NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

IMPROVING WRITING AND LEARNING IN THE NATION'S SCHOOLS

Sustainable Practices Through Purposeful Partnering at Shoreline

by Steve Pearse, Puget Sound Writing Project

Summary: The Puget Sound Writing Project (PSWP) and the Shoreline School District, a Seattle-area suburban district, set out to improve student achievement in writing by increasing the number of students meeting standards by 15 percent on standardized measures at the third and sixth grades. This is the story of a successful whole-school collaboration to align instruction and curriculum to essential learnings and best practices in writing instruction based on data from writing assessments.

Shoreline School District (www.shorelineschools.org), a suburban district serving 10,400+ students and located just north of the Seattle city limits, has benefited from engaging with the Puget Sound Writing Project (PSWP) since the site was founded at the University of Washington in 1978. Encouraged by PSWP founder and director Anne Ruggles Gere's outreach to local school districts, Shoreline central office and building-level administrators invited interested district teachers—including this writer—to apply to participate in summer institutes. Subsequently serving as teacher-consultants for the district and their respective schools, many Shoreline teachers have assumed important roles in writing-related programs and initiatives. In 1982, for example, Gere invited Shoreline and other local language arts and content-area secondary teachers to explore, develop, and implement classroom writing-to-learn strategies via an NEH grant, culminating in the publication of *Roots in the Sawdust: Writing to Learn Across the Disciplines* (1985).

Following my retirement from Shoreline schools in 2003, I expanded my informal teacher-consultant and district liaison role with PSWP, for a time serving as associate director (North Region) for professional development. In this capacity, I represented PSWP in support of writing-related professional development requests from a number of western Washington school districts, including Shoreline.

Shoreline—highly-regarded for its active, supportive community base; academic excellence; and responsiveness to student and community needs—continues its commitment to supporting sound practices for the teaching and learning of writing. From supporting PSWP-directed initiatives and establishing an annual Shoreline Embedded Invitational Institute (as of the 2006–2007 school year), the district and its schools continue to partner both formally and informally with PSWP. The on-site Shoreline writing institute, embedded within the school year as opposed to the traditional university summer program, features ongoing collaboration between the district's P–12 writing teacher specialists and PSWP teacher-consultants.

<u>Design of Shoreline's Embedded Invitational Institute</u>

The 2006 institute coordinator, teacher on special assignment (TOSA) Megan Chamberlin, invited P–12 teachers to apply to attend a ten-credit course based on the PSWP Invitational Summer Institute model. Participating teachers, it was planned, would write, conduct research on a topic related to the teaching of writing, and work in writing groups. The curriculum included genre study and creation of an anthology. They would learn from other teachers about the teaching of writing, write and share their writing, reflect on the processes of writing and teaching, and explore current theory and practice in the teaching of writing. They were also expected to take on a school and/or district leadership role on the subject of writing and develop ways of sharing their strengths as writing coaches for other teachers. Institute participants were also expected to create curriculum that would be posted on the Shoreline School District website for colleagues to use. An effort was made to include teachers who represented all of Shoreline schools. For the 2006–2007 institute, over thirty teachers applied. After Megan and instructor Susan Starbuck conducted interviews, twenty-two teachers were offered spots in the institute. Funding was supplied by the Shoreline Foundation, and meeting space by the district.

Susan, a long-time PSWP teacher-consultant, assisted by Megan Chamberlin, was the instructor of the course. Teachers met over the length of the school year, often on established Learning Improvement Days, and the course also included sessions on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. This model was replicated during the 2007–2008 and 2008–2009 school years, with twenty-two P–12 teachers attending each ten-credit institute. The Shoreline Foundation funded the institutes for those years, and state funds supported it in 2008–2009. As in other places, the recession hit the district in the 2009–2010 school year; however, the Shoreline School District supplied enough funds to launch a shorter, five-credit institute, which also filled quickly. This course is taught by Megan and teacher-consultant Katie Johnson.

The Syre Elementary School Writing Action Plan:
Initial Steps in Support of Systemic Teaching Practices

One of nine Shoreline elementary schools, Syre is a K–6 school located in the northwest corner of the district. Serving students enrolled in regular and special education classrooms, Syre benefits from strong parental and community involvement and support. (For example, grade-level projects integrating curriculum and student performance with technology are frequently shared with the community.) Student demographic statistics reflect Syre's ethnicity range as being 78 percent white, 13 percent Asian/Pacific Islands, 2.5 percent black, and 2.3Hispanic. Approximately 10 percent of Syre students qualify for free or reduced meals. Expectations for all students are high in this predominently upper-middle class community.

