

# The Power of a Network Organization: A Model for School-University Collaboration

[Alyson Whyte](#)  
*Auburn University*

[Nancy Ellis](#)  
*University of Vermont*

## Abstract

An English language arts methods course developed through a professional teacher network offers many advantages of a professional development school (PDS) but is easier for individual teachers and university instructors to initiate than a PDS. This report describes a writing methods course that an expert National Writing Project (NWP) teacher helped the university course instructor design. It helps preservice teachers synthesize knowledge of school practice from their prior school experience, the system of classroom organization known as Complex Instruction, and NWP knowledge. The designers of the course concluded, on reflection, that elements of the NWP summer invitational institute and the nature of annual review of NWP sites supported ongoing dialogue among the participating secondary school teachers, preservice teachers, and course instructor. Videotaped discussion among a participating preservice teacher, the NWP teacher consultant, and the course instructor; written and graphic work by this preservice teacher; and video and Internet information about Complex Instruction and the NWP are linked to this online article.

## Professional Development Schools and Professional Networks as Avenues Toward Situated Methods Instruction

Until recently the preparation of teachers for certification to teach in public schools has been almost entirely the domain of departments of education in colleges and universities. Student teaching and some introductory lab courses are situated in the field, in classrooms where preservice teachers experience the "real life" of teachers for varying amounts of time.

Alternatives to this familiar pattern exist in an array of professional development schools (PDSs) that provide onsite experience for preservice teachers, with the systematic involvement of classroom teachers working with university instructors to provide education of preservice teachers, revision of university instructors' teaching, and professional development for the in-service mentor teachers. Setting up a PDS is typically a complex endeavor requiring elaborate, formal, long-term negotiations between the institution of higher education and the district or school. Short-term ad hoc arrangements with teachers and schools for student teacher placements and classroom lab assignments are much more common. Ad hoc arrangements rarely include professional development opportunities for mentor teachers and the university instructor dialogic relationships among preservice teachers, mentor teachers, and university instructors.

This article describes an organizational arrangement that offered many of the advantages of a PDS but with entrée through a professional teacher network rather than through a PDS arrangement. This model was less formal, required fewer institutional negotiations, and was easier for individual teachers and university instructors to initiate than a PDS.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994) identified 10 characteristics of successful collaborations, suggesting that in a PDS arrangement high-quality collaboration among preservice teachers, mentor teachers, and university teachers can “lead to practice that is both responsible, i.e., based on professionalized knowledge, and responsive, i.e., sensitive to the needs and concerns of individual students” (p. 204). Robinson and Darling-Hammond cited 10 characteristics found in successful collaborations between schools and universities:

1. Mutual self-interest and common goals.
2. Mutual trust and respect (all parties recognize and utilize the talents and perspectives of each participant).
3. Shared decision making, from goal-setting to operations.
4. Clear focus (strong consensus regarding the outcome, a vision of the new organization to be created, and the mission of that organization).
5. Manageable agenda (mapping activities so that all are aware of how their efforts and the efforts of others contribute to the outcome).
6. Commitment from top leadership.
7. Fiscal support.
8. Long-term commitment.
9. Dynamic nature (members have the opportunity to revisit plans, incorporate new understandings and ideas, and change priorities as experiences dictate – having a map rather than an itinerary).
10. Information sharing and communication.

### **The National Writing Project and Complex Instruction as Contributors to Methods Course Design**

The National Writing Project (NWP; <http://www.nwp.org>) comprises 185 sites in the 50 states, Washington, DC, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. NWP sites are niches where practitioners from university and K-12 education can engage in continual dialogue about school practice. At one NWP site, a university writing methods instructor who is also the NWP site director, the site co-director, and two of the site's teacher consultants (TCs) worked together spring 2003 to teach an English language arts (ELA) methods course at the university campus and the co-director and TCs' middle school campus. The course

instructor's purpose for the course was for preservice ELA teachers to synthesize a method of unit design (based on applied sociological research) that was taught in their university classroom, discipline-specific concepts and skills taught by the NWP co-instructors at the partnership school, and the preservice teachers' prior knowledge.

### Three Knowledge Bases for English Teaching

#### Preservice Teachers' Prior Knowledge

Knowledge about teaching among preservice and early-career teachers stems from remembered images of school. Goodman (1988) asserted that childhood school experiences have a significant impact on teachers' professional perspectives, including affecting preservice teachers' interpretations of course experiences and powerfully influencing the translated knowledge and projected practices of preservice teachers (Thomas, Pederson, & Finson, 2000). Teachers have vivid images of teaching from their experiences as students (Calderhead & Robson, 1991), and these critical episodes become guiding images for teachers, Goodman argued, in the form of intuitive screens through which new information is filtered.

