

ENGLISH LEADERSHIP Quarterly

Leadership for Excellence

Conference on
English
Leadership

▶ IN THIS ISSUE

Collegial Partnership

Oona Abrams, editor, NCTE member since 1997

If you are reading this, it means you have made it through the wilderness of winter. Congratulations! Apparently, TS Eliot got it wrong—April is *not* the cruelest month by far. While the number of snow days here in New Jersey has been reasonable, it seems that the delayed openings and early releases attributable to inclement weather have made for a scattered winter. By the time this issue of *ELQ* arrives, several weeks' worth of PARCC testing will be concluded and many a crocus will be in bloom.

It's been a long winter. What have your secrets of survival been? If not for my colleagues, I don't know how I would have weathered some storms. With fellow 11th- and 12th-grade ELA teachers here at Chatham, my work has primarily been collaborating to compose common writing rubrics for argumentative, explicative, and narrative essays. We've entered into meaningful dialogues about instruction and assessment as we use those rubrics to assess student writing. Last week, the English department welcomed Elizabeth LaBan, author of *The Tragedy Paper*. Ms. LaBan talked with students who had read her novel, fielded abundant questions from the book club, and later coached budding young authors in writing workshop. LaBan's visit was made

possible thanks to the partnership of three of my colleagues and NCTE/CEL members, Rachel Ruffner, Christine Cavallo, and Christina McCabe. These three ladies put their talents together to apply for a grant from a local education foundation, and as a result, our students got to collaborate with a professional YA novelist. There's no doubt that there are always inhouse opportunities to partner with colleagues, but beyond local initiatives, where else and to whom might our professional passions lead us?

As I reflect upon the theme of this issue, "Collegial Partnership," a range of experiences comes to mind, but hard work and dedication to our students' best interests are at the heart of it. Several of the authors in this issue initiated their partnerships or were inspired to pursue a project together through a shared experience at an annual CEL or NCTE Convention. In "Rewriting the Narrative of Teacher Education Through Collaboration," Amanda Stearns-Pfeiffer and Kristin Sovis address the imminent need to "bridge the gaps" created by clashes between theory and practice. Collaborating across time zones, Nicole Sieben and Gordon Hultberg prove that CEL is a place where leaders foster meaningful professional relationships that have a lasting impact on

INSIDE

Rewriting the Narrative of Teacher Education through Collaboration 2
Amanda Stearns-Pfeiffer and Kristin Sovis

Collaboration Fosters Hope 7
Nicole Sieben and Gordon Hultberg

Leading and Learning from Within: Using Common Planning Time for Sustained Professional Development 12
Tracy McCubbin, Elizabeth Fincher, Jared Gilbert, Helen Kalili, Jennifer Kovatovich, Kristin Mathieu, and Donna Pasternak

National Blogging Collaborative: Drive, Partnerships, and a Cause 15

student learning experiences. Donna Pasternak and her writing partners in Milwaukee make a compelling case for allowing teachers to drive their own professional development in "Leading and Learning from Within." Finally, Christopher Bronke shares his experience working with educators across the country in "National Blogging Collaborative: Drive, Partnerships, and a Cause." I hope that you are as inspired as I am by the meaningful projects chronicled here.

May these final few months of the school year be as stress free as possible. Don't forget to mark your calendar for the upcoming #litlead Twitter chat: **Thursday, 5/14, 9pm EDT.** See you there! ●

Join the conversation: @oonziela

Rewriting the Narrative of Teacher Education through Collaboration

Amanda Stearns-Pfeiffer, Oakland University; Rochester, MI, NCTE member since 2000

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Just as the public education system in our country has been operating in a climate of standards-driven assessment (i.e., the Common Core State Standards and its various related standardized tests), teacher education now has changes being imposed upon it at an unprecedented rate. The New Standards for Teacher Preparation were proposed by the U.S. Department of Education in November of 2014. These standards aim to track the “success” of the teachers who graduate from our teacher education programs by tracking the “success” of their students on standardized tests. Educational reforms such as these have resulted in high-stakes standardized assessment of both students

and teachers that is void of context and that has further projected the public narrative that both students and teachers are failing. Adding to this narrative is that our teacher education programs are failing, as highlighted in the recent article “Short-Changed by Grade Inflation” (2014) by *Washington Post* writer Esther Cepeda.

How do we rewrite this narrative into one that authentically represents our profession as teacher educators and that highlights the innovation, dedication, and professionalization of our nation’s teachers and the creative, thoughtful, smart achievements and contributions of our students? We make opportunities to do collaborative work that transcends our own institu-

tions, programs, and departments. It is only through highly visible collaboration that the public narrative of a crumbling system will be rewritten to highlight the dedicated and highly professionalized field that we as teachers all occupy. The days of doing highly professionalized work with our preservice English teachers in the isolation of our classrooms has been disrupted. As Jim Burke discussed in his address at the 2014 CEL conference, disruption is necessary in growth. Disruption is uncomfortable, but necessary. The growth, though, comes in the response to that disruption.

As English educators at regional, midsized Midwestern institutions, we are making a concerted, conscientious effort to make visible our purposeful and meaningful collaborations with university-wide colleagues, K–12 colleagues, regional communities, and other English educators. We have both found it necessary to look beyond ourselves to help our preservice teachers flourish in their first year(s) in the classroom. In the following narratives, we share our own attempts at initiating the process of collaborating with others, both within and outside our institutions.

One Model of Collaboration: Bridging the Gap between Education and English Departments

As an English educator, I’m housed in the English department at my university. Truly, it would be easy to close my proverbial classroom door and not venture out of my office to see what is going on in the education department. I know plenty of colleagues who do that, and the reasons are myriad. On the final morning of the 2014 CEL

The Conference on English Leadership (CEL) of the National Council of Teachers of English is an organization dedicated to bringing together English language arts leaders to further their continuing efforts to study and improve the teaching of English language arts. The CEL reaches out to department chairs, teachers, specialists, supervisors, coordinators, and others who are responsible for shaping effective English instruction. The CEL strives to respond to the needs and interests germane to effective English instruction from kindergarten through college, within the local school, the central administration, the state, and the national level.

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conference, Heather Rocco and Chris Bronke talked about potential adversities in collaborating with colleagues: time constraints, fear, opposing agendas, and negative attitudes. As I began my position at Oakland University in the English department, though, I found myself trying to organize a program that was only partially housed in my department; many program requirements originated in the education department. Forging a relationship with my education colleagues across campus was necessary, but to say that it hasn't posed challenges would be inaccurate. English departments tend to view what education departments do as separate pieces of teacher education: they learn teaching "practices" in those courses (like how to deal with discipline issues), while in our English education courses they learn how to incorporate content-specific best-practice teaching methods in their classrooms. Allowing our program to run in this disjointed manner invites outside entities to call our program unorganized or ineffective. If we were going to be a competitive option for our novice teachers, then we had to find common ground. Most especially, one goal is to speak back against the current and damaging narrative that teacher education lacks rigor and high standards. Professionalizing novice teachers requires, therefore, the collaboration of all entities involved.

