NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT AT WORK
Volume 1, Number 4

Models *of* Inservice

The Fledgling Years: Lessons from the First Four Years of the National Writing Project in Vermont

by Patricia McGonegal and Anne Watson

National Writing Project in Vermont
University of Vermont

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.

Please see the inside back cover for more information and a list of all available titles in the NWP at Work series.

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Establishing NWP in Vermont: Linking the State, the University, Theorists, and Vermont's Schools
by Patricia McGonegal

Inservice at Two Vermont Schools: A Success and a Learning Experience
by Anne Watson

National Writing Project in Vermont
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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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FOREWORD

National Writing Project at Work, a series of monographs written by writing project teachers and site directors about their work, debuts with four monographs that describe models of inservice. Over the last few years, teachers, site directors, and national directors of the National Writing Project have begun to document and disseminate knowledge generated by NWP local site initiatives. These initiatives, inspired by the mission and vision of the NWP, include a wide range of teacher professional development models, including school site writing series, teacher research projects, statewide reading projects, summer institutes, school site coaching, and professional development designed by teachers. The monographs illustrate the local creativity and responsiveness of individual NWP sites. Collectively, they are an important body of teacher knowledge about the multiple forms of inservice teachers experience as useful and respectful. They show that there are many forms of successful professional development and support the NWP belief that there is no one right way to do this work.

Professional development of teachers is a pivotal component of school reform, and teacher voices are critical for this work to be successful. In these monographs, we hear why and when teachers commit to this work, what it does for them as educators, and how it helps change their professional self-images. We learn the authors' ideas behind their designs for reform, their grassroots theories about what it takes to transform school culture, teaching, and learning, and what support they need to do this work. The monographs show how school reform happens—how in a multitude of ways, large and small, in schools across the country, teachers make it work.

Looking at this first set of monographs, we notice several trends. First, the authors bring their extensive experience in schools, their reputations as leaders, and their extensive insider knowledge of their schools, districts, and states to their work. They wield the power of their insider status, their networks, and their knowledge of the systems to effect change. Second, they take on new roles, roles they have never played before, and, consequently, they take risks. The risk taking involves failures as well as successes, and a notable strength of the monographs is the honest voice in which each is written.

Third, while some of the monographs are reports of professional development that originated with NWP's Project Outreach Network with its explicit mission to engage teachers of students of poverty, all of the projects in the monographs have equity at their core. Each monograph describes work that targets a population of students and teachers not being served. Fourth, the teachers and site directors were—or learned to be—politically canny, seeking alliances, partnerships, and funding for their work. Fifth, these teachers are not always working in friendly climates. They are attempting reform with staffs who have burned out, or are nearing burnout, with high teacher turnover, with too many simultaneous initiatives—

in short, with all the realities of current public school education, especially in urban and rural schools of poverty.

We are pleased that the first volume of NWP at Work will include monographs about inservice programs. The work described here will have much to add to the debate about effective professional development. In these times, when a significant percentage of teachers leave the profession after five years, these monographs offer opportunities to engage teachers intellectually and feed their teaching souls. These are models of school reform that keep teachers teaching.

It is with great pleasure and pride that we introduce the National Writing Project at Work series. We are hopeful that teachers, site directors, policymakers, academics, and all who work in the realm of school reform will find much to think about in this series.

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INTRODUCTION

Mention Vermont and most people immediately picture small villages with white church steeples tucked in the crooks and valleys of the rugged land. In truth, this image does exist, and although Vermont's landscape is rapidly changing, it is still the most rural state in the nation.

Vermont has over 300 individual school districts. More than 200 schools have fewer than 150 students in grades K–6. Although each school has its own board of education clinging to local control, most schools belong to large, widespread supervisory unions containing several school districts. As a result of the distance between schools, however, each school retains its autonomy. When students leave grade six, most are thrust into a supervisory union high school with several hundred students. In spite of its rural nature, Vermont has placed itself on the national map with strong educational initiatives, notably the first-in-the-U.S. statewide Portfolio Assessment Program, which was implemented in 1991 and designed to encourage better teaching and give rich data on student performance.

In 1996, another educational innovation, the National Writing Project in Vermont (NWP-VT), began its first year. This monograph, written by Patricia McGonegal and Anne Watson, documents the first four years of the NWP site. Patricia covers the historical background, explains the gap in the state's professional development filled by NWP-VT, and discusses the first summer institute, funding, and collaborations. Anne compares two early professional development series: one was a success, the other was not. Anne reflects on what was learned from both series and offers a mini-handbook for planners and coordinators of professional development series.

ESTABLISHING NWP IN VERMONT: LINKING THE STATE, THE UNIVERSITY, THEORISTS, AND VERMONT'S SCHOOLS

by Patricia McGonegal

Classroom teachers have played a role in designing Vermont's educational structures for many years. In 1989, when Vermont began to develop the statewide Portfolio Assessment Program, Geof Hewitt, a Vermont Department of Education writing consultant, invited a small group of teachers who were known as good writing instructors to draw up a survey. The survey was designed to explore the thoughts, theory, and vision of teachers across the state. Survey questions asked teachers about their teaching, the people and publications they built their theory on, and their ideas about assessment. The results of this survey, coupled with the informed vision of the Vermont Department of Education (DOE) leaders, laid the groundwork for Vermont's portfolio initiative. The teachers, with DOE staff, drafted recommendations for the content and standards for assessing the work in a student portfolio.

As the statewide assessment was developed, teachers continued to be involved. The initial teacher-leadership team met often with Geof and Commissioner Richard Mills, struggling with such questions as: What should the contents of a portfolio look like? What criteria should we use to assess it? At which grade levels should we take snapshots of the work? And Richard's persistent question, Should we make this mandatory?

Today, no one seems to use the word mandatory, but the stakes are high and make it unlikely that a school would ignore the portfolio system. The assessments feel mandated. Because they are public information, assessment results are published. In an effort to improve results, administrators have tied funding to these assessments. These incentives, and local pressures built into the system, have given the Portfolio Assessment Program and its sister assessment, the New Standards Reference Exam (another initiative produced with the input of Vermont teachers), enough clout to move them to the center of educational reform efforts in Vermont.

Today, teachers are still the agents of the portfolio assessment system; many of them are veterans of the original leadership team. Teachers serve as leaders of seventeen portfolio networks across the state coordinated by the DOE. Twice yearly, these network leaders conduct sessions for interested teachers, explaining the rubrics, analyzing benchmarks, and suggesting prompts for writing that will meet the valued criteria. The leaders help teachers "calibrate" their judgments on sample texts, explaining the reasons for designated scores for benchmark pieces, and help them score writing the same way. The portfolio "training sessions" are valuable, reflecting sound theory and good practice. But despite the significant involvement of teachers in the state's professional development efforts for the Portfolio Assessment Program, there still seemed to be something missing.

