

CHAPTER 3.

ACCESS AND TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN WRITING

Sarah J. McCarthey, Rebecca L. Woodard, and Grace Kang
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Dana and Beth are both early childhood educators with over twenty years of teaching experience. In the year this study took place (2009-2010) and the three years prior to this study (2006-2010), however, they had very different professional development (PD) experiences in writing. On the one hand, Dana participated in two long-term university school partnerships, collaborated with her literacy coach, attended multiple district workshops, and worked on a master's degree program in language and literacy studies. On the other hand, Beth's only PD experiences in writing were district workshops (about one per year), and getting materials from her literacy coach. Dana perceived both of the writing-focused university-school partnerships as highly influential on her writing instruction, whereas Beth perceived a half-day workshop focused on writing as the most influential PD she engaged in. Their experiences with PD in writing as a small urban (Dana) and rural (Beth) teacher are representative of our findings in this study.

The purpose of this study was to understand urban and rural teachers' access to and perceptions of professional development in writing. Particularly in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era focused on improving reading and math achievement,¹ PD in writing has often been neglected in elementary settings (McCarthey, 2008). Recently, though, the National Commission on Writing (2003) recommended PD for teachers as part of a "writing revolution" (p. 3).² Additionally, efforts such as the National Writing Project (2011) have focused on providing PD through its Summer Institute bringing teachers together to "improve writing and learning for all learners."³

Perhaps in response to this reform culture, much current research is focused on identifying the features of effective PD that ultimately increase student achievement (e.g., Desimone, 2009; Troia, Lin, Cohen & Monroe, 2011). For example, Desimone (2009) identified five critical features for effective PD: (a)

a content focus (i.e., activities that focus on subject matter content and how students learn); (b) active learning (i.e., how teachers engage in knowledge instruction); (c) coherence (i.e., the extent to which teacher learning is consistent with teacher's knowledge and beliefs); (d) duration (i.e., span of time spent on activity), and (e) collective participation (i.e., arrangements that encourage interaction and discourse). She argued that researchers need to move past teacher satisfaction and attitude studies towards more "empirically valid methods of professional development," and that "the myriad of experiences that count as teacher learning pose a challenge for measuring professional development in causal studies ... measuring the core features of teachers' learning experiences is a way to address this challenge" (p. 181). While the twenty teachers in our study did tend to have particularly positive experiences with PD that had these critical features, their physical locations limited or expanded their access, and the relationships they formed with colleagues and professional development providers greatly informed their perceptions. We argue that context and teachers' perceptions must be central to our studies, not peripheral, if we are to better understand the messy work of teaching and learning. Sociocultural theories, then, deserve attention in studies of professional development in writing (e.g., Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999).

CATEGORIZING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN LITERACY

While we realize that categorization can be limiting, during teacher interviews, we realized that the teachers' PD in writing fit into four distinct categories: (a) university/school partnerships, (b) district-level PD, (c) school-based PD, and (d) self-directed PD. We became interested in how teachers perceived these different kinds of PD, and in their access to the kinds of PD they found most influential on their instruction.

UNIVERSITY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

University-school partnerships focused on school-wide reform are increasingly common. Research on university-partnership projects such as the National Writing Project (National Writing Project & Nagin, 2006; Whitney, 2008), the School-Based Change approach (Au, Raphael, & Mooney, 2008), and the Master Teacher Program (Crawford, Roberts, & Hickman, 2008), are overwhelmingly in favor of such pairings. They cite benefits such as changing the mindsets of teachers (Crawford et al., 2008), increasing teacher confidence

(Godt, 2007; Whitney, 2008), and creating on-going professional networks for teachers (Au et al., 2008).

The National Writing Project has received much attention for its PD networks embedded in school-university partnerships (Lieberman & Wood, 2002). Whitney (2008) found that participants in the NWP described their experiences as “transformative.” A key feature of all 200 sites is the 20-day Summer Institute in which teachers conduct PD activities for peers.

DISTRICT-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Traditional district-level PD structures have received extensive criticism (Crawford et al., 2008; Hawley & Valli, 1999). These short-term workshops where outside experts come in to train teachers on administrative-chosen topics usually emphasize individual activity, passivity, and immediate results. In contrast, Elmore's (1997) study of Community School District 2 in New York City documents the exemplary use of PD to mobilize knowledge in system-wide reform. He concluded that it is essential for districts to engage in problem solving through sustained efforts that focus on instructional improvement.