My own collaboration with colleagues in the education department has been eye opening. We have learned from one another, and we have changed some of what we do in our methods classroom in order to align our expectations and to use our individual strengths to improve our program. Three specific ways in which my colleagues have influenced the understanding of, and approach to, preparing preservice teachers are outlined here. These three points of collaboration have led to a more visible education process. Letting others see the valuable work our students are doing allows for a stronger argument that our work cannot be simplified to

Complex work requires complex measures of effectiveness, but others will only see our work as complex if we invite them into our educational space.

a reductive evaluation method. Complex work requires complex measures of effectiveness, but others will only see our work as complex if we invite them into our educational space.

I. Looking Beyond the Unit Plan

In my many conversations with education department colleagues, they drew my attention to the "gap" between methods courses and field placement and noted that it was our job, as secondary education faculty, to somehow narrow that gap. We were, of course, not the first to identify this problem. Our solution included the need to look beyond teaching our preservice teachers to write unit plans. Traditionally, English teaching methods courses have incorporated some sort of teaching unit project (Smagorinsky & Whiting, 1995), so incorporating a unit plan as a final project was a natural move within my own courses. These projects are usually touted as moving from theory to practice. However, being able to describe what they *would* do in the classroom is different than being able to actually *do* those things in the classroom. It is my belief that our teacher education program should prepare students to articulate *what* they are doing, *why* they are doing it, and show they can *do* it. However, I had only been asking students to demonstrate the first two. How, then, can we incorporate an aspect of our program that allows students to *show* what they can do in the classroom, too? While I will still use a version of the teaching unit project, changes to my courses include more focus on my preservice teachers' practice.

II. An Emphasis on Practice-Based Instruction

In rethinking the way we wanted to evaluate how well our intern teachers were prepared, we wanted to gather a more accurate sense of how well they could do the intricate, complex work that teachers have to do on the job; we wanted to create a snapshot of interning teachers that captured more than unit planning. We recognized that we could not do this work alone and brought in the cooperation and coordination of our field supervisors, with the goal of narrowing the gap between our methods classrooms and the field. When I came onto the team, my colleagues had already adopted language from Ball's (2014) "Teaching Works: High Leverage Teaching Practices," which provided us all with a universal language to talk about teaching practices. High Leverage Teaching Practices (HLTPs) are "a core set of fundamental capabilities" that when "carried out skillfully, increase the likelihood that teaching will be effective for students' learning" (Ball, 2014). There are nineteen HLTPs, and we have chosen five of them to use as "lenses" through which we view our intern's teaching. For example, HLTP #3 is "Eliciting and interpreting individual student's thinking" (Ball, 2014). With this language, field supervisors now have a vocabulary that allows for a more nuanced view of teaching and can offer more than just the broad observations traditionally made in classroom visits (such as voice projection, classroom "presence," and discipline techniques).

Our intern teachers now regularly record themselves in the classroom (either via audio or both audio and video), and we work with them to be able to articulate what they're doing and point to specific places in their teaching where they do those things. This model of using classroom evidence to support what we *say* happens in the classroom is in keeping with what our preservice teachers will be asked to do in their teaching evaluations once they're on the job. Aside

from making their practice more visible, this experience also provides our interns with practice explaining what they are doing in the classroom and why they make the pedagogical decisions they make: again, to empower preservice teachers to tell the story of their own teaching.

III. Changing the Culture of Teacher Education

At the 2014 CEL conference, Sarah Brown Wessling challenged us with this task: “Let’s change the culture of teaching to be more collaborative, to invite others into our classrooms and invite others to look at our teaching, and learn from that feedback, to say to a teaching colleague, ‘I need your eyes on this.’” Creating a culture where peer feedback is welcomed is not an easy task; building a teacher education program where teaching practices are made visible is one step in that direction.

Logistics always pose problems in observing others teaching. One remedy we’ve instituted is for our intern teachers to record themselves; those recordings are then used to discuss successful teaching practices in our classrooms, usually with rubrics that attempt to specify what we should focus on in the teaching example. The rubric design is taken directly from the HLTP language. It is important to note that “successful” doesn’t mean our interns must record an example of perfect teaching.

Aside from analyzing the teaching excerpts in our courses, we have also implemented a biweekly meeting of preservice teachers from all disciplines. At these meetings, we discuss

We are attempting to build a culture of openness in practice that rarely exists in education, a culture of evaluating one another’s classroom experiences in sophisticated ways.

different aspects of HLTPs viewing and analyzing teaching videos together (which again builds a level of sophistication in how we talk about teaching and in what we notice about teaching practices). Our intern teachers take turns teaching lessons during these meetings, and we provide feedback as a group. The emphasis is on professional collaboration and collegiality. We are attempting to build a culture of openness in practice that rarely exists in education, a culture of evaluating one another’s classroom experiences in sophisticated ways. Ultimately, a culture of self-reflection prompted by peer feedback better prepares preservice teachers for the systems of teacher evaluation that are being implemented in classrooms. While this collaboration between diverse departments and field instructors is still evolving, we hope next to bring our interns’ mentor teachers into this complex work, which will add another rich layer of nuanced feedback for our preservice teachers. As Wessling suggested, someone has to volunteer to go first in being peer-reviewed. It is our hope that the graduates from our teacher educa-

tion program will be so accustomed to the process of making our private classroom practices more public (more *visible*), that they will help change the culture of teaching, learning, and professional development within their respective schools.

Another Model of Collaboration: Bridging the Gap between K–12 Schools and English Education Programs

My position as an English educator is also housed in an English department. Like my co-author, I recognize the conveniences that could come were I to leave my office only to teach my classes: more time to prepare my classes, assess my students’ work, and conduct research. I also recognize, however, that working in isolation would severely limit the potential of our English education program in providing our preservice teachers with the best possible practice experiences. To see this, I need only reflect on my own acclimation to my position as a junior faculty member and what has best supported my transition from K–12 teacher to doctoral student to faculty member. The answer is always the same: above all else, individual, colleague-to-colleague interactions have helped me make teaching and professional decisions most appropriate to my teaching and institutional context. The professional gains I have experienced thanks to mentorship are not unique to me; as noted in McCann, Johannessen, and Ricca, (2005), mentorship and colleague-to-colleague support are primary indicators of retaining effective early-career English teachers.

October 2015 *ELQ* Call for Manuscripts: Getting into Arguments

French essayist Joseph Joubert once asserted that “the aim of an argument or discussion should not be victory, but progress.” As English educators, we are tasked with teaching students how to write arguments that “support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.” How are students making progress before, during, and after learning the skills of effective argument? What arguments about literacy are we engaging in with colleagues and school leaders? How are those arguments informing our choices as leaders? Share manuscripts and cover letters as Google Docs with abramselq@gmail.com. **Deadline: July 15, 2015**

In applying this realization to my work with my preservice students this past semester, I felt absolutely responsible to initiate and create a platform from which my preservice teaching students could engage in similar professional mentorship. And so, I reached out to expert K–12 teachers in my region. My collaborations with these teachers, however, began long before I asked them if they would be interested in participating in a fieldwork project with the preservice teachers in my writing methods course.

