

# minnesota writing project

2004

annual update

2005

Minnesota Writing Project aims to improve K-college literacy instruction in Minnesota. Housed within the Center for Writing at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, MWP is the local site of the National Writing Project, an authorized provider of the No Child Left Behind Act (Title II, Chapter C, Subpart II). MWP ...

- Identifies exemplary teachers of writing who can teach other teachers
- Encourages teachers to write
- Assists schools and districts in identifying their literacy needs and supports them through pertinent staff development training
- Supports long-term reform and improvement in literacy instruction through classroom-based, action research
- Maintains partnerships between schools and the University of Minnesota
- Promotes cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity within MWP

## MWP Meets the Needs of Non-Native Speakers

Due to our state's geography and demographics, our major work occurs in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. Most of these districts are experiencing an increased number of non-native speaking students. In St. Paul that number increased 83.6 percent and will undoubtedly continue to increase. In 2003, the US Department of State allowed Hmong refugees from Thailand to resettle in Minnesota. A recent *Star Tribune* article (11/16/04) reported that more than 730 children from Wat Tham Krabok refugee camp have enrolled in St. Paul schools, and the district is adding 10 to 20 new students a week.

No Child Left Behind requirements have heightened the need to support teachers working with ELL students. Legislation requires that schools can be identified for "needing improvement" if the cell size is 20 students or more. As the ELL population grows, the number of Minnesota schools needing improvement in reading will undoubtedly increase. Our site is prepared to offer assistance in this area with several teacher consultants who are ELL teachers with strong presentation skills.



Teachers and students explore writing, art, and technology at the Young Writers' Conference 2004.

## 2004 – 2005 Quick Facts

We have increased the number of professional development activities for educators by 32% and the number of participants in these activities by 36%.

Two of our teaching consultants became 2004 National Board Certified Teachers.

Six of our teaching consultants published articles, poems, and/or novels.

We are one of 189 local writing project sites in the United States.

In 2003-2004 NWP teacher consultants served more than 100,000 educators.

## Young Writers' Conference

For the past several years MWP has offered a Young Writers' Conference that brings students from Twin Cities middle schools to the University of Minnesota for multiple days of writing and creativity. This year, four instructors and sixty students from four schools, two urban/two suburban, with racially mixed student populations, gathered at the Weisman Art Museum on the University campus for three days. The students had a chance to create writing and art projects relating to the current exhibit, "Genesis, Contemporary Art Explores Human Genomics."

“Returning to writing and a writing group has reminded me of the passion I have always had for the power of the written word. I know that I will return to my classroom this fall inspired and ready to inspire my students.”

-2004 Summer Institute Participant



## MWP Provides Summer Opportunities for Educators

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This year MWP held its 14<sup>th</sup> annual summer invitational institute. It began with a three-day retreat that gave the new fellows an opportunity to reflect individually on their own teaching and writing practices. In conjunction with the opening retreat for our summer institute, we designed a two-day retreat open to all MWP members, giving new and returning MWP participants an opportunity for interesting dialogue. Since nearly one-third of the new fellows were teachers of English language learners, much of the discussion focused on teaching reading and writing to underserved student populations.

During the summer institute on the U of M campus, fellows not only engaged in informal writing activities in response to prompts and demonstration lessons, but also participated actively in more formalized writing processes with their writing groups. An anthology of their work was published both in a bound volume and on the MWP website (<http://mwp.cla.umn.edu/anthology/2004>). Demonstration lessons encouraged active participation, produced many new teaching ideas, and inspired fascinating conversations. The demonstrations ranged from strategies for active reading to developing poetry portfolios in ELL classrooms.

Throughout the institute, guest speakers presented their expertise to model best practices for teaching and writing. University of Minnesota Center for Writing Graduate Assistant Jim Oliver and MWP Technology Liaison Sandy Hayes shared their experiences of incorporating blog pages, websites, and PowerPoint presentations in their reading and writing instruction and then mentored fellows in their application of these new technologies. After the institute, summer participants attended follow-up sessions, where they shared how they are applying what they learned.

For the past several summers, MWP has also offered drop-in days open to all teachers, giving them a chance to join the invitational institute. Last summer, the first drop-in day that focused on writing and the visual arts included a tour of the Weisman Art Museum and a presentation by poet Margaret Hasse, who shared poetry inspired by the visual arts. Participants wrote their own pieces in response to works in the museum, and MWP teacher consultant Joanne Toft engaged them in a collage activity based on a painting in the collection. The second drop-in day focused on reading strategies and current books that appeal to teen readers. Two middle school teachers, fellows from MWP's St. Paul Junior High Initiative, demonstrated effective strategies to get students engaged with young adult literature. Teachers had the opportunity to learn about and have a hands-on experience with the Kerlan Collection, one of the largest collections of children's literature in the country.

