Building a District-Based Secondary Writing Program

Through the National Writing Project Model

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February 21, 2007

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Executive Summary

This study examines the effects of a professional development program conducted in the Mehlville School District near St. Louis, Missouri. Gateway Writing Project provided the inservice program, which was based on established National Writing Project principles. The professional development sought to develop a core group of teacher-leaders who could build and sustain a literacy-improvement program at the middle and high school levels. Program effectiveness was measured in terms of the teachers' classroom use of writing process skills and strategies, as well as their students' performance in writing.

The study compares data from communication arts teachers and their students in grades 6–11. A total of 44 Mehlville teachers participated in the professional development programs in 2004–2005 and 2005–2006; of these 44, 17—eight from 2004–2005 and nine from 2005–2006—participated in the study ("program teachers"). The 10 comparison group teachers did not participate in the GWP professional development program. To assess the effectiveness of the program, we used a quasi-experimental design; teachers and students were matched to ensure comparability on a number of qualitative and quantitative demographic and performance features. Data included interviews and classroom observations, as well as tests of student writing achievement.

Analysis of student writing in a nationally scored assessment demonstrated that program group students' achievement increased overall more than that of comparison students. According to both a holistic assessment and a component analysis of six analytic traits, these differences were statistically significant for *stance* and *sentence fluency*. Qualitative analysis suggests that participating teachers implemented the professional development in their classrooms. In terms of writing instruction, key differences between program and comparison teachers' classrooms included student writing choice, use of models, and prewriting activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1978, the Gateway Writing Project (GWP) has, as part of its mission, been committed to improving literacy instruction—and in particular the teaching of writing—through its professional development and for-credit programs. GWP's service area includes the city of St. Louis and the surrounding metropolitan area.

The Mehlville School District is located in a suburban area south of the city of St. Louis. Its student population is typical of most suburban St. Louis districts: Twenty-one percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. African American, Hispanic, Asian American and Native American groups make up 16% of the district's student population. In recent years, the district has experienced an increase in the number of English language learners, with an influx of students whose families have emigrated from former Slavic nations—usually Bosnia.

Recognizing the need for professional development in literacy at the secondary level, Mehlville School District (MSD) administrators explored several professional development providers and chose GWP to offer *Writing to Promote and Assess Learning*. GWP spent two years working in the district. In the 2004–2005 school year, 29 teachers from all content areas voluntarily participated in *Writing to Promote and Assess Learning*. In the 2005–2006 school year, 15 additional teachers participated.

The original study design called for a districtwide assessment of student writing during the 2005–2006 school year. When that plan proved unfeasible, the professional development coordinator decided to collect writing samples only from the study and comparison groups in order to assess the professional development's impact on student achievement. Pre- and post-test student writing was scored off-site by the National Writing Project.

PROGRAM FOCUS AND BACKGROUND

District administrators requested *Writing to Promote and Assess Learning* specifically for secondary teachers. The district felt its current literacy efforts and test scores were sufficient at the elementary level, but wanted to boost these efforts at the secondary level.

The program sought to build secondary teachers' capacity to teach writing and literacy skills. The professional development followed National Writing Project principles and National Staff Development (NSD) standards. It was job-embedded and embraced a model of "teachers teaching teachers." GWP facilitators worked to affect, to change, and to improve teacher knowledge and practice regarding writing pedagogy. The change in teachers' practice, it was hoped, would also improve student performance on writing tasks. The efficacy of the professional development was assessed by both teacher growth (as measured by classroom observations, researcher field notes from the professional development sessions, and semistructured interviews) and student growth (as measured by an on-demand, timed writing assessment administered to the study and comparison groups).

In the 2004–2005, all 435 MSD secondary teachers were invited to attend *Writing to Promote and Assess Learning,* and all 29 teachers who volunteered were accepted to participate. In 2005–2006 the district's recruitment focused on the "core areas"—communication arts, social studies, science, and math. Teachers from the district's three middle schools and two high schools participated in the program each year.

Program Context

Writing to Promote and Assess Learning provided a background in the essential elements of a writing-improvement program (see appendix A). In particular, its sessions stressed the use of writing as a collaborative experience and as a powerful thinking tool. The program content was additionally customized to support MSD curriculum and priorities. Facilitating the professional development were two GWP teacher-consultants, Ms. Cathy Beck and Ms. Mary Kim Schreck.

The program offered a broad array of strategies and practices in the teaching of writing. Each strategy focused on aspects of the writing process including prewriting, organizing, revising, word choice, and developing sentence fluency. In addition, facilitators provided the theoretical framework to give context to the strategies. Such theoretical undergirding was intended to allow participants to move beyond simple replication and to adapt the strategies to their unique teaching situations. The professional development sessions were held monthly and included time for teachers to discuss the implementation of the program in their classrooms and to reflect on their challenges and successes.