Thomas and his co-authors (2000) have suggested that scoring drawings of teaching by preservice teachers as one of three "styles" of teaching—explicit, conceptual, and exploratory—and sharing these interpretations of the drawings with the preservice teachers can foster reflection by preservice teachers on the norms for school practice which their drawings represent.

Whyte and Ellis (2003) developed definitions for scoring drawings by preservice ELA teachers as explicit, conceptual, or exploratory. To make the drawings by ELA preservice teachers easier to score, Whyte and Ellis made a number of changes to the definitions of explicit, conceptual, and exploratory teaching in the Draw-a-Science-Teacher-Test Checklist (DASTT-C) scoring procedure designed by Thomas and his colleagues (2000). They changed the DASTT-C definitions of explicit, conceptual, and exploratory teaching to the definitions which follow:

*Explicit teaching.* This is a didactic model for transmitting algorithmic or factual information. The task(s) students complete usually have a right answer or a set of steps to be completed to reach an acceptable answer. The teacher initiates classroom activities that provide information and/or modeling of a routine to be learned and repeated and also provides practice of the routine with corrective feedback. In representations of explicit teaching, typically, the teacher is standing at center of a circle of the students or at the front of the classroom, often at a chalkboard and/or a teaching chart. The teacher is often telling the class about the topic and students take notes, sometimes raising a hand. Student assignments may be written on the blackboard. Students may be looking at texts or working with pencil/pen and paper.

*Conceptual teaching.* This is a model that is didactic and at the same time constructivist. The tasks assigned to students are nonroutine tasks that teach a concept central to an academic discipline. The teacher has prespecified the concept that is being taught through simultaneous, conceptually redundant activities. Tasks involve investigations, discovery, and open-ended problem-solving. In representations of conceptual teaching, typically, the students are carrying out hands-on, multiple-media activities in interdependent small groups; student-to-student task-related talk may be represented through conversation bubbles. Typically, the teacher is observing groups closely. The classroom is usually represented with many routine duties delegated to students. The

teacher may be represented intervening briefly in a group's work to extend students' thinking or publicly assigning competence to students.

*Exploratory teaching.* This is a maieutic model for teaching concepts. What makes exploratory teaching maieutic is that the curricular content arises in response to students' interests and decisions rather than curricular coherence occurring through prespecification of what disciplinary concepts will be taught. The task(s) students complete are nonroutine and teach academic concepts through the coherence of the teacher's academic knowledge base, in response to work guided by students' interests and decisions. Over days, weeks, and months, classroom activities focus on two interdependent goals: student questions and conceptual teaching of an academic discipline. Tasks consist of exercises and investigations that engender oral and/or written interaction which, examined in retrospect, is coherent in terms of students' understanding of concepts that constitute an academic discipline. In representations of exploratory teaching, the teacher may be one of a group of students seated as a whole class in a circle or in small groups. The teacher may be represented observing students who are working together or actively orchestrating students' movement as students work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. Conversation bubbles may show task-related talk (e.g., the teacher or classmates helping a student develop a piece of writing or an interpretation of a literary text). The teacher may be represented helping students work on individual projects, discussing or exploring with students, or following up on student interests or questions. Classes may be represented in informal settings outside school.

Preservice teachers during the final year of coursework in an undergraduate ELA program drawing "an ELA teacher teaching and students learning" most often drew explicit teaching at the beginning of a semester methods course, but after experiencing simulation of a Complex Instruction unit, the same teachers most often drew conceptual teaching (Whyte & Ellis, 2003).

### **Complex Instruction**

Complex Instruction (CI; <http://www.complexinstruction.org>) is a way of teaching concepts ("Big Ideas" in academic disciplines), as well as facts, so that all students have access to this learning. CI, developed at Stanford University by Elizabeth Cohen (1994; Cohen & Lotan, 1997), is based on organizational theory and expectation states theory (expectations for competence). Organizational theory predicts that uncertain tasks are performed more productively when participants work laterally (Perrow, 1967). In classrooms, according to this theory, provided students see tasks as being productively uncertain, the more students talk and work together, the more they will learn. Expectation states theory (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1966) predicts that students with relatively lower academic and peer status will talk and work with classmates less frequently and will not learn as much as higher status students. (For a website that teaches preservice teachers about CI, go to <http://www.uvm.edu/pt3/ComplexInstruction/index.html>. This link includes candid video of a status problem in a middle school ELA classroom.) CI is a classroom management system through which teachers delegate authority to students, through norms and roles, to generate student-to-student task-related talk. The teacher intervenes indirectly to equalize students' status in the classroom by raising the status of those students with lower status. Theoretically, when status is equalized, all students in the classroom will talk and work together equitably and all will learn. Empirical evidence supports this theory in repeated studies of frequency of task-related talk and achievement gains in classrooms using CI (Cohen & Lotan, 1997). (See [Video 1](#) for an overview of CI as it has been implemented in Vermont.)