With an 81 percent consensus vote in early December 2003, Syre teachers approved their peers' proposal to use the district-allotted twelve Teacher Development Center (TDC) days, together with building funds, to focus professional development efforts on creating a scope and

sequence for writing instruction and learning. Since the beginning of that school year, the Syre Writing Committee—led by Kelli Olsen, fourth grade teacher, a Shoreline Embedded Invitational Institute teacher-consultant (2006) and the school's .2 FTE-released staff mentor for writing—had been researching sound teaching and learning practices, selecting and reading especially informative texts and other curricular materials, and sharing their findings with all Syre teachers. The committee then recommended an action plan proposal to principal Pat Hegarty, himself a PSWP Invitational Summer Institute participant, former high school English teacher, and language arts specialist for the district.

High Expectations, Energized Teachers:
The Motivation Behind the Plan

State and district writing scores, although well above average by state and district standards, fell short of the school's reading assessment results—and of teachers' high expectations for their students. Syre's history of working collaboratively in grade-level teams to improve teaching and learning, along with a comprehensive understanding of literacy as it links reading and writing experiences and skills, influenced the adoption. Syre teachers had recently studied and discussed effective practices research. They then drafted a philosophy of teaching and learning that has guided schoolwide initiatives and grade level agreements to the present day.

NWP Core Principles Inform the Syre Action Plan

Ensuring that Syre student-writers would perform at higher levels when teachers act according to in-common understandings, agreements, and practices in the teaching of writing served as the plan's rationale as well as its proponents' essential assumption. Informed by their individual involvement with one or more PSWP or other writing project programs (e.g., invitational summer institutes and/or open institutes), lessons learned through shared teaching materials and instructional approaches, and grade-level team discussions regarding student-writer strengths and weaknesses, Syre teacher-leaders and their principal framed a school improvement plan (SIP). As it turned out, the plan's conceptual framework naturally, although not intentionally, corresponded with central National Writing Project principles. The chart below traces those broad but central connections:

NWP Core Principles	Key Syre Writing School Improvement Plan (SIP) Elements
Teachers at every level . . . are agents of reform.	Grade-level teams meet regularly to determine areas of focus for classroom instruction.
Professional development programs should provide opportunities for teachers to work	Teams collaborate to align instruction and curriculum and best practices in writing

together to understand the full spectrum of writing development across grades and across subject areas.	instruction, while also using assessment data from writing assessments.
Effective professional development programs provide frequent and ongoing opportunities for teachers to write and to examine theory, research, and practice together systematically.	Teams use vertical teaming to create pathway discussions between grade-level teachers and specialists to communicate and understand needs of individual student-writers.
A reflective and informed community of practice is in the best position to design and develop comprehensive writing programs.	Teams develop a clear, agreed-upon scope and sequence that defines writing instruction at Syre.

District-Adopted Philosophy Tenets Informing Syre's
School Improvement Plan for Improving Student Writing

The Syre School Improvement Plan grew out of school staff–determined learning principles—in this case, authentic choice, active learning, consistency, and self-assessment. Not coincidentally, these several principles align with key Shoreline District "Writing Philosophy" statements, themselves based upon National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) principles of writing teaching and learning:

Syre Learning Principle #4: *choice*
> *When choice is infused in the learning process, it creates ownership of one's learning and motivates learners to become independent and self-directed.*

Supporting Shoreline School District Writing Philosophy Statement:
> *The more varied and personally significant the purposes and audiences, the better and more profound our students' writing and thinking will become.*

Syre Learning Principle #5: *Active Learning*
> *Active, hands-on learning creates an atmosphere in which collaboration, ownership, and responsibility lead to a meaningful learning experience.*

Supporting Shoreline School District Writing Philosophy Statement:

In order to help . . . our students enjoy the thrill of the plunge, we need to create a classroom community that supports students, rewards progress, provides experiences, and models success.

Syre Learning Principle #8: *Consistency*
Curriculum needs to be consistent. New learning evolves from prior knowledge and experiences.

