Shifting focus: a journey from a strict product approach to process writing.

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Abstract

The writing workshop is an approach to teaching writing that focuses on the entire process of synthesis instead of just on the final text product. In this paper we discuss the collaboration between a classroom teacher and a college professor who worked together toward a first implementation of the writing workshop in a school context where a strict, highly prescriptive product approach was firmly in place. This endeavor was based on a teacher inquiry model that allowed for context-specificity and continuous collaborative theoretical study, instructional planning and trouble-shooting. The study highlights some significant directions undertaken through this endeavor, including an evolving conference procedure, a focus on communicative situations and the study of genres, an integrated approach to literacy, and the explicit instruction in implementing authoring tools.

Introduction

Traditionally, writing is perceived as a school-based activity which involves all students writing on the same topic during one particular class session. In such cases, topics are invariably delineated by teacher-determined prompts, and texts are begun and finished as single drafts. At the end of the writing session the students turn in their texts, which are then corrected and graded by their teacher. Even when teacher feedback to student texts is more than a mere grade, it usually takes the form of corrections of writing mechanics or of standardly generic comments that focus on what the student did wrong. The marked texts are then returned to the students who -at best- casually glance at the teacher's notes and file the text away without a second thought.

Such practices treat writing as a product, relegate student-created texts to otherwise irrelevant, gradable exercises and utterly disregard the process through which a written text is developed. Through the "writing-as-product" paradigm the "how-tos" of writing, if at all addressed, are reduced to highly formulaic prescriptions (e.g. the five-paragraph essay) or to overly specific instructions on how to write one particular text.

In this paper we discuss the collaboration between a classroom teacher who taught in this way within a system that expected her to teach exactly in this way but wondered how it could be otherwise, and a university professor whose help she enlisted.

Literature Review

Donald Graves (1983) begins his classic book *Writing: Teachers & Children at Work* with the following:

Children want to write. They want to write the first day they attend school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils… anything that makes a mark. The child's marks say, "I am."

"No, you aren't," say most school approaches to the teaching of writing. (3)

As the quote from Graves indicates, traditional approaches to teaching writing can turn off children from using writing as a useful, meaningful tool of expression. As a result, such practices often lead children to produce flat, unimaginative texts and to consider writing a boring, unpleasant task (Fu & Townsend, 1999).

The writing workshop has been proposed as a response to traditional product-focused approaches to teaching writing. Through this method, the focus is shifted from the end-text produced and is instead spread to the whole *process* of crafting a written text: from the initial "swirl" of memories, feelings or ideas that inspire a text through the "long line of reductions" that lead to what finds its way on the page (Graves, 1983, p. 219).

The writing workshop affords students consistent, frequent and extensive opportunities to work on their texts (Block, 2001; Calkins, 1994). In the writing workshop, writing is viewed as an effort for personal expression and communication, and therefore, many of the strategies it involves are geared toward dealing with the students as authors; establishing a sense of personal investment (Avery, 2002) and ownership over one's writing (Five, 1999; Price, 1998); and building awareness of an audience beyond the teacher/grader (Fox, 2001; Fu & Townsend, 1999). A vital component of this endeavor is constructing legitimate spaces for students' passions and interests by allowing them choice as to the topic and/or the genre of their texts (Calkins, 1994; Cambourne, 1988; Wells, 1986).

In the writing workshop, students are encouraged to work through various drafts before arriving at a text they consider finished. Importantly, the reviewing process is not limited to the notion of proofreading prevalent in traditional approaches. Rather, the workshop provides students with the space and the tools to engage in multiple reexaminations of their texts that may even lead to major overhauls (Murray, 1982; Tompkins, 2000). As students draft and re-draft their texts, they can utilize the help of their teacher and classmates through revision-and-editing conferences (Avery, 2002; Calkins, 1994).

