

THE BENEFITS TO NEW TEACHERS
OF
THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT'S
NEW TEACHER INITIATIVE

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THE BENEFITS TO NEW TEACHERS OF THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT'S NEW TEACHER INITIATIVE

PART ONE:

THE INTRODUCTION

This report, “The Benefits to New Teachers of the National Writing Project’s New Teacher Initiative,” describes the extent to which and the ways in which beginning teachers benefited from their participation in the New Teacher Initiative (NTI). We place special emphasis on this first paper in our series because we believe it is important to document the nature of program outcomes. The NTI ultimately only has value to the extent it is able to serve new teachers in ways that enable them to be better teachers and better teachers of writing. Thus we provide evidence that helps illuminate the diverse range of benefits that accrued to the participating NTI new teachers.

These benefits are ones that we identified through our observations of NTI events and our conversations with those involved in the NTI. The accounts of the new teachers who participated in the 18 site-based programs were especially informative, giving us the opportunity to learn from their “eyewitness reports” and “on the ground” experiences.

We have organized our discussion of the benefits in a hierarchy that is roughly Maslovian in character. We begin with a description of benefits or outcomes that addressed new teachers’ basic needs. We then discuss the benefits that pertained to the teaching of writing, and end with those benefits that pertained to the overall professionalization of the beginning teachers.

This report is organized into three parts. They are as follows:

Part One: The Introduction

We summarize the topic of this report and briefly describe its organization.

Part Two: The Benefits to New Teachers

We provide the reader with some contextual background about the conditions in large, urban districts in which most of the new teachers work. Against this landscape we go on to describe and discuss in detail the range of specific contributions the various NTI programs made to the new teacher participants.

Part Three: Summary Thoughts

We offer our own thoughts about the benefits of NTI participation to new teachers, and make links to current research about our focal topic.

PART TWO: THE BENEFITS TO NEW TEACHERS

Introduction

From a distance the National Writing Project's New Teacher Initiative would appear to new teachers to be similar to any other staff development programs they encountered in the urban schools and districts where they taught. The goals of the NTI programs were straightforward, the numbers of participants were relatively small, and the amount of time expected of novices was often modest. But almost as soon as the programs began, new teachers realized that the NTI was in fact a very different kind of professional development experience. And in the end, the benefits to new teachers in the NTI programs turned out to be significant.

As part of our documentation of the New Teacher Initiative, we at Inverness Research interviewed over 40 NTI participants about their experiences. We heard what it was like to be a novice teacher in Boston, or Philadelphia or Las Vegas. We heard about the many challenges the new teachers faced, and some of the triumphs they had. We heard from almost every new teacher we interviewed that the NTI was among the more formative experiences of their brief teaching careers.

There were variations among the 18 NTI programs. Some programs instituted regular meetings of new and veteran teachers where teachers could learn about effective writing practices from one another. A few programs centered around teacher research that helped new teachers to focus on one aspect of their teaching by observing and interrogating their own classrooms. Others engaged beginning teachers in an electronic listserv, where they could discuss issues of teaching and learning online. Still others built programs around one-on-one mentoring, and others designed abbreviated summer institutes for new teachers.

Whatever the particular setting or program design, the benefits to NTI participants were universal. In well-articulated and explicit language, all the new teachers we interviewed pointed to specific and frequently similar aspects of their programs that contributed to their development as professionals. As our interviews with NTI participants surfaced these common benefits, we were surprised by two things.

First, that teachers could articulate numerous subtle ways that the NTI affected them was noteworthy. We expected that teachers would derive some benefit from their experiences, but given the relatively modest size of the NTI investment at each site,¹ we did not anticipate the benefits to be as profound, as nuanced, or expressed so consistently with such clarity and conviction.

Second, we learned that the needs of new teachers are not one-dimensional, nor do they emerge in a linear fashion. Rather they appear to surface more organically, in more complex, "messy" aggregates. As it turned out the NTI programs managed to address the range of new teachers' needs in multiple, unexpected, and most importantly, simultaneous ways. It appeared to us that the benefits converged and accrued for individuals as they were ready to absorb them.

¹ The annual allocation each NTI site received was roughly \$10,000.

For the sake of the discussion that follows we have organized our findings in Part Two into three sections, each focused on a group of needs and benefits that are organized in a loose, Maslovian hierarchy. However, the reader should keep in mind that our organizational structure does not necessarily reflect how these benefits actually emerged for the NTI participants.

The following list is a summary of findings which are discussed in detail in Part Two:

- 1) The NTI Addressed the Basic Needs of New Teachers
 - NTI programs provided basic “survival” information to new teachers
 - NTI programs offered emotional support to new teachers
 - In NTI novices benefited from positive personal and professional interactions with veteran teachers
- 2) The NTI Supported and Developed Teachers’ and Students’ Writing
 - NTI programs provided new teachers with basic skills and strategies to teach writing
 - NTI programs helped new teachers to focus on writing in their classrooms when it otherwise might have been neglected
 - NTI programs helped new teachers re-conceptualize their previous ideas about the nature of writing
 - NTI programs helped new teachers learn to connect writing to a range of other disciplines
 - NTI programs taught new teachers the pedagogical content knowledge of writing
 - NTI programs helped participants and their students meet with authentic successes in writing
 - NTI programs enabled participants to experience writing themselves allowing them to support their students as writers
- 3) The NTI Benefited New Teachers’ Professional and Intellectual Life
 - NTI programs helped new teachers to see and use writing as a reflective tool
 - NTI programs helped some new teachers use writing to infuse inquiry into their own practice
 - NTI programs provided a professional learning community that supported novices in reflecting on and improving their own teaching
 - NTI programs offered novices potential membership in a larger educational network

The Landscape of Urban Schools and Districts

Before describing new teachers’ reactions to the New Teacher Initiative, we want to set our findings against the backdrop of a landscape in which many NTI new teachers – especially those in large, high-need, urban districts – find themselves. It is important to be aware of the social, organizational and cultural environment of their schools and districts to fully understand the ways in which new teachers benefited from their NTI experiences.

Most of the urban districts in which the NTI new teachers have embarked on their professional careers are very large, bureaucratic systems that teeter on the edge of dysfunctionality. They are rarely able to offer attention to individual teachers or students. Almost all face budget deficits, or financial turmoil and uncertainty. As a result, teachers, especially the newest teachers, are frequently faced with job loss or transfers. In addition, most of the NTI districts are also plagued by chronic low student scores on standardized achievement tests. Large percentages of their student population qualify for free or reduced lunch. Again, often the

newest teachers are assigned to the neediest schools and students. Simultaneously, testing, accountability and performance pressures have mounted for teachers and schools, especially with the No Child Left Behind federal legislation demands. Policies intended to address various problems in the districts come and go as frequently as new administrations and restructuring efforts at both the school and district level do, creating a bewildering “policy churn,” which feeds the uncertainty new teachers feel. Finally, because of an overall lack of capacity it is increasingly difficult for these districts to establish viable induction or support programs that effectively meet teachers’ immediate or long-term needs. Thus beginning teachers reside in contexts rife with demands and pressures, but with few resources for support

In our interviews with new teachers we heard story after story about the ways each of these landscape features caused them almost insurmountable challenges. What the following fourth grade teacher from Philadelphia described is representative of many of the stories we heard. We include it here for the reader to serve as one vivid illustration of the contextual background against which our outcome findings can be referenced.