Who Are These Teachers, and Why Collaborate on Behalf of My Preservice Students?

Three of the four K–12 teachers who participated in this collaboration are Saginaw Bay Writing Project (SBWP) fellows, our region’s affiliate of the National Writing Project, just as I am. Two teachers participated in this past summer’s SBWP institute that I co-taught with another of the four. Of the participants, one teaches in a rural elementary school, one in a suburban high school, and two in suburban elementary schools. All four teachers are esteemed in their districts.

In collaborating with these four K–12 teachers through SBWP institutes and professional development events, I was continually impressed with their commitment and attention to research-based, reflective practice to best meet the needs of their students. Furthermore, foundational to these teachers’ practices are highly organized, carefully crafted writing workshop models based largely on the work of Katie Wood Ray, Lucy Calkins, and Kelly Gallagher—all teacher-researchers whose writings were foundational to my methods course, as well. The rationale, then, behind this collaboration—which would place my writing methods students in these expert teachers’ classrooms—was that my students see the “best practices” of teaching writing and highly effective writing workshops in action, both of which we had been reading about and dis-

cussing all semester. In seeing real students and real teachers engaging in writing workshop, I believed, students would be able to apply our theoretical and practical coursework in crafting thoughtful lesson plans appropriate to the classroom and teaching context, as learned about during their observation visits and through conversations with the cooperating K–12 teachers. In essence, this project was intended to bridge the gap between the theory of the methods class and the practice of teaching that many methods students report experiencing in reflecting on their methods coursework (McCann et al., 2005). In retrospect, this collaboration did this and more: this project bridged the gap between K–12 schools and my institution’s English education program.

What Was This Collaboration?

This project connected the previously mentioned four K–12 teaching experts with preservice teachers who were enrolled in my writing methods course. The K–12 teachers opened their classrooms for preservice teachers to conduct both a teaching observation and a teaching demonstration. Between the two classroom visits, K–12 teachers consulted with preservice teachers in helping them craft appropriate and effective lesson plans. The project required that preservice teachers initiate contact with their cooperating K–12 teachers to learn about the classrooms, curricula, and students; make arrangements for both the observations and teaching visits; reflect on observations conducted, consulting with coordinating teachers to craft appropriate and effective lesson plans; and, finally, teach and reflect on their teaching. Preservice teachers’ process assignments included regular “teacher notebook” reflective writings, observation notes and classroom map notes, observation reports and reflections, drafts of lesson plans, and teaching reports and reflections. Their product-based assignments included polished drafts of their “teaching day” lesson plans and an entire unit plan for each

student built around the lesson plans intended for the classroom and students they worked with during this fieldwork project. Following are three specific ways my understanding of, and approach to, preparing my preservice teachers has been influenced by this collaborative fieldwork project. These three specific points are also foundational to making the education process visible for our preservice teachers and in our institutions, K–12 schools, and regional communities.

I. Preservice Teachers Need Authentic Opportunities to Observe and Practice Teaching

Throughout the project—during class meetings, individual conferences, via email, and in reflective writings—my methods students expressed sincere gratitude for the opportunity to work “with real, live teachers” who enact “all of the practices we’ve been reading about,” in the words of one of my students. More importantly, my students saw the theory and practices studied in our coursework alive and well in actual classrooms, classrooms in which students were engaged in the writing process. This realization was relayed in every students’ observation report and in our semester-end symposium, during which students shared reflections on this project and semester. One student even remarked that being in such a highly functioning and efficient kindergarten writing workshop was “beyond an assigned value” and “the best experience of [her] undergraduate career” thus far. This comment was received with affirming nods and further student commentary, all indicating that this fieldwork project gave them confidence in establishing a functioning writing workshop in their own future classrooms. One student relayed this sentiment in her teaching reflection, “I knew I believed in ‘best practices’ and a workshop model. I knew, thanks to Ray and Gallagher, that these practices most support student growth. But until I got to see the actual physical arrangement of a writing workshop and the students in it, I

really felt at a loss for how I'd ever do it myself." Another student reported, "I taught a workshop. Sure, my coordinating teacher laid the foundations, but I taught it and students got what I was teaching. Writing workshop is doable. It's not an abstraction. It happens in classrooms every day."

II. Preservice Teachers Need an Invitation and Seat at the Table of Our Teaching Profession

Another way in which this project was successful in professionalizing preservice teachers was in its valuing of preservice teachers as professionals in our field. Instead of situating preservice teachers as subordinates to collaborating K-12 teachers and me, the project positioned them as co-learners and co-participants in the learning and teaching processes. My preservice teachers reported feeling empowered as co-learners and active participants in the intellectual discourse that is critical classroom observation and intentional teaching. One student wrote about her collaborating K-12 teacher:

Right away, she told us not to hesitate if we had any questions at all. And she meant it, because when we emailed and asked for feedback on our proposed lesson plans, she gave pointed, honest, helpful remarks. She suggested we do more groups with fewer students in each. While we saw her point and discussed it at length, we eventually went with our original groupings given [that] the organization activity involved six sentences and that we could circulate the room more easily as a team of two than if we were one in number.

This excerpt reflects the careful negotiating and decision making that this team of preservice teachers engaged in at this point of the project, similar to that in which classroom teachers engage recursively after teaching a single lesson plan. Inviting preservice teachers into our profession and granting them the respect and confidence to do thoughtful work is without doubt invaluable in shap-

ing these preservice teachers' perceptions of their own work as teachers and of our profession. As one student wrote, "I felt like a real teacher for the first time in my life, and it's all because [the K-12 coordinating teacher] trusted us with his students." To engage our preservice teachers in critical, research-based, and collaborative work, we must engage in the same and invite preservice teachers into this work we do. This fieldwork project did just this and begs the question: as teacher educators, why not facilitate more opportunities for preservice teachers to be directly mentored by teaching professionals in authentic professional situations?

III. The Support of Expert, Practicing K-12 Teachers Is Necessary in Preparing the Next Generation of Teachers

Without the expert work of the practicing K-12 teachers *and* the professional service they provided in giving their time, expertise, and classrooms of students to professionalizing my methods students, this project would have never happened. The K-12 teachers who participated in this project acted as mentors in a way that I cannot and offered students a seat at the table of the teaching profession. In coordinating this collaborative project, though, I could bring preservice and practicing teachers together, bridging the gap between the theory and practices studied in the course with the actual classroom and profession of teaching. In bridging this gap, mentor relationships were established between preservice teachers and practicing teachers. One K-12 teacher wrote in an email to me: "[A methods student] was so excited about the mentor text that I actually watched two of my students who struggle to focus on whole-class instruction perk up and pay attention the entire reading." This veteran teacher went on to write about how the preservice teachers were "breaths of fresh air" who "gave [her] hope in the future of teaching." Through our collaborative efforts, both the K-12

teachers and I worked together to make this fieldwork experience one of value to preservice teachers and classroom students, which begs the question: as teacher educators, why not engage expert teachers from our regional K-12 schools in professionalizing our preservice teachers?

