DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 202 CS 210 783

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TITLE Improving the Second "R": Writing Projects as Staff Development.
INSTITUTION Southeastern Educational Improvement Lab., Research Triangle Park, NC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO RR-07-004
PUB DATE May 87
CONTRACT 400-86-0007
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Objectives; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Teacher Education; Inservice Teacher Education; Instructional Effectiveness; Instructional Innovation; *Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Education Programs; *Teacher Workshops; Teaching Methods; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *National Writing Project

ABSTRACT

To evaluate the approach to improving instruction espoused by the National Writing Project (NWP), this research report examines the assumptions, practices, and impacts of the NWP program to train teachers to teach writing. Following a brief description of the NWP model and its underlying assumptions, the report compares the goals, strategies, and achievements of the NWP with findings from recent research in adult development, effective in-service education and school change. The report concludes that (1) in the aim to change teacher attitudes and behaviors, and to create openness to change itself, the NWP is in consonance with adult development theorists, who value adaptive flexibility and cognitive complexity in a teacher; (2) as an in-service effort, the NWP succeeds in getting teachers to try new approaches and techniques, but fails to transfer these skills into teachers' active repertoires, presumably from lack of further reinforcement; and (3) in relation to school change, the NWP is deficient in implementing innovations in curriculum and instruction because its focus on teachers excludes administrator involvement, and because organizational barriers prevent teacher-consultants from institutionalizing new practices for writing instruction. The report recommends that the NWP include activities enhancing teacher consultancy to strengthen follow-up coaching, encourage administrator participation, and structure the school year in-service program so teachers may participate in the full series of activities. (JG)

RESEARCH REPORT

07 - 004

Improving the Second "R": Writing Projects as Staff Development

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May 1987

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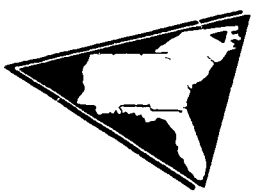

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This publication is based on work sponsored wholly, or in part, by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the United States Departmen. of Education, under Contract Number 400-86-0007 The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, the Department, or any other agency of the U S Government

Students throughout the nation have difficulties with writing, the second "r" (NAEP, 1986). Concern over the writing problem by educators in the Southeast has led The Southeastern Educational Improvement Laboratory to focus efforts on Improving Writing Skills. The Lab has proceeded on the assumption that improvement in student writing skills requires improvement in instruction, and improvement in instruction requires the provision of staff development opportunities to teachers. One model of staff development in writing that has achieved widespread support (23 sites in the Southeast) is the National Writing Project, originally the Bay Area Writing Project. Writing Projects are closely tied to current research efforts to understand teaching and learning of writing, as demonstrated by their inclusion in the national Center for the Study of Writing. But how well do Writing Projects serve the staff development function? What is their impact on teachers and students?

This paper is an effort to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Writing Projects as a strategy for staff development in writing instruction. In it, NWP assumptions, practices, and impacts are examined from the perspective of the literature on effective staff development and school improvement. The concern in the paper is the program the NWP presents to train teachers to teach writing, not the nature and content of that instruction.

The paper is organized as follows: First, there is a brief description of the National Writing Project Model and its underlying assumptions. Second, findings from research concerned with each of three approaches to studying staff development are used as a frame for analyzing NWP. The three approaches are: adult development; studies of effective in-service training; and school change. In each, there is a comparison of the findings of the research with the goals, strategies, and achievements of NWP in order to determine what Writing Projects do well, what changes may be considered, and what aspects of teacher in-service in writing might be better served by other agencies.

The National Writing Project Model

The NWP model is not one in which great centralized control is exercised. Each site in the network is designed to serve its own constituency, and, as a result, there are variations in how an individual NWP operates. (Indeed, the variation makes it difficult to generalize about NWP impacts.) Despite the differences among sites, all share a common philosophy and base their activities on shared assumptions. Further, there are common strategies used across sites.