Typically, CI curriculum is designed as small group work preceded by an orientation and followed by a wrap-up, during which groups report to the whole class on their group's performance of the task on which they worked that day. Units may be teacher-made or adapted by the teacher from existing curriculum. Usually, each small group works on a different problem-based task or activity center. Tasks are rotated from group to group every day until each group has grappled with each task (or, with older students, until the groups' presentations consistently show understanding of the concept central to the unit). The group tasks in a CI unit are designed to require multiple abilities, various media, and a variety of learning opportunities around a central concept.

CI is conceptual teaching, because CI units prespecify what concept central to an academic discipline (and what associated facts) students will construct understanding of as they talk and work together during the tasks that constitute the unit. Redundancy (but not boredom) is built into the tasks so that students develop deeper and deeper understanding of the central concept as they move from one task to another.

### **National Writing Project Knowledge**

NWP teachers confront the uncertain task of teaching students to write. NWP teachers tend to encourage students to make personal choices and to explore their own interests and styles. During invitational summer institutes of teachers, the NWP's keystone program at every site, NWP teachers meet in writing groups to talk about their writing in progress and to ask one another for help and feedback. In NWP teachers' classrooms, students may share their writing by reading aloud to an audience of peers and receive feedback from them.

NWP teachers have established networks of colleagues to talk with about the uncertain task of teaching students to write and for whom they demonstrate practices they have found effective. NWP professional development programs include readings chosen by NWP teachers related to their teaching methods, which they demonstrate for colleagues, and to their professional interests (generally these readings center on developing young writers' literacy, but professional readings need not be focused on that topic).

The ethos of all NWP professional development programs is exploratory teaching: Teacher knowledge comes first, and in-service content depends on participating teachers' interests, needs, and questions. The demonstrations and interests of NWP teachers range from explicit to exploratory teaching of writing. The program is rooted in the decision of James Gray, the founder in 1974 of the Bay Area Writing Project (which became the NWP), to shift his teaching of English at San Leandro High School from teaching classical texts ("three poems per poet") to "making his classroom into a library: creating book lists, finding books that would interest his students, and giving 'book talks' to engage them" (Lieberman & Wood, 2003, p. 6).

Gray's exploratory teaching of reading—encouraging students to read freely and providing them time to talk with their peers—found its way into the practices for teaching writing widely valued among the members of the NWP. The NWP experienced rapid growth at the same time expressivist writing was being promoted and discussed by composition theorists, such as Peter Elbow (1973, 1981), who were also writing teachers. With important exceptions (e.g., Ponsot & Deen, 1981, on inductive teaching of classical rhetorical forms and Caplan & Keech, 1980, on teaching specification), books and monographs on teaching writing by NWP TCs have taken an exploratory more than conceptual or explicit stance toward the teaching of writing (e.g., Claggett, 1992, on graphic representation as a means of invention in poetic and analytic writing; Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998, on elements of the craft of fiction writing; Nelson, 1994, on private

expressive writing and related published writing; Noden, 1999 on syntax; Portalupi & Fletcher, 2001, on elements of the craft of discursive writing; Strong, 2001, on voice, genre, style, syntax, and usage).

Exploratory teaching of writing means that concepts central to writing, such as specification, coherence, tone and voice, and genre/multigenre forms are taught in a classroom organized along the lines of an art studio, where although the teacher may assign exercises, young writers have ownership of topic, genre, and form. Exploratory teaching of writing is commonly referred to as "writing workshop."

### **Differences Between Complex Instruction and NWP Knowledge**

Complex Instruction is based on a theoretical framework from the social sciences and empirical evidence supporting that theory. The principles and practices that form the foundation for CI have accrued through systematic, cumulative hypothesis testing 1979-present, reported in refereed articles (e.g., Cohen, Lotan, Abrams, Scarloss, & Schultz, 2002) and in books for teachers and researchers (e.g., Cohen, 1994; Cohen & Lotan, 1997). There is a large body of research produced by a program of applied research sustained for more than 20 years.

