

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT AT WORK

Continuity



Continuity in the Rhode Island Writing Project: Keeping Teachers at the Center

by Susan Ozbek, Marjorie Roemer,
Keith Sanzen, and Susan Vander Does

*Rhode Island Writing Project
Rhode Island College*

The National Writing Project at Work monograph series documents how the National Writing Project model is implemented and developed at local sites across the country. These monographs describe NWP work, which is often shared informally or in workshops through the NWP network, and offer detailed chronological accounts for sites interested in adopting and adapting the models. The programs described are inspired by the mission and vision of NWP and illustrate the local creativity and responsiveness of individual writing project sites. Written by teams of teachers and site directors—the people who create and nurture local programs—the texts reflect different voices and points of view, and bring a rich perspective to the work described. Each National Writing Project at Work monograph provides a developmental picture of the local program from the initial idea through planning, implementation, and refinement over time. The authors retell their journeys, what they achieved, how they were challenged, and how and why they succeeded.

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National Writing Project
Berkeley, California

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

The mission of the National Writing Project is to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation's schools. Through its professional development model, the National Writing Project recognizes the primary importance of teacher knowledge, expertise, and leadership.

The National Writing Project believes that access to high-quality educational experiences is a basic right of all learners and a cornerstone of equity. Through its extensive network of teachers, the National Writing Project seeks to promote exemplary instruction of writing in every classroom in America.

The National Writing Project values diversity—our own as well as that of our students, their families, and their communities. We recognize that our lives and practices are enriched when those with whom we interact represent diversities of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and language.

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How do writing project sites continue to attract and engage hard-working teachers in cocreating professional development throughout their careers? How do they sustain a presence in their local service areas, adapting to the interests of successive generations of teachers while still maintaining a sense of organizational mission? This third set in the NWP at Work monograph series focuses on the varied approaches local NWP sites take to “continuity.” Each monograph offers a window into the design and structure of opportunities that provide an intellectual home for writing project teacher-consultants who lead the work at each of the nearly 200 local sites around the country.

The first two sets in the NWP at Work series highlight two of the three components of the NWP model: the summer institute and site-sponsored inservice programming in schools and districts. The present set offers illustrations of the third component: continuity. Continuity, essentially, consists of those practices that nurture ongoing professional development and provide an indispensable source for sustained leadership development at local sites. The invitational summer institute identifies, recruits, and invites teachers into the culture, offering opportunities for leadership of the site. Inservice programs disseminate learnings about the teaching of writing. And it is through continuity that each site invests over time in the continued learning of its community of teacher-consultants.

Continuity, as the name implies, extends and deepens the cultural values enacted in the invitational summer institute: learning is ongoing, and it is socially and collaboratively constructed. At NWP sites, continuity goes beyond follow-up to the summer institute and constitutes the programming that sustains the professional community of the site and builds its leadership. Sites rely on teacher-consultants and university colleagues to collaborate and reinforce the partnership that is the backbone of the site; and continuity programs allow each site to grow and respond to changing educational landscapes. Continuity, according to Sheridan Blau, director of the South Coast Writing Project, is “where knowledge is as much produced as consumed.”

Continuity to Support Continued Learning

The kinds of programs sites engage in as continuity are wide-ranging and varied in intensity, drawing on local interests and needs. Such programs can include writing retreats, teacher research initiatives, and study groups on issues of concern in the service area, to name a few. While aspects of continuity described in this series involve long-range programming, teacher-consultants at writing project sites also value the less-formal and more-social occasions for learning. These might include book groups, dine-and-discuss gatherings, yearly reunion dinners, and ongoing listserv discussions that keep them involved and connected. An effective approach to continuity supports the dynamic growth of teacher-consultant knowledge by offering teachers access to colleagues and intellectual engagement in the midst of what can be the isolated act of teaching. It is, as one teacher in Oklahoma notes, a place where “you keep seeing people grow.”

Continuity to Develop and Support Leadership

The monographs in this set provide a look at slices of the professional communities at a number of writing project sites. Taken together, these stories from site leaders offer a theory of action about leadership that has attracted—and continues to attract—teacher-leaders. Successful sites have found ways to respond to shifting educational priorities while preserving their core values. Not an easy task in many cases.

It will be apparent from this set of monographs that continuity is firmly linked to sustainability, so that the challenge of preparing for both normal and unanticipated site leadership transitions might be met. Continuity programs vary in form and purpose, yet they all share the goal of supporting the continued learning of teacher-consultants. This focus on learning encourages sites to take an inquiry stance toward their work: to devise new structures that support diverse and democratic leadership; to reassess the goals and mission of the site through visioning and strategic planning; to examine ideas about literacy occasioned by new technologies; and to inform thoughtful, sustained, and relevant professional development in schools.

Local Sites/National Network

Finally, the NWP itself, over its nearly 35-year history, sponsors an array of initiatives, subnetworks, and events that support continuity at local sites. These cross-site exchanges provide opportunities for teacher-leaders and directors to extend their work by identifying new resources and learning from other sites. Local continuity programs then become a way for site leaders who participate in national programs and initiatives to involve colleagues in sharing new resources and learning throughout the local community.

So the explanation for the sustainability of NWP sites over time is this notion of continuity, the means by which teachers make the local site their intellectual home and a place of continual learning. Writing project sites are like solidly built houses: they endure because they have solid foundations and adhere to a set of principles that value the collaboratively constructed knowledge of teachers from preschool through university.

With this volume of NWP at Work we invite directors, teacher-consultants, school administrators, and all education stakeholders to explore the concepts and practices of the National Writing Project's continuity programs. These programs build leadership, offer ongoing professional development that is timely and responsive to local contexts, and provide a highly effective means of sustaining a community to support current and future teacher-leaders.

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INTRODUCTION

Early enough to think twice about the wisdom of getting out of bed on a Saturday morning, I grab a quick cup of coffee and head to Rhode Island College. My goal is to arrive with just enough time to call security, in case the building is locked, and food service, if the coffee and bagels have not yet been delivered. On this particular morning, I cut it close. It is ten minutes to nine. Even so, as I pull into the parking lot, it is empty. The maple trees that line the brick path to the Forman Center sparkle in the morning light, but the beauty of the day only serves to punctuate the anxiety. I have come to know in the moments before our meetings—the sinking feeling that no one will come. Thankfully, before I grab my bag from the backseat, Susan Friendson rounds the corner. Then within seconds, Sue Ozbek arrives. We are a triumvirate of Sues, “chronic attendees of the Presenters’ Collaborative Network” as Sue O. calls us. As we walk toward the building, we talk—about our mothers, husbands, sons, and daughters—catching up on family news since our last meeting. I reach for the door and am pleasantly surprised. It opens, and two people I have not seen before are waiting in the corridor for the meeting to begin. Mindful of the collective sacrifice of a day off for the existence of this network, we begin leisurely: a light breakfast, and some conversation. By 9:30, nine of us sit around the table feeling satisfied with the choice we made to get out of bed on a Saturday morning for the Presenters’ Collaborative Network.

