

NEW TEACHER INITIATIVE DESIGNS:
A FUNCTION OF
NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT
CORE VALUES
AND
SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

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NEW TEACHER INITIATIVE DESIGNS: A FUNCTION OF NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT CORE VALUES AND SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

PART ONE:

THE INTRODUCTION

This report, “New Teacher Initiative Designs: A Function of National Writing Project Core Values and Supportive Infrastructure,” describes a powerful dialectical process that emerged at each of the 18 New Teacher Initiative (NTI) sites as they planned and implemented their new teacher support programs. From the inception of the initiative and throughout its duration, the process of developing, improving and refining the NTI programs was fueled by two potent entities – the fundamental values to which the National Writing Project adheres, and an infrastructure deliberately designed by the NWP to support effective professional development for new teachers.

Our report provides an analysis of how the recursive and iterative interaction among values, infrastructure, and design occurred in the New Teacher Initiative. We identify the core values that were most instrumental in the design of the NTI programs, describing them from the perspectives of both the NTI site leaders and the new teacher participants. We also identify and explicate the components and strategies of the NWP infrastructure, or modes of work, designed to support the initiative, drawing on testimonials of both the NTI leaders and the participants. Then the report provides a more detailed illustration of how NTI sites, through interactions with elements of the NTI infrastructure, evolved increasingly effective design features for their programs by continually comparing and contrasting their professional development activities and strategies to core NWP values or principles.

We conclude the report with discussions of two propositions. First we posit the idea that as the NTI sites matured and developed a “site-level practice” of new teacher support, their programs offered increasingly high levels of congruence between the core, focal values and the design of their work. Second, we propose that the dynamic relationship among the core values, the infrastructure provided by the NWP and emergent NTI designs was made possible by a high “cultural capacity,” and was responsible for propelling the overall NTI improvement process.

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: Understanding the NTI Designs as a Function of NWP Core Values and Supportive Infrastructure

Drawing on the observations and interviews we conducted during the course of our study of the NTI, we provide a conceptual analysis of how the NWP core values, and how the infrastructure aimed at supporting NTI sites to enact those values played a critical role in the design process

at each of the 18 NTI programs. We illustrate how the dialectic process among values, infrastructure and design played out at several sample sites, driving the learning process and contributing to ongoing improvement of the NTI offerings. We postulate that as the NTI sites achieved greater congruence between the design of their programs and the core values they held, their support for new teachers increased in effectiveness. And we also discuss why we came to believe that the “cultural capacity” of the NWP, of which the core values and the support infrastructure flowed, served as a critical context for the NTI work with new teachers.

Part Three: Summary Thoughts

In the final section of this report we offer summary thoughts about our focal topic.

PART TWO:

UNDERSTANDING THE NTI DESIGNS AS A FUNCTION OF NWP CORE VALUES AND SUPPORTIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

As we studied the New Teacher Initiative, focusing on the work at the Cohort One sites and the programs they launched for new teachers, we had the opportunity to witness a “construction process” from its very beginnings. In developing their new teacher support programs NTI teams, of course, drew on their site’s accumulated experiences of working with veteran teachers, their own individual and personal experiences of new teachers, and, in a few cases, some more formal but still preliminary efforts at the NWP site to target a novice teacher audience. For the most part, however, the NTIs started construction with empty building lots and only rough mental blueprints.

We began to understand that supporting new teachers in complex environments is a “messy business.” Not surprisingly, strategies and models did not emerge neatly or quickly. On the contrary, the NTI site-level teams were faced with unexpected constraints and challenges that appeared in a wide range of dimensions – from highly turbulent district policy and financial environments to their own capacity issues. Not unlike new teachers in the urban schools and classrooms they hoped to support, the NTI teams confronted difficult, unfamiliar contexts and cultures. They tried out “lesson plans” that fell short of what they had hoped. They called on their NWP colleagues and mentors for support, and re-grouped to try again.

In spite of the apparent “messiness” of the development of new teacher support programs across the field of NTI sites, early on we began to observe underlying processes that gave coherency and logic to the New Teacher Initiative. In particular we saw a strong, common dynamic emerge as the NTI sites planned, implemented, and assessed their new teacher support programs. The root source of the dynamic was simple: nested within their home Writing Project sites, each of the 18 NTI programs ultimately sought to reflect NWP cultural values and practices in their support for new teachers. They strove to achieve congruence between their NTI programs and important Writing Project principles.

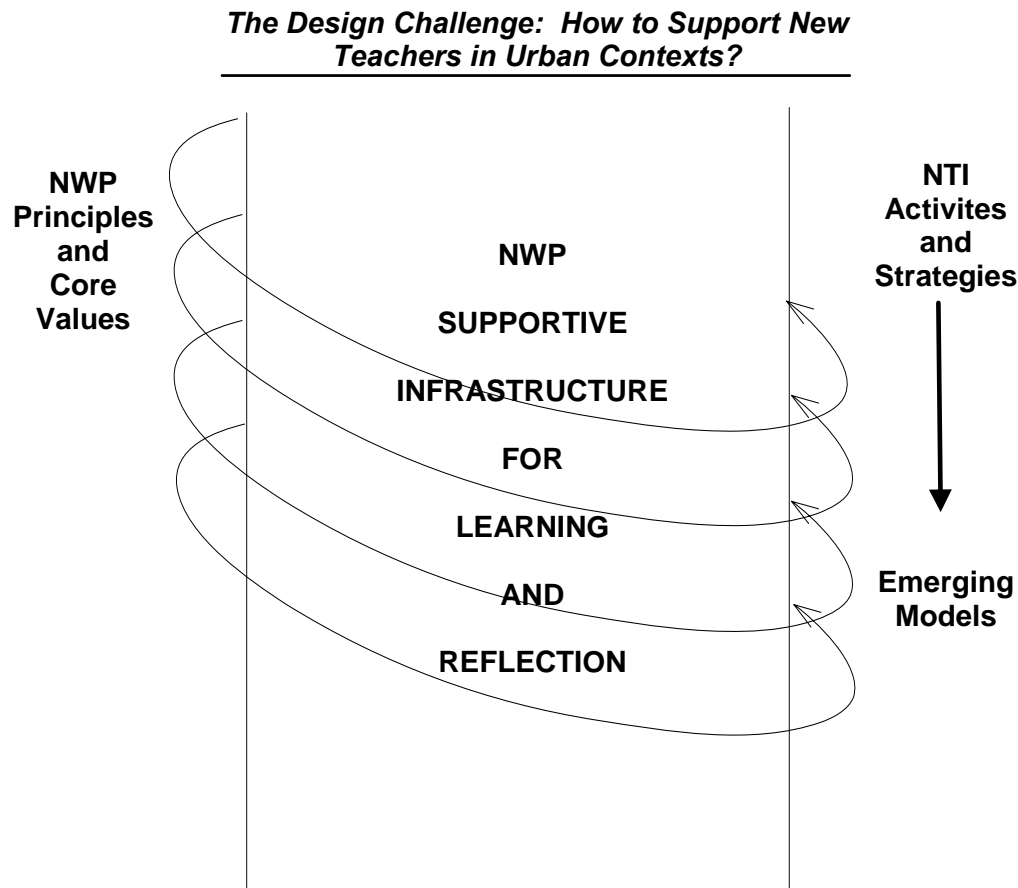
We found a dynamic consisting of an ongoing, iterative oscillation between two strong poles or entities: first, the fundamental values to which the National Writing Project adheres, values such as respect for teachers and teaching, intellectualism, or trust in experiential learning; and, second, the professional development designs the NTI sites created for new teachers, designs such as workshops, study groups, or on-line discussions. Moreover, we also found a third element in the dynamic. We saw that the back and forth interaction between values and design did not just happen. It was promoted, mediated and enhanced by what we came to think of as an infrastructure for learning and reflection. A flexible and responsive infrastructure of supports was carefully designed and provided to the NTI sites by the National Writing Project throughout the duration of the initiative.

