



Evaluation of the California Subject Matter Project

Bay Area Writing Project Case Study

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California Subject Matter Project: The Bay Area Writing Project and the Oakland Unified School District

Introduction

In 2002, a group of teachers and administrators saw an opportunity to bring a new focus to writing in the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD). Over eight years, they leveraged state receivership into an opportunity to introduce an interwoven system of assessments and professional development. Their goal was to increase the breadth and depth of the writing taking place in their schools. Teachers and professional developers alike reported growing in their practice as a result of going through this process. However, there were also some serious challenges to the work as organizers struggled to get buy-in at all levels of the system. The following report describes the roots and underlying beliefs of this work, the project that evolved out of these early beginnings, the writing assessment that was created, and the professional development that supported the work. In closing the report examines both the challenges and the outcomes of the work.

The Beginnings of the Project and Its Philosophical Grounding

Early in the '00s, a number of factors came together to create an opening to change writing instruction in OUSD. State receivership put increased pressure on the district to incorporate standards aligned assessments.

One impact of this was to make people open to creating new assessments. At the same time, a group of people were interested in transforming the writing instruction taking place in the district. Together, these factors provided the groundwork for the Writing Proficiency Project. This section describes the district context at the beginning of the Writing Proficiency Project and the beliefs that the organizers shared.

Exhibit 1 The Oakland Unified School District

Located in the East San Francisco Bay Area, OUSD is a large urban school district serving 38,826 K-12 students in 109 schools. Students come from diverse backgrounds and speak 44 native languages. About a third of students are African American and another third Latino. The district categorizes 29.9% of students as English language learners (ELLs) and 66.85% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

State receivership provided an opportunity for the Writing Proficiency Project to develop.

In 2002 financial troubles triggered the state's takeover of the OUSD (see exhibit 1). The receivership brought with it a big push for standards-aligned materials and assessment. At the time, the district used a textbook publisher's assessment, but some teachers did not find it useful and participation across the district was low. Concurrently, writing instruction was at a low point, especially in elementary schools where the adopted curriculum and the way it was implemented put the primary emphasis on reading. With the arrival of a new head of instructional services that was interested in creating a new writing assessment, OUSD was poised for the creation of the Writing Proficiency Project and the development of a new writing assessment, The Process Writing Assessment.

The two main architects of the Writing Proficiency Project had previously worked with a nearby urban district's assessment. Based on that work, and the opening they and others saw, one of them pushed to design an interwoven system of assessments and professional development to enable their implementation (see exhibit 2). With the support of the new head of instructional services, work on the Writing Proficiency Project began. Other people became involved, including teachers. A teacher who later became a writing coach talked about her interest and involvement:

Exhibit 2.
The Process Writing Assessment

The assessment is designed to be administered over several days since it incorporates a process writing approach (one that involves brainstorming, revisions and feedback). Students work collaboratively to brainstorm and give each other feedback and are supported as they think through their ideas before writing independently. The Process Writing assessment represents a departure from the previous district assessment, which focused on writing to a prompt on demand.

Politically...rumblings were beginning that maybe, just maybe, the scripted phonics based program wasn't hitting the mark. And maybe the place that people were most willing to talk about it not hitting the mark was in writing. So it was a little crack and I became very interested in pursuing the little crack. I noticed that the other teachers who were also interested were colleagues that I respected and I could learn a lot from. So I guess that was my entry point into doing work with BAWP.

Her interest in changing the way writing was taught in the district, the opening she saw, and her respect for the other people getting involved with the Process Writing Assessment pushed this teacher to get involved too.

The assessment and the professional development to support it are based on BAWP core beliefs.

The development of the Writing Proficiency Project and the Process Writing Assessment was grounded in deep beliefs about teachers, teaching, and learning. These beliefs derive from the original organizers' work with the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) (exhibit 3). They include creating opportunities for teachers come together to reflect and grow their practice, a space offering opportunities for teachers to write, and building teacher leaders.

