



11-2003

# Teacher and Coach Implementation of Writers Workshop in America's Choice Schools, 2001 and 2002

Amy Jane Bach  
*University of Pennsylvania*

Jonathan A. Supovitz  
*University of Pennsylvania, JONS@GSE.UPENN.EDU*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre\\_researchreports](http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports)

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Elementary Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation

Bach, Amy Jane and Supovitz, Jonathan A.. (2003). Teacher and Coach Implementation of Writers Workshop in America's Choice Schools, 2001 and 2002. *CPRE Research Reports*. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre\\_researchreports/40](http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/40)

[View on the CPRE website.](#)

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. [http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre\\_researchreports/40](http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/40)  
For more information, please contact [libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:libraryrepository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

# Teacher and Coach Implementation of Writers Workshop in America's Choice Schools, 2001 and 2002

## **Abstract**

In this report, we follow a line of inquiry that we began in a 2002 Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) report titled Implementation of the America's Choice Literacy Workshops. Herein, we examine the implementation of the writers workshop component of America's Choice, which we consider the core instructional reform of the first year of implementation of the America's Choice comprehensive school reform design. By conducting structured observations in a random sample of elementary and middle school classrooms in America's Choice schools across the United States, and applying a rubric that assesses the fidelity of teachers' implementation of writers workshop, we have produced a measure of implementation of a central component of the design. While our measure of implementation has limitations, it does reveal the degree of teachers' implementation of the structures of the literacy component of America's Choice and provides insight into the depth of teachers' understanding of the larger concepts of the design.

In our study, we focus on three particular questions. First, what is the extent of implementation of writers workshop in elementary and middle schools at the end of their first year of America's Choice? Second, did 2002 teachers achieve higher levels of implementation in their first implementation year than 2001 teachers in their first year of implementation and, if so, could these differences be attributed to improvements in the America's Choice design? Finally, what is the relationship between the fidelity of literacy coaches' implementation of writers workshop and teachers' implementation of writers workshop within the same schools? Through these questions, we seek to document the progress of America's Choice and point out areas where further refinements might be warranted.

## **Disciplines**

Curriculum and Instruction | Educational Methods | Elementary Education and Teaching | Junior High, Intermediate, Middle School Education and Teaching

## **Comments**

[View on the CPRE website.](#)

# **Teacher and Coach Implementation of Writers Workshop in America's Choice Schools, 2001 and 2002**

**Amy J. Bach  
Jonathan A. Supovitz**

November 2003

Consortium for Policy Research in Education  
University of Pennsylvania  
Graduate School of Education



## Contents

List of Tables and Figures .....	i
About the America’s Choice Design .....	iii
About CPRE’s Evaluation of America’s Choice .....	iv
Additional Reading on America’s Choice .....	v
Introduction .....	1
Research Design .....	1
Sample .....	3
Analytic Framework .....	4
Possibilities Created Through Fidelity to the Model .....	5
Results .....	7
Comparison of Cohort 3 and Cohort 4 Ratings .....	7
Comparison of Cohort 4 Teacher and Literacy Coach Ratings .....	8
Discussion .....	10
References .....	13

## List of Tables and Figures

Table 1. Observations Conducted in America’s Choice Schools .....	4
Table 2. Ratings of Classroom Lessons of Cohorts 3 and 4 Teachers, Disaggregated by Grade Level .....	8
Table 3. Ratings of Classroom Lessons of Cohort 4 Teachers and Literacy Coaches, Disaggregated by Grade Level .....	10
Figure 1. Ratings of Classroom Lessons of Cohorts 3 and 4 Teachers .....	7
Figure 2. Ratings of Classroom Lessons of Cohort 4 Teachers and Literacy Coaches .....	9



## About the America's Choice Design

The America's Choice school design is a K-12 comprehensive school reform model developed by the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE). America's Choice is a well-established school reform model currently being implemented in over 500 schools across the nation. America's Choice focuses on raising academic achievement by providing a rigorous standards-based curriculum and safety nets for all students. A stated goal of America's Choice is "to make sure all but the most severely handicapped students reach an internationally benchmarked standard of achievement in English/language arts and mathematics by the time they graduate" (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2001, p. 1).

The core of the America's Choice design contains a set of principles about the purpose of schooling and how schools should operate, and it provides a set of tools for building a program based on those principles. These essential principles and tools include:

- High expectations for all students, with communication of those expectations through explicit performance standards that are aligned to assessments and include examples of student work that meet the standards.
- The implementation of standards-based literacy and math blocks, which happen every day for every child, and dramatically change teaching and learning in every classroom. The rituals and routines associated with these blocks are designed to prepare students to deal with demanding content and become independent learners.
- Ongoing assessment of students in order to inform daily instruction.
- School-embedded, ongoing, teacher professional development led by a full-time literacy coach designed to strengthen teachers' knowledge of the America's Choice approach to teaching and learning. This includes learning how to conduct a close analysis of their students' work in relation to standards, and using this knowledge to develop lessons calibrated to the needs of different students.
- Standards-based curriculum and instructional strategies that help students develop key skills, convey core concepts, and apply what they know.
- A school leadership team, led by the principal and subject-matter coaches, that coordinates implementation through a variety of means. These include setting performance targets and analyzing student work on a variety of measures, training teachers, adjusting school schedules, and implementing safety-net programs to provide time for students to receive additional instruction.
- "Safety nets," including tutoring and course recovery programs, that are structured into the school day and school year, and that provide students with extensive support and multiple opportunities to achieve the standards.