Program Description: The NWP consists of a network of project sites, each of which involves at least one institution of higher education and one school district. (In the Southeast, most sites involve more than one school district and a few include a consortium arrangement among institutions of higher education.) A program cycle begins with an Invitational Summer Institute for teachers who then become teacher-consultants, offering in-service and assistance during the school year.

Summer Institutes provide a theoretical basis for writing instruction, opportunities for teachers to share their own instructional practices, and an opportunity for teachers to improve their own writing and become comfortable with the process. The in-service component varies greatly among sites.

Assumptions: The assumptions on which the NWP is based have been described by one of the founders of the Bay Area Writing Project, James Gray (1985). They are:

1. Since the writing problem affects both the universities and the schools, it can best be solved through cooperatively planned university-school programs.

2. Student writing can be improved by improving the teaching of writing, and the best teacher of teachers is another teacher.

3. Successful teachers of writing can be identified, brought together during university summer institutes, and trained to teach other teachers in follow-up programs in the schools.

4. What is known about the teaching of writing comes not only from research but from the practice of those who teach writing.

5. Programs designed to improve the teaching of writing should involve teachers at all grade levels and from all subject areas.

6. Change can best be accomplished by those who work in the schools, and not by transient consultants nor by packets of teacher-proof materials.

7. Change in classroom practice happens over time, through staff development programs that are on-going and systematic.

8. The intuition of teachers can be a productive guide for field-based research, and practicing teachers can conduct useful studies in their own classrooms.

9. Teachers of writing must write themselves.

Program Strategies: The greatest variation in NWP sites occurs in program strategies and tactics. However, the following elements are generally present in all sites. Specific ways of implementing them are left to the project site.

1. Summer Invitational Institute: Teachers from all grade levels and all subject areas apply to participate in the Summer Institute, which generally meets on a college campus for five weeks. There are three components of the Institute. First, participants practice writing in a variety of forms--personal, literary, persuasive, and expository. They meet with response groups of about five teachers, across grade levels and subject areas, to discuss their writings and to offer suggestions for improvement. Second, teachers demonstrate successful classroom practices.

These demonstrations, frequently called "presentations," not only provide a means for sharing practices within the Institute, but also form the basis of the in-service presentations that the participants offer at their schools during the year. Finally, the Institutes include the study of current theory and research in the teaching of writing. Frequently, the teachers themselves seek theoretical and research bases to understand their own pedagogy and their own writing processes. However, explicit attention to the research base is often directed by the Institute staff.

2. School Year In-service: Participants in Summer Institutes are teacher-consultants in their home schools and districts. They offer in-service sessions to other teachers and provide less formal assistance in improving writing instruction. Both the in-service and classroom assistance are voluntary--teachers ask other teachers for help. Districts can contract for NWP services if workshop participation by teachers is voluntary. In some sites, the in-service sessions are fairly structured--each teacher-consultant offers a three-hour workshop, during which they make a presentation and involve teachers in writing activities.

3. Networking: All NWP sites engage in a variety of activities to encourage networking among teacher-consultants. There are follow-up meetings, sometimes held as frequently as monthly, but generally during the Fall and Spring. Project directors make classroom visits to teacher-consultants and provide intellectual and affective support to their efforts. In addition, most projects publish newsletters, and many include teacher and student writing in them. Finally, directors, co-directors, and teacher-consultants are encouraged to participate in state, national and regional activities concerning writing. The regional network is particularly active in the Southeast.

4. Project Advisory Committee: Most projects have an Advisory Committee that consists of the project co-directors and teacher-consultants.

Although not essential elements to the NWP model, there are a number of programs that have been developed directly as a result of the existence of a project in a given area. For example, there are a number of Young Writers Projects that provide a summer opportunity for students to develop their writing abilities. In some sites, these programs have been developed in a manner that explicitly encourages teacher-consultants to test out ideas about writing instruction. Writing Projects have also frequently provided impetus for the development of "writing across the curriculum" programs or "writing intensive courses," in elementary and secondary schools and in colleges. A final example of an effect of participation in an Writing Project is that many teachers become interested in pursuing classroom-based research, and some programs have been developed to support their efforts.

