



Winter 2011

Vol. 20 No. 2

In this issue

Reflections on the 2010 NWP Annual Meeting

Stephanie Rollag ... **Page 1**

Professional Development, continued

National Afterschool Matters Initiative... **Page 6**

Lake Superior Writing Project 2010

Susan Perala-Dewey ... **Page 3**

Professional Development, continued

Voices of Initiative fellows... **Page 7**

Models of Professional Development

Edina Cohort ... **Page 5**

Announcements and Upcoming Events

Nominations for 2011 ISI are open... **Page 8**

Making Connections in Orlando at the NWP Annual Meeting

Stephanie Rollag (ISI 2009)

I tell my students to make connections all of the time. I encourage them to relate their lives to stories and poems, to share ideas with their classmates, and to build on each other's skills in groups. Yet, I am often guilty of forgetting to make my own connections. I teach in my classroom, run from one meeting to another, and find myself isolated in the world of teaching. The 2010 National Writing Project Annual Meeting reminded me of the power of connections for educators and the opportunities we have within our own Minnesota Writing Project. The vast network of educators filled me with ideas, energy, and memories of Orlando.

The break-out sessions offered a quick sense of community. As I interacted with intelligent and inquisitive teachers from around the country, I found myself digging into new strategies and questions about education. The hands-on activities pulled me into a range of conversations about using writing to improve comprehension, looking at pop culture in education, and starting more youth writing programs. With each session I was struck by the professionalism of the presenters and the passion of the convention participants.



Stephanie Rollag, Kirsten Jamsen, and Candance Doerr-Stevens connecting at the 2010 NWP Annual Meeting in Orlando, Florida

The mixing and mingling of ideas spread throughout the weekend. The open format of the large group social events allowed for conversations to integrate resources from prior sessions, NWP networks, and politics surrounding education. The social hours featured the special focus networks. This emphasis enabled people to unite with other professionals in similar situations, from the Urban Sites Network to the Rural Sites Network. At the same event, people discussed policies that are urgent to the National Writing Project and other educational programs. The passion of the teachers in the room came together around these common topics.

I realized the depth of the writing project community as I sat among 1,300 other writing project participants at the General Assembly. Throughout the assembly, our common experiences were pulled together. We listened to Sharon Washington, executive director of NWP, share her story of “A day in the life of a writing teacher.” Throughout her honest story, the room leaned in, laughed along, and sighed to the realities, challenges, and encouraging moments of being a Language Arts teacher. Keynote speaker Donalyn Miller used humor to tell how she faced the challenges of the writing process for herself and her students. She then shared how the Texas Writing Project revived her love of writing and helped her bring writing back to the heart of her classroom. It was a story that resonated with the members from all of the different writing projects in the room.

Sharing the experience with Minnesota colleagues made the meeting all the more meaningful. Evenings in Disney’s Magic Kingdom provided an inspiring place for those of us from the Minnesota Writing Project to reflect on various sessions together. We were able to share the knowledge that we gained throughout the day, and brainstorm about new ideas to bring back to Minnesota. I learned about my fellow MWP members, the work that they are doing, and the common interests in education that we have.

My arrival to Orlando marked my first Disney World experience and my first NWP annual meeting. I was energized by the warm weather and the wealth of community. As I left Orlando, I realized that I will keep telling my students to make connections. As for my own learning, I will continue to grow with the Minnesota and National Writing Project networks.

Sharing the experience with Minnesota colleagues made the meeting all the more meaningful. Evenings in Disney’s Magic Kingdom provided an inspiring place for those of us from the Minnesota Writing Project to reflect on various sessions together.



Walt Disney’s Magic Kingdom



Stephanie turns 30 in Orlando

Whetting Appetites at the 2010 Lake Superior Writing Project

Susan Perala-Dewey (ISI 2008)

Hungry for more. That was the response of several participants of the first Lake Superior Writing Project Mini-Institute held this past summer at the University of Minnesota Duluth. You see, unlike the 3-week-plus immersion of the MWP Summer Institute, our mini-institute was only one short week.