SCHOOL-BASED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

School-level professional development in literacy has become a focus in recent years, as many states, districts, and schools are moving toward the literacy coach position (Dole, 2004). The strength of literacy coaching is the accessibility of change agents who have relationships with school staff (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Parise & Spillane, 2010). Literacy coaching has contributed to improvements in students' literacy learning (Biancarosa, Bryk, & Dexter, 2010), as well as teachers' knowledge and quality of their practices (Neuman & Wright, 2010). However, variability in the amount of time coaches spend with teachers can affect students' proficiency (Bean, Draper, Vandermolten, & Zigmond, 2010). Teachers value collaboration with coaches, on-going support, and instructional strategies they learned through the coaches' work in classrooms and study groups (Vanderburg & Stephens, 2010). In Walpole and Blamey's (2008) two-year study of a staff development program, coaches identified having multiple roles, whereas the participants identified coaches as either directors or mentors.

SELF-DIRECTED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Technology has created unprecedented access to knowledge and PD, particularly for isolated teachers. Professional organizations are beginning to offer

self-directed professional development for teachers online (e.g., NCTE Pathways, 2011), but little research has documented the results of organized online programs. Participation in professional organizations is another type of self-directed professional development that provides teachers with an independent professional community, the capacity to advance and disseminate specialized knowledge, opportunities for ongoing PD, and advocacy for members (Bauman, 2008; Hargreaves, 2000; Roen, Goggins, & Clary-Lemon, 2008); yet, few empirical studies have focused on the effects of professional membership on teacher beliefs and practices (Little, 1993).

With this framework for categorizing PD in mind, our guiding questions were: (a) What access to professional development about writing do teachers have? (b) What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of PD on their writing instruction? And (c) How does access influence teachers' perceptions?

METHODS

PARTICIPANTS AND SELECTION

The study focused on 20 teachers from four districts: two districts from a small urban community located near a large state university, and two schools from rural districts.

District 1 has a diverse student population: 45.7% are White, 37.3% are Black, 6.8% are Hispanic, 9.8% are Asian, .3% are Native American, .1% are multi-racial, and 47.1% qualify for free or reduced lunch. The district writing curriculum consisted of the Units of Study (Calkins, 2003, 2006), and was mandated for all elementary teachers. The teachers who participated were: six white, three African American, one Asian American; eight female and two male.

District 2 has the following demographics: 42.8% White, 33.8% Black, 8.2% Hispanic, 6.1% Asian, .2% Native American and 8.9% multi-racial, and 63% are low-income. The district recently adopted the Write Traits (Spandel & Hicks, 2009) curriculum. The teachers who participated were: three white, one African American; four females.

District 3 is a rural district: 97.6% White, 0% Black, 0.4% Hispanic, 0.8% Asian, 0% Native American, 1.2% multi-racial, and 16% are low-income. The writing curriculum is a Harcourt basal series. The participants were two white females.

District 4 is a rural district: 95.1% White, 1.3% Black, 0.4% Hispanic, 0.1% Asian, 0.1% Native American, 3% multi-racial, and 32% are low-in-

come. The district uses the Trophies (2003) basal curriculum. The participants were four white females.

To select participants, districts were contacted by the university-schools relationships coordinator; then schools were nominated by educators familiar with PD opportunities; school principals were contacted; finally, all K-6 teachers at the schools were invited to participate and offered a small stipend.

DATA COLLECTION/ANALYSIS

Three researchers conducted three interviews and observations of each teacher over the course of one school year. Data collection occurred throughout the school year (e.g., Round 1: September/October; Round 2: January-March; Round 3: April/May) to capture changes in perceptions of PD and writing practices. The semi-structured interviews focused on curriculum, student work, and professional development. For this analysis, the researchers focused on the professional development section of each of the protocols, which included questions with specific probes about opportunities and teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness and impact on writing practices.

We interviewed two University Curriculum Specialist (UCS), who worked extensively with two of the school districts, about their roles and perceptions of the districts' writing curriculum; two elementary language arts specialists from District 1 about the role of coaches and the curriculum selection; and one curriculum specialist from District 4.

Interviews were transcribed by the researchers or verbatim by a professional transcriber. Data analysis began by combining the responses related to professional development from all three interviews for each of the 20 teachers and placing them into one document. The team summarized each teacher's responses and created charts to represent the opportunities to participate in different types of PD within the last three years. The charts included four main categories of PD taken from the literature: (a) university-school partnerships, (b) district-level workshops, (c) school-level opportunities, and (d) self-initiated activities.