## About CPRE's Evaluation of America's Choice

The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) at the University of Pennsylvania was contracted by NCEE in 1998 to conduct the external evaluation of the America's Choice school design. Each year, CPRE designs and conducts a series of targeted studies on the implementation and impacts of the America's Choice design.

The purpose of CPRE's evaluation is to provide formative feedback to NCEE and America's Choice schools about emerging trends in the implementation of the design, and to seek evidence of the impacts of the design using accepted high standards of evaluation design and analysis methodologies.

CPRE's evaluation of America's Choice is guided by three overarching evaluation questions. First, is America's Choice being carried out in the manner envisioned — that is, how are teachers and school administrators understanding and implementing the many facets of the reform design? Second, as a result of the implementation of America's Choice, are the instructional practices of teachers changing in ways that would improve student learning? Third, to what degree can improvements in student achievement be attributed to the design? Within this framework, annual evaluation studies target specific aspects of the America's Choice design for more in-depth investigation. To address these questions, the CPRE evaluation team gathers a broad array of qualitative and quantitative data to develop a rich and valid picture of the implementation process over time and to capture the impacts of the design on students and teachers. Data sources include:

- Surveys of teachers and administrators in America's Choice schools nationwide.
- Site visits to schools across the nation to observe classroom instruction, examine implementation artifacts, and interview teachers, students, and school administrators.
- Telephone interviews with NCEE staff, school faculty members, and school and district administrators.
- Document reviews.
- Observations of national, regional, and school-level professional development.
- Collection of student performance measures, including state and local tests, the New Standards Reference Examination, and more authentic samples of student work products.

After data collection, CPRE research team members analyze the data using appropriate qualitative and quantitative research techniques in order to identify patterns of intended and unintended consequences and to detect effects of the design on students, teachers, and schools. The results are reported in a series of thematic evaluation reports that are released each year.



## Additional Reading on America's Choice

The following reports are currently available from CPRE. Print copies are available at no cost by emailing [cpre@gse.upenn.edu](mailto:cpre@gse.upenn.edu), or by calling 215-573-0700. Copies can also be downloaded at [www.cpre.org/Research/Research\\_Project\\_America's\\_Choice.htm](http://www.cpre.org/Research/Research_Project_America's_Choice.htm).

- **Mapping a Course for Improved Student Learning: How Innovative Schools Systematically Use Student Performance Data to Guide Improvement** (Jonathan A. Supovitz and Valerie Klein, November 2003)
- **The Heart of the Matter: The Coaching Model in America's Choice Schools** (Susan M. Poglinco, Amy J. Bach, Kate Hovde, Sheila Rosenblum, Marisa Saunders, and Jonathan A. Supovitz, May 2003)
- **The Relationship Between Teacher Implementation of America's Choice and Student Learning in Plainfield, New Jersey** (Jonathan A. Supovitz and Henry May, January 2003)
- **Impact of America's Choice on Student Performance in Duval County, Florida** (Jonathan A. Supovitz, Brooke Snyder Taylor, and Henry May, October 2002)
- **Implementation of the America's Choice Literacy Workshops** (Jonathan A. Supovitz, Susan M. Poglinco, and Amy J. Bach, April 2002)
- **Instructional Leadership in a Standards-based Reform** (Jonathan A. Supovitz and Susan M. Poglinco, December 2001)
- **Moving Mountains: Successes and Challenges of the America's Choice Comprehensive School Reform Design** (Jonathan A. Supovitz, Susan M. Poglinco, and Brooke Snyder, March 2001)
- **America's Choice Comprehensive School Reform Design: First-year Implementation Evaluation Summary** (Thomas Corcoran, Margaret Hoppe, Theresa Luhm, and Jonathan A. Supovitz, February 2000)



## Introduction

In this report, we follow a line of inquiry that we began in a 2002 Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) report titled *Implementation of the America's Choice Literacy Workshops*. Herein, we examine the implementation of the writers workshop component of America's Choice, which we consider the core instructional reform of the first year of implementation of the America's Choice comprehensive school reform design. By conducting structured observations in a random sample of elementary and middle school classrooms in America's Choice schools across the United States, and applying a rubric that assesses the fidelity of teachers' implementation of writers workshop, we have produced a measure of implementation of a central component of the design. While our measure of implementation has limitations, it does reveal the degree of teachers' implementation of the structures of the literacy component of America's Choice and provides insight into the depth of teachers' understanding of the larger concepts of the design.

