1.       How did the C3WP Advanced Institute support the work in your high-need school? What roles did participants in the AI serve in the professional development? Have the AI participants emerged as leaders in the site as a whole?

    To clarify reference: Our summer 2017 C3WP Advanced Institute directly affected our work with Northeast High School.  Our 2018-19 SEED Institute at Northeast High School was designed to support the teachers’ work there. We will address both in this reflection.

    2017 C3WP Advanced Institute:  The summer 2017 Advanced Institute supported our work directly. Pam Davis, Lauren Funk, Melissa Legate, and Cara Morgenson from the Advanced Institute all took leadership roles in the SEED PD Institute at Northeast High School.  In summer 2017, these teachers worked with Dr. Rachael Shah to develop expertise with the C3WP program. Pam Davis, as English department chair at Northeast, helped us recruit the school’s entire English department for participation in the program. She participated fully during the PD year as a teacher in her own classes, as well as providing coaching sessions to colleagues who needed make up hours.   Lauren Funk joined Cara Morgenson in facilitating the entire PD program. Melissa Legate provided individual coaching for one teacher who needed make up time late in the year. These facilitators have all extended their leadership inside the Nebraska Writing Project network. Lauren Funk is now in her final year as site Co-Director (four year term), and is working with Lincoln Public Schools administrators to develop a model Embedded Institute for integrating C3WP into the vertical curriculum at Lincoln East High.  Pam Davis joined the Advisory Board for our site last summer, and we look forward to her continued leadership. Melissa Legate has been appointed the new site Co-Director, starting her four year term in August 2019. She is also preparing to offer the C3WP program to Madison Schools through the i3 strand of our C3WP work, when we move from early start rural district (Weeping Water) to late start district (Madison) in 2020-21. Cara Morgenson facilitated the SEED institute at Northeast in 2018-19, after doing a Spring 2018 partnership with Director Robert Brooke with her ELL Level II class at North Star High School focused on understanding immigration in Nebraska.  She is now in a PhD program at UNL and is tapped to help with the “Writing Home” NEH Institute Robert Brooke proposed this year with Tanya Baker and Sarah Robbins.

    Although these four teachers are the ones directly involved in the Northeast SEED PD this year, several other teachers who participated in the 2018 C3WP Advanced Institute have become site leaders in other ways.  Mike Catron, Bill Dimon, Derek Funk, Angie Vetter, and Diana Weis have all given workshops on C3WP material in their home districts in the past year. Mike, Bill, Angie, and Diana have also been tapped to provide one-on-one support to teachers at Weeping Water Schools in year 3 of the i3 grant.  In addition, Jess Meyer, another 2017 AI participant, will be doing a preservice-secondary writing partnership with Dr. Rachael Shah this coming fall, introducing the 2019 U. of Nebraska-Lincoln secondary English Education preservice teachers to C3WP materials and philosophy as part of a seven-week informal practicum experience.

    2018-19 SEED Institute at Northeast High School:  At Northeast this year, 18 teachers worked with 185 students in English 9, 10, 11, AP Language, and Government and Politics courses.  According to an end-of-program data analysis slide show created by participating teachers Lindsay Daniel and Triniti Kennedy for the Nebraska Writing Project Spring Gathering, the student writers all made significant gains in every category measured by the UST Ranking system.  Since C3WP philosophy and practice meshes with the new district goals for Lincoln Public Schools secondary level, this work is directly relevant to the school’s needs. In fact, at the final meeting of the 18 program participants, work teams from each secondary grade level presented planning materials for next year which showed how they were integrating C3WP concepts into the target objectives for the grade-specific English and Government classes.

2.       What key lessons did your site learn from doing one year of C3WP professional development in your partner school?

Northeast High School’s position was unique in that they participated in this grant while elements of C3WP were being implemented district-wide into English 10 courses simultaneously. The major selling point to the department was the fact that they would, in a sense, be ahead of the curve as a department as the district plans to adopt C3WP across grade levels in its English curriculum. Hence, vertical alignment was a major focus throughout the professional development. By making vertical alignment intentional, the department was able to see that in future years, their efforts would not go unnoticed in their student performance. While most individuals were able to see the fruits of their labor in their own classrooms, it wasn’t until the final session when Triniti Kennedy and Lindsay Daniels presented the entire department data to the group that teachers saw the positive effects as a whole. Making time more frequently throughout the professional development process to celebrate individual and group successes is an important part of sustained group buy-in.

