to text in a more active way. We read a *Newsweek* essay entitled "The Curse of Cursive" (Bennett, 2009), in which the author considered the role of cursive (and of writing in longhand, in general) in a modern world. I chose the piece knowing that it would evoke some debate. After the participants silently read the essay, I distributed enlarged copies of the essay affixed to newsprint sheets. Teachers

collaboratively annotated the article, circling or underlining noteworthy phrases, writing questions, and otherwise interacting with the text.

Eventually they not only commented on the original text but also wrote in response to each other's words. While such collaborative "text-on-text" strategies are not new, they were new to these teachers who enthusiastically read and wrote—afterwards, sharing possibilities for how they might apply this kind of activity to an upcoming lesson with their students on early twentieth century immigration to America or one on the nature of cellular diffusion.

The "process" discussion that followed, in which the teachers and I analyzed the activity, was exciting. We began to talk about how their students might benefit from the opportunity for this kind of processing both in talk and in writing. Prior to this text-on-text workshop, in our close looking at some of their students' writing, we'd noticed that students responses to nonfiction text implied a lack of engagement, that the students in their writing failed to make adequate use of the text. Teachers felt that this text-on-text work, particularly when based on a strong, rich piece of text, might be one strategy that could begin to address this issue.

Did we have time to carry out the activities and discussions in the fullest, best ways? No, not at all. If we met the middle of the day, during a common "prep" period, teachers were pressured by other obligations. Still, this was a chance to inspire some valuable close attention to student writing, and, though it was not a perfect situation, it was an important opportunity. And on my next visit to the school, I was invited into the classroom of one of the

> teachers on the team, to observe a lively lesson in which her 8th grade ELA students used the text-on-text strategy to respond to extended quotes from a class text.

It was in the meeting times—both within the schools and in the cross-campus forums—that teachers found opportunities to grow their practices by sharing ideas and struggles. Here Susannah gives one example of a discussion in a cross-network meeting that provided a vital opportunity for Writing Initiative teachers to deepen their understanding of their students' reading, writing, and learning processes:

> David, an experienced high school social studies teacher who had assigned a major research paper, told us he was devastated by the quality of work students had turned in. Of the few papers actually submitted, nearly all were clumsy Internet cut-and-paste jobs. In response, Nicole, a first-year teacher from a different school, noted that in her sixth grade English language arts class, she had shifted her focus from the "big-ticket" research report to smaller-scale, more frequent research projects drawn from in-depth thematic class reading and related discussion. Though she worried about not assigning large-scale formal writing pieces, she hoped that the deeper thinking skills she was guiding her students to develop would, over time, lead to more sustained formal essays and reports down the line. Nicole talked about nurturing student voice in order to maintain a lively, thoughtful connection between the student researcher/writer and the writing she or he produced. David, who had noticed the nearly total absence of student point-of-view and voice in the reports he had collected, asked Nicole specific questions about her lessons and assignments. The two traded ideas, and other participants contributed suggestions and stories of writing lessons and assignments. It was the beginning of a powerful discussion about student engagement and

> ownership of learning. This is but one example of the kinds of fruitful discussions that took place in these cross-campus meetings.
>
> The discussions among teachers were the most effective aspect of the Writing Initiative. I was surprised that so few of the teachers had had the opportunity to engage in conversations about practice and in sessions involving student work. While there was never enough time, I did my best to find room for this kind of discourse. For many of the young teachers who comprise the faculties of these small schools, this was one of the most powerful developments.

Entering any school as an outsider will have its challenges; finding ways to address those challenges is critical. Susannah writes, "Flexibility is definitely at the heart of any teacher-consultant's life, though judging which compromises are the right ones is not always easy." In one of Susannah's schools, identifying a mutual time to meet during the school day was not possible. Susannah enlisted the support of the principal, and with the small professional development stipend the principal was able to provide, Susannah and the group met once each month after school. In another school two key teachers with responsibilities beyond their classrooms were hesitant to take on additional professional obligations. Susannah negotiated a give-it-a–try-and-then-decide day; both agreed to remain in the project and recruited other teachers. And in a third school, the teachers initially assigned to participate were unavailable. Because meeting time with the school's administration was scarce, Susannah used email to enlist support from the literacy coach and advice from the principal, and a group of teachers motivated to participate was identified. In each instance, with support from administration, a literacy coach, or other teachers, Susannah was able to resolve the challenge; she found interested teachers to work with and times and ways to do so.

Susannah concludes:

> The Writing Initiative work offered me a chance to apply what I had learned as a site-based Writing Project consultant working a minimum of one day every week at a school over a year long period to a different situation—one where I met representative teams from each school four times a year in a cross-site seminar and, at the most, spent one day a month in their schools. Yet, as I look back on what happened in each school—how I located opportunities for rich work with teachers, built relationships with and among staff members, and negotiated with administrators to help create small communities of teacher learners in places that initially seemed inhospitable to such entities—I recognize that in this new situation, I was applying the same Writing Project practices used effectively in many of the other schools in which I had worked.

Laura Schwartzberg: An Early Success and Later Complications

Where possible, NYCWP TCs work alongside teachers who participate with them voluntarily. To accomplish this, TCs will introduce/explain the Writing Project's work at staff and department meetings and when feasible offer a workshop. But sometimes other matters take precedence. In Susannah's case, teachers were selected to participate in the CUNY SSO because they taught the targeted student population. In the story that follows, Laura Schwartzberg describes her work as a TC one day a week in an elementary school where administration, interested in an inquiry approach to teaching of writing, selected two particular grades as the logical place for this work. Here Laura introduces the school, its multiple professional development initiatives, and her work with one of those identified groups, the third grade teachers and students.

The Community School is a Title I school[28] with about 500 economically and racially diverse students. Many children travel from distant neighborhoods to attend the school. For most, English is a first language. Classes are heterogeneously grouped, except for a Gifted and Talented class in each grade. The school's teaching staff is stable with many teachers having been there more than 10 years and some as many as 20 years. The school prides itself on its professional development offerings—programs that push into classrooms and enrichment programs including sports, arts, music, and chess that are either push-in or that groups of children or whole classes go to during the school day.

On my first day at the school, the AP released the five third grade teachers, a few at a time, to briefly meet with me. Until that moment, none of the teachers had been told that they would be working with a Writing Project consultant every Wednesday for the rest of that year. So I used my time to explain my presence as a Writing Project TC, describe my work and what it might look like in their classrooms, and ask if it was okay to stop by their classrooms that day. They seemed receptive to an approach that would emphasize writing across the curriculum. But they did express concern about where this work could fit into their already crowded curriculum.

[28]According to the U.S. Department of Education, the purpose of Title I funding "is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments." The basic principles of Title I state that schools with large concentrations of low-income students will receive supplemental funds to assist in meeting students' educational goals. For an entire school to qualify for Title I funds, at least 40 percent of students must enroll in the free and reduced-price lunch program. Title I funds can be used to improve curriculum, instructional activities, counseling, or parental involvement; increase staff; or improve programs. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind, schools must make adequate yearly progress on state testing and focus on best teaching practices in order to continue receiving Title I funds. Malburg, (2012; updated: 9/3/2014). Understanding the Basics of Title 1 Funding. http://www.brighthub.com/education/k-12/articles/11105.aspx

In our brief meetings the teachers had expressed interest in focusing on their social studies curriculum, *Communities Around the World*, which included studies of Mexico, China, and Africa. When I asked the teachers how they were approaching their social studies curriculum, several mentioned wanting their children to understand the needs communities have in common. We talked about helping children think about how different environments influence the choices people make, and where it made sense to do so, I described work I had done with children creating imaginary communities. I could see sparks of interest, so I proposed that, if they did not have a specific beginning time for the *Communities Around the World* study, we might spend time having children create their own island communities before launching into the yearlong study. Several teachers were enthusiastic and no one objected to my suggestion.

Later that day, when I stopped by their classrooms, most of the teachers were welcoming. The children were lively and attentive and I was excited about launching the work. The teachers planned to begin their study of *Communities Around the World* with the reading of maps. So that was where I would begin. I kept jotting down ideas and decided that initially, I would model some of the map and inquiry work.

To my relief, I learned that on Wednesdays, three of the 3rd grade teachers had a common 45-minute preparation period. I let the teachers know that I would visit each of their classes regularly, and we worked out a schedule for the visits. I also shared my hopes for the common "preparation period," as a time to plan together ways they might follow up the work between my weekly visits. I

> wanted this work to become an integral part of their curriculum, not just something that happened during my Wednesday visit.
>
> On my second visit, after the teachers shared with the children that I would be visiting weekly, I began the way we often do, drawing on the children's knowledge, in this instance, of maps. The children talked about maps they had previously studied, how maps help people, and why people use particular maps. When I pointed out that everything they had said thus far referred to maps that represented a real place, and that sometimes in fictional stories they read there were maps of imaginary places, they excitedly began naming stories that had maps—the land of Oz, Narnia, and the Hundred Acre Wood, among others. Several of the teachers participated, reminding children of other books they had read that featured imaginary places. It was at this point that I explained they would eventually be creating their own imaginary island, but that first each of them would create an imaginary room, one that was perfect in every way. The children brainstormed ideas with a partner and then began writing first drafts about their ideal room.

Sustained Inquiry in the 3rd Grade: In three of the 3rd grade classrooms, the beginnings were promising. Starting the in-depth study of communities with the children's creations of imaginary worlds allowed the children to seriously consider the needs of human populations. For the teachers this was an opportunity to observe and better understand an inquiry-based approach to their *Communities Around the World* curriculum. The teachers were open to the writing-to-learn strategies and followed up the lessons I modeled. As the children worked to understand what an island is and develop their own island communities, they asked questions that were enlightening to their teachers, who began to address some of the gaps in their students' current understandings.