In our study, we focus on three particular questions. First, what is the extent of implementation of writers workshop in elementary and middle schools at the end of their first year of America's Choice? Second, did 2002 teachers achieve higher levels of implementation in their first implementation year than 2001 teachers in their first year of implementation and, if so, could these differences be attributed to improvements in the America's Choice design? Finally, what is the relationship between the fidelity of literacy coaches' implementation of writers workshop and teachers' implementation of writers workshop within the same schools? Through these questions, we seek to document the progress of America's Choice and point out areas where further refinements might be warranted.

Following this introduction, we present a description of our research design, which includes a description of the characteristics of writers workshop for those not familiar with this instructional technique. We also explain our sampling procedure and detail CPRE's analytic framework, the rubric we used to assess the fidelity of instruction to the writers workshop model. We then continue with a presentation of the results of CPRE researchers' ratings of classroom lessons in 2001 and 2002, as well as ratings of the lessons of literacy coaches in 2002. We then briefly discuss the possibilities that fidelity to the America's Choice model brings. We conclude with a discussion of the results.

## Research Design

This study extends a series of observations that were first done in the spring of 2001 of teachers in their first and second year of implementation of America's Choice. The 2001 observations were discussed in a CPRE report titled *Implementation of the America's Choice Literacy Workshops*. The 2002 observations were conducted as part of a larger study on the coach's role in the implementation of America's Choice. Another report, titled *The Heart of the Matter: The Coaching Model in America's Choice Schools*, examines the role of coaching in America's Choice schools in grades K-8. Both studies are available on the CPRE website ([www.cpre.org/Research/Research\\_Project\\_America's\\_Choice.htm](http://www.cpre.org/Research/Research_Project_America's_Choice.htm)).

Our research design was similar for the observational component of the data collection in both 2001 and 2002. First, in order to minimize travel, we constrained our sample to geographical areas where America's Choice was operating in multiple schools. Based upon these geographical areas, we developed a sampling frame from which we selected a random sample of schools to visit. In 2001, our school visits were in the District

of Columbia, Florida, Kentucky, Minnesota, New Jersey, and New York. In 2002, our visits were to schools in California, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York. From within these regions, we randomly sampled 27 schools to visit for a day-and-a-half each. Schools were designated lower-elementary schools, upper-elementary schools, and middle schools. A school's designation dictated which grade levels would be the focus of our data collection. Although not a specific criteria, the sample of schools we selected included both urban and rural areas.

In 2001, we sought to do observations in grades 1-2, 3-4, and 7-8. In 2002, we focused our observations on grades 2, 4,

and 8 because these were grades that first began implementation of writers workshop. There were, however, some cases where observations occurred in other grades. In 2001 and 2002, we used different methods for selecting teachers to observe and interview. In 2001, after contacting the selected schools and getting their permission to conduct a site visit, we requested a list of all teachers at the identified grade levels. From this sampling frame, we randomly sampled two teachers to be observed and interviewed. We did not observe or interview the literacy coach. In 2002, instead of randomly selecting teachers, we informed the literacy coach and the principal that we wanted to observe the literacy coach and two other classes in the first wave of

### **The Structure and Major Components of Writers Workshop**

Writers workshop begins with a short 5-15 minute mini-lesson. There are three kinds of mini-lessons: procedural, craft, and skills. Procedural mini-lessons focus on teaching students about the rituals and routines of the writers workshop. Craft mini-lessons aim to teach about the elements of good writing like technique, style, and genre. In craft mini-lessons, students learn the writing strategies that authors use to produce effective writing. Skills mini-lessons address the mechanics of writing, such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and paragraphs. Skills mini-lessons often incorporate student writing by using examples of student written work where mechanics need to be improved. These lessons may be teacher directed or interactive and they focus students on a particular task and also establish a set of expectations of what will be taught and why. The content of a mini-lesson should be based on students' needs and the standards they are working toward. Standards are a key component of the America's Choice design. Teachers use the standards to guide their mini-lessons and should make constant reference to the standards so that students become aware of the criteria against which their work will be judged. A 30-40 minute independent work period follows the mini-lesson. In the independent work period, different students are engaged in different facets of the writing process, including planning, drafting, revising, editing, and polishing/publishing. Students may work either individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Response groups provide students an opportunity to elicit feedback on drafts from a partner or small group of peers. Teachers use the independent work period to have individual conferences with students. Conferencing is essential because it gives teachers the opportunity to gauge students' understanding of the material covered and measure their progress in relation to the standards. Writers workshop ends with a short five-to-seven minute closing session. The closing session is frequently centered around author's chair, in which individual students share selections of their written work in progress. The closing activity brings an end to the literacy workshops but its main purpose is to reinforce the topic of study for that day.

literacy workshop implementation at the school. The decision on which two teachers was left to the literacy coach. We also stated that we wanted to interview the literacy coach, the demonstration-classroom teacher, one of the first-wave teachers we observed, the model-classroom teacher, and the principal. Although our design called for three observations in each school, there were a few sites where we were not able to conduct all three observations due to scheduling conflicts, time limitations, and the changes that individual schools made to the rollout of the model. In some cases, we also had to conduct interviews and observations outside of the target grades. It is important for the reader to note that because the schools selected and the sampling procedures were different in 2001 and 2002, we are not making any claims regarding the equivalence of the Cohort 3 and Cohort 4 teachers.

