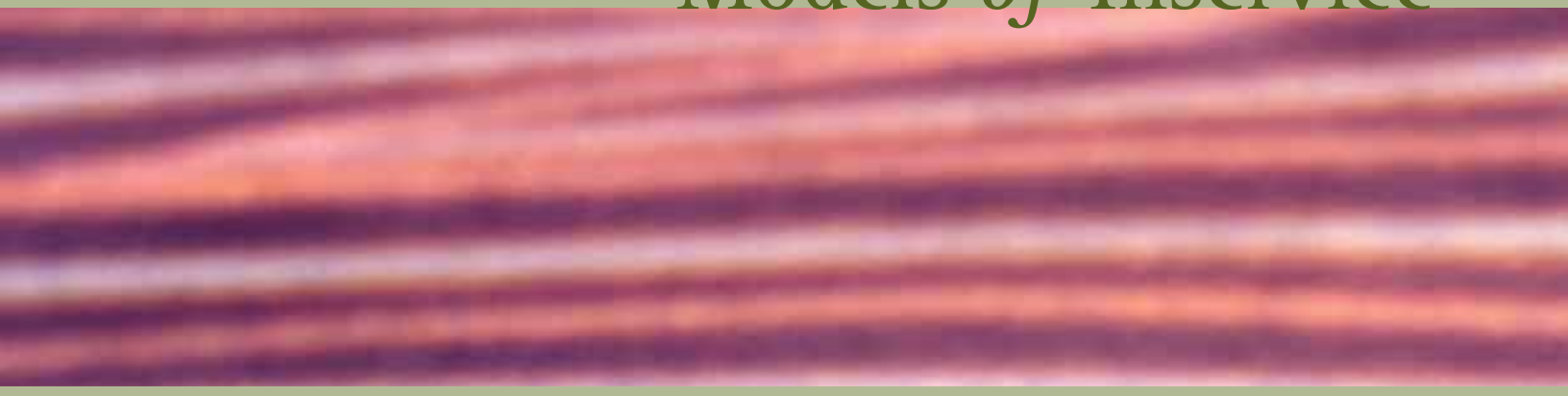
NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT AT WORK
Volume 1, Number 6

Models *of* Inservice



The Saginaw Teacher Study Group Movement: From Pilot to Districtwide Study Groups in Four Years

by Mary K. Weaver and Mary Calliari with an afterword by Janet Rentsch

Saginaw Bay Writing Project
Saginaw Valley State University, Michigan

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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The Saginaw Teacher Study Group Movement: From Pilot to Districtwide Study Groups in Four Years

The First Year: The Literacy Study Group at Webber Middle School, 1996–97
by Mary K. Weaver

The Saginaw Teacher Study Group Movement Grows: Expanded Partnerships and Emerging Teacher-Leaders
by Mary Calliari

Afterword
by Janet Rentsch

Saginaw Bay Writing Project
Saginaw Valley State University, Michigan

National Writing Project
Berkeley, California

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

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

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

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

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FOREWORD

National Writing Project at Work, a series of monographs authored by teams of writing project teachers and site directors about their work, debuted in 2002 with four monographs inaugurating Volume 1: Models of Inservice. This series continues with a second set of monographs—of which this is one—concluding the volume on inservice at local NWP sites. NWP at Work began as a dissemination project with the goal of regularly producing easily accessible, well-written, and inviting documents on the extensive work of the National Writing Project. This first volume will be followed by volumes on NWP summer institutes and on sustainability and continuity of a professional community at a local writing project site.

Dissemination of learning and knowledge is a long-standing tradition within the NWP network. But typically such dissemination has been fleeting, done by word of mouth or shared in workshops. Over the past few years, teachers, site leaders, and national directors of the National Writing Project have begun more intentional and systematic documentation and dissemination of knowledge generated by NWP local site initiatives. The first volume of NWP at Work, focusing on professional development inspired by the mission and vision of the NWP, covers a wide range of teacher professional development models, including school-site writing series, starting and nurturing satellite sites, teacher-research projects, statewide reading projects, school-site coaching, and professional development designed by teachers. The monographs present models of change in the classroom, school, district, and state. They illustrate the local creativity and responsiveness of individual NWP sites. Collectively, they are an important body of teacher knowledge about the multiple forms of professional development that teachers experience as useful and respectful. They show that there are many forms of successful inservice 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 volume of monographs, we notice several trends. First, the authors are veteran teachers who 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, in the projects described in these monographs, the teachers 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, all of the projects presented in this series have equity at their core—equity for students and for teachers. 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 staff 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.

Five of the monographs describe initiatives from NWP's Project Outreach, which has an explicit goal of engaging teachers of students in poverty. The Project Outreach teacher-consultants and directors who plan these initiatives co-construct the projects with the teachers at school sites—teachers who are not necessarily NWP teacher-consultants. (While some of these teachers later attend an NWP summer institute, many cannot, but they are all the beneficiaries of NWP training.) Since these teachers design and implement their own professional development, one critical outcome is the emergence of new teacher-leaders.

We are pleased that the first volume of NWP at Work is about inservice programs. The work described 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 document opportunities to engage teachers intellectually and feed their teaching souls. These are models of teacher learning and school improvement that keep teachers teaching.

It is with great pleasure and pride that we offer this next set of monographs in 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

In June 1996, the staff of Webber Middle School in Saginaw, Michigan, the seventh-poorest city in the United States, gathered for its year-end staff meeting to hear the results of the seventh grade reading scores for our state assessment test, the Michigan Education Assessment Program (MEAP). Having worked hard that year, the staff was sure the scores had improved. When Joe Miller, assistant principal for curriculum, announced that Webber's seventh grade scores[1] were 10.9 percent pass and 89.1 percent fail on the informational text section of the criterion-referenced state reading test, there was total silence; the staff was devastated! Mary K. Weaver, a teacher at Webber, was determined to take reform action in response to Webber's low test scores. That single action would have ramifications throughout the district for years to come in the Saginaw Teacher Study Group Movement.

This monograph covers the Saginaw Teacher Study Group Movement from its inception in 1996 through its expansion to include the overwhelming majority of Saginaw teachers in 1999–2001. Since 1996, classroom teachers in Saginaw have been volunteering for study groups addressing the learning and teaching of students in poverty. In the first half of this monograph, Weaver tells the story of one of the first Saginaw study groups and how, over time, studying literacy resulted in significant changes in teacher practice and student learning, development of a literacy program and literacy curriculum, and higher test scores at the school. The Webber Middle School story is embedded in a larger districtwide movement of similar voluntary teacher research groups, some site specific, some across schools, but all teacher designed and facilitated, each taking on a challenge and approaching it with an inquiry teacher research stance.

In the second half, Mary Calliari, who along with Weaver and others designed and started the first study groups in 1996, picks up the story three years later when she facilitated a study group that met in 1999–2000 and successfully changed the district reading curriculum. Calliari also recounts how her involvement in the study group movement led to her development as a local teacher-leader after twenty years as a classroom teacher. Weaver and Calliari conclude this piece reflecting on what they have learned and offering advice to others interested in starting and maintaining voluntary teacher study groups that take an inquiry stance on an issue of their choice. In an afterword, Janet Rentsch, co-director of Saginaw Bay Writing Project, offers a site director's perspective, focusing on the collaboration among the Saginaw Bay Writing Project (SBWP), Saginaw Public Schools, and Saginaw Valley State University.

1 MEAP middle school reading assessments are given in the seventh grade.

THE FIRST YEAR: THE LITERACY STUDY GROUP AT WEBBER MIDDLE SCHOOL, 1996-97

by Mary K. Weaver

In 1996 Webber Middle School was an unaccredited middle school, and the scores Joe Miller delivered in June 1996 were definitely not good news. State accreditation was based on how well students fared on the yearly MEAP tests. A school received accreditation if half of its students earned 300, a minimum passing score, on one of the four MEAP assessments in math, reading, science, and social studies over a three-year period.[2]

Rumors had been circulating from the governor's office that unaccredited schools could be subject to state control.[3] Would the state take over as administrators of our school? Would the teachers lose their jobs? What could we, as a staff, change or implement to increase student reading scores?

In 1995 the unemployment rate in neighborhoods surrounding Webber was above 50 percent. Seventy-five percent of the children were fourth-generation welfare recipients. Webber Middle School served 667 students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades: 89 percent African American, 10 percent Hispanic, and less than 1 percent Caucasian (Saginaw Public Schools 1996 demographic data). The forty-four staff members were 52.5 percent Caucasian, 45.5 percent African American, and 2 percent Hispanic.

