

# NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

*Final Evaluation Report*

**Prepared by  
The Academy for  
Educational  
Development**

**Prepared for  
The National Writing  
Project**

**Winter 2002**



Academy for Educational Development  
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# **NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT**

## ***Final Evaluation Report***

**Submitted**

**to the**

**National Writing Project**

**by the**

**Academy for Educational Development**

**New York, NY**

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## SUMMARY

The National Writing Project (NWP) is a nationwide professional development network, begun in 1974, whose mission is to improve the teaching of writing in the nation's schools. A basic assumption of NWP is that writing is fundamental to learning across the entire curriculum, not just in English and language arts classes. Further, written communication is a critical skill needed for success at work and in adult life.

Currently involving 175 local sites across the country, NWP is a “teachers-teaching-teachers” model of professional development. This model acknowledges the primary importance of teacher knowledge, expertise, and leadership. Experienced teachers attend invitational summer institutes at their local writing project sites to examine the theory and practice of the teaching of writing, learn in a community of kindergarten to university-level teachers, conduct research, and develop their own writing. During the school year, these teachers provide professional development workshops for other teachers in their schools and communities. In addition, writing project sites provide a range of supports for teachers and schools, including inservice workshops, teacher research groups, new teacher support, writing and reading conferences, and parent workshops.<sup>1</sup>

In 1999, NWP commissioned the Academy for Educational Development (AED) to conduct a three-year national evaluation. AED collected data on how student writing is developed in classrooms, the conditions that support student achievement in writing, and the outcomes for students in NWP classrooms. This report presents results from all three years of the evaluation, with emphasis on the results from the third year (all graphs pertain to the third year of the evaluation unless otherwise noted).

## METHODOLOGY

There were four sources of data for this evaluation:

- **Teacher assignments and student work.** AED staff collected two classroom writing assignments from every participating teacher, along with the corresponding final drafts of student work, in each of the three years of the evaluation. With these data, evaluators were able to look at students’ opportunities to learn and the competencies they demonstrated through written work offering evidence of “authentic intellectual work.” Authentic intellectual work refers to the “original application of knowledge and skills (rather than just routine use of facts and procedures)”; it also involves “disciplined inquiry into the details of a particular problem and results in a product or presentation that has meaning or value beyond success in school” (Newmann, Lopez, and Bryk, 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> For additional information on NWP, see the following sources: National Writing Project, *National Writing Project 1999 Annual Report* (Berkeley, CA: Author, 2000); M.A. Smith, “A Marriage That Worked: The Department of Defense Dependents Schools and the National Writing Project,” *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81:8 (April 2000) 622-26; National Writing Project, *Essentials of the NWP Model* [internal document] (Berkeley, CA: Author, 1999); and M. St. John, *The National Writing Project Model: A Five-Year Retrospective on Findings from the Annual Site Survey*, (Berkeley, CA: Inverness Research Associates, 1999).

- **Timed writing prompts.** Baseline and follow-up writing prompts were administered to measure students' writing achievement and progress from fall to spring in 1999-2000, 2000-01, and 2001-02. The prompts were administered during one class period, with approximately 25 minutes of the period devoted to prewriting activities. Both prompts were administered in the fall and spring, with approximately half of the students responding to each prompt at each administration. Thus, all students wrote to both prompts. Both writing prompts used in the study asked students to write a persuasive letter to someone they knew. Their writing was scored by teachers trained in applying scoring guides, or "rubrics," based on two separate aspects of writing: rhetorical effectiveness and writing conventions. The rhetorical-effectiveness score reflects how well the writer understands and responds to a particular writing situation. In this case, qualities included focus/coherence, elaboration, and style of writing. The conventions score reflects student mastery of the conventions of English usage, mechanics, and spelling.
- **Teacher interviews and surveys.** AED staff surveyed and interviewed all NWP teachers in years one and two of the study about their participation in writing project staff development and its impact on them professionally; their instructional approaches in teaching writing; leadership opportunities; and support for the teaching of writing.
- **Extant data.** Background data were collected on participating students (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, free-lunch status), teachers (e.g., years of experience, gender, subject-area taught), schools (e.g., size, location, percentage eligible for free lunch), and districts (e.g., size, location, percentage eligible for free lunch). National representative survey data from the National Assessment for Education Progress (NAEP) and the U.S. Department of Education's School and Staffing Survey (SASS) were used to provide comparisons to NWP teacher-survey data.

## STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The sites, teachers, and students selected for the study represent a diverse sample of NWP classrooms in terms of location, setting, size of district and school, racial/ethnic makeup of students, and number of English Language Learner (ELL) students. A total of 36 third- and fourth-grade teachers from five writing project sites across California, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania participated in the study over the three years. All participating teachers had attended a writing project summer institute and had experience with NWP that varied from a few to more than eight years. Participating teachers did not have any other particular expertise (such as teaching persuasive writing) and were selected to represent the range of teachers involved in the writing project nationwide.

The student sample comprised each participating teacher's third- or fourth-grade class. Thus, the student sample was cross-sectional and changed each year. Specific background demographics of students changed somewhat each year; the overall patterns were the same, however. For example, in all three years, the majority of students attended low socioeconomic status (SES) schools. However, a greater proportion of students in year three were low SES (83%) than in years one (76%) and two (80%). Because the student sample changed from year to year, comparisons of results across years were made only to determine overall patterns and trends.

## FINDINGS

The following section summarizes findings from year three of the study.<sup>2</sup>

<b>Finding 1: NWP provided teachers with intense, ongoing professional development experiences.</b>
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- **NWP teachers had multiple opportunities to participate in ongoing professional development.** All NWP teachers began their participation with the five-week summer institute and continued with follow-up, or “continuity,” programs, tailored to the needs and expertise of the teachers and sites. Continuity programs included a variety of events such as workshops, institutes, Saturday meetings, retreats, school visitations, and teacher research groups.
- **Teachers described the continuity programs as extremely valuable in furthering their professional development**—exposing them to new practices, keeping them up to date on state-of-the-art practices and the latest thinking in the field, and changing their attitudes toward professional development.
- **Most teachers attributed staying on top of the latest research and literature to their involvement in the writing project.** Three-fourths or more of NWP teachers in the study strongly agreed that the writing project provided them with new information (75%) and caused them to seek further information or training (78%). NWP teachers were much more likely to strongly agree with these statements than teachers nationwide who participated in intensive (32 hours or more in the last year) professional development. Only about one-fourth of teachers nationwide strongly agreed that the intensive professional development they experienced had provided them with new information (28%) or caused them to seek further information or training (24%).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Findings from all three years of the evaluation were similar and revealed similar trends. Differences in results from year to year were likely the result of changes in the student population from year to year. For example, a greater proportion of students in year three of the study were low socioeconomic status. In the following section, percentages reported are from year-three data, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>3</sup> The nationwide sample of teachers includes 40,148 third- and fourth-grade, regular (full-time) classroom teachers of English, reading, ESL, and/or general elementary classes who completed the U.S. Department of Education's School and Staffing Survey in 1993-94. Their responses related to professional development within the past year that lasted more than 32 hours.

### **Finding 2: NWP helped foster a professional community.**

- **Continuity programs helped NWP teachers develop a valuable professional network**—both formally and informally—that provided teachers with mechanisms to share and learn new information and served as “sounding boards” and “support systems.” For some teachers, a professional network was also facilitated by an electronic listserv.
- **Sharing expertise with colleagues enhanced professional community of the NWP teachers’ and helped extend the impact of NWP.** NWP teachers increased the reach of the continuity programs and expanded their own professional community by sharing what they learned with their colleagues through formal and informal venues. In terms of formal venues, almost all teachers (87%) in the study conducted workshops on various writing-related topics for other teachers.<sup>4</sup> Many reported that they held school leadership positions, which allowed them to influence the teaching and learning priorities of their school. They also shared their expertise with their colleagues in informal ways, such as discussions during planning periods.

### **Finding 3: Teachers reported changes in their beliefs about teaching as a result of NWP.**

- **Professional development offered by the writing project changed teachers’ philosophies about teaching.** In interviews, teachers reported that the writing project had a profound impact on their philosophy about teaching. This finding was substantiated through surveys that revealed most NWP teachers (88%) in the study strongly agreed that writing project professional development opportunities had changed their views on teaching. This compares with only 12% of a 1993-94 national sample of teachers who had participated in other types of intensive professional development lasting at least 32 hours.

### **Finding 4: Teachers reported an increased use of exemplary teaching practices as a result of NWP.**

- **Teachers reported that the writing project caused them to change their teaching practices.** Eighty-three percent of writing project teachers in the study strongly agreed with this statement. The impact of NWP on teachers’ practices seems to be much greater than that of other intensive professional development opportunities. For example, only 17% of teachers in a national sample strongly agreed that the intensive (32 hours or more) professional development they experienced caused them to change their teaching practices.
- **NWP teachers saw writing as a tool through which learning occurs.** According to interviews, the teachers in the study saw writing as a powerful tool for learning across the curriculum and for developing critical thinking skills. In other words, they saw writing as fundamental to teaching all subjects rather than a separate subject. Thus, teachers reported that they taught a variety of types of writing (e.g. persuasive, expository) and integrated writing across the curriculum. This finding was substantiated by the wide variety of subject

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<sup>4</sup> Data are from the year two survey of participating teachers (n=29).



areas, genres, and concepts addressed in the writing assignments collected from NWP teachers over the three years of the evaluation: of 154 assignments collected over three years, nine were persuasive pieces, 60 were expository, 34 creative, 34 personal narrative, and 17 were poems. Assignments covered the content areas of social studies, science, mathematics and art, as well as language arts.

- **NWP teachers were more likely to use exemplary practices and spent far greater time on writing instruction than most fourth-grade teachers across the country.** NWP teachers were more likely to use some exemplary instructional practices on a weekly basis than a nationally representative sample of fourth-grade teachers. These practices included asking students to plan their writing, write in journals/logs, choose their own topics to write about, or use a computer to write a draft. Further, over four-fifths (83%) of NWP third- and fourth-grade self-contained classroom teachers in the study spent more than 90 minutes a week on writing, compared with only 31% of fourth-grade teachers who responded to the NAEP survey of writing practices.
- **A majority of teacher assignments provided students with an opportunity to perform authentic intellectual work.** Almost all assignments (96%) collected for the study had at least some expectation that students construct knowledge by interpreting, evaluating, analyzing, or synthesizing information rather than simply reproducing it (such as recalling facts or dates). In addition, over two-thirds (68%) explicitly asked students to demonstrate an understanding of concepts (rhetorical strategies or genres, methods of inquiry, or content from the discipline). Most assignments (94%) required or gave students the opportunity to connect the topic of the assignment to significant experiences, observations, feelings, or situations in their lives. All these qualities in teacher assignments have been shown to have a positive affect on student achievement and higher standardized test scores (Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001).

<b>Finding 5: A majority of students' work showed evidence of construction of knowledge, organization and coherence, and control of the conventions of writing.</b>
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- **Student work demonstrated construction of knowledge, organization and coherence, and control of the conventions of writing.** Specifically, 41% of student work analyzed for the study showed substantial evidence of construction of knowledge (through analysis, synthesis, interpretation, or evaluation), and an additional 38% showed some evidence. Most student work (86%) also showed substantial or moderate organization and coherence, with the writing revealing a discernable, effective pattern. In addition, a high percentage of the work (92%) showed general or clear control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling.
- **The study confirmed Newmann's finding that students were much more likely to construct knowledge when the assignment to which they were responding made an explicit call to do so.** More than five times as many pieces of student work showed substantial evidence of construction of knowledge when students were explicitly asked in the assignment to do so, compared with the work of students not explicitly asked to do so (51% versus 8%). The high percentage of teacher tasks (96%) that asked students to construct knowledge indicate that students in NWP classrooms have many opportunities to engage in construction of knowledge, an indicator of authentic intellectual achievement.

**Finding 6: A majority of students reached adequate or strong achievement for rhetorical effectiveness and general or clear control of the conventions of writing on their responses to the writing prompt by follow-up. Students showed statistically significant gains from baseline to follow-up.**

- **Most third and fourth graders (82% and 85%, respectively) reached adequate or strong achievement for rhetorical effectiveness on their responses to the writing prompt by follow-up.** Almost three-fourths (72%) of third graders and 78% of fourth graders demonstrated general or clear control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling in their prompt response.
- **Third- and fourth-grade scores showed statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) increases from baseline to follow-up for both rhetorical effectiveness and writing conventions.**

The majority (52%) of students increased their scores in rhetorical effectiveness by at least half a point. Slightly less than one-fourth (19%) of students did not change their scores, and approximately one-fourth (29%) showed a slight score decrease. Close to half (47%) of scores for writing conventions also increased from baseline to follow-up; slightly less than one-third (30%) of students did not change their scores; and about one-fourth (24%) showed a slight score decrease. For both rhetorical effectiveness and conventions, most increases in score were by a point or more, while most decreases in score were by a half point.
- **Although there were some differences in achievement between subgroups, the student-achievement findings hold true for students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, English language learners, students from classrooms with high percentages of free-lunch-eligible students, and males and females.** Differences between subgroups in this study were similar to subgroup differences found in the 1998 NAEP writing assessment results.
- **Overall, trends in the findings were consistent across the three years of the evaluation.** Differences in student achievement results from year to year were likely as a result of differences in the student sample from year to year.

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

This report describes the results from a three-year evaluation of the National Writing Project. Through multiple methods and data sources collected by the Academy for Educational Development, the study has illuminated the impact of the writing project on teachers' professional community; views and practices; the ways in which writing project teachers develop student writing and use writing as a tool for learning; and the writing achievement outcomes for students in 25 third- and fourth-grade classrooms.

The data collected for this study show that the NWP had a profound impact on participating teachers. The study revealed the many ways that writing project teachers used effective classroom practices to foster student achievement in writing and used writing as a tool for learning through diverse and challenging writing activities and assignments. Finally, it showed that most third- and fourth-grade students in the study classes demonstrated adequate or strong levels of achievement in their writing and made statistically significant gains in rhetorical effectiveness and control of the conventions of writing over the course of a school year. It is clear from the findings that NWP provides teachers with intense, ongoing professional development experiences and fosters the development of a professional community, which has a positive impact on teachers' beliefs and increases their use of effective practices, resulting in strong student achievement in writing.

## INTRODUCTION

*For me, the writing project is a place to find people who have definite voices and opinions that focus on the real work of teaching and on student voices and student work. (Fourth-grade teacher)*

The National Writing Project (NWP) is a nationwide professional development network, begun in 1974, whose mission is to improve the teaching of writing in the nation's schools. A basic assumption of NWP is that writing is fundamental to learning across the entire curriculum, not just in English and language arts classes. Further, written communication is a critical skill needed for success at work and in adult life. Currently involving 175 local sites across the country, NWP is a "teachers-teaching-teachers" model of professional development. This model acknowledges the primary importance of teacher knowledge, expertise, and leadership. Experienced teachers attend invitational summer institutes at their local writing project sites to examine the theory and practice of the teaching of writing, learn in a community of kindergarten to university-level teachers, conduct research, and develop their own writing. During the school year, these teachers provide professional development workshops for other teachers in their schools and communities. In addition, writing project sites provide a range of supports for teachers and schools, including inservice workshops, teacher research groups, new teacher support, writing and reading conferences, and parent workshops.<sup>5</sup>

In 1999, NWP commissioned the Academy for Educational Development (AED) to conduct a three-year national evaluation. The evaluation sought to determine data on how student writing is developed in NWP classrooms, the conditions that support student achievement in writing, and the outcomes for students in NWP classrooms. Specifically, the research questions were:

- What are the characteristics of NWP teachers?
- How do NWP teachers design and implement writing instruction in their classrooms? What is the level of school/district support for NWP?
- What are the characteristics of schools, districts, and students participating in the evaluation?
- What are the student writing outcomes in NWP classrooms?

### Methodology

To address the research questions, AED staff used multiple methods to collect data from 24 third- and fourth-grade writing project classrooms located around the country in 1999-2000, 29 classrooms in 2000-01, and 25 classrooms in 2001-02. The data collected included 1) timed

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<sup>5</sup> For additional information on NWP, see the following sources: National Writing Project, *National Writing Project 1999 Annual Report* (Berkeley, CA: Author, 2000); M.A. Smith, "A Marriage That Worked: The Department of Defense Dependents Schools and the National Writing Project," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81:8 (April 2000) 622-26; National Writing Project, *Essentials of the NWP Model* [internal document] (Berkeley, CA: Author, 1999); and M. St. John, *The National Writing Project Model: A Five-Year Retrospective on Findings from the Annual Site Survey*, (Berkeley, CA: Inverness Research Associates, 1999).

student responses to writing prompts administered in the fall and spring; 2) two teacher assignments from every classroom; 3) student work corresponding to every teacher assignment; 4) written surveys and telephone interviews with participating teachers; and 5) extant data on the schools, districts, and communities within which participating schools were located. The table below shows the number of classrooms, teachers, and students in each study year and the number of pieces of data analyzed by type. Each type of data collected for the study is also briefly described below. A full description of the methodology is located in Appendix A.

