

NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT AT WORK

Summer Institute



Enabling Communities and Collaborative Responses to Teaching Demonstrations

by Janet Swenson, with Diana Mitchell

*Red Cedar Writing Project
Michigan State University*

The National Writing Project at Work monograph series documents how the National Writing Project model is implemented and developed at local sites across the country. These monographs describe NWP work, which is often shared informally or in workshops through the NWP network, and offer detailed chronological accounts for sites interested in adopting and adapting the models. The programs described are inspired by the mission and vision of NWP and illustrate the local creativity and responsiveness of individual writing project sites. Written by teams of teachers and site directors—the people who create and nurture local programs—the texts reflect different voices and points of view, and bring a rich perspective to the work described. Each National Writing Project at Work monograph provides a developmental picture of the local program from the initial idea through planning, implementation, and refinement over time. The authors retell their journeys, what they achieved, how they were challenged, and how and why they succeeded.

Please see the inside back cover for more information.

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National Writing Project
Berkeley, California

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The mission of the National Writing Project is to improve the teaching of writing and improve learning in the nation's schools. Through its professional development model, the National Writing Project recognizes the primary importance of teacher knowledge, expertise, and leadership.

The National Writing Project believes that access to high-quality educational experiences is a basic right of all learners and a cornerstone of equity. Through its extensive network of teachers, the National Writing Project seeks to promote exemplary instruction of writing in every classroom in America.

The National Writing Project values diversity—our own as well as that of our students, their families, and their communities. We recognize that our lives and practices are enriched when those with whom we interact represent diversities of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and language.

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More than thirty years after the first Bay Area Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute in 1974, nearly 200 National Writing Project sites continue to hold invitational institutes each summer. Several thousand teachers participate yearly in these summer institutes, and every year new groups of summer fellows at local sites across the country describe their summer institute experience as “life-changing,” “the place where I rediscovered myself as a writer,” “the best professional development I have had in all my years of teaching,” or “the reason I have decided to continue to teach.”

This set of monographs in the NWP at Work series offers readers a behind-the-scenes look at the intentional and complex thinking that supports teachers as professionals, as researchers, and as writers in NWP summer institutes. Collectively, the monographs provide insight into both the principles shared by writing project sites and the unique imprints that individual sites put on their invitational institutes.

National Writing Project summer institutes are lively venues where, for four or five weeks every summer, groups of experienced teachers, K–16, gather on a college or university campus to engage in collaborative learning and inquiry into teaching practice. With teacher knowledge and expertise squarely at the center, participants discuss current research, share demonstrations, and brave going public with their own writing. During the process, not only do they develop their capacity as leaders at their schools and writing project sites; their understanding of what it means to be professional teachers and colleagues is transformed, and they take this new vision back into their classrooms.

What makes each writing project site unique is the nature of its local context, the challenges presented by that context, and the kind of risk taking involved in addressing the site’s concerns. Each of the monographs in this set describes in vivid detail the way a writing project site identified and took steps to refine a local practice in order to improve the impact of its summer institutes. The monographs’ foci range from developing more effective recruitment to improving the responses to demonstrations. In one case, a site determined that application to its summer institute needed to be a year-long process and required a greater pool of applicants and a structure for increasing diversity. In another, site leaders took a magnifying glass to the process of response to teacher demonstrations and developed a collaborative approach that moved the responses from a kind of “thank you very much” to a richly nuanced critique. In yet another case, site leaders developed a summer institute curriculum that included the arts as a focus, from the “writing wall” created by participants the first day to a group improvisation at the end. No matter what the primary focus of the monograph, readers will notice a strong commitment to equity and diversity throughout.

While each site's summer institute has its own distinctive stamp, the institutes share common components:

- Teachers attend voluntarily, by invitation.
- Their participation places them in a national network of K–12 and university practitioners.
- All are exposed to the power of collaborative practices.

Significantly, the summer institute is not a venue for turnaround training. For teachers, it is a form of professional development that focuses on classroom and social practices that take into account their local context, opportunities, and challenges. The summer institute is never a “one size fits all” approach to professional development.

At the site level the institute purposefully prepares teacher-leaders to extend and deepen the ongoing work of the local site. Following the summer institute, teacher-leaders continue their connection to the professional community in a number of ways. For example, they lead study groups, conduct classroom inquiry, join the local site's leadership team, and facilitate professional development in the site's programs in schools and districts. These multiple opportunities to exercise leadership become for the teachers an ongoing form of professional development. These and other activities all begin with an intensive summer institute experience. Nor should we overlook the power of personal connections that begin at the summer institute and continue to deepen as teacher-consultants find their place in the NWP network.

The National Writing Project at Work monograph series debuted in 2002 with four monographs focusing on professional development, followed by four additional models of professional development published in 2004. The monographs, authored by teams of writing project teachers and site directors, focus on various aspects of the work of local writing project sites. We are pleased to add the summer institute monographs to the NWP at Work series. We are hopeful that teachers, site directors, policymakers, academics, and all who work in the realm of school reform will find much to think about in this series. This second set will be followed by monographs on continuity and on sustaining professional communities at local writing project sites.

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INTRODUCTION

[T]hose who wish and know how to think participatively . . . know how not to detach their performed act from its product, but rather how to relate both of them to the unitary and unique context of life and seek to determine them in that context as an indivisible unity.”—M. M. Bahktin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*

During the first several invitational summer institutes at Red Cedar Writing Project (RCWP) we marveled at the breadth and depth of teacher knowledge that the teaching demonstrations represented but acknowledged with regret that the oral and written responses to these demonstrations seemed perfunctory. Sitting in an airport on our way home from the 1995 National Writing Project Annual Meeting, we—Janet Swenson, director of RCWP, and Diana Mitchell, former co-director of RCWP—were making plans for our next summer institute and found ourselves asking questions: Why were the responses to teaching demonstrations so lacking in the vitality evidenced elsewhere in the institute? Why did the written responses read like thank-you notes rather than critical contributions to a professional discourse? Why, on more than one occasion, had we overheard insightful observations from teachers engaged in informal conversations around the snack table that were not reflected in their more formal responses? Although we understood the teaching demonstration to be a required element of the NWP model, the time seemed ripe for reconsidering our own beliefs about and goals for this component of the summer institute.

Our goal has always been to collaborate with RCWP participants to further develop the type of community that helps each of us improve our practice. Jerome Bruner, in his text *The Culture of Education*, describes these as “enabling communities,” groups of colleagues who help us deal with the impermanence and instability of our broader culture and, in particular, of our profession. Enabling communities understand that “the process of becoming aware of practice . . . is an antidote to mindlessness. And mindlessness is one of the major impediments to change” (1996, 79). Bruner believes that participants in these enabling communities help one another become aware of practice by “[giving] ‘thought’ a form that is more visible, more audible, more referable, and more negotiable” (108). We wondered what would happen if, in the summer institute, we turned our attention to building, contributing to, and learning from the enabling communities that form there. Would these communities provide institute participants with occasions to make their thinking about teaching demonstrations and the language we use to discuss the demonstrations “more visible, more audible, more referable, and more negotiable”?

In the following monograph, we describe the heuristic, or problem-solving, strategy that we developed to address these goals. Named Collaborative Responses to Teaching Demonstrations (CRTD), it is a protocol for generating responses to teaching demonstrations and for making the language we use to describe these teaching acts and their anticipated outcomes available for peer review and critique. As Bahktin (1993, 19) has suggested, thoughtful responses allow us to reunite our

performed acts of teaching with their “products”—changes in the beliefs, knowledge, and/or performance of the teachers in our summer institute—and in this process to identify, individually and collaboratively, the generalizable strengths that form the foundation for high-quality approaches to teaching writing.