Susan Vander Does

The Presenters’ Collaborative Network, or PCN, is described in the site’s brochure as “a leadership opportunity in professional development.” It was started in 2002 to support the creation of a corps of teacher-consultants who would lead workshops for the Rhode Island Writing Project (RIWP) at local schools and conferences. The PCN is a group of teachers, past participants from any of our summer institutes or our year-round embedded programs in schools (sustained RIWP programs offered year-round on site at schools). The PCN meets four Saturdays a year specifically to share and to critique classroom demonstration presentations in order to learn more deeply about one’s own practice as well as to prepare for inservice possibilities. The fifth meeting of the year is at the Annual Rhode Island Writing Project Conference, where many PCN members offer workshops as part of our daylong program.

What follows is the story of how the PCN came about and what, in fact, it has become. The monograph describes the workings of the group and what it means to the growth and development of the site. The team of writers includes Susan Vander Does and Susan Ozbek, the first leaders of the PCN; Keith Sanzen, one of the PCN’s most active participants; and Marjorie Roemer, the Rhode Island Writing Project site director.

CONTINUITY IN THE RHODE ISLAND WRITING PROJECT: KEEPING TEACHERS AT THE CENTER

by Susan Ozbek, Marjorie Roemer, Keith Sanzen,
and Susan Vander Does

SMALL AND VIBRANT

Rhode Island is, of course, the smallest state, and we are the only site within it. The state divides into many, many different neighborhoods with very different ethnicities. It is urban, suburban, and rural in almost equal parts and encompasses diverse neighborhoods and multiple national groups. While 83 percent of the children in the state attend public schools, 34 percent are eligible for subsidized lunch programs. Rhode Island is 36th in the National Kids Count poverty ranking and 22nd in their overall rank for children's well-being—and is markedly more needy than other New England states that surround it. In Rhode Island the variations among the thirty-six school districts are striking.

The participants of the Presenters' Collaborative Network represent the many different school districts, and their students reflect the diversity within the state (see appendix A). The specific makeup of each school, however, can be very different from the averages for the state. Differences in socioeconomic status are also sharp. So, in professional development sessions, a presentation might be shared from one school and adapted as needed for varied school settings, grade levels, and other circumstances in order to make it relevant to each particular setting.

AFTER THE SUMMER INSTITUTE: WHAT'S NEXT?

The Beginnings

Initially, the PCN was formed to make sure that presentations initiated in the invitational summer institute were refined and shaped to make the best possible offerings for inservice activities as well as to invite an inquiry into practice. What is most interesting about this program, however, is that while teacher-consultants' readiness to go "on the road" has grown slowly over time, we have found that the very act of meeting to refine presentations has turned out to be the strongest continuity program we could devise. The effect of the PCN on maintaining ties to the writing project, encouraging an inquiry stance toward practice, and nurturing leadership in teacher-consultants is much more significant than we could ever have imagined.

Continuity programs aim to continue and extend teacher involvement with their sites. At our site, we have for many years held a large renewal meeting in early fall for all attendees at our summer programs and a major spring conference. At various

times we have also offered smaller, informal renewal opportunities: Saturday morning meetings, potlucks, writing marathons, and small writers' groups that have continued after the summer. We've sponsored a number of teacher-researcher groups and have given teacher-consultants opportunities to lead new programs, especially those on site in their own schools. Teacher-consultants have continued and strengthened their association with us through activity in Project Outreach,¹ in a Teacher Inquiry Communities Network² minigrant, and in our New England sites network meetings, as well as through presentations at the National Writing Project Annual Meeting, and even as attendees of our monthly executive board meetings.

However, it is the PCN that has had the most sustained and lasting effect in extending the actual experience of our summer programs. For six years now, groups of teachers have met consistently five times a year to present, critique, ponder, revise, and adapt demonstration lessons and learn more about their own practice. The stated goal has been to refine the programs and to think about how they might be restructured for different school populations, but the effect has been to keep teachers working together, thinking like writing project teachers, supporting one another's innovations, and sustaining the network that enables teachers to grow in the company of others.

Theory of Action

So our theory of action emerges retrospectively: to build and sustain a community, people need to be involved in ongoing constructive activities. Nostalgia for the summer past doesn't sustain a vibrant community, but work on a new project, a new undertaking, does. It is no wonder that when teachers return for their Saturday at the PCN, January feels like July. Within minutes—after spending time writing in journals, and as the presentation is offered and responded to—teachers feel as if the summer had never ended. The community of shared inquiry is immediately reestablished. Participants recover the experience that tells them their search for better methods for teaching does not occur in isolation; it grows out of the fabric of shared commitment, passion, and expertise.

In fact, the program serves many purposes. It is a gathering for teacher-consultants to continue to examine and learn from practice and a showcase for our work, and as such, it attracts the interest of potential summer institute participants. So the work of the PCN gets shared, and, to some extent, it engages new recruits, offering new ideas to past participants and whetting the appetites of others for more connection to the RIWP.

¹ Project Outreach supports resource development and program activities intended to enhance the capacity of local sites to understand and address issues of equity in their local programming. Project Outreach engages cohorts of sites in a facilitated site development process intended to help them diversify leadership and provide improved opportunities for sustained professional development to teachers working in communities impacted by poverty.

² The Teacher Inquiry Communities (TIC) Network is a national network that links sites interested in developing leadership and resources for teacher inquiry. It provides sites that already have a teacher inquiry community in place a means for sharing information and disseminating their practices with other sites and interested parties.

REMEMBERING THE EARLY DAYS: ONE TEACHER'S STORY

Susan Ozbek

After another school year of using worksheets and grammar books in an attempt to give my students a way into writing more effectively, I felt like giving up on the teaching of writing. Although I considered myself to be a writer of sorts, I felt that I had never been instructed or encouraged in any useful way to improve my own writing ability. I was in a soul-searching state of learning about myself as a writer and a teacher of writing when I discovered the Rhode Island Writing Project. It was 1988, and in the Rhode Island Writing Project's summer institute that year I met other teachers struggling with some of the same concerns that I had. Sharing my work—questioning and responding to questions, and revising in a supportive environment with peers—strengthened my belief in myself as a writer, and I decided that I wanted my students and colleagues to share the same belief in themselves.

I returned to school in September, enthusiastically explaining what I had discovered. To my surprise, I met resistance. Reconnecting with my summer colleagues, however, provided the continuity I needed to keep on the path of what I knew to be good teaching. I continued to become more involved with the Rhode Island Writing Project, eventually conducting an after-school presentation for a group of teachers in another town. The session went well, but the audience had its naysayers and protesters. Questions swam in my head. I truly believed in the writing process, but had I made any new converts? Would I be asked to present again? Where would this journey take me?