It was only one year ago that I wrote in this very newsletter my dreams of beginning a writing project here in Northeastern Minnesota. While I had put that vision on hold, Muriel Thompson and Kirsten Jamsen, directors of the MWP, had not. Last December they had the idea to write for an NWP mini-grant. The proposal, in short, was to “test the waters” of the Lake Superior Arrowhead region for writing project interest by teachers. We proposed to put on a one-week mini-institute modeled after MWP’s summer institute.



Lake Superior Writing Project cohort, 2010

“[As a teacher,] I view writing differently—and the assessment of it. I am excited to take ideas back to class.”

—Mini-Institute participant

Once we knew the grant was funded, my colleague Jean Stevenson and I worked closely with Muriel, Kirsten, and Debra Hartley to develop plans to recruit teachers and carry out the institute. Debra designed an attractive and informative brochure and provided us space on MWP’s website. We kicked off our recruitment efforts at MCTE here in Duluth last April and followed up with a campaign of email brochures to hundreds of area schools. By the first of June we were biting our nails, wondering if we would get enough teachers

to apply to make the program worthwhile. Not to worry; three weeks later we had 23 teacher applicants! Since 15 was our limit, we were then faced with selecting our first cohort.

We met with this special group of teachers on campus each day from 9 am to 3 pm from August 13th –17th. Our mornings began with writing and sharing. Our primary text was Vicki Spandel’s *The Nine Rights of Every Writer*. As in MWP’s institute, small groups worked together to present a chapter from the text and met each afternoon to write and respond to each other as writers. One of the week’s highlights was a visit by TC Ann Mershon of Grand Marais. Ann inspired us as she shared how her MWP experiences led her to develop as a teacher and writer. Her publications and stories about teaching in Turkey truly transported us to another place and time ... one we can all dream of!



Ann Mershon

Our week ended true to writing project philosophy: in sharing and celebration! We met at UMD’s new Bagley Outdoor classroom. The weather cooperated for our morning reading, with tears being the only precipitation. This reading demonstrated the depth and strength of the writing project model: one short week of writing and support had produced a range of beautiful voices and narratives, punctuated by the personal and professional landscapes of 13 dedicated area teachers. While our week began with uncertainty and trepidation, it ended with tears, laughter, and a strong sense of wanting more: more time with colleagues, more time to share, more time to write.

“I have been inspired and motivated to begin the writing I’ve wanted to for so long. I feel like I am, once again, a writer.”

—Mini-Institute participant

"[As a writer,] I was able to go into an area I've been scared of touching for 20 years ... I feel more confident. The week was a blessing."

—Mini-Institute participant

At least some of our LSWP teachers will get just that—more writing project experience. In October, several of us made the trip to St. Paul for MWP's Fall Renewal Workshop. Some members of our cohort

have already met as a writing group, and at least two will likely be chosen to attend the MWP 2011 Invitational Summer Institute. In March we'll meet on a Saturday to reunite, reconnect, and write together again. We'll share what we're doing in our classrooms and gain insight as to how our writing project experience may have shaped (or re-shaped) how we teach writing.



A writing group in action

Future plans include a second annual LSWP Mini-Institute with a new group of eager teachers, hungry for the time, space, and nurturing the writing project model provides. In the near future, we hope to gain status as a "satellite" of the MWP, and eventually gain the local support needed to operate independently ... baby steps. So tell your teacher friends in the north about LSWP. We'd love to have them join us this summer!

"The entire week was an absolute blessing—my personal writing retreat, as well as clarifying my role as a teacher of writing."

—Mini-Institute participant



A time for celebration and reading

Second Annual MWP Midwinter Writing Day Saturday, February 26

Our writing event at the Minnesota Humanities Center is approaching soon.