The knowledge that is fundamental to the NWP is teacher knowledge, often intuitive. Practices NWP teachers have found effective are passed from one teacher to another in conversation and in formal demonstration sessions where teachers have opportunities to share their experiences, model their strategies with one another, and experience the activities as their students would. The NWP promotes intellectual pluralism, bringing teachers who hold various perspectives together to name their own successes and challenges, interact, and elaborate their repertoires and understandings as writing teachers.

Some practices have become widespread through state, NWP, and commercially published monographs and books by members of the NWP about the teaching of writing (e.g., Caplan & Keech, 1980; Claggett, 1992; Fletcher & Portalupi, 1998; Olson, 1997/2000). Whereas, much of the evidence supporting NWP knowledge has been local and anecdotal, in 1999 an evaluation study of NWP knowledge and student achievement found association between NWP teachers' summer institute experience, these teachers' classroom practices, and their students' achievement in writing (Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

### **Commonalities Between Complex Instruction and the NWP**

Central to both approaches is fostering students' task-related talk and students' concept attainment in settings where they work in groups on open-ended tasks that call for higher level thinking and solutions to ill-structured problems (no "right answer"). Those students who participate in talking and working together are those who make the greatest gains in learning.

A further commonality between Complex Instruction and the NWP is the norm across these programs' chief executives and members that no one is best at all abilities, and everyone is good at some abilities. As CI researchers and now CI teachers, the authors of this article remember the norm throughout the Program for Complex Instruction that across all levels of experience, from first-year graduate students to the program's director, everyone in attendance at a staff meeting, teaching at a summer CI institute, or discussing a doctoral student's rehearsal of a dissertation defense or job talk was seen and

acknowledged as having important knowledge to contribute to the teaching of CI or the presentation of CI research at hand. Similarly, at NWP invitational summer institutes each teacher consultant (including the summer institute facilitators) demonstrates a teaching practice, workshops his or her writing, shares professional reading, and so on. Through this intensive foundational experience, NWP teachers become accustomed to being seen as each having knowledge and strengths to contribute to colleagues. That same norm pervades the review of applications for renewal of funding by NWP sites, NWP annual meetings and specialized network meetings, and the orientation and coaching of site directors by NWP staff.

Finally, throughout the history of the Program for Complex Instruction, teacher knowledge has shaped the design of hypothesis tests across elementary, middle, and secondary school settings and across academic subject areas and various uses of Complex Instruction. As one example, Mary Male, at California State University at San Jose, combined CI with reciprocal teaching for young children (personal communication with Elizabeth Cohen, March 2003). Thus, although on the surface whether teachers' knowledge is valued might appear to be a contrast between CI and the NWP, valuing teacher knowledge is a characteristic common to both programs.

### **The Preservice Teachers' Tasks**

During the 1st week of the course the authors of this article studied, the preservice teachers worked in the university classroom on capturing their prior knowledge about teaching ELA. From the second week through the end of the semester, the preservice teachers worked to come to know the students in one class at the participating middle school, interviewed and observed the NWP teacher who taught that class, and (on teams of three to four preservice teachers) designed and taught a weeklong Complex Instruction unit in the NWP supervising teacher's classroom. A conference with the university course instructor the 13th week of the semester and a progressive final examination – composed over the course of the entire semester, particularly the 12th through 16th weeks of the course, and worth 60% of the semester grade – were the main tasks encouraging synthesis of the preservice teachers' prior knowledge, NWP knowledge, and knowledge of Complex Instruction.

### **Preservice Teachers' Prior Knowledge About ELA Teaching**

To illuminate prior knowledge about teaching, the preservice teachers wrote "I am" formula poems about themselves as teachers and read those aloud during the first class session. Then between the first and second class sessions preservice teachers made a drawing of "an ELA teacher teaching and students learning" or "When I think of an ELA teacher, I think of . . ." accompanied by writing about their thinking and work processes making the drawing. In the second class session the preservice teachers participated in a "gallery walk," viewing one another's drawings and brainstorming in response to the instructor's request that the preservice teachers share what they noticed during the gallery walk.

During the individual conferences with the course instructor, which took place the 13th week of the course (see the section on Synthesizing Knowledge Bases for ELA Teaching), the course instructor relied on a protocol designed to create dialogic content and interaction frames (Barnes, 1992; Barnes & Todd, 1995) from the standpoint of the preservice teacher for the course.