To create a context for our work, we first introduce you to the Red Cedar Writing Project. We then describe in more detail the problem we experienced with responses to teaching demonstrations; provide an overview of the CRTD and a guide for implementing the protocol, including descriptions of the five “lenses” teachers use to develop CRTDs; explain how we managed to implement the protocol without impinging on other important work in the institute; and finally reflect on the strengths and limitations of the CRTD protocol. CRTD has certainly evolved during the ten years we have used it, and we imagine, should readers find the premise of using such a protocol intriguing, they could abstract and amend those portions that seem most generative and add lenses and/or steps that will help it to address their particular needs.

ENABLING COMMUNITIES AND COLLABORATIVE RESPONSES TO TEACHING DEMONSTRATIONS

by Janet Swenson with Diana Mitchell

RED CEDAR WRITING PROJECT

“A river runs through it”—the campus that is. Since 1993, the Michigan State University (MSU) Writing Center, housed in a classroom building on the banks of the Red Cedar River, has served as the home of the writing project that adopted the river’s name. The Red Cedar Writing Project sits, metaphorically, at the heart of the sprawling 5,200-acre campus that was this nation’s first land-grant university, serving as the prototype for the sixty-nine land-grant institutions established under the Morrill Act, which followed a few years later. Today, as the campus that wears its heart on its sleeve observes its sesquicentennial, the newest generation of “Spartans” are charged to continue the university’s legacy of service to the people of the state and nation. For writers and teachers of writers, this means renewing our quest to identify and expand the ways in which writing serves the community good, and particularly the good of those often marginalized and silenced.

Although the campus is often cited as one of the most beautiful in the United States, and the site name and campus description suggest a bucolic setting, Red Cedar Writing Project is adjacent to the state’s capital and one of its largest urban centers, the greater Lansing area. The site’s service area is extremely diverse; it serves teachers and students from urban, suburban, and rural communities; from some of the state’s most affluent communities to those embedded in multigenerational, pervasive poverty; from racially and ethnically homogenous African American and European American communities to highly heterogeneous ones. Teachers involved at the site come from schools that send most graduates to Big Ten universities as well as schools that send almost no students for postsecondary study; from districts where students perform far above the average on state standardized tests to those districts that are threatened by state takeovers because of student scores on those same tests. The diversity of the communities and districts has added immeasurably to the quality of our writing project site’s experience. And although such differences have contributed to heated, heartfelt discussions related to issues of equity and justice, we seldom noticed these occurring in response to teaching demonstrations in the early years of the project.

INITIAL PROBLEMS WITH RESPONSES TO TEACHING DEMONSTRATIONS

When RCWP held its first summer institute in 1993, teaching demonstrations were followed by brief whole-group discussions and individual letters that

resembled thank-you notes similar to this one: “Thank you very much for your wonderful presentation. I was deeply engaged throughout. I plan to use this approach in my own classroom next year.” In subsequent years, we asked participants to develop more “critical” responses and suggested they address the question, “What would you suggest presenters change if they were to offer their demonstrations at a conference or workshop?” But when we met to debrief demonstrations with presenters, we noticed that they seldom referenced their colleagues’ written responses. Neither did they mention the demonstration comments in end-of-institute reflections. We concluded that they did not view the current method or products of the responding process as remarkable. And we had given them little direction about how to make it more meaningful.

We were particularly perplexed by the lack of engagement in the whole-group discussions. When we left the demonstration circle, none of us seemed to have any shortage of observations to share in small, informal groupings gathered around the snack bar. In these discussions, we often floated propositions related to the demonstrations, received responses, and refined our thinking in what we perceived to be safe, generative, and unrushed settings. We noticed that many informal clusters were summer institute writing groups, and that teachers were engaging in the type of stimulating conversations that could have served as a useful prewriting activity. We further realized that the process of attempting to reach consensus in these groups provoked and extended these generative conversations. Dialogues in which four or five colleagues attempted to reach agreement about what they had just experienced, how it fit into larger educational contexts, and how best to express it in language, appeared to enable a more-thoughtful analysis of the teaching demonstrations than either our whole-group discussions or our individual letters had.

We now realize that one reason the written responses to the demonstrations had often been ineffectual was that we provided little time, space, or motivation for invention and prewriting. This was one point in the institute that didn’t fully realize a process approach to writing; teachers experienced a demonstration, engaged in brief and fairly innocuous whole-group discussions that were largely celebratory, and then were asked to develop what amounted to an on-demand, timed writing.

Elsewhere in the summer institute, we prepare writers and peer respondents for their work by asking them to consider the rhetorical situation for each piece of writing they will compose. To consider, that is, the

- Mode
- Audience
- Purpose(s)
- (Writer’s) Situation

This rhetorical analysis, called MAPS, was first described by the late Bernie VanTal (then faculty in English Composition at the University of Michigan) and introduced to us by Patti Stock, the founding director of the MSU Writing Center. MAPS (lovingly referred to as “warmed-over Aristotle” by RCWP participants and

others in the Writing Center) invites authors and respondents to identify the MAPS for their writing projects and then to frame questions for their writing groups that relate to the ability of the current writing draft to address their MAPS.

Having identified the mode (or type) of writing they are composing, writers ask themselves (and their respondents) what they know about the characteristics of exemplary texts written in this mode and how such characteristics are or are not exhibited in their own draft. Writers also identify the needs and desires of their intended audiences and consider whether the current draft addresses these. They name the purpose(s) for their texts and attempt to determine whether the text in its current form is likely to achieve its purposes with the identified audience. Finally, participants consider their perceived situations as writers and determine any questions they might want to address to respondents that are situational in nature.

With chagrin, we realized that we never offered summer institute participants a similar opportunity before asking them to respond to each others' demonstrations: What were, in our minds, the defining characteristics of this demonstration response letter? Was the presenter the only audience for the demonstration response letters? Could the authors and others in the institute also be the audience? What authentic purposes could colleagues' responses serve for the presenter? What purposes might these responses serve for others? And what was or should be the writer's situation for this composing task?

LEARNING THE FIVE LENSES AND DEVELOPING A GROUP RESPONSE: THE MORNING OF THE FIRST DAY

With these questions in mind, we designed a protocol for developing responses to teaching demonstrations that addressed the mode, audience, purposes and situation for these response letters—a protocol that honored teachers' desires to participate in small-group professional conversations. (See appendix A for preparation for the CRTD prior to the summer institute.) Subsequent to their participation in each day's teaching demonstration, writing group members construct a CRTD by “re-viewing” the teaching demonstration five times—using five different “lenses” to describe and analyze the demonstration, its effect, and the manner in which such an approach to teaching is positioned in larger educational contexts and conversations. The participants work together to construct shared understandings of the teaching demonstrations in order to reach consensus¹ on language that expresses the group's understanding of

- the range of affective responses that participants experienced as teachers and as learners
- the elements of “best practice” embedded in the teaching demonstration

¹ Many (e.g., Habermas 1996) have written in recent years about the value of *not* reaching consensus—of identifying and preserving differences of opinion as a way of mitigating against the dominant discourse and thus maintaining hegemony. When groups cannot reach commonly agreed-upon language, we encourage them to share this with the presenter (e.g., “Although some of us felt that . . . , others thought . . .”). We continue to be concerned, however, that teachers, feeling real or imagined pressure to adopt a particular stance, might acquiesce, resulting in less diversity of opinion than individual letters might reflect.

- the relationship between the demonstration and the current educational context,² particularly as that context is expressed in documents such as the Michigan English Language Arts Standards and Benchmarks, the state standardized tests, and other state and national policies and legislation
- extensions and adaptations that would be necessary for the lesson to work as well with diverse groups of students in other contexts and/or that might enrich the demonstration in its current context
- questions that arose for participants as a result of the demonstration.