A Missing Element in Vermont Professional Development

As a teacher-leader with the Portfolio Assessment Program, I often noticed a curious practice: when teachers left the portfolio network meetings, they would stand in cold parking lots (this is Vermont, remember) and describe books, articles, ideas, and classroom activities that excited them. At the network meetings, some teachers raised questions there was no time to address, and some even spoke of a writing life of their own. The time allotted for these activities was brief and felt out of proportion to the interest. I wondered, was there a professional space for teachers to develop and share these theories and practices and questions? A place supported by the educational system, and located indoors? A place that would honor and nourish these ideas and create methods for sharing them?

In July 1986, my first summer at the Bread Loaf School of English,[1] I heard references to such a place. The writings and conversations of Jim Moffett, Ken Macrorie, and others spoke glowingly of the National Writing Project. Later, at a school leadership conference in San Diego, I experienced an NWP session, and tasted what Macrorie and Moffett knew. The session leader, a teacher from Texas, made us all write and read our own pieces. She referred to literature that would supplement what we did that day, and she inspired useful, concrete ideas and practices I could take back and use in my classroom. After the session, I went up and asked her, "How did you get so good at doing workshops like this?" Again I heard the words *National Writing Project*.

After a bit more information gathering, Geof and I applied to become a writing project site in winter 1995. We had found the missing elements. The NWP was a place for teachers to read, question, and share sound practice of all kinds within Vermont's recommended portfolio genres—underneath them, alongside them, and in addition to them. Here was a place for teachers to write, exploring the experiences they imposed on students, and exploring their own lives, positions, and challenges as professionals. Here were models for teachers reaching out to other teachers, affirming and expanding the great things teachers do every day. And here was a model that challenged them to grow constantly and forever.

Geof signed on as co-director for NWP-VT, and we also enlisted the help of Paul Eschholz at the University of Vermont, co-founder of the successful Vermont Writing Program (VWP), which began in 1977. In VWP, Paul coordinated summer institutes where teachers came together to take courses from notable teachers like Don Murray and Mary Ellen Giacobbe, and Paul worked with teachers back in their schools as well. His work introduced to Vermont the notions of process writing and teachers writing and sharing practices. Many VWP veterans eagerly applied as pioneers of the first invitational summer institute at NWP-VT.

1 The Bread Loaf School of English is a program at Middlebury College leading to a master of arts or master of letters degree (http://www.breadnet.middlebury.edu/).

Getting Started

We built that first plane as we flew it. After our proposal was accepted, NWP sent us a priceless packet of model forms, schedules, demonstrations, and writing group formats. In the spring, we were visited by Mary Ann Smith and Joye Alberts of the NWP. They modeled an interview, emphasizing what to ask for in our candidates' teaching demonstrations. Some of our advisors helped us read applications and decide what we wanted to see in our candidates. We looked for people who were good teachers and good writers.

Looking back at our first interviews with teachers, I can see that we were already shaping them to fit the needs we saw in the schools. We talked to the applicants about authentic writing ideas, engaging activities, and building on—and building to—the contents of our students' portfolios but not teaching to those pieces alone. None of us questioned or undervalued the powerful impact of the state assessment or the attention paid to writing. While planning for the first institute, we found ourselves wondering what kinds of school-year staff development could enhance and enrich this work.

Never having been to a summer institute, I asked Don Gallehr, director of the Northern Virginia Writing Project, if I could visit the first few institute days at his site. NWP sponsored this on-the-job mentoring and firsthand experience. I felt an air of something unique and important happening from the first moment of the Northern Virginia Writing Project summer institute, but it all happened in a relaxed, cordial setting. I could see the planning Don and his staff had done in the months prior. When the first two demonstrations went off seamlessly, I realized the weight and importance of the coaching that helped shape them. Taking part in a writing response group, I understood the organic, honored role that writing was to take. Talking to Don's co-director, I came to understand the complex role the director takes: Don had enlisted lots of help from staff and former teacher-consultants, but he was not above bringing the food and setting up the coffee himself the first day, and fretting over the planning of his own demonstration.

Back in Vermont, with only weeks to go, we continued to shape our plans with the help of advisors from our local talent pool: several University of Vermont professors, some VWP veterans, and portfolio designers.

Our first summer institute was powerful. There was enough laughter to cause a neighboring professor to walk into our classroom and say, "I don't know what you people are doing in here every day, but I want to be invited to it next year." Dixie Goswami from Bread Loaf joined us and set out the simple yet profound notion of the teacher as researcher, awakening many of us to the notion that teacher research is what good teachers do naturally. There was much to talk about and to read, and many breakthroughs and discoveries about ourselves and our own writing.

After the Summer Institute

After the first institute, we hoped to re-create, in our inservice series for other Vermont teachers, the spirit and the achievement of those four weeks. In the fall of 1996, we began our first inservice sessions at two elementary schools in northern Vermont. Teacher participants were enthusiastic and involved. The next year we doubled the number of school series, bringing in more teacher-consultants from our summer institutes as coordinators and presenters. We began a collaboration with the Vermont Council of Teachers of English, cosponsoring a Saturday session at a local hotel, offering teachers from across the state a taste of NWP-VT.

We set out to sell the NWP Basic Assumptions (see Appendix A) to our schools. Some of these assumptions were more easily sold than others. Inservice Program Coordinator Anne Watson and I emphasized to school leaders the need for ongoing contact. Few would dispute that professional development writing programs need to be ongoing, consistent, and provide opportunities for teachers and students to practice writing over a period of time. The word time is pivotal. In Vermont, as elsewhere, teachers and students are expected to demonstrate immediate results in writing with little opportunity to practice. Writer, teacher, and author Natalie Goldberg states, "It is odd that we never question the feasibility of a football team practicing long hours for one game; yet in writing, we rarely give ourselves the space to practice." Nor do we have classrooms where teachers readily practice writing along with their students.

Just as the session in San Diego had done for me, our sessions gave teachers more than the usual workshop. There was a piece of classroom practice involved, but it was tied to theory, as writer Ann Bertoff suggests it always should be. She quotes a colleague who was asked for a copy of a successful exercise and who replied, "Sure, [you can have my recipe], but you have to take the theory, too."

