

# Models *of* Inservice

## The Professional Leadership Development Project: Building Writing Project and School-Site Teacher Leadership in Urban Schools

by Zsa Boykin, Jennifer Scrivner, and Sarah Robbins

*Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project  
Kennesaw State University, Georgia*

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

Please see the inside back cover for more information and a list of all available titles in the NWP at Work series.

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National Writing Project  
Berkeley, California

## **NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT**

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

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

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

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Series Editor: Elizabeth Radin Simons  
Editors: Joye Alberts, Amy Bauman  
Design: Diana Nankin, 38degrees.com

National Writing Project  
University of California  
2105 Bancroft, #1042  
Berkeley, CA 94720-1042

Telephone: 510-642-0963  
Fax: 510-642-4545  
Email: [nwp@writingproject.org](mailto:nwp@writingproject.org)  
[www.writingproject.org](http://www.writingproject.org)

National Writing Project at Work, a series of monographs authored by teams of writing project teachers and site directors about their work, debuted in 2002 with four monographs inaugurating Volume 1: Models of Inservice. This series continues with a second set of monographs—of which this is one—concluding the volume on inservice at local NWP sites. NWP at Work began as a dissemination project with the goal of regularly producing easily accessible, well-written, and inviting documents on the extensive work of the National Writing Project. This first volume will be followed by volumes on NWP summer institutes and on sustainability and continuity of a professional community at a local writing project site.

Dissemination of learning and knowledge is a long-standing tradition within the NWP network. But typically such dissemination has been fleeting, done by word of mouth or shared in workshops. Over the past few years, teachers, site leaders, and national directors of the National Writing Project have begun more intentional and systematic documentation and dissemination of knowledge generated by NWP local site initiatives. The first volume of NWP at Work, focusing on professional development inspired by the mission and vision of the NWP, covers a wide range of teacher professional development models, including school-site writing series, starting and nurturing satellite sites, teacher research projects, statewide reading projects, school-site coaching, and professional development designed by teachers. The monographs present models of change in the classroom, school, district, and state. They illustrate the local creativity and responsiveness of individual NWP sites. Collectively, they are an important body of teacher knowledge about the multiple forms of professional development that teachers experience as useful and respectful. They show that there are many forms of successful inservice and support the NWP belief that there is no one right way to do this work.

Professional development of teachers is a pivotal component of school reform, and teacher voices are critical for this work to be successful. In these monographs, we hear why and when teachers commit to this work, what it does for them as educators, and how it helps change their professional self-images. We learn the authors' ideas behind their designs for reform; their grassroots theories about what it takes to transform school culture, teaching, and learning; and what support they need to do this work. The monographs show how school reform happens—how in a multitude of ways, large and small, in schools across the country, teachers make it work.

Looking at this first volume of monographs, we notice several trends. First, the authors are veteran teachers who bring their extensive experience in schools, their reputations as leaders, and their extensive insider knowledge of their schools, districts, and states to their work. They wield the power of their insider status, their networks, and their knowledge of the systems to effect change. Second, in the projects described in these monographs, the teachers take on new roles—roles they

have never played before—and, consequently, they take risks. The risk taking involves failures as well as successes, and a notable strength of the monographs is the honest voice in which each is written.

Third, all of the projects presented in this series have equity at their core—equity for students and for teachers. Each monograph describes work that targets a population of students and teachers not being served. Fourth, the teachers and site directors were—or learned to be—politically canny, seeking alliances, partnerships, and funding for their work. Fifth, these teachers are not always working in friendly climates. They are attempting reform with staff who have burned out or are nearing burnout, with high teacher turnover, with too many simultaneous initiatives—in short with all the realities of current public school education, especially in urban and rural schools of poverty.

Five of the monographs describe initiatives from NWP's Project Outreach, which has an explicit goal of engaging teachers of students in poverty. The Project Outreach teacher-consultants and directors who plan these initiatives co-construct the projects with the teachers at school sites—teachers who are not necessarily NWP teacher-consultants. (While some of these teachers later attend an NWP summer institute, many cannot, but they are all the beneficiaries of NWP training.) Since these teachers design and implement their own professional development, one critical outcome is the emergence of new teacher-leaders.

We are pleased that the first volume of NWP at Work is about inservice programs. The work described will have much to add to the debate about effective professional development. In these times, when a significant percentage of teachers leave the profession after five years, these monographs document opportunities to engage teachers intellectually and feed their teaching souls. These are models of teacher learning and school improvement that keep teachers teaching.

It is with great pleasure and pride that we offer this next set of the National Writing Project at Work series. We are hopeful that teachers, site directors, policymakers, academics, and all who work in the realm of school reform will find much to think about in this series.

JOYE ALBERTS  
Associate Director, National Writing Project

ELIZABETH RADIN SIMONS  
Series Editor, National Writing Project

## INTRODUCTION

Between 1996 and 1998, a team of teacher-consultants affiliated with the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP), Georgia, used support from Project Outreach of the National Writing Project to develop a model for promoting teacher leadership within individual urban schools and for their writing project site as a whole. Our model is not a preordained set of steps to follow or even a detailed set of guidelines; rather, it is a flexible framework—an adaptable set of concepts and promising practices for thinking about and carrying out school-based inservice grounded in teachers' own collaborative inquiry into their work. The model grew organically from KMWP's local Project Outreach team of about a half dozen emerging leaders, who set out to learn collaborative leadership skills while simultaneously applying those skills in school-based inservice projects. While the school-based professional development activities each of these teacher-consultants facilitated varied to meet the needs of each teacher's particular context, all of the individual inservice projects drew on and contributed to the framework for leadership development that KMWP was gradually defining through a shared inquiry process. This monograph revisits the experiences of some key participants in this inquiry process to highlight what and how they learned about promoting teacher leadership in urban schools and for their National Writing Project (NWP) site. Our story is closely tied to the early history of the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, especially its deep commitment to teachers working in urban settings.





# COMMITTED FROM THE START: CREATING TEACHER-LEADERS IN URBAN SCHOOLS

by **Zsa Boykin,  
Jennifer Scrivner, and Sarah Robbins**

The Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project sponsored its first summer institute in 1994, after months of collaborative planning with area school districts. From the start, a major goal of the site was to build teacher leadership in urban schools facing challenging teaching situations. With that in mind, and with the help of several district administrators in one large part of the site's service area, a substantial number of urban educators working in schools the county classified as "at risk" were recruited for the first three summer institutes (ten of twenty participants in 1994; ten of eighteen participants in 1995; and thirteen of eighteen participants in 1996). These teachers played a key role in shaping the philosophy and practices of KMWP from the start. (See appendix A.)