I am a fourth grade teacher and I have been for these last four years. I am teaching at a school located in the northern part of Philadelphia. It is a rather large school. There are about 700 children K to 4 and we are an overcrowded school, with three annexes. We are about half Latino and half African-American and my particular class is where the English language learners are placed in the 4th grade. So all of the EL’s are placed into my room... I am Hispanic and so I am able to speak Spanish, although I do have Vietnamese speakers as well, but most of my students are Spanish speakers.

It is a poor area and so everybody qualifies for free lunch. It is a very difficult school actually to teach in and to administer as well... We have a lot of behavior problems. There is a brand new principal who is taking over this year and so it has been an adjustment year for everybody and it has been a very tough year in particular, this year. This has been the most difficult year I have had since starting four years ago. It is even harder than my first year, which was very hard. I don’t know what it is – it may just be a mixture of the kids that I have this year. I think part of it also is just the different administration. Morale is very low.

The building that I am in is 97 years old and so it is a very hard building to teach in. It is ugly and unsightly, and it is not equipped any more to handle the number of kids that we have. We have been and I understand now, that we are on the top of the list to get a new school building. But this is a process that has gone on for a long time. I haven’t been there as long as other people have been there, but when I talk to some of the veteran teachers, they talk about years where they had even gone so far as to have been part of committees to draw up blueprints for their ideal school and the district slating them for a new school, very soon. And they tell about those plans getting scrapped for whatever reason. During my time here there have been questions about the land that was acquired to build a new school, there has been litigation and that sort of problem. So I think that we have just been caught in these variables that have prevented us from getting a new building, which has been well needed. And you know, it becomes hard ... nobody is really endorsing it, advocating for it...²

² The quotes we use in this report are taken directly from transcripts of interviews we have conducted with NTI participants. They are not composites. We have edited the quotes to make them more readable, but we never change the meaning or intention of what the participant had to say.

The NTI Addressed the Basic Needs of New Teachers

Entering the world of urban districts proved daunting to almost all new teachers with whom we spoke. A few days of orientation meetings at the start of the school year provided the teachers with a bare-bones introduction to their new positions. Yet they anticipated they would soon collect more information from administrators and other colleagues to help them navigate the unfamiliar territory more adeptly. But especially in the landscape of a large money-strapped district, there is often no one available to help newcomers answer even the most fundamental questions. As a result, the NTI teachers we interviewed reported they often felt alone and overwhelmed by the most basic problems.

- **NTI programs provided basic “survival” information to new teachers**

Before new teachers could delve deeply into the work of teaching they needed to become proficient in the language and customs of the foreign land in which they now lived. Therefore most NTI programs deliberately planned discussions or activities to allow participants to pose concrete, beginning-level questions covering topics such as district requirements, student management, or classroom organization. The issues raised were sometimes ordinary, sometimes delicate: Can my students take their literature books home? What do I do when a student makes a threatening remark? How do I get my students’ parents more involved? What happens if I get a pink slip?

As one example of how the NTI sites responded to the novices’ need for basic information, the DCAWP site designed a strand of work to help new teachers meet their district professional portfolio requirements. The NTI leaders there also compiled what came to be known as a “survival binder” for their newer peers, with information including how to acquire mandated professional development hours, the phone numbers of veteran teachers and lists of nearby teaching resources.

One participant from this site reported her appreciation of this component of the program:

NTI made sure that you knew these basic things. They told me exactly what I needed in my classroom, from basic survival advice to how to organize my room. I needed index cards, file trays, file folders, paper clips, tissues and things that I don’t even dare to think about...The “survival guide” was another thing – I could not have functioned without that.

This new teacher and others told us that they grew to view NTI sessions as the first and main forum where they could ask questions freely and “make meaning” of their new environments. In this way the NTI programs helped arm new teachers with a better understanding of what was expected of them, and contributed to stabilizing their first few months and years of teaching.

- **NTI programs offered emotional support to new teachers**

New teachers told us that their membership in NTI helped to combat the isolation they often felt in their first assignments. Even in the best of teaching circumstances there are few structured opportunities for veteran or novice teachers to meet as colleagues. In the New Teacher Initiative programs, however, regular interaction with fellow practitioners was an essential component of all the programs. Simply being able to talk to other teachers did a lot to remedy the feelings of alienation.

One teacher from Third Coast told us that her consistent participation in NTI helped her to “cope” with the feeling that she had to master her new job all by herself:

Sometimes there is a sense of alienation within your own building; you just feel alone or out there. You are teaching and trying to remain professional on your own, above water. Another new teacher and I would joke, ‘either we are going to sink or swim today.’ And NTI has been a part of that coping, that survival.

Although most of the NTI programs created regular opportunities for novices to come together, several designed more specific structures to allow teachers to share their experiences with one another. For example, in the NYCWP NTI teachers convened around an electronic listserv. Even though there was little face-to-face meeting time at this site, NTI participants on the listserv grew to rely on the feedback, empathy and sense of belonging they found in this communal conversation. One teacher told us:

The fact that other people were sharing and were willing to offer up their personal experiences was helpful. I realized here is a place where I can actually unload and everyone on the message board understands exactly what I am talking about. It was not nice hearing that other people had problems, but I felt I wasn’t the only one. The online community became a safe haven.

We heard repeatedly from participants about this notion of their NTI as a “haven” or “home.” The novice we interviewed from Third Coast summed up her feelings about the emotional support she received in NTI saying:

I think more than anything what I have liked about meeting with everyone is just feeling like I have kind of a home base – it’s like a homeroom for a new teacher.

As another example, another New York teacher said she turned directly to the NTI listserv when she faced particular challenges in her classroom. “I went straight online and sent out this email and it was like having ten life preservers thrown back in my direction.”

Embedded in the preceding teachers’ sentiments is the idea that through their NTI new teachers found their first real professional community. The openness and constancy of the NTI group structure, in whatever form it took, allowed the new teachers to form bonds with colleagues which in turn nourished them. They turned to their NTI group, for comfort and sustenance, but also for a sense of stability the regular personal interactions offered.

Most of the NTI participants had not yet found another setting in their schools or districts which offered this kind of support. At first we were somewhat surprised by this. The groups rarely met more than once a month, the summer institutes were abbreviated, and the online communication was sometimes intermittent. But, we realized, in contrast to the world of change and flux they experienced in their schools and districts, new teachers were reassured by the fact that they could count on their NTI.

- **In NTI novices benefited from positive personal and professional interactions with veteran teachers**

An important aspect of the concept of NTI as a “home base” was that it was shared with veteran teachers. For the beginning teachers positive interactions with more experienced counterparts often occurred for the first time in an NTI setting. Surprisingly but not uncommonly, novice teachers had few relationships with seasoned teachers in their own schools. The veterans were either wary of developing bonds with beginners whom they suspected might soon leave the school, or were so busy themselves they had little time to offer advice. New teachers told us they were often ignored by veterans, or more rarely treated unkindly, and this contributed to the isolation and stigma that they typically felt as newcomers.