### **Summary of Data Collection: Years One, Two, and Three**

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Total</b>
Students in the study	583	736	595	1914
Teachers in the study	24	29	25	36
Fall prompts scored	479	633	521	1633
Spring prompts scored	505	636	533	1674
Matched prompts scored	399	534	471	1404
Pieces of student work scored	583	760	649	1992
Teacher tasks scored	46	58	50	154
Teacher surveys completed	24	29	25	78
Teacher interviews completed	24	29	0	53

#### ***Timed Writing Prompts***

Two writing prompts were developed by AED, NWP, and teachers involved in year one of the study. The prompts were administered during one class period, with approximately 25 minutes of the period devoted to prewriting activities. To allow for analysis of change over time, students were asked to respond to one prompt in the fall (baseline) and a second prompt the following spring (follow-up).<sup>6</sup> Both versions of the prompts were administered in the fall and spring with approximately half of the students responding to each prompt at each administration. Thus, all students wrote to both prompts.

The prompts called for persuasive writing, a demanding form of composition that requires writers to take a position, select supporting details, organize ideas effectively, and express these ideas clearly and convincingly. In addition, a persuasive piece encourages writers to go beyond simply retelling information to constructing arguments and providing evidence to support the case. The responses were scored on a six-point rhetorical-effectiveness scale that included the qualities of focus/coherence, elaboration, and style. Responses were also scored on a four-point scale for conventions of English usage, mechanics, and spelling. Demographic information collected on every student and classroom allowed for analyses of various subgroups, including socioeconomic status (SES) and English language learners (ELL), as well as analyses by grade, race/ethnicity, and gender.

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout this report, the fall administration of the prompt is referred to as “baseline,” and the spring administration as “follow-up.”

### ***Teacher Assignments and Student Work***

To gain a better understanding of teacher assignments and their impact on students, AED staff collected two assignments and the corresponding student work from all teachers in the study. Teachers were asked to submit assignments that gave the best sense of how well their students were learning and understanding a subject or skill at their highest level. In interviews, teachers reported that the assignments they submitted for the study were typical of the ones they used throughout the year.

The teacher assignments and corresponding student work were analyzed using criteria developed by Newmann and his associates to assess the quality of “authentic intellectual work.” Authentic intellectual work refers to the “original application of knowledge and skills (rather than just routine use of facts and procedures).” It also involves “disciplined inquiry into the details of a particular problem and results in a product or presentation that has meaning or value beyond success in school” (Newmann, Lopez and Bryk, 1998). Specifically, the assignments were analyzed to determine the extent to which they called for students to construct knowledge (rather than reproduce facts), demonstrate understanding of the content or concept being taught, and connect the topic of the assignment to their own lives. Student work was analyzed to determine the extent to which students demonstrated construction of knowledge, organization and coherence, and control of the conventions of English usage, mechanics, and spelling. These criteria are described in greater detail in Appendix A.

Examining classroom practices and authentic intellectual work is important for three reasons. First, teacher assignments are related to student achievement and the quality of student work. Research shows that authentic pedagogy boosts student achievement for students of all social backgrounds (Newmann and Wehlage, 1995) and that teachers who give students assignments requiring authentic intellectual work see greater gains on standardized test scores (Newmann, Bryk, and Nagaoka, 2001). Similarly, more challenging teacher assignments are associated with high-quality student work (Newmann et al., 1998; Clare, 2000). Second, authentic intellectual work is similar to the type of problem-solving that adults face in their everyday lives; having opportunities to engage in such work helps prepare students to be critical, analytical thinkers. Third, examining teacher assignments and student work provides data on actual classroom practices and related student outcomes in a way that self-reported data (e.g., teacher interviews and surveys) and standardized test scores cannot. This examination provides direct evidence about students' opportunities to learn and the competencies they demonstrate.

### ***Teacher Surveys and Interviews***

To understand the instructional and school contexts, AED staff surveyed and interviewed teachers regarding their participation in writing project staff development and its impact on them professionally; their instructional approaches in teaching writing; leadership opportunities; and the level of school support for the teaching of writing. These data also provided a context for understanding the outcomes shown in the student responses to timed writing prompts and in the student work collected with the teacher assignments.

### ***Extant Data***

As context to the entire study, background data were collected on participating students, teachers, schools, and districts. Specifically, the following data were collected for all participating classrooms: student demographics (gender, race/ethnicity, and free-lunch and ELL status); teacher characteristics (years of experience teaching, years of involvement with NWP, gender, and subject-area taught), school characteristics (size, location, and percentage of enrollment eligible for free lunch and identified as special education); and district characteristics (size, location, and percentage of enrollment eligible for free lunch).

The mixed-method approach used in this evaluation provided multiple indicators of the ways NWP teachers develop writing and foster high-quality student writing in their classrooms. This approach, and the multiple lenses through which data were analyzed, helped provide a valid picture of the outcomes for students in NWP classrooms and the conditions that produced those outcomes.

### **Organization of This Report**

This report presents the results of the three years of the evaluation, with emphasis on the results from the third year. Chapter One, *Site Characteristics and Study Participants*, describes the teachers and students participating in the study, as well as their local schools and district contexts. Chapter Two, *Local Writing Project Experience*, describes participating teachers' involvement with their local writing project, their leadership experiences, and the impact that they believe NWP has made on their teaching and in their schools. Chapter Three, *Writing Project Classrooms*, describes how writing project teachers in this study use writing in their classrooms, including examples of assignments scored for authentic intellectual achievement. Chapter Four, *Student Achievement*, presents the results of analyses of two types of student data: student responses to the teacher assignments and responses to a baseline and follow-up writing prompt. The appendices contain materials relevant to this study, including a description of the methodology, the teacher survey and questionnaire regarding student assignments, and scoring rubrics.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **SITE CHARACTERISTICS AND STUDY PARTICIPANTS**

In the third year of the study, 25 teachers from five writing project sites across the United States participated in the study, along with nearly 600 students from their classrooms. All participating teachers had attended a writing project summer institute and were actively involved in their local writing projects at the time of the study. Teachers' experience with NWP varied from two to 15 years.

The writing project sites were selected to reflect the range and diversity of schools, students, and teachers involved in NWP. The sites and classrooms represented a diverse sample in terms of location, setting, size of district and school, racial/ethnic makeup, and number of ELL students. All teachers asked to participate had to have completed a writing project summer institute and were teaching a third- or fourth-grade class during the study years. Participating teachers did not have any other particular expertise (such as special training in teaching persuasive writing) and were selected to represent the range of teachers involved in the writing project. In addition, given the overall mission of NWP to improve the teaching of writing for all students in the nation's schools, AED staff over-sampled classrooms with a majority of low-income students (as measured by free and reduced-priced lunch status).

Third- and fourth-grade classrooms were selected for the study for several reasons. First, by third and fourth grade, most students have participated in other types of writing assessments and therefore would not be completely unfamiliar with assessment procedures. Second, students at these grade levels are beginning to develop writing skills and master conventions, making it an appropriate time to assess their current achievement levels and measure progress over a school year. Third, the same scoring rubric could be applied to writing from students at two contiguous grade levels. This chapter describes the study sites, schools, teachers, and students.

#### **Site Characteristics**

In year three, the five writing project sites were located in California, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania. Between four and six teachers were selected to participate from every site, for a total of 25 teachers from 24 schools in 15 school districts in year three (see table below). Eleven schools were in urban areas, seven were in rural areas, and six were in suburban areas. Two-thirds of schools ( $n=16$ ) were fairly small, with total enrollments of fewer than 700 students. All schools in the study were elementary schools.

Most selected schools had a high proportion of students from poor families, reflecting the sampling design. In over two-thirds of schools ( $n=17$ ), more than 50% of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.



### Site Characteristics: Year Three

	CA	KY	MS	OK	PA	Total
<b>District Characteristics</b>						
<b>Number of Participating Districts</b>	4	1	5	4	1	15
<b>District SES<sup>7</sup></b>						
High SES	0	1	5	2	0	8
Low SES	4	0	0	2	1	7
<b>School Characteristics</b>						
<b>Number of Participating Schools</b>	6	4	5	5	4	24
<b>School Location</b>						
Urban	4	1	0	2	4	11
Rural	0		4	3	0	7
Suburban	2	3	1	0	0	6
<b>School Size</b>						
Less than 700 students	2	4	3	5	2	16
700 or more students	4	0	2	0	2	8
<b>School SES</b>						
High SES	3	1	1	2	0	7
Low SES	3	3	4	3	4	17
<b>Student Characteristics</b>						
Special education students	3%	2%	2%	19%	9%	7%
English language learners	52%	7%	0%	6%	0%	16%

### Teacher Characteristics

In year three, 25 writing project teachers participated, 24 of whom had also participated in year two. One new teacher was added to replace a participant who no longer taught third or fourth grade. A substantial majority of teachers (92%) were female, and most (80%) were white (see table below). A total of 8% were Latina/Hispanic, 4% were African-American, and 8% were of another race/ethnicity.

With at least four years of teaching experience, most participants in year three were fairly seasoned teachers. About one-third of teachers had between four and 10 years of experience, 40% had between 11 and 20 years of experience, and 28% had more than 20 years of experience. Experience with NWP also varied from two to three years (21%) to eight or more years (42%). Most participants were classroom teachers, responsible for one group of third or fourth graders. Five teachers taught individual subjects such as science, computer technology or language arts, or they taught gifted and talented classes.

<sup>7</sup> In high-SES districts and schools, less than 50% of students are eligible for free/reduced-price lunch. In low-SES districts and schools, at least 50% of students are eligible for free/reduced-price lunch.

As shown in the table below, teacher characteristics did not vary greatly from year to year. The greatest variation was seen in teachers' years of experience in the classroom and years of experience with the writing project. For example, a greater percentage of year-two teachers had 10 or fewer years of teaching experience and three or fewer years of experience with the writing project compared with teachers in years one and three of the study.

### Teacher Characteristics by Study Year

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<b>Number of Participating Teachers</b>	N=24	N=29	N=25
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	17%	10%	8%
Female	83%	90%	92%
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>			
White	79%	76%	80%
African-American	8%	7%	4%
Latina/Hispanic	8%	10%	8%
Other	4%	7%	8%
<b>Experience teaching</b>			
4-10 years	29%	43%	32%
11-15 years	17%	14%	20%
16-20 years	21%	21%	20%
More than 20 years	33%	21%	28%
<b>Experience with local writing project</b>			
1-3 years	39%	48%	21%
4-7 years	21%	14%	38%
8 or more years	39%	38%	42%
<b>Subject taught</b>			
Primary classroom teacher	79%	75%	79%
Subject teacher or other	21%	25%	21%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

### Student Characteristics

Participating teachers were asked to complete class lists indicating the gender and race/ethnicity of their students, as well as their English language learner (ELL) and special-needs status (see table below). As reported on the class lists, students were diverse in terms of race/ethnicity and ELL and special-needs status; equal numbers were male and female. There were fewer third graders (31%) than fourth graders (69%) in year three. A total of 43% were white, one-third (33%) were African-American, 15% were Latino/Hispanic, and 8% were of another race/ethnicity. A total of 16% of students in the study were identified as ELL. Most ELL students (65%) spoke Spanish, and two-thirds of ELL students were beginner or intermediate English speakers; 7 % of students had special-education status.

Student characteristics varied somewhat from year to year. For example, there was a greater percentage of third graders than fourth graders in year one, while the reverse was true in years two and three. In addition, fewer students in year three were Latino or ELL than in years one and two. Finally, there was a greater percentage of students in low-SES classrooms in year three compared with years one and two.

### Student Characteristics by Study Year

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
<b>Number of Participating Students</b>	N=583	n=736	n=595
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	51%	49%	50%
Female	49%	51%	50%
<b>Grade</b>			
Third	58%	32%	31%
Fourth	42%	68%	69%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>			
White	35%	37%	43%
African-American	33%	35%	33%
Latino/Hispanic	22%	22%	15%
Other <sup>8</sup>	10%	7%	8%
<b>English Language Learners</b>	24%	24%	16%
Spanish (% of ELL students)	18%	87%	65%
Other language (% of ELL students)	6%	13%	35%
<b>Special Education</b>	8%	7%	7 %
<b>Classroom SES</b>			
High SES classroom	24%	20%	17%
Low SES classroom	76%	80%	83%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

<sup>8</sup> Other race/ethnicity includes Native American/Alaska Native (2%); Asian (5%); and unspecified other (1%).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LOCAL WRITING PROJECT EXPERIENCE

*The Writing Project changes the way you do things in class. [Writing] shifts from being a subject to a way of doing things and it helps you appreciate the children in your class as writers first. (Fourth-grade teacher)*

The NWP teachers participating in the study were involved in five different local writing projects nationwide. Even though they were participating in different local projects, the teachers shared many similar experiences. All teachers began their participation with the writing project by attending an invitational summer institute. The institute, usually lasting five weeks, included opportunities for teachers to demonstrate successful teaching; participate in writing- and editing-response groups, and discuss relevant readings and research. However, the project's professional development did not end with the institute. Follow-up—known in the writing project as “continuity”—is a key to the NWP model. Continuity programs include workshops, institutes, Saturday meetings, retreats, school visitations, and teacher-research groups. All participating teachers attended continuity programs, although how frequently they attended varied.

This chapter describes the experiences of teachers participating in the study in terms of leadership opportunities, impact of the writing project on their professional community, practices and beliefs, and the project's support for writing instruction. It provides a background for understanding the characteristics of writing project professional development and its impact, as well as the ways in which teachers in the study fostered student writing in their classrooms. Data are from interviews and surveys conducted with every teacher participating in the study in years one and two.

#### **Leadership Opportunities: Teachers Teaching Teachers**

The notion that teachers make the best teachers of teachers underpins the NWP model. The thinking behind this practice is twofold. First, experienced teachers have expertise and knowledge to share with other teachers. Second, because of their classroom experience, teachers often have more credibility than outside consultants in providing professional development to other teachers. Given these premises, NWP encourages teachers to assume leadership roles and provide professional development to colleagues in their own schools and across the state. Most NWP teachers in the study did just that.

Writing project teachers used both formal and informal venues to share their expertise with colleagues. Almost all teachers (87%) conducted workshops on writing for other teachers. Most often, workshops were arranged through contracts with the writing project and were not held in the teacher's own school. Topics in these workshops included using literature for classroom writing; writing-across-the-curriculum; motivating students to write; using patterns for writing; scaffolding for writing; writing about characters; extending writing; integrating science and writing; understanding the role of new standards; using stories from around the world; using thematic units; and building vocabulary.

In their own schools, some teachers presented formal workshops on topics similar to those described above. These workshops were often offered as part of a contract with the local writing project or as a response to a personal request from the principal. One teacher said:

*My principal is always calling on me to present things I've learned. I did a whole series of workshops over the summer [for teachers in my school] about things like explaining writers' notebooks.*

Several writing project teachers also held positions or served on committees that provided additional forums for sharing information and strategies and developing a professional community with their peers. For example, a few teachers coordinated small groups of teachers who met on a regular basis to discuss teaching and learning issues. Several others acted as mentors to new teachers, allowing the new teachers to observe their classrooms and then meeting with them to discuss strategies. Still other teachers served on committees, such as the staff development or school improvement committees, and tried to influence the school's priorities and approaches to teaching and learning.

Not all teachers had or wanted formal leadership roles in their own schools: "It is the prophet-in-your-own-backyard issue," stated one teacher who encountered resistance from some colleagues. Teachers from her school were more receptive to "outside" professional development consultants than to their own colleagues. Another teacher said:

*There are always politics that have to be negotiated. There is a conundrum of taking leadership but not getting caught in a trap of always being the one called on.*

Another teacher explained that his school was under extreme pressure to raise test scores in reading and math. Thus, all professional development discussions and workshops were dedicated to reading and mathematics, which limited the extent to which he was able to take a leadership role in terms of professional development around writing instruction.

In these cases, as well as in schools where teachers had more formal leadership roles, writing project teachers found informal ways of sharing what they learned through the writing project. Whether in the hallway between classes or in the teachers' room during lunch, writing project teachers often found themselves in conversations about student writing.

*Other teachers see me as someone who has gone through the writing project. They come to me and ask for advice. For example, if their children have written something and it isn't very good, they want my advice.*

Writing project teachers also tried to set examples and share resources supporting good student writing. For example, many teachers posted examples of student writing for others to see:

*Teachers look at my bulletin board called "Showcase in Writing" and ask me how they can get their students to [write] like that.*

Writing project teachers also shared articles, lesson plans, books, and other information with their colleagues.

### **Support for Writing Instruction**

One of the research questions for this study was, “What is the level of school/district support for NWP?” A cornerstone of any professional development effort is institutional support and a school culture that supports effective instruction. Support for teachers participating in the writing project came from both the school and the project. For the most part, teachers in the study reported that their school and district were supportive of NWP. However, few teachers reported having regular opportunities to share with other teachers, and some teachers described their administrators as “nonintrusive” or “laissez-faire” rather than “supportive.” One teacher stated, “My principal is not in the classroom very often, which is why I’ve been able to implement writing process.”