Our first inservice coordinators struggled with the question of proportion. What should our assignments and expectations be? We had assigned whole books at the summer institute. This was too much to try at a series of three-hour, after-school sessions, so our teacher-consultants found one-page articles by Donald Graves and Donald Murray. They also asked teachers to find readings to share as well. The rich response to this request taught us an important lesson, one that we might have learned at the institute: If we do too much for the participants, they become consumers only. Asking them to bring nourishment to the sessions—food, theory, experience—is key to a successful experience. I like the image of an inservice workshop as a ball game of some kind: I handle things for a while, then toss the ball to the participants. In order to put the ball in their court as early as possible in a session, I always ask the participants a question, or for journal writing, or introductions, or small group discussion. Back and forth. I always know where we are going, but share the floor and leave room for spontaneity. Turning over much of the responsibility, activity, and even supplies we consume at a session invites buy-in, engagement, power, and responsibility. When we do it all ourselves, in the spirit of

"you people are tired, and overworked; we'll feed you, and we'll decide what you will do, think, and read," we see many more folded arms and less interest from the teachers.

Funding

Who pays for all this work? Vermont's experience with funding may be unique. As a small state, Vermont has few enough teachers that we see each other in many contexts. Geof and I knew enough people at the University of Vermont to elicit cash when we needed it. The English department chairman, Alan Broughton, actually passed the hat among university departments, including English, the Graduate College, Continuing Education, the President's Office, and the College of Education, to secure our required NWP funding match that first year. He helped us similarly the second and third years. Alan's association with Geof helped him realize that this was an authentic, worthwhile endeavor. Together with in-kind donations (Paul's and Geof's time) from the University of Vermont and the Department of Education, we were able to make our match. I also approached a long-time colleague at the Department of Education who coordinated large grants like Title I, Goals 2000, and a huge gift from IBM. After several long conversations and one short grant proposal, he awarded, from Goals 2000 funds, a salary subsidy for part of my teaching contract. To direct our project, I was released from my high school classroom for half my day.

What is not unique to Vermont is the necessity of articulating exactly what these funds are paying for. Our biggest communication challenge is convincing our funders of the NWP tenet that there are no quick fixes. Often, our efforts are mistakenly assumed to be part of the state assessment system, and we have to clarify that while we are working toward solid literacy achievement, our funders will not be paying for more scoring practice. Taking on this diplomatic challenge up front helps us stay distinct and free to do what we know works best.

Some of our teacher-coordinators, with their administrators, found similar funds to subsidize our school-year inservice work, finding Goals 2000, Eisenhower, and other block grant money to pay for our series in schools. A little research taught us that our cost to schools, $100 per hour (see Appendix B) in 1999–2000, is not expensive, especially for the quality experience we provide, and we are becoming better and better at marketing our offerings. Beginning our second year, we designed and sent out a brochure (see Appendix C) advertising our staff development sessions. This brochure, as well as so many other forms and ideas, was lifted from examples from other writing project sites sent to us in the original NWP new-site packet. I don't know what we would have done without that modeling.

We sent our brochure to every principal and superintendent, and to every curriculum coordinator on the DOE mailing list, redesigning and sending it again at the start of each school year. As a result of our first mailing, we heard from several school administrators, teachers, and curriculum coordinators. Knowing that teachers are the key

marketers of good ideas to their colleagues, we also began a database of teachers who attended our sessions. Once teachers have attended an event or series, they help us spread the word about NWP work and sometimes get a series going at their schools.

School Inservice and Partnerships

As our site grows, we try for increasing partnerships with the effective initiatives and professional organizations across the state. In 1999, we began cosponsoring our Saturday Specials with the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network, as well as the Vermont Council of Teachers of English. At portfolio network meetings, we make use of NWP ideas and models, talking up the theory and activities of the project and asking teachers to write and talk about their readings and theory. We are working with the University of Vermont College of Education, hoping to bring NWP theory and practice into the preservice program there. We have invited undergraduates to our Saturday Specials for free, and we are discussing bringing NWP teacher-consultants into undergraduate courses as guest lecturers. This fall, NWP-VT will work with the DOE in providing "technical assistance" to schools deemed in need of help in literacy education. Our major efforts are concentrated where classroom teachers are: in Vermont's schools. Each year, we try to develop more-effective staff development sessions.

In the next section, Anne describes her experience coordinating sessions in two very distinct schools. One of these was already a "learning community," interested in extending its knowledge of teaching writing. The other school, apparently distracted by involvement in too many reform initiatives, seemed less developed in its commitment to writing across the curriculum. Our experience at both schools taught us valuable lessons about setting up and conducting inservice series.

More and more, we see how complex a job it is to recognize, understand, and address the needs of students, teachers, and schools in our state. Our job is similar to every teacher's job, and every student's—it's research, it's learning, it's ongoing, it's exciting, and it's satisfying. As the site continues, we prove again and again the NWP assumptions: there are certainly no quick fixes; writing is indeed a tool for learning across the curriculum and across the grades; and real teachers are the best teachers of other teachers.

INSERVICE AT TWO VERMONT SCHOOLS: A SUCCESS AND A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

by Anne Watson

When I began work as the inservice program director for NWP-VT, I realized that my previous experiences in education were going to be invaluable. I had taught for twenty-five years and knew about teaching and what teachers needed. For sixteen years, I was a K–12 Chapter I Reading Coordinator. In that job, coordinating services for special-needs students, I learned how important it was to have clear communication between me, the classroom teachers, and the twelve teacher assistants who provided remedial reading for students. I had also been a principal in a small, rural school, attending to the needs of teachers from a principal's perspective. Because of my background, I usually have immediate rapport with the principal and the teachers when I'm setting up an inservice series. Whenever possible, I transfer my past learning experiences into current use. This usually makes for a successful series, however, not always.

In this section, I describe two very different professional development series in two very different schools. After describing the two series, I offer two resources, "Advice for Setting Up a Professional Development Series," and "Tips for Coordinators of Inservice Series." There are appendices of model agendas, evaluation forms, and other materials. As a rule I urge you to, as we do, make use of the resources available through the National Writing Project network. Don't feel you have to begin everything from scratch. You'll have enough to do!

In Brentwood, the first school described, the school administrator had been the school leader for several years, and the school had a systematic action plan in place to address the students' learning needs through professional development programs. This was not the situation at the second school, Adams. The Adams faculty were adjusting to a new administrator and addressing several curriculum issues simultaneously.

The Brentwood Elementary School Series: A Success

Putting together an NWP-VT professional development writing program to best meet a school district's request is a challenge. An image that comes to mind is putting together a jigsaw puzzle. In 1999, I had the pleasure of coordinating a professional development series at the Brentwood Elementary School, in Brentwood, Vermont, where the pieces meshed smoothly. Brentwood is a small, picturesque, rural town in the northeast area of Vermont. It sits in a valley surrounded by rolling hillsides and dairy farms. A small state college is situated less than a mile from the school. The school is a beautiful old building that was renovated but retained the

integrity of the original structure. Although it is located on a street within easy walking distance for local residents, most students are transported long distances from surrounding farm areas. The K–6 school has a student population of approximately 270 students, and it is one of several elementary schools in a large supervisory union. Like most Vermont schools, there is little, if any, racial diversity. There is some diversity in the Chittenden County area, but Vermont schools have a predominately white population.