To this end, course facilitators worked in collaboration with teachers to address specific teacher and student needs and to develop classroom curriculum in alignment with district and state goals. Facilitators also observed individual classrooms for at least one full class period, and then conferred with the teachers. During these conferences, facilitators offered strategies for strengthening writing assignments, provided additional materials to use as models, and suggested professional materials to deepen the teachers' understanding of the teaching of writing.

Finally, the course emphasized teachers' personal writing, operating from a core NWP assumption that teachers can best teach writing when they are cognizant of the writing process as writers themselves. Based on the premise that such an awareness better equips teachers to deal with their students' writing challenges, a strong emphasis was placed on developing the program participants' own writing skills and on providing opportunities for them to reflect on their personal writing process. To encourage teachers to articulate their knowledge—in keeping with the professional development practice of teachers teaching teachers—participants showcased changes in their practice with an end-of-the-year "gallery walk" that included student writing, sample activities, classroom photographs, and reflections.

For both cohorts, the school district provided released time for the teachers. Teachers were not paid for their participation, but they could opt to take the class for graduate credit at their own expense.

Table 1
Summary of *Writing to Promote and Assess Learning* Activities in MSD

On-Site Structures	Description	Number of Sessions	Number of Hours
Monthly workshop sessions	Interactive sessions in which participants experienced an array of strategies, developed curriculum, and wrote themselves.	8	44
Preparation for monthly meetings	Teachers wrote and revised their pieces, gathered information for curriculum development, and read articles provided by facilitators.	8	24
Classroom coaching	Facilitators observed individual teachers' lessons, provided feedback, and problem-solved; made appropriate modifications to future sessions.	2 per teacher	1 1/2 – 2 hours per visit

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research investigated the impact of GWP's professional development in the MSD for both the 2004–2005 and 2005–2006 programs. *Writing to Promote and Assess Learning* was evaluated both in terms of its effect on teachers (e.g., did they become better teachers of writing?), and its effect on students (e.g., did students become better writers if their teachers had participated in the project?). Additionally, we hoped to identify and describe features of the model that we felt could be replicated in other schools.

The study framed its goals in terms of three major questions:

1. To what extent and in what ways does the professional development provided build teachers' capacity to teach writing and literacy skills?
2. How, specifically, do teachers apply skills learned in their professional development sessions to their classroom practice?
3. Do any such changes in practice positively affect student writing growth and development?

The first question explores the ways in which the professional development program might affect teachers' knowledge and delivery of effective writing instruction. Using field notes from the professional development sessions and classroom observations from a trained GWP teacher-consultant (who was not part of the program and did not know which participants were in the program or comparison groups), we sought to draw connections between the strategies teachers learned and the implementation of these strategies in the classroom.

To answer the second question, we used the observations from the independent observer noted above, in conjunction with teachers' self-report of skills they applied in their classrooms. In addition, a semistructured interview followed some observations as time allowed.

The third question was answered by observing changes on a pre/post, on-demand writing assessment, administered to students in the program group and comparison group. These tests were scored off-site by NWP and yielded both a set of analytic scores and a holistic score for each student.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Overall Research Design

This research employed a pre/post quasi-experimental design. (A true experimental design was not possible as we needed to utilize intact classrooms and could not randomly assign students or teachers to the study.) In order to control for as many extraneous variables as possible, program teachers and their intact classrooms were matched with nonparticipating teachers and their intact classrooms. Program and comparison teachers were matched based on grade level, teacher experience, and certain demographics of the students they served (i.e., free/reduced-price lunch status and ethnicity). Data, collected from both groups, included teacher interviews, classroom observations, field notes, and tests of writing achievement.

Sample

While secondary teachers in all content areas were invited to attend in 2004–2005, 15 of the 29 participants were communication arts teachers. In 2005–2006, 12 of the 15 participants were communication arts teachers. Teachers in the study and comparison groups were limited to the 27 communication arts teachers primarily because the district had originally planned to collect writing samples from all secondary communication arts classes as part of its writing assessment program. When that plan proved to be too ambitious, the district decided the samples collected from the communication arts teachers in the research study would provide a satisfactory indicator of the state of writing in the district and the impact of *Writing to Promote and Assess Learning* on student achievement.

Teachers were matched by the grade level they taught, years of teaching experience, and level of education (e.g., bachelor's degree, master's degree, certifications). They were also matched by student characteristics including free/reduced-price lunch status, ethnicity, and gender. Because this study took place within one school district where student demographics were fairly consistent between classes, matches for teacher demographics were given preference over student demographics. Moreover, if the comparison-teacher pool did not include a close demographic match for a program teacher, that program teacher was eliminated from the study.

