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Since Fall 1984, the Flint area middle school language arts teachers have been participating in a Writing Inservice Project co-directed by Marian Wright, middle school language arts staff consultant for the Flint Community Schools, and Lois Rosen, Assistant Professor of English at the University of Michigan-Flint. The following report describes the Project that grew out of this need and the process of change as it occurred over a two-year period.

CURRICULUM CHANGE IS A SLOW PROCESS

By Lois Matz Rosen and Marian Wright

Birth of the Project: Marian

"Teach writing! How can I teach these kids to write when they don't even know what a sentence is? Sure, I'll teach writing after they can write a sentence and learn a few other skills. But they have to have the skills before they can write."

These were the responses I received when I talked with our middle school language arts teachers about writing. Teachers agreed with the public opinion that our students lacked the ability to communicate their ideas and thoughts effectively in writing. But, as they perceived it, the reason for the problem was that students just did not have the basic skills of sentence structure, grammar, and the mechanics of capitalization and punctuation. The solution to the problem, therefore, was that we needed to do a better job of teaching those basic skills.

Having returned from a three-week intensive experience in the 1983 summer Eastern Michigan Writing Project, which completely changed my behavior as a writer as well as my thinking about writing instruction, I knew that an increased emphasis on sentence structure, grammar, and mechanics was not going to help our students become better writers. That

is exactly what we had been doing, and it simply wasn't working. We had to made a change in our thinking about how writing should be taught.

It is not easy to change life-long habits. Most of us were brought up on the importance of correctness whenever we set pen or pencil to paper. As students, our compositions were graded on correctness of grammar, form, and mechanics. Therefore, as good teachers of writing, we, too, emphasized correctness. As a result we received compositions from our students which were mechanically correct, but often dull, stifled, and uninteresting to read.

When I think about correctness, I am reminded of the day when I heard a seventh grade student in a class taught by one of the Project teachers read his piece describing a frightening experience. Ronald held his classmates in suspense as he described coming home from school one day to find his mother on the couch "burning up with fever," yet assuring him that she would be all right. Hearing her cries for help during the night, he ran to the neighbor's house in his "sock feet" to get help, and then watched the paramedics place his mother in the ambulance. All of us, hoping for a happy ending, were stunned and saddened when the story concluded: "My mother died the next day." When class was over, I asked to see Ronald's piece, thinking of ways to publish it. I couldn't believe that the piece of writing I looked at was the same piece I had heard. There was not one mark of punctuation in two full pages of writing! Yet, Ronald had read that piece with polish and feeling. I wonder if that meaningful story would have emerged had his teacher admonished: "Make sure you write in complete sentences with capitals and periods."

I am not saying that correctness isn't important. Correctness certainly is important, but not in the beginning when writers are first putting their thoughts, experiences, and ideas into words. At this point we need to free our student writers from the constraints of form and mechanics by telling them: "Don't worry about spelling, periods, commas, and capitals now. We'll take care of that later. Just write what you want to say." When beginning a piece of writing, writers need to give

their total concentration and effort to what they are saying. Once they have written what they want to say, the focus can be turned to how it is said. The next day, during a writing conference, Ronald's teacher asked him to read his piece out loud to her and put the periods in "so someone else can read your story as well as you did yesterday." He did this eagerly and effortlessly.

Where do you begin to help teachers and administrators change their thinking about writing instruction? In 1983 I saw it as an insurmountable task, feeling as if I were chipping away at a mountain with a teaspoon. Knowing that the first step in the process of change is the recognition and identification of the need for change, I embarked on a writing awareness campaign. Writing was the focus of my written and verbal communications with teachers and administrators: I reproduced articles describing the newest theory and techniques in the teaching of writing and distributed them to teachers; I publicized every writing conference available and urged teachers to attend; I made available all information on university courses in the teaching of writing for those interested in acquiring graduate credits; I used the negative results of the state writing assessment to stimulate discussion in curriculum meetings; I spent time with teachers who were giving their students some good writing experiences, sharing their successes and helping them develop new ideas. Finally, I began to hear teachers and administrators not only talk about writing, but indicate the need to do something about it. Something was beginning to happen!

When Lois joined the faculty at the University of Michigan-Flint in Fall 1984, we arranged a planning session with the Language Arts Coordinator, the Director of Curriculum Services, the Director of Middle School Education, and the Deputy Superintendent of the Flint Community Schools. As a result, the Flint Middle School Writing Inservice Project was born.

