

**Building and Sustaining a School/Site Partnership:
The Roles of the Denver Writing Project, Northglenn High School, and the Teacher-
Consultant Coordinator**

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Foreword by Michelle Comstock

Summary: This is a history of the triumphs and challenges of an ongoing partnership—six years old at the time of the writing—between a high school and an NWP site, told from the perspective of the teacher-consultant facilitator. The site director has added a foreword describing the value of the partnership to the site.

Foreword
by Michelle Comstock

In 2003 Denver Writing Project (DWP) Co-director Rich Argys, one subject of this case study, initiated a teacher study group at Northglenn High School. With Rick VanDeWeghe, the founding director of DWP, he crafted a school/site partnership that supported the study group for one year and in the second year launched a yearlong “writing across the curriculum” course that still thrives today. All along the way, Rich has tailored the program to address shifting areas of concern, such as English language learners and writing in content areas. Since becoming the Denver Writing Project site director in 2008, I have learned most of what I know about creating, implementing, and evaluating a flexible professional development program from Rich and his work at Northglenn High School. However, it wasn’t until I was asked to write this foreword that I began to really see how Rich’s approach has profoundly influenced our site’s professional development philosophy and planning. Without the tasks of researching and writing this piece, I would have read and enjoyed the article and Rich’s reflections—in fact I did read them in earlier incarnations—but I wouldn’t have read them as a co-writer, a role that has increased my emotional and intellectual stakes in the partnership with Northglenn and literally made me a coauthor in its continuance.

Rich’s approach, which emphasizes adaptability and flexibility to changing student and teacher needs, continues to inform our outreach efforts at both the local and state network levels. In this foreword, I discuss Rich’s professional development values and strategies a bit more in relation to programs at other Writing Project sites as well as in relation to our own site’s overall model

for leadership. I then report on what is currently happening with the Northglenn program and with professional development in general at our site.

When Rich began the study group at Northglenn in 2003, he wasn't delivering a program; he was responding to a particular need among teachers regarding ELL issues in their classrooms and in the curriculum. The teacher participants co-constructed the group's key questions and methods of inquiry, while Rich amassed and organized their various discussion points and findings. Rich's approach was a practical one (given the limited time and resources of public school teachers and administrators), and it was also grounded in the NWP and DWP principles of empowering local teachers and responding to local school needs. While based on a model that sometimes conflicts with the prepackaged, mass-produced programs now implemented in our districts, this approach has proven sustainable (and preferable) to our local teachers. We're not just helping them solve particular local issues; we're offering them an alternative means to solving these problems as leaders in their schools and as participants in their own classroom research.

As I was conducting research for this foreword, I was pleased to see that Rich's approach is congruent with the Writing Project principle of "teachers teaching teachers" and has been carried out at a number of sites, including the Saginaw Bay Writing Project, which implemented the Saginaw Teacher Study Group Movement, based on leadership by teachers (who are trained in facilitating peer-based inquiry), a common local need, and voluntary participation (Weaver, Calliari, and Rentsch 2004, 14). Teachers at this site worked carefully to create a "third space"—a space of mutual respect and inquiry outside of but not separate from both the local school and the university (Weaver et al., 15). In comparing SBWP's program with ours, I noticed how the Northglenn High School group also created a third space, where teachers explored the messy, heated debates around cultural differences and language use in a context of mutual respect and trust.

Third space advocate and cultural geographer Edward Soja (1996) writes about the importance of these spaces within our contemporary culture, claiming they offer us "a space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the . . . imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives that have heretofore been considered . . . to be incompatible, uncombinable. It is a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other" (5). This third space can become a powerful practical and conceptual tool for teachers to engage in the mutual inquiry and discussion necessary to address the complicated issues of language and culture in their classrooms and schools.

While reading and rereading Rich's reflections, I also saw how the Northglenn program both represents and informs our site's model of leadership, a model put in place by Rick

VanDeWeghe. The model is highly flexible and responsive to local needs and issues. When Rick asked me if I was interested in the director position, he recommended I read Margaret Wheatley's *Leadership and the New Science* (2006), which outlines many of the principles guiding leadership at our site. Wheatley writes, "All of us, even in rigid organizations, have experienced self-organization, times when we recreate ourselves, not according to some idealized plan, but because the environment demands it. We let go of our old form and figure out how best to organize ourselves in new ways." Leadership, she argues, becomes "a behavior, not a role" (24).

Along with Rich, our site's leaders are less likely to simply fulfill static organizational roles and are instead poised to develop study groups and inquiry projects initiated and co-constructed by local teachers. We've discovered that whatever benefits a particular population can benefit our site as a whole. Just as addressing problems faced by ESL students, the focus of the first study group at Northglenn, helped the entire Northglenn student population, addressing the particular problems faced by Northglenn teachers has benefitted our entire site by giving us new models for inquiry and ELL classroom strategies.

Rick VanDeWeghe advised Rich not to jump to solutions in the initial study group, advice that resonates with Wheatley's findings that until we interact with the environment [whether it's a school, university, or district], we cannot formulate thoughts and plans (38). Predicting, therefore, becomes less important than responding. I noticed how Rich cultivated response over prediction when he chose to observe and learn from his colleagues and students instead of going in with a ready-made expansion plan. This doesn't mean he went into the Northglenn study group without a clear sense of what the DWP is or wanted to become, especially as we began to develop the professional development course; it just means he acknowledged the ever-changing nature of the Northglenn teaching environment and of how he might respond to it.

