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A Time of Reflection at the 2015 Invitational Summer Institute

Zua Vang-Kong (ISI 2015)

Eastern Heights Elementary School, Saint Paul Public Schools

As an English language learner, the road to becoming confident in literacy was not easy. Reading came a lot easier than writing for me as it didn't involve all the conventions and grammar of a proper sentence. I grew to love reading once I comprehended the words I read. This occurred when I was in fifth grade and Nancy Drew became one of my best friends. I had a hunger for knowledge, and the more I read, the more I became aware of how the English language worked. My limited vocabulary grew, my world expanded with ideas and imagination. Words and proper sentences came to life from books read, helping to better my writing abilities. However, grammar continued to plague the sentences I wrote, all kept silent in journals that I've kept throughout different periods of my life. During these times, writing became a way for me to put my thoughts and feelings about hard times into words. Writing about these experiences was therapeutic but eventually my life just got so busy with work and raising my own children that I rarely had time to pick up a pen to write anything personal. If I did, my brain drew a blank and the paper filled with doodles.

This is really funny because year after year, I would teach and encourage my students to write a lot by writing



2015 MWP ISI cohort



Zua reading at the ISI retreat

about their own personal experiences or about things they knew a lot about. However, this never translated into my own life except when modeling in front of my students.

In the Fall of 2014, **Eastern Heights** was awarded the **LRNG Innovation Challenge grant** through the MacArthur Foundation, along with the National Writing Project and the Show Me Campaign. Through this partnership, I became aware of the Summer Invitational Institute. I debated about participating, knowing that writing is an area of weakness for me. However, the more I thought about it, the more I convinced myself to participate. I asked, how can I be an effective teacher of writing if I don't have confidence in my own writing skills and won't share my writing with others? Learning is lifelong, and so with these thoughts, I contacted Stephanie Rollag and got enrolled.

The whole experience seemed intimidating at first, but what a wonderful time I had with the Writing Project! The cohort was made up of many secondary ELA teachers, but there were also teachers of other content areas, elementary teachers, and even a teacher of adult learners. The MWP staff did a great job setting up a safe learning environment for all, with lots of support, resources, and opportunities to grow. During my time with the Writing Project, I realized how much I missed out on all these years by not writing. I had so much bottled up and so many more ideas that would

never have surfaced had I not been forced to write and share in my wonderful writing group! Though we came together as strangers, we left the Institute stronger and more knowledgeable of who we are as individuals, educators, and contributing members of our society.

The Writing Project opened my eyes to some amazing writing ideas that other teachers and writers are using each day in their classrooms, or in blogs or podcasts, or in the process of writing. I've learned many great things and hope I can utilize them with my kindergartners this year. Some age-appropriate things I've learned and will be implementing are how important it is to allow students to do some prewriting and freewriting, and showing students different ways to generate ideas and details. I've also taken away the importance of focusing on writing first and not so much on its structure. It is also very important to implement writing time. Because of my lack of confidence in my own writing skills, writing was the content area that was the first to be given up if something came along and time had to be taken away. However, after this experience I will make more effort to have students write on a daily basis, even just for ten minutes.

I asked, how can I be an effective teacher of writing if I don't have confidence in my own writing skills and won't share my writing with others?



ISI teacher creates a digital story

The Continuum of a Writer: From “Wannabe” to “Will Be” to “I Am a Writer!”

Kay Carpenter Rosheim (ISI 2015)

Forest Hills Elementary, Eden Prairie Schools

Ever hear the phrase, “fake it ’til you make it?” I like this saying because it conveys a sense of confidence by the faker, that although not at a level of mastery, there is a conviction and willingness to persevere until the achievement of whatever skill or task is mastered. An experience creating a Twitter account for myself last year and revisiting my profile this summer was cause for that phrase to once again resonate with me.

A year ago, as I went through the process of creating my profile on Twitter (still marked by the icon of the egg screaming, “newbie”), I was deliberating over my profile. How would I describe myself to my professional peers? I was not going to use Twitter for social purposes. No, I used Facebook for that. Twitter, I heard, was what the cool kids used to share their learning in the professional realm; therefore, I needed to select my words carefully.