Having the freedom to delve into the island study for several months was a deep learning experience for the children and their teachers. The children had time to think about the needs of communities, to argue over such things as whether or not an island had to have electrical power, to consider what special features their island should have, and to ask still more questions. Questioning, talking, and writing served as speculative tools to help the children create a pictorial map of their island. In planning the physical features of his island, one boy wrote that he wanted tall mountains to surround the island. When asked why, he explained that mountains would protect the island from storms blowing in from sea. Allowing ample time for speculative writing led to these kinds of discoveries. The children, with support from their teachers, used writing for planning, for labeling, and for creating keys and enhancing their finished maps. They also wrote fictional stories to accompany their maps. They were impelled to revise when they noticed that there was no room on their map for a needed train station or that they had neglected to include important information in their story.

The Common Prep: It is not surprising that this work was most successful in the classrooms of the teachers who were able to meet with me and with each other during their shared prep. One of my concerns was how to have teachers take ownership of the work when there was no after-school inservice course to provide the underlying theory for working in an inquiry-based way. Although I certainly wanted to provide the teachers with some writing strategies, what I was offering was more of an approach than a collection of techniques to apply to a curriculum. In a crowded school day where sustained time for planning, reading, writing, and discussion was scarce, what we did have was the common prep period. And the teachers made good use of these meetings. They commented on what they had observed when I modeled work in their classrooms, and we planned follow up and work we would do together. The teachers began to examine why third graders studied communities and what the children could gain from the study. They were working with the implications of this work for their teaching. At one point one of the third grade teachers observed that it was a mistake to assume children "got something" just because she taught it. She was reminded that third graders are young and their thinking quite concrete; they often needed several opportunities before they understood ideas. Another said that she was struck by how much time I allowed for discussion and how the children seemed to benefit from this opportunity.

Later on as their work diverged, I met with the teachers individually during their common prep so that I could see each of them. And sometimes we met as a group to do both short- and long-term planning. Some of the community studies would be the same and some would differ. When the third grade study of world communities was about to shift to communities within China, I discovered that a museum kit on China was available from the nearby Brooklyn Children's Museum and passed the information on to the teachers. When the kit arrived, drawing on the kinds of work we had done together in the island study, the teachers made time for the children to observe and write about the wonderful artifacts in the kit before it went back three weeks later.

The three third grade teachers were excited about using writing in social studies; they recognized how the island study engaged children and set the ground for their studies of other "communities around the world." And they saw how writing nonfiction was powerful for many kids. Each saw the children's excitement and understood that the excitement was not frivolous. The children in their classes wanted to learn and the content area writing provided the opportunity. In their reflections on the island study, teachers wrote that they saw how content area writing had led to breakthroughs for children who "hated to write." They also wrote that the understanding of building an island community from scratch was the most significant understanding for the children, which would provide a strong framework for their study of other communities[29].

Laura's success with the study of community during her first few months at the school was a strong beginning but not to be repeated. In January, when test preparation for the New York State English language arts and math exams took over, one result was no time for social studies. Time to plan collaboratively with the third grade teachers was now limited and from one week to the next, there was little follow up. Laura found herself doing more model lessons than working alongside the teachers. In addition, in this highly enriched school, students and teachers were constantly being pulled out of class for myriad activities including special assemblies, last-minute field trips, and professional development. In an instance of the right hand forgetting to tell the left, on

[29] For more information about the communities study, see Schwartzberg, L. 2009. "Creating Imaginary Islands," in *Making Time for Inquiry*. http://instituteforliteracystudies.org/making-time-for-inquiry/

one Wednesday when Laura arrived, all of the teachers she worked with had been pulled out of their classes for a day of math professional development.

Prior to her work at the Community School, Laura's TC assignments included one or two days per week at a school, consulting in the classrooms of teachers taking part in a Writing Project in-service course offered at their schools. At the Community School, there was no such venue where she could "supply the theoretical underpinnings of what I modeled in the classroom." Laura strongly believed that without the theory, there would be no major changes or paradigm shifts in the teachers' practice—just some new strategies. So where she could, she found other ways to share foundational ideas as well as good practice with the teachers.

> Coming into a school with good intentions, but without the course to build those theoretical underpinnings and with not much flexibility or freedom for teachers to pursue children's interests, meant that I had to tread carefully. And once I met the teachers and began to understand their reality, I did not want to impose another mandate on teachers who were already loaded with mandates to follow.
>
> I had to carefully plan my work around the school's existing programs. If I introduced approaches or units of teaching teachers could not follow up, either because they didn't understand the rationale or because they were inundated with other demands, the work would not go anywhere. I had to figure out how to work within the school's frameworks, but not succumb to practices that I felt were educationally unsound.
>
> I left the school feeling ambivalent about my experience. Children were doing a lot more content area writing and teachers recognized its power as a learning tool. Students were enthusiastic about learning, although I sometimes felt I was having more of an impact on the students than

> on their teachers, particularly in the fourth grade. One teacher told me that I had made writing so much fun and taught her how to reach many more reluctant writers. I hope that this teacher can hold on to the fun and excitement as she continues teaching writing without the help of a consultant. The third grade teachers recognized the impact that the imaginary island study had on the children; I think they will use a more inquiry-based approach in their future study of world communities.

Barbara Watanabe Batton: Limited Time and Mandated Skills and Genres

At Barbara's school, although the third grade teachers were required to work with the Writing Project, several had been consulted in the planning and expressed interest in an inquiry-based approach to writing. However, for these teachers, the pressure to prepare students to become proficient on the state tests and to teach the mandated skill of the week and genre of the month began to take precedence over what was initially intended.

Barbara had a 15-day contract for five months of work.

Barbara Batton found herself in a consulting situation that did not allow time for conversations to take place. This time crunch left Barbara in the uncomfortable position of appearing to be an outside expert, rather than a collaborative partner. In the current culture of high-stakes accountability, it is tempting to cede the role of skilled practitioner to an outside consultant. The teachers at Barbara's school were under pressure and, she learned after a few weeks, wanted her to demonstrate one-size-fits-all strategies. Like Laura, Barbara found herself doing demonstration teaching and wondering how effective she was.

The school's principal and NYCWP Director Nancy Mintz agreed that Barbara would work with five third-grade teachers for 15 days over five months on generating writing, using inquiry-based and writing-to-learn strategies. Because she did not want to lose any of the limited time she'd have in the school and was unsure of what to expect on the first day, Barbara came prepared with ideas and materials. These ideas were based

on an intensive study of inquiry-based learning in which both she and Laura Schwartzberg had enthusiastically participated. Although the ideas and materials themselves were excellent tools for embarking on inquiry-based learning with children and, quite fortuitously, were related to a field trip the third graders were taking the following week, the essential problem was that they represented Barbara's vision, rather than being rooted in an understanding of what this particular group of teachers was willing to commit to. One 45-minute meeting in which the TC explains what she has to offer and teachers, as they did with Barbara, express excitement over what she proposes is insufficient for gaining that understanding. Every TC has "been there." The principal introduces us to teachers as a consultant from the Writing Project, and the teachers look at us expectantly, waiting to see what we have to offer. We know that time is limited, so, when some interest is expressed, we are tempted to jump in too soon with what we think fits and know has worked before. Sometimes, if we are lucky, our ideas may match up with what the teachers want for their students. When this is not the case, the best possible outcome is for teachers to express the disconnect and give the TC an opportunity to re-enter. In this case, it took an email from the grade leader for Barbara to learn what the teachers wanted to see from her. Barbara writes:

> The school is in a congested part of the city, surrounded by apartment buildings and many major thoroughfares. The building is not new and serves about 700 students, mostly Hispanic, in grades pre-K through 5. For the past decade, the school has been designated as a School in Need of Improvement (SINI) and is in a constant state of struggle to be removed from that list. Classes are heterogeneously mixed, except for an English Language Learners (ELL) class and a Collaborative Team Teaching (CTT) class, which consists of a general education and a special education teacher, in each grade.
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> On that very first visit in October, I was able to meet with the third grade teachers with whom I would be working. I had no idea what would be expected of me then, but I

came prepared with a shopping cart full of different kinds of squash, gourds, and pumpkins, and a plan for how to begin, just in case.

At the meeting, I spoke about inquiry-based teaching and learning and "inquiry acts" (Pataray-Ching & Roberson, 2002, pp. 498-505) as acts of creativity that allow students to move from what is known or familiar to construct something new using creativity and imagination. I talked about various writing forms we might employ that were more speculative and exploratory than product-driven. The teachers responded to my talk about inquiry, sharing their own experiences and frames of reference. They also talked about being tired of having students write memoirs about "small moments," which they had done since September, and said they wanted to try other kinds of writing with their students. I learned during the meeting that the school followed a pacing calendar of monthly literacy genres, as is common in many New York City elementary and middle schools, and that October's writing genre was nonfiction. A field trip to a pumpkin farm was scheduled for the following week, and there was enthusiastic approval for observation and description of natural objects as a starting place for the inquiry work. That first visit I went to all five classes and introduced the objects and demonstrated the use of double-entry writing format as a way of recording and describing sensory-based observations.

Unfortunately, the initial meeting described above was the only time I ever met with the teachers as a whole group. There was never an opportunity to talk with each classroom teacher. I also sensed a tension between the value of slow, sustained inquiry and the ever-present demands of the school's pacing calendar.

> On my second visit to the school, I discovered teachers had to follow another literacy mandate, "the skill of the week." That week the skill was "to compare and contrast," which I incorporated into what I planned to do with each class. The literacy coach took over each class during the final 15 minutes of each 45-minute period, enabling me to meet with each teacher. Unfortunately, it was the one and only time that happened.

During those 15-minute meetings, Barbara learned that the teachers wanted her to focus on essay writing in preparation for the New York State English Language Arts (ELA) exam. Still maintaining the theme of inquiry-based learning, she did help students to generate essays and booklets that the school's literacy coach photographed and displayed on the hallway bulletin board. Barbara was surprised to learn soon after that there was a mismatch in understanding between her and the teachers.