Through Rich and his program (and through researching and writing about it), I learned that our site doesn't have to function randomly (we still have a leadership council with mentoring and professional development responsibilities), but our site structure (study groups, partnerships, open institutes, and retreats) should emerge out of our interactions with local schools and districts, an ongoing process that will keep us effective and relevant.

What is now happening with the Northglenn program and our professional development initiatives? Our partnership with Northglenn will continue this coming school year and will expand to include Mountain Range High School. One of Rich's former colleagues moved to Mountain Range and wants Rich to implement a similar DWP professional development course there, making Mountain Range one of our new teacher learning communities. The DWP course continues today at Northglenn under the new leadership of Alice Smith, who played a major part in Rich's advanced institute this summer. Northglenn's current English chair also participated in

our 2009 invitational summer institute and plans to continue advocating for the site in her district this coming year. At the advanced institute, as he does at the invitational summer institute, Rich seeks out teacher-consultants with promising demonstrations and presentation skills. He tells them why and where their demonstration—for example, writing to learn in science—is needed in DWP outreach efforts. Then he helps them refine and polish their workshops for inclusion in upcoming professional development. At the state network level, Rich is creating a notebook of our demonstrations and other teacher resources in order to respond more substantively and efficiently to particular local professional development and study group needs.

As our professional development offerings expand, Rich and I will build an evaluation system, much like the one implemented by the Saginaw Bay Writing Project, that measures the success of our groups and also provides ways for professional development participants to become more involved in our larger site network. Because it will ask teachers to identify current issues and questions in their classrooms, the evaluation system will inform us of new opportunities for professional development. In order to encourage such partnerships with other schools, I've invited invitational summer institute participants to work in inquiry groups to compose proposals for new study groups in our local schools. This fall we are sponsoring one such study group focused on urban issues in education, and we plan to sponsor at least one more group in the upcoming year. We hope these groups grow to become flexible and sustainable partnerships much like the one at Northglenn.

Works Cited

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Building and Sustaining a School/Site Partnership: The Roles of the Denver Writing Project, Northglenn High School, and the Teacher-Consultant Coordinator

The focus of this study is a teacher-consultant, Rich Argys, and the multiple roles—including colleague, site/school liaison, negotiator with the school administration, designer, and facilitator—that he played in creating and sustaining a school/site partnership begun in 2003 and thriving today. Rich’s intention was to offer inservice that met the needs of the students and teachers at his school. As the needs of and demands on teachers changed, Rich adjusted the professional development that he was offering his colleagues, and that adaptability proved key to his success. Although the focus of this paper is Rich, his role was in no way a solo act; he was part of a team. Rick¹ VanDeWeghe, founding director of the Denver Writing Project, and Rich’s colleagues at Northglenn High School were major players.

Introduction and Background

“We had our second class of the year on Sat, 11/1 and it was even better than the first,” Rich Argys, co-director of the Denver Writing Project, wrote in an ebullient email (11/3/08). Equally enthused after the third class, Rich emailed, “One of our librarians—born, raised, and educated in Germany—didn’t understand the subtleties in many of the comics [the demonstration was on using comics to teach writing and illustrating] we studied that morning. From her willingness to risk sharing her confusions, our colleagues broadened their understanding of what it means to be an ELL in a classroom.” (2/1/09) Also, many participants experienced mini epiphanies, so common in NWP workshops, when colleagues learn new and inspiring details about each other through shared writing.

This study of an ongoing partnership between the Denver Writing Project and Northglenn High School begins in 2003 with a small study group looking at English language learners in “transitions” classes—a midpoint in the ELL curriculum between sheltered courses and immersion in mainstream content courses. In 2004 the study group continued, and Rich also negotiated the first in a multiple-year series of professional development classes. “Reading and Writing across the Curriculum” featured guest presentations by DWP teacher-consultants. In subsequent years the course evolved, while the study group(s) ended in 2006. This (2008-2009) year is one of transition. Rich and Alice Smith (DWP 2007) are co-leaders of the course and next year leadership will transfer to the capable hands of Alice Smith, due to Rich’s upcoming retirement in May 2009 (see DWP/NHS Timeline).

¹ In keeping with the more informal spirit of this document, I’m referring to people by their first names. But I see a problem. Rich and Rick are very close, easily confused. As you read just keep in mind *Rich* Argys is the teacher-consultant facilitator and *Rick* VanDeWeghe, the founding director of DWP.

Denver Writing Project/Northglenn High School Partnership Timeline

Year	Study Groups Focus Participants Facilitator	Course Title* Participants Facilitator
2003-2004	<p>Study Group: Question: What problems do ESL students face in our transitional and/or mainstream classes? Participants: 4/5 Teachers of ESL Transition classes Organizer & Facilitator: Rich Argys</p> <p>[Sept 04 Workshop for whole school on NWP ELL Writing Conference]</p>	
2004-2005	<p>Study Group: Question: How can we help ELLs improve their writing? Participants: ESL Dept Chair, ESL teachers, teachers from 2003-2004 Study Group & some other ESL transitions course teachers from several content areas. Organizer & Facilitator: Rich Argys</p>	<p><i>Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum</i></p> <p>Participants: English teachers and teachers of other disciplines.</p> <p>Organizer & Facilitator: Rich Argys</p>
2005-2006	<p>Study Group: Focus—teaching writing Participants: Faculty from several disciplines interested in studying the teaching of writing. Organizer & Facilitator: Rich Argys mentored teacher-consultant and NHS teacher Beth Roberts to facilitate this study group.</p>	<p><i>Learning to Write and Writing to Learn</i></p> <p>Participants: Teachers from several disciplines across the curriculum Organizer & Facilitator: Beth Roberts</p>
2006-2007		<p><i>Teaching Nonfiction Writing Across Content Areas</i></p> <p>Participants: Teachers from several content areas</p> <p>Organizer & Facilitator: Rich Argys</p>
2007-2008		<p><i>Crossing Over: Writing to Learn in all Subjects</i></p> <p>Participants: Teachers from several content areas</p> <p>Organizer & Facilitator: Rich Argys</p>

