DEEP CHANGES IN CLASSROOM PRACTICE:

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE EFFECTS OF PARTICIPATION IN THE C3WP

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ABSTRACT

The National Writing Project (NWP) received an Investing in Innovation grant in 2012 designed to provide 7-10th grade teachers in high-poverty, low-achieving rural school districts with professional development. The goal of the NWP effort, the College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP), was to enhance teachers' capacity to teach students argument writing aligned with new state standards aimed toward college and career success.

An independent intent-to-treat randomized controlled study conducted by SRI found that the C3WP achieved statistically significant positive results in supporting ELA teachers in changing their classroom practices and improving students' skills in all four attributes of argument writing that were measured: content, structure, stance, and conventions. In particular, C3WP students demonstrated greater proficiency in the quality of reasoning and use of evidence in their writing (Gallagher, at al., 2017).

The evidence of positive impact on student performance in argument writing is a high achievement that merits not only the important recognition it has received, but also a fuller understanding of how the positive impact was realized. The purpose of this paper is to examine through the perspectives and voices of those most integrally and intimately involved, the C3WP participating classroom teachers, how it was actually accomplished. **What** were the changes that teachers made in their classrooms as a result of the C3WP? **How** did the C3WP effect those changes with teachers even in especially challenging rural environments?

Teachers recalling their C3WP experiences described supports that closely mirror the features research identifies as promoting effective professional development: collegial and collective participation, content focus, well-designed instructional components, active learning, and sufficient duration. Moreover, many teachers described the development of their own thinking and classroom instruction, as a result of the C3WP, as lasting change. They talked about changes not only in their classroom practices, but changes in their beliefs about the nature of teaching and the potential of their students. The aim of this paper then is to look "below the water line" of the positive findings about student impacts, and to understand better the unseen but critical factors that contributed to the successes teachers and students enjoyed through the C3WP, as well as the deep changes in teachers' thinking and practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Implemented across 12 NWP sites, the College, Career, and Community Writers Program[1] was successful across 22 rural districts in 10 states, producing positive, statistically significant results on four aspects of participating students' argument writing—content, structure, stance and conventions. For those interested in the design and engineering of professional development and teacher improvement, questions remain. What occurred in the program to produce benefits to students? What changed in classrooms that improved students' argument writing abilities? How did the success actually happen?

Understanding not only the consistency and depth of what changes occurred in teacher thinking and practice, but also how those changes happened is important to answering a key question especially relevant to those interested in educational improvement more broadly: *How to bridge the gap between professional development and classroom practice?* Too often teachers leave high-quality professional experiences with enthusiasm and new knowledge, but when faced with the realities of their schools, classrooms and students find it challenging, and more often impossible, to "translate" what they have learned into changed teaching practices. Their best intentions to make the new ideas happen in their teaching are almost always constrained by lack of time, of content knowledge and of design expertise. In contrast the C3WP was notably effective producing measureable student achievement in argument writing in educational milieus among high needs, rural districts where the teaching of writing was often minimal.

The C3WP experience offered teachers professional development that produced deep change—shifts in the nature of teacher thinking, as well as sustained improvement in instruction—because, as teachers reported, the program incorporated many qualities that converging streams of research report to be most effective.

By deep change we refer to Coburn (2003), who highlights its dual aspect, changes in both teachers' instructional enactments <u>and</u> their beliefs:

> By "deep change," I mean change that goes beyond surface structures or procedures (such as changes in materials, classroom organization, or the addition of specific activities) to alter teachers' beliefs, norms of social interaction, and pedagogical principles as enacted in the curriculum. By teachers' beliefs, I am referring to teachers' underlying assumptions about how students learn, the nature of subject matter, expectations for students, or what constitutes effective instruction. p. 4

The features of the C3WP professional experience that: 1) the teachers we interviewed described as important to them, 2) research cites as conducive to improved classroom

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[1] In the first two years of its inception the C3WP was know as the College Ready Writers Program (CRWP). The teachers we interviewed for this paper participated in that first iteration of the program, and many who we

instruction, and 3) we propose supported the deep nature of change we believe the C3WP effected in best cases, are as follows.

Below we enumerate the features of the C3WP professional experience that the teachers we interviewed described as important and that we propose supported the deep nature of the change in their teaching. What teachers describe aligns with the features shown by research to be conducive to effective change in classroom instruction (e.g., Garet, et al., 2001; Desimone, et al, 2002; Borko, 2004; Darling- Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Desimone, 2009; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007; Desimone & Garet, 2015).

- **collegial and collective participation**
  When teachers work together as colleagues, trying out new curriculum and teaching strategies, making sense of their new ideas and practices, focusing on student performance and work, and supporting one another through the process over time through regular face-to-face meetings and interactions, professional development can take effective hold. Through collaboration teachers can more readily make changes in their classroom instruction, and their students can benefit.

- **content focus**
  When teachers learn content-specific curriculum and instructional strategies, rather than generic principles of teaching improvement, and especially when they learn together, they are able to focus and make sense of new ideas and of how to enact them in their classrooms.