> On December 1, I received an email from the grade leader, written "on behalf of the third grade." The email stated: "During our grade meeting last week we came up with a set of goals and objectives that we would like you to keep in mind during our December writing sessions." What struck me the most was the request that the inquiry portion of my lessons with students be limited to five minutes, despite their statement that "We absolutely love the way you expose the children to things they would otherwise never see."
>
> I was stunned because I really thought things had been going well—even though I'd had no real communication with the teachers, no time set aside to meet with them, plan together, or gain feedback from them. I only assumed things were going well based on my rapport with the students, who seemed to enjoy the times I came to visit immensely. Obviously, I was wrong to judge my work based on the students' response. I failed to remember that

this work is not just about the students and me having a good or meaningful time together. It is first and foremost professional development work, work enacted alongside and with teachers. However, in this school, there was no opportunity to work alongside or with the teachers in any real or sustained way. I had begun with my own agenda, putting inquiry and writing to learn at the forefront, but without insisting on teacher feedback. Ironically, even though my initial reaction was to be stunned by the email, it felt like I had finally gotten some kind of response and re-direction. As a result, I was forced to re-enter and start over, this time on the teachers' terms, not mine.

After receiving the grade leader's email, I wrote back to all of the third grade teachers, thanking them for sharing their thoughts about the work and for their suggestions and feedback. For the rest of my weekly visits to the school, I followed the teachers' requests. During my final school visit, the entire third grade gathered together and participated in a culminating event, "A Writing Celebration."

Fortunately, before leaving, I was able to talk with the teachers, who elaborated on what they learned from the work. The teachers commented that they had seen the value of inquiry-based learning and of exposing the children to new materials and ways of working. Despite these positive responses, the teachers also wrote that they would have liked to have seen more explicitly structured writing lessons. However, I do believe the teachers witnessed another approach to teaching during my work with their students, one they might attribute to the value of inquiry-based teaching and learning, despite their impatience with its slower pace and lack of a more easily replicated formula, and in spite of the weekly and monthly

> curriculum mandates. Perhaps these are just small beginnings but with more time, these understandings could have been more developed. Lack of time and space for professional development work was the biggest problem.
>
> If I had been able to actually consult with the third grade teachers on a regular basis, we might have been able to plan a reading and writing investigation together, one that the teachers would have sustained even when I was not present. The only time there was a continuity of the work I initiated was during the first project, the three-paragraph essay book of drawings and writing. Ironically, it was right after the completion of that seemingly successful study that I was forced to revise and re-enter through another door.

Barbara's skill as a veteran teacher and TC is evident in the way she was able to regroup with strategies that were aligned with the teachers' requests outlined in the email while still offering what she knew to be effective inquiry-based practices that would keep the students' excitement and curiosity alive. The fact that the grade leader bothered to send the email also suggests that, despite any initial misunderstandings, the teachers saw that she had a lot to offer and wanted to learn from her.

Entry in a Minefield of Mandates: The Delicate Work of Professional Development

Entering a school as an outside consultant requires listening to the educators who comprise the school community, assessing their knowledge, interests, and concerns in relation to the professional development you are offering. Looking across these four stories, it is also clear that entry often necessitates re-entry. For each of TCs re-entry decisions were made based on listening to constituents and recalibrating approaches.
And regardless, when collaboration was not achievable and the TC did most of the planning and teaching, it is not at all clear that there would be a lasting effect on teachers' practices.

Professional conversations are at the heart of what Sonia Nieto (2003) refers to as the "intellectual work" (p. 4) of teaching; work that is collaborative in nature and "builds on teachers' professionalism and encourages their intellectual activity" (p. 6). Barbara did not have the opportunity to follow the NYCWP guiding principle of beginning her work by observing teachers in their classrooms, getting to know them through conversations, inviting them to collaborate, and then jointly planning and reflecting on the work. And beyond the fifteen-minutes she spent with each teacher on her second visit to the school, no designated time outside the classroom was ever provided for her to meet with the teachers. For Laura, who did have time with the teachers on her first visit to the school and then a regularly scheduled prep period with three of the teachers, the conversations they had were in competition with multiple other professional development commitments. And by mid-year, conversations more closely related to the standardized test, took precedence. Both Barbara and Laura sought ways to work within the confines of their schools. But their effectiveness, compared with that of Diane and Susannah, very different from that of TCs who have more time to collaborate and hold the kinds of professional conversations with teachers that Nieto refers to—in Susannah's case, through meetings with teachers before and after school and during the four cross-network workshops; in Diane's, a multi-year consultancy, through co-planning the curricular fairs and with the chance to facilitate an inservice course at her school.

Writing Project TCs will continue to work in schools where there is pressure to raise test scores or risk the threat of closure. They will be in schools where the curricular demands and time constraints are so rigid that it doesn't seem possible to do anything more than take over the class and hope the teacher will learn something. In each instance the TC can—and must—be flexible and adaptable, but not to the point where her work becomes formulaic and prescriptive or where we risk losing our very identity as an organization. The NYCWP's work, which is so deeply rooted in dialogue, reflection, and collaboration, can help teachers see both what is possible within the mandates and past the mandates and learn ways of teaching that leave room for voice and imagination—both their students' and their own.

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PART 4. SUPPORT FOR SITE-BASED TEACHER-CONSULTANTS

CHAPTER 11

Growing into Technology: NYCWP TCs Adopt 21st Century Literacy

Felicia George

Over twelve years ago, out of the frustration I experienced as I tried to move a group of dedicated, hard working school-based teacher-consultants (TCs) into the world of multi-media composing and creating, I wrote the following in my journal:

> After three years of planning and running Advanced Institutes focused on exploring technology supported media as other forms of literacy, we, as a site, haven't moved beyond where we were in that first year in terms of the numbers of teacher-consultants who are using technology with teachers in their classrooms. Why haven't they jumped on this opportunity to expand their own knowledge and include teaching 21st Century literacies in their work? Certainly the TCs use computers all the time for professional and personal purposes. So, why don't they make that next step and connect it to their work with teachers and students?

As an associate director at our site, I shared the title of Tech Liaison with Paul Allison, a high school English teacher and national pioneer in integrating technology and teaching.[30] Together we were responsible for supporting and guiding the development

[30] In 2003 Paul began to work with a group of teachers to build a web space, YouthVoices, bringing students together to share and create a range of compositions in a variety of media. The website includes a space for collaborative development of instructional guides for using the space. He also meets regularly with a core group of four NYC teachers on Tech Thursdays to support each other in using YouthVoices and other technology with their students. Paul also co-facilitates a weekly webcast, *Teachers Teaching Teachers*, which has attracted an international audience of educators eager to discuss innovative technology for classroom use.

of the New York City Writing Project's technology program. No easy task. Although ours is one of the oldest sites of the National Writing Project and has a reputation for providing quality professional development, only a handful of our veteran TCs were bringing technology into their school-based consulting or the inservice workshops they facilitated.

This is a story of change, of how a group of competent and experienced but technology- resistant professional educators gradually came to embrace the new and initially uncomfortable behaviors and approaches that technology demands. It is also a story of leadership and the various roles played by directors, TCs and teachers—some steering the course, others taking charge of specific tasks, and others offering support along the way—as we brought 21st Century literacy into our work with teachers and students.

The issue of bringing technology and other "new" knowledge to a group of seasoned TCs has implications that will not go away even as teachers raised in the age of hand-held digital devices, Twitter and Instagram join our consulting team. Technology will continue to evolve and demand new learning. Hopefully what we have understood from our experience encouraging reluctant TCs to adopt new technologies will be useful for educating TCs and teachers about technological innovation in the future.

My role as associate director responsible for developing our site's technology programs alternated between that of co-pilot and attendant, co-leading and making sure that everything was in place. Ultimately, though, it was the persistent use of technology to accomplish real and practical tasks that won over the day. And while what follows holds the potential of being a roadmap, nothing was linear about this journey.

Beginnings: The Role of Site Leadership

Why Technology: Technology is a powerful tool of communication and expression impacting both teaching and learning. As early as the mid 1990's our TCs understood the arguments for technology. Technology for educational purposes matched our site's core beliefs in access and equity—values that lead to student empowerment. Online discourse puts students at the center of discussion allowing them equal opportunity and space to make their voices "heard." In using some of the on-line forums available at the

time (Nicenet[31] and Speakeasy[32]) the TCs saw classroom conversations shift from a back-and-forth dialogue with the teacher to more inclusive and cross-class dialogues. They understood the educational benefits –an ability to publish more easily, access to expanded audience and readership for a student's writing, and the opportunity to connect with ideas and people across time and distance. They acknowledged that digital tools offered new venues for research, writing, and composing and had already changed the ways communication occurred. But even with these understandings, bringing technology into their consulting proved not easy.

The Context of our Work: Sources of Resistance

The New York City Writing Project Teacher-Consultant: Most of our site-based TCs did not grow up using I pads, smart phones, or digital cameras. They were not the multi-tasking, social networking digital natives that Marc Prensky described. (Prensky, 2001)

As school-based TCs working with teachers within their classrooms, TCs suggest ideas for curriculum and resources based on what the teacher is attempting to accomplish with students. They do not present packages of instruction and if teachers aren't asking for support in using technology, they don't push it. The NYCWP TCs do not push writing either, but because they understand the value of writing—how it transformed their own work lives and contributed to students' growth as learners—they find ways to bring writing to the forefront of their work with teachers. As experienced teachers no longer working in classrooms of their own, the TCs had not had similarly transformative experiences using technology with students. Given who the TCs were, it was no surprise that they would not immediately adopt new digital tools as their tools of choice in consulting.

The Public School System: In the New York City public schools, although there is an official policy requiring the use of technology for instruction, the tools and access range in availability and reliability. So, even though most schools are equipped with computer

[31] Nicenet was a free online classroom oriented discussion forum that allowed teachers to set up spaces for shared conversations about selected topics.
[32] Speakeasy was another online discussion form first used by the NWP for teachers to share their writing and have conversations across space and time.

labs or lap top carts, teachers who want to use technology regularly run into problems with scheduling and equipment use, blocked websites, and unreliable Internet connections.

The TCs' unfamiliarity with the tools coupled with ill-equipped schools where some worked posed stumbling blocks to our moving into 21st Century literacies. This was the case even though the TCs understood the compelling reasons for using technology.

