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## Prompted

*Maria Theissen (ISI 2010)*

Like many teachers, I am a big fan of caffeine—accepting it hot, cold or lukewarm with slightly separated non-dairy solids. You might say that it’s a part of my daily routine, certainly something that I look forward to. Arriving at Nicholson Hall for July’s Summer Institute, back sweaty and quadriceps still complaining about the recent bicycle commute, I always made a point of stopping in to the Writing Center to procure my daily joe.



*2010 Summer Institute cohort*

Somewhere on the way to August, caffeine *stopped* being my sunrise stimulant. Morning after morning, teetering up the stairs to Nicholson’s nosebleed section, I found my stomach doing small cartwheels of excitement about the writing prompt instead. Neatly written on the whiteboard, often with accompanying artifacts scattered enticingly across the front table, taken from texts whose titles and authors now reside in my composition book, the writing prompt did what caffeine could not. It woke my own memories and afforded insight into the minds of those around me.

During those daily prompts, we were 23 people locked together in noisy silence at the peak of Bloom’s Taxonomy. We were writers with purpose, independently honing our craft. In the minutes that followed—sharing phrases, sentences and sometimes whole pieces—we were a community of writers, engaged and invested, invited to know and

respect one another in the intimate realm of thought. Morning after morning, my mind returned to this question: As we shepherd our own students through the slings and arrows of adolescence, isn't this the collaborative atmosphere of expression and acceptance that we strive to create for them?

The answer, for me, is a resounding **yes**. Once in autumn and twice in spring, my students' learning—and my teaching—will be publicly quantified by standardized tests that do not recognize the value of thoughtful writing. Despite this, my experience at the Summer Institute has fortified my resolve to foster communities of young writers. So, if you happen to pass by room 213 at 8:35 a.m., you will find a classroom of students waking their memories, honing their craft and writing with purpose. I will be writing with them, continuing a habit I picked up in July and, quite possibly, drinking water instead of coffee.



## How to grow a teacher ... MWP ISI 2010

*Karen Palmen (ISI 2010)*

If anyone were to tell me that I was to spend the hottest month of the year in Minnesota indoors in a university classroom, I would have told him or her to find another victim. Why would I want to sit in a stuffy classroom observing teacher lessons, learning how to improve student writing, working in groups, and practicing my writing? **NO THANKS!** However, that's exactly what I was fortunate enough to do in the 20th Annual Invitational Summer Institute of the Minnesota Writing Project. It was worth every minute.

We started the institute with a weekend retreat at Mount Olivet Retreat Center. Here we did the usual meet and greet but in beautiful surroundings that inspired the spirit of intellect and awe in all of us. We were placed in our summer reading and writing groups and set forth on the journey that changed my understanding of literacy forever.

My reading group chose the book *When Kids Can't Read, What Teachers Can Do* by Kyleene Beers. What a fantastic guide to teaching reading. Each of us in our group felt that we would be able to use many of Beers' strategies in our classrooms next year. This is interesting because we come from the spectrum of K-12 education; one of our members was a first grade teacher, another was in the middle school, and I teach high school. Each of us felt our text was relevant to our work setting.

My intention when I came to the summer institute was to rediscover my love of writing and to step away from academic writing to do some writing **FOR ME!** My writing group helped me achieve my goal! I had one of the most inspiring experiences in my life with writing group. Here again, we all came from different aspects of education and brought that experience to the group. With the support of my writing group I was reacquainted with my "voice." I discovered that I could take my personal experiences and my academic experiences and turn them into powerful writing that would move readers to a space in time, place, and history that perhaps they had not previously known. What a tremendous boost of confidence that my writing group inspired in me!

The Minnesota Writing Project reanimated the writer in my soul. It has given me the motivation and exhilaration to continue writing and sharing my knowledge and skills with the students in my own classroom.



## 2008 ISI Cohort Meets for 2nd Annual Writing Retreat

A group of nine TCs from the 2008 Invitational Summer Institute met in early July for writing support and collegiality. In the spirit of their 2009 reunion that met in Duluth, this year's group gathered at the Dunrovin Retreat Center just south of Marine on St. Croix for a period of three days.

The three days were filled with opportunities to write, receive feedback, and reconnect on personal and professional matters. Among the memorable events were the food-inspired group poetry writing, the walks around the grounds and through the woods, and the long conversations related to love, marriage, and parents.