Teachers scaffold their students' development as writers through various types of instructional activities such as (a) mini lessons where writing techniques, genre characteristics and procedural workshop issues are addressed; and (b) guided writing sessions, during which the teacher works with small groups of children on their specific writerly needs (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1983). This should dispel common misconceptions that portray the writing workshop as an instruction-free zone. The vitally instructive nature of the approach holds even more true of contemporary writing workshop practices, where the systematic study of authoring techniques, grammatical phenomena and stylistic choices focuses on how language elements are woven together to create texts that successfully correspond to communicative needs.

The Problem

Maria, one of the authors of this paper, is a teacher in a suburban school in a mid-size city in Cyprus. Maria's pedagogical credentials and her rich, 15-year teaching experience gave her a certain degree of confidence in her expertise and her teaching

ability. She did, however, experience a sense of apprehension and frustration when considering her teaching of writing and the texts produced by her students.

In the years prior to the time this paper addresses, Maria taught writing following practices commonly used in Greek Cypriot (GC) schools. Traditionally, in GC elementary classrooms writing is understood as a component of language arts instruction that takes place rather infrequently. Even though short texts in list or paragraph formats are written by students daily, the teaching and writing of complete, connected texts is reserved for specific sessions that are scheduled once every three or four weeks.

Invariably, the texts produced during these sessions are written on basal or teacher-provided prompts which are often thematically related to a text the class had recently worked on during reading. In a practice that evolved and got solidified over the past decade, writing instruction is often conducted in two-session blocks (henceforth *Prewriting & Writing Block approach)*. The first of the two sessions is used for pre-writing activities. Though different teachers shape these prewriting sessions in different ways, the norm seems to involve an introduction of the prompt, a brainstorming over the topic, and the creation of an outline for the text to be written. The outline is often exceedingly detailed, offering not only paragraph themes but also within-paragraph content as well as vocabulary recommendations. In some cases, it is so comprehensive that, during writing time, students have nothing more to do but engage in a fill-in-the-gaps exercise. We believe that, in many ways, this immensely leading approach is a result of recent misconceptions regarding the text-centered or "communicative" approach, which will be discussed later in this paper; guided writing supposedly helps children focus on generic 'textual' features ensuring textual coherence such as 'who', 'what',

'where', 'when', 'why' – a classic misconception of the 7 rhetorical questions pertaining to generic text construction.

On the day following the prewriting session, students are asked to work individually during an 80-minute period to write a text responding to the prompt. Writing directly in their "official" notebooks, the students use the outline developed in the prewriting session to write their text in a single draft. Though students are often allowed to ask the teacher for help during this process, they are discouraged from talking to each other. Toward the end of the writing session, students are urged to finish their text and to go over it checking for grammar and spelling errors. At the conclusion of the session, the students turn in their notebooks for grading.

Though her students' writing was of fairly similar quality to the texts written by other colleagues' students, Maria was dissatisfied both with her teaching of writing and with her students' writing skills. When looking over her students' texts, she was disillusioned by the lack of originality, creativity or true emotion. Though her better writers managed to utilize the class-created outline to craft unique and cohesive texts, many of her students' texts were disinterested and uninteresting. Several students remained so close to the outline's mold that their texts ended up being extremely similar to each other's. At the same time, though she tried to assign writing prompts her students would find engaging, she found that most considered writing an unpleasant chore and that only a handful of students became truly involved in the activity and the topic.

Most importantly, however, Maria came to seriously doubt the conventional wisdom that guided the Prewriting & Writing Block approach. The commonly-articulated rationale behind the very closely guided writing which the approach called for

was that, once students had numerous opportunities to jointly brainstorm about topics, create solid outlines, and use them to write well-organized, well-developed texts, they would internalize these skills and become able to use them when writing independently. Maria's experience far from verified this claim. Whenever she tried to wean her students from the substantially articulated scaffold of the prewriting session, she found both her students and herself flailing: With the exception of a handful of children, less detailed outlines led to shorter, less developed texts, characterized by feeble content and mundane vocabulary. No prewriting support produced even more worrisome results.