Reflection and inquiry are mainstays of BAWP professional

Exhibit 3.
The Bay Area Writing Project

The Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) is one of 17 regional California Writing Project sites. Housed on the UC Berkeley campus, BAWP works with teachers throughout the Bay Area to improve the teaching of writing in order to improve student writing and learning. Their Invitational Summer Institute (ISI) immerses teachers over a period of weeks in writing and the pedagogy of teaching writing. After successfully completing the ISI, teachers are considered BAWP teacher consultants who can lead professional development. Core BAWP beliefs include providing opportunities for teachers to reflect upon and discuss practice together, asking teachers to experience the writing process, developing teacher leaders, and having teachers teach other teachers. Alongside these strong beliefs about teachers, teaching, and learning come deeply held values about teaching writing. For BAWP and the leaders of the Writing Proficiency Project, writing is a process that brings out students' voice at the same time that it produces a polished final product. According to them, writing is part of a collaborative feedback process in which students edit their own and others' drafts in order to

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development and often occur in group settings where teachers can discuss and reflect upon new ideas and ways of approaching challenges. BAWP considers these conversations vital to changing practice. One of the goals of the Writing Proficiency Project was to create opportunities for these discussions. As an organizer said, “I believe in the power of professional learning communities for teachers. Coming out of a couple of years in the district where I felt teacher expertise and knowledge was not prioritized or valued, I thought this initiative would give more voice to teacher expertise and knowledge.” Thus, in part, the Writing Proficiency Project was designed to create opportunities for teachers to develop a community in which to work on their practice.

Making opportunities for teachers to be writers is another central tenet of BAWP. The basic premise is that in order to understand the writing process and to be able to teach it effectively, teachers must be writers too. Therefore, Writing Proficiency Project professional development included time for teachers to write. A teacher consultant talks about the importance of this

The big driver, was that every teacher who participated would produce writing in the genre they would be assessing their students in...that was the deal breaker... They realized what they were asking their students to do. They realized they didn't know how to do it. It was a humbling and powerful experience.

Even as writing can be intimidating for some teachers, confronting their fears and actually experiencing the process of writing can be important for understanding what the process is like for their students. Furthermore, by engaging in the writing process themselves, teachers can gain new understandings of the content and how to teach it.

Finally, another BAWP core belief is that “the best teacher of another teacher is a teacher.” A Writing Proficiency Project organizer spoke about how she took this way of being from BAWP and tried to create it in OUSD. “I always saw myself as a writer too. And BAWP has always given me a professional home. And that’s what I try to give others; [a place] where teachers’ voices and wisdom is heard and valued. Where they feel like they’re honored.” The organizers hoped that the Writing Proficiency Project would honor teachers, provide opportunities to reflect upon and discuss writing and teaching, and develop teacher-leaders.

The Writing Proficiency Project

The Writing Proficiency Project organizers were eager to increase the amount of writing happening in OUSD and to spread a more BAWP-oriented approach to writing and teacher professional development. First, they would gradually roll out the Process Writing Assessment starting in ninth grade, which would work its way down to elementary and middle schools over several years. At the same time, they would provide professional development for teachers in order to enable them to use the assessment formatively and to grow in their practice. In order to be able to do this and hold to the BAWP beliefs central to their work, they recruited other BAWP teacher consultants to lead the work with them. This section describes how these interwoven pieces worked to support teacher learning about process writing.

The Process Writing Assessment

Through the Process Writing Assessment, the designers aimed to increase the amount of writing occurring in OUSD, support the use of process writing, set standards for writing, and inform instruction. Not just an assessment, the developers wanted to use the PWA to support the teaching of process writing as well as support teachers in a process of inquiry into their own practice.

The Process Writing Assessment provided models and structures to support the teaching of process writing.

The organizers of the Writing Proficiency Project felt that the assessment requirements brought on by state receivership created an opportunity to leverage change. They sought to use the new writing assessment to change writing instruction throughout the district. Through the new writing assessment and professional development opportunities they created, they hoped to give examples of good practice and to set some standards for high-quality writing. One of the organizers stated, “We chose an assessment because, for better or worse, assessment tends to drive instruction.” The assessments were designed as a series of lessons to be done with students that incorporated BAWP best practices such as collaborative learning and process writing. They explicitly included activities to be done in pairs or groups and included structures to support students as they developed their thinking.

