

The Work Will Teach You How to Do It:

A New Director Learns How to Begin and Grow Inservice

By Sally Crisp, director, Little Rock Writing Project

Summary: In this case study a site director confesses to her initial fear of starting to offer inservice, describes how she overcame the fear, and shares what she learned in the process. She offers tips to new directors embarking on developing inservice.

Overview

When I became a Writing Project director, I didn't know how to reach out—our leadership team really didn't know how to reach out—and to tell the truth I was afraid. My thinking went something like this: *When we go out to offer professional development, we have to be perfect, we have to be super, because if we aren't, our reputation will be lost before we're ever under way.* I thought we would have to wait until we were ready with the best-ever professional development, and then maybe we could go out.

This narrative describes how I addressed my fears of inservice and, with the help of many others at the LRWP and the National Writing Project, started getting under way with school/site partnerships.

When the Principal Called

In January we do mailings to the principals in our area inviting applications to the invitational summer institute. In the spring of 2005 Becky Ramsey, then principal of Terry Elementary in Little Rock, called and left a message asking if we could send her more applications. This was before we had a fillable application on our website, so when I got the message, I thought the easiest thing would be to put three or four in the mail. At the same time, it crossed my mind that I could just deliver them—and maybe catch her for a quick visit.

I felt comfortable going out to Terry School because I knew the school: I had been a Terry parent and grandparent. Our younger daughter Molly—now grown—had started kindergarten there. And more recently I had stood with parents and other grandparents to pick up our grandson, Dean, from kindergarten. So Terry was familiar to me. I thought I might still have some connections.

In 2005 I was a new director. I was learning about the work of a Writing Project site, and I was coming to recognize that we needed to make connections with schools and venture into offering inservice. At NWP meetings, I had heard about having a “partnership” with a school. To the extent that I understood it, the idea of partnering with schools seemed sound to me.

With our shiny summer institute and professional development brochures in hand, I went out to Terry School on an early spring afternoon to see if I could catch Principal Ramsey. I walked through the front door and straight to the office around 3 o'clock.

School had just let out. I stood at the counter, introduced myself to the secretary, saying I was with the Little Rock Writing Project at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and asked if the principal might have a few minutes to visit with me. A woman standing beside me turned and extended her hand and said "Hi, I'm Becky Ramsey. What can I do for you?"

Becky invited me into her office; I told her of my connections to Terry School, recalling the kindergarten and first-grade teachers—Nona Grubbs and Joyce Alley—who had taught Molly there a number of years before. Both women were still teaching at Terry, Becky told me. We visited for more than a few minutes—talking about writing and how writing ought to be an everyday thing in every classroom—and I saw right away that Becky understood, valued, and supported writing in her school. We talked about the invitational summer institute, and I broached the subject of professional development, face to face with a principal, for the first time ever.

As Becky and I walked back out into the front office, Nona Grubbs came in. She said she remembered me and said very convincingly, though it had been years, that she remembered our Molly as a kindergartener. Our conversation went on, now with the three of us, Becky, Nona, and me. Right there in the front office, my new friend Becky Ramsey and I recruited Nona for the invitational summer institute. Although I was apprehensive about offering inservice in schools, I was confident about the summer institute, and it felt easy to recruit teachers for it. Nona thought immediately of asking a colleague, fifth-grade teacher Debra Brown, to apply for the invitational summer institute along with her.

Nona and Debra became fellows in the 2005 Little Rock Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute. At that first meeting in Terry School's front office, Becky, Nona, and I had talked about the possibility of a relationship between the LRWP and Terry. And as the summer institute moved along, Nona and Debra were already thinking of which Terry teachers they would encourage to apply for the 2006 invitational summer institute. A recent reflection from Nona explains why she was eager to recruit other teachers from her school:

Kindergarteners were not really expected to write except for dictated sentences. The LRWP summer institute helped me understand that it was OK for all age children to convey their thoughts creatively—no matter what stage of writing. And I have put more emphasis on writing—using workshop with my five-year-olds. They love to create their own books and become illustrators and authors. They enjoy author studies too. While the mechanics of writing are important, it was emphasized at LRWP that creativity should be encouraged to promote the love of writing. And the younger the better.