2008-2009		<p><i>The Reading/Writing Connection</i></p> <p>Participants: Teachers from several content areas</p> <p>Organizers & Facilitators: Rich Argys and Alice Smith</p>
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* Each year the course has a reading and writing focus, with different content. The presenters are DWP teacher-consultants and Rich looks for new teacher-consultants from each summer institute whose demonstrations might fit the next year's course. Since 2007, Rich has been co-director of the DWP and during each summer institute scouts for new fellows who might be good presenters. His first interest is the content of the demonstration especially those in fields other than English. Even if the teacher-consultants offer weaker presentations, if he sees potential in their delivery or in their subject, he invites them to present and coaches them in refining their presentations.

The major source for this case study is Rich Argys. I've quoted liberally from a long interview we did in the fall of 2008 and from the many emails between the two of us that followed. I've tried to capture Rich's voice: sardonic, irreverent, self-deprecating and inquisitive. Another source is Rich's writings. At NWP writing retreats in 2004 and 2005, he wrote articles summarizing the first two years of the study group that began the partnership (2003, 2004) and later, a master's thesis (2005a), analyzing the first year of the course. Other key sources are Rick VanDeWeghe, the founding director of the DWP, and Alice Smith, DWP, 2007 who contributed emails and answered questions. An earlier, shorter version of this case study appears on the NWP website at <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2843>.

The lens here is that of an onsite teacher-leader and facilitator. Rich plays several roles: senior and trusted colleague and mentor to fellow teachers and teacher candidates, liaison to the knowledge that exists at the Writing Project site, and negotiator with the school administrators. The leitmotif of the piece is teachers as the agents of their own learning. Rich doesn't *deliver* a program, he *co-constructs* it by listening, nudging, bringing in resources in the form of presentations, personnel, readings, and even whole courses based on faculty, student, and whole-building needs

The partnership described here is a success, and its successes are chronicled. That success is not much help to readers at NWP sites without consideration of the challenges that inevitably occur *and how those challenges are met*. I cover those as well, along with some analysis of why they happened and what was learned.

Three Roles in a Site/School Partnership

While each NWP site develops inservice based on local needs and site resources, there are three basic components in the inservice provided by local sites. They are (1) the Writing Project site,

which brings direction and resources to the partnership, (2) the school and participating teachers, and (3) the person facilitating the inservice, who designs, implements, monitors, and evaluates the inservice offered. Northglenn High School, situated in Northglenn, Colorado, seven miles north of Denver, is a young town that was planned by a builder, Perl-Mack, in 1959. The town started with a population of 15,000 and has grown to 37,000. Its population includes people from many walks of life and a range of economic levels. When the partnership began, Northglenn High School had 2,400 students but now has 1,850. The staff includes 100 teachers, 5 counselors and 8 administrators. The Hispanic community began to expand in Northglenn in the early 1990s. From the 2000 census data on the town's website, the town's racial demographic is about 80 percent white with 20 percent Hispanic population and small numbers of other groups.

How the DWP/NHS Partnership Began: NWP's Inservice Institute Summer 2003

In its first years the DWP offered some local inservice in Denver area schools, and Rich remembers, "We wanted to branch out and infiltrate some of our local public schools and offer some services."² How could they do this? For advice they took advantage of an NWP resource and participated in the 2003 Inservice Institute, a cross-site advanced institute for teams of site leaders from ten states, held at the Babson Executive Conference Center in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Rick VanDeWeghe, site director, invited Rich to attend the institute with him. Rick knew Rich from his years as a site professor in the University of Colorado Denver teacher education program at Northglenn High School. He was impressed with Rich's skill at supporting teachers' development. And he knew that Rich was very committed to the Denver Writing Project.

The purpose of the Inservice Institute at Babson, Rich says, was to study "how to get your site to the point where you can be an inservice provider to the local schools. . . . The institute offered Rick and me lots of guidance, sharing with other site teams, and time alone (the 2 of us from DWP) together to envision and sketch our own site plan for professional development outreach. Also, we were awarded a Jump Start grant which allowed us to begin to implement our plan immediately."

At Babson two important things happened. First they decided to start small. Their theory, Rich remembers, came from Rick:

The way to grow and sustain growth [of inservice . . . is to] do it slowly and surely, in other words, don't bite off too much. Starting small can be a challenge in public schools—in this day and age everyone wants a quick fix because we are all under fire from many different directions. . . . Too often we find ourselves reacting hastily—and hence ineffectively—to pressures from outside the classroom to improve scores on standardized tests which, by definition, don't consider individual interests or skills,

² All unidentified quotes are from a telephone interview with Rich Argys September 6, 2008.

learning styles, or multiple, diverse measures of student learning. It's quite a travesty, really, when we consider current research on both student learning and realistic, effective assessment.