Analyzing this dynamic helped provide us with a conceptual frame for understanding how the individual NTI programs grew and improved over time. Even more importantly, it shed light on the deep structure of the initiative, revealing the foundational cultural capacity under-girding the NTI, namely the core values of the NWP. We believe that it was this cultural capacity on which the NTI was able to draw that produced the very strong outcomes of the project – a very broad range of benefits we witnessed accruing to its new teacher participants.

The Dynamic

Our thinking about the dynamic relationship among NWP core values, the supportive infrastructure for learning and reflection, and emergent NTI designs is represented in the graphic below:

The Dynamic Relationship Between NWP Core Values and NTI Designs



By participating in the New Teacher Initiative each of the 18 sites was challenged by a common, central question or design challenge: how best to support new teachers in urban districts within the context of the NWP? As NTI leadership teams began to explore how to resolve that key question, a process of learning and reflecting was set in motion. Thus at each of the sites a recursive dialogue occurred both explicitly and implicitly between core values, or what one might call "theory," and the design of activities and strategies, or what one might consider "practice." Again, the oscillation between values and design, or "theory" and "practice" was not a very neat process. Rather, NTI teams selected activities or strategies loosely based on their past experiences – of what they recalled from their own early teaching years, or of what they knew about other induction programs, or of the professional programs offered by their NWP sites, such as a workshop series or a mentoring program.

A key component of the New Teacher Initiative was the supportive infrastructure – consisting of people, activities, events and modes of working – provided by the NWP. This infrastructure supported sites in navigating through the difficult challenges of building their new teacher support programs, enabling them as they tried out various professional development designs, encouraging them to observe and reflect on what happened. By creating opportunities for the NTI sites to hold up their own work, to have other eyes look and respond to it, and to learn about others' work too, the infrastructure supported sites in comparing their results to the core principles and values that define the Writing Project – values such as an emphasis on writing, or insistence that all participants voice their thinking.

Comparing and contrasting their designs to core values generated self-assessment questions. For example: *Were we responsive to new teachers' needs? Did we include enough practical information about writing instruction in our workshop? Did we include enough reflective writing? Did this event help build trust and a feeling of safety? Are we providing sufficient opportunities to develop a community of support and discourse?* The process of moving back and forth between 1) values, ideals or theory, 2) then reflection on feedback and outside input, and 3) onto design, implementation or practice, led NTI teams back to the drawing board to change, to readjust, to move forward, or to simply start all over again. And so on.

The dynamic relationship among the core values, the infrastructure which supported sites in learning and reflecting about their work, and the evolving program designs, propelled sites toward increasingly refined solutions to the question with which they began. Moreover, this dialectic proved to be a central, defining feature of the NTI as a whole, helping to generate learning and knowledge at both the site and initiative level.

The Core Values

We think of the National Writing Project as a highly “principled” organization. That is, the Writing Project is structured around and reflects a cohesive set of guiding axioms or values. Due in large part to the strong, humanistic vision of the founder, Jim Gray, and his fundamental beliefs about teachers, teaching and learning, but also to over thirty years of adhering to and refining those beliefs, Writing Project values serve as the bedrock of the organization's ethos. As part of the larger NWP community, the New Teacher Initiative programs naturally drew upon and reflected their home culture. Interestingly, however, there were several values that we began to think of as “core values,” those that surfaced quickly, strongly and most frequently, and thus appeared to be most central in the NTI efforts. We identified three we thought of as: community, egalitarianism, and inquiry.

In the book “Inside the National Writing Project” Ann Lieberman and Diane Wood describe a set of ten “social practices leading to professional community” that is the NWP. They write: “The social practices adopted by the NWP convey norms and purposes, they create a sense of belonging, and they shape professional identities.”¹ Although we have come to believe that these “social practices,” like the professional development designs in support of new teachers the NTI sites developed, are derivatives of more foundational core values (such as community, egalitarianism and inquiry), Lieberman and Wood's description of social practices helped us understand better the nature of NWP core values. Coupled with our own observations and

¹ 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. 21

interviews we began to understand the particularly key role these core values played in the thinking and design of the NTI efforts.

Community

The core value that emerged first and foremost in the New Teacher Initiative was that of community. Almost every nascent NTI program aimed explicitly to build a community for new teachers through its offerings. The Teacher Consultants (TCs) who served in leadership roles in the local NTI sites generally taught in the same schools and districts as the novices who participated in the NTI activities and events. As a consequence, they understood well the (often) difficult school and district contexts in which new teachers existed. They hoped, through the NTI, to offer new teachers an antidote to the isolation and lack of community and relationship they often suffered in their first years of teaching. As one Site Director from a NTI site explained to us:

...We found smart, dedicated young people who are working 12 hours a day. And what the school district is doing during the course of their day (and it doesn't take them long to figure this out) is telling them in one way or another to be stupid and don't ask questions. 'Don't use everything you know, don't try to make connections between things, don't rock the boat, just do what you are told and shut up...' after awhile the pressure builds up and there is no pressure release valve in the environment for them to use their intelligence and their passion to look seriously at their own work. And so, they are going to leave the profession. Everyone knows that the statistics, particularly in urban schools, bear that out.²

Thus to prevent new teachers from leaving teaching, a driving principle for the nine Cohort One sites was to create a strong, welcoming professional home or community of learners for the new teachers they served. Similar to and based on the professional communities they knew at their home NWP sites, the NTIs aimed to provide an alternative culture, where novice teachers could find solace and refuge, as well as identity and challenge as professionals. Many novice NTI participants we interviewed, similar to the one from New York City quoted below, responded as their programs had hoped. Their views helped us understand how precious the value of community was for them.

...the mere fact that you can unload like your worst problem for that day and 10 people respond to you with – 'I am so sorry to hear about that,' or 'I completely understand what you are going through,' or 'This happened to me last year.' The program doesn't have to do much more, they don't even have to offer you advice. Just the encouragement, just the 'hang in there,' – that was really something that new teachers don't get. I certainly didn't feel it in my graduate classes.

In terms of social practices, the NTIs aimed to “create forums for teacher sharing, dialogue, and critique.”³ They also hoped to “encourage a re-conceptualization of professional identity and link it to professional community.”⁴ Importantly, most of the leadership teams also envisioned the NTI as a passageway into the larger NWP community to which they invited new teachers. Although not all of the NTI programs achieved the ideal of professional community, nor ensured that novice teachers continued teaching or went on to participate in the NWP site, many did. Thus for many of the new teachers, as for the Philadelphia second-year teacher cited below, the NTIs did become communities where professionalism and learning were found, increasing the likelihood of their participants' future as educators.