## Institutional Memberships & District Partnerships

To encourage long-term collaborations between school districts and MWP, we offer two-year institutional memberships to districts. These memberships provide school districts, schools, and individual teachers an opportunity for ongoing programming. Instead of offering a predetermined set of services for the membership, the MWP outreach coordinator coplans with each member district to customize the services according to needs. Currently with ten member districts holding these memberships, MWP has the potential to reach over 125,000 students. We meet a variety of literacy needs with our programs:

Our **grammar workshop**, designed for teachers in grades 6-12, provides current research and best practices in the teaching of grammar. A number of practical suggestions are offered as a means of integrating grammar with writing instruction.

The **6-Traits of Writing** continues to be our most requested topic for workshop sessions in districts. Participants have included teachers from kindergarten to twelfth grade as well as paraprofessionals working with special education students.

Requests for **workshops focused on secondary reading** have increased with Minnesota's new relicensure requirement and the testing under No Child Left Behind.

The **required state writing assessment at grades 5 and 10** continues to be a topic of interest. This year we hosted a workshop for special education and ELL teachers.

**Writing Across the Curriculum** is a continuing issue and MWP offers workshops in which teachers design writing assignments in a variety of disciplines, apply them in their classes, and then reconvene to share their experiences and student work.

In addition to offering teacher inservice, MWP has partnered with the St. Paul school district on a research project that seeks to answer the following question:

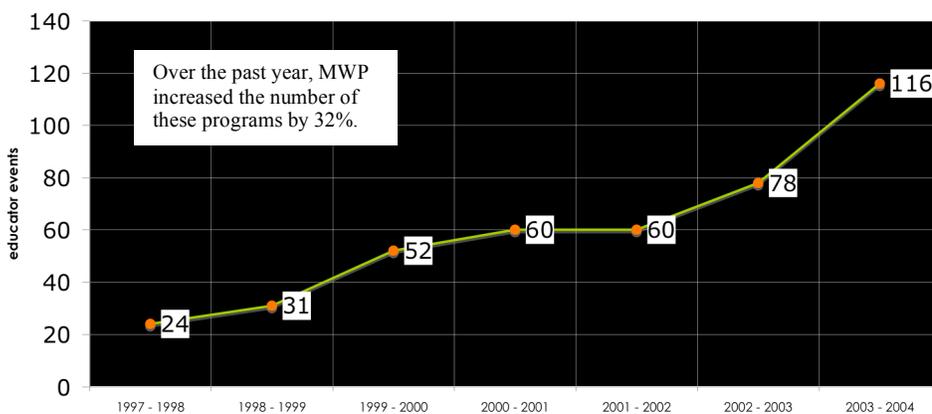
### What effect does a National Writing Project staff development model have on teacher practice and student performance in an urban middle school setting?

During 2003-2004, over 70 principals, cross-disciplinary teachers, and coaches worked together to establish the writing process within content area classrooms as well as in special education and ELL classrooms. In this project, they worked to –

- educate teachers from all disciplines about the state writing rubric
- acquaint teachers with their students' position in district middle school writing
- aid teachers in setting goals for the coming year based on the characteristics of the writing submitted across the district
- assess impact on student achievement as a result of staff development in the areas of reading and writing
- inspire teachers to create writing assignments related to curriculum content

## MWP Increases Its Service to Districts and Schools

16% AVERAGE ANNUAL GROWTH IN INSERVICE PROGRAMS 1997 - 2004



MWP inservices to school districts provide opportunities for teacher consultants to share their knowledge and skills. These inservices meet a variety of literacy needs, including –

- writing at particular grade levels
- writing across the curriculum
- 6-trait assessment and instruction
- state writing assessment preparation
- curriculum review and consultation

## Communication

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To foster the connections among those involved with MWP, we provide several avenues for communication:

- Our website (<http://mwp.cla.umn.edu>) undergoes perpetual modification and now includes demonstration lessons from summer institute participants, announces upcoming workshops and institute information, and links to many other relevant websites. We also post work produced at our various events, such as the Writers' Anthology from the Summer Institute, artwork and short stories done by students at the Young Writers' Conference, and ideas gathered at workshops, meetings, and conferences.
- We maintain a listserv for our members so that fellows can continue their conversations about writing and teaching and stay informed about upcoming events and conferences.
- The MWP newsletter, published and mailed out three times a year, records events of importance to MWP members and is available online on our website.
- This past fall we sent our updated brochure to over 7000 Minnesota educators.

Check out our website for these summer offerings:

- Technology Institute: Tech Tools with the Write Staff
- Writing and the Visual Arts
- Reading in the Content Areas
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual MWP Writing Retreat

## MWP Policy Board Members 2004-05

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Bev Alsleben	Anne Andersen
Marsha Besch	Gin Besser
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Gin Besser	Lisa Christen
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Jane Johnson	Sharon Lapensky
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Micki St. Sauver	Michael Thompson
Joanne Toft	Muriel Thompson

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