I had some knowledge of the Brentwood school community from having been a principal in a neighboring town. Although our paths seldom crossed, I respected the school's principal and admired the input she gave in local meetings we both attended. I knew that, over the past eight years, the Brentwood principal and teachers had built a rich learning environment for teachers and children. From the school philosophy and daily structure the principal had developed, I knew Brentwood teachers were experienced at working as teams. A comradeship of support and genuine interest existed among the twenty-one teachers in the school. In preliminary meetings, Patricia and I could see that the teachers also had a real voice in making decisions. They collaborated with us on the NWP-VT series agenda. They were seeking better ways to engage their students in diverse forms of writing, across grades and subject areas. Together with the teachers, we mapped out the focus of the series and negotiated the timing of each session. The teachers also wanted to coordinate their existing scope and sequence for writing skills with the workshop series. (Scope and sequence determines the grade level at which specific grammar, usage, and mechanics in writing are introduced and mastery expected.) During the series, the discussion of the writing skills scope and sequence provided a space for teachers, across grade levels and content areas, to clarify and fill in specific writing instruction gaps.

To include the whole staff in the planning of the series, at the first session, I gave a survey (see Appendix D) to teachers, asking them to comment on their strengths and areas of need in their classroom literacy instruction. We used this knowledge of the specific needs of the teachers to structure the series. Their responses also showed me that the Brentwood teachers were open and receptive to NWP's model of professional development.

At a typical Brentwood session, the teachers greeted the presenter warmly and responded to the workshop and the topic for the session. At the close of the session, the presenter facilitated a discussion on the applications and extensions of the workshop. From this closing activity, the presenter gleaned pertinent information for future writing demonstrations and maintained the model of teachers teaching teachers. We didn't want NWP-VT teacher-consultants to appear to be the experts. Brentwood teachers arrived at each session looking forward to writing and discussing teaching practices. No matter how high the level of stress in their day, they were ready to focus on writing with enthusiasm. I didn't have to nudge and coax them. Throughout the series, I witnessed a community of teachers becoming a community of writers. As the series coordinator, I asked a lot from the participants: I assigned readings, issued prompts, and supported the activities led by the

teacher-consultant. I asked the teachers to experiment in their classrooms with the ideas presented in the workshops, and they did. As a result, teachers not only came to each session ready to practice new writing techniques, they began to share student writing based on previous workshops. A willingness to read their own pieces aloud during the sessions brought laughter, and sometimes tears or humble silence, as we listened to words tumble forth in poetic images. Each session contained elements of both personal and professional involvement.

Our last session was an emotional celebration of teachers reading aloud the pieces they had chosen for the anthology booklet. There were requests: "Lisa, read your poem about Vermont," and "I want to hear Mary's piece about the rocking horse." They also encouraged each other. "Come on, Ted, read your piece." Teachers lingered long after the 5:30 P.M. closure, discussing current writing practices. There was no rushing out the door, the participants glad that another inservice series was over. I, too, felt the desire to linger. The teachers' evaluations at the end of this series showed growth and enthusiasm. One teacher summarized her experience by writing, "By engaging me in the writing process and letting me discover the pleasure of writing, I can more honestly teach writing."

The Adams K–8 School Series: A Learning Experience

One might assume the National Writing Project beliefs about teachers writing, teachers teaching teachers, and teachers sharing writing-instruction practices would always guarantee a successful professional development series. Not so! The preconditions I described in Brentwood helped make the series successful.

Adams, a K–8 school, was different. Situated in a rural farming area, the natural setting around the school is one of ruggedness. There is no village with local stores within walking distance. There are approximately three hundred students with approximately twenty-five teachers. Students are dependent on bus transportation or their parents to get to school.

I discovered the puzzle pieces for this series were jagged and misfit, not as smooth as at Brentwood. Although Tish knew one of the more enlightened and progressive teachers, neither Tish nor I had any depth of knowledge about the school. At the initial meeting, Tish and I met with the principal and a committee of the classroom teachers. The group discussed writing instruction needs and how NWP teacher-consultants might address them. At that meeting, we stressed the NWP assumption that professional development programs work best when teachers attend by choice. The committee assured us that interest was high and that the series would support a schoolwide goal of writing across the curriculum. We were given the common (but occasionally inaccurate) assurance of buy-in by a majority of the teachers. We were not made aware at this time of other curriculum initiatives that were underway. It was our understanding that professional development in writing instruction was a top priority. With this information in place, we began creating the series to address the school's needs as described to us.

Because Adams was a K–8 school, we would be working with content-area teachers who wanted to talk about research writing. We saw a double challenge here: we were introducing a complex type of writing for teachers who probably had little background in writing theory, and we would be working with a staff who also had plenty of other commitments to subject-related professional development.

At the first meeting, we immediately realized that, despite the earlier assurances, the sessions were mandatory. I still cringe at the memory of the first session. We were to begin promptly at 2:30 P.M., but the students were still being dismissed at 2:30. Teachers slowly filtered into the school library, stopping at the snack table to mingle and chat. I had to suggest getting snacks and finding a place to sit. The principal introduced me, then she apologized for not being able to attend the session and quickly left. Suzanne Roberts, the teacher-consultant, waited patiently to begin her writing demonstration. Teachers continued to mill at the snack table. I had a hunch that some of the teachers had no idea why they were attending. I doubted I'd see the administrator again. It was clear that the focus and purpose for these sessions had not been disseminated prior to our arrival, and I wondered what kind of preparation and focus these teachers were receiving around their "schoolwide goal."

While I led introductions and reviewed the series overview and the day's agenda, two teachers in the back of the room began talking behind their hands. I asked the group to introduce themselves and to talk briefly about a piece of writing that was important to them or an author they liked. What was it about the author's writing they enjoyed? There were embarrassed giggles and several had a hard time thinking of an author. I asked if any of them had ever kept a journal. Did they write letters or poems when they could find time in their busy lives? During the introductions, most indicated their discomfort with writing and repeatedly stated they didn't have time to write with their students. I noticed that several had neither paper nor pencil. Others shuffled through student papers to find a blank sheet of paper when they learned they'd be writing during the session. Writing was something they taught to children, not something they did themselves. It was hard to imagine that, only a few short weeks before, the planning committee had enthusiastically agreed to focus on writing instruction.

