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Remembering How To Love Writing

Robyn Dettling Madson (ISI 2014)
Forest Lake High School

Writing. I ask my students to do this almost every day: writing prompts, arguments, refutations, summaries, analyses, narratives . . . and yet, I don't do it. As far as I know, neither do most of my colleagues.

I take it back—I used to write. All the time. It was pretty much like breathing or eating. It was just a part of existence. I had my first poem published in the newspaper in first grade. It was about the winter and it involved snowflakes falling onto stovetops. I took my first creative writing class in the summer between third and fourth grade. I wrote poetry through my angsty and anxiety-ridden middle school years, dedicating it in my journal to my best friends. Throughout high school, I took creative writing as soon as I could, then took every writing class I could fit into my schedule. I wrote poetry through my first real love, first real break-up, first real surgery, and first real episode of depression. I wrote through six University of Minnesota writing courses, digging in my heels when one professor insisted I capitalize my i's, then basking in just a few words of praise on one of my prose poems: "Wow, you CAN WRITE," scribbled the professor, finally, after weeks of "constructive" criticism. When I started teaching, I wrote with my students, and we held poetry slams at local theaters with cash prizes and crazy writing. I wrote with them about music, art, nature, and the relationships I still hold dear today.

Then somewhere along the line, I stopped. I'm not sure where or when. Perhaps when I had kids, I suddenly had less time, but I have pages of journals scribbled in



2014 ISI cohort at Mount Olivet Conference and Retreat Center



Cory Pedersen writes at the Weisman Art Museum

insane, sleep-deprived mommy prose that might say otherwise. Perhaps I just found other hobbies, but my little traveling journal full of slightly tipsy notes regarding the attractiveness of this fiddle player or that dobro player would beg to disagree. Perhaps it corresponded with my switch from teaching Poetry Writing, Multicultural Women’s Literature, and Linguistics in a crazy modular schedule that lent itself to creative thought processes and time management . . . to teaching English 10 and College Preparatory Composition in a bell-regulated, seven-minute passing time, rigor-before-all, data-focused world. Maybe I began to forget that writing was a central part of my being. Maybe I just got too busy. Maybe I no longer saw the point.

Enter the Minnesota Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute. I received the invitation, applied on a whim, and interviewed. I got the “Congratulations!” letter and I got nervous. Later, as I drove to the retreat center for the first meeting, I felt sick—like pull over and throw up all over the highway sick. I was scared when Muriel gave us each a piece of a poem and asked us to find the people with the other stanzas, then find a creative way to present that poem. And I was really scared when I wound up sharing a poem with two super-cute, small blond women who seemed to really enjoy dramatic choral reading (thanks, Laura and Kat for handling my complete awkwardness).

Maybe I began to forget that writing was a central part of my being. Maybe I just got too busy. Maybe I no longer saw the point.

Then we began to write together. Short bits with slow sharing, then longer writing based on shared reading and questioning. Personal writing. Writing about pictures, then with pictures. Writing about strange paintings with S-shaped birds and overly-excited flies. Writing about teaching values and beliefs. Writing in different places around the University. Writing with everyone, with groups, with partners, alone. Everyone wrote: leaders, co-leaders, facilitators, support staff, and institute participants. Everyone shared sometimes.

It really seems obvious, in hindsight, that this mundane practice of writing together and working as a group to play with words, delight in ideas, and hone our craft—both writing and teaching—would be as transformative as it proved to be. We forged friendships across school districts and grade designations. We learned tips and tricks of the trade through questions and demos: “Choral reading is what now?” and “You use cards to determine who gets to say what in a group discussion? Whoa . . . mind blown.” We listened to different voices: Cory is a rock star, Jessica delights in the joy her daughter exudes when she eats, KK has a “vanilla family,” and Kate is blown away by her students, like a kite. We shared our stories and got sunburned in the process. At the end, it became the one of the most productive and, dare I say, functional groups I’ve ever been a part of.