Before long I was asked again, to go to different schools now and to work with the teachers. My work was different each time, based upon what I was asked to do. I prepared lessons and presentations on my own time, using the materials I had. There wasn't time or a place for me to meet with anyone about what I was working on. After a couple of years of trying to cope with this setup, I found myself standing outside in a blowing fall wind with my friend and colleague Susan Vander Does, discussing the situation and sharing our thoughts on how things might possibly be improved. We knew that we needed to figure out a way to develop a support system for the teacher-consultants who were preparing presentations to take to the schools that requested inservice work.

And then in 2000 Susan Bennett, then director of the Redwood Writing Project in Humboldt, California, gave a presentation at the NWP Annual Meeting in Milwaukee focused on coaching summer institute participants in their preparation of best-practice workshops. Bennett inspired us. We quickly recognized that providing peer mentoring for teacher-consultants who were preparing a workshop presentation was a way to help strengthen their work. By the spring of 2001, a group of teacher-consultants were able to meet at the Red Fez restaurant to name the new program, and the Presenters' Collaborative Network was born.

Initially, PCN's goals were to build capacity for inservice and to assist in the personal development of those interested in presenting. It was only after a year of meeting together that the teacher-consultants discovered the strong and deep sense of support they had been seeking.

The spring conference extends the work of PCN by providing even more outreach. We always invite a major speaker to deliver a keynote address, and high-profile Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) administrators attend as well as large numbers of teachers in training.

CREATING THE NETWORK

Convening the Group

Together with the executive board of the RIWP, the PCN developed the Presenter's Handbook to be given to all teacher-consultants embarking on conducting inservice (see appendix B for a description of the executive board). The handbook covers everything we know to be necessary for a good presentation: the basic elements of a good demonstration, the ways in which feedback can be gathered, the connection with the writing project for planning before and after the presentations. However, it is the coming together of interested teacher-consultants that is most important. Open to those who have participated in any of our summer or embedded institutes, the PCN was created to keep enthusiasm alive as well as to give teacher-consultants an opportunity to field-test a presentation and receive feedback for revision. Each September, announcements are sent to our listserv explaining the PCN's mission, annual schedule, and credit options (see appendix C). Two weeks prior to each meeting, an agenda is emailed with the name of the presenter, the topic, the time, and the location (see appendix D). Though some people do RSVP, no registration is required. While this makes handouts and estimates for food challenging (and contributes to the fear that this time no one will come), we have found that an open-door policy works best. We are mindful of the pressure on everyone's time, and we welcome even those who join us at the last minute.

Journal Writing: Reflections on Teaching and Presenting

Like an army, the RIWP travels on its stomach. We begin our meetings with food; it gives us a chance to chat, sip coffee, nibble on a muffin, and feel relaxed and refreshed. After that, we write in our journals for thirty minutes (see appendix D). This time for personal reflection gathers our attention, clears a space in our heads, and requires us to notice where we are in our own thoughts and feelings as we enter the day's conversation.

Enacting these rituals of the summer institute is our homecoming—a return to the community. It reinforces the idea that we have come together not just to transmit information and swap teaching strategies, but also to process, reflect, and interrogate new ideas together. One of the facilitators offers a prompt; usually it is a short reading, selected not for its connection to the presentation of the day but for the way it resonates more broadly with our work as teachers and as presenters (see appendix E for list of selections). There is often a mystical synchronicity between the reading chosen and our collective state of mind.

Sometimes we use our journals to explore issues related to presenting. For example, one that surfaces frequently is focus, as we try to decide, as NWP leader Mary Ann Smith puts it, on which slice of our teaching we wish to shine a light. At one meeting a few years ago, as a way of exploring this issue, we wrote to the question, “What does success look like in your classroom?” As a result we discussed the challenge of isolating a practice for a presentation in a political climate that demands progress as evidenced by test scores but denies the complexities of teaching and learning. Our conversation from that day is eloquently represented in the closing of Gerardine Canon’s journal entry, a reminder of why we do what we do and how hard it is to measure the immeasurable.

. . . My success in the classroom, however, may not be evident for months, years. A chance meeting at the mall with a former student, now a junior at Brown University, revealed that the journal writing begun in my grade-eight English class provided a strong foundation for the journal writing required in his classes at Brown. Another former student, now an ex-con, thanked me for encouraging him to read in grade eight because years later, as an inmate at the Rhode Island Adult Correctional Institute, he was able to find solace in reading in the ACI library. Other times success is reflected in a more cohesive student body, more engaging discussions, a new willingness to read, to write, to think. Sometimes I just know.

More recently we reflected on how we choose a promising practice, and that day we talked about the challenge of “boxing it up for travel” without boxing it in. At another meeting, after listening to an excerpt from *Teachers at the Center* (Gray 2000), we pondered two guiding principles of the writing project:

1. How the mindset of “promising practices without restriction” allows us to be open to new ideas and approaches and keeps us from ever saying this is “the writing project way.”
2. How teachers’ knowledge and experience are honored in the work we do.

Some of the teacher-consultants responded by illustrating how their experience with the PCN is based on these values. Chris Pariseau wrote about teacher knowledge, “It is only in this context where people invite me to talk about what I know that I realize the depth and breadth of my knowledge. It has been said that writing exists on a sea of talk. PCN meetings have provided that sea of talk and so much more.”

Sue Friendson considered the way in which a new RIWP initiative at her school was designed to support teacher knowledge and leadership:

Can’t help it, but I’m thinking about this excerpt in terms of how Chris and I can use it to help explain this new embedded institute we’re facilitating soon. The original idea of starting this one was to find a way of offering our faculty some really enriching and inspiring professional development. As it is now, we get all top-down [professional development] in which most people

bring student work to correct while some “expert” drones on. What we really need, to paraphrase [Jim] Gray, is the honoring of teachers’ own expertise.

The PCN reaches teachers at different stages of readiness for leadership. Donald Cala, a first-time participant, expresses the self-doubt that we often feel about going public with our work.

Okay, so here I am at the Presenters’ Collaborative Network October meeting and I’m not sure exactly why I came. I’ve never presented anything to professional educators before and don’t know if I could ever muster the self-confidence I would need to do so. I don’t know that I could feel that I would have something worthwhile and of value to contribute to them. I feel sometimes as though my head is barely out of the water when it comes to teaching science to my students.

Donald’s self-doubt points to the way in which PCN reaches out to potential leaders, giving them a safe space to consider what might otherwise seem impossible. We believe that having a place to express doubt in one’s capacity or readiness for leadership is a first step toward becoming a leader, especially when surrounded by colleagues ready to help should one decide to take the plunge.