- **well-designed instructional components that are both immediately useable and educative over the long term**
  Research findings indicate that professional development on its own rarely helps teachers make the kinds of shifts that reform advocates envision. Nor does asking teachers to use new curriculum without professional support prove effective (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Rather, for teachers to make the complicated shifts in their practice, especially in the academic core disciplines, there is a better chance if their professional development includes experiences with teaching well-designed curriculum components, especially if the professional development includes not just the use of the curriculum, but also planning its use. A well-designed curriculum can not only provide effective tools for teaching, but over duration help teachers better understand the nature of a particular discipline and the nature of the conceptual development necessary for student mastery (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Davis & Krajcik, 2005).

- **active learning**
  Research also indicates that when professional development is designed to give teacher opportunities to investigate, inquire and actively engage in adopting new curriculum and instructional practices the likelihood of effective change is high. "Active learning" often includes modeling the professional development to reflect the relationship to the

discipline, the discourse, and/or the practices that are the goals of innovation in the classroom.

- **sufficient duration**
It is well-established that short term, one-shot professional development is not effective. In contrast, long-term and content-focused professional development has a greater impact on teachers and their classrooms.

This paper not only relies on, but deliberately showcases what teachers had to say about their experiences in the College, Career, and Community Writers Program—what they viewed as the changes in their classrooms, and how they explained the changes that occurred there.

Moreover, in order to fully explore the underlying causes of the project's success we also add our own thinking. We draw on our 25 years of studying the NWP, as well as many more years observing teachers, classrooms and professional development across the nation to inform our ideas about why the C3WP worked as well as it did. Understanding the nature of the construction, as well as the underpinning values of the key design elements of the C3WP can help others interested in creating ever more effective and productive learning experiences for teachers to improve their own efforts.

Our methodology and research perspective

The data supporting this paper is drawn from four major sources.

1) We conducted in-person and phone interviews with a range of participating Cohort One[2] teachers throughout the first two years of the C3WP.
2) Of special import to this paper were additional interviews we conducted in the spring of 2016 with 18 still actively participating teachers selected by NWP site directors or C3WP coordinators. This sample of teachers can be considered "best case." It was deliberately selected by either NWP site directors, C3WP coordinators or Inverness researchers to create a pool of teachers that had continued to teach argument writing after their first two years of intensive C3WP professional development. We asked these teachers a series of questions about their practice before and after their C3WP experiences. Each interview lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half.
3) We conducted 147 classroom observations in Cohort One classrooms in the first two years of the project. These observations provided important backdrop information to the teacher interviews, giving teachers' testimonials both credence and color.
4) We also conducted roughly 48 observations[3] of various professional development events, ranging from all-day workshops, to one-on-one coaching sessions. Familiarity with the various professional development experiences teachers had enabled us to understand better when teachers cited particular tools, resources or interactions they found useful.

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[2] We refer to the 22 treatment districts as the Cohort One districts.
[3] Together with SRI—both the classroom and PD observations

In our most recent interviews (#2 above) we asked teachers to tell us "pre" and "post" stories about the change they experienced as a result of their two-year involvement in the C3WP. Our view is that firsthand reports from those who actually participated in the C3WP and lived the changes the project produced are an invaluably instructive source of information. We have interrogated, analyzed and portrayed teachers' perspectives in ways to offer a glimpse "inside" the C3WP. Our aim, simply stated, is to report on teachers' own thinking. Their testimonials can best bring to light the invisible story of why the C3WP was successful for them and for their students. Participants' ideas offer illuminative data to a wide audience interested in how successful improvement efforts, such as the C3WP, actually play out, affecting the thinking and practice of real teachers in significant ways.

We deliberately provide many direct quotes drawn from the transcriptions of our conversations with teachers. We have edited them for (more) correct grammar and inserted punctuation. We have occasionally added words or terms that help the reader understand what the interviewee was saying, but teachers' words have been preserved as much as possible to convey a realistic voice.

The teacher interview protocol we used is as follows:[4]

1) Briefly describe your experience with the CRWP. In what activities did you participate and when?
2) Please describe your teaching of writing <u>before</u> your participation in the CRWP. What would have been typical of your classroom? What would I have been likely to see?
3) And an "after" question: What does your teaching of writing look like today, <u>after</u> your CRWP experiences? What would I see in your classroom today, afterwards?
4) We know these "before" and "after" pictures don't happen over night. There's change over time, so with that in mind could you describe some of the key changes or critical moments that happened along your evolution? Select one or two important changes that occurred for you and describe what they were and why they were significant.
5) Thinking back on these key changes or critical shifts what enabled you, what helped you to make them? What supported you? Can you explain why they were these useful and helpful?
6) What were the obstacles, or hurdles, that made it difficult to make these changes? In other words, what were the hard parts for you of making the changes you've described? These could be internal or external or both.
7) What is the future of argument writing in your classroom? What are your plans for your future teaching? Why?
8) Thinking again in a "before and after" mode, can you describe the nature of how you connected, talked, interacted with colleagues in your school or other schools <u>before</u> your CRWP experiences?
9) And how do you connect and interact with them today, <u>after</u> your CRWP experiences?
10) Reflecting back on the whole of your
11) experience, what has been the greatest benefit?