During school visits, CPRE researchers collected a variety of data that contributed to our understanding of teachers' implementation, interpretation, and understanding of the America's Choice literacy workshop design. First, CPRE researchers observed classroom instruction and documented in great detail what teachers were doing, what materials were being used, and how students were interacting and responding. Second, during the visit, CPRE researchers took opportunities to examine different classroom artifacts. These included wall posters, bulletin boards of student work, word walls, student portfolios, writing folders, source books, and conference logs. Third, observations were followed by structured interviews with observed teachers or coaches to discuss the source, purpose, and execution of the lesson in order to better understand the teachers' intents and goals and how they felt the lesson went. All school visits occurred in the spring (March to May) of either 2001 or 2002.

## Sample

In 2001, we visited 23 schools and conducted 42 observations of teachers' lessons. Of those schools, 17 observations were conducted in 10 different Cohort 3 schools. Cohort 3 schools were at the end of their first year of implementation of America's Choice in the 2000-2001 school year. Of those observations, 15 were of writers workshop and 2 were of readers workshop. For this study, we have included only the writers workshop observations from Cohort 3 schools. In 2002, we conducted 70 observations in 27 Cohort 4 schools. Cohort 4 schools were at the end of their first year of America's Choice implementation in the 2001-2002 school year. Of these, 65 observations were of writers workshop. Our 2002 observations included both teachers and literacy coaches. In this study, we report only the observations of writers workshop. We observed 45 teachers and 20 literacy coach writers workshop lessons. All teachers and literacy coaches in both 2001 and 2002 were observed only once. The length of the observations varied according to the length of the lessons. Elementary schools with block scheduling tended to have writers workshops that lasted between one and two hours while middle schools tended to have shorter lessons that lasted from 45 minutes to a little over one hour.

Table 1 shows the final sample of teachers and coaches whose writers workshop instruction was observed in 2001 and 2002, broken down by grade levels. In 2001, almost half of the sample was in the upper-elementary grades, about a third in the middle grades, and 20% in lower-elementary grades. In 2002, the observations of teachers were fairly equally distributed across lower-elementary, upper-elementary, and middle grades. There were slightly more coach observations in the middle school grades (40%) than in either lower- or upper-elementary grades (30% each).

**Table 1. Observations Conducted in America's Choice Schools\***

Grade Range	2001 (Cohort 3) Sample of Teachers	2002 (Cohort 4) Sample of Teachers	2002 (Cohort 4) Sample of Literacy Coaches
Lower-Elementary Grades	3 (20%)	16 (36%)	6 (30%)
Upper-Elementary Grades	7 (47%)	16 (36%)	6 (30%)
Middle School Grades	5 (33%)	13 (29%)	8 (40%)
Total	15 (100%)	45 (100%)	20 (100%)

\* Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

## Analytic Framework

In order to distinguish between different levels of implementation of the America's Choice literacy workshops, CPRE researchers in 2001 developed a holistic rubric to measure a lesson's fidelity to the America's Choice writers workshop structures. This rubric was used again in 2002. Applying the rubric, classroom observations were rated according to the presence, or absence, of the three key structures that make up writers workshop: the mini-lesson, the independent work period, and the closing session as well as evidence of teacher-student conferencing during the independent work period and reference to the New Standards Performance Standards during the workshop. The holistic rating scale is as follows:

**Stage 1: Absent or minimal structures of readers or writers workshop.** At the first stage, what we observed in a classroom bore little or no resemblance to the structures of readers or writers workshop. In these cases, teachers essentially eschewed the workshop structure in favor of other instructional approaches. In an example from one classroom, the

lesson consisted of a series of seemingly unrelated student activities. Another class had no mini-lesson. In these and other classes, researchers had a hard time detecting the America's Choice program in the observed structures and content.

**Stage 2: Partial implementation of workshop structures.** Classroom events at the second stage exhibited some evidence of the structures of the literacy workshops, but were missing some major component(s). This suggested that the teacher had a tenuous understanding of the purpose of the workshop. In some classes, large portions of the workshop structures were missing. For example, one mini-lesson became a full-blown lesson, crowding out the independent work period and closing session. In other classes, there was no connection between the mini-lesson and work that students were assigned to do during the independent work period, or the lesson lacked a brief closing session.

**Stage 3: Solid adherence to workshop structures.** These classes were faithful renditions of either readers or writers workshop. They consisted of a well-executed mini-lesson, an indepen-

dent work period, and a closing session. However, these classes lacked important details, such as teacher-student conferencing and teacher reference to the New Standards Performance Standards, which indicate a deeper understanding of the purposes underlying the workshop structures.