Webber had a history of school reform. In 1991 we adopted the middle school philosophy (see appendix A), changing from a junior high school focusing solely on academic preparation for high school to a middle school concentrating also on the social context and social nature of learning. We wanted to provide our students with the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual support to become active, successful independent learners. Many teachers who strongly believed in the junior high model transferred to the high schools. The remaining teachers were willing to try the new structures we put in place to support our middle school philosophy; we restructured the school day and the school.[4] These changes were designed to increase student achievement by building community, increasing attendance, and decreasing suspensions. We had a history of low MEAP test scores and had put most of our energy into narrative text strategies and neglected to focus on informational text strategies. Joe Miller's information made us rethink curriculum, this time moving our focus to informational text strategies.

2 As of this writing in 2002, this policy is being revised at the state level.

3 "Michigan law calls for state intervention if a school is unaccredited and failing to make progress for three or more years. Possible remedies exist in the law. The state superintendent of public instruction can appoint a new administrator; parents with children in the unaccredited school can transfer their students to any accredited school within the district; a school could be ordered by the state to affiliate with a university or a private provider, such as the Edison Project; or the school could be closed" (Hornbeck 1990, 8A).

4 We divided each grade level into teams: at the sixth grade level, teachers teach a ninety-minute block of English language arts/social studies or math/science; at the seventh and eighth grade levels, classes are taught in forty-five minute sessions and have a different teacher for each of the four subjects, which are taught separately. The sixth grade "house" is on the first floor; students are surrounded by their peers except in elective courses, which might be cross-grade level. The seventh and eighth grade "houses" are separated into two different wings on the second floor.

As school improvement chair and an eighth grade English teacher, I went to see my mentor, Jane Jurgens, the district English language arts kindergarten to twelfth grade (K–12) curriculum coordinator. Jane and I revisited our ongoing conversation concerning student literacy. Knowing that the Michigan Curriculum Framework and state assessments were criterion-based mandates, we turned to instruction, the part of the learning cycle that teachers could influence. We discussed models of professional development that could change our instructional practices. Our school district offered professional development through a variety of inservices; typically the district hired an educational consultant to speak to us in the high school auditorium filled with nine hundred or more teachers.[5] We were looking for a better professional development model.

As SBWP teacher-consultants, Jane and I felt we needed professional reading to help focus teacher dialogue and reflection. And Jane had a book in mind, *Reading and the Middle School Student: Strategies to Enhance Literacy*, by Judith L. Irvin, which explained the role of literacy in all content areas in a user-friendly format. I read it and liked it. Research and theory were presented in a readable, usable format, which was important to me. The practical suggestions about teaching and learning strategies that motivate reluctant readers were especially helpful. While reading Irvin's books, I questioned the literacy practices in my own classroom and talked with Jane about my concerns and ideas. Jane watched me as I learned from Irvin. She then offered to approach Gene Nuckolls, the school district's assistant superintendent for secondary education, about Webber Middle School's interest in studying student literacy, and she encouraged me to propose a study group at Webber to read Irvin and together question our practices. Nuckolls, who had provided teacher support for the first two years of the Saginaw Bay Writing Project, willingly supported this teacher-driven initiative and allocated funds for the purchase of the texts. What next? Could I get a group of colleagues together on a regular basis to discuss these issues? How would this model look? At Webber's last school improvement meeting that year, I sketched out an idea of a study group with teachers from each of the grade levels. We all had the summer to think about this plan.

Project Outreach and a New Model of Professional Development

Serendipitously, in the spring of 1996, SBWP joined the Project Outreach Network (PON) of the National Writing Project (NWP). Project Outreach is an NWP initiative to reach teachers of students in poverty. Six teachers from Saginaw spent the first week of August 1996 at a one-week training retreat. There we learned about a professional development model that was new to us: a voluntary study/action research group in which teachers research questions regarding their own practice and discuss school issues, such as Webber's reading scores. These groups are designed to foster a school-based culture of professional communities.

5 In 1992, for example, the district shared the research of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences. We learned his view of intelligence as "the capacity to solve problems or to fashion products that are valued in one or more cultural settings" (Gardner & Hatch 1989). Gardner used biological as well as cultural research to formulate a list of seven intelligences—a new outlook on intelligence that differed greatly from the traditional view, which usually recognizes only two intelligences, verbal and computational. This caused teachers to revisit their definition of intelligence and the role of assessment in classrooms, but without ongoing support or follow-up sessions, few teachers made changes in their instructional practices. They reverted to known, reliable methods of instruction.

Thinking about what I would do at Webber in the fall, I asked our Project Outreach team to consider trying this professional development model in Saginaw. At first we got it wrong and spent hours filling chart paper with step-by-step explanations of how to run a teacher-directed study group. We were so pleased with ourselves when a PON leader dropped by our group; however, she was a little surprised that we did not understand how these groups unfolded. Being too kindhearted to tell us directly after all the time we had invested in our planning, she somehow helped us realize that these groups were not prepackaged but were constructed by the participants according to their own needs. As we learned more about these groups, I became convinced that they could be the method for changing instructional practices at Webber.

The First Study Group at Webber, 1996–1997

Right after the one-week PON summer institute, I invited sixth, seventh, and eighth grade English language arts (ELA) and content area teachers to attend a planning meeting for a literacy study group to discuss student literacy and expectations for participation in the group.[6] Eight ELA and eight content area teachers came. Jane, who attended the meeting, told the group that we had administrative support in Gene Nuckolls; Nuckolls was pleased that the Webber staff was willing to confront a difficult topic.

The eight ELA teachers had entered this planning meeting believing that each one alone had failed the students and that each had to come up with answers to fix the reading problem. By the end of the meeting, Lucy Fife, an eighth grade inclusion teacher, noticed that the group members had begun to realize that their problems were the same. All the students were having reading and writing problems.

At first, however, experienced teachers were wary of yet another meeting focused on changing their practice. "Is this going to be just another meeting?" asked Patti Williams, a twenty-five-year veteran teaching eighth grade science. "Will we get anything accomplished, or will it just be talk, talk, talk, as so many other committees are?" I tried to set a different tone, to divert their skepticism and invite their participation, by asking, "What would you like to accomplish by participating in this group?"

The beginning teachers were more receptive. Nina Cristoforo, an ELA teacher, said, "I'm willing to give it a try. I am extremely frustrated!" Cathy Roy, a first-year math teacher, said, "I'm concerned about the underdeveloped reading skills. Students have a great deal of difficulty solving story/word problems. They recognize the mathematical numbers but [don't] always understand the context of the problem." Finding this common thread gave us a united feeling.

With Irvin's book in hand, the group, including the math and science teachers, began to hope that we might make some headway with this overwhelming literacy problem. We ended the meeting agreeing to read a chapter prior to each session and to meet for an hour on alternate Fridays for the entire school year. Fifteen teachers

6 At this time no one, including me, used the term *teacher research*. I believed that the use of the term would be too frightening for my colleagues and might discourage them from participating.

out of a staff of fifty voluntarily formed the group with the support of the assistant principal for curriculum, Joe Miller, who allowed us to use our common planning time during the scheduled workday. So began our journey of researching, collaborating, trying strategies in classrooms, reporting on what worked and didn't work, and developing teacher instructional skills.

We went through Irvin's book chapter by chapter. From the introduction, we realized that we had been trained "under the old erroneous notion that by the secondary level, the student would know how to read sufficiently so that they could master the content . . ." (Irvin 1998, xiii). Early on, we noticed that texts shift between elementary and middle school; in middle school students read more difficult texts and a greater number of textbooks. Two teachers, Marilyn Reeves and Dannette Dixon, who had taught elementary school for many years, also noted that the genre of texts changed from elementary to middle school. "Elementary students most often read from basal readers, which are generally written in narrative style," Marilyn said at one meeting. "At the middle school level, there is a greater focus on expository text, which is more factual, containing main ideas and details."

Using Marilyn's insight, which was eye-opening for us, we looked at Webber MEAP Reading Subtest data from 1995 (see figure 1).

% OF STUDENTS WITH PASSING SCORE OF 300 AND ABOVE	READING GENRES
8.4	Story and Informational
43.1	Story
10.9	Informational

Figure 1: Data on Webber MEAP Reading Subtest, 1995

Just 43.1 percent of the students passed on comprehending stories, while only 10.9 percent passed reading informational or nonfiction text. We wondered how we could have missed such a discrepancy between scores. Obviously, our instructional emphasis needed to be on informational text. We realized that not only content area teachers but also language arts teachers had to identify a variety of strategies to assist our students in developing more effective reading comprehension for informational text. For the rest of the year, we taught the strategies that we were learning in Irvin while looking at learning environments that motivate students, and we experimented with changing seating arrangements and forming small-group learning communities. All of us practiced strategies such as KWL and SQ3R,[7] developing vocabulary, improving reading comprehension, and using literature to teach content.