² Quotes we use in this report are taken from transcripts of interviews we have conducted with NTI participants. We have edited them to make them more readable, but we never change the meaning or intention of what the participant had to say.

³ Lieberman and Wood, p. 22

⁴ Ibid., p. 22

I think it is always useful to come back to a community of teachers... of course our school will do that occasionally, but it is always structured around the school's particular pressing needs of testing and discipline, and all of those things that come up in the lives of teachers and administrators. But in situations (like the NTI) it is really helpful to talk to teachers from all over the city, different age groups, different experiences – so many different levels to come together and reflect on different things. There are a couple of veteran teachers who are in my school who just love the Writing Project site and the community that it creates for teachers...

Egalitarianism

Although well-intentioned, most traditional new teacher support programs are structured around a deficit model. New teachers are thought of as unskilled, unformed and untested. They need lots of help. In short, they are often viewed as second class citizens, not yet “real” teachers. In contrast, although they were well aware of the special needs of new teachers, the NTI sites demonstrated quite a different stance toward their participants. By insisting on treating new teachers as equals, with something to offer and contribute, they revealed a core National Writing Project value: egalitarianism. NTI participants were viewed first and foremost as classroom teachers; only secondarily were they new classroom teachers.

One NTI Thinking Partner told us that she saw the sites she mentored approaching their new teacher program as if “new teachers had an intellectual life, and were to be respected for what they brought to the programs.” However, bucking stereotypical notions of what new teachers are was not easy for the sites as they planned and designed their programs. It was easier to think of new teachers as raw beginners who needed lots of information from more experienced teachers; and conversely, it was all too easy for the new teachers to feel themselves inferior. One Site Coordinator described how difficult it was for both the participating veteran and new teachers to insist on the principle of egalitarianism in their workshops: “We really struggled to try to make the point that we were learning from each other... initially, people didn’t seem to feel that way. Over time, however, people began to recognize that new teachers had something to offer the whole group. We really pushed on that.”

In terms of Lieberman and Wood’s “social practices” the principle of egalitarianism mirrors what they describe as the NWP practice of “approaching each colleague as a potentially valuable contributor.”⁵ What is key here is, because most of the NTI teams embraced the spirit of egalitarianism, they considered new teachers as their colleagues, and therefore as contributors. Moreover, because new teachers were considered to be of equal standing, the NTI designs also incorporated the social practice of “honoring teacher knowledge.” New teachers were solicited for their thinking, were listened to and responded to in conversation and in writing, and were encouraged to have a voice. The following NTI participant reflects what we heard from many others:

Being considered equal really goes back to the whole [notion of] professionalism. The NTI people that I dealt with early on and throughout the whole process really treated everybody like a professional... it was this idea that we are all professionals. They stated that specifically at the beginning. I remember, we were all sitting in this nice hall and they said, ‘The reason we are going to be here, the primary goal – is to treat each other like the professionals that we are.’

⁵ Lieberman and Wood, p. 22

Inquiry

A third core value or principle that played an important role as the NTI programs designed their efforts was inquiry. Lieberman and Wood identify one of their ten social practices as the practice of “promoting a stance of inquiry.”⁶ They write, “Permeating the entire NWP culture is the idea that constant questioning and searching are fundamental to good teaching.” Throughout our interviews and observations we found NTI teams hoping to inculcate new teachers with a reflective stance, an inquirer’s way of thinking about their teaching and their students. Many NTI leaders felt that the practice of inquiry and reflection was pivotal to what differentiated teaching as a mere job from teaching as a life-long intellectual and professional pursuit.

A NTI Site Coordinator explained how reflection and inquiry contribute to new teachers’ longevity in the profession:

The core of the idea of our teacher inquiry class is that [inquiry] is helping the new teachers reframe how they look at their work. One of the teachers in the class last week said, ‘Every time something comes up in my class, I stand back and think – Hmmm?’ So as novice teachers assimilate inquiry, and approach what they do in their classrooms in that way, then they are more likely to stay in the profession. And that’s because they are likely to be more successful. Because it’s a way of getting better results, and having teaching be a more satisfying process.

The core value of inquiry was perhaps the most challenging for the NTI leadership teams to fully realize in their programs. Only a couple of the NTIs offered new teachers fully developed, inquiry-based programs such as a teacher research course. It was considerably easier for the budding NTI projects to incorporate elements of inquiry into their programs as they evolved. In particular the NTIs focused on one important aspect of inquiry – reflection – by giving new teachers multiple and varied opportunities for reflective writing.

Because of the close relationship between writing and thinking, activities such as reflective journal writing, responding to writing prompts focused on teachers’ classrooms, writing out and responding to teachers’ questions, etc., readily promoted a reflective stance toward classroom practice and student learning. For example, one first-year teacher describes her NTI site establishing a culture where asking questions of oneself and fellow practitioners – “seeking” – was accepted and expected:

[An inquiry stance toward teaching] arose in our NTI... but not directly. It somehow came to the surface by the program forcing us to write. I think then we started to reflect, and then we started to ask questions of ourselves. Then we would discuss them as a group and it automatically came up, because I think the new teachers... had different stories to share than, of course, the teachers teaching the program, who had 10-plus years of experience.... We were all asking each other questions, like a young teacher would ask, ‘Well how do you teach somebody to write? How do you do it when [students] say, ‘I don’t have nothing to write.’ Does that child have a writer’s block?’ And then you start sharing. ‘Well I use this and I use that,’ and then you start to think, ‘Well, maybe I should try that, or try this.’ So [inquiring] didn’t come directly; it came indirectly through our own sense of... seeking.

Most importantly, as the NTI programs sought to have their work mirror the core value of inquiry, and by challenging new teachers to observe, reflect and assess their own practice, important sub-textual messages were communicated about knowledge and authority. NTI participants

⁶ Lieberman and Wood, p. 30

began to understand that through reflection and inquiry they had the power and responsibility to develop their own knowledge, and the voice and authority to share it. We too, as students of the New Teacher Initiative, began to understand the close links between inquiry, the firsthand knowledge it produces, and teacher professionalism. The following NTI participant describes the relationships among them:

I always have to go back to reflection because that is what you are constantly doing. It's thinking about what you have done, maybe how can you improve it, or change it. And it is all about being the very best at your craft, at your profession... We all hopefully are striving to be better and to continue to improve ourselves. Without reflection how could you ever possibly have that? Reflection forces you to look at yourself and your practices, to look at what you are doing, and to ask if you could be doing it better... I think that there is always room for growth, especially because students are always changing and we have to find new ways to reach them. I can't say enough about my experience with [the NTI]... the Writing Project and with critical friends. It changed everything for me. No staff development or new training initiative ever impacted me the way just sitting in a room with my peers and having intelligent conversations did.

Of course there are many other core values and principles to which the National Writing Project adheres and which emerged in the work of the New Teacher Initiative. However the values of community, egalitarianism and inquiry, appeared (to us) most strongly, most readily, and most frequently as the NTI programs were created at each of the 18 sites.