Despite all these activities, concerns remain as to how much change actually takes place in classrooms as a result of participation in the NWP. Three research traditions related to staff development will be used to analyze NWP. Each of these has a somewhat separate history, epistemological stance, and underlying set of assumptions about what "really matters" in improving the delivery of instruction. Taken together, then, the view is fairly comprehensive. It is important to note, however, that the NWP does not explicitly espouse any of these perspectives on staff development. The grounding of the NWP assumptions is quite atheoretical and rooted in the experience of the founders and developers of the program. The results of analysis from frameworks not integral to the NWP must not be viewed as prescriptive but rather as offering insights to the NWP that might be useful in its continuing efforts to increase program impact and to other educators concerned about improvements in writing skills of students.

In each section that follows, the particular research perspective on staff development is described. The three frameworks are: adult development, effective in-service, and school change. The descriptions are followed by an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the NWP according to that perspective, including data, where it exists, on those elements of the Writing Project that are relevant to the perspective. It is important to reemphasize that the focus of this analysis is not the content of the NWP (how one teaches and learns to write) but the process by which that content is disseminated within the NWP.

Adult Development: Theorists and researchers approach adult development in a variety of ways. There are those who focus on psycho-social stages and others who are mainly concerned with changes in cognitive structures in adults. It is the latter view that is of concern in this paper. The task of staff development programs, according to this perspective, is to provide a means for teacher cognitive growth. Oja and Sprinthall (1978), cite the work of Harvey, Hunt, and Schroeder, who were able to document that "teachers who were classified at more advanced developmental stages were more effective as classroom teachers...stated simply, teachers at higher stages of development functioned in the classroom at a more complex level (e.g. they were more adaptive in teaching style, flexible and tolerant). Also, such teachers were more responsive to individual differences and, most importantly, employed a variety of teaching models (e.g. lectures, small discussions, role-plays, indirect teaching strategies) and were more empathic; that is, such teachers could accurately 'read' and respond to the emotions of their pupils..."(pp. 119-120) The importance of these characteristics to the teaching of writing is indicated by Freedman's (1984) survey of excellent writing teachers. Those teachers valued independence in their students, agreeing that "the most important reason for teaching writing is to "force students to think for themselves." They also "focus on teaching writing to give students an opportunity to correlate their personal experiences with the topics being studied, to clarify what they are learning by applying concepts, and to allow students to share their imaginative experience and express their feelings."

Using adult development as a basis, Sprinthall (1979) proposed an instructional model for in-service that includes the following:

1. Place the person in a "role-taking" new experience more complex than the usual tasks.

2. Make a productive match between the level of the individual learner and the learning potential of a given experience.

3. Provide opportunities for careful and continuous guided reflection (teach reflection strategies).

4. Balance amounts of experience and reflection (more experience without reflection is less productive than less experience with reflection).

5. Provide continuous supervision and support. (Oja and Sprinthall (1978) found that clustering teachers by building during the transfer stage was helpful.)

6. Provide personal support for the necessary period of dissonance of "equilibration," which may be a "grieving process" for some teachers.

7. Understand that a person's current stage of psychological development is "only [a] preferred mode of functioning," and not a permanent classification.

Adult Development and the Writing Project: In his evaluation of the Bay Area Writing Project, Scriven (1980) notes that BAWP's emphasis is on producing direct change in the classroom through effecting changes in teacher behavior rather than on working toward changing the system. This premise has remained central to the self-definition of the Project. Scriven cites "the treatment of teachers as extremely valuable resources and as autonomous agents" as among the factors most contributing to the success of the NWP. Further, Thomas (1978) found that "the enthusiastic response and overall teacher satisfaction generated by the BAWP may be particularly important in developing a sense of teacher efficacy (found by a 1977 RAND report to correlate most highly with teacher change). "Repeatedly, the issue of teacher efficacy is mentioned by both project leaders and participating teachers as the most powerful and most immediate result of NWP staff development programs. Pritchard (1987) states that "virtually every study of teachers who have participated in NWP training indicates that teachers show striking improvement in their attitudes about themselves as writers and as teachers of writing."

