



Minnesota Writing Project

Winter 2006

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Pittsburgh NWP Meeting Inspires Educators

by Anne Lowe

Pittsburgh, PA in November may not sound like an exciting place, even if you're a Steelers fan, but Pittsburgh with your own Minnesota Writing Project reading study group and 1,000 fellow teacher consultants from the National Writing Project sounds like a place and time I would not want to miss!

Because I am an English Language Learners (ELL) teacher in a high school for newly arrived immigrants, two events at the 2005 National Writing Project Annual Meeting stood out for me. The facilitated conversation, *Race Talk: Creating Safe Communities for Critical Conversations about Hard Topics*, and the workshop, *Access, Relevance and Diversity: Site Change in Project Outreach*, forced me to ask myself critical questions about how I run my classroom. What is my role as a teacher? Am I a mediator of culture in my classroom? Is everyone included? With other participants, I wrote and talked about issues of race and culture that can prevent equal access to opportunities in our sites and schools.

At the English Language Learners Network Social, I heard inspiring stories written at the ELL Santa Fe Writing Retreat. I learned more about the English Language Learners Network and the work it does to support ELL teachers like me in the teaching of writing for all students.

A first-time meeting attendee, I also joined MWP members Muriel Thompson, Marsha Besch, Mary Cathryn Ricker, and Steve Smarjesse to give a presentation on how our MWP study group was



Participants at the 2005 NWP annual meeting in Pittsburgh

formed and run last year. Our session, *No Reader Left Behind: Fostering Community, Dialogue, and Reflection through Teacher Study Groups*, had a great turnout, and we received a lot of comments and questions from other sites.

In the meeting's plenary address, NWP director Richard Sterling underscored the importance of encouraging students to write. Sterling challenged us to rethink how we teach writing and how we use technology to teach writing today. He believes we can engage students who have not previously been successful in school by understanding the role technology plays in their lives and using it as a tool for teaching students how to write. Sterling suggested three principles that govern the new environment of learning:

collaboration, problem-solving, and use of media. One example he offered of

how to incorporate all three in a learning environment is using weblogs. Our own MWP website has a link to resources you can use to learn new classroom technology, including blogs.

I left the NWP annual meeting with renewed energy to use the strategies and writing practices I have gained from past experiences with MWP in future writing projects with my students. I view my students as both writers and future American citizens who will work and live in a world where writing and literacy are the keys to success.

What is my role as a teacher? Am I a mediator of culture in my classroom?

MWP Organizes Exchange Days

by Marsha Besch

On November 28 and 29, 120 excited first, second and third graders rushed into Crosswinds Middle School in Woodbury to hear about storytelling, make their own books, and make new friends. On January 31, fourth, fifth and sixth grade students spent a day at the Weisman Art Museum and the Andersen Library at the University of Minnesota campus. The Minnesota Writing Project organized both events for Families All Matter, a cultural exchange program between urban and suburban students.

During the primary students' workshop, Guthrie actor Isabell Monk O'Connor entertained the students with an African folktale complete with props and responded to questions about her writing career. Mary Gotz, a professor emeritus at Hamline University, showed students how to make their own books. Students also listened to a reading of Monk's picture book, *Hope*, and shared their own family stories.

At the Weisman Art Gallery, intermediate



MWP outreach coordinator Marsha Besch leads students in a stretching break during a Families All Matter workshop at Crosswinds Middle School in Woodbury.

(Photos courtesy of Stillwater Courier.)

students toured and wrote responses to an exhibit called the *HOME House Project: The Future of Affordable Housing*. They also participated in an activity focused on Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's book, *Shiloh*, at the Andersen Library's Kerlan Collection.

Supported with desegregation funds and led by Eric Anderson of Stillwater Area Public Schools, Families All Matter has fostered partnerships between St. Paul and Stillwater schools. In the classroom, students have been learning about the diversity of

families through the program's curriculum. Stillwater schools participating in the project include Lake Elmo, Lily Lake, Andersen, and Rutherford. Schools from St. Paul include John A. Johnson, Battle Creek, and Crossroads. MWP staff members Muriel Thompson, Alex Mueller, and Marsha Besch led the exchange days.



Carlie Hart, a third-grader at Lily Lake Elementary, works on her book.



Andersen Elementary School volunteer Julie McCabe helps students during a presentation on bookmaking.

We would like to thank the following Sustaining Members, who generously donated \$50 or more to MWP:

Paul Carney ~ Joan Kuzma Costello ~ Don Leathers
Gerry Lidstrom ~ Ann Mershon ~ Joe Moses
Steve Smarjesse ~ Micheal Thompson

MWP Co-Sponsors MCTE Spring Conference

Attending the spring conference of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English (April 28-29) is always a great way to network with colleagues and learn new teaching strategies, but this year you have an even greater incentive to go: MWP is co-sponsoring the event in Rochester. In addition to individual sessions led by MWP teacher consultants Tanya Miller and Mary Cathryn Ricker, we will be running the following sessions:

Creating Literacy Networks Artful Writing Using the Arts to Support Reading and Writing A Cross-Curricular Literacy Initiative

MWP will also hold an informal gathering following the Friday afternoon session for members and teaching consultants. Hope to see you there!

*For registration information, go to
<http://www.mcte.org>.*

2006 Summer Institute Outreach Scholarships

Here's one more reason your colleagues should apply for the 2006 Summer Institute! The Minnesota Writing Project will award scholarships to two 2006 Summer Institute fellows who teach in areas of Minnesota that have been underserved by MWP. These scholarships may be used to defray travel, lodging, and food expenses or simply serve as incentives to attend.

Amount: \$1000

Eligibility: Applicants must be experienced PreK-college educators who have applied for enrollment in the 2006 Summer Institute by the April 1 deadline.

We especially encourage the following educators to apply:

- teachers who work in districts that have been underserved by MWP
- teachers who work in urban or rural areas that are impacted by poverty
- teachers of color

Application Procedure:

See <http://mwp.cla.umn.edu> for information and application forms.

Good News!

After years of thought, research, drafting, revising, and networking with the University of Minnesota's Department of Curriculum and Instruction, we are proud to announce that the University of Minnesota Regents have officially approved our **Certificate in Teaching Writing and Critical Literacy!** This graduate program will officially begin in the fall of 2006. Stay tuned for details!

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Congratulations to **Jennifer Budenski!** For her work as a teacher in the Hopkins Alternative Program Off-Campus Pavilion, Budenski received the Midwestern Region's College Board Bob Costas Grant for the Teaching of Writing. Named for the Emmy Award-winning broadcaster and author, the grant recognizes teachers who use innovative methods to inspire and develop their students' writing skills.

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The Minnesota Writing Project has moved! Come visit our new digs in **10 Nicholson Hall**.



Newly renovated Nicholson Hall



MWP holds our first board meeting in our new home.

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Check out our website, <http://mwp.cla.umn.edu>, for current information on several opportunities:

**4th Annual Writers' Retreat
Summer Workshops
Gopher Writing Camp**

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