First Steps: 1998-1999

Our first encounters with technology as a site began about the same time that I joined the NYCWP as a TC in the fall of 1999. Three things happened almost simultaneously—a group of seven NYCWP TCs and site administrators participated in a five-day technology institute at the *Center for Educational Technology Institute*, in Middlebury, Vermont; upon returning home our directors initiated an online discussion forum led by experienced TC Ed Osterman; and Paul Alison, the teacher who was already doing extensive technology work with students in his school, emerged as the leader for our technology program and of the technology group that began meeting that year.

The NYCWP Listserv: Ed was asked to moderate a Listserv on the Lehman College server in part because of his early participation in technology programs and his considerable skill as a facilitator. Although Ed would never see himself as a "tech guru," the Listserv supported work he was already comfortable with and knew much about and led to leadership roles in online conversations both nationally and locally.

Next steps: 2000-2004

In the summer of 2000, Paul co-led the first of many advanced technology institutes for Writing Project teachers and school-based TCs. I was at first a participant and then, in summer 2002, a co-leader. Each of these Institutes integrated writing project approaches—literature circles, writing to learn strategies, freewriting, poetry work—with what were then the latest innovations in technology – hypertextopia, blogging, flash. Like all Writing Project Summer Institutes, every session included explicit time for the participants to use the various web-based tools to explore how technology could

support their particular commitments and interests as urban educators. This hands-on practice was a crucial step towards teachers recognizing the potential and value of this medium.

Although teachers who participated in these institutes were committed to using technology for instruction in their classrooms, for our school-based TCs—those most responsible for carrying our work to others—the work progressed more slowly. In 2003, Project Director Nancy Mintz decided that one way to move the school-based TCs forward was to require an online component in all NYCWP inservice courses and seminars. Only TC Barbara Martz and her co-facilitator Sally O'Connell, a teacher already drawn to technology, began using Nicenet in their on-site inservice seminar. So much for mandates!

Persistence: In fall 2004, I asked Barbara to join me in presenting the Nicenet program to the group of school-based TCs at one of our Friday meetings. I hoped a fellow TC sharing her experience in an inservice course would be more convincing than having one of the directors or our teacher/tech converts do this. It worked. Soon after, three of the TCs reported that they had set up Nicenet sites for their inservice seminars. Soon after a group of the school-based TCs joined the *First Saturdays Weblogs and Beyond* workshops that were part of a Technology Initiative grant several of us wrote. Oddly enough, at the very moment that more of the school-based TCs began experiments in their inservice courses with technology, funding at the NYC Department of Education (DOE) shifted and we no longer were funded to offer afterschool inservice courses at each school where we worked on-site. So much for progress!

Yet the need to develop our openness to technology remained. In spring 2005, Nancy made technology a regular feature of our Friday TC meetings. That year we began the three-year Technology Initiative program funded by NWP with monthly Saturday meetings attended by TCs and writing project teachers. School-based TCs used what they were learning in these seminars to share information about technology programs at our Friday meetings, and we set up a blog for TCs to respond to articles from our reading initiative program. It seemed we were well on our way.

We plateau: Over the next few years, pressing issues related to repeated restructuring efforts by the NYC DOE resulted in no more than three or four Friday sessions a year

devoted to technology tools. And there was so much to choose from as Paul introduced us to webquests and discussion boards, among other technology tools. Even though we focused on tools that were easily accessible and had the most potential for our own use, these meetings were too few and far between to have much impact. Perhaps had we used a specific program to do our actual work—something that eventually did do—we'd have been less sidetracked by the demands of other initiatives. But in keeping with our belief and Paul's model in providing multiple options so that each individual can find his or her own entry point, it did not occur to us to limit our exploration to a specific tool.

My role: When introducing digital formats to the TCs, we turned to practices rooted in Writing Project professional development principles and beliefs. I designed workshops that asked TCs to use computers just as we ask teachers to write in the workshops we offer. My plans included time for TCs to sit in front of a computer and explore a particular tool I had learned. I also asked the TCs to reflect on what they were doing as they used the technology and after they used particular tools. I made room for them to bring their expertise and knowledge into the room and for them to confront the issues that made the use of technology uncomfortable or a challenge in their consulting.

While Paul kept introducing us to the richness of what was possible, I became the mediator, bringing new tools to our TCs in useable bits that they could apply to their own learning. Recognizing the importance of practice, I eventually slowed down and began using the same tool over and over for different tasks to build up comfort and familiarity. Most of what I did with the TCs occurred on Fridays but as a site we also used other opportunities, such as tech retreats, institutes and Saturday workshops, to provide TCs and teachers continued practice with evolving technology tools. Both stances, the innovation and persistence, were necessary.

Connecting the Use of Technology with the TCs' Interests and Needs – A Turning Point: 2006–2008

In fall 2006 we began the school year with the question—What lies beyond Nicenet? We found an answer in an easily accessible Web 2.0 WIKI tool called Google Documents (now Google Drive). For years our school-based TCs intended to update and revise the collection of inservice presentations that filled our files. But there was never time at our weekly Fridays at the Project office to do this. Then in December

2006, Gina Moss, a school-based TC, led a Friday meeting on using Google Documents. Gina and I had learned about this amazing program for collaborative writing at a technology advanced institute. Gina had used it in a course and was more familiar with its features than I was, so I asked her to take the lead on presenting it. Once again, it didn't hurt for the other TCs to learn from a peer about this new tool.

For the TCs who couldn't understand why they would ever blog or participate on a discussion board, this was the turning point. We began collecting on the Internet inservice presentation handouts and informational sheets that were kept in an overstuffed file cabinet that we could only get to by making a trip to our office in the Bronx. At a Google Docs follow-up session at the next Friday meeting we were able to upload the most used presentation documents and set up guidelines for revision, adding document collaborators (those who could view and edit a posted document), and posting materials. We were on a roll.

By fall 2007 we were sharing our Friday TC meeting notes via Google Docs making it possible for everyone in the TC group to edit and add to the accuracy of this record. We also began using Google Groups for our professional literature circle discussions[33] about readings on language and other topics we chose to study throughout the year. In 2009 we posted–scheduled events for our Friday TC meetings on Google Calendar for everyone to access. Many TCs also began to use tools like Ning, VoiceThread, and Youth Voices. The move toward using Google applications made clear that our TCs were willing to struggle with new tools when it was within their interests to do so. And that made sense.

Yet there was still a gap between what the TCs were comfortable doing themselves, the possibilities offered by technology, and what we bring to our consulting work with teachers.

[33] One feature of our Friday meetings is to read a text as a full group or to divide into smaller groups to read different texts on a topic or issue that is relevant to our work. For a more detailed description of this practice see Ed Osterman's *Supporting On-Site Teacher-Consultants: New York City Writing Project's Community of Learners* 2008 NWP Monograph.

Leaders Who Push Technology Forward – Paul Allison, Sally O'Connell, Patsy Wooters

You could say it is a contradiction that our site is known among NWP sites for its leadership in technology used in the classroom. But that is because of the few, not the many. Two teachers and a school-based TC led the way.

Paul: Paul Allison, participated in the 1985 Summer Invitational. He brought technology to his teaching in the early 1990s and since then has worked consistently in his classroom with each new innovation from web design to podcasting and multimedia production. Paul's approaches to using technology are grounded in composing theory and NYCWP teaching practices and beliefs, all of which are evident in the ways he structures his work with teachers and his high school students. In a blog posting he describes what it means to freewrite and cites the theoretical work on which this process is based.

> A good place to begin blogging with students is with asking them to freewrite about a self-selected question. This is also how I introduce blogging to students. "Let's start by writing non-stop, anything that comes into your head about anything that is important to you right now." It takes some time each year, with each class to get students to believe that I mean this, that I really do want them to write about something that they care about, not just what their teachers want them to write. Peter Elbow's description of freewriting in *Writing Without Teachers* (1973) is still a good place to begin (Allison n.d.).

As the site Technology Liaison Paul consistently brought his understandings of technology in the classroom to Writing Project teachers through summer institutes, technology advisory committee meetings, technology retreats, and presentations at Friday TC meetings. He met regularly with site directors to talk about where we needed to be in our thinking and practice and made available to us the sites he developed and co-moderates, YouthVoices and Teachers Teaching Teachers.

Sally: To expand our site's capacity in technology, we needed to find teachers who would adopt the use of technology as Paul had. Sally O'Connell a teacher with elementary certification, who taught a parenting class for high school students with children, had co-led the inservice courses with TC Barbara Martz. Sally began using Nicenet in her parenting class and found that when students responded to a prompt or reading on the discussion board, her voice was no longer at the center as it had been in face-to-face classroom conversations. What she had tried to accomplish in the classroom, creating a dialogue among students where she did not mediate the discussion, was happening naturally online. Sally documented her work with students and her growing tech leadership in a posting during a Summer Institute:

> About 4 years ago I wanted my students to use the computer for writing—we had a lab that wasn't used—and in need of attention. There was no Internet access—I didn't know much about computers—only using mine at home for emailing family members and friends. I fixed up the lab—learning things out of need, brought my students in and off we went.
>
> Even with the Internet connection, I virtually had the place to myself. I helped teachers hook up their classroom computers to the Internet, set up a library computer hub and became one of the people "on call" for problems as they arose. Often I didn't know how to fix a problem, but that's where my learning curve took a sharp turn upward. I learned out of necessity (O'Connell, 2003).

In the summer of 2003 Paul and I asked Sally to co-lead our advanced technology institute.[34] Sally's experiences as institute co-leader and growing confidence with

[34] In the Advanced Technology Institute, *Next Steps in Literature and Technology*, we integrated Writing Project literacy practices like Literature Circles (Daniels, 2002) and Writing Marathons with digital work. Participants read non-linear short stories by Jorge Luis Borges that could be seen as forerunners to what online authors are able to create with hypertext programs. We partnered an assigned reading of Borges' story "Garden of Forking Paths" with a real time writing marathon in which institute participants visited community gardens and then in the computer lab turned their writings into hypertext stories using a program known as Storyspace. The days were full with writing, group sharing or discussion,

technology led to her development as a leader among her colleagues. And Sally had a lab to go back to—a place to try out what she was learning in the courses and institutes.