In the desire to change teacher attitudes and behaviors in a personal way, and in the larger sense of creating an openness to change itself, the NWP seems to be attempting to increase the developmental level of individual teachers. The open stance of the program ("...the Writing Project has no packaged plans, no teacher-proof materials, no set formulas..." Gray, 1985) coupled with "its goal of imparting to teachers a larger vision' of writing as a tool for personal growth as well as for academic success" (Thomas, 1978), seems to place it in harmony with the views of the developmentalists.

In strategies as well, the NWP embodies, at least to some extent, Sprinthall's proposal. Teachers in the invitational program are placed in new "role-taking positions," as teachers of teachers, as theoreticians, and as evaluators of teachers and materials. They are selected for their already demonstrated abilities to ensure that they will, in fact, "make a productive match" with the learning potential of the summer experience. Through the writing they are asked to do, they are provided with opportunities for continuous guided reflection on the summer's experience, although this is only a beginning in the action/reflection cycle that theoretically should be continued as teachers return to classroom teaching. And, as these teachers participate in the simulated student activities devised by other participants, present their own demonstration lesson, and take part in writing groups, they balance their reflection with experience.

However, the Summer Institute is not the actual situation demanding transfer of skills--it is the use of skills in the classroom that is of concern. Project directors and colleagues provide personal support for the initial period of dissonance stimulated by the summer's experience, but the NWP's real departure from Sprinthall's program shows in the lack of continuous support that might be provided after the Summer Institute to aid in the process of equilibration.

Effective In-service Education: Research on the characteristics of effective in-service programs shares some common ground with the adult development perspective. For both, the focus is on the individual teacher and how he or she comes to integrate new knowledge and skill. The difference lies in a shift of focus--from increasing teachers' cognitive complexity to determining specific techniques that appear effective in changing or expanding a teacher's repertoire of instructional skills.

The most comprehensive view of effective in-service strategies has been offered by Joyce and Showers (1980) in their summary of findings from 200 research studies "on the ability of teachers to acquire teaching skills and strategies." Analyzing the five main components of training identified from that review of research, Joyce and Showers indicate the particular impact each has on teacher acquisition of new skills:

1. Presentation of Theory can raise teacher awareness but without other training components can rarely result in skill acquisition of transfer of skills.

2. Modeling or Demonstration might be effective for fine tuning of skills but alone also rarely results in mastery of a new skill.

3. Practice under Simulated Conditions is effective in both fine-tuning of skills and mastery of new strategies or skills, but this assumes prior awareness and knowledge.

4a. Structured Feedback, whether self-administered or provided by others, provides for self-awareness of teaching styles and, when regular and consistent, also for changes in identified behavior.

4b. Unstructured Feedback is less likely to produce change but is productive for increasing self-awareness of teaching styles and therefore useful as a preparation for directed training activities.

5. Coaching for Application, in which an observer provides systematic feedback and assistance, may be necessary for transfer of skills to the classroom, although many teachers may be able to achieve transfer with a combination of other components such as demonstration and discussions of theory followed by practice with continuous structured feedback.

Joyce and Showers suggest that the optimal combination of training components is determined by the desired outcome. For example, "Where the fine tuning of style is the focus, modeling, practice under simulated conditions, and practice in the classroom, combined with feedback, will probably result in considerable changes. Where mastery of a new approach is the desired outcome, presentations and discussions of theory and coaching to application are probably necessary as ell." They predict considerable success in expanding teachers' repertoire of classroom practices if all of the above components are used: "If any of these components are left out, the impact of training will be weakened in the sense that fewer numbers of people will progress to the transfer level (which is the only level that has significant meaning for school improvement)."

