

WRITING(S) ON THE WALL

Volume 2, Issue 3

*Newsletter for the Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project at
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania
Fall 2007*

Third Successful Summer Institute for NPWP

Summer 2007 marked the Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project's third year at ESU. This year, eight teachers representing Monroe, Pike, Luzerne, and Lackawanna counties participated in the intense four week Summer Institute. The teachers' grade levels ranged from third to the university level, and their contents included English, Drama and Library Science.

During the Summer Institute, teachers work on their own writing; read and discuss research and theory in the areas of writing, teaching, learning, and diversity; develop research questions around topics of writing and diversity as they pertain to their classrooms; and develop effective practices for their classrooms.

Jean Cassamassima, a 14 year veteran teacher at Arlington Elementary School, said that during the NPWP 2007 Summer Institute, she was reminded that if she "let the students write about something that they can connect with in some way, it would be more interesting for my students." She describes the Institute as a place where "what I had to say really mattered. I was validated from day one."

Other 2007 participants include Lisa Baldwin, Lehman Intermediate School-East Stroudsburg School District; Scott Gibson, East Stroudsburg University; Nora Goodwin, Smithfield Elementary-East Stroudsburg School District; Amber Hyder, Greater Nanticoke Area School District;

(Continued on page 3)

Northeastern Pennsylvania

Writing Project

Director,

Lucy Stanovick

Codirector,

Susanne Rasely

Deputy Director,

Leslie Antonette



Visual representations of the '07 participants

Special
Announcements

NPWP's Spring Conference is set for March 29, 2008—keynote speaker will be Jacqueline Woodson

We have revamped our website
www.esu.edu/npwp

Kathy Dekmar (05) is being included in Who's Who Among Professional Women 2007

TC Rosalyn Finlayson (05) has been named the new Pennsylvania Writing Project State Network site liaison for NPWP

Emily Cantilina (05) has been named NPWP's Program Coordinator

Leslie Antonette Has been named NPWP Deputy Director

From the Director Lucy Stanovick
Where Do You Stand?

I've been thinking about place—how we define it, how it defines us. How sometimes I feel calmed and enveloped in a place and other times I feel so out of place and wonder if it's me, or the place. Co-director Susanne Rasely wrote a poem about the NPWP site, modeled after George Ella Lyon's "Where I am From" poem to consider our place as a site:

We are from absences

From misplaced counties and displaced homes

We are from Routes 80 and 78

(Intersecting in a nonexistence space)

We are from the hemlock tree

The wild yellow dandelion

Whose prolific reach is a weed,

ever-challenged by Round-up and mower.

We're from rural table and urban bar

from East Stroudsburg and New York City

We're from "those stupid hicks"

and "arrogant city slicks"

From raising taxes and falling wages

and two-hour commutes

We're from black, white, brown, yellow, red,

purple, peach, green, pink

Double latte with extra caffeine

From take me home to find my home –

Why can't you just leave me alone?

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

*Under the overpass drives another car
leaving the kids in the dark*

Searching for a better life

Bring back the money –

Leave the violence behind

We return in the dark

Searching for the light of day.

We are NPWP.

I love this poem for its honest tension, for its wide-lens scope with a close-up zoom. While we can think about the site's place in relation to teachers and students, schools, the university, or the community, the poem also invites us to step out and look at the whole place, the place we call home. During the 2007 Summer Institute, Jeanne Cassamassima reminded us that we all have an acre of our own that we must tend. This poem captures the diversity of our acre. As a site, we must tend to it *all*. As TCs and teachers, we can advocate for the health of our acre by speaking out against neglect, mislabeling, and fear of new patches of growth. We must stand in the balance so as to recognize the worth of all our parts.

(Continued from page 1)

Todd Sharrow, Abington Heights High School-Abington Heights School District; Elyse Vitchers, Bushkill Elementary School-East Stroudsburg School District; and Elizabeth Ward, Pocono Mountain East High School-Pocono Mountain School District.



