**December Teach to Lead Summit**

**Louisville, KY**

**Dec. 6-7, 2014**

**Problem:**

The Kentucky Writing Project (KWP) is a network of eight writing project sites, supported by their local universities, by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), and by the National Writing Project (NWP). We have worked together for a decade to provide high quality professional development (PD) to Kentucky teachers on writing. These sites are situated around the state: Louisville, Murray, Morehead, Richmond, Hazard, Highland Heights, and Bowling Green. We also have a re-established site in Lexington which is considered a satellite site of KWP, but not currently affiliated with NWP.

A shift in focus across the state over the past few years to school-based professional development led us to work with KDE to propose a new model for our Summer 2015 outreach work. Our Teacher Consultants (TCs)—teachers who have completed the invitational summer institute—report that this school-based PD varies widely in quality and often focuses on procedural or administrative kinds of work rather than on opportunities to deepen instructional practice. KWP, in contrast, focuses on a more experiential approach, as recommended in Desimone’s (2011) list of “core features of effective professional development” (p. 69): content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. In multiple, day-long workshops KWP teacher consultants demonstrate classroom practices and engage participants in analyzing and applying the ideas to their own classrooms.

We have had a strong track record in changing teacher practice through this process. In its recent study of writing in Kentucky (a review of nearly 185,000 students’ writing scores disaggregated by teacher), the Education Professional Standards Board found that

more effective teachers of writing were more likely to have participated in

programs of the National Writing Project. NWP activities were highly rated

by both the teacher respondents and the institutional respondents, and it seems

clear that participation in these activities may be the single most attractive

mechanism for improving the quality of writing instruction, both for teacher

candidates and for teachers already in the classroom.—*Status of Writing*

*Instruction In Kentucky Public Schools* by Terry Hibpshman and Kim Walters-

Parker (EPSB, 2012)

This year, instead of offering an array of open workshops (i.e., any teachers from around the state could attend), we decided to pilot a school-based PD model. We will invite high needs schools and districts to apply for mini-grants. The schools would select sessions from a menu of opportunities, based on Teacher Consultants’ expertise, to form a three-day schedule of professional development. Funds received by KWP from KDE will be used to prepare teacher leaders to lead PD in these selected schools and pay them for their work. Schools, in turn, will provide in-kind contributions (e.g., photocopies, refreshments) and will guarantee that a lead teacher in each content or grade level will continue working with KWP in the fall to provide continuity and ensure that PD learning is being incorporated into classroom teaching. Building on the success of the KDE English/Language Arts content-area networks (no longer in operation), we will provide a combination of face-to-face and virtual meetings that are designed to support the team of lead teachers.  These teachers will lead follow-up study groups in their schools to continue the work that began in the summer workshops.

An initial meeting of TCs nominated by the eight KWP sites is scheduled for November 8 at Morehead State University.  At that time, we will begin an inquiry into writing needs, focused heavily on the Common Core State Standards for argumentation and opinion writing.  Each site will send up to four representatives (one each primary, intermediate, middle, high) who agree to

   participate in year-long inquiry (including trying strategies and materials in their classrooms);

   attend 3 weekend planning sessions (Nov. 8 in Morehead; Jan. 9-11 in Carrollton; March 20-22 in Rough River);

   prepare demonstrations based on Kentucky school/district needs; and

   facilitate professional development in Summer 2015 (primarily in June) in Kentucky schools and districts selected for the mini-grants.

Grant funds from KDE will cover Teacher Consultants’ expenses to attend planning meetings, along with a small stipend. Summer PD travel will also be covered by the grant.  Depending on the needs of the districts and schools who are awarded the mini-grants, some team members may present at multiple sites.   All team members will be expected to co-facilitate at least one 3-day workshop.

Team members who are interested may arrange for an independent study credit at the University of Louisville for this work (at their own expense).

Allows teachers to lead from the classroom

We have purposefully targeted primary, intermediate, middle and high school teachers who have participated in an invitational summer institute through our Writing Projects as one of the goals of the institute is to develop teacher leadership. These new leaders will be supported in this year of inquiry as they deepen their own instructional practices in opinion and argument, collecting student work for analysis, reading and reflecting on research and professional texts, and developing demonstrations of practice for teachers in their grade bands.

The design also reflects the fact that it is difficult for practicing teachers to leave their classrooms in order to provide PD to colleagues in other districts and schools.  Scheduling the workshops for June will allow teacher leaders to do this work outside of their school responsibilities.  It further meets schools/districts’ needs for convenience.  Instead of sending a few teachers to a workshop in a distant city, the PD comes to their doors, ensuring a larger audience for the work and a greater chance that teachers will be able to form study groups, developing the PD feature of “collective participation” that Desimone (2011) suggests.

The requirement of Fall follow-up and a study group structure will help ensure that the PD learnings of the summer are enacted in classroom teaching that directly affects student learning while promoting active learning for teachers that is directed at their instructional content.  Because the schools will apply for the mini-grants to fund the PD, the workshop content and follow-up will be driven by the schools’ expressed needs. One focus that we anticipate will be analyzing student work and planning follow-up instruction.  For some fall sessions, virtual meetings that are asynchronous will be used to honor teachers’ schedules and the reality that pulling teachers from their classrooms is difficult, even when they will be learning strategies that will improve instruction.   By guiding these lead teachers through a series of planned activities in their schools, we will support their growth as leaders as well.