Once we established the opportunities each teacher had, we categorized their perceptions into: (a) benefits and (b) disadvantages of each type of PD. We used their responses to questions about major influences on their writing instruction to understand the potential impact of PD on their instruction. Interviews from the district-level coordinators and UCSs were used to provide context for the writing programs, role of the coaches in buildings, and perceptions of effectiveness of implementation.

FINDINGS

Our findings suggested that access to K-12 professional development opportunities varied by location. The two small urban districts (1 and 2) had the following, (a) seven University Curriculum Specialists (UCS) who work in local schools modeling in classrooms and collaborating with teams of teachers on either math or literacy; (b) the Summer Academy (SA) a week-long, intensive experience on the university campus involving keynote speakers and school-based teams who plan curricular implementations; (c) the local site for the National Writing Project with a 20 day Summer Institute focused on writing with technology; (d) district literacy coaches who had variable roles (e.g., working with children, providing resources, or acting as mentors) in elementary buildings; (e) district-run workshops with release time for all teachers to attend. In addition, some of teachers were in the master's program at the university; several discussed self-initiated professional development such as National Board Certification.

The rural districts (3 and 4) both had district-run workshops and in-service professional development, but they did not focus on writing. The in-service at both schools primarily focused on school-wide Response To Intervention (RTI) training (Illinois State, 2008). District 4 had a literacy coach and curriculum specialist in the elementary building, whereas District 3 only had an RTI coordinator.

Table 1 presents an overview of the professional development activities in which the 20 teachers participated. All teachers were involved in some type of professional development; however, not all types of PD were available to all teachers. The teachers in small urban districts had substantially more opportunities to work with the university in three different types of PD focused on writing—working with a UCS, participating in a Summer Academy, and participating in the local NWP. By contrast, the rural districts did not have any teachers participating in the university-school partnerships, but they did have literacy coaches in their buildings.

Below, we (a) describe the types of PD, (b) indicate the numbers of teachers who had access to that type of PD, and (c) communicate teachers' perceptions of the impact of various types of PD on their teaching of writing.

UNIVERSITY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

Three different types of university-school partnerships were available to teachers in the two small urban districts. Teachers who participated in these activities reported having positive experiences with the PD offered.

Table 1. Participation in professional development

Teacher (District)	University-school Partnerships			School- based		Dis- trict- level	Self-directed			
	Summer Academy	University Curric. Specialists	NWP Summer Institute	Literacy Coach	Colleagues	District Workshops	Professional Literature	Master's Program	Professional Membership	National Board Certified
Tamara (D1)			X	x		x				
Mandy (D1)	x			X	X	x				x
Jocelyn (D1)	x			x	X	x		x		
Vicky (D1)	x	X		x	X	x		x		
Dana (D1)		X	X	x		x		x		
Ellen (D1)	x	X		x	x	x				
Wanda (D1)	x	X		x			x	x		
Mike (D1)	x	X		x		x				
Tara (D1)	x	X		x		X				
Jackson (D1)		X		x		x		x		
Elana (D2)		X	X	x	x	x				
Natasha (D2)	x			x	X	X				
Amber (D2)	x	x			X	X				
Melanie (D2)	X	x		X	X	X		x		
Kerry (D3)					X				x	
Rebecca (D3)					X		x			
Beth (D4)				x		X				
Cora (D4)				x	X	X				
Katie (D4)				x		x		X		
Kendra (D4)				x	X	x				
TOTAL	10	10	3	17	12	17	2	7	1	1

Note. Lower case x=PD in which teachers participated. Upper case X=PD that was most influential on teachers' writing instruction.

University Curriculum Specialists

Of the seven UCSs, two (Claire and Elizabeth) worked with elementary schools in the urban districts on literacy. Claire worked with groups of teachers at individual schools on their literacy curriculum in four to six week cycles. She had been in this role for three years, and described her work as a combination of co-teaching, modeling, planning and debriefing. She believed the major benefits of her work were providing support for teachers and working with children in the classroom context. Claire described an evolving model, “primarily, I meet with groups of teachers or individual teachers. They identify something that they struggle with. [In this last semester, it’s been all writing related.] Then, we set up time to plan together and then usually what ensues from that is a lot of co teaching, a lot of modeling, a lot of them talking about things afterward, and then we have student work.”