After much deliberation I landed on these four phrases to describe who I was professionally:

- learner
- teacher/reading specialist
- doctoral student
- wannabe writer

I hit “save” and with a click of a button my professional profile was posted and available for the world to see.

Why did I classify myself as a “wannabe” writer? Why didn’t I identify myself as a full-fledged writer? I am, after all, a published writer. I do write and enjoy writing, but I felt if I claimed myself as a writer I would need to spend more time at it than I currently had to give. Regardless, at the time, I didn’t feel as though I had the skill set and characteristics of a bona fide writer.

Then something wonderful happened to me.

This summer I enjoyed the privilege of meeting and learning with a talented group of K–12 teachers from all over the state, led by masterful staff and professors at the University of Minnesota and leaders of the Minnesota Writing Project.

What actions did I need to take to be able to shift my identity to writer? Self-discipline, purposely making time each day to write, talking about writing with other writers, and reading



Participants sharing a laugh during the institute

professional books on the topic of writing and teaching writing. It was precisely the activities I participated in through the Minnesota Writing Project that provided the catalyst for me to change my profile to what I’ve longed to be my identity: that of a writer. Thanks to the experience of MWP, my Twitter Profile is simply stated through the use of four words: observer, learner, teacher and WRITER.

Thank you to all participants and leaders of the 2015 Summer Institute. Your inspiration and influence helped change my life!

The 2015 ISI Writing Community

As the teachers of the 2015 Invitational Summer Institute came together to develop writing and teaching practices, they also created a community. Across teachers' digital stories, daily writing prompts, and final writing pieces, they shared humor, imagination, and craft around their experiences in and out of the classroom. Here is a sample of writing from this year's Summer Institute, celebrating life's moments of literacy and discovery. Look for the full online anthology of this year's ISI participants on the MWP 2015 Invitational Summer Institute Fellows page.

Excerpt from **Look Both Ways**

Sean Bailey (*ISI 2015*)

Ramsey Middle School, Saint Paul Public Schools

"The comic book section is the best! Plus the computers there have the Internet!" I thought the last part there would be the selling point.

It's 1997 and as two kids in the working class 'burbs of West Saint Paul we are not quite bathed in the Internet yet—the Internet is still a far off place that requires more money than our families have and a computer that doesn't use floppy disks.

Daniel rocks back and forth on his shiny chrome BMX bike silently. He looks in my general direction but says nothing.

"Come on man," I plead, "I'm tired of sitting here, the stupid air conditioning doesn't work, we don't have any Mountain Dew left, it's too hot to do anything. This just stinks!"

The only answer I get from Daniel is a stare and the quick glint of his chrome bike as a cloud reveals the sun under the haze for a moment.

Nothing. Traffic roaring behind us in the distance. Finally, Daniel looks away in anger, and then back at me.

"The library is dumb. It's summer, why the hell would we go to the library?" Daniel is the son of a strict Christian minister. Hell is a place you go, not a word you should use in conversation.

"Whatever, man, it's got more than just books," I reply, "Forget you!"

I point my wheel, my own shiny chrome BMX bike, toward the library. The summer air is thick and I need to escape. The bike and the



Sean and Joanna's writing group at the Celebration

library are quickly becoming my means of escape from all sorts of situations, people, and things I just don't want to deal with.

After I have a block or two between Daniel and me, I look back and see nothing but haze and cracked suburban tarmac. Daniel isn't following. Anger gathers in my throat. I swallow it silently. I pump my legs hard.

"Screw 'm!" I say to the street.

At the library I chain up my chrome ride and wander into the blast freezer of knowledge and Internet access. It is a vast, cold place. Shelves tower into the sky packed with whole worlds, time machines, blueprints, and dreams. Old folks linger around the newspaper stacks, teenagers fight with copy machines, and I wander to the Internet sign up sheet. I scribble my name for the next half hour. In awe of the vast sea of information waiting out there on the Internet I float aimlessly, taking in as much as I can.