It is the issue of transfer of skills to the classroom setting that, in many ways, distinguishes effective in-service from less effective programs. Developing a skill does not ensure transfer into the active repertoire of teaching strategies. For Joyce and Showers, the addition of a coaching component to the sequence of in-service activities will increase the inclusion of new strategies and techniques into classroom practice. A coach (usually another classroom teacher) can provide companionship and support, technical feedback, and analysis of application, including an assessment of student response and of optimal use within the curriculum.

Researchers have looked beyond the sequence of in-service activities to determine what makes a good in-service program. Howey, Bents, and Corrigan (1981) argue that many in-service activities "can reasonably be integrated into the on-going activities associated with school and focus more directly on the problems of the schools and the teachers in it." Their belief is that if in-service programs "literally focus...on the specific interest of teachers and others in their work setting...[it could] focus...upon concerns and interests which are cross-cutting in nature, which have school-wide as well as individual implications." In-service, then, should be more than workshops but systematic attempts to improve the school and instructional processes in classrooms, according to this view.

Effective In-service and the Writing Project: Studies of the NWP offer some insight into how effective the model is as an in-service effort. On the one hand, Thomas (1978) writes that in light of the fact that the NWP offers a variety of methods rather than a specific package, "the report that all of the...in-service teachers surveyed has tried three or more of [the] methods seems noteworthy. More impressively, all [Institute] teachers reported trying at least five or more of the techniques presented to them during the [Summer

institute] program. Clearly [NWP] is affecting its participants." On the other hand, a 1977-78 evaluation of the school year in-service component demonstrated than fewer than ten percent of in-service participants "clearly indicated by self-report that they had achieved an integration of the course content...This...raises the questions whether a) most teachers may require more help than is generally given in relating one presentation to another, and b) if so, how such help should be given." The present format of both the Summer Institute and the school year in-service effectively introduces new approaches and techniques to the teaching of writing, but the transfer of these skills into the teacher's active repertoire seems unlikely without further reinforcement. Although there were different explanations offered by Pritchard (1987), her study nevertheless revealed that after three years, there was little difference between the practice of teachers who had participated in a Summer Institute and those in the same school who had not.

School Change: The body of research on school improvement includes studies that focus on the school itself as an organization and seek to determine how best to facilitate the adoption and implementation of an innovation. This perspective is important for assessing the NWP as a staff development program for two reasons. First, an underlying assumption of the NWP is that "writing is a skill acquired over time, demanding constant attention...it is as fundamental to learning in science, in mathematics, and in history as it is in English and the language arts..." Such a position indicates the need for a school-wide focus on improving instruction in writing. Second, the "crisis" in student writing skills is serious enough to warrant attention from all teachers, not only from those who are committed enough to devote a summer to intensive work on learning to write and to teach writing.

Recent studies of school improvement indicate that although change is difficult for schools, innovations in curriculum and instruction can be successfully implemented. Huberman and Miles (1984) found that the following conditions influence the success of an innovative program:

1. A problem-solving orientation, particularly on the part of administrators.

2. A cooperative and cohesive school climate.

3. A combination of pressure and support--a larger scale innovation seemed to require greater administrative pressure to retain the initial scale, but "lived or died by the amount and quality of assistance that ...users received."

The innovations studied were mainly those concerning curriculum and instruction, but organizational changes occurred along with the implementation. Changes of this type included structural ones (such as the creation of in-service committees or management teams); procedural alterations (production of new evaluation and supervisory forms, revised class loads, team arrangements among teachers, and rescheduling); and organizational climate improvement (exemplified by acceptance of new beliefs about student-teacher relationships, expectations of students, and teacher camaraderie.)