Almost all (96%) of the teachers reported that their administration encouraged them to attend workshops in reading and writing. This often meant that administrators would find resources for substitute teachers or the costs associated with professional development workshops. In one year-round school, a principal secured a substitute teacher for five weeks so that a teacher could attend the writing project summer institute.

Most (90%) teachers also reported that the administration at their school was supportive of implementing writing project strategies and ideas: “Our principal allows innovation and encourages children to write,” said one teacher. Many echoed the importance of having administrators who believed in the importance of writing and allowed teachers to implement writing process strategies. This was also true at the district level: several writing project teachers were grateful for district resources, including curriculum coordinators who supported writing. “Our curriculum director [at the district] is so supportive of what we do. She’s a ‘forward-thinker’ and has a vision—that is critical,” one teacher stated.

In most schools where administrators valued writing, the majority of faculty valued it as well: “Writing is seen as worthwhile in my school,” said one teacher. “Everyone is open-minded about writing,” added another. Valuing writing, however, did not ensure that teachers had time to discuss writing and learn from one another. In close to two-fifths (39%) of schools, teachers reported that they did not have regular opportunities to share strategies and experiences with other teachers.

According to most writing project teachers, new state and national assessments, such as the portfolio assessment in Kentucky, had helped put a “spotlight” on writing. All five states participating in the study had some form of a writing assessment in the elementary grades. The following two comments from writing project teachers illustrate the impact of these efforts on instructional practices as well as on student performance:

*In a way, testing has been a support because it has a writing component—it has brought writing to the front of teachers’ minds, and there is more pressure to do writing.*

*I’m finding, partially because of reform efforts, that children are less resistant to writing. They are writing earlier and more often.*

Many teachers cautioned, however, that the new spotlight on writing could also be problematic. Writing tests not only added to the stress and pressure teachers faced every day but also often promoted teaching writing in isolation, rather than connecting writing to the curriculum or using it as a tool for learning and expression. One teacher stated:

*The pressure on standardized tests is heavy—it is coming from other teachers and the district. There is a lot of peer pressure from teachers to do more workbook assignments and test preparation in a traditional way.*

A few teachers were also frustrated by reform efforts and tests that seemed to ignore writing. These reforms were often in place to help increase test scores in reading and math. One teacher said:

*Our reform program is really an obstacle [to writing]. It is so structured and there isn’t any time for anything. Everyone is saying that writing is important, yet they can’t seem to find a place for it.*

According to teachers, especially those in schools with large classes, time for individual attention to help students become better writers was hard to find. Some teachers pointed to other structural obstacles to teaching writing: lack of computers, books, and other supplies, and scheduling constraints.

Much support around writing instruction came from writing project colleagues, mostly in other schools or districts. Every writing project develops important professional networks, both formal and informal, that provide teachers with “sounding boards” and “support systems.” For example, one writing project teacher stated:

*I’m always amazed by the people I meet in the writing project—we stay in touch. It is interesting to talk to people from all grade levels. It creates a powerful network to be able to look back at the kinds of things going on in kindergarten, and look ahead to the kinds of things my students will be doing in high school.*

This network is also facilitated by an electronic listserv. One teacher noted that the writing project listserv helps teachers share ideas:

*I contribute [to the listserv] all the time. It is really interesting because of the topics and because people who contribute come from various places and grade levels. It’s powerful because you see things at a deeper level.*

## Impact of the Writing Project

NWP teachers across the five local sites in the study reported that the writing project had a profound impact on their philosophy about teaching and their teaching practices. For some teachers, the first time they had focused on their own writing was at the summer institute, and doing so gave them much greater insight into how students become writers. One teacher explained:

*The institute helped me understand what students were going through [as writers]; how they need to get new ideas. Writing is all about revision and getting new ideas and pre-writing. Writing is more of a thinking process now.*

Interviewed teachers also described the continuity programs as extremely valuable in furthering their professional development—exposing them to new practices, keeping them up to date on state-of-the-art practices and the latest thinking in the field, and changing their attitudes toward professional development. One teacher stated:

*These activities make me reflect on my practice to see what is going on and how what I'm doing fits with professional journals, the district's agenda, and school reform.*

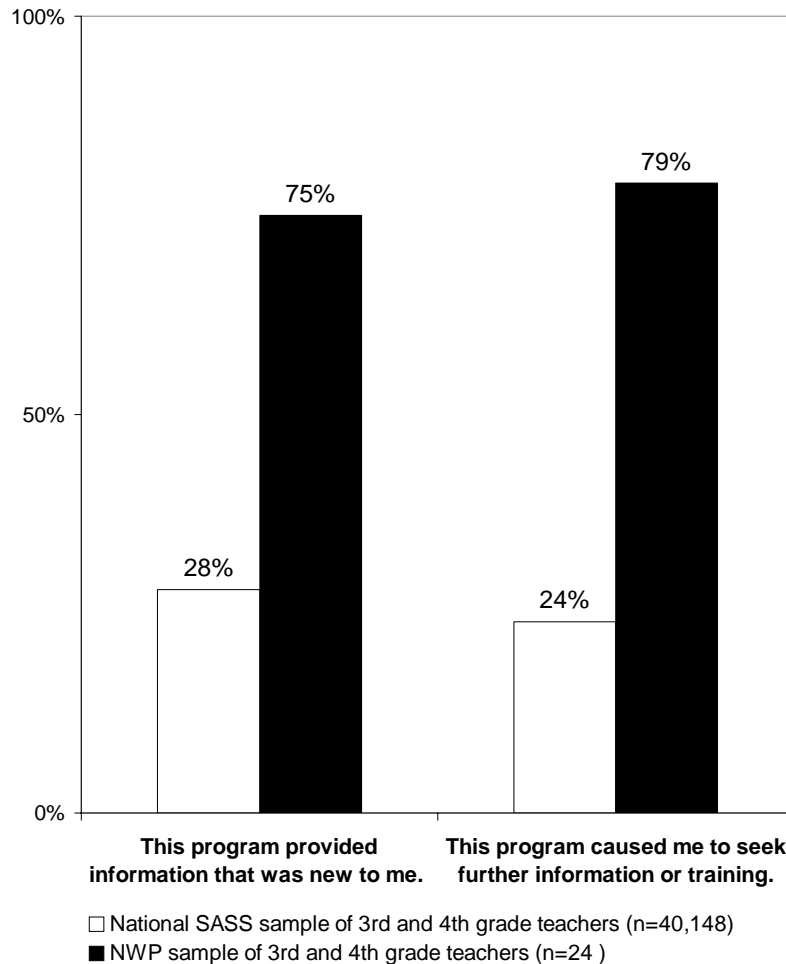
Compared with a national sample of teachers, the impact of NWP on the teachers in the study seemed much greater than that of other intensive professional development experiences. As shown in the graph below, most surveyed NWP teachers (88%) strongly agreed that writing project professional development opportunities had changed their views on teaching; this compares with only 12% of teachers from the School and Staffing Survey (SASS) who had participated in other types of intensive (32 hours or longer) professional development.<sup>9</sup> In addition, 83% of writing project teachers strongly agreed that the project had influenced them to change their teaching practices, compared with less than one-fifth of teachers in the national sample (see graph below).

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<sup>9</sup> The nationwide sample of teachers includes 40,148 third- and fourth-grade, regular (full-time) classroom teachers of English, reading, ESL and/or general elementary classes who completed the U.S. Department of Education's School and Staffing Survey in 1993-94. Their responses related to professional development within the past year that lasted more than 32 hours.



### Comparison of SASS and NWP Teachers' Professional Development Experiences, Respondents Who “Strongly Agree”



The shifts in teaching included changes in the ways writing project teachers organized their classrooms (“I used to always have students work individually in straight rows. Now they sit in groups and can talk about the task.”) to changes in their philosophy about teaching (“It changed my outlook on children’s ability to write and the way to teach writing.”) Participating teachers uniformly acknowledged that the writing project helped them see that good writing requires an investment of time and that children become writers through an ongoing process.

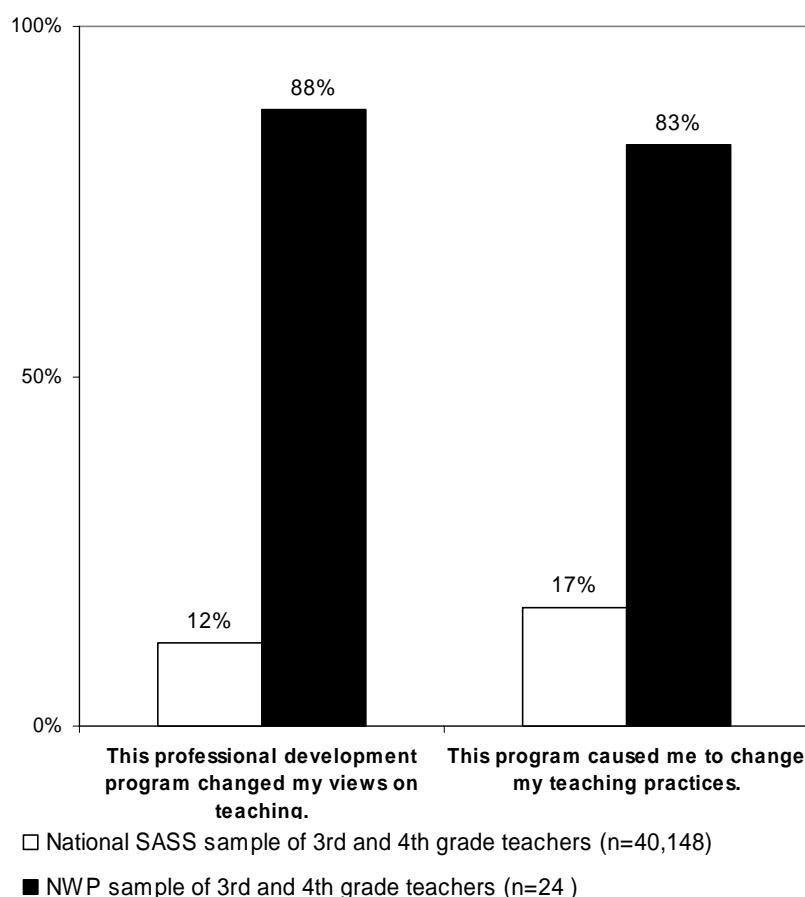
Many interviewed teachers also tied an improvement in their students’ views about writing to the changes in their teaching style:

*Students enjoy writing a lot more now than before I went to the writing project.*

*My kids feel rewarded when they create a good piece of writing—they feel very proud and love their work.*

Several teachers also attributed staying on top of the latest research and literature to their involvement in the project. In comparison with teachers nationwide, NWP teachers in this study were much more likely to strongly agree that the writing project provided them with new information (75% vs. 28%) (see graph below). In addition, a majority of writing project teachers (79%) strongly agreed that the project influenced them to seek further information or training, compared with just 24% of teachers nationwide.

### Comparison of SASS and NWP Teachers' Professional Development Experiences Respondents Who “Strongly Agree”



One teacher described these changes:

*I learned to erase my pedagogy and “get with” the things that were new. It [the writing project] keeps me a lot more up to date with what is going on in education and research. It keeps my eyes on the horizon and helps me to see the big picture.*

Most teachers believed that the impact of the writing project went beyond their own classrooms. Teachers reported that the formal and informal ways of sharing information had an impact on teaching and learning in their schools. They observed other teachers implement writing strategies in their classrooms with positive results. As expressed below, some also reported that the writing project had an impact on the whole school:

*A lot of strategies from the writing project are now almost standard in our school—they weren't before.*

Several teachers also mentioned that they had been instrumental in recruiting more teachers to participate in a writing project summer institute; this was seen as a benefit to the school.

In sum, although teachers' experiences varied across different local writing projects—especially given different follow-up or “continuity” programs—many described similar opportunities, both formal and informal, to develop a professional community, teach other teachers, and take leadership roles in their school, district, and state. They also described similar types of support and challenges to teaching writing. Lastly, participating teachers reported that writing project professional development substantially changed their views both on teaching and their teaching practices.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WRITING PROJECT CLASSROOMS

*Writing is the breathing of my classroom.* (Third-grade teacher)

A main tenet of the NWP model is that there is no “one right way to teach writing.” Successful teachers use a wide range of strategies, and while one strategy may work for one teacher or one classroom, it may not for others. Another central tenet of the writing project is a view of writing as a powerful learning strategy. According to noted scholar Janet Emig, “Writing serves learning uniquely because writing as process-and-product possesses a cluster of attributes that correspond uniquely to certain powerful learning strategies.” Writing is an active process that involves multiple modes (the eye, hand, and brain) and provides a product available for review and evaluation. Writing also supports the development of higher cognitive functions, such as analysis and synthesis (Emig, 1983). Another literacy expert further explains: “Writing is basic to thinking about and learning knowledge in all fields as well as to communicating that knowledge” (Fulwiler, 1987).

This chapter describes writing project classrooms, including the strategies and assignments that the NWP teachers in the study used to foster student achievement. Specifically, the chapter describes the different ways teachers foster learning through writing, use writing to encourage construction of knowledge, implement other writing strategies, and assess student writing. The chapter also provides a context for looking at the student-writing outcomes described in chapter four. Data are from telephone interviews conducted in years one and two, written teacher surveys completed in year three, and analyses of 50 assignments collected from participating teachers in year three.

#### Learning through Writing

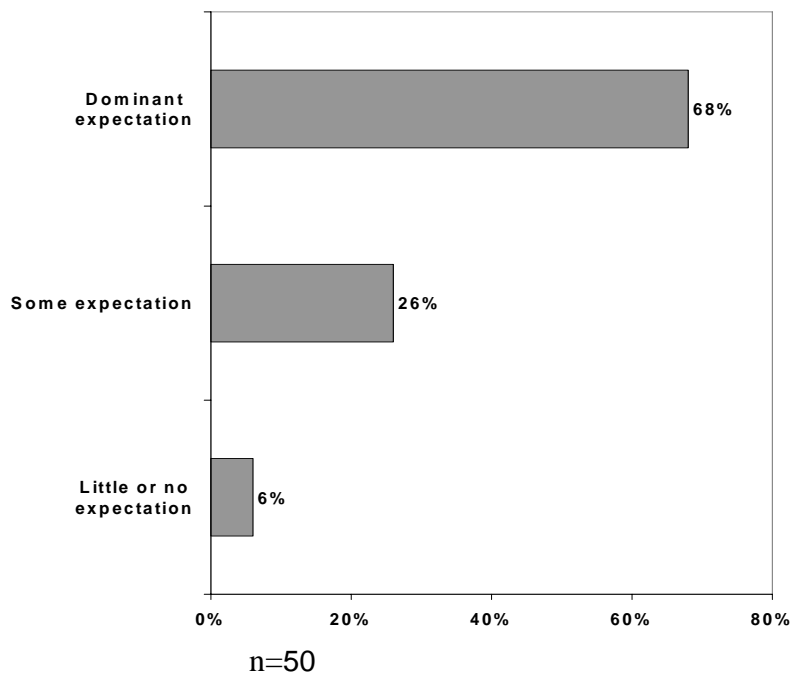
Although participating teachers used no single approach to writing instruction, they did reveal one common strategy: “Writing is part of everything we do.” All the writing project teachers echoed this statement by explaining how writing is key to learning in their classrooms.