For some, the inspiration to write was fueled by having a writing community close at hand. For others it was the ability to explore what one needs to write when given the opportunity. As Susan Perala-Dewey describes the retreat,



From left: Liz Curran, Elisa Holm, Sean Fleming, Debra Hartley, Susan Perala-Dewey, Diane Thayer-Peterson, Patty Sullivan, Tom Backen, Michelle Shaw

Photos at Dunrovin were taken by Elizabeth Curran.

I think it was kismet ... a powerful, unique, meant-to-be circumstance that I happened to trust all of you with my deepest and most desperate worries ... I truly believe this is part of the magic writing offers to each of us. To take the time to describe a situation, reflect on it, and make a plan of action (alone or with others). This takes courage, time and concentration; something I am convinced I would not have found this summer without my time (and company) at Dunrovin. I am so thankful for the friendships, personal and professional, my MWP experience has given me... "It's the gift that keeps on giving."



### Hail to Gail

Hail to our good cook, Gail  
Your meal pleased us without fail

No gluten, onion or dairy  
(It must have been quite hairy)

From salad to bundt cake  
Is there anything you can't make?

Rachel<sup>Ray</sup> and Julia<sup>Childs</sup> might have attitude  
But you deserve our heartfelt gratitude





## Crow

*Susan Perala-Dewey (ISI 2008)*

The crow family down the block does not need to go to therapy. Not that they could afford it anyway, with their scavenging habits and public forays into neighboring garbage cans. While some folks might be tempted to report them for loud domestic disputes, you have to admit they communicate.

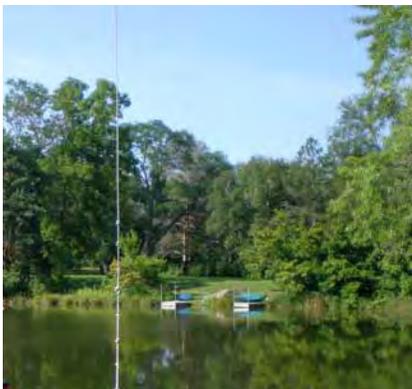
Unlike the Scandinavian warblers who quietly take their problems to the forest, the crows get it all out in the open. They talk, they squawk, they screech. They jump up and down and let it all out. They chase each other out of favorite perches and gather on rooftops for heated committee meetings.

Unlike robins from the south who keep their little ones in the nest until they've learned proper etiquette, crows kick their kids out of the house early on and insist they socialize with other crow kids.

And when one crow parent disagrees with the other, there is no passive-aggressive behavior. They duke it out with beaks pecking, wings flapping, and five-toed claws grabbing. It's no wonder they appear on street corners looking so disheveled with missing feathers and wing-tips.

So think twice the next time you hear, "therapy is for the birds" or "go eat crow!"

*July 2010*



# EXPLORING THE BOUNDARIES OF LITERACY EDUCATION

## AGENDA

Welcome/Writing Prompt

**Keynote: Enterbrainmnet Live!** by Frank Sentwali,  
Creator of Edu-Poetic Entertainment, a Twin Cities spoken word and music ensemble



Following this performance, John Albright (ISI '05) will share classroom experiences incorporating Frank's program in his curriculum.

## LUNCH

### Two Breakout Sessions: Hot Topics in Literacy

- Diverse Learners — How do we meet their needs?
- Common Core Standards — What does it mean for our students?
- Digital Writing — How do we make it work in our courses?
- Writing Assessment — What is good writing?

**The day will include plenty of time to write and share with other teachers!**

**When:** Saturday, October 16, 2010

8:30 a.m.- 3:30 p.m (CEU's available)

**Where:** U of M Continuing Education and  
Conference Center, St. Paul Campus

**Cost:** \$60 — includes parking, meals & snacks  
(continental breakfast at 8:30 a.m.)

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To register: By **Friday, Sept. 24th**, send payment to MWP, 10 Nicholson Hall, 216 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455, or contact MWP @ umn.edu to reserve a place and bring payment on the day.

## Sharing Their Words

### My Garden *Denise Bade (ISI 2010)*

My flowers are my pleasure!  
I walk the beds with wine in hand.  
I admire all that has been planned.

I label  
I love  
I shelter  
I guide

I transfer  
I train  
I mulch  
I divide

I clip  
I cover  
I trim  
I seed

I plan  
I plant  
I water  
I weed...

My flowers are my pleasure?



The above garden photos are used under a Creative Commons License for Flickr member Jayantnandan. To view more of this photographer's work, visit [www.flickr.com/photos/nandanj/4951933100/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/nandanj/4951933100/).