KMWP is located at Kennesaw State University (KSU), which draws students from suburban and rural as well as urban schools, and this National Writing Project site has made a special commitment to recruit educators from schools in diverse settings. Having an especially enthusiastic group of young teachers from urban schools at our first few summer institutes was one factor that encouraged us to apply to participate in NWP's Project Outreach, partly because we wanted to explore new ways of working with teachers who might not be able to attend our summer institutes. (Project Outreach is a three-year NWP initiative that supported one year of site self-study followed by implementation and dissemination of programs to improve the quantity and quality of NWP services to teachers in low-income communities.)

While Project Outreach provided funds to enhance our efforts to reach more urban teachers and to collaborate with other writing project sites involved in the national initiative, this goal had been a part of KMWP's vision all along. What Project Outreach did was to enable us to dedicate special funds and additional resources to this aim while also helping us to study what we learned along the way. The structure we created for our own local outreach to urban schoolteachers who felt unable to attend a summer institute can be adapted by other NWP sites, whether or not they are participating in a specially funded initiative such as Project Outreach.

The model for this work was developed by a group of six teacher-consultants who first attended a Project Outreach summer institute and then became our local Project Outreach leadership team. This group wanted colleagues in their home schools to have opportunities for professional development similar to the one they were having as members of the KMWP Project Outreach team. So working as a team, these teacher-consultants gradually created a structure for building a school-based inservice project, called a professional leadership development project (PLDP), with a relatively small group of colleagues in their own schools. This

meant that at the same time this team was working as a Project Outreach leadership team and also as a study group that met regularly at Kennesaw State, each member of this six-person team also collaborated with her own school-based study group, action research team, or similar professional development activity group. Each of these school-based groups chose a focus, designed a professional leadership development project with goals relevant to its particular school, and carried out that project.

Of the six teacher-consultants who were in the KSU study group and also facilitating their school-based projects, five were relatively new to teaching and leadership. Therefore, for their support and development, and to study their own leadership learning process, they met quarterly to share stories (both successes and challenges) and to refine their procedures and goals. Talking and writing together, they reflected on their school-site inservice projects and developed leadership skills at the same time. This model of facilitating inservice at a local school while studying the leadership process served dual goals: KMWP was reaching a teacher population it had prioritized (the urban educators in the local school projects), and it was nurturing leadership for KMWP.

Ultimately, through their work with both Project Outreach and the individual school-based projects, the six teachers identified several beneficial features of their leadership development efforts. These features were teacher collaboration, empowerment of teachers to lead their own professional development, and ongoing reflection on leadership skills that were growing among all participants. We are writing this monograph in the belief that those individual school-based projects and the process followed by the multimember Project Outreach team working at KMWP could serve as models for other writing projects to use in small-group inservice during the school year.

The authors of this monograph are Zsa Boykin, a teacher-leader for the program described here; Jennifer Scrivner, the KMWP site coordinator of Project Outreach; and Sarah Robbins, the director of KMWP. The upcoming section of this monograph provides additional relevant details from the early history of KMWP—decisions and practices that helped shape this project. The two subsequent sections describe the heart and core of KMWP's work—the development of the leadership group and the site-based study groups. And in the final section, the authors collectively reflect on what they learned about reaching urban educators during the academic year through collaborative, school-based staff development.

### **ATTRACTING URBAN TEACHERS TO THE KMWP: SARAH ROBBINS, SITE DIRECTOR, REMEMBERS**

Although the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project was still a young site in 1996, we had been paving the way for school-based inservice in Cobb County (where KSU, the writing project site's host university, is located) even before our NWP site was founded. Soon after I arrived at Kennesaw State University in 1993,

Meribeth Cooper and Stella Ross, then middle school and high school language arts coordinators for the Cobb County district, asked the university to establish a National Writing Project site to nurture collaboration between the university and the school district. From earliest discussions, we looked forward to working with the schools in the southern part of Cobb County, which is home to many urban schools with Title I status, high student and teacher turnover, and test scores lower than those in the more stable and affluent northern parts of the county.

Southern Cobb County, formerly a relatively homogeneous, middle-class environment, has become much more urban and diverse over the past few years. Apartment buildings, trailer parks, and subsidized housing units have appeared along this corridor running north from Atlanta. Families in search of the suburban dream find themselves living in neighborhoods facing problems associated with transient populations and overburdened infrastructures. As in so many American metropolitan areas today, a number of factors have contributed to southern Cobb County's situation. These include dramatic increases in immigration to the Atlanta area from other countries as well as from other areas of the United States and the subsequent need for affordable housing for those newcomers. Because of the decreasing home values in older suburban neighborhoods, as well as the boom in high-density apartment buildings, southern Cobb County fulfills that need for many new residents.

Take, for example, the city of Smyrna, Georgia, which reflects the demographic trends of the southern section of Cobb County. At the turn of the twentieth century, Smyrna was a village of fewer than two hundred people, virtually all of whom were white. Today Smyrna's diverse population stands at 45,000. The growth and change of Smyrna's high school, Campbell High School, parallel those of the city. Campbell, one of southern Cobb County's major secondary schools, has an enrollment of 2,040 students, although in any given semester withdrawals and enrollments can affect that number by as much as 200 students. Representing twenty-six nationalities and the largest Hispanic enrollment in the county, Campbell's population is 5 percent Asian, 43 percent African American, 14 percent Hispanic, 35 percent Caucasian, and 2 percent multiracial.

By 1996, we had teacher-consultants in a number of the southern Cobb County schools—teachers we had carefully recruited to participate in the KMWP Summer Institute. Before our first and second institutes, Tricia Mingledorff, then the elementary reading and language arts coordinator for the Cobb district, made special efforts to communicate with principals in south Cobb about the benefits their students could garner from having teachers participate. To further ensure that south Cobb schools were represented in our summer institutes, we needed to recruit the young teachers who were working in those schools. (As veterans were often requesting transfers to the northern part of the county, south Cobb schools had a high proportion of young teachers, many just beginning in the profession. To serve those schools, we knew we would need to build the leadership capabilities of young teachers rather than counting on veterans as the main pool for KMWP programs.) So, collaborating with Cobb administrators for each of our first three summer institutes, we identified potential leaders at elementary, middle, and high school levels.

