



Minnesota Writing Project

Winter 2007

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Teachers Have a Grand Ole Time in Nashville

by Laura Cochlin

Nashville, Tennessee, home of the Grand Ole Opry, and the site of this year's NWP annual meeting. Conversations about the power of writing and ways to share this power with teachers and students filled two full days. I attended sessions addressing inquiry in the primary classroom, making sense of state mandates, and models for professional development.

I was in awe of the far-reaching effect of involvement with a writing project. The first session I attended had representatives from 28 states. The results of a survey administered to past writing project participants also conveyed the positive impact of the organization. The NWP offered 7300 programs in one year. In 2004-05, approximately 95,000 individual teachers were served by writing projects. The summer institutes had 3,142 participants in 2004-05. The majority, 96%, of the teachers that work with writing projects say what they learn improves their teaching.

Even though we were from different parts of the country, the questions and comments that arose surrounding teaching and learning were the same. Many people were

feeling as if they were losing the ability to teach writing the way they want to teach writing due to state mandates. The other key question was how to provide sustainable professional development for teaching writing. Reflecting back on the conversations around these topics, the messages had a common thread.



MWP teacher-consultants enjoy a dinner in Nashville after a day at the NWP Annual Meeting. From left to right: Muriel Thompson, Kirsten Jamsen, Kris Martens, Alex Mueller, and Laura Cochlin

It is important to be involved in a professional learning community where you can collaborate and learn together. It is here you will also find the support needed to continue with the important work of teaching. I also heard it being said to start small. Rome wasn't built in a day. You might have to start that professional development at a kitchen table with a few close colleagues. This work will

have an impact on student achievement, others will become interested, and the learning will spread.

There were many statements I heard while at the annual meeting that will influence my teaching and collaboration with other teachers. One quote which I found to be important was made by Sheridan Blau. He stated in his keynote address, "Writing is the best and most reliable instrument for learning." This being the case, it is essential to allow time for students to write for authentic purposes and audiences.

We would like to thank
the following Sustaining Members, who generously
donated

\$50 or more to MWP:

Jean Borax ~ Paul Carney
Lynn Macal ~ Sandra Nesvig
Steve Smarjesse

MWP Facilitates Educational Exchange Between Stillwater and Saint Paul

by Alex Mueller

For the second year in a row, MWP helped host an educational exchange designed to bring St. Paul and Stillwater elementary school students together to build relationships through writing. On November 27th-29th, one hundred and eighty excited fourth and fifth graders from each district convened at Crosswinds Middle School in Woodbury and Wellstone Community Center in St. Paul to write "Where I'm From" poems with teacher-presenter Buffy Sedlacek and make books with retired Hamline Professor Mary Gotz. MWP staff, Muriel Thompson, Alex Mueller and Marsha Besch collaborated with Eric Anderson, the diversity curriculum/leadership counselor for Stillwater Public Schools, and Craig Seath, Stillwater's classroom partnership technology integration specialist, to lead community building activities, run writing groups, and facilitate the making of books.

This event was part of a Partnership Exchange curriculum, which the students have been following in their classrooms. According to Anderson, these collaborative events are



Students participate in a community building exercise.
Photo by Craig Seath, Stillwater Public Schools



Students share posters to introduce their schools to each other. *Photo by Craig Seath, Stillwater Public Schools*

designed to meet the East Metro Integration District's goal "to provide and promote integrated opportunities for students, families, and staff that expand cultural understanding and support academic achievement." Stillwater schools participating in the exchange were Afton Lakeland and Rutherford. Schools from St. Paul were French Immersion and Hancock Hamline.

Nominate Your Colleagues for the Summer Institute!

Do not let your colleagues miss out on the transformative professional development of the MWP Summer Institute. This year the institute will begin with the retreat at the Mt. Olivet Retreat Center from June 20th-22nd and continue at the University of Minnesota from July 9th-27th. The deadline to send in your nominations for the 2007 Summer Institute is rapidly approaching!

Please fill out the form on our website (<http://mwp.cla.umn.edu>) and mail or e-mail (murielt@umn.edu) it to us as soon as possible.



The following piece began as a quick write in the session, "Rethinking Issues of Girls and Literacy," at the 2006 National Writing Project Annual Meeting in Nashville

Kristine Martens

I Am Who I Am

I am who I am...an advocate teacher of English Language Learners in a suburban school setting where test score bragging rights speak louder than most anything else.

I am who I am...a frustrated teacher who walks a tightrope between No Child Left Behind mandates and actually finding time to teach meaningful curricula in between state and national testing dates.

I am who I am...a curious teacher who loves words and experiments with multicultural texts in which my students can see themselves and their families.

I am who I am...a writing teacher who models how drafts are created by modeling work samples I myself complete.

I am who I am...an active teacher who dives into assignments each day alongside my students.

I am who I am...a probing teacher who cares enough for my students to encourage them to try more and more challenging materials.

I am who I am...an introspective teacher who requires students to write about their souls – to stop and explore their often turbulent, hormonal states.

I am who I am...a sharing teacher who requires students to read their pieces aloud in writing groups to gain confidence and glean insights.

I am who I am...a thoughtful teacher who requires thinking and reflecting along the pathway to make rough ideas become alive in published pieces.

I am who I am...a reflective teacher who requires reworking, rethinking, and rewriting because that is how writers improve.

I am who I am...a professional who daily experiments with new techniques from the 2006 summer experiences at the Minnesota Writing Project and values its larger connections to the National Writing Project's mission.

I am who I am...a thankful teacher for ripe and willing students who everyday consciously (and unconsciously) capture their heartbeats on paper.

I am who
I am.



Announcements

Find Our Voices at MCTE

MWP will be co-sponsoring the MCTE Spring Conference for the second straight year. In keeping with this year's theme is "Finding Our Voices," we hope you attend and find the strong MWP voices of our teacher-consultants. The conference will be held at Cragun's Resort in Brainerd on April 27th and 28th. For registration information, please see the MCTE website: <http://www.mcte.org/>.

Like last year, MWP will have a strand of sessions. Teacher-consultants Melissa Borgmann, Michael Borka, Susan Miles, Tanya Miller, and Julie Winn will present their work on spoken word poetry, boy writers, shoebox writing prompts, active reading, and the multi-genre research paper.

Writing with Bob Dylan

As in years past, students from St. Paul gathered at the Weisman Art Museum for the MWP Young Writers' Conference. On February 7th and 14th, sixty eighth and ninth grade students met with MWP teacher-consultants, Center for Writing staff, and prospective English teachers to peruse and write in response to the Bob Dylan's American Journey exhibit. As interested writers, artists, or musicians, these students sang Dylan songs, analyzed Dylan lyrics, and began to write poetry and prose to include in books they made with bookmaker Mary Gotz, a former Hamline Professor. These students will return to the Museum on March 21st to complete and celebrate their writing.

* * *

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

**5th Annual Writers' Retreat
Summer Workshops**

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