

*Supporting High School English Teachers' Understanding of
What Proficient Readers and Writers Know and Do*
Oceanside Unified School District 2010-2011 6 units
Final Report Submitted by Erika Daniels

I was granted six units of assigned time to work with the high school English teachers in the Oceanside Unified School District. My work has been twofold. At Oceanside High School, I am facilitating six rounds of a peer observation process throughout the 2010-2011 academic year. At El Camino High School, I am working with a 10th grade English teacher to implement a completely revamped version of the curriculum. This work in turn will inform a proposal for systemically developing writing in the district. The grant was the continuation of the work begun during the 2009-2010 academic year.

The **goals** of the project were:

1. To facilitate peer observations at Oceanside High School in order to allow the teachers to learn from each other and to refine their practices
2. To assist the El Camino High School English department in re-visioning their English curriculum in order to prioritize writing and writing instruction, which in turn would support the development of a district-wide writing development plan

To **facilitate these goals**:

1. ECHS: I primarily supported one 10th grade English teacher who had been charged with revamping the English curriculum so that it focuses on language. Specifically, the goal was to help students understand the purpose of language and to learn the tools necessary for mastery of language. The English department intended to use the results of this pilot as it works to revise the English curriculum as a whole. Additionally, the district office asked us to create a system-wide vision of writing development and instruction. We used the work of the ECHS teachers and creating such a plan. It was submitted to the Associate Superintendent for review and is appended at the end of this document.
2. OHS: The teachers observed at least once a month in each other's classrooms while I either a. covered classes to allow the teachers to observe each other or b. visited classrooms to conduct my own observations. During the PLC meetings, we debriefed the observations in order to identify what our colleagues were doing well and what changes they might make in order to maximize student learning. At the beginning of the second semester, an exciting development occurred. Several teachers in other content areas expressed an interest in the peer observations. As a result and with the full support of the school's administrative team, we opened up the process to all teachers. This allowed teachers to gain a deeper understanding of what effective pedagogy looks and sounds like regardless of the content being taught.
3. District: I meet frequently with the Associate Superintendent to make sure the district's needs were being met and that they are pleased with the progress the teachers were making.

Evaluation procedures:

ECHS: 1. I submitted the writing proposal to the district office who will make decisions about its implementation once budget realities become more clear. 2. The CAHSEE results from the pilot teacher's class are not yet available, but we anticipate a favorable outcome.

OHS: 1. We believe that the increase in participants indicated a positive outcome to the process. Teachers reported feeling more connected to their colleagues and more energized as they work to engage their students. Many teachers stated that they were "underestimating" their students and were encouraged by the levels of achievement they saw in other classes. 2. Grounded theory themes from the debrief conversations are included on pages 2 and 3 of this document.

Being able to see colleagues at work

1. The benefit of going second is that I made adjustments based on what I saw in KB's classroom.
2. It was helpful for me because it made me think "what can I do?"
3. He saw my immature group so I wanted to see his. He kept his cool. . .didn't try to fight with them.
4. What was kind of cool is she was doing a lesson I was going to do the next day. She came up with a bunch of cartoons dealing with allusions. She added a visual element.
5. One thing that strikes me with AG—his system. He has a rhyme and a reason for everything he does; I don't always have that.
6. I observed DML and am trying to pull the kids into thinking so that's what I was looking for. DML asked a question and half a million hands went up. I noticed she really talked to the kids. She also made them be accountable for stuff. She didn't just write everything on the overhead for them. Sometimes I do that to make things move faster.
7. I was really impressed. Her class is run so smoothly. She'll start with SSR and then ask the students where they are. And you showed the book you were reading.
8. It's good to see what our students see.
9. The room was safe and warm so they felt they could learn there. They were working on mythology and they got to be creative. She made sure each group had an A student, B students, etc so every group could be successful. Some of the talk was off-topic, but it was good. They were still on task. She gave positive feedback constantly. She was energetic and mobile around the room. I am knowing how I am during first and second periods and thinking about how to translate that throughout the day.