The identified teachers had fewer years in the classroom than most NWP summer institute participants, but they were already instructional leaders and, we hoped, would be more inclined to stay in their schools if we provided access to professional development opportunities supporting their personal growth and their students' success. While these teachers typically had less than ten years' experience in the classroom, a number of them had already managed successful careers in business before answering the call to teach. A few others had raised families, often becoming leaders in parent-teacher organizations along the way, before entering the classroom as instructors. Thus, several were young only in years served as schoolteachers, not in age. Each of these talented teachers had attended one of our first three summer institutes.

In a recent conversation, Jennifer Scrivner and Zsa Boykin recalled what they were like at the beginning of the Project Outreach initiative. Jennifer, describing herself then as an enthusiastic educator with "almost six years of teaching under my belt" and a "new sense of confidence" derived from attending the 1995 KMWP Summer Institute, was "ready to be more involved in work beyond the classroom." Zsa Boykin remembered the KMWP group of six that volunteered for the first Project Outreach summer institute as "pliable agents of change, curious risk takers, and, most important, excited learners." In short, we assembled a leadership team whose members were very like the other teachers we hoped to reach—dedicated instructors working in the toughest schools.

Of the initial Project Outreach leadership team of six teachers plus the site director, three teachers were African American and four were of European American descent. In retrospect, we see that having a high percentage of African American teacher participants was a special strength of our leadership team. This fact encouraged us, at times, to focus on topics of special interest to teachers of color and also led us to plan events emphasizing issues that white teachers might have been less likely to address. It may have given us increased credibility in working with the schools we were trying to serve and perhaps also provided us with enhanced insight into students' needs. Overall, the diversity of the group was an important source of our learning. Through that diversity, we learned such lessons as how to collaborate across differing backgrounds, always respecting and honoring the various talents and experiences each individual brought to our process. Consistent with our site's core values, all of us participating in this initiative had strong personal commitments to diversity and equity, as outlined in the KMWP mission statement. (See appendix B. Also see <http://www.kennesaw.edu/english/kmwp/Mission.htm>.)

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF OUR LEADERSHIP TEAM: ZSA BOYKIN REMEMBERS

Our Project Outreach leadership team, which was the KSU-based study group developing this school-based inservice model, became also a leadership study group, because for three years we worked together to analyze, assess, and refine the leadership skills that teachers in urban environments need to survive. We carried out this analysis collaboratively, through written reflection and discussion. In year one of Project Outreach's three-year funding, we incorporated the piloting of school-based inservice projects into our NWP site's self-study of how the KMWP could better serve teachers in low-income schools. In year two, having had success with our pilot inservice projects in the schools, we refined our model. In year three, we again refined and also disseminated our model. Through all three years, we constantly analyzed our leadership abilities—communication, cooperation with administrators, and ability to engage in self-critique—while we were developing them together. The leadership study group comprised six kindergarten-through-twelfth-grade classroom teachers and one college instructor, all of whom happened to be women. Although, traditionally, most women don't want a lot of attention given to their age, the relative youthfulness of our team did play a huge factor in the leadership development process at KMWP. Without a doubt, it presented a challenge, but it was also a source of strength. Consider these factors:

- Our site was only two years old.
- Five of the six classroom teachers were under the age of thirty-five.
- Five of the six classroom teachers had taught five or fewer years.
- Only one of the six teachers had an advanced degree.
- Only one of the six teachers had ever presented at a local or national conference.

The initial inquiry of the leadership study group led us to recognize that traditional ways of doing staff development were not likely to help us broaden our reach into the teacher populations we most wanted to serve—educators in urban schools like those in south Cobb. Instead, we envisioned empowering teachers through professional development selected, planned, and implemented by teachers. We were especially drawn to staff development programs tailored to individual schools and decided to devote a large percentage of our Project Outreach funds to this aim.<sup>1</sup> We imagined how those programs could be led by teacher-consultants and how we might help the teacher groups find their focus. So for recruitment purposes, we focused not on entire teaching staffs but on groups who self-identified as interested in a particular topic—for example, a small group of teachers who wanted to take Spanish together so they could work better with the changing student and parent population in their neighborhood; a school-based team of teachers who wanted to collaborate to build a multicultural literature library; a group of teachers who decided to read professional literature about retaining beginning teachers in the profession.

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<sup>1</sup> In years one and two of Project Outreach, our NWP site received \$10,000 per year for the program. We allotted \$6,000 of this total amount to school-based inservice. The relatively high percentage of the grant that we "spent" in individual schools signaled the level of commitment we felt to school-based inservice. Each of six participating schools, whose individual inservice projects were led by one member of our local Project Outreach team, received a \$1,000 minigrant.

### Four Daylong KMWP Leadership Meetings

One of the most important practices responsible for molding us into teacher-leaders was a series of four daylong meetings, held quarterly, at Kennesaw State University. We found it invaluable to have six to eight consecutive and uninterrupted hours to listen, plan, talk, and write. We understood the need for teachers to meet away from school to do a better job leading in our schools, much as business and political leaders need opportunities for retreats from their regular workplaces so as to think more creatively about how to address challenges. As several members of our planning team observed, teachers are rarely given the time or leeway needed to work on professional development themselves. But our meetings gave us that time. As part of our Project Outreach budget, therefore, we created a line item to cover substitute-teacher pay once a quarter.

Our meetings generally began with time for shared personal stories before our serious business. For instance, we congratulated one group member on a promotion to lead teacher, and we commiserated over problems with children. During this time we were able to speak openly, and often we laughed heartily. Through this relaxed beginning, we created a sense of family and came to know each member's strongest and not-so-strong assets. Further, these exchanges made discussing touchy issues about our work easier, because we knew and cared about each other.