Jess Emery, Lee Fisher, Kate Mabel, and Greg Dahlstrom meet as a writing group

Now begins the heavy process of reflection and implementation, integrating the lessons learned into my daily teaching practice. As I head back into that test-laden, data-laced teaching world that our current politics and policy has pushed us into, I am carefully guarding that group ethos of creative word play, experimentation, and dedication to thoughtful craft. I have a deeper empathy with my writing students, having been one again. I’m excited to share these ideas with my school and my students. I’m excited to share my successes and failures with my new teacher friends.

And somewhere along the way, I remembered how to love writing. I remembered how it feels to compose something funny, something righteously angry, something deadly serious, something hopelessly melancholy. I remembered how working and playing with other writers rejuvenates my spirit, as cheesy as that sounds. I remembered the basic reasons I took up this calling—I love my students first and foremost, but I also love my craft. I love showing them how to use their own creative and critical voices. In the haze of everyday life, I might have forgotten some of that. Thanks to the MWP institute, I’ve remembered.

And somewhere along the way, I remembered how to love writing.

A Growing Season

Kate Mabel (ISI 2014)

Monroe Elementary, Anoka-Hennepin

One of my personal interests is gardening. My front and back yards are mostly shady, so I don't grow edibles. But there is a small part of our backyard along our new fence that gets some sun, so this summer I decided I'd plant clematis. To support my decision my husband Mark built a trellis (he fully supports anything that requires the use of power tools).

When I found my Clematis and brought her home, I learned about her by reading the planting directions attached to her pot. Her vines have three main requirements to thrive: sunlight on their stems and leaves; cool and moist (but not wet) roots; and support for climbing. The directions noted that Clematis "needs a little special handling at the start." I dug a hole with plenty of room on all sides and placed Clematis in the ground. She instinctively grabbed onto the trellis while I planted ground cover seedlings to shade and protect her roots. Afterward, I called Mark over to admire our plant baby and shared what we could do to help guide and support her growth. He supported me so much he built four more trellises.

I enjoy gardening for many of the same reasons I enjoy teaching. As a teacher and gardener, my goal is to support students by giving them the tools they need to thrive as learners. Teaching is a perennial career and, like a hardy hosta, I've been divided, transplanted, and left to take care of myself. I go dormant most summers and surprise myself every fall when I begin growing again. But this summer I needed more than time to slow down and rest.

I came to the 2014 Invitational Summer Retreat and Institute with my own directions: Needs time, guidance, and freedom to grow. My teaching roots required attention from my Minnesota Writing Project leaders and classmates.

In the mornings, the room 325 Nicholson Hall greenhouse became a space where we gave each other room to reveal vibrant colors through conversation, demonstrations, and sharing. As sun-loving writers and teachers of writers, we challenged each other to unfurl and climb. Alive with ideas generated by prompts, senses, emotions, and experiences, we expressed ourselves with blossoms of written and spoken words.

In the afternoons, my writing group asked thoughtful questions, gently encouraging me to try new things while providing their undivided support. They taught me to do the same for them, and we handled each other with care.

I watered Clematis before I left for the Mount Olivet Retreat Center, every day before class, and for the rest of the summer. The two of us grew stronger and came to life in our new surroundings. With sincere gratitude to everyone who facilitated and participated in the 2014 Summer Institute garden plot, I anticipate many more growing seasons. You are my models for student advocacy and empowerment through writing. You guided me to critically think, question, look, and listen in ways that will forever impact my teaching and writing.



Kate's Clematis



Four more trellises

I watered Clematis . . . for the rest of the summer. The two of us grew stronger and came to life in our new surroundings.

We Are Writers: Pieces from the ISI

When participants in the 2014 Invitational Summer Institute made their annual visit to the Andersen Library to explore the University of Minnesota's [Kerlan Collection](#), curator Lisa Von Drasek asked, "Are any of you writers?" Without hesitation, every one of us raised a hand. Yes, we are writers.

Here, we share a small sample of the amazing pieces by writers from this year's institute and encourage readers to explore all of the writings from the institute in the [MWP 2014 Invitational Institute Gallery](#), available by mid-October.