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[4] Note that the protocol uses the term CRWP, rather than the current acronym because the interviews were conducted before the change was made. In addition, teachers' quotes still use the original term for the same reason.

WHAT WERE THE CHANGES?

The C3WP offered teachers tools, resources and a professional milieu to render new teaching—namely, the teaching of argument writing—in immediate, operative and ultimately successful ways. When we asked teachers about the kinds of changes that occurred in their classrooms as a result of their C3WP participation their responses were remarkably similar, consistently falling along roughly seven dimensions of change. However, they spoke in terms of their personal experiences, not in analytical terms. The analysis of the dimensions is ours. In the actual transcripts of the teachers' words, shown in the teacher quotes we use as illustration, the distinctions between the dimensions we have identified for the purposes of this paper bleed naturalistically into one another.

The quantity and the qualities of writing in general changed

In recalling their past, teachers reported that **before** the C3WP they taught very little writing. They said that before their C3WP experiences most of their English Language Arts (ELA) class time was devoted to the teaching of literature and literary analysis. If they taught writing at all, the majority of their focus was most frequently on grammar, syntax and usage, with a reliance on worksheets or workbooks for student drill and practice.

> *Before the CRWP you would have seen me teaching grammar in isolation, assigning writing topics…and you would have seen the kids working in workbooks.*

Of those teachers who remembered teaching some writing before the C3WP, many said that they frequently relied on traditional English assignments, i.e., the 5-paragraph essay, and/or a research paper given to students toward the end of the school year. These teachers told us that they often assigned writing to their students with a minimal amount of direction or instruction.

> *You would have seen a 5-paragraph essay in my class. Every Friday we wrote, or I should say, attempted to write a 5-paragraph essay. And I would grade it, and we just never progressed. It was just…I assigned topics.*

What emerged from these testimonials, but what no teacher told us directly, is that in the absence of formal, current training teachers were forced to rely on their own resources when teaching writing. As a result, their options for providing robust writing instruction were limited—they either taught very little writing, or taught what they themselves had experienced in their own past middle and high school careers.

After their C3WP experiences teachers said that the teaching of writing became an almost daily occurrence in their classrooms. In comparing their memories of their classrooms before and after the C3WP, teachers said the quantity of writing increased greatly. Not only was there <u>more</u> writing, but also there was <u>more variety</u> in the writing. The much greater diversity of

assignments ranged from Writing into the Day, to Quick Writes, to written responses to questions and issues, etc.

> *Volume! We just do so much more writing now. We used to do a research paper and a couple of little writing assignments, but now we write in journals every day. That's become a non-negotiable in my class.*

> *We write a lot even if it is not all argumentative. I would say that there is hardly a thing that we read that we don't write some sort of a reflection on.*

For many teachers an important shift in ELA emphasis also occurred. Writing became front and center in their ELA instruction, instead of literature which had previously predominated in their programs.

> *I structure most of my units more with writing in mind now, instead of the opposite way. Instead of focusing on literature work, the literature fits into the writing.*

The nature of how teachers taught writing changed

In our interviews teachers recollected that **before** the C3WP they taught writing in very traditional ways—by assigning worksheets focused on skills practice, or by assigning topics or questions to which students were expected to respond in writing. Some teachers recalled that they had thought it important and necessary to standing in front of the class to lecture or explain. They also recalled the hard work of grading individual papers and of providing individual feedback to students. And many admitted to teaching writing in ways they had before suspected and afterwards understood to to be un-motivating and ineffective for their students.

Of special note is that in our interviews many teachers used a key phrase common in the National Writing Project community to describe changes in the nature of how they taught writing. Indigenous to NWP thinking and language is the following: *the difference between* _assigning_ *writing and* _teaching_ *writing*. It is likely that this key idea was promoted during the C3WP professional experiences teachers encountered, but as a result, at the time of our interviews, the concept had become integrated into teachers' own vocabulary and way of thinking. They relied on it to explain the change they perceived in how they taught writing.

> *You know there is a saying, you can assign writing or you can teach writing. Prior to my work with CRWP, I was more inclined to assign writing. I would explain to the students what I wanted, and I would give them a detailed assignment sheet, and then I would turn them loose to start writing. In the meantime I would be going around the room trying to give them as much one-on-one help that I was capable of doing. And you can imagine that ran me very ragged. They wanted me to help them, walk them through every paragraph they were writing. It was insane. And exhausting and extremely,*

> *extremely exhausting…I just felt like I was chasing my tail all of the time. I was not getting the results from them that I wanted.*

Teachers reported that *after* their C3WP experiences they understood the difference between assigning writing and teaching writing. What one teacher told us, "Before C3WP I assigned topics, and afterwards I actually taught writing," was echoed by many others. Teachers gave the C3WP credit for teaching them how to teach writing.

An important expansion of the idea of learning how to teach writing was what many teachers reported that after the C3WP, they understood the importance of scaffolding writing for students, of what some called "layering" or breaking down the writing process in manageable chunks for teachers to present and for students to learn. We include the following lengthy quote because it shows well what teachers meant by the difference between teaching and assigning writing, and by scaffolding their instruction. This teacher, just one among many who explained in detail what they did in their classrooms, describes how she teaches writing to her students after her C3WP experiences.