Supporting Shoreline School District Writing Philosophy Statements:
Research shows that regularly scheduled time for explicit instruction and practice is necessary at all levels and content areas. AND, *since our students develop as writers throughout their time in school, it is important that we use a common language when discussing writing.*

Syre Learning Principle #9: *Self-assessment*
Learning involves reflection and self-assessment and is strengthened by the support of those we trust: teachers, parents, peers and community members.

Supporting Shoreline School District Writing Philosophy Statement:
Effective writing instruction requires sophisticated management structures for student conferencing, peer editing, feedback, portfolio construction, and reflection.

Year One: 2003–2004: Writing Processes, Traits, and Products

Focus: *Develop a clear, agreed-upon scope and sequence that defines writing instruction at Syre.*

Effective educational leadership—and literacy leadership in particular—often begins with the principal's ability to view change as a problem-solving process (Schmoker 2001). As a PSWP teacher-consultant, principal Pat Hegarty modeled the power of process, as a writer and as Syre's principal teacher.

Along with this in-common desire to improve upon already-strong writing scores, Syre teachers also recognized the importance of establishing a coherent schoolwide approach to teaching writing. Anticipating Syre teachers' decision to use available district and building funds to focus on writing, Pat's memo to the newly-elected writing research and planning team reflects a problem-solving approach to instructional leadership:

MEMO

To: Syre Writing Group
From: Pat
Re: Developing a scope and sequence for writing instruction

The ballot for our TDC [Shoreline's teacher development center] plan is due today. Based on our staff council feedback, it is likely this will be approved. As a next step, then, we need to talk about what broad areas we need to focus on as we begin to develop a K–6 plan for writing instruction at Syre. Key to this is having a common language. Below I have crafted some ideas and questions as starting points. As a work group, please discuss these:

What?
Process – How to produce written texts.
        Are we explicit about teaching the writing process? What parts of the writing process are emphasized?
Products/Forms
What are our kids writing? What should they be writing? How much writing do they do?
Six Traits – Qualities of good writing.
        Are we explicit about teaching the six traits? What traits are emphasized? What specific lessons do we have to bring these to life?

How?
How is technology incorporated into the writing instruction?
How can we share best practices?
How is teaching writing structured in the day?
How can we nurture a culture of writers. . . .

   [Syre staff memo excerpt]

Learning and Planning: In-Common Understandings and Agreements

        Kelli Olsen and fellow fourth grade teacher and PSWP teacher-consultant Elizabeth Beck, co-leaders of Syre's Writing Committee, shepherded the now-approved plan. With Washington State superintendent of public instruction writing framework documents and the precedent of a similar process completed at another elementary school within the district as working contexts, grade-level teams met at the district's Teacher Development Center to review Syre teachers' process, products, and traits practices. Spread out over a two-week period, each grade-level teaching team met for an entire contract day with Kelli and this writer. The goal: "To organize a Syre Writing Scope and Sequence and provide a common language, common goals, and eliminate any 'holes' we currently have in our writing program."

As the recently-retired writing specialist for Shoreline schools and a long-time PSWP teacher-consultant, I served as facilitator and resource person throughout this process. Each grade-level team brought in planning books, sample lessons, and supplemental texts to guide the day's work. Teams completed three templates—writing *processes*, *products*, and *traits*—to be sent on to Syre's Writing Practices committee.

A portion of the sixth grade team's process template follows:

Writing Process Stages	Strategies or examples that we agree as a grade level to directly teach and to have students explicitly practice	Our performance expectations (What students should know and be able to do by year's end)
PREWRITING: *Exploring the topic*	• Webbing, listing, outlining	Students independently choose the appropriate prewriting technique to align with a given assignment
DRAFTING: *Beginning the writing*	• Modeling paragraph form or structure (including topic sentences, supporting sentences, concluding sentences and transitional sentences • Multi-paragraph organization • Other forms as well	Students give a completed prewrite; students construct a paragraph including: topic sentence, supporting details, and transition/concluding sentence with minimal teacher support
SHARING: *Getting advice*	• Peer conferences, task-oriented • Whole-class anchor papers + class discussion of scored samples • Establishing context through topic, audience, purpose	Students identify topic, audience, and purpose within prompts, their own work, and the work of others.