We were learning as we went, reporting back to the group on the effectiveness of new activities after assessing student work. This recursive reporting went on for the

7 Originally developed by Donna Ogle (1986), KWL is a widely used strategy designed to foster active reading. The basic three steps consist of: K—what do I already know? W—what do I want to know? L—what did I learn? KWL provides a structure for activating and building on prior knowledge for eliciting student input when establishing purposes for reading and for personalizing the summarization of what was learned (Stephens and Brown 2000, 47). SQ3R is a time-honored study system developed by Robinson in 1961: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review. Increasingly, teachers find that helping their classes create their own systems based on sound instructional principles and tailored to specific content areas is more successful (Stephens and Brown 2000, 112).

whole year; everyone had opportunities to practice and report back several times. At the same time, we also studied four exemplary reading programs from throughout the United States. From our examination, we discovered that these programs had in common (1) a commitment to literacy instruction for all students, (2) building and district-level administrative support, (3) a middle school organization and orientation, (4) a commitment to teaching learning strategies through content areas, and (5) success as demonstrated by formal and informal measures.

While the underlying purpose of this literacy group was to provide colleagues with an opportunity to discuss, share, and compare philosophy and techniques that were effective for our student population, our reading combined with the research in our classrooms gave us the data to recommend a curriculum change. We took the best of each program we studied and what we had learned in our classrooms and proposed a mandatory sixth grade reading class. We designed the curriculum for the course during weekly meetings in May 1997.

We worked to balance our recommendation with the middle school philosophy, which offers exploratory programs in both core and elective courses, taking advantage of students' natural curiosity. We recommended eliminating an elective and replacing it with a reading class. Our assistant principal in charge of curriculum and instruction was a key member of our group and supported our efforts at literacy reform. At Webber Middle School, site-based management allows buildings to develop and implement elective classes.

The reading class was adopted in the spring of 1997 as part of the 1997–98 school improvement plan. When the reading class began in the sixth grade, all the sixth grade teachers agreed to use the reading strategies in their content areas. We created posters as visual reminders for teachers and students to refer to as they continued their work that year. We believed that it would be best practice for all grade levels.

The new sixth grade reading class had a long-term effect. In the spring of 1999, after students completed statewide assessments, the seventh grade teachers noticed significant reading improvements in the students who had been in the reading class the previous year. Based on this data and their research, the seventh grade teachers followed the lead of the sixth grade teachers by eliminating an elective in 1999–2000 and introducing a reading class at their grade level, too.

Progress as Reported in MEAP Reading Scores

Our MEAP scores from 1995 to 2001, as seen in figure 2, showed slow but impressive growth over six years.

1995	1996	1998 [8]	1999	2000 [9]	2001	READING GENRE
8.4	11.0	24.8	30.3	16.0	34.0	Story and Informational
43.1	32.4 [10]	52.9	59.1	42.9	62.6	Story
10.9	13.7	31.8	34.8	23.1	45.6	Informational

Figure 2: MEAP Scores for Webber Middle School, 1995–2001

(Percentage of students who scored 300, the passing score, or above.)

We believe the reforms made at Webber, which were suggested by the study group, were instrumental in raising these scores.

I want to highlight three aspects of the Webber study groups that have continued at Webber Middle School after that first year: first, the value of what has come to be called the third space (Banford et al. 1996), necessary for transformative teacher inquiry; second, the time to effect real change; and third, the leadership development that came about as an unplanned side effect of the study groups. All these points are made in a reflection that Lisa Sweebe wrote three years later:

> Although the sixth grade teachers implemented the reading program [suggested by the study group this first year], everyone was involved as a stakeholder, and the teachers in the literacy [study] group supported one another, and listened to each other. The first year when I taught the reading class, I experimented with focusing on strategies and techniques. The second year, I implemented literature circles. I enjoyed teaching that class because the students enjoyed reading. This literacy [study] group taught me to look at a problem closely rather than struggle for a quick fix. I was able to read and analyze and not point a finger at others for the methods that they had tried. This was teacher research based on teacher inquiry. It was a wonderful model of professional development; not top down but teacher-led. It was a colearning process that belonged to everyone. People could try different activities, log and record the results, come back and reflect, and share classroom practice.

Five of the teachers involved in the Webber Middle School study groups (including Lisa) have since participated in the Saginaw Bay Writing Project. Jane took on additional leadership responsibilities as supervisor for professional development for Saginaw Public Schools. Literacy groups continue to be an important part of my professional life and specifically of my new role as K–12 social studies coordinator for Saginaw Public Schools. By forming an inclusive community and strengthening our professional relationships, we connected theory and practice, supported curricular reform, and developed as leaders and professionals.

8 The 1998 test was administered in February 1998; previous tests had been administered in October.

9 In 2000 the test was changed, and the scores were lower across the state.

10 The Story scores dropped in 1996 by 10.7 percent. We speculated that this drop occurred as a result of the study group focusing on informational text strategies to the detriment of narrative. We adjusted our focus to ensure that we included story selection strategies while improving informational scores.

THE SAGINAW TEACHER STUDY GROUP MOVEMENT GROWS: EXPANDED PARTNERSHIPS AND EMERGING TEACHER-LEADERS

by Mary Calliari

Study groups have become a critical component of Saginaw teachers' professional development, fostering the growth of teacher-leaders from among their many participants. These study groups, which began with three groups in 1996, have been designed across a variety of formats, ranging from small groups of eight people meeting at a Barnes and Noble bookstore to districtwide groups involving all thirty-three buildings in the district.

The benefits of the study groups are apparent. For example, overall, 95 percent of Saginaw teachers have participated in a study group focusing on implementing literacy strategies to enhance student achievement. In addition, the study groups have provided professional development for a new district reading initiative through a greatly expanded collaboration between Saginaw Public Schools (SPS), the Saginaw Bay Writing Project (SBWP), and Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU) (see figure 3). I now take up this monograph with the story of these events.

YEAR	STUDY GROUP FOCUS	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS/ GRADE LEVELS	NUMBER OF STUDY GROUPS	TOTAL NUMBER OF TEACHERS PARTICIPATING	LEADERSHIP
1996–1997	Teaching literacy to low-income youth	9 schools/K–12	1	9	SBWP/SVSU
	English language arts	12 schools/K–12	1	15	SBWP/SVSU
	Webber Middle School	1 school/6–8	1	17	SBWP
1997–1998	Multicultural literature	10 schools/K–8	2	15	SBWP
1998–1999	Urban learner[11]	8 schools/K–12	1	10	SBWP
1999–2000	SBWP/SPS/SVSU University Partnership—content area reading strategies	33 schools/K–12	200+	850	SBWP/SPS/ SVSU
2000–2001	SBWP/SPS/SVSU University Partnership—content area reading strategies	33 schools/K–12	200+	850	SBWP/SPS/ SVSU

Figure 3: Saginaw Teacher Study Groups

11 Saginaw Public Schools, in collaboration with Saginaw Valley State University, offers prospective administrators a three-credit course as a leadership academy. All current administrators must attend, and any teachers interested in becoming administrators are invited to participate. After participating in the academy during the winter of 1998, Mary Weaver and I formed a study group that explored Belinda Williams's concept of urban learners. We had been exposed to Williams's work, *Closing the Achievement Gap*, while attending the academy. During the spring of 1999, members of the study group made a presentation about urban learners to prospective teachers at Saginaw Valley State University.

Overview of the Development of Saginaw Teacher Study Groups, 1996–1999

The first year of study groups, 1996–97, the year Mary Weaver led the group at Webber Middle School, two other study groups emerged in the district: one focused on literacy for low-income students and one focused on standards. Both of these groups started as a result of SBWP involvement in the Project Outreach Network. I participated in the English language arts (ELA) group studying standards. The group consisted of fifteen teachers from twelve schools, representing early elementary to high school. We met seven times in 1996–97 and discussed a variety of articles related to the ELA content standards, but just the existence of the group was notable. A study group like this, comprising teachers from all grade levels, does not happen often in our district. Through sustained dialogue, each of us deepened our understanding of the new content standards and developed cross-grade-level collegiality. (See appendix B for the syllabus.)

The second year of study groups, 1997–98, the groups focused on multicultural literature. Two study groups formed that year: one for elementary teachers and one for middle school teachers. I participated in the group that reviewed multicultural literature for students in kindergarten through third grade. Our group met at the local Barnes and Noble bookstore, where the books we reviewed could be purchased at a 20 percent discount. Neither the discount nor the store's comfy chairs were the primary reason we'd chosen Barnes and Noble instead of the district staff development center. Rather, we hoped the bookstore setting would provide a more relaxed atmosphere for the new professional development model we were trying to nurture. At the meetings, group members shared multicultural books they had used in their classrooms, discussed how they aligned the literature with the curriculum, and in some cases even shared their lesson plans.