Teacher Educator Collaborations as Bridges

The two collaborations we describe are different: the primary function of one is to bridge the gap between English and education departments and the primary function of the other is to bridge the gap between teacher education programs and K-12 teachers and schools. However, upon reflection, the cross-current among these collaborations is clear: both collaborations seek to improve the preparation of K-12 teachers. In doing so, both of these projects make the work that we do as teacher educators visible, as the projects transcend the solitary work we do in our offices and classrooms. These projects illustrate the rigor of our English education programs—a rigor that cannot be quantified by a standardized assessment of us, our students, or our programs. This authentic rigor pushes back against the standards-driven narrative of a failing public education system by illustrating collaborative, context-informed, thoughtful, research-based work that teacher educators, preservice teachers, and practicing K-12 teachers do day in and day out. These kinds of collaborations ensure that we continue our journeys as educators, doing highly professional work to ensure that all students who walk through our doors take seats at our tables. ●

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Collaboration Fosters Hope

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Gordon Hultberg, Intermountain Christian School, NCTE member since 2003

Children are motivated when they understand they are cared for and respected. Building hope in education shows caring and respect for our students, our classrooms, and ourselves as educators. The more respect given to the voices in our classrooms, the more those who take part in educational communities will feel like the “one cared-for” by the “one-caring” (Noddings, 1995). As Nel Noddings’s work suggests, education is so much more than achievement scores, standardized assessments, and academic subjects; education is about understanding, caring, empathy, and respect. According to Hattie’s (2009) meta-analyses, a caring classroom environment is one of the most influential factors in students’ academic success. Therefore, not only is teaching through a pedagogy of hope and caring important for students’ psychosocial development, it is also important for students’ academic development as well.

The Origins of Our Collaboration

Our collaboration grew out of a common commitment to CEL, a shared interest in learning about best practices in writing education, and a mutual respect for one another and the time and talent we both have to offer. In November 2013, we sat across a breakfast table from one another, both running for CEL member-at-large positions, waiting to give our

campaign speeches and share our passion for our CEL community. While our speeches communicated different service goals, our sentiments were the same: CEL has given us much and we wanted to give back to our community of literacy leaders. While the election results found our opponents the victors in the election, we had won in so many other ways that we were yet to discover.

Three months later, we again found ourselves sitting across a mutual table of inquiry. Both focused on writing instruction in our own educational programs—Nicole at the teacher education level in New York and Gordon at the secondary school level in Utah—we both share an interest in inspiring students’ motivations for writing. Having just received grant money through the NCTE CEE Research Initiative to explore her new theory of *writing hope* (Sieben, 2013) in secondary schools, Nicole put out a call for study participants on NCTE’s Connected Community, and Gordon immediately responded to the call with an enthusiastic email inquiry. The program Nicole proposed through the grant was designed to forge collaborations across institutional levels—between college professors and secondary school teachers and between college students and secondary school students. Through email correspondence we discovered our mutual writing teacher mentors—

Peter Smagorinsky, Carol Jago, Peter Elbow, Nancie Atwell, Penny Kittle, Kelly Gallagher, George Hillocks Jr., and the list goes on.

Personal Best: Gordon

I employed all the “best practices” in writing instruction but still felt something was missing for my students—I wanted them to *want* to write and to *initiate* writing processes on their own that were authentic to them. Reaching out to Nicole was a natural extension of my desire for students to conceive of an English class that exists to serve *their* learning purposes. Upon receiving her call for study participants, I felt that Nicole provided an interesting perspective on teaching writing through motivational best practices. She spoke about strengths-based approaches to teaching writing through a positive psychology lens, specifically through a *writing hope* lens that could bolster writing experiences for students.

Writing Hope: Nicole

Writing hope (Sieben, 2013) is a skills-based and motivational disposition that can build writing competencies in individual writers and groups of writers. Put simply, writing hope is the will (agency) and the way (pathways) to accomplish purposeful writing goals (Sieben, 2013). Through research-based, instructional interventions, writing hope can be taught

to students and teachers. Up until the start of this study, writing hope interventions had been implemented only in university courses with first-year college students and with graduate students in preservice teacher education programs. The next step began when I started to explore how writing hope can influence writing ability in secondary schools, and this is where my cross-country, cross-institutional collaboration with Gordon began.

Building Trust through Collaboration: Nicole

It was easy to trust Gordon from the moment we began this collaboration because I knew what his teaching pulse was—he was an educator who put his students’ interests and growth above all else, he showed a profound interest in working together to improve students’ writing experiences, and he was a caring instructor and active member of CEL. With such a passionate study participant involved, I knew this Writing Hope Works Project would be much more than a study; rather, it would be the start of a long-lasting collaboration with a trusted colleague and inspiring literacy leader. It meant having the chance to work with middle school and high school students on building their writing hope agency and pathways and getting the opportunity to create authentic writing opportunities for students through the sharing of their work with other teachers and students through our project’s website: www.writinghopeworks.com. The website explains that I designed the Writing Hope Works Project to develop writing hope in school communities across the United States so that students and teachers feel agentic about authentic purposes for writing. The intention of the project is to connect a community of writers across the United States that will build a collective hope in our country extending far beyond the confines of this venture. Through writing, I believe hope can be created, established, and enhanced (Sieben, 2013).

As the end of the first quarter ap-

proached, Gordon began to send me products of student writing to feature on our Writing Hope Works website. Not only did Gordon send me emails containing the incredible work of his talented and motivated students, he also sent me detailed hope narratives about the writers to accompany these student works. Each student submission that is published on our website also has a beautiful story of hope that inspired the piece of writing for the student. Some of the work shared for publication was the result of assignments Gordon had given to the entire class and some of the work was the result of student-driven motivation that Gordon had no doubt inspired through his caring disposition and inquiry-based teaching practices. Through a pedagogy of writing hope, Gordon’s students have begun writing with agency and passion using multiple pathways to achieve authentic writing success.

Pathway to Trust: Gordon

An additional factor for me in building a trusting and reciprocal relationship with Nicole was knowing that her theory of writing hope provides a theoretical framework within which teachers can work to help students become agents of their own learning. This framework is not prescriptive and instead encourages teachers to devise the creative means to accomplish those ends within the context of their own school communities. Thus, although the Writing Hope Works Project does include suggestions for teaching writing and providing feedback through a growth mindset with strengths-based writing hope strategies (Sieben, 2013), teachers become creators of curricula in collaboration with Nicole and/or other teachers in their schools. Although influenced by other teachers, I felt empowered through the Writing Hope Works Project to help my students design and plan a future Utah StuCamp un-conference, built around the EdCamp model, to give other Utah students a voice in their education. I also initiated curiosity files: paper storehouses

for students’ curiosity about the literature and ideas we discuss in class. The students incorporate color, creativity, art, and playfulness in these files, thus becoming agents in their own learning. Ultimately, both creativity and agency can motivate students to produce writing; but in addition the social, psychological, and spiritual outcomes go hand-in-hand with newfound confidence to speak, act, and write for authentic purposes and interests, which the Writing Hope Works Project allows us to do. Students recently used writing to process family members’ deaths and friends’ suicides, voice concern to the administration over perceived injustice, express difficult family conversations, and take stock after the end of a romance.