## 1959 Girls

Kimberly Colbert (ISI 2010)

*You need to pick your afro daddy*

*Because its flat on one side*

*You need to pick your afro daddy*

*Because its flat on one side*

*Well, if you don't pick your afro*

*You're gonna have one side high*

*Afro by Erykah Badu*

Gimmie that bell-bottom-afro-puff-lime-green-polyester  
suit-platform shoe music

I want a beat

with heavy bottom

wa-wa guitar

and real horns

that move side to side in funky unison

Take it to the bridge with a thumb slap

Don't play me no metrosexual crossover sweet-drink-in-a-  
pretty-glass-so-I- can-hold-my-pinkie-up tune

I want Funk so stank you can smell

the thick blue cloud

swaddling bare light bulb

at basement party

locked embrace in a slow drag

falsetto beggin' hard

crocodile tears fall to

deep bass love ballad

You've come to know a love of your own

'59 girls

grow up in Parliament Funkadelic-Soul Train age

do the bump to Kool and the Gang, Ohio Players

Sugarfoot with tipped afro

playin' loud on transistor radio AM

sets us on Fire

Turn the dial to get the fuzz out

EWF tells us that's the way of the world

"Gansta" means driving a duece and a quarter

diamond in the back, sunroof top, diggin the scene. . .

Fo' the love of money

'59 girls

fantasize over Michael-Marlon-Tito-Jermaine and Jackie

jam to three inches of shiny, black wax

stacked precariously with yellow and red plastic inserts

on a portable turntable

Stop!

The love you save may be your own

'59 girls

come of age at tail end of Model Cities

after riots

urban blight and white flight

are the order of the day

'59 girls

daughters of the nouveau middle class

Langston Hughes' dream motif

bussed to cure the disease of

defacto segregation

don't mess up

parents will beat yo' ass over some bad grades

'59 girls

beautiful but never knew it

first to sport cornrows

yet called Black Bo Derek

first to have mahogany, coco and café au lait

makeup and pantyhose

greeting cards with familiar faces

that recited our poetry

'59 girls

watched locked doors open

and entered

heads held high

queenlike

to shoulder the weight of buckets

bearing the happy tears of our ancestors

And-we-grew-up

'59 girls

reverberate the fading sound of the baby boom

no longer the New Generation

now the parents

some the grandparents

Elders

in a world

where imagination good and bad

has become reality

Happy birthday

Happy birth day '59 girls

Enter this new age with

Dig-ni-ty

Keep holding your heads high

Celebrate

To a new beat

## Upcoming Events

### Save the Date! 4th Annual Fall Workshop – Saturday, October 16th, 2010

Come reconnect with fellow MWP professionals as we explore the boundaries of literacy. Spoken word artist Frank Sentwali will perform while other teachers lead roundtable discussions on hot topics in literacy. See included flyer for more information.

### National Day on Writing – Wednesday, October 20, 2010

NCTE is sponsoring an encore celebration of writing. For more information on various writing events or the National Gallery of Writing visit [www.ncte.org/dayonwriting](http://www.ncte.org/dayonwriting).

### MCTE Fall Workshop – Monday, October 25th, 2010

Author of *Readicide*, Kelly Gallagher, will be the featured speaker for the conference. For more details visit [www.mcte.org](http://www.mcte.org).

### MWP TC Wins National Award

Elizabeth Boeser (ISI 2007) received the 4th Annual Media Literacy Award sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English. The award showcases teachers who incorporate innovative uses of media in their curriculum. Elizabeth teaches a variety of English Language Arts classes at Jefferson High School, including 10th grade English, College English, and TV Production.

### New TCs Offer Guidance and Leadership

This year we have three new teachers who have offered their time and expertise to help advise and lead ongoing activities for our writing project. We thank them for their service. If you would like to be involved with the MWP Advisory Board or a cohort representative, contact us at [mwp@umn.edu](mailto:mwp@umn.edu).



#### Charles Barniskis – MWP Advisory Board

Charley teaches high school English at Minnetonka High School, where he is currently the department head. Charlie's professional interests related to writing include instructional scaffolding such as maintaining a writer's notebook and how this promotes students' formal writing.



#### Maria Theissen – MWP Advisory Board

Maria teaches a combined class of 2nd and 3rd graders at Concord Elementary in Edina. Maria's professional interests include digital writing in the primary classroom, particularly the use of electronic portfolios.



#### Erin Moore – 2010 Cohort Representative

Erin teaches language arts at the Academy for Science and Agriculture in Vadnais Heights. Erin's professional interests include how students' use of technology in collaborative groups might increase reading comprehension.

## Minnesota Writing Project Advisory Board Members

2010–2011

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