Patsy: In addition to working as a school-based TC in a high school, Patsy Wooters coordinated our sites participation in the NWP National Reading Initiative. The NYCWP Teachers who were part of the initiative lived and worked in every corner of the city so to sustain their continued participation, Patsy with my help, created a blog thereby providing the group with a site to regularly speak and work with one another. From here Patsy moved on to direct work with students. She brought flash drives to the classrooms where she consulted, so that students without Internet access at home could continue to work on their writing and add what they saved to Nicenet when they returned to class. It was natural for her to move to using Nicenet as an online space for collaborative writing and for responding to student writing.[35]

A TC Transformed With Support From a Teacher: Debra Freeman

For the TCs hesitant about technology, exposure, practice and the opportunity to use the tools for real purposes needed to come together before they would begin to use new approaches and tools in their consulting. But from some of the TCs this was not enough. TC Debra Freeman was one of the more hesitant about using technology with teachers.

Adept at using the latest technology in her personal life, Debra had fun with the tools we introduced in Friday meetings but never took these to her consulting work. In response to a question about using a WIKI in NYCWP courses she tells why: "I would feel uncomfortable entering into this without some degree of confidence that I could explain it and take teachers through it prior to asking them to do it on their own."

Five years after writing the above, after a session where I introduced VoiceThread to the TCs, Debra asked me to introduce the program to a teacher with whom she was

exploring software, using software to compose and reflections both on composing with technology and implications for the teachers' classrooms.

[35] Several TCs had taken up the challenges that technology presented and were using WIKIs, discussion boards, Nicenet, VoiceThread, Google Documents and Google Groups with teachers and students. The NWP/Google sponsored *Letters to Our Next President* project in 2008-2009 was an impetus to several TCs and some made use of these tools beyond this project.

working closely. The teacher, Margie Segal,[36] already used technology in her classroom and often worked with visuals to illustrate historical events for her special education students. Debra recognized in VoiceThread a natural medium for Margie. Margie loved VoiceThread and through its use, Debra became more involved in the ways Margie used technology in the classroom. Debra was able to support Margie's interests as she learned more about technology and her confidence using digital tools for instruction grew.

That spring, Debra and Margie paired up to co-facilitate a 10- session inservice course, *An Inquiry into Technology*, at Margie's school. It is worth noting that Debra's motives were many fold—some related to technology, some not. She was concerned about how dispirited many of the school's young teachers were about their students' abilities. She saw technology as a way to attract these younger more tech-savvy teachers to the Writing Project, and the Writing Project as a way to encourage teachers to build on students' interests and strengths; and to use Web 2.0 tools as a way to bring interactive, writing-intensive, and project-based activities to their classrooms.

Given the initial motivation for this inservice, one planned outcome was that the teachers learn about their students' knowledge, in this instance, of technology. The group developed a technology survey for students and the responses they received dispelled a common misconception: "That our urban students had little access to technology in their lives." The discovery that almost all of the students had internet access at home led to discussions about how teachers might tap into students' interest in social networking and considering how assignments might invite the students to use the web for academic purposes.

Veteran, tech-shy TC Debra shared this realization at the end of the course: "…at the heart of [the learning teachers did during the course] was the idea that we [teachers], like our students, come to new ideas slowly and with resistance, but if we trust that we can be teacher-learners, that we can learn from our own mistakes, and that our students have something to offer, our classrooms will become places for shared learning and

[36] Margie's students produced several VoiceThread projects and she developed her own web space for students to post. Posts to her *AVA Today* blog asked students to think of resolutions for the New Year, share a six-sentence story and respond to Walter Dean Myers' depiction of Harlem.

better equipped to take our students into the 21st Century" (Freeman, 2009, p. 82). The *we* Debra refers to is the community of teachers who participated in the seminar. However, Debra's words also illustrate what is true about TCs, both the NYC school-based TCs and TCs at other sites. Although we see ourselves as risk-takers and learners, the experience of working with what is unfamiliar, and perhaps uncomfortable forces us to re-acquaint ourselves with the notion of what it means to learn something new.

What's Worked and Where We Are Now: The Journey Continues

Our site's directors started out thinking that our emailing, word processing, school-based TCs would adopt the newer tools of technology with the same kind of openness and inventiveness with which they implemented ideas and approaches as teacher participants in the Writing Project. When we realized that the TCs' attachment to the traditional paper and pen literacy tools that gave them voice as teachers and now teacher-consultants were not easily replaced, we shifted our emphasis from product to process, providing time and support for the TCs to practice using digital literacy tools in ways that would help them experience the tools' impact on learning. Allowing multiple and repeated opportunities for TCs to "play" with technology in risk-free situations where they could receive immediate support was essential. Integrating the technology into the TCs' daily work, reflecting on how it changes composing and communicating, and honoring the questions and the knowledge that each person brought to these new experiences helped bring about some changes. Remembering that TCs, like teachers and students, are willing to do the hard task of learning a new skill or relearning ways to approach an old skill works best when the purposes are real and the practical uses are evident. Some of what happened was deliberate; some of what happened was by chance or circumstance, and almost everything we learned, we learned along the way.

As we move forward we have to remember that not everyone is or should be expected to be at the same level in terms of their knowledge and ease with using technology. For the individual and for the community the path is never even or a straight line; and there will setbacks and pauses. What allows us to move past these is a persistence grounded in our belief in the capacity of colleagues to learn and take on the difficult challenges of their positions.

Technology tools will continue to evolve and require new learning. All of us who work as TCs will need to be prepared to motivate the teachers we work with to explore and use these latest digital literacy tools with students. This is the way we will stay current and the way we push for educational equity.

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CHAPTER 12

New Leadership for Renewal and Change in an Experienced Teacher-Consultant Group

Linette Moorman

The on-site professional development program of the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) is well documented in two previous NWP monographs. In *On-site Consulting: New York City Writing Project*, Mintz and Stein (2002) describe the nature of their inservice work in two different schools. In the monograph *Supporting On-site Teacher-Consultants: New York City Writing Project's Community of Learners*, Osterman (2008) demonstrates how a regularly scheduled day of support for our teacher-consultants (TCs) offered a safe, rigorous professional community that contributed to the success of the inservice work and to the professional identity of the consultants. In this chapter, I examine the ways I, as a new co-director of the site and an insider in the Writing Project's professional development efforts, worked to create change in a longstanding, well-established program.

Background

In 1981, supported by a federal Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education grant, the NYCWP instituted a professional development program based in four New York City high schools. In each school, the program had two components: an on-site after-school graduate seminar in the teaching of writing for interested teachers and, for two days each week, the services of a New York City teacher released from the district to the Writing Project to work on site as a TC alongside teachers in their classrooms. A third and critical component of this model was ongoing support for the site-based TCs. Every Friday they met at the Writing Project office at Lehman College in the Bronx to prepare materials and resources for their individual work with teachers, co-plan for the after-school graduate seminars, and provide support for one another.

In 1984, when federal funding ended, the NYC Board of Education became the primary funder of the inservice program. Over the next 15 years, many more schools received our on-site services, and the group of teachers released to the NYCWP grew in number.

Established Routines and Rituals

The close-knit group of TCs that met on Fridays established regular routines that allowed them to work collaboratively in a learning community that met their needs. One of the key activities of Fridays was the "go-round." In their group meeting, the TCs took turns sharing their experiences in schools. Sometimes they shared successes, but often they raised the issues they were confronting, sought advice from the group, and worked collaboratively to think through ways to address their challenges. The go-round, especially in the early days of doing this work, was a necessity. It provided a trusted, supportive, collegial circle of friends that teachers, now in a new role, saw as a "lifeline" (Osterman, 2008, p. 6) as they honed their skills as on-site TCs. But the go-round could also become a complaint session without recourse, in which, because no structure was in place to make visible the answers that were not on the tip of someone's tongue, the collaborative problem solving went nowhere.

That one day a week at the NYCWP necessitated an intense level of *doing*—of developing and preparing materials, publishing anthologies of teacher and student writing, and helping one another with a variety of issues. As the demand for our work grew, Fridays were often packed with activity. Even for this energetic and committed group of TCs, the pace could be overwhelming.

External and Internal Changes

In the early to mid-1990s, enormous changes were occurring throughout the NYC school system. A number of initiatives were being carried out to restructure some of the city's struggling high schools. Small schools with community and corporate affiliations were established, and the old model of junior high schools was changing to a new model of middle schools. In addition, changes in assessments at all levels of the school system and the standards and accountability movement were creating anxiety in some schools. One outcome of this anxiety was that teachers of all subject areas and at all levels became aware of the need to strengthen their students' writing performance.

Suddenly there was a growing interest in the Writing Project's inservice programs and increased opportunities to expand our work, not only in the high schools, but also in the middle and elementary schools. To meet these demands, the number of New York City teachers released to the Writing Project to serve as site-based TCs grew quickly from seven to 17. By 1997, we were working in 22 high schools, eight middle schools, and six elementary schools across the five boroughs of New York City.

Change in New York City Writing Project Leadership

In 1995, I became one of the directors of the NYCWP. I had been actively involved in Writing Project continuity and inservice activities as a classroom teacher since participating in the Invitational Summer Institute in 1980. In 1990, I began working at the NYCWP full time as a co-director of the Junior High School Writing and Learning Project, a grant-funded program. Now, as one of the directors of our site, I took over the leadership of the expanding TCs group and coordination of our site-based professional development program.

Because of the rapid expansion of the TC group, which included TCs from grades K–12—some highly accomplished and long-term, others brand new to the role—I had three major concerns:

1. How could we become one cohesive and productive on-site TC community?
2. How could we move in new directions and put in place some new structures while honoring and respecting the tremendous work that had built a highly successful program?
3. How could we make Fridays more productive, using issues raised in the problem-solving go-rounds as a starting place for study, for initiating inquiry-based learning endeavors?