SBWP/SPS and SVSU Partnership Leads to Expanded Study Groups, 1999–2001

In 1998, in response to the districtwide low performance on the fourth grade state reading assessment, the Saginaw Board of Education mandated that all third grade students read at grade level and appointed a committee to develop a new Birth to 12 Reading Initiative for the district. I served on that committee. From the start, committee members realized that professional development would be a key component of the new reading initiative; the district needed to help teachers change their teaching of literacy. Jane Jurgens, now the supervisor of professional development for Saginaw Public Schools and co-director of the SBWP, saw this as a perfect opportunity to introduce the study group model to the district and develop a stronger partnership between the district and Saginaw Valley State University. At approximately the same time, the university (through Marianne Barnett, director of SBWP) was awarded a $9.1 million United States Department of Education, Title II, Partnership Grant for Improving Teacher Quality for five years (1999–2004). The money could support, in part, the changes Jane envisioned, especially the rela-

tionship between the university and Saginaw Public Schools by way of the Saginaw Bay Writing Project.

During the spring of 1999, Weaver, Jurgens, and Barnett met and talked about the Saginaw Teachers Study Group Movement and used it to inform part of the inservice design for the Birth to 12 Reading Initiative. The inservice component combined the National Writing Project workshop format with the newer idea of study groups, and all grades used the same basic model. The first semester offered traditional workshop-style professional development in reading. The second semester offered study groups based on the first semester's professional development. Thirty-three schools and approximately 850 teachers participated in this districtwide K–12 inservice. Each study group was facilitated by one of the 132 district content area lead teachers, each of whom was training to become an instructional leader in her building and for the district.

At the elementary level, that fall teachers attended grade-level workshops that focused on best practices in literacy using Patricia Cunningham et. al.'s Four Block framework.[12] As part of the Birth to 12 Reading Initiative, the district had purchased the text, *The Teacher's Guide to the Four Blocks*, for all its elementary teachers and adopted the framework (Cunningham et al. 1999). Teacher-consultants from SBWP led the workshops. Each session included grade-level demonstrations of the components by emerging teacher-leaders who had attended a Four Blocks workshop and were already using the framework in their classrooms. Marianne and Jane asked me to present the Writing Block to the second grade teachers. Teachers received a forty-dollar stipend for attending the three-hour workshop, as specified in our district teaching compact.

During the second semester, elementary buildings were responsible for holding a series of six one-hour follow-up study groups. Teachers received a district stipend of forty dollars for the first three sessions of these study groups, and individual buildings had the option of paying their teachers for an additional three hours from their professional development funds according to the building school improvement plan. Individual schools made decisions about meeting dates, times, places, and whether to hold meetings with teams of teachers from other buildings.

The professional development in the fall semester for the middle and high schools was taught by professors from Saginaw Valley State University, who offered interactive workshops on content-specific reading strategies for the different content area groups. In the spring, as in the elementary model, teacher-leaders facilitated study groups of

12 The Four Blocks are from *The Teacher's Guide to the Four Blocks:*

The Guided Reading Block is a strategy in which teachers choose material for students to read and determine a purpose for which they are reading. Teachers then guide the students to use reading strategies needed for that material as a whole class, in small groups, or with partners. Guided reading is always focused on comprehension and uses a variety of reading materials.

The Self-Selected Reading Block includes teacher read-alouds, students reading at an independent level from a variety of books, teacher conferencing with students, and opportunities for students to share what they are reading with their peers.

The Writing Block uses a writer's workshop format and includes a minilesson conducted by the teacher, opportunities for children to write, and teacher conferencing with students. This block ends with students sharing in an Author's Chair.

The Working with Words Block teaches students to read and spell high-frequency words and to understand the patterns that allow them to decode and spell other words.

teachers researching the use of the new techniques. In the fall of 2000, teachers shared successful uses and adaptations of the reading techniques they had studied the previous year. Across both years, the teachers used *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies: 75 Practical Reading and Writing Ideas*, by Elaine Stephens and Jean Brown, which the district bought for them as a resource in their studies.

The First Districtwide Round of Study Groups as a Learning Experience in Group Facilitation

In the spring of 1995, the year I participated in the Saginaw Bay Writing Project Summer Institute, I was a fifteen-year veteran early childhood teacher. I remember seriously thinking of leaving after the first day! Imagine myself a writer? I just taught kindergarten; how could I have anything worthwhile to share? But I survived the summer institute, and from there my view of professional development began to change. Soon I was part of the NWP Project Outreach group, and I returned to school eager to begin study groups immediately. For three years after that, I participated in the study groups but did not facilitate.

So by the time I became a facilitator for the grade-level study groups held in the winter of 2000, I had come a long way. Most of the 131 other district content area lead teacher-facilitators had never even heard of study groups before being asked to facilitate one in their buildings. Fewer than five of these teachers had actually participated in a study group. To help address this issue, lead teachers from each building participated in a facilitator workshop, designed collaboratively by the district and Janet Rentsch, co-director of SBWP.

The intent of the training was to help prospective facilitators understand their roles as facilitators, a pivotal and defining role in study groups. Here they learned to facilitate, not dictate, and to involve even reluctant participants. However, the majority of the two-hour training was taken up with the necessary housekeeping details for study groups, such as sign-in sheets, payroll information, data collection forms, and so forth; little time was left to discuss the facilitator role.

No follow-up meetings were scheduled to address this oversight. It was assumed that teachers were natural facilitators, which, we soon learned, was not always true. For many teacher-facilitators, this was an introduction to a new model of professional development requiring active involvement of all participants, and the facilitators were hesitant and often uncomfortable with leading such a new concept. "I can't do this," several said fearfully. "I don't even know what a study group does. How can I be a facilitator?" But whether we were ready or not, the district directive was clear: "Go forth, and ye shall be study group facilitators."

From my Project Outreach work and the 1997 study group experience, I had a better vision of the facilitator role. I knew that a study group's success was based on the involvement of the participants. My role as a facilitator was to assist the group process by guiding the discussion with questions, keeping the group focused on the

content, and involving all members. But even I found myself stepping back into the traditional role of know-it-all when I first began the study group that winter of 2000. Change is so difficult. Even though I identified the behaviors that I needed to change, I needed to keep the changes conscious until they became automatic, or my behavior would not change.

As we discussed the guidebook, many teachers in the group looked to me as the facilitator to find the answers to their questions and concerns. Teachers were still operating in the old professional development mode of being given the answers from outside sources rather than looking for answers among our group members. I facilitated a group of eight prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers from my building and two other elementary buildings. During the three months, we met six times, rotating the meetings from school to school. For an hour, we discussed instructional practices. Teachers then chose a strategy to try in their classrooms and shared their successes and failures the following session. After the first two sessions, several teachers thanked me and commented on how much they liked the process.

As I reflected on the process after our second session, however, I was not as content as the other members seemed to be. Remembering the facilitator sessions at the Project Outreach Network training in 1996, I realized that I had spent too much time imposing my ideas on the group and not nearly enough time leading them to find the answers they sought. I reminded myself that I needed to step back and let the process unfold. As I learned to ask questions and even bite my tongue at times, other members of the study group stepped forward with their thoughts and ideas, many of which often matched mine! It was an added benefit for me when teachers shared ideas I could add to my repertoire. We began to have more interesting discussions as our differing philosophies became apparent. By the sixth and final meeting, we had truly become a learning community. This would not have occurred if I had continued misusing my facilitator role, and it was a reminder to me that the success of a study group is partly dependent on the skill of the facilitator. Since there was no facilitation support, my reflections on my facilitation were solitary, and I lost the opportunity to help myself and others become better facilitators.

What I knew from my experience as a facilitator was reinforced by surveys at the end of the year: It had been a mistake not to build in a support system for facilitators. An attempt to address concerns was made the following year with a second facilitator training. At this training, the full two hours was devoted to the facilitator role, and excellent handouts were shared with teachers (see materials in appendix C). I found especially helpful the "Troubleshooting" section, which offered possible responses to problems that could occur during study groups, such as lack of group focus or an aggressive participant dominating the discussion.

Despite the glitches the first year, we accomplished much. The group members truly enjoyed the opportunity to talk with colleagues about classroom practice, since as teachers, we never seem to find enough time for sustained dialogue about our practice. This was one of the first times that teachers in our district had met *with* district support *without* an administrator present; because no one felt threatened, both new

and veteran teachers opened their classroom doors and freely shared what they were doing with empathetic colleagues. I believe this would not have occurred without the structure of a study group forcing busy teachers to take the time to dialogue.