The hope was to move teachers from using more prescriptive writing to a process writing approach that involves drafting and revising while also increasing the amount of writing occurring in the district. This would involve a major shift in teacher’s practice. Prescriptive writing follows a specific formula for what the product entails and restricts topics. For instance, at times the teacher will provide a sentence starter that a student must complete as they write about a teacher-selected topic. On the other hand, process writing calls for the basic elements of writing (e.g. topic sentences) but allows for variation within papers and student choice of topic. Often, students first work to get their ideas down and then go through a feedback and revision process to improve their writing.

The Writing Proficiency Project organizers hoped to use the Process Writing Assessment to encourage teachers to adopt a process writing approach to their instruction. One teacher said, “In this case, teaching to the test...is going to lead to good teaching.” The goal was to assess what areas the students were doing well in and where they needed help in order to then set out the next steps for teaching. The assessments were given three times a year and each grade level focused on one genre (e.g. narrative).

The Process Writing Assessment is intended to support a cycle of inquiry into practice.

The Process Writing Assessment was designed to enable teachers to delve into their practice using the assessment as a starting point to reflect upon and plan their instructional focus. Teachers worked collaboratively to score the assessments under the supervision of their site teacher-leader. Through this collaborative scoring, the designers hoped that teachers would have discussions about how to teach writing rooted in what they were seeing in the assessment and then make plans based on these conversations. An organizer describes her vision saying,

The scoring calibration process that I see as the initial inquiry conversation. What do we see in the writing? What are the main trends that we see? And then the second conversation that is supposed to happen...is what are our next steps. The actual planning...what are the key instructional strategies we're going to try at each grade level or across the grades. We're going to try that in our classrooms, we're going to do some teaching, and we're going to come back together after that to look at some student work and see some evidence of what we've tried.

The developers hoped that assessing student learning by scoring the Process Writing Assessment could lead to reflection upon and discussion about practice. Teachers could then try new strategies in their classrooms, reassess their students, and re-teach as necessary before administering the next Process Writing Assessment and beginning the cycle again.

Professional Development and Resources for Teachers

Different strands of professional development supported the implementation of the Process Writing Assessment. Initially the designers of the Writing Proficiency Project hoped that participants would attend a summer institute followed by a yearlong series of trainings. In reality, teachers generally attended one or the other. In addition to these professional development opportunities, the organizers also provided events to support site teacher-leaders and principals. Finally, elementary and middle school coaches worked with schools or individual teachers as requested. All of these professional development events were rooted in the BAWP belief that good professional development asks teachers to experience the writing process, creates opportunities for teachers to reflect upon and discuss practice in groups, and develops teacher-leaders. The following are the components of the Writing Proficiency Projects professional development offerings:

- Summer institutes provided one-week, intense learning opportunities in support of improving writing in the OUSD. The two main goals were for teachers to experience the writing process and to create a community in which teachers could reflect upon and discuss their practice.
- The yearlong series met monthly and offered teachers support as they worked to implement changes in their classrooms. Through this series, teachers were introduced to new strategies, given the opportunity to try them out, and then reflect upon them and the challenges students might face as they engage in them.
- The Writing Proficiency Project designed professional development to support teacher-leaders in their new roles as they coordinated the administration of the Process Writing Assessment, trained teachers in scoring it, and generally supported teachers as they worked to implement the new assessment. Some of these leaders presented at the summer institutes and the yearlong series. In order to support them, the Writing Proficiency Project provided teacher-leaders professional development on scoring and coached presenters one-on-one.

- Professional development for principals worked to build their understanding of the Writing Proficiency Project and to increase their buy-in. The hope was that if those goals were met, they would provide time and supports for teachers as they worked to implement related changes in their classrooms.
- The website provided resources for teachers as they work to improve their writing instruction. Through them, the organizers hoped to push back on “what teachers were getting at school sites, a really formulaic way of teaching writing.”