Data were collected from eight teachers who participated in the 2004–2005 program and nine who participated in the 2005–2006 program (a total of 17 study teachers), as well as 10 matched comparison teachers. Table 2 below summarizes the numbers and characteristics of program and comparison teachers. Fifty percent of the secondary communication arts teachers in the district participated in the study. Both program and comparison teachers participated on a voluntary basis. There was no attrition in the sample in either year.

Table 3 outlines characteristics of program and comparison students in these teachers' classes. While every attempt was made to have similar profiles among program, comparison, and overall district characteristics, the voluntary nature of the study and the need to preserve intact classrooms made this difficult in some instances.

Table 2
Characteristics of Program and Comparison Teachers

	Program Teachers	**Comparison Teachers**	**District Secondary Communication Arts**
Number	17	10	74
Mean Years Experience	9.35	10.1	12.2
Level of Education	3=BA, 13=MA, 1=EdS	3=BA, 7=MA	23=BA, 48=MA, 1=EdS, 2=Ed.D

Table 3
Characteristics of Program and Comparison Students

	Program Students	**Comparison Students**	**Mehlville (grades 6–11)**
Number	449	253	5754
Grade Level	Grade 6 n = 166 Grade 7 n = 117 Grade 8 n = 24 Grade 9 n = 17 Grade 10 n = 79 Grade 11 n = 46	Grade 6 n = 50 Grade 7 n = 44 Grade 8 n = 26 Grade 9 n = 0 Grade 10 n = 73 Grade 11 n = 60	Grade 6 = 850 Grade 7 = 902 Grade 8 = 969 Grade 9 = 1024 Grade 10 = 1060 Grade 11 = 949
Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	16.2%	11.5%	21%
Gender	Female 50% Male 50%	Female 50% Male 50%	Female 49% Male 51%
Race/Ethnicity	African American 10% White 87% Hispanic 1% Asian American 2%	African American 5% White 93% Hispanic 1% Asian American 1%	African American 13.4% White 84% Hispanic 1% Asian American 1.8%
Voluntary Transfer Students	8%	6%	11%
ELL Students	1%	1%	1.5%

Data Collection and Analysis

Table 4 provides a summary of the research questions and the data sources that addressed each question. Each data source is then described in more detail following table 4.

To the extent possible, data were gathered and analyzed independently. To minimize researcher bias, a GWP-trained teacher-consultant not affiliated with the inservice, Ms. Astra Cherry, conducted the classroom observations used in the data analysis (see appendix B). All student writing samples were scored independently by NWP during a national scoring conference. All quantitative data were analyzed by Dr. Michelle Mathews and Ms. Sarah Huisman, independent education research consultants. All qualitative data were analyzed by Dr. Nancy Robb Singer, lead researcher for the project.

We randomly selected a small subset of teachers in both the program and comparison groups and asked these teachers to allow an observer into their classroom to document practices. We also asked these teachers to participate in a short interview at the conclusion of that visit. These data allowed us a more in-depth look at teacher practice beyond self-reported survey data.

Table 4
Summary of Data Collection Methods

Research Question	Data Sources	Administration	Respondents
To what extent and in what ways does the professional development model provided build teachers' capacity to teach writing and literacy skills?	Semistructured interviews Researcher's field notes and memos	Conducted after each classroom visit Collected throughout the inservice	Program teachers; n = 7 Comparison teachers; n = 6
How, specifically, do teachers apply skills learned in their professional development sessions to their classroom practice?	Semistructured interviews Classroom observations	Conducted after each classroom visit Conducted in the spring	Program teachers; n = 7 Comparison teachers; n = 6 Program teachers; n = 7 Comparison teachers; n = 6
Do such changes in practice positively affect student writing growth and development?	Student writing samples from on-demand district-administered prompts	Administered pre (September) and post (May); scored using both holistic and analytic rubrics	Program students; n = 449 Comparison students; n = 253

Teacher data

Several data sources were employed to help capture multiple dimensions of teacher practice. To determine to what extent the inservice program affected teacher practice, we used semistructured interviews and classroom observations. We also collected qualitative data in the form of field notes that focused on activities and conversations conducted during the inservice. These multiple sources of data, described below, also helped us validate our outcomes and tease out elements of the professional development that were particularly useful for teachers and ultimately beneficial for their students.

Classroom observations. A GWP teacher-consultant not directly affiliated with the program was trained to use the Classroom Observation Protocol (appendix B). These on-site classroom observations helped identify the kinds of writing practices and the level of implementation that program teachers employed in

their classrooms. Observation times were mutually agreed upon, and teachers were aware that the observer was noting their uses of writing practice. In addition, the observer noted other qualitative data such as the physical arrangement of the classroom (e.g., whether there were spaces for writing/sharing/ publishing student work). We collected these data to help us discern subtle differences between program and comparison teachers. For the same reasons, we asked the observer to transcribe the teachers' lessons (to the extent possible) and to specifically note any features of the lesson that she felt reflected unique or effective uses of writing pedagogy.