Because I had already been seeking methods of equipping students to become authors of their own learning, the Writing Hope Works protocols sounded intriguing; fortunately, in Nicole I have a writing expert in my corner who wants to support me in any appeals I may make to administrators, parents, or students for credibility for such approaches to writing that Nicole’s research advocates. The psychological effect of feeling a partnership with someone in higher education who cares less about a particular pedagogy or pet theory and more about what goes on in my own classroom with real kids is buoying. I think this is why I send her writing workshop photos, Twitter updates, stories, successes, and challenges: I need to get the word out any way I can that students are learning or failing or trying, every day. Collaborating with Nicole has given me an authentic audience for my teaching and my life-long learning process as a teacher of writing and as an English curriculum planner that surpasses existing onsite audiences. She grasps the ELA objectives, she encourages me in my approach to them, she challenges me to meet them by pushing myself. Though our work together has only really just started, definite benefits have already accrued to my school, my students, and me.

Direct and Indirect Consequences of Collaboration

Direct Consequences: Nicole

For both of us, there have been various direct consequences of our collaboration. For the past ten months, the collaboration that we continue to foster has made us each feel like we have a “buddy” to rely on for support in our classroom practices and educational communities. When we have days in our own classrooms where we feel as though something did not go according to plan, which we all know as teachers can happen, we know we can reach out across our own institutional levels to a caring colleague who can provide unique perspectives and can help us determine new pathways to try for the future. Having collegial buddies who are invested in our success as teachers and researchers can make all the difference in the successful unfolding of an academic year. It has made us both feel we are a part of a caring educational community, much bigger than our own individual institutions and ourselves, that supports our growth as literacy leaders and life-long learners. And when the politics of education gets us down, and we feel restricted by imposed standards or grading systems, we know we have a buddy to pick us up, dust us off, and move us toward more worthwhile educational goals. te Riele (2010) has said that many educational goals are not worth pursuing and, thus, are not worth building hope for. Instead, it is the worthwhile goals that we must encourage each other to pursue, to take steps toward accomplishing, and to build hope around (Sieben, 2013). Ultimately, this collaboration has taught us to build hope around worthwhile writing goals that we set together across institutions and across educational levels.

What my collaboration with Gordon has given me is an authentic audience for my research, my writing, and my passion for exploratory writing processes. It has given me a professional partner at the secondary school level who can tell me what

strategies work best with his students and what interests motivate his students to want to write for school and outside of school. Gordon’s feedback not only informs my research, but also my practices as a teacher of writing and writing teacher education. This collaboration has given me the space to ask questions without concern about judgment or political influence. It has given me a space for growth and reflection in my own research and writing processes too, and for that I am truly grateful. Finally, my collaboration with Gordon has led to the development of my own writing hope in authentic ways as I see the practical applications of my theoretical writing hope work coming to life in the classroom through Gordon’s writing instruction and literacy leadership, through the writing across the curriculum initiatives happening in Gordon’s school in multiple subject areas, and through the inspired student writing produced in Gordon’s middle and high school.

Surprised by Hope: Gordon

In my collaboration with Nicole, I am becoming the learner: my students teach me, and I am more open to, receptive, and aware of my new role. Every day for me is a disaster: something goes not as planned.

However, every day is also a great opportunity—and *something* good happens. A recent example is that a student made a writing appointment with me to share an autobiographical piece about his mother’s death, his relationship with his father, and his dawning understanding that his dad’s stern approach to education is for his own good. The student has set his own writing goals (part of the Writing Hope Works Program), which involve writing a family biography, and he actually cares about doing well in school (according to his paper). When I encouraged him to consider the audience for his paper, he imagined “other students who might also be thinking of quitting school,” so I urged him to think of the larger number of students he could reach on the writinghopeworks.com website. For this student and for me (as his teacher), this collaborative program has provided us with hope that our writing and our work can and will reach a larger audience beyond our school that can be influenced by the perspectives we each share. I now have a critical friend in Nicole who is not connected to any performance-related review, yet whose influence is already being felt on campus by administrators, who are sure to drop by my room when there is a visiting committee

Call for the NCTE Secondary Section 2015 High School Teacher of Excellence Award

NCTE affiliates are invited to nominate high school teachers who have contributed in the classroom and demonstrated excellence in practice. Each NCTE affiliate may select a single teacher for this honor. The manner of selection is determined by the affiliate’s governing board, which might advertise for nominee applications before choosing a winner or acknowledge a teacher who has previously won an award within the affiliate, thus moving that person’s recognition to a national level.

Deadline: May 1. Send documentation to the Secondary Section Steering Committee administrative liaison, Kelly Sears Smith (ksearsmith@ncte.org). For the nomination form and a description of required supporting documents, visit <http://www.ncte.org/second/awards/hste>. Completed nomination packets may be mailed to secondary@ncte.org or National Council of Teachers of English, High School Teacher of Excellence Award, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1010.

A complete list of the 2014 High School Teachers of Excellence Award recipients is available at <http://www.ncte.org/second/awards/hste/winners>.

of any kind. The collaboration has brought a kind of credibility.

Additionally, our collaborative interests in building writing hope in our schools and in educational systems across the country led to a joint presentation for the 2014 CEL conference, “Leading in a Collaborative World,” with another pair of educators who frequently collaborate in Texas to bridge the gap between high school and college writing achievement. The stories we heard from participants and presenters of solutions to entrenched and only marginally successful composition practices left us inspired. Our group discussions led us both through some articulations and discoveries about our own unintended consequences of our cross-institutional collaboration.

Indirect Consequences: Nicole

For me, there have been a number of unintended consequences of my collaboration with Gordon, but there is one in particular that I would like to highlight because it has been the most lifesaving consequence of all. While in this project I had originally set out with the goal to build writing hope for secondary school students and teachers, today the collaborations that I have built with teachers like Gordon and their students have given me invaluable sources of hope as well, and not just a hope about writing, but a hopefulness about life, learning, and teaching.

This summer my father passed away suddenly, and I was instantly paralyzed by grief. Given the close relationship that my father and I shared, it seemed unimaginable to me that I would ever feel a sense of completeness again. Ever since that unexpectedly tragic day in July when everything seemed to change, the first occurrence that gave me a familiar feeling of hope came in the form of professional passion through my collaboration with Gordon and our plans for implementing writing hope strategies in his school community. For all intents and purposes, it is safe to say that I had lost all sense of hope, but

then August sixth came, the day that I was supposed to provide professional development training to Gordon and the rest of the teachers at Intermountain Christian School in Utah. Gordon was extremely kind, empathetic, and hopeful not just for our collaborative project, but also for me and my survival of this tragic loss in my life. Gordon and other colleagues provided me with a space to find hope again in the work that we are doing together and in the work that we continue to do as teachers of writing and as teachers of social justice.