Overwhelmingly, the evidence is that the single factor that contributes most directly and certainly to major, effective changes over time is forceful leadership. Crandall and Loucks (1982) enumerating the many difficulties inherent in school change, such as finding an appropriate practice, securing local or external resources, and arranging for schedules, facilities, and assignments, conclude:

> Unless the project is truly a collective crusade, which was a rare but not unseen case in our sample, making all these things happen involves administrative competence, authority and responsibility...It happens most often when a central office administrator or an influential principal is involved closely with the project--from its development (if a local one) or identification (if an external one) through its institutionalization. When that involvement is enlightened, forceful, resourceful, and long-lasting, highly significant changes are carried out and institutionalized.

Crandall and Loucks view leadership at all levels, including state and federal governments, as necessary to keep an innovation free of obstacles to its ultimate success. They see institutionalization as crucial to the longevity of commitment to the adopted program, since it provides for "writing the practice into the school curricula, into standard operating procedures, and into yearly materials and staffing cycles," involving also the elimination of competing practices.

Of almost as great importance as leadership is the provision of effective assistance. Many dissemination programs, including the NWP, provide good awareness sessions, accessible demonstration or observation opportunities, adequate initial training, and high-quality materials, but leave schools and teachers mostly on their own once the project is actually underway. This, according to Crandall and Loucks, is what compromises project success:

> Successful sites have more diverse and sustained assistance. Effective assistance is user-oriented rather than innovation-oriented (or assister-oriented), and it gets more so over time. It can come from within the building or district as well as from outside. Its effects--such as reassurance, support, expansion of users' repertoires, problem solving, and increased interdependence--help users master the practice, which in turn leads to student gains and other school improvement goals.

Although there is irreconcilable tension between pressure to maintain the integrity of an innovation and counterpressure to ignore or adapt it, Huberman and Miles (1984) suggest that "user oriented adaptation may be more necessary for complex, less clearly structured innovations that demand a strong user commitment to inquiry, learning, and revision"--an analysis appropriate to the NWP and to what is known about effective writing instruction.

School Change and the National Writing Project: Although it is clear that, as Sarason (1971) writes, "educational change depends on what teachers do and think--it's as simple and as complex as that," it is equally clear that what teachers do and think is influenced by their peers and their supervisors. From the perspective of the school change literature, the NWP model has two

major problems. First, it focuses on teachers exclusively and does not actively seek school and district administrative support and involvement. Second, although conceptually teacher-consultants could well provide the follow-up assistance required for institutionalizing new practices for writing instruction (or, indeed, the inclusion of writing in the curriculum for the first time), there are organizational barriers (schedules, class loads) to their doing so. Each of these issues is discussed in turn.

It seems that the NWP in its present form can be characterized as a type of "collective crusade," referred to by Crandall and Loucks above. As such, it has the possibility of changing schools over time. However, the collectivity would need to be of sufficient numbers and concentration in a single school to overcome the barriers to institutionalization that exist. Administrative support increases the efficiency and permanence of change.

It is not clear why the NWP does not actively solicit administrator involvement. The objection to "top down" innovation is framed, in the assumptions, in terms of university based professionals telling teachers what to do, but administrators are as school-based as teachers. There is a tension between teacher control of and administrative push for changes in curriculum and instruction. However, NWP, existing as entities that are separate from school district hierarchies, could well approach the problem as one of building a team for better writing instruction.

The second issue--that of creating structures that liberate teacher-consultants from the constraints that prevent them from providing assistance--is, in many ways, beyond the purview of Writing Projects. If, however, the importance of that follow up assistance is recognized, teacher-consultants are skilled in providing it, and principals and supervisors actively supportive of the program, there may be a variety of locally developed solutions to the problem.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In one sense, the goal of this paper has been to determine how best to improve instruction in writing. The National Writing Project represents the single most significant effort to enable teachers to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure that students are able to write fluently and skillfully, that they are able to discover and communicate their own ideas, that they can harness the power of words for themselves. Its achievements are many. But policymakers and educators remain concerned that progress in improving writing is slow. To some extent, the pace is bound up with the complex nature of the task, but still there may be ways to quicken and increase the impact of staff development for instructional improvement in writing. The paper, then, was written to explore how to strengthen approaches to improved writing instruction.