Suzanne began her demonstration by describing her experiences with reluctant student writers. She showed samples of students' writing. She explored the uses of "persona writing," a format she had used with her hard-to-reach students. She described how we all have a relative, neighbor, or friend with quirks that may be funny or annoying to us. An objective in persona writing is to embellish the personality traits of someone you've observed over time. Suzanne provided an alternative for those reluctant to develop a persona piece about someone they knew; it was fine to create an imaginary character. We had chosen her demonstration because it was applicable across all disciplines. The demonstration had engaged everyone at the summer institute. Surely it would be effective across the range of uses and purposes this group might demand. But I felt anxious. Who in this group would contribute? After warming up the group with her gentle and real style, and modeling the informal language her students produced in this exercise, Suzanne

asked the group to write. There was hesitancy from nearly everyone. Some, like the very students in their classrooms, doodled and never began to write. When the exercise was finished, only the English teachers were willing to share their writing.

I observed from the sidelines. A content-area teacher and a physical education teacher continued to talk, whisper, and make jokes. Direct eye contact from me did not dissuade them from their inappropriate behavior. I glanced toward an English teacher, hoping for support and affirmation. His contribution amounted to swinging his legs and telling unrelated stories about what he was already doing in his classroom. I continued to support Suzanne by extending examples of how her writing demonstration could be transferred across grade levels.

The series agenda stated that each session would end at 5:00 P.M. Teachers began fidgeting, clearing the table, and stuffing book bags by 4:30. One or two slid from their seats and quietly left. The remainder bolted on the dot of 5:00 P.M. The snack table was left in disarray. As Suzanne and I rearranged the library tables, we discussed our impressions of the session. We were both disappointed. As the coordinator, I realized this would be a long, tough series.

During the two-hour drive home, I had plenty to think about. Perhaps we should have started with a general introduction to writing. I was hoping the next session, on writing across the curriculum, would create a greater response. In retrospect, I felt I should have started the series with the writing-across-the-curriculum presentation, since it was an area where teachers had some experience. Persona writing was an unknown area for the teachers. In spite of Suzanne's modeling, it was too difficult a leap for the majority of teachers to make. The behavior I had witnessed by the Adams teachers reminded me of when I was a trainer with the Vermont Portfolio Assessment Program. Being the messenger of information teachers do not want to receive is uncomfortable. I felt concern for Suzanne and the other teacher-consultants who would be sharing their writing demonstrations with this less-than-enthusiastic group. As the series wore on, things did not improve. Each of our teacher-consultants encountered silent, unwilling people—not everyone, but enough to make this our benchmark for a series that did not work.

Lessons Learned

Looking back at those sessions, Tish and I saw that we never should have agreed to the Adams series. We might have worked well with a small group of teachers from the school, but it was apparent we could not work with unwilling, distracted people, and because of what we learned at Adams, we now go to great lengths to make our processes clear during our negotiations. A contract is written with the school that outlines the series, including the number of sessions. When a school tells us all the teachers are "on board," we press for more details about precisely what this means. Also, we speak more plainly about the increased chances for success when an administrator is present and participates in the sessions. And we are adamant that attendance must be voluntary.

We're smarter about setting up series, too. An overall introduction to writing across the curriculum is extremely useful, and we now equip our teacher-consultants with a basic demonstration focused on writing to learn. A kickoff session in this area provides the introduction and scaffolding some teachers need.

When faced with an initial session like Suzanne's, we now have some strategies. We act and speak more directly. For example, we intervene and interrupt disruptive behavior. A word or two with the offending or distracting participant usually works. We have other strategies, too, like calling an unscheduled break during the session, or negotiating a change in the schedule. We make sure there's sufficient time at the end of each session for teachers to respond with feedback by using the evaluation form (see Appendix E). We begin sessions by reviewing the feedback information. We create time to deal with teacher's requests. Sometimes, a question is answered simply by reviewing the series schedule and indicating when the request will be addressed. We bring articles in response to requests. If sessions continue to be less than satisfactory, we make time to meet with an administrator. Sometime we have to push hard on the request for a meeting. When we do meet, we explain our concerns without mentioning specific teachers and approach the administrator with the attitude of "what can we do together to make this series a success?"

Sometimes, even though it hurts to turn away business, we say no to a school that does not seem to be ready for NWP work. We look for characteristics of a school like Brentwood before we commit to a series. We look for a school philosophy of teamwork, where teachers are accustomed to talking to each other, and where there is consistent administrative leadership over several years. We look for a principal interested in attending some of the sessions and teachers with decision-making authority for the sessions.

We are wary of schools like Adams where a top-down model of leadership exists, where teachers seemed factionalized, even angry, and where too many uncoordinated efforts are being attempted. In Brentwood, the principal met with me several times to review our progress, but at Adams I met with the principal only once. Correspondence occurred through email and fax messages. I'm not sure the principal ever looked at the series agenda or the weekly reminders that I asked to have posted. It was not a good feeling to arrive at the school and not be recognized. At Adams, the inservice was clearly being done "to" the staff. Teachers in the Adams school were simultaneously working on math and science initiatives. Adding writing to the professional development program was overload. Their schedules were already full. When considering a series request, it is important to know what other professional development programs are occurring at the same time. Don't be afraid to say no. Explain that, because you want teachers to have a commitment to writing, you'd prefer to reschedule the series for later. Establish a tentative reschedule date and keep in touch with the school administrator.

Onward

As we look to the future, we can see many items on our wish list. We've put them in a rough order from the more easily accomplished to the more challenging and long-term:

- follow up and refine what we have already done by revisiting where we've worked
- publish our newsletter more often and increase and improve our publicity
- develop a database indicating by geographical regions schools where NWP-VT teachers are located
- develop a school mentor program
- establish a teacher-research group
- build a wider base of leadership and capacity by expanding the number of teacher-consultants and creating roles for a growing number of teacher-consultants
- reach into new areas where Vermont teachers could use our help by becoming members of the state regional professional development affiliates
- address more firmly the issue of state initiatives that focus only on testing outcomes
- become recognized as a Statewide Professional Development Writing Program.

Every day here in the NWP-VT office, the telephone rings with new questions, and people are pleased with our answers. Yes, we'll be happy to tell you about our summer programs. Yes, some of our summer fellows will be happy to come to your school and lead a workshop series. Yes, we'll be glad to talk more about the summer program you heard about at the workshop. Yes, we can help you raise your students' test scores while extending their abilities and attitudes far beyond the scope of anybody's test. Yes, we can build, with your help, a professional home where teachers can grow and question, argue, challenge, and lead each other.