With K–6 templates completed, Kelli and Elizabeth coordinated and edited their peers' work with an eye toward crafting value statements grounded in sound research and practice. In addition to serving as co-chairs of their school's writing team, Kelli and Elizabeth had joined the district's K–12 Writing Curriculum Review team to consider and discuss, among

other resources, NCTE summaries of key research and practice. An excerpt from one key document pinpoints themes underlying the direction and spirit of Syre's work:

Actively involving students in the writing process, mentored by teachers who write as well as favorite authors, helps teachers more clearly see which writers need what instruction. Targeting instruction within the context of examples of written work over time allows for a valid assessment of a writer's abilities and needs (Writing in the Intermediate Grades, 3–5, p. 2).

Dedicated Time, Instructional Focus, and Teacher Support

When I asked Kelli which among the several writing-effective practices themes most influenced her work on behalf of Syre teachers and writers, along with her own classroom practices, she stressed the importance of scheduled, focused time on task; teaching the 6+1® traits (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory) in the context of process; and ongoing professional support:

> *Writing needs to be a separate time that you spend, and not just integrated . . . I'm still doing writing across the curriculum, but encouraging my students to practice what they have learned during formal, direct writing instruction. [Writing] is hard, but once you do break it apart for kids, they view writing differently.*

Kelli also mentioned that when it came to her students' conversations about writing at home, parents and other family members often focus on only one of the traits—*conventions*. Using *ideas* as her introductory 6+1® traits concept, Kelli began the year with several *ideas and content*-related minilessons: "The more specific you are, the better," she emphasized. "Teachers *must* use the language of the traits with their kids."

Also during the 2003–2004 school year, Kelli, Elizabeth, and Pat selected three NCTE-recommended texts on effective writing instruction as in-common background for professional study and discussion "before," Kelli explained, "we agreed on what these values should be."

Year Two (2004–2005): Expanding Educator Expertise Through Study Groups
Focus: *Develop process, product, and trait values, based upon Year One's scope and sequence work, study-group readings, and consultant-provided presentations.*

> *We write so that we know what to teach about how this writing work gets done. We write so that we know what writers think about as they go through the process. We write so that our curriculum knowledge of the process of writing runs deep and true in our teaching.*
> —Katie Wood Ray, *What You Know By Heart* (2002, 3)

Syre teachers agreed to participate in one of three study groups, reading and discussing Regie Routman's *Writing Essentials*, Katie Wood Ray's *What You Know By Heart*, or the New Zealand Staff Ministry's *Dancing with the Pen: The Learner as a Writer*. For Vanessa Rowlands, former second and current fifth grade teacher, "Reading the same book brought out good conversations—and the authors' opinions brought out our own."

The groups shared what they had learned from the readings during *writing focus* sessions, replacing traditional faculty meetings. In this way, study-group discussions and discoveries contributed to revised *process*, *product*, and *traits* agreements, as excerpted below:

PROCESS VALUES • Using the writing process • Using a variety of prewriting strategies, e.g., webbing, lists, drawing brainstorming, story mapping • Drafting with prior teacher modeling • Sharing in multiple ways: whole group, small group, peer and teacher conferences, etc. • Using the writing process terminology consistently
Process Maybes: • How much do your students use a dictionary while editing and what scaffolding do you provide to help students develop dictionary skills?

PRODUCT VALUES • Kids will be writing every day. • Writing will be taught as a specific subject AND as an integrated subject. • Emphasis will be placed on narrative and expository writing. **Product Maybes:** • Writing strategy lessons will be given X times per week.

TRAIT VALUES • Whether explicitly taught or implicitly present, the traits are used in writing instruction. • The trait terminology is used consistently with students as developmentally appropriate. • Students are encouraged to use trait concepts when giving feedback to others. Trait Maybes: Use published writing or various sources (e.g., WASL* released items) to explicitly teach the traits. How do you integrate the teaching of the writing process and the teaching of the traits?

---

* Author's note: WASL = Washington Assessment of Student Learning

Later that year, Syre invited Steve Peha, a private consultant whose work was already known to many area teachers, to present his vision of the writer's workshop, as well as to answer teachers' questions and to promote discussion about young writers' needs and interests. A few years earlier, Shoreline had invited Peha to explain the big picture of effective writing teaching and learning. Peha presented his classroom management-oriented vision and illustrations of the writer's workshop ("Welcome to Writer's Workshop," as published on Peha's website Teaching That Makes Sense www.ttms.org for interested teachers and administrators.)