*I use writing throughout the day—it is part of almost everything. The children write to explain and write to integrate what they’ve learned in different areas. It has become such a habit that I don’t really even think about it. When I plan what I do [in any subject], I always plan a writing component.*

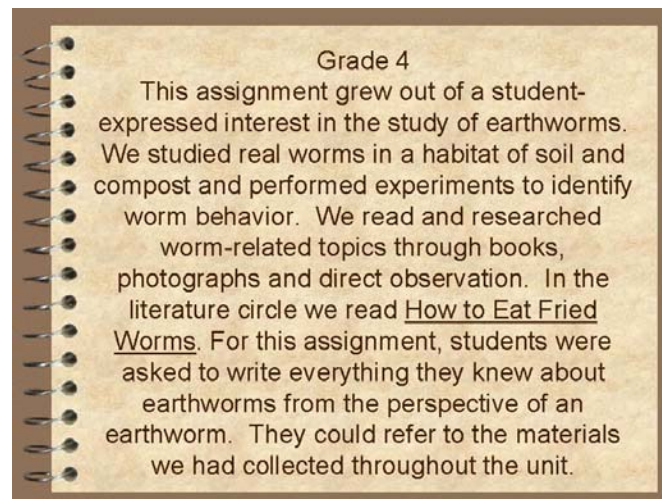
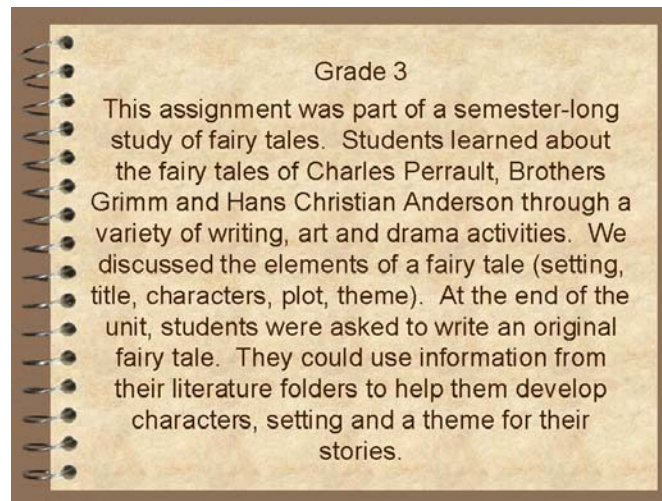
Research shows that effective writing programs teach students to “write for many audiences and in many modes, including those required for subjects other than English” (Holbrook, 1984). The 50 assignments collected from participating teachers in year three illustrate the ways that they used writing for multiple purposes, including teaching concepts in content areas. Over two-thirds (68%) of the assignments explicitly asked students to demonstrate an understanding, rather than superficial awareness, of the concepts being taught. Concepts taught included knowledge of rhetorical strategies or genres (e.g., persuasion, narrative, folk tales, poems); methods of inquiry (e.g., knowledge of the scientific method, social science inquiry); or content from the discipline (e.g., language arts, science, social studies). An additional 26% of assignments expressed some

expectation that students demonstrate understanding beyond a superficial awareness, and only 6% of assignments had little or no expectation for students to demonstrate an understanding of the concepts taught. This trend was very consistent with results from years one and two. Across all three years, nearly identical percentages of assignments had a dominant expectation that students demonstrate concepts in content areas (68% in year three, 69% in year two, and 67% in year one).

**Percentage of Assignments Requiring Students to Demonstrate Concepts in Content Areas**



Presented below are two examples of assignments given with the expectation that students demonstrate understanding of the concepts being taught.<sup>10</sup>



In the first assignment, after studying setting, title, character, plot, and theme, students were asked to demonstrate their understanding of the elements of a fairy tale by creating their own fairy tale. In the second assignment, students were asked to demonstrate their understanding of worms: specifically, they were asked to write everything they knew about worms from a worm's perspective. Both assignments explicitly asked students to demonstrate through writing their understanding of these topics beyond a superficial awareness.

At the other end of the spectrum, the few assignments not explicitly asking students to demonstrate understanding of concepts were typically those not related to teaching a particular area or concept. An example would be asking students to write about a life event or to write a

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<sup>10</sup> The descriptions of these assignments are summaries. A more detailed description completed by every teacher was used for scoring purposes.

new ending to a story; here, the purpose was to give students an opportunity to write rather than to teach content or a particular concept.

In interviews, teachers reported the many other ways that they used writing to teach concepts across the curriculum. For example:

- In daily math journals, students explained concepts or reflected on what they had learned. They also wrote explanations of solutions to problems or compared and contrasted different mathematical concepts or figures, such as quadrilaterals. According to one teacher, “Writing [in math] can teach them a different structure of writing and a different kind of language. For example, I want them to use math language like ‘angles’ instead of ‘pointy places’ or other non-math terms.”
- In science classes, journals were also used for students to write their predictions, observations, and conclusions. One teacher described a journal in which students wrote entries from the viewpoint of a scientist. Often, students were asked to write in order to summarize the scientific ideas they had learned or to explain their research findings. “In science,” said one teacher, “writing is more functional but it can include all kinds of writing, including comparisons, charts, or explanations of scientific diagrams.”
- In social studies, teachers mentioned writing biographies, newspaper articles, and various kinds of journals to enhance students’ understanding of the content areas (e.g. sometimes students wrote in journals using the voice of the person they were studying). Some teachers also used family interviews to explore history connected to students’ lives.
- A few teachers mentioned writing as it related to art, such as using art to inspire creative stories or reflections. “We look at a lot of art and then write out our interpretations and criticisms,” explained one teacher.

The assignments submitted by writing project teachers displayed a broad range of writing genres: expository writing (17 assignments); fiction (seven); poetry (four); personal narrative (20); and persuasion (two).

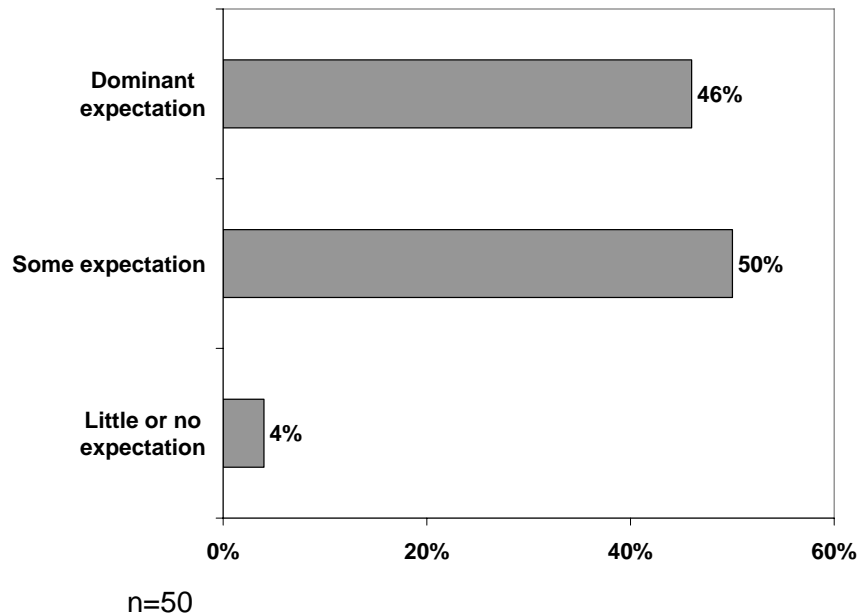
## **Writing to Construct Knowledge**

Writing is a tool through which students can construct knowledge. Construction of knowledge, or “applying basic skills and knowledge to complex problems,” requires students to interpret, evaluate, analyze, or synthesize information rather than merely reproduce it (Newmann et al., 1998). To be successful in their work and daily lives, adults routinely construct knowledge. Working on assignments that require construction of knowledge helps students learn to apply their knowledge and skills to the type of unique, real-world problems that they will face as adults.

A majority of the assignments submitted by writing project teachers called for students to construct knowledge. Specifically, almost half (46%) of the assignments had a dominant

expectation for students to construct knowledge. Half (50%) of the assignments articulated some expectation that students construct knowledge, and only 4% showed little or no expectation that students construct knowledge in their written work. These results are fairly consistent with those from years one and two. A slightly smaller percentage of assignments in year three had a dominant expectation that students would construct knowledge (46% versus 48% in year two and 52% in year one), but a smaller percentage of assignments had little or no expectation for construction of knowledge (4% versus 14% in year two and 9% in year one).

### Percentage of Assignments Requiring Construction of Knowledge



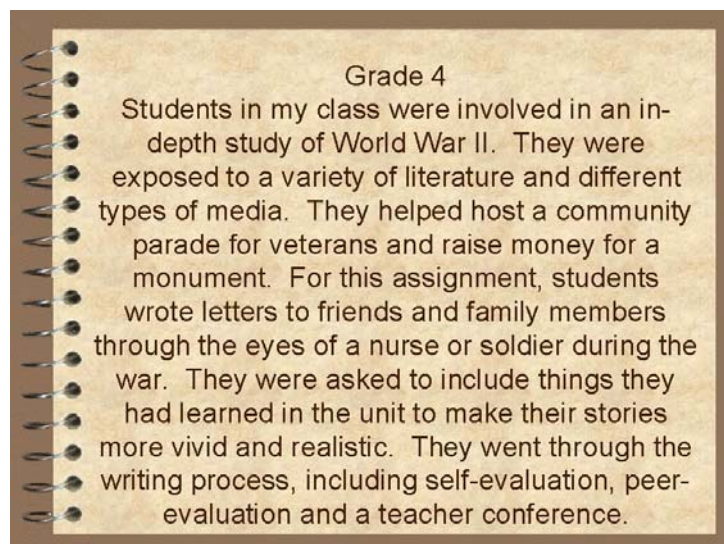
Below are two examples of teacher assignments with a dominant expectation for students to construct knowledge.

Grade 3

The unit we were studying was an economics unit. As a culminating event the children developed a plan to open their own business. They had several ideas about the business and were to narrow them down based on the results of a survey they had designed. They surveyed 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders. The writing assignment was to write a report to the president of their company (the teacher) telling her about the results of the survey and their decisions about the business. They were given the following questions/directions to use when they responded:

- Describe the product/s you plan to make.
- Describe what it was like to survey people.
- Based on the survey, what decisions did you make about the products you will make in your business?
- If you were to do this survey again, what changes would you make?





In both assignments, students were expected to construct knowledge by interpreting information; neither asked students to reproduce information that had been given to them. In the first assignment, students conducted a survey to gather information about a business they were planning to open. Students wrote a report on the survey results and the decisions they made based on the results. This required analysis, interpretation, and synthesis. They were also asked to describe what it was like to survey people; this required analysis. In the second assignment, students were asked to interpret history through the eyes of a soldier or nurse in World War II.

In contrast, assignments calling for little or no construction of knowledge are typically ones asking students to retell a story or restate factual information. It is important to note that not all assignments will or are expected to require that students construct knowledge. For example, acquiring basic factual information and writing about it are sometimes necessary to build a knowledge base, but these activities do not call for construction of knowledge.

## Writing Strategies

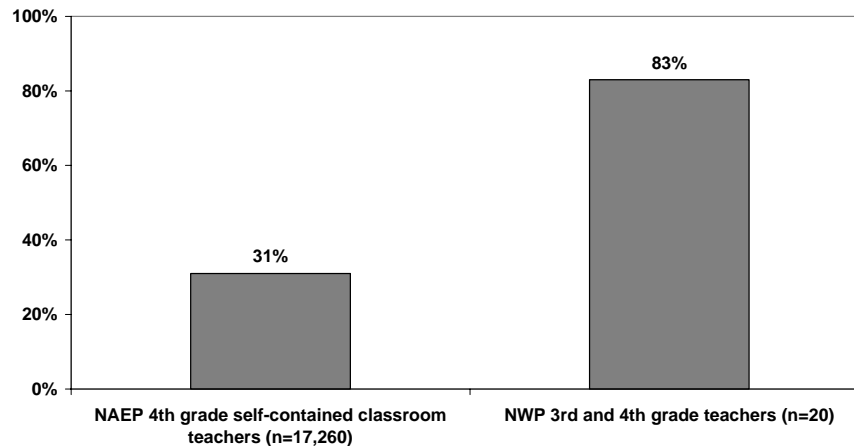
According to surveyed NWP teachers, writing is an ongoing aspect of their classrooms. Compared with a national sample of fourth-grade teachers, writing project teachers in self-contained classrooms spent much more time on writing. As shown in the graph below, 83% of NWP third- and fourth-grade classroom teachers spent more than 90 minutes a week on writing, compared with only 31% of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) survey respondents.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The national sample includes 17,260 fourth-grade classroom teachers who responded to the 1998 NAEP teacher questionnaire regarding writing instruction. The NWP sample includes 2001-02 evaluation participants who taught in self-contained classrooms (n=20).

### Comparison of NAEP and NWP Teachers Spending More Than 90 Minutes on Writing in One Week

#### Teachers who spend more than 90 minutes on writing in one week



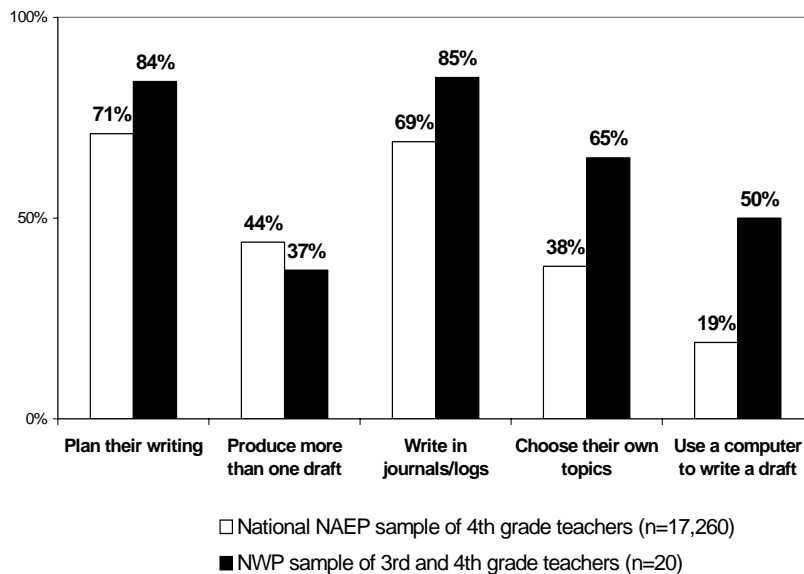
The following quote by one teacher emphasizing the importance of providing students with time to write expressed a common opinion of other teachers in the study:

*It takes a while to create a good piece of writing, but it is worth the time that it takes. It involves many thinking and planning skills, integration of skills, application of skills. It is a tough thing to do, but rewarding.*

Classroom writing time included many different writing strategies, such as planning, producing, revising, and sharing. Prewriting strategies were considered a foundation of good writing and were used by a majority of teachers in every, or most, assignments. Noting how important prewriting is, one teacher commented, “Kids have to get in the mindset of writing and think through what they are going to do.”

Writing project teachers not only spent more time on writing instruction in their classrooms than the average fourth-grade teacher; they were also more likely to use exemplary instructional practices on a weekly basis. As shown in the following graph, writing project teachers were more likely than NAEP survey respondents to ask their students to plan their writing (84% vs. 71%); write in journals/logs (85% vs. 69%); choose their own topics to write about (65% vs. 38%); and use a computer to write a draft (50% vs. 19%) at least once a week. They were slightly less likely to ask students to produce more than one draft (37% vs. 44%) at least once a week, but this might be explained by the greater use of writing activities, such as journals/logs that do not lend themselves to drafts.

### Comparison of NAEP and NWP Teachers' Practices Occurring at Least Once a Week



Another approach to writing used frequently by several teachers in the study was daily “writing workshops.” In general, these workshops offer a specific time during the day for students to work on writing strategies or specific skills, such as punctuation or the use of quotations. Below is one description of a writing workshop:

*The students write independently for about 45 minutes of that time, including a mini-lesson, independent writing, and shared writing. We work on everything—descriptive language, punctuation, patterns in their writing that need help.*

ELL teachers reported that they used writing process as much as possible to address their students’ special needs. However, they often altered the emphasis on certain strategies. For example:

*I find that most kids learn in the same ways. [However], ELL students need more chances to practice and revise. They need more help with verb tense. Having them enjoy writing really helps.*

These teachers also reported that their local writing project provided support and training specific to ELL populations, as explained by the following quote:

*In our writing project, you can’t avoid these [ELL] issues. One of the professors has a specialty in second-language learners so we read a lot of that research. And we are always asking, “How does that apply to ELL students,” with every example.*

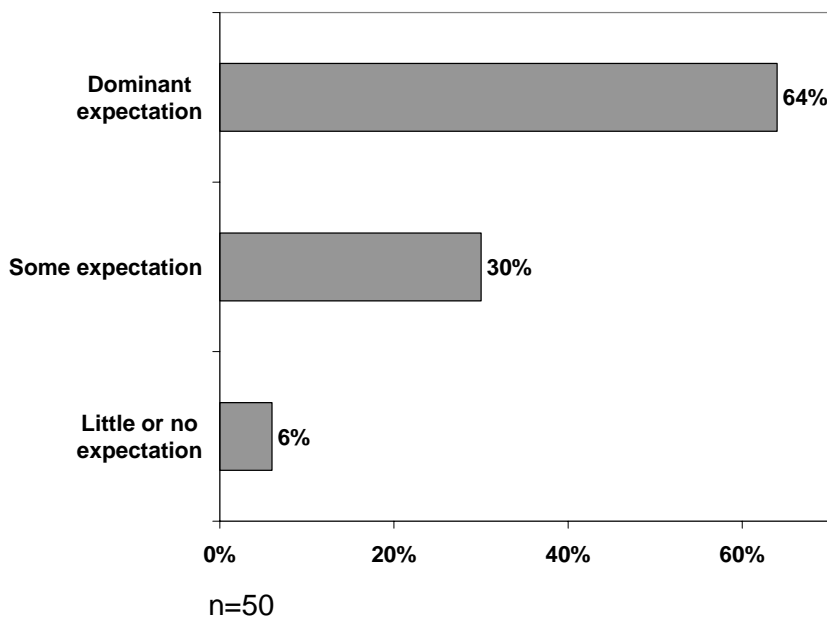
Another important strategy that teachers emphasized in interviews was how they tried to make writing “real” to their students and related classroom activities to what students were experiencing in their lives. Two explained:

*I really want them to explain themselves and make inferences about their lives and the work they do in the classroom.*