Maria was frustrated. She felt that the overly detailed scaffold of the accepted approach was depriving her students of the opportunity to think about their writing and to express their own ideas, and she suspected that it had no real transfer into their future writing endeavors. Even worse, she feared that rather than helping her students develop into capable, independent writers, the approach acted as an overly restrictive cast: it provided artificial support for a limited time but, once removed, it left students weak and in need of intensive physical therapy. And she did not know how to provide that service.

A conversation with Xenia, the other author of the paper, who at the time was teaching language methods courses for the education department of a nearby university, led to conceiving and crafting the collaborative project described in the pages that follow.

Methods

Participants

The two authors of this paper were a college professor of language and literacy methods (Xenia) and a fourth-grade teacher (Maria) who came together in an action-

research type of project that sought to implement thoughtfully and methodically for the first time a writing workshop in a GC elementary classroom. The student-participants were the class of students Maria taught during the school year described in this paper. The class was made up of 13 girls and 12 boys all of whom lived in the primarily middle-class, suburban area serviced by the school.

Data Collection

      As part of this project, Maria and Xenia worked together regularly for a twelve-moth period (approximately twice a month). Each interaction was shaped by current needs and involved a combination of discussions of theoretical/methodological issues, debriefings regarding recent classroom activities and planning of future activities. The data for this paper includes our records of those communications, the instructional materials we created, and all the texts produced through the year by Maria's students.

Eliciting Another's Help

      The collaboration commenced in the summer months prior to the start of the academic year with a series of meetings where Xenia and Maria talked about teaching literacy, with a focus on writing instruction. Maria assumed the role of an active inquirer who sought to "elicit another's help in going beyond [her] own present understanding" (Lindfors, 1999, 5). In many ways, Maria set the tone of those conversations: she delineated her challenges and wonderings, she posed topics for exploration, she commented on recommendations, and took an active role in designing and revising instructional plans. Conversely, by accepting Maria's invitation to partake in her inquiry,

Xenia steered away from hijacking the conversations or from attempting to lecture Maria about good teaching. Instead, she endeavored to (a) share information about the writing workshop as well as communicative competence and its relationship to text production and comprehension, (b) listen and respond to Maria's questions and objections, (c) recommend relevant readings, (d) understand the context within which Maria and her students worked and (e) collaborate with Maria in developing instructional practices appropriate for that context.

The early meetings mainly addressed theoretical and methodological issues regarding Maria's concerns on the limitations of her current practices and the potential of the alternative practices Xenia proposed. At the commencement of the new school year, the topics became progressively more practice-oriented, focusing on both long-term instructional planning as well as on the development of specific instructional activities. Even then, however, issues of theory always remained part of the conversations, as practical application queries often led back to the theoretical literature.

One of the significant practical hurdles we had to overcome was the novelty of the writing workshop approach for both Maria and her students. Practices like free topic choice, peer conferencing and writing in response to communicative situations were so far removed from the students' and Maria's experiences that a hurried, top-down implementation would inevitably fail. We both felt that Maria and her incoming fourth grade class needed to gradually ease into this new way of conducting school through carefully planned activities that would progressively introduce new ideas and new practices to allow teacher and students to try things out bit by bit, mull them over and put them through an integrative process that would eventually render these novelties an

unforced part of their communal culture. In the session that follows, we highlight some of the most significant directions we took in this effort.

Facilitating a Cultural Change

Introducing Peer Conferencing

Conferencing is at the heart of the writing workshop. Teacher-student and peer conferences are instrumental in refocusing the center of attention of school writing from the end-product to the whole process of text synthesis. In established implementations of the writing workshop, both types of conferences run in a fluid manner throughout the extended period of time allotted for independent student writing (Calkins, 1994; Harwayne, 2003). Maria was apprehensive of immediately instituting such a procedure, as it represented an abrupt departure from familiar practices. Recognizing this as a zone-of-proximal-development issue, Xenia heeded Maria's concerns and worked with her in developing and establishing conference routines that would allow Maria to maintain a sense of manageability of the workings of her classroom.