The 2005 NWP Inservice Institute in Wellesley

Earlier that summer we had been invited to apply for the 2005 NWP Inservice Institute, a cross-site advanced institute for teams of site leaders from ten states, held at the Babson Executive Conference Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Shari Williams, then LRWP co-director, and I had applied and been accepted. I'm not sure why we were invited—perhaps we were a "remedial" site, or maybe NWP

reviewers had seen some promise in our Continued Funding Application. Either way we were pleased to be invited because we needed and wanted to learn how to get started in inservice.

So at the end of our invitational summer institute, Shari and I flew from Little Rock to Chicago, changed planes, and flew east to Boston. It was a beautiful clear day, and the pilot told us we would be flying over the length of Lake Erie. Shari and I talked about inservice—what we might be able to offer our schools—as we watched blue Lake Erie pass below us.

The Inservice Institute was terrific: lots of planning time, lots of coaching from folks experienced in getting inservice going. (And the food at Babson was amazing.) I went to an afternoon session where Tom Fox from Northern California talked about getting inservice started at his site. He told us that one of the first schools he had worked with was his child's school. I wondered again whether an inservice contract—maybe a partnership—might come from our conversations with Becky Ramsey and the Terry School teachers.

By the second or third day at Babson, having been led through the planning process by our coaches, Shari and I were making plans for LRWP to host an “Advanced Institute on Quality Professional Development.” We would invite our teacher-consultants and some teachers and administrators from the school or schools we hoped would sign on with us. We knew that as participants in the Inservice Institute we could apply for some NWP Jump Start funds, which we would use to support the Advanced Institute. The Babson experience had moved our thinking along and energized us.

Soon we were heading home. Flying back to the middle of the country, Shari and I fleshed out ideas for the early fall Advanced Institute. And we began also to think and talk about school connections we had. I brought up my impromptu meeting in the spring with Becky Ramsey, the principal at Terry; we knew our new teacher-consultants Nona and Debra were leaders committed to Terry's success. Shari thought about Tyrone Harris, the principal at Martin Luther King, Jr. Magnet Elementary, who had been her colleague at another school. Our teacher-consultant Will Felton, also a terrific teacher-leader, was then at King.

Right there in the air on the way home, we revised the plans we had just fashioned at Babson. We would have the Advanced Institute, but we would find some existing LRWP funds to pay for it. And we would use the Jump Start funds as seed money for partnerships. At Babson we hadn't quite gotten bold enough to think of actually approaching anyone about a partnership. But when the idea came to us that we could bring some Jump Start dollars, this helped our momentum and courage grow. Babson and the Advanced Institute—the idea of it—had served as a kind of tipping point to get us into action. If we received NWP Jump Start funds, as we hoped, we would go for broke: we would approach the principals at Terry and King about multiyear partnerships. We would tell them we could bring some dollars, Jump Start dollars, to establishing partnerships, if they would match them.

When the plane landed in Little Rock, we had plans to host an Advanced Institute as soon as school started and to ask for appointments with Becky Ramsey and Tyrone Harris. We would propose partnerships with Terry and King Schools.

Into Action: Securing, Funding, and Planning for School Partnerships

Back on the ground from Babson, Shari and I both set into action, Shari making the appointment with Tyrone Harris at Martin Luther King, Jr. School, while I made one with Becky Ramsey at David D. Terry School.¹ Shari and I met with Becky Ramsey on a hot August day. We explained a partnership as a sustained, long-term relationship, emphasizing that our work would be low-key, with “teachers teaching teachers,” and that change would likely take place over time. In fact, as I recall, we said from the very first meetings with the principals that we hoped to be able to work with their schools for perhaps two or three years. About the funding we told them, “Here are dollars we can bring.” And we asked, “Can you match these dollars?” Right then and there, without hesitating, Becky said, “Yes.” She added that Nona and Debra, our teacher-consultants there at Terry, could get a group of their colleagues together so we could begin planning for the partnership. A few days later we met with Principal Harris and our teacher-consultant Will Felton at King—and we had another partnership in place.