As literacy teachers, it is true that it is our job to teach writing, reading, and critical thinking skills, but we know it is also our job to teach life skills that allow students to live full, rewarding, authentic, socially just, and hopeful lives. While I knew this at my core as a former high school English teacher and current English educator, this experience reinforced how much hope we as teachers can gain from our work when it is authentically beneficial to our students’ development as critical writers, readers, and thinkers in the world. My collaboration with Gordon and my relationship with our NCTE CEL and CEE communities in essence renewed a hope in me that had been depleted from a crippling loss in my life. An influx of heartfelt emails, cards, and calls from colleagues within our NCTE community showed care not only about my professional well-being, but also about my personal well-being and my individual processes of grieving and finding hope once again.

Colleagues not only sent condolences, but also shared stories of their own losses and various strategies they have utilized to process grief through a journey that all acknowledged is always uniquely individual. The simple acknowledgement of grieving as an original process provided me with the validation to be in a place of uncertainty for a time as I explore the unique ways in which I might grieve. For now, my grieving process has taken the shape of a writing exploration in which I write

to learn, understand, and know the new truth of my emerging history. Through my grieving thus far, I have learned that just as writing is a truly unique process for each of us, so too is grieving. The stories provided by our NCTE community told alongside my own emerging story of grieving have truly become my “landscape of knowing,” as our 2014 annual convention theme suggested they would. This collective storytelling has made a difference in my surviving the sudden loss of my beloved father. To create a network of support when a person feels heartbroken and hopeless is a collaboration we do not necessarily speak much of, but we ought to, because it is a collaboration of survival. It is a collaboration of hope. With deep grief like this, it can take a village to save someone when a sense of hope has been lost. My collaboration with Gordon and other colleagues has been one pathway back to living with hope again; my relationship with writing and storytelling has been another.

Sustainable Dialogue: Gordon

Because of my partnership with Nicole the researcher and the critical friend, the benefit spider-webs out to teachers and students in other secondary content areas and upward and downward to interactions with college and elementary educators. It has made me aware of my data collection in other areas of my instruction, such as devising assessments for reading comprehension and critical thinking; it has even forced me to rethink the way I handle plagiarism issues. I had expected my participation would give me a fuller perspective on writing pedagogy, but I find it is also changing how I think about instruction as a whole. I had assumed that sharing strategies across multiple grade levels and subject areas would help align our preK–12 cross-curricular writing program, but it also acquaints me with strategies my colleagues use to successfully motivate their students. Although my collaborations with same-school partners began twenty-five years ago, this is my first time

partnering with a higher education professional to affect the local and national dialogue surrounding questions of college readiness and student motivation. I agree with Nicole about the trust, empathy, and respect that both sustain our collaboration and flow out of it. In their recent article for the “Creativity Café” column of *The National Teaching and Learning Forum*, a trio of higher education teachers puts it this way: “Collaborations are sustained by mutual respect” (Sweet, Blythe, & Carpenter, 2014, p. 10). Our collaboration across institutions is sustained in this very same way.

Collaborative Guiding Questions

Another of the positive outcomes is a shift from inward focus to outward focus, facilitated by collaboration. Thus, we provide a list of significant implications that our work together may have for other literacy leaders wishing to collaborate. As a result of our findings from our work together, what follows is a list of guiding questions for collaboration that we pose for literacy leaders to consider:

1. How can I take the lead and initiative when an opportunity or idea for collaborating arises? We never know where an opportunity may lead or what may follow from it. NCTE communities and other professional organizations and conferences are great places to forge and foster long-lasting and meaningful collaborative relationships.
2. Could a collaborative opportunity come in the guise of a research proposal or of another faculty member, administrator, counselor, parent or student request? How can I keep a broad view of the landscape so as not to miss out on beneficial growth opportunities? A collaborative opportunity may not always appear as such.
3. Although the product and the process of any collaboration will be important, how can I consider ways of being especially open to

what is happening within me during the process? How do I invite and react to my partner’s involvement and contributions? Do I take time to reflect on my own responses to the students, co-leaders, technical staff, and administrators involved?

4. How can teacher training programs consider introducing pre-service teachers to the benefits of any collaboration—not limited to mentorships or secondary/post-secondary inquiry? As the three co-authors from Eastern Kentucky University attest, “Strong mentoring from those who have collaborated previously increases the odds a new collaboration will work whether among faculty members or faculty-student teams” (Sweet et al., 2014, p. 11).
5. Are all parties treated with equal respect and appreciation for the knowledge and experience they each bring to the inquiry project? An equal balance of power and influence allows each party to learn from the other.
6. How am I using social media and in-person meetings to demonstrate active listening and respectful discourse and feedback so that trust can be established? Open communication between collaborators is vital.
7. Am I willing to accept the possible stress of deadlines, tensions, and varied interests in the hope that raised levels of caring, trust, hope, and respect result? Be prepared for and mindful about intended and unintended consequences of the collaboration.

Climate Change: Warming Trend

Amidst an educational climate that continues to emphasize standards and numbers-based assessments, we have found that a positive constant that we can depend on is the collegiality that

we have formed through our NCTE communities. Our CEL and CEE families have continued to reinforce the impact that we make as literacy educators, not just for our students but for each other as well. In short, we feel the reciprocity between us has been enabled through this CEE research opportunity and through our mutual interest in the CEL community of NCTE. Our collaboration through opportunities made possible within NCTE is a move from cold clinical participation in education to a warm professional collaboration that welcomes growth, understanding, support, and respect for the perspectives we each bring.

As literacy leaders in our respective communities, we believe that through collaboration, we all have the power to foster student, educator, and school success, in both public and private institutions. Through dialogue, we share values and connectedness; through collaboration, we build collective hope. As connected educators, we listen to and learn from each other in order to offer students worthwhile educational experiences that foster hope for the future. ●

Join the conversation: Gordon @pradlfan, Nicole @Teach4JusticeNS

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Leading and Learning from Within: Using Common Planning Time for Sustained Professional Development

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 Lynde & Harry Bradley Technology and Trade School, Milwaukee, WI
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The English teachers at our large urban technology and trade school (Tech) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, were faced with a uniquely favorable situation in 2012: Common duty time (i.e., planning time) was instituted by the district at the metropolitan high schools. That meant our English department members were to meet for one class period each workday for the entire school year to share best practices and student data, implement the Milwaukee Public School’s (MPS) Comprehensive Literacy Plan, discuss student accommodations with special education teachers, and align curriculum over the four grades.

At Tech, departments had the option of organizing their common time in a way that best suited its members. When we learned of a grant competition for a high-needs school to professionally develop in writing instruction through the National Writing Project (NWP), we knew this would be a rewarding use of our common planning time. NWP is a professional development network hosted at institutions of higher education across the United States. We formed a partnership with one of the local sites, the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee Writing Project (UWMWP), and a few of us met over the course of the summer to write the grant.