Another example of the efficacy of this group support for emerging leaders is provided by Tracey Whitehead, a young, eager social studies teacher who participated in the invitational summer institute in 2003 and joined the PCN immediately after. Since then she has been appointed to the Rhode Island Department of Education, heading up a program for middle school reform, and she has just recently accepted a position at a newly formed middle school as an assistant principal. Tracey is forthright in saying that it was the writing project, and particularly the PCN, that readied her for her new roles. After her first exposure, she returned to her school and began a study group. That was the beginning for her in taking a leadership role in her school. Everything else followed from those first steps, and Tracey asserts that without the ongoing peer support of those Saturday meetings, she couldn’t have moved forward on the path that she has taken.

Within the PCN, too, leaders have emerged. At a time when the Rhode Island Writing Project was growing as a site and building many new programs, it became clear that one director could never be at the center of every emerging program. The Project Outreach team was one example of a separate-but-integral set of activities; the PCN became another. Entirely teacher-run, PCN intersects with other programs such as the invitational summer institute, the spring conference, and the inservice work in schools, but it remains in its own sphere, too. The Susans, Keith, Lisa, Chris, and Rebecca have emerged as the leaders in this work, shaping and sustaining the program.

As we engage in and reflect on the work of our colleagues, we engage in and reflect on our own. This is certainly the case in the next portion of a typical PCN agenda,

where we participate in a demonstration lesson and then offer response. Using the structure of the “tuning protocol” to guide our response, we heighten our awareness of the challenges and nuances of teaching and presenting.

RUNNING THE PRESENTERS’ COLLABORATIVE NETWORK

The Tuning Protocol

In a world where vicious criticism passes for entertainment on various “reality” television programs, a format for critique that is supportive while also providing honest criticism for growth is vitally important. The PCN responds to presentations using a method loosely based on the tuning protocol, which was originally created by David Allen and Joe McDonald for the Coalition of Essential Schools to look at student work (see appendix F). Susan Friendson, a high school English teacher, encountered the tuning protocol as a part of the Critical Friends program. She suggested that it could be formatted in a way that could work for us as a means of response when a teacher-consultant has shared a lesson. This protocol outlines specific areas to be discussed, gives the structure of a timetable, provides a balance of compliments with constructive criticism, and allows for a wide range of dialogue concerning theory, philosophy, and practice.

Facilitators for the PCN are those who are most familiar with the protocol and with the PCN sessions. They are able to keep the agenda moving and the group on task; they keep a finger on the pulse of the PCN meeting, checking for rhythm, flow, and group temperament. Facilitators politely suggest when it is time to move to a new topic of discussion; they make decisions about when to use time for important, but sometimes tangential, conversations that emerge in our consideration of the principles of good teaching.

Once the format of the protocol has been addressed, presenters are asked for a specific area on which they would like the group to focus their feedback. Typically, presenters have asked questions such as, Do I provide enough background information in my presentation for my audience to understand its context? Does the sequence of my presentation make sense? Do I have too much student work? My student work is very tough to read; should I keep it in the presentation?

If teacher-consultants have difficulty formulating a question, they can be directed toward the Tuning Protocol Response Notes to consider a possible area of growth (see appendix G). Allowing presenters to frame the focusing question for the protocol emphasizes that the presenting teacher-consultants are the ones who are valued in the session.

After posing the focusing question, presenters are instructed to treat the presentation as if it were being done in front of a “live” audience—that is, as if they were presenting to a group of teachers at a host school. Occasionally a presenting teacher-consultant will stop and attempt to engage the PCN group in an extended

conversation with such questions as, Do you think I should use this portion of the handout? or Do you think this research supports my practice? If such a situation occurs, the facilitator makes note of any questions and promises to bring them up during an appropriate section of the protocol.

Once the presentation has been concluded, the facilitator reviews the idea of “warm” and “cool” feedback, which are terms borrowed from the original tuning protocol. Warm feedback serves to give presenters positive feelings about what they have done. Cool feedback gives them ideas about areas on which they can improve. The imagery of a warm comment reminds us that we are giving comfort to those who were brave enough to volunteer. The image of coolness tells us that we need to be honest, but tempered, to avoid extreme criticism.

Comments to improve should never be harsh or “cold.” And part of reviewing the protocols with the group is to remind and teach teacher-consultants how to respond to one another honestly without being cold. To help here, we provide participants with “stems,” which are beginnings of sentences to help frame a statement. Using sentence stems can help the presenter hear the criticism in a safe and productive manner. Examples of stems include

- I’m not sure how I feel about . . .
- I had difficulty connecting with . . .
- You may want to try . . .
- I really liked . . . but I felt that it could be . . .

Of course such comments are a traditional part of giving feedback during classroom writing conferences. In fact, the PCN is structured as a group writing conference.

Feedback is offered in a circle. As various members take their turns they may either comment or say, “Pass.” When giving peer critique, it is generally better to open with warm feedback as it shows the presenters that you have listened to them and found value in what they said. To begin with negative criticism can quickly demoralize presenters or put them on the defensive, both of which make them unable to hear the positive comments. Then again, piling up all of the cool feedback tends to wash away the positive foundation established at the beginning of the session. To address this problem, we have found it best to alternate rounds of warm and cool feedback for each category.

The most difficult part of delivering the protocol is that the presenter is not allowed to speak until all the feedback is given. Often presenters are seen nodding furiously during criticisms they would have given themselves or shaking their heads repeatedly, holding back words so they do not jump into the conversation to defend a particular point. Sometimes they look toward the facilitator with helpless eyes desperate to

interrupt. If a presenter attempts to interject or asks, “Can I just clarify something?” the facilitator remains firm in asking the presenters to hold comments to the end.

For the presenter to remain silent until the end of the warm-and-cool feedback session is critical to the protocol process. Instead of commenting on the dialogue going on around them, which would limit a full range of discussion, presenters take notes at a feverish pace, which forces them into a silent world of writing and thinking that they might otherwise not experience if they were in a state of defensive response. PCN member Chris Pariseau calls it “the art of opening your ears.” Once the feedback has been given, presenters may look at their notes and finally let loose the inner dialogue they have struggled so hard to contain during the feedback session. More often than not, the feedback has given voice to feelings the presenters had themselves, and the general feeling is, “You know, I was thinking that, too, but I didn’t know quite what to do about it.”

At a recent focus group, we asked people if they felt the comments ever became too negative. Rebecca Limoges commented, “I worry about people who are coming for the first time to present.” She wondered how people, despite our best effort to create a supportive environment, initially perceive the process. Lisa Narcisi said, “The first time I presented, I felt as though I was being attacked, and then my skin thickened a little.” She commented that people are going to take away from the experience what they will and that we will never be in full control of how people will process the information given to them. The best we can do is to be alert to people’s feelings and guide them toward the best possible experience we have to offer.

The session is rigorous but always leaves participants with a sense of accomplishment. Chris Pariseau contrasts walking out of his school sometimes asking, “I’m a teacher?” and leaving the PCN each time proclaiming, “I’m a teacher!” He says that he appreciates the honest feedback. He knows that when Sue Friendson is listening to something he has worked on, she is going to “cut right to the heart of the matter.”

