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WRITING ASSESSMENT AND STAFF  
DEVELOPMENT: THE STORY OF WINNIPEG'S  
ABERDEEN SCHOOL

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The staff at Aberdeen Junior High School in Winnipeg began, almost inadvertently, a Writing Across the Curriculum program by requesting a session on holistic marking. While already committed through the Aberdeen Project to improving literacy instruction, we focused increasingly on the writing abilities of our students and on methods to encourage the growth of those abilities. Inservices, the institution of writing folders, brown bag lunches to share progress, a professional Writer-in-Residence, visits with the division consultant all became part of this teacher-owned process.

Both for the purpose of providing data for the project's evaluation and for their own curriculum planning, the teachers have conducted a schoolwide assessment of writing every six months since the project began three years ago. Scoring sessions continue to provide the most important inservicing for teachers in writing instruction.

The Aberdeen Project illustrates four principles important to effective staff development. The vehicle for change—in this case writing—must be sufficiently focused, yet central to all student learning. Frequent and institutionally sanctioned collaboration among teachers provide the pressure and support needed for meaningful change to occur. Administrative presence is another important feature; without taking over decisions he believed his staff should make, the Principal continually made clear his commitment to language development and to the process. Both he and the project's coordinator worked hard to maintain staff ownership of the project, recognizing the necessity for the staff to articulate its own needs, goals, and solutions. Outside "experts" served only to facilitate that articulation.

Aberdeen teachers have a powerful sense of directing the course of their school's program, of having put their students increasingly on track academically, and of having established patterns of genuine collaboration, all of which

will continue to contribute to their success in facing the many problems—including teaching writing—of an inner city school.