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT IN VERMONT ADVICE FOR SETTING UP A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERIES

"National Writing Project in Vermont Advice for Setting Up a Professional Development Series," along with "Tips for Series Coordinators," are guidelines that have proven useful to us over the past four years. We offer them as guidelines to adjust and adapt for your needs.

Initial Contact and Planning Meeting

Schools typically call us because of a local teacher-consultant's enthusiasm or because they read our brochures and announcements. When a school calls, we set up a planning meeting at the school site. Depending on the school structure, this meeting may take place with a school professional-development committee, school literacy team, districtwide curriculum coordinator, and/or the school administrator. When possible, both Tish, as site director, and I, as program coordinator, attend. If I'm not playing the role of series coordinator, he or she may join us, too. During the initial meeting, we listen carefully to the description of the school's needs. We ask for clarification when needed.

Tish and I show artifacts of other series, such as agendas, articles for teachers to read, and anthologies of teacher writing from other series. We describe the invitational summer institute. We speak about NWP's model and the impact it has on teachers. All of this creates a strong image as we describe NWP-VT practices, stressing:

- specific teacher-consultant demonstrations to create a best match
- teachers writing during the session and with their students
- teachers implementing newly acquired writing practices between sessions
- teachers returning to the next session with student writing samples
- assigning readings to review between sessions.

After four years, we know a little about what makes NWP-VT inservice series work best. In this initial planning meeting, we propose the length and time of the series, at least five and preferably ten three-hour sessions after school. We discuss that for real impact on teaching and learning, the series should be twenty-five to thirty hours of instruction.

We mention some of the NWP Basic Assumptions (see Appendix A). We stress voluntary versus mandatory participation. When we bring this up, the site planning group always acknowledges that their experience with the issue of mandatory attendance matches ours.

We encourage school administrators to participate with teachers in the sessions. We encourage participation by one school district (versus multiple schools in a supervisory union) for maximum chance of setting up a tight, ongoing learning community. We stress the value of small group sessions (approximately twenty-five or less) to allow for best interactions. We tell them the cost of the series ($100 per hour as of 1999–2000). And we negotiate dates, searching for less-committed times for the group. Tish and I confer frequently as we draft the agenda for the series. We try to ensure that the series is based on the needs expressed by teachers. A sample agenda (see Appendices F and G) for the series is reviewed by the administrator and committee to ensure we're on track.

Once the series is under way, the coordinator of the series takes over (see "Guidelines for a Series Coordinator"), consulting with us when necessary. When the series ends, wearing my program coordinator hat, I visit the principal. It is important to bring closure as well as offer possible next steps. The meeting can open the door for a mentor program or continued consulting with the school. It's a good idea at this time to confirm again our strong assumptions: that ongoing, voluntary professional development is key to the school, reaps great rewards, and may only be beginning for the group. Some teachers may want to attend the invitational summer institute and return next year to carry on leadership within the school. We also encourage teachers to attend the week-long open institute held during the summer.

Looking back at a series through the feedback and evaluations from school personnel and from our staff, we see big payoffs. We can judge how close we came to accomplishing what we agreed on during our planning meeting. We can then review and refine our process for the next series. Through all this work, Tish and I are a good team, having shared so much of the construction of all this, the successes and the battle scars. And we both believe "two minds work better than one."

GUIDELINES FOR A SERIES COORDINATOR: TIPS FROM THE NWP-VT HANDBOOK

The series coordinator wears many hats. Borrowing from NWP models (this time from the Bay Area Writing Project), we put together a coordinator's handbook, which is outlined below; it is divided into the coordinator's responsibilities before, during, and after the series. Since coordinating a series is a complex job, we strongly suggest training sessions for teacher-consultants who will be coordinating series, not only for the details of coordination, but to ensure a consistency of vision across series.

Before the Series

Before the series begins, the series coordinator:

- **Conducts the Teacher Resource Survey (see Appendix D).** At the planning meeting (or the first workshop), we recommend that the participants fill out a brief survey describing the strengths and needs of their classroom writing programs. We use the survey for planning or revising the agenda and as a strong reference point for group discussions following writing demonstrations.
- **Designates a teacher at the school as a contact person.** This enables mailings and any necessary information to be distributed between sessions. The contact person is also a marketing resource for future writing project programs.
- **Finds the best match between teacher-consultants and the sessions.** Some schools request specific demonstrations that are easily matched to specific teacher-consultants. Sometimes, however, new sessions need to be created, or established sessions need to be reworked to fit a school's needs.
- **Contacts the teacher-consultants.** The coordinator contacts teacher-consultants about their upcoming demonstrations in a timely fashion. Busy teacher-consultants need lead time to plan their schedules and arrange for coverage in their own classrooms, if necessary.

- **Reviews the agenda and sends it to the school and the site director.** The school's professional development planning committee and/or administrator, the writing project site director, and the coordinator usualy review the agenda to confirm that it fits what was agreed upon during the planning sessions.
- **Revises meeting dates and reschedules presenters if necessary.** The coordinator keeps all potential presenters informed of changes that effect their schedules.
- **Sends the final agenda to the teacher-consultants.** Teacher-consultants receive the final agenda at the beginning of the series. They need to see the big picture, not just the piece they are presenting.
- **Sends the final agenda to the school planning group.** A member of the planning committee acts as a liaison to make sure agendas are distributed at the school in a timely fashion. The school administrator and planning committee present the information to all teachers at a faculty meeting. Reminders are also posted in the teachers' room as part of the weekly schedule.
- **Places a reminder phone call to the principal or planning committee.** We recommend placing a reminder phone call or sending an email to the school principal or planning group at least one week prior to the start of the series.
- **Maintains contact with the school administrator and school planning committee prior to the first session.** It's easy for an administrator and school planning committee to quickly move on to the next school issue. To keep the enthusiasm and focus directed toward the goals of the writing series, you need to maintain contact.

During the Series

During the series the coordinator:

- **Maintains the big picture.** The coordinator keeps the series connected, takes care of the weekly session details, and brings closure to the series.
- **Communicates with the principal or administrator.** If the administrator is not attending sessions, the coordinator provides an agenda and feedback about each session, schedules an appointment to discuss the progress of the series, and urges the administrator to attend sessions when possible. The frequency of meetings with the administrator depends upon the length of the series. Two or three meetings are probably sufficient.