All of the teachers (10) who had the opportunity to work with Claire or Elizabeth in their classrooms reported that the UCS had an impact on their curriculum. They commented on the importance of their being in the classroom to model lessons and discuss writing. District 1 teachers were particularly enthusiastic. Ellen described how the UCS met with teachers by grade level, then modeled with students, and finally debriefed. Vicky had the opportunity to have Claire twice the year before, “it was so helpful to watch her with kids,” and stated that Claire “is like a master at teaching writing.” Mike reported that the partnership serves as a “liaison between public schools” and “the university can really bridge that divide.”

In District 2, Amber had worked a bit with the UCS (Claire) and found that she was “phenomenal and the kids responded to her. She is fabulous and so intelligent, a pleasure to work with.” Elana noted the effectiveness of modeling lessons to see how Claire worked with her students on various writing activities and decided to make some changes in her instruction. The key element for the success of the UCSs with teachers was the relationships they established with individual teachers who encouraged them to come into classrooms, model, and debrief about writing instruction.

Summer Academy

The Summer Academy (SA) had been supported by the university administration for five years to bring teachers to campus in an effort to improve local schools. The SA then became a part of a larger initiative to bring the university and schools together with the seven UCSs playing roles in leading it. The initial

effort was to make major changes in instruction in each participating building, but evolved to focus on assessment, student work, and reflective practice.

Many teachers who had been part of the SA (seven of 10) also reported gaining confidence in their writing instruction. Most important was the opportunity to work with colleagues from their school to differentiate their writing curriculum for students of varying abilities. The teachers who were critical of the SA were new teachers who had few opportunities to follow up with leaders or colleagues. Although the focus was not specifically on writing, most teachers from District 1 reported gaining confidence in their writing instruction due to the emphasis on differentiated instruction (DI). Vicky found that the SA helped her become, "More aware that I have 34 students with varying abilities. ... It is going to change the way I am going to assess. I am looking more for growth in my students than I ever was." Ellen said, "I look at learners as individuals instead of everybody needs to write a paragraph." However, Wanda was not enthusiastic about the SA because the curriculum was "idealized" and she could not always use it.

In District 2 teachers had more mixed responses. Melanie stated, "That was my first taste of differentiation ... so it was a huge learning time to bring back to my classroom. I still use the things I learned at the SA and how each kid could learn and how I know what they are learning, that was huge." Amber participated for two years in a row and said, "This year I did not feel it was as worthwhile as the previous year. The reason being, in 2008 they had phenomenal speakers and got you excited about DI. This year it was more do what you want to do... There was not enough instruction given to explain exactly what to do." Natasha participated in the SA, but did not find it very helpful because there were not enough classroom curriculum materials presented. She preferred PD that she could apply the next day with her students, and the SA did not provide that. Most teachers in both districts found the SA valuable, but it depended on the focus of instruction, the speakers, and the perceived applicability to their contexts. In addition, the teachers who valued the SA the most also had the opportunity to develop relationships with the UCS who integrated the SA with one-to-one modeling in the classrooms.

Summer Institute of NWP.

The local site of the NWP was established in 2008 with the following components: individual writing time, peer writing groups, demonstrations of teaching lessons, literature discussion groups, and a focus on technology where teachers each had their own laptops to create digital compositions. The three teachers who had participated in the local NWP noted their involvement enhanced their

own writing and instruction, especially the focus on technology. Dana found the experience, “Life changing... you come back at the top of your game, using everything you learned.” Tamara gained many ideas for writing including writer’s notebooks, and considering technology outside of the computer lab. Elana felt that the NWP changed her perspective on the teaching of writing, but she noted that she was not able to use the projects related to technology at the kindergarten level. Although the teachers valued their experiences at NWP, they did not teach in the same schools and did not have many opportunities to sustain relationships they had built during the NWP.