The first day of the summer institute, the co-director offers a teaching demonstration, and we introduce the CRTD protocol. After the demonstration, teachers remain in a large-group setting, but sit with other members of their writing groups. One person in each of these writing groups (the director, co-director, or one of two returning teacher-consultants who have been invited back to serve on the summer institute team) is already familiar with the CRTD protocol.

Three facets of the CRTD protocol are different the first time it is used: 1) we allow an hour and a half to two hours for responses (during the summer, responses normally require about forty-five minutes); 2) the entire group collaborates on a single response to the teaching demonstration (although participants have opportunities to confer within their writing groups); and 3) everyone can observe the work of the scribe as the group's response is emerging (courtesy of a laptop computer, LCD projector, and screen) and note how the scribe is working to reflect what are often competing, overlapping, or contradictory responses in this highly recursive writing process.

Lens 1: Describing Affect for Teachers and Learners

Perhaps Parker Palmer says it best: The first lens concerns the

question about teaching that goes unasked in our national dialogue—and often goes unasked even in the places where teachers are educated and employed. But it should be asked wherever good teaching is at stake, for it honors and challenges the teacher's heart, and it invites a deeper inquiry than our traditional questions do. . . . Who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form—or deform—the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world? How can educational institutions sustain and deepen the selfhood from which good teaching comes? (1998, 4)

Palmer reminds us that conversations about affect, or feelings, are often overlooked in conversations on teaching and learning. This lens puts the spotlight on seemingly invisible cues that give students important information. Does the teacher like us? Does the teacher respect us as learners? Does the teacher care about what she is teaching? Does the teacher work to involve us in the learning and build on what we already know and have experienced? All of these cues, often evidenced in nonverbal actions, contribute in important ways to the learning that goes on in the classroom, mostly by influencing students' desire and willingness to learn. As teachers, we are not always aware of these nonverbal messages. This lens helps bring the messages to

² Prior to 2004, this lens focused solely on the state English language arts content standards and benchmarks, which are closely reflected in the state standardized test. To reflect teacher interest and concern, particularly as reflected in the implications of the No Child Left Behind Act, we broadened this lens.

the surface and inform teachers' understanding of how their students may perceive them and their approaches.

The opening sentences of the CRTD typically identify one or more strengths teachers perceived in the demonstration. Respondents then move to the area below the first heading ("Affect") to name the feelings they experienced during the demonstration—first as the demonstrator's students, and then as the demonstrator's colleagues—and to tie these feelings to the events occurring at the time. We deliberately start with this section for two reasons: 1) participants new to the protocol usually feel confident naming their feelings, and 2) we believe that affect is too often overlooked as a critical variable in teaching successes and failures, and so it gratifies us to give it a preferential treatment.

In his teaching demonstration "Literature Shop Class: Hands-On, Visual, and Personal," 2004 RCWP participant Rick Cook brought us into conversation with Billy Collins' poem "Introduction to Poetry" (1988, 58), Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* (1990), Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1993), and his own grandfather's World War II-era, emotionally charged letter written to the family the day after his platoon visited a death camp. Rick's demonstration prompted us to think about the things we carry, literally and metaphorically, and whether we consider these as burdens or assets. He invited us to consider not only our personal baggage, but also the ways in which our perceptions of these things we carry influence our personal stake in major national and international events. Many of us cried as we considered how we have been shaped and how we have shaped ourselves in response to our lived experiences. We imagine that if asked today, those who were in that summer's institute could readily say what they discovered about themselves that day and how it has influenced their thinking since then.

Participants expressed strong responses to Rick and his teaching, which attempts, through a range of genres and representations of lived experiences, to give students opportunities to contrast these different narratives and thus generatively complicate their understanding of war. In the collaborative letters that writing groups developed, they noted that they felt drawn in, trusted, safe, inspired, and invited, and had a "sense of ownership of the lesson." One group of respondents noted, for instance,

Your passion for this subject [war and "war wounds"] was palpable in this room. The rate at which you spoke and walked—the sense of engagement and urgency you projected were contagious. We felt our own hearts race, our pulses quicken, our breathing get faster and shallower. We sat on the edge of our seats. You helped us become passionate about your topic—identifying our own wars and war wounds and the ways these influence our perception of external wars.

In an era in which policymakers require teachers to focus on "demanding" more of students, this focus on heightening student engagement through affect is an oasis. Not all students respond to teachers who genuinely care for and about them, but for many students, it is an aphrodisiac that leads to a lifelong love of learning.

Lens 2: Articulating Best Practice

Although participants may find it easy to articulate the genesis for affect, they find it far more challenging to identify language that clearly articulates what they consider elements of “best practice.” We describe best practices as those English language arts methods, materials, approaches, and contexts that positively affect learning and productively address problems generally acknowledged by those in the discipline to be at once fundamental and profound. Although we agree in principle with Schon’s assertions about the inherent value of reflection (as described in his 1987 text *Educating the Reflective Practitioner*), in the current political climate it no longer seems sufficient for teachers to “know in their guts” that particular approaches to teaching and learning are more apt to be successful than others. Teachers today need ready access to clear, concise, compelling explanations for why they must be allowed to continue to develop context- and child-specific approaches and materials for teaching the English language arts and other, newer literacies.

In the summer institute, during our whole-group CRTD practice session and again later in our various writing group sessions, we explain that when teacher-participants are attempting to identify best practices, they might use these two questions as a litmus test to determine whether they are focused on a practice that is specific to this lesson or on a generative approach to teaching writing:

1. Might this practice apply to many teaching demonstrations (e.g., “engages students in researching their own questions,” “begins, but does not end, with the students’ own lived experiences”)?
2. Is this practice likely to enhance the literacy learning of a highly diverse group of learners (e.g., “encourages students to identify in what contexts various language choices might be most effective,” “literature choices include widely varying community and family structures and values”)?

If teachers cannot initially name any best practices, those of us who have constructed these responses in the past prime the pump by highlighting various aspects of the teaching demonstration and naming attributes we have come to believe represent “promising practices.” (Having each taught more than thirty years and experienced fairly large shifts in our own professional understanding, we tend to be a little more circumspect about declaring these “best” practices and instead suggest, for now, that they seem highly productive.) We have also, in the past, copied and distributed Zemelman, Daniels, and Hyde’s chart of best practices in the English language arts provided in their book by the same name (1998, 8).

As an example, in response to the teaching demonstration by Rick Cook that we referenced in the previous section, the participants made the following observations:

- The theme “being told is the opposite of finding out” was illustrated throughout the session. At each point, we were helped to make our own discoveries, to find our own “truths.”

- We did not have to guess about your philosophical beliefs and how they influence your teaching. From the start, you made your values and beliefs transparent to us and helped us learn to discern these in other settings with your “invisible tricks” methodology.
- Your lesson addressed several of Gardner’s multiple intelligences. You made effective use of
 - visual images (the slides)
 - kinesthetic engagement (hiding the pencils)
 - oral language (small group discussions)
 - writing (our own pieces).
- Your modeling was effective, particularly when demonstrating
 - note-taking on the poem you shared
 - writing your own poem
 - finding samples from other authors.
- You made excellent selections of highly diverse texts/authors.
- You made connections from text to self (“I Carry” to own interpretations).
- You made connections from text to world (“I Carry” to more global interpretations).
- You made connections from text to text (connecting your grandfather’s letter about his war experiences to *Maus*, for example).