Before or during each workshop, the coordinator:

- **Communicates with teacher-consultants prior to their presentations and provides information.** A phone call or email with a friendly "happy to be working with you" message is important. Information concerning the group dynamics and the linking of previous writing demonstrations is valuable to the presenter. This may be an opportunity to address teacher requests and make suggestions for adaptations, if necessary. The coordinator provides pertinent information to each teacher-consultant helping him or her feel connected to the whole series. The series coordinator provides logistical information, such as the number of participants, directions to the school, phone numbers, etc. The coordinator makes sure that the teacher-consultant's needs are met and their presentations can transfer across grade levels.
- **Sets the tone for the series.** The coordinator is the nurturer and heart of the series. In this role at each session, the coordinator: arrives early at the site, making sure the room is ready for teachers; checks equipment for the teacher-consultant's presentation; greets the teacher-consultant and offers encouragement about the group

he or she will be addressing; greets the participating teachers warmly and with enthusiasm and gives them some "release" time to talk about their day; brings sufficient copies of pertinent reading material; coaxes and cajoles when necessary.

- **Links the writing practices from session to session.** It is necessary to model and review connections during each session. The coordinator clarifies, again and again, helping teachers acquire new practices in teaching writing.
- **Provides consistency across sessions.** The coordinator asks teachers to try out the practices in their classrooms and bring samples of student writing to share. He or she makes sure there are recommended texts and handouts related to each session, and facilitates the rapport between the teachers and the teacher-consultants.
- **Administers the evaluations at each session** (see Appendix E).
- **Facilitates the creation of an anthology of teacher writing and disseminates it to all participants.** Teachers delight in this shared project, which, like so many NWP practices, is a powerful model for their classes. For many, it is their first publishing experience and it is something we recommend for each series.
- **Administers the final evaluation for the whole series** (see Appendix H). It's important to schedule enough time during the last session for the written evaluation and a discussion of the series. The coordinator can also record the verbal suggestions. Teachers may have varying points of view depending on the grade level they teach or their writing experience. They need to hear each other's views. This is valuable feedback to help plan future series.

After the Series

After the series, the coordinator:

- **Sends letters to the school administrator, the teacher-consultants, and the site director to sum up and clarify the impact of the series on the group.** The letters outline what has occurred and include the evaluation results (see Appendix I).

REFERENCES

Bertoff, Ann. 1987. "The Teacher as Researcher." *Reclaiming the Classroom: Teacher Research as an Agency for Change.* Goswami and Stillman, eds. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers.

Goldberg, Natalie. 1986. *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*. Boston: Shambhala Publications.

APPENDIX A: NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

1. Writing is pivotal to learning, academic achievement, and job success.
2. Writing instruction begins in kindergarten and continues through university.
3. Universities and schools in collaboration can provide powerful programs for teachers.
4. Effective teachers of writing regularly write themselves.
5. Exemplary teachers make the best teachers of other teachers.
6. Teachers are the key to reform in education.
7. Professional development begins when teachers enter teaching and continues throughout their careers.
8. Writing is fundamental to learning in all subjects.
9. Real change in classroom practice happens over time.

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INVOICE

National Writing Project in Vermont

INVOICE

Please make your check payable to:
National Writing Project in Vermont
c/o Chittenden East Supervisory Union
Richmond, VT 05477

Please direct inquiries to Patricia A. McGonegal 899-5130 or mcgonega@lemming.uvm.edu

Thank you for working with us.

To: Richmond Elementary School
Richmond, VT 05477

Invoice No. 1

Amount Due: $1,500.00

Description of Services: National Writing Project inservice sessions:
8/24/01, 8/25/01, 11/20/01, 11/21/01: = 15 hours

Terms: payable upon receipt

Date: November 21, 2001

NWP in Vermont:
Development for Professionals

A cooperative effort of the University of Vermont, the Vermont Department of Education, and the public and private schools of Vermont, NWP-VT helps all teachers to use writing in their instruction and improve the writing of all students in all subjects, K–16.

A branch of the National Writing Project (170 sites), the NWP-VT helps Vermont teachers through a variety of programs:

- NWP-VT summer institutes
- school-based workshop series
- "Saturday special" conferences
- teacher mentorships

Want a sample?

NWP-VT staff can often arrange for a demonstration session to kick off interest and begin teacher discussion. Call today for details!

Staff Development Workshops

Writing project staff confer with your school on content and schedule courses based on your school and staff needs.

Focus Possibilities

- **Writing to Learn:** How can we use written language to aid thinking and learning?
- **Writing Environments:** What needs to be in place for a classroom to produce good writing?
- **Vermont Standards:** What activities will help teachers and students address the Vermont Framework?
- **Creating a Portfolio:** Why use portfolios? How can we help students build and value them?
- **Writing Across Subjects:** How can content-area teachers, (e.g., arts, social and physical sciences), use writing to think, learn, and communicate?
- **Freewriting and Beyond:** What happens when students write informally every day? How can this be turned into more formal pieces?
- **Response to Literature:** How can reading and writing be integrated?
- **Teachers as Writers:** What can we discover in our own experience with writing and learning?

NWP-VT Basic Assumptions

- Writing needs constant attention from the earliest grades through the university.
- Teachers of writing must also write; the process of writing can be understood best by engaging in that process firsthand.
- Real change in classroom practice happens over time.
- Effective staff development programs are ongoing and systematic, bringing teachers together regularly to test and evaluate the best practices of other teachers and the continuing developments in the field.
- What is known about the teaching of writing comes not only from research but from the practice of those who teach writing.
- The university and schools work together as partners, believing that the top-down tradition is no longer acceptable as a staff development model.
- Successful practicing teachers are the best teachers of other teachers, providing credibility no outside consultant can match.
- The National Writing Project promotes no single "right" approach to teaching writing.

How can I learn more about the National Writing Project in Vermont?

- Call or email us:
  Patricia McGonegal, Director
  899-5130
  mcgonega@leming.uvm.edu

  Geof Hewitt, Co-Director
  828-3158

  Paul Eschholz, Co-Director
  656-0878

  Anne Watson, Coordinator
  899-3054
  macevt@aol.com

- Visit NWP-VT's web page:
  http://www.nwpvt.org

National Writing Project in Vermont

We are teachers who believe in the power of writing.

2001–2002

Staff Development Opportunities

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE TEACHER RESOURCE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Teacher Resource Survey

A. Describe the components of your classroom writing program that work well for students. This may include prewriting strategies, conferencing techniques, and editing procedures. What is working well for you and your writers?

B. Describe an area of your classroom writing program that you feel needs some attention, some "revision." Include ideas you have for the revisions.

APPENDIX E: EVALUATION FORM FOR INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS

NWP-VT
November 21, 2000
Richmond Elementary School
Richmond, Vermont

Professional Development Feedback

Presenter: _____ **Writing Demonstration:** _____

1–2 = of limited value
3 = somewhat valuable
4–5 = valuable
6–7 = extremely valuable

Appropriateness of Topic: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7**

Comments:

Methods Demonstrated: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7**

Comments

Overall Effectiveness: **1 2 3 4 5 6 7**

Comments

APPENDIX F: SAMPLE SERIES AGENDA

WRITING OR MAKING MAGIC?