I believe the principals eagerly agreed to the idea of partnering with us—and to bringing their funds—not only because of the funds we could bring but also because of our LRWP teacher-consultants, their own teachers Nona, Debra, and Will, whom they knew as school leaders.

It was fortuitous for us that the principals had authority over some of their professional development funds. We knew what the partnership funds would be used for: stipends for coordinators and presenters, materials for participants, and so on. We were learning, even as we planned, that monies were there, particularly in Title 1 or Century 21 schools.

(We’re still learning. A new partnership we have this year, 2009, will be funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Having learned through an NWP Site Bulletin that these “stimulus funds” could be available in schools and districts, we said, as we negotiated the new relationships, that this might be a source of funding. It still feels awkward to ask for money, but we have learned we can do it.)

We were ready to get to work. Shari and I decided she would oversee our partnership with King for the year while I would follow Terry. We would, of course, let each other know what was happening. We were eager to see how our brand new partnerships would develop.

The First Advanced Institute—Planning Partnerships (and Other Activities)

As we planned the Advanced Institute, we thought it would provide an efficient and even synergistic way of planning for the year. We had the two partnerships agreed to, and we wanted to get the teachers from Terry and King (and maybe administrators, specialists, and so on) together with LRWP leaders to think

¹ Like Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary, Terry Elementary School has a distinguished namesake, David D. Terry, who was a U.S. Congressman from Arkansas in the mid-20th century. Terry’s wife, Adolphine Fletcher Terry, led the Women’s Emergency Committee to Open Our Schools, after the 1958 desegregation crisis.

about professional development—especially what would constitute good-quality professional development. We would talk about what the teachers had experienced that worked and that didn't work, and what they wanted. I don't usually like to focus on the negative, I don't like to start out with the negative, and so I was a little "iffy" about talking about the not-so-great professional development. But we did it, and it worked. The teachers were very forthcoming about professional development that had not been helpful. One teacher-consultant talked about "drive-by" professional development, which is of course the polar opposite of an NWP partnership. So this negative talk served well as a basis for what they didn't want—and for what they might plan instead for that first year. They wanted and we wanted our partnership work to be truly helpful to the teachers at their schools.

In planning the institute (see [agenda](#), page 14), we had thought of small- and large-group activities we would do, with some group work specific to Terry and some to King, so that their planning for the year would be well under way. We hoped also for some interaction between schools and that, as it turned out, was even better than we expected. Our Advanced Institute—planning it and offering it—is another example, I think, of getting *into action* without knowing the perfect approach. It was a leap of faith.

With a great deal of anticipation, we invited administrators and teacher-leaders from Terry and King to our Advanced Institute on a Friday evening and Saturday in late August, just as school was getting under way. We also extended the invitation to all teacher-consultants who might be interested, and several of them came.

The Advanced Institute was a powerful learning experience for me. There was a good deal of planning for Terry's year, for King's, and for other outreach possibilities (such as our first Young Writers Camp), all fueled by the energy and enthusiasm of the teachers who were there. On Saturday I began to get a measure of our teacher-consultants' initiative. During a breakout into small groups, Will Felton left the King planning group and sought out Terry teachers Nona Grubbs and Dianne Jackson. Will had come up with the idea that King and Terry should together host a two-day writing conference during the annual Arkansas Education Association conference. I saw that our teachers were thoroughly engaged. I thought, *Teachers know what they need and want in professional development.*

In November 2005 we held an LRWP/Terry/King conference—a partnership of our new partnerships. Held on Thursday at Terry, on Friday at King, the conference was a success. Over 50 teachers attended. Workshops given by our teacher-consultants ranged from "Responding to Writers" to "Writing about Rocks" to "Publishing with Handmade Books." Our teacher-consultant Dana Breitweiser brought some colleagues from the Harmony Grove Schools in Haskell, a small town just southwest of Little Rock, and by the summer of 2006 we were planning for a yearlong partnership with Harmony Grove Elementary and Middle Schools there.

2005-2006: Year 1 of the LRWP/Terry Partnership

After our work at the Advanced Institute, we had a draft of our plans for the first year at Terry.² Originally built as a school for 400 children, Terry now has 700-plus in its main building and portable classrooms (known as “the village”) and about 30 classroom teachers. About 70 percent of Terry students receive free or reduced-price lunch. African American students are in the majority; a number of nationalities are represented, and there are a number of English language learners.

