Programs for School District Support

MWP teacher consultants offer the following services to Minnesota school districts:

**Curriculum review and consultation** – MWP teachers work with district curriculum planners to assist in the development or evaluation of district or school literacy programs. Our teachers tailor their guidance to meet the needs of individual schools and staff.

**Institutional Partnerships** – Fifteen schools/districts currently invest in two-year cooperative agreements with the Minnesota Writing Project. These long-term collaborations are meant to provide customized services to school districts, schools, and individual teachers. We hold four meetings a year for our partner administrators, focusing on specific topics related to writing and reading literacy practices.

Working in the newly-renovated Nicholson Hall on the University of Minnesota campus, our teachers and students now have easy access to a nook for conferencing, an airy computer lab, and a classroom space for presenting sample lessons.

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In 2008-2009, we focused many of our efforts toward re-envisioning leadership. Through providing opportunities for educators to develop as leaders, we hope that teachers will see themselves as agents of change within their schools. Some of our leadership events this year included:

- Minnesota Writing Project Envisioning Committee
- Advanced Leadership Summer Institute
- Professional Conference Opportunities
- National Writing Project Directors Retreat

The Minnesota Writing Project (MWP), located at the University of Minnesota, enters its nineteenth year as a National Writing Project site with increased stability and credibility. Established in 1990, our site identifies its mission as serving educators in the entire state, which consists of approximately 300 school districts, over 50,000 teachers, and more than 800,000 students.

Given our belief that the best teachers of teachers are other teachers, we continue to provide opportunities for educators to learn from one another, write together, and share their learning.

**Increase in Inservice Programs 2004-2008**

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**Inservice Programs** – Series of sessions led by MWP teachers on a variety of literacy topics such as:

- Writing process (primary, intermediate, secondary)
- Writing across the curriculum (intermediate, secondary)
- Working with ESL students (elementary, secondary)
- Conducting writing assessments
- Early literacy
- The reading-writing connection
- 6+1 Traits writing instruction and assessment
- Reading strategies
- Embedding grammar instruction (teaching grammar in context)
**Programs of the Minnesota Writing Project**

### Summer Institute for Teachers

MWP offers a 3-week intensive Invitational Summer Institute where pre-K to college teachers energize and improve their teaching strategies by writing poetry and prose, watching guest speaker presentations, teaching demonstration lessons, and conducting classroom research projects.

**Opportunities to write**

Involving practice with writing prompts, constructive feedback, and collaborative writing groups

**Study groups** formed around current research in the instruction of reading

**Demonstration lessons** designed by fellows and presented to colleagues in order to generate new teaching ideas to share in their own schools

**A classroom research project** carried out by TCs during the school year

“The summer institute gives invaluable time and experience to teachers who want to improve their teaching. There is really no other program that offers this kind of training in the Twin Cities area. In addition, MWP offers continuing support once teachers are back in their classrooms.”

“I was surrounded by inspired writers and teachers. From this context of encouragement, I was able to take risks in literacy that I would have otherwise not taken. The connections among teachers with rich and varied backgrounds and experiences were invaluable. This is a place in which teaching, learning, and literacy practices are truly honored, and that respect is communicated through every component of the institute.”

— 2008 SI participants

### Young Writers’ Conference

The Young Writers’ Conference is offered through an **expanded partnership** with the St. Paul School District. The Conference is an opportunity for schools to inspire some of their best student writers by bringing them to the University of Minnesota campus, fostering interaction with other student writers, and encouraging critical response to a variety of creative stimuli at the Weisman Art Museum. Sixty students and their accompanying teachers were invited to participate in a cross-disciplinary writing experience at the museum. Over a period of three days, students and teachers viewed, learned, and wrote about the exhibit.

This year’s conference centered around the exhibit “Changing Identity: Recent Works by Women Artists from Vietnam,” which allowed us to incorporate elements of visual literacy along with writing about identity. To inspire writing and reflection on one’s personal identity, professional photographers and writers shared how they address identity in their own work. Final writings were shared with the larger group and then published in an anthology.

When asked what insights they gained from participating in the conference, students wrote:

“Shi [Kao Kalia Yang] taught us a lot. I will never forget her and she told me that my name was a name that people will remember. That made me want to write a book some day.”

“I realized that words are just more than letters bundled up together. They’re whatever we use everyday – to express ourselves.”

“I learned you don’t have to be scared to show your work.”

“One of the best parts of this experience was the new friends I made and the writing I got to do.”

### Opportunities for Teacher Leadership

This year we’ve focused our efforts on developing teacher leadership.

From July 14th-18th, MWP held an Advanced Leadership Institute for educators who have recently retired or are close to that next step in their careers. We hope these new teacher-leaders will help us to expand our capacity to serve schools and teachers.

The MWP Envisioning Committee, a group of twelve individuals involved in the planning of MWP’s future development, met throughout the year to generate ideas for our site’s local expansion. Planning has involved revising the Minnesota Writing Project’s mission statement, discussing various leadership structures, and considering how these new structures will allow for various levels of leadership, ownership, and participation.

One of these structural expansions included the establishment of a new outreach co-director position to help lead our outreach program.

This year, our site was awarded a small grant of $4,000 from the Foundation for Excellence in Teaching and Learning at Education Minnesota. With this grant funding, a group of teachers formed the Friends of the Wiki Committee. This group allowed MWP teachers to design and develop an online space that is relevant to their individual needs.

This year we held our 2nd Annual Reunion/Renewal Workshop. Guest speakers shared teaching strategies for closing the achievement gap.

In response to many teachers requesting professional development related to the teaching of 21st Century Literacies, MWP sponsored the Digital Writing Workshop, a full-day session which helped participants learn how to make the Web 2.0 accessible and practical for them and their students. MWP teacher Elizabeth Boese (‘07) guided teachers through a hands-on exploration of how blogs, wikis, and social networks can be used to augment and revise traditional instruction of writing.

Involvement in the NWP’s Professional Writers Retreat has provided valuable networking opportunities for two MWP writers: Sharon Cormany Omelas (’03) and Sherri Larson (’07). The writing retreat, held in Santa Fe, NM, focused on the responsibility of teachers to write for and on behalf of the profession. MWP teachers were able to visit with editors and former NWP participants, who provided direction and insight on professional writing opportunities.