Having another pair of eyes in the room

1. You go help a kid and lose focus on the big picture. The observers were able to see what everyone else is doing.
2. The kids were respectful and on task. You asked me to see what side of the room you addressed the most. It was definitely the left side, and I think it's that way because of the way the overhead is set up. The kids on the other side were still engaged though. They were quiet, but they were looking at you and making eye contact. I noticed that the right side of the room had most of the really talkative students. Maybe moving three or four to the other side would draw your attention over there.

Sharing ideas/Learning new strategies or approaches

1. KB and I were talking and came up with an idea of doing an overhead with directions for pair-share.
2. Giving them a specific role to play in the partnership (pair-share) so that they have to say something seemed to help keep them on task.
3. TM started class with students grading each other's homework. I have never done that. I thought it was interesting. I might try something like that because it keeps them more honest. She also made a prompt out of an essay. It added another later. Highlighting multicolored, you did it a little differently than I do. . . those were things I appreciated and might try out.
4. He was giving the test on the Poe piece so he read the questions aloud, then said, "What is this asking?" He was really careful about modeling how to read the questions and then soliciting responses. He also said, "Now we need to get 8s." It was also evident the kids had been prepped, and he has posters and resources all over the room. I'm going to do that.

5. What I saw in him, I'm going to use. I did suggest he use more accountable talk.
6. When I see the teacher out with the kids, not behind the computer, I know they're checking for understanding. (KM) One of the tools that has worked for me is for everyone to hold up the page we are working on. I can scan the room without going up and down every aisle. Also, proximity—once you approach the kids in back and put the “problem” kids up front, that helps engagement. (DB) One of the problems is with 45 kids in the class, it takes me five minutes to do attendance. (AG) One of my strategies is to slip the attendance in a clear plastic so that I can make changes as kids come in.
7. Wendy and Al have a really good way of organizing their learning objectives, etc, on the board. I am going to redo my board because I just have a clump of information out there.

New understandings (or reminders) of what students can or should do

1. I thought I would be putting out fires. My expectations were way too low for the kids.
2. One thing lacking was the lower-end kids. They often just want to color and make it pretty.
3. There was such an expectation in DML's class. Even the kids who didn't come prepared were doing something. I want to learn how to do that. (SW) I tell them, “If you don't have it, fake it.” Everything was layered; all different things going on at the same time.
4. I didn't think they would get it, but they did.
5. Now I'm wondering, was I clear in my directions? Sometimes I set a time frame or they have to clear their desks, put everything aside before they get their books out. How do I know what is going on in their heads though?
6. I used the sentence starters. I was surprised—one of my girls pointed out to another student: “im” means not. The word was “impermissible,” and she talked about what “permission” meant. I forget how good the students can be with teaching each other. For accountability, I called on students randomly. It reminded me that I need to do more pair/share even if the curriculum isn't set up that way.
7. My purpose was to glean ways I can motivate my students. I just wanted to see how that happens in other subject areas. What I saw was high expectations. It was important for me to remember that we need to have high expectations for all of our students. She used video, music, and questioning to review. It looked like a lot of students were engaged. I could just tell by looking at them even though not a lot were talking. The same kids kept volunteering, but it seemed that some kids just needed someone else to get them going.
8. I was hesitant to do the mythology project with the R180 Intensive class. They blew me away, though, because they were so on-task. They loved it. I felt guilty even thinking that they couldn't do it! I had low expectations. That was what I gleaned from the History class—that you have to have high expectations. It was very clear-cut so the students knew exactly what they had to do. We had to read the stories together but after we read, they were very capable.

Proposal for Systematic Writing Support and Instruction Oceanside Unified School District

What the research says about effective literacy development

Effective professional development in literacy instruction demonstrates a clear understanding of what literacy really is. Literacy is commonly thought to be reading, but it is actually four processes: reading, writing, speaking, and listening (CDE content standards, 2007). Truly literate individuals can engage in those behaviors across a variety of genres and types of texts. Literacy means being able to communicate.

