



## In this issue

### Facing Budget and Reading Realities in DC

Joyce Malwitz shares highlights from the NWP Spring Meeting... **Page 1**

### A Note from the Director

MWP Director Muriel Thompson offers a brief overview of national funding issues... **Page 3**

### Desegregation and Digital Literacy in Little Rock

Julia Blenkush and Jennifer Lundin at the Rural Sites Conference... **Page 4**

### Writing and Connecting with other TCs

Ann Thompson describes the Second Annual Winter Writing Day... **Page 6**

### What Will You Be Reading This Summer?

Suggestions from TCs... **Page 7**

### Announcements and Upcoming Events

Sheila O'Connor at 2011 ISI retreat; TC featured in national report... **Page 8**

## National Writing Project Spring Meeting in Washington, DC: "Where is Mr. Deeds?"

Joyce Malwitz (ISI 2006)

Each spring is marked by a meeting "on the Hill," where National Writing Project leaders are able to meet with legislators and their educational aides to advocate for federal funding for NWP. This year's trip was especially important as issues related to educational funding were on the chopping block. Below, Teacher Consultant (TC) shares her experiences visiting DC with MWP Director, Muriel Thompson.

Today, April 8, 2011, the United States government voted to keep its doors open. Nearly averting a government shut-down, our legislators passed an historic bill that makes unprecedented budget cuts, including the elimination of the National Writing Project and many other literacy and educational programs. My attendance, then, at the spring National Writing Project meeting last week in Washington, DC, was bittersweet as many attendees and NWP staff knew this might be one of our last meetings, knew that unless NWP is championed by legislators who believe it worthy of future federal funding, NWP as we know it will close its doors.

Today, April 8, 2011, the United States government voted to keep its doors open. Nearly averting a government shut-down, our legislators passed an historic bill that makes unprecedented budget cuts, including the elimination of the National Writing Project and many other literacy and educational programs. My attendance, then, at the spring National Writing Project meeting last week in Washington, DC, was bittersweet as many attendees and NWP staff knew this might be one of our last meetings, knew that unless NWP is championed by legislators who believe it worthy of future federal funding, NWP as we know it will close its doors.

A common theme at this spring's meeting was that regardless of federal funding cuts, NWP will survive and continue to provide a valuable service in promoting best practices in literacy instruction and maintaining a network of dedicated teachers across the United States. Muriel Thompson, Director of the Minnesota Writing Project, also attended this spring's meeting and provided much-needed historical background, reminding us that twenty years ago when the writing project opened in Minneapolis, it did so without federal funding. Just as NWP will continue with or without federal funding, so will MWP.



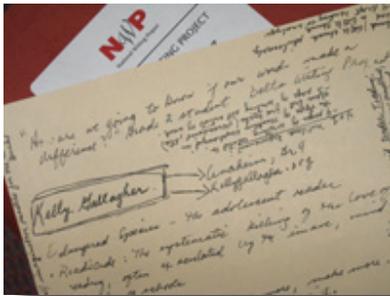
Even though looming budget cuts cast a pall over our meeting, not all was doom-and-gloom. Kelly Gallagher, author of *Teaching Adolescent Writers*, *Deeper Reading*, and *Readicide* (see [page 7](#)), riveted the audience during his keynote address. I like to think of Gallagher as a rock star English teacher—maybe not Mick Jagger, more like Bono—with a compelling message that he delivers with compassion and humor. Gallagher is one of us...he is still teaching 9th grade, still writing lesson plans, and still grading papers. We are lucky that Gallagher shares his ideas through his books, which are packed with great ideas that can be immediately used in the classroom. For the past several years, teachers attending the summer institute have responded positively to Gallagher's books and have shared his ideas in their school districts.



Kelly Gallagher

Gallagher drew heavily upon *Readicide* in his presentation. Calling the American adolescent reader an endangered species, Gallagher defined

“readicide” as the “systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices of schools.” Schools that are pressured to implement teach-to-the-test practices have a detrimental long-term effect on reading and create “apartheid schools” in areas of poverty where test performance tends to lag, Gallagher claimed. Furthermore, Gallagher noted that “readicide” practices don’t promote critical thinking and would not be tolerated by upper class kids and parents, creating a two-tier system of education. Gallagher went on to affirm what all good teachers know: if you really want kids to be better readers and writers and love learning, they have to read, read, read and write, write, write. With a purpose, with a passion, and with pleasure.