Strategy and Structure: Lois

When Marian Wright asked if I was interested in developing a writing inservice program for the Flint middle school language arts teachers, I was excited by the challenge of working with the diverse population of an urban school system but also concerned about how effective an inservice program could be in helping teachers reshape their approach to writing instruction. The summers I had spent co-directing the Southeastern Michigan Writing Project had convinced me that two conditions were necessary for this change to occur: the teachers needed information about the newest research and theory on the writing process and they had to become writers themselves so they could understand what they were asking their students to do. However, I also knew that the total immersion of a three-week summer institute and the teacher support system that grew out of this daily 9 AM to 4 PM focus on writing had a lot to do with the commitment to change the Project teachers made and the success in teaching writing that most of them experienced when they returned to their own classrooms in the fall. Could a series of after-school workshops spread over the school year achieve the same effect? I feared that the Flint middle school teachers would be hesitant to try out these new approaches and would merely come to the workshops to find out what was new and collect handouts, which would be filed away and forgotten. Also, I was concerned that they would see me as the university faculty "outsider," dispensing the latest information, yet totally divorced from the day-to-day reality of the classroom teacher, rather than as a fellowteacher who understood what was going on in their classrooms.

In asking the Flint teachers to adopt a writing process model, I would be asking them to change much more than just teaching methods. Their attitudes toward writing and their role in the classroom when students wrote would have to alter as well. I would be asking them to 1) emphasize the value of students' ideas by focusing writing instruction on content rather than correctness; 2) provide help in generating material instead of simply assigning topics; 3) read drafts and encourage revision; 4) praise what students did well and help them reconsider ways to revise what wasn't working; 5) hold informal mini-conferences as

students wrote; 6) provide for peer readers and student response instead of just collecting and grading the finished project; 7) save attention to correctness for final drafts; 8) see themselves as coaches, informed readers, fellow writers rather than evaluator/graders. In short, I would be asking these teachers to move students through a full gamut of steps and stages in composing and to be heavily involved throughout in positive and supportive ways. This was a drastic change from the familiar "assign/correct/grade" approach with its emphasis on the form and correctness of the finished piece.

Change is not an "event" that can occur simply through exposure to an inservice; rather it is a "process" that takes place over a period of time. Loucks and Pratt address this issue in "The Buck Stops Here: A Concerns-Based Approach to Curriculum Change" (*Educational Leadership*, December, 1979), stressing the fact that it is the teachers who must change, not the institution, in order for curriculum to be significantly affected. Because this involves an alteration in feelings and attitudes as well as methods, this process of change is a unique experience for each teacher, a factor that must be taken into account when plans are made for staff development.

With these ideas and concerns in mind, I planned a series of five three-hour after-school workshops scheduled from October to May. The one advantage of this plan was that it would give the Project teachers a chance to use the new methods after each workshop and bring the results to the following workshop where we could provide a mutual support group for sharing successes and problems. I hoped this would offset the isolation of each teacher's efforts to experiment with the new ideas and materials. In order to further support the teachers and offer each one the individual help that was most needed, I added two sets of "classroom visits" to the inservice program. Marian and I would visit one class per teacher each time, not to evaluate, but to interact with both teachers and students when the students were involved in writing. These visits were also intended to assure the teachers that the workshops were based on a genuine understanding of their students. Figure 1 shows the 1984-85 schedule of workshop topics and class visits.

The Flint Middle School Writing Inservice Project 1984-1985	
October	What's Basic to Teaching Writing?
November	Generating Writing
December	Classroom Visits
January	Responding to Writing
February	Grading/Evaluating and Publishing Writing
April	Classroom Visits
May	Implementing the Curriculum

Figure 1

The Process of Change: Marian and Lois

"Give me time. You know I've been teaching out of that grammar book for years and it's hard to change all of a sudden, but I am. Just give me time." This casual remark, made by one of our Project teachers with over twenty years of classroom experience, shows what we found to be a key factor in the process of change: time. Merely exposing teachers to new ideas and giving them handouts at workshops did not mean that classroom practices would automatically change. Before this could occur, teachers had to modify, or even abandon, the attitudes, values, and methods that had shaped their writing instruction for many years as well as experiment with the new approach to writing. This not only involved a degree of risk-taking and an openness to change which varied from teacher to teacher, but also took much more time than we had anticipated. Curriculum change is a slow process.