"Learn to Write" and "Write to Learn"

Kathy Kilker, 2006

Another delightful and busy school year has begun! We teachers are just as excited as the children, aren't we? I am just in awe of these wonderfully trusting and hard-working young students who come traipsing into class, chattering and smiling! They all have stories to tell and write. To that end I am again using *The Units of Primary Writing* by Lucy Calkins as the framework for my Grade 1 Writing Workshop. My immersion in the Northeast PA Writing Project Summer Institute, writing and learning extensively with colleagues across grade levels, and doing Action Research in my classroom last year using the Calkins' Units has sustained me in making this commitment to my young students. My journey this year in helping them "Learn to Write" and "Write to Learn" has begun: "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive" R.L. Stevenson.

Let's carry on, then!

NPWP's Continuing Relationships with Local School Districts

On October 8 and 26, TCs Kathy Dekmar (05) and Emily Cantilina (05), and Co-director Susanne Rasely led all-day in-services at Lehman Intermediate School in the East Stroudsburg School District. TC Karen Jackson Petersen (05) led one hour workshops on the October 8 date. The inservice was to demystify the writing process for teachers across the disciplines. Day one focused on the "how" and day two focused on diversity of assessment strategies.

Director Lucy Stanovick, TC Paula Schmelz (05), and TC Kathy Dekmar (05), recently met with Dr. Douglas Arnold, the new superintendent of Pleasant Valley School District to introduce the NPWP and its work. As a result, Dr. Arnold invited NPWP director, Lucy Stanovick and Deputy Director, Leslie Antonette, to serve on Pleasant Valley's district-wide Central Planning Committee, which will work to create a multi-year planning process for the school district.

COFFEE CHAT

ATTENTION TCs: Set up a date for teachers interested in the NPWP, or teachers you'd like to introduce to the NPWP, to meet after school. We supply the coffee and goodies. Chat about your experiences and sip your Joe!

ALL YOU DO: Send an email to Emily Cantilina programcoordinator@goemc2.com stating your interest, your school, and possible dates/times to meet.

ATTENTION!

We are updating our files! Please contact us with new email or snail mail information! Contact Karen Jackson Petersen at kjp75@ptd.net

Check us out at

www.esu.edu/npwp

SI and “what would happen if. . .”

Beth Ward, 2007

It was my pleasure to participate in the Summer Institute of 2007. Honestly, it was the best academic experience of my life. Expecting the rigors involved in a graduate level course, I was ready for the reading and writing involved. What I didn't expect was to be taken out of my comfort zone so completely that there was no going back.

As a high school teacher in a very diverse school district, I really thought that I had a handle on the whole diversity issue. I expected to acquire strategies that would enhance my attempts to reach students of different backgrounds, abilities, and interests. Participating in the Institute is teaching me that understanding diversity begins with me, not with other people. I have learned so much about myself this summer. I have learned how much I don't know. I have learned about the many well intentioned but misguided ideas I have, and how these ideas have negatively affected my attempts to reach students.

I also learned that I am doing many things right. The most valuable gift that I received from being a part of the Summer Institute is affirmation—affirmation that I am not alone in my love for my students, my desire to do the best possible job that I can for them, and my frustration with the obstacles that I encounter along the way.

I have heard that each summer group experiences a special bond. The 2007 group is no different. I feel privileged and grateful to have worked with all of the individuals in my group. They are all smart, creative, funny, caring risk takers. Because of them, I stretched in ways that I never anticipated and in areas with which I was completely unfamiliar.

I know much of what I am saying seems ambiguous without specific examples. It is difficult to explain such a unique and enlightening experience. The Summer Institute is something that has to be experienced. The best way I can say it is that I was knocked off center, and I needed to be knocked off center. It is the best thing that could have happened to me (professionally and personally) at this time. I have been pushed into the unknown. As I prepare to return to school in the fall, there are so many new and exciting possibilities. The question, “what would happen if. . .” has created new potential for me in my teaching. I have a new perspective. Perhaps this is best illustrated in a dream I had two nights ago:

It is the first day of school and the kids in my homeroom are numerous and unruly. More and more students pile into the room and ignore my attempts at “classroom control.” I try every strategy known to teachers. Nothing works. Finally, I give up. I am standing in the middle of the room, and I say to myself, “I wonder what would happen if I waited for them to control themselves?” I feel relieved and excited.

The dream ends.