Lincoln Public Schools is enthusiastically pursuing the implementation of C3WP principles into their 7-12 English curriculum, which places Northeast ahead of their colleagues at other LPS high schools in this regard. One of the most important things learned from this experience was the notion that embedded institutes are most effective when participation is voluntary. Creating buy-in from the beginning is an important component not just for teacher autonomy but also long-term sustainability. Additionally, adhering to the National Writing Project principle of “the best teachers of writing are writers themselves” promotes writer-identity and can help teachers who are not as familiar with the Writing Project models feel more at ease in bringing C3WP writing instruction to their classrooms. Upon reflection, it should be stressed that when bringing in C3WP to teachers both familiar and unfamiliar alike with the National Writing Project, taking extra steps to ensure that teachers have established identities as writers in organic ways will be extremely beneficial to teachers and lead to more buy-in. Throughout the course, in reading exit tickets after sessions, teachers who were familiar with NWP expressed that they wished there was more time to do some of their own writing and exploration, while teachers unfamiliar felt confused as to why it would be necessary to do their own writing. In order to create organic experiences that empower teachers as writers, it is necessary to cultivate that identity consistently with the professional development process.

This leads to one of our site goals regarding Embedded Institutes. There has been an increase in interest in Embedded Institutes through the Nebraska Writing Project. Working with Northeast High School has provided our site with some ideas about creating a culture of teachers as writers as we work with individual buildings and districts across the state to provide Embedded Institutes. Given Nebraska’s state test for juniors is the ACT, C3WP works well as a selling point for teachers and districts to aid in the Writing section. Additionally, as our experience with Northeast High School can attest, working with a social studies teacher also demonstrates the applicability across disciplines.

3.       Tell us about the second half of the school year. How did the mid-year meeting impact your planning for professional development? Were teachers able to sustain momentum through the end of the year? What strategies were most successful in helping them do so? What challenges did you face?

As representatives of the High-Needs Grant leadership/facilitation team, Pam Davis and Cara Morgenson arrived in New Orleans for the mid-year meeting January 26-27, 2019 with a number of successes to celebrate, challenges to consider, and questions to pose as we looked toward wrapping up the year of C3WP at Northeast High School.  In many ways, the meeting was filled with “a-ha moments,” particularly through conversations with facilitators are other sites.

Through the roundtable discussions, conversations with our site’s thinking partner (Carla Truttman), and collaborative work time for site partners, Pam and Cara generation a number of ideas and strategies for future planning, particularly to connect more effectively with administration and other district leaders and curriculum specialists (English and Social Studies). In many ways, the gathering with other facilitators, teachers, leaders from the national team provided a sounding board through which to share and hear similar celebrations and challenges across grants/sites. Pam and Cara also had a goal of exploring ways to support team mindset, particularly in shifting toward positivity and seeing growth in students’ writing and critical thinking skills. Teachers had developed an intense focus on hours and meeting grant commitments, and we were working to shift toward emphasis on student growth and professional learning. There were a handful of Write Into the Day and other activities that Pam and Cara brought back to the site to work into the Professional Learning Community (PLC) agendas immediately following the mid-year meeting.

In advance of the mid-year meeting, Lauren Funk facilitated a four-hour professional development session for the Northeast team on January 21, 2019. This meeting was the last of four extended in-service sessions (3-4 hours each) facilitated by Lauren, leaving the program with only 10 hours remaining of the 48 total PD hours offered for the grant. In many ways, the learning that took place at the mid-year meeting would have been tremendously useful earlier in the year, as our program was finishing up. However, the meeting supported the celebration of the evidence of student and teacher growth and learning as well as the reframing of challenges specific to our site (and, we quickly learned, many others across the country).

Of the 18 teacher participants, 17 finished all grant requirements. Only one did not complete the Using Sources Tool (UST) data entry for the final cycle of writing.  Sustaining motivation and generating a growth mindset among the Northeast English department was at times challenging, however we were able to take back a number of things from the mid-year meeting to share, and there was a noticeable shift in engagement and focus on the successes of the year, particularly after entering and discussing the data from the 3rd cycle of writing. Activities we included in agendas immediately following the mid-year meeting included: mini-unit walk-through Powerpoints and materials (particularly as we headed into standardized testing season), the quick 10 list and additional writing prompts specific to students’ skills and needs, new site-specific and national UST data to share with teachers, and several resources to guide Cara’s planning for future PLC meetings. Exit tickets and surveys for teachers had been routinely incorporated throughout the year, and the tone of these began to shift as teachers became more familiar with the C3WP resources and were able to work collaboratively with small curriculum groups to focus on targeted instruction for specific grade levels and courses. Several teachers emerged as leaders among the group and connecting with these individuals fostered leadership and more targeted work among the small curriculum groups.