MWP Teacher Consultants will meet for this free event on Saturday, February 26th, from 12:30-3:00 pm. The event will offer you the opportunity to:

- take time for personal writing and sharing with others
- meet with one or more members of your writing group
- join a new writing group if you are interested
- stay connected to the community of MWP Teacher Consultants

Prompts will be offered for some of the writing time, but there will also be time for people to work on their own ideas or writing projects.

There is no cost to attend this event, but we do need to get an idea of how many will be attending. Please reply to Candance (doeroo26@umn.edu) or Muriel (mwp@umn.edu) by Friday, February 18, if you are able to join us on February 26th.



Minnesota Humanities Center

Venturing Out and Forging Anew: Exploring Models of Professional Development

(Excerpted from the 2011 NWP Funding Renewal Grant)

In addition to recruiting and planning for the Invitational Summer Institute (ISI), a vital part of MWP's outreach programming centers on organizing and conducting inservice programs for teachers. Through the commitment of various MWP leaders, such as Marsha Besch, Joyce Malwitz (ISI 2006) and Micki St. Sauver (ISI 1991), and the help of available TCs, we have worked closely with leaders from surrounding school districts to design programs to meet their needs.

Over the past few years, MWP has been experimenting with new models of professional development in order to develop models that best meet the shifting needs of both districts and individual educators. One model, such as the Edina Cohort, focuses on professional development as an embedded process, while another, such as the Afterschool Matters cohort, anchors professional development in the process of individual inquiry.



