



Minnesota Writing Project

Fall 2007

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17th Annual Summer Institute: Community, Connections, & Camaraderie

Boomeranging
by Mike Borka

"Everything has changed. Nothing has changed." These words, received in a letter from a friend, encapsulate my experience of returning to the Summer Institute for the first time in ten years. What's changed in ten years? In 1998, the price of a gallon of gas was \$1.15. The New York Times cost \$.60. And the average U.S. salary was about \$38,000. Many things, it seems, have changed or grown in some way. I wish I could say the same were true about my hair, but I fear it grows now as it did then...not so well. But growth is the right word here because I found newness within a familiar structure.

Technology: that's changed a bit in the last decade. This summer I word processed, Power Pointed, iMoved, and wikied my way to a better understanding of how technology can support all phases of the writing process, but especially how it can help access wider audiences. This was not situated learning but knowledge that will follow me when I return to campus this fall. I now understand how to embed wikis and blogs into my children's literature course as a way for students to share with each other their ideas on the texts they read. Technology stretched my teaching, and I hope it will extend their learning.

New to me, too, this summer was my role in creating and introducing the daily writing prompts. I was, in fact, Prompt Guy. For me this responsibility was unique because I do not regularly provide my students with prompts. From my past experience, though, I remembered how important the prompts were in setting a tone. I needed, then, to take this established practice and connect it to my beliefs so it made sense and supported everyone's writing process. In short, I couldn't mess it up. Again, the Institute moved my thoughts and practices forward. I had to arrive each day with a prompt and put it out there wondering what it might provide in return.

And what it brought was community. At the Institute, I was surrounded by people who knew a lot about literacy instruction but were as interested in learning more. Then as now, we tried to teach, listen, and collaborate to the benefit of all. I felt this support most keenly in my writing group as people went back and back to my text, guiding, suggesting, questioning. For me, this connection is the lasting impact of the Institute. It is the part that follows me, the part that provides insight, and the part that I am looking forward to go back...soon

Reflection
by Cathy Wegener

The days of summer are dwindling but I am left with a memory, sure footed and long lasting, of the MWP Summer Invitational Institute.

Myself and other teachers began our journey in June at the Mount Olivet Retreat Center. We were treated as royalty in our accommodations and food. Lorna Landvik stopped by to regale us with tales of writing and stand-up comedy. We spent much of the weekend relaxing, writing, and getting to know the others who signed up for three weeks of the intense, rewarding work that was to follow.

The Writing Institute began on July 9 at the University of Minnesota Writing Center. The staff at the Center clearly respected the work that teachers do each and every day on behalf of our students.

We wrote each day.

The treat of quiet, contemplative writing was comparable to eating the biggest, gooiest hot fudge sundae one can imagine. This business of writing crosses all lines, whether you are young or old, teaching high school or our youngest learners. We broke into small writing groups and helped each other through our current writing, whether it be academic or personal. The small writing groups nudged (sometimes pushed) us to write better than we thought we could.

Our reading groups met several times during the institute and made a Wiki reflecting our thoughts about the reading comprehension books we read.

The camaraderie that was built at the institute was overwhelming. We were all in the field together, pushing through the mud and muck. As I teach writing this year to my young learners, I know I will refer back to the hard work and fond memories of this summer.



Inside the Institute...



Ann Thompson's sons

Writing means so much more when it's on a topic close to your heart. As I face the "empty nest" this fall, my poem reflects thoughts I've had lately. The Summer Institute gave me the courage to put my words and feelings into this genre.

-Ann Thompson

On our second day of the MWP, we did a Writer's Marathon. Three members of our group were graduates of the U and the discussion quickly turned to the "good ol' days." As I began to give a virtual tour of my old boathouse, I was overcome with emotions and memories. When we finally stopped to write, this poem literally flew onto the paper. Enjoy!

-Barb Everhart

A Mother'S Daydream

by Ann Thompson

Time passes.
Babies who swayed in
her arms,
now tall and strong
wave goodbye.