Presenting invariably builds confidence. In fact, Rebecca points out that “even if you are not presenting, you gain confidence. You see what others are doing that affirms your own practice. You can feel the excitement building around ideas, and you think to yourself, ‘I can do this.’ Sometimes the PCN takes people who never even considered being presenters and puts them a step closer to going out to schools to share what they have learned.” Presenters and attendees alike all gain a deeper understanding of their own practice.

The Value of Dialogue

The PCN functions as a forum on issues of teaching, learning, and public policy. It is composed of teachers who represent students from diverse backgrounds and with differing degrees of ability and knowledge. Therefore issues that are frequently discussed include how this presentation will be received by teachers who work in settings that differ economically and culturally from those of the presenting teacher, and how the presentation can be modified to meet their needs.

Recently a teacher from a suburban school district did a wonderful presentation based on the work of Nancie Atwell's book *Naming the World* (2006). As part of the poetry workshop, the presenter shared a videotape of a lesson Nancie Atwell had taught her own students. Two teachers from the largest urban district in the state suggested that the video might distract teachers in their school from seeing how the poetry lessons could work for their own students because the group shown, which was white, was not representative of their student body. This prompted a discussion on ways in which the presentation could be adapted, such as possibly omitting the videotape, so the work would speak more directly to teachers serving different student populations.

Most recently, Chris Pariseau shared a presentation entitled "Research in Process: Two Strategies for Reading Primary Sources." As the group worked through the tuning protocol, he posed practical focus questions for the group to consider such as Should I start with a research-based quotation? Would this be a good presentation for the spring conference? Can it stand alone, or should it be presented only as part of a series? He introduced his work by saying that his presentation came from an earlier PCN presentation on coding text and using Post-it Notes, except, he added, "I didn't code any text or use Post-it Notes!"

Chris explained that the typical approach to writing a research paper was to have kids formulate a question, research it, and then write about their findings. As Chris engaged his students in the writing process, however, he began to question that logic. "I found that they needed to talk between note-taking and writing their first draft. They aren't just taking notes in order to produce a draft. They need to process the information. They need to talk it through." He added, "It can't be 'BE QUIET AND WRITE!' Students need to discuss what they find in between gathering information and writing."

Chris produced several texts for us to read so that we could try the process for ourselves. After giving us a research question to ponder, he instructed us to take notes in a double-entry journal and then talk about our notes. Our discussions inspired new research questions. After Chris shared the pragmatic points of setting up a double-entry journal and provided guidelines for a text-based seminar, the writing brought us to a new level of discussion. We deliberated such questions as Where does research writing begin? How many times should students be encouraged to revise their questions? After each investigation? After each discussion?

Even though Chris's initial focus questions were organizational, his presentation sparked a deeper dialogue about reading, writing, and thinking. His work made us see the research paper as a process rather than as a product. We explored "the way of writing"—how we see it as a journey rather than as a destination for our students and for ourselves. As we sat around the table, we were not just discussing tips and tricks that might serve to raise student test scores. Our dialogue on that morning went far beyond sharing a "promising practice." We dived deeply into the thinking beneath our teaching decisions. Chris's presentation sparked a conversation about critical values that ground our teaching.

Sometimes PCN talk is about envisioning ways in which a particular teaching strategy or presentation can be adapted to meet the diverse needs of urban, suburban, or rural teachers. Sometimes we talk about the struggle to provide students with equal access to teaching that goes beyond the scripted lessons currently mandated by the state for schools deemed “low-performing” and operating under sanctions. We talk about what teachers working under such conditions can do to hold true to their values. When Chris, who teaches in a school that is currently under sanctions, presented his work on research writing as previously described, he did much more than share a promising practice with his colleagues on a Saturday morning. He found intellectual and moral support for the critical stand he takes with his urban students each day against the existing oppressive “corrective” actions.

Keeping It Going

At the end of each meeting, we try to enlist the next presenter. During one such effort Melissa Pereira, a first-time participant of PCN, tentatively volunteered. “I could share my work on windows and mirrors, but I’m sure everyone knows it. I stole the idea from a session at the spring conference,” she said.

While it was not true that everyone knew the work she offered to share, the presenters of the session to which she was referring, Sue Ozbek and Susan Friendson, were at the table. “Of course you should present. That’s the whole point of the work we do. We share, we steal, and we make it our own,” they said. In fact, “to steal ideas” is the most frequent answer participants give when asked why they come to the PCN. Melissa agreed to share her work at the next meeting.

It isn’t always this easy to find our next presenter. Though participants joke about needing to leave the room for a drink of water and avoiding eye contact at this point in the meeting, people who attend regularly feel a sense of responsibility for presenting. “If I don’t take a turn,” says Chris, “I feel as though I’m going to a party without bringing a bottle of wine.” If no one around the table volunteers, we think about calling people we haven’t seen at PCN in a while, we ask facilitators of the summer institutes to recommend people with strong presentations, or we ask executive board members for suggestions, and then we decide which one of us will take responsibility for contacting those people.

Flexible Continuity

An average PCN meeting brings between eight and twelve teacher-consultants together. Considering the hundreds of people we reach through our listserv and mailings, we are somewhat troubled by the small number of participants we attract. On the other hand, we are pleased to note that the PCN has met continuously since its inception in 2002. Lisa Narcisi tells the story of one very snowy Saturday morning when she called campus security to ask, not if the campus was open, but if food had been delivered to the Forman Center. As she says, “I figured if the coffee was there, then the writing project would be there too.” Three people came that day!

What the PCN lacks in size, it makes up for in energy. Participants often remark that the PCN puts a fire under them. Chris explains: “I typically do my school work on Sundays. But after a PCN meeting I find myself reaching into my book bag on Saturday. I want to look at student work.” Rebecca Limoges agrees: “I actually take my bag from the car and into the house after a PCN meeting. I feel energized to think about the ideas from the morning and how I can work them in. I want to see the linkage. It affirms what I already do and makes me think about what else I can do. It’s inspiring. It makes me want to do more.”

Others talk about how PCN nudges them to innovate, to think beyond tomorrow. For example, Lisa Narcisi tells how it inspired her to follow through on her idea for an alternative to the “dreaded research paper” by having students publish their findings in the form of “Shortcuts,” cartoons designed by Jeff Harris that appear every Saturday in the *Providence Journal*. She explains that the extra incentive for tackling a very challenging project came from knowing that if she did this work with her students she could share it with other educators. In this way, she says, “The PCN holds me to a higher standard.” Others talk about how it pushes them to present and has helped them gain confidence as presenters.