## **New Knowledge of Complex Instruction**

To learn Complex Instruction, during the second through fifth weeks of the semester the preservice teachers experienced full simulation in their university classroom of a CI unit (on the theme of negative effects of power in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*). Oral response to video vignettes of CI classrooms in California and the first of a series of lectures on the theory central to CI preceded the simulation of the CI unit, during which the preservice teachers participated as high school or middle school students would. During one class at the middle school, which occurred while the CI simulation was taking place in the university classroom, the preservice teachers (as teaching teams) made and administered a "get to know you" questionnaire that included three sociometric items as preparation for recognizing and treating status problems in their middle school class later during the semester (this and many other features of the progressive final examination for the course were adapted from Rathbone, 2002). As the university class sessions moved back and forth between the university classroom and the mentor teachers' middle school classrooms, the preservice teachers wrote weekly 500-word research logs on their learning toward teaching their own units. (For sample research logs by a preservice teacher, see [Appendix A](#).)

Following the simulated CI unit, the preservice teachers attended further lectures on the sociological theory on which CI is based. These lectures included modeling, practice, and feedback on key elements of CI, including skills for talking and working together; reciprocal roles within small task groups; characteristics of CI tasks; and multiple-abilities treatments for creating a mixed set of expectations for competence within small task groups.

In teams of three to four, the preservice teachers designed CI units centered on concepts important to the expressive English language arts. (For a sample CI unit by three participating preservice teachers, see [Appendix B](#).) The 11th week of the semester, three of the six teams of preservice teachers taught their CI units in their NWP cooperating teachers' classrooms. The other three of the six teams collected data on the percent of students talking and working together, patterns of interaction within student work groups, and key teacher behaviors for the teaching teams that taught during the 11th week. The three teams teaching later in the semester taught their CI units during the 14th week of the course, and the teams that had taught first collected data on percent of students talking and working together, interaction patterns, and teacher behaviors, while the second set of teaching teams implemented their CI units.

Section II of the progressive final examination interpreted the results of the sociometric questionnaire the preservice teachers administered to the middle school classes they taught. Section III of the progressive final examination reported how the preservice teachers established cooperative norms (for classroom management) in the class they taught at the middle school and reported and discussed any incidences of student misbehavior as means to gain status in the middle school class as a group. Section IV of the progressive final exam reported how the preservice teachers taught their students to become efficient in small group work through the use of group processing roles, how preservice teachers wrote rich groupwork tasks redundant around a big idea or central question, how preservice teachers managed at least two rotations of at least four multiple-ability learning activities taught simultaneously and rotated among groups of learners on succeeding days, how preservice teachers used the two status treatments of the multiple-abilities treatment and assigning competence, and how preservice teachers measured content outcomes by employing pre/post content measures (Rathbone, 2002). (For a sample progressive final examination, see [Appendix C](#).)



## **NWP Knowledge**

To encourage appropriation of NWP knowledge, the university instructor suggested that the preservice teachers sketch students of interest and sketch their NWP teacher during a class session at the middle school the fifth week of the course, following the initial drawing of “an ELA teacher teaching and students learning” or “when I think of an ELA teacher, I think of . . .” The university instructor sketched alongside the preservice teachers and shared her sketches in the next university class session. (For examples of sketches and commonplace book entries by the course instructor, see [Appendix D](#)).

By this time, the preservice teachers had drafted the first section of their progressive final examination, characterizing their interviews of the NWP cooperating teachers. This sketching sometimes brought NWP knowledge that was in practice in the class the preservice teacher was observing into competition with the prior knowledge of ELA teaching the preservice teacher had brought to the course. For example, preservice teachers commented that the interior of one classroom was more “cluttered” than their visions of how an ELA classroom should be.

Shortly after sketching the supervising NWP teachers and their students at the middle school, the preservice teachers made a second drawing of “an ELA teacher teaching and students learning,” or “when I think of an ELA teacher, I think of . . .” again accompanied by writing about the preservice teacher’s thinking and work processes making the drawing. In the 13th week of the semester, a third drawing and accompanying writing by every preservice teacher followed the first three teaching teams’ week-long teaching of their CI units at the middle school.

After each of these drawings was made, the preservice teachers had a “gallery walk” and then brainstormed and recorded what they had noticed about the drawings. After the gallery walk and brainstorming about the second drawings, the university instructor introduced the ideas of explicit, conceptual, and exploratory teaching and asked the preservice teachers to write about the following:

1. What they noticed when looking at their first and second drawings.
2. What they wanted to remember from the gallery walk toward their third drawing.
3. Whether they would score each of their first two drawings explicit, conceptual, or exploratory.
4. Which of these three kinds of teaching they saw represented by words and images they had been recording in commonplace books (bound sketchbooks) as resonant for them as teachers.