Our formal discussions, usually led by the Project Outreach site coordinator, Jennifer Scrivner, opened with an overview of how much time we were going to allot to various segments of the agenda. Sometimes we changed the agenda order to effectively maximize our meeting, but the use of an agenda focused us on the tasks we needed to complete before the day ended. Without the team realizing it at first, Jennifer and Sarah Robbins (as site director) were modeling how to lead our site-based meetings and how to run our individual school projects. Through their techniques, we picked up some simple but important leadership lessons. All of our voices had value. Everyone had an opportunity to say what she wanted to say. We never got off track from our agenda, though, because we all knew how to listen actively. In fact, the most important lesson I learned while leading professional development activities was to listen to the concerns and desires of my colleagues.

Building on our general vision, we created a framework for our professional development that addressed the following goals for both parts of our work together—the leadership study group and the school-based projects. Our goals included

- empowering teachers to lead their own professional development
- learning to collaborate with administrators and other teachers not already affiliated with the National Writing Project
- viewing our school-based projects as action-research projects designed to help us learn how to support urban educators
- developing approaches for ongoing assessment of participants' professional growth, of the particular inservice programs, and of our model.

By the time we were running our own school-based inservice programs, we were using the same approaches we used in our leadership analysis meetings; we had an agenda protocol. Meetings began with each teacher giving a report of how the school project was progressing—both challenges and successes. Next, having listened as critical friends, we critiqued the individual programs, revising and revamping each other's ways of thinking and complimenting each other's successes. Continual shared critique, in other words, became a regular part of our study group's working sessions, and through it our rapport was strengthened.

This shared critique in our meetings was vital to my personal sense of accomplishment. When I was feeling frustrated that my plans were not moving fast enough or smoothly enough, my cohorts always had a suggestion or a word of encouragement. Just as Martin Luther King Jr. would not have had his mountaintop experience if not for strategic meetings with his organizers, planners, and workers, teacher leadership development requires surrounding oneself with strategists committed to a mission that is too enormous to handle alone.

An early challenge we all encountered was that, as one of the teachers wrote, "Our principals think teacher research is not authentic. They are not convinced that classroom teachers can develop inquiry questions [and they] don't understand why [teachers] are not satisfied with the inservices sponsored by our counties." Fortunately, we had the support of the National Writing Project, as represented in our site director, Sarah Robbins, to help us. We enlisted her services in several ways. First, she contacted key county-level administrators to remind them about the big-picture goals of our school-based inservice projects. Her second step was to send letters of commendation about our work with the NWP to each of our principals. She also met with each of our principals or assistant principals to allow them to ask her questions face-to-face. Sarah's goal was multilayered. She wanted to inform the principals of her confidence in each of us as leaders while assuring them that our method of teacher research was legitimate (since we were basing our work in the schools on the study of writings such as *The Art of Classroom Inquiry*). These connections also taught us how helpful it can be to communicate in positive, constructive ways with administrators. Finally, at the meetings, we did reflective writing to keep track of how, when, and why we made specific decisions. Strategic meetings and written reflections, we found, created a history of our decision-making process, which could and did lead to relevant professional development.

Because we saved all of the written reflections that we generated, we could periodically reread what we had written. By reflecting on our own and our colleagues' earlier writings, we could track our progress and identify themes and issues that needed our continued attention. Here are some examples from my own and Jennifer Scrivner's reflections—brief samples drawn from the many pages of data that we reviewed in order to write this essay.

### **My Reflections While at Campbell Middle School**

In writing about how one of our leadership team meetings functioned early in the year (9-11-96), I noted:

We understood our limited time frame [for the workday we spent together]. We even stated our backup plan if Plan A [for our agenda] didn't work. I liked the fact that we followed calm, meticulously planned strategies to get our work completed.

At midyear, as we were taking stock of the progress of our individual school-based projects, one of my reflective comments emphasized the power we were finding in being able to talk with colleagues:

3-31-97:

I am especially glad to have [my colleagues] give me input as I plan for my June 26 presentation.

By the end of the Project Outreach initiative at KMWP, I was recognizing leadership development as a collegial activity as this 1998 reflection shows: "Sharing leadership is far better than going at it solo."

### **Reflections from Jennifer Scrivner While at Bryant and Later at Brumby Elementary**

During the initial retreat organized for Project Outreach site coordinators in April of 1996, Jennifer Scrivner was already seeing the KMWP's participation in community terms, and she was considering ways of building community among members of her local leadership team by cultivating a nonjudgmental environment for teacher reflection and growth. She linked that goal to aspects of the site's culture that were already in place: "Our site is like a family of learners all relying on each other's expertise and knowledge."

By the next year, Jennifer could reflect on the importance of community building in her relationships with the local and national leadership teams:

5-12-97:

It is very powerful to work in a place where the intellectual freedom and support are so nonthreatening. The atmosphere we have developed . . . allows me to make mistakes and not be harshly judged or feel like I am the "lone ranger" of the project. . . . I [had] never participated in an email conversation until my involvement with the Project Outreach Network of the National Writing Project.

When writing an overall evaluation of KMWP's leadership study group in August of 1997, Jennifer observed:



Good leaders inspire others. . . . A plus for our leadership style has been letting the teachers at . . . schools decide for themselves what professional development services they need and want.

### **The Individual School-Based Projects**

While the team leaders for this KMWP initiative were meeting together to study their own professional growth, they were also collaborating with others in their home schools, as outlined above. The chart that follows (see page 12) offers a snapshot of the professional development projects led by the leadership study group in their individual schools. The chart illustrates the diversity of the activities. The model accommodates a range of schools—elementary, middle, and high schools—as well as the range of projects. Each school, under the guidance of the KMWP leadership teacher-consultants, created a project meeting the needs of the teachers involved, such as a way to connect with the students’ families or a way to mentor new teachers.

In the early planning stages for each of the inservice projects, we asked the school-based groups who were participating to prepare a brief written plan for their professional leadership development project. The leadership team then provided suggestions for how to carry out the project, and the member of the leadership team responsible for that school then collaborated with colleagues there to carry out and evaluate the plan. (See a copy of the planning form in appendix C.) After the team had reviewed the project’s plans, each school received a \$1,000 minigrant to help implement the plan. Minigrant funds were used for such budget items as supplies, substitute teachers to cover classes if school teams wanted release time to meet (as the leadership study group was doing), consultant fees, and professional reading materials. While \$1,000 may not seem like a huge amount of money compared to district-level staff development budgets, teachers were excited about being able to decide for themselves how to spend these funds.