The four or five Terry teachers who had been to the Advanced Institute invited other interested teachers to an after-school meeting in the Terry Media Center to plan for a fall study series. Nona and Debra, fresh from the invitational summer institute, suggested two things for the fall series: studying Ralph Fletcher’s *What a Writer Needs* and bringing in some LRWP teacher-consultants to do workshop demonstrations, both of which we did. The teachers set the agenda and ran the group discussions for the five or six study sessions. They talked thoughtfully about Fletcher’s ideas and suggestions, coming back again and again to their classrooms, their students, their practices, what was working and what wasn’t. One or two of us from LRWP were there to join in, but it was the teachers who kept the good collegial talk going.³

Terry School’s First Annual Exciting Writing Week

Energized from their study together, Nona, Debra, and the others who had chosen to be in the fall study series began to think and plan for our spring activities. They talked about how to involve *all the Terry teachers*, pre-K through fifth grade, to encourage more and better writing in their classrooms. Following Nona’s lead, they came up with the idea of an all-school celebration of writing at the end of the school year. They reasoned that whether their colleagues had taken part in the fall study series or not, they surely wouldn’t want to be left out of the all-school event. To be ready for the big spring event, all the teachers would need to look ahead to have student writing for hallway galleries of writing, classroom anthologies, and so on. We believed that preparing for the week of celebration would encourage the teaching of writing—and get lots more writing done, we hoped, in all the Terry classrooms.

In January we had a planning meeting for the all-school celebration in May. Nona, Debra, and Dianne Jackson invited all the Terry teachers to meet and plan for Exciting Writing Week. Teachers who had taken part in the fall series came, and some others came as well—about 20 teachers in all. Exciting Writing Week would be a week of emphasis on writing, with hallway

² Ultimately we completed three-year partnerships at both Terry and King. The story of our partnership with King School certainly deserves to be told, but for now, this is Terry’s story.

³ I learned several things that first fall, one of which was that it was too much to have the book discussion and a workshop demonstration on the same day; one or the other always got shortchanged.

galleries of writing, classroom anthologies, guest authors, and assemblies with young writers reading their work.

I remember the teachers' enthusiasm at our planning meeting. One of the teachers suggested Exciting Writing banners in the hallways and a large banner for the front of the school. She added, "We'll laminate it, and we won't put any dates on it—so that we can use it every year." I thought, *The Terry teachers have bought into Exciting Writing Week, into our partnership!*

For Exciting Writing Week, May 15–19, every single student had a piece of writing on display in the hallway galleries. The week included Terry's young writers walking through galleries and signing anthologies. Arkansas' poet laureate, Peggy Vining, came for a day. For a writing workshop day, LRWP leaders and I prepared workshop outlines for the Terry teachers: the pre-K through second grade teachers had instructions for a workshop based on *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*,⁴ while the third through fifth grade teachers had outlines for a "Where I'm From" workshop.⁵ On Friday there were assemblies featuring writers from every classroom at the microphone.

My department chair, George Jensen, and my writing teacher husband, both big LRWP supporters, went with me that Friday afternoon to hear the young writers. They observed that the children cheered for each other as if they were at a rock concert. teacher-consultant Debra Brown, on behalf of the teachers, presented me with a four-inch binder which held every single classroom anthology. On the front cover are the words "Dedicated to the Little Rock Writing Project."

On Friday Becky Ramsey forwarded to me an e-mail she had sent out to her faculty about that first Exciting Writing Week, saying in part "Last night after the program, I walked the hallways and read all the fabulous student writing on display . . . BIG thanks . . . for a very successful first annual 'Exciting Writing Week' at Terry ! . . ."

I wanted to add from LRWP an affirmation of their hard work, well done. Here is my response, written to Becky and her teachers late that Friday night:

From: Sally Crisp [mailto:scrisp@ualr.edu]
Sent: Fri 5/19/2006 10:07 PM
To: Ramsey, Becky; Brown, Debra; Grubbs, Nona
Subject: thank you

Dear Becky, Debra, and Nona—

Please pass on to all the teachers and students a big "thank you" for the wonderful program and the magnificent book made up of the classroom books. I know it is the result of lots of work by

⁴ LRWP teacher-consultant Tamy Chapin was the original creator of the "Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus" workshop.