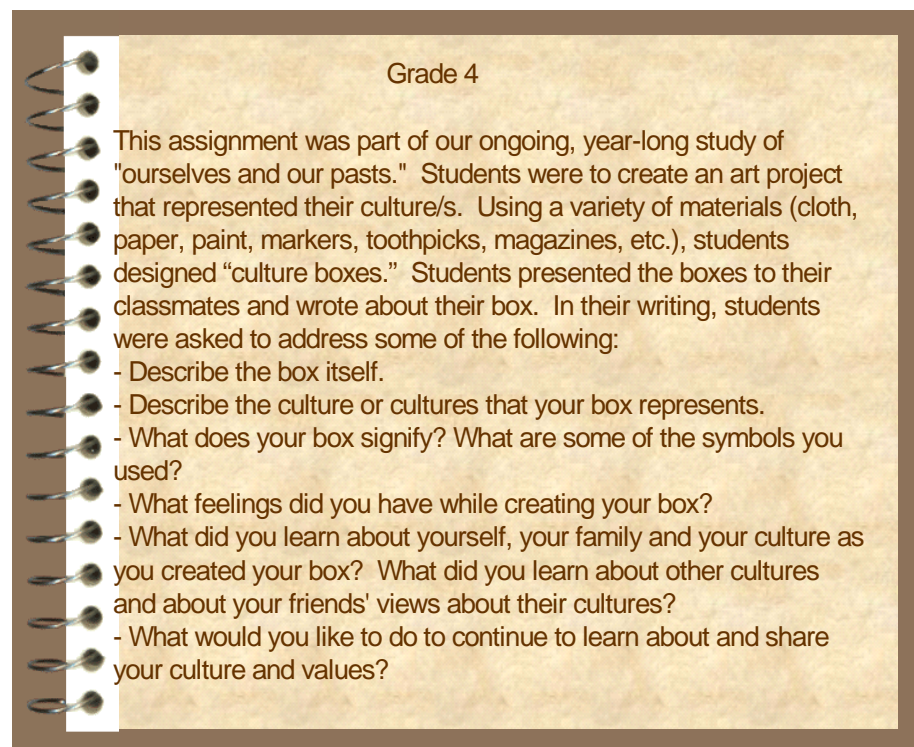
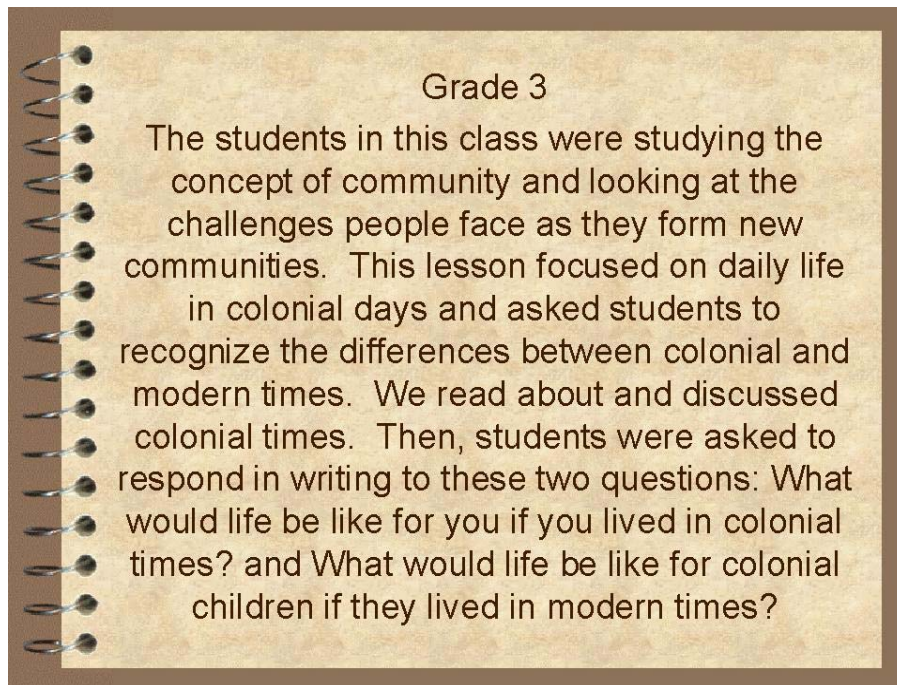
*I try to use what is happening in our town to inspire them. For example, one year there was a flood in our area and we had to write about it. It was very moving. Another year we wrote letters to weathermen and they all wrote back!*

The importance that the writing project teachers placed on connecting assignments to students’ lives was evident in the high percentage of assignments that asked for a connection. In nearly two-thirds (64%) of the assigned tasks collected for the study, teachers explicitly asked students to connect the topic to significant experiences, observations, feelings, or situations in their lives. An additional 30% of assignments offered the opportunity for students to connect the topic to their lives but did not explicitly call for them to do so. Only 6% of assignments offered very minimal or no opportunity for students to connect the topic to experiences, observations, feelings, or situations in their lives. (Clearly, not all assignments can or should ask students to make this connection.) These results are similar to those from years one and two of the study. In year three, a slightly higher percentage of assignments had a dominant expectation that students would connect the assignment to their life (64% in year three compared with 57% in year two and 53% in year one).

**Percentage of Assignments Requiring a Connection to Students’ Lives**



Below are two examples of assignments that explicitly called for students to connect the topic to their lives.



To complete these assignments, students were asked to make a connection to their own lives. In the first assignment, students were asked to think about their own lives and then describe what life would be like for them in colonial times and for colonial children in the present. They wrote about themselves in the past and thought about how people from the past might live in the present. The second assignment required students to connect the assignment to their lives by describing their culture/s and what they learned about themselves, their family, and their culture through the art project. Students could not complete this assignment without connecting it to their lives. They were also asked to connect the assignment to their lives by identifying what additional information they would like to learn and share about their culture and values.

In addition to the two examples presented above, asking students to write about an experience or observation was another way that assignments connected a topic to students' lives. However, as noted earlier, not all assignments can or should make an explicit call for students to connect the topic to their lives. Asking students to write a report of factual information or a story about a predetermined topic are examples of assignments that do not require a connection to students' lives.

### **Assessment of Student Writing**

In writing project classrooms, assessment is an important tool for teachers to learn about their students as well as an additional writing strategy for students. Depending on the type of writing, teachers participating in the study reported using different methods of assessment. In general, they did not formally assess all writing because not all writing was designed or appropriate for assessment and because of the volume of writing in their classrooms. For example, journals, prewriting activities, "quick-writes," and other daily writing activities were often collected and checked for completion but not assessed for mechanics or content. A few teachers described how reviewing this kind of work helped them understand the learning taking place in the classroom. One teacher explained:

*Sometimes I just analyze what needs to be worked on in the class. For example, I might see [in their writing logs] that they are trying to put conversation into a piece but they need more lessons on how to do that.*

Final drafts of work that went through a writing process (sometimes referred to as "published writing") were usually assessed with a rubric. For example, 84% of assignments submitted for the study in year three were assessed with a rubric, and in all but two cases teachers reported that students were aware of the scoring system.

The origin of rubrics varied. A few teachers used rubrics that were developed at the school, district, or national level. More often, the teacher developed the rubrics and altered them based on the characteristics of the assignment and the time of year. Teachers reported that they felt it essential to share rubrics and criteria with students at the beginning of the writing process. Teachers often reviewed criteria with students and sometimes showed examples. One teacher explained:

*The rubrics are generated by me and by students. We create our rubrics as a class and talk about all of the elements to include in the writing, which could include mechanics, organization, clarity of ideas, etc.*

Only a few teachers said they did not use rubrics, but all of these said they were developing knowledge and skills to use them in the future.

In sum, data from teacher interviews and surveys and from analysis of teacher assignments illustrate the approaches that the writing project teachers in the study used to develop student writing and use writing as a tool for learning across the curriculum. The data indicate that these teachers fostered student writing and achievement by integrating writing throughout their teaching; using exemplary teaching practices such as prewriting, journal writing, and frequently allowing students to choose their own writing topics; and giving assignments asking students to engage in authentic intellectual work.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT**

**T**his chapter describes student achievement in two types of writing: 1) student responses to assignments and 2) baseline and follow-up student responses to timed writing prompts.

Both types of data are direct writing assessments, which research shows are valid measures of student performance and what students learn in school (Heck and Crislip, 2001). The two types of writing occurred under different conditions and were scored using rubrics that measure different types of achievement. Student responses to writing assignments provide a measure of student achievement in construction of knowledge, organization and coherence, and English writing conventions on a single piece of writing.

The responses to timed writing prompts provide a measure of how well students understood and responded to a particular writing requirement—in this case, persuasive writing. The responses to writing prompts were also scored for writing conventions. In addition, the writing-prompt responses provide a measure of change in writing achievement over the course of the school year. Together, the two types of writing-achievement data collected provide a more comprehensive picture of student achievement in writing project classrooms than either would alone.

Following is a summary of findings from achievement data in both areas: student responses to assignments and the timed writing prompts. Data are presented in aggregate and also disaggregated by selected demographic characteristics.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Student Responses to Writing Assignments**

Teachers who submitted assignments for the study also submitted the corresponding final drafts of student work. Examining the student work provided insight into the writing outcomes for third and fourth graders in writing project classrooms. Specifically, it showed the extent to which students were performing authentic intellectual work in their writing assignments. The goal of examining student work was not to judge its overall quality but to classify it according to three criteria: construction of knowledge; organization and coherence; and usage, mechanics, and spelling. The construction of knowledge shown in student work was also analyzed in relation to the extent to which teacher assignments explicitly called for construction of knowledge. The criteria used to analyze student work were selected because they have been shown to be related to higher student achievement and reflect the types of intellectual demands and skills students need to be successful as adults (Newmann et al. 1998). Scorers assessed student work for each criterion independently. A score on one criterion was not related to scores on the other two. For example, a piece of work could score high on construction of knowledge but low on organization and coherence. Results of these analyses are presented below.

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<sup>12</sup> Throughout this chapter are examples of student work, all presented as handed in by the students—hand-written or typed on the computer—and some include graphics.

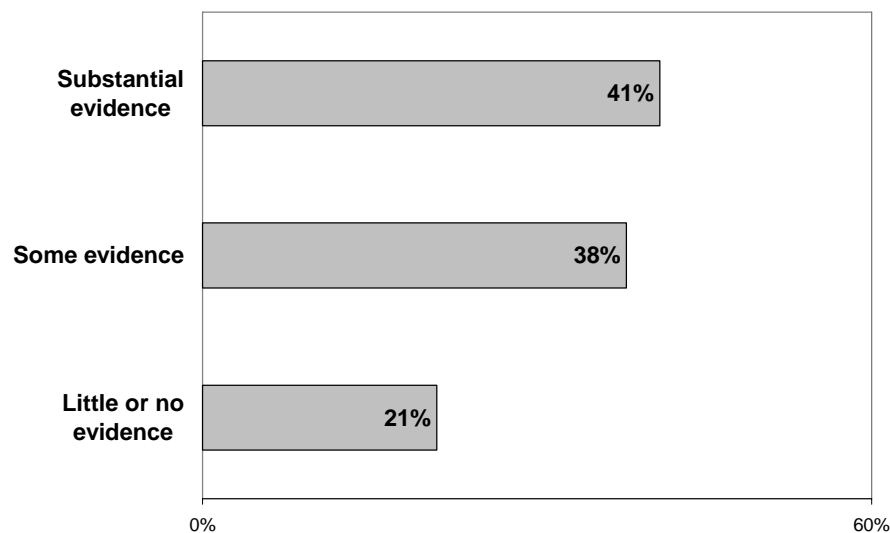


### ***Construction of Knowledge***

The first criterion applied to the student work—construction of knowledge—examined the extent to which students went beyond mechanically recording, reporting, or otherwise reproducing information. Constructing knowledge includes interpretation, evaluation, analysis, or synthesis of information. To score high on this criterion, a substantial portion of the student’s work needed to be reasonably original, not merely a restatement of an analysis previously given in text or discussion; however, the writing did not necessarily need to represent completely original or idiosyncratic thinking on the student’s part. The work was analyzed with the understanding stated previously that not all student work is expected to show substantial evidence of construction of knowledge and that students also need opportunities to acquire factual information to build a knowledge base.

The majority of student work collected from participating writing project classrooms demonstrated some level of construction of knowledge, with 41% of student work collected showing substantial evidence of this (see graph below). In these pieces, most of the writing showed interpretation, evaluation, analysis, or synthesis. A similar percentage (38%) of student work demonstrated some evidence of construction of knowledge; in these pieces, a moderate portion of the writing showed interpretation, evaluation, analysis, or synthesis. The remaining 21% of student work showed little or no construction of knowledge; this writing reflected mechanical recording, reporting, or otherwise reproducing information. The percentage of student work showing substantial evidence of construction of knowledge in year three was lower than in year two but higher than in year one (41% in year three versus 57% in year two and 26% in year one).

**Percentage of Student Work Showing Construction of Knowledge**



n=649

The following are examples of student work that showed substantial evidence of construction of knowledge.

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### **Student Work Showing Substantial Construction of Knowledge (grade 3)**

#### **If I lived in Colonial times**

**If I lived in Colonial times. I would make a law that says women could vote and girls could stay in school as long as boys. It would be illegal for some one else to hit your child with out your permishin. It would be illegal for someone to just get a fancy bottle give it a fancy name and inside it's just plane water and people think it is medicine.**

#### **If those girls lived in my times**

**Girls would go to school the same amount of time as boys. Everybody has many school books. They would go to restaurants. They would go to the GAP. If they were teachers they would have to teach the children how to really spell the words right instead of just caring if the writing was neat. the girls could do many different jos when they grow up not just be a mom or a teacher.**

---

For this piece, *If I Lived in Colonial Times*, the student analyzed several aspects of life in the past and present, with a particular focus on gender and family issues. For example, the student states, “Girls would go to school the same amount of time as boys.” There is little or no rote reproduction of knowledge in this piece of student writing.

The following letter by a fourth-grader also demonstrates substantial construction of knowledge. The student wrote a letter to her family through the eyes of a soldier during World War II (see corresponding teacher assignment in chapter three). In this piece, the student constructed a substantial amount of information by interpreting historical facts from the perspective of a soldier. For example, the student used facts about the war and the conditions that soldiers endured to interpret how she would feel if she were in that situation. In addition, her comment that “Lindsay wouldn't like it here because there is so much loud noise you can't hear yourself think!” provides further evidence of interpretation.

Student Work Showing Substantial Construction of Knowledge (grade 4)

Jan. 14, 1943

Dear Family,

How are you?

I'm ok. Except for I miss home cooking. C-rations are getting old and yucky. When I was fighting all I could see was darkness, smoke, and I smelled gun powder. I thought of all y'all on Jamie's birthday. All I could send her was a small box of candy that I brought on the ship and a little card that I made. One of my good friends died. He was at Pearl Harbor when Japan dropped the bomb. He had no family so when they buried him his purple heart was on his left side of his jacket beside a big hole. It was very sad. Well, I know Lindsey wouldn't like it here because there is so much loud noise you can't hear yourself think! I have painful

headachs constantly. I really hope that  
you get this better because I don't  
have a lot of time to write. I  
love all of ya'll.

Your Daughter,

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**Partially edited text**<sup>13</sup>: "Dear Family." How are you? I'm OK. Except for I miss home cooking. C-rations are getting old and yucky. When I was fighting all I could see was darkness, smoke, and I smelled gun powder. I thought of all ya'll on Jamie's birthday. All I could send her was a small box of candy that I bought on the ship and a little card that I made. One of my good friend's died. He was at Pearl Harbor when Japan dropped the bomb. He had no family so when they buried him his purple heart was on his left side of his jacket beside a big hole. It was very sad. Well, I know Lindsey wouldn't like it here because there is so much loud noise you can't hear yourself think! I have painful headaches constantly. I really hope that you get this letter because I don't have a lot of time to write. I love all of ya'll. Your Daughter, \_\_\_\_\_.

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<sup>13</sup> In some samples of student work, some spelling and punctuation corrections were made for the sake of clarity.

In contrast, the student in the next example describes a trip to the dentist. Although the description is highly detailed, it involves almost no interpretation, evaluation, analysis, or synthesis of information. This piece also illustrates how student work can score low on one criterion (construction of knowledge), but high on other criteria (organization and coherence and conventions).

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#### Student Work Showing Limited Construction of Knowledge (grade 4)

H B A Day at the Dentist  
Monday I went to the dentist.  
First this is what I did. My mom  
and I dropped my brother at school.  
After we took the bus. When the  
bus came we got on it. Then we finally  
got there and we waited until they called my name.

After I went inside and they  
cleaned my teeth. Last of all they  
pulled my teeth and it hurt! And  
now I need to take care of my teeth  
for three weeks.