Teacher interviews. As time allowed, teachers also participated in a short, semistructured interview at the end of the classroom observation (see end of appendix B). These interviews sought specifically to understand the level of implementation of learnings from the professional development. Teachers were asked to reflect on the writing lesson they had just completed and then to provide descriptions of additional writing lessons from their classrooms. Responses were recorded in detailed field notes, but were not transcribed verbatim. The lead researcher reviewed the interview field notes, and conducted follow-up interviews when a comment or observation seemed particularly interesting or problematic and required additional information.

Student data

Student writing samples. To measure student growth in writing, we collected two on-demand writing samples. The assessments were administered by MSD in pre/post fashion in September 2005 and in May 2006, to students in both the program and comparison groups. Students had 45 minutes to complete each writing sample.

Framework for Evaluating and Scoring Student Writing

Building upon a long tradition of writing assessment, the NWP provided a rigorous evaluation framework for this and other LSRI studies nationwide. The NWP developed standards and related "anchor papers"—samples exemplifying each level of achievement—along with descriptive commentary; and designed and conducted an independent national conference for scoring students' written work.

Rubric

The evaluative framework included a rubric attending to six specific attributes as well as the overall character of students' writing, adapted from the widely used *6+1 Traits of Writing* (Culham 2003; Bellamy 2005). The six specific attributes are as follows:

- Ideas / Content Development
- Organization
- Voice
- Sentence Fluency
- Word Choice
- Conventions

In addition to scores in each of these areas, each writing sample received an overall holistic score, one defined not as an aggregate of these component parts but as an independent, overall, summary judgment.

A national panel of experts on the assessment of student writing, along with NWP senior researchers, determined that the *6+1 Trait Model of Writing*, while sufficiently comprehensive, required certain modifications to make it more appropriate for use in the LSRI research studies. The following modifications were made in the rubric prior to an initial scoring conference in 2005:

- The scale of the rubric was extended from four to six points in order to ensure sufficient discrimination and therefore to allow increased sensitivity to any changes in student performance.

- The language defining the traits was clarified to enhance the reliability of evaluative judgments.
- The evaluative judgments were modified to focus exclusively upon the student's writing (where, on occasion, the original rubric included references to the reader's reactions or to the writer's personality as the basis for judgment).

A number of additional modifications were made to the *6+1 Traits Model* for use in 2006, refining and clarifying the definitions of the constructs measured. The resulting rubric assessed the following elements of writing:

- *Content* (including quality and clarity of ideas and meaning): The *content* category describes how effectively the writing establishes and maintains a focus, selects and integrates ideas related to content (i.e., information, events, emotions, opinions, and perspectives) and includes evidence, details, reasons, anecdotes, examples, descriptions, and characteristics to support, develop, and/or illustrate ideas
- *Structure*: The *structure* category describes how effectively the writing establishes logical arrangement, coherence, and unity within the elements of the work and throughout the work as a whole
- *Stance*: The *stance* category describes how effectively the writing communicates a perspective through an appropriate level of formality, elements of style, and tone appropriate for the audience and purpose
- *Sentence Fluency*: The *sentence fluency* category describes how effectively the sentences are crafted to serve the intent of the writing, in terms of rhetorical purpose, rhythm, and flow
- *Diction* (Language): The *diction* category describes the precision and appropriateness of the words and expressions for the writing task and how effectively they create imagery, provide mental pictures, or convey feelings and ideas
- *Conventions*: The *conventions* category describes how effectively the writing demonstrates age-appropriate control of usage, punctuation, spelling, capitalization, and paragraphing

Scoring

The student writing samples were scored at a national scoring conference held on June 22 to 24, 2006. Students' writing samples were integrated and scored—the local site research teams determined which set of grade-level standards (elementary, middle, or high school) would be applied when scoring work from their sites. All of the student writing was coded, with identifying information removed so that scorers could not know any specifics of the writing sample being evaluated (e.g., site of origin, group [program or comparison], or time of administration [pretest or posttest]). Across all sites, 16% of the student writing was scored twice (so that reliabilities could be calculated).

The scorers participated in six hours of training at the beginning of the scoring conference. Their scoring was calibrated to a criterion level of performance at that time, and then recalibrated following every major break in the scoring (meals and overnight). Overall, reliabilities (measured as inter-rater agreement, defining agreement as two scores that were identical or within one single score point of each other) ranged from 88% to 94%, with an aggregate across all scores of 91%. The lowest reliability was observed for Voice (88%) and highest for the Holistic scores (94%). This level of reliability is as high as is typically observed, and easily adequate to support the research purposes pursued here. (See table 5 for complete data describing the reliability of the scoring of student writing.)

