



In this Issue

Meeting Billy in Philly

*Ann Thompson attends the National Writing Project Annual Meeting ... **Page 1***

Spotlight on Rural Teaching

*Sherri Larson visits Kalamazoo, Michigan, for NWP Rural Education Network Conference ... **Page 3***

NWP Writing Retreats

*John Albright shares his experiences with NWP Professional Writing Retreats ... **Page 5***

Envisioning MWP

*Mary Beth Blegen describes the work of the MWP envisioning committee ... **Page 6***

MWP's New Structure and Mission

*View the fruits of the committee's labors ... **Page 7***

Announcements and Upcoming Events

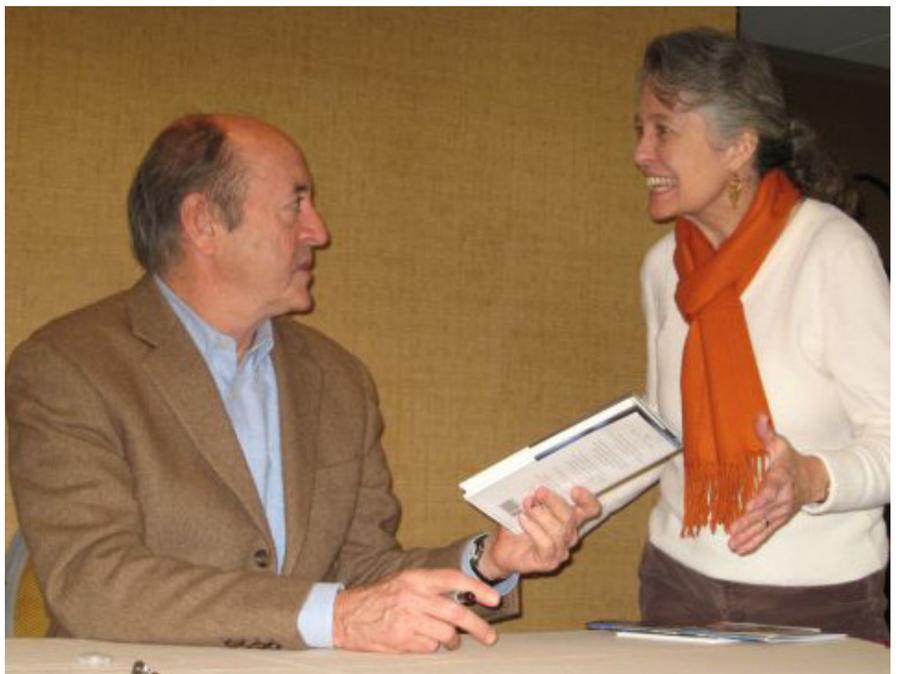
*TC receives NCTE 2009 teaching award ... **Page 8***

Meeting Billy in Philly!

Ann Thompson (ISI 2007)

I have to say that one of my most memorable experiences at the National Writing Project Annual Meeting in Philadelphia was listening to Billy Collins read his poetry and then meeting him afterward at his book signing. I love the way he brings humor into simple everyday events! And thanks to my MWP Summer Institute experience, I now have a better appreciation of poetry and actually think of myself as a budding poet.

But that was only one of the amazing experiences I had at the Annual Meeting. As the new Continuity Director for MWP, I was able to meet other continuity leaders from writing projects all over the country and learn what has worked for their sites.



Billy Collins signs Ann's copy of his book

For example, at the UW Milwaukee project, they invite past Summer Institute participants to one day of their current SI. In the morning, these past participants have a renewal workshop with writing activities and discussions. Then lunch is with both past and current Institute participants. The afternoon is devoted to writing together as an entire group, with old and new Teaching Consultants sitting at tables together. The afternoon session also creates a great opportunity for past participants to present the paths they have taken since their SI experience—personal writing development, staff development, curriculum development, or MWP leadership opportunities.

As I joined members of the MWP leadership team—Muriel Thompson, Kirsten Jamsen, and Candance Dorr-Stevens—on this wonderful adventure to Philly, I had the opportunity to get to know them better, and we shared ideas that will be helpful to our site. I am impressed with their devotion to improving the teaching of literacy and supporting teachers, and that’s why I want to do all I can to support MWP!

You can’t go to Philadelphia without immersing yourself in American history. So Muriel and I spent our entire Saturday seeing the sights, from the Liberty Bell, to Independence Hall, to Betsy Ross’s house, to Ben Franklin’s grave, and on and on. However, our feet paid the price!