> *…today…with an argument we talk about the topic before we ever get an article, that's to see if students can stir up a little emotion, or see how they felt about a topic. Then we read. I provide every student with their own copy of an article or a set of articles, and we do a close read with the article. We look for key facts in each paragraph, and we look to see what the main idea of each paragraph is. Then the students highlight in the margin, and they write a short sentence or snippet of the main idea of that paragraph. Then they proceed to the main idea of the next paragraph, and so on…So, in summary then we worked through it together…to find our argument and our evidence we often end up more or less with an outline…even if we aren't able to complete that paper, it gives us practice with setting up an argument and finding evidence.*

Although teachers did not tell us directly, we could discern from what they described, like the teacher quoted above, that they were learning to teach writing instead of assign writing. The ways in which they thought about their writing instruction became much more nuanced and multi-dimensional. Testimonials illustrate how teachers' thinking about the nature of teaching writing expanded. For example, one teacher spoke about how her sense of her role and responsibility developed. It became her job, she realized, to construct instruction to enable students to learn, rather than to make assignments and expect students "to get it." Another teacher highlighted "a more tightly focused learning goal," and "teaching… more specific… writing moves" after her C3WP experiences. "Before I would have just said to my class, 'Write a claim,' without any real instruction." And as still another example of teachers' deepening understanding of the nature of teaching writing, one teacher discussed the difference between directing her students to "do" peer editing, with them complying to the form but not the substance of the process, and later, after her C3WP professional development, giving students not only techniques but also genuine responsibility for improving their writing through peer review. This teacher, as others we interviewed, compared what she <u>thought</u> she had been

doing (i.e., peer editing) with what she was <u>actually</u> able to achieve through the changes she made in her classroom as a result of the C3WP.

The quantity and qualities of argument writing changed

Before the C3WP none of the teachers we interviewed recalled teaching argument writing in their classrooms. Several teachers said they didn't even know what argument writing was. Many, as the teacher quoted below, described their writing classes as unfocused and lackluster.

After the C3WP almost all teachers reported teaching some aspect of argument writing. Many of them told us that they made argument writing the center point of their writing instruction, systematically teaching the nature of, the elements of, and tools for argument.

Like the teacher quoted below, several others explained how as their own understandings of argument writing developed and expanded, so did their teaching of argument.

> *… I learned so much more [about argument writing]…there is a difference between persuasive writing and argumentative writing…persuasive writing can manipulate the reader or the audience in some ways, and so there might be a cherry picking of evidence without a consideration of the opposing side and without counter arguments. So, now with my students when we approach argument, we don't pick a topic and then go find evidence to support it. We start with the issue and we explore what the conversation is that is already going on around this issue. We situate ourselves in that conversation and within the body of evidence from all angles and then we decide. Okay now that we have become educated about this issue, what do we think about it? And how do we take into consideration what the other side says and how do we either rebut that or even concede to it? I feel much more confident about allowing students to have that opportunity to explore and change their minds and work their way through a sort of discovery thought process. I also feel like I have so much better tools to use when I am trying to teach them how to effectively use the source material to make an argument…*

Teachers' expectations of their students changed

Before their C3WP experiences teachers told us that often their expectations of their students were low. They did not expect their students to enjoy or engage in writing, or to be willing to write without pushing and prodding. Nor, teachers attested, did they expect their students to be fluent or effective writers.

However, as a result of teaching argument writing using many of the tools and strategies they learned through their participation in the C3WP professional development, teachers told us that their views of what their students could and did write changed dramatically. *After* the C3WP, teachers saw their students engaging in lively debates, responding in writing, building on incremental writing assignments, and learning and using the techniques for argument writing

they were being taught. Teachers began to witness the intellectual accomplishments of their students, and as a result their expectations for them rose to much higher levels.

> *I don't think that I trusted my students enough at the beginning of this process. I didn't give them enough credit. I will trust them a lot more next year to do some of that harder work. That maybe was my own internal worry, that they would fail, but I should have started sooner building some of those skills with them, because they totally can do it. I think this works really well for them. I learned that I could have expected more from them.*

The nature of student-teacher relationships changed

As teachers shifted in their views about the fundamental nature of teaching and what constituted effective teaching of writing, so did their views of their relationship with their students evolve. **Before** the C3WP teachers said they felt they had to be "the sage on the stage," knowing all the answers, directing their students to comply with assignments and tasks.

> *Before the CRWP it was definitely more lecture in my class. I taught writing the way I was taught back in the day. There was a lot more narrative writing and a lot more just plain assignments—"Write me a story!" That was it. No scaffolding, no modeling.*

After the C3WP teachers reported that they realized that teaching involved handing over responsibility to students, that they needn't stand center stage. They explained that with the changing nature of their relationship with students their classrooms became more "alive." They also noted that by actively teaching specific argument writing skills, they were able to give their students more responsibility and autonomy to think for themselves. In response teachers described structuring their classrooms differently, in ways that promoted independent student thinking.