Besides outlining the various school projects, the chart below shows that we had some turnover in the leadership study group itself over the course of Project Outreach’s term. This is a common challenge in multiyear projects, especially in urban areas. In each case, we met the challenge of turnover by replacing the teacher who withdrew with another teacher of similar background.

TEACHER(S)	SCHOOL	PROJECT IN YEAR ONE	PROJECT IN YEAR TWO
Zsa Boykin	Campbell Middle	Twenty teachers took a ten-week Spanish class together to support work with the school's growing English language learner (ELL) population. (Note: additional district funds provided)	Ten teachers participated in professional conversations based on readings about topics of interest to them. [Three or four meetings]
Michelle Goodsite	Campbell High	Four teachers prepared interdisciplinary units for English and history. [Six or seven meetings]	Twenty teachers supported ELL instruction by working with the ELL Welcome Center to support non-English speakers. (Note: additional district funds provided)
Janet Grier and Jennifer Scrivner <sup>A</sup>	Bryant Elementary	Five teachers (plus facilitator) used multicultural literature to enhance students' writing; developed ways to model literature response-writing for students. [Weekly meetings]	Five teachers refined their approaches for linking study of multicultural literature to writing instruction. [Weekly meetings]
Stephanie Lambert and Amy Ostrowski	Labelle Elementary	Teachers studied the home-school connection in literacy and created "literacy suitcases" for rotating home use.	School withdrawn from project when Amy "retired" to start a family; replaced by Brumby Elementary. [See below]
Afton Day and Jennifer Scrivner	Brumby Elementary <sup>B</sup>	Not yet a part of program.	Five teachers expanded and refined the "literacy suitcases" first tried out at Labelle the year before. [Monthly meetings]
Bernadette Lambert	East Cobb Middle	Replaced Stephenson Middle School. [See below]	Fifteen teachers joined in "professional conversations" to share their own best classroom practices and multicultural literature. [Two daylong sessions and preplanning]
Dorothy Augustine-Howard	Stephenson Middle <sup>C</sup>	Seven or eight teachers took part in a mentoring project for first-year teachers. [Four to six sessions]	Dorothy withdrew from project after taking on the time-consuming role of president for state National Council of Teachers of English organization.

Note: In year three, the dissemination year for Project Outreach, we were no longer able to provide funding for individual schools. However, several of the inservice professional leadership development projects continued without Project Outreach funding.

A Jennifer Scrivner was working as a learner support strategist at Bryant in the project's first year but moved to Brumby in the second year to serve as assistant principal.

B The Brumby project built a pilot developed by Stephanie Lambert and Amy Ostrowski at Labelle Elementary School in the first year of Project Outreach Network. Stephanie and Amy subsequently took a break from teaching to begin their families.

C Dorothy Augustine-Howard's project at Stephenson Middle School in year one of our study was the only professional leadership development project set outside of south Cobb County. While the participants found this mentoring program useful, when Dorothy needed to concentrate on her presidency of the Georgia Council of Teachers of English in the second year, our team decided to replace Stephenson with another south Cobb school, in part because our connections with south Cobb County and school administrators had become so strong by then.

## **THE INSERVICE PROJECT AT BRYANT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: JENNIFER SCRIVNER REMEMBERS**

In this section, we take an in-depth look at one of the school-based professional development projects facilitated through our work together. Though each of the school-based projects was unique, this case study highlights some of the challenges teacher-leaders faced and the strategies they developed to reach their school group's goals.

In 1995, after six years as a classroom teacher, I became a teacher-consultant for the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project. I had just finished the KMWP Summer Institute when I was contacted by the principal of Bryant Elementary, one of south Cobb County's most challenging schools. The principal had just started her first year at Bryant and wanted me to accept a position there. Bryant had recently obtained a charter school grant and was forging ahead to implement schoolwide reform. Hired as a learner support strategist, I was in a lead position to work with faculty members on instructional strategies, to provide professional development, and to assist in a quasi-administrative role with students deemed at risk for academic failure.

When I began working at Bryant in 1996, 50 percent of the eight hundred children there were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and breakfast. The transient rate of households served by the school was 40 percent, and the teacher transient rate was close to 50 percent per year. Since African American students were 99 percent of the student enrollment, the faculty—the majority of whom were white—were struggling to integrate more multicultural elements into the curriculum. Adding to the difficulty of this struggle, it may be important to note, was the fact that Cobb County's district-level curriculum was still dominated by the upper-middle-class white perspectives and experiences evident in the population of the northern, more affluent areas of the county.<sup>2</sup>

Bryant seemed a perfect place for the KMWP to try to reach teachers who served at-risk students. Teachers felt overwhelmed with the day-to-day onslaught of student needs, but the charter school status had been a big boost to morale. Teachers were looking for new ways to challenge students. On top of this, KMWP already had a tiny foothold in the school building. Besides me, the writing project site had another teacher-consultant there, Janet Grier, and the two of us clicked when I arrived at the school.

Once our NWP site found out that we could receive the Project Outreach school-level minigrant, Janet and I met with the principal to discuss Bryant's potential participation in a school-based inservice project. The principal was delighted to see me as learner support strategist working so closely with Janet, who was a second grade teacher, and the prospect of additional funds to support teacher development held great appeal. With a nod from the principal, we began our quest for teacher-participants.

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<sup>2</sup> Textbook adoptions held since 1996 have led to significant improvements in the level of diversity reflected in curriculum materials and plans available to teachers. Significantly, a notable number of the members of the most recent county textbook adoption committees were KMWP teacher-consultants, several of whom were involved with Project Outreach.

At the next faculty meeting, we invited any of the Bryant teachers who were interested to meet with us to discuss the grant opportunity. Much to our initial disappointment, only the five-person second grade team, of which Janet was a member, showed up. Consequently, we had to “start small and in our own backyard.” I believe the second grade team bought into the goal of leading their own professional leadership development project because of their trust in Janet and her expertise in the classroom. Truthfully, being new to the school, I was viewed then only as an administrator hired by the principal to shape things up, so I was an outsider not to be trusted. Even so, the teachers were intrigued with the opportunity this small minigrant supplied, and they beamed at the idea of having resources they could manage themselves. And I can remember one teacher who was impressed with the fact that our NWP site had chosen to come out to work with the teachers of low-income youth at the local school level instead of trying to get her to come to the university. As she said, “I need help here at Bryant. My kids are not at Kennesaw State.”