Since this was a district-directed professional development, although in partnership with SBWP and SVSU, we documented our sessions with the required form (appendixes D and E) without the form becoming the centerpiece of our sessions. We used the three-part form developed by Mary Harmon, SVSU, and Janet Rentsch, SBWP/SVSU, to give us direction; teachers shared their experiences with strategies they tried in their classrooms; they perused *The Teacher's Guide to the Four Blocks* for other strategies; and they chose another strategy to try during the following week. As group members became familiar with this format, the dialogue evolved from simply answering the questions in a round-robin format to conversation that was much more natural. The required form became a valuable reporting tool as study groups used it to report to the district about the strategies they had implemented. Many of the teachers who participated liked this new model of inservice, the study group. The district also believed the study groups were a success. Evaluation comments collected in the spring of 2000 indicated that teachers were comfortable with the format, enjoyed the opportunity for dialogue, and implemented new reading strategies. A decision was made to continue the process during the 2000–2001 school year.

Concluding Thoughts and Some Advice on Study Groups

When we began this journey, we knew nothing about study groups. We learn more each year, and we offer below our current list of what we believe are the essential elements of study groups that will change teachers, their practice, their schools, and their districts. Study groups can and do exist without everything on our list being in place, but if transformation is the goal, most items are necessary preconditions. From our experience with the Saginaw study groups, the most effective ones have included all of the components.

- **Leadership by teachers**
  As members of the writing project, we believe in teachers teaching teachers. We see study groups as a way to expand this model.
- **Facilitator training for the teacher-leaders**
  Facilitator training is critical. Some teacher-facilitators were not familiar or comfortable with the skills necessary for leading a study group. For others, it was a natural transfer of classroom skills to another venue.
- **A common topic, goal, or need**
- **Voluntary participation**
- **Commitment and shared philosophy**
  The early groups chose their topics, membership was voluntary, and commitment was strong. Later on, the study groups for the district reading initiative were manda-

tory. The mandatory groups informed all teachers about the initiative but varied in effectiveness. Teachers who welcomed the groups shared beliefs and benefited. Teachers who felt coerced, or who lacked commitment and shared philosophy, simply put in their time and did not change.

- **Collaboration with and resources from organizations like the National Writing Project, local sites, and the district**
  As winners of an Academy Award often say, we couldn't have done this without our collaborators. Our study groups began with the National Writing Project and were sustained through the support and collaboration of the district, the local writing project, and the university. Through the National Writing Project we joined Project Outreach, which introduced us to a new idea—study groups—and supported their development. The partnership of our writing project with our local university, Saginaw Valley State University, provided funding to offer districtwide professional development over a two-year period.

  Jane Jurgens, the district English language arts coordinator and a co-director of SBWP, was a member of our Project Outreach team. Her leadership and expertise were essential in developing an effective professional development plan. Gene Nuckolls, the assistant superintendent, who had been extremely supportive of the writing project, knew Jane and Mary and gave district support to their plan for study groups.

- **Development of a third space, a culture of acceptance and inquiry, and a climate of mutual respect**
  The culture of a study group, which develops over time, is probably the single most important factor for success. Lucy Fife from Webber referred to the third space when she explained why the group worked: "It's really great to be able to talk about the results. Ideas were introduced; a third space was created, where we could sit back and reflect on our practice. The difference was that we could try things in a supportive environment. If it didn't work, we could look at the causes and not be criticized."

- **Accountability and evaluation of the group**
  Early on, we gathered verbal and written reflections but did not have an evaluation system that compared previous professional development efforts to study groups or measured the success of the groups.

No reform is possible without leaders. The subtext of the study group movement in Saginaw has been leadership development. Many teachers have joined the SBWP; we, Mary Weaver and Mary Calliari, continue to take on new leadership roles; teacher-leaders have worked in study groups to implement a districtwide initiative. As a result of this success, the district continues to make study groups the core of each new professional development project. Yet we have just begun to scratch the surface of the potential of study groups. With the district acceptance of the model, we and our colleagues, as teacher-leaders, will continue to learn and improve upon the model.

AFTERWORD: A CO-DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE SAGINAW TEACHER STUDY GROUP MOVEMENT

by Janet Rentsch
Co-director, Saginaw Bay Writing Project

The professional development study group model described in this monograph and implemented in Saginaw Public Schools (SPS) was an ideal model for Saginaw Bay Writing Project (SBWP). Its origins were grassroots and teacher inspired, beginning with Mary Weaver's reaction to the Webber Middle School test scores. It received district support from Jane Jurgens and others and, most important, from the teachers in the district. The benefit of such an organic process is the internal support from the district administrators and teachers for the project. The challenges for the project, especially from 1999 to 2001, when the project went districtwide, were these: Will the teachers, without writing project experience, participate in and support the proposed project? Will teachers who have little background in literacy education engage in study groups that challenge the way teachers teach and explain the way students learn?

The SBWP has supported literacy education across the curriculum for teachers for the past ten years. The founding director, Kay H. Harley, English professor, in collaboration with Jane Jurgens, then a teacher at Saginaw Public Schools, nurtured the professional development strength of this site from its 1993 start. From the beginning, the vision for school district support has been for professional development and collaboration with school districts. Our summer invitational and advanced institutes, attended by teachers from urban, suburban, and rural districts, focuses on teacher inquiry-driven research, supporting projects like the Saginaw Teacher Study Group. Because the project was district driven, the writing project worked to support and shape the project as a whole and designed second-semester study groups based on the best practice of reflective writing and learning.

Beginning with NWP Project Outreach support, teacher-leaders conceptualized and piloted the Saginaw Teacher Study Group, and SBWP supported the work. When the project went districtwide, SBWP also coordinated it with the Saginaw Public School District. The districtwide project was supported and developed in collaboration with the SPS District Reading Committee, which invited me as a participating member. SPS provided the resources, reference books, leadership training, and a workable model for teachers to effectively lead and participate in reading/study strategy groups in their own buildings. The collaborative planning for the two years of districtwide training included literacy strategies and research articles supplementing the professional development work that Mary Harmon, SVSU English professor, developed as an inservice model. The district called on SBWP teacher-consultants, also teachers in the district, for teacher leadership training

for this districtwide effort. I collected the data and collated the year's study group report. This important evaluation of the districtwide effort informed the second year's efforts (appendix F).

The challenge of a large-scale project: Implementing any strategy on a large scale is a complicated business that draws in teachers with various educational backgrounds, involves teachers' union issues, demands reporting to the school board and district personnel, and takes careful coordination and diligence. Designing professional development for twenty-year veterans and new three-month teachers was challenging as we delivered information on the newly adopted reading curriculum. The teachers' union questioned, and eventually supported with conditions, the six hours of professional development requested for the study groups, as it exceeded the district teacher agreement of six hours total per year.

The benefit of a large-scale project: The opportunity to implement a large-scale professional development model that has district support, district resources, administrative understanding, and teacher-leaders who share this vision appears seldom in one's career. Participating with the District Reading Committee established a collaborative relationship that has fueled the partnership between the district and the SBWP. This was a special time when need met resources and opportunity, affecting the educational experience and learning of students, prekindergarten through grade twelve, as evidenced by the improved MEAP data in buildings that accepted the challenge of reflective learning and study.

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APPENDIX A: MIDDLE SCHOOL PHILOSOPHY

In fall 1991, Saginaw Public Schools began to investigate the middle school philosophy. We read J. H. Keefe's work (1983), which advocates a positive psychosocial environment that allows flexibility and various kinds of interdisciplinary teaming. We proposed changing from a junior high structure to a middle school structure.

The idea for middle schools grew from the recognition that junior high schools were not meeting the needs of early adolescents. Junior highs focus on academic preparation for high school, while middle schools focus on the social context and the social nature of learning. The middle school emerged to provide an organization, a curriculum, and an instructional approach designed specifically for the early adolescent to ease the transition from the elementary school to the high school. Middle schools provide early adolescents with the physical, emotional, social, moral, and intellectual support they need to become active, successful, and independent learners through appropriate programs, policies, and practices. At the same time, middle school students experience profound changes in school structure, instruction, expectations of independent learning, and reading material.

For our middle school, we divided each grade level into teams: at the sixth grade level, teachers taught in a ninety-minute block: English language arts/social studies, and math/science; at the seventh and eighth grade levels, classes were taught in forty-five-minute sessions. All students went to individual teachers for their electives. The sixth grade "house" was on the first floor, so students were surrounded by their peers except for elective courses. The seventh and eighth grade "houses" were separated on the second floor.