The Supportive Infrastructure for Learning and Reflection

Over the course of the three years of the New Teacher Initiative most NTI site teams were remarkably successful at evolving thoughtful designs for their new teacher support programs which, in turn, produced a wide range of benefits for their participants. But these positive results did not occur magically. We believe that in large part the efficacy of the NTIs was the result of scaffolding and support the sites received. The NWP provided the initiative players with a carefully crafted infrastructure for learning and reflection. It was designed to engage and motivate sites, but most importantly, to promote and model NWP values, principles and practices so that sites could create uniquely "Writing Project" new teacher support programs in their local areas.

The supportive infrastructure consisted of an overall organizational structure, specially assigned people and roles, and various tools and practices for promoting learning through inquiry and reflection. We describe the various elements below

A Layered Support System

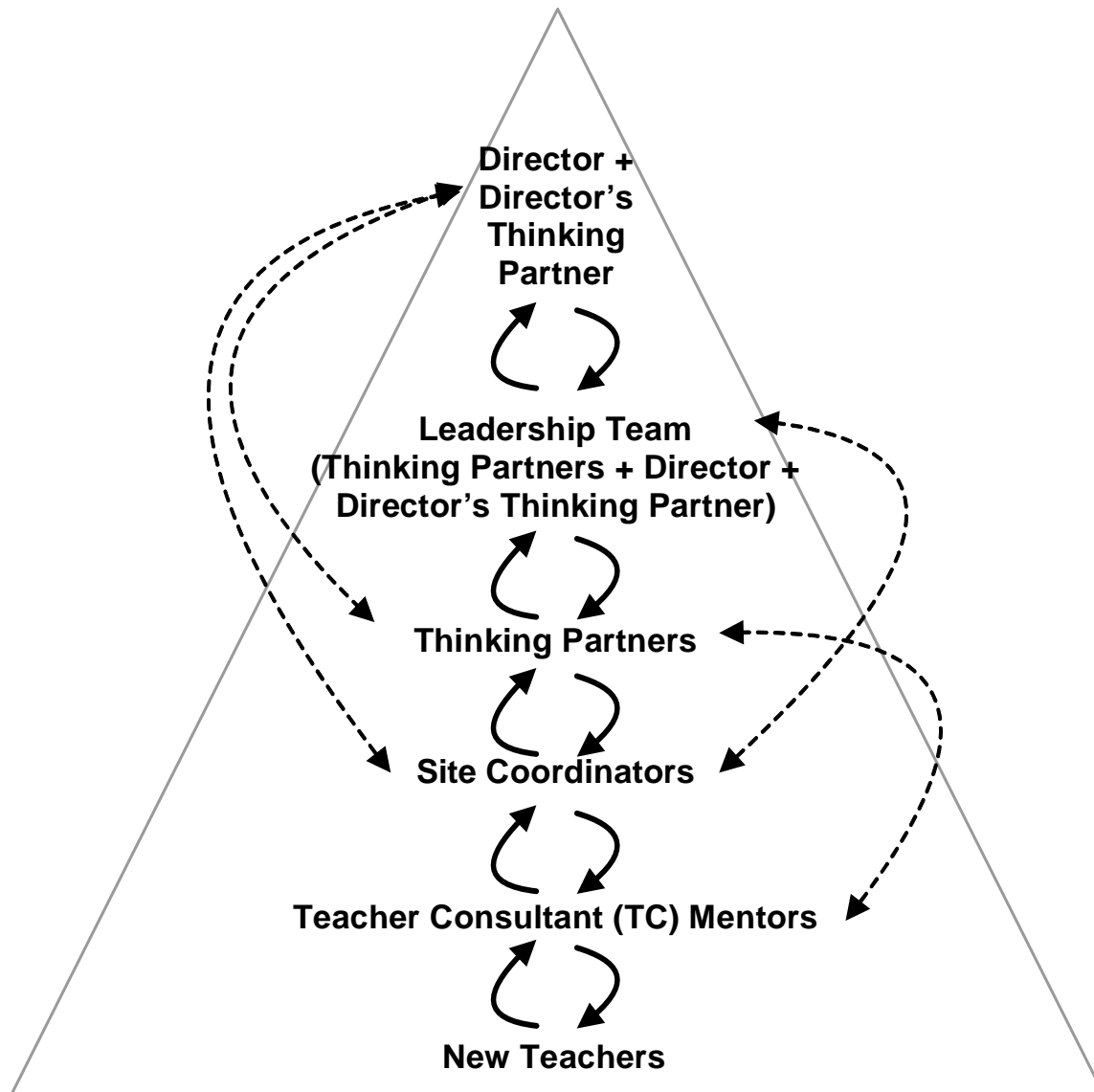
The overall organization of the New Teacher Initiative was deliberately structured as a layered, pyramid-like support system, intended to support communication and learning among the various constituencies involved in the initiative. Specifically, at each of the participating NTI sites new teachers were supported in a great variety of ways by NTI Teacher Consultants or veteran mentor teachers, who were in turn supported by a NTI Site Coordinator. The Site Coordinator interfaced with new teachers, the TCs, and the NWP Site Director at the participating site, as well as with the NTI leaders at the initiative level. Each NTI Site Coordinator had a "Thinking Partner" who served in a coaching, mentoring and technical assistance role. Thinking Partners, in turn, were "mentored" by the NTI Director, who, in her turn, was supported by her Thinking Partner, a member of the NWP national management team. In addition, as a group the Thinking Partners served as the NTI Leadership Team,

meeting occasionally and communicating frequently through a listserv mechanism to function as a network of “mentors of mentors.” Moreover, all members of the NTI community – including new teachers from the sites, TCs, Site Coordinators and Leadership Team members – met several times a year at various functions, such as the Urban Sites Network conferences or the NWP Annual Meetings. NTI sites also met at national summer institutes designed by the National NTI Leadership Team especially for sites to: present their work; articulate their theories of action; identify what was being learned; discuss new questions about working with new teachers; and provide opportunities for NTI sites to get response and feedback from the national NTI community.

Mirroring fundamental National Writing Project values and principles, the organization of the NTI effort and the support structures were deliberately designed to establish collegial relationships throughout the NTI network, and to focus effort on constructing knowledge about supporting new teachers in an iterative and egalitarian way. Information flowed up and down the layers of the pyramid. All voices were encouraged and welcomed. No one constituency claimed to know the answer to how to support new teachers in challenging urban school environments.

The following diagram portrays graphically the multiple levels of participation in the NTI, and how communication and relationship-building flowed through the pyramid.

The NTI – A Supportive Layered Pyramid of Relationships



The NTI Leadership Team

The NTI Leadership Team consisted of the Project Director and eight to nine Teacher Consultants from various NWP sites. The members covered a range in their experience with the National Writing Project. Some were former NWP Site Directors from mature sites; others were relatively new to teaching and had just recently become TCs. The Leadership Team met three or four times annually to reflect on, to shepherd, and to further the overall initiative effort. Most importantly they collaboratively planned and designed all the NTI-wide events and activities.

Members of the Leadership Team described their work to us in the following ways:

...We are a support network.

We are a small learning community that comes together to understand the [NTI] work from both the national and the local perspectives. I see us as a think tank. We come up with all kinds of ideas. We are planners, very intentional about certain structures we want to put in place and certain concepts we want to get across to local site teams. So, we provide an intellectual leadership function within the design of the structure of NTI itself.

We design activities and structures... to help nudge, challenge, and support the teams that we are working with through their work, to (help them achieve) the goal of NTI, which is to help new teachers find a place within the Writing Project and support them as they face teaching.