Janet and I believed that as the teachers in this group studied together they would become a more cohesive team, learning from each other. We wanted to model an NWP experience for them, hoping that some would go on to become teacher-consultants. We also wanted to provide authentic professional development for them while simultaneously building local teacher leadership through the joint work of this project. In our first meeting, Janet and I shared National Writing Project stories—testimonials about how our summer experience had affected our teaching. For the first time, it seemed, the Bryant teachers saw me as a fellow teacher, struggling with the same issues they were. It was also at that meeting that the group adopted goals and began to forge a cohesive learning community. The goals included

- developing professionally while conducting action research
- providing quality writing instruction for our students and ourselves
- creating building-level leadership in teachers.

These goals aligned with the vision of our local Project Outreach leadership group in a number of ways. The teachers would be managing their own professional development by working together on curriculum and shared action research of their new teaching approaches. They would be using reflective writing of their own to study the reading and writing of their students.

A vision was born that day. After that, we met as a team after school on Tuesdays. The engine that moved our goals forward was the study group process itself. We settled on the idea of developing ourselves as teacher-scholars through researching a particular shared interest in our teaching. As action researchers, we gathered and interpreted artifacts from our classroom teaching. We studied examples of the writing students did. We were working in an action research framework to refine our teaching while also thinking about how this collaborative process was supporting our leadership growth.

One part of my role in the group was to facilitate the research process. The team members knew they wanted to study writing, but because they were not quite sure of their focus, the other teachers invited me to come in and model several different approaches to student writing. I agreed reluctantly, since I did not like playing the expert, and I know that today I would handle the situation differently. Today, I would propose that each teacher, including me, come to the next meeting with a writing lesson to share, thereby modeling the NWP philosophy of “teachers teaching teachers.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, looking back, I do realize that the group needed to see me in action, teaching. So visiting their classrooms may have helped.

After my demonstration lessons, we discussed how we as teachers also struggle with writing, and we tried to reflect on what that must be like for our students. Being reflective was to become a hallmark of the Bryant study group process (just as it was for the leadership study group). After some deliberation, the teachers chose to focus on literature response lessons using multicultural literature. Since Bryant was primarily African American, the teachers hoped that exposing students to many different kinds of literature would prove to be effective motivation for writing. We bought books on literature response pedagogy to study in the group and gave money to each teacher with which to purchase books on multicultural literature.

The following Tuesday, I planned a field trip to a local bookstore, Media Play, to purchase multicultural books. The store manager had agreed to give us a significant discount. Nothing can quite describe a group of second grade teachers, armed with \$100 each, taking over a bookstore. Sprawled out in aisles, reading children’s books and giggling, they bargained with each other. “I’ll get this one about the little Jewish girl in Poland,” said one, “if you get the one by Paul Goble on Native Americans.”

Throughout the year, we kept a collaborative journal that soon became a treasured team possession. The journal, which traveled weekly to a different group member, reflected our hopes of teaching success and our questions about our own practices. The journal became a symbol of our shared ability to question our practice and—with encouragement from our fellow teachers—make it better. Questioning our practice also led us to explore the idea of action research—to ask a question about our teaching of writing and then keep data on what we were learning about our teaching. In this case, our primary inquiry question was to see how reading multicultural texts might shape the responses our students wrote to their reading. We found that by expanding our range of reading materials to reflect the diversity of our student population, we promoted more engaged and detailed responses.

Along the way, one of our biggest realizations was seeing that just about everything is data. We began to collect “artifacts” and to bring them to our team meetings. These artifacts included everything from student work to our own written notes, budget records, journal entries, phone messages (not all of us were using email yet), memos from our school administrators, and the written reports we were preparing at regular intervals for the NWP. Conversations within the study group became more focused, and we felt empowered. Each member of the team blossomed as we

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3 Jennifer’s description of what she would do now derives in large part from the strategy employed by study group colleague Bernadette Lambert at East Cobb Middle School, and it therefore provides a good example of how we learned from cross-school sharing about the progress of our projects.

learned and worked together, building new knowledge. We built teacher confidence at Bryant, and new teacher-leaders were born.

Eventually, the teachers shared findings from our group—about our students’ reading and writing and about our professional growth—in a large faculty meeting, talking about our project and the successes we had had with literature response. Student samples and data were presented. For some of these teachers, this was the first time in the spotlight of a faculty meeting, and the opportunity to hear praise from their fellow teachers built both their confidence and their self-esteem. Later, the teachers presented at the June Project Outreach conference at Kennesaw State University. The conference drew in teachers from the metropolitan Atlanta area as well as teachers from sister writing project sites in Georgia. The Bryant teachers, nervous about their presentation, worked on it evenings after school for weeks. When the evaluations came back calling the presentation “outstanding,” I made copies for all the team members. Recently, I learned that one team member still keeps her copies of the evaluations in her school filing cabinet. “I pull them out and read them after I have had a really bad teaching day,” she confided. “They remind me of how hard we worked, and [they] cheer me up.”

What surprised me at first about the Bryant experience was that, despite the success we felt in working on it, none of the teachers applied to the KMWP Summer Institute. Given the positive comments they made about the study group, I thought at least some of the teachers would apply. But when I inquired about why they had not applied, I was reminded why school-based inservice is so crucial if the NWP is to reach teachers working in at-risk settings. Several of the teachers had young children and could not afford the child care in the summer months. One teacher was newly married and moving from the school. Another transferred to a different school and wanted to save her energy for the change.

What advice would I give to teacher-consultants starting to facilitate a school-based inservice project like the one we had at Bryant? First and foremost, I would tell them to trust the process. This piece of advice may seem simple, but it was probably the hardest thing for me to learn as a leader, and it is vital to the work. Second, I would tell potential facilitators to listen, listen, and listen to their colleagues. Listening to teachers validates their expertise and helps them talk about—and discover—what they know and believe about teaching. Then, direct those teachers to the research that supports their knowledge-based practice. Third, I would suggest they celebrate, celebrate, and then celebrate some more. In this case, our team consistently celebrated the successes teachers were having in their classrooms, especially the positive experiences growing directly out of our project. (Teachers who work in the challenging urban environments can benefit enormously from reminders about the positive impact they are having on student learning.) Fourth, I would remind newcomers that it takes time to build a community of learners. Of course, at the same time, I would note the invaluable returns that a risk-free environment fosters within the realm of teacher development and leadership. And my last-but-not-least bit of advice would be: start small and believe in yourself.