Excerpt from *Paper Boats*

Lanka Liyanapathirana (ISI 2014)
Woodbury Middle School

In seconds, they created disorder.

In seconds, the boys in the middle attacked.

In seconds, their banter became a barrage of obscenities.

And in seconds, my heart hurt, but I continued to stare and stare and stare.

Tearing me away from my trance, my grandmother's hands, fastened to my upper arm, quickly dragged my sister and me to safety, my feet battling her perseverance. In a downpour of action, I haphazardly stole glances again and again, hoping that someone would save the boys.

But no one did.

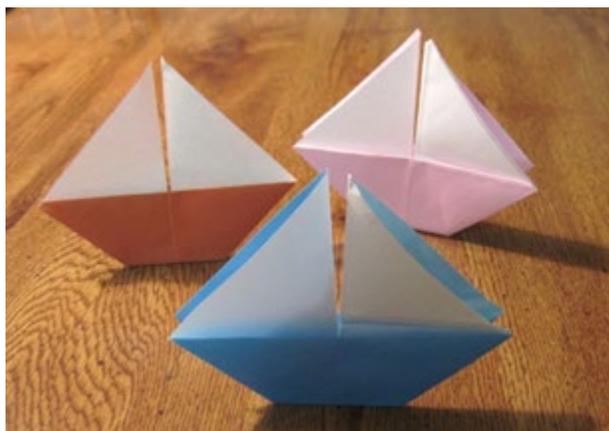
Before I knew it, I was in my house, door barricaded, grandmother outside guarding our house, a Sri Lankan tradition in the face of perceived danger. I tried peeking out of our curtains, hoping to see kindness in action, but my grandmother caught my curiosity and the consternation in my face. She came to the door, walked in and veiled the malice from my eyes. She then took my hand, didn't acknowledge the past few minutes, and brought me to the dining room table. Thoughts flooded my mind. Feelings struck my heart, bolt after lightning bolt. I wanted to run back to the curtains. I wanted to look outside. I wanted to see if anyone was helping. But I didn't.

Or actually, I couldn't.

Silent at the table with paper in front of her, my grandmother slid it towards my sister and me. We quietly began folding boats, crease by crease.



*Lanka Liyanapathirana
reads from his piece*



D is for Dough. Break Bread If You Please.

Lee Fisher (ISI 2014)

Robbinsdale Armstrong High School

Bread is truly magical. I used to hate baking it because I could never get the yeast right. I spent the better part of three years trying to replicate my grandma's Sally Lunn bread, a magnificent and fluffy treat made in a Bundt pan, with leftovers perfect for French toast. All I ended up with was a short, dense, brick-like substance that I wouldn't force on even the birds. I don't know why it gave me such difficulties, but one afternoon, my senior year of college, my mom and I tried again and she showed me how to proof the yeast. It's a simple little task that takes a bit of patience, but I've never been disappointed since. And now I feel like I've joined a community that dates back longer than I can fathom.

You see, bread is old. We're talking 30,000 years. And for as long as we can look back, it seems to be associated with community. Growing wheat was at the heart of agriculture, the practice cited as one of the main contributors for modern civilization as it allowed people to stay in one place instead of moving as hunting and gathering required. Widely known is bread's religious symbolism in Christianity, but a bit earlier than that, folks in the Neolithic Period noted that after a stalk of wheat died, more wheat grew back in its place, so it, along with women's ability to create life, was regarded as sacred. Ancient Egyptians, Romans, and Greeks similarly connected bread, grain, and agriculture to their respective religions. All of this goes to say, bread has got quite the history.

Originally, as refining techniques for flour were discovered, they became associated with society's elite. To be seen as powerful, you needed good clothes and a white-bread sandwich in hand. Only the poor ate whole grains as purchasing processed goods was out of their reach. The reversal of this mentality is relatively recent and due to science informing us of the nutritional chasm between refined and whole grains driving up the price of artisan bread and lowering the cost of the supermarket brand.