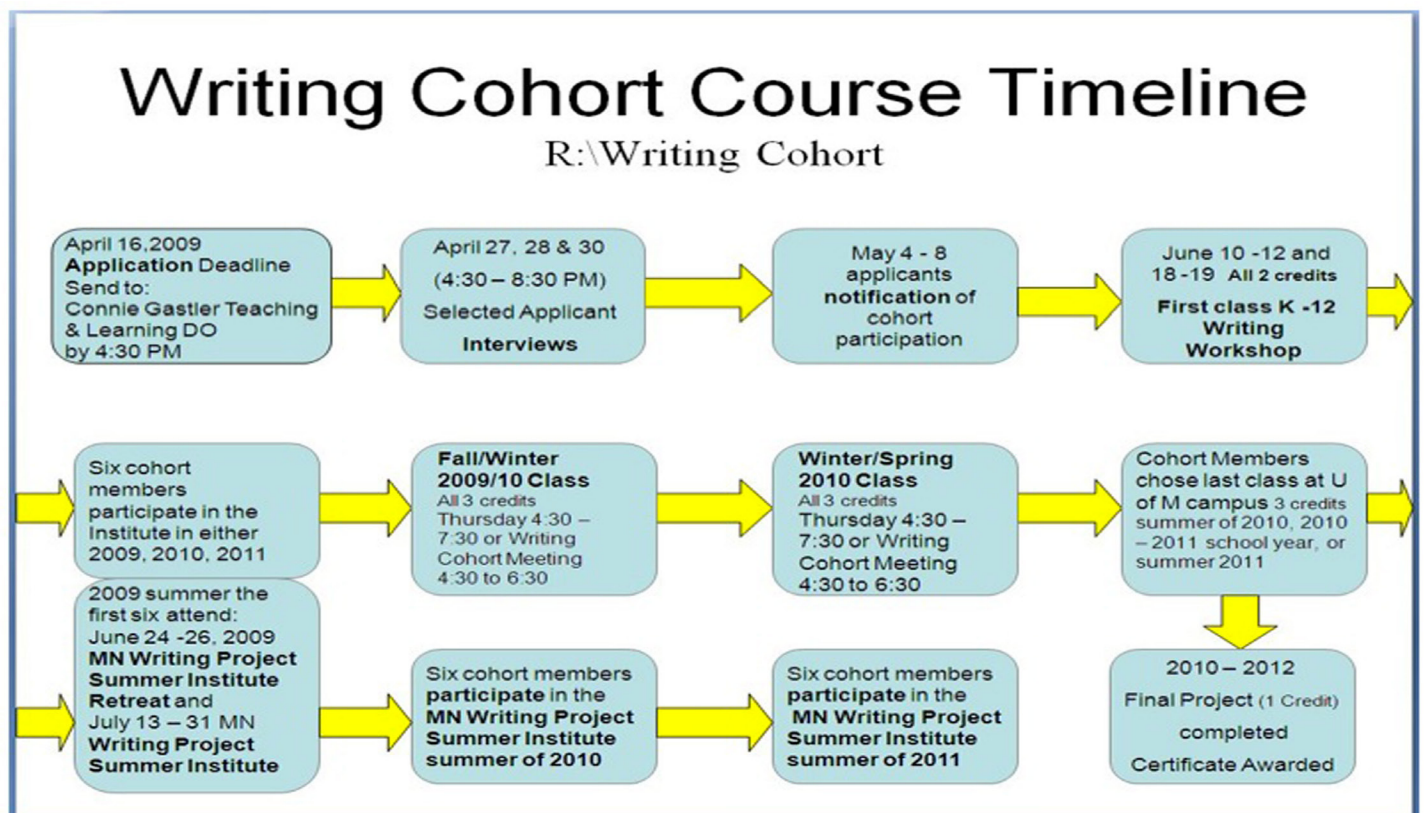
Edina Cohort at work

Edina Cohort: Embedded Professional Development

Our most successful inservice venture has been our partnership with the Edina Education Fund to provide our Certificate in Teaching Writing and Critical Literacy for 18 Edina teachers (K-12).

As shown in the following chart, this cohort of teachers has now completed 8 credits together. Fourteen of the teachers have participated in our ISI, with the remaining four to join us this summer. Teachers have completed together courses on the writing workshop, digital media, and assessment, and are now embarking on additional choices for their capstone course in which they conduct their own action research and their individual university course selection.

The following graphic shows the cohort's process:



The cohort has been critical in building collaboration between grade levels, elementary to secondary, and across schools. It has provided teachers with a new and sophisticated way of thinking about 21st century literacy skills and helped them become teacher leaders in interpreting the new CORE standards within a 21st century framework.

When asked how the cohort is influencing system change beyond individual teachers' classrooms, teachers identified the following:

- We have a strong representation of cohort members on all the Curriculum Design Teams for the Language Arts Review (K-5 and 6-12). Fourteen of eighteen cohort members hold leadership positions in that process by serving on a Design Team. The remaining four cohort members are acting as specialist consultants for Special Education, Interventions, and English Language Learners.
- The discussions we have started to have across the district are impacting our colleagues' thinking. 100% of the teachers serving on the Design Teams (cohort and non-cohort teachers) listed improving writing in Edina Public Schools as their priority when implementing the new standards.
- This cohort will help us put in place a well-designed and articulated E (Early Childhood) to Grade 12 curriculum.



More members of the Edina Cohort at work

National Afterschool Matters Initiative

In 2009 NWP invited MWP to be the third site to participate in the National Afterschool Matters Initiative, part of the National Institute of Out of School Time. As described by NWP, "The National Afterschool Matters Initiative Practitioner Fellowship immerses youth development professionals in the methodology of practitioner research or reflective inquiry and creates a supportive intellectual community in which practitioners raise and explore their own question to improve their practice with youth and communities." In collaboration with the Center for Youth Development at the University of Minnesota, this fellowship encourages participants to reflect upon their role as a youth workers and complete an action research project to improve their practice, which will then be shared with the wider youth worker field.

The first cohort of practitioners recently completed their year-long reflective-practice fellowship by presenting their research findings to a group of over 100 youth work and educational leaders in the Twin Cities area. Thus, MWP's first year participating in this unique fellowship came to a close with a successful Research Roundtable, which showcased the inquiry work of the practitioners for a broad audience of University, school, and community leaders. This

event also welcomed the members of the new cohort just beginning their fellowship year.

