Impacts on Students of a Short-Cycle Implementation of the National Writing Project's College, Career, and Community Writers Program

In an independent evaluation, SRI International found that a 2-year implementation of the National Writing Project's College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP) had a positive, statistically significant effect on a validated measure of students' source-based argument writing.[1,2] In response to policymakers' and district leaders' questions about the intensity of resources used, the National Writing Project partnered with SRI to test the efficacy of a short-cycle implementation of C3WP. In this study, SRI randomized two classrooms of 31 teachers into either C3WP or business as usual. These were seventh- or eighth-grade classrooms in 12 urban and rural high-needs schools across five states. (One teacher withdrew from the study.) The teachers had 6 months to use C3WP curricular materials and formative assessment tools in their C3WP class before measuring student writing outcomes in both classes.

Teaching students to write arguments developed through reasoning and supported by the use of evidence from source material is complex. This study showed a positive, statistically significant impact on two attributes of student source-based argument writing, demonstrating promise for the short-cycle version of C3WP professional development in impacting students' ability to engage in such writing. The findings were less robust than those from the 2-year version of the program, however. This suggests that although schools may see results from C3WP in a single school year, a longer term investment may produce a greater impact. This study also expanded C3WP into urban contexts, demonstrating potential effectiveness for a broader range of students.

The National Writing Project's College, Career, and Community Writers Program

C3WP is designed to improve the source-based argument writing of students in grades 7–10 by introducing teachers to new instructional practices through professional development, instructional resources, and formative assessment tools. Local university-based sites provide professional development, adapting the C3WP program to local circumstances while maintaining its core features.

The C3WP Evaluation

SRI randomly assigned two classes per teacher to either the C3WP program or a business-as-usual control condition; teachers were asked to refrain from using program tools and materials in the business-as-usual classroom until outcome assessments had been collected. The evaluation examined program implementation and student writing over 6 months during the 2016–17 school year.

Differences Between This and the Prior Evaluation

- **Time frame:** In the prior study, the National Writing Project worked with teachers for 2 years. In the first year, it developed relationships with the teachers and teacher knowledge of and comfort with source-based writing; teachers had the second year to use the C3WP tools and materials. In this study, the National Writing Project worked with teachers for only 1 year; given the timing of baseline data collection and state tests, teachers had at most 6 months to implement the C3WP tools and materials.

- **Scale:** In the prior study, the National Writing Project worked with teachers to implement C3WP in all grades 7–10 English language arts classrooms in 22 districts (over 300 teachers). In this study, the National Writing Project supported 30 teachers to implement C3WP; teachers implemented in a single classroom.

- **Sample:** The prior study sample comprised students in grades 8–10 in rural districts. The current study included students in grades 7–8 in both urban and rural schools.

C3WP Was Implemented as Intended

C3WP was implemented with high fidelity to key program components. Across the six sites, 93% of English language arts teachers participated in 40 or more hours of professional development. At least half the professional development used strategies to support classroom enactment of the C3WP curricular materials (such as demonstration lessons, coaching, and planning for implementation). Eighty-seven percent of teachers attended at least one event that used the C3WP formative assessment tool to analyze student writing.

C3WP Students Demonstrated Greater Proficiency with Argument Writing

Four attributes of student writing were measured by the Analytic Writing Continuum for Source-Based Argument Writing—content, structure, stance, and conventions. This short-cycle implementation of C3WP had a positive, statistically significant impact on structure and conventions and a marginally significant impact on content and stance. Adjusting for baseline performance, students in C3WP classrooms outscored students in business-as-usual classrooms by about 0.13 on a 1- to 6-point scale on each attribute. In comparison, C3WP students in the prior study had outscored business-as-usual students by 0.22 on content and structure and 0.18 on stance; impacts on conventions were 0.15 and only marginally significant.

C3WP students outperformed business-as-usual students on a measure of argument writing in both studies (model-adjusted differences)
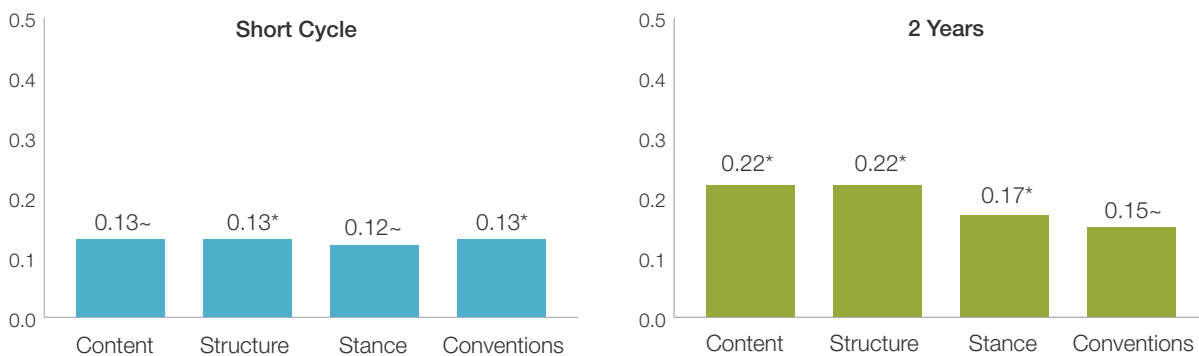
Source: SRI calculations using data from study-administered writing assessments.

Note: To improve precision of the estimates and account for the study design, the statistical models adjusted for factors such as students' baseline writing scores and clustering of students within classrooms and districts.

$\sim p < .1$; $* p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $*** p < .001$

Notes

[1] C3WP was formerly called the College-Ready Writers Program, or CRWP.

[2] Gallagher, H. A., Arshan, N., & Woodworth, K. R. (2017). Impact of the National Writing Project's College-Ready Writers Program in High-Need Rural Districts. Journal of Research on Effectiveness in Education, 10(3), 570–595.

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