And then somewhere in the late 1990s, in the name of eating healthier, bread became public enemy number one. It has more or less stayed there since, all because of carbohydrates. Here's the deal though. Carbs are found in all foods, especially all those fruits and veggies we're told to eat. The problem is when fiber is missing from the mix. You see, carbohydrates turn into sugar and starch when digested, which gives us energy. Fiber slows that process down so the energy is long lasting. Without fiber, all that sugar gets absorbed at once and our bodies have a hard time handling that. Refined flours used in generic pasta, coffee-shop muffins, and almost any mass-produced bread have much less fiber. Whole grains have a whole bunch of it.

What it all bakes down to is this: bread is a delicious part of human history. If you're worried about health, eat whole grains. If not, understand that it is basically a sweet and should be treated like one—enjoyed in moderation.



Lee Fisher reads from his piece

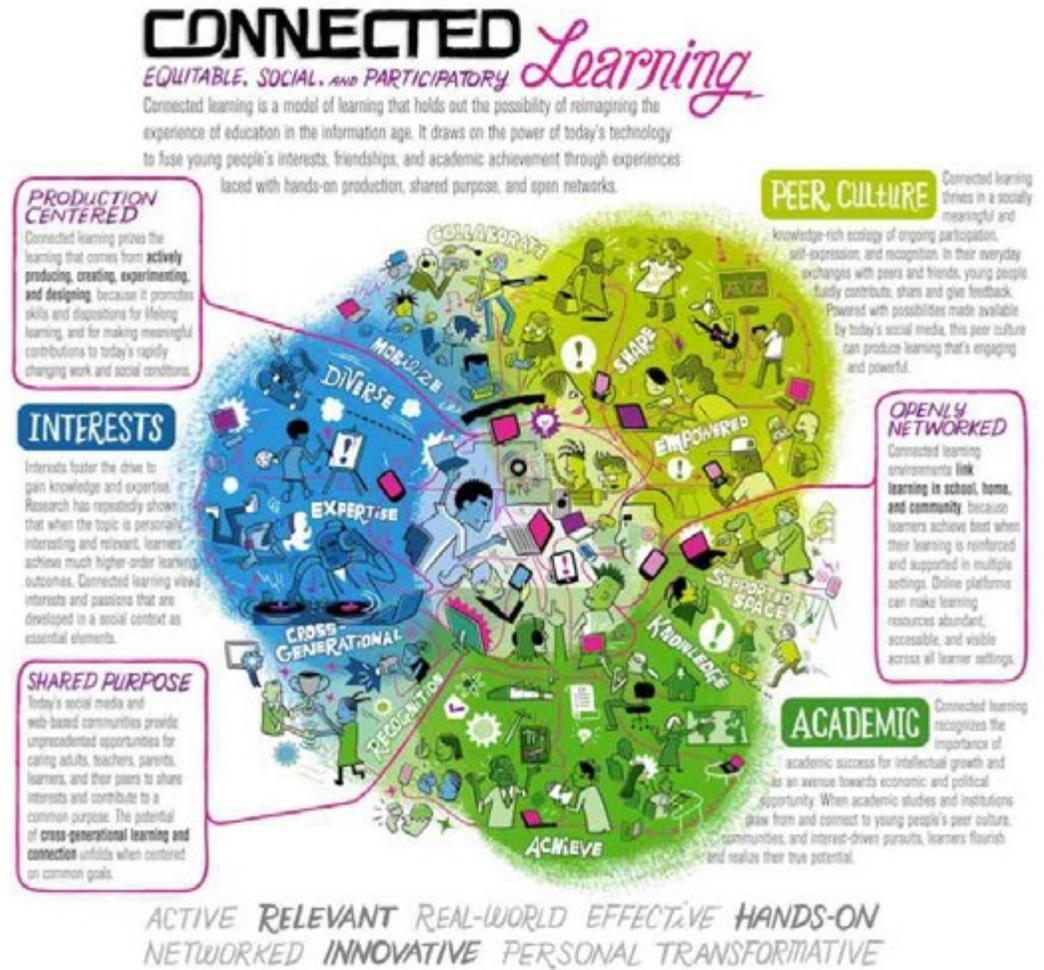


To be seen as powerful, you needed good clothes and a white-bread sandwich in hand.