The First Year: The Teachers

In the beginning, the twelve teachers who participated had several concerns. A major concern was the amount of classroom time it took to teach writing as a process. "If I teach writing and spend all the time

it requires, how am I going to cover the other parts of the curriculum--grammar, spelling, literature, study skills?" There were concerns about how to deal with the "atrociousness of students' grammar and mechanical skills." Teachers were worried about grading and evaluating writing, and "how to get students to write without always expecting me to read and grade everything." Getting students to revise, or even just to reread their work, was also a concern. Some teachers were skeptical about having students respond to each other's writing, thinking the students couldn't handle it and would "pan" or make fun of each other in a negative way. Others wondered how students could possibly help each other when they couldn't proof and edit their own papers.

As the teachers began to experiment with new techniques from the workshops, they felt insecure: "Am I doing this right? Am I on the right track?" Showing us student folders full of interesting, lively writings, they apologized for the errors. A few teachers experimented with peer response groups, but were uncomfortable with the results: "The room was so noisy. I felt out of control not knowing exactly what they were doing in those groups. Is this the way it should be?"

Despite these apprehensions, the teachers were enthusiastic, willing to give this new approach a try. During workshops, they often commented, "I can hardly wait to get to school tomorrow and try this out!" When they experimented with ideas from the early workshops, the teachers began to discover the positive effect these techniques had on student writing. Their students really did have a lot to say and enjoyed saying it in writing, especially when they wrote about what they knew best--their own experiences. In amazement, one teacher said, "I just give out the paper and make sure that everyone has a pen or pencil. Then I tell them to write. They do it all!" One teacher noted that even "students weak in spelling and grammar do have a lot of good things to say." Others found that allowing students to talk with each other about their writing stimulated them to write more descriptively, adding important and interesting details to their pieces.

Teachers were pleased with what was happening but were almost "frozen" at the generating stage. "Now that I have them started in writing, what do I do next?" How, they asked, can we help students move into revising, editing, and publishing? These concerns were addressed during the next workshops.

By the end of the first year, change was beginning to take place. Many of the initial apprehensions diminished as the teachers began to gain better control of the new methods. They felt more confident about teaching writing and were pleased with the positive student response. A dramatic shift was also occurring in what teachers valued about their students' writing; they were now responding to the content first, looking for the good points rather than the mistakes. "I praise a lot now," said one teacher, "something I would not have done a few years ago." Also, they had overcome their early fears about peer response and were encouraging students to share drafts and comment on each other's work. In fact, in a few classrooms peer response groups for revision and editing were working well. Helen even decided to replace the final examination with a piece of writing. Students in one of her classes used the process of writing--pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing--to produce a finished piece which she substituted for the traditional test of grammar and mechanics. "After all," she said, "why not test them on the application of what we have been doing all year, rather than asking them to identify the parts of speech?"

We all recognized that the Project needed to continue in order for the teachers to become more knowledgeable and secure in this new way of teaching writing. As Imogene said, "I see now what I would have liked to do and should have done. Next year I'll do it."

Eleven teachers committed themselves to the second year of the Project. Seven new teachers joined the Project. After some initial concern about boring the experienced teachers if we went over the same material or confusing the new ones if we didn't, and some discussion of separate sessions for the new teachers, we decided that the support the experienced Project teachers could give to the seven new teachers would

more than compensate for any problems they might have with the process approach. As for boredom, we dealt with that by changing the content of the workshops, although the experienced teachers assured us they "needed to hear it one more time." We added three new features to the second year: "demo" lessons during classroom visits, "roundtable sessions" with Project teachers at each building to discuss the concerns unique to their students, and a publication of students' writings. Figure 2 illustrates the 1985-86 schedule.

The Flint Middle School Writing Inservice Project 1985-86	
October	The Writing Process Revisited Individual Conferences with Returning Project Teachers
December	Read to Write, Write to Read: Ways of Responding to Literature
January	Classroom Visits
February	Writing in Process: The Teacher's Role
March	Approaches to Assessment: Grading Writing and Judging Growth
April	Publication of Students' Writings
May	Presentations, Publications, Future Plans Classroom Visits Publication of Students' Writings

Figure 2

The Second Year: The Teachers

The seven new Project teachers had the same concerns the experienced teachers had the first year, but were encouraged and reassured as they listened to the success stories of their colleagues. Consequently, the new participants plunged right in, feeling more secure from the very beginning.