From big-picture issues (*How do you teach the traits and the writing process at the same time? Should all students be working on the same kind of writing or be on the same process*

stage?) to more procedural questions (*What are some other ways of managing Status of the Class? Where should kids keep their works-in-progress? Do you have a way to keep primary kids on track when they conference with peers?*), Peha helped these teachers connect the research-to-practice dots as they prepared to initiate or revise their own writing workshop classrooms.

Year Three 2005–2006: Writer's Workshop As the Expected Norm

Writing workshop approaches to teaching writing—variously defined and described—represent an equally wide range of classroom practices. Despite differing emphases, a common theme threads through the fabric of classrooms and schools that establish and nourish a "we're in this together" approach to teaching writing: workshopping has the potential to stitch together teacher and student understandings and agreements in support of purposeful, sustained practice (Dahl and Farnan 1996). Of course, writing workshop models differ widely in the elementary grades as well as across secondary language arts classrooms. Yet the instructional approaches and student responses to them that I observed in Syre classrooms reflected the sort of effective partnering, decision making, and enthusiastic learning that Dahl and Farman describe.

Beginning with this school year, Syre teachers agreed to (1) teach writing via a defined workshop approach; (2) balance instruction across writing traits, processes, and products in accordance with the new building-developed scope and sequence document; (3) combine effective instruction with available technology; and (4) align formal and informal assessment with writing instruction and learning. Translated into concrete, observable classroom routines, this meant teachers across the grade levels had agreed to:

      1. schedule (and document) forty-five+ minutes, three times per week for focused writing instruction and practice

      2. teach writing via a writing workshop approach that incorporates teacher modeling (minilessons), student writing time, and opportunities for peer sharing

      3. incorporate formative and summative assessments of student work, along with reflective ("thinking about my writing") activities.

Whether adopting elements of Peha's classroom management-driven writer's workshop model, Katie Wood Ray's concept of curriculum-focused minilessons, or Regie Routman's emphasis on modeling sustained writing activities that encourage student-writers to write about self-selected topics for specific readers, Syre teachers were expected to adhere to those three schoolwide instructional practices.

Agreements into Practice:
Fourth-Graders Hone Their Skills as Reflective Writers

Just before the 2005 holidays, Kelli invited me to observe as she taught a revising for

ideas and content minilesson. Beginning in September, she had been coaxing her fourth grade workshop participants to view their initial notebook entries and ready-to-share drafts as fluid, tentative texts. From modeling her own approach to composing to establishing writer's notebook and engaging her students in purposeful reflection activities, Kelli nurtured the *sina qua non* atmosphere of trust and acceptance, together with core elements and practices of the writer's workshop classroom detailed within the texts teachers read and discussed in study groups.

First brainstorming and then choosing their own topics, Kelli's students completed freewrites (e.g., Regie Routman) in their journals, which were traditional glue-bound composition booklets. At other times, after having chosen one or more notebook pieces to pursue with a given audience and purpose in mind, these fourth-graders consulted their tabbed (*Topic Ideas/Reference, Prewriting, Drafting, Revising, Edit/Publish*) three-ring Writing Resource notebooks when they needed process reminders or examples. When more formal whole-class emphases were called for, Kelli's students practiced the strategies and approaches that their teacher modeled for them during one or more of their biweekly minilessons.

Kelli's student-writers also read snippets of works-in-progress to their classmates ("Pick a sentence you'd like to share . . ."), saving ready-for-sharing pieces in their publishing folders. In addition, they used the language of process ("I'm in the middle of revising my beginning" or "I'm ready to start editing") when they conferenced with their teacher or with a parent volunteer.

On this day, Kelli transitioned from teacher modeling and demonstrating to supporting her student-writers' own work. She began by addressing the stages students might be working on with their own writing projects, while keeping their attention on her instructional emphasis: developing and refining *ideas and content*:

"If you're doing your prewriting, can you change some of your general words and sentences to more specific ones? If you're writing in the drafting stage, could you add it to your piece? What if you're revising? Could you add? You might want to change it."

As she made this last suggestion, Kelli pointed toward classroom writing process posters: "Should you look at your prewriting work? Your draft? What does *revising* mean?"