Minnesota Writing Project's Fall Workshop: Teaching with Connected Learning

Spend a day exploring the concept of Connected Learning with keynote speaker Paul Oh, an interactive learning experience, and teacher demonstrations.

Paul works with K-University teachers across the U.S. with digital literacy, playing an important role in developing Educator Innovator (<http://educatorinnovator.org>), a National Writing Project initiative offering teachers ways to make, learn, and play through connected, online experiences.



When: Saturday, October 11, 2014
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Where: Minnesota Department of Education
Conference Center A, 1500 Highway 36 West

Cost: \$60, includes registration, meals, and snacks

Register: By Friday, September 12, send payment to MWP,
10 Nicholson Hall, 216 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455
or contact MWP@umn.edu to reserve a place.

*If possible, bring an iPad or laptop to the workshop.

Offered in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Education. For standards information contact the English Language Arts Specialist at Charon.Tierney@state.mn.us or call 651-582-8643.

Writing for Social Justice: Stories, Lessons, and Transformative Possibilities

Stephanie Rollag (ISI 2009)

For the second year, teachers explored the topic of writing for social justice during the Minnesota Writing Project's Open Institute. With a close look at texts by Linda Christensen, this year's participants created their own stories of justice with a writing group and investigated a specific literacy topic connected to social justice through a literature review or lesson plan. As the theme of social justice unfolded and the group of teachers thoughtfully engaged with each other, we began to consider questions about what we are teaching in our classrooms, why we are teaching it, and how it influences our students, our communities, and our world.

The teachers' lesson plans, final writing pieces, and reflections from the course illustrate the ways these questions became a part of our course and an opening to discover the transformative possibilities of teaching for social justice. By sharing some of the reflections and final pieces from participants, we hope to bring readers a glimpse of the way the class came together around this topic.

Nancy Alexander, an elementary art teacher in the course, brought writing and art together in her lesson plan to engage students in the topic of social justice. We are sharing her illustrated piece to see the ways it will serve as a model for students in her art class and a prompt for their writing around social justice. We are also including parts of her written reflection to show the ways she considers the questions that we asked throughout our course.

Ryan Rapacz, a high school English teacher, brought topics of justice to life in his writing piece, *The Places We Run*. We invite you to read Ryan's writing to discover the power of stories in understanding topics of justice. As you read their texts, we hope you experience a sense of the possibilities that took shape in this course.

Nancy's Reflections

What we are teaching in our classrooms

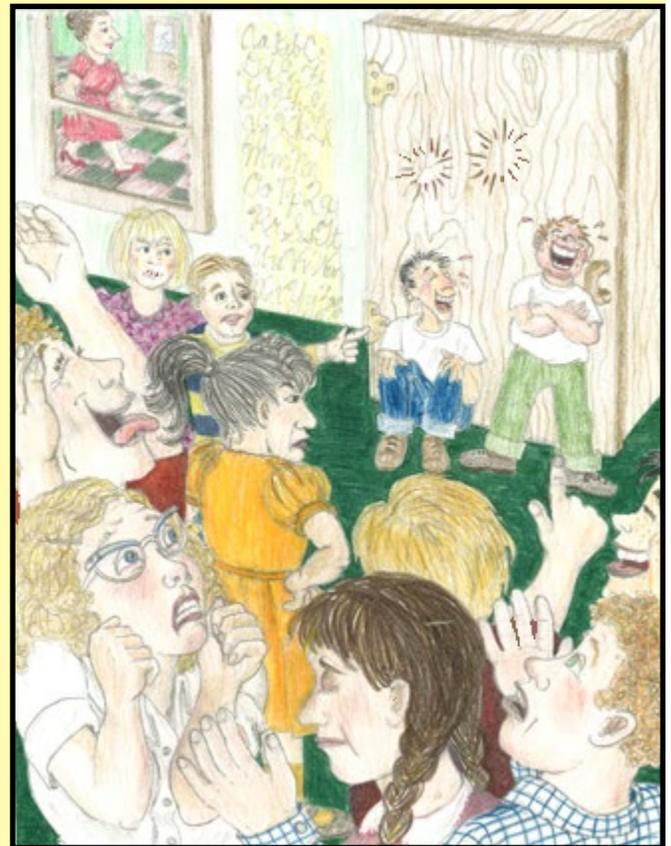
As a class, we discussed the challenge of teaching students all of the skills that they need to be successful while purposefully working toward social justice. As Nancy reflected on her ideas about developing a unit around social justice she explained,