We also studied Mac Iver's (1990) advisory program, which promotes social and academic support activities. We planned to follow the advice from the National Middle School Association, *This We Believe* (1992), by "discussing problems with individual students, giving career information and guidance, developing student self-confidence and leadership, and discussing academic issues, personal or family problems, social relationships, peer groups, health issues, moral or ethical issues and multicultural issues/inter-group relations."

APPENDIX B: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDY GROUP SCHEDULES

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDY GROUPS

Below is detailed information regarding every study group scheduled for the 1996–97 school year. Please peruse the list and complete the Registration form attached. Upon receipt of your Registration, a copy of the feature article(s) will be sent to you so that you may read it prior to the session.

A.
Wednesday, October 9, 1996
Conference Room A.....4-6 PM

ELA # 3 Meaning and Communication

Source: *Uncommon Sense: Theoretical Practice in Language Education*

Author: J. S. Mayher

Article: "Integrating the Four Modes of Language Use: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing"

B.
Wednesday, October 16, 1996
Conference Room A.....4-6 PM

ELA # 5 Literature

Source: *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts*

Author: A. C. Purves

Article: "A Review of the Various Aspects of Teaching Literature in School" (Audience: K-12)

Source: *The English Journal*

Author: S. Stotsky

Article: "Academic Guidelines for Selecting Multiethnic and Multicultural Literature" (Audience: 7-12)

C.
Wednesday, November 6, 1996
Conference Room A.....4-6 PM

ELA # 6 Voice

Source: *The Quarterly*

Author: D. J. Abrams

Article: "Above All, There Is a Voice" (Audience: K-12)

Source: *The English Journal*

Author: J. K. Cone

Article: "Using Classroom Talk to Create Community and Learning (Audience: 7-12)"

D.
Wednesday, November 13, 1996
Conference Room A.....4-6 PM

ELA # 7 Skills and Processes

Source: *Linguistics for Teachers*

Author: S. Zemelman and H. Daniels

Article: "Defining the Process Paradigm"

E.
Wednesday, December 11, 1996
Conference Room A.....4-6 PM

ELA # 8 Genre and Craft of Language

Source: *Living Between the Lines*

Author: L. Calkins

Article: "Memoir: Reading and Writing the Story of Our Lives"

Source: *Envisioning Literature*

Author: Judith A. Langer

Article: "Building Environments" (Audience: 7-12)

F.
Wednesday, January 15, 1997
Conference Room A.....4-6 PM

ELA # 9 Depth of Understanding

Source: *American Educator*

Author: D. Perkins

Article: "Teaching for Understanding"

G.
Wednesday, February 5, 1997
Conference Room A.....4-6 PM

ELA # 1 Meaning and Communication

Source: *Literacy for a Diverse Society*

Author: Elfrieda Hiebert

Article: "Literacy and Schooling: A Sociocognitive Perspective"

APPENDIX C: GUIDELINES FOR GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Role of the facilitator

A good discussion leader is vital to the success of a study group. It is not necessary to have training or experience in facilitating group discussion as long as you are enthusiastic, friendly, a good listener, and able to think on your feet. It is essential that you understand the study group concept, know your role, and prepare carefully for each session. You do not need to be an expert in the topic being discussed, but you should know enough about it to be able to ask sensible questions and to raise points that have been missed by the group. You must be able to create a friendly atmosphere of cooperation and trust in which participants are comfortable sharing their opinions and ideas. You are not a teacher; you do not have answers to all the questions; you help the group find their own answers.

Tips for effective discussion leadership

Be prepared

Be the best-prepared person in the room. This means understanding the goals of the study group, being familiar with the subject, thinking ahead of time about the directions in which the discussion might go, and preparing discussion questions to help the group in considering the subject. This kind of preparation will enable you to give your full attention to group dynamics and to what individuals in the group are saying.

Set a relaxed and open tone

- Welcome everyone, and create an atmosphere in which each participant feels at ease expressing ideas and responding to those of others.
- Refreshments help people relax.
- Well-placed humor is always welcome and helps people focus on differences in ideas rather than on personalities.

Establish clear ground rules

At the beginning of the study group, ask the participants to help you develop ground rules and ask if they agree to them or want to add anything. Keep the list and post it for each meeting as a reminder. Typical ground rules are:

- Everyone is encouraged to participate at his or her own comfort level.
- Everyone is encouraged to speak; no one person should dominate discussion.
- All views will be respected; everyone's input is valuable.
- Disagreements will not be personalized; no name calling or put-downs tolerated.
- Confidentiality will be maintained; this is especially important as teachers risk new practices in their classrooms.

Identify the purpose and goals of the group

Make sure everyone knows why he or she is in the group. Ask participants for a list of questions they want answered. Keep it and post it for each meeting for reference. Review the agenda or evaluation sheet for participants.

Facilitator Training Notes modified by permission from *http://www.nald.ca/clr/study/scfacil.htm* National Adult Literacy Database, February 22, 2001.

Assist the group process

- Guide the discussion according to the ground rules and remain neutral.
- Keep the group focused on the content of the discussion. Monitor how well the participants are communicating with each other: who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and whose points have not received a fair hearing.
- When you have to intervene, put it off as long as you can. Too many interruptions stifle discussion. Let it go until you are sure the participants are not coming back to the topic.
- Don't talk after each comment or answer every question; allow participants to respond directly to each other. The most effective facilitators often say little but are always thinking about how to move the group toward its goal.
- Don't be afraid of silence. It will sometimes take a while for someone to offer an answer to a question you pose. People need time to think.
- Try to involve everyone; don't let anyone dominate.
- Remember, a study group is not a debate but a group dialogue.

Help the group grapple with content; use questions to help make the discussion more productive

- Make sure they consider a wide range of views. Ask them to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem. In this way, tradeoffs involved in making tough choices become apparent.
- Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs.
- Either summarize the discussion occasionally or encourage group members to do so.
- Help participants to identify common ground, but don't try to force consensus.
- You will find a list of useful questions attached.

Reserve adequate time for closing the discussion

- Use the last few minutes or so to wrap up on a positive note.
- Ask the group for last comments and thoughts about the subject or to share any new ideas or thought they've had as a result of the discussion.
- Thank everyone for his or her contribution; acknowledge that exploring controversial issues is hard work. New learning, even focusing on old material, is hard work.
- Provide time for the group to fill out the evaluation sheets.

Role of the participants

Participation is what study groups are all about. Participants must be willing to "own" the study group, to set goals and work toward them, and to take responsibility for their own learning. The organizer, usually your principal, sets up the study groups, and the facilitator guides the discussion while the participants cooperate to make it work.

Facilitator Training Notes modified by permission from *http://www.nald.ca/clr/study/scfacil.htm*
National Adult Literacy Database, February 22, 2001.

The following suggestions will help you get the most out of your study group experience.

- Make an effort to attend every session of the study group. The process works best when the members become familiar with each other. You will get more out of it if you keep up with the discussion and the reading.
- Listen carefully to others. Make notes on what you are learning from others' insights so you can concentrate on listening rather than on what you want to say next.
- Take your turn and pass it on. Give others a chance to speak, looking forward to hearing what everyone has to say.
- Help keep the discussion on topic by keeping your comments relevant and making them while they are pertinent.
- Address your remarks to the group rather than the facilitator. Question other participants to find out more about their ideas.
- Communicate your needs to the facilitator. He or she is responsible for summarizing key ideas and seeking clarification of points. If you have a question, you can be certain others in the group have the same question.
- Do take part in the discussion. Everyone in the group has unique experience and knowledge, and this variety makes the discussion interesting. Don't feel pressured to speak before you are ready, but realize your contribution is valuable.
- Engage in friendly disagreement. Challenge ideas and opinions you disagree with, and expect to have to explain your own. Humor and a pleasant manner help you make your points and keep the disagreements friendly. There is no place here for rudeness or belligerence.
- Respect the position of those who disagree with you. Strive to understand their point of view. Making a good case for positions you disagree with makes you better understand your own positions.
- Keep an open mind. This is your chance to explore ideas you may not have considered before. You gain nothing by stubbornly sticking to points you made earlier.

Facilitator Training Notes modified by permission from *http://www.nald.ca/clr/study/scfacil.htm*
National Adult Literacy Database, February 22, 2001.

Questions to help the facilitator guide the discussion

To start the discussion

What experiences have you or teachers you know had with this issue?

How is this issue a problem in your school? Your classroom?

Why do you think this is such a problem?

How does this affect you?

What do you find most persuasive about that point of view?

That encourage the expression of a diversity of views

Does anyone have a different view?

Does anyone want to add to or support or challenge that point?

Could you give us an example to illustrate that point?

What do people who disagree with that view say?

What would be a strong case against what you just said?