Several students responded with impromptu definitions or descriptions of their own revising strategies.

"So, if you're revising," Kelli summarized, "look for general ideas and try to make them more specific. If you're in revising . . . if you're drafting . . . what are you going to do if you're editing?"

"I'm going to go back to revising to fix it," one girl announced.

"What if you're in the middle of publishing?" Kelli asked.

Another student then advised, "After you've finished, read to see if it makes sense."

"You might want to add it to your process folder to think about that, maybe," Kelli suggested.

A recurring strategy Kelli and other Syre teachers use to monitor group and individual

student-writer progress (as well as to prepare students to make good use of personal writing time) is Steve Peha's rendition of Status of the Class, an activity first described by Nancie Atwell (1987) that can be conducted within five to ten minutes. Kelli checked in with her students as she moved from demonstrating how she revises for ideas and content, to inventorying her student-writers' own works-in-progress.

Quiet writing time (twenty+ minutes) followed; Kelli continued to attend to her own piece as she silently monitored her student-writers at work.

Modeling Reflection-in-Process

Because they helped her to ". . . see what kids are thinking, not just gleaning their thinking by looking at their writing products," Kelli and her fourth grade teaching colleagues incorporated *Reflect on Your Writing* protocols to focus their students' attention on modeled writing traits and strategies, as well as to monitor their depth of understanding:

Reflect on Your Writing
Choose a piece of writing that you believe meets the following criteria. Then explain how you know or the reason you think it meets each criterion. USE EXAMPLES from your published copy and draft to help explain.

1   This piece of writing shows I focused on the trait of **ideas** in several ways (give examples of how you narrowed your topic and *telling* sentences that you changed into *showing* sentences).
2   Going through the steps of the writing process helped improve my writing in several ways (give specific examples).
3   The **most difficult part** of writing this piece was (think about the topic, writing process, traits, etc.).
4   I am **proud** of this piece of writing for many reasons (think about what you learned, tried, realized, etc.).

In Kelli Olsen's classroom, students provide feedback as she shares her draft of "Things I Like or Dislike About My Community." Working from her laptop computer, Kelli directs their attention to the prewriting cluster projected on the screen while she models ways of focusing on a specific writing trait. Asking her students to turn to an *ideas and content* resource page, Kelli reviews the importance of providing readers with helpful, interesting details so they will understand the writer's main idea and purpose. In keeping with her teacher-as-practicing-writer role, Kelli does so interactively, conversationally, combining her informal think-aloud protocol with an inquiry analysis approach to teaching and learning:

"So, here are my details about weather . . . *nice in summer and winter*, AND *no heavy coats over bulky sweaters in winter* . . . Which of these is more specific?"

From the back of the room, a girl asks, "*Why* is it more specific?"

"I've added an example, haven't I? What about *nice in summer*?"

"What do you mean?" several students ask, some with hands raised and others pointing at the screen.

Answering their question as she adds to her prewrite, Kelli responds in think-aloud style:

"*Summer, always 70 to 80 degrees*—OK I thought of a word I want to put in…*moderate*; and for winter." She keyboards "*. . . never too cold, not a lot of snow*. Which would be better, *nice weather*, or [should I] add these details? And I'd rather write about those details; I might fall asleep if I tried to write more about *nice*!"

Kelli repeated this "contrasting text choices" lesson—imprecise and underdeveloped points versus fitting and informative details—as it applied to her piece about her neighborhood:

Nice weather	*Summer, always about 70–80 degrees; winter, never too cold, not a lot of snow*
friendly people everywhere	*helpful in stores by carrying groceries and telling me where items are located*

"Well, what would you like to know? How could I make this more specific?"

Several students suggested revising possibilities, including naming specific people at the store, and adding where Ms. Olsen was when she saw or chatted with people she met: While she aimed her cart down store aisles? As she walked to the corner Starbucks that Saturday morning?

Taking these and other student cues, Kelli added to her draft, reading aloud as she entered text: *I pass by people, and they say hi . . . walking down streets, at church, on the beach; smile; asking if I need assistance*.

"Do you think I put that down in my draft?" she asked, referring to her hard-copy list of details and descriptive phrases. "Will I have to write more than that when I write my draft?"