While in Washington, D.C., Muriel and I also visited each Minnesota legislator. Each legislative aide we met with was impressed by MWP goals and practices, regardless of his or her political beliefs. Muriel and I reminded them that MWP provides transformative in-service for Minnesota teachers and encourages them to play a leadership role in their schools, ensuring that each child is engaged in meaningful and successful literacy instruction. Muriel and I knew that several legislators favored cutting federal funds to programs like NWP, yet we received a respectful hearing from each staffer. Across Capitol Hill that day hundreds of writing project teachers met with legislators and their aides; we hope that our combined voices will open the door to re-funding NWP in the future.

Before leaving Capitol Hill, I visited the Library of Congress where I toured Thomas Jefferson’s library, moved book-by-book from Monticello to Washington D.C. What a marvel and inspiration. Surrounded by his books and manuscripts, I felt I reached across the ages to touch the soul of a fellow lover of all things literary. Then, as I departed the Library of Congress, I was struck by the following quote, inscribed overhead: “In books lies the soul of the whole past time.” Yes, I believe that is so.



Sharon J. Washington,  
Executive Director, NWP

“A common theme at this spring’s meeting was that regardless of federal funding cuts, NWP will survive and continue to provide a valuable service in promoting best practices in literacy instruction and maintaining a network of dedicated teachers across the United States.”



## A Note from the Director...

*Muriel Thompson*

These are times of mixed emotions for me—excitement as we finalize preparations for our 21st Invitational Summer Institute and frustration as the National Writing Project (NWP) continues to seek ways of surviving. This is a critical time for support for the National Writing Project, which directly benefits our site here in Minnesota. MWP's existence currently depends heavily on support from NWP, both financially and structurally.

Many of you may know that on March 2nd, 2011, President Obama eliminated direct funding to the National Writing Project as part of a broad effort to work against earmarks. As Congress begins work on reauthorizing ESEA (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act), Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., has introduced a bill that would permanently scrap a number of smaller education programs that lawmakers say aren't effective. The rationale for including the National Writing Project on this list is that the program is "redundant of other federal and local efforts to improve writing instruction" and that states already "receive over \$3 billion annually in teacher training funding."

Education is suffering—as was so apparent in our interviews of summer institute candidates this spring. Teachers are hunting for avenues for gaining professional development as schools continue to strip away these resources. Through the NWP/MWP network, educators are assured that we can be exposed to more effective and innovative methods for improving student achievement from wherever they may originate. Truly, the National Writing Project is a national infrastructure that allows teachers to grow, to learn, and to teach other teachers.

Only through national funding can we be sure that MWP will continue to serve the teachers and students of Minnesota. Thus, it is crucial that we inform Congress! In June, MWP's Leadership Team will gather to strategize ways of sustaining our site's work in the wake of reduced support from NWP. As we go forward, thank you for being involved, and I strongly encourage you to continue sharing with our legislators the stories of how you and your students have benefitted from involvement with MWP.

I will continue to inform you through email, but you can always stay up to date by checking out this site: <http://nwpworks.ning.com/>

## Desegregation and Digital Literacy in Little Rock, Arkansas

*This spring MWP sponsored the attendance of two Teacher Consultants at the Rural Sites conference in Little Rock, Arkansas. As new program leaders for Rural Sites, TCs Julia Blenkush and Jennifer Lundin write about their experiences.*