At the institute they looked at study groups as a way to introduce the Denver Writing Project as a provider of inservice to local schools. "It was really Rick's brainchild," Rich remembers. "He thought we should start small study groups, led by a fellow from the DWP in his or her own school. And I said, 'Well, I'd like to start one in my school.'"

Second, their plan for the Northglenn study group fit into a DWP site model of professional development that Rick had already designed and called [The Trinal Model](#) (VanDeWeghe n.d.). The model is simple and wise. It is a self-sustaining, three-part, integrated model of professional development. The three years are

Year One: Study Groups on a topic selected by study group participants on site at a school

Year Two: School-based inservice program [typically based on issues raised in year one]

Year Three: Other follow-up programs to be determined [from the work of years one and two].

The seeds of the Trinal Model came from a pilot study group at a local middle school coordinated by a teacher-consultant. "Though [the study group] was a short-lived experiment," Rick says, "I was able to see what it could become if we just went about it more planfully. It was our first experience with a professional learning community that had some, but not all, of the ingredients that would become the Trinal Model." Since that time, the model has been replicated at many schools and a community college.

2003-2004 The First Northglenn Study Group

"Adaptability and meeting school needs": these two focuses, Rich believes, explain the longevity of the DWP/NHS partnership. When he began inservice at Northglenn, he and Rick had in mind their planning at Babson—start small and focus on school needs—but Rich wasn't familiar with study groups. Rick gave him *Teacher Study Groups* (Birchak et al. 1998) and he reviewed his copy of *The Art of Classroom Inquiry* (Hubbard and Power 2003), which he had received at the 2002 invitational summer institute.

Being an insider at Northglenn High School, Rich knew the students' and teachers' needs and understood that these were the starting place for inservice. From talking with teachers, Rich believed that the highest need was the struggling ESL, mostly Latino, transition students. As these students graduated from the ESL classrooms into transition and mainstream classes, they floundered, seeking out their old ESL teachers for help. Rich wanted to help his colleagues better

meet these kids' needs. The staff was "unsure of how to proceed," Rich wrote, "and disagreeing on the best curricular, pedagogical, and behavioral tacks to take with our students" (2005a, 3).

After the Inservice Institute, Rich decided to study the ESL students in a study group. He wanted to try a study group that would be a new professional development model at Northglenn. In his 2005 master's thesis he wrote, "Try as we might, many staff development sessions failed to engage teachers in learning, offer applicable solutions to challenges faced by Northglenn students and teachers, and value the expertise of practicing teachers and their ability to instruct their own colleagues" (2005a, 2). From his experience in the DWP invitational summer institute in 2002, Rich believed that an inservice program grounded in the principles behind the summer institute, "the NWP model of teacher-led, building-specific, data-driven professional development" would be a welcome change and meet the professional development needs of Northglenn's teachers.

Funding

Rick, as Denver Writing Project director, seeded the inservice with a DWP minigrant to the school for \$1000. Rich persuaded his principal to match the grant. After the first study group, there had been much talk among teachers—word-of-mouth commentary—about the quality of DWP professional development at Northglenn. As a result, since 2003 the Northglenn principal, and there has been a turnover of principals, has paid between \$1000 and \$2000 a year for Denver Writing Project inservice. Rich writes, "The amount depends on our professional development needs and which demonstrations I think will work well at our school." The first year the study group collectively decided how to use the money, giving stipends to themselves and buying books.

Since 2004 when courses began to be offered, money goes to the DWP for teacher-consultant presenters.

Taking Risks: Learning to Lead Inservice

Rich's decision to lead inservice was not without its obstacles; he had never taught ESL and never been in or facilitated a study group. "So," he writes, "I placed my ESL teaching inexperience on the ever-growing pile of things I didn't used to know how to do and proceeded to try and find out how to help students and colleagues" (2004, 2).

Rich also went against conventional study group wisdom in selecting participants. "I was a little bit heavy-handed," he confesses, "I picked my own people." He wanted a few dedicated, experienced teachers passionate about the ESL students. He didn't open up the membership because he wanted control of the group in its inaugural year to ensure its success and to start building a reputation for DWP inservice at his school.

Rich saw his facilitator's role as keeping folks focused on the mission of the group. First they created an inquiry question: *What problems do ESL students face in our transitional and/or mainstream classes?* Rich oversaw the collection of data, took notes at the meetings, and typed up a summary that he emailed along with the agenda for the next meeting. He worked at creating a balance between imposing structure letting the work take a natural course. Significantly, he facilitated discussions about the group's individual racial assumptions, a brave and important step when white teachers (all the participants were white) look at problems facing students of color.

From nearly the beginning, many of us—or all of us at different times—worried aloud that our observations or comments might be construed as, or might actually *be*, racially or culturally biased. I found our concerns reasonable, and the collective awareness of our inability to speak definitively or accurately for others—particularly others of different cultural groups—both healthy and advised. With our own shortcomings publicly understood and acknowledged, we felt more comfortable speaking freely within the group. . . . Pretty quickly, our comfort with and trust of each other grew to a point where we felt free to say what we thought and surmised about students' difficulties, behavior, and progress in our own and others' classes.” (2005a, 5)

Considering that this group met only once a month for an hour, they achieved a high level of trust, important to their task. It was, no doubt, an outgrowth of Rich's careful selection of intelligent and dedicated participants and probably made easier by the fact that all shared a desire to help kids who were making the often difficult transition from sheltered ESL classes into mainstream content area courses. Group members' bonding around this subject was facilitated by their mutual risk-taking as they explored a variety of possible causes of kids' difficulties. It is important to remember that this first year's group didn't burden themselves with finding *solutions*, but rather, following VanDeWeghe's advice, focused on identifying *problems*.