## WHAT WE LEARNED: LESSONS FROM THE LEADERSHIP STUDY AND THE INSERVICE INITIATIVE

Below, we summarize what we learned in the course of our study. In the first section, we focus on our leadership team's study of its own leadership development, especially as a group of young urban teacher-leaders.<sup>4</sup> We think these findings will be helpful to any NWP site seeking to nurture teacher-leaders who work in low-income schools. In the second section, we offer a checklist of some things we now try to keep in mind when we collaborate with teachers in an urban school to create professional development during the academic year. We continue to learn, so this is not a definitive list; each year we have more to add.

### The Leadership Study Group and How It Grew

A critical factor in the success of the leadership study group was that we had the time to get to know and care for one another. We looked forward to meetings and to working together. We were able to take risks in one another's company and to be critical friends; we learned to give, hear, and act on constructive criticism. Along the way, we also learned some very practical skills and some important lessons about process.

We were lucky to be part of Project Outreach and have additional funding to support our work as a study team and as leaders of school-based inservice. Our team really came together personally at the first Project Outreach retreat, where all the local leadership teams from participating NWP sites gathered during the first and second summers of the program. Some of the friendships we developed there have continued beyond the National Writing Project experience. Something happens when teachers trust one another and find that risk-free place where they can share with each other and learn from each other. Our team reached that place during the first national-level retreat, by just grabbing hold of the Project Outreach ideals—which were consistent with our vision for our NWP site and schools—and trusting what we knew as good teachers.

But the most important learning we did occurred at our home site, the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, as we worked together over a long period of time, gradually developing and refining particular strategies or protocols for collaborating and evaluating our work. We met both informally and formally as a team, and each time the bond grew stronger. We became our own study group, researching big-picture ideas such as access and leadership by analyzing the way leadership was growing in our group, in our schools, and for our KMWP site. Besides developing the capability to

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<sup>4</sup> Janet Grier, Bernadette Lambert, and Jennifer Scrivner all took on administrative positions with increasing responsibilities. Janet moved from classroom teacher to curriculum specialist and then assistant principal for an elementary school, supporting the professional development of an entire staff. Bernadette became a district-level professional development facilitator as one of the middle school literacy specialists working with several schools in south Cobb County. Jennifer moved up from learner support strategist at one school to assistant principal at another and then became a coordinator for a regional school enhancement program sponsored by the federal government. (Jennifer is presently a stay-at-home mother teaching her toddler son and doing part-time work as an educational consultant.) Zsa Boykin served as one of the three teacher-mentors for the 2000 KMWP Summer Institute and has led the site's English language learner minigrant project. She now directs the program for gifted students at Lindley Middle School in south Cobb County. Dorothy Augustine-Howard was president of the Georgia Council of Teachers of English. Michelle Goodsite served as the chair-elect and then advisory council chair of the entire KMWP.

look at our NWP site and our own professionalism in a big-picture way, we learned some very specific skills. Working together, we learned how to

- structure a meeting with a flexible agenda
- listen to and ask reflective questions of one another
- write more reflectively and critically about our work as it unfolded and, based on those observations, formally agree on “rules” we would follow every time we gathered (for example, moving on if a topic bogged us down, planning to come back later but ensuring that we accomplished the tasks that had to be done)
- run a meeting and lead discussion so that all voices are heard (for example, watching for anyone who has not spoken and specifically inviting that person’s input)
- assess our learning by writing and collaboratively interpreting our writing (both new pieces and old).

Other practical leadership skills we learned included how to balance a budget and how to negotiate with a principal and county officials. What we learned in our leadership study group we were then able to transfer to our work at the local school level, in much the same way we were able to share the summer institute’s demonstration lessons with other teachers. Perhaps one of the biggest “ahas” was how well the study group process itself worked for us as a team. We noticed—and talked specifically about—how it empowered us to have truly professional conversations as teachers. All of our team members learned to trust the process and not to be afraid of the time spent on process-related activities. We also found that self-consciously reflecting upon both the processes and the skills involved in our leadership study group could prepare us for carrying that learning into other venues.

We watched each other blossom as we learned and worked together, building knowledge about our NWP site and its service area. We can honestly say that we all grew to be leaders from this experience. We were able to validate each other’s leadership and expertise so that each of us could discover what we know and believe about leading reform as teachers within a school and through affiliation with our NWP site. The many skills our leadership study group developed together have enhanced our professional progress individually. Consider these facts:

- Three more of the members of our study group have earned advanced degrees, bringing the total to four.
- All the members of our leadership team have presented at countywide, regional, and national conferences.
- All team members have taken on formal leadership positions with increasing responsibilities, including administrative posts for schools and districts and roles in KMWP programs and on the advisory council.
- Two members have written for publication in professional education journals.



## Adapting a Model of School-Based Inservice

While we're proud of the professional growth achieved by all the individuals on our team, we are even more excited about the ways other teacher-consultants at our site are now adapting the school-based inservice framework that we initially tried out through Project Outreach. In the spring of 2001, for instance, we received a minigrant from the Urban Sites Network to try out a variation on our model. Changes included

- Expanding the model to two new schools. We provided a yearlong professional development program to two south Cobb schools that will partner to form joint study groups.
- Expanding the KMWP leadership. We introduced several additional KMWP teacher-consultants from other schools to this inservice model by having them participate in the joint school program while coleading sessions and then reflecting upon their learning.

From our original school-based inservice projects (the professional leadership development projects funded by Project Outreach) and our current work collaborating with other schools, we have developed a checklist of suggestions for implementing this model.

- Bring the project to the school since it's often difficult for staff to come to a summer institute. Realize that every teacher who can benefit from an NWP connection may not be able to attend a summer institute, so be willing to take other opportunities for professional growth into the school setting.
- Make it a yearlong project.
- Make connections and build relationships with district and school administrators.
- Recruit teachers from the targeted schools to attend the summer institute. Even one or two first-year teachers can become the start of a network. Since a teacher working in a school building knows that context best, she or he is more likely to be able to facilitate school-based study groups effectively. Having a study-group leader from another building with a similar profile has worked well for us in similar programs we have modeled on our Project Outreach model (for example, in a later initiative funded with an Urban Sites minigrant), yet we still feel the ideal situation is to have the leadership for a school-based program include at least one teacher from that building.
- Give support to teacher-consultants from urban schools who want to facilitate professional development with their own colleagues. For example, you might provide support like the leadership study group for teachers facilitating at school sites. Similarly, you could offer regular opportunities for consultation with an experienced leader of building-level inservice, when a teacher-consultant is leading such a project for the first time.