The Role of Leadership in Re-Envisioning

As a new director who recognized the need for change, I also understood that change efforts imposed from outside, if they did not respect or acknowledge local knowledge, usually were defeated or, at best, received half-hearted support. As I considered plans

for making changes in the Friday meetings, I thought about the people with whom I would be working. I saw a group of dynamic, energetic, committed individuals. I was reminded that each on-site TC arrived at the NYCWP with a personal history of accomplishments as a successful classroom teacher and a passionate believer in human potential to learn. Each held strong personal beliefs about the power of literacy in people's lives. Each held strong beliefs about students' right to learn to use writing effectively for a variety of purposes in their lives. Each was dedicated to making a difference in the professional lives of other teachers.

I began to envision Fridays at the NYCWP as having the potential of Barry Lopez's (1992) idea of *querencia*. *Querencia*, as used in Spain, refers to "the spot in the bullring where a wounded bull goes to gather himself" (p. 39). For Lopez, *querencia* becomes "a place on the ground where one feels secure" (p. 39). In its broadest sense, it includes not only a sense of place, but "knowledge of what is inviolate about the relationship between a people and the place they occupy..." (p. 40). Fridays had to remain the place where the TCs found safety in learning about themselves and their work and could look closely at their own performance as on-site consultants. Time for the practical work—of using the resources of the Writing Project to prepare materials and work collaboratively with colleagues to refine their individual practice as TCs—had to continue. Most of all, Fridays had to provide opportunities to re-engage the thinking behind this work, so that each day the TCs could go out to the schools re-energized to deal with this not-so-easy work. I felt we needed to re-balance our time on Fridays to engage in dialogue about the principles, beliefs, and core values that inform and guide our work:

- What does it mean to be a teacher of other teachers?
- What does it mean to anchor our professional development model in the belief that teachers bring knowledge, expertise, and leadership to their practice?
- How are the values of commitment to human capacity, social justice, the power of democratic communities, and transformative work for all persons enacted in our work in schools?

We also needed to make time for reading a variety of materials that would serve as lenses to study our work in order to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to provide effective professional development in the varied contexts in which we work. (For a bibliography of our reading, see Osterman, 2008, Appendix C, p. 23).

As a new leader of this group, I had to balance valuing the work that had established a high-quality professional development program while making some necessary changes. This newly expanded group of on-site TCs needed to remake the "collaborative culture" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, pp. 48–49) of Fridays to allow for the contributions of every member of the group. The challenge was to help the experienced long-term TCs be part of the change process rather than a hindrance. In this work, it was crucial to have the support of my co-director, Marcie Wolfe. Her vision and direct intervention in establishing my leadership were invaluable in helping the group accept my new role.

Honoring What Is and Inviting Rethinking

To lay the groundwork for change, I initiated an inquiry into the work of Fridays. On the first of two Fridays, through writing and storytelling, we revisited the history of the inservice program—generating charts of information documenting the accomplishments of Fridays and gathering the history of the program in the schools. This work gave the group the opportunity to acknowledge appreciatively what was in place. On the second Friday, we took the information from the first session and, placing it against the larger context of the NYCWP's goals and the current needs, raised the following questions:

- How effectively are the current routines and practices supporting these needs and goals?
- What has changed since the program began?
- Given the changing context and our goals as a Writing Project, what changes are needed to make Fridays a learning community that can better support the goals of the Writing Project's professional development work in schools?
- What do we need to do to use our time more efficiently on Fridays?

Some of the long-time TCs saw these questions as a threat to preserving what they had worked so hard to put in place. Although the inquiry of these Fridays was valuable, it exposed a growing resistance to thinking about change. The nagging question remained: How best could we make needed changes without alienating the experienced TCs?

Maintaining Valued Structures and Making Changes

As a new director, I listened for what was important to the group and helped them to reach consensus on the most highly valued structures and effective practices. These included:

1. the go-rounds—time to write, share their successes and challenges, and get feedback from a trusted circle of colleagues;
2. time to gather resources;
3. time to plan collaboratively; and
4. opportunities to continue their learning.

All of these would remain in place, but they could be approached differently.

I decided to focus on the content of the go-round. I wanted the TCs to recognize the content of what they wrote about as documentation of their work and data that we, as a community, could analyze, learn from, and use to inform our actions. To focus the writing on documenting what the consultants were doing was essential. Implementing an inquiry approach would require slowing down to examine more systematically the unique professional development program we were committed to growing and expanding.

Following the two-day inquiry, I realized that I needed a small team to assist me in planning for Fridays and leading the activities. In addition to collaborating with the Writing Project's associate directors, Ed Osterman and Linda Vereline, for each topic we studied, I invited two more TCs to plan with us, to give feedback and assist us in developing journal writing prompts for the weekly go-round. The prompts we developed focused on aspects of the TCs' practice. They asked the TCs to describe,

investigate, and reflect on some specific piece of their work. I wanted the journal writing to be valued as documentation of individual TCs' work. A writing prompt to start the new school year would be:

- As we begin a new year of working in the schools, write about your goals, plans, expectations, and concerns for your "entry" into a new school or for the continuation of work in the same school(s).

As the year's work progressed, the prompts would change to reflect the progression of the work or to focus on a particular area:

- Write about an area of success or challenge you are experiencing in your work. Provide a detailed description of the situation, the teacher, and the other personnel and of how you achieved this success or how you are addressing this challenge.
- Tell a story about a teacher whose classroom is being transformed by your work with the teacher and his or her students. Identify what's working and what you are learning from this experience.

The writing generated by the prompts created what we had hoped for. The documentation of the work and the thoughtful reflections provided data for learning and encouraged ongoing self-assessment of each TC's work and a collaborative approach to exploring possibilities for addressing a variety of issues.

Studying Our Site Work

In addition to the prompts, we needed procedures that would help us expand and reinforce established non-judgmental practices like those we used when working in a writing group. I drew on my knowledge of several Prospect Center documentary processes (Himley, 2002), which had the potential to "develop in all of the participants the habits of mind—the stance—of careful observation and description" (Himley &

Carini, 2000, p. 127). The kinds of prompts and the purposes behind them, along with the size of the group, necessitated different structures and protocols.

Each Friday session began with a 45-minute journal writing time in response to one of the prompts we had developed. We then worked in small groups of four or five TCs, using adaptations of various processes and protocols to ensure that every voice was heard and respected. Sometimes groups convened according to school levels—elementary, middle, or high school. At times, I made suggestions for groups based on my knowledge of the needs of particular TCs, for example, putting a new TC with a particular consultant whose work would form a model for the kind of on-site work expected of that new TC. At other times, TCs were free to choose to be part of a group or to form groups that would best meet their needs and interests.

Examining Stuck Places

Once TCs began to trust the journal writing as a space in which to both analyze and rethink their work, we began to experiment with multiple ways of examining their consulting practice. A mapping activity invited TCs to use drawing and writing to create a pictorial representation of their work, using these instructions:

- Draw a map of what your work looks like in a particular school.
- Put yourself in the map to explain your position in that school and show the people with whom you have working relationships. Be sure to include teachers, administrators, and students.

Working in small groups, we used a protocol adapted from other processes and protocols. In the first round, we simply described what we saw in the drawing. In the second, we gave our interpretative response grounded in what we saw. The presenter of the map confirmed our observations and then clarified or elaborated on the group's responses. In a final round, group members raised questions and shared ideas that opened up possibilities for rethinking and making changes.

Although some maps showed a high degree of TC involvement and interaction with teachers and administrators, others showed deeper involvement with fewer teachers

and little or no relationship with administrators. In some maps, TCs saw themselves in the center of the work, acting as a catalyst for change, while others saw themselves on the periphery looking in and waiting for the invitation from teachers to work with them.

One TC drew a particularly complex and revealing map of her work in a large, well-run traditional high school. She drew herself in the center of the social studies department, working with the assistant principal and the social studies teachers. One bubble indicated that she attended the monthly department meetings, where she demonstrated writing-to-learn strategies to help strengthen the learning of history. Another showed a significant number of teachers from the department participating in the on-site after-school seminar she taught. At a quick glance, it looked like a success story.

However, another part of her drawing showed a brick wall blocking access to teachers in the English department. This particular TC— a high school English teacher who had been successful as both a teacher and a TC in schools where the population was predominantly low-performing students of color, many of whom spoke English as a second language—felt stymied in her efforts in her assigned school to improve the teaching of writing for students with similar struggles. An uncooperative assistant principal of the English department and a group of seasoned, traditional teachers were not interested in anyone "tampering" with what was in place.

As members of the group focused on her work, they fully identified with the places of success and of perceived failure or frustration. Group members highlighted her accomplishments with the social studies department and, in a dialogue with her, opened up new possibilities for extending her work to other departments. These reflective practices forced all of us to look critically at issues to which we were either giving too much credence or overlooking. New questions emerged:

- Who are the teachers I am not reaching in my work, and why?
- What are my assumptions about this particular teacher or group of teachers in the building?

- How might I work to build relationships with members of the administration in order to gain stronger support for the teaching of writing?
- What can I do to make the Writing Project's work more visible in my school(s)?

These reflective practices were equally valuable to me as the director, who needed to stay informed of struggles and challenges, as well as successes, in working to support change in literacy practices. As a result of the documentation, the artifacts presented, and the discussions that ensued week after week, I gathered useful information about the working styles of individual TCs and how to provide the necessary support for particular individuals as well as for the group. What we learned helped us focus our attention on areas that needed improvement. For example, many of the documented experiences underscored the importance of school administrators to the success of our inservice program. I knew—from my own experiences as a school administrator in a New Jersey school district, from the work I did as a Writing Project TC in a restructuring district in Manhattan, and from successful partnerships with school administrators in the Junior High School Writing and Learning Project—the importance of helping the TCs shift their perceptions of administrators from adversaries to potential allies. I began providing one-on-one coaching to individual TCs to help them develop their confidence so they could effectively inform and educate their principals and advocate for the Writing Project. I strengthened our outreach to administrators by visiting the schools and having meetings with key administrators and the TCs. Although a few TCs remained skeptical about working with administrators, most developed strong working relationships that were beneficial to the program.