I have to mention that Muriel wanted to see the pipe organ in Macy’s on our way back to the hotel that day. Little did we know that when we got there it was the beginning of their holiday showcase and their guest host was just arriving with Santa in a carriage! I snapped a picture of Julie Andrews as she walked by me to greet the audience outside Macy’s! A fun ending to a very beneficial trip!

You can’t go to Philadelphia without immersing yourself in American history.



The view from Ann’s hotel window



Ann, Candance, and Muriel standing in front of the Fountain of the Three Rivers in Logan Circle

For highlights of the 2009 NWP Annual Meeting, [go to the NWP website](#). Here you will find a video of Billy Collins’s address, other videos and photos of the meeting, samples of blog posts and tweets, and a sample of attendees’ responses to the prompt, “write about what it takes to teach students to write.”



Ann represents MWP at NWP

Spotlight on Rural Teaching

In March of last year, Sherri Larson (ISI 2007) attended the NWP Special Network conference on Rural Education in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The conference featured author and teacher Karen Vocke, who spoke about her decades of experience helping migrant students and their families. To find out more information about Karen Vocke or her book *Where Do I Go From Here?: Meeting the Unique Educational Needs of Migrant Students*, visit www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2732.

Yes, there really is a Kalamazoo!

Sherri Larson (ISI 2007)

On t-shirts, buttons, and storefronts, this slogan is the proud proclamation of the beautiful (albeit small) city, host to the 2009 Rural Sites Network in March. I was privileged to attend the conference to represent the Minnesota Writing Project.

My visit to Kalamazoo began with a preconference writing marathon. This all-day event consisted of a beautiful walk and “writing stops” around Kalamazoo. We began at a coffee



Sherri Larson in Kalamazoo

shop, and continued to the beautiful local art museum. We wrote in our journals while sitting on benches along the busy pedestrian shopping mall. We visited the award-winning public library and the city’s art center. A limerick contest and songwriting competition erupted at a local restaurant. We ended the day at Bell Brewery. (Perhaps it was more of a crawl than a marathon at the end....) As a result of this organized event, I laughed and learned and shared stories for the rest of

Remixing Media: An Original Form of Writing or Copyright Violation?

Do innovative uses of others’ creative work constitute original work in their own way? Is this a new form of writing? Or is this just plagiarism in a new form?

While in Kalamazoo, Michigan, Sherri attended a conference session, “Remix as a Writing Practice,” that explored these very questions.

While some may see remixing as a violation of copyright, others see remixing as an active process of appropriation and one of the many new literacy skills related to digital writing. Some literacy scholars describe appropriation as an “intelligent sampling” that occurs when students tap into existing cultural resources of images, music, and video to create new texts that creatively juxtapose these pieces in meaningful ways.

To explore the idea of remix as a form of writing and its relation to copyright, check out some of the following websites:

[Remix as Writing Practice](#): *Explores the remixing of images as a form of writing.*

[Remix: The Art and Craft of Endless Hybridization](#): *An article by literacy scholars Knobel and Lankshear that discusses remixing as a cultural practice and offers many examples of remixing.*

[Music Videos Help Educators and Students Conquer Copyright Confusion](#): *Includes student-friendly, animated music videos created by researchers at Temple University’s Media Education Lab that explain copyright and fair use.*

[The Cost of Copyright Confusion](#): *Based on interviews with teachers, this study “shows that the fundamental goals of media literacy education—to cultivate critical thinking and expression about media and its social role—are compromised by unnecessary copyright restrictions.”*

the weekend with a Michigander, a Montanan, a Texan, and a Louisianan.

I'm from a rural background (Spring Valley, Wisconsin, population 1000), but now teach in St. Michael-Albertville (combined population 10,000). Before going to Kalamazoo, I wondered, "Am I still rural enough?" My new definition of rural is based on discussions over the weekend; I've determined that if a town still has a main street, it's rural. And it can't be a manufactured main street of new construction façades. No, I mean a real main street, with brick and crumbled stucco, and grungy, above-bar apartments and store windows that steam up in both summer and winter. Both the town of my youth and the town of my teaching—though very different—fit that definition. Main Street represents a strong connection to place and to history.

I've determined that if a town still has a main street, it's rural. ... Both the town of my youth and the town of my teaching—though very different—fit that definition. Main Street represents a strong connection to place and to history.

The conference theme was "Open Spaces and Small Cities: The Landscape of Rural Education." The speakers and sessions focused on place and belonging and identity. That's what the writing marathon was all about. That's what local historian and speaker Larry Massie shared at the keynote address in his storytelling about Michigan's history. Featured speaker Karen Vocke spoke about providing effective educational opportunities for migrant farm workers. The sessions explored how to best teach our

rural students through understanding and honoring the traditions and history of both people and place.