The NTI Thinking Partners

The members of the Leadership Team not only worked together as a group to guide the NTI, but they also served individually as Thinking Partners, each paired with one or two of the 18 sites. Their charge was to support the site teams as they set about the work of planning and implementing their new teacher programs. Their mode of working was customized to the site and to the Thinking Partner's skills and capacities, but always bolstered and influenced by the thinking generated by the Leadership Team of which they were a part.

The Thinking Partners performed a variety of activities – sites visits, regular phone calls, emails, making contact at national meetings – which served to further the work of the local NTI leadership teams. But perhaps most importantly, their role was to support the local NTI teams in thinking and learning about what they were doing. One Thinking Partner described it this way:

I act as a sounding board ...the Site Coordinator run ideas by me, and says, 'Here is what I'm thinking, what do you think about this?' Or, 'Here is what we're planning to do at the retreat, what do you think?' ...It's more of being a listening ear, or a sounding board for them, acting as a resource person to them. And we have been thinking through their course... so the Thinking Partner [provides] the opportunity to have another set of eyes kind of looking in, not to monitor the work, but to see what is being done here, and what is happening, and what is not happening.

Thus Thinking Partners helped site teams, particularly the Site Coordinator, think through their site issues and plans. A process of reflection and collaboration was set in motion at the sites, whereby local Coordinators worked with Thinking Partners first and foremost as colleagues, but also benefited from Thinking Partners' expertise and broader view of the New Teacher Initiative. The visits and calls provided both direct support to the sites, but also, reciprocally a contextualized and therefore deeper understanding of local issues and challenges for the Thinking Partners.

Supportive Activities and Events

The supportive infrastructure the NWP provided also consisted of regular activities and events in which site leadership teams participated each of the three years of their NTI commitment. It was these events, where the entire NTI network met, or one of the two Cohorts gathered to examine their work, that proved to be highly motivating to the individual sites. As one Thinking Partner explained, “I think it is putting in place the structure for them to learn and gain knowledge and insights and motivation from other sites – so that is the work we do, which is work behind the scenes.”

The major activities and events were the following:

NTI Summer Institutes

Each summer each of the two NTI Cohorts convened at a summer institute in a conference center setting. Three to four members from each of the local NTI teams attended, along with their Thinking Partners. For a week the Leadership Team facilitated the site teams through activities, writing exercises and discussions to enable them to examine and think about their new teacher programs. Site teams shared stories, ideas, successes and challenges; they wrote and reflected on their work; and tapped into the NTI learning community as a whole, asking questions about and examining each others’ work as a way to understand it more deeply and push it further toward core ideals.

Annual Meetings

The NTI local teams and the Leadership Team also met annually at two events traditionally convened by the National Writing Project. First was the NWP Annual Meeting, held every fall where all 195 NWP sites are invited and encouraged to attend this three-day conference to share their most current work, meet with colleagues, and generate new ideas. NTI site teams were asked to attend these meetings. NTI sites had a special session at the conference; in the beginning the meetings were internal, used as working time for the NTI teams, but in the later years of the project the sessions also allowed NTI teams to present their “work in progress” with other NWP sites interested in new teacher issues.

The second annual event where the NTI teams met regularly was the Urban Sites Network meetings, generally held in early spring. The USN meetings provided another opportunity for NTI sites to meet all together. Here again they were able to meet as a network within the larger Urban Sites Network, or in smaller teams with their Thinking Partners, and to share their current new teacher support practices with one another as well as with participants from the broader USN. At the USN meetings NTI members also gained a slightly different perspective on the issues of urban sites and issues surrounding beginning teachers in those contexts.

Supportive Processes

Another aspect of the NTI infrastructure provided by the National Writing Project was a set of processes in which NTI members participated. They ranged from writing with specific goals in mind, to using specially designed tools or instruments aimed at eliciting thinking and reflection, to participating in formal formative feedback mechanisms that we, at Inverness Research Associates, employed to gather information and understanding to feed back to the NTI members.

Written Documentation

The NTI Leadership required the 18 NTI sites to provide written documentation of their work with new teachers. The documentation included a progress report that concluded each NTI year and described accomplishments, challenges and lessons learned. In addition, both initially and for each year of participation in the NTI, sites were asked to submit proposals for further funding, explaining their local new teacher needs, proposed programs and theory of action. The written reports fulfilled two important functions. They provided the Leadership Team with written statements describing the work and the thinking of each of the sites. Simultaneously the process of writing and submitting the reports, which were often accomplished by teams of individuals, ensured that NTI local program leaders formally reflected on, assessed and interrogated their work in an ongoing way, and wrote about it with regularity.

Protocols for Evaluating Work

At the Summer Institutes in particular, one of the primary tools used for helping sites examine their NTI work were protocols designed by the Leadership Team. The protocols, used in conjunction with sites' presentation of their work, allowed the sites to see their work from others' vantage point. After their presentations, site leaders were able to listen to observations, questions and suggestions from fellow sites in a fairly formalized setting. The audience and site together reflected on the work, and then – as a community charged with pushing forward the common goal of supporting new teachers – were able to address those issues.

Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

The “evaluation” of the NTI we conducted for the past three years was designed intentionally to provide formative feedback to the initiative as it evolved. We interviewed members of the Leadership Team, including the Project Director, as well as the local NTI Site Coordinators, TCs, and a sample of their participating teachers annually. The process of preparing for and engaging in the interview was deliberately intended to allow NTI participants to reflect on their work, and in most cases, the chance to talk to an outsider proved to be valuable and insightful to participants and researchers alike. Moreover, our sharing back to the NTI community what we had learned from them also proved to be an instructive process through which individuals and the community at large gained insight into their own efforts.

Over and over again, as we observed NTI events such as Leadership Team meetings and Summer Institutes and interviewed players such as Thinking Partners and Site Coordinators, we saw how the infrastructure elements stemmed from the deep cultural capacity of the Writing Project. The infrastructure used to support the work of the NTI almost always reflected and modeled and allowed participants to emulate the core values of community, reflection, egalitarianism. The infrastructure enabled individuals and teams to actually change their designs and practices, and to make changes that more closely reflected the Writing Project community's ideals.

In particular, a major “source” for the three key values that appeared central to the NTI design process was the NTI Leadership Team. Through their coaching and communication this national-level, highly experienced group served as a direct conduit of NWP values and modes of work. Thus, in the way the overall initiative was structured by the leaders, i.e., as a supportive, layered and fluid pyramid of relationships, and in the way the members of the leadership team worked with one another and their assigned sites, egalitarianism, community and inquiry were reflected back to the local teams in both words and deeds.

The Dynamic Relationship Among Core Values, Supportive Infrastructure and Designs: Vignettes From the Field

In this section of the report, we have selected a sample of three vignettes drawn from the Cohort One sites which show the dynamic we have described in this report, and which we witnessed frequently as we observed the New Teacher Initiative in action. The vignettes are intended to illustrate and help the reader discover, as we did, the interplay among NWP core values, components of the support infrastructure, and NTI designs for new teacher support. These brief descriptions illuminate how emergent activities and strategies developed to reflect the core values of community, egalitarianism and inquiry. They also illuminate how the designs of those activities and strategies were continuously revised and refined through a process of contrast and comparison to core values and principles, a process which was deliberately encouraged by the support infrastructure we have previously described.