In contrast, NTI programs deliberately brought new teachers and veterans together, aiming to create a positive context for developing supportive relationships among fellow practitioners. A teacher from Southern Nevada compared her previous experiences with meetings of novices and veterans to those of NTI:

[Prior to this experience] everyone else was so negative and so miserable in their profession and so I was a little skeptical about going and I wasn't sure what I would have to offer as a new teacher. But I went and these wonderful English teachers were there, just all sharing and collaborating and I just felt so good about myself. We would write and we would share our writing and it was all in an efficient way... it wasn't just a big session where everyone was complaining. It was just really, 'How can we be successful as teachers and how can we have that success for our students and still be energetic and happy about what we are doing?' ... There isn't one meeting that I have been to that I haven't walked away just feeling like a better person, like I am doing the right thing, and if I am not doing the right thing, I know where to go to get help and just someone even to listen.

This Las Vegas teacher expressed what many other novices articulated to us: admiration for veteran teachers with years of accumulated experience and expertise, willing to share freely. The relationships they had with these veterans were very positive for several reasons. First, the veterans who were NWP Teacher Consultants (TCs) had immediate credibility with the new teachers because they were most often employees in the same district or even school. Novices and veterans alike taught the same students and worked under similar conditions. Secondly, TCs had honed their writing practice over time, developing teaching repertoires which worked with the kinds of students both they and the novices taught. And finally and perhaps most importantly, the TCs had been tapped to lead the NTI programs because they were not only skilled in sharing their expertise, but also wanted to share it with other teachers, especially new teachers.

A good example of how rich personal and professional relationships developed among veterans and novices comes from the NYCWP NTI site. Beginning teachers who joined NTI in New York became part of a heterogeneous community through the NTI listserv. Through electronic postings, NTI participants raised questions, observations and issues to which fellow listserv members, including long-time Teacher Consultants, responded. Veterans posted their ideas and queries on the listserv just as their newer counterparts did. In one strand of dialogue teachers discussed their concerns about their own efficacy. In response to a TC's assurance that she had faced many challenges in her career too, one second-year teacher wrote to the group:

I think one of the hardest things about being a new teacher is when you see a “master” teacher working with students you think ‘oh will I EVER get there?’ Or worse ‘I could never do that.’ It is heartening to hear that everyone has gone through some pretty tough times, especially in the beginning.

As this online conversation continued, a first-year teacher shared her particular struggles with management issues. She weighed the prospect of observing a master teacher deal with classroom management and decided against it, suspecting “they do not have discipline problems in their classrooms.” Rather, she surmised, it would be more beneficial to “observe a teacher who struggles with classroom management...” In response, one TC agreed with the challenges posed by looking to a seasoned teacher but gently suggested its potential benefits:

You can learn how the teacher structures the lesson. Is there room for fooling around? How are the students engaged in the learning? How are reading and/or writing activities implemented? Does this make a difference? What happens when students are placed in groups? Does the teacher instruct orally and then send them off to work or are there protocols that are followed? Does the teacher use particular activities to focus or settle students?

The veteran went on to compliment the novice who posted the question:

I think it is so wise that you know to watch others do their ‘craft.’ We can learn so much by just watching and listening. And then there’s the companion of discussions, sharing struggles, getting advice, and just learning that every day may hold yet another surprise. But I swear it gets better over time. It did for me.

This interchange from the listserv illustrates the promise of the experienced teacher-newcomer relationship. The TC simultaneously validated the beginning teacher’s experience, offered her a new perspective, and suggested alternatives for her to consider. The exchange also shows how a successful mentor-mentee relationship involves modeling and practicing the skills of analysis and reflection focused on classroom practice.

Finally, we see in this sample interchange a good example of how the veteran-novice relationships embodied “teachers teaching teachers,” one of the core principles of the National Writing Project. Through “teachers teaching teachers” the NTI programs helped participants with their most basic needs. By helping participants acquire rudimentary skills and information, and by providing them a “family” and “home, NTI helped new teachers weather the first difficult steps of their careers.

The NTI Supported and Developed Teachers’ and Students’ Writing

The NTI is a new teacher support program that is centered around a particular discipline. The initiative aims to help new teachers by engaging them in the practice and teaching of writing. This is unusual in the national field of new teacher support work. We know of only one other, much smaller new teacher support project that is discipline-specific.³

At the beginning of the New Teacher Initiative we were not clear how the focus on teaching writing would relate to the more general support of new teachers, or just how these two apparently separate strands of endeavor would interact. As we observed the NTI programs

³ The Teacher Institute at the Exploratorium, through funding from the National Science Foundation, currently sponsors a program where veteran high school science teachers and novices partner, attend professional development sessions together, and then collaborate in their home school settings.

develop we saw that the new teachers did, as intended, learn new strategies and activities to teach writing. But as they became more involved in their NTI programs – in particular, as they tried out and observed writing teaching strategies in their classrooms, as they discussed with their NTI colleagues what they were thinking about as a result, and as they engaged in the writing process themselves – the new teachers became aware of much broader issues of teaching and learning through the teaching and learning of writing.

In other words, we found that when new teachers' understanding of and experience with the discipline deepened, their overall understanding of teaching was affected. At that point, what we had thought of as the writing strand and a more general support strand became intertwined and less distinguishable. Moreover we saw the NTI producing important outcomes in both broad dimensions.

We discuss these multidimensional outcomes in more detail later in this report. First, however, we will focus in the following section on how the NTI supported the development of teachers' and their students' writing.

- **NTI programs provided new teachers with basic skills and strategies to teach writing**

Teacher preparation programs typically focus their brief time with pre-service students on generic issues of practice, and cannot offer more than a limited introduction to subject matter studies. Once hired, teachers may attend some district or school staff development days on certain areas of the curriculum, but again, in financially-burdened and accountability-driven districts, what curricular training there is for new teachers is usually focused on programs that claim to bolster students' reading and mathematics skills. Writing, not often considered to be integral to reading instruction, frequently gets short shrift, and professional development opportunities for new teachers wanting to become better teachers of writing are rare.

NTI provided a way for new teachers to fill this gap in their professional learning. The NTI leaders taught participants a range of concrete strategies for teaching writing to their students. Importantly, participants almost always experienced the strategies firsthand in NTI sessions. Some of these included quick writes and prompts, ways to tie writing to literature, and the use of atypical genres of writing (e.g., letters, journals, lists, etc.). NTI new teachers told us they found virtually all of these strategies to be high quality, as well as "user-friendly" and practical, and therefore readily translatable to the classroom.