Children who are offered the loving care, respect and encouragement of parents, teachers, and communities in inclusive, fair, and positive ways have a much greater opportunity to grow up to become proponents and instigators of the same. Teaching our students about activism and social justice will help them to grow strong in the ways of peace with the ability to think critically and act against discrimination and oppression.

Why we are teaching for social justice

Throughout the course, we considered how our beliefs about social justice influence our teaching. Nancy articulated her goal:

My goal is to help my students understand the basic premise that all our lives are touched by issues of social injustice and that they, as artists, can work towards positive change in our world through inspiring thoughtful exchanges about important ideas and create paths to equal opportunity, inclusion, justice,



In this drawing, Nancy (lower left) recalls an event from her childhood

and peace.

How we influence students

Ultimately, the teachers of the Open Institute worked together to consider how writing and teaching for social justice does impact students. Nancy clarified:

As I reflect on the transformative process this class has guided me through, I can see that the creation of this school project . . . almost has taken on a life of its own. I'm excited by the possibilities of reaching out to students in their own territory. I'm hopeful that they may offer to voice real concerns they've experienced in order to craft an authentic record of an event that mattered to them.

The Places We Run

Ryan Rapacz (ISI 2014)

If I'm lucky, there might be a few weeks between snow melt and the flood when I can run the island. Once the snow recedes, it gives way to the carcasses of deer and turkey that didn't make it through the winter. The melt also exposes three miles of gravel path that hugs the bank of the Mississippi river around Pike Island. On the east end of the island is the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers.

For the Mdewakanton Dakota, the point at which two rivers or streams connect is called a bdote. The bdote at the Minisota and Haha Wakpa rivers is a sacred place; it is a place where time roiled the river and life sprang forth. It is the origin, the center, life itself.

During the time between the snow melt and the annual flooding I like to stop at the confluence. The water is already high and the currents of the two rivers churn and swirl as they become one. It is a turbulent dance that pulls my eye down river.

However, it doesn't take long for the river to spill its banks and fill the path and low spots with frothy water. The island doesn't flood as much as it is consumed by the Mississippi. The water breaches the berm on the backside and creeps up the bank beneath the bridge. The water pushes up from underneath the island. It bubbles and spurts and seeps up through the roots and dirt and sand. The water falls from the sky.

The island is gone again, sunk beneath the river, and consumed by water clouded brown by sediment.

The river has always run over its bank and deposited sediment in the coarse river grasses and ferns. It's a greedy river that pulls water from pools and lakes and creeks. Its basin is broad and stretches across the Upper Midwest and into Canada: Dakota Territory. When the heavy snowpack from the far north begins to melt in late March, the river takes more than it can drink and spills the rest in the flats through the entire span it travels from Lake Itasca to its delta.

* * *

Because the island floods every year, it would have flooded in the spring of 1863, too.

The island looked different then. It was clear-cut by the soldiers, and teepees were pitched about the island. There were men posted on the wooden bridge that gave access to the island, and they wrapped around the perimeter keeping guard. The soldiers were armed with their Springfields and Wentworths. Their paper musket ball packets hung heavily from their belts. Soldiers were also stationed in parapets in the Fort atop the bluff, their guns aimed down toward the island where 1,600 Dakota were being held prisoner. They had surrendered during the uprising the previous summer.