Challenges

As the organizers worked to piece together this interconnected system of assessments and supports for teachers, they confronted a number of challenges. These included working within the district context, bringing together OUSD and BAWP (two very different organizations), working with varied levels of implementation, and having no external measures of success.

Working within the context of OUSD presented challenges such as a prior lack of focus on writing, teacher turnover, and frequent changes in available resources.

Four contextual factors strongly impacted the work of the Writing Proficiency Project. First, at the beginning of the Writing Proficiency Project, by a variety of reports, there was not a strong focus on writing in OUSD, especially at the elementary level. What writing did take place was often formulaic in nature. This approach is quite different from the emphasis on process writing espoused by the Writing Proficiency Project. Secondly, not only is there a great deal of turnover in OUSD but also many teachers are new to teaching. Thirdly, teachers vary in their preparation to teach writing. Finally, Writing Proficiency Project organizers were confronted with ever-changing resources, which made it difficult for them to plan ahead.

The Writing Proficiency Project and BAWP worked to overcome these challenges by trying to meet teachers where they were in their practice and building from there. They worked to get buy-in for the project and for process writing through the voluntary adoption of the Process Writing Assessment and the professional development to support it. During professional development events, presenters modified the work to meet the needs of new and underprepared teachers and to integrate some ideas OUSD teachers had about effective instructional practices for into the professional development. BAWP’s flexibility and adaptations helped them work with a wide variety of teachers to meet their needs and enable them to improve their practice.

Both participants from OUSD and from BAWP worked to bridge the cultural differences between the organizations.

When the work of the Writing Proficiency Project began, the OUSD and BAWP had different cultures. OUSD had not previously had a strong focus on writing, and what writing there was tended to be prescriptive in nature. BAWP held strong beliefs about what the writing process should look like and how professional development should be approached. Furthermore, it had a limited presence in the district when the Writing Proficiency Project began. There were tensions as the two organizations worked to

understand each other's culture and to develop lines of clear communication. One of the tensions centered upon how to teach writing. An OUSD teacher consultant summed it up:

There was some grating with the BAWP fluency of writing and getting kids writing approach...What I'm really thinking is of things with ELLs in terms of sentence frames...it's formulaic writing but it's in service to the gradual release of responsibility [so kids get responsibility]. The way I was experiencing BAWP initially was that there was an old guard judgment that those kinds of scaffolding techniques were not OK—there was something about that, which would stifle creative writing. And a lot of the Oakland teachers were coming in going yes, but you have to meet the students where they are. You have to meet the teachers where they are. And if this is where you are, then this is where you begin. And then I've experienced BAWP as not backing off of that, but actually going towards that. You would start to see professional development around sentence combining, which I don't think was in the BAWP lexicon 10 years ago.

As partners from both organizations sought to improve communication, OUSD teachers and leaders reported that BAWP teacher consultants better understood the teaching context within OUSD and adapted their work with teachers to the realities of their classrooms.

One of the strategies the organizations used to overcome these challenges was finding teacher consultants who were well versed in urban school settings to present at Writing Proficiency Project events. They especially focused on getting more Oakland teachers through the BAWP summer institute so that they could work as teacher consultants in the Writing Proficiency Project. This way, they would be bringing in teacher consultants with first-hand knowledge of the OUSD to lead the professional development. Along with having an understanding of the context, these teacher consultants also had the credibility of being able to say, "I've been there."

One of the things that we tried to do throughout the project actually was increase the number of BAWP [teacher consultants] who worked in Oakland because what we found in that first year was we had a lot of issues with pairing BAWP [teacher consultants] who were not from Oakland who did not work out at all in our project because they just did not understand the context of Oakland.

After the first year, the Writing Proficiency Project organizers also coached teacher consultants before they presented at professional development events in order to help them tailor their events to the OUSD audience.

According to OUSD and BAWP, the two organizations found it challenging to work together because they had different ways of doing things. In addition, BAWP was used to working at the site level, rather than at the district level. Thus, they needed to think about professional development as part of a larger context. The two organizations worked to bridge their cultures and backgrounds by developing structures that codified communication and expectations. They set up a formal feedback process. They also worked to set up written expectations for teacher consultants' jobs and an evaluation process. In this way, they were able to facilitate conversations around difficult topics, something they struggled with the first year.