Hours pass. Whole lives pass in the websites I devour, and then in the books I flip through. I look up at the big clock, and I realize my mom and dad will be home soon, which also means dinner, and I am the type of kid who wouldn't miss dinner for anything in the world. It is time to mount my chrome cruiser and head home.

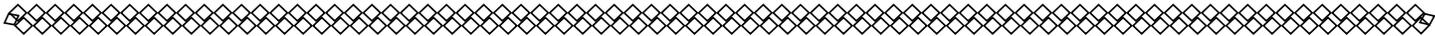


Excerpt from **Why I Run**

Joanna Imm (ISI 2015)

One of my favorite old photographs is one of Albert Einstein playing the violin. To me, it reminds me that it is a skill to enjoy doing something you're not talented at or skilled in. Einstein, while a brilliant physicist and theoretician, was not a brilliant musician. He could have quit, but he clearly got something out of playing that he couldn't get from physics.

And that's why I run. I'm a bad runner, and I don't have any great hopes of getting any better. But there's something I get out of it, still. And so I run.



"Spoonbridge!" Tim Wilson flickr.com

NWP NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

Annual Meeting
Hilton Minneapolis
Thursday–Friday, November 19–20
Information and registration

in conjunction with



At the National Council of Teachers of English Conference in Minneapolis, you will be able to attend presentations by MWP teacher consultants Jaqueline Arnold, Mike Borka, Candance Doerr-Stevens, Elizabeth Erdmann, Cherise Kristoffersen, Kirsten Jamsen, Heidi Jones, Sherrie Larson, Robyn Madson, Grethe Viken Moksnes, Lindsey Nelson, Steph Rollag, Abigail Rombalski, Muriel Thompson, and Jessica Tierney; and Trondheim Writing Project teacher consultants Maria Hole-Forsmo and Torild Solbjør Eliassen.

Attending the National Writing Project Annual Meeting?

If so, join Michelle Shaw (ISI 2008) in the Minneapolis Writing Marathon!

Come experience the National Writing Project's

Minneapolis Writing Marathon!

Led by Michelle Shaw
Minnesota Writing Project

9:00am to 12:00pm
Friday, November 20



Have you given yourself time to write lately? Have you seen the city as a writer?
Would you like to meet other writers?

Gathering Place: Hilton Board Room 1

Time: 9:00 am on Friday, November 20

What: Brief introduction and handout with map and suggestions to guide explorations

Writing

- Writers form their own small groups, which go wherever they wish, moving from place to place.
- Writers write whatever they want.
- Writers share writing without criticism.
- The marathon will officially run from 9:00-12:00 noon. However, groups may choose to go beyond noon.

How it Works:

Writers in small groups move across the city, stopping wherever they want and writing whatever they wish.

They read their work to each other, socialize, and experience the city. There's no criticism, just a "thank you" for sharing.

It's a GREAT way to treat yourself to a day of writing, to meet other NWP writers, and to experience the city.

Pre-registration is not necessary but is encouraged with your NWP Annual Meeting Registration. Open to all NWP conference participants.

Questions prior to Nov. 20: trickywickshaw@hotmail.com

Writing for Social Justice

For the third year in a row, MWP offered a two-week Open Institute focused on writing for social justice. As teachers engaged in topics around identity and community, language and power, social class, immigration, and digital activism, they created lesson plans and considered the challenges and benefits of bringing these topics to the classroom. Throughout the course, participants also took up topics of social justice in their own writing. Teachers explored a variety of modes, ranging from voice and image on Prezi to screenshots of text messages; they also took up multiple genres, from personal narrative to realistic fiction. We invite you to read an excerpt from a powerful piece by course participant Anna Schick, and a reflection on the Open Institute by Sarah Bassett.