Relegating peer conferences to a later time, we originally focused on progressively instituting functional student-teacher conferences. In the very early stages, these conferences took a very structured form: students wrote through their independent writing time and turned in their papers to Maria at the end of the session. She immediately reviewed each paper and identified text aspects she wanted to discuss with each student-writer. The following morning, she would assign seatwork to the class and hold individual conferences with students. Then, students reworked their pieces during other independent writing sessions. Though this frame was different from the more free-

flowing conferences represented in the literature, Maria worked hard to emulate their spirit and content. She limited conferences to short conversations where she gave specific feedback by highlighting well-used techniques and sensitively conversing with students about areas of possible improvement. Focusing primarily on content and organization, Maria tried to nudge students toward rethinking their work and helped them generate ideas of their own to address the weaknesses at which she hinted. Though refraining from providing immediate solutions was a hefty challenge, as it went against numerous years of established practices, Maria strove to ask helpful but not overly guiding questions and to keep the conversations focused on a handful of significant issues.

As Maria and her students acquired more experience with student-teacher conferences, our planning moved toward two new relevant directions. First, while maintaining the dependable frame of the structured student-teacher conference, Maria also started to hold less formal conferences during independent writing time. Feeling secure in the knowledge that she would meet with every one of her students at least once during the structured conferences, Maria began exploring the more fluid conference style exemplified in the literature, conferring with students on a needs basis. At the same time, following mini lessons about providing and receiving feedback, peer conferences were introduced in a form akin to the structured teacher-student conferences. Through this structure, students were able to exchange drafts and confer with classmates on their texts.

Relating the Writing Workshop to Genre Literacy and the Communicative Approach

Prior to the commencement of this project, Maria had concerns regarding the students' willingness to rework their texts. In the past, students hardly heeded her urgings

to go over their texts and correct spelling and punctuation errors before turning them in. What were the chances that they would be disposed to go through a process that expected them to move things around, write new sections, delete already written work, rework whole paragraphs, and even effectively rewrite the whole text while producing their various drafts? The students' enthusiasm for embarking in this endeavor surprised us both. Students readily accepted the notion of multiple drafts, crossing things out, inserting asterisks for additions and changes and even writing their final drafts. In answer to Maria's puzzlement over this willingness, the students' typical response was "I like my text better this way, madam. That's why I don't mind doing it."

This business of students actually *liking* and *caring about liking* the texts they wrote was another first in Maria's experience. In the past, the predominant emotion students expressed toward their texts was frustration at the idea of having to write another one. In many ways, Maria empathized. How excited can you truly be over writing on a topic you do not really care about, using ideas that are not your own and saying things you do not really mean? Therefore, though disappointing, it had been hardly surprising that the students' personal narratives often were mere listings of events and their descriptions[1] mere listings of attributes. To counteract this trend, we steered our theoretical discussions and our instructional planning toward two significant directions: connecting texts to the communicative situations that generated them and genre study.

At the time of this project, Greek Cypriot elementary education was in the process of introducing an approach to literacy instruction that brought communicative

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[1] *"Descriptive texts"* are a pseudogenre used as the basis for many writing prompts in GC Elementary Education. Devoid of any communicative frame, prompts like "My house," "My grandfather," "A stormy night" typically expect students to use showy, romantic, literary language to describe the subject's physical and other attributes.

competence[2] at center stage. The approach, which for the purposes of this paper will be called *Communicative Approach in Mother Tongue Education (CAMTE)*, has its roots in theoretical linguistics and sociolinguistics and the second or foreign language acquisition approach known as Communicative Language Teaching[3]. CAMTE acknowledges language (both oral and written) as a tool of communication, and its

> "ultimate objective is the comprehension of the social semiotic aspect of language (Halliday & Hasan 1991), which is accomplished through the development of the ability to recognize and appropriately use a wide array of language varieties and genres, which will eventually lead to critical literacy (see Cope & Kalantzis 1993, 2000; Fairclough 1992; Gee 1990; New London Group 1996; Street 1996; Tsiplakou 2006)" (Tsiplakou, Hadjioannou & Constantinou, 2006, p. 582)[4].