Lens 3: The Michigan Language Arts Standards and Benchmarks

As Tom Fox notes in *Defending Access: A Critique of Standards in Higher Education*,

The working contexts of many teachers do not support a collective and thoughtful examination of standards. Instead, teachers often feel unsupported and see standards as another threat to their autonomy. It would be easy for an administrator or a school board to turn the standards into a remedial tool and threaten teachers with compliance. (1999, 9)

We imagined that we might address Fox’s concerns by using as another lens the Michigan content standards and benchmarks for English language found in the Michigan Department of Education’s (1996) *Michigan Curriculum Frameworks* (which bears a striking resemblance to the standards developed by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English). Many excellent teachers with whom we worked in the mid to late nineties had limited knowledge of the standards or the state standardized test (field tested in 1996 and implemented in 1997). Many RCWP teachers were introduced to these documents during their summer institute experience.

To scaffold the professional conversations pertaining to the third lens, we provide participants with the Michigan standards and benchmarks and released items from the Michigan English Language Arts standardized tests. Today, many teachers are

quite familiar with the standards and standardized tests, and, although we still include copies in their notebooks, we also include a range of other legislative and policy documents—ranging from the grade level equivalency standards and “Michigan, Yes!” (Michigan standards for school accreditation) to excerpts from *No Child Left Behind*. Our goal is to create an occasion for conversations about the specific ways in which teachers’ current approaches to teaching do or do not address the concerns that are the focus of these legislative and policy documents.

Once again, we draw an example from the responses to Rick Cook’s demonstration. One of the writing groups noted the following relationship between Rick’s work and the broader educational context:

To make AYP [Annual Yearly Progress], our students must show growth on the MEAP [Michigan Educational Assessment Program standardized tests]. Particularly problematic for schools is the portion of the social studies test that asks students to read across and synthesize a variety of texts/genres and then create and defend a relevant argument (making what have been identified as “Core Democratic Values” part of that argument). In addition to getting low social studies test scores, many schools struggle to keep their writing scores going up [or fail to make AYP]. This demonstration is an excellent example of an approach that should help in both instances. Students are asked to read across a wide range of texts related to war (letters, excerpts from novels, poetry, comic novels, song lyrics, etc.), develop a thesis for an original poem, and then use evidence from the sources to support that creative work. The focus on poetry leads students to a closer examination of the language they use to express their thoughts, with particular attention paid to economy and symbolic language (metaphor) than they might if asked to write a more traditional persuasive essay. In addition, the sheer volume of writing you ask your students to develop (in a variety of forms) and revise after feedback should help them to score well on the tests. We found, in particular, that your demonstration was effective in addressing these content standards/benchmarks:

- CS 5, B 3: Analyze how the tensions among characters, communities, themes, and issues in literature and other texts reflect the substance of the human experience. (p.13)
- CS 8, B 4: Identify and use aspects of the craft of the speaker, writer, and illustrator to formulate and express their ideas artistically. Examples include imagery, irony, multiple points of view, complex dialogue, aesthetics, and persuasive techniques. (p.17)
- CS 9, B1: Analyze and reflect on universal themes and substantive issues from oral, visual, and written texts. Examples include human interaction with the environment, conflict and change, relationships with others, and self-discovery. (p.18)

When we developed the CRTD, we did not anticipate benefits it might have for our project as a professional development provider. Since implementing the protocol in 1995, we have tracked the most to least often addressed Michigan English Language Arts Content Standards (CS) in teachers’ demonstrations. Those most often addressed are CS 3, *Meaning and Communication in Context* (“All students will focus on meaning and communication as they listen, speak, view, read, and write in personal, social, occupational, and civic contexts”) and CS 6, *Voice* (“All students will learn to communicate information accurately and effectively and demonstrate

their expressive abilities by creating oral, written, and visual texts that enlighten and engage an audience”). By contrast, the least often addressed standards are CS 11, *Inquiry and Research* (“All students will define and investigate important issues and problems using a variety of resources, including technology, to explore and create texts”) and CS 1, *Meaning and Communication–Reading* (“All students will read and comprehend general and technical material”).³

We had not previously thought to track such data, and doing so has resulted in new avenues for inquiry: Since we readily acknowledge the importance of helping students to become proficient researchers and readers of general and technical material, how can we support teacher demonstrations that address these underrepresented areas? Does the summer institute more readily accommodate teaching demonstrations aimed at a certain subset of our state standards? If so, which ones and how? How might we (and how should we) address these underrepresented standards through the returning teacher-consultant demonstrations and/or the RCWP continuity program?

Despite the generative ways that including the standards as a lens has allowed us to analyze the opportunities participants find (or don’t find) in the summer institute, this lens continues to raise concerns for us as well. Considering the standards out of context—without examining the ways in which they are driving curriculum development, teaching, teacher licensure, student assessment, and standardized testing—suggests a neutrality and determinism we want to resist. We have managed this to a small extent by broadening the frame and making the standards only one of several policy documents that are played against the teaching demonstrations, but we also continue to look for texts such as Tom Fox’s (1999) or Susan Ohanian’s *One Size Fits Few* (1999) to make these standards and policies explicit foci for critical professional conversations.

Lens 4: Extensions and Adaptations

The fourth lens encourages participants to identify the “core” of a teaching demonstration. Teachers analyze the appropriateness of the approach for the students with whom they work most closely, including students from varying racial and ethnic groups, from varying grade levels and disciplines, from less- and more-well-financed schools, and so forth. Having imagined how this approach might work with their own students, the teachers are encouraged to identify adaptations and extensions that would allow this approach to work as generatively as possible in alternative settings and/or for longer durations. Teachers enjoy imagining where this episode of teaching might lead, suggesting activities and outcomes that build on or go beyond the ideas or concepts addressed in it. Teachers have an amazing repertoire of practices and ready recall of texts in a wide range of genres and on an equally wide range of subjects, and they seem to enjoy this opportunity to make good use of these capacities to coconstruct alternative curricula, methods, and materials.

³ For a complete version of the Michigan English Language Arts Standards, see this website: http://www.michigan.gov/documents/MichiganCurriculumFramework_8172_7.pdf.

In response to Rick’s demonstration—which examined war through various genres and representations of individuals’ lived experiences both to study the texts and to examine the influence of genre on interpretation—participants offered these extensions or adaptations:

- Extend the study of *Maus* beyond war to genocide, intergenerational communication struggles, current world affairs.
- Invite colleagues to explore the possibilities for developing interdisciplinary units of study (using *Maus* as an example of ways to combine history, English, geography, social studies, and other subjects).
- Invite students to interview family members, neighbors, and others, regarding their memories of World War II.
- Invite students to use storyboarding as a prewriting technique.
- Invite students to do their own graphic autobiographies (though narrower in focus and shorter than *Maus*).
- Invite students to identify icons in *Maus* and then keep a list of icons they see during the day. Discuss the role of icons in American culture.
- Invite students to create a piece of writing with animal imagery that, like *Maus* and *Animal Farm*, gives animals human characteristics and also uses them symbolically.

Lens 5: Questions Arisen

While we were developing this monograph, we invited teachers to reflect, mid-institute, on their experiences developing and receiving the type of feedback the CRTD process invites. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive. About half of the participants noted that the CRTD letters were one of the few occasions in their teaching careers in which colleagues focused on identifying what was “right” about their teaching. The other half, after noting the benefits of giving and receiving these close readings of approaches to teaching, asked for a section that explicitly invited them to share with any presenter the reservations that they had about any aspect of the presentation. In an attempt to avoid inviting didactic responses (“Here’s what you should have done . . .”), and in recognition of those teachers who expressed appreciation for the positive tone of the letters, we now invite teachers to raise questions that they have regarding the teaching demonstration by using “I” or “we,” referencing teaching as a shared professional endeavor, and shaping the comment as a question (“How can we keep student attention if we need to lecture for more than fifteen minutes?” “How can I truly accept the premise that often ‘less is more?’”). Such framing raises these issues as challenges to the profession, not challenges to a single teacher.