Moments forever lingering.
Outstretched arms
wrapped around her,
as bright eyes search for hers,
soaking in her abundant love.

Little voices leaving
an indelible mark on her heart,
chanting, imitating, questioning.

Cheek to cheek,
she savors the sweet moment,
knowing that chaos
is ready to burst.

But time passes.
What is lost to memories,
is gained in loving satisfaction,
knowing that she escorted
babies to boys, boys to men.

Good men,
the image and essence of their
father,
her forever love.

The River Flats

by Barb Everhart

"to capture a time when passion led actions" JL

Oh, how time has passed
The sounds of construction off the river
The birds chirping in the trees
The faint sounds of laughter
Of a team from the past

I remember those days fondly
The wading in the water at 5:30 am
The sound of the oar hitting the water
With a crisp splash
And a grunt, as it's pushed through the river

Lifting the boat overhead
River foam, dripping from the boat onto our sweaty bodies
Climbing the hill, boat on a shoulder
Placing the eight behind some chicken wire
Located in the corner of a parking garage

But times have changed
The old buildings have come down
And new ones created
To serve the young and able-bodied women
That row for the U. today

The memories are fading
As with the setting sun on the Old Mississippi
We can still be seen, if you look really hard
We're the women that weren't paid, weren't gifted
Weren't beckoned by a Varsity coach

We were the rowers, the past
The women made of steel, and grit, and grind
No locker rooms, no showers
Only our kind
To pave the way for the Powerhouses of today.

This year's institute experimented with wikis for collaborative writing and sharing of ideas. Each book study group was required to write a "wiki chapter" which included a book review, and "link lists" of related online resources related to the book. Investigate the four wiki chapters written for this year's institute. Some focus more on the collaborative process of writing, and others show the possibilities of online publishing.

Deeper Reading by Kelly Gallagher <http://drwiki.pbwiki.com/>

The Literature Workshop by Sheridan Blau <http://blahblahblau.pbwiki.com/>

Mosaic of Thought by Keene and Zimmermann <http://mwpmosaic.pbwiki.com/>

When Kids Can't Read by Kyleen Beers <http://cantread.pbwiki.com/>



Spring's "**Tea with Auntie Mo**" provided time for reflection on the social justice work we do related to education and literacy. Through the committed efforts of TC Melissa Borgmann, MWP was able to meet with Ms. Maureen Dabula of East London, South Africa. Affectionately known as "Auntie Mo," she shared with us her efforts to promote literacy in South Africa through AIDS/HIV outreach. Using the Anglican church as an infrastructure for education, Ms. Dabula has helped over 500 orphans get access to schooling. In addition to helping children, Ms. Dabula also promotes a collective knowledge through encouraging women to write about their experiences and share

what they know about mothering, crop-growing, etc. When, Ms. Dabula described the situation of AIDS/HIV in South Africa as "moving faster than literacy," everyone in the room could feel the weight of her work. Auntie Mo's talk was then followed by questions, a time where Auntie Mo and others made connections and compared notes on their outreach efforts.

Registered yet?

MWP reunion/renewal workshop,

"Improving Student Writing,"

will be held **Wednesday, October 3rd, from 8:30-3:30pm** on the St. Paul campus. For more information, or to register, visit the MWP website at <http://mwp.cla.umn.edu> or call/email: 612-625-6323/mwp@umn.edu

other upcoming events

MCTE Fall Workshop: Monday, October 29 at Royal Cliff in Eagan. Featured speaker is Kelly Gallagher author of *Deeper Reading*. Website: www.mcte.org

The Education Minnesota Professional conference: Thursday October 18 and Friday, October 19th at Saint Paul RiverCentre in downtown St. Paul. Featured speakers include Mark Victor Hansen (10/17), coauthor of "Chicken Soup for the Teacher's Soul," and Jonathan Kozol (10/18), author and activist for poor children.

Stop by and visit us at our MWP booth.

Writing Central: A Day for Literacy at College of St. Bens' and St. John's University: Friday, November 9th 8:00-2:00. For more information contact Mike Borka at mbork@csbj.edu.

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