This section of the paper is organized as follows: First, there is a discussion of the strengths of the National Writing Project, again from the perspective of staff development. That discussion is followed by recommendations to the NWP, drawn from the literature on staff development. The recommendations presented are ones that build on the strengths of the projects and that do not, in either a philosophical or practical sense, seem to contradict the assump-

tions on which the NWP is based. A second set of recommendations to policy-makers and those in authoritative positions in other educational agencies concludes the paper.

Strengths of the National Writing Project: The strengths of the National Writing Project can be seen as falling into two categories. The first concerns the close connections to research on the writing process and on instruction in writing and to the best practices of exemplary teachers. The second category, extremely relevant to the discussion of staff development, focuses on the inherent views of teachers, teaching, and the profession of education embodied by the NWP.

There is no question that the NWP is deeply conscious of and even collaboratively involved with the most current research studies in the field of writing development. The clearest demonstration of this involvement is the organizational inclusion of the NWP in the Center for the Study of Writing. But the involvement is deeper and more pervasive. Writing Project directors are themselves scholars in the areas of composition, rhetoric, and instruction. Further, the fact that the NWP does not espouse a "one best system" of writing instruction is indicative of the inquiry-oriented approach to improvement. Finally, through its numerous interactions with successful teachers, the NWP is able to collect and disseminate the best of "craft knowledge." And, because teachers become secure in viewing themselves as writers and presenters, it is they who are the disseminators of effective practices. In the final analysis, the best structured staff development program can only be viewed as successful if its content is of high quality, and the NWP meets that test.

Whether it stems from NWP understanding that the writing process is a personal one or from an educational philosophy, the fact is that the NWP increases teachers' feelings of efficacy and professionalism. In contrast to many commercial writing programs found in the schools that "all share a particularly dangerous characteristic: a total focus on training teachers to teach the construction of particular forms of texts, with careful attention to prescribed and unvarying steps in the creation of such texts, regardless of the classroom context," (Healy, 1987, emphasis added), the NWP develops in teachers skill in selecting writing activities that are appropriate for the particular knowledge, skill, interest of students and for the curriculum. Further, the concern for teacher as learner carries over to classrooms in which teachers are able to observe and analyze student learning. The NWP presents a "challenge to professional growth" (Thomas and Watson, 1979) that frequently results in profound effects on teachers.

From another perspective as well, the NWP adds to the education profession. Through its use of "response groups" and its focus on the sharing of successful practice, it builds collegiality among teachers. Such collegiality is a mark of an effective school (see Little, 1981). Further, NWP helps build the "technical culture" of teaching that both Lortie (1975) and Fullan (1982) see as essential in altering teachers' views of student learning as "determined by factors outside the teachers' control...or by unpredictable and mysterious influences."

The challenge to NWP sites, then, is how to develop ways of increasing their impact without sacrificing the very real strengths they bring to the educational arena. The recommendations offered in this paper can enhance the effectiveness of the NWP model by building on its strengths.

Recommendations to NWP sites:

1. **Include activities that enhance the abilities of teachers to perform the consultancy functions of the teacher-consultant role.** Such activities could include:

   a. developing "coaching" skills

   b. developing team building and group problem solving skills

   c. developing skills in providing a variety of types of follow-up assistance

   Enhancing teachers' abilities to operate as consultants, as understood in staff development terms, fits the NWP view of teachers as professionals and, in fact, enhances teacher professionalism. In addition, if teachers are able to assume leadership among their peers, the development of collegiality among faculty members is strengthened. Summer Institutes include many activities and adding a focus on teachers as consultants is likely to crowd the schedule. Therefore, some adjustments need to be made. The most likely area for decreased focus is the development and polishing of "presentations." The major benefit of the presentations is that teachers have an opportunity to share successful practice and learn from one another. That benefit can be accrued through less formal (and time consuming) means.