The next year, they were a more diverse group, as Rich felt it important to also include the entire ESL department (as opposed to just mainstream transitions teachers). As the first year had evolved, the group's focus became intertwined with some goals of the ESL department, and Rich found it disingenuous to continue the group without including ESL teachers interested in contributing to and benefitting from the study group's mission. This blend nearly doubled the size of the group, and the dynamic was further influenced when some of the original members had to drop out and were replaced by other content area staff. Understandably, the small-group trust and tight-knit collaboration that the first-year group had achieved was compromised by the larger number of participants, more diverse, sometimes contentious opinions around the table, and the focus on achievable solutions versus merely identifying problems. Attendance at group meetings was less stable (due to both the complication of coordinating many schedules and

participants' commitment to the group's mission). The second year's group did function effectively, though, and their work included a revision of existing writing rubrics to create an instrument that is much more succinct and easier for students and teachers to use.

Successes

There are many indices of success of the first year. One is the work of the study group itself: they collected data, identified key ESL problems and their causes, and came up with some solutions. Second, their work was recognized and honored. Rich writes, "Our school administration valued our work enough to ask two of us to present our findings and recommendations to our entire staff at a series of professional development sessions at the beginning of the next school year, and I have used our inquiry to guide my own professional development presentations to other groups as a teacher-consultant with DWP" (2005, 6).

From the start, Rick and I had an agenda for Northglenn beyond the study group. In the Trinal Model, the questions raised in study groups are followed by larger-scale DWP professional development sessions addressing the questions. The principal was impressed by the study group and agreed to support its continuation the next year and also to start a Reading and Writing Across the Curriculum course—a new strand of DWP work. This latter strand has remained robust to this day.

2004–2006: The Study Group Continues for Two More Years

The second year of the study group followed the DWP Trinal Model master plan by expanding on the first year. Rich sought advice from the school's staff development coordinator, who suggested adding the ESL department chair and the district's ESL coordinator; the group grew to nine. The group set themselves three tasks around the question *How can we help ELLs improve their writing?*

The first task they accomplished well, revising a writing rubric so that ESL students could understand it and use it to improve their writing. Rich, now an advisor to teachers, has a copy on his desk and says, "I've sent it all over the place, I still show it to teachers, and I actually like it myself. I give it to people across the curriculum." Next the group set out to come up with "a common set of expository writing guidelines and graphic organizers to assist our ELLs" (2005, 2). This larger group, with their different perspectives, couldn't agree on common tools. The third task was to write a common tip sheet which students could carry with them. They had many great ideas but again didn't create the product. Rich found a published version of what they were looking for and distributed it to the group. "As group leader," Rich wrote, "I often felt frustrated trying to balance . . . disparate suggestions" (2005, 4). A big learning was that their question was

too broad. The next year Rich hoped they would narrow their focus to some key ESL writing challenges.

Despite the challenges the group faced, they had a lasting impact on the school. Perhaps more important than the specific documents we produced this year, we succeeded in bringing out a much needed dialogue between our ESL department and other content area departments. We have raised the profile of our ESL population and we've given our ESL department access to some of our most dedicated and successful teachers in other departments. The ESL department and our ELL students are no longer the neglected younger sibling of our curriculum, but a viable and increasingly respected part of our school community. (2005, 4)

Rich did not facilitate the third year of the study group. Thinking back, Rich says, "I would like to be honest. If I had had enough energy and time, I would have liked to do one more year. The first year we had content area teachers who took ESL grads. The second year we actually focused on how we can help these kids with their writing. If I'd had the energy, I would have liked to have done a third year to shore up those efforts, but we didn't get that far."

In 2004-2005 he had both facilitated the study group and started the Reading/Writing Across the Curriculum course for the staff. It was too much work—another learning. He handed the study group over to a colleague and the group dropped the ESL work to look at their own writing—not a bad direction in itself but it did not build on the previous work.

A Serendipitous NWP Resource

In June 2004, the second year of the partnership, Rich attended an NWP ELL writing retreat in Washington state. He brought along colleague Suzanne deLemos, a social studies teacher who was not a teacher-consultant but had participated in the study group and the course. Rich remembers,

[When] she and I came back, the principal asked, "Would you guys do an inservice for the whole school?" Suzanne and I did four presentations back to back on a Friday in September, and every staff member in the school cycled through. Afterward, I had umpteen teachers come to me and say, "That was the best staff development inservice ever!" So that helped a lot. And I used the Writing Project model; we had people writing, we had people talking. To me it was a classic Writing Project demonstration and the people ate it up."

As a school leader Rich took the initiative not only to attend the retreat (and remember he wasn't an ELL teacher), bring a colleague and then bring it back to the school, further spreading the

NWP model of relevant inservice and enhancing the reputation of the DWP work at the school. Two more people joined the study group after hearing the presentation.