Table 5
Reliability Rates for Writing Scores by Analytic Element

Number Scored	Double Score Rate	All Elements	Holistic	Content	Structure	Voice	Sentence Fluency	Diction	Conventions
6,493	16%	91%	94%	92%	90%	88%	90%	93%	91%

RESULTS/FINDINGS

Classroom Practices

Classroom observations, field notes, and interviews documented a wide range of practices by both program and comparison teachers. All of the classroom observations revealed one consistent finding: teachers in the Mehlville School District consistently used writing in their classrooms on the days when they were observed. However, key differences between program and comparison groups emerged from the qualitative data. While we cannot say that all of these differences in classroom practice were a direct result of the professional development intervention, we can point to several elements of practice that may help to explain the subtle difference in writing instruction—and perhaps writing improvement—among these students. These elements, which were evident to a greater degree in the program teachers' classrooms, included student writing choice, use of models, and prewriting activities.

A close look at the professional development course syllabus (see appendix A) and the researcher's field notes make clear that study participants were not only *exposed* to, for instance, the use of prewriting strategies, they were *involved personally* in using the various strategies as they worked on four major pieces of their own writing throughout the course.

Student Writing Choice

Overall, program teachers allowed for more student choice in writing assignments than teachers in the comparison group. In fact, 4 of the 6 comparison teachers' observations (67%) revealed use of a prompt, versus 1 of the 7 program teachers (14%) observations. Student choice included selection of topics within assignments (i.e. students were asked to write a hyperbole, but the subject of the hyperbole was entirely their choice), and also among genres. In comparison teachers' classrooms, choice was limited as evidenced by a greater use of teacher-generated prompts and worksheets.

During the inservice, teachers were pushed to explore choice in their own writing. Throughout the professional development, teachers were encouraged to explore multiple genres including descriptive, narrative and persuasive writing. They were also discouraged from turning to formulaic writing and guided toward more creative—and it was hoped more engaging—modes of communication. Several participants referred to explicit changes they had made in their practice in terms of rejecting formulaic writing and embracing choice. One teacher remarked that after attending the first few professional development sessions she went back to her classroom and "removed many charts like the 5 paragraph essay from [her] walls."

Use of Models

A second difference between program and comparison teachers was noted in their use of models. While both groups used some modeling, program teachers demonstrated strong use of three different modeling strategies: modeling using professional works, modeling using other students' works, and modeling using the teacher's work. The observations documented only one use of models (an example of student work) in the comparison teachers' classrooms. However, in the program teachers' classrooms there were multiple examples of all three modeling strategies. The most striking difference involved modeling using the teacher's own work. None of the classroom observations noted comparison teachers sharing their own

writing. However, this strategy appeared in 3 of 7 (43%) program teachers' observations. Two of these teachers shared stories they had written (one demonstrated point of view; the other, a tall tale) and one teacher demonstrated the "friendly letter format" by writing a friendly letter to her students.

In the professional development, facilitators demonstrated how teachers might use professional writers' works to elevate their students' writing. Participants read articles by writers such as Anne Lamott and Gary Paulsen. They were asked to analyze the writer's craft and then to emulate it in their own writing. Throughout the professional development, teachers were also routinely asked to share their work with others, demonstrating that the social, collaborative nature of writing can also motivate and inspire writers. Moreover, the facilitators told stories from their own teaching lives in which they enumerated the rewards of teachers writing with their students. Among the testimonials, they talked about the benefits of students seeing them struggle with the writing process. The process of sharing writing in its messy, unfinished form, they said, helped to demystify the writing process.

Prewriting Activities
On the days they were observed, program teachers also employed a wider range and use of prewriting activities than comparison teachers. Prewriting activities noted from the classroom observations included graphic organizers, freewriting/quick writes, and the use of questions. However, comparison teachers gave only a brief nod—if they gave one at all—to prewriting, and these prewriting events were mechanical and rushed. In program teachers' classrooms, on the other hand, prewriting activities extended throughout the writing process. Although not absent from the comparison teachers' classrooms, graphic organizers and freewriting were used less frequently. Notably, the use of questioning as a prewriting strategy was absent from all of the comparison teachers' classrooms, but present in over half of the program teachers' classrooms (57%). In addition, the observer noted that these questions were not simple recall questions; teachers probed students to help them ask critical, clarifying questions to further their own reading and writing.

Teachers involved in the professional development used a wide range of prewriting strategies in their own writing for the course. In addition to having participants use common prewriting techniques such as concept maps and webs, facilitators also encouraged teachers to use classroom talk ("turn to your partner and share") as a means for students to prepare and rehearse for writing. Moreover, the facilitators shared their personal writers' notebooks—a generative source for their own writing ideas—with the participants and encouraged them to keep one as well.