The first round of classroom visits showed us how powerful our modeling had been for the experienced teachers. Now we began to see these teachers reflect what they had seen us doing: interact with students as they were writing. The teachers were moving all around the classroom, spending a few minutes with one student writer and then on to another, giving a pat on the shoulder, laughing at the humor in some pieces, showing concern with the seriousness of others. We saw them pull up a chair or crouch down beside students so they could talk face-to-face. The environment and configuration in the classrooms of the teachers were changing from straight rows and silence to several small response groups with constructive dialogue between students. No longer were the teachers just making assignments; they were a part of the action. The demonstration lessons had the same effect on teacher behavior. Teachers adopted the writing strategies, the topics, and even the very language of the demo lessons to use with their own students: "What did you like best about that paper? What do you remember?" became familiar questions when students shared their writings.

Two major concerns remained: how to help students revise more effectively and how to handle evaluation/grading. Teachers discovered part of the difficulty with revision was that students didn't understand revision meant more than correcting mechanical errors and making a clean copy. They began to address this problem by using the overhead projector to guide the whole class through a step-by-step revision of a student's paper. When students responded, "Oh, that's what you want us to do!" the teachers reported they saw more substantive revision. As for evaluating/grading, the teachers accepted the idea that not every piece of writing had to be graded. However, they were still struggling with the dilemma of how to evaluate student writing that was good in content but poor in mechanics. Teachers tried various techniques such as grading scales and double grading, but were never entirely satisfied with their results, even when they created a grading scale of their own at one of the workshops.

By the end of the second year, we were able to assess the effect of the Project on the teachers' approach to writing instruction. What

changes occurred? First, teachers devoted more classroom time to writing; for most, writing became a major emphasis in their curriculum. Individual student writing folders were bursting with pieces of writing at all stages of development; finished pieces were displayed on classroom bulletin boards and in the hallways. Second, teachers had become highly responsive to the content of students' papers, willing to look beyond surface mechanics to the quality of students' ideas. As Joe commented, showing us a student's two-page paper that was completely devoid of punctuation and capitals: "Before this year I would not have read more than two or three lines of this paper. Now I can ignore the mechanical mistakes and get to the content, knowing that we can fix it up later." Attention to correctness was reserved for final drafts and teachers were more likely to work with students on mechanics through their own pieces of writing rather than relying on isolated textbook drills. The teachers looked for growth in the writing skills of their students rather than perfection; they understood that writing is a multi-faceted skill developed with practice over a period of time. Finally, the teachers were focusing writing instruction on the writing process, helping students learn to move successfully from pre-writing and planning stages through drafting, revision, and editing. The Project really did change the way these teachers taught writing. One building administrator, after listening to a roundtable discussion held in his building, commented to the Project teachers, "This is the most exciting thing I've seen in writing going on in this building in the twenty years I've been here!"

The Project in Retrospect: The Students

Like the teachers, the students had some lessons to learn about writing as well as some previous attitudes to unlearn. One boy probably voiced the sentiments of many when he raised his hand at the end of a classroom visit to ask, "What do you do if you hate to write?" The negative feelings about writing and fear of failure that some students brought with them to middle school were clearly in evidence at the beginning of each year of the Project.

During our first round of classroom visits each fall, we observed similar phenomena. Although most students were willing to write when asked to, a few just sat and stared at the paper, insisting that they had nothing to say; others barely produced a line or two before running out of ideas, or quickly scribbled down a few sentences and declared themselves "done." When teachers initiated sharing of writing with the whole class, there were usually willing volunteers, but students didn't know how to respond. With typical adolescent fervor, they giggled, cheered, and commented to each other all through a writer's reading; in some classes they sat in silence through intensely moving pieces. The writer, not the piece of writing, was often the focus of attention. The students lacked confidence in their work and seemed uninvolved in what they were writing; there was a sense that for many this was just another assignment that had to be finished to satisfy the teacher.

In contrast, in our spring visits we found a striking change from the fall in students' attitudes toward writing. They were more willing, even eager, to write and were noticeably more involved in their work. Helen described this new feeling in her classroom as "Freedom, even joy. They like it so much it's almost as if it were an elective like home ec or art." Orris reported that on the days she promised writing time students reminded her as they entered class: "Now remember, you said we could have writing today." "Panning" was no longer a problem; in fact students would sometimes break into spontaneous applause after a piece was read aloud or engage in a perceptive discussion of its merits, indications that they had learned to value each other's work.