The Trinal Model at Northglenn

In the DWP Trinal Model of inservice, which Rick and Rich planned at the Inservice Institute, a study group leads to DWP inservice on questions raised by the study group. In our interview Rich admitted, “I feel a little funny because I know there should be a linear progression of ESL study group to ESL inservice, which isn’t what happened.” But Rich shouldn’t feel uneasy; the model just worked differently. Rich had established the reputation of DWP with the study group, a reputation he could parlay into a staffwide, voluntary series of inservice sessions on reading/writing across the curriculum that also served teachers as a credit-bearing university course. From the beginning the course had been Rich’s objective; it just happened to meet a different need for the school. While the trajectory of Northglenn inservice doesn’t exactly follow the Trinal Model, it does follow Rich’s mantra of the key to successful inservice—adaptability and flexibility to meet school needs.

2004–2009 The Course: Reading/Writing Across the Curriculum

Before telling the story of the reading/writing course, let’s go back for a minute to the three roles in NWP site inservice and the focus of this case study. The roles are (1) the site and what it brings to the inservice, (2) the school and teachers and what they bring to the inservice, and (3) the role of the person in charge of the inservice—the major focus of this case study. The model for the series that Rich wanted is common to NWP sites—a yearlong workshop series or course offered on site at a school and co-constructed with the school to meet its needs. Rich didn’t want a set or scripted curriculum but a carefully planned menu of successful practices shared by teachers who had developed or modified them—workshops designed to meet the specific needs of Northglenn. In short, the NWP provided Rich with a model of professional development that it has been refining since 1974.

The first year, Northglenn contracted with DWP for a series of six 90-minute, after-school professional development presentations by DWP teacher-consultants, to take place at Northglenn from November through May. The DWP provided a teacher-consultant, Rich, as the facilitator, and Rick, the site director, was his planning guide and colleague. “And there was a lot of back-and-forth between Rick and me as I sought his advice in getting this project underway at Northglenn. I wanted his advice on a number of issues.”

Eighteen Northglenn teachers³ enrolled in the series voluntarily (Argys 2005a, 1). Through the University of Colorado Denver's professional development partnership with Northglenn, Rich was able to arrange inexpensive university credit through the Extended Studies department of the School of Education and Human Development. From the start, credit has been an important incentive for teachers.

When the course started in 2004, Rich was on another learning curve in his new role as planner, coordinator, facilitator, and evaluator of the course. As facilitator, with Rick's guidance he arranged for the presentations, which included "Unfolding the Voice: Teaching Two Voice Poems," "Elaboration and Exemplification in Persuasive Writing," "Reading as a Writer and Writing to Learn," "Scaffolding the Writing to Learn Process," "Community Service Learning: Letters to the Editor," and "Getting Kids to *Get Tough Texts*" (2005a, 5). With Rick's advice, he selected the course text, *Because Writing Matters* by NWP and Carl Nagin (2006).

The participants kept reading and writing logs where "they discussed their reactions to the presentations, their reactions to the monthly readings, and their experiences implementing presenters' ideas with their own students" (Argys 2005a, 5). Rich, in designing the course, and individual teacher-consultants in their own presentations, employed NWP's ideas of 1) teachers teaching teachers; 2) using writing-to-learn-techniques 3) using discussion as part of the writing and learning processes; and 4) reflecting on our writing and on our teaching. The formula was overwhelmingly successful. In his role as evaluator, Rich solicited reactions from participants to judge the effectiveness of the presentations and also to give feedback to the presenters to improve their demonstrations. (2005a, 5)

In his master's study of the course, Rich found that the teachers reaped many benefits. They were "pleased with the critical thinking that these lessons demanded of their students, as well as with the writing their students produced." He continues, "The teachers teaching teachers their own best practices appear[ed] to work better than any other model of professional development yet employed at Northglenn High School. Equally important, as mentioned by several participants in this study, the same techniques should work for nearly any serious minded group of teachers and students" (2005a, 19). "One shortcoming of this [initial year's] study is the lack of student artifacts from math and science teachers." (2005a) (See footnote for quotations from representative teacher reflections.⁴) In subsequent years, since the course has continued to be

³ The group "included 7 English teachers, 3 each from the math and science departments, 2 from social studies, our reading specialist, the special education department chair, and a representative from both our consumer and family studies and cooperative work experience departments. Our district's secondary literacy coordinator also joined us at the beginning, but was unable to continue due to scheduling conflicts" (2005a, 4).

⁴ [Non English teachers were concerned]

multidisciplinary, Rich has included more math and science presentations including student work.

“The series was so well received by staff during 2004-05 that our principal agreed to fund another, even longer series for 2005-06. In addition, our district’s literacy coordinator observed our first presentation and subsequently encouraged me to apply to teach a similar series sponsored by the district’s staff development department and open to all district teachers, K-12.” (2004a, 5)

2006–2008 “Expect Perturbations”

From 2004 to 2006 the class went well and it continued to be successful enough for school funding from 2006 to 2008, but Rich was dissatisfied. There were a number of problems, he notes, especially “time and energy conflicts.”

To be very crass some of this has to do with who needs university credit for relicensure and who doesn’t. . . . Math and science people are with me not so much for the credit but because they love it and these people literally go back the next day and adapt the lesson that they learned in my class—not every time, of course. The English people, many have moved on to different schools, some are brand new and just finished MAs or they’re in MA programs so this credit isn’t interesting and they’re awfully busy with their own course work. Largely I would have to say I’ve been really dinged of late in participation with the number of duties that are put on teachers in my district. It’s just becoming not exactly exponential but it’s a lot more than it was five years ago.