**Stage 4: Exemplary implementation of workshop.** These exemplary lessons adhered not only to the workshop structures, but also contained evidence that the teacher had a deep understanding of the purposes behind the workshop structures (for example, teachers who capitalized on the independent work period to purposefully meet with an individual student or a small number of students who required extra instruction on a concept). Other teachers made explicit reference to standards throughout the entire workshop. Through these and other examples, teachers indicated that they understood the purposes underlying the structures of the America's Choice literacy workshops.

In order to apply this rubric to the data collected, CPRE researchers first read the descriptions of the classroom observations and consensus ratings were achieved. In cases where there were disagreements, the observations were reviewed again and discussed at length until an agreement between researchers was reached.

We also want the reader to recognize the limitations of our rating system. Fidelity to the literacy workshop structures does not, in and of itself, indicate that teachers and literacy coaches have a deep understanding of standards-based instruction, but it is an indicator that they have at least a starting conception of the America's Choice philosophy and can be seen as an intermediary indicator of deeper implementation. Additionally, these ratings do not necessarily represent instructional quality because lessons that do not follow the writers workshop

model could be rich, engaging, and effective. Conversely, lessons that scrupulously follow the writers workshop model could be rote and flat. Nonetheless, these observations can be used as a guide to indicate how closely teachers' lessons are aligned with the structural elements of the America's Choice literacy workshops.

## Possibilities Created Through Fidelity to the Model

Faithful implementation of the literacy workshop structures can unleash myriad teaching and learning opportunities. These include establishing classroom routines, lesson connection, explicit reference to standards, teacher-student conferencing, and mini-lessons that are generated by an analysis of student needs.

To begin, faithful, continuous implementation of the three components of the literacy workshops help establish solid classroom routines, which are an important organizing mechanism in the America's Choice literacy workshops. Teachers who establish classroom routines spend less time giving directions and organizing students and they reduce behavioral problems in classrooms. Routines can help both teachers and students to use class time productively.

Additionally, it is the degree to which the mini-lesson, independent work period, and closing activity are connected to one another that distinguishes not only lesson depth, but teachers' overall understanding and enactment of the literacy workshops. Mini-lessons should present an opening topic to students. The subsequent independent work period gives students the opportunity to practice an activity that makes use of the topic of study introduced in the mini-lesson. The third and final part of the literacy work-

shops, the closing session, gives students a chance to demonstrate what they have learned. It is also a time for teachers to reiterate to students the purpose of the day's activities. Teachers who weave a thread of connection from the mini-lesson to the independent work period activities and finally to the closing session offer multiple opportunities for students not only to learn about a specific topic, but also to practice what they have learned and demonstrate their understanding of the topic.

Similarly, when teachers make explicit reference to the New Standards Performance Standards throughout the entire literacy workshop, students are able to understand not only the purpose of the assignment, but also the criteria against which their work will be judged. Schools that have committed to adopting the America's Choice model should not only be concerned with the initial implementation of the workshop components, they should also focus on assuring that teaching is geared around standards. Those teachers who not only communicate standards to students, but who also provide opportunities for students to check their work in relation to the standards, help students take responsibility for their own learning. When standards are posted and displayed in classrooms, students are given the resources they need to check their own work. When standards are explicitly mentioned throughout the workshop and when they are posted around the room, teachers communicate not only the importance of standards, they also provide students with the tools they need to be self-directed learners and to work individually or in small groups without guidance from the teacher.

The independent work period is the backbone of the literacy workshops; it provides a space where a variety of teaching and learning opportunities can take place. America's Choice classrooms are potentially full of a rich set of re-

sources for students to explore and take advantage of and most of these resources are used during the independent work period. Some of these resources include using writing sourcebooks as a tool for reflection and as a catalyst to generate new writing topics; assembling writing folders for students' written work and using them as a way to monitor student progress over the semester; encouraging students to consult with their peers and to discuss their writing; and displaying other resources throughout the room, such as mini-lesson tear sheets that students can refer to when completing their assignment and word walls where lists of new vocabulary words are collected and displayed for students to use when they are reading or writing.

Teachers who have a deep understanding of the purpose of the different components of the literacy workshops can take advantage of the opportunities created by the independent work to provide additional targeted instruction to students. Teacher-student conferencing is a major component of the literacy workshops because it gives teachers the opportunity to gauge students' understanding of the material being studied and measure their progress in relation to the standards. Conferencing results from teacher assessment of student needs and allows teachers to focus on specific areas of difficulty with individual students. Conferencing also allows teachers the time to provide individual guidance to students and to evaluate student progress in relation to the standards; it is a tool that can help teachers identify those students who have understood and internalized the standards in their writing and reading activities and also those students who need more work in particular areas. This type of monitoring of student progress plays an essential role in the literacy workshops and should not be overlooked or underestimated.

When teachers consistently confer with students individually, they are



able to gauge students' understanding of the class lessons. If a number of students are having trouble in the same area, a teacher can create a mini-lesson that addresses this particular area of difficulty. An ideal mini-lesson is one that is chosen by assessing previous student work and determining the weak areas that students need to focus on. Homework and other class activities that are turned in for a grade provide opportunities for teachers to analyze student work. Students who share their work in the author's chair at the end of the workshop also provide teachers with an opportunity to gauge students' understanding of the daily lesson. Analyzing student work can provide teachers with a number of valuable insights. When teachers review student work, they are able to gauge what students understood from previous mini-lessons so they know when to move on to another lesson or revisit an old one. Similarly, students who have demonstrated mastery of a particular concept in their work can have their work used in the mini-lesson to help other students who continue to have trouble.