———————

In keeping with her constant emphasis on the writer's choices—and ultimate authority and responsibility—Kelli then closed this think-aloud minilesson with a reminder that, as much as she appreciates her students' ideas and suggestions, this draft, and her choices regarding it, are her own.

Syre's Writing Adoption: Nurturing Possibilities

Early on in *Writing Essentials*, one of the texts Syre teachers chose to study and discuss, Regie Routman defines her goals for student-writers and their teachers:

I want students to write with passion and ease. I want them to become motivated, confident writers who see writing as an everyday, useful, even enjoyable tool. I want the same for teachers. I want teachers who focus on writers and writing, not on procedures and prompts…I want to make teachers' lives easier and more enjoyable. I want to bring sanity, common sense, and joy back into writing classrooms (2005, 4).

Not all of the Syre students I observed in several classrooms during many workshop sessions wrote with the apparent desire and comfort level that Routman hopes for. That said, only a tiny minority of the students with whom I chatted schoolwide ever seemed disengaged or distracted during writing workshop time. Whether interacting with their teacher as she modeled a strategy, sharing a draft with peers, writing independently, or engaging in a one-on-one revising conference with another adult, these kids were focused and engaged.

Syre's strong instructional staff, one-third of whom have participated in one or more PSWP-sponsored initiatives, continue to plan and monitor writing instruction through grade-level teaming. Their young writers work in a place where writing concepts, strategies, and routines grow out of individual needs and interests, and where teachers write alongside their students as they guide and encourage their efforts.

As to assessment performance, those already-high building writing scores continue to improve, from 83 percent of fourth graders meeting standard on the state writing assessment in 2005, to 92 percent doing so in 2009. Although Syre's commitment to key writer's workshop tenets may not constitute the sole cause of student-writer performance, the larger picture of teaching and learning most certainly does correlate strongly with that success. As current Syre principal David Tadlock recently stated, "I think the scores reflect the acceptance and standardization of the process and product approach—that from pre–K up, adults lead kids through a 'being a writer' set of opportunities that engage them in writing."

As Syre's School Improvement Plan (SIP) has evolved over time, strong, consistent leadership—on the part of key teacher-leaders as well as the building principal—continues. Pat Hegarty accepted a high school principalship two years ago, yet Syre's collaborative leadership style has stayed on course. Like Pat, David Tadlock, an outstanding teacher of writing, also taught secondary language arts and served as a PSWP Fellow.

Lessons Learned

It is true that such targeted, purposeful collaboration across grade levels and courses can be more complex at the secondary level. And yet, the Syre Elementary model for arriving at informed agreements on behalf of teaching and learning—selecting, planning, and implementing sound instructional practices—would seem to be adaptable to many school settings. It is consistent, purposeful, and authentic modeling and support that matters to student-writers.

The many lessons learned from the Syre Elementary experience may well coincide with those associated with other successful writing project and school/district partnerships. For this

partnership, those lessons might most helpfully be distilled to the following observations:

• Making it real—incorporating partnership agreements into teaching and learning norms—contributed to teacher and student focus, purposefulness.

Syre's consensus model for determining teaching practices, resulting in a schoolwide writer's workshop implementation, was defined in explicit, normative terms: creating a realistic action plan, featuring the writer's workshop approach to teaching and learning; providing a minimum of forty-five minutes per day dedicated to writing instruction and/or practice; and using student-writer performance as a primary teaching guide. Syre teachers continue to share their own and their student-writers' best work with teachers across the district, thanks in large part to the Shoreline Institute.

• Making it possible—providing time, professional resources, and active administrative and consultant support.

The fact that both Syre principals are PSWP teacher-consultants and former language arts teachers most certainly contributed to the success of this partnership. Although the Syre experience may well have occurred had these building leaders not themselves been excellent teachers of writing, there is no question that coupling expertise, experience, and enthusiasm with leadership and support truly mattered.

Together with providing teachers with ongoing opportunities to read, share and contribute to the professional conversation, Pat Hegarty met regularly with Syre's Writing Committee, contributed to and supported the year-by-year implementation plan, and shared the results with Syre parents and community members.

Through my role as cofacilitator of the partnership's initial work, I served as a bridge that spanned the writing project, the school district, and Syre classrooms. As a former district teacher and TOSA for language arts, I was able to bring district-level context and experience to the planning table; as associate director for professional development on behalf of PSWP, I provided support and requested resources on behalf of Syre Writing Committee members and their colleagues.