Effective adolescent literacy instruction includes the following components:

1. Direct and explicit comprehension instruction
2. Instruction and practice in literacy skills across the content areas
3. Motivation and self-directed learning; moving toward independence
4. Strategic tutoring; targeted instruction based on specific learning needs
5. Exposure to and work with texts on a variety of levels across a variety of genres
6. Intensive writing including instruction on the craft
7. Ongoing formative assessment

Biancarosa, G. & Snow, C. (2004). *Reading next: A report from Carnegie Corporation of New York*. Washington, D.C.: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Therefore, student literacy instruction needs to be focused on skills and strategies required by each pillar of literacy. Students need to learn:

1. What proficient **readers** do to make sense of texts (i.e. visualize, infer, summarize, predict, question, connect, skim, scan, monitor comprehension, identify main ideas)
2. How proficient **writers** craft their work (i.e. identify purpose, choose form or genre to meet that purpose, think about audience when choosing ideas, revise for coherence, edit for clarity)
3. How effective **speakers** make themselves heard and understood
4. How effective **listeners** sift through multiple conversations and audio sources to identify important ideas and concepts

Why is writing important to OUSD?

Conversations at each secondary English-Language Arts work group during both the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 academic years revealed that there is a lack of systematic support for improving teachers' skills and ability as writing instructors as well as a pervasive feeling that writing as a literacy domain is not privileged nor prioritized in the Oceanside Unified School District. Whereas all literacy domains are equally important, writing is one area where work group teachers have specifically articulated a need. They would like to receive more support in terms of both professional development to improve their practice and resources in light of the challenging class sizes. Finally, they have stated that they would like to see a greater commitment from the OUSD district office to prioritizing and supporting systematic writing development in students across all grade levels and content areas.

Specific proposal for improving the effectiveness of writing instruction

In order to truly improve the effectiveness of writing instruction and the quality of student writing, the district office needs to make writing a district priority. By explicitly identifying quality writing and effective writing instruction as a district priority and by committing tangible resources to this goal, district leadership will increase the attention paid to developing this vital skill. There are myriad

ways in which to accomplish this goal and following is a list of suggestions. While each of these suggestions can exist independently, it is recommended to implement several simultaneously in order to have optimal impact on student achievement in writing.

Whereas this proposal requires a significant commitment of financial resources, this is the most appropriate and effective way to 1) improve the quality of students' writing across the grade levels and 2) raise teacher morale and investment in their practice. Investing in the teachers at each school site is the most effective and efficient way to improve student achievement. Although there are many research studies that support this fact, a high school senior phrased it best. She said, "The first thing (teachers) have to see is that it's the government that makes us come to school, but it's the teacher who makes us want to learn" (Burke, J. 2008. *The English teachers' companion: A complete guide to classroom, curriculum, and the profession*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann).

It is recommended that district leadership:

1. Utilize the expertise that exists within the district
 - a. Ask for nominations and volunteers from each school site to create and offer on-going professional development workshops on effective writing instruction
2. Identify a lead teacher at each school site (elementary, middle, and high school) who is responsible for collecting and disseminating research on best practice
 - a. This lead teacher's role will be different than that of literacy coaches in the past in that he/she will be a practicing classroom teacher with an adjunct duty of acting as the site "expert" on writing instruction
3. Devote frequent principals' meetings to developing an understanding of what Writing Across the Curriculum looks and sounds like as well as how to support it for all teachers and students
4. Offer on-going professional development to vertical teams on a voluntary basis
 - a. See Appendix A for an example of what this PD might look like
5. Require that faculty meetings and pre-school days commit time to discussions of what effective writing *and* writing instruction looks and sounds like
6. Provide one-day release time for all secondary teachers during each grading period
 - a. This will allow them to discuss their students' writing, to calibrate their evaluation of the writing, and to score the quantity of papers that are a reality due to the current student load (200-250 students per teacher)
7. Revise the high school English curriculum so that it prioritizes and privileges writing instruction
 - a. See Appendix B for a curriculum suggestion developed and piloted by Carrie Targhetta at El Camino High School during the 2010-2011 school year
8. Encourage all teachers (K-12) to attend professional development offerings through the San Marcos Writing Project, California Association of Teachers of English, and other professional organizations
 - a. See Appendix C for sample offerings