⁵ The workshop outline was based on the chapter "Where I'm From: Inviting Students' Lives into the Classroom" from Linda Christensen's *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* (Rethinking Schools, 2000); many NWP folks will be familiar with George Ella Lyon's poem "Where I'm From," featured by Christensen.

teachers and students, and I will take time to look at every page. The writing galleries everywhere and the wonderful banners inside and out were terrific, too. You are rightfully proud of your students' writing!

Mrs. Hankins' class also gave me a cute, oversized book, a "take-off" on *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*. One little boy stopped to tell me that it had been done by his class. I asked if he had a page in it. Right quickly he found it, looked it over, took a bright marker out of his pocket, and corrected a word. The writing process is never done!

Perhaps not every teacher in the building was wildly enthusiastic about Exciting Writing Week—there may have been some foot-dragging—but every teacher and every student took part.

I was there that first year at Terry: for the fall study series, some of the planning meetings, and as much of Exciting Writing Week as I could manage. Along with other LRWP leaders who came to Terry, I shared my knowledge and experience and offered ideas. But I stood back, so to speak; I didn't want LRWP to have ownership of the partnership. I believe—and I'm pleased to say—the Terry teachers took ownership from the beginning.

2006-2007: Year 2 of the LRWP/Terry Partnership

Now we were gaining *ethos*. We had partnership experience, and thus we had references. As we began our second year with Terry and King, we were also beginning relationships with three more schools: St. Joseph's Catholic Primary School and Harmony Grove Elementary and Middle Schools.⁶ I continued, along with others from LRWP, as a liaison to Terry.

We began the next school year with another LRWP Advanced Institute. The Terry teachers got acquainted with Principal Terri Seiter and the teachers from St. Joseph's. Terry School's work became a model for St. Joseph's, and an interesting partnership of partnerships developed between the two schools. The St. Joseph's teachers asked if the Terry teachers would come for an after-school meeting to share their knowledge of writing workshop in the lower grades. Three Terry teachers went, and later arrangements were made for some of the St. Joseph's teachers to visit Terry and observe the Terry teachers in writing workshop with their kindergarten children.

Recruited by Nona and Debra, Terry teachers Dianne Jackson and Julie Jones had attended our 2006 invitational summer institute. When school started in the fall, Debra Brown had transferred to another school, but we still could count on three strong teacher-consultants and other teacher-leaders at Terry as we began our second year of partnership there.

Almost as soon as school got under way, our Terry teacher-consultants told me they had decided—without our help, I might add—that their traditional October family night would become "Family Writing Night," with the theme "Because Writing Matters." They had made plans for supper,

⁶ In the second semester of the first year with Terry and King, we also had a semester-long partnership with LRSD's Chicot Elementary.

goody bags with paper, pencil, and the Bay Area Writing Project's booklet "Because Writing Matters" (most were in English, but some in Spanish as well), a writing prompt,⁷ and an open mic period to close the evening. They also had planned a silent auction to raise funds to help support the coming spring's Exciting Writing Week, already a tradition.

About 300 parents and children came for sandwiches, the silent auction, the writing, and the open mic. The Terry teachers felt the turnout was good. They made almost \$700 from the auction and had trouble bringing the open mic to a close at the end of the evening. For me, the best part of the evening was seeing parents and children side by side, writing and sharing writing.

For the 2006 fall study series, Dianne and Julie suggested Katie Wood Ray's *Wondrous Words*. They had read it in the invitational summer institute and felt Ray's concrete ideas would encourage good discussion. An interesting thing I observed and took pride in was that the Terry teachers made a special effort to include their new and transferred teachers. It seemed to me this showed how important they considered their conversations about teaching writing.