Infusing Reflection Into a Professional Development Workshop Series: The OSUWP NTI

The Oklahoma State University Writing Project (OSUWP) NTI offered monthly after-school inservice and later summer “mini-institutes” to its participants. The sessions were designed to provide novices regular time with colleagues with whom they could share their early teaching experiences in the context of content-specific workshops. Unexpectedly, the program attracted large numbers of alternatively certified beginning teachers. They expressed a great need, even more so it seemed than their regularly certified counterparts, for help with classroom management and discipline issues. The NTI team had intended to include reflective writing in the workshop series, but in their effort to respond to the cries of these new needs, they quickly modified their original plans. The team’s plan, then, was to offer immediate help first, and follow-up with reflective writing later.

So while TCs modeled professional journaling in the inservice sessions, journal writing which promotes self-reflection and self-assessment was not explicitly required of participants. The team had high hopes but low expectations that NTI participants would in fact engage in writing of this nature; they reasoned that after the new teachers were settled into their classrooms they would be better able to reflect on their practice and discuss it with others.

But as the program progressed at OSU, the lack of reflective writing and professional conversation in the NTI sessions was always a source of discomfort for the team. Particularly the long-time TCs, for whom writing and shared dialogue was an integral part of their practice for which they credited their NWP experience, recognized its absence, a little at first and increasingly as the inservice series progressed. The beginnings of a resolution for the team came through conversations with other NTI teams and the initiative’s leadership, first at the NWP Annual Meeting in the fall of 2003. Hearing other NTI teams present and analyze their work helped the OSU NTI leaders more confidently act on their desire to infuse a more explicit reflective stance in their remaining sessions. Upon their return home, the monthly meetings with new teachers immediately incorporated more journaling and “professional conversation” into their agendas. The Site Coordinator explained how the NTI readjusted its focus mid-way through the series:

After we went to the Annual Meeting last year... we realized we were doing much more teacher training and not as much reflective practice. In January, at the beginning of the new semester we announced a change in focus. The workshop sessions became... much more about professional conversation, much more focused on journals. We asked the teachers to read some of their journals and then we would have a professional conversation.

This gentle but firm redesign of the program benefited all involved. As the TCs worked alongside the new teachers, engaging in their own professional journaling and participating in conversations about

their own practice, the process confirmed for them the value of reflection and reflective writing. They remembered that new teachers were not different than other teachers. They saw that novices didn't need to be treated as if their inexperience or focus on survival skills made them incapable of engaging in professional reflection and discourse. In fact, when the NTI leaders "raised the bar" – when they expected more intellectual rigor and more reflective thinking – the new teachers met the standard easily.

Another component of infrastructure, the final NTI report, urged the team to further develop their thinking by asking them to consider what they had learned in their year of work. They wrote: "We have learned that new teachers value professional conversation, teaching journals and reflective practice, just as experienced teachers do." The new teachers at the OSU site corroborated this finding. This new mathematics teacher was interested to learn that required written reflection was beneficial to him:

Doing professional writing about my practice, in my journal or otherwise, influenced my notions of teaching. I wrote about what went well and what didn't and learned that to know why you're doing what you're doing is key. I became more reflective about my own practice; someone just commented that I've changed a lot since the beginning of NTI.

In the third and final year of the NTI program the leadership established the expectation of journaling at the outset. NTI participants were asked to write in, and share from, their journals regularly. The Site Coordinator now saw reflective journaling as a key foundation stone in their program's work with novices, noting that, "Our experience during the mini-institute especially showed us that new teachers need very little experience with journaling to realize its power and impact on their practice." As a result of their successes, the site sought to continue this line of work with new teachers, leading the OSU team to apply for and receive a NWP Teacher Inquiry Grant in 2006. This award, another element provided to the site by the NTI infrastructure, has allowed them to plan an additional mini-institute for NTI alumni focused on teacher research and inquiry, and to return to the core line of work – of reflection and inquiry – they intended all along.

Creating a Community of Equals through On-line Mentoring: The NYCWP NTI

Beginning in Year One of the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) NTI, the program leadership created the NTI listserv. The listserv was initiated after at least one face-to-face meeting of the NTI participants, and was intended to allow new teachers to participate in a written "conversation" with fellow novices. With the exception of the veteran TCs who facilitated the conversations, no other teachers were participants. In this way the listserv provided a "safe place" for participants to converse about their students, their practice and current issues of concern.

The design of the listserv evolved as the initiative did. In Year One of the NTI this on-line forum was facilitated by the two NTI TCs, both veterans of long standing with the site. They began the conversation by asking the new teachers to respond to a research article. After few responded to the article but many posted other more personal concerns or questions, it became clear that the listserv was most active and effective when the dialogue originated with the new teachers themselves and focused on their issues. Thereafter the facilitating TCs sometimes posted open-ended questions to ponder, but in starting a new thread of conversation the TCs most often took their cues from the novices. In Year Two, the TCs largely let participants take the lead in directing the discussion from the outset. As one new teacher articulated, "When we go to the listserv, we are really driving the agenda." Still, TCs played an important role working "behind the scenes" to build trust and connections within the group. They continually invited participation in the conversation, provided affirmation, or reiterated or offered questions about new teachers' postings, and, most importantly, modeled how to conduct professional dialogue about teaching issues and challenges.

In reflecting on the listserv's evolving design, one of the New York City NTI TCs explained how a broadened view of the listserv, undertaken by the leadership team instinctively at first, helped promote both egalitarianism and community for the new teacher participants. She said:

The listserv really expands the idea of who gets to be the mentor. It's so important for people who are new at anything, particularly new teachers, to feel that they have expertise and a voice. It helps them to feel secure in their developing profession. When a teacher puts something out on the listserv, they're not only asking the consultant, they're asking everyone on the list. It's tremendously empowering for those teachers who participate to get to offer an experience...

The notion that a new teacher could "drive the agenda" and take on a mentoring role to a fellow novice is powerful and unusual for new teacher induction programs. Not surprisingly, when people are treated equally and with respect, the facilitating TCs found that a sense of community, even virtual community, developed naturally. But when additional TCs joined the leadership team in Year Two, the NTI leadership team was faced with a design challenge: how to guide them to be good facilitators so that the quality of the listserv could be maintained. Understanding how to coach them required the leadership team to analyze and understand more explicitly how best to initiate, structure and sustain a listserv conversation that reflected core values. According to the NYCWP NTI Site Coordinator, what helped in the analysis, and hence the replication of the veterans' interactions with the new teachers, was the opportunity to "step back and reflect."

At the NTI Summer Institute we had a chance as a team to have some time together... we had time to step back and look at the listserv conversations we had collected. We could look back on our work and reflect. When you are in the midst of doing the work, you just can't do that ... it was useful to us too to have other TCs at the Institute listen to us, to read and respond to the conversations. That helped us understand what was involved, especially the facilitator's role.

As the NYCWP group team continued to discuss the parameters of listservs and online mentoring and community building, both at home and at various NTI functions, the veteran TCs continued to model strategies for promoting the core values of egalitarianism and community building, while the newer TCs worked to emulate those strategies. In reflecting back on the process of dissecting the listserv work, the Site Coordinator observed, "I think our conversations also served other sites that were struggling with issues of setting up on-line communication for new teachers."