(For an example of this reflective in-class writing, see [Appendix E](#); for entries from a preservice teacher’s commonplace book, see [Appendix F](#).)

The 13th week of the semester, before holding a conference with each of the preservice teachers, the university instructor interviewed each of the three NWP teachers who supervised the preservice teachers. Interview questions included, “What do you, as an expert NWP teacher, see that the preservice teachers have done that approaches expertise in being an NWP teacher?” and “What important expertise at this preservice phase is missing from these preservice teachers’ experiences and repertoires?”

At an individual conference with each preservice teacher during the 13th week of the semester, the university instructor laid the three drawings together—not in a sequence but as a cluster—on the tabletop and asked questions which included, “Tell me, what do

you see these teachers teaching here?” “What kind of interactions did you draw in this drawing . . . in this one . . . and in this one?” and “Do you see any development in you as a teacher in these three drawings? What do you see?” During this conference, one of the instructor’s goals was to bring in NWP knowledge that was represented in some way in the drawings, through comments such as, “What you’ve drawn here, a teacher sharing her writing with her students, is what lots of NWP teachers do,” or

The talk about writing in the conversation bubbles here is the kind of talk NWP teachers work to foster in their classrooms: These students in your drawings are tying their comments to specific points in one another’s texts and letting the author make suggestions and decide on the changes. That is what NWP teachers teach young writers to do.

### **Synthesizing Knowledge Bases for ELA Teaching**

Stating NWP knowledge and linking NWP principles and practices to the preservice teachers’ representations of ELA teaching was only one goal of the conference between the university instructor and each preservice teacher the 13th week of the semester. Another goal for the conference was to bring the preservice teachers’ prior knowledge of ELA teaching into prominence, together with knowledge about Complex Instruction and NWP knowledge. The instructor might say,

Here in your first drawing you represented a teacher bringing her students “into the story world.” Tell me some more about that. What teachers have you had who did things like that? What do you see—and hear—when you think back to those teachers who took young readers into story worlds?

or “Your own teachers, the English teachers you had in middle school and secondary school, have important knowledge about how ELA should be taught. When you think back to your own ELA teachers, what can you still see in your mind’s eye?” Negative evaluations of preservice teachers’ own school experiences were responded to by language such as “How did you feel when that happened, can you remember? . . . What does that memory tell us about what needs to happen in a writing class, what the students need in the classroom?” Or the instructor sometimes would respond with something like,

Well, do you think there’s ever a value to that kind of explicit teaching? . . . Something NWP teachers do is teach that kind of lesson as a minilesson, or even sometimes assign high school students minilessons to prepare and teach on mechanics or syntactic conventions the writers in the class are having difficulty with. Let’s talk about what that kind of minilesson looks and sounds like.

During the conference the university instructor shared how she would characterize the teaching represented in each of the three drawings the preservice teacher had made—as explicit, conceptual, or exploratory—and asked the preservice teacher to correct or confirm that interpretation. The university instructor invited the preservice teacher to share entries in his or her commonplace book that seemed to reflect a commitment to explicit, conceptual, or exploratory teaching—or to share some of the strongest resonances for the instructor and preservice teacher to look at together through these lenses. (For excerpts from a transcript of the conference between a preservice teacher and the course instructor, see [Appendix G](#).)

From there, the preservice teacher and university instructor conferred on what the preservice teacher’s working stance toward teaching writing seemed to be and how the

preservice teacher wanted to work during the final weeks of the semester to expand, refine, or express that stance in a private fourth drawing. (For drawings 1 -4 and accompanying reflective writings by a preservice teacher, see [Appendix H](#).) The instructor and preservice teacher also brainstormed what the preservice teacher might want to focus on in the public visual argument that was the last element of the final exam for the course. (For a sample progressive final examination, including scanned visual argument and accompanying writing, see [Appendix C](#).) This visual argument might stem from prior experience about ELA teaching, NWP knowledge, or Complex Instruction or from some synthesis of these knowledge bases for the teaching of ELA.

The last week of the semester, the preservice teachers created the final sections of their progressive final examinations, which documented and described what they knew and were able to do with respect to manipulating the social and academic structures of the classroom to create learning situations for young writers and which concluded with visual arguments, accompanied by written captions, for the preservice teachers' stances toward teaching the expressive language arts. (For a sample progressive final exam, go to [Appendix C](#).) The final examination was a gallery walk of the preservice teachers' visual arguments for how writing should be taught.