Leadership and the Study of Broader Issues

As TCs took a more inquiring stance toward their work, they began to raise questions about larger social and political issues in education that intersected with the professional development they were doing in schools and classrooms. One issue that emerged was the issue of accountability. The militaristic approaches of "cracking down on teachers" that they saw or heard about from teachers were unsettling. TCs observed that many administrators had no models for engaging teachers in productive dialogue about important educational issues. I saw this issue as an opportunity to examine our

own attitudes and assumptions about accountability and supervision in our Writing Project work. I also used this study to solidify my role with the group by offering the TCs ways to take leadership of the work we would be doing.

Throughout my time as director, I worked diligently to provide the TCs with opportunities to take on the leadership of specific studies, activities, and events. I offered the more experienced TCs opportunities to mentor newer TCs. When the opportunity to lead our accountability study arose, I consulted with the two associate directors and invited two TCs with whom I had a solid working relationship prior to becoming director to co-lead the study. In these early years as director, I needed allies from the group.

Although they were new on-site consultants, I chose Laura Schwartzberg, elementary TC, and Nancy Mintz, middle school TC, to join the planning team for the accountability inquiry. They were outspoken and supported me and my efforts; I trusted them to give honest feedback during the planning.

Once the accountability study leadership team was in place, we invited everyone from the TC group to recommend articles and other resources for the exploration of the topic. We compiled a number of articles from a wide range of sources and from a variety of stakeholders and groups, such as Fair Test and ASCD.[37] In exploring the topic, we wanted readings to ground us in the historical development of the issues and provide a range of opinions and perspectives on the subject.

To begin our investigation of the accountability movement, we reflected on the word *accountability* in order to share our varying perspectives. [38] The collection of personal reflections on the word and idea of *accountability* was rich with images, associations, memories, and experiences from our everyday lives. It immediately began to shift the

[37] The National Center for Fair and Open Testing, www.fairtest.org, and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, www.ascd.org.

[38] Reflection on a word is one of a family of descriptive processes developed by Pat Carini and other teachers at the Prospect Center in Vermont. It involves generating words and images that come to mind, writing them down, and then sharing them. "The point is to uncover some of the richness of layered meaning the word embodies" (Carini et al., 2010, p. 82).

ground on which many people stood regarding the idea of accountability. We then asked the group to write in response to the following questions:

- Where am I on this issue?
- What assumptions do I hold that might be getting in the way of my understanding of this issue?
- What more do I need to learn about this issue?

The impassioned conversations that followed the sharing of writing aired some of the hostility to what they were seeing and hearing in the schools in the name of accountability. In preparation for the continued exploration of accountability, we distributed a few articles to be read by the next week. The second week, we focused on deepening our understanding of the topic through journal writing and small-group discussion. We then asked the group to write in response to the following questions:

- What connections do I see to my work?
- How might this exploration of accountability and new knowledge from differing points of view assist me and be put to practical use in my school?

The sequence of activities was deliberate. The writing and readings that followed the reflection helped all of us to see how entangled the idea of accountability had become with testing, politics, and misunderstood notions of standards. Several of the TCs who initially entered the room saying, "I am not accountable to anyone," gained clarity in understanding that there was a hierarchy of accountability, even within an organization that valued egalitarianism and collaboration. I named the levels and people to whom I was accountable, beginning with Marcie Wolfe, the director of the Institute for Literacy Studies; the various administrators; and the funders, including the National Writing Project. The TCs began to create their own lists. We discovered that most of us want accountability in every area of our lives. We became acutely aware of the need for educative dialogue about accountability in education.

Accountability and Supervision

Two Fridays later, the issue of supervision took center stage as we discussed accountability in connection to the Writing Project's work and to our shared responsibility for holding ourselves accountable to the various stakeholders. Although the accountability planning team had anticipated some resistance to the idea of supervision, we underestimated the strong negative reaction it would cause. Supervision as most of us had experienced it in our teaching lives seemed incompatible with the ideals of working collaboratively in the democratic community of Fridays. The idea that the director of the Writing Project was a "supervisor" was irreconcilable with the views and experiences of the Writing Project leadership, particularly among the "old-timers" in the group. When a situation like this arises, it is extremely helpful to have a repertoire of processes that can hold the space for difficult conversations to happen. I turned here to the Writing Project's long-standing tradition of using story—writing about our own experiences—as a way to begin the study of a subject. I drew on the Prospect Center's idea of *summary*—of drawing points and ideas from our collective stories and, in particular, delineating where we agreed and where there were differences. Group members were invited to write a recollection addressing the following prompts:

- Write a recollection of a time you were supervised, or you supervised someone else.
- What made this a positive and productive relationship or the opposite?

The writing brought out different sides of the topic. We recalled experiences when supervision supported us in becoming stronger teachers. We told stories of times so negative we were happy to leave a particular school or see the supervisor move on. Sharing stories, listening without comment, and then building from the stories a summary that identified what made for positive or negative supervision, we realized that many of the positive characteristics were compatible with our beliefs about and experiences of Writing Project leadership. We recognized that the model of leadership we had come to identify in the Writing Project was a respectful, collaborative, caring, and supportive way of helping people to be highly productive.

By allowing everyone to be heard in the respectful culture of a writing community, the facilitators enabled the group to think about supervision and accountability as important aspects of leadership. As we continued to explore issues of leadership, authority, and power,[39] we gained greater understanding of our own assumptions and biases. The content of these sessions increased the TCs' knowledge, while the readings, processes, protocols, and strategies strengthened the integrity of the community and created a healthier work environment. We were becoming the "rigorous and reflective professional community" Osterman (2008, p. 1) writes about.

End-of-Year Reviews

Building from our study of accountability and supervision—and in addition to the reports TCs prepared for school administrators at the end of every school year—I put in place end-of-year reviews, an adaptation of the Prospect Center's "review of practice" (Himley, 2002; Himley & Carini, 2000). Each TC prepared a 30- to 40-minute presentation that focused on his or her work in one school or with one group of teachers (Osterman, 2008, Appendix E, pp. 11–12). The reviews of practice had the potential to serve two purposes. They would provide the TC community with an additional forum to learn about each person's work, and they would create an opportunity for supportive self-assessment.

I worked with the TC leadership team to develop written instructions for the preparation of these reviews but also to decide, with input from the whole group, on the focus for a particular year. In the eight years I was director, we tended to select topics based on pressing issues that emerged from the TCs' work in the schools, issues that felt important to the health and sustainability of our school-based professional development. One year, for example, we focused on our leadership in the inservice courses; another year the issue of making the Writing Project's work visible in the schools became our focus (Osterman, 2008, Appendix F, pp. 34–36). Initially I took on the role of coaching individual TCs in the preparation of their reviews, particularly those who were new to the group, were uncertain about what to do, or were fearful of being judged negatively about work that wasn't going as well as they had anticipated.

[39] These topics were being concurrently studied in the Institute for Literacy Studies monthly inquiry led by Cecelia Traugh (director from 1995 to 1999) and later by Elaine Avidon and Anthony Conelli.

Everyone had to prepare a review, but not everyone had to present every year. To accommodate the reviews that were presented, we used the last three Fridays of the school year. On each of those days, we did four reviews, two in the morning and two after lunch.

Because the emphasis was on description and analysis of what the TCs had done for the purpose of getting better, rather than on receiving a rating, these end-of year reviews were embraced by the group. They proved to be an effective, non-threatening form of supervision and accountability. The reviews put in place a process that supported our shared sense of responsibility and accountability for the Writing Project's professional development work. Additionally, they helped to keep me informed of the work of individual TCs and of the group. The information garnered often proved useful during negotiations for contracted services with school and district leaders. However, the most important value of this activity was the TCs' self-knowledge and self-assessment of their efforts in a particular area of the work. As Osterman (2008) says, "Often these end-of-year reviews of practice were so powerful that many of us could recall the conversations and issues raised long after" (p. 11).

Lessons in Leadership Through Working for Change

Taking on the leadership of a close-knit, successful TC group that had evolved into a culture almost separate from the larger NYCWP was not an easy task. However, entering with an agenda to make changes would have been disastrous without the support of the larger community of the Institute for Literacy Studies where the Writing Project is housed.[40] The open doors, the listening ears of other directors, the loyalty of a core of TCs, and the generosity of the associate directors who met with me each Thursday at the college provided my *querencia*.

My deeply rooted respect for people and my own experiences with the disrespect I often encountered as a black educator made me sensitive to how I exercised my authority as a leader. I needed to be strategic about when to isolate the negative individuals and how to encourage their positive behavior. I needed to use my allies well

[40] The Institute for Literacy Studies is a research unit of The City University of New York located at Lehman College. It is the parent organization of a number of literacy projects and programs and of the New York City Mathematics Project.

and not make them weapons against the potential resisters. Some of this knowledge, I believe, came from being a classroom teacher and managing discipline in the classroom. I took actions out of necessity, and sometimes they were the right move to make. At times, I needed to admit my errors and make adjustments to create the harmonious work conditions we all needed. Most of all, I learned that positioning myself as a learner and collaborator with the TCs did not mean giving up my responsibility to achieve our shared goals. Although it was important to listen to and have the TCs' input in creating change, I needed to know when to initiate a change and when to step back and allow their own trusted colleagues to lead.

Although I was confident that I could make changes that would renew the TC community and expand the ways of working in the schools, I was unsure of my authority as a leader. I cannot discount the reinforcing qualities of leadership I learned by talking with and observing other leaders. My growing ability to lead with intention, respect, and generosity toward the TCs was strengthened by a number of excellent role models at the Prospect Center and the National Writing Project. I would say that every new director who enters an established site needs community beyond the immediate group of TCs—a community that provides support, honest assessment of performance, and confidentiality to work through the challenges of being a leader.