Questions addressed to Rick after his presentation included these:

- How do we assess students’ personal writing?
- What resistance might we anticipate from the community over using a “comic

book” in class? (Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* has a comic-book-like style.) How might we best respond to such reactions?

- When one lesson requires a substantial portion of a marking period, how do we judge that it is worthy of that much attention?
- How do we make conversations about race/ethnicity and religion comfortable and meaningful for all of our students?
- How do we help students develop the prior knowledge that scaffolds involvement in a unit that deals with events from a time period and culture very different from their own?

Organic Revisions

The CRTD protocol is not static; it continues to grow and evolve organically, as the teachers who participate in the project feel that it must in order to have the conversations they feel are necessary. For instance, as in other NWP sites, issues of equity and social justice remain a primary concern in RCWP. Originally, “Other Considerations” was the lens we thought we would use to register their concerns on equity issues. We found, however, that participants struggled to write anything in this section; perhaps it was so broad that it seemed oblique. Instead, teachers created the lens “Extensions and Adaptations” to register their concerns. If a particular writing idea or piece of literature or activity wouldn’t work in their district for social, economic, or ethnic reasons, participants would use this category to suggest ways of “leveling the playing field” (by suggesting books, ideas, or activities that would work in their district) even while decrying the necessity of doing so. Thus, the lens of “Other Considerations” was retitled. After eliminating “Other Considerations,” we later added a “Questions Arisen” lens because we have found a need to express ideas that simply can’t be neatly categorized into other lenses.

DAY TWO: SYNTHESIZING MULTIPLE RESPONSES AND DEVELOPING RESPONSES IN WRITING GROUPS

Collaboratively developing a whole-group response to the co-director’s teaching demonstration on the first day of the institute allows us to answer questions about the CRTD protocol and the responses it invites. This sets a base for the second day, when we introduce the work of reading/research groups and writing groups and discuss how the CRTD protocol affects the work of these groups. Beginning with the very first teaching demonstration, presented that day, participants will develop collective responses in their writing groups, so we spend up to an hour before that answering questions that revisit the rationale and process for the protocol.

We begin by discussing the multiple, overlapping audiences and purposes for the collaboratively composed letters. We identify four audiences and occasions for which these responses are apt to be useful: 1) for presenters as they reflect on their demonstrations, analyzing and synthesizing writing group responses; 2) for the presenter

and his or her coach as they reflect together on the demonstration and group responses to the demonstration; 3) for groups of respondents attempting to articulate noteworthy attributes of the teaching demonstration and their individual responses to it, including their attempts to contextualize it by imagining the approach in use with their own students and in their own settings; and 4) for all summer institute participants, who take away a publication in which presenters have described their demonstrations and synthesized the groups' responses. Descriptions of teaching demonstrations and syntheses of demonstration responses are published as *The Little Book of Promising Practices*, which is distributed at the summer institute's closing dinner along with an anthology of participants' writing. (See appendix B for a sample teacher entry from *The Little Book of Promising Practices*.)

Readers who have participated in summer institutes know how challenging it is to publish just the anthology by the institute's end; tackling a second publication works only if its development, collection, editing, and collation are shared, relatively effortless endeavors. With this in mind, to prepare participants for the development of their contributions to this publication, the *Promising Practices* editor (formerly Diana; since her retirement, Mitch Nobis, another co-director) uses an LCD projector to review with them a template that is available on all of the Writing Center's networked computers and on a disk in their project notebooks. The template serves as a combined writing prompt and style sheet; in other words, the headings clearly identify the document's parts—a brief summary of the demonstration and a distillation of the contents of the four writing groups' letters, using the lens titles to organize this section. The template also serves as a style sheet by using placeholders in order to establish the font type, size, and style for each section; the location of the title, author, and section headings; and the margins. The placeholders also function to establish verb tense and use of verbal phrases with bullets.

The editor explains that while writing groups are meeting to develop their CRTD responses, the presenter opens the template on a computer, writes the description of the teaching demonstration, and saves it as a first draft. At the conclusion of the CRTD session, writing groups are asked to print two copies of their responses—the presenter and editor each receive one, and these serve as backups in case of computer snafus. Each group also saves a digital copy in the RCWP folder in “Global Shared,” a partition on the Writing Center's server that allows RCWP summer institute participants to open their files from any computer in the Writing Center. (Those who wish to try the protocol without access to networked computers can simply ask participants to email copies of their responses to the editor and presenter.) The editor explains that the presenter will benefit from having these responses in digital file form to enable initial cutting and pasting of each group's response to each of the five lenses. Finally, the editor shares, in turn, four writing groups' responses to a previous teaching demonstration and the presenter's demonstration description and synthesis of those responses.

We then launch into the second summer institute teaching demonstration (usually offered by a returning teacher-consultant), and, at its conclusion, meet in our writ-

ing groups. The writing group members who have experience developing these responses lead the way this first time, claiming an area of the room for their group to convene (“Group 3 has the snack area.” “Group 1 has the conference room!”), and encouraging members to grab chairs and congregate around a computer or a laptop. The more experienced members also serve as their group’s scribe on the first day. Groups generally rotate the keyboarding responsibility, although practices vary from group to group.

We have found that many RCWP teachers have never participated in a collaborative writing project effort,⁴ that involves the coconstruction of the entire text (although most teachers can recall writing in groups in which the writing task was simply divided between group members). With that initial lack of experience in mind, one can readily understand why some are reluctant to serve as scribe. The scribe is at the epicenter of a process that is like a human earthquake—often having to deal with overlapping dialogue, “conversation stoppers” (for example, “Well, I think that is ridiculous!”), conversation monopolizers, and unclear references (“Move *that!* Move *that!*”). Identifying the best methods for preparing scribes to both facilitate and record group members’ responses remains a challenge, and we invite participant groups to study it with us. Participants have reported to us that the “mirroring” language they adopt while serving as scribe-language such as “Do I understand you to be saying that . . . ,” “I think I hear you suggesting that . . . ,” “Does this text adequately reflect what you’re suggesting?”—has served them well not only in other professional setting but in personal interactions as well.

Group members usually begin by sharing aloud observations and reactions to the teaching demonstration before beginning to collaboratively draft the letter. The process that groups follow after that becomes more clearly defined over time as each group gels and as participants become more familiar with this process. Some groups work through the lenses one at a time; others jump back and forth as thoughts occur to participants. Some groups find a theme in the demonstration and construct their comments around that theme, often making the letters interesting and humorous through their use of various wordplays. (See an example of a group letter on page 19.)

Often someone in the group begins the writing process by suggesting an opening sentence, and others offer modifications through proposed additions, deletions, or substitutions. Although the members of the group use the lenses as a way of focusing these professional conversations, they aren’t constrained by them. Sometimes these important asides are issue-driven; the demonstration, for instance, will touch on assessment issues, and group members will share their struggles or ideological stances on assessment. Other times the diversion is a result of the success they experienced as writers during the demonstration; members share with one another excerpts from the writing they did in response to the writing invitations embedded in the demonstration.

⁴ For more information on collaborative writing, see, for instance, Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, *Singular Tests, Plural Authors. Perspectives on Collaborative Writing* (1990) and Sally Barr-Reagan, Thomas Fox, and David Bleich (eds), *Writing With: New Directions in Collaborative Teaching, Learning and Research* (1994).

Across these last ten years, we have developed a strong appreciation for these professional conversations as authentic professional development. We have some ideas about why the discussions play out as they do from theorists of discourse, and wish to thank, in particular, Bob Fecho, Peg Graham, and Sally Hudson-Ross, whose essay in *English Education*, “Appreciating the Wobble: Teacher Research, Professional Development, and Figured Worlds” (2005), brought to our attention the theoretical framework for “teacher wobble” as a result of movement between “figured worlds.”