How do content area teachers find time to instruct their students in writing *and* biology, for example? Who helps the history teacher evaluate student writing for factual accuracy, intelligent presentation of ideas, and mechanical errors? We all feel a need for some balance, but [the] essential question: *How?* reverberates for many teachers still struggling to do too much (2005a, 17).

[From a math teacher]

...having all the people that you found willing to come and engage us at the professional level is something that I don’t think would have been happening apart from the partnership [between NHS and the University of Colorado, Denver (DWP)]. It has helped our school to become a much more professional learning community (2005a, 16).

[From an English teacher]

Another reason (this presentation) was interesting to me was because the nonfiction texts were, to me, very difficult and boring science texts about holograms. At the beginning of the lesson I wasn’t even sure what a hologram was (I’m still not exactly sure), and I knew I didn’t care to learn about what they were, let alone how to make one. Later . . . when [the presenter] began talking about how she watches her kids actively avoiding reading, thus actively avoid learning, I was struck with the idea, “Wow, that is exactly what I was doing when I was avoiding trying to understand the text.” It was an eye opening moment to be placed in the same shoes as my students (2005a, 20).

Those interim years were a perturbation. In their chapter “The National Writing Project: Scaling Up and Scaling Down,” McDonald, Buchanan, and Sterling (2004), under the heading “Expect Perturbations,” observe that in any dynamic system, perturbations should be expected. No one welcomes them and often they are difficult to predict; what’s important is dealing with them. Rich did that by seeking new leadership, teaming up with Alice Smith, altering the design of the course, and changing the meeting time.

Transitioning the Leadership from Rich Argys to Alice Smith

Alice Smith began teaching at Northglenn in 2003. Rich and others noticed her leadership potential early. “Alice,” Rich wrote, “is already a ‘pro’ re: presenting, teaching, and facilitating adult learners, and has been since her second year of teaching. (We tapped her as literacy coordinator when she was a first or second year teacher; she’s that good.) I have mentored her year-by-year (as I have many others—that’s even part of my job now (Teacher Education Coordinator) regarding subtleties of dealing w/ students and teachers and school politics, but she’s presented and taught and facilitated very successfully” (email 11/3/08).

Rich’s mentoring began when he invited Alice to DWP Saturday writing retreats. Alice remembers,

[T]he Saturday writing retreats were my first exposure to the Denver Writing Project format. It was my second year teaching at Northglenn High School and Rich Argys (along with several other Summer Institute alumni) invited me to attend one of the retreats. I still remember how much I was shaking with fear when it came time to share our writing in the afternoon.

In the coming years those writing retreats became my solace from my hectic teaching life. Every time Rich invited me to another retreat I would agree to come and then immediately panic, wondering if I could spare a Saturday away from my planning and grading. But I was always rejuvenated after one of the retreats because I got to step outside of the classroom and focus on my *own* writing. At those retreats I was more than a teacher. I was a professional, a writer, and a creative thinker. Of course I gleaned some new ideas for the classroom, but that was always subtext. The purpose of the retreats was always to rekindle our passion for writing. (email 10/24/08)

In the Summer of 2007 Alice participated in the DWP invitational summer institute with three other teachers from Northglenn.

A lot of people say the summer institute is the best professional development opportunity they have ever experienced. But I don’t think of the words “professional development” when I think about that summer. I would describe it as a renaissance of

creative thinking, a personal catharsis, and an adventuresome journey into a world of writing I had never experienced before. (email 10/24/08)

2007-2008 Planning the Transition Year

Mentoring Alice to replace him, Rich wanted Alice to understand “1) what I’ve set up and why, in the hope that she can keep it going in my absence; and 2) how to avoid the integrity and effectiveness of our approach to professional development being compromised along the way” (email 10/24/08).

In 2007-2008 Rich was facilitating the DWP/NHS course as he’d done in previous years but, as mentioned above, the number of teachers had fallen as pressures and demands on teachers’ time grew. At the same time Alice was offering a course, *Tell It Like It Is: Non Fiction For and About Adolescents*, at Northglenn, sponsored by the principal and funded by the building’s professional development funds on teaching literature/reading. Rich and Alice began to share notes.

As the year progressed Rich and I found that the teachers participating in our classes were over-extended. It became increasingly difficult for them to attend professional development classes after school. So, we started discussing ways to combine our efforts and I suggested we structure this year’s class the same way the DWP structures its Saturday retreats.

Seeing how teachers were over-extended during the week and remembering her experience at the writing retreats, Alice suggested they combine forces go for a Saturday class that could replicate in part a DWP writing retreat.

2008-2009 Transitioning Through Combined Leadership

Rich and Alice met in the summer of 2008 to plan the 2008-2009 year, planning four full Saturdays (previous courses had met after school monthly for roughly two hours). The Saturdays would be a combination of course demonstrations and the excitement and writing of DWP Saturday writing retreats. They sketched out demonstrations for the mornings and writing activities for the afternoon. Alice and Rich co-planned and co-taught the class. They were pretty much splitting the duties and all the while Rich was carefully mentoring Alice.