New teachers learned that the approaches advocated by NTI made writing more accessible – first for them and then for their students. The story of an OSUWP NTI participant, who turned to teaching after almost 20 years in engineering, illustrates what we heard from others. He saw his urban high school students struggle with traditional writing assignments, focused on topics not related to their own lives. Inspired by his experience in NTI, he decided to try a different approach and offered his students some alternative ways in to writing, designing more student-centered writing topics and prompts for his classroom. In one instance he asked his students to write a letter to their child thirty years in the future "telling them how proud they were of what they had become." He found the experience eye-opening, for himself and for his students. "It was a safe way for them to project themselves, and the letters were long and heartfelt." This beginning teacher changed a few small aspects of his instruction, but in doing so had provided an entry point for many students, something they had rarely experienced to this point.

NTI new teachers told us they also found the activities and strategies they learned to be of high quality. While teachers liked that they could leave an NTI session with something to use immediately with students, they appreciated that the activities “weren’t just gimmicks.” A teacher from Winthrop NTI found this aspect of his learning to be particularly constructive:

Probably the most beneficial thing about NTI was just learning different strategies, and not just strategies – because sometimes I guess tricks can be just that, cute tricks – but research-based strategies that really worked.

We learned that NTI new teachers like this one became more critical consumers. They began to discern the difference between quality strategies and activities grounded in research and practiced teaching experience that could lead to long-term benefits for students, and the “quick fixes” often promoted in abbreviated professional development offerings.

- **NTI programs helped new teachers to focus on writing in their classrooms when it otherwise might have been neglected**

Even if new teachers are better equipped to teach a subject, it doesn’t necessarily mean it becomes a priority in their classrooms. Faced with many, often conflicting, demands on their instructional time, new (and veteran) teachers typically teach what is pushed most strongly in their district standards and on high-stakes testing. Literacy and basic math skills are generally emphasized in high-need urban districts, so, not surprisingly, writing is often overlooked.

But teachers we interviewed told us that as they learned sound strategies for teaching writing, NTI helped to remind them of the place and significance of writing in the curriculum. And most importantly writing began to occur more and more frequently in their classrooms. As an example this second-year high school teacher spoke about the shift in her classroom:

As a result of NTI I'm wanting to increase students' writing opportunities. Many don't like to read or write. I now use quick-writes daily, and I don't grade them, as a way of getting the students to write [without pressure]. I want to get them in the habit of writing... Another way in is to have them write children's books. I want to get them to do it, to start to see utility in writing. So NTI has increased my writing work with students.

Another beginning social studies teacher from Winthrop WP expanded the role of writing in his teaching when he incorporated multiple media sources into his lessons for the first time:

The project has shown me thousands of different ways to bring writing into the classroom besides saying, 'Here is an essay, write.' For example, when we studied overpopulation or the Kyoto protocol, we brought in photographs or political cartoons dealing with these things and from there we read articles, we talked about it, and then went back to study the political cartoons to see what people were saying. Then students wrote either response papers or created their own political cartoon and wrote letters or arguments about the topic.

An important outcome of the NTI was that new teachers not only used the range of strategies they learned but also used them more frequently. They began to ensure that writing was a regular part of the instructional diet they provided to students, recognizing the potency of highlighting writing, and the downsides associated with neglecting it.

- **NTI programs helped new teachers re-conceptualize their previous ideas about the nature of writing**

As writing gained a greater presence in the novices' classrooms, their understanding of the subject matter of writing gained greater depth. New teachers admitted that in the past they thought teaching writing meant simply teaching grammar and sentence structure. As we listened to what new teachers told us about how their ideas about writing evolved, we discovered a highly nuanced set of changes in their conceptualization of the nature of writing. First of all, because new teachers had learned to see writing as a richer, more complex subject, they were able to recast their writing assignments with greater purposefulness. Whereas in the past they had viewed writing as a time-filling exercise without much regard for learning goals, the NTI experience helped them revise their lesson plans.

A first-year science teacher from the OSU site had just this experience. Prior to attending NTI, he posted a "famous quote" in his room each morning and asked students to record their thoughts about it. He told us that he created this exercise to fulfill an expectation in his school that students complete "bell work" – an activity intended to keep students busy before the bell that rang the beginning of actual instructional time. He graded his students simply on the level of their participation in the task, overlooking any of its value as a writing activity. During NTI his perceptions changed; he saw that by focusing on the writing he could make the activity a worthwhile one. He said, "...I will do it [now] for the writing. Writing is a dying art form. It is an important subject. And if students learn to express themselves, [the daily practice] will improve their reading and verbal skills."

Secondly, many teachers had not understood the value of personal writing. Rarely had they given their students an opportunity to write themselves, and if they did it was primarily within a prescribed framework, for example, answering reading comprehension questions. NTI changed that for many of the teachers with whom we spoke. One NYCWP second-year high school teacher modified her thinking about the discipline in her 9th grade English class:

I am now less afraid to have students just write. Before I was very English teacher-like. I learned from NTI about low stakes writing versus high stakes writing, and the value that low stakes writing, like writing letters and keeping journals, can have. It's loosened me up a lot to write in English class.

Finally, especially at the elementary level, novices did not imagine that the literacy skills they were required to teach might include writing. However, as the novices acquired a deeper understanding of writing through their NTI experience they began to see "literacy" more broadly and holistically. They began to understand that it was important to teach their students a set of language capacities, including the ability to read *and* write. As one teacher from the Greater Houston site who had been teaching reading but not writing noted, "The program helped me survive as a teacher of the English language, of reading and writing combined together."

Thus as the NTI participants learned about and utilized process-oriented writing the experience broadened their thinking about what writing is and what it can do. An important outcome of the NTI was that their conceptualization of writing expanded. New teachers began to see they could teach writing in a different way, and that students could benefit as a result. They told us they saw that writing could support students' learning in all areas. They even began to see writing as an important vehicle for promoting students' thinking.

- **NTI programs helped new teachers learn to connect writing to a range of other disciplines**

The NTI participants were new teachers of math, science and technology as well as English/language arts instructors or elementary generalists. In many cases, their NTI work helped them see how writing could be used in various disciplines as well, and saw how writing could uncover and deepen students' content knowledge. One science teacher from DCAWP told us she focused much more attention on her science labs because of the opportunity it posed for students to write about what they were learning. A math teacher from OSU, accustomed to asking students to complete 70 problems at their desks, began to ask students to do fewer problems but to explain their mathematical thinking in writing. The social studies teacher from Winthrop quoted earlier told us the more he integrated writing into the historical analysis he wanted students to do, the more value he saw in what it could do for students' conceptual understanding.

This teacher and other non-English/language arts teachers were initially surprised by the prominent role writing could play in their instruction. But they became converts, and hence vocal supporters of the frequent use of writing in their lessons. In fact the Winthrop teacher said soon he became "the writing guy for social studies" in his school. In that role he found himself encouraging fellow "content teachers" to utilize more writing as well. His message to colleagues was, "We really shouldn't be afraid of assigning writing."

- **NTI taught new teachers the pedagogical content knowledge of writing**

An outcome of the NTI was that participants began to understand the complexity not only of writing but of teaching writing. The way the new teachers expressed this to us was by describing how their initiative experiences helped them make sense of the terminology, approaches and even educational jargon that are used readily in schools and districts, but that are rarely unpacked and made understandable to novices. Teachers are expected to teach such things as "vocabulary," "fluency," "revision" or "essay" for example, but what are those things really? And how does one go about teaching them to students?