CRTD and “Figured Worlds”

Across our country, preservice teachers participate in discourse groups at their universities and in their field-based experiences, and, despite national and state standards, these groups embrace a relatively wide range of beliefs regarding effective theories and pedagogies. When they enter their first professional placement, teachers join others in new communities of practice. There, in school- and district-based discourse (Gee 1990) and interpretive (Fish 1980) communities, they construct an identity of what it means to be a “teacher,” and who, in particular, they are as teachers. These personal and professional identities are constructed within school worlds and also in response to them. Each of the RCWP teachers, then, brings to the summer institute and to these CRTD writing group meetings an individual construction of the teaching profession—what Holland and others (1998) would refer to as a “figured world”—and of his or her individual position within that world.

The CRTD acts to disrupt that world, but to disrupt it in what we hope is a generative way. In the process of defining and redefining for themselves and their peers their beliefs about quality teaching (best practice), the ends of education (affect and standards), and the relationship between teaching as art and teaching as science (extensions and adaptations), teachers are suddenly without the equilibrium many of them had in their previously authored worlds. In those worlds, they had already arrived at consensus with their colleagues, or they had identified conflicts and chosen either to close their classroom doors or to become resident rabble-rousers.

At the Red Cedar Writing Project, teachers suddenly find themselves in a new world that each summer is in the process of being “con-figured.” That is, to use both current and archaic definitions for the prefix *con*, a world in which they join *with others in a careful and attentive study*; a study that takes the form of “serious play” (Vygotsky 1967, 5–18). The playful professional conversations that use a close reflective and reflexive study of an episode of teaching as their focus help individual teachers in this new discourse and interpretive community recompose an identity as “teacher” and “self as teacher.” It is this to which we think so many National Writing Project teachers refer when using evangelical language to assert that through their involvement in the summer institute, they have been “born again” as teachers.

At the summer institute, in this new world, self-identification is achieved not only through comparison but also through contrast.⁵ Teachers suddenly find that some practices revered at their schools (rubrics, for instance) are disdained at others (“too limiting; too formulaic”). They find that issues they see as fundamental to good language arts instruction (social justice, for instance) aren’t even on the radars of other colleagues (“it belongs in social studies”). They find that interpersonal relationships between colleagues are viewed as essential in some locations (“we go out every Friday night”) and superfluous in others (“I see my colleagues at staff meetings”).

HOW THE CRTD PROTOCOL FITS INTO THE SUMMER INSTITUTE

Before we began using the CRTD protocol, we allowed the same fifteen-minute period for the development of these collaborative letters that we had allotted for individual response letters. Since individual letters had taken participants only five to ten minutes to develop, we thought this same amount of time would be sufficient for a collaborative letter. We were wrong. We first increased the time to thirty minutes, but eventually landed on forty-five-minute periods (occasionally more) because of the intensity of the discussions.

Although we now spend forty-five minutes a day on the CRTD process, we do not feel that we have had to shortchange the time we have traditionally allowed for reading/research groups, writing groups, or such summer institute community-building endeavors as log reports, writing time, or opportunities for informal networking. We begin each day with a luxurious half-hour devoted to writing time and breakfast. Because we limit the number of participants in each summer institute to the number of days in the institute, we complete the teaching demonstration and response before breaking for lunch. Since the CRTD periods are scheduled for the forty-five minutes before lunch break, groups engaged in conversation at the end of that time have the option to continue it over lunch—and this is becoming an increasingly common occurrence.

⁵ Some writing group members, understandably task oriented, have chastised group members whenever the talk moved beyond the five lenses—believing that such conversations were superfluous and “off track.” In those instances, the returning summer institute member reminds the group that although one invitation is to develop a response for the demonstrator, another is to engage in professional conversations that may well lead them beyond the demonstration under consideration. In more recent years, we’ve integrated this into our explanation of the protocol on the first day of the institute, illustrating our claim that the group writing talk and incumbent “asides” often provide some of the richest moments for professional development in the project, with references to heated debates about such issues as assessment and differential resourcing of schools, issues that grow out of responses to a particular demonstration.

Not every teacher participant sees the CRTD protocol as useful. Although these teachers have been few in number across these past ten years, we have had writing groups that simply saved previous letters and, having developed stock language—particularly on “best practice” and “affect”—offered only minor additions, deletions, and substitutions as they saw fit.

Invited to reflect on the CRTD protocol after their second week in the summer institute, the 2002 RCWP teacher-consultants recommended that group membership be rotated midinstitute. We did this in 2003 and found that it seemed to benefit everyone. At the halfway point in the institute, instead of developing responses in *writing* groups, we did so in *reading/research* groups, requiring group members to join new discourse and interpretive communities, and once again to negotiate shared meanings and values for words, phrases, and concepts such as “child-centered” and “constructivist.”

We worry that using lenses that we have named⁶ to analyze a single episode of teaching (albeit one that the demonstrator believes embodies principles essential to effective teaching) may seem formulaic, but we have found that RCWP teachers have deep respect for an opportunity not only to make both writing and the teaching of writing central in the summer institute, but to consider teaching and the writing it engenders from a variety of perspectives—perspectives that they have indicated to us are of consequence to them. Few teachers enter the institute having had the opportunity to conduct close analyses of their own or their colleagues’ teaching by positioning themselves as “participant-observer” researchers.

Stuart Selber also provides reassurance regarding the use of such a heuristic:

As opposed to algorithmic approaches, which are precisely defined and structured, heuristic approaches provide a suggestive framework that can help writers systematically probe the contingencies and dynamics of author-to-readers intention structures, including the rhetorical situation. Whereas algorithmic approaches set down fixed rules for organizing an argument, for instance, heuristic approaches help writers determine the most effective organizational pattern given the particulars and complexities of a specific communication situation. (2004, 172)

We have found that although the lenses, which continue to evolve each year, provide a starting place for these professional conversations, the conversations extend far beyond them, and we are reminded of Kuhn’s suggestion that this is the way a disciplinary knowledge is developed: Its members 1) engage in gradual elaborations, clarifications, and applications of their understandings and 2) develop an awareness of serious problems in the established ways of thinking about their work (1970, 23–34).

FROM GROUP RESPONSES TO PUBLICATION

As we described earlier, the collaborative letters have multiple audiences: the presenter, the coaches, the groups who compose them, and the summer institute group as a whole. After each group’s letter is composed, two copies are printed and given to the co-director or returning teacher-consultant who, in turn, makes sure the presenter gets a copy. The person who accepts responsibility for developing *The Little Book of Promising Practices* makes sure that all four or five letters (the total depends on the number of writing groups) are completed the day of the demonstration so that the presenter is ensured of a complete set and can begin composing his or her *Little Book of Promising Practices* entry in a timely fashion.

⁶ Taking heed of the cautionary notes of Zeichner and Liston (1990, 20: “We do not think it makes much sense to attempt to promote or assess reflective practice in general without establishing some clear priorities for the reflections”), we hoped that using the CRTD protocol after a teaching demonstration would become an occasion for teachers to

- retrieve relevant information from each teaching demonstration
- discover new concepts and theories regarding literacy teaching and learning by using the CRTD protocol to discover and order their responses
- interpret how the teaching demonstration relates to their own experience of the world
- analyze problematic data that surfaces in the act of developing CRTD-focused responses to the teaching demonstration and the demonstration itself
- combine that interpretation with the development of a proposal for how the world might be changed (derived from Young 1978).

The CRTD is a work in progress. We continue to examine ways we might invite teachers to develop their own organizational schemas (without shortchanging other goals for the summer institute) that support critical inquiries related to the close study of individual approaches to teaching writing and to move from these critical studies of teaching to professional action—to advocating for contexts and conditions that allow best practice teaching.