Identify an area of need or target a specific problem

Isolated rural districts have limited access to high quality PD. The mandated use of Kentucky’s new teacher assessment system, the Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES), has focused much attention on data and assessment issues, but if students are to grow as writers and thinkers, the need for continuing teacher instruction remains. Writing has taken a back burner in our state because of the shift in testing requirements, but these workshops will address writing instruction at the source.

In talking with teachers around the state, we see that a common need for instruction is in the area of idea development in all content areas.  Writing in response to text and using evidence in support of an argument are areas of high need, which fit well with our focus on argument and opinion writing.   A second issue related to use of evidence in idea development involves the struggles that middle and high school students have in reading difficult text.  While simplistic strategies for finding key ideas do not help students to improve their reading skills, many teachers have limited knowledge of alternate approaches.  While they may have heard of close reading, we find many teachers have misconceptions regarding its instruction. Finding worthy text is also a challenge—some texts teachers are given to use are themselves lacking in idea development.  Constructing quality prompts is another piece of this puzzle we will investigate.

Develop and implement approaches that address the need or solve the problem

Our inquiry into strong lesson sequences which address students’ needs in these areas will guide the PD that we offer. The Writing Project’s process for testing strategies in real classrooms, then demonstrating these strategies to colleagues (rather than “teaching about” the strategies) will support teachers in understanding the practices as learners. We follow up with reflective conversations about the practices, figuring out together how to adapt lessons for the differing needs of our students. Having experienced this instructional practice in the summer workshops, lead teachers will have practiced it with their colleagues and have models that will support their continued sharing of practices with their colleagues after the fall sharing sessions.

Utilize teachers’ professional experiences and expertise

KWP Teacher Consultants come to this leadership team with a strong track record of classroom success.  We will build on their knowledge and experiences, while engaging them in learning new ways of thinking and teaching that they will practice through planned inquiry their classrooms.  Coming together in January and March will allow the group to report and share what they are learning and to collectively develop strong PD demonstrations for the schools awarded the mini-grants.

The Fall 2015 follow-up element will further use the school/district teacher leaders’ experiences in trying new materials and strategies in their classrooms as the focus of face-to-face and virtual meetings. We anticipate using Google Community for the online asynchronous sessions.

Promote collaborative work among multiple stakeholders

The Kentucky Writing Advisory Council at the KDE, under the leadership of Kelly Clark, was instrumental in shaping this pilot project.  The collegial nature of the KWP state network makes possible the collaboration of up to 32 teacher consultants on this school mini-grant project.  We anticipate phone conferences and meetings with the administrative teams of successful applicants to ensure that the expectations of the project are fully communicated.  These conversations will include superintendents, principals, chief academic officers, curriculum specialists, and KDE literacy specialist Kelly Clark, along with KWP Director, Jean Wolph.  We will ask schools/districts to consider what is already in place and what might compete with or detract from teachers’ abilities to focus on this work.

Because such initiatives can appear “top down,” we hope that teachers will be involved in the decision to accept these mini-grants. To that end, our application will include an indication of teacher buy-in.

Seek to create systemic supports for teacher leadership

By initiating teacher study groups in the summer PD, then supporting school-based teacher leaders in continuing their learning in the fall, we hope to launch a new process for responding to instructional needs.

Districts will need to commit funds for teacher release time or teacher compensation for extra time and to demonstrate teacher support as they participate in an inquiry-based study group.

Be viable in the local context and sustainable over time.

We expect that the simplicity of the model will encourage schools/districts to continue the groups past our ability to provide direct support. We will encourage the participation of school/district leaders in the study groups. It is a structure that is sustainable because its purpose and products could change as needs change.

Include tracking measurable improvements, including improvements beyond test scores

A primary focus of the fall follow-up sessions will be student work analysis. Because we must narrow our focus in order to develop PD that is classroom tested, we will limit this pilot to student growth goals in identifying and using evidence effectively in their writing. By tying our work to the expectations of PGES, Kentucky’s new teacher assessment system, we will be able to support them in doing work that they are required to do by the state.

During the summer PD, we will help teachers establish goals and provide them with rich instructional materials and strategies. In the fall, they will teach the lesson and track growth in student performance. Follow-up sessions will allow teacher leaders to plan study group sessions and lead their colleagues in responding to the evidence of student achievement in argument writing. Using protocols and reflection, feedback, focusing and documentation guides developed by the National School Reform Faculty ([www.nsrfharmony.org](http://www.nsrfharmony.org)), participating teachers will develop their instructional practices with scaffolding that is flexible while supporting change.

We expect to use Google forms to survey involved stakeholders at a few checkpoints during the process in order to be responsive to needs.  Such surveys will also help us track growth in teacher understanding and practice.

Reference

Desimone, L, M. (2011). “A primer on effective professional development.” *Kappan*, 82, 69, 68-71.