• Syre's writing project-trained teaching staff constituted an active, unifying component of schoolwide teaching and learning.

Over a third of Syre's teachers, the building principal, and the co-facilitators (Kelli

Olsen and myself) were invested in PSWP initiatives, either as institute alums or as advisory board members. This "critical mass" of writing project-trained participants served as a kind of locus of control for the partnership, one that continues via the Shoreline Embedded Invitational Institute.

Kelli Olsen writes, "We shared ideas [and] frustrations, problem-solved, and brought in student writing from actual students. And all of this was so timely because what we were discussing was happening right then in our classrooms (vs. taking a summer course…). It was so important to hear how writing progresses throughout the years (or sometimes stays the same!)."

• A shared vision and practice as teachers-as-learners community, as opposed to isolated classroom practitioners, made sharing the wealth a natural, systemic, and gratifying workplace dynamic.

At Syre, grade-level teamwork, dedicated planning time, active principal support and participation, and frequent sharing and discussion contributed greatly to building-wide writing workshop success. From sharing responses to professional texts, considering current research, designing targeted lessons, sharing student work, and engaging with the community, these teachers developed expertise as they learned from one another—and from their students.

• Aligning with school district and writing project principles and practices ensured ongoing focus, support, and professional growth.

As discussed above, Syre's staff-determined *learning principles*, as featured in the school improvement plan (SIP), parallel key Shoreline School District's Writing Philosophy statements. Syre, unlike some other Shoreline schools that chose to address other content areas and skill sets, chose writing instruction and learning as its focus, enjoyed district support, and continues to contribute to district-endorsed sound teaching practices.

A Closing Note

With the Puget Sound Writing Project in its fourth year offering an embedded institute with the district, interested teachers representing every Shoreline school continue to benefit from sharing instructional ideas and addressing their own writing. As Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi remind us: Kids in writing workshops do see themselves as writers. In fact,

> *they develop a genuine feel for writing—its power and purpose. They know what*
> *it means to write for themselves . . . but they also know what it means to write for*

an audience of interested readers. They understand the heavy lifting that writing does in the real world. This doesn't happen by magic. It happens because teachers create a unique environment where students get to walk in the shoes of writers nearly every day (xi).

Teacher-as-writer—and as supportive model for young writers—lies at the heart of the workshop principles and practices Kelli Olsen and her Syre Elementary colleagues investigated and adopted, beginning with the 2005–2006 school year. The school's instructional center of gravity has moved from a variety of individual teaching approaches to all teachers modeling similar workshop strategies. Syre teachers now engage student-writers in their own discoveries as producers of text. Central themes and practices are now in place, thanks to several dedicated Syre staff members whose ties to PSWP have guided this important work.

Works Cited

Atwell, Nancie. 1987. *In the Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton-Cook.

Dahl, Karin L., and Nancy Farnan. 1996. *Children's Writing: Perspectives from Research*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Gere, Anne R. 1985. *Roots in the Sawdust: Writing to Learn Across the Disciplines*. NCTE.

Fletcher, Ralph. 1996. *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You.* New York: HarperCollins.

Fletcher, Ralph, and JoAnn Portalupi. 2001. *Writing Workshop: The Essential Guide*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

New Zealand Staff Ministry of Education. 1992. *Dancing with the Pen: The Learner as a Writer*. Pacific Learning.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. "6+1® Traits." December 12, 2007. http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/department.php?d=1

Peha, Steve. "Welcome to the Writer's Workshop." October 15, 2006. http://www.ttms.org

Puget Sound Writing Project. Janine Brodine, K–12 Director. December 12, 2007. http://depts.washington.edu/pswpweb/sitemap.html

Ray, Katie Wood. 2002. *What You Know By Heart*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Routman, Regie. 2005. *Writing Essentials: Raising Expectations and Results While Simplifying Teaching*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Schmoker, Mike. 2001. *The Results Fieldbook: Practical Strategies for Dramatically Improved Schools*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

"Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)." Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. December 10, 2007. http://www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/default.aspx

"Writing in the Intermediate Grades, 3–5." NCTE. December 8, 2007. www.ncteorg/prog/writing/research/115617.htm