## Results

Our results are presented to show two types of comparisons. First, we compare the observation ratings of Cohort 3

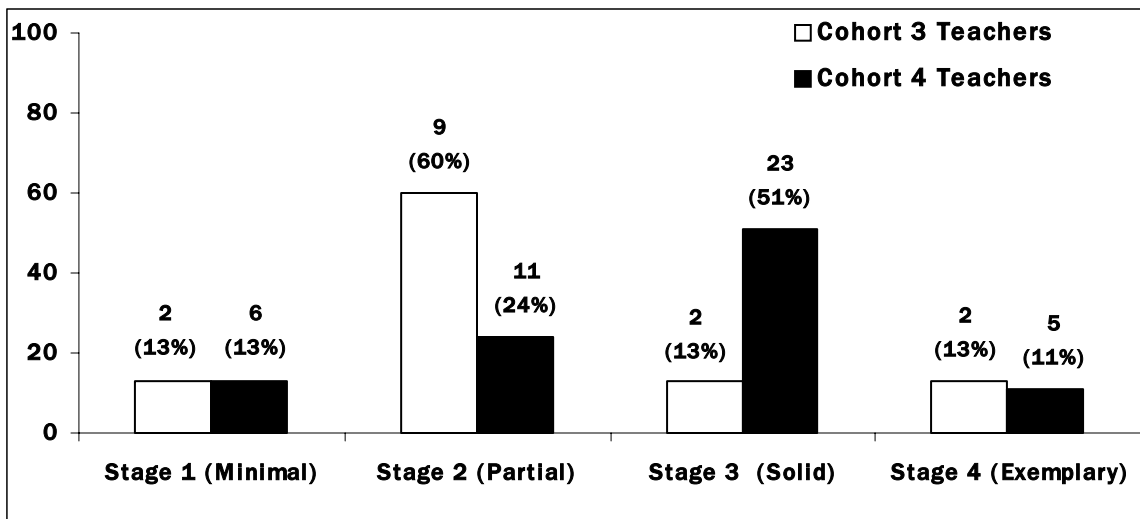
teachers in writers workshop from 2001 to Cohort 4 teachers in 2002. This is a fair comparison because each group was observed in the spring of their first year of implementation of America's Choice. Second, we compare the ratings of Cohort 4 teachers and Cohort 4 coaches using the data from 2002. The purpose of this comparison is to examine whether coaches, on average, are stronger in their implementation of writers workshop than are the teachers they are training, as one would expect, and to see if there is any relationship between the fidelity of instruction of coaches and teachers.

## Comparison of Cohort 3 and Cohort 4 Ratings

Our first analysis compares the ratings of teachers' lessons in Cohort 3 and Cohort 4 at the end of their first year of implementation of the writers workshop component of America's Choice. The results of our ratings are shown in Figure 1.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the distribution of ratings differed for the two cohorts. The proportion of ratings that were at the low and high ends of the scale were similar. In 13% of the observations in each year, CPRE researchers had

**Figure 1. Ratings of Classroom Lessons of Cohorts 3 and 4 Teachers\***



\* Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

trouble detecting the basic structures of writers workshop and a similar percentage of the observations were considered to be exemplary examples of writers workshop implementation. However, Cohort 4 had a much higher percentage of teachers rated a 3 (solid implementation) than did Cohort 3 (51% compared to 13%) and a lower percentage of partial implementation (24% compared to 60%). Freeman and Halton's (1951) test of differences in the distributions indicates that the Cohort 4 observations were statistically higher than were the Cohort 3 observations ( $p=.03$ ). This indicates that teachers at the end of their first year in 2002 were, on average, more strongly implementing writers workshop than were teachers at the end of their first year of America's Choice a year earlier.

We were also interested to see if these differences between cohorts were apparent across different grade ranges. Table 2 shows our results for each cohort, disaggregated by lower elementary, upper elementary, and middle school. Although the sample sizes are small, particularly in Cohort 3, there are several notable pat-

terns present in Table 2. First, ratings are stronger at the elementary levels compared to the middle school grades. This is a pattern that we first noted in 2001 with Cohort 3, and it has persisted in Cohort 4. Second, despite the greater challenge in the middle school grades, the improvements from Cohort 3 to Cohort 4 are visible at all three grade ranges. As noted, however, these improvements are more consistent and larger in the elementary levels (both lower and upper elementary) than they are in the middle schools. Because the decomposition of the results into three sub-groups has resulted in small sizes, we were unable to statistically confirm these apparent patterns.