Recognizing the potential of the CAMTE in helping students reclaim school writing as a meaningful act, we read extensively on the subject, engaged in lengthy conversations and used it widely in our instructional planning by bringing the CAMTE core component of the communication situation[5] to focus. As the year progressed, students were no longer asked to write texts that were devoid of communicative content or characterized by pseudo-communicative content[6]. Instead, invitations for text writing were framed by

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[2] Communicative competence is a term proposed by Dell Hymes to signify the kind of language knowledge that goes beyond the knowledge of language structures, and affords speakers the ability "to communicate with one another appropriately in various situations" and "to make sense of what others say and do in communication situations" (Lindfors, 1987).

[3] See Charalambopoulos (1999) and Tsiplakou, Hadjioannou & Constantinou (2006) for the linguistic foundations of the CAMTE and Canale & Swain 1980 for a presentation of CLT.

[4] Henceforth: the translation of quotes from non-English-language texts has been rendered by the authors.

[5] According to Lindfors (1987), a communicative situation is defined by who is talking, to whom, about what, when, where, with what intention, and through which medium.

[6] An example of such a type of prompt comes from early on in the year: Students were asked to write a letter to a friend or family member who lives overseas where they were to describe their house. Though on the surface the task defines a specific communicative situation by providing answers to all aspects identified in the above footnote, it fails to satisfy the common-sense requirement – people do not write letters to loved ones with the generic intention of describing their house. However, people do write letters to pen pals to talk about recent renovations to their home and do describe their houses in real-estate ads

communicative situations that either provided or asked students to provide the kinds of contextual information needed for appropriately shaping one's linguistic behavior. For example, instead of assigning students the customary task of reading an encyclopedia entry on a well-known individual and writing a summary of that entry, Maria opted to help students gather informational texts on famous individuals they had chosen, instructed them how to take notes on the information read, and supported them in writing imaginary interviews akin to the ones published in a medium of their choice.

The real and make-believe communicative situations that contextualized their texts appeared to influence significantly the presence of voice in student writing. Humor was one of the first voice elements to show a dynamic presence in the students' texts, and passion was soon to follow. Tongue-in-cheek accounts of stomachaches that led to the pediatrician instead of to simply missing the dreaded language arts test, chubby ladies named Slimson (/pastiði/ in the original), beloved chocolate-eating dogs, and demands for an organized soccer field on school grounds started parading across the pages of students' texts. And, despite some common elements stemming from the nature of the writing prompt and from ideas heard in in-class discussions, these texts were original and unique, and demonstrated a clear growth in the students' development as writers.

However, it must be noted that contrary to naïve implementations of the CAMTE and of the writing workshop, students were not left to fend for themselves while writing in the various literary and non-literary genres that fit the communicative situations which served as contexts for their texts. Rather, genre study became a frequent component of Maria's lessons. For example, as part of the interview project described above, we

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when they wish to sell them. And naturally, the register and stylistic requirements of the texts to be written in response to each of these two situations are dramatically different.

planned for opportunities for reading interviews from various sources, for examining the roles of the interviewer and the interviewee, for investigating questioning techniques, and for observing interview write-up styles. Thus, in the process of writing their own interviews, students had significant, articulated genre knowledge to fall back on.

Connecting Reading and Writing

The natural reading-writing connections made visible through genre study inspired discussions of the idea that writing and teaching writing not only could but should be connected to other aspects of literacy instruction. Recognizing this as important, we worked toward including writing learning objectives in Maria's reading lessons, a practice that provided students with means both for better understanding the texts they were reading and for writing more effectively. For example, while examining the role of the scene-setter (Saunders-Smith, 2005) in a series of literature circles lessons, Maria taught mini lessons regarding the role of the setting in plot development and depth, and about authoring techniques for providing setting information. Later, Maria reminded students of this during writing lessons and student-teacher conferences and encouraged them to use this knowledge as they wrote their own narratives. We observed that subsequent student texts exhibited considerable attention to setting development, utilizing several of the strategies discussed during reading lessons. The following excerpts from the work of one of the class' average students are indicative of the progress we observed:

> We woke up in the morning and went to the pool. There we laughed, played, ate and then, when afternoon came about, we went to the apartment…. (Excerpt from a text on *a favorite vacation day*, September)

As we entered [the forest], we could taste the fresh air just like a refreshing fruit. I was surprised, because I cannot breathe this fresh air every day. I felt my nose fill up with various scents of leaves, flowers and trees. We saw a stream, and I took my shoes off and put my feet in the water. My sister and my mother did the same. My father kept taking pictures of us with his camera and smiled at us. Everything around us was pure green. The water was cold and clear. As I sat in the water I started thinking… (Excerpt from a text on *a visit to a forest*, November).

Fostering Transferable Literacy Skills

As mentioned earlier, one of the significant weaknesses we had identified in the *Prewriting & Writing Block* approach was that, despite assertions that the explicit prewriting sessions involved learning that would transfer into students' independent writing, such transfer did not appear to be taking place. Therefore, one of our major objectives was the selection and teaching of writing tools with significant transfer potential. To this end, we read and discussed texts like Laura Harper's (2003) *The Writer's Toolbox: Five Tools for Active Revision Instruction* and Mary Ehrenworth's (2003) *Looking to Write*, and harvested them for ideas and recommendations. We then selected a number of the tools described therein (e.g. snapshots, looking closely, thoughtshots), and prepared several lessons to be taught during both reading and writing sessions. While learning about such authoring tools, students were given opportunities to observe them in action in the texts they were reading; they worked on short written assignments involving *complete* texts where they were expected to use them; and they were strongly encouraged to use them, when appropriate, during writing workshop.

Though some of the early attempts of implementation were somewhat contrived, as the year progressed, the students became progressively more skilled at successfully using the tools that got gradually added to their author's toolbox. Also, it soon became

evident that, contrary to the hapless fate of the overly generic mottos of previous years

(e.g. "create well-organized texts," "use descriptive words"), the author's tools actually

became part of the practices and the language of the classroom community: Maria began

observing the frequent use of these tools in student texts- even months after a tool had

been originally introduced. In her experience, not many writing lessons had ever had such

longevity. In addition, at first with surprise and then with pride, Maria often heard her

students make mention of these tools in their writerly conversations, which was a new

speech genre (see Bakhtin, 1986) for her classroom altogether. "He actually said, 'I

should have put a thoughtshot[7] over here!'" Maria exclaimed in a phone conversation

with Xenia when discussing a conference she had with a student a few weeks after the

introduction of the thoughtshot technique (Harper, 2003). "We were having a conference

and, even before I said it, he came up with it himself and just walked off to continue

writing." Such references to authoring tools became very common in the classroom with

students using then in their conversations with both the teacher and their classmates, and

even creating nicknames for frequently used techniques (e.g. "zooming" for "snapshots").

The entry of this terminology in the daily language of the classroom is significant not

simply as an accomplishment in vocabulary acquisition but as a cultural practice,

suggesting that the classroom community was progressively constructing a discursive

space where writing was thought of and talked about in metacognitive terms; a space

where artisans talked about their craft.

Implications

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[7] The presentation of a character's internal reflections through flashbacks, flash forwards or brain
arguments (Harper, 2003)

In this paper we presented the collaborative effort of an elementary school teacher and a college professor who sought to create an effective environment for writing instruction in a GC elementary classroom through the writing workshop approach. Though the fact that the study involved one teacher and one elementary classroom does not allow for generalizations akin to those of quantitative research, the extensity (Webb, 1961) of this work lies in its close and multidimensional study of an attempt at innovation. The findings of such a research, though not immediately replicable, can crucially illuminate complex processes and provide insights into possibilities for other classrooms and professional development endeavors.