Other positive changes occurred in students' writing: When given the opportunity to write, everyone could, and the writings were longer, richer, and more interesting than earlier in the year. Many students learned how to revise their work for content, not just correct errors. Students said they enjoyed being able to brainstorm, to rework a first draft, to "help others with their writing." Students also expressed their general approval of the writing program: "Before when we started writing I didn't think much about it. I just thought it was something we had to do for a grade. But now I want to write because I like it.

At times I think I might want to become an author, but it is very hard work."

By the end of the second year, over 2000 students had been influenced by the Project. And we could see the Project's full impact. Before, students had written very little; now, many wrote prolifically--personal experiences, short stories, plays and poetry inspired by Martin Luther King Day. It seemed to us that writing came to have a greater significance in the lives of these students. For many, writing offered them a safe place to deal with their emotions and the sometimes troubling events of their lives. (For example, one student concluded a detailed and anguished piece about her parents' separation with "Boy now I'm glad I got that out of my system.") As a Project teacher put it, "There's no place else to say it, so they write it." And, writing became a means for some students to achieve recognition from peers and a feeling of personal success. The Project publication was a source of pride and pleasure for all the Project students, not just those who were published. Teachers reported they "couldn't get the booklets out of the kids' hands."

The process approach to writing instructions indeed seems effective. When developing writers are encouraged to view writing as a way to communicate meaningful ideas and experiences to a reader or as a way to shape ideas for themselves, and when they are given support through all the stages that lead to a finished, shared product, the act of writing can take on a whole new purpose and intensity--both in the classroom and in students' lives.

Conclusions

At the start of the Project, we believed that the teachers would spend the first year learning about the process approach and developing skills in using it; the second year would be for increasing confidence and gaining mastery. What we found was that at any given point in the two years, the range of understanding and skill in applying the new concepts was considerable. As Loucks and Pratt suggest, each teacher's progress was unique. Some were able to deal almost immediately with all

aspects of the process approach while others, even after two years in the Project, are still unsure of their role in helping students revise and edit their work. Though all the teachers are more confident in teaching writing as a result of the Project, most are still eager to learn more, still experimenting and discovering, still consider themselves novices as writing teachers. During the third year of the Project, the teachers are working on curriculum design for writing and continue to meet regularly for sharing, creating new materials, and continuing to learn about teaching writing.

Our experience has shown us that staff development is much more complex than scheduling an inservice day or even a series of inservices. Any school or district embarking on a program that requires teachers to master a new set of understandings and skills must acknowledge the length of time it takes before the new learnings are consolidated and become a natural part of each teacher's instructional approach. Also, teachers' needs and concerns must be supported as they undertake the changes that lead to true professional progress.

We believe the changes brought about by the Flint Middle School Writing Project stem from several factors. First, spreading the workshops across the school year gave teachers a chance to experiment with the new ideas and methods gradually, knowing that they would be given an opportunity at the next workshop to discuss what they had done and share successes and problems with other teachers. Second, the modeling and demonstration lessons that took place right in teachers' classrooms gave them a more concrete picture of how to interact with students for writing instruction than any test or inservice session could. Third, the class visits gave teachers support, encouragement, and individual help. An added benefit of these visits was the understanding we gained of both teachers and students which helped us plan workshops that directly addressed their needs. But most important was each teacher's personal commitment to becoming a better writing teacher. Out of this common goal grew a community of teachers, exchanging methods and materials along with samples of student writing. "We learned to be a

group," one teacher wrote, "to share more openly with one another, as the year drew to a close. We need this time to share what we're doing."

The authors wish to thank all the teachers who participated in the Project for their openness to new ideas, their willingness to change, and their commitment to the teaching of writing. Thanks also to Dolores Ennis, Flint's Director of Middle School Education, who provided the ongoing support that made this Project possible, and to Candida Gillis for her excellent editorial advice during the revision of this paper.

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Describing his earlier concern about the possible effect of cold weather on the booster rocket's O-ring seals, a Morton Thiokol engineer remarked:

I made the comment that lower temperatures are in the direction of badness for both O-rings, because it slows down the timing function.

* * * *

In response to testimony by several Rockwell International executives that Rockwell had been opposed to the launch, a NASA official testified that

I felt that by telling them we did not have a sufficient data base and could not analyze the trajectory of the ice, I felt he understood that Rockwell was not giving a positive indication we were for the launch.