> *Now there is a lot more communication, more flow between the two of us—between the students and myself, and myself and the students.*

> *The classroom now is much more dynamic. We have a lot more conversation about our writing and the students are much more engaged in the writing.*

> *Now my students know what all needs to be included in the writing and they are anxious to make sure that everything is included. They want to make sure that they have the evidence from the text and that they are putting their own spin on it and developing that claim and extending it, not just stating the information, but pushing it further and explaining what that means. It is much more of the responsibility on the students for writing instead of so much me lecturing where it was before.*

Still another testimonial shows how this teacher's instruction moved toward authentic student engagement. She explained how by <u>teaching</u> her students writing, the class moved from "doing something the teacher "told you" to "thinking about why":

> *I now have the terminology to [help students understand the importance of] showing their thinking. It is thinking about why you are doing it and how that is going to work to further your argument, so that's the connection to the thinking part. It is just so much more engaging than just regurgitating information back. It is really taking what you learn and taking it to a new level, doing something and making it your own and having the ownership as a result of that.*

Student attitudes about writing changed

> *Oh no, high school students do not like to write. Before (the CRWP) it was absolutely miserable. Then it was miserable for me and we had a process and they whined, complained and then when I had to grade the papers, I whined and complained. It was just not good.*

Before the C3WP teachers, like the one quoted above, told us that their students disliked writing. Some even said their students "hated" writing. Teachers testified that their students were reluctant and resistant writers.

After the C3WP teachers described how their students' attitudes toward writing became much more positive. Many students realized they not only enjoyed writing, but <u>loved</u> writing.

> *The students are much more engaged. I feel like they are enjoying writing and I can see that growth throughout the year.*

> *In fact some of my students want to write an argument paper every 10 minutes…they are just into it, and they want to do it. My junior class has been through the whole program, so when they had to take their ACT test this last week where they have to write a brief argument they were just great...They know what to do.*

Student writing performance improved

Before the C3WP teachers reported that often their students performed poorly not only on writing assignments, but also on writing tests and assessments.

> *As part of the GED test or the HiSET test there is a writing component where students are asked to write an essay. Before I got involved with the writing project that was one of the areas that my kids would fail, and they would have to retest pretty often. That was the area we just did not do well on. With the Writing Project I actually learned how to teach writing. I have not had a student fail the writing portion of that test since.*

Teachers told us that *after* the C3WP, as students' attitudes and motivations shifted and as their knowledge of argument writing tools and strategies increased, their writing performances improved in multiple ways readily noticeable to their teachers.

> *This year I have actually noticed some changes in the kids' writing and that seems really important to me. That means more to me than the score they are going to make on their standardized test…seeing them actually improve their writing…I am actually noticing a change from the beginning to the end. They are not as reluctant to write because they know what they are doing. They know what I am talking about.*
>
> *…the students know now not just what they are looking for in their own writing, but they can identify what should be in a classmate's writing. By the time I have a final draft, they have written it, a partner has revised it and they have edited it themselves and the final draft is much stronger than what I was seeing in any years past.*
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> *I would say that this year particularly, and this was the year after our students had been two years with teachers who had been in the CRWP, the freshmen that came to me in the fall were the best for incoming freshmen writers that I have seen.*

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In summary, teachers' descriptions of what kinds of changes they witnessed as a result of their C3WP experiences converged on key elements. Teachers saw change in the amount and type of writing they taught. They included argument writing frequently in their instructional repertoire for the very first time. Even more importantly the teachers we interviewed told us that they better understood the nature of teaching writing because of the C3WP professional development and the curricular resources they were given to use in their classrooms. They cited the difference between assigning writing and actually teaching writing, describing in great detail the kinds of instruction they were able to employ successfully with their students after the C3WP. Equally importantly many of the teachers described their changed expectations of and relationships with their students.

These kinds of developments—in particular the shift in teacher thinking about the nature of the discipline of writing and its teaching, coupled with the shift in thinking about the nature of the associations between a teacher and her students—suggest the kinds of "deep change" in teacher beliefs and the teaching actions stemming from those beliefs that Coburn (2003) describes. We heard teachers tell about how their "underlying assumptions about how students learn, the nature of subject matter, expectations for students, or what constitutes effective instruction" (p. 4) evolved through the C3WP.

HOW WERE THE CHANGES EFFECTED?

How did the C3WP bridge the gap between its professional development offerings to actual changes in teachers' instruction? How did argument writing actually begin to take hold? How did the C3WP achieve the "before and after" differences in the teaching of argument writing teachers described above? And how did the C3WP effect the kinds of "deep change" teacher testimonials suggest?

We asked teachers to explain to us how they thought the C3WP worked to produce the changes they experienced in themselves, their classrooms and their students. Again, as with the teachers' explanations of what changes they observed as a result of the C3WP, teachers' testimonials converged around a handful of common ideas. Their analyses about the causes of the C3WP's efficacy were remarkably similar. Moreover, the features of the C3WP they highlighted mirror very closely those current educational research identifies as promoting effective teacher change. We describe them below in roughly the order in which teachers ranked their importance.

Co-implementation

Teachers were not left alone to implement argument writing in their classrooms.