Across the program teachers' classrooms, the classroom descriptions from an independent observer capture practices that closely mirror three important components of the professional development. While we cannot say definitively that there was a cause-effect relationship between the professional development intervention and the teachers' classroom practice, we can point to several important components of the coursework and the modeling that teachers received in the professional development that were visible in the observed classrooms.

Student Performance
Students in both the program and comparison groups were assessed two times during the 2005–06 school year in pre/post test fashion. Their mean scores are reported below in table 6. While all students' writing scores increased during the year, students of program-group teachers made higher gains than the comparison group in the traits of *stance* and *sentence fluency*. These gains in program students' writing were statistically significant.

While statistically significant gains were seen in only two traits—*stance* and *sentence fluency*—the data analysis also revealed a disordinal interaction between the two groups of students. That is, the program group's average mean pretest score was significantly lower than that of the comparison group. In other

words, program teachers had more distance to cover, more gains to make with their students than did the comparison teachers. This disordinal relationship is noteworthy in that the program students showed greater growth overall (see table 6) and statistically significant growth in two specific traits.

Table 6
Mean Scale Scores for Writing Assessment and Related Repeated Measures Analyses of Variance

Score	Group	Mean Time 1	Mean Time 2	Difference (T2 – T1)	F^1
Holistic	Program	3.46	3.70	.24	1.59
	Comparison	3.52	3.63	.11	
Ideas	Program	3.51	3.71	.20	.375
	Comparison	3.59	3.71	.12	
Organization	Program	3.24	3.44	.20	.008
	Comparison	3.28	3.46	.18	
Stance	Program	3.77	3.98	.21	6.826**
	Comparison	3.95	3.91	-.04	
Sentence fluency	Program	3.56	3.79	.23	4.563**
	Comparison	3.66	3.69	.03	
Word choice	Program	3.50	3.66	.16	2.652
	Comparison	3.61	3.63	.02	
Conventions	Program	3.53	3.77	.24	2.164
	Comparison	3.64	3.73	.09	

[1] *F* values correspond to the test of significance of the interaction between group and time.

*	$p \leq .05$
**	$p \leq .01$

DISCUSSION

This study examined the application and effectiveness of a professional development model designed to support writing instruction. All of the program and comparison teachers in this study were excellent, experienced teachers, and our observations noted a preponderance of literacy events in all classrooms. Descriptions from classroom observations of both program and comparison teachers revealed a literacy-rich environment: books, word walls, author's chairs, and displays of student work were noted in both program and comparison teachers' classrooms. However, on measures of writing performance students in the program teachers' classrooms showed greater improvement over the year, and this improvement was statistically significant in the areas of stance and sentence fluency.

In attempting to tease out the subtle differences in teacher practice that could account for these improvements, we found qualitative differences in student writing choice, use of models, and prewriting activities. For instance, in comparison teachers' classrooms, choice was limited in that there was a greater use of teacher-generated prompts and worksheets. On the other hand, program teachers were more inclined to allow students to pursue their own writing topics and genres. The classroom observations documented only one use of models (an example of student work) in the comparison teachers' classrooms. However, program teachers' used multiple kinds of models including student work, professional examples, and the teachers' own writing. Finally, comparison teachers gave only a brief nod—if they gave one at all—to prewriting, and these prewriting events were mechanical and rushed. In program teachers' classrooms, the prewriting activities extended throughout the writing process. Most

notable was the program teachers' use of questioning. There were no documented instances of questions as a means to further student writing in any comparison teacher's classroom; program teachers, however, used questioning as a strategy to advance student writing 57% of the time.

The professional development described in this report is foundational. As the demographics show, program teachers who volunteered for the inservice were not more experienced or better educated than the comparison teachers. Yet in measures of student writing, program teachers' students showed greater growth. Moreover, program teachers' students began at a lower point than comparison teachers' students. What elements, therefore, were present in the inservice that could explain these differences? Through carefully selected readings, through discussions of practice, and through active modeling—watching a master teacher conduct the activity and then replicating it in his or her own classroom—it is likely these teachers came away from the inservice with a better understanding of process writing and how it could be successfully employed in the classroom. Key to this understanding is the practice of teachers seeing themselves as writers. Through experiencing the writing process as writers rather than solely as readers or teachers, teachers internalized the process and were better able to support students in using the same strategies in their own classrooms.