Still, we wonder, What keeps teachers away? Why is the group so small? While we invite everyone who has participated in one of our institutes and explicitly say in the invitation that teachers need not present to participate, we have heard that some people don’t come for fear that they will feel pressure to present. We believe a few others stopped coming because they weren’t being called for inservice and had expected the project to provide them with a source of employment. For some teachers, ideas taken from the writing project just don’t fit into their current teaching assignment, and they are not, in their view, in a position to innovate. One teacher explained that his curriculum had become so restrictive that coming to PCN was a painful reminder of the kind of teaching he is no longer able to do, and so he stayed away . . . for a while. Some people who have not attended for a year or more because of family, educational, or other professional commitments also return when the time is right.

Within the PCN, we have homecomings—happy returns of friends we haven’t seen in a while. And so it seems that what makes the PCN a successful continuity program is the dichotomy between its consistent structure and its ability to function with a fluid cast of characters. We have discovered that inconsistent attendance is not a weakness but, instead, a strength; flexibility is a necessity for a continuity program.

JUDGING SUCCESS: LEARNING FROM OUR EXPERIENCE

Over the past six years, the Annual Rhode Island Writing Project Conference brochures have listed seventy-seven presentations. Some of these are special sessions with our keynote presenters: Donald Graves, Constance Weaver, Linda Rief, Steve Zemelman, Susan Ohanian, and Richard Allington. For some presentations, we invited special speakers from the Rhode Island Department of Education or co-

facilitators from various RIWP programs to showcase work that came out of those programs. But seventeen of the remaining forty-seven presentations came directly from the PCN, and another fifteen were the presentations of people who attended the PCN, even if they hadn't tried out their particular presentation there. So more than three-quarters of our own conference presentations owe something to the PCN for their development.

In addition, at least eight PCN presenters have recently shared their work at school professional development sessions; so the results for our own inservice work have not been negligible. But, increasingly, we have come to see the PCN as serving another critical function: sustaining our community.

Maintaining Connections

While the summer programs certainly start the process of affiliation for teachers in Rhode Island, it is the PCN that sustains the collaboration. What is the magic of the PCN? Why does it work differently from our other continuity programs to reanimate the bonds that connect us all to the National Writing Project and to one another? In part, it seems to be the specificity of the work. It is always easy to come together to complain about insensitive administrators, or aggressive parents, or apathetic kids. Writing project teachers who return to schools and districts that seem strikingly less collaborative and inventive than the invitational summer institutes can spend a lot of time expressing their disillusionment. But the PCN offers something different: concrete instantiations of the work teachers actually do in classrooms. Through the demonstrations and the tuning protocol, participants focus on the real work of teachers in real examples. They get to talk about the things that matter in specific cases. How useful is this example of student writing? How clear is this explanation? How effective is this transition from one part of the lesson to another?

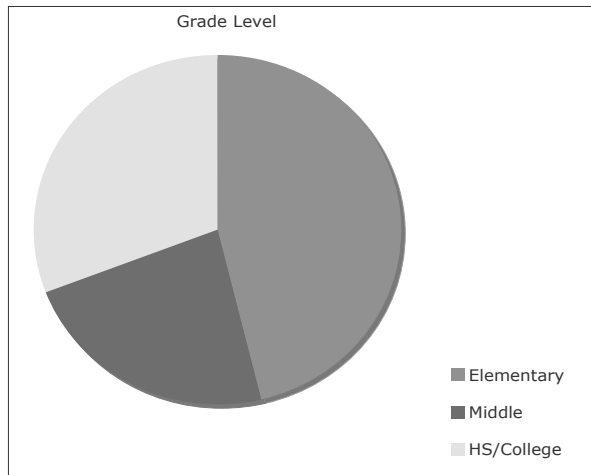
They also get to remember how much a group of supportive peers can mean. In the climate of schools now, the mode of operation can feel like surveillance. Faced with strict federal guidelines, district administrators adopt a mandate and monitor stance. Often teachers feel themselves judged more than supported. The PCN serves to remind us of the strength that teachers can have when they have the opportunity to truly collaborate with one another. "Teachers teaching teachers" is powerfully enacted every time we walk into that room on a Saturday morning, every time we walk down that brick path to the Forman Center and greet one another with surprise and relief, every time we sit in that circle and affirm the seriousness and intricacy of what we each do every day in our classrooms.

REFERENCES

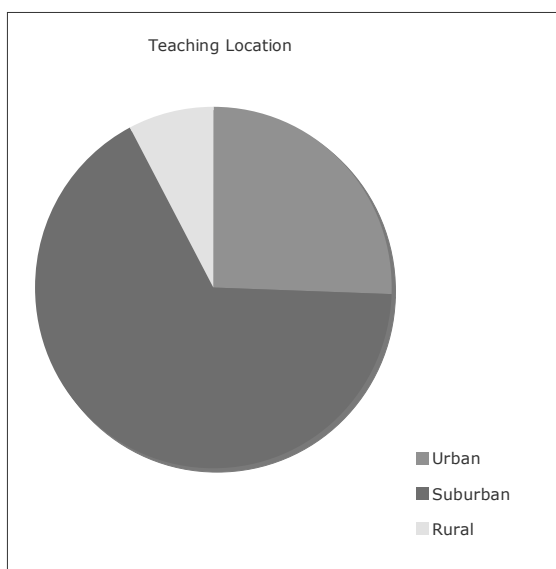
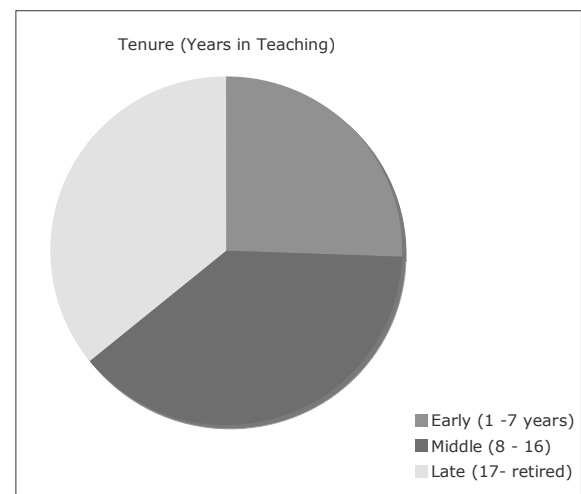
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- Gray, James. 2000. *Teachers at the Center: A Memoir of the Early Years of the National Writing Project*. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: DISTRIBUTION OF PCN PARTICIPANTS BY GRADE LEVEL, TENURE (NUMBER OF YEARS IN TEACHING), AND TEACHING LOCATION



N = 39



APPENDIX B



The executive board of the Rhode Island Writing Project consists of

Director: Marjorie Roemer, Rhode Island College

Co-directors: Jennifer Cook, Rhode Island College

Dina Sechio DeCristofaro, Scituate Middle School

Beverly Paesano, Providence College
formerly Centerdale Elementary School

Susan Vander Does, Saylesville Elementary School

4 teachers from middle schools and high schools around the state

1 elementary school principal

1 community college teacher

1 retired elementary school teacher

1 representative from the Rhode Island Department of Education

1 program assistant

This group meets once every month to review the work of the site and to make decisions about programs and policy. Each member of the group plays a particular role at the site, such as coordinating the summer programs, the embedded institutes, the inservice programs, the continuity programs, or the technology initiatives.