Excerpt from **They Live Among Us**
Anna Schick (Open Institute, 2015)

I was sitting in the back of the Madison city bus stopped at a red light on the capital loop when I saw her. Matted stringy brown hair framed her sun-worn cheeks. A UW sweatshirt, frayed at the wrists and peeling flakes of lettering like dandruff, hugged her wide shoulders without love. The skirt, whose flowered pattern had lost its clean sway and, rather, hung heavy, soiled from sleeping on the street. Her right hand steered the shopping cart. Plastic bags bursting from the crisscross sides like bubble wrap ready for a good stomp, empty aluminum cans, discarded cardboard, previously white shoes, and plastic milk jugs piled high inside the cart. Her murky eyes followed the left hand; her forefinger directed at an imaginary someone.

We waited long enough at the light that more heads turned to join mine in gawking at the fantastic sight. She shouted to the air, shook the finger, manicured with dirt and layered in sores, with authoritarian rightness. The clean-shaven freshman boys, new to campus and the big city ways, shifted their clean backpacks from their laps to the floor to get a better view. The one on the aisle side leaned forward and jutted his face closer to the bus window separating our world from hers. “Check her out,” he chuckled to his grinning buddy. I sunk in my seat behind them, fished out my phone from the pocket of my new jeans and called my dad.

The tears arrived before he picked up.

“Why did you take care of me?” my voice shaking.



Open Institute participants write

“Anna? Anna, what’s wrong?” my dad who took my call no matter what business meeting it interrupted.

I exploded in angry confusion at the injustice living on the other side of my bus window. Why did I deserve to be cared for? How was my brain worthy of return and hers not? How was my way paid to spend two weeks in a psych ward getting pumped with drugs, direct care, and confidence? Why did I have a mother who researched Zoloft in her spare time and a friend who pulled me off the street when I drove the same shopping cart through a blizzard? Why did strangers help me? Because my mania materialized in a campus library and not the street corner? Who is responsible for helping her return to life? Who will listen to her talk her nonsense and lean their trained ears in to listen? Why is my mental illness an urgent tragedy and hers a mockery, a mess that needs to be removed from our sight? How do I get to ride the bus with the frat boys while she continues to fill her cart? And why is my story heard by many while hers is blown with the wind?



Sarah Bassett reads at the Open Institute

Working Toward Justice

*Sarah Bassett (ISI 2014, Open Institute 2015)
Hiawatha Academies*

My composition notebook from the MWP Open Institute is riddled with lists.

Lists about the origins of my name, focus questions, norms for our writing group, ideas for creative and analytical writing pieces, feedback from my writing group, injustices we've highlighted, answers to "Immigration is...", ideas to add to my literature review, resources for my classroom, and more feedback.

This past June, we started with perhaps one of the most important lists: What kind of a classroom space helps you make meaning and learn? As a group of teachers, we'd had our fair share of classroom experiences. We quickly filled a sheet of chart paper as our conversation evolved and one point stood out: we needed classmates who would be willing to share ideas and experiences,

good and bad alike.

As part of my work in the MWP Open Institute, I was afforded the luxury of time to reflect on my past experiences with injustice. In the perpetrator/bystander/victim model, I have had experiences in each role. That acknowledgement alone would have caused me to recoil in shame before taking this course.

Let's be clear though: I am still not a social justice expert, and that's ok.

However, as we shared our classroom experiences both as teachers and as students, we fulfilled our collective need for honesty from one another, we asked each other the tough questions that didn't always have (or require) answers, and we rewrote scenarios of injustice with just endings.

At the end of the course, when my classmates presented their research, lesson plans, and creative pieces centered around issues of social justice, it was clear that my classmates had used writing to become more consistent and socially just educators.

When I looked down at my notebook after the presentations, I saw another list: racial equity, food deserts, social class equity, mental health, gender equity, GLBTQ rights, immigration/citizenship, religious equity... all in all, almost a page full of more social justice topics that I wanted to explore. I had come away with more questions than I'd had before, but also with a renewed dedication to continue the important work of social justice—armed with a list, of course.



