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After the Summer Institute:
Longitudinal Follow-up of Fellows in the Classroom

How effective was our Summer Institute? This is a question all National Writing Project site directors try to answer for themselves each year. This article reports on a three-year study conducted by two site directors in northern Arizona which examined the effects, both immediate and longitudinal, of their Summer Institute on the fellows' attitudes and concerns about teaching writing. Questionnaire, essay, and interview data were collected before fellows attended the Summer Institute and then compared with questionnaire, interview, and observational data collected immediately after the Institute as well as one and two years later.

Analysis of the data revealed that modest progress was achieved immediately after the Institute, but significant progress was achieved over time. The authors then illustrate this change with a case study of one teacher who was followed for the full term of the study. They conclude that implementing the principles of writing as a process takes time for "risk taking and refinement." An extensive version of this article, including full details of the methodology, will appear in Research in the Teaching of English, February, 1994.

—PTL

The Context of Our Study
We were a brand new site of the Writing Project; 150 miles of desert populated mainly by thirsty saguaro cactus stretched between us and the nearest Writing Project in our state. Participating school districts were spread all over northern Arizona with almost 200 miles of mountains and canyons and the Colorado River stretching between our university base and the most distant school district. A few of the fellows came from districts located in towns of 20,000-40,000; over half of them came from rural areas. Perhaps because of the rural nature of northern Arizona, the "winds of change" Hairston (1982) had described six years before hadn't blown very hard in our area, and most of the fellows had only a fuzzy notion of what "the writing process" meant. As we interviewed for our first Summer Institute, we encountered mostly traditional writing instruction (more assigning than teaching and virtually no modeling).

The Purpose of Our Study
Since we were a new site, we wanted feedback about the effectiveness of our efforts. We wanted to know what impact the Summer Institute was having on teachers and we wanted to know what shape implementation would take in their classrooms. In order to determine if there were patterns, we decided to do a three-year study, following the first group of teachers three year as well as gathering data on the next two groups of teachers as they joined our Project.
The Tools We Used
We designed our research in a qualitative framework described by Faulkner (in Van Maanen, 1982). Using his “triad” mode, we collected three bodies of data: questionnaire data about teacher concerns before and after the Summer Institute, teacher self-reports about classroom implementation, and classroom observations.

Questionnaire data. The Stages of Concern (SoC) questionnaire from the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) developed by Hall, Wallace and Dossett in 1973 (in Hall and Hord, 1987) elicits teacher concerns about any new teaching innovation (in our case the writing process). We used this questionnaire as a pre-test before the Summer Institute began and as a post-test on the last day. The SoC offers statements like “I don’t even know what the writing process is,” “I am concerned about not having enough time in my day to organize the writing process,” “I would like to revise the instructional approach of the writing process.” Teachers respond on a continuum scale.

Teacher self-reports about classroom implementation. For gathering teacher self-reports about classroom practice we relied on three types of contact:

(a) pre-Summer Institute selection interviews in which we asked teachers to describe their strengths as teachers of writing as well as goals they had for further development as teachers of writing;

(b) application essays in which prospective fellows described ways they were already using writing in their classrooms;

(c) group interviews at multiple follow-up meetings at individual school sites as well as at the university in which we asked teachers to describe current uses of writing in their classrooms and to explain successes and difficulties they were having with teaching writing as a process.

CBAM provided us with a structure to codify the shape classroom implementation was taking (the Innovation Configuration — IC) according to these self-reports. The IC divides classroom practice into categories like “ideal,” “acceptable,” and “unacceptable.” So that our categories would be familiar to the fellows, we designed the IC after one of the texts we had used in the Summer Institute — Proett and Gill’s The Writing Process in Action (1986). From that explanation of the writing process we developed four instructional categories we considered critical to process-oriented teaching: rhetorical stance (conceptualizing voice, audience, purpose, and form), attention to prewriting and planning (journaling, brainstorming, clustering, mapping, etc.), attention to reviewing/revising (getting responses, testing against criteria, proofreading), attention to opportunities for highlighting (sharing, publishing, mailing, posting, filing, reading, etc.).

Classroom observations. Because of our roles as NAWP directors, we were able to observe a large percentage (about 80%) of the fellows teaching writing lessons over the three-year period of our study. From these observations, we targeted six teachers to observe in a systematic way. Using the IC, we designed an observational rubric for our field notes so that we could compare visits with one another. Each of us visited the same teachers four times — three teachers on the Navajo Reservation and three teachers in Flagstaff. After each visit we interviewed the teachers about what we had seen, placing the particular lesson in a larger teaching context. We then wrote lengthy narrative reports of the implementation process followed by each of these six teachers.

The First Year — 1988
The SoC questionnaires fell into an encouraging pattern. The questionnaires from before the Summer Institute showed more than half of the teachers in stages of concern that focused on themselves — what the writing process was all about and how it would affect them. The questionnaires from after the Summer Institute showed that the large majority of teachers had moved into stages of concern that focused on impact — how the writing process would affect their students and their colleagues (see Figure 1 below).

![Figure 1]

In short, during the Summer Institute the fellows had filled their need for information and become concerned about how using the writing process would affect their students and their peers. We began visiting classrooms and gathering self-report data from teachers.
The Second Year — 1989

The questionnaires from this second group of fellows showed a pattern very similar to the one we had discovered the year before: the large majority of the fellows began in "self" concerns but had moved to "impact" concerns by the end of the five weeks (see figure 2).