For starters, who knew Kalamazoo had a "Friends of Poetry" organization? One of the small breakout sessions explored different cheap or free ways to make poetry reach into the everyday lives of people. Murals and billboards, slams and spoken word contests are not just a city thing.

How about combining creative writing into the drama program so that students' real experiences are combined into one piece? What if that one piece is the school's annual play? That's what drama teachers Steven and Laura Feffer do at a high school for at-risk youth. Answer: it'll sell out, and the community will get to see the talents of students they may have dismissed. I tried this idea of "collab" (collaboration) with my creative writers in the microcosm of just 10-minute presentations. It worked. Moving their writing to the stage was a powerful journey.

My favorite of the sessions was entitled, "Is this Writing? What Students Do When They 'Remix.'" I'd first learned about digital storytelling in the MWP summer institute in 2007. Later that summer, I learned more through Trio Institute, a collaboration between teachers and the Weisman Art Museum, Walker Art Center, and Minneapolis Institute of Arts. "Remixing" in writing, as in music, is the unique combination of already existing media to form new media. It is similar to the "appropriation" of image and text in visual art. Whenever someone asks, "Is this writing?," I want to say yes. I want to challenge my creativity and my perspective in order to see possibilities.



Yoda Remix from somethingawful.com

Yes, there really is a Kalamazoo. Thanks to the Minnesota Writing Project for allowing me to learn that—and so much more—at the 2009 Rural Sites Conference.

NWP Writing Retreats

John Albright (ISI 2005)

November 19, 2009

Just about every September my 7th graders ask if they can write “joint stories” during Writing Group. I’ve come to learn that their “joint stories” actually mean the goofy, let’s-pass-the-notebook-back-and-forth-and-spend-most-of-the-period-deciding-on-names-for-our-characters kind of writing. I want to tell them that in order to become a writer, they must experience the darkness, the unspeakable emptiness that often pervades the writer prior to the glorious coming of the mosaic flow of ideas, and that if they do not experience these oppressive pangs by themselves, they may never discover what it’s like to become writers.



John Albright

I want to tell them this, but I don’t. I simply tell them, “No, writing is a solitary activity. You need to learn to listen to the voices inside you.” Then I add, “But you’re always welcome to do that over at your friend’s house after school.” I get a sigh and a pair of rolled eyes, of course.

While it is true that much of the writing process is solitary, without support from a community, writing is often an activity that does not happen. Nowhere does this ring more true than in a NWP writing retreat. I’ve had the great fortune of attending two of NWP’s Professional Writing Retreats. The first took place at Sleeping Lady in the Northern Cascades of Washington in 2006. I went to write about reading. Between the occasional stroll in the foothills of the Northern Cascades, I did some inspirational writing about the value of books. I learned from colleagues and made a good friend who I am now rooming with in Philadelphia at the NWP annual meeting.

I returned from the 2006 Professional Writing Retreat and wanted to do it all over again. So I applied for a grant from the NWP to organize a miniature version of the retreat for my Minnesotan colleagues. Jennifer Budenski did most of the work, but together in 2007, we hosted a shorter version of a Professional Writing Retreat for Minnesota TCs. While we did not do it perfectly, it allowed ten teachers the opportunity to clarify their tasks and carry out some important work free of outside interruptions. In a world that continually pulls us in different directions, it’s a great privilege to be able to “retreat” with a pen and an idea.

While it is true that much of the writing process is solitary, without support from a community, writing is often an activity that does not happen.

I was able to share some of my experiences with Professional Writing Retreats at last year’s annual meeting in San Antonio in a workshop entitled “Integrating Professional Writing into the Core Work of a Site.” That then rekindled my desire to experience the retreat yet again. This past summer, I was accepted to the second “strand” of the annual NWP Professional Writing Retreat in Tubac, Arizona. This strand is for TCs who have largely completed a draft and need help focusing their arguments and clarifying their prose. By the end of the summer, I completed a small tome about reading in the early 21st century. I cannot foresee what will come of it, but you can be guaranteed that I could not have done it without the support of a community of writers.

This summer in Arizona I roomed with a high school teacher from San Antonio. Guess what he was writing? A joint essay with a friend.

Apply for this year’s Professional Writing Retreats:

Spend July 15–18, 2010, at Tubac Golf Resort and Spa in Southern Arizona, at Professional Writing Retreat A or B. Participants have long stretches of time to write and receive feedback from their writing group.