The Writing Proficiency Project received varied levels of district and school-level implementation.

While the head of instructional services supported the Writing Proficiency Project with money and other resources, at every other level of the district the Writing Proficiency Project met with mixed support. For instance, some district administrators who supervise principals were supportive of the Writing Proficiency Project and allowed the middle school coach to present at principal meetings. Others were not supportive and did not allow the coach into meetings. Not surprisingly, the principals working under the supportive administrators had much higher buy-in. Principal buy-in was key because those who did buy in encouraged and facilitated teacher participation.

While principal support can be important for implementation, it is not the only factor. Low teacher commitment, insufficient training and follow-up, and a culture of isolated practice can all hinder buy-in and implementation. For instance, at one school the principal had a lot of training, but implementation was superficial and inconsistent with the Writing Proficiency Project's core beliefs. There was low-level buy-in by teachers and little support for implementation. In comparison, at a school where the entire leadership team went to the summer institute, implementation was much higher. In this school, multiple leadership team members reported that through the Process Writing Assessment, they were able to realize their vision of teaching writing through a process oriented approach (exhibit 4).

Towards the end of the Writing Proficiency Project, this lack of broad district support became an even bigger issue. The main district champion resigned in the spring of 2010, leaving a vacuum. No one was actively advocating for the Writing Proficiency Project anymore, leaving the project in a precarious position during a time of severe budget cuts.

Exhibit 4
The Writing Proficiency Project in Practice

You walk into the school and the walls are covered with student writing in varied genres. This is a school where writing is important. This is a school that implemented the full complement of activities envisioned by Writing Proficiency Project designers—professional development, the Writing Proficiency Project as a model of writing instruction, analysis of data, and then data-driven instruction.

How did it come about? To begin with, prior to the Writing Proficiency Project, the school had a strong emphasis on writing in its language arts curriculum and teachers worked extensively with BAWP. Thus, when the Writing Proficiency Project began, they were interested in becoming involved and supporting the work. They hosted some of the professional development, which made it easy for all staff to participate in it. Teachers then went through the cycle of administering and scoring the Process Writing Assessment, discussing the results and trends in student work, and tailoring future instruction to meeting student needs. As a teacher leader at the school reported,

The effect of the PWA is that we have whole school scoring time. So, we have people reading different grade levels as well as within each grade level. We kind of get a school wide sense of where are the kids and where do we want them to go. And where there are certain common trends, how do we address this as a staff? If it's something like developing more variety in your sentence structure, how do we teach this and, how does it look at different grades?

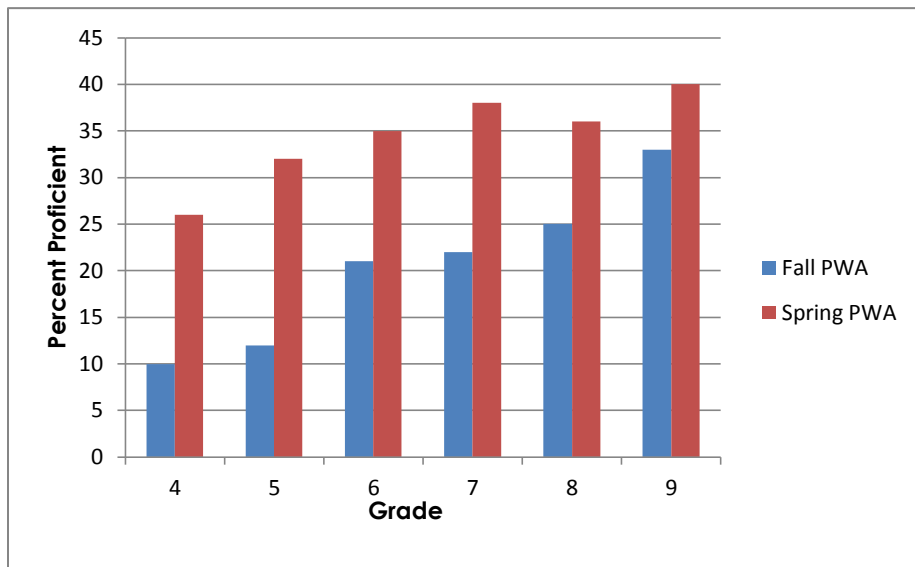
Thus, the Process Writing Assessment gave teachers at the school time to sit together to assess and analyze student work for trends. This, in turn, informed their instruction.