As we were fortunate to have our meeting time be part of our paid workday, we budgeted the grant monies to fund book study groups, to underwrite a departmental professional development library, to purchase individual research materials to develop workshops that would enable us to share our knowledge with the rest of the Tech faculty, to attend local

conferences, and to compensate one of the UWMWP site director’s coming to Tech once a week to study with us.

If MPS had not instituted common departmental time at our school, we would have had to meet outside our regular school day, adding to our already busy days of teaching, coaching, and advising. Having access to a common period allowed us to participate in a novel experience that solidified our department around a professional development topic (PD) that drew us together through the enhanced knowledge we gained in researching theory and practices that benefited our students in a manner that directly affected our individual classrooms. Our PD became one that we focused and controlled—a PD designed by ourselves, for ourselves, with a long-term goal to lead an all-school professional development program in which we shared the practices and evidence of improved student achievement in writing. We hoped to broaden the professional learning community we established in-department with the teachers in other departments.

In this article, we share our thoughts about our personalized learning, our experience creating and leading our own PD, and how learning with each other in this manner is both sustainable and replicable.

Tech

Tech is an urban public school with 98 percent of its students eligible for free or reduced price lunch in 2012. Collectively, the English department faculty teach every student enrolled at the school; and, thus, *we know* what students in English need to be successful. Per the statewide assessment used in 2012, 60 percent of

Tech students were not proficient in reading and writing. Therefore, we focused our inquiries on the study of writing theory and practices, hoping to develop a common language about career- and college-ready writing, explore methods of writing instruction that would raise student achievement in writing, and learn an inquiry-based model of PD, called a Teacher Inquiry Workshop (TIW). The TIW is a PD model (Biggs, Hodgson, & Penniman, 2008; Stock, 2007) that supports instructional choices and growth dependent upon individual teachers’ specific teaching contexts and classroom needs and a model favored by the UWMWP.

Who We Are

Although seven of us from the English department created TIWs to present to the instructional staff and administrators at Tech in spring 2013, our learning community also included a student teacher, the Tech literacy (instructional) coach, and a university faculty member in English Education and one of the UWMWP site directors, Donna. We first formed two book study groups, using conversations about the texts as the launching pad to understanding everyone’s classroom contexts and the needs of our students. We then began analyzing our classroom practices for inquiry topics that would affect student achievement in a significant way.

Tracy, our department chair, had been teaching English for six years, all at Tech. A teacher consultant with the UWMWP, she learned the TIW model by previously completing their summer institute and, thus, had experience creating workshops and could coach us onsite. Tracy worked

with Jenny, who had thirteen years of English teaching at both the middle and high school levels. 2012 was Jenny's first year teaching at Tech. The two decided to explore the use of mentor texts: texts used as models for understanding genre that serve as examples for a particular writing situation. Tracy and Jenny felt that "while we were using the term 'mentor texts,' we were not confident in how to effectively utilize them in the classroom. We wanted to research ways to find appropriate mentor texts and then implement them into a lesson that would ultimately lead our students to become better writers."

Jared and Kristy worked together because both recognized a similar problem in their Advanced Placement (AP) students: the lack of necessary skills to formulate a powerful argument. Jared had fourteen years of teaching English, twelve at Tech, while Kristy had more than nine years of teaching high school English. 2012 was Kristy's second year at Tech. Looking to align their practices in AP Language and Literature, both researched ways to help their students answer AP exam prompts through argumentation by "focusing on utilizing *claim*, *evidence*, and *explanation* when writing on demand. We found this to relate directly to our individual classroom instruction."

Elizabeth, in her second year of teaching high school English and her first at Tech, decided to work alone. Elizabeth observed, "I was frustrated by my students' responses whenever I would introduce a research project. As soon as I mentioned the words 'research paper,' they would automatically shut down. I knew that when given the opportunity, they would ask questions for eternity, but there was a disconnect between their hunger for learning and classroom research." Thus, "I was interested in understanding how inquiry and questioning helps students become better writers. I also wanted to learn ways to increase students' engagement while following the writing process." With these questions in mind, Elizabeth

focused her inquiry work on using the questioning process to engage students in formal writing.

Like Elizabeth, Helen chose to work alone, because "I was looking for concrete ways to increase the vocabulary skills of students, so they can better articulate their ideas. Identifying and building upon root words, prefixes, and suffixes, puts students on a level learning field, because everyone uses these word parts when speaking English." Helen returned to the classroom in 2012 after working for four years as a MPS district mentor (coaching early career teachers). Prior to this, Helen taught English at the middle and high school levels for thirteen years. Like Tracy, Helen is a teacher consultant with UWMWP with experience in creating TIWs and acted as an onsite coach.

What We Learned

In addition to improving student achievement in writing, one of our goals was to lead the Tech teaching and administrative staff in a choice-driven PD. Even though we focused our TIWs on our specific classroom contexts, we wanted to engage our peers in our work; therefore, we interviewed teachers from other departments. We could now understand their classroom needs and learn how our inquiries might influence their practices. When we presented our TIWs in spring 2013, participants selected whichever session they felt most relevant to their teaching and their students' needs. Sessions ran concurrently, with roughly 30 participants in each.

Elizabeth felt that by focusing on the process of questioning to engage students in finding writing topics, roughly 80 percent of her students increased in both the quality and quantity of their writing. She "learned that students were less apprehensive to tackle a project if they saw themselves as the initiators and became intrinsically motivated in it." She noted, "I learned how to incorporate creative strategies that revived me as a teacher and revived my students in

the classroom." Seeing that she had successes and failures, she loved "that I was encouraged and inspired to try new things in my classroom" and was "excited about lesson planning and content, because these were the two issues about teaching I could control."

Helen's students told her that teaching them root words helped prepare them for their ACT tests. Additionally, she noticed that when she gave them short assessments in class, 80 percent showed proficiency in identifying the meaning of roots and putting roots in sentences. Helen noted that by focusing her inquiry on vocabulary, root words, prefixes and suffixes, she was meeting the needs of underperforming urban students.

As a result of their work together, Jared and Kristy saw evidence of improved student achievement. Jared noted that his students gained confidence in their writing, while Kristy felt student writing, "Improved dramatically in that they pretty much stopped summarizing completely." She felt that "students now have a language that they both can use and understand." After participating in the teacher-led PD, Jared shared, "Perhaps the best part of working through the TIW process was being able to focus on something positive and beneficial." Kristy observed, "Being allowed to personalize my learning through deciding my own inquiry topic made me feel empowered and professional." After their presentation, they learned that the science department took their argumentation model and adapted it to use when their students wrote lab reports. Additionally, Kristy and Jared created posters showing the application of *claim*, *evidence*, and *explanation* for every classroom at Tech that further supported a common language around argumentation.