- If possible, arrange for stipends for participants in school-based inservice, since even a small stipend honors teachers' commitment to professional growth. When stipends are not possible, encourage schools to provide other perks affirming teacher professionalism, such as time to work together during the school day.
- Foster and nurture the culture of the group by planning social time.
- Coconstruct the professional development with the teacher-participants.
- Align professional development activities with both teacher-determined needs and school improvement plans.
- Maintain a regular schedule of meetings with a ritual of activities.
- Begin with a small group of teachers who volunteer.
- Explicitly teach leadership skills to teacher-participants.
- Include ongoing oral and written reflection by all participants to evaluate the work itself, the process behind the work, and its implications.

## CONCLUSION

Our work on school-based inservice has shaped our thinking and beliefs about professional development. Some of our school-based professional development projects have been more productive than others (had more participants or held more sessions). All of them have shared characteristics promoting success—namely, a notable degree of teacher control over the inservice process; sustained work that brought teachers together multiple times for learning relevant to their daily classroom challenges; and an emphasis on ongoing, collaborative evaluation using reflective writing.

For the three of us, writing this narrative has been yet another avenue for reflection, another opportunity to revisit our experiences and learn from them. We hope other NWP sites will now be able to take advantage of our learning to build teacher leadership communities like those we have described here.

## APPENDIX A: SUMMER INSTITUTE PARTICIPANTS FROM AT-RISK SCHOOLS, 1994–2003

Institute Year	Percentage of Participants from At-Risk Schools
1994	50
1995	55
1996	72
1997	40
1998	58
1999	46
2000	50
2001	33
2002	42
2003	36

## APPENDIX B: MISSION STATEMENT OF THE KENNESAW MOUNTAIN WRITING PROJECT

### Mission Statement

The Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project seeks to encourage initiative, recognize individual contributions, promote creativity, enhance communities, and provide opportunities for professional growth.

The goals of the KMWP are:

- To provide a program for teachers teaching teachers in order to improve writing instruction from kindergarten through college.
- To facilitate professionalization of the teacher as writer, consultant, leader, and researcher.
- To value racial, ethnic, economic, linguistic, and other areas of diversity in project leadership.
- To foster positive relationships in the classroom and the community through trust and mutual respect.
- To develop a wide array of teacher leadership opportunities so that we can have a positive and lasting impact on the teaching profession.
- To promote student empowerment through teacher professional development.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**Interdependence:** We believe that we have the capacity to act autonomously and simultaneously, in order to work independently. We strive to incorporate efficacy, flexibility, craftsmanship, sensitivity, and interdependence into all our work.

**Learning:** We believe that all learning requires an engagement of and transformation of the mind.

**Diversity:** We believe that by valuing diversity we enrich our lives and professional practices.

**Trust:** We believe that people have the inner resources to achieve excellence.

**Leadership:** We believe that teacher leadership, an essential ingredient in any KMWP program, can be exercised in a variety of ways.

## APPENDIX C: PROJECT OUTREACH

### Professional Leadership Development Project Planning Guide

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ School: \_\_\_\_\_

(You may use other sheets of paper if you like, but limit yourself to 2 pages of text.)

You may use minigrant funds in any way(s) that will promote the professional development of teachers. To get started, you might ask yourself: How do teachers need help to grow professionally? How can I lead that process?

I. What are the main goals you hope to accomplish for yourself as a developing leader and for the colleagues who will work with you on this project? What problems, needs, or topics of interest do you want to address?

II. What program calendar would you like to follow? What events will you need to facilitate to meet your goal, when will they happen, and what will be the program content of each?

III. Budget information. List your anticipated expenses and justify/explain each.

IV. What evaluation process will you use to assess how participating in your project helps teachers develop professionally and helps you develop your own leadership skills?

If you receive funding, you are agreeing to share your reflections on your learning through the grant activities with the Project Outreach team at your school and the larger National Writing Project team.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Zsa Boykin** taught middle school language arts to at-risk learners for thirteen years before she began teaching sixth, seventh, and eighth grade gifted students at Frank P. Lindley Middle School in Cobb County, Georgia, a suburb just outside of Atlanta. Zsa is a teacher-consultant with the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, where she was recently asked to serve as the site's advisory council chair-elect. She is also presently serving a three-year term as a member of Cobb County's Advanced Learning Program Advisory Council. As the lead gifted teacher on her campus, Zsa has piloted several textbook adoptions, written curricula for general and gifted instruction, and provided professional development to her colleagues.

**Sarah Robbins** is a professor of English and English education at Kennesaw State University, Georgia. The founding director of the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, she has also led a number of teacher-development programs funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, including national-level projects such as Keeping and Creating American Communities and Making American Literatures. Sarah is the author of *Managing Literacy, Mothering America: Women's Narratives on Reading and Writing in the Nineteenth Century* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004) and a co-editor of *Writing Our Communities: Local Learning and Public Culture* (NCTE/NWP, in press) and *Writing America: Classroom Literacy and Public Engagement* (Teachers College Press/NWP, 2004). For fifteen years, Sarah worked as a K–12 classroom teacher in Michigan and Georgia.

**Jennifer Scrivner** has fifteen years of experience in public schools across the southeast as an elementary teacher, instructional lead teacher, and school administrator. For two years, she worked for the regional educational laboratory, SERVE, as a senior program specialist focusing on educational leadership issues. She is currently a stay-at-home mother, part-time educational consultant, and part-time doctoral student at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Her doctoral research focuses on principal-teacher relationships and teacher leadership issues.

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National Writing Project  
University of California  
2105 Bancroft, #1042  
Berkeley, CA 94720-1042

Tel. 510-642-0963  
Fax. 510-642-4545  
[nwp@writingproject.org](mailto:nwp@writingproject.org)  
[www.writingproject.org](http://www.writingproject.org)