MWP Outreach Co-Director Joyce Malwitz serves as the facilitator representing MWP. She strives to incorporate writing as the primary means of self-reflection through journaling and follow-up writing assignments that fellows base on continued mining of their journals and written reflections during their twice-monthly sessions. Following NWP's model, the fellows also participate in small writing groups, sharing their writing with each other and providing feedback through praise, asking questions, and suggesting further



Afterschool Matters participants meet

avenues of exploration. This year's fellows are well on their way to selecting topics for exploration and, in early evaluations of their sessions, have indicated their whole-hearted support of writing in the fellowship. Even more than teachers, youth workers are isolated practitioners, so having the opportunity to share verbally, and in writing, their experiences, wonderings, imaginings, and reflections is a luxury they rarely, if ever, experience.

Fellows responded favorably to their experience in the cohort. Rarely engaged in reflective practice, they indicated that this experience changed them and helped them approach their work in new and refreshing ways. They talked about analyzing their own "professional stance" as they struggled to implement their individually designed action research projects. As part of their evaluation, fellows contributed the following comments:

"I have a feeling that we are all in this together. Everyone is supportive of each other."

"It is a gift to be working with such a talented group of people. I love the insight that cohort members offer into each other's work."

"I'm a good writer and glad that I have this fellowship time to concentrate on it."

"Intentionally thinking has pushed me to ask different questions and pursue information from different people more so than I otherwise would have."

"I realize that it is much more helpful to be self-reflective and approach my practice with an inquiring eye to try to find ways that theory fit my practice."

"It was valuable to see change and improvement in my thinking through writing. For me it was seeing it on paper—as messy as it was—and seeing change over time."

Participating in a national collaborative between NWP and the National Institute of Out of School Time has affirmed MWP's goal to establish partnerships with organizations that focus on the needs of youth outside of the traditional classroom. While both classroom teachers and afterschool time youth workers share the same passion and commitment to children and young adults, their professional worlds seldom align, resulting in misperceptions about each other's work. Teachers, for example, may view youth workers as after school "babysitters," and youth workers may lack knowledge about current best practices in education, feeling that students are consigned to a dreary school day from which youth workers must save them. By bringing these two worlds closer together through reviewing action research and reflective practice that reflects the concerns of both professions, we begin the process of providing a seamless educational experience for children.



Afterschool Matters practitioners discuss their research in progress

Announcements & Upcoming Events

Nominations for 2011 Invitational Summer Institute

We are currently accepting nominations for the upcoming summer institute. Please consider nominating a teacher from any discipline, K-college, that you think would benefit from and contribute to the literacy-based leadership experience of the summer institute.

The dates for this year's institute are:

Retreat: June 22-24, 2011

Institute: July 11-29, 2011

Nomination forms can be found at mwp.umn.edu/summer

Supporting MWP

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 at writing.umn.edu/home/giving

MCTE Spring Conference April 15-16

This year's conference will be held in Brainerd, Minnesota, at Cragun's Resort. Featured speakers include Frank Sentwali, Lorna Landvik, and Jim Burke. See www.mcte.org for more information.

Sheila O'Connor to Visit MWP in June 2011

Author and editor Sheila O'Connor will be the guest presenter at this year's retreat for the 21st Annual Invitational Summer



Sheila O'Connor

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*.

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

Sheila O'Connor's website at www.sheilaconnor.com to explore more of her work.

MWP TCs who want to attend should contact MWP at mwp@umn.edu. Visit the Mt. Olivet website for more information on the site, its trails, services, and directions. The one-minute video tour is quite stunning!

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:
Candance Doerr-Stevens
Susan Perala-Dewey
Stephanie Rollag

Editing & Layout:
Debra Hartley

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

mwp.umn.edu