APPENDIX C: APPLICATION

Application

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

School: _____

School District: _____

Position: _____

Grade(s) Taught: _____

Subject(s) Taught: _____

Please list the names and years of Writing Project Institutes you have attended:



Please send completed application:
Rhode Island Writing Project
Rhode Island College
Alumni House
600 Mount Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908



Rhode Island Writing Project
Rhode Island College
600 Mount Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908



**Presenters'
Collaborative
Network**

A Leadership opportunity in Professional Development



Do you want to participate in professional development that respects you as a teacher and lets you develop your own best practice? Then PCN is what you are looking for.

Rhode Island Writing Project
Rhode Island College
Alumni House
600 Mount Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
(401) 456-8668
RIWP@ric.edu
www.ric.edu/riwp

Presenters' Collaborative Network

A Leadership Opportunity

Be on an active list of presenters at the RIWP, and work as a paid Teacher Consultant (TC) in schools across the state.

Who are we?

We are a network of Writing Project fellows, graduates of the Invitational or Embedded Institutes interested in developing best practice presentations and presenters' skills. We model the group on the "teachers teaching teachers" model of the National Writing Project.

How do we work?

We work on presentations facilitated by TCs to:

- Sharpen workshop focus
- Base practice in research
- Choose compelling student work samples
- Plan for the active engagement of workshop participants
- Provide a knowledgeable and supportive audience that can offer feedback.

"By allowing excellent teachers the opportunity to demonstrate their best practices without restrictions, the project remains open to new ideas, approaches, and variations. The writing project is not a writing curriculum or even a collection of best strategies; it is a structure that makes it possible for exemplary teachers to use the ideas that work."
— James Gray "On Coaching"
From *Teachers at the Center*

The Calendar

October 14, 2006

November 4, 2006

January 6, 2007

March 3, 2007

April 7, 2007

*All meetings are at RIC in the Forman Center
and run from 9:00 am—12:30 PM*



Credit Option:

Based on 20 contact hours, participants may choose to earn one graduate credit from RIC or professional development credit from the RI Department of Education. Participants must indicate whether they want this credit or CEUs on their application.

Many TCs who have presented at the PCN have shared their presentations at various conferences such as the RIWP Spring Conference, NCTE, National Writing Project, and within their own schools. The program has also been recognized by the National Writing Project and many sites across the country are using this program to improve teachers' best practice. Some past presentations include:

- Using Comic Books for Reading and Writing Instruction
- Dialogue Journals in English Class
- Finding Voice Through Performance
- "Shortcuts": A Way to Publish the I-Search
- Reading & Writing in the Content Areas
- Setting Norms: Building a Community of Learners

What participants have to say:

"A professional development opportunity where educators' opinions, thoughts, and ideas are valued."

"The other members have offered me great, honest feedback that has really helped my presentations."

"Seeing and experiencing these demonstrations of caring people enriched my professional life, and I hope to share what I learn with others."

"Very enlightening group. Helps me to be more enthusiastic about the work I do."

"I love being with such supportive and creative people for my own growth. Knowing that the people are out there everyday teaching children even sweeter."

PCN is coordinated by Susan VanderDoes, a reading specialist with the Lincoln School Department, Susan Ozbek, a retired fifth grade teacher who has taught both locally and internationally, and Keith Sanzen, a middle school English teacher in Scituate.

PLEASE JOIN US!

If you have any further questions please contact the office at (401) 456-8668 or by e-mail at RIWP@ric.edu.

APPENDIX D: AGENDAS



Presenters' Collaborative Network Agenda for October 14, 2006 Location: HBS 212

- 9:00–9:15 Coffee and . . .
- 9:15–9:30 Welcome and Introductions
- 9:30–10:00 Journal Writing and Sharing
- 10:00–11:00 Presentation:
 Melissa Pereira participated in this year's invitational summer institute. She teaches at Burrillville Middle School and will present "It Sinks; It Floats: Writing in Science."
- 11:00–11:15 Break
- 11:15–12:15 Tuning Protocol
- 12:15–12:30 Reflections

PCN 2006–2007 Schedule 9:00–12:30

Forman Center, Classroom A
October 14
November 4
January 6
March 3
April 7, 2007—Spring Conference, Richard Allington—Keynote speaker



Presenters' Collaborative Network

Saturday, November 13, 2004

9:00–12:30

Forman Center, Classroom A

Agenda

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 9:00–9:15 | Coffee and . . . |
| 9:15–9:30 | Welcome and Introductions (Sign-in and update database) |
| 9:30–10:00 | Journal Writing and Sharing |
| 10:00–10:15 | The RIWP Professional Development Catalog |
| 10:15–10:30 | Presenter's Focus and Questions for Responders |
| 10:30–11:30 | Presentation
Janice Place presents: "Buzzing Across the Content Areas:
Improving Students' Skills in Nonfiction Reading and Writing" |
| 11:30–11:45 | Break |
| 11: 45–12:15 | The Tuning Protocol: Responding to Janice |
| 12:15–12:30 | Looking Ahead: Who's Next? |

APPENDIX E: PROMPTS FOR JOURNALING

Sometimes we use a question; sometimes it's a quotation that sparks our response. Here's a partial list of the prompts we use to begin journaling.

1. What does success look like in your classroom?
2. How do we choose a best practice to share? What does it mean to “box it up for travel” without boxing it in?
3. An excerpt from Teachers at the Center
In the course of his career, he [Jim Gray] has worked with countless teachers, and almost without exception, he has instilled in them new confidence in their special knowledge about the experience of their work and the belief that they can make a difference in their classrooms and beyond. One reason Jim has had this effect on teachers is that the writing project model he developed does not dictate “The One Right Way to Teach.” His view of varying classroom strategies and curricula is ecumenical. The question he most often asks teachers is one we might also ask heart surgeons, highway engineers, or members of any other profession: When you reflect on your practice, how can you explain why you do what you do? (xiii)
4. What kinds of experiences produce change and how can teachers ask questions to move toward change?
5. Ann Berthoff often instructed writers “to look and look again” as a way of promoting critical reading and critical thinking. Her double-entry journals are what she called (after I. A. Richards) “the continuing audit of meaning.” What do we mean by “looking and looking again”?
6. What usually works in your classroom? Or what lesson or practice do you count on to work every time?
7. Think about these two quotes together:
“He who asks questions cannot avoid the answers.” (African proverb)
“It’s not the answers that enlighten, but the questions.” (Ionesco)
8. What schoolwide activities take place in your building that build community?
9. “An intellectual is someone whose mind watches itself. I am happy to be both halves, the watcher and the watched.” Albert Camus, *Notebooks*.