Within each of the three knowledge bases that constituted the course, experiences tapped the senses and mental images as avenues to concept formation. Simulation of a CI unit, sketching of the NWP supervising teachers and of their students and teaching at the middle school, and drawings of ELA teaching were the main ways through which the course aimed to address how tacit, powerful memories of school (prior knowledge) might filter out new knowledge during preservice coursework. Images from prior experience must be brought deliberately into interaction with new sensory, emotional experience in an activity setting where preservice teachers perceive themselves as teachers (producers of knowledge) rather than as students (consumers of knowledge, exchanging behaviors for a grade; Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999). From the preservice teacher's point of view, the content of the course and the interaction between the instructor and the preservice teacher must center on genuine negotiation of meaning between course content and the preservice teacher's knowledge and experience (Barnes, 1992; Barnes & Todd, 1995).

What the course required of preservice teachers was that they synthesize pedagogical knowledge about conceptual and exploratory teaching and, depending on the preservice teacher's prior experience, perhaps about explicit teaching, as well. Their synthesis of that knowledge was the production of knowledge by the preservice teacher during the course. The course aimed to say to these preservice teachers, "Let's see how you've synthesized your prior experience, what your NWP teacher has taught you, and Complex Instruction: There's no one way." The preservice teacher had to bring theoretical and practical approaches that are somewhat compatible into comparison and contrast with one another—and use all three.

### **Reflections on the Course**

Based on analysis of the course and reflection, two features of the NWP as a network led to increasing three-way communication among preservice teachers, mentor teachers, and the university instructor during this PDS-style lab experience. (For a 15-minute panel discussion among a participating preservice teacher, the NWP mentor, and the course instructor, see [Video 2](#)) The first feature of the NWP which encouraged this interaction (the authors of this article infer) is the extended time writing together, sharing and developing writing, responding to self-chosen readings, and demonstrating school practice that characterizes NWP summer institutes. These practices are put in place

during onsite training of new site directors by NWP mentors before the new director's first summer institute. Through 4 to 5 weeks together engaging in these dialogic practices during the summer, public school teachers who are NWP teacher consultants and the university teacher who is the NWP site director have come to appreciate one another. In Robinson and Darling-Hammond's (1994) terms, they enjoy mutual self-interest and common goals and mutual trust and respect for the talents and perspectives of each participant.

The authors of this article infer that the second feature of the NWP aiding three-way communication is the character of the NWP's annual review of each site within the network. This review process institutionalizes the following six criteria Robinson and Darling-Hammond claimed characterize successful PDSs. In the open-endedness of the NWP's specifications for length and, implicitly, for voice and register in applications to renew site funding, the NWP review process institutionalizes shared decision-making and goal-setting channeling into operations. At this site, TCs write a lengthy application together and in so doing have collaborated to shape and reshape their NWP site. Further, in the guidelines, which are set for these applications for funding, the NWP reinforces major premises that function as overarching objectives across all NWP sites. Finally, in the feedback NWP reviewers of these applications provide, the NWP institutionalizes the restraint to set a manageable agenda, and in the NWP's requirements for local matches of federal funding – in this site's case by the university that houses the NWP site and also by partnership school districts – the NWP institutionalizes commitment from top public school and university leadership, fiscal support, and long-term commitment. [Video 2](#) describes how, in the view of members of the site, the authors of this article studied the NWP's review process and created the first 8 of the 10 characteristics of effective PDSs identified by Robinson and Darling-Hammond (1994). The video also includes how the network organization underlying this course has permitted the ninth and 10th of Robinson and Darling-Hammond's criteria to begin to happen: "systematic ad hocism" (the dynamic nature of teacher education) and information-sharing and communication among the participants in a PDS or, in this case, in a PDS-style lab experience.