> Our CRWP team is absolutely amazing and they became like family. That in itself gave us the support and the encouragement that we needed. They are so good to us and that made our confidence level grow…we may have been nervous to have them come in and sit in our classroom and see what we were doing, but as soon as you did it once, you realized that they were just here to help you. They were so supportive and they just thought that you were doing such a good job. And they provided real help if we were for example developing a mini-unit and we were struggling, you could just email one of them and they would help you. They'd come in and they talk to you and say 'This is really good,' or "What did you think of this?'

Writing Project sites used a range of strategies depending on their capacity to augment the C3WP professional development, tools and resources teachers were given. Support offerings included classroom visits, co-teaching of lessons, extensive email tutoring and cheerleading, and grade-level meetings at school sites.[5] These were just some of the strategies and techniques C3WP sites created to aid teachers' in their implementation efforts. The net effect was that teachers were not left to fend for themselves after a professional development, not merely given the directive to teach argument writing, but rather that they were deliberately sought out, encouraged and assisted in making changes in their instruction.

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[5] See the C3WP portfolio for our companion paper, "Teacher Leadership As The Scaling Of Teacher Learning," which describes the nature and scope of the teacher leadership development that both supported and was developed by the C3WP. http://inverness-research.org/2017/12/27/portfolio-c3wp/

Two TCs from the site came out and worked with me. That was a great thing. Knowing that I wasn't in this all by myself because they were there to help…I think the supports [were the most important part of her CRWP experience]. I think the fact that I had people to go to and that people came to me. I think that was the key. They took such an interest in me and they always were in contact with me and I still hear [from them]. When they came into my class, and showed me how to do this, and how to deal with my students and got to know the people that I worked with, I think that was the best for me. When you are the only one, you do feel kind of isolated.

The following teacher explained how through active attention and support teachers grew to feel like partners in the C3WP effort, and how the project promoted co-implementation, in contrast to implementation.

CRWP gave us the resources, not just the strategies and stuff, and also the people that connected us. People who were able to guide us and plan with us and talk with us about different issues. And it wasn't a directive, not only 'Oh, you need to do this writing prompt.' Sometimes I think when it is not coming from the teacher level, it can sometimes feel like a threat, but it never really felt like that. It felt very supportive, I think would be the best word. So because of that, then that opened up the avenues for us to be able to co-plan and work together in an environment that felt like we were becoming a cohesive unit versus just 'I teach this and you teach that.'

Collaboration with colleagues

Collaboration with colleagues was also cited by the teachers we interviewed as one of the top key factors contributing to how the C3WP effected changes in their classrooms. In spite of the close proximity of the seven to ten ELA teachers in their small rural schools, almost all reported that working with their colleagues over time was a first—a rare experience, but with the C3WP an immensely valuable one not only for grade level articulation, but also for the mutually beneficial support teachers needed over the course of implementing rigorous new practices. A teacher leader using the C3WP materials in her classroom explained:

The CRWP is not possible without a networked approach to teacher professional development. What I mean by that is a kind of crowd sourcing and collective knowledge building, identifying existing collective teacher knowledge and constructing situations in which that can be leveraged. Bringing teachers together and giving space for them to name what they are doing or to work on something together, it brings people together. It's the network that brings people together, teachers together from around the country in one place or together online. The network was instrumental in laying the ground work for how our site operates together—that is how we collaborate on creating professional development.

C3WP sites used various strategies to promote the kinds of collaborations among participating teachers described above. Professional development was often held in large group formats, including teachers convening together from all the Cohort One participating schools and districts. Or, Writing Project sites fostered grade level or department level meetings and interactions through the visits or presentations of TCs acting as coaches. Collaboration was meaningful because of the commonality of the challenge—argument writing—teachers faced.

> *Everybody was working on some of the same projects, so there was a lot more sharing. For example, we would ask, 'Did this work well?' or if it didn't work well, 'How can we try this differently?' —because we all had a common goal that we were working towards.*

> *The bonds between our department have grown stronger, and you realize what a benefit it was being part of this. We really were able to reap the benefits and see the results because of it, and that brings us closer together. There is a pride aspect involved in that. We really learned a lot and we have had good results and we hope that that continues.*

Instructional resources, tools and strategies

In the second year of the C3WP, the project provided teachers with resources specifically designed to support the teaching of argument writing. The program realized that teachers just learning about the purpose and parameters of argument writing needed actual teaching materials and strategies to use in their classrooms. Too typically professional development provides teachers with sound, often lofty and ambitious ideas and goals. But much less frequently does professional development actually provide teachers with the means for realizing those instructional goals in the classroom. The "translation" from professional development to classroom practice is left up to individual teachers.

In contrast the C3WP tackled this recurring dilemma by rapidly creating and delivering tools and strategies for teaching argument writing to participants. One project coordinator explained:

> *…what I think is a different formulation now with the CRWP is that we have these brilliant mini-units. I recall one of the site directors saying 'I believed that teachers had to change their beliefs before their practices changed, and I am learning that they can change their practice, and the beliefs come later, so that the change in philosophy comes later. So if I were to speculate here…I think giving teachers, the potential TCs, and the established TCs that mini-unit and saying, 'Will you just please try it and see where it fits in your instruction? Think where it fits with what you know about writing and what you know about the writing project, and then come back and let's talk.' They say, 'Wow, I think that worked!' I think that might be the difference because we are not asking them to come up with something on their own, we are kind of giving them a way in [to argument writing] with their mini-units.*

Aimed deliberately on immediate classroom usage, and conveyed via professional development sessions as well as online venues, teachers told us that they found that they really could take what they learned and use it in their classrooms "the next day."