2. **Invite and encourage administrator participation in NWP activities.** It is unlikely that many administrators would be able to devote the time needed for full participation in Summer Institutes, but it would be fruitful to plan morning, afternoon, or even evening activities that include them. The idea is for them to develop the kind of awareness of and support for the project that leads to an understanding of the need for structural changes to increase the impact of project participation.

3. **Encourage participation by groups of teachers and a key administrator (Superintendent, Principal, Curriculum Coordinator) from the same school in summer institutes.** Such action would increase the critical mass of teachers in each school, provide a basis for support and help in the transfer of knowledge and skills gained in the Summer Institute to the classroom setting.

4. **Change the nature of the school year in-service component to one that is sequenced and structured for teacher participation in the full series of activities.** Teacher-consultants would remain the key organizers and presenters of the in-service, but would draw upon their consultancy skills. Further, the topics for in-service would be determined by the faculty and administration of the school.

Recommendations to Policy Makers and Other Educational Leaders:

1. **Recognize and support the National Writing Project as a model that develops a cadre of teachers who are at the "cutting edge" in issues involved in writing instruction and as a model that advances both research and practical knowledge of how to teach writing. Particular support should be given to NWP efforts to improve the school-year component.** Although Writing Projects alone will not be able to solve the "writing problem" in the schools, their contribution to improved education has been enormous. The model is such that the interplay between research and practice is certain to continue to improve educational practice in important ways. Support for the NWP is, therefore, important to any effort to improve student skill in writing. Such support should include support for NWP efforts to exert greater leadership within schools by providing teacher-consultants with reduced schedules and time to collaborate with others.

2. **Develop programs that increase administrator knowledge and support of improvements in writing instruction.** It is unlikely that the NWP sites will be able to have a major impact on school and district administrators without losing the important value of their "teacher-centeredness." Nonetheless, any program to improve instruction in writing requires administrative support. Other agencies should take responsibility for building this support so that teachers who participate in NWP activities can rely upon its existence when they work within their schools. Programs that do so can take a variety of forms and can be sponsored by a variety of agencies. For example, Principals' Centers can offer workshops and other activities that help administrators understand both the nature of the writing process and its importance in many aspects of learning.

3. **Support school-based programs that involve administrator/teacher teams in the improvement of writing instruction.** Such school-based programs can call upon the knowledge and skills of teacher-consultants as an important component and can work with NWP sites in developing appropriate in-service and assistance activities. A variety of models can be used for increasing the quality and numbers of school-based programs. For example, State Education Agencies can work with teams from a number of schools, using the "trainer of trainers" approach.

4. **Develop and support programs that create awareness of the importance of the process approach to writing and of the inclusion of writing instruction in all curricular areas at all grade levels.** Many of the strengths of the NWP model stem from the fact that participation in activities is voluntary. As a result, participants are committed to and enthusiastic about writing. Yet part of the responsibility of an in-service program may be to present ideas that appear, and perhaps are, contrary to the existing beliefs and practices of teachers. Further, the NWP provides an opportunity for those who would like to improve their writing instruction, but it does not push those who ignore writing entirely--or teach it in counter-productive ways--to confront the negative consequences for their

students of their actions. In-service programs in writing sponsored by state agencies or those that use the school's in-service time, for example, would provide an opportunity for all teachers to learn basic approaches to writing instruction (including the fact that "canned" programs seldom improve student performance) and might, in the end, increase teacher interest in pursuing writing instruction in the deep ways fostered by the National Writing Projects.

Given the number of NWP sites in the Southeast and the commitment of their directors and teacher-consultants, it should be possible to develop programs that test the efficacy of ideas for program improvement presented in this paper. Indeed, the Southeastern Educational Improvement Laboratory is supporting some efforts along these lines. Future Lab documents will report on these activities.

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