A New York novice described her own experience of trying to teach others to write and how NTI helped her approach that complex task:

The teaching of writing is such a tough idea. You know how to write yourself, but how do you explain it and how do you break it down for students more completely? The actual classes that I have taken are just so irrelevant to what I am doing in my classroom every day, but then I hear about this Writing Project where you can teach me how to break down a paragraph for my students. Really, how do you do that? But it was great. Everything that was thrown on the table, I considered. I never knew that teaching someone how to write would be so difficult, but that there are so many different ways that you can go about it.

Just as teachers learn to teach writing, not just assign writing to their students, so did the NTI leaders teach the novices how to teach writing, not just tell them how to do it. In other words, the NTI leaders taught participants the pedagogical content knowledge of writing. They taught the new teachers the special language of writing, the deep and layered meanings of that language, and, most importantly, how to enact that language in practice.

For example, many new teachers told us they had considered the use of journals in their classrooms, and some had even tried using them. But through their NTI experiences they

gained a much deeper understanding of what it takes to get students invested in thoughtful journal writing, and of how a journal might be an integral part of a writing program. They testified that they would approach using journals with their students quite differently in the future.

In another example, the NYCWP NTI new teachers engaged in a lengthy listserv conversation (with each other and Teacher Consultants) about the utility and validity of “teaching” students vocabulary words. One teacher began his query with the entry:

I feel on the fence about vocabulary instruction. I was reprimanded last year for including traditional vocabulary (10 words on Monday to look up and learn for Friday). Though I understand the district's stance on teaching vocabulary in context, I see many high functioning high schools involved in intensive vocabulary instruction (word origin, prefixes, etc.). Do my students miss out on this?

I feel many of them are in early stages of reading and writing. Where vocabulary can aid in this, it can also turn many off. Where I am seeing one student write out his first poem, I have another student in the same class pulling out a photo-copied packet of words to know for the PSAT.

His listserv colleagues responded to his dilemma with various ideas about how they handled vocabulary learning in their classrooms. In the process, participants began to dissect the pedagogy of acquiring new words, in and out of context, and how that played a role in their high school students' literacy. One of the Teacher Consultants asked, “Do you find that students use the words they have been quizzed on in their writing and speaking? How do you teach the words before you quiz the students? And how do they study for quizzes?” The online conversation offered an opportunity for all participants to reflect on and expand their own knowledge about this aspect of literacy.

As still another example, a participant in the Boston NTI spoke eloquently about how participation in her NTI program helped her give meaning to “editing and revising” with a classroom of new students. Through action research in her classroom she uncovered more nuanced understanding of these terms and other aspects of writing – both for herself and her students:

When I started teaching 5th grade, I realized that these kids really had no idea what I meant when I said 'editing and revising' and they couldn't connect those words with their writing. That is where I focused my research and it allowed me to really question what I was doing with the kids: were the writing activities that I was doing with the kids beneficial? Were they really helping them to become better writers, or was it just sort of covering what I needed to cover?

I think that I helped to teach them the language of writing. I think that when you are writing or when you are discussing writing, you use a separate or different language than you would in your every-day speech. We talked a lot about the different traits of writing. We talked about what it means to have voice in your writing, what it means to have sentence fluency, and what it means to have a piece of writing that is organized. Teaching them the language to use to be able to discuss the writing was very beneficial. I would say out of anything, I think that was one of the most important things. I did lots of mini-lessons and one mini-lesson that I can remember was on varying their sentence beginning, because I noticed a lot of them started their sentences with the same words or phrases. So teaching them the language of 'vary your sentence beginnings' instead of just saying, 'you are repeating your same words.' It is like teaching them another language. Not only do I know and understand that language a little better now, I think I can apply it in my teaching a little better.

At the strongest NTI sites an important outcome was that the new teacher participants began to acquire a body of pedagogical content knowledge, and with it, a much deeper comprehension of

the discipline itself. They were then able to apply their more sophisticated understandings of writing to their classroom teaching.

- **NTI programs helped participants and their students meet with authentic successes in writing**

Having a stronger, deeper grasp of the discipline, giving writing a higher priority in their classrooms, and linking it to other subject areas all converged to one important effect. The NTI teachers told us they were better, more confident teachers of writing and as a result their students' writing improved.

Most teachers reported that their students did not like writing before they started introducing NTI strategies in their classrooms. That tended to change as they experienced writing differently. One NYCWP NTI teacher saw this occur when teaching her students poetry. She was nervous as she strayed slightly from the course curriculum and she wasn't sure students would engage in writing haiku. But she was pleasantly surprised. As is evident from her posting on the NTI listserv, she experienced the boost that comes from having taught a successful lesson:

The kids loved it... they read, they wrote, they spoke and they listened! All of the skills covered, plus they learned a little something and left my room in great spirits. The next day they asked me if we could do poetry again... Can you believe it? They're asking for the opportunity to write.

More broadly, NTI teachers began to see how successful writing experiences could affect all aspects of their students' lives. Students who were given the opportunity to write in alternative, less traditional formats often felt their "voices were heard." They found writing as self-expression to be empowering. And as students became engaged in writing and contributed to the classroom, the new teachers found that negative behavior diminished, and classroom management issues improved.

A Third Coast new teacher at a writing magnet school saw this occur in her own classroom after she implemented some approaches she learned at NTI. At her school she told us, "We focus a lot on the grammar aspect or other mechanics of writing. When we do writer's workshop, it is basically more of a structured thing. We have things that we have to teach, as opposed to just letting it be just writing, just expression, just kind of a release." She went on to say how different writing had become in her classroom, and the impact the change had on her students:

Now students are able to sit down and write a letter to dad in jail, or write how frustrating it is for them to have to take care of a brother and sister, or how tired they are because they have been up all night long. Students are able to generate their ideas in a positive way as opposed to acting out. They are actually able to express themselves in my classroom. I now have kids coming to me and saying 'Instead of going outside, can I come in during my lunch time to journal?'

This teacher's classroom experience mirrored many other reports we heard. As the novices and their students met with successes in writing, they were motivated to write even more, setting up a positive feedback cycle that promised a central position for writing in the future of their classrooms.

- **NTI programs enabled participants to experience writing themselves allowing them to support their students as writers**

The phenomenon of “more writing begets better writing” occurred for the new teachers as well as for their students. The NTI teachers we interviewed looked back on their writing experiences prior to the NTI with a bit of chagrin, noting that while they “talked the talk” with students they didn’t “walk the walk” regarding their own writing. Few actually had the interest or took the time to write themselves, and if they did it was only in “traditional” formats. In contrast, NTI programs challenged these new teachers to write for themselves. As a result, an important outcome of many of the NTI programs was that new teachers experienced writing by actually becoming writers.