We acknowledge that there may be other differences between program teachers and comparison teachers that we have not recognized, and we are currently redesigning our classroom observation protocol to better capture these dimensions. We will have an opportunity to use this refined instrument as we continue work in the MSD during the 2006–2007 school year. Following this third year of foundational work, we plan to offer an advanced inservice—one that focuses on classroom inquiry—in the summer of 2007. These cohorts, we hope, will develop a core group of teachers with a deep understanding of effective approaches to writing instruction. In turn, we hope that these teachers will not only improve instruction and student performance in their own classrooms, but also provide future direction and leadership in their schools and at the district level.

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Appendix A

ENG/Tch. Ed. 5850 Topics in the Teaching of Writing: Writing to Promote and Assess Learning

Three hours graduate credit
Prerequisite: Teaching certification; consent of advisor

Writing to Promote and Assess Learning offers a broad array of practices for teachers of writing in all subject areas. Participants will learn how writing can be used before, during and after instruction to ensure that students are learning essential information, making connections to past learning, and developing meaningful, thoughtful interpretations of text and classroom experiences. Participants will read articles and selections from books, write extensively, reflect on their own writing process, develop their skills as teachers of writing, and develop curriculum that embeds good writing and assessment practices throughout.

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Course Objectives:

- Participants will read theories of writing that provide a rationale and context for the strategies and assessment practices presented.
- Participants will write in a variety of genres to learn how writing promotes learning as well as to improve their own writing skills.
- Participants will develop curriculum that is aligned with Missouri's Curriculum Frameworks and Show-Me Standards and embeds writing experiences to assess prior knowledge and progress in learning.
- Participants will design rubrics that articulate their expectations and guide their assessment of writing.
- Participants will participate in small and large group discussions, peer edit/revision sessions and oral presentations to sharpen their perceptions of the links between speaking, writing and reading.

Academic Honesty:
Academic honesty is fundamental to the activities and principles of a university. All members of the academic community must be confident that each person's work has been responsibly and honorably acquired, developed, and presented. Collaborative projects assume serious contributions by all members. Any effort to gain an advantage not given to all students is dishonest whether or not the effort is successful. The academic community regards academic dishonesty as an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences that could lead to failure of the class. When in doubt about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quoting or collaboration, consult the course instructor.

Assignments:
Reflection log
Ten "constructed responses" to prompts on class learning
Descriptive piece (1-2 pages; rubric provided)
Narrative piece (2-3 pages; rubric provided)
Persuasive piece (2-3 pages; rubric provided)
Photowrite (models and rubric provided)
Revision of one descriptive, narrative, persuasive piece or photowrite
Curriculum unit according to rubric
Oral presentation of unit
Management Plan
Summary Reflection

Course Content:
Session 1
Introductions, program overview and expectations
Understanding writing process
Mining ideas for writing
Writer’s notebooks
Creating brain compatible classrooms
Read: Paulsen article

Session 2
Warming up with words
The importance of word play
Sentence variation
Revision work on narrative writing (Barry Lane video)
Read: Laura Harper article; use Graves revision piece to complete first revision of narrative writing

Session 3
What is good writing?
Word crafting
Using PQP as peer response method
Using imitation to teach writing
Strategies for becoming a good observer (zooming in; explode a moment, shrink a century, snapshots)
Share narrative for feedback from instructors
Read: Tchudi article; write two new introductions to narrative piece.

Session 4
How to use prompted writing
Creating productive prompts
Assessment: Developing rubrics, using portfolios
Read: Phelps and LeNoir articles

Session 5
Format for curriculum unit explained. (models surveyed) Elements include:

1. key concepts to be mastered
2. performance and content standards to be assessed
3. strategies for assessing prior knowledge
4. graphic organizers to be used
5. content information to be mastered
6. written work and oral presentation assigned
7. performance tasks
8. rubrics (scoring guide) for major assignments
9. culminating activity

How do we successfully move students from narrative to expository writing?
Descriptive writing

Share descriptive piece for peer feedback (turn in to instructor)
Strategies for using graphic organizers for expository writing
Non-traditional nonfiction writing
Conferences on unit; writing time
Assignment: Bring materials for photowrite; read Burke

Session 6
Share non-traditional nonfiction writing for peer feedback (turn in to instructor)
Preparing a photowrite (topic selection, gathering language, choosing graphics and format)
Conferences and writing time
Gather information for photowrite, work on unit
Using cognitive maps
Strategies for assessing daily learning (word tournaments, word sorts)
Assignment: Write photowrite; develop graphic organizer of learning from sessions 1-6.