A conversation at the Open Institute

The Joy of Teaching Summer Theatre Camps

Ann Thompson (ISI 2007)

For the past two summers, I have been a teacher for the University Youth & Community Programs through MWP. It offers young people a great opportunity to go to a week-long camp at the University. Each day they spend half their time doing a recreational activity and the other half participating in a fun learning camp.

I created a week-long theatre camp specifically for middle-schoolers, and it's offered one week in June and one week in July. We start the week talking about possible play script ideas and end the week with their own short play that they perform for their parents—complete with costumes, props, and simple sets!

The goal is for them is to have fun, but I sneak in a few teaching points—like all the literary devices needed to write a play script, the difference between a play script and a novel, how to be specific in the idea-gathering process, how to collaborate both in small and large group settings during the writing process, and basic acting skills. Plus the campers are fascinated by my character make-up demonstration as I transform from a middle-aged woman to an 80-year-old lady in costume.

I'm always energized by the amazing creativity of these young campers. For example, my June campers wrote a play script that had a group of famous people from throughout history fall through a rip in time and end up on the deck of the Titanic. A couple of the historic characters know what's going to happen, so they devise a plan to prevent the tragedy. They must do or say something so funny that the iceberg (played by a young girl who always came to camp smiling) will laugh hard enough to melt!

As you might guess, it's a wild and crazy week, but it's just as much fun for me as it is for them!

(Ann Thompson is a retired middle school Communications/Theatre teacher.)



June campers ready to perform



The cast in their costumes

Insights on Life, Education, and Global Competence in Colombia

Bianca Suglia (ISI 2012)

Edina Public Schools

As an immigrant to the United States, an immersion language educator, and a world language teacher and speaker, the pursuit of global competence has naturally been embedded in the very fabric of my professional endeavors and personal life. Defined as “the disposition and capacity to understand and act on issues of global significance” by Asia Society and EdSteps, global competence is becoming the very mission of schools around the globe.

I am no stranger to striving to enhance my ability to teach for global competence in a culturally responsive way for all students, nor to the questions and inner struggles that might arise for an immigrant who is navigating a new culture and way of life. This educational pursuit became more nuanced thanks to an enriching opportunity facilitated by my school district, Edina Public Schools. In January of 2015, I was one of ten fortunate Edina teachers who became the recipients of a generous grant that allowed us to embark on a 15-month **Global Competence Certification** journey. This singular program, designed for in-service educators, is the result of an extraordinary vision shared by Columbia University, World Savvy, and Asia Society. In addition to very rigorous online academic coursework, this program involves global fieldwork and a collaborative practice group capstone project.

This past summer I fulfilled the “global fieldwork” requirement of this program by opting to be immersed for two weeks into a comparative educational experience in Colombia, South America. From the very beginning, I sensed that Colombia is a fascinating world of contrasts and conflicts. I was struck by the way in which gorgeous haciendas, luxurious museums (the Museo del

Oro that we visited, for example), breathtaking views of the city from the cable car in Monserrate, and vibrant people would mingle with striking images of extreme poverty, unpaved and unsafe streets, and intense feelings of fear and panic regarding the current political situation in Colombia. The first day we arrived in Bogotá, plans had to be altered to ensure our safety because of crowds of people that gathered in downtown Bogotá as a result of a cease-fire agreement signed the day before between the government and FARC, the strongest guerrilla group in the country.

During our week in Bogotá, we spent full days at Sabio Caldas, a school that was born from an alliance between private schools, public schools, and the government that provides opportunities for the low income population to have access to high quality education. Despite the fact that Sabio Caldas is situated in a high risk area in Bogotá, the school represents a true haven and an oasis for the community. The school mission is to focus its education on the harmonious interaction between human values, arts, sports, languages, and mathematics.

After a rejuvenating weekend spent in the balmy and calming environments of Palomino, Santa Marta, and Sierra Nevada, my second week of learning and teaching occurred in a different area of the country, the warm and sunny



Bianca and Elena in a classroom at Colegio Jorge Nicolás Abello

port city of Barranquilla, by the Caribbean Sea. Currently, Barranquilla is leading the country in its efforts to establish bilingual schools, train teachers to become world language teachers, promote bilingualism, and facilitate cultural and educational exchanges for their students. These characteristics define the identity of the bilingual school we visited there: Colegio Jorge Nicolás Abello.