What is it about that position that you just can't live with?

How might others see the issue?

What are the most important concerns that underlie your views?

Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?

What do you think people who hold that opinion care deeply about?

What experiences or beliefs might lead people to hold that view?

About values

Are there any common values or concerns here in spite of different opinions on how to deal with them?

What motivates that choice?

What might be the consequences of that choice for others?

If push came to shove, what would you do and why?

How might others see the issues?

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National Adult Literacy Database, February 22, 2001.

That promote deliberation

Supposing you can't have everything, what would you choose?

What seems to be the key point here?

Are there any points on which most of us would agree?

What is the crux of your disagreement?

That sum up

What have you learned about this issue?

Did any common concerns emerge?

In what ways do you see the issue differently as a result of considering others' views?

That lead toward next steps

With what approach would most of this group agree?

What is already being done to deal with this problem?

What are some first steps in dealing with this problem?

What might we do about this problem?

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Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	POSSIBLE RESPONSE
Certain participants don't say anything, seem shy.	Try to draw them out, but don't put them on the spot. Make eye contact to remind them that you'd like to hear from them. Look for nonverbal cues that they want to speak. Often, people will feel more comfortable in later sessions and will begin to take part. When that happens, show genuine interest and ask for more. It always helps to talk with people informally before and after the session and at breaks.
An aggressive person dominates the discussion.	It's your responsibility to intervene and set limits. Remind him or her that you want to hear from everyone. Next, you might ask him or her not to talk until everyone has had a chance. To model this group dynamic for classroom use, you may want to use a talking stick. Only the person holding the talking stick may speak. If someone goes into a lengthy digression, you may have to interrupt to get back on track.
Discussion suddenly stops or doesn't even get off the ground.	Acknowledge that this is occurring. Ask, "What is happening here?" or "Maybe we're not getting at your real concerns. What do you think people really need to talk about here?"
Lack of focus, not moving forward, participants wander off the topic.	This is a hard call—after all, the discussion belongs to the group. Yet, it's your job to focus the discussion and move it along. Allow room to explore closely related topics, but if only a few are taking the discussion in a new direction, the others are likely frustrated, resentful, and bored. Try to refocus by asking, "How does your point relate to . . . ?" or stating, "That's interesting, but let's return to the central issue." If, on the other hand, most of the entire group is more interested in pursuing a different topic than the one planned, you should be sensitive to that and bring it to the group's attention in order to give them a chance to reconsider their goals.

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National Adult Literacy Database, February 22, 2001.

Someone puts forth information that you know to be false. Or participants get hung up in a dispute about facts, but no one present knows the answer.	Ask, "Has anyone heard of conflicting information?" If no one offers a correction, offer one yourself. If no one knows the facts, and the point is not essential, put it aside and move on. If the point is central to facts of the discussion, encourage members to look up the information before the next meeting. Remind the group that experts often disagree and there may be no generally accepted answer.
Too large a group or too many people with too much to say; or you feel the discussion is getting away from you.	Consider comoderating. Often if one facilitator is stymied, the other will have a good response to a situation or an insightful question.
Lack of interest, no excitement, no one wants to talk, only a few people participating.	Are you, as the facilitator, talking too much or not giving enough response time after posing questions? People need time to think, reflect, and get ready to speak up. It may help to pose a question and go around the circle so everyone has a chance to respond. Occasionally, you will have a group of people who are tired or who have had a bad day. There may be a lack of excitement if the group seems to be in agreement. In this case, try to bring up other views. "Do you know people who hold other views? What would they have against the views that you have expressed?" If all else fails, end the meeting early.
Tension or open conflict in the group. Perhaps two participants lock horns and argue. Or someone gets angry, yells at another, or puts another person down.	If there is tension, address it directly. Remind participants that disagreement and conflict are good, but in order to be productive, they must relate to the issue. It is acceptable to challenge a person's ideas but not the person. Interrupt personal attacks, name-calling, or put-downs as soon as they occur. The group members will support you if they bought into the ground rules in the first place.

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National Adult Literacy Database, February 22, 2001.

APPENDIX D: SECONDARY READING STRATEGIES STUDY GROUPS EVALUATION NOTES

Saginaw Public Schools Second Semester Districtwide Professional Development

Secondary Reading Strategies Study Groups Evaluation Notes for Meetings 1-3

January 5 through March 5, 2001 First three 1-hour sessions paid for by the District

School: _____ Meeting Time and Place: _____

Facilitator: _____ 1st Meeting Date: _____

List previous strategy(ies) implemented by group members and their comments.

Teacher	**Which Strategy + Page # in *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies***	**Comments**

List research, which I've read in the past month, that informs my teaching practice.

List assessment tools I use to inform my teaching practice.

As a result of research and assessment, I will implement the following strategies to meet student reading needs by the next meeting.

Use additional paper as needed and attach to this sheet. Data gathered will be used for building reports and district reports. When sheets are complete, turn into your building principal. Developed by Dr. Mary R. Harmon, English Department, Saginaw Valley State University.
Due date for #1–3: March 5, 2001.

Saginaw Public Schools Second Semester Districtwide Professional Development

Secondary Reading Strategies Study Groups Evaluation Notes for Meetings 1-3

January 5 through March 5, 2001 First three 1-hour sessions paid for by the District

School: _____ Meeting Time and Place: _____

Facilitator: _____ 2nd Meeting Date: _____

List previous strategy(ies) implemented by group members and their comments.

Teacher	**Which Strategy + Page # in *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies***	**Comments**

List research, which I've read in the past month, that informs my teaching practice.

List assessment tools I use to inform my teaching practice.

As a result of research and assessment, I will implement the following strategies to meet student reading needs by the next meeting.

Use additional paper as needed and attach to this sheet. Data gathered will be used for building reports and district reports. When sheets are complete, turn into your building principal. Developed by Dr. Mary R. Harmon, English Department, Saginaw Valley State University.
Due date for #1–3: March 5, 2001.

Saginaw Public Schools Second Semester Districtwide Professional Development

Secondary Reading Strategies Study Groups Evaluation Notes for Meetings 1-3

January 5 through March 5, 2001 First three 1-hour sessions paid for by the District

School: _____ Meeting Time and Place: _____

Facilitator: _____ 3rd Meeting Date: _____

List previous strategy(ies) implemented by group members and their comments.

Teacher	**Which Strategy + Page # in *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies***	**Comments**

List research, which I've read in the past month, that informs my teaching practice.

List assessment tools I use to inform my teaching practice.

As a result of research and assessment, I will implement the following strategies to meet student reading needs by the next meeting.

Use additional paper as needed and attach to this sheet. Data gathered will be used for building reports and district reports. When sheets are complete, turn into your building principal. Developed by Dr. Mary R. Harmon, English Department, Saginaw Valley State University.
Due date for #1–3: March 5, 2001.

APPENDIX E: ELEMENTARY READING STRATEGIES STUDY GROUPS EVALUATION NOTES

Saginaw Public Schools Second Semester Districtwide Professional Development
Elementary Reading Strategies Study Groups Evaluation notes Meeting 1-3
January 5 through March 10, 2000 First three 1-hour sessions paid for by the District

School: _____ Meeting Time and Place: _____

Facilitator: _____ 1st Meeting Date: _____

List previous strategy(ies) implemented by group members and their comments.

Teacher	Which Strategy + Page # in *The Teacher's Guide to the Four Blocks* or *Making Words* books	Comments

List strategy(ies) discussed in the study group today.

List which strategy each member will implement by the next meeting.

Teacher	Content area	Strategy and Page #

Use additional paper as needed and attach to this sheet. Data gathered for building reports and district reports. Developed by Dr. Mary R. Harmon, English Department, Saginaw Valley State University.

Saginaw Public Schools Second Semester Districtwide Professional Development
Elementary Reading Strategies Study Groups Evaluation notes Meeting 1-3
January 5 through March 10, 2000 First three 1-hour sessions paid for by the District

School: _____ Meeting Time and Place: _____

Facilitator: _____ 2nd Meeting Date: _____

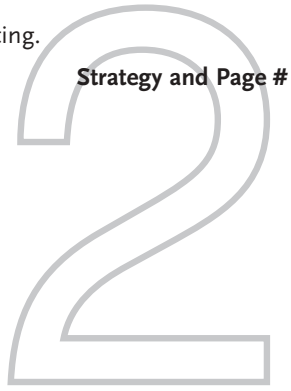
List previous strategy(ies) implemented by group members and their comments.

Teacher	**Which Strategy + Page # in *The Teacher's Guide to the Four Blocks* or *Making Words* books**	**Comments**

List strategy(ies) discussed in the study group today.

List which strategy each member will implement by the next meeting.