A teacher from Greater Houston described the personal experience of finding her voice as a writer:

They said you can't teach writing unless you can experience that writer inside of you. Because of the NTI, I have now found my voice and now say, 'I am going to write this the way I want to write it and how I want it to sound.' [Writing this way] has made me more brave... It is a risk, but I am going to take a risk because if I write the five-paragraph formula essay I am not writing fully. When I just write with feeling and gusto, it works.

We learned from the NTI Site Coordinators that the expectation in every one of the NTI programs was that participants write. Some leaders required that teachers keep their own professional journals and write two entries per week. Some asked teachers to submit a piece of writing to “publish” by the session’s end. As new teachers wrote for the first time, or returned to the act of writing (or publishing) after a long hiatus, they gained empathy for their students. Like them they had to face a blank page, or find just the right word to express a thought, or face the anxiety that arises when sharing one’s work with others. Novices told us that through their firsthand experience of writing they became better teachers of writing, more able to encourage the writer in each of their students.

Many of the new teachers shared their own writing with their students. In revealing to their students that they were writers too, the teachers found that students were more inclined to take on the role of authorship. A teacher from Southern Nevada NTI saw the direct link between her own writing and that of her students:

Before this experience I would give my students an assignment and say, 'Okay, go to it!' Then there would just be one behavior problem after another. But after going through the Writing Project with them, I just started writing with my students. I started getting an idea of how to take them through their writing and through the writing traits, and it has been a phenomenal experience... It was just great to show them my own writing. I never really had done that before and I think that it helped them get it and it made them invested in what they were doing because I was sharing with them. I got some really emotional pieces, not that I was wanting them to pour out their hearts on paper, but I think that sometimes as writers, that is an effective way to write, something you feel strongly about, especially a personal experience.

Perhaps most importantly, the novice teachers’ own writing proved to be transformative in many ways. They saw that by providing students with the same opportunities, their students’ writing experiences could be profound as well. One teacher from the OSU NTI reported his delight in witnessing students find the same value in the process of writing as he had:

Toward the end of the school year I tried out some of the ideas I learned at the NTI sessions... the results were wonderful. Not only did I learn a lot from doing that, I learned a lot about my students too. It was through the NTI I realized the value of making it own-able by the students. They owned their work, and then they related to it on a personal level and what a difference it made.

By insisting that new teachers engage in the discipline and experience the process for themselves, not just hear about it, the NTI gave new teachers a powerful learning experience that affected their relationship with writing and with their students as writers. It is a central tenet of the National Writing Project that “everyone can and should learn to write.” Writing is important for self-expression, and for finding a voice, but also because it is through writing that we learn because writing demands reflection, problem solving and critical thinking.⁴ Thus through experiencing the importance of writing directly, the new teachers were more motivated and better equipped to ensure that their students learned to write.

The NTI Benefited New Teachers’ Professional and Intellectual Life

As we have already mentioned, our interviews revealed new teachers becoming aware of much broader issues of teaching and learning through the teaching and learning of writing they encountered in their NTI programs. An important outcome of the NTI was the influence it had on new teachers’ overall growth and development.

Participants told us that in NTI they gained insight into their teaching and teaching career in a way they had not expected. The NTI programs became learning communities, forums where the novice and veteran teacher participants could share and develop knowledge collaboratively. Being part of this kind of intellectual, social milieu began to shape the way the new teachers thought of themselves. They began to think of themselves as professionals, contributing to and sustained by the network of other teachers of which they had become a part. In the following section we will focus on how the NTI programs supported new teachers more broadly in their professional and intellectual life.

- **NTI programs helped new teachers to see and use writing as a reflective tool**

NTI teachers began to understand that what they learned about writing in the New Teacher Initiative was not only useful for themselves and for their students as writers, but also for their teaching practice. Many of the NTI programs asked novices to reflect, through conversations and discussions with their peers, but also through writing, on what they were doing in their classrooms. They wrote to particular prompts and questions either in workshop settings or on a listserv. They were asked to write about books they had read to their students, about successful or unsuccessful lessons, about the way they set up their classrooms. All of these activities aimed to promote processes of observation and reflection, and for many the experience of surfacing ideas, questions and realizations about their work through the act of writing was revealing.

A teacher from Third Coast described it this way:

After my first meeting, I found out that NTI was more of an opportunity for me to journal, to write and learn basically about how I teach. I have been able to pull ideas from myself and to see what I can change to help the students in my classroom based on what I am already doing, and also how I can

⁴ National Writing Project, Carl Nagin, *Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

enhance that. It has basically given me an opportunity to sit down and write, just to take observations or to jot down notes or ideas that I get in my head while I am teaching. When I have the teachable moments, I can write that stuff down so I can implement that to improve my teaching. I thought it would be more the program leaders telling me how to teach writing, but really it has taught me how to write myself and how to take the time to sit back, take notes based on the observations that I see from students and kind of learn from them.

This teacher and others learned the value of writing as a tool for seeing with a critical or observer's eye what one is thinking or doing. The above teacher's explanation of being able to "pull ideas from myself" is a powerful image. Her writing surfaced her own thinking for herself, allowing her to examine it more deeply. Many teachers had similar experiences, telling us that in NTI writing was "like having a conversation," talking through a classroom issue or complex situation, but with oneself. The added benefit was that the conversation and thought process was recorded and could be revisited.

An OSU science teacher who participated in the NTI serves as another example of how the novices learned to use writing for reflection. Soon into his first year he started regularly writing about his lessons and students' reactions to them. He kept all of his writing in a big binder, calling it "a running, living document" which allowed him to continually review his earlier thoughts and actions. He told us that rereading what he had written was as important as writing it. He said of the binder, "I use it to organize my thinking." He realized what so many of his NTI colleagues had as well, namely that reflective writing helped articulate what had happened and what to do next. In this way an important outcome of the NTI was that NTI teachers learned to use writing reflection as a technology for improving their practice.

- **NTI programs helped some new teachers use writing to infuse inquiry into their own practice**

At the NTI sites where participants engaged in reflective writing most frequently, NTI leaders supported novices in adopting a reflective or inquiry stance toward their teaching. Many NTI teachers remarked that by questioning their teaching and then writing about it, they gained not only insight in hindsight, but also greater confidence to make better informed decisions about changing their current practice. Using writing as a tool for reflection led naturally toward developing a more reflective overall approach to the work of teaching.

Many teachers simply developed the habit of more careful observation of their classrooms, a practice suggested by several NTI programs. This Third Coast teacher relished the chance to study her classroom dynamics:

I think what has been very helpful to me is the opportunity to sit back in my classroom, without guilt, with a notebook and a pen, saying to myself, 'I don't care who walks in, because I am helping my students. I am helping myself because I am [taking notes on my observations] and observation is [the source of] vital information for the growth of my students and for myself.'