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ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

ELAINE AVIDON taught social studies in the New York City junior high schools for seven years and basic writing/composition in the Department of Academic Skills/S.E.E.K. Program at Lehman College for 25 years. In 1995 when the ACS Department was closed, she became faculty in Lehman's Department of Early Childhood and Childhood Education. Avidon began working with the New York City Writing Project in 1980. She was associate director of the Writing Project from 1985 to 1991 and a director from 1991 to 1996. In 1990, with several NYCWP teachers, she started the Elementary Teachers Network, a project that draws on descriptive inquiry processes developed at the Prospect Center in North Bennington, Vermont, to support children's learning. Avidon is also a founding faculty member of Bard College's Institute for Writing and Thinking. In 2006, she retired from her department and is currently a co-coordinator of Lehman's Writing Across the Curriculum initiative.

BARBARA WATANABE BATTON taught grades 1–5 in the New York City public schools for 25 years (1967–1992) and was a founder and teacher-consultant of the Elementary Teachers Network in Bronx elementary schools for over 10 years. For several years she represented the Institute for Literacy Studies as co-director of an Even Start family literacy program in the Bronx. She was a founding member and study group leader of the Elementary Leadership Project, a program of the New York City Writing Project seeking to recruit and develop new elementary teacher leadership. Batton is author of "The Parent-Teacher Learning Collaborative at Community Elementary School 53: The Story of a Partnership," published in *Family Literacy Forum* (2003).

JOE BELLACERO taught English, reading, and writing at the junior high and high school levels for 34 years, 30 of them with the NYC Department of Education. He has been involved with the New York City Writing Project since 1985 and became an associate director in 2005. In that role, he was a co-designer of the NYCWP's New Teacher Initiative and the annual Spring Satellite Invitational Institute. In addition, he has worked as an on-site teacher-consultant in schools throughout the boroughs of New York. His work in creating a writing-intensive school at Robert F. Wagner Secondary

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DEBRA FREEMAN began a 15-year journey as a teacher-consultant for the NYC Writing Project after eight years as a NYC high school English teacher. As a TC, she worked in a variety of high schools, providing support and professional learning opportunities for school faculties and facilitating graduate seminars. She collaborated on the design of the NYCWP New Teachers Initiative and co-presented this work at several National Writing Project conferences. Freeman was the editor of the High School of Graphic Communication Arts NCTE-award-winning literary magazine, *Open Minds* (2006–2009), home to the writing of students whose classrooms she frequented alongside Writing Project teachers. She is currently working as a director for the New York City Department of Education Office of School Quality Leadership, partnering with school leaders to address school improvement efforts.

DIANE GIORGI taught high school social studies and writing in the New York City school system for 15 years before joining the NYCWP as a full-time teacher-consultant in 1999. She has worked as a Writing Project TC with administrators, teachers, and students at small and large secondary schools in four of the five boroughs of NYC. In conjunction with her Writing Project work, Diane taught inservice graduate courses and study groups; presented at local, regional, and national conferences on disciplinary literacy, on supporting English learners, and on teaching argument writing; and participated in NWP initiatives on essay scoring, content area literacy, and literacy in the Common Core. Giorgi has taught courses in content area literacy and methods of teaching social studies as an adjunct in the graduate education department at Pace University. She is currently an independent consultant.

FELICIA GEORGE, now retired, began her education career in 1970 as a Head Start teacher. Over the next 25 years, she served as an administrator for various nonprofit educational organizations, beginning with the Non-Sexist Child Development Project of the Women's Action Alliance, the American Reading Council, and the National Helpers Network. In 1999, she joined the New York City Writing Project as co-director of middle school programs. She became associate director in 2003. During her tenure with the NYCWP, she coordinated several special projects and initiatives including the National

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LONA JACK-VILMAR has been a teacher-consultant with the New York City Writing Project for 17 years, working with high school teachers and their students in small progressive, alternative, and international schools serving English language learners. She has worked as a high school English teacher, directed an adult learning center, and coordinated ESL staff development programs for community-based organizations across New York City. She earned a master's in applied linguistics from Teachers College. Her published work includes a book review of *On Discourse Analysis in Classrooms: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research* (Teachers College Press, 2008) published in the NWP's Teacher Inquiry Communities Network Resources (2010) and a chapter, "Caribbean English Creole in New York City" coauthored with Lise Winer, in *The Multilingual Apple: Language in NYC* (1997).

ALISON KOFFLER-WISE has taught English language arts in the NYC public schools for more than 20 years and has worked with the New York City Writing Project as an on-site teacher-consultant since 2006. Most recently, as a TC, she has been involved in designing workshops for teachers centering on creative approaches to the New York State Common Core Learning Standards. A poet as well as a teacher, Koffler-Wise won the Poetry Teacher of the Year Award from Scholastic, McGraw-Hill, and Poets' House in 2003. She was three times the winner of the Bronx Council on the Arts BRIO grant and was the 2011 winner of the Green Heron Poetry Award. Her poems can be found in such publications as *Heliotrope* and *Home Planet News*.

JULIE MIELE first encountered the NYC Writing Project as a tenth grade student at a New York City public high school. Years later, Miele became an English teacher, and, in 2007, after eight years in the classroom, she began working with the NYC Writing Project as an on-site teacher-consultant. As a TC, she worked primarily with new teachers in the capacity of new teacher mentor; to date, she has mentored more than 50 first-year teachers. Miele has facilitated or co-facilitated numerous NYCWP workshop series and graduate courses, including the Spring Satellite Invitational Institute. In the summer of 2011, she enrolled in a leadership program and joined the staff of Sunset Park High School full time as the assistant principal of one of the school's small learning communities. Miele credits much of her commitment to education and writing to her involvement with the Writing Project.

NANCY MINTZ, Director of the New York City Writing Project from 2002 to 2010, taught grades 6–9 for 28 years before becoming an on-site teacher-consultant for the NYCWP in 1996. In 1999, she became the Writing Project's co-director for middle school programs. Throughout her years as a NYCWP participant, she was an active member of the National Writing Project, first as a teacher participant in cohort 3 of NWP's Urban Sites Network (USN) Teacher Research Initiative and then for 10 years serving on the USN leadership team. Her piece, "Developing Collaborative Relationships in a School Setting: Taking an Inquiry Stance in Professional Development," was published in the NWP at Work monograph series (2001). Mintz, now retired, studied Pilates with an eye to becoming a certified Pilate's instructor.

LINETTE MOORMAN was a New York City public school elementary teacher and elementary and middle school staff developer for over 20 years. As a district teacher-consultant and staff developer, she implemented independent reading programs through the use of classroom libraries and led after-school inservice seminars in the teaching of writing across the curriculum. For 12 years, Moorman held a number of leadership positions at the New York City Writing Project and Institute for Literacy Studies. As co-director of the Junior High School Writing and Learning Project and director of the NYCWP, she provided supervision and professional development for the teacher-consultants working on-site in New York City schools. For nine years she worked for the National Writing Project as the national coordinator of the NWP New Teacher Initiative and as a field director providing support to sites throughout the network.

GINA MOSS taught English in New York City public high schools for seven years before becoming an on-site teacher-consultant embedded in six different schools. While in the classroom, she participated in NYCWP-based action research in the use of independent reading, funded by a National Writing Project mini-grant. The results of this research were presented at the NWP National Conference and at the Urban Sites Network Conference in 2001. Her work with the NYCWP has also included coordination of graduate seminars, presentations at local conferences, and participation in the National Reading Initiative. After five years as a full-time TC, she returned to the classroom in 2009.

ED OSTERMAN worked for over 30 years in New York City public schools as a high school English teacher and as a literacy consultant with teachers across the curriculum. He has been associate director and is a founding member of the New York City Writing Project, the largest program of the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, CUNY. He served for ten years as editor of the NYCWP newsletter and has presented at local, regional, and national conferences. As an on-site teacher-consultant for the NYCWP, Osterman has worked with teachers at a number of large and small high schools in the Bronx and Queens, New York, and he served for many years as a part-time literacy coach at Bronx International High School and ELLIS Preparatory Academy in the Bronx. Osterman is author of several articles published in the NWP Newsletter and of the NWP monograph, *Supporting On-Site Teacher-Consultants: New York City Writing Project's Community of Learners* (2008).

GRACE RAFFAELE taught middle school English language arts and humanities for 15 years in NYC public schools. She became involved with the New York City Writing Project in 1994 and has co-facilitated several Invitational Summer Institutes. She was as a co-editor and production designer for the NYCWP's paper newsletter, is currently on the production team for the electronic newsletter, and serves as technology co-liaison to further the NYCWP's technology work in NYC schools. As an on-site teacher-consultant, Raffaele works at a school for recent immigrants in Queens, New York, and has furthered the use of writing and technology across the school. She continues to pursue her interest in photography with students and teachers as well as in her own work outside of the school.

LAURA SCHWARTZBERG taught grades K–5 for 28 years before becoming an on-site teacher-consultant for the New York City Writing Project in 1999. Working in schools throughout New York City, she provided in-class support for teachers and coordinated graduate seminars and summer institutes on reading and writing. She has presented at local, regional, and national conferences and contributed to "Writing as a Way of Knowing," published by the Galef Institute (1997). Laura also represented the Institute for Literacy Studies as co-director of an Even Start family literacy program in East Harlem. She was a director of the Elementary Leadership Project, a program of the New York City Writing Project seeking to recruit and develop new leaders among elementary teachers.

SUSANNAH THOMPSON has been active in the New York City Writing Project since the spring of 1987, when she walked into the library of a Manhattan intermediate school to join a group of Writing Project course participants who were talking passionately about reading, writing, and teaching. A former middle and high school English teacher, she has been a teacher-consultant for the NYCWP since 1990, consulting in numerous middle and high schools in New York City and developing workshops and seminars on academic and essay writing. Concurrently, she teaches creative writing as well as composition and literature courses at Lehman College, The City University of New York, where she is in her 21st year of being inspired by student readers and writers.

For more information about the New York City Writing Project, visit
http://www.nycwritingproject.org

For more information about the National Writing Project, visit
http://nwp.org

For more information about the Institute for Literacy Studies at Lehman College, visit
http://www.instituteforliteracystudies.org