In working together to implement the use of mentor texts, Jenny and Tracy saw improved student performance in different areas. Jenny's students expressed less stress and frustration when composing and pushed her to include more "models

when I hadn't brought in a mentor text." Tracy saw improvement in her students' writings when she "implemented weekly mentor sentences focusing on one skill." She said that 80 percent of her students improved on immediate assessments and saw a 60 percent improvement in long-term writing skills. Jenny felt the "best components of this process was being able to collaborate with a colleague throughout the research process, share our classroom experiences, and then share it with our colleagues on a larger scale." As a veteran of the TIW process, Tracy noted, "The joy (and stress) in this method is that you get to share your knowledge with other teachers. We are not an island [unto] our own; we all expand our practices by learning from each other. I am a firm believer that all PD should be led by teachers in a workshop format. 'Bottom-up' will revolutionize the educational profession."

Sustainability and Replication

While developing our TIWs we frequently wondered just how we could use this opportunity to support future PD at Tech—as well as PD throughout the district—especially without grant funding. Common time to work together as a department is central to its success.

Additionally, for the purpose of continuity and sustainability, all the TIWs were videotaped for self-evaluation and reflection, as well as for future individualized PD by other Tech teachers. The district took copies of the sessions to post on its portal to allow access to other MPS teachers. All the materials created and used by the English department were available during the presentations, through the department's PD library, and distributed to teachers that went to other sessions. Most of the materials we constructed to create the TIWs were shared with the larger

NWP community by Donna during her monthly conference calls with the other grantees.

In the 2013-2014 school year, our department continued our collaboration with a series of book studies. Additionally, writing this article together sustained our work and allowed us to revisit and re-envision our department's goals with our new members. Moreover, some of us presented versions of our TIWs at a regional conference in November 2014, and Donna is replicating this work with the Tech science department, specific to their needs and classroom contexts.

Empowering Professional Development

Our experience typifies what York-Barr and Duke found from their studies, that "teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement" (2004, p. 15). The activities in which we participated engaged us in inquiry to improve content knowledge and leadership skills through participation in a professional community (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; DuFour, 2004; Hubbard & Power, 2003; Lieberman & Friedrich, 2007; NCLE, 2013).

This was an empowering PD experience that was both challenging and rewarding. It was unique because we selected our own topics based on our classroom concerns and student needs. This, in turn, reinforced our leadership as teachers and our expertise as we led the PD for the rest of the instructional staff. Our colleagues throughout the school learned from us and implemented our learning in their own practices, improving student achievement across the school. We felt valued that our administration recognized our expertise and

supported us as we analyzed our practices to determine what would best improve student achievement in our content area. Our ability to organize and implement the PD supported our morale and confirmed our worth as educators. The entire department grew as professionals, putting a new face on PD at our school and within our district. ●

Join the conversation:

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National Blogging Collaborative: Drive, Partnerships, and a Cause

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The theme for CEL 2014 was “Leading in a Collaborative World,” and it is clear that this task is not possible unless one has a cause, drive, and collegial partnerships. So, when one sees an article written by an elementary teacher from Seattle, a social studies department chair from Pennsylvania, an elementary teacher from Lexington, and two high school educators from the Chicago suburbs, it might be natural to ask, “Why is such a wide range of educators writing together?” Well, the answer is simple: We have a cause, drive, and have developed collegial partnerships. Meet the National Blogging Collaborative team. As a group, our mission is to create a collaborative network of practicing educators from across the country to develop the confidence, skills, and voice necessary to produce authentic writing that brings the realities of the classroom to the public.

Our Cause

We are all writers; at some level, it is that simple. That said, it became clear to us that not enough teachers are. When one explores the national landscape of education, the lack of teacher voice is a serious problem. To us, that is not something that we can ignore; in fact, if we want to push for needed change in education, teacher voice must become the most important factor. Of course, there is a wide range of reasons why teachers are not blogging. Be it not having enough time, not having the confidence in one’s writing, or simply not knowing how to get started, it is easy to find ways and reasons not to blog. To that end, we realized that something must

be done, that education needed a platform and process to help empower all teachers to better add their voice to the national conversation. So, we developed and launched an organization that provides support for all those obstacles; our writing templates, timelines, and one-on-one writing coaches help teachers move past the barriers associated with blogging and enable them to add their voices to the conversation.

Our Drive

As a team, we worked hard to create a process where our coaches work one-on-one with educators looking to begin or improve blogging. Our goal is to help writers with every step of the process: from idea/topic creation through publication. Additionally, we have protocols and procedures to help unite bloggers from across the country to produce co-blogs. These pieces serve a vital role in the national education conversation in that they help unite teachers and the bigger cause of helping all students by showing decision makers that all schools, students, teachers, and communities, regardless of geography, want all kids to succeed and have many barriers to overcome for that to happen.

Our Collegial Partnership

This team did not happen by chance, in fact, we believe nothing does. Rather, this team came about because of a desire to help, a belief that through collaboration we could make a difference. There is no paycheck involved (in fact, it costs *us* money to do this); instead, we get to learn from one another each step of the way. Through our collegial partnership we

have gained friends, a deeper understanding of writing, a more complete picture of education across the country, and a space to share all of this with others. That is what collegial partnerships in a collaborative world are all about—finding others who will push you, make you better—and that is what we have here. So, we challenge you to find a cause, find some partners, and use your drive to enact change. ●

Join the conversation: @mrbronke, @mrsbronke, @notbradclark, @lisa_hollenbach, @brookster29, @natblogcollab

February 2016 Call for Manuscripts: Teacher Leadership

In their 2007 article “Ten Roles for Teacher Leaders” in *Educational Leadership*, Cindy Harrison and Joellen Killian assert that “regardless of the roles they assume, teacher leaders shape the culture of their schools, improve student learning, and influence practice among their peers.” How is teacher leadership in English language arts encouraged, nurtured, and sustained? In what ways can teachers aspire to leadership outside the realm of school administration? How do teachers lead themselves and others within turbulent school cultures? How have the CCSS and PARCC affected teachers’ approaches to leading? Share manuscripts as Google Docs and send cover letters in direct e-mail to abramselq@gmail.com. **Deadline: December 15, 2015.**

Call for Manuscripts/ Future Issues

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–5,000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary, secondary, or college) where English is taught. Informal, first-hand accounts of successful research, teaching, and learning activities related to themes of upcoming issues are encouraged. Themes of upcoming issues include:

October 2015: **Getting into Arguments**

(deadline July 15, 2015)

(see call, p. 4)

February 2016: **Teacher Leadership**

(deadline December 15, 2015)

(see call, p. 15)

Submission Guidelines: 1) Manuscripts should address the theme listed in the call for manuscripts for that issue. 2) Manuscripts should be double-spaced with 1-inch margins in 12-point font. 3) Manuscripts should follow the current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 4) Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover letter, which includes the theme the article addresses, a bulleted list of key points the article addresses, author name(s), affiliation, work address, work phone number, fax number, and email address. Manuscripts will not be reviewed without the cover letter. Email a copy of your manuscript and a cover letter to abramselq@gmail.com. Make sure that when sending your electronic submission, you indicate in the subject line of the email the issue date for which you are submitting (e.g., August 2015 *ELQ*). ●

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