

Research Project Overview

Dr. Patricia Wachholz

Purpose: Research Study

Institution: Florida Gulf Coast University

Date: Fall 2005

Brief Description/Title:

"Real Writing in Florida's Schools"

Abstract

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- A. Provide a brief summary of the proposed research in lay terms. Include major hypotheses, research questions and research design.

This project is one in which directors of the five National Writing Project chapters in Florida are working together to collect data that will allow us to describe the nature of the kind of writing that is actually being produced by school children across Florida. We believe that the emphasis on FCAT Writes! has, in many ways, distorted what the public, including parents, believe students are capable of producing as writers in elementary, middle, and high schools, and that the best evidence is to show stakeholders what is actually being produced in the classes of teachers who are associated with the National Writing Project. Therefore, in five universities across Florida, researchers are working with colleagues in elementary, middle, and high schools to collect writing samples from student writers, and to talk about writing with the student writers. The university researchers will never actually interact with the student writers, or know their identities; instead, the identities of the student writers will be known only to the classroom teachers with whom the students regularly work; those teachers will assign the student writers a code number and use those code numbers in all references to the writers when exchanging information with the university researcher.

We are seeking permission to work with teachers in the local area only, and only to collect and analyze samples of writing (for evidence of growth over time) and records of their conversations with their students (for evidence of changes in their attitudes toward writing and self-efficacy beliefs about their writing). Writing samples will be analyzed using 6+1 traits criteria.

- B. Describe the source(s) of subjects and the selection criteria. Specifically, how will you obtain potential subjects, and how will you contact them? Will any compensation or incentives be given for participation? If so, what?

Teacher recruitment and consent: 6-9 Teachers who have participated in the Invitational Summer Institute for the National Writing Project at Florida Gulf Coast University will be invited to participate in this study. We will contact them by email with an invitation to attend a meeting in which we will explain the project, using details outlined in the written informed consent form. Those who continue to be interested will be asked to contact the researcher via email or telephone and will be sent the consent form in the mail, with a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which they can return the signed form.

Teacher participants will be paid a \$350 stipend at the end of the data collection period.

Student recruitment: Teachers will select students whom they will interview as writers based on their own criteria. They might select students who will benefit from spending extra time talking about their writing, or they might select a particularly talented writer, an average writer, and a struggling writer. The choices of writers will be left exclusively to the classroom teacher.

- C. Informed consent: Describe the consent process. Attach a copy of all consent documents after Section III, Signatures Page.

Student Assent and Parental Consent: Student assent and parental consent will be achieved by asking the classroom teachers who agree to participate to distribute the assent forms in envelopes along with the parental consent forms. The teachers will be responsible for collecting the forms, and will need to exclude the writing samples of any students whose forms are not returned, and not copy or send to the researcher any interview notes with any of those students.

- D. Procedures: Provide a step-by-step description of each procedure, including the frequency, duration, and location of each procedure.

The project for which we are seeking approval will proceed in this way:

Once the project is approved, teachers at each level of instruction (elementary, middle, and high school), each of whom has completed the Summer Institute of the National Writing Project at Florida Gulf Coast University, will collect writing samples from a group of his or her students. The teachers will make copies of these samples, remove students' names and replace them with a code number, then send the copies to the university researchers. We will make a file of the samples and begin coding the samples for markers of syntactic maturity, vocabulary, and correctness, voice, and tone. During the first week of December and again in the first week of May, we will ask the same teachers to identify three of the original students whose work samples we received, and collect new samples of writing from them, again making a copy of the work for the university researchers. We will again code the samples, and compare and contrast them with the earlier samples, looking for indicators of growth and improvement. We will also ask the teacher to interview the three selected students, asking them questions such as these:

What do you think you do best as a writer?

Choose one of your pieces of writing. What is the best part of it? What would you like to do better as a writer?

What things do you do in class that help you write better?

Do you think your writing is better than, about the same as, or not as good as that of others in your class?

The teacher will record responses as the student talks, then make her or his notes legible before photocopying them for the university researchers (using only the students' code numbers as identifiers). We will code the responses in terms of attitudes toward writing and self-efficacy beliefs about writing and look for evidence of change in attitudes or beliefs from December to May.

- E. How will confidentiality of the data be maintained? Include the exact location of the signed originals of the Informed Consent Forms, the method of storage, and the names or titles of individuals (other than University and federal officials) having access to the consent documents. Specify the date for destruction of data (surveys, disks, etc)?

Confidentiality will be strictly maintained, to the extent required by law. Only the classroom teacher, who works with the students on a daily basis, will know the students' identities. As researchers, we will have no direct contact with the students whatsoever and will never see their actual names in association with their written words or recorded comments. The teachers, before giving us copies of student writing samples or their interviews with students, will replace

students' names with code numbers. Consent forms and writing samples will be stored in a locked file cabinet for a period of three years and will be shredded thereafter.

F. Describe all known and anticipated risks to the subject including side effects, risks of placebo, risks of normal treatment delay, etc.

This project is not controversial, nor are there any anticipated risks. The classroom setting is the one in which all students normally participate; the activities are all ones that are part of the regular writing curriculum, including conversations about writing with the teacher.

G. Describe the anticipated benefits to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result.

The teachers, all of whom are National Writing Project at FGCU participants, will be able to read and edit the report that the university researchers write as we analyze the students' writing samples and interview responses. Later, as a follow-up study, and only if the project is extended to its projected completion (in a later proposal), the state writing project group (of which we are a part) hopes to publish a collection of students' writing from across the State of Florida. It is the intention of the group of National Writing Project Directors representing Florida Chapters to give educational policy makers, teachers, school administrators, and parents an opportunity to see the kinds of writing that our school children are capable of producing, given encouragement and feedback in classes in which teachers emphasize writing without emphasizing only test-focused writing.

Additions or changes in procedures involving human subjects, as well as any problems connected with the use of human subjects once the project has begun, must be brought to the attention of the IRE. All adverse effects to the subjects are to be brought to the attention of the IRB immediately and in writing.