The Dakota were held prisoner on the north end of the island behind a fence that had been hastily erected over the six days they were forced to march from Mankato to Fort Snelling. On the other side of the fence and about one mile east was bdote: the origin, the center, the genesis of life.

The winter had been relatively mild, but measles had spread throughout the camp killing some 300 prisoners. When the snowpack began to melt, it would have meant relief for the Dakota interned on the Island. But, the Mississippi drank mightily from its basin.

When the water spilled over the banks and seeped through the soil and consumed the island, the camp turned to mud. The Dakota wore the mud around the cuffs of their wool pants. Clumps hung from their hair and streaked their skin. It smelled of rich, organic life.

* * *

Once the flood recedes and I am able to run the island again, it smells of rich, organic life and is covered in greasy silt three inches thick. The river pulls it over its bank and it settles in drifts across the path. The mud is both sticky and slick. It clings to shoes and legs. It slides under foot. It is tracked around the island and back home and up the driveway and into the entry. It coats my calves and speckles my shirt. It dries and cracks.

In the shower, the mud and sweat stream down my legs and swirl in the water pooled at my feet.

* * *

By midMay the island was dry, but dirt and mud caked the teepees and clothing of the Dakota. They were forced aboard steamships and pushed off down river to a drought-stricken reservation in southeastern Dakota Territory. Just one mile into their final journey, the steamships bore slightly north away from the island and into the turbulent waters of bdote. The Dakota shuffled aboard the boat and glanced back at the origin, the center, at life itself; they drifted down river still carrying the island's dirt underneath their fingernails and in the seams of their clothing.

* * *

In the summer, when I bring my girls to the island to explore, they poke their heads into hollowed-out oak trees and climb atop rotting stumps. They chase fairies that zip from their minds into the underbrush and out of sight. We hide behind giant trees and orchestrate elaborate plans to snare sprites and pixies. They run wild down the path, their little legs grazing the broad leaves that reach out of the thicket. The only place they tip toe is over the bridge where the troll lives. They believe the island is magic.

Once we cross the bridge and get far enough away where the troll can no longer hear us, I tell them there was a time when the island's magic was weak. I tell them that there was a time when the fairies had to hide and people were held as prisoners on the island.

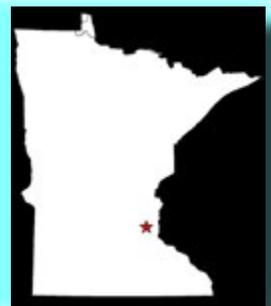
My daughter Alice asks, "Did the trolls do it? Did they keep people in jail here?"

Not knowing how to answer, I tell her to quiet down. "Shhh, the trolls might hear you."

She whispers, "What kind of trolls were they?"

I look east down the path toward the confluence. "The worst kind. They looked a lot like us."

The Minnesota Writing Project no longer collects individual membership fees. Instead we ask that those interested in supporting our efforts donate to our University of Minnesota Foundation Account (Fund #6464). This shift from membership fees to foundation support makes your gift fully tax deductible. For more information [visit our website](#).



2014 MWP Mini Summer Institute

Ann Thompson, MWP Continuity Director (ISI 2007)

On Thursday, July 17, approximately 20 past Invitational Summer Institute teachers attended a one-day Mini Summer Institute on the University of Minnesota campus. As in the full ISI, the teachers had the opportunity to write to prompts, share their writings, and learn from teacher demonstrations.

After the first prompt, it was time to get to know each other a little better, so the group broke into teams to play floor scrabble, which is similar to the regular game except with very large letters. And they really got into some serious competition. Teachers might want to consider creating this activity as a fun way for students to play with and enjoy words.

Nick Ross (ISI 2013), 7th grade English teacher at Columbia Academy in Columbia Heights Public Schools, gave the first demonstration of the day. He presented his adaptation of the **PERCEIVE** framework for interpreting visual media created by the Weisman Art Museum. Nick uses his adaptation when his students are reading both non-fiction and fiction.