At the end of last year, as district funding for the Writing Proficiency Project dwindled, the work of the Writing Proficiency Project continued at the school. Staff members who had worked extensively with BAWP were able to provide school-based professional development to support implementation by the whole staff. This support was invaluable for new teachers, who had not been able to attend previous district-sponsored events.

The Writing Proficiency Project had no external measures of success.

Every year, the district analyzed the changes in student scores on the Process Writing Assessment between the fall and spring administration. Student scores on the Process Writing Assessment made promising improvements every year (see exhibit 5 on the next page). These scores were difficult to interpret for multiple reasons, but two stand out as most important. First, the fact that data are collected and scored by teachers within a school who administered the test to their own students raises questions about the validity and reliability of the scores. Reliably scoring standardized assessments is a technically very challenging task and even assuming teachers put forth their best efforts at scoring, this process is not as standardized as many used in high-stakes accountability systems. Second, there is no expected growth to which any gains could be compared. For example, does the fourth grade improvement from 10 percent proficient in the fall to 26 percent proficient in the spring mean that students progressed appropriately for the year or is it that they showed greater or lesser improvement than would be expected without the PWA? With these data, it is impossible to know.

Exhibit 5
Grade Level Improvements on the Process Writing Assessment, 2008-09



Source: Writing Proficiency Project End-of-Year Report 2008-09 prepared for the OUSD.

One way to get around both concerns would be to tie improvements in PWA performance to students' performance on standardized tests. If students with higher performance or higher gains on the PWA had similar performance on another standardized test, it would provide reassurance about the validity and reliability of the scoring and a benchmark against which to interpret results. However, the organizers were unable to tie these improvements to outside assessments. As one of the organizers wrote, "It was... a downfall that we had no external measures of success. We could never show a strong relationship between the seventh-grade Star writing assessment and the PWA." This made it difficult to garner support for the project, especially in this era of high-stakes testing.

Outcomes

Over eight years, the Writing Proficiency Project also saw successes. Organizers reported an increase in the amount of writing and the quality of writing (as measured by the PWA) occurring in schools as well as in BAWP's presence in the district. Through both the Process Writing Assessment and the professional development that supported it, the Writing Proficiency Project also worked to develop teacher-leaders and to create a forum for teachers to discuss and reflect upon their work.

Organizers reported that the level of writing in OUSD schools increased as a result of the work with the Writing Proficiency Project.

The Writing Proficiency Project reportedly increased the amount of writing occurring in OUSD. While there were different levels of implementation, in 2009–10 the assessment was used in nearly all middle and high schools and in more than 20 elementary schools.

This result represents a significant shift in curriculum and instruction. In addition, as was described in Exhibit 5, there were improvements on the processing writing assessments from Fall to Spring across all grade levels.

One organizer said, “We definitely brought writing back into focus and made it more of a priority for many more schools.” In part, this change was brought about by increased teacher confidence in teaching writing as a result of their work with the Writing Proficiency Project according to participants and organizers. A teacher talked about how working with the Process Writing Assessment and the yearlong class enabled her practice:

As a teacher I feel more confident about teaching writing and teaching it in a way that is alive, that the students have a lot of say, that the students are exposed to different styles of writing. I feel like I’m providing my students with skills that they can carry on.

The Process Writing Assessment enabled the teaching of writing by providing teachers with supports for process writing and building their sense of efficacy.

Through its work with the Writing Proficiency Project, BAWP increased its presence in the OUSD.