### Comparison of Cohort 4 Teacher and Literacy Coach Ratings

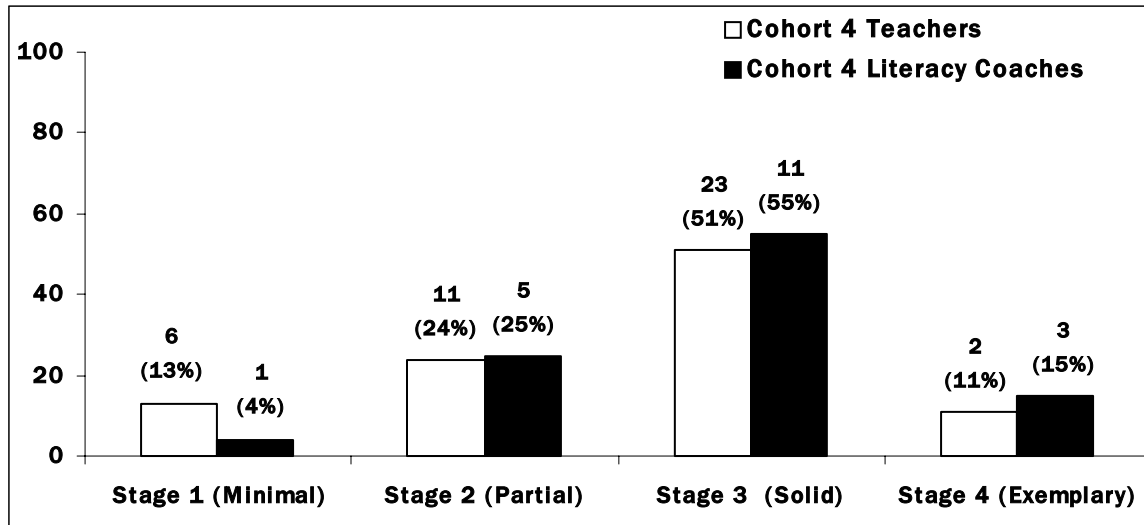
Our second comparison concerns the ratings of Cohort 4 teachers and Cohort 4 literacy coaches. Again, the observations that produced these ratings occurred at the end of their first year of implementa-

**Table 2. Ratings of Classroom Lessons of Cohorts 3 and 4 Teachers, Disaggregated by Grade Level\***

Stage	Lower Elementary		Upper Elementary		Middle School	
	Cohort 3 (n=3)	Cohort 4 (n=16)	Cohort 3 (n=7)	Cohort 4 (n=16)	Cohort 3 (n=5)	Cohort 4 (n=13)
1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (14%)	2 (13%)	1 (20%)	4 (31%)
2	2 (67%)	3 (19%)	3 (43%)	1 (6%)	4 (80%)	7 (54%)
3	1 (33%)	11 (69%)	1 (14%)	10 (63%)	0 (0%)	2 (15%)
4	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	2 (29%)	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

\* Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

**Figure 2. Ratings of Classroom Lessons of Cohort 4 Teachers and Literacy Coaches\***



\* Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

tion of the writers workshop component of America's Choice. The results of these observations are shown in Figure 2.

Based on these observations, Cohort 4 literacy coaches performed somewhat better than the teachers they were instructing and guiding. In only one literacy coach classroom observation did CPRE researchers have difficulty detecting evidence of the writers workshop structures, whereas in six, or 13%, of the Cohort 4 teacher lessons there did not appear to be evidence of the workshop structures. About a quarter of both the teachers' and literacy coaches' classes evidenced only partial implementation of the writers workshop structure. Just over half (51% of teachers and 55% of coaches) exhibited solid adherence to the workshop structures. In just over 10% of the classes of both teachers and literacy coaches, there was evidence of exemplary implementation of the writers workshop structures. Freeman and Halton's (1951) test of differences in the distributions indicates that there is no statistical difference between the ratings of Cohort 4 teachers and literacy coaches ( $p=.83$ ). This indicates that, on average, coaches were implementing the workshops with no greater fidelity than were teachers after one year of America's Choice.

We also examined the patterns by grade level to see if there were patterns within this overall picture. Table 3 shows the ratings of classroom lessons of Cohort 4 teachers and literacy coaches, disaggregated by grade level. Although it is difficult to draw firm conclusions (because of small sample sizes) at this level of decomposition, it appears that the patterns of stronger coach ratings relative to teachers' ratings follows at all grade levels, although it is less apparent in middle school ratings. Again, because of the small sample sizes, it is difficult to read too much into these disaggregated results.