The presenters become the first audience for the letters. They read the letters to reflect on the effect their teaching decisions had on others and to think critically about alternative “teaching moves.” The second readers are the coaches. The CRTD process letters have become critical in the presenter and coach’s debriefing sessions. The coaches often invite the presenters to use the letters to identify surprises, concerns, lessons learned, and matters to celebrate that relate to their teaching practices.

The final audience is the entire summer institute cohort, who each see a synthesis of the letters accompanying a brief description of the demonstration in *The Little Book of Promising Practices*, distributed on the last day of the institute. (See appendix B for an example.)

An Example CRTD Letter

Although we feel the letters are a poor substitution for the critical conversations from which they are distilled, we would like to share a complete letter. Immediately after we implemented the CRTD protocol, we noticed that the character of the letters changed substantially. The letter below is one of four that Kristina Griffin, a teacher at Flushing (Michigan) High School received in response to her demonstration “Seeing the Trees in Spite of the Forest: Using Haiku to Teach Effective Language Choices and Revision.” Kristina has studied Japanese and has long admired haiku; she brought her passion for the genre, as well as her extensive knowledge about it, to her presentation.

Dear Kris:

Economy of words —

Sage advice from a

Lover of language

As Teachers and Learners

We appreciated your in-depth definition of haiku and the history behind it; moving beyond the 5-7-5 limitations gives us new ideas for how to teach this. Your bag of items heightened our curiosity, and we became engaged in the lesson quickly. This also allowed for an interesting mode of grouping. We appreciated knowing the distinction between Japanese and American haiku. You also gave an inspirational preface to writing the haiku, providing many ways to prompt our writing so we weren’t intimidated by the genre. Overall, we felt that you approached a sometimes-difficult subject with a fresh and innovative approach.

Elements of Best Practices

- You managed the discussion in a positive and affirming way, keeping the conversation lively and engaging while also giving directions/instruction.
- You offered choices that promoted student ownership and engagement.
- You used movement that facilitated student interest (individual, small group and whole class).
- You invited us to play with language through imagery and revision.

- You invited us to write from our own experience and perceptions.
- You wove in a clever use of props and objects to connect brainstorming, drafting, and the writing of the haiku.
- You guided our examination of the word choices that authors make and helped us to understand how and why revision occurs.
- You facilitated explorations of poetry that went beyond literary concepts such as similes and metaphors. For instance, you helped us note the effects of various juxtapositions of words and to note the variety of effects their placement engendered. You then helped us to see how word placement can affect meaning and feeling in other forms of writing.

Standards and Benchmarks

- HS 2.3: Plan, draft, revise, and edit their texts, and analyze and critique the texts of others in such areas as purpose, effectiveness, cohesion, and creativity.
- HS 3.7: Recognize and use varied innovative techniques to construct text, convey meaning, and express feelings to influence an audience. Examples include experimentation with time, order, stream of consciousness, and multiple points of view.
- HS 4.4: Demonstrate ways in which communication can be influenced through word usage. Examples include propaganda, irony, parody, and satire.

Extensions and Adaptations

- Regional dialect differences in word pronunciation would provide interesting interpretations of haiku in other parts of the country (Louisville in southern and northern dialect, for example).
- Have each group share one or more poems at the end of the lesson, if time allows.
- Use Japanese watercolor paintings to illustrate the ideas of the haiku; students could then paint images of their own haiku.
- Create a collection of haiku on a particular subject (e.g. “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” by Wallace Stevens).
- Create a collection of haiku via multimedia (PowerPoint, website, etc.).
- Invite administrators or parents to class in order to write haiku as well.

Questions Arisen

- At what developmental level do my students need to be in order to do this type of sophisticated thinking and writing?
- How do I grade my students’ work on this creative of an assignment?
- How much freedom do I allow my students in terms of content?

Economically yours,
TBS, PRW, JAS, and AAK

Kristina and her coach had opportunities to talk about which of the groups’ responses surprised her and which confirmed her own sense of the experience. None surprised her (this is often the case for presenters), but she was particularly gratified that she had managed to avoid intimidating participants, since the research she had read on haiku suggested that this is a common occurrence.

As is often the case, the best practices her colleagues cited extended Kris's own conception of the critical characteristics of her own lesson. Having these desirable characteristics named, presenters often begin to examine other lessons they offer for similar traits.

Offering extensions and adaptations is one way that respondents "co-own" the presentation—that is, they reimagine the work either to reach different objectives and/or different students (adaptations), or to retain the demonstration's focus but to extend it. Since summer institute demonstrations are often decontextualized—that is, they are taken out of longer units of study—participants often find these contributions useful.

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

We were looking for a way to enrich the letters that our summer institute participants developed in response to their colleagues' teaching demonstrations and, in so doing, to enrich the professional development experienced by both the letter writers and the recipients. We had teachers develop these responses in groups because we wanted them to use the opportunity to engage in professional conversations with their peers and because we understand language, including professional discourse, to be socially, politically, and culturally constructed.

Given the diverse situations in which RCWP teachers develop their primary discourses (in families, in communities) and secondary, professional discourses (in preservice teacher preparation programs and then in use in particular schools and districts), we felt that public, "problematized" professional conversations had the potential to disrupt taken-for-granted language used to describe learners, learning, learning situations, teachers, teaching, and communities in generic terms. Further, we hoped that matters of race, class, and culture would surface in these professional conversations as Michigan teachers examined episodes of teaching under such lenses as "best practice" and "the broader educational context."

Over the years, as teachers noted the growing disparity between their conceptions of best practices in writing theory and pedagogy and local, state, and federal mandates, we hoped that repeatedly engaging in a close and critical study of instances of teaching—particularly as these relate to individual children's situations, to broad policy mandates, and to critical differences in language used to describe and analyze teaching—might also prepare teachers for social action, advocating for equitable opportunity for all students, regardless of their race, first language, or socioeconomic class.

In many of these areas, the Collaborative Responses to Teaching Demonstrations process has proven useful for enough teachers, and enough of the time, that we continue to revise it, and it becomes an ever-more-generative source of authentic professional development for teachers.

In conclusion, we believe the Collaborative Response to Teaching Demonstrations has been a significant improvement over individually composed letters. The CRTD protocol has served as an effective heuristic not only for providing more useful feedback to presenters but also for making the language of response, our professional metadiscourse, a focus of critical inquiry. The information from the letters has provided us with a wealth of information about what teachers pay attention to and has thus helped us see what we must pay attention to in order to coconstruct meaningful, provocative professional experiences for our colleagues. We continue to implement, revise, and research the CRTD strategy. We hope this monograph will entice our National Writing Project colleagues to take what seems useful from our protocol; modify it to meet local needs, interests, and concerns; and share the results with us.

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APPENDIX A: PRIOR TO THE SUMMER INSTITUTE

Successful implementation of the Collaborative Responses to Teaching Demonstrations protocol rests on just a few steps taken prior to the summer institute. At the spring planning dinner, Red Cedar Writing Project participants receive and review their institute notebooks, which include sections that provide important information related to expectations for the teaching demonstrations. The notebook also has an appendix that contains a copy of the Michigan English Language Arts Standards and Benchmarks, as well as the frameworks for the state's three writing tests, all of which will be used during the CRTD process.

We are careful to note while reviewing the notebook that the inclusion of the Michigan English Language Arts Standards and Benchmarks and standardized test frameworks in their binders does not represent an endorsement of these documents. We explain that the documents are included because we believe that if we are to advocate for what each of us individually believes is best practice in the teaching of writing, it is important for us to be familiar with policy documents that are currently driving the course of curriculum and practice in the state. We note that while we will be reviewing the standards regularly in response to teaching demonstrations, participants will not need to memorize them; rather it will be enough to develop a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between these standards and our own theories, practices, and beliefs about effective teaching and student learning.