As a result of its work with the Writing Proficiency Project, BAWP reportedly has a stronger foothold in OUSD. An organizer stated, “BAWP had been held at bay during the height of [the adopted curriculum]. It was kind of kept out of the district as [professional development] providers or on the peripheral.” Things changed with the introduction of the Writing Proficiency Project. One successful outcome was that BAWP was no longer blocked from working in the district. At the same time, the BAWP teacher consultants leading the Writing Proficiency Project actively worked to recruit teachers into professional development and assessment work that would support BAWP type teaching and learning. Teachers and organizers reported that because of this effort, more teachers became interested in BAWP and pursuing professional development through them. According to representatives from both BAWP and OUSD, once teachers were at the professional development, they responded to how respectfully and professionally they were treated by BAWP. By the time that the elementary schools were added to the Writing Proficiency Project, the following was clear:

The fact that this assessment was coming from the Bay Area Writing Project stance [meant that] teachers flocked to it. Exactly for those reasons. Teachers were treated respectfully; they were viewed as intellectuals, as curious professionals. At every juncture, the level of professionalism was apparent.

Through a combination of working to bring BAWP into the district and teachers’ appreciation of how they were treated by BAWP, the work of the Writing Proficiency Project increased BAWP’s presence in OUSD.

The Writing Proficiency Project worked to develop teacher leaders.

The Writing Proficiency Project worked to develop teacher leaders on two different levels. First, it invited some OUSD teachers who were also BAWP teacher consultants to lead the professional development. This move was strategic because they wanted people who were steeped in the BAWP philosophy and also understood the OUSD context to

develop and implement the assessments and the professional development. At the same time, this strategy helped grow these teacher consultants' leadership capacity. Secondly, the Writing Proficiency Project worked to develop the leadership skills of the site teacher-leaders through their strand of professional development. Initially, these teacher-leaders were seen as coordinators but the Writing Proficiency Project organizers soon realized that with some extra training they could be used in a more substantive way.

We realized we had a treasure of these teacher [-leaders] who were for the most part very curious, very interested, very intrigued with writing. That somehow there was something compelling about this. They were willing to step up to the plate to put in some more time for a little bit extra money. But mostly they were willing to take that risk. So we ran a more intense [professional development], three additional [professional development events] with the teacher [-leaders].

With this additional professional development the organizers hoped that the teacher-leaders could help teachers at their sites to better understand how to use the Process Writing Assessment as a vehicle for improving writing instruction and also work to spread the word.

The Writing Proficiency Project expanded teacher professional community.

Creating a community of reflective practitioners interested in working together to improve their practice was an important goal of the Writing Proficiency Project. Teachers reported really valuing the time to talk and reflect together. One teacher-leader said:

I've taught for 17 years now and I don't feel like I know all the answers, I don't think I even know half the answers but I know that what I liked about the [Process Writing Assessment] was the fact that you get to talk to other teachers about writing and you can talk in an environment where you're respected, you're trusted, it's honest, you can agree to disagree you get different viewpoints and at the end of day may not have an answer to your question. You may have several answers and choices.

Through the Process Writing Assessment, teachers were given structured opportunities to get together to talk about writing instruction and the dilemmas and challenges they faced as they worked to improve their practice.

Conclusion

The Writing Proficiency Project showcases how a group of teachers and administrators can leverage a potentially difficult situation to create an opportunity for developing a new curricular direction in a district. Through their work together, the OUSD and BAWP laid the foundation to bring a more process-writing-oriented approach to teaching writing to OUSD. At the same time, teachers, administrators, and professional developers learned how to bring two very different organizations together and create a working relationship. Teachers and organizers reported that as a result of their work together, process writing has a place in the OUSD curriculum and teachers who believe in it have forged supportive relationships. In addition to this, BAWP is much more present in the district. However, the Writing Proficiency Project also ran into some major obstacles, not least of which is a lack of sustainable funding. Finally, the project was never able to gain full buy-in at any level of the district. As a result, it did not bring about systemic change. In

part this may be because project leaders were never able to tie their student outcomes to external measures of success. In order to move forward with the work, it will be important for organizers to garner political support for the project within the district in order to maintain the desired focus on writing and to create systemic change within the district.