We were further interested in the relationship between teacher and coach ratings within the same schools. It seems to make sense that a teacher's ability to implement a new form of instruction would be no greater than a coach's ability to effectively model that form of instruction. To explore this line of inquiry, we developed a structural equation measurement model to examine the correlation between the ratings of teachers and coaches, taking into account the grouping of coaches and teachers within schools. We found that the correlation between coach and teacher ratings was strongly statistically significant ( $r=.75$ ,  $p<.0001$ )

**Table 3. Ratings of Classroom Lessons of Cohort 4 Teachers and Literacy Coaches, Disaggregated by Grade Level\***

Stage	Lower Elementary		Upper Elementary		Middle School	
	Cohort 4 Teachers (n=16)	Cohort 4 Literacy Coaches (n=6)	Cohort 4 Teachers (n=16)	Cohort 4 Literacy Coaches (n=6)	Cohort 4 Teachers (n=13)	Cohort 4 Literacy Coaches (n=8)
1	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (13%)	0 (0%)	4 (31%)	1 (13%)
2	3 (19%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)	7 (54%)	5 (63%)
3	11 (69%)	5 (83%)	10 (63%)	4 (67%)	2 (15%)	2 (25%)
4	2 (13%)	1 (17%)	3 (19%)	2 (33%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

\* Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding.

after accounting for the relationship between teachers and coaches. This confirms that there is a strong link between the quality of coaches' implementation of writers workshop and teachers' abilities to implement the writers workshop structures.

## Discussion

In this study, we report on the progress of teachers and literacy coaches to implement the writers workshop component of the America's Choice design, which is a key component of rollout in the first year of implementation. We designed our study in a way that allows us to compare two cohorts of classroom observations of random samples of teachers in geographically diverse samples of schools at the end of their first year of implementation of America's Choice. With this study, we asked three major questions. First, what is the extent of implementation of writers workshop at the end of the first year of

implementation? Second, has implementation of writers workshop improved over time? Third, what is the relationship between teachers' implementation of writers workshop and that of their school's coach?

Our results indicate that America's Choice has made substantial progress in teachers' implementation of writers workshop from 2001 to 2002. Teachers at the end of their first year of implementation of America's Choice in 2002 (Cohort 4) had significantly higher classroom observation ratings than did teachers at the end of their first year of implementation of America's Choice in 2001 (Cohort 3). In 2001, only about a quarter of the classrooms that we observed were rated at least a 3 (solid adherence to the workshop structures) on our four-point rating scale. In 2002, over 60% of the classrooms we observed were rated a 3 or higher. While there is still substantial room for improvement, particularly in middle schools, whose teachers tended to have lower ratings than did teachers in el-

elementary schools, these results provide strong evidence of improvements to the design and implementation of America's Choice.

What might these improvements from 2001 to 2002 be attributed to? First, America's Choice made some important design changes in that period. In elementary schools, the design coach was replaced with a second literacy coach. This increased emphasis on implementing the literacy workshops appears to be evident in the higher quality of implementation and may partially explain why there are less dramatic improvements in middle schools, which continued to have one literacy coach and one design coach. Second, America's Choice continued to refine its training of coaches, which translates into stronger implantation in classrooms.

We also noted an ongoing pattern of stronger fidelity in the elementary grades compared to the middle school grades. Why have middle schools been consistently implementing the literacy workshops at a lower level than elementary schools? The difficulties that middle schools face in implementing the literacy workshops may be due to additional initiatives that ultimately detract from America's Choice. In addition, because middle schools tend to have less flexibility in their class schedules than do elementary schools, literacy coaches and teachers in middle schools do not have two-hour literacy blocks in which to implement the literacy workshops. Having less time to implement the literacy workshops may contribute to lower ratings among middle school observations. Finally, middle schools are faced with the additional strain of only having one literacy coach to roll out the America's Choice model. Because the responsibility of rollout and implementation falls solely on that one literacy coach in middle schools, literacy coaches may not be able to spend as much time working with teachers as they would like.

Lower ratings in middle schools may result from teachers spending less time training with the literacy coach and literacy coaches having less time to visit classrooms and monitor teachers who are newly implementing the model.

Our second set of analyses focused on teacher and coach ratings in Cohort 4 in 2002, at the end of their first year of implementation of America's Choice. The prime responsibility of the literacy coach is to roll out the America's Choice literacy workshops in classrooms throughout their schools. The purpose of having literacy coaches working full-time in a school is so that they can model the workshop design for teachers, respond to questions, and facilitate teachers' implementation. It would seem to follow that a school's success in implementing America's Choice would only be as strong as its coach's ability to effectively teach in the manner advocated by the design. Our ratings of coaches suggest that there is room for improvement in coaches' understanding and implementation of America's Choice. About 30% of the coaches we observed did not exhibit robust implementation of writers workshop. While this conclusion needs to be taken with a grain of salt, as it is based on the observation of only a single class, it suggests further strengthening of coaches is needed.

The fact that there is a strong and significant relationship between teachers' and coaches' ratings is both good and bad news. On the positive side, it validates the decision by America's Choice to embed a coach within a school and seems to indicate that a strong literacy coach can have a powerful influence on the instruction within a school. On the flip side, coaches with shallow understanding of the design — which appear to be present in about 30% of cases if our single observation can be used as a reasonable indicator — can seriously impede the implementation of the America's Choice design. Not surprisingly, as goes the coach, so go the teachers.



## References

Freeman, G. H., & Halton, J. H. (1951). Note on an exact treatment of contingency, goodness of fit, and other problems of significance. *Biometrika*, 38(1/2), 141-149.

National Center on Education and the Economy. (2001). *Comprehensive reform designs*. Washington, DC: Author.