## References

- Barnes, D. (1992). The significance of teachers' frames for teaching. In T. Russell & H. Munby (Eds.), *Teachers and teaching: From classroom to reflection* (pp. 9-32). New York: Falmer Press.
- Barnes, D., & Todd, F. (1995). *Communication and learning revisited: Making meaning through talk*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Press.
- Berger, J. B., Cohen, B. P., & Zelditch, M., Jr. (1966). Status characteristics and expectation states. In J. Berger & M. Zelditch, Jr. (Eds.), *Sociological theories in progress* (Vol. 1, pp. 29-46). Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Calderhead, J., & Robson, M. (1991). Images of teaching: Student teachers' early conceptions of classroom practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 7, 1-8.
- Caplan, R., & Keech, C. (1980). *Showing writing: A training program to help students be specific* [Monograph.] University of California, Berkeley: The Bay Area Writing Project.
- Claggett, F. (1992). *Drawing your own conclusions: Graphic strategies for reading, writing, and thinking*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Cohen, E. G. (1994). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Cohen, E. G., & R. A. Lotan (Eds.) (1997). *Working for equity in heterogeneous classrooms: Sociological theory in practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Cohen, E. G., Lotan, R. A., Abram, P. L., Scarloss, B. A., & Schultz, S. E. (2002). Can groups learn? *Teachers College Record, 104*(6), 1045-1068.

Elbow, P. (1973). *Writing without teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Elbow, P. (1981). *Writing with power*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Fletcher, R., & Portalupi, J. (1998). *Craft lessons: Teaching writing K-8*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Goodman, J. (1988). Constructing a practical philosophy of teaching: A study of preservice teachers' professional perspectives. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 4*, 121-137.

Grossman, P., Smagorinsky, P., & Valencia, S. (1999). Appropriating tools for teaching English: A theoretical framework for research on learning to teach. *American Journal of Education, 108*(1), 1-29.

Lieberman, A., & Wood, D. (2003). *Inside the National Writing Project: Connecting network learning and classroom teaching*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Nelson, G. L. (1994). *Writing and being: Taking back our lives through the power of language*. San Diego, CA: LuraMedia.

Noden, H. R. (1999). *Image grammar: Using grammatical structures to teach writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Olson, C. B. (Ed.) (1997/2000). *Practical ideas for teaching writing as a process at the high school and college levels*. Sacramento, CA: CDE Press, California Department of Education.

Perrow, C. (1967). A framework for the comparative analysis of organizations. *American Sociological Review, 32*, 194-208.

Ponsot, M., & Deen, R. (1981). *Beat not the poor desk: Writing: What to teach, how to teach it, and why*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Portalupi, J., & Fletcher, R. (2001). *Nonfiction craft lessons: Teaching information writing K-8*. York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.

Rathbone, C. (2002, April). *Making groupwork work: Ensuring instructional efficacy in the student teaching internship through the implementation of Complex Instruction*. Paper presented at the New England Educational Research Organization Conference, Northampton, MA.

Robinson, S. P., & Darling-Hammond, L. (1994). Change for collaboration and collaboration for change: Transforming teaching through school-university partnerships. In L. Darling-Hammond, (Ed.), *Professional development schools: Schools for a developing profession*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Strong, W. (2001). *Coaching writing: The power of guided practice*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Thomas, J. A., Pederson, J. E., & Finson, K. (2000, January). *Validating the draw-a-science-teacher-test checklist (DASTT-C): From images to beliefs*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Education of Teachers of Science, Akron, OH.

Whyte, A., & Ellis, N. (2003). Graphic representation as a bridge from explicit to conceptual teaching. *Arts & Learning Research Journal, 19(1)*, 167-194.

### **Resources**

Video 1 - <http://www.uvm.edu/complexinstruction/video/overviewbroadband.htm>

Video 2 - <http://www.uvm.edu/complexinstruction/video/networkbroadband.htm>

Appendix A - <http://www.auburn.edu/sunbelt/res-logs.pdf>

Appendix B - <http://www.auburn.edu/sunbelt/c-i-unit.pdf>

Appendix C - <http://www.auburn.edu/sunbelt/final-exam.pdf>

Appendix D - <http://www.auburn.edu/sunbelt/common-univ.pdf>

Appendix E - <http://www.auburn.edu/sunbelt/reflective-writing.pdf>

Appendix F - <http://www.auburn.edu/sunbelt/common-preservice.pdf>

Appendix G - <http://www.auburn.edu/sunbelt/conf-trans.pdf>

Appendix H - <http://www.auburn.edu/sunbelt/preservice-draw-write.pdf>

**Author Note:**

Alyson Whyte  
Auburn University  
email: [whyteal@auburn.edu](mailto:whyteal@auburn.edu)

Nancy Ellis  
University of Vermont  
email: [nrellis@adelphia.net](mailto:nrellis@adelphia.net)

*Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* is an online journal. All text, tables, and figures in the print version of this article are exact representations of the original. However, the original article may also include video and audio files, which can be accessed on the World Wide Web at <http://www.citejournal.org>