First, we believe that the success of this project is to a significant degree a product of the respectful collaboration between the college professor (Xenia) and the teacher (Maria). According to Fullam (1992), professional development efforts are often unsuccessful because providers treat teachers like the subjects of the program instead of as knowledgeable professionals who can partake in the construction of their professional development. Throughout this project, both parties maintained a high level of respect for the expertise and the knowledge of each other and created a discursive space that allowed this knowledge to be voiced, listened to and considered when planning for instruction.

Regrettably, in many professional development programs, listening is only expected of program participants. However, this experience suggests that it is equally important for it to be also exercised by the developers. The situation within which we operated involved a class of students who had never written without a prompt, who always wrote on spoon-fed structure and content, who had never produced multiple drafts of a text, and who had been discouraged from talking to anyone while writing. Also, this

involved a teacher who, though enthralled with the writing workshop implementations presented in the literature, had no experience with process writing as a concept or as a practice. Given these circumstances, the kind of abysmal fate a "standard" writing workshop professional development program would have faced can be easily imagined. Had Xenia not listened to Maria's description of the context within which she was teaching and had she not heeded her concerns that demanded careful, gradual implementations of procedures, we are certain that this project would not have even started. By listening, we were able to work together in fashioning a context-specific innovation, driven by Maria's inquiry. And, according to Richardson (2003), an inquiry approach to stuff development that allows for context sensitivity has been repeatedly shown to be a significant component of effective professional development programs.

We also believe that the continuity of the collaboration was also an important component of its effectiveness. Bechtel & O'Sullivan (2006) note that the short-term nature of professional development programs negatively influences the integrity and the quality of proposed implementations. Although we think that the meetings prior to the beginning of the school year were significant in establishing a strong theoretical framework, we are certain that had we not established provisions for continuous communication, the project would have flailed. The ability to come together, debrief on what was going on in the classroom, and make timely instructional decisions and course corrections afforded both of us a sense of empowerment and a better understanding of the evolution of the innovations we were trying to put in place.

Beyond the more general implications for professional development, this research also provides noteworthy insights that can guide initial implementations of the writing

workshop in school systems and school communities where process writing is a new concept. We concede that even at the end of the school year, the version of the writing workshop that operated in Maria's classroom was far from being an ideal implementation of the approach. Writing workshop experts would probably cringe at the still high presence of writing prompts, the structured conferences, the absence of daily writing time. However, we believe that given our specific circumstances, this hybrid implementation of the writing workshop was a significant and necessary step: the cultural change had to be slow and incremental, keeping the classroom community moving forward but always within their zone of proximal development. Besides, prior to making any groundbreaking changes to her teaching, Maria needed to see a positive change in her students' learning outcomes, which, as Guskey (1986) notes, is a significant prerequisite for change in teachers' beliefs and practices.

In addition, the success we encountered in this project points to the potential of a *comprehensive approach* toward teaching about the writing workshop to in- and pre-service teachers. As a novice to the approach, Maria needed both to understand the approach conceptually but also to visualize how the workshop looks, sounds and feels like in an expert implementation. These were afforded through our study of the literature and our theoretical conversations. However, Maria also needed support in navigating her way toward expert implementation in a personally meaningful manner that kept her feeling empowered and in control of her instructional practices. Writing on self-selected topics, conferring with classmates and truly revising texts may be components of *process* writing, but in the literature they are often presented as final, polished *products*, already functioning in an established workshop. In reality, they are complex practices that need to

be progressively put into place through careful scaffolding, instruction and coaching. Unless teachers' introduction to the writing workshop also involves an understanding of this complexity and a commitment to help teachers find ways to develop them in their own classrooms, many initial implementations will be destined for failure – an outcome that often leads to the immediate and unquestioned dismissal of a new approach.

In this paper, we discussed the collaboration between a classroom teacher and a college professor who worked together in implementing the writing workshop approach in a context where process writing was a novel concept. Though the end product of this effort represents an admittedly diluted implementation, our effort has always remained committed to the theoretical and methodological ideals represented in the literature and we continue to work toward sounder and more comprehensive renderings. Our aspiration with this piece is that it will serve as a scaffold to teachers and their mentors in their initial efforts for implementation of the writing workshop.

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