Some new teachers became involved in more formal inquiry in the context of NTI teacher research courses. The Third Coast Writing Project, for example, developed an action research course as a key component of its NTI program. For the one participant the experience led her to distinguish between teaching on "autopilot" and teaching with an inquiry stance. She said,

I think that as you teach, and not that I have been teaching for a long time, I think you begin to realize that what you are given to teach is just something to cover and it is not always quality and not that it is not good, but it is 'this is what the kids need to know and by the end of the year, you need to make

sure you covered this.’ I think with action research, it is not about covering something, it is about actually diving into an area where you think the kids need improvement or you need improvement or whatever it may be. I think that it produces a higher quality of work and I think it produces a higher level of learners and goes beyond ‘this is what the district gave me to teach, I am just going to teach it and open your book to page 465 and find the adverb.’ Just because they can find an adverb doesn’t really tell me that they have learned anything. Action research provides a high level of learners and it creates more critical thinkers in the classroom – not only the students, but myself. I think that anybody who can look at themselves and give themselves constructive criticism, I think that is far more beneficial than just saying ‘yep, I covered everything.’

Another Third Coast NTI participant found that doing teacher research established a standard for her present and future practice:

I think it is going to set up habits for me for every year that I teach. I would love to think that I wouldn’t be able to teach without doing research, because they are so complementary and set up a really positive dynamic. Working this way keeps your ear to the ground, to the research, to the journals, to colleagues and to the professional development, and that sometimes gets lost during a teaching career.

Whether through simple modeling of reflective, inquiring “teacher talk,” or through promoting reflective writing, or by offering more structured inquiry and research activities, the NTI experiences influenced many of the new teachers to adopt an inquiry perspective on their beginning classroom teaching practice. Most importantly many of the beginners saw their “new” way of looking at things as the foundation of good teaching.

- **NTI programs provided a professional learning community that supported novices in reflecting on and improving their own teaching**

In the strongest programs the NTI became a professional home for beginning teachers. Within the landscape of large bureaucratic districts, in addition to offering an emotionally supportive community where the novices found solace and refuge, several of the NTIs also offered an intellectually supportive one, where the beginners received stimulation and developed their identity as thoughtful professionals. The following quote from a NYCWP NTI teacher in her listserv posting to colleagues represents the sentiments of other new teachers about their “professional home:”

I was really happy when I received the first email after our break. I didn’t really realize how much I missed this experience and how much I value it until it was missing and I found it again. I have been thinking about how I have friends outside of the city that I talk to frequently about teaching, but these days whether it’s good or bad I want to share it on the listserv. I am a bit surprised because I have never been a big fan of email so I didn’t know whether this experience would work for me.

One feature of this teacher’s NTI communication is especially pertinent to how the NTIs achieved real professional community. In NTI she engaged in group conversation, as a member of a community, rather than as an individual in a one-on-one dialogue. In the NWP culture of “teachers teaching teachers,” teachers gain mutual benefit from their relationships with one another in a way that cannot happen alone. Even in their abbreviated formats, the NTI programs tried to replicate the “teachers teaching teachers” dynamic for novices. They wanted participants to see teaching (and learning) not as an activity occurring in isolation, but rather as a collaborative, iterative process that occurs in interaction with a diverse group of others.

One Third Coast teacher described the two facets of the peer group experience this way:

The group collaboration and knowing that you have camaraderie and colleagues out there, other than just in your building, that was validating. Also it was important to realize that there are other people out there supporting you professionally; that's validating too. I think as a new teacher, or maybe as a teacher period, it is very easy to get lost in your own little world of planning and grading and all of these things. So to know that you have that professional support and someone who is really developing you professionally – caring about what you are working on, caring about what you are reading and what you are learning as you go – that has definitely been the best thing for me.

We found this new teacher's experience repeated in many other NTI settings. Thus an important outcome of the NTI programs was that new teachers were given the opportunity to make sense of their own practice and teaching, through participation in a professional community and to define themselves through belonging to it.

- **NTI programs offered novices potential membership in a larger educational network**

While the NTI experience was often intense and productive for the new teachers, it was almost always brief. Only a few new teachers participated in their programs for more than one year's session. From its inception NTI leaders envisioned involvement in the program as a teacher's first step leading toward increasing familiarity with a philosophy of education grounded in standards-based teaching practices and NWP core principles. The NTI was viewed as an introduction and an invitation to join the larger NWP site community.

Inquiry and reflection, and the notion of community are National Writing Project values and practices that were expressed in the NTI work. Indigenous to and deeply embedded in Writing Project culture, it was these values and practices that made the difference to the new teachers we interviewed, in their eyes transforming their chosen career from a mere job to a life-long profession that was worth pursuing. Not surprisingly, most of the new teachers we interviewed were eager to step over the threshold from NTI to involvement in their NWP site, hoping to keep up the connection with the professional community they had just entered.

New teachers started attending their NWP site events after "graduating" from their NTI program, and a few participated almost immediately in the invitational institutes. As an example, this third-year teacher attended the Winthrop Writing Project summer institute one year after having participated in NTI.

When I first started teaching I really tried to find my place in education, but I didn't really find that place at first. I hadn't really found my place until NTI and now the Writing Project. With the Writing Project, I found my niche.

His sentiments were echoed by others who had been introduced to their Writing Project site's ongoing work. A new Las Vegas teacher described what it was like participating in site-sponsored events with seasoned TCs:

It is why you go into teaching. You say to yourself, "this is my career, and hopefully I will continue, and will retire in education." I always thought that I was going to, but my early experiences teaching made me think that wouldn't happen. But that all changed with the NTI. So to walk into a Writing Project with professionals, people that you know really care about what they were doing, I felt like I was among my co-workers. They all really cared, and they weren't burned out, and they weren't bitter about what they were doing. And they wanted you to be successful too.

Both of these teachers relished the thought of being members of an ongoing professional network that could sustain them for the rest of their professional lives. A very important outcome of the NTI then, was that it offered new teachers the possibility of long-term involvement in a high-quality learning community. The NTI offered new teachers a very important vision and promise of a fulfilling professional life that is often sadly missing from many educational settings.

PART THREE: SUMMARY THOUGHTS

The conclusion of this report consists of our own thinking about the outcomes of the New Teacher Initiative. We draw on two sources – our own study of the NTI conducted over the first three years of the initiative, and on recent research on what helps new teachers not only remain but also grow in the profession.

As we look back on the growth and evolution of the New Teacher Initiative over the past three years, we are struck by the wide spectrum of benefits accrued to the new teachers, and by how consistently and predictably these benefits appeared across the 18 NTI programs. The breadth and depth of these outcomes allow us to speculate on the long-term benefits of new teachers' participation in the NTI program. We think there are three major areas in which the NTI contributions to beginning teachers hold the potential for career-long influence. First, our study suggests that it is likely that the NTI experience is likely to affect beginning teachers' decision to stay in teaching. Second, it suggests that the NTI has influenced broadly the novices' beginning teaching practice. And finally, we think the NTI experience, so closely linked to the National Writing Project culture, contributed to novice teachers' lasting identity as professional educators.

Participation in NTI Supports Teachers to Stay in Teaching

Teachers new to the profession leave their positions at a dramatic rate, frequently within the first five years, and at a rate higher than that of the student drop-out rate in some districts.⁵ As we noted previously, two reasons teachers cite most often for their early departure are unstable working conditions and inadequate support. The new teachers we interviewed as part of this NTI study corroborated facing both these challenges.