Site leaders and teacher-consultants, K–University, are encouraged to apply. Our pool of participants will be as representative as possible of the geographic, racial, and ethnic diversity of the National Writing Project network.

Deadline: March 22, 2010

Go to the [NWP website](#) for more information.

MWP Envisioning Committee: Taking Time to Envision the Possibilities

Mary Beth Blegen (ISI 1991)

In the summer of 1991 a group of teachers gathered at the University of Minnesota as the first cohort of the Minnesota Writing Project. Under the leadership of Muriel Thompson and Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, the summer work was devoted to sharing lessons, researching ideas, and spending time in writing groups. At the end of the session, we gathered to read aloud to each other. For many the experience was new, frightening, thrilling, and life-changing.

I was in that first cohort having seen an ad for MWP while teaching in Worthington. Greta Micheals, one of the early supporters, let me stay at her house for the summer's work. I doubt if any one of us really understood that summer just what a role MWP would play in our teaching, our writing, and our lives.

I know that we didn't realize then that almost 20 years later hundreds of teachers would have participated not only in the summer institute, but also in workshops and other programs which are sponsored by the Project.

As the Minnesota Writing Project enters its 20th year of supporting teachers in the teaching of writing, in their own writing, and in the sharing of teaching ideas, plans for its continued expansion have taken shape during the year-long work of an Envisioning Committee.

Muriel Thompson and Kirsten Jamsen convened the group in the fall of 2008. Our charge was to look long and hard at the organization of the Project to ensure that its expansion and purpose were documented in an attempt to grow more teacher leaders and extend the outreach of MWP.

We began our work by revising the mission statement to more closely represent what the Project is doing and wants to do. Accompanying the revised mission statement are goals that give clarity to the work. We looked at models throughout the country and finalized one that fits with the ongoing work of MWP.

The organization of the MWP has grown to include several new positions. Each of the positions now has a job description that is clearly stated with qualifications, goals, roles, and potential for compensation. See the Advisory Board list on page 8 to see who fills each role.

The Minnesota Writing Project's mission of working with teachers and school districts in Minnesota began in 1991 and will continue long into the future.