Next on the agenda was Jessica Tierney (ISI 2012), Assistant Director of MWP. She presented an overview of the **National Writing Project's Connected Learning** initiative and got everyone involved in discussing the framework. Within this model, technology brings together young people's interests, peer culture, and academic work through hands-on production, shared purpose, and open networks. To end her talk, Jessica had us create found poems by "hacking" our text messages, an activity she learned about from the **2014 Connected Learning MOOC (#clmooc)**.

A long lunch hour was set aside so that the teachers could have time to eat, write, and enjoy the University. Thanks go out to Cherise Kristoffersen (ISI 2012) for presenting the lunchtime prompt!

Kara Scheid (ISI 2012), a 4th grade teacher at Park Spanish Immersion in St. Louis Park, gave the afternoon demonstration. She explained how she uses YogaCalm techniques to get her students focused and ready for writing. And then she treated the teachers to some great tips for creating characters, part of which was inspired by the Young Authors Conference she attended this spring.

Like any MWP event, the Mini Summer Institute Day focused on teachers teaching teachers, either through the formal presentations or the sharing that happened in small groups—and it's always great to get new ideas from your peers as the upcoming school year approaches!



Kendrick Davies (ISI 2006) places a tile on the Scrabble board

Connected Learning at the Minnesota Writing Project

2014 was the summer to **Make, Play, and Connect at the National Writing Project**, and TCs from the Minnesota Writing Project joined the fun by participating in the **Connected Learning MOOC (#clmooc)** and learning more about Connected Learning in the study of the free eBook, **Teaching in the Connected Learning Classroom**. The goal of Connected Learning is to make learning relevant and to support young people as they pursue knowledge and expertise around topics and issues they care deeply about. Want to know more? Visit **connectedlearning.tv**, **Educator Innovator**, or the **National Writing Project**. And join us at the **2014 Fall Workshop** where Paul Oh, Senior Program Associate at NWP, will engage us in making, playing, and connecting.



The goal of Connected Learning is to make learning relevant and to support young people as they pursue knowledge and expertise around topics and issues they care deeply about.

Announcements & Upcoming Events

Save the Date! Fall Workshop—Saturday, October 11th

Please join us for our 8th annual Fall Workshop on Saturday, October 11th. Paul Oh, Senior Program Associate from the National Writing Project, will have us making, playing, and connecting through interactive—and digital—activities inspired by NWP's **Connected Learning**, **Educator Innovator**, and **Digital Is**. See **page 6** of the newsletter for registration information and check the **MWP News & Events Page** for updates.

MCTE Fall Workshop—Monday, October 27th

Kylene Beers and Bob Probst, well-known literacy scholars and authors of *Notice and Note: Strategies for Close Reading*, will be the featured speakers for the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English conference at the Marriott Hotel in Brooklyn Park. For more details, visit the **MCTE website**.

Join the MWP Online Book Club

Our online book club is going strong! To become a member, join **Goodreads** and send an email to Debra Hartley (**hartley@umn.edu**) telling her you want to join the club. If you have any questions or suggestions, please contact Debra or Ann Thompson (**thomp402@umn.edu**).

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 the writing project. We thank them for their service. If you would like to be involved with the MWP Advisory Board or be a cohort representative, contact us at **mwp@umn.edu**.



Robyn Dettling Madson—MWP Advisory Board

Robyn teaches argumentation, communication, and college composition to students in grades 10-12 at Forest Lake High School. In 2012, Robyn was one of 10 finalists for Minnesota Teacher of the Year. Read her reflection on the ISI on **page 1** of the newsletter.



Sarah Bassett—MWP Advisory Board

Sarah teaches high school English at Hmong College Prep Academy, a K-12 public charter school in St. Paul. She brings to the board a unique teaching perspective and a wealth of knowledge about charter schools and culturally relevant teaching practices.



Lanka Liyanapathirana—2014 Cohort Representative

Lanka (whose last name is actually quite easy to pronounce) teaches 7th grade at Woodbury Middle School. He foregrounds his teaching with a deep commitment to community, equity, and an exploration of issues related to social justice. Read an excerpt from his writing, *Paper Boats*, on **page 4** of the newsletter.

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