> *The supports, first and foremost, were the materials gathered by the National Writing Project core team. These were instrumental in supporting my immediate application of [argument writing] in my classroom…If those explicit materials were not available, I simply wouldn't have time to bring together similar materials to be able to practice and experiment in my classroom. So that was huge.*

The availability and accessibility of the C3WP resources, tools and strategies were instrumental in what teachers described as learning how to <u>teach</u> writing instead of just <u>assign</u> writing. They served an important dual educative function—as means for <u>teaching teachers</u> how to teach argument writing, and as means for <u>teaching students</u> how to write argument. Embedded within these curricular resources were design features that reflected NWP values and pedagogical practices thereby serving an educative as well as a utilitarian function.[6]

Success with students in the classroom

One of the most motivating aspects of the C3WP experience for teachers was the response of their students. When teachers saw their students interested in and even excited by argument writing, and when they witnessed their students becoming effective argument writers as a result of their instruction, a positive feedback cycle started up. The cycle worked in the following way. Teachers made honest, if tentative steps toward teaching argument writing. In turn, their students responded by actively engaging in the C3WP activities and using the C3WP tools their teachers presented. As a result, teachers were pleased by their students' development and were motivated to keep trying new ideas and to continue teaching argument writing. And the cycle continued.

> *Seeing the successes of the kids was a big 'Ah, ha!' for me. At the end of the first year, we had finished the final argument and we were sharing each other's papers…I had one of my students' papers up on the document camera, and just the quality of the feedback from the kids was, like, 'Wow, you know, I taught the kids something!' They couldn't have done that if I hadn't taught them that. I guess I really did teach them something. And so I have really learned something here and it all kind of came together…I could see that I really was doing something different with my students and they were producing something better than what we had before that.*

C3WP participants told us that the tools and materials they received from the project enabled them to teach argument writing to students who they had previously viewed as reluctant and

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[6] See our companion paper, "Reflecting on the Critical Role of Generative Structures," which explains how the C3WP instructional resources were designed to teach both NWP values and argument writing. http://inverness-research.org/2017/12/27/portfolio-c3wp/

even resistant writers. Though often surprised at their own successes—at the change in their students' attitudes and abilities—teachers reported how deeply influenced they were when they saw their students succeeding with argument writing.

> *What is most important to me is the impact that the CRWP has had on my students. I know it has benefitted them and so that is what is meaningful for me. I know it has made a difference for the kids that I have taught over the past 3 years and for the kids that I will continue to teach. I know that I can equip them better to tackle writing and to feel confident in writing. I think kids want to be taught. Writing is overwhelming to a lot of kids and giving them just some ideas about how to get in there and do it helps them have such confidence… So helping them be successful at it, that has been most important to me.*

Regularity and longevity of the professional experience

When we asked teachers to explain how the C3WP achieved successes with teachers and students, teachers described the importance of the project's longevity and the regularity and constancy of support. Teachers valued the in-depth, growth over time approach of the C3WP.

> *I think it is the continuous practice that the CRWP provided. We constantly were getting support with the professional development and we were constantly being, and I mean pushed in the nicest way, but being pushed to try one more thing, to try another strategy, just to keep going and keep going. So many times in education you get this new idea and you are given a little professional development and then you are supposed to do it on your own. You don't get that support, and so when it bombs, you quit. With CRWP we had that ongoing support until you could really see the results. I think that made the biggest difference.*

According to teachers, the C3WP did not let up. Teachers told us about the value of meeting regularly over two years, or working with the same teacher coach over the school year, or interacting with the same leadership over time, thus building skills and understandings slowly, incrementally and cumulatively.[7]

> *The way that this professional development has happened is totally different from any other professional development that I have seen. The follow-up and practice, and even the sessions just being more interactive. Most professional development people just talk at you and you are supposed to sit there, you sit there and listen and then you go home. But not in CRWP, because of the follow-up in the classrooms and the expectations.*

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[7] "The Role of Educational Improvement Capital in the Success of the National Writing Project's College, Career, and Community Program," found in our C3WP portfolio, explains how the NWP—through the C3WP—was able to offer teachers long-term, long-lasting professional supports. http://inverness-research.org/2017/12/27/portfolio-c3wp/

> *Which is hard! It is hard work for everybody, but I think you have to do some hard work if you want to grow.*

Mandate

C3WP teachers—as part of the NWP agreement with districts—received a stipend for participating in the program, and as such were obliged to fulfill the requirements, i.e., teaching a mini-unit, attending professional development sessions, etc. The directives inherent in the project helped achieve its successful results—teachers had to participate and they had to teach argument writing. However, what is more typically construed as a top down "mandate" in schools and districts was construed within the C3WP culture as a professional agreement, one that teachers, as professionals, were expected to honor.

Those who mentioned the requirements of the C3WP as an element that contributed to how the project succeeded did not speak negatively. Rather, as the teacher cited below, they described a mutually beneficial arrangement.