### Digging at Desegregation in Little Rock

*Julia Blenkush (ISI 2009)*

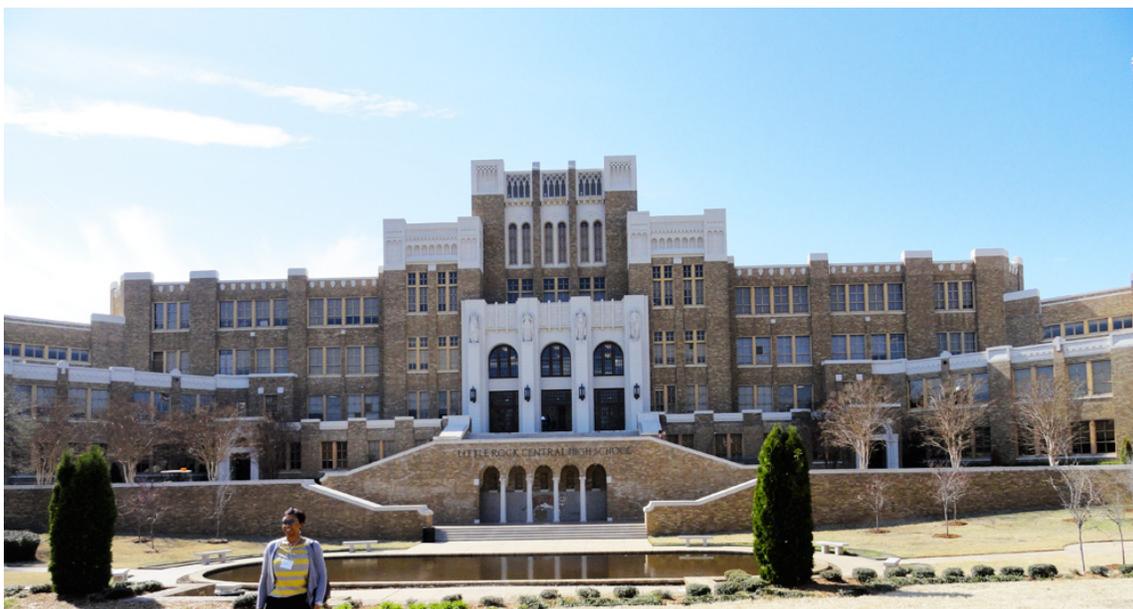
“Overcoming Inequity: Creating Opportunities for All Rural Students” was the title of the March 11-12, 2011, Rural Sites Network conference held in Little Rock, Arkansas, this year, hosted by the Great Beat Writing Project and University of Central Arkansas, Conway. As with all NWP conferences, we left feeling rejuvenated and enlightened if not a bit bleary-eyed from the wealth of information and experiences. Here are a few of the highlights.

For many of us, the desegregation of America’s public schools is a history lesson read from a textbook. In 1957, nine young African American students attempted to enter the massive doors of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, only to be thwarted by masses of angry parents, students, neighbors, and eventually, the governor himself. I have read about the “Little Rock Nine” and even shown documentaries about this in my classes. At the conference, I had the opportunity to tour Central High, which is still a functioning, thriving public high school. This unique opportunity enabled me to hear the stories of the past while the hallways teemed with high school students interested in creating opportunities for the future.

This powerful reminder of past inequities in education stayed with me as we listened to Lee Ann Bell from Barnard College. In her keynote address she mapped out the Storytelling Project Model from her book *Storytelling for Social Justice*. This model provides an understanding of how racism operates in our institutions (“Stock” stories) and encourages us as educators (or “Gatekeepers”) to use counter-storytelling communities to provide opportunities for those “emerging/transforming” stories. It was a vivid reminder of how important it is to allow students to use their writing, their storytelling, as a means of self-expression and change.



*“Testament”  
Little Rock Nine Memorial, State Capitol*



*Little Rock Central High School*

While much of the conference focused on students, I was reminded of how important it is for us as educators to write as well while watching an original play, *Digging Up Arkansas*, written by Northwest Arkansas Writing Project Teacher Consultant Mike Thomas. This play, which incorporates 3rd through 5th grade Arkansas history concepts, will tour the state as a fun and interactive way of teaching Arkansas history. Perhaps more important for me was the reminder that along with teaching writing, we need to be writers ourselves, fully immersed in the process of creating, editing, and publishing.



*Little Rock in March*

## **Digital Arkansas**

*Jennifer Lundin (ISI 2007)*

The weekend of March 11-12, I had the chance to get away from the classroom and connect with rural educators from across the nation in Little Rock, Arkansas. While there I had the chance to sightsee and speak with people whose classrooms were filled with the same types of kids I have, and others whose classrooms may have had the same economic background but different diversity.

Saturday was the day of workshops. I took advantage of these to explore what other people are doing in their classrooms. What I found is that there is a driving force behind digital writing as well as collaborative writing. There are four writing projects in Arkansas, and all were represented at Friday night's welcome dinner. The link between them was digital writing and collaborative writing—sharing our literacy through digital media.