Session 7
Share photowrite for peer feedback (turn in to instructor)
Writing persuasively (determining central question, gather arguments/ supporting details, addressing the other point of view)
Strategies for collecting meaning from reading (using post-it notes to respond, two-word strategy, reading response journals, vocabulary)

Conferences and writing time
Assignment: Gather data for persuasive essay, work on unit

Session 8
Share persuasive essay for peer feedback (turn in to instructor)
More on revision strategies (ratiocination-a step by step approach to looking for elements of writing to improve, student/teacher conferences)
Conferences, writing time
Teaching skills in context
Assignment: Choose piece to revise and ratiocinate, work on unit; read Newkirk's Reclaiming the Essay (writing thought-provoking essays that aren't five-paragraphs
Oral presentations on unit and peer feedback
Class evaluations

In addition to the above session work, instructors will observe each participant as they use writing in their course content. Conferences will follow each observation to enhance instruction.

Evaluation/Grading

Attendance and participation	20 points
Reflection log	20 points
Narrative	40 points
Persuasive Essay	40 points
Photowrite	40 points
Descriptive piece	30 points
Revised piece	75 points
Graphic organizer	10 points
Curriculum unit	100 points
Presentation	10 points
Final reflection	10 points
Participation	20 points
Total	425 points

Grading scale
A- to A=380-425 points
B- to B=340-379 points
C- to C=298-339 points
F=297 and below

Appendix B

Classroom Observation Protocol
Gateway Writing Project

Context: This instrument is designed to be used on a continuum with other measures of classroom practice. Teachers have already completed a self-report survey of their classroom practices. This observation and the brief interview attached are intended to provide further evidence to support the survey data. The observation cycle may be followed by an in-depth interview that will occur at a separate time.

Observation Date	
Observer's Name	
Teacher's Name	
Class/Grade Level	
School	
Observation Time/Length	

I. *Physical Setting/Classroom Context*
Briefly describe the classroom setting. For instance, consider the room arrangement and what's on the walls/board. Also consider what's *not* there. What are the details that stand out to you concerning the literacy elements of the classroom—particularly the teaching of writing? If helpful, sketch the layout of the classroom designating desk/work and writing spaces/supports (e.g. computers).

II. *Lesson Flow and Summary*
Please record the major events of the lesson. Cite evidence, examples, and direct quotations if possible.

Time (Min.)	Observation	Comments	Materials

III. *Strategies*

Listed below are strategies/concepts participants rated on a self-assessment survey. Either in the lesson you observed or in other assignments/student writing the instructor may share with you, please mark "yes" if you saw evidence of the following:

What kinds of writing did you see used? (Leave blank if not observed.)

	Yes	Notes/Evidence
Quickwrites/free writes		
Constructed responses		
Point of view writing		
Dialogues/plays		
Poetry		
Personal narratives/memoirs		
Stories		
Essays of various kinds		
Book reports		
Research papers/projects		
Reading response journals		
Learning logs/classroom notes		
Personal journals		
Letters		
Editorials		
Summaries		
Interviews		

What strategies did you see used? (Leave blank if not observed.)

	Yes	Notes/Evidence
Graphic organizers		
Writers notebooks		
Word walls/word banks		
Word building activities		
Sentence combining/sentence building		
Mini-lessons		
Modeling		
Running records		
Student-teacher conferences		
Scoring guides		
Portfolios		
Daily Oral Language		
Power Writing		
Literature Circles		
Other major strategy (specify)		

What aspects of the writing process did you observe? (Leave blank if not observed.)

	Yes	Notes/Evidence
Prewriting		
Drafting		
Peer responding		
Revision		
Editing		
Publishing student work		

Did you observe support as students developed a major writing assignment?

	Yes	Notes/Evidence
Discuss the assignment in class		
Provide choice within an assignment		
Allow the students to work on the assignment over time		
Give opportunities for writing in class		
Conference with individual students		
Provide opportunities for revision		
Use examples of finished products as models		
Discuss and analyze these models		
Give students opportunities for feedback from peers on drafts		
Provide some instruction in how to respond to drafts		
Allot time for editing and proofreading of drafts before they are submitted.		
Other (specify topic)		

Did you observe response to student writing?

	Yes	Notes/Evidence
Write comments in the margins or at the end		
Offer students specific written suggestions for revision		
Provide comments and a grade		
Write comments on post-it notes		
Use editing symbols and abbreviations		
Put comments on a response form		
Conference with individual students		
Not applicable		
Other (Explain:)		

Did you observe the sharing of student writing?

	Yes	Notes/Evidence
Publishing		
Read arounds		
Bulletin board displays		
Author’s Chair		
Websites or online conference boards		
Other		

IV. *Post-Observation Interview*

1. How do you feel today's lesson went?

2. Is today's lesson typical of your classroom?

3. What would you hope students would learn from this lesson?

4. How does this lesson relate to the overall unit objectives? To other lessons previously taught?

5. Have you made changes to your writing instruction since you began the inservice project? If yes, what have the changes been?

6. Do you have any questions for me?

V. *Other Observations*
Please record any additional notes/observations/insights you might have.

Appendix C

(Insert Teacher Survey if necessary.)