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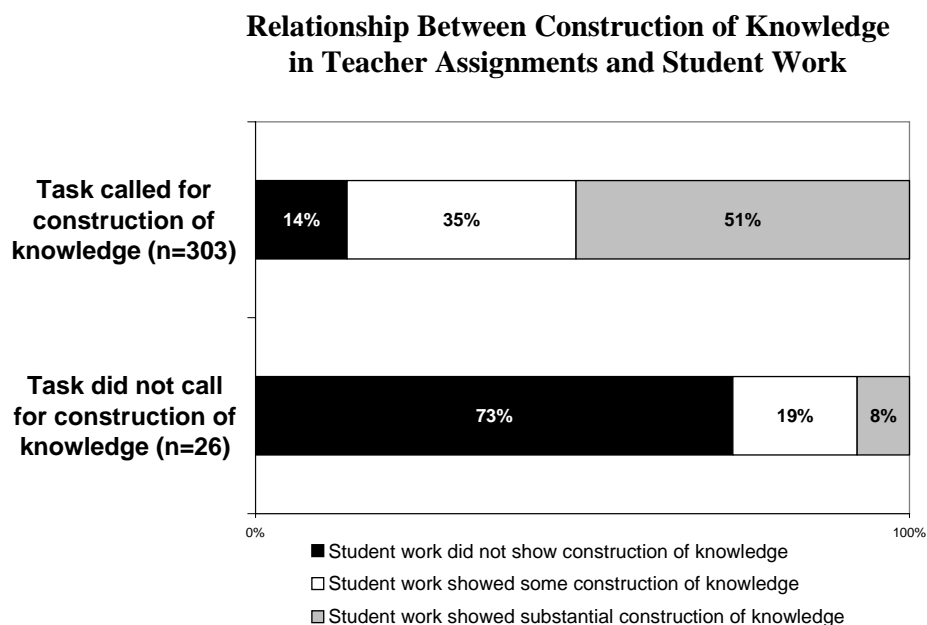
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Student work that scored high for construction of knowledge was much more likely to be in response to an assignment with at least some expectation for students to evaluate, interpret, analyze, or synthesize information. For example, the earlier “If I lived in Colonial Times” piece was written in response to an assignment that scored high for construction of knowledge. Newmann et al. (1998) found that, logically, the more demanding of authentic intellectual achievement an assignment is, the more likely a student will demonstrate authentic intellectual achievement.

In the NWP sample, more than four times as many pieces of student work (51% versus 8%) showed substantial evidence of construction of knowledge when the assignment made an explicit call to do so, compared with student work from assignments that asked students simply to reproduce information (see graph below). At the other end of the spectrum, only 14% of students’ work showed little or no construction of knowledge in response to an assignment that explicitly asked for it, compared with 73% of students’ work in response to assignments that did

not ask them to construct knowledge. This analysis confirms Newmann’s finding that when students have the opportunity to construct knowledge, they are much more likely to do so.

However, assigning a task that explicitly calls for construction of knowledge does not guarantee that students will demonstrate this. Teachers must also “provide instruction that builds students’ skills to succeed in construction of knowledge through disciplined inquiry” (Newmann et. al, 1998).



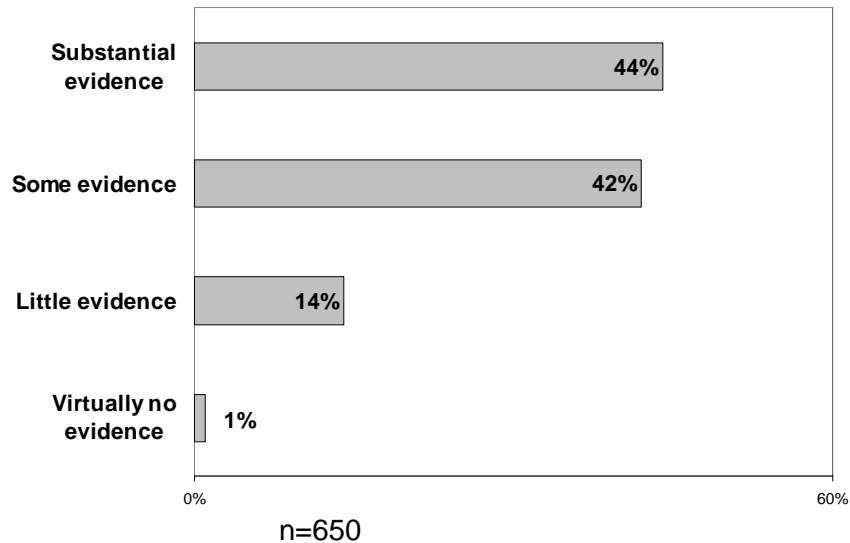
Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

### ***Organization and Coherence***

The second criterion examined the organization and coherence of student writing. Student work that scored high on this criterion demonstrated arrangement of reasons, examples, information, and/or personal anecdotes in a discernable and effective pattern resulting in an organized, unified effect.

In a majority of student work collected, a substantial or moderate portion of the work showed ideas, reasons, or examples organized in an effective pattern (see graph below). Over two-fifths (44%) of student work showed substantial evidence of organization and coherence; an additional 42% showed moderate evidence; and 14% showed little such evidence. Almost no work (less than 1%) was completely unorganized or incoherent. The percentage showing substantial evidence of organization and coherence in year three was slightly lower than in year two and higher than in year one (44% in year three compared with 51% in year two and 32% in year one).

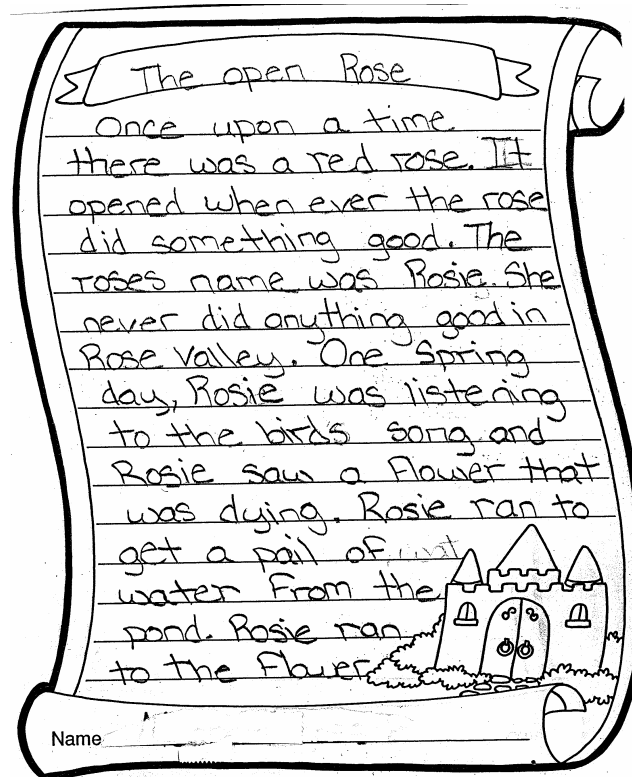
## Percentage of Student Work Showing Organization and Coherence

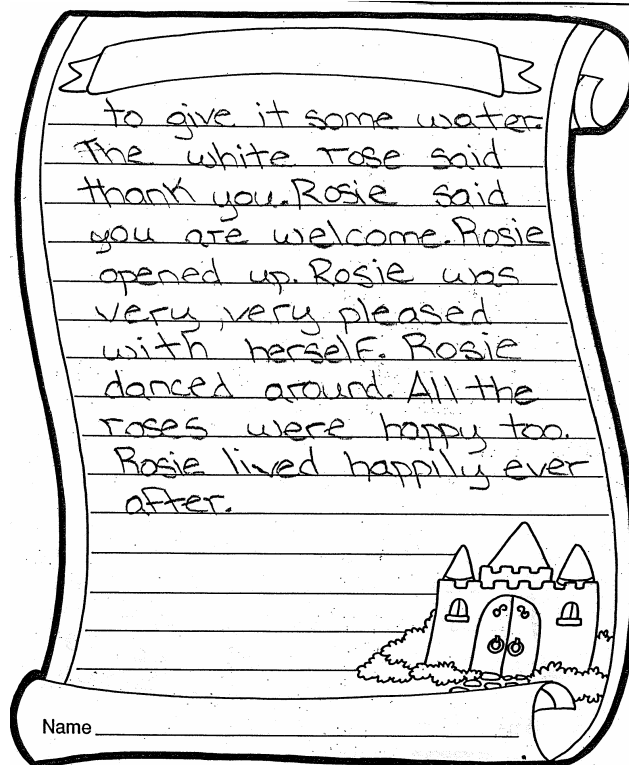


The following are examples of student work that showed substantial evidence of organization and coherence.

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### Student Work Showing Substantial Organization and Coherence (grade 3)





**Partially edited text:** "The Open Rose." Once upon a time there was a red rose. It opened whenever the rose did something good. The roses' name was Rosie. She never did anything good in Rose Valley. One spring day, Rosie was listening to the birds' song and Rosie saw a flower that was dying. Rosie ran to get a pail of water from the pond. Rosie ran to the flower to give it some water. The white rose said thank you. Rosie said you are welcome. Rose opened up. Rosie was very, very pleased with herself. Rosie danced around. All the roses were happy, too. Rosie lived happily ever after.

In the story, "The Open Rose," the student tells the story of Rosie the rose, who finally opened up after she did a good deed. After an introduction, Rosie moves through several events in an organized, chronological order, ending with the fairy tale conclusion of "happily ever after."



The example below also demonstrates substantial organization and coherence. The student gives reasons that he might be right-brained, followed by reasons that he might be left-brained. He then brings these two contrasting thoughts together by stating that he is both right- and left-brained. Throughout the piece, the student provides examples to support his statements. For example, he explains that his “challenge class” is a place where he likes to “figure stuff out,” which is a characteristic of the left hemisphere.

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### **Student Work Showing Substantial Organization and Coherence (grade 4)**

#### **Left and Right**

I think I am right brained because I like to read books that have magic in them, like the Harry Potter series. I also like to use my imagination and do small jigsaw puzzles. I like to draw things especially animals, and I love to color.

I think I’m left brained because I like to figure stuff out. When we’re in Challenge, our class begs Mrs. Kay to read us some Conundrums or Moron Trivia. I like to read non-fiction books and books that are based on a true story too.

Because I like to do all kinds of puzzles mazes, word searches, cross words, hidden pictures, and jigsaw puzzles, I think I’m both right and left brained. I also like to play sports and we decided that sports would use both sides of the brain.

We learned that most men are right brained and most women are left brained.

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In contrast, the following piece of student work is difficult to follow. Although individual sentences may make sense, they are not connected to one another. The reader cannot completely understand what the student is saying (e.g., “Did you know that covered heat less than uncovered one?”).

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**Student Work Showing Little Organization and Coherence (grade 4)**

---

Solar engey

I know that the sun is halfway through  
his life

Stop using radiator  
and open your blinds  
if you live next to a factory  
you might die of cancer  
if the sun was bigger  
it might be gone. If it  
was shorter we'd be gone  
Did you know that covered  
heat less than uncovered  
one. My theory is less gets  
in heat. I mean today I was  
sitting with my back to the  
sun. My neck was not the blind  
closed. My neck wasn't hot  
any more because it blocked  
it.

---

**Partially edited text:** “Solar Energy.” I know that the sun is halfway through his life. Stop using radiator and open your blinds. If you live next to a factory you might die of cancer. If the sun was bigger it might be gone. If it was shorter we'd be gone. Did you know that covered heat less than uncovered one? My theory is less gets in heat. I mean today I was sitting with my back to the sun. My neck was hot. The blind closed. My neck wasn't hot anymore because it blocked it.

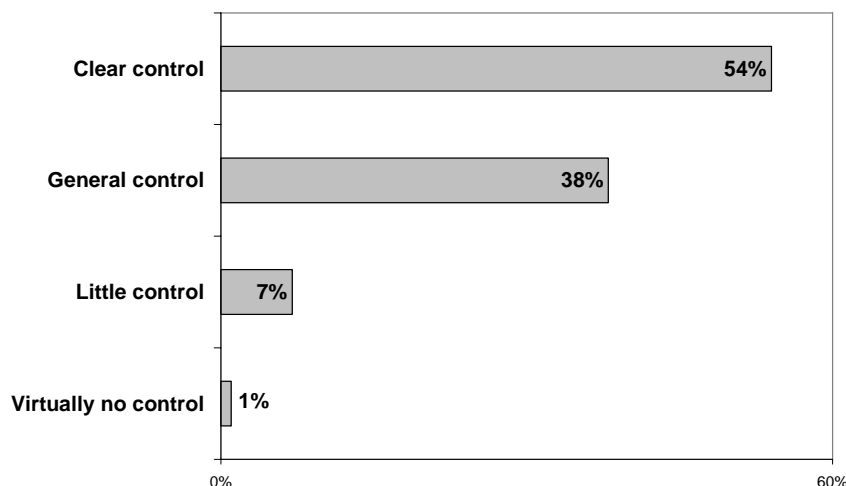
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### ***Usage, Mechanics, and Spelling***

The final criterion examined the degree to which students attempt to, and succeed at, using language structures at the word and sentence levels to convey their meaning. Writing that demonstrates proficiency with usage, mechanics, and spelling appropriate to the grade level scored high on this criterion.

In most of the work collected, student writing showed clear or general control of these conventions (see graph below). Specifically, over one-half (54%) of the work showed clear control, characterized by a minimal range of errors. Another one-third (38%) showed general control of writing conventions. In these pieces, several kinds of errors were repeated throughout the work but they did not cause significant confusion about the meaning. Only 7% of the work showed little control of writing conventions. This writing, which demonstrated serious and numerous problems, distracted and confused the reader. Just 1% of the work showed virtually no control of the conventions of writing; in these cases, the writing was incoherent, with serious errors in almost every sentence. These findings are very similar to those from year two. For example, 54% of the work showed clear control in year three compared with 56% in year two. Greater proportions of work in years two and three showed clear control of writing conventions compared with year one (54% and 56% versus 33% in year one), possibly reflecting the much larger percentage of fourth-grade students and smaller percentage of third-grade students in years two and three of the study compared with year one.

**Percentage of Student Work Showing Control of Conventions of Writing**



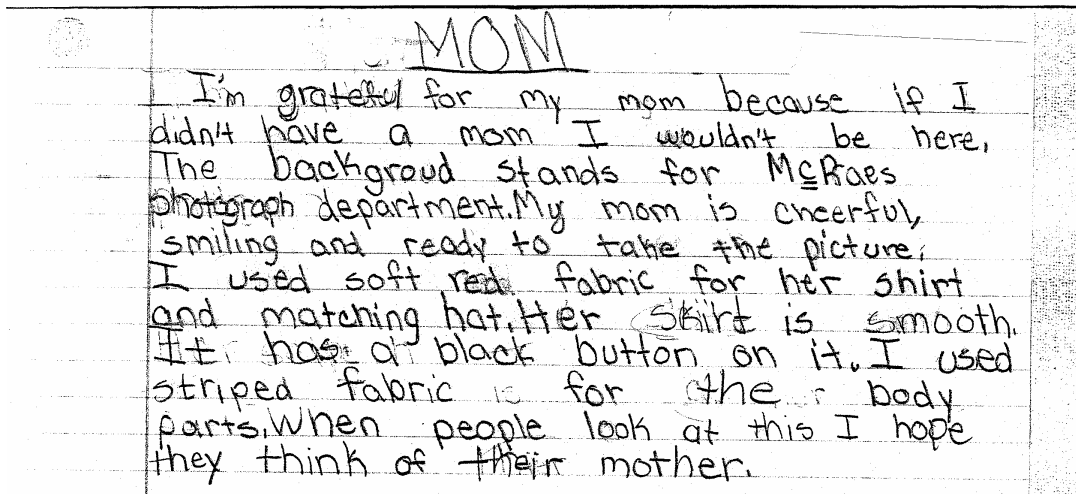
n=650

The following are examples of student work that showed clear control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling. The first example was a response to an assignment that asked students to write a descriptive paragraph about a quilt piece they had made. The second example was written in response to an assignment asking students to choose an event from their life and describe it.

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### Student Work Showing Clear Control of Conventions (grade 3)



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**Partially edited text:** "Mom." I'm grateful for my mom because if I didn't have a mom I wouldn't be here. The background stands for McRaes photograph department. My mom is cheerful, smiling and ready to take the picture. I used soft red fabric for her shirt and matching hat. Her skirt is smooth. It has a black button on it. I used striped fabric for the body parts. When people look at this I hope they think of their mother.

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### Student Work Showing Clear Control of Conventions (grade 4)

#### MY FIRST BIKES

When I was five years old, my Aunt and her boyfriend got me a purple and yellow bike with training wheels. When I was seven, my Aunt and her boyfriend gave me a bigger bike without training wheels. It was pink and white with white wheels.

She taught me how to ride with no training wheels. She helped me to keep my balance by holding the bike up while I rode it. My aunt was so nice to me. I got better riding without training wheels. I won a red 12 speed last December at my rent office during Christmas. They put my name in a hat, shook it up then they drew my name.