> *We were given time and paid for time, and it helped us to be able to focus on what we needed to focus on, because if you don't have the time, you can't get stuff done. So that was key.*

Holding up 1) what teachers described as the key components of how the C3WP proved efficacious to 2) what current research describes as the features of effective professional development, we find there is a near perfect match between the two. Of special import is that the teachers we interviewed provided unsolicited feedback on the qualities of the professional experience they experienced with the College, Career, and Community Writers Program. Our questions to them were deliberately open-ended, so that their views are especially significant, revealing the aspects of the C3WP professional development that were most impactful.

As a large body of research indicates that through collaboration, teachers can more readily make changes in their classroom instruction and their students can benefit. A strong community culture often existed in the many small rural schools and districts participating in the C3WP, but a strong professional culture of collaborative teaching was much rarer. Many C3WP participants were the sole ELA teacher at their grade level, many met with their department colleagues infrequently, and many had never experienced professional development focused specifically on their subject matter. In contrast, C3WP professional development sessions were conducted in ways where teachers' voices, experiences and perspectives were solicited and woven throughout the fabric of the professional growth that occurred over time. Teachers were invited to share what they were doing in their classrooms via mini-unit instruction, invited to examine their student work together via the Using Sources Tool, and invited to join in the larger C3WP network via travel to regional and national meetings

and conferences[8]. As a result, almost all C3WP teachers we interviewed spoke highly about the collegial professional culture of the C3WP. Collegiality gave them confidence to try something new and difficult like argument writing, and supported them throughout. Moreover, as they worked in collaboration with one another they began to see the value of modeling their own classrooms on their C3WP work, establishing more egalitarian and cooperative cultures and handing over greater responsibility to their students.

The content focused C3WP effort, aimed at supporting teachers in argument writing instruction, combined with very high-quality instructional materials that proved both utilitarian in the short term, and educative in the long term, also exemplified what research suggests as a key aspect of effective professional development. Teachers attested to the value of having argument writing curricular materials to use in their classrooms. The materials helped them teach argument writing immediately, the materials "spoke" to their students and enabled them to begin to write argument effectively, and in the long run, the materials taught the teachers about the nature of writing, teaching writing, and teaching argument.

In addition, educational research cites the value of active learning as a feature of effective professional development. In this case too, C3WP teachers described how during their C3WP experiences they were actively, often rigorously engaged—reading and writing themselves, sharing what they were doing in their classrooms, examining student work, etc. Finally, again echoing what researchers cite as effective professional development practice, teachers described the benefits of the two-year long duration of the C3WP. It was not a one-shot professional development event, but rather an extended experience during which teachers had multiple opportunities to learn, experiment, revise and refine their practice of teaching argument writing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Educational researchers collect data for multiple purposes. Our qualitative study has produced data for the purpose of a fuller understanding of the success of the C3WP, data of special interest to those vested in educational improvement: funders, designers and providers of professional development, school administrators and classroom teachers. These audiences are eager to know more explicitly what changes occurred in C3WP classrooms and how those changes were effected. Therefore, we deliberately sought out a data source most likely to shed light on the inner workings of the program—the teacher participants.

Our aim was to reveal aspects of the program's efficacy that could be uncovered only by those most directly involved. We deliberately showcased teachers' own words, relying on their testimonials as those most intimately engaged in the program, to illuminate and explicate to outsiders how the C3WP actually played out. The vast majority of the teachers we interviewed

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[8] See our companion paper, "Serving Colleagues and Connecting Professionals," for an in-depth look at the design of the C3WP and why it worked for isolated rural teachers.

converged around the key ideas we have described. From their "on the ground" perspectives we learned about **what** changes occurred in teachers' classrooms, and we learned teachers' explications of **how** those changes occurred. Strikingly, what teachers related closely duplicated what research describes as best practices in professional development design. Teachers explained the value of working collaboratively with one another, of the specific focus on argument writing, of the curricular resources and materials made available to them, and of the active, long-term nature of the C3WP professional experience.

Additionally, because of the quality and qualities of the C3WP described by teachers, we have evidence to suggest that the changes in their classrooms, in their instructional practices, and in their own thinking is likely to be the "deep change" Coburn (2003) describes. Although the teachers we interviewed did in fact use new materials, often reconfiguring the organization of their classrooms and adding many new activities to their daily instruction, they also made fundamental changes in the way they viewed the nature of teaching, the nature of writing, and the way students learn. Because of these "deep changes" within individuals we hypothesize that the C3WP enabled a sample of best-case teachers to deconstruct and reconstruct teaching practices, and to internalize new perspectives, thereby carrying change within themselves into future time and contexts.

Finally, we have had two main goals throughout this study. First and foremost, our aim was to provide data that helps reveal what occurred "below the water line" in the C3WP. Those interested in understanding what really occurred there, and applying those lessons learned to their own work in educational improvement, are a primary audience. A second goal of our study was to elevate the value of teacher testimonials as a rich, instructive data source. What better resource for knowing how a program affected its participants? And what better informants than those who actually enabled the important instructional changes that in turn led to increased student performance in argument writing?

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