DISTRICT-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Both the urban and rural school districts offered “School Improvement” days (four to six days) in which students were released from school and teachers participated in mandatory PD activities. In the urban districts teachers had choices about which district-sponsored activities they wanted to attend, whereas teachers from rural districts were mandated to participate in particular activities. In District 1 the programs were not content-specific; the teachers found these to be somewhat valuable, but only loosely related to their writing instruction. In District 2, teachers met in grade level teams and presented to peers what they had done in their classrooms in writing. Melanie found it valuable to work with, “other teachers to bounce ideas off ... it was all about *Write Traits* and being able to dig into the materials and share our fears with our co workers.” Amber found it was helpful to meet on those in-service days, “We talked about the Write Traits and how to teach each one to the class. We looked at student work and talked about it. We had a great presenter for the workshop.” Natasha valued the grade level meeting times that the kindergarten teachers had, “Hearing what works for other teachers is meaningful and ... seeing one teacher using these journals, that at one point I thought it was great to show that at parent-teacher conferences.” Teachers who found the district-level workshops helpful noted the importance of the collegiality that was formed among peers.

In districts 3 and 4, teachers reported that the focus of most in-service PD days was Response To Intervention, a state-mandated program with “three essential components: 1) using a three tier model of school supports, 2) utilizing a problem-solving method for decision-making, and 3) having an integrated data system that informs instruction” (Illinois State, 2008). The school in district 4 was particularly focused on their school improvement plan and improving test scores. All four district 4 teachers reported feeling frustrated with their in-service professional development. Katie said, “[Our PD has been about] RTI, MAP, ISAT, data-driven this whole year. Not really how we can fix the problem,

just look at these scores and figure out what we need to do, but we haven't really been taught how to." Cora said, "Unfortunately I could say that overall I find it to be a waste of time. I know it's all politics, but I feel like sometimes people forget we're here for these kids. And so spending a day going over a plan that evaluates the leadership in my building ... is not helping me be a better teacher." The district 3 teachers reported similar perceptions that their in-service PD time was not helpful. Kerry wished that their PD was about content "that I could just use more directly. Instead of more philosophy sort of things, like more things I could actually take back to the classroom and incorporate into what we already do." These findings suggest that there was major variability in the types of PD provided at the district level and that much of it was not consistent with teachers' desire for practical applications to their classrooms. Teachers had the most positive perceptions of PD that was content-focused and provided them with opportunities to develop collegiality with peers and relationships with PD providers.

SCHOOL-LEVEL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

School-level professional development had two inter-related aspects: coaching and working with colleagues. In District 1, the coordinators described the coaching model at the elementary schools as "evolving" over the last several years. A coach split his or her day between working with students for half of the day and "providing job-embedded professional development for teachers" for the other half. The district leaders found that the implementation depended on the building, "there is not a single model." They found that the coach "can wear many hats, providing resources, helping a teacher to plan, facilitating a discussion about data, co-teaching in the classroom." In District 2 the coaches had similar roles where they worked half day with students and the other half with teachers in the buildings. District 3 did not have literacy coaches, but they did have an RTI coordinator who led in-service sessions. In District 4, the school had both a curriculum coordinator and a literacy coach.

In all four districts, there was variation in how literacy coaches interacted with teachers. Teachers were somewhere along the continuum from simply receiving resources from their coach, to meeting often for co-planning sessions, to having lessons modeled by their coach. Many teachers indicated that if they initiated working with the coach, she was always responsive, but it usually required the teacher to be proactive. All 10 teachers in District 1 had literacy coaches in their buildings; however, some teachers worked with the coach primarily on reading and some teachers never worked with the coach. Seven of the ten teachers had positive perceptions of working with the coach because it was

collaborative and contextualized. For example, Mandy valued working with her coach and wanted more opportunities to co-plan and co-teach with her. She found these coaching sessions to be the significant, “It is the most meaningful form of professional development because it’s a long term relationship and it’s ongoing.” Ellen commented that the coach came into her classroom twice a week and they both conferred with students. Jackson found his literacy coach an invaluable resource, “It’s a mutual trusting relationship. Anything you need she provides you, any support you need, she’ll come in and do a mini-lesson, do it with you.” However, implementation was inconsistent across buildings. Three teachers indicated that they did not have opportunities to work with the coach on writing because the coach pulled students out to work on reading skills or had not responded to requests for help.

District 2 also had building literacy coaches with varied roles. Melanie stated that the literacy coach helped her with assessment and organization. One of the important features was that they had a personal relationship, “We are good friends; we see each other in the hall and she will say, ‘I have this great thing. Can I make copies for you?’” In contrast, Amber did not have access to the building coach, “I have not worked with her. She hasn’t been into my classroom, unfortunately. I know she has worked with other teachers, but not at the intermediate level.” Both Elana and Natasha commented that there was a building literacy coach, but they did not have much interaction with her.