The Difference is in the Teacher

A Series of Professional Development
Workshops Regarding Writing and the Teaching of Writing

Presented by:
The National Writing Project in Vermont

Hosted by:
Moretown Elementary School
Schedule of Sessions: all sessions begin at 3 P.M. and end at 6 P.M.

Date	Presenter	Topic
January 29	Ed Darling	"Personal Writing"
February 5	Patricia McGonegal	"Writing to Learn"
February 19	Beverly Boke	"Good Writing Grows on Your Skin: Building Sensory Awareness"
March 12	Steve Hudak	"Writing About Food"
March 26	Paul Eschholz	"Writing with Teachers"
April 9	Geof Hewitt	"Assessment Theory and Practice"
April 30	Thom McAllister	"Rewriting the Masters: The Reading/Writing Connection"
May 14	Cate Lamb	"Integrating Writing Using Multiple Intelligences: Focus on Math"

APPENDIX G: SAMPLE SESSION AGENDA

NWP-VT Professional Development Writing Series

Agenda

2:30–2:40 P.M.	Get snacks, settle in
2:30–2:50 P.M.	Highlight students' writings
	Discuss in-class practices of previous teacher-consultant demonstrations
2:50–3:00 P.M.	Writing prompt and read aloud opportunity
3:00–3:15 P.M.	Exploring links between readings and writing practices
	Open discussion across grade levels
3:15–4:15 P.M.	NWP-VT teacher-consultant Peg Bryant
	Writing Demonstration: "Summoning the Muse"
4:15–4:30 P.M.	Questions, discussion, written feedback
4:30–4:40 P.M.	Break
4:40–5:20 P.M.	In-house teamwork on school writing program,* facilitated by NWP-VT coordinator
5:20–5:30 P.M.	Review next steps. Clarify expectations for next session

*In-house teamwork was agreed upon in planning the series. Not all series have this component.

APPENDIX H: SAMPLE EVALUATION FORM FOR SERIES

NWP-VT Professional Development Writing Program
Reflective Evaluation

1. Reflect on changes in your teaching.

   What impact has the NWP-VT Professional Development Writing Program made on writing instruction in your classroom?

   What specific NWP-VT practices have made a difference in your teaching?

2. Reflect on changes in your students.

   What impact has your NWP-VT experience had on your students?

3. Reflect on your observations of class literacy.

   Are students writing more?

   What kinds of writing are occurring?

   Is there a difference in students' engagement in writing?

4. Comment on the improvement of students' literacy performances.

5. If you were to describe the NWP-VT professional development writing program to other teachers, what would you say?

APPENDIX I: SAMPLE LETTER TO SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

November 29, 2001

Dear _____,

Enclosed are the evaluations and feedback statements for the NWP-VT professional writing program held last week. Several of the comments indicate that time spent in grade-level meetings was valuable. Teachers seem to want more opportunities to do this. This information may be valuable to you as you plan strategies for the remainder of the school year.

It's clear that a small number of the faculty felt there was too much emphasis on having teachers write. A personal dislike for writing was strongly voiced. However, a basic philosophy of the National Writing Project is that teachers who instruct writing practice writing as well.

As we discussed previously, some primary teachers did not find the sessions pertinent to their needs. The inability (or unwillingness) to transfer learning strategies surprises me. I suggest the teachers be asked specifically to state their needs for teaching writing. Next, have someone meet with them on a regular basis to address their needs. Then, have the primary teachers report at faculty meetings new strategies they are using with students. This gives the teachers a feeling of having their needs addressed. It also creates accountability.

In reflecting on the whole series, a blend of theory coupled with specific instructional strategies occurred. The teachers appeared interested in further discussing theory during Tish's presentation. Examining the developmental levels of writing (as James Moffett defines) associating genres and levels of writing could be a valuable exercise with teachers across the grade levels.

In the future, perhaps a different model would provide teachers with continuity in the use of writing strategies. Have you considered a semester course devoted to the teaching of writing? This could be arranged through UVM with NWP-VT teacher-consultants as presenters with someone such as Tish or myself as the instructor. This would provide the opportunity to look at theory and practice and provide time for revisions within the classroom.

Recognize my suggestions are those of an overzealous retired administrator! Feel proud of the accomplishments of the faculty. The quality of writing instruction is high. However, it would be good to continue nudging the focus of writing while the enthusiasm is present from the NWP-VT series.

I've enjoyed my time with you and the teachers. I look forward to hearing from you regarding possible future directions.

Sincerely,

Anne Watson
NWP in Vermont Coordinator

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Patricia McGonegal, director of National Writing Project in Vermont, has worked with students in several grades and currently teaches English at Mount Mansfield Union High School in Jericho, Vermont. Energized by literacy courses and the teacher networks she encountered at University of Vermont and the Bread Loaf School of English, she began thinking of herself as a teacher researcher. A network leader for Vermont's Portfolio Assessment Program, Tish also served as a state network coordinator for the Bread Loaf Rural Teacher Network and co-founded, in 1996, the National Writing Project in Vermont. Now dividing her day between teaching high school and directing NWP in Vermont, she continues to involve herself in the examination and revision of teacher development and school reform across the state.

Anne Watson, program director of National Writing Project in Vermont, has been a teacher and administrator and has worked at the elementary and college levels. An active participant in both the 1970s Vermont Writing Program and the Writing Assessment Leadership Committee, Anne knows Vermont's context and initiatives well. Asked to coordinate the early school inservice series, she soon became the NWP in Vermont's inservice program coordinator and now advises and prepares others to coordinate work at schools, sometimes again taking on that role herself.

Other titles available in the National Writing Project at Work series:

Volume 1: Models *of* Inservice

No. 1 The Story of SCORE: The Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute Takes on a Statewide Reading Initiative
by Lynette Herring-Harris and Cassandria Hansbrough
Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute

No. 2 On-Site Consulting: New York City Writing Project
by Nancy Mintz and Alan Stein, introduction by Marcie Wolfe
New York City Writing Project

No. 3 The Johnston Area Writing Partnership: The Capital Area Writing Project Model for Building District Capacity to Offer Quality Professional Development
by Ruie Pritchard, Sandra O'Berry, and Patsy Butler
Capital Area Writing Project

No. 4 The Fledgling Years: Lessons from the First Four Years of the National Writing Project in Vermont
by Patricia McGonegal and Anne Watson
National Writing Project in Vermont

For more information regarding the National Writing Project at Work monograph series, call 510-642-0963, or visit the National Writing Project website at www.writingproject.org.

NWP

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