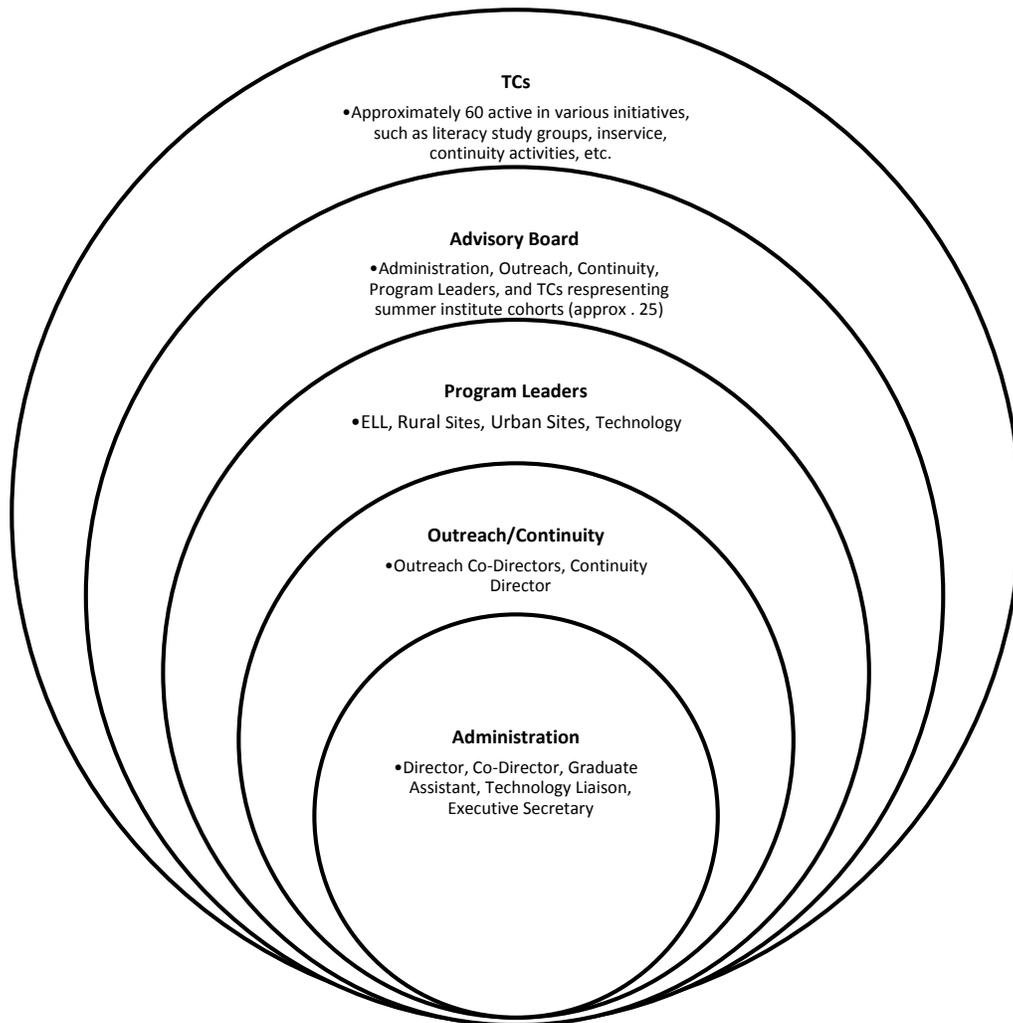
The envisioning committee at work

We began our work by revising the mission statement to more closely represent what the Project is doing and wants to do. Accompanying the revised mission statement are goals which give clarity to the work.

The members of the Envisioning Committee included:

*Bev Alsleben • Marsha Besch • Mary Beth Blegen • Candance Doerr-Stevens
Kirsten Jamsen • Jane Johnson • Joyce Malwitz • Micki St. Sauver
Ann Thompson • Muriel Thompson • Terri Wallace*

Minnesota Writing Project



Through the envisioning process, the committee developed this image to represent MWP's structure.

Mission Statement

The Minnesota Writing Project is a National Writing Project site committed to improving student literacy through the development of the leadership, voice, and professionalism of teachers. By supporting and developing teachers, MWP facilitates ongoing learning and collaboration among teachers, empowering them to meet educational goals and challenges.

Goals

- To establish and sustain a network of teachers who write, teach, and learn with other teachers
- To support teachers as writers and researchers
- To develop and disseminate best practices in the teaching of 21st century literacies
- To assist districts and schools in meeting their literacy needs through professional development
- To promote cultural, racial and ethnic diversity within MWP
- To strengthen collaboration between the University of Minnesota and Minnesota's school districts and teachers.
- To nurture connection with the National Writing Project and its Special Focus networks



Kirsten and Mary Beth consider an idea

Upcoming Events

Nominations for 2010 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 and contribute to the literacy-based leadership experience of the summer institute.

The dates for this year's institute are:

Retreat: June 23–25, 2010

Institute: July 12–30, 2010

Nomination forms can be found at <http://mwp.umn.edu/summer>

Supporting MWP

The Minnesota Writing Project is no longer collecting 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, please visit <http://writing.umn.edu/home/giving.html#mwp>

MCTE Spring Conference April 23–24, 2010

This year's conference will be held in Duluth, Minnesota. Featured speakers include Leila Christenbury, Kao Kalia Yang, Julie Landsman, and Pete Hautman. See <http://www.mcte.org> for more information.

Elizabeth Boeser Receives the 2009 NCTE Teacher of Excellence Award

While attending the National Conference of Teachers of English in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, this past November, MWP TC Elizabeth Boeser (ISI 2007) was awarded the English High School Teacher of Excellence Award for the state of Minnesota. Boeser, a Language Arts teacher at Jefferson High School in Bloomington, Minnesota, received the award for her innovative teaching of literature and writing using various online tools of instruction.



Minnesota Writing Project Advisory Board Members

2009–2010

Lindsey Anderson

Jennifer Behnke

Theresa Behnke

Marsha Besch, Outreach Co-Director

Melissa Borgmann

Mike Borka

Laura Cochlin

Bob Cudahy

Kendrick Davies

Candance Doerr-Stevens, Teaching Assistant

Kristine Earsley

Debra Hartley, Technology Liaison

Gretchen Hovan

Kirsten Jamsen, Co-Director

Jane Johnson, Rural Sites Network

Sherri Larson

Ann Lindsey, Urban Sites Network

Anne Lowe, ELL Network

Joyce Malwitz, Outreach Co-Director

Sandra Nesvig

Mary Cathryn Ricker

Micki St. Sauver, Research Director

Deb Stortz

Micheal Thompson

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:

John Albright

Mary Beth Blegen

Candance Doerr-Stevens

Sherri Larson

Ann Thompson

Editing & Layout:

Debra Hartley

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

mwp.umn.edu