This struck me because of the economic needs in our classrooms. What it comes down to is finding a way to make it work—writing the grants to get the flip cameras, giving of your time beyond the school day to put the projects together, connecting to other districts, and pooling your resources.

I was inspired to come home, stop making excuses, and instead to create actions. I WILL look for and write a grant so my kids can use their digital knowledge in writing, because I think it will help them become better writers and allow them to show us how the “digital natives” can succeed in this 21st century world of writing.

## Teachers Pamper their “Writing Selves” at the MWP 2nd Annual Winter Writing Day

*Ann Thompson (ISI 2007)*

On Saturday, February 26, the MWP Continuity Committee hosted the 2nd Annual Winter Writing Day at the Minnesota Humanities Center. Twenty-two teachers took advantage of a cozy afternoon devoted to personal writing time, time to share ideas with other teachers, and time to support writing groups.



Of course the event began with the customary writing prompt. Continuity Committee member Patty Sullivan read a piece that inspired the teachers to recall and write about a favorite childhood game. The group-sharing time afterward was filled with laughter as one person after the other read heart-warming stories from their playful pasts.

Quick introductions were next, and all the participants told us the school they teach in, what they teach, and if they are still in a writing group or wanted to join a new one that day. Some even shared their current writing ideas or projects. It certainly opened the door to a variety of conversations later in the day with the teachers.



The second half of the afternoon was devoted to writing groups. Those whose writing groups were at the event found a quiet corner to have a regular meeting. Anyone interested in joining a new writing group met with a Continuity Committee member who facilitated a discussion on what each person was looking for in such a group. There was also an “event-only” writing group for those who are currently in writing groups, but were the only members able to make the event.

The survey reactions to the day were very positive:

“Appreciated the format and generous amount of time to write and connect.”

“I am fired up about writing and the excitement of joining a new writing group.”

“I appreciate that this day was created, so I could connect with other teachers interested in writing to help themselves improve their practices as a writing teacher.”

“It exceeded my expectations. I met two women who I feel will make a wonderful writing group with me. I also met two others who helped me see the art and writing infusion possibilities.”

In June, the MWP Continuity Committee will begin planning the summer and fall events that offer opportunities for past summer institute participants to stay connected to MWP. Watch your emails for all upcoming events.



## What's in your bedside tower of books?

As we all plan our summer projects, vacations, and of course the ever-growing reading lists, consider the professional books suggested by fellow MWP TC's.



### Deepening our appreciation of life and the art of living

*The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living* by the Dalai Lama

*Liaisons of Life: From Hornworts to Hippo, How the Unassuming Microbe Has Driven Evolution* by Tom Wakeford

### Advancing our knowledge of literacy & learning

*Adolescents on the Edge: Stories and Lessons to Transform Learning* by Jimmy Santiago Baca and ReLeah Cossett Lent

*Copyright Clarity: How Fair Use Supports Digital Learning* by Renee Hobbs

*Growing Readers: Units of Study in the Primary Classroom* by Kathy Collins

*Never Work Harder than Your Students & Other Principles of Great Teaching* by Robyn R. Jackson

*RTI in Literacy—Responsive and Comprehensive* by Peter H. Johnston

*Second Grade Writers: Units of Study to Help Children Focus on Audience and Purpose* by Stephanie Parsons

### Promoting a sensitivity to culture and equity

*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire

### Further developing our identity as writers

*Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* by Anne Lamott

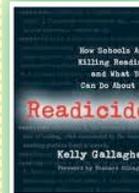
*Hidden Gems: Naming and Teaching from the Brilliance in Every Student's Writing* by Katherine Bomer

### For nurturing the creative intellect

The Hunger Games Trilogy by Suzanne Collins

*Water for Elephants: A Novel* by Sara Gruen

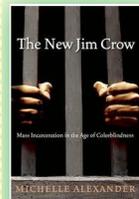
### Showcase Selections:



*Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It* by Kelly Gallagher

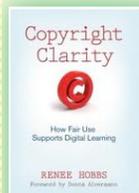
"Readicide is an intriguing look at many possible solutions to the problem of the decline of reading in American schools." *Midwest Book Review*

(This was the most-often-suggested book.)