School cancellations due to weather were a bit of a challenge for our site (we had record-setting snow and flooding in Nebraska this spring), requiring quite a bit of flexibility. PLC meetings began to move away from more structured agendas toward more time for curriculum group work. Many teachers really took to this new approach and opportunity to work more independently, supporting those who perhaps needed a bit more structure. Our work with vertical alignment became more targeted to grade levels and specific courses, then bringing back ideas from curriculum groups to share out and discuss with the whole team. Our single social studies teacher continued to partner with facilitators to work independently on vertical alignment and information to share with the district Social Studies curriculum specialist and her team in the building.

Finally, a major challenge throughout the year--and one that we weren’t able to address fully--was communication with the Northeast building administration. Following the hire of a new principal, there were some gaps in relaying information about the grant and getting all on the same page in terms of what the year-long professional development program would look like and what administrative support would be needed. Information from the mid-year meeting, new planning resources shared on the C3WP website, and lessons learned this year will greatly inform approaches to work going forward.

4.       What advice do you have for sites regarding [integrity of implementation and fidelity of implementation](https://www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/what-we-need-in-education-is-more-integrity-and-less-fidelity-of-implementation/) in C3WP? We are interested in collecting site supported adaptations to C3WP materials that retained the integrity of the program.

Our district provided match funds so that a social studies teacher could attend the C3WP workshop, and this social studies teacher worked in innovative ways to adapt mini-units and C3WP principles to her social studies curriculum.  She ended up so enamored with the C3WP approach that she is working on creating a presentation for a social studies conference on how the program changed her classroom. Adapting to social studies did require significant work on her part, and she often broke off and used allotted hours to find text sets and tweak materials.  We advise setting aside significant time for teachers to adapt materials if they are working in other subject areas. WE also advise starting with highly motivated teachers when branching out. In addition, this experience emphasized the natural fit between social studies and C3WP, and it demonstrated the potential value of asking district social studies curriculum directors to provide match funds to sponsor social studies teachers.

One challenge to fidelity may have stemmed from the number of teachers in the program (18) and the availaility of facilitators (both whom were also employed as either full-time teachers or graduate students themselves), which made it difficult to co-teach, visit individual classrooms, or meet extensively with individual teachers. Sometimes teachers struggled to fully implement C3WP, shortening or altering mini-units to fit time constraints in ways that did not always fully reflect the principles of C3WP.  We recommend sites consider working with smaller numbers of teachers, or (as in our 2017 advanced institute, which involved 20+ teachers who implemented C3WP with strong fidelity) having teachers individually self-select rather than signing on as a department, or building in additional funding for more individualized support when running programs for large groups.

5.       What are your plans to sustain the work at the school or at other districts or schools? Do you have strategies that other sites could benefit from?

Because the participants at Northeast worked to create a vertically aligned curriculum, the groundwork they laid during the 2018-19 school year will carry over into their work for the 2019-20 school year, and beyond. As previously mentioned, the department is ahead of their colleagues in other buildings in the district as they have already become intimately familiar with C3WP and have already adopted it into the classes they teach. This provides opportunities for the group to be leaders within the district.

Additionally, Lauren Funk and Bill Dimon are working with their principal Susan Cassata at Lincoln East High School to plan an Embedded Institute specifically focused on C3WP for their entire building over the next 3-5 years. An Embedded Institute will allow teachers more time and space to identify themselves as writers as well as gain the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively create cultures of argument in their classrooms.  The goal is to appeal to not just English department members, but across disciplines, which fits into the larger building goal of “increase student achievement through increased student engagement”.

6.       Do you have any other insights that would inform NWP’s future work with C3WP?

We very much valued the experience of working with this grant.  Possible useful expansions for future work with C3WP might include:

* resources to host vertical alignment discussions
* additional materials keyed toward social studies classes
* additional alternate text sets that can be used with mini-units
* clearer definitions/markers of what makes a paper “developing,” “skillful,” etc
* deeper explicit integration of Harris moves throughout the mini-units