Teacher	**Content area**	**Strategy and Page #**



Use additional paper as needed and attach to this sheet. Data gathered for building reports and district reports. Developed by Dr. Mary R. Harmon, English Department, Saginaw Valley State University.

Saginaw Public Schools Second Semester Districtwide Professional Development
Elementary Reading Strategies Study Groups Evaluation notes Meeting 1-3
January 5 through March 10, 2000 First three 1-hour sessions paid for by the District

School: _____ Meeting Time and Place: _____

Facilitator: _____ 3rd Meeting Date: _____

List previous strategy(ies) implemented by group members and their comments.

Teacher	**Which Strategy + Page # in *The Teacher's Guide to the Four Blocks* or *Making Words* books**	**Comments**

List strategy(ies) discussed in the study group today.

List which strategy each member will implement by the next meeting.

Teacher	**Content area**	**Strategy and Page #**

3

Use additional paper as needed and attach to this sheet. Data gathered for building reports and district reports. Developed by Dr. Mary R. Harmon, English Department, Saginaw Valley State University.

APPENDIX F: SAGINAW PUBLIC SCHOOLS INSERVICE 1999–2001 READING STUDY STRATEGIES SUMMARY REPORT

Saginaw Public Schools (SPS) district goal:

Students are endorsed in reading on the HST MEAP as an indicator of the strength of their reading abilities as a lifelong learner. To help students achieve this goal, SPS turned its attention to staff/teacher development to influence students' reading abilities. SPS partnered with Saginaw Valley State University to develop an inservice model based on research that effectively teaches reading methods to support the teaching of reading by every teacher in the district.

Description of first semester inservice offerings:

From September through December 1999 and again in 2000, nine inservice sessions were offered to staff/teachers by grade level (elementary) and content area (middle school/high school) per year.

Each year elementary teachers who had already implemented the Four Block method of instruction gave interactive inservice sessions by grade level. They referred to *The Teacher's Guide to the Four Blocks* (purchased by the district and given to each teacher) in their presentations, demonstrating for teachers this method of instruction, which incorporated four different approaches to beginning reading. This model also established instructional "experts" within the district and within buildings for teachers to meet and use as a resource as they implemented this method of instruction in their own classroom. Research articles were recommended at each session.

In fall 1999, the middle school and high school sessions were divided by content area and led by Saginaw Valley State University professors disciplined in that content area. Professors led an interactive presentation of four to six content-specific reading strategies to enable students to become active learners. For fall 2000, teachers who used specific reading strategies in their classroom presented successful methods to the teachers. Both years they used a resource book purchased by the district, *A Handbook of Content Literacy Strategies: 75 Practical Reading and Writing Ideas*. The teachers came with and left with a ready resource for referral as they implemented these strategies in their classrooms. Research articles were recommended at each session.

1999 and 2000 First Semester Data

	Grade Level	# Attended 1999–2000	# Attended 2000–2001
Lead Network			
	K–12	n/a	81
Elementary			
	Pre-K and Kindergarten	42	55
	First grade	60	61
	Second grade	47	63
	Third grade	38	48
	Fourth/Fifth grade	60	56
Middle School			
	Middle School 6–8	49	26
	Middle School 6–8	76	104

High School

High School 9–12	43	30
High School 9–12	55	21

SPS offered a site-based inservice model second semester to affect teacher instruction in a supported forum. The teacher-leader acted as a facilitator to help the group members understand their teaching experience and convert that experience to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to troubleshoot student difficulties in reading. SPS understood that discussion and involvement of the teacher and mutual understanding among the teachers are more important in the long run for effective teaching of reading strategies. SPS provided the resources, reference books, leadership training, and a workable model for teachers to effectively lead and participate in reading study strategy groups in their own buildings.

Second Semester Leadership Training session data:

Date	Grade Level	# Of teacher-leaders who attended	
		1999–2000	2000–2001
1/26/00, 1/27/00, 1/16/01	K–12	128	144

For both years, teachers determined their groups, determined their time and place of meeting, and determined what to study from the resource books provided by the district. The district paid for 3 hours of professional development and the buildings had the option of supporting 3 additional professional development hours.

In 2000–2001, all 24 elementary schools and all 9 middle schools/high schools established reading study strategy groups led by teacher-leaders from their building. Attached is the report by building of the numbers of teachers who participated and their comments from the evaluation sheets.

Facts about data reporting:

- 1999–2000, six schools combined their reading study strategy groups; data and comments for these schools are reported by building.
- 2000–2001, two schools combined their reading study strategy groups; data and comments for these schools are reported by building.
- The number of classroom staff includes general classroom staffing, Special Ed, Title I, At Risk, and MSRP. So percent of teachers who participated would be affected if one or more of these categories were not considered.
- The number of teachers who participated was gathered from the evaluation sheets.
- 2000–2001, the kinds of assessment teachers used to assess student skill and comprehension are listed in the comment section.
- 2000–2001, the number of research articles studied by the teachers was recorded.

In 1999–2000 this study group inservice was a new model, and 50 percent participation was expected second semester. Nineteen of the 21 elementary schools with data recorded over 50 percent participation. Two of the 7 secondary schools with data reported over 50 percent participation.

In 2000–2001, the second year of this model, all 24 elementary schools had established groups, with 19 schools reporting over 50 percent participation. All 9 secondary schools established groups, with 5 of the schools reporting over 50 percent participation rate.

1999–2000 data

- 269/336 (80%) teachers at the elementary level participated in reading study strategy groups second semester. (Based on 20 buildings* who turned in evaluation sheets and numbers)
- 131/310 (42%) teachers at the secondary level participated in reading study strategy groups second semester. (Based on 7 buildings* who turned in evaluation sheets and numbers)

2000–2001 data

- 350/441 (79%) teachers at the elementary level participated in reading study strategy groups second semester. (Based on 24 buildings* who turned in evaluation sheets and numbers)
- 192/409 (47%) teachers at the secondary level participated in reading study strategy groups second semester. (Based on 9 buildings* who turned in evaluation sheets and numbers)

*Note the increase of participation in total number of buildings.

Recommendation

The site-based study group was a new model in 1999 and one that was well received by the teachers who participated. The district chose to continue the reading study strategy groups for the 2000–2001 school year, and the teachers have adopted the study group method of collaboration and study. The challenge is for a method to continue this level of collaboration with a mechanism in place to collect evaluation data of the work done in the groups. One recommendation would be a collaborative exchange model between buildings with planned visits by another team of teachers, a set agenda for the visit, and a report that is generated by the visit written by the teachers. This model has been successful at other sites in:

- strengthening building goals for reading through peer feedback
- identifying strong programs and best practices
- disseminating building innovations and models

- widening the impact of the reading initiative
- assessing the progress of the building toward stated reading goals and objectives
- demonstrating accountability for meeting reading goals
- capturing the authentic study and resulting work of a project.

Saginaw Public Schools is working to meet the district Birth to 12 Reading Initiative goals. Since reading is so vitally important to student achievement, and the district is using the MEAP results as one indicator of student achievement, any efforts by the district to support this work of emphasizing and implementing reading strategies teacher development will ensure that students learn to read and understand a variety of materials in various contexts. As the district continues this professional development model, or a variation of this model, current instruction will continue to be strengthened and reading scores should reflect the improved reading skills of the students.

Report prepared by Janet Rentsch, Saginaw Valley State University, Saginaw Bay Writing Project Inservice Coordinator.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Mary Calliari, a teacher-consultant for Saginaw Bay Writing Project, Michigan, is currently the elementary literacy teacher trainer for Saginaw Public Schools. Her areas of interest include early literacy, professional growth, and curriculum mapping. Mary was a member of the NWP Project Outreach team from the Saginaw Bay Writing Project.

Janet Rentsch, a co-director for the Saginaw Bay Writing Project, Michigan, is currently the director of Sponsored and Academic Programs Support at Saginaw Valley State University. Her areas of interest include understanding the reading and writing processes that support comprehension, especially for secondary students and university students in all content areas. Previous to her current position, Janet was the professional development coordinator for the writing project site where she works with program development and documentation. She has taught English for five years in public education and has taught reading and study-strategies courses and composition for six years at the university.

Mary K. Weaver, a teacher-consultant for Saginaw Bay Writing Project, Michigan, currently is a kindergarten-through-high-school social studies coordinator for Saginaw Public Schools. Her areas of educational interest include researching and implementing effective learning strategies for children in poverty, reading and writing informational texts, and integrating literacy and math in social studies. She presents workshops on improving communication and relating to others through valuing differences and creating unity. Mary is dedicated to social and economic justice and was part of the NWP Project Outreach team from the Saginaw Bay Writing Project.

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