*The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander

"Legal scholar Alexander argues vigorously and persuasively that [w]e have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it. Jim Crow and legal racial segregation has been replaced by mass incarceration as a system of social control (More African Americans are under correctional control today... than were enslaved in 1850)." *Publishers Weekly*



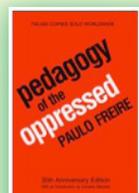
*Copyright Clarity: How Fair Use Supports Digital Learning* by Renee Hobbs

"I'd like to prepare for all of the fun creative writing and television production projects I hope to plan before school starts next year. I am excited to help my students meet the new digital media standards sent out by the MN Department of Education." – Liz Boeser (ISI 2007)



*Growing Readers: Units of Study in the Primary Classroom* by Kathy Collins

"She will be presenting at the Hamline Literacy Institute this summer. This wonderful read breaks down the true art of reading with easy-to-follow lessons and ideas for springboarding your own reading lessons." – Cathy Wegener (ISI 2007)



*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire.

"As districts move toward 'managed (scripted) instruction' I need to re-discover the passion that moved me into teaching in the first place: transformative education." – Sean Fleming (ISI 2008)

## Announcements & Upcoming Events

### Sheila O'Connor to Visit Summer Institute Retreat

Author and editor Sheila O'Connor will be the guest presenter at this year's retreat for the 21st Annual Invitational Summer Institute on Thursday, June 23rd. O'Connor has written and edited several books, including *Where No Gods Came* and her most recent novel, *Sparrow Road*.



*Sheila O'Connor*

In addition to writing, she teaches creative writing at Hamline University in St. Paul and edits the journal *Water-Stone Review*. Visit

#### [Sheila O'Connor's website](#)

to explore more of her work. MWPTCs who want to attend should contact MWP at [mwp@umn.edu](mailto:mwp@umn.edu). Visit the [Mount Olivet Convention & Retreat Center](#) website for more information on the Center, its trails, services, and directions.

### Join Us for the Second Annual Mini Institute

Due to the success of last year's mini institute held in late July, we will be offering another summer writing event. Stay tuned for more details on the date and featured speakers.

### Save the Date! Fall Workshop—Saturday, September 24

Please join us for our fourth annual fall workshop, to be held once again on a Saturday from 9am to 3pm. Please stay tuned for more details on the theme for this year's workshop.

### Sharon Ornelas (ISI 2005) Featured in *Teacher Voices National Report*

Each year, NWP and the College Board highlight the efforts of exemplary teachers from across the nation, asking that they share their experiences in a report titled "Teachers Are the Center of Education/Teacher Voices." This year's report focused on teachers working with immigrant students and second language learners.



*Sharon Ornelas*

Visit the link below to download the free report and to watch a short video clip of Sharon describing her commitment to working with immigrant students, both with and without papers:

[nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/3562](http://nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/3562)

## Minnesota Writing Project Advisory Board Members

2010–2011

Charles Barniskis  
Theresa Behnke, Urban Sites Network  
Marsha Besch, Outreach Co-Director  
Julia Blenkush, Rural Sites Network  
Mike Borka  
Jennifer Budenski  
Kendrick Davies  
Candance Doerr-Stevens, Teaching Assistant  
Debra Hartley, Technology Liaison  
Gretchen Hovan  
Kirsten Jamsen, Co-Director  
Sherri Larson  
Jennifer Lundin, Rural Sites Network  
Joyce Malwitz, Outreach Co-Director  
Lindsey Nelson  
Sandra Nesvig  
Micki St. Sauver, Co-Director  
Deb Stortz  
Maria Theissen  
Muriel Thompson, Director  
Joanne Toft  
Mary Verbick  
Terri Wallace, Executive Secretary

## Minnesota Writing Project Newsletter

Published by the Center for Writing  
University of Minnesota  
10 Nicholson Hall, 216 Pillsbury Dr. SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

An Official Site of the National Writing Project  
also funded by  
the Center for Writing  
and the College of Liberal Arts  
at the University of Minnesota

Contributing Writers:  
Julia Blenkush  
Candance Doerr-Stevens  
Jennifer Lundin  
Joyce Malwitz  
Anne Thompson

Editing & Layout:  
Debra Hartley

The University of Minnesota is an equal  
opportunity educator and employer.

[mwp.umn.edu](http://mwp.umn.edu)