Soon it was time to plan for Exciting Writing Week 2007, and the planning group, in which I was included, got under way. Before we knew it, the large Exciting Writing banner went up on the front of the school and writing filled hallway galleries. The year before, we had had a local jazz singer and writer, Genine Perez, open the Friday celebration with "What a Wonderful World." She was invited to sing again and this time added a song-writing feature to her performance, asking for words and phrases from the children and then composing a song—words and music—which she and the children sang together right there in the Terry cafeteria. [For an NWP article on the 2009 Exciting Writing Week see <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2925>.]

In early summer 2007—after this second year in partnership with Terry—I was driving by Terry and noticed the message on their marquee:

Read and write.

Be safe.

Have a great summer.

For me, two little words—*and write*—told the story of our LRWP/Terry partnership.

2007-2008: Year Three—and Into Year Four

In our third year with Terry, 2007-2008, LRWP leaders and I served mostly as support as the Terry teachers again thoughtfully and strategically included the new and transferred teachers in the fall study group, where they watched and discussed Lucy Calkins' DVD *Big Lessons from Small Writers*. They

⁷ The Terry teachers invited a Little Rock district science specialist, Lola Perritt, to bring small live animals in carriers as writing prompts!

again on their own had a successful Family Writing Night; like Exciting Writing Week, it was becoming a tradition. And in January, the Terry teachers again planned for spring and Exciting Writing Week.

Along with teacher-consultants from other schools with which we've worked, we've invited Nona Grubbs and Dianne Jackson to visit our invitational summer institutes with their stories and photo slide shows, to give our institute fellows a sense of what a partnership with the LRWP might look like.

As school started in the fall of 2008, we were officially beyond our partnership with Terry. Yet Terry's new traditions, fostered by LRWP, had taken hold. Here is an email I received in September from teacher-consultant Dianne Jackson:

Ms. Ramsey has okayed our Family Writing Night for Thursday, October 30th. We will try to have a planning meeting this next week...

She has also approved the week for Exciting Writing, April 27th through May 1st. We would like to use the slogan "Inking Our Thinking," if that is alright...

Dianne Jackson

The Work Teaches Us

"The work will teach you how to do it" is an Estonian proverb my husband and I came across some years ago. It's been a sort of mantra at our house over the years. We've found it true again and again.

That first year I learned much. I learned because I was there. Now when I have the opportunity to plan with teacher-consultants who will be hosting and coordinating a new partnership, I can work from my knowledge of having been there "on the ground." I would say I learned what I might have expected to learn, and I also learned much more. For one thing, I learned it's good to have chocolate at after-school meetings! I learned that even very experienced, very professional teachers can be open to new ideas, to change. (I think of Nona's saying she put away practices of many years, like dictating writing to the little ones.) I learned that the teachers were willing and even eager to dig into professional literature for theory and especially for best practices. I learned more at every meeting with them about their individual and collective commitment to best practices, to their students, to Terry School and to success with all the children there.

I observed the Terry teachers taking over more and more ownership of our LRWP/Terry partnership. As the months moved along, we found ourselves, rightly I think, at our best as a resource and support to the teachers. One secret was that those first Terry teachers who came to our invitational summer institute in 2005 and 2006—Nona, Debra, Dianne, and Julie—were already strong leaders who were very much invested in Terry. I saw that these teachers, and others there, knew how to get to work and get things planned and get things done. (All I did that second year for Family Writing Night, for instance, was show up and say a few words about the Little Rock Writing Project.)

I learned how putting an all-school event three or four months out on the calendar could get the attention of all the teachers. From Exciting Writing Week and Family Writing Night, I learned the value of traditions in informing a school's culture over time. Because these new traditions are in place, writing at

Terry is ongoing. And I believe both the writing and the traditions that foster the writing are fine results of our LRWP/Terry School partnership.

I've noticed, as I look back, that it seems as though every action we took led us to other actions; for example, in 2005 we visited Terry School to deliver applications; at the visit we recruited Terry teachers for the invitational summer institute; we participated in the NWP Inservice Institute at Babson and got the idea for our Advanced Institute; we secured partnerships with Terry and King; we offered our "Advanced Institute for Quality Professional Development," at which we planned our partnerships with Terry and King Schools; and we hosted a mini-conference on writing. We did all this from the spring to the fall of 2005 and have continued in like fashion.