Incorporating More Inquiry into a Workshop Series: The Third Coast WP NTI

In its first year the Third Coast NTI offered new teachers in their service area a workshop series. Beginning with a one-day fall retreat, the Third Coast WP NTI hosted six after-school meetings. Each meeting began with a dinner and social time where teachers engaged in informal conversation about their practice, then a "How Things Are Going" discussion and problem solving, a presentation of current educational issues or content-specific strategies, and finally a focus on the new teachers' own research process. The first year was considered successful, but the NTI team felt dissatisfied. They wanted a little more intellectual rigor for their new teachers.

At the second NTI Summer Institute the leadership team attended, they found other teams struggling with similar dilemmas – programs that seemed satisfactory, but that didn't really "flow." A common theme was the challenge to discover what new teachers really needed. Simultaneously, the Leadership Team had designed several processes to examine the idea of inquiry. As a result there was much discussion among the participants about inquiry and how to think about it. "The word 'inquiry' kept coming up," according to the Third Coast Site Coordinator.

In the second year, following the Summer Institute, the teacher research component was greatly "beefed up" because, as the Site Coordinator explained, "The first year was too much directed by us, and not so much directed by the teachers themselves working on stuff. ...we essentially wanted to turn

it over to the participants, so that the new teachers weren't just ingesting knowledge, but were creating it too."

The NTI team's "theory of action" was that by engaging new teachers in the process of inquiry, it would deepen the teachers' learning, enhance their professional experience, and build a common ground for collegial dialogue. Each participant developed a research project based on classroom practice. They were supported in developing their skills as researchers through varied activities including selected readings from texts provided by NTI, whole- and small-group discussion and presentations from guest speakers. In a deliberate effort to make the inquiry process manageable for new teachers, Third Coast WP tailored the final product to meet the needs of the individual. Some teachers delved deeply into their topic while others kept a simple journal of their thoughts and observations. "Focusing more on the process, rather than on the final product gave our teacher-researchers more time to examine their data from many angles." All of the NTI participants shared their findings at the culminating two-day retreat.

Assessing the NTI year's work the Site Coordinator noted that the teacher research process helped build a feeling of a community among equals. "That is why the teacher researcher component is so good, because it is a unifying thing that everybody can talk about." A NTI TC who helped facilitate the sessions echoed how the facilitation of the teacher research and inquiry processes helped foster the social practice of "approaching each colleague as a potentially valuable contributor," and helping to realize the core value of egalitarianism.

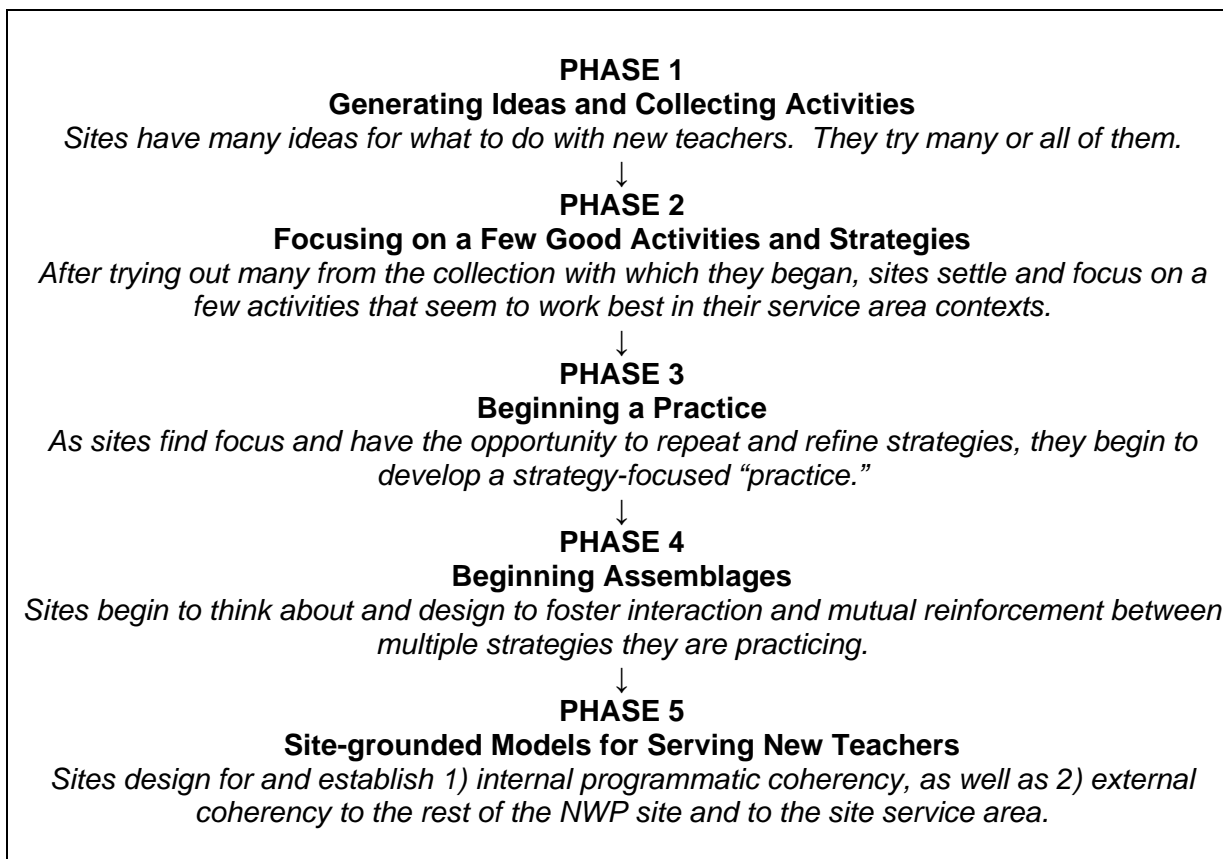
In the third and final year the Third Coast program met less frequently but for longer, more extended periods of time, and focused exclusively on formal teacher research. The concentrated focus on teacher research gave "every member... just what they needed," according to the NTI leaders. In their final report they describe how each novice teacher's research effort promoted inquiry, and how inquiry, in turn led to greater teacher confidence and authority:

...every member [would be able]... to apply the new learning immediately to their special situations. Because the learning situation is authentically of their own creation, each new teacher would leave the group with answers, new techniques they had discovered and imbedded into their own practice immediately and more deeply than if they had come for a series of workshops that had been prescribed by us.

The Third Coast NTI leadership team has continued to pursue their understanding of the relationship between new teachers and inquiry. At the Dissemination Retreats, and later, through continued NTI funding for a two-day writing retreat this spring, and support from their NTI Thinking Partner, the team has worked with the OSU NTI team to collaboratively write an article describing how new teacher research promotes and develops their knowledge, "voice," and ultimately leadership propensity.