We met with the Secretary of Education, and he emphasized that literacy can no longer be defined as the ability to read and write in our own native language; true literacy now implies knowledge of a second language and the ability to be versed in technology. While at this



Bianca Suglia and Elena Cardales Rodríguez

school, we collaborated closely with other Colombian teachers and their principal, prepared detailed and culturally inclusive language and social studies lessons, and co-taught. I was fortunate to partner with Elena Cardales Rodríguez, an excellent, passionate, and talented Colombian teacher.

American and Colombian teachers alike spent hours deconstructing global competence, the characteristics of both educational systems, and skills we all need to nurture in

our students, no matter where we are in the world. One common vision is the view that language is freedom. Language is power. Seeing the Colombian students able to communicate, connect, compare, and convey ideas and experiences in English was outstanding. As a polyglot, I felt like a fish in the water in this bilingualism-infused world, and as a world language teacher, all my beliefs and values were reinforced by this experience. Language is so empowering because it gives us access into the mentality and the culture of those we are interacting with; knowledge of another language increases one's ability to understand ourselves and others better as it provides another lens into the human experience we share.

While my stay in Colombia was short, its effect is lasting and reaffirming of the importance of empathy, bilingualism, reflection, and openness to new perspectives. This immersive opportunity also allowed me to relearn and reinforce the important life lessons of remaining present in the dialogue, embracing discomfort, learning about various perspectives, and using my own culture and history as the key to understanding my relationship to others. More than anything, my weeks in Colombia reconfirmed for me the resiliency of the human spirit, which has the ability to resurrect and triumph despite adversities and challenges.

Colombia's message to us is similar to that of Dr. King, who once said that "the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." This essence is summarized by the words of a Colombian teacher on our last day; when asked what her mission and advice is for her displaced, poor, or orphaned students, she uttered with tears in her eyes:

"Siempre adelante!!!"

Language is so empowering because it gives us access into the mentality and the culture of those we are interacting with; knowledge of another language increases one's ability to understand ourselves and others better as it provides another lens into the human experience we share.

Announcements & Upcoming Events

NWP Annual Meeting (November 19-20)

Join teachers from National Writing Project Sites across the country at this year's Annual Meeting in Minneapolis! MWP is excited to have teacher consultants from our own site presenting throughout Thursdays break-out sessions. [Information and registration details are available here.](#)

NCTE Convention in Minneapolis (November 19-22)

For the first time, the National Council of Teachers of English Convention will be taking place in Minneapolis. Hear sessions connected to this year's theme, *Responsibility, Creativity, and the Arts of Language*. [Information and registration details are available here.](#)

Saturday Sessions Ahead! SAVE THE DATES

This winter, MWP will be hosting its 6th Saturday Session Workshop Series, centered on connecting learning with collaboration and community.

January 9 *Building a Collaborative Classroom*

February 6 *Connecting in a One-to-One Digital Classroom*

March 5 *Connecting to the Community*

More information will be coming soon.

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.

Jimmy Dreese - MWP Advisory Board

Jimmy teaches 10-12 grade English Language Arts at Forest Lake High School. We welcome Jimmy's creative energy and enthusiasm for teaching.



Molly Vasich - MWP Advisory Board

Molly teaches 11th and 12th grade IB Language and Literature at Washburn High School. Molly brings innovative uses of digital literacies and engagement with issues of social justice and equity.



Jen Secor Nelson - 2015 Cohort Representative

Jen teaches 7th and 8th grade Language Arts at Coon Rapids Middle School. We look forward to Jen's wealth of experience and knowledge related to curriculum and instruction.



New Urban Sites Leader

Daniel Muro LaMere (ISI 2013) is the new MWP Urban Sites Leader. He is teaching high school English at Robbinsdale Cooper High School.



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2015-2016

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