In District 4 the teachers’ perceptions of their coach’s role and work differed, as evidenced by Cora and Katie. On the one hand, Cora said:

Well I think the position of literacy coach in this building is a joke. It is not what a literacy coach is. I see her ordering supplies and pushing papers and... she’s done nothing with my room. ... My idea of a literacy coach is someone that’s not only helping the teacher but is also working with students too. I mean that’s another pair of hands that should be helping us.

On the other hand, Katie said the literacy coach helped her with RTI, helped her find activities, and pulled students to work with them every week. She said that the coach helped teachers if they used her but, “I don’t think everybody uses her.” Both Beth and Kendra agreed that the coach would find them materials when they asked her, but wished the coach supported them more in their classrooms.

The majority of the small urban district teachers did not mention working with colleagues as a form of PD; however, those who did found it to be

significant. Two teachers from District 1 who were on the same grade level team at their school reported it as one of the most influential forms of PD. Mandy noted that she met often with Jocelyn for team planning and that she found “tons and tons of collaboration” extremely meaningful. She also continued, “I mean you can get ideas from the conferences, but if you don't come back and talk about how to implement those ideas, the ideas will work (only) for a particular group of students.” Jocelyn realized that teaching writing was a weakness, “[meeting with colleagues] helped me to become better at it.” In District 2, Natasha wanted PD that she could directly apply to her classroom. She felt that the best means for this was collaborating with her teammate, Elana, where they would brainstorm ideas together that were applicable to kindergarten.

Teachers in the rural districts, who had less access to structured professional development in writing, were more likely to mention colleagues as a significant influence on their writing instruction. Four of the six rural teachers described their colleagues as highly influential. Kerry said that observing and talking to other teachers has been her most significant PD. Rebecca planned writing with the third and fifth grade teachers based on ISAT needs. Kendra described the teacher next door, who taught the same grade, as a significant influence on her writing instruction. What was clear from teachers' responses was the importance of developing strong professional relationships with coaches or with colleagues in the schools and working collaboratively on instruction.

SELF-INITIATED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teachers were involved in a variety of self-initiated professional development activities from being a part of master's degree programs at the university to reading professional literature or writing on their own. Seven teachers were in a master's degree program; only one of these teachers found it to be a major part of her growth as a teacher. Dana (District 1) integrated her work with the UCS, the NWP, and her coursework. She said, “There's just been a lot of wonderful input, theory, practice—I can't advocate for that enough. You feel like you're very theory grounded. You feel like you're current.” However, the other teachers did not find that their coursework related to writing or was a factor in their attitudes toward writing. In District 2, Melanie had graduated with a master's in administration and felt that would have more of an impact when she became an administrator. Katie (District 4), who was a confident writing teacher, got her master's degree in 2003 at a nearby university where they focused on writing in the classroom.

Individual teachers had gained National Board Certification (1), mentioned professional literature that had made an impact on their writing practices (1),

or discussed the workshops at Teachers College in New York City they had attended on their own (1). Most surprising, was that the teachers did not cite involvement in professional organizations even when specifically asked, and many were not connected to the local or national organizations available in the community. Only Kerry cited her involvement in the State Reading Council as a form of PD. What is striking about teachers' reports about self-initiated PD is the lack of opportunities to interact with colleagues or peers. Only Dana found self-initiated PD helpful, and she had developed ongoing relationships with the UCS and the professors who taught courses and directed the NWP.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study of 20 teachers from four districts demonstrates that access to high-quality professional development is varied in urban and rural districts, and that access to such PD plays a major role in teachers' perceptions of its impact on their writing instruction. While we found the Desimone (2009) model helpful for framing effective PD (i.e., coherent, content-focused, ongoing, collaborative), it failed to highlight context such as differences between urban and rural schools and the role of relationships in teachers' perceptions of PD. Thus, our work, like that of Grossman, Smagorinsky, and Valencia (1999), suggests a need for reframing PD models to consider sociocultural contexts. We need a more nuanced model that highlights how context shapes the differential opportunities Dana (from a small, urban community) had versus Beth (from a rural community).