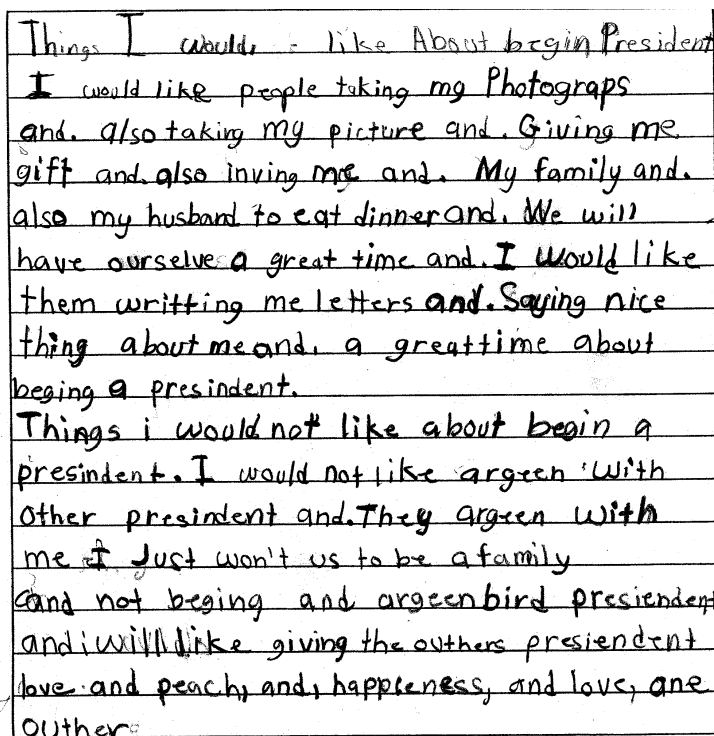
Now I can ride with no hands on my 12 speed. When I got bigger I got better riding my bike.

I asked my mother to buy me a new 12 speed bike. "You might win a bike at the rent office, she said."

In contrast, the example below shows little control of writing conventions and is difficult to understand because of the many misspelled words and problems with periods.

---

### Student Work Showing Little Control of Conventions (grade 3)



Things I would like About begin President  
I would like people taking my Photographs  
and. also taking my picture and. Giving me  
gift and. also inving me and. My family and.  
also my husband to eat dinner and. We will  
have ourselve a great time and. I would like  
them writting me letters and. Saying nice  
thing about me and. a great time about  
beging a president.  
Things i would not like about begin a  
president. I would not like argen 'With  
other president and. They argen with  
me. I just won't us to be a family  
and not beging and argen bird president  
and i will like giving the outhers president  
love and peach, and, happiness, and love, and  
Outher

---

**Partially edited Text:** "Things I would like about being President." I would like people taking my photograph and also taking my picture and giving me gifts and also inviting me and my family and also my husband to eat dinner. And we will have ourselves a great time. I would like them writing me letters, and saying nice things about me and. a great time about being a president.

Things I would not like about being a President. I would not like arguing with other presidents and. They agree with me. I just want us to be a family and not begging and arguing about being President. And I will like giving the other presidents love and peace and happiness and love one another.

### **Student Achievement by Specific Subgroups**

Student achievement data were analyzed by gender, race/ethnicity, and ELL and socioeconomic status to determine if different outcomes existed. The data were analyzed by subgroup, with the understanding that additional factors not considered in these analyses may be involved, such as parents' educational attainment, school location, or teacher experience. Although certain groups demonstrated lower achievement in writing than others, within every group there were some individuals who showed strong achievement and some who showed limited achievement. The data presented in this report highlight average achievement levels of groups and, therefore, do not capture the variability within each group.

The overall achievement patterns seen in student work held for different subgroups of students as well, although there were some differences between groups (see table below). For example, a slightly higher percentage of writing by female students showed substantial evidence of organization and coherence and general or clear control of usage, mechanics, and spelling, compared with writing by males. Similarly, a higher percentage of writing by white students showed greater levels of achievement on these criteria compared with African-American and Latino students. A slightly higher percentage of ELL students showed substantial evidence of organization and coherence and general or clear control of the conventions of writing. Students in high-SES classrooms outperformed their peers in low-SES classrooms on all three criteria. Differences by SES were greater for construction of knowledge than organization and coherence or conventions.

Data on all three criteria show that the largest differences were between white students and African-American and Latino students and between students in high- and low-SES classrooms. It is important to note that in this sample of students, race/ethnicity is highly correlated with socioeconomic status. Almost all (98%) of African-American students and 86% of Latino students were in low-SES classrooms compared with 74% of white students.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, some of the difference in achievement by race/ethnicity may be explained by the greater percentage of African-American and Latino students in low-SES classrooms.

**Percentage of Student Work Scoring High  
on Authentic Intellectual Work Criteria by Subgroup**

Subgroup	Criteria		
	Construction of Knowledge (% of work showing substantial evidence)	Organization and Coherence (% of work showing substantial evidence)	Conventions (% of work showing clear or general control)
<b>Female</b>	41%	54%	94%
<b>Male</b>	41%	49%	90%
<b>African-American</b>	29%	34%	87%
<b>Latino</b>	33%	46%	87%
<b>White</b>	50%	47%	96%
<b>Other</b>	55%	57%	95%
<b>ELL</b>	39%	49%	89%
<b>Non-ELL</b>	41%	43%	93%
<b>High SES</b>	50%	52%	97%
<b>Low SES</b>	35%	40%	89%
<b>Total</b>	41%	44%	92%

<sup>14</sup> It is also important to note that 83% of the students in this sample were in low-SES classrooms. Only 17% were in high-SES classrooms.

## Student Responses to Writing Prompts

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AED and NWP staff developed two writing prompts designed to be age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and interesting to student writers. The prompts were administered during one class period, with approximately 25 minutes of the period devoted to prewriting activities. The prompts, shown below, asked students to write a persuasive letter to someone they knew. Persuasive writing was selected as a demanding form of composition requiring writers to take a position, select supporting details, organize ideas effectively, and express those ideas clearly and convincingly. A persuasive piece also encourages writers to go beyond simply retelling information to constructing an argument and providing evidence to support the case. The prompts were used in years one and two of the study. This section presents the results from the scoring of third- and fourth-grade timed responses to the writing prompts.

### Book Recommendation Prompt

#### Getting Ready to Write

Think about a book you really liked. It can be a book you have read or that has been read to you. You will write a letter to someone you know about this book, convincing him/her to read it. Before you write, think about:

- The title of the book and what it was about
- Why you liked the book
- Who you would write to about this book. Think about why this person should read the book.

#### Time to Write

Directions: Choose a book you really like. It can be a book you have read or someone has read to you. Write a letter to someone you know telling him/her why he/she should read this book. Use examples from the book to tell this person what it is about. Give reasons why this person should read the book. Remember in your letter, you are trying to convince this person to read the book.

### Class Invitation Prompt

#### Getting Ready to Write

Think about a person you would like to invite to visit your class. You will write a letter to your teacher, telling your teacher why the person should be invited to your class. Before you write, think about:

- Who the person is
- Why the person is important to you
- Why the class would enjoy this person or learn something from this person

#### Time to Write

Directions: Choose a person you would like to invite to your class. Write a letter to your teacher to convince him or her to invite this person to your class. Explain who the person is and why the person is important to you. Give reasons why this person should visit your class. In your letter, try to convince your teacher to invite this person to your class.

Allowing for analysis of change over time, students from 25 classrooms were asked to respond to one prompt in the fall (baseline) and to a second one in the spring (follow-up). Both versions of the prompt were administered in the fall and spring with approximately half the students responding to each prompt at each administration. Thus, all students wrote to both prompts. The prompt responses were scored using two separate rubrics: a six-point rhetorical-effectiveness scale, which included the qualities of focus/coherence, elaboration, and style, and a four-point scale for the conventions of English usage, mechanics, and spelling.

This section first presents examples of student work demonstrating strong achievement, adequate achievement, and limited achievement in rhetorical effectiveness as well as examples demonstrating clear and limited control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling.<sup>15</sup> Every example illustrates only one of the many ways to reach that particular level of achievement. For example, different responses to prompts may be scored a 6 and yet have quite different strategies, tones, points of view, or organizational structures. This section then presents response score results by grade, followed by selected subgroups (gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic and ELL status).

### ***Rhetorical Effectiveness***

***Strong Achievement in Rhetorical Effectiveness.*** Papers that demonstrate “strong achievement” in rhetorical effectiveness received a score of 5 or 6. These papers show a clear position, a discernible and effective pattern, and logical and coherent links or transitions. The paper’s argument is thoroughly developed and elaborated, with reasons and examples supporting the argument, and the paper shows a clear awareness of audience. In addition, the word choice is lively, interesting, and precise. Lastly, sentences vary in length and type, and the writer’s voice and tone are appropriate and confident. The following example illustrates a score point of 6.

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<sup>15</sup> The examples presented in this section illustrate papers scoring a 6, 4, and 2 in rhetorical effectiveness and a 4 and 2 in conventions. Appendix J contains an example of student writing for every possible score in both categories.



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Rhetorical Effectiveness Score Point 6 (Strong Achievement), grade 4

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Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Do you like to read? Well if you do, I know the best person to invite to the class: J.K. Rowling! J.K. Rowling is the famous author who wrote all the Harry Potter books, and I think she'd be great to come ~~to the class~~ to the class and talk about her writing.

If she came, she could explain to the class on how to make your stories thrilling, almost like your really there. Next, she could even teach the class how to write good fantasy stories like she did with Harry Potter. After that, she could tell about her life as a

child, as Lindsay's Grandmother did. We can even hear how she perfects to read her books. Finally, the class could ask her questions such as "how did you get the idea for Harry Potter?"

Please, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_

invite J.K. Rowling to the class because she's my hero and I want to

become an author some day. Plus, the class could learn a lot about writing stories, and you could even learn something from her too!

Your best student

C.P.S. You're my favorite teacher, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ !)

**Commentary:** This paper presents a clear, convincing position that is maintained from beginning to end. The student effectively develops the position with five compelling, detailed reasons why the author, J.K. Rowling, should be invited to the class. The paper is well organized with appropriate transitions. It has a strong sense of audience, an opening that engages the reader in the argument, and an effective, direct appeal to the teacher at the beginning of the third paragraph. In the closing, the writer's voice is confident and enthusiastic. The occasional first-draft errors in writing conventions are offset by a strong sense of voice and style and are not considered in evaluating the paper's strengths for rhetorical effectiveness.

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**Adequate Achievement in Rhetorical Effectiveness.** A paper scoring in the mid range (3 or 4) is one that shows adequate achievement, with some clear areas for improvement. The student presents or implies a position but may waiver or digress. The organization is discernible but may be loose or unsystematic. The arguments are not fully developed, and awareness of audience may be superficial or scant. Writing style may be adequate but lacking in conviction and variety. The following example represents a score point of 4.

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**Rhetorical Effectiveness Score Point 4 (Adequate Achievement), Grade 4**

Dear Mrs
Arsen Amirkhanian is the person I will be writing about throughout my essay. He is my uncle.
For the first reason he should come is that he knows alot about birds and can teach us some new things about them. Also he can bring some of his birds and we can touch them.
For another reason he should come is that he can tell us what his birds eat. Also he can tell the ingriants of the much you have to feed them.
For my last reason he should come is that he can tell us wich kind of bird sings. It's going to be, mate.
He had 18 birds and he gave 2 to me. Now he has 16 and some laid eggs and some are singing.
Sincerely,

**Commentary:** The position is implied although not as directly and forcefully stated as in papers demonstrating strong writing achievement. The position is supported by three paragraphs each of which presents relevant but not elaborated reasons. The last paragraph, however, while tangentially related to the topic, is not relevant to the argument presented. The style is clear and straightforward but lacks the vigor of higher scoring papers and sentences are somewhat repetitive.

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**Limited Achievement in Rhetorical Effectiveness.** A paper scoring in the lowest range (1 or 2) is one that is too brief or incoherent to judge, with little or no pattern. The argument is extremely brief, unintelligible, random, or inappropriate. The writer shows no awareness of audience needs, and the word choice is extremely limited, inappropriate or imprecise. The paper lacks a basic sense of sentence structure, and the writer's voice is not evident. The following example illustrates a score of 2.

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**Rhetorical Effectiveness Score Point 2 (Limited Achievement), grade 4**

Dear Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_

Did you read a book named The Town Mouse & the Country Mouse. It is about two mouse they were cousins. The town mouse was lazy but the country mouse worked hard. The town mouse lived in a apartment.

Sincerely,

**Commentary**

The brevity of this paper contributes to its rating of Score Point 2. The position is only implied, and while the discussion of the book does give some information about the content, the discussion does not present any convincing evidence for why the book should be read. There is little awareness of the audience, aside from the opening, which appears to address the reader. The style is mechanical, with little if any evidence of intent to convince the reader. Overall, the paper demonstrates limited command of persuasive writing.

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**Conventions of Usage, Mechanics, and Spelling**

The writing-conventions rubric is a four-point rubric that takes into account students' control of standard written English on a first draft. It reflects student skill in usage, mechanics, and spelling, and is derived from a general-impression reading of students' first-draft writing. A paper scoring high (4) on writing conventions shows clear control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling. It may contain a minimal range of errors, but the errors do not divert the reader's attention or cause confusion about meaning. The middle two scores reflect writing that generally shows control of writing conventions but may have some errors (3), and writing that shows little control of conventions, with serious and numerous errors (2). A paper scoring at the bottom of the scale (1) shows virtually no control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling. Writing may be incoherent, with serious errors in almost every sentence. The following examples illustrate a score of 4 and 2.

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Conventions Score Point 4 (Clear Control), grade 3

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Dear Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_

I think we should invite Alessandro Filipepi to our classroom to visit us. Alessandro, who you know as Botticelli, painted holy paintings that were put in churches and in wealthy people's houses. He painted in Florence, Italy, in the fourteen hundreds. I would like to invite Alessandro Filipepi so we could learn about his beautiful works of art. Many people are interested in his art too. I would like him to come here so we could learn how he made his art to look like it was moving. It would be really cool if he could come and teach us how he learned to mix colors and out linings. So you see, if he could come to our classroom we would be qualified to learn how to paint graceful pictures. I would like to ask Filipepi three questions

that are in my head. These are the questions. Number one, why didn't he use many dark colors? Number two, did he like making his art and how does he make a flat painting look three dimensional? My third question is how did he get into art? Botticelli was born in Florence, Italy probably in 1444 and died when he was sixty-five years old. He learned about art in his brother's workshop. Botticelli's first teacher was a man named Filippo Lippi. I would love to talk to Botticelli aloud. My favorite painting is called, "The Adoration of the Magi". It makes me think of Christmas which is my favorite holiday.

From your student,

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**Commentary:** This paper shows clear control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling. Although there are some errors, they are typical of third-grade, first-draft writing and do not divert the reader's attention or cause confusion about meaning.

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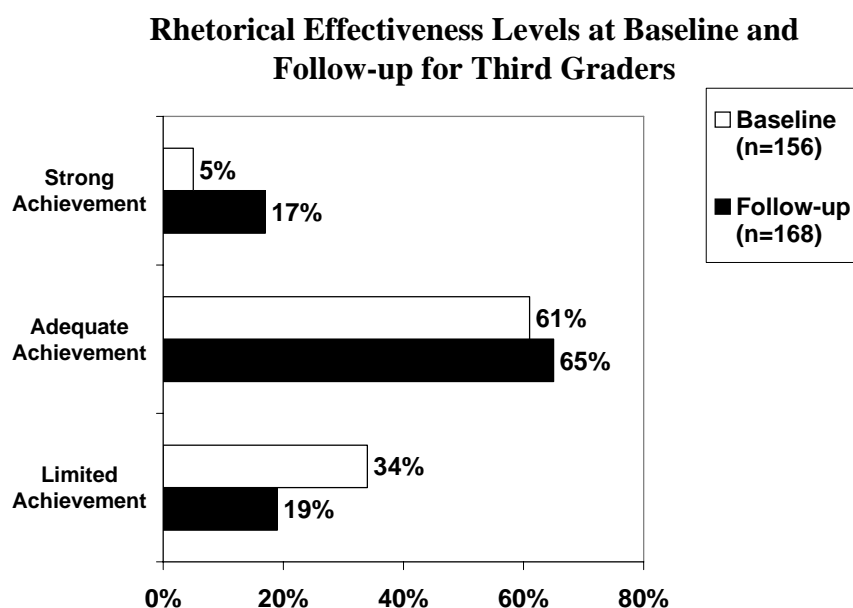
Conventions Score Point 2 (Limited Control), grade 3

Dear mom.  
I Think Harry-  
Potter whub be a  
good Book for You.  
it it about wizards  
and witches  
I like This book  
because it is abawt  
witches and wizards  
a boy named  
harry potter he  
nepr now he was a  
wizards in tell su-  
sumout tells him.  
had goes to This  
wizards and witches  
School. he gets in  
a lot of trouble at  
This school.  
Love

**Commentary:** Despite its clear evidence of fluency and the writer's willingness to develop ideas, this paper is hampered by limited control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling. There are frequent errors in sentence structure, spelling, and punctuation, which distract the reader and sometimes cause confusion about meaning.