“This year,” he writes,

I mostly want to be sure that Alice understands some basic tenets of DWP/NWP philosophy re: professional development, and particularly of how I have set up this partnership between our school and DWP. For example, I always use DWP teacher-consultants for presentations, and we always use writing as part of every lesson (and

part of the course requirements). I also want to be sure Alice understands the money part of this partnership. In Alice's non-DWP courses in the past, she's focused on teaching literature (although I'm sure she has incorporated writing) and she has taught the whole thing herself—no outside presenters. (email 10/25/08)

“While Alice and I are equal co-teachers this year, I am mentoring her to do all the contract stuff, administrative negotiation, etc. I will have DWP pay her the \$200 fee this year for setting up the 4 demonstrations. Finally, I negotiated for our principal to pay Alice \$250 per year for teaching the class. I take nothing from the school, as I've been paid by DWP, and my position at NHS is quasi-administrative, anyway” (email 10/25/08).

Rich also explained in a memo to Alice the facilitator's duties during the year.⁵

Concluding Thoughts

It's very difficult to measure the impact of a long-term partnership on a big high school. But when asked to reflect on this, Rich, who is very cautious not to make superlative claims, admits, “I suspect that there's more writing to learn in various classrooms throughout the school.” That's an impressive result. There has also been a huge related influence in the English department. In Rich's words, “It's kind of cool because my school now has like 5 or 6 WP alums on staff. Our brand new instructional coach is our former English chair.” The latest department chair applied and was accepted for the DWP's invitational summer institute for 2009. And Rich proudly reports, “So that makes 4 of 4 English chairs currently at our school (starting w/ me in 1998) who are DWP alumni. In our building recruiting for the DWP has become sort of a group effort.”

Rich ended his reflection on the impact of his work with typical understatement, “I can't boast that this has completely turned my school around; it hasn't yet.” What's clear is that his work has had a big impact on teachers and therefore the reading and writing skills across the curriculum of Northglenn students.

⁵ “After finalizing the syllabus, the next steps are:

1. Contact UCD SEHD Extended Studies dept. and submit the syllabus and our resumes.
2. Contact the presenters to see if they can come on the days we wrote - there is usually some mixing and matching necessary.
3. Send final syllabus and schedule to those who've expressed interest.
4. Get a facilities use form for those days, rooms 407-408
5. Have DWP write a contract to NHS for \$1,000. (4 demonstration x \$250)
6. Decide on what supplemental readings we want to use (we can do this month-by-month).
7. Decide on specific agenda prior to each class.
8. Decide if we want to see if principal Mary will buy books (if we want to go there).” (email 11/10/08)

Brief Checklist of Tips on Building Partnerships (with obvious examples from the DWP/NHS partnership)

Use NWP resources – If possible, attend an NWP Inservice Institute or workshop at the Annual meeting and/or anything the NWP offers that's relevant, for example attend NWP writing retreats to capture your partnership on paper.

Use site resources – Tap director knowledge; invite teachers to site events like the DWP Saturday writing retreats.

Offer university credit – Of course, some will come just for the credit, but then they often get hooked. For those who want to come it can be a welcome benefit.

Expect perturbations – Be vigilant in noticing when relevance and interest drop. Then be adaptable and flexible to meet teacher, student, and school needs. This is easy advice to give!

Start small – Despite pressure to solve problems quickly, start small, build a reputation as teachers in the small groups spread the word about good, relevant PD.

Take risks – Although Rich jokes about never having taught ESL, it takes courage to move into new areas and take on new responsibilities like facilitating a small group or a course for the first time.

A relatively small amount of money can start a partnership – The DWP/NHS partnership started with a \$1000 grant from the site, matched by the principal.

As inservice facilitator – Keep an eye on the mission of the work, impose structure but be flexible and aware of the needs of the group.

As inservice facilitator – Make the focus of the work attainable.

Be mindful of how much you personally can take on – That might mean some disappointment (like Rich's not leading the third year of the study group). Prioritize your commitments for greatest good for teachers and students.

Consider the multiple—and often unnoticed—impacts of inservice – At Northglenn impacts are wide ranging: raising the profile of ELL students at the school, increasing the number of teacher-consultants on the staff, spreading writing across the curriculum, teachers experiencing the joy of writing.

Seek new leadership – When the time comes, seek and mentor the next generation of leaders.

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Funding Allocation and Timeline

- a. I negotiate w/ my principal and set up a contract w/ DWP for teacher-consultants' presentations (75 minutes = \$250. A six-session course costs the school \$1500.
- b. DWP sends a contract to my school, I sign, and my school sends a check to DWP to pay for presentations
- c. I contact teacher-consultants and set up a schedule for them to visit our classes and present.
- d. After each teacher-consultant presents, I notify DWP to pay them \$150. (Of the \$250 fee for a 75-minute presentation, the teacher-consultant earns \$150, the site keeps \$50 to fund youth writing camps, etc., and I get \$50 for setting up the whole partnership, scheduling, etc.)

Suggested/Potential Structure for Guest Writers and Saturday Retreats

Participants sit in a large circle

Introductions: Summer Institute year, school, grade, subject

Lead 15 minutes of warm-up writing time (based on a prompt of some kind)

Transition into small-group sharing of the quickwriting

Transition to sharing small group discussions with large group

Present short craft talk/discussion/lecture about a particular writing technique(s) that we can play around with independently

Possible independent reading time

Sharing/Discussion

Time for Q & A and book signing (when applicable)

Rules of Thumb:

- We tend to always follow writing time with sharing and/or discussion time. We want to hear as many voices as possible in the large group.
- All the teacher-consultant writing shared and discussed during at the retreat will be the result of the prompts/writing ideas presented at the retreat.
- Potential DWP new recruits are welcome to attend with a teacher-consultant.
- Coffee will be provided.
- Retreats last 3.5 hours.