While the small urban districts had collaborative relationships with the local university, neither rural district was connected to it. The consequences of this were that the urban teachers had more opportunities to engage in PD that was more consistent with the Desimone (2009) model—the university-school partnerships had a content focus (often writing), active learning components (teachers engaged in writing in the National Writing Project or reviewed student work with University Curriculum Specialist), coherence (NWP & UCS connected beliefs and practices), duration (lasted more than 1 day workshops), and collective participation (teachers and PD providers collaborated).

By contrast, rural teachers experienced mandated, test-driven activities provided by the district. Building-level coaches did not focus on writing, did not alleviate isolation nor help teachers improve their writing instruction. Without access to ongoing, embedded, discipline-specific writing PD, rural teachers relied on their building colleagues as their primary sources of information and support. An implication of our study is that rural teachers need to have access to

high-quality PD that is ongoing, coherent and linked to classroom instruction (Desimone, 2009).

Most of the urban teachers who participated in the university-school partnerships found them to have a positive impact on their writing instruction. Working with the University Curriculum Specialists, who modeled writing in classrooms and met with small groups of teachers, was cited as the most significant influence on teachers' writing instruction. Teachers reported the other university-school partnerships such as the Summer Academy and local NWP also influenced their writing instruction. Thus, we recommend that universities extend partnerships from small urban schools to include rural districts. In addition, efforts need to be more bidirectional: rural administrators need to offer support for teachers to participate in high-quality PD.

However, merely forming these partnerships may not be enough. Our research found that university-school partnerships had an impact on teachers' perceptions, yet teachers were left to make their own links among them. Thus, we suggest that university-school partnerships (e.g., UCS, NWP, and SA) as well as district-run workshops become more coordinated, with explicit links to one another to improve writing instruction. For example, Troia et al. (2011) described a set of well-coordinated PD including weekly coaching sessions, classroom demonstrations, and curriculum planning, as well as resident authors who shared lessons and publishing opportunities with teachers and students. A more coordinated set of services that includes frequent opportunities to plan together, observe peers teaching writing, and talk about student work has the potential to make a greater impact on writing instruction. These collaborative, on-site features of PD could help build and maintain relationships at the same time that they focus on students' learning within school contexts.

Understanding school contexts and the relationships within them is essential to the success of professional development. Our research found that teachers had varied experiences with literacy coaches in different buildings depending on their roles, which varied from working with students to only providing resources (Walpole & Blamey, 2008), and teachers' relationships with them. Some teachers reported collaborating with the coaches and developed close professional/personal relationships with them, while others had little access to or did not take advantage of their building coaches. We recommend that the roles of coaches should be adapted to the school context, and that administrators and coaches communicate more clearly with classroom teachers about those roles, encouraging teachers to take full advantage of the building coaches.

Encouraging more collegial relationships between coaches and teachers can lead to the type of sustained change described by Parise and Spillane (2010) that has an impact on students. Our data suggest that developing close professional/

personal relations (even beyond collegiality) was a factor in teachers' reports about the influence of the UCS or literacy coaches on their instruction—those who had close relations with the individual providing the PD found it influential. This finding expands the research on coaching by identifying developing close relationships between coaches and teachers as a major factor in teachers' willingness to engage in reflective practice (Bean et. al., 2010; Walpole, McKenna, Uribe-Zarain, & Lamitina, 2010). Future studies should investigate the influence of personal relationships on changes in instruction in more contexts. Most importantly, we hope this research points to the need to develop PD opportunities in writing that are as rich, connected, and relational for rural teachers as they are for urban teachers.

NOTES

1. No Child Left Behind refers to the federal law that was passed in 2001 requiring states to comply with the following to receive federal funding: implementing academic context standards, administering standards-based assessments in grades 3-8 in reading and mathematics, employing a single statewide accountability system that measures adequate yearly progress of all schools, identifying schools for improvement, and requiring teachers to be highly qualified in their subject areas.
2. The College Board founded the National Commission on Writing in 2002 to focus national attention on the teaching and learning of writing, and respond to the growing concern within the education, business and policymaking communities that the level of writing in the United States is not what it should be. The commission uses multiple strategies to promote the teaching and learning of writing including issuing regular reports on the state of writing in the US.
3. The National Writing Project was founded by James Gray in 1974 to promote writing in K-12 schools with the belief that teachers should teach teachers. Prior to spring 2011 (when funding was suspended) there were over 200 local sites that received federal funding. The Summer Institute brought together teachers for 20 days to participate in demonstrations, writing, and responding to writing. Beyond these required components, sites may have a particular focus such as technology or English language learners.

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