Most schools and districts lack the capacity and resources to offer beginners quality support. While 83% of new teachers participated in some form of induction in 2000 (up from 51% in 1991), the kind and quality of programs they attended varied considerably.⁶ Urban districts typically don't have the money, infrastructure or personnel to offer their increasing numbers of new teachers effective induction. Educational researcher Susan Moore Johnson and others have noted that induction efforts are weakest and retention rates are lowest at low-income schools, so much so that researchers have identified what they call a "support gap." In observing teachers' tendency to migrate from low- to high-income schools over a four-year period, Johnson's study showed that new teachers who stayed in their low-income schools did so because their schools were able to create specific ways to support them in their early years of teaching. Without such supportive induction efforts, teachers found their situations too overwhelming to continue, and left their positions.⁷

⁵ K. Fulton, I. Yoon, and C. Lee (2005) *Induction Into Learning Communities*. Washington DC: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, p.1. Retrieved on August 29, 2005 at

http://www.nctaf.org/documents/nctaf/NCTAF_Induction_Paper_2005.pdf

⁶ *Ibid.*, p 7.

⁷ S.M. Johnson, S.M. Kardos, D. Kauffman, E. Liu, and M.L. Donaldson (2004) The Support Gap: New Teachers' Early Experiences in High-Income and Low-Income Schools. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12 (61) retrieved August 15, 2005 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n61.pdf>

NTI was developed as a modest initiative, and did not ever assume that it could provide full-scale induction to its participants. However, the NTI sites tried to design programs that served broad, both personal and professional, needs of new teachers, reaching beyond the parameters of more traditional modes of induction. They surmised that new teachers, just like their veteran counterparts, needed the support of a professional community of practitioners which would provide both an emotional and intellectual home. The merits of the kind of design for new teacher support the NTI programs aimed to achieve is corroborated by recent research.

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF) article "Induction Into Learning Communities" presents evidence from studies of many induction programs, finding that induction has largely failed new teachers because it has been too narrowly defined. They propose an alternative – "comprehensive induction" – whose primary goal can no longer simply be to increase retention. Instead, comprehensive induction should "be a stage in a continuum of teacher development" and should support teachers beyond their initiation into the profession, assuring their "entry into a learning community."⁸ As we have described, the NTI programs offered just that. Participation in NTI became for many of the participants much more than a singularly focused induction experience. Rather it became an introduction into a complex profession and into a learning community of practitioners. For some of the NTI novices it became a critical part of their own "continuum of teacher development," one that many told us raised the possibility of actually attaining in teaching what they had hoped to have.

For many new teachers that vision still seemed distant. They faced myriad challenges and obstacles on a daily basis, and some few told us they had decided that teaching was not for them. For a much larger number, the desire to remain in the profession, to continue at least another couple of years, was certainly influenced by their NTI experience. We think that an important outcome of the NTI work is that it did positively affect new teachers' decisions to stay in teaching.

Participation in NTI Helps Teachers to Become Thoughtful Practitioners

Sharon Feiman-Nemser's recent article, "From Preparation to Practice: Designing a Continuum to Strengthen and Sustain Teaching," like the NCTAF report, describes a professional learning continuum for teachers, extending from pre-service to induction to the early years of teaching. In introducing the induction phase she writes, "New teachers have two jobs – they have to teach and they have to learn to teach." She pinpoints "constructing a professional practice" as one of the primary tasks of making a successful transition from a pre-service student to a classroom teacher.⁹

"Constructing a professional practice" is a significant part of what teachers did in NTI. Specifically, the NTI exposed novices to the idea of using writing as a tool for reflection in their teaching. They told us NTI helped them to see how they could continually examine and question their thinking and teaching more carefully. Some even adopted the beginnings of an inquiry stance in their teaching. Having learned the skills of reflective teaching, they were inclined to observe, question, and critique themselves, which in turn led to ongoing improvement in their practice. Many new teachers initially thought they were going to learn a few discrete writing strategies.

⁸ K. Fulton, et al., p. 1

⁹ Sharon Feiman-Nemser, "From Preparation to Practice: Designing a Continuum to Strengthen and Sustain Teaching," *Teachers College Record* 103 (6): 1026-27 (2001a)

Milbrey McLaughlin and Joan Talbert in their study for Stanford's Center on Research on the Context of Secondary Teaching noted that this kind of reflective and thoughtful teacher develops best in a community of fellow practitioners. They write, "The path to change in the classroom core lies within and through teachers' professional communities, learning communities which generate knowledge, craft new norms of practice, and sustain participants in their efforts to reflect, examine, experiment and change."¹⁰ As a professional community NTI provided its participants with the strategies and structure in which to grow those skills.

Participation in NTI Helps New Teachers Develop Professional Identity

For novices the other key feature of "learning to teach," according to Feiman-Nemser, involves "forming a professional identity." She proposes that it plays a critical role in strengthening "the beginning teacher's capacity for further growth."¹¹

As we heard repeatedly, the NTI experience helped many teachers to create and develop a professional sense of themselves. In our view, this was perhaps the most unexpected outcome given the parameters of the original initiative. But in a brief timeframe, participants were welcomed and nurtured in a professional home, surrounded by like-minded novices and expert veteran teachers, and encouraged to observe, analyze and share issues of practice. Immersed in such an environment even for a brief time, the newcomers began to cast themselves as professionals as well. They began to define themselves in terms of their NTI experiences, and those terms originated and were embedded in the professional values and beliefs of the National Writing Project.

Moreover, the NTI also served as a formal entry point into the larger NWP professional community. Certainly not all, but many of the new teacher participants in the NTI programs went on to participate in a range of other activities at their National Writing Project site. The most enthusiastic and sophisticated proceeded quickly into an invitational summer institute, or returned to their NTI programs as facilitators, mentors or organizers. Thus in many cases the NTI served as an interface deliberately designed to give new teachers invitation, access and support to engage with the larger NWP.

In their study of the National Writing Project Ann Lieberman and Diane Wood describe the NWP's effort to re-conceptualize "professional identity" by "linking it to professional community."¹² They note that the NWP is fundamentally about "learning what it means to be a learner and understanding in important ways what it means to help others learn." They observe that neither of these can be accomplished unless a culture is established that will "transform how people think of themselves and how they interact with colleagues in a learning community." We certainly observed NTI teachers experiencing both of these mental shifts. They credited NTI with at least part of their "transformation" from seeing themselves as isolated individuals working at a job, to professionals of stature closely linked to a community of fellow practitioners. A significant outcome then of the NTI is that it provided new teachers with an important re-conceptualization not only of themselves but also of the teaching profession, a sustaining vision likely to last.

¹⁰ Milbrey W. McLaughlin and Joan E. Talbert, "Contexts That Matter for Teaching and Learning: Strategic Opportunities for Meeting the Nation's Education Goals." Stanford, CA: Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching, 1993

¹¹ Feiman-Nemser, p.1027

¹² Ann Lieberman and Diane R. Wood, *Inside the National Writing Project: Connecting Network Learning and Classroom Teaching* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2003), p. 31-32