A Developmental Progression of New Teacher Support: From Activity to Model

After studying the NTI for three years, and observing the kinds of dynamic interrelationships among NWP core values, infrastructure supports and NTI designs the preceding three vignettes illustrate, we have come to believe that there is a (roughly) predictable progression of development as sites evolve their new teacher support programs. The design and implementation seems to occur in phases. Of course, we saw exceptions to this proposed developmental sequence, but in general NTI programs seemed to evolve along the lines described in the chart below:



We think of the maturation process of the NTI programs as essentially an alignment process – one of creating ever greater congruence between the core values of the NWP and the professional support designs the NTI sites developed for new teachers. One without the other creates imbalance or dissonance. As sites discovered, offering new teachers activities without a firm grounding in a critical core value, such as community or inquiry, risked becoming no different than the standard professional development fare new teachers received from their schools and districts. By the same token, values alone without sufficient real-time, face-to-face and rigorous interactions with new teachers risked becoming a rhetorical exercise. When NTI program efforts began to “find themselves,” and began to develop effective programs for new teachers, there appeared to be a high level of congruity between their values and their design.

The Dynamic Between Core Values and Design Drives Improvement

In our thinking there is a simple but important relationship linking the dialectic process between the core values and the designs, and the developmental sequence in which the NTI evolved that we just described. The dialectic that occurred at each of the NTI sites, whereby the leaders engaged in a process of comparing their designs for new teacher support to NWP core values, generated a continuous inquiry – an ongoing cycle of questioning, observing, analyzing, and redesigning supported through various relationships, mechanisms and processes we have called the supportive infrastructure provided by the NWP. For example, as the OSU leadership team found their inservice sessions becoming prosaic and shared their concerns with other NTI teams at a summer institute, they were moved to consider the core values of inquiry and reflection, and then deliberately incorporated reflective journaling into their program. Or, as the leaders at the Third Coast NTI realized that their workshops were too didactic, they looked to other NTI programs that offered teacher research courses, and gravitated toward the core value of egalitarianism by enhancing the teacher inquiry component of their program to give novice teachers greater voice and autonomy.

This kind of cycle served as an engine, driving sites to revise and ultimately improve their new teacher support programs over time. It is why we think of the relationship and mutual influence among the core values, the infrastructure, and the emerging designs as a dynamic relationship, one in which multiple instantiations of programs coupled with iterative critical reviews, fueled the NTI sites' overall progress and growth. We have also come to believe that the strength, rigor and pervasiveness of this dynamic was one of the most important factors responsible for creating the wide range of benefits to new teachers we found to be the major outcome of the New Teacher Initiative.

PART THREE:

SUMMARY THOUGHTS

We conclude this paper on the relationship between NWP core values and the New Teacher Initiative designs with the following summary thoughts.

- In our view, the NTI fulfilled its mission to serve as a large-scale inquiry into new teacher support issues. The sites were charged with a very worthy design challenge: how to best serve new teachers in high-needs urban districts within a National Writing Project context. Strong core values, such as those of community and egalitarianism and inquiry, served as powerful and highly generative design principles. Moreover, as with any genuine design problem, its resolution was not and could not be easily achieved. It demanded a struggle. Each NTI leadership team had to discover and construct a design solution on its own, one that was based on local needs and contexts, but aligned with the core (design) principles and values.

Thus the New Teacher Initiative as a whole exhibited the same elements as a successful design technology problem posed to an enterprising group of young students – first, a set of good design principles or aesthetic values; second, a good challenge or problem; and third, the freedom, autonomy and support to create a viable design. And, as in a successful classroom or research and design organization, the NTI effort generated a range of thoughtful designs, as well as greater overall knowledge about how to solve the central design problem.

- As we have discussed, the dialectic between values and design mediated and furthered by a strong set of supports by the NWP, proved to be a central, defining feature of the NTI as a whole. When we study educational improvement efforts we are always curious to know: what is it, underlying everything that makes the project “run?” What drives it? Sometimes it is responding to financial incentives, or making good on promises made to funders, or simply fulfilling policy mandates and requirements. It is rarer when a project is fueled by the kind of “internal combustion” process we found in the New Teacher Initiative. By internal combustion we mean the intellectual activity in which the sites engaged, the dialectic between core values and designs that fueled the NTI engine, helping to generate learning and knowledge at both the site and initiative level.
- Perhaps another source of the successes of the NTI experiment and the design challenge the initiative posed is the parallels between the design process and the writing process. In other words, writing and designing are similar enterprises that involve similar intellectual work. Therefore designing a new teacher support program came naturally (though not necessarily easily) to the NTI players. We are certainly not the first to note the similarities between the two. In fact one Thinking Partner told us:

There are parallels between these understandings that we have about the ‘recursivity’ of writing and the teaching of writing, and how we write and talk these [NTI] experiments into being. Everyone of us is subject to revision. We come together as a group and we ...expect that everyone is subject to revision and all of our work is subject to revision and that process of going through it is transformative.

We speculate then that the process of design and re-design which constituted the central activity of the NTI, and the writing process were similar and therefore accessible to the NTI teams. Moreover, individual leaders could draw on what they knew about writing and teaching writing to apply to new teacher design work; and the national leadership could also readily apply similar infrastructure supports to program building for novice teachers that were successfully used to support traditional NWP writing workshops or institutes.

- The New Teacher Initiative provided an important avenue for individual leadership team members, as well as teams as a whole, to develop and refine program designs that embodied the not-easy-to-achieve core values. Because the teams started from the very beginning, with no new teacher support programs at all, they were forced to think very consciously and deliberately about how to design a uniquely “NWP-esque” new teacher support effort.

Involvement in this intellectual design process, coupled with often intensive participation in NTI support activities, served as an important professional learning experience for all the leaders of the NTI, but it was especially educative for newer TCs. Less experienced and less enculturated to NWP values and principles than their veteran peers, looking at professional development designs critically in collegial and often rigorous settings, and through the lens of core values was challenging for newer Teacher Consultants. For example, the NYC team realized that if they wanted to sustain and broaden their NTI work, the mentoring TCs might need more explicit and structured guidance about how to work within this initiative, e.g., how to work with novices and facilitate a listserv which gave new teachers an honored and equal voice. The OSU NTI realized that they needed more concentrated focus on writing, reflection and professional conversation in their workshop series, and the participating newer TCs benefited from being involved in those activities alongside the new teachers. And these are just two of the many examples of NTI work enhancing the skills and knowledge of NTI leadership team members.

Overall then, through seeking to align their new teacher support programs with core NWP values, and by virtue of doing so in well-supported venues that in fact reflected those values, the NTI teams expanded their own leadership capacity, and the capacities of their sites as a whole.

- The Writing Project, including the NTI, produce exceptionally positive benefits for teachers, but it is often not clear, especially to outside audiences, just how it happens. Observing the growth and development of the new teacher efforts from the ground up revealed the “inner workings” of the initiative process. Through studying and seeking to analyze how the NTI worked and how it was effective, we were enabled to see what is often invisible. We refer to the “invisible” infrastructure which served as a core component of the initiative, and which enabled the NTI sites to both move forward with their work and to ensure its quality and integrity. We also refer to the values and principles which were not initially visible, but which were revealed as the NTI programs progressed.

We found that both of these invisible assets or capacities to be deeply rooted cultural structures that enabled the NTI to build its programs through the dialectic processes we have described in this report. They stemmed from a well of cultural capacity that very few other teacher improvement or induction efforts can draw upon. The New Teacher Initiative, however, situated as it was within the larger National Writing Project culture was able to contribute significantly to new teachers in a range of important ways.