During the preinstitute planning dinner, which all participants attend, Janet hands out institute notebooks, and we review them together. At this point, she also provides the participants with a handout for her teaching demonstration and explains each of the sections. These include

Contentions: the beliefs and/or research that support the approach to teaching-writing being demonstrated

Related Reading: the published theories and/or research that support the approach being demonstrated

Process: the steps involved in the demonstration, including the supplies and/or equipment that are required

Samples: sample handouts and/or student responses.

She then offers her demonstration and answers any questions the participants have about this aspect of the summer institute.

By the end of our preinstitute planning dinner, teachers have reviewed general information about the writing project, have participated in a teaching demonstration, and have started a piece of writing. Owing to time constraints for this first meeting, we save the introduction of group responses to teaching demonstrations for the first day of the summer institute.

APPENDIX B: ONE TEACHER'S CONTRIBUTION TO *THE LITTLE BOOK OF PROMISING PRACTICES*

Seeing the Trees in Spite of the Forest: Using Haiku to Teach Effective Language Choices and Revision Presented by Kristina I. Griffin, Flushing High School, Flushing, Michigan

The Demonstration

I planned this demonstration hoping to model for my colleagues my desire to help students discover and use the power of language. Ralph Fletcher (1997) writes that “the judicious use of detail is the most important writing tool I have.” Certain poetic forms, especially haiku, reflect this philosophy. This is why I choose to use haiku writing to help my students practice the effective diction and revision choices that are important in all modes and genres of writing.

Haiku is accepted among my colleagues as an accessible format for getting students to experiment with poetry and writing in general. However, research shows that students in general are dissatisfied with having to read and write haiku in the classroom. Some say that no matter how hard they try, it “sounds corny.” Others complain that haiku doesn’t say anything meaningful. Most are actually intimidated by the need to say so much within such a small frame (Kolitsky and Tweedie 2002). I believe, however, that students are missing out because many teachers are not enlightened by the possibilities haiku offers us as writers and writing teachers, and this comes from a lack of real understanding about and appreciation for the genre. For this reason, I built into my lesson some information I hoped would surprise them about the nature and context of haiku poetry, past and present.

I began the lesson with honest observation of everyday objects. I did not introduce the haiku connection until later in hopes that their curiosity about my lesson would translate to curiosity about the ordinary objects [with which] I presented them. Then, the participants moved into putting their observations down in words. In small-group and whole-class discussions, we reflected on word choices and observational processes. As a group, we then experimented with revision, examining how diction can be manipulated to create specific effects and imply greater meanings. Next, I expressed my belief that haiku represents an “economy of words” that can be useful in all modes and genres of writing and also offers a chance to practice diction and revision. I polled the group to create a “recipe” of haiku on the board based on their prior knowledge. Then, in groups, they examined haiku samples and found that most haiku do not conform to their preconceptions. I shared with them the nature of haiku, debunking the 5-7-5 myth and guiding them to reexamine the haiku samples with this new information.

The participants moved to independent writing, with me offering suggestions for inspiration and observation through photo books, calendar pictures, outdoor walks, and much more. After some time, the participants returned to groups to share their haiku and assess each other’s use of diction and image choice. I encouraged participants to use the group discussions as prompts for revision. As a parting note, I suggested that participants explore Michael Kolitsky’s “A 3-D Haiku Experience” website (1999) as a potential multimedia extension of my lesson.

As Teachers and Learners

[Below Kristine Griffen draws on four letters from her colleagues to summarize the institute response to her teaching demonstration]

Your bag of items heightened our curiosity, and we became engaged quickly. You successfully tricked us into prewriting. We appreciated your in-depth definition of haiku and the history behind it; moving beyond the 5-7-5 limitations gives us new ideas for how to teach this. We also began to see how enlightening the experience could really be. Your confidence and knowledge of your subject matter made us feel like we were in good (professional) hands. Also, the visuals really helped a lot, especially the books for inspiration and experience. Overall, we felt that you approached a sometimes-difficult subject with a fresh and innovative approach.

Elements of Best Practice

- Included strongly designed anticipatory set.
- Appealed to multiple intelligences with hands-on observation.
- Invited students to write from their own experience and perceptions.
- Examined the word choices that authors make and how revision can occur
- Modeled revision with our first list of descriptive words and with your poem.
- Used scaffolding to develop our understanding of true haiku.
- Promoted use of several elements of the writing process in a nonlinear way.
- Clearly stated the expectations.
- Offered choices that promoted student ownership and engagement.
- Used props/objects to connect brainstorming, drafting, and writing of the haiku.
- Had students share conversation about writing then [share] their own writing and collaborate.

Michigan Curriculum Content Standards and Benchmarks

(CS = Content Standard; B = Benchmark)

CS 3, B 3: Plan, draft, revise, and edit their texts and analyze and critique the texts of others in such areas as purpose, effectiveness, cohesion, and creativity.

CS 4, B 4: Demonstrate ways in which communication can be influenced through word usage.

CS 8, B 4: Identify and use aspects of the craft of the speaker, writer, and illustrator to formulate and express their ideas artistically.

CS 12, B 3: Use literary history, tradition, theory, terminology, and other critical standards to develop and justify judgments about the craft and significance of oral, visual, and written texts.

Extensions and Adaptations

- Use the launching activity for other forms of descriptive writing and for distinguishing observation from interpretation.
- Offer the cinquain as an alternative.
- Condense another poem/piece of text into a haiku (integrate science, math, social studies).
- Offer a performance or group share opportunity (poetry slam, lunchroom coffeehouse) or compile a class publication.
- Take the students to websites you talked about.
- Invite a guest speaker.

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- Bring in Japanese food and write about it.
- Use Japanese watercolor paintings to illustrate the ideas of a haiku; have students paint images of their own haiku.
- Create a collection of haiku on a particular subject (e.g. “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” by Wallace Stevens).
- Invite administrators or parents to class in order to write haiku as well.
- Have students create T-shirts with a finished haiku each, and have students wear the shirts around school.

Questions Arisen

- When is the use of structure (5-7-5) useful?
- Why is such economy of language such a valuable tool, and how do I communicate this to the kids?
- How do I grade a haiku or other such creative assignments?
- How do I deal with people who will not revise? Or what if they don't need to revise?
- How do I make the lecture part more tangible to visual learners?
- At what developmental level do my students need to be in order to do this type of sophisticated thinking and writing?
- How much freedom do I allow my students in terms of content?

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Janet Swenson is director of the Red Cedar Writing Project and associate professor in the Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Culture at Michigan State University, where she also directs the MSU Writing Center. Janet is a member of the NWP Task Force and was formerly a member of the National Council of Teachers of English Executive Committee during her service as chair of the Conference on English Education (CEE). She currently serves as CEE's representative to the National Technology Coalition. Prior to her work at MSU, she taught in the Flint public schools for more than fifteen years, serving at Holmes Junior High School, Flint Central and Flint Northern High Schools, and the Genesee Area Skill Center (GASC) Technology Center.

Diana Mitchell, founding co-director of the Red Cedar Writing Project, earned her Ph.D. in English in 1992 while serving as a high school teacher in the Lansing (Michigan) public schools. Diana continued to teach in Lansing public schools until her retirement several years ago. During her career, she served as chair of the Women in Literacy and Life Assembly (WILLA) and the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents (ALAN) of the National Council of Teachers of English. Diana is the author of *Children's Literature: An Invitation to the World* and coauthor of *Exploring and Teaching the English Language Arts* with Stephen Tchudi and of *Both Art and Craft: Teaching Ideas that Spark Learning* with Leila Christenbury.

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