I learned especially that, as kindergarten teacher Nona Grubbs put it, "The younger the better." When I first met the principal with whose school we've begun working this year, she asked if we would work with an *elementary* school. I told her a little about Terry and King and other partnerships, and I said, "Absolutely. Don't we want them to know from the start that *they are writers?*"

Lessons Learned

Lesson One: Into Action. I was fearful of launching into inservice—perhaps more than our leadership team, more than our teacher-consultants. It felt risky, but looking back, I can see that my impulse to deliver the summer institute applications to Terry School was a first step toward our three-year partnership. In their 1982 classic *In Search of Excellence*, Thomas Peters and Robert Waterman list as principle number one “A bias for action: a preference for doing something—anything” rather than “sending a question through endless cycles and cycles of analyses . . .” We’ve learned about momentum: As we’ve taken actions, those actions have led to further actions. We could still be analyzing, still be planning for that absolutely perfect inservice.

Lesson Two: A Theory of Action. A tall, elegant NWP brochure with the words *Encouraging Writing* on the front had come in the mail, and I thought, *Yes, that’s it*. Because this was essentially my “theory” of teaching writing—because I had been encouraging writers and writing for quite some time—I knew we could do this. In my own mind, and in fact, *Encouraging Writing* became a theme for LRWP’s inservice, supplanting *Best Professional Development You’ve Ever Seen or Ever Will See*, a daunting theme, for sure. Developing a theory of action helped us overcome a host of things, including fear of inservice, analysis paralysis, perfectionism.

Lesson Three: An NWP Site Offers Something Special. A National Writing Project site has something different and special to offer in professional development. We’re “teachers teaching teachers.” We have teacher-consultants in the schools. We’re nearby. We can sustain our work with schools over time. We’ve learned that teachers want substantial professional development that *involves* them, and the NWP brand of professional development truly involves them.

Lesson Four: Ask and Receive. Since sources of funding change, we try to keep on top of where the money for professional development is. There are Title 1 and Century 21 schools. This year we know we will have at least one professional development partnership funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act “stimulus” funds. What we’ve learned is that we can generate revenue. Monies are there to support professional development. We have learned we can ask for money and receive it.

Lesson Five: Know and Grow Your Strength. The story of our partnership with Terry Elementary School is to a great extent the story of our teacher-consultants and other teacher-leaders at Terry, who were the engine of the partnership. At Terry, King, and other schools we’ve worked with, our teacher-consultants and other teacher-leaders have envisioned, planned, and carried out our partnerships. We know our teacher-consultants, with their knowledge and expertise, are our strength, and we’ve learned to start building our capacity from the time of the initial interviews for the invitational summer institute. This is perhaps the most important lesson we’ve learned.

Appendix: Advanced Institute Agenda

Little Rock Writing Project 2005 Advanced Institute
September 23 & 24, 2005
Using Writing in Every Classroom: Models for Professional Development

Saturday Session:

9:45-10:00 Registration

10:00-10:30 Welcome and Introduction to the Organic Model

Dr. Sally Crisp / LRWP Director

10:30-11:00 Exploring Possibilities

✎ 4 groups will form randomly: Young Writers Programs; School Partnerships; Continuity; Professional Development

✎ 4 Possibility Charts will be posted around the room for each area

✎ Specific groups will go to the poster specific to its focus and come up with 4 possibilities for LRWP work (15 minutes)

✎ The groups will rotate around the room to review the Possibilities Charts and to add comments. (10 minutes for each chart/30 minutes)

✎ The original groups will return to their charts to review the posted comments (15 minutes)

11:30-12:00 Group Reporting and Feedback

12:00-1:00 Lunch

1:00-3:00 Action Plan Development: Each specific group will work through the Action Plan

✎ LRWP Leadership team will act as coaches

✎ The groups will be divided as follows:

Martin Luther King Partnership / Shari Williams

Terry Partnership / Sally Crisp

Professional Development / Michael Daly & Dana Breitweiser
Continuity / James Bengé
Young Writers Camp / Paula Kerr

3:00-4:00 Group Reporting and Feedback Follow the Protocol given in the handout