During the second year we examined classroom implementation. (The first group of teachers had completed a year of teaching, while the second group of teachers had been back in the classroom only a few months.) Using the Innovation Configuration, we coded self-reports of classroom practice. We discovered that neither of the first two groups had been doing much process instruction before the Summer Institutes and that post-Institute implementation was uneven. The group of teachers who had had more time (1988) had made significant changes in three of our four critical areas, while the group of teachers who had had very little time (1989) had made much more modest progress (see Figures 3 & 4 below). We continued to observe teachers conducting writing lessons.

The Third Year — 1990

The pre and post Stages of Concern data showed the same pattern as the previous two years — the majority of teachers in a "self" concern stage before, moving to "impact" concerns by the end of the five weeks. We continued to interview teachers and code their responses using the Innovation Configuration. Throughout the fall and spring we structured our observations of the six targeted teachers.

We now had a body of data in each of our three categories: Stages of Concern data, self-report classroom data, and observational data. We remembered the dramatic differences we had noticed between the "second-year" teachers and the "first-year" teachers during the second year. Curious about continued progress, we invited our Innovation Configuration to a questionnaire and sent it out to all the fellows who had participated all three years. We asked them to identify themselves only by year they attended and then tell us what was happening in their classrooms across each of the writing process instruction categories. This way we hoped we would get honest responses, yet we could continue to track year-to-year growth (if there was any).

We had a good response to the questionnaire, with almost 75% of the teachers returning them. From this IC questionnaire, we had implementation data from three groups of teachers now — a group who had been in the classroom almost a year (the 1990 teachers), a group who had been in the classroom almost two years (1989), and a group who had been back almost three years (1988). The responses we received bore out the suspicion we had that more time in the classroom led to more and more implementation (see Figures 5, 6, & 7). [1]
A Case in Point

Our classroom observations supported the questionnaire data. Teachers we had watched for three years followed a similar implementation pattern: year 1 — new activities superimposed on old methods; year 2 — writing as process becoming the center of language arts; year 3 — writing as a learning tool being used in content areas.

One teacher’s story will serve as an example. (I’ll call her “Ann.”) The year after Ann (a second-grade teacher) attended the Summer Institute, she began to use clustering (a technique she had learned as a result of one of the teacher demonstrations) as an activity to help students recall information she had already taught. It quickly became a favorite activity, and she began to use it in all of her content areas. At the same time she began placing student writing on the walls of her room as a form of publication. However, her teaching methods did not change substantially: she continued to use textbooks, worksheets, and her old lesson plans.

The next year Ann worked over the summer and completely restructured her approach to language arts, instituting a real writing process approach. She continued to use clustering, but it now became one of several prewriting strategies she used with her students to help them generate ideas for their writing. Further, she instituted drafting with her kids and organized peer response groups to help them improve first drafts. She continued to put work on the walls, but that was only one way she published her students’ writing. For example, she made a big book of her students’ versions of a predictable story and circulated it in their homes.

The third year was different still. During that year, Ann continued to use writing process notions of instruction in language arts, but she also began to use writing in her math instruction. Students wrote in math journals almost daily. They also began writing their own story problems for each other.

When we interviewed Ann, it was clear that she was consciously aware of the pattern we had seen emerge. “It takes a long time to change your teaching,” she said. “But I’m much happier with my teaching now. I feel like I know what I’m doing.”

Drawing Conclusions

According to Faulkner (in Van Maanen, page 85), quantitative data (our questionnaire numbers) permit researchers to discover whether anything is happening, while qualitative data (teachers’ self-reports and classroom observations) permit researchers to discover what
is happening if the quantitative data warrant such a conclusion. The Stages of Concern questionnaires had developed into a strong pattern. There was evidence that our Summer Institute was having an effect on teachers — at the very least on their attitudes toward the writing process.

Our qualitative data had developed a pattern as well, but it was a pattern we would have missed if we hadn’t followed the teachers over a period of three years. Our teachers were changing their classroom practice, but the change was slow. First they tried out the activities they had learned from each other. Evidently using these activities continued the process of change, because the next year instruction in language arts saw a dramatic shift. The third year, they were ready to tackle subject matter to see what effect writing would have on the study of literature, for example. What we were seeing, then, was a pattern of the Summer Institute with teachers teaching teachers having an impact on thinking. Next we were seeing teachers teaching themselves, continuing the change.

Perhaps, we reasoned, teaching is a process too. Perhaps the Summer Institute is a pre-teaching experience analogous to pre-writing. And then perhaps the first year is a draft. The students provide the response, and the second year the teacher tries a second draft. The third year is more polished, a more complete draft. And perhaps, we speculated from our own experience as teachers and as Writing Project directors, perhaps the process continues in a constant loop of risk-taking and refinement.

In our society of the “quick fix” this information is very important. It’s important to administrators who fund teachers to attend Summer Institutes and who then expect immediate change. It’s important to us as Writing Project directors who visit our teachers and expect immediate change. And it’s important to us as teachers who attend the Summer Institute and expect immediate change. In our experience, change was slow but steady. We haven’t followed the teachers beyond the third year in a systematic way. But the informal contact we have had indicates that change continues into the fourth and fifth years. We speculate that the next stage of growth has something to do with mentoring other teachers and with moving into larger classrooms of teachers who are looking for new answers. (“Ann,” for example, has become a polished presenter and often leads inservice sessions.)

In short, we concluded a funny thing: implementing the writing process is a process of its own.

Note
1. As a footnote, we noticed that the 1990 fellows had implemented faster than the other two years and decided our Summer Institute must have been more effective. We examined our own practice and discovered one dramatic difference — in 1990 we had modeled all of the categories in our own work with the fellows rather than merely talking about them! We decided this would make an interesting research project later on.

References