

## **The Denver Writing Project Trinal (Three-Part) Model of Professional Development**

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**Summary:** The Denver Writing Project continues to expand its service to schools through a strategic approach known as the “trinal” model. Multiyear programming begins with teacher study groups that address needs and interests identified by the teachers, and develops over time into a dynamic partnership with teachers and school.

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### **A Brief History of the Trinal Model**

In 2003 the Denver Writing Project (DWP) launched the Trinal Model of Professional Development, a three-year approach. In Year One we establish a study group at a school. In Year Two the group receives inservice work facilitated by the Denver Writing Project on the topic of the study group. For Year Three the group chooses its own focus and form. (Please see [Overview and Definition of Study Groups](#) below.)

We began three Year One study groups in 2003 after attending the NWP Inservice Institute, with the assistance of an NWP minigrant. In 2004 we offered two Year Two inservice programs that grew from two of the original study groups. By 2005 we had two programs in Year Three status, combinations of study groups that have continued on as well as inservice work that has been renewed. New study groups have been established yearly since 2005.

Sample study group topics for the first year include

- understanding the needs of a growing ELL population at the school
- writing across the curriculum
- understanding diversity at our school
- effective literacy practices
- writing and math.

In the second year, the DWP teacher-consultants provide professional development on the same topics. So if the study group examines issues of diversity the first year, DWP offers the group professional development in, for example, teaching for diversity in writing, or what diversity means for understanding reading. Similarly, if a first-year study group explores writing across the curriculum, in the second year DWP provides demonstrations on writing across the curriculum. In the third year there are several options; some schools start new study groups, some continue with the professional development from the second year, some end the partnership to meet other priorities.

Now, in the fifth year of the program, two cycles can be happening at once in the same school. One group may be in their second year as another new group is starting up. This has been the case in two schools where we have had study group and professional development partnerships for four or five years.

The program has been especially successful at Northglenn High School, site of the first study group in 2003, where it has been continuously coordinated by Co-director Rich Argys. A new study group formed there each year for three consecutive years, and the writing project has had inservice work going on there every year since 2004. A rich and dynamic partnership has developed, owing to the flexibility of the opportunities for professional development during Year Three and beyond (e.g., more study groups, different configurations of inservice). Rich Argys reminds us that flexibility is the key to sustainability.

### **Trinal Study Group Goals**

We have two sets of goals, one for the participants in our inservice programs and the other for the site. For participants we have adapted goals from Thomas Guskey's "What Makes Professional Development Effective?" (2003). They are

- enhancement of teachers' understanding of teaching and learning
- collaboration and collegial exchange
- genuine inquiry into schoolwide issues
- data collection to enhance understanding and guide practices
- valuing of site-based knowledge and experience
- development of a learning community.

As well as our inservice goals, we hope to achieve the following site-based goals:

- develop site-based inquiry habits of mind and corresponding activities
- nurture and recognize site-based expertise in a topic
- develop leadership within the cadre of study group leaders
- lay the groundwork for school-driven partnership with DWP for inservice activities in support of the existing school goals as articulated by the study group
- promote long-term relationships between the school and DWP through activities emanating from inservice programs.

### **How DWP Study Groups Work: Coordinators, Activities, and Expectations**

The on-site study group coordinator is a DWP teacher-consultant who teaches at the school, though group members may or may not be teacher-consultants themselves. Each study group leader is given a copy of *Teacher Study Groups* (Birchak et al. 1998) and asked to read it before starting the group. The book has chapters on how study groups are organized and facilitated, and the issues that come up. The group coordinator keeps in mind that this group's work should lead to a larger-scale inservice program for the following school year (Year Two), and follow-up programs (Year Three).

There are specific study group activities and expectations for both participants and coordinators:

For participants these are

- developing a focus question related to student learning that would impact student achievement and give teachers greater insight into the inquiry topic they are studying

- collecting data that gives insight into the inquiry topic, such as student writing samples; reading protocols; interviews with students, parents, and administrators; teacher notes; and other empirical artifacts
- setting up a schedule of activities, meetings, data collection, etc., for the year
- writing bimonthly and final reflections on their individual work in the group, focusing both on their developing understanding of the topic and on the dynamics of the study group itself.

For coordinators the expectations and activities are

- reporting periodically to school administration and the Denver Writing Project director
- presenting results of their study group in a product to be determined—e.g., progress report, presentation to school staff, conference presentation, presentation to Denver Writing Project Summer Institute
- having postproject questions that have been generated, and a reflective critique of their yearlong work
- articulating the ways in which DWP inservice activities may support the work of the study group and the mission of the school.

### **Sample Study Group Budget**

While final spending decisions are approved by the DWP director, the groups are semi-autonomous in how the money is used. We leave spending of the money to the discretion of the study groups, with the following options available:

- coordinator stipend
- participant stipends
- copying
- books and materials
- refreshments.

DWP invests \$1000 (funded by NWP grant funds for two new study groups each year) in the first year of a study group and asks the school principal to match it. Our contribution is not contingent upon the school match. In the second year, we continue the partnership by offering inservice, for which the school pays fees related to teacher-consultants providing demonstration teaching on site. The cost is negotiated between DWP and the school or district.

### **Evaluation**

End-of-the-year evaluations determine whether the goals have been met. They are based on

- study group members' written reflections, collected during the year, on the inquiry topic and the study group process; these are analyzed for evidence of the habits of mind characteristic of inquiry as well as for the quality of experience of the study group itself
- the study group coordinator's written reflections on leadership development and on his or her understanding of study groups

- principals' willingness to match funding (although often we support a study group getting started even though the principal doesn't match).

## **References**

Birchak, Barb, et al. *Teacher Study Groups: Building Community through Dialogue and Reflection*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Guskey, Thomas. 2003. "What Makes Professional Development Effective?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 84 (10).

## DENVER WRITING PROJECT'S TRINAL MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT Overview and Definition of Study Groups

The DWP Trinal Model of professional development is a self-sustaining, three-part integrated model (see diagram below). The first three years are

1. Year One: Study groups started at a school site
2. Year Two: School-based inservice program delivered by DWP
3. Year Three: Follow-up programs determined by the site.

DWP uses the definition of a study group that comes from Barb Birchak et al., *Teacher Study Groups: Building Community through Dialogue and Reflection* (National Council of Teachers of English, 1998, p. 1). A study group is a small number of teachers and/or administrators at a school who share a common interest in understanding a phenomenon better through site-based inquiry that

- requires voluntary commitment
- builds community and caring
- challenges our thinking as educators
- integrates theory and practice (the group typically bases its work on reading and research),

along with an added fourth characteristic:

- leads to curricular and pedagogical change and increased student learning.

# DENVER WRITING PROJECT

## TRINAL MODEL OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