**Writing-Prompt Response Results by Grade.** The following graphs and tables illustrate the writing scores at baseline and follow-up and the changes in scores over time for third and fourth graders.<sup>16</sup> Overall, third- and fourth-grade scores increased from baseline to follow-up for both rhetorical effectiveness and writing conventions.<sup>17</sup>

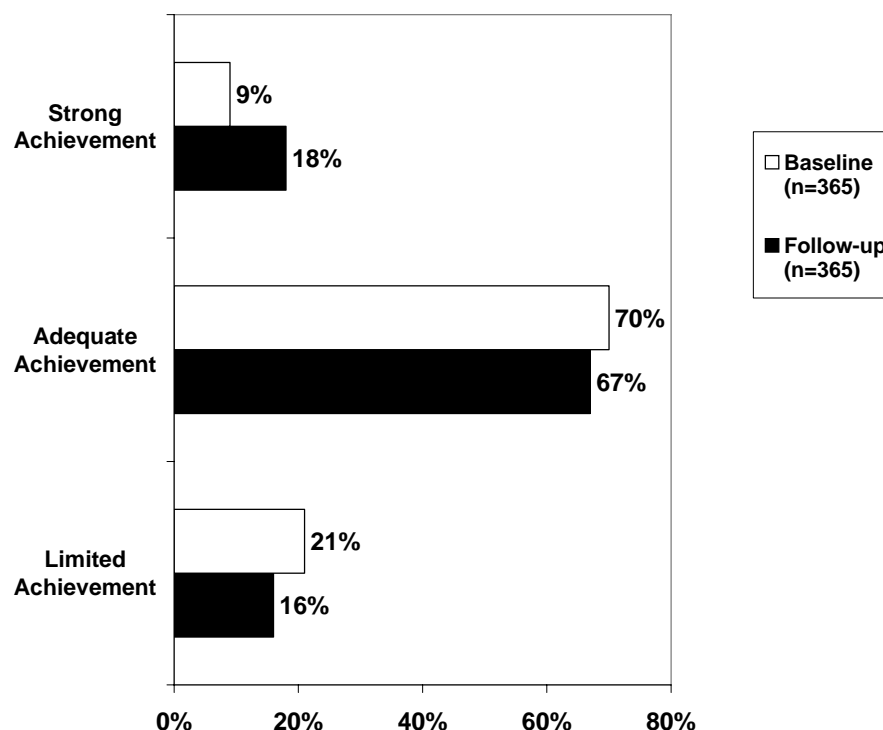
**Rhetorical Effectiveness.** As shown in the graphs below, the majority of students reached adequate or strong achievement on their writing-prompt response by follow-up (82% of third graders and 85% of fourth graders). The percentage of third graders with strong achievement more than tripled and the percentage of fourth graders with strong achievement doubled from baseline to follow-up. In addition, the percentage of third and fourth graders with limited achievement decreased by more than one-third. These trends were consistent with the results from years one and two.



<sup>12</sup> The demographic characteristics of third and fourth graders were similar for gender, race, and ELL status.

<sup>13</sup> Increases from the baseline to follow-up were statistically significant ( $p < .001$ ) for both third and fourth graders, using paired T-Test statistics.

### Rhetorical Effectiveness Levels at Baseline and Follow-up for Fourth Graders



The table below illustrates the specific changes in scores from baseline to follow-up for rhetorical effectiveness. The majority (52%) of students increased their scores by at least half a point. Slightly less than one-fourth (19%) of students' scores did not change, and approximately one-fourth (29%) showed a slight score decrease. A much higher percentage of third graders (60%) than fourth graders (49%) increased their scores. Across the three years, the percentage of students whose scores increased went down slightly, while the percentage of students whose scores decreased went up slightly.

### Changes in Rhetorical Effectiveness Scores from Baseline to Follow-up For Third and Fourth Graders

	Third and fourth graders n=471	Third graders n=147	Fourth graders n=324
<b>Increased</b>	52%	60%	49%
<b>Stayed the same</b>	19%	17%	20%
<b>Decreased</b>	29%	23%	32%

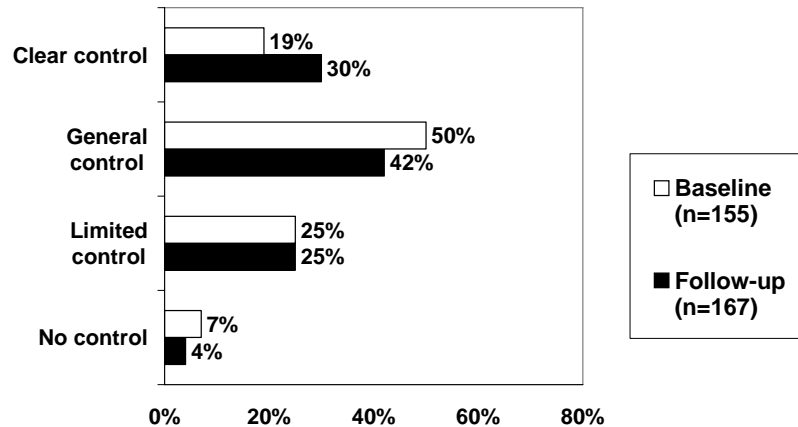
Similar to years one and two, score increases for year three were of greater magnitude than decreases: 40% of increases were by half a point and 60% rose by one or more points. In contrast, 61% of decreases were by only half a point. Decreases in students' scores may reflect the fact that, by the end of the school year, students are often experimenting with writing more

extensive and complicated structures and sentences and using more sophisticated language; this can have a negative effect on the overall rhetorical effectiveness and control of conventions in their work.

**Writing Conventions.** Scores for writing conventions also increased from baseline to follow-up. Most noticeably, the percentage of students who demonstrated clear control of usage, mechanics, and spelling increased by one-third in both third and fourth grade (see graphs below). By follow-up, the majority of third (72%) and fourth graders (78%) showed clear or general control of writing conventions. Compared with years one and two, students in year three of the study showed a slightly smaller increase from baseline to follow-up. While year-one and -two results showed substantial decreases from baseline to follow-up in the percentage of students with limited or no control, year-three findings showed only slight decreases for grades three and four.

Both the prompt responses and the student work from teacher assignments were analyzed using the same rubric for writing conventions. As reported earlier, over half (54%) of student work showed clear control in writing conventions, a much higher percentage than seen with the follow-up prompt responses (30% for third graders and 35% for fourth graders). This is probably because student work was final-draft work rather than first-draft, and, unlike the prompts, was not completed under a time constraint.

**Scores for Writing Conventions at Baseline  
and Follow-up for Third Graders**

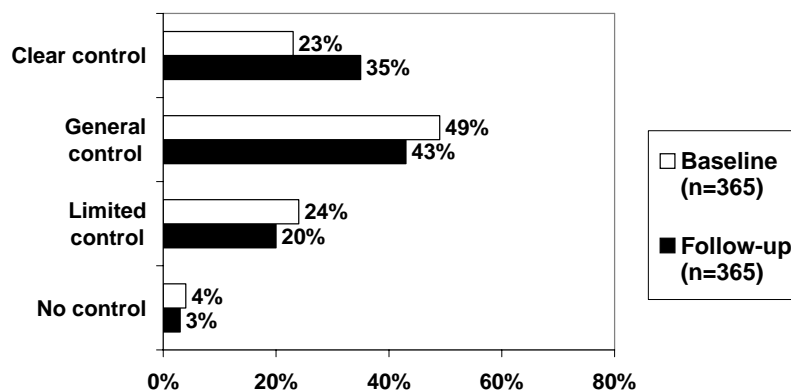


Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.



The table below illustrates the specific changes in scores from baseline to follow-up for

**Scores for Writing Conventions at Baseline  
and Follow-up for Fourth Graders**



conventions. The majority (47%) of students showed an increase in scores for writing conventions from baseline to follow-up. Slightly less than one-third (30%) of students' scores did not change, and about one-fourth (24%) showed a slight score decrease. A higher percentage of third graders than fourth graders showed an increase.

**Changes in Scores for Writing Conventions from Baseline to Follow-up  
for Third and Fourth Graders**

	Third and fourth graders n=469	Third graders n=145	Fourth graders n=324
<b>Increased</b>	47%	51%	45%
<b>Stayed the same</b>	30%	24%	32%
<b>Decreased</b>	24%	25%	23%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

As with rhetorical effectiveness, increases were of greater magnitude than decreases. Over one-third (39%) of increases were at least one point, while the majority (68%) of decreases were by only half a point. As noted above, decreases in scores may reflect students' attempts at the end of the year to use more extensive, complex, and sophisticated sentences and structures than at the beginning of the year, leading to an increase in errors.

### ***Writing-Prompt Response Results for Selected Subgroup***

In this section, writing-prompt results are presented by gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic SES and ELL status. Where appropriate, subgroup trends for prompt results are compared with trends found in the analysis of student work and the 1998 NAEP Writing Report Card (Greenwald et al., 1999).

**Gender.** Consistent with years one and two, both females and males improved their scores from baseline to follow-up. However, more females than males scored high on both rhetorical effectiveness and writing conventions at the follow-up measure; a higher percentage of females increased their convention scores, and a higher percentage of males increased their rhetorical effectiveness scores from baseline to follow-up.

### Writing Prompt Results by Gender

Rhetorical Effectiveness	Male n=268 <sup>18</sup>	Female n=264
Adequate or strong achievement at follow-up	80%	87%
Increase from baseline to follow-up	55%	49%
Conventions		
Clear or general control at follow-up	67%	85%
Increase from baseline to follow-up	44%	49%

**Socioeconomic Status.** Of the 25 participating classrooms, the majority (n=18) were low-SES classrooms, with at least half of the students eligible for the free/reduced-price lunch program. Similar to years one and two, more students in high-SES classrooms than low-SES classrooms scored high on rhetorical effectiveness and writing conventions at the baseline and follow-up measures. A greater percentage of students from high-SES classrooms also increased their scores from the baseline to the follow-up measure. These trends were consistent with those found in the analysis of student work earlier in this chapter and the NAEP data. Specifically, the NAEP data showed that family income had an association with writing achievement: students eligible for free/reduced-price lunch had lower scores in writing than ineligible students.

<sup>14</sup> The numbers shown are the number of respondents in each category (e.g., male, female). The actual number of respondents for each subanalysis (e.g., increase from baseline to follow-up) may be slightly different because of attrition.

### Writing Prompt Results by Socioeconomic Status

<b>Rhetorical Effectiveness</b>	<b>Low SES</b> n=370	<b>High SES</b> n=85
Adequate or strong achievement at follow-up	<b>80%</b>	<b>99%</b>
Increase from baseline to follow-up	<b>51%</b>	<b>59%</b>
<b>Conventions</b>		
Clear or general control at follow-up	<b>72%</b>	<b>96%</b>
Increase from baseline to follow-up	<b>50%</b>	<b>70%</b>

*Race/Ethnicity.* Students who took both the baseline and follow-up prompt represented a diverse group in terms of race/ethnicity. Almost one-half (44%) were white, about one-third (30%) were African-American, 17% were Latino/Hispanic, and 10% were of another race/ethnic background.<sup>19</sup> As noted earlier, race/ethnicity was highly correlated with classroom SES. Almost all (98%) of African American and three-fourths (86%) Latino students were in lower SES classrooms compared with 69% of white students and 51% of students from other racial/ethnic groups.

Differences by race/ethnicity are evident from comparisons of rhetorical-effectiveness and writing-conventions scores. A higher percentage of white students and students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds than African-American and Latino students scored high on rhetorical effectiveness and writing conventions at the follow-up measure. These patterns were similar to those found in the analysis of student work reported earlier in this chapter and in the 1998 NAEP results by race/ethnicity. A greater percentage of students of other racial/ethnic groups showed an increase in scores from baseline to follow-up for both measures compared with all other racial/ethnic groups. When controlled for SES, racial/ethnic differences diminished slightly. The smallest percentage of increase from baseline to follow-up was seen among Latino students, in contrast to years one and two where they showed the greatest percentage of increase in rhetorical effectiveness and conventions scores. This finding may be related to the much smaller sample of Latino students in year three of the study.

<sup>15</sup> As previously noted, other race/ethnicity includes Native American/Alaska Native (2%); Asian (5%); Pacific Islander/Filipino (0%); and other (1%).

### Writing Prompt Results by Race/Ethnicity

<b>Rhetorical Effectiveness</b>	<b>African-American</b> n=167	<b>Latino</b> N=84	<b>White</b> n=230	<b>Other</b> n=49
Adequate or strong achievement at follow-up	<b>77%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>94%</b>
Increase from baseline to follow-up	<b>48%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Conventions</b>				
Clear or general control at follow-up	<b>74%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>92%</b>
Increase from baseline to follow-up	<b>47%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>50%</b>

**English Language Learner.** About one-sixth (16%) of students who responded to the prompts were identified as ELL students.<sup>20</sup> These students came from 13 classrooms in five states. A majority (70%) of ELL students spoke Spanish as a first language, with almost all (98%) attending low-SES classrooms.

Fewer ELL students scored in the highest two categories of rhetorical effectiveness and writing conventions or increased their scores from baseline to follow-up than non-ELL students at the follow-up measure.

### Writing Prompt Results by ELL Status

<b>Rhetorical Effectiveness</b>	<b>ELL</b> n=85	<b>Non-ELL</b> n=447
Adequate or strong achievement at follow-up	<b>74%</b>	<b>85%</b>
Increase from baseline to follow-up	<b>36%</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>Conventions</b>		
Clear or general control at follow-up	<b>59%</b>	<b>79%</b>
Increase from baseline to follow-up	<b>45%</b>	<b>47%</b>

<sup>16</sup> ELL students include those who write in English and in another language.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This report describes the results from year three of a three-year evaluation of the National Writing Project. Through multiple methods and data sources collected by the Academy for Educational Development, this study has illuminated the impact of the writing project on teachers' views and practices; the ways in which writing project teachers develop student writing and use writing as a tool for learning; and the writing achievement outcomes for students in 25 third- and fourth-grade classrooms. Interview and survey data provided evidence that the writing project changed teachers' philosophies about teaching and had a deep and sustained impact on their daily classroom practices. When compared with a national sample of third- and fourth-grade teachers who participated in at least 32 hours of professional development, the NWP teachers in this study were much more likely to report an impact on their beliefs and practices. What also distinguishes these writing project teachers from other elementary teachers is that they foster student writing by infusing writing throughout the curriculum and across subject areas. They also foster process-oriented approaches to writing through frequent use of strategies such as prewriting, peer editing, and revision. Further, they spend a far greater amount of time on writing instruction than most fourth-grade teachers nationwide.

Analysis of a sample of third- and fourth-grade teachers' writing assignments and the corresponding student work also showed that the writing project teachers in this study provided students with many opportunities to perform authentic intellectual work. Through writing assignments that varied widely in nature (e.g., poetry, historical fiction, persuasion, exposition) students had multiple opportunities to learn and practice the kinds of critical thinking skills that require evaluation, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of information, or "construction of knowledge," rather than rote reproduction of facts. Overall, a majority of student work showed high levels of construction of knowledge, organization and coherence, and control of the conventions of English. Further, analysis of teachers' assignments and student work showed the clear connection between the two. When assignments asked students to construct knowledge rather than reproduce facts, students were much more likely to do so.

Looking at another type of student achievement data—timed responses to writing prompts—provided additional evidence that students in these writing project classrooms were achieving at adequate or strong levels. Most students reached at least adequate achievement (82% of third graders and 85% of fourth graders)—and 17% of third graders and 18% of fourth graders reached strong achievement—for rhetorical effectiveness by the end of the school year. Most (72% of third graders and 78% of fourth graders) also demonstrated general or clear control of the conventions of usage, mechanics, and spelling. In addition, writing project students showed statistically significant increases from baseline to follow-up for both rhetorical effectiveness and writing conventions.

In both types of achievement data (student work and timed responses to writing prompts), the general patterns in the findings held for different subgroups of students. However, there were some differences in achievement between subgroups. Females outperformed males, white students outperformed students of other racial and ethnic backgrounds, students from high-SES classrooms outperformed those from low-SES classrooms, and more non-ELL students increased their achievement from baseline to follow-up than ELL students. Overall, these subgroup

differences were consistent with those found in other national writing assessments such as NAEP. The student achievement results presented here were also fairly consistent with those from years one and two of the study. Slight variations in results most likely derive from the differences in the student sample demographics from year to year.

In conclusion, the data collected for this study showed that the National Writing Project had a profound impact on participating teachers' beliefs and practices. The study also revealed the many ways that writing project teachers fostered student achievement in writing and used writing as a tool for learning through diverse and challenging writing activities and assignments. Finally, it showed that most third- and fourth-grade students in the study classes demonstrated adequate or strong levels of achievement in their writing and made statistically significant gains in rhetorical effectiveness and control of the conventions of writing over the course of a school year.

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