APPENDIX F: TUNING PROTOCOL FOR PRESENTATIONS

INTRODUCTION—5 minutes • Facilitator outlines protocol goals, guidelines, and schedule. • Brief explanation of cool and warm feedback. • Participants ask questions from participants about protocols.
PRESENTATION OVERVIEW—5 minutes • Presenter(s) explains components of presentation. • Presenter(s) asks focusing question(s) or asks participants for feedback in a particular area
CLARIFYING QUESTIONS—5 minutes • Participants ask facilitator and presenter(s) questions. • Presenter(s) and facilitator respond.
PRESENTATION—1+ hours (flexible) • Presenter(s) runs through the presentation. • Participants write notes about what they notice during the presentation.
PAUSE TO REFLECT ON WARM AND COOL FEEDBACK—5 minutes • Participants may take this time to reflect on what they'll contribute to the feedback session.
WARM AND COOL FEEDBACK—18 minutes • Participants share feedback while presenter(s) remains silent. • Each participant shares warm and cool feedback from the Tuning Protocol Response Notes. • Participants need not speak about every one of the points. • Facilitator might remind participants of presenter's focusing questions. • Presenter(s) takes notes.
PRESENTER(S) RESPONSE—2 minutes • Presenter(s) ask questions about feedback and/or respond to participants' suggestions.
DEBRIEF—5 minutes (flexible) • Group engages in open discussion about the tuning session the group has shared. • The PCN makes changes to protocol as needed.

APPENDIX G: TUNING PROTOCOL RESPONSE NOTES

Listed below are essential components found in the RIWP guidelines for high-quality presentations. Please use the space provided to take notes for “warm” and “cool” feedback to the presentation which we will offer to the presenter at the end of the session. Does the presentation have . . .

1. A device to focus the audience to determine their experience or knowledge of the subject?
2. A clear statement of purpose—theory behind the presentation?
Listen for a clearly presented central idea.
3. Some instruction—modeling?
4. Student samples that demonstrate the central idea?
5. Participant involvement—particularly writing?
6. Closure—a summary or check for understanding and time for questions?
7. A handout? The handout (if applicable) includes sources or suggested reading (such as an article supporting the ideas presented), forms, charts or instructions if necessary.
8. Comments/Questions/Suggestions

APPENDIX H: PRESENTATION GUIDE



A good presentation includes the following:

- Focus from the audience: Determine the audience's experience or knowledge of the subject.
- Clear statement of purpose: Explain the theory behind the presentation.
- Instruction: Provide modeling of what is expected.
- Samples of student work: Post examples or make handouts.
- Participant involvement: Provide opportunities for writing.
- Closure, summary: Check for understanding.
- Classroom uses: Suggest what to try with students.

Materials

- Appearance: Make sure materials are clean, readable, and attractive.
- Student samples: Determine they are persuasive.
- Samples of forms: Include charts, graphs, and/or instructions.
- Bibliography: List relevant articles and books.
- Articles: Share and summarize the ideas presented.
- Simple, clear, and manageable materials: Evaluate for their helpfulness in reinforcing what you have presented.

Presentations should provide answers to these questions:

- What is it?—Give a very brief introduction to the practice. State the grade levels for which it is appropriate.
- Why do it?—Connect the practice to teaching/learning theory and the professional literature.
- What do I need?—List materials needed.
- What do I do?—Explain the steps for carrying it out; list procedural or management issues.
- How could this practice be extended or adapted?
- Professional references—Give a short list of pertinent readings or copies of a supporting research article.

APPENDIX I: COVER SHEET FOR PRESENTERS



An Affiliate of the National Writing Project

Title of Presentation

Your name

School/District

Phone/e-mail

The Rhode Island Writing Project is located at Rhode Island College.

600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Providence, Rhode Island 02908

Phone: (401) 456-8668 E-Mail: riwp@ric.edu

Director: Marjorie Roemer

Co-Directors: Beverly Paesano

Dina Sechio DeCristofaro

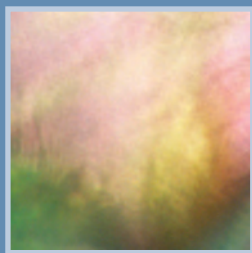
Susan Vander Does

Susan Haynes Ozbek is a retired teacher with more than forty years of experience in education. She served as a teacher of English in the Peace Corps and in international schools, and as a reading and writing specialist in the public schools of Rhode Island, where she worked primarily with learning disabled students. She has been active in the Rhode Island Writing Project since 1988 and currently serves as a member of the executive board. She has facilitated several RIWP summer institutes and advanced institutes and served as an active member of Project Outreach. She continues to work with young writers as part of the RIWP summer programs. With Susan Vander Does, she helped to establish the Presenters' Collaborative Network and co-directed it with her for five years. They have presented their work at several NWP conferences.

Marjorie Roemer has been director of the Rhode Island Writing Project for the last thirteen years; her earliest writing project experience was at the South Coast Writing Project in Santa Barbara, California in 1986. In over forty years in the classroom, she has taught junior high school, high school, and college, and is presently a professor of English at Rhode Island College and director of the writing program there. Her articles have appeared in *College English*, *College Composition and Communication*, the *Harvard Educational Review*, and many other journals in her field. She has presented papers and workshops at more than 70 national conferences. Her work focuses on the teaching and assessing of writing, reader response, professional development for teachers, and inquiries into the nature of school reform.

Keith Sanzen, a teacher-consultant for the Rhode Island Writing Project, proudly counts himself among the ranks of odd individuals who enjoy teaching middle school students. He currently teaches seventh and eighth grade English at Scituate Middle School, where he serves as the Gryphon Team leader and mentor coordinator. Keith is a regular presenter at the RIWP Spring Conference and has a specialized focus in "alternative texts," including multimedia and graphic novels, to equip struggling students with strong literacy practices. Keith enjoys examining a wider context of literacy in which students "read the world" in a critical fashion. In addition to being a member of the RIWP Executive Board, Keith also cofacilitates Presenters' Collaborative Network and the RIWP Literature Institute.

Susan Vander Does has served on the executive board of the Rhode Island Writing Project since 1992 and as a co-director since 2000. She has facilitated the invitational institute, the advanced institute, the Young Writers' Program, an embedded institute, the Literacy Leadership Institute, the Presenters' Collaborative Network, and many inservice and local and national conference presentations. She began her career 25 years ago teaching English as a second language to kindergarten-age through adult students, then focused on language arts in the upper elementary grades. She is currently a teacher-consultant in reading at Saylesville Elementary School in Lincoln, Rhode Island, and a doctoral candidate in the joint program at Rhode Island College and the University of Rhode Island. She is preparing to research teachers' observations of students' reading comprehension.



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