Losing control is one of my biggest fears. I realize now that this fear has been getting in the way of achieving certain goals with my students. So, thanks to getting knocked off center, I feel ready to find out **what happens if.**



Beth Ward deep in discussion at SI 07

NPWP Out and About

TC Karen Jackson Petersen (05) facilitated a professional development workshop at Pocono Mountain East High School on October 3, 2007. The program focused on PMEHS' new initiative, "Writing for Success." Karen lead colleagues in designing writing activities across the curriculum.

TC Linda Rogers (06) is participating in Professional Development Workshops for Monroe County teachers with the Education Committee of the Monroe County Historical Association. She is sharing her NPWP action research on "Writing to Learn" and modeling writing strategies. Linda will also be presenting her Action Research in a session titled "Writing to Learn: Helping Pre-service Teachers More Effectively Transfer Course Content into the Elementary Classroom" at the 51st Annual Conference of the College Reading Association in Salt Lake City, Utah in November, 2007. Beth Ward (07) continues to advise the Pocono

Mountain East High School Student Citizenship Organization. Due to NPWP, she feels better equipped for the job. Among other things, she is currently organizing the annual Mix-It-Up at Lunch event.

TC Kathy Dekmar (05) is running a mini-professional development workshop for teachers as part of the Pleasant Valley Intermediate School Diversity Council. The council has developed a three year plan to integrate its three main goals: to recognize, accept, and embrace all diversity. The council will ask teachers to examine their own feelings about diversity as an individual, as a teacher, as a role model and then will present tools to engage discussions about diversity in their classrooms regardless of curriculum or grade level.

Tick, Tick, Tick...

Amber Hyder, 2007

That's the clock. Hear it? It's saying "tick, tick, tick...six days of freedom left." Six days until I'm back at work: waking up at the crack of dawn, 8th grade lunch duty, lesson plans, home-bound instruction, endless meetings, cocky tenth graders, and to top it off, *still* no raise, and *still* no contract.

But it's not that bad, this year: I actually have some idea of what I'm doing! Sure, it could be that this is the start of my fourth year, but I feel it's due to the Northeastern Pennsylvania Summer Institute I participated in at East Stroudsburg University this summer. Typically, I'm

like a sponge, absorbing the things around me, and through the Institute, I was "super-absorbent;" one would have to be, with all of the brilliant ideas floating around the room at any given moment. Writing workshops, stations, "Who Am I," MRP™ (see Lesliee), allowing the students more freedoms and responsibilities, "Expert Books," better books to assign for independent reading...I could go on, but I was asked to write a *short* piece!

Not only do I feel I'm better prepared to teach my little angels to write, and actually make writing enjoyable and exciting, but I've walked away with a greater belief in myself as a teacher and writer. I admit, it was incredibly intimidating

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

to enter into a program with teachers who've put in a lot more time, who are a lot more qualified, who can quote great authors or recite a passage from a novel and then tell you the page it came from. That's not me; what would I have to offer? But I did have something to offer: my experiences, my stories, my ideas, my thoughts, my opinions; they *mattered*, and they stuck. At our follow-up August meeting, a few people mentioned a story I had told during the SI about a negative experience I had at my school with an administrator, and that they still thought about how they would have reacted to the situation. The fact that they didn't automatically *know* how to react, that they didn't judge my response, that they understood and were behind me—it was one of the moments that said, "See? You do fit in here. You are one of them."

So I'm ready to go back this year. The clock is ticking louder, and I *am* cringing a bit at every sound, but I know that if I can take the experi-

ences I had in the Institute with me into the classroom, into the positives and negatives that I'll encounter over the course of the year, I'll emerge unscathed, stronger, and with my head up. That's what the Summer Institute has done for me.



Amber Hyder at SI07

Pennsylvania Writing Project State Network News

The Pennsylvania Writing Project State Network (PWPN) met on September 8th on the Penn State–Harrisburg campus. Director Lucy Stanovick, Co-director Susanne Rasely, TC Jenn Marmo (05), and TC Rosalyn Finlayson (06) attended. Several things came out of this meeting. The national mini-grant that Sue authored with the help of the council was awarded to PWPN. The \$5000.00 grant will be used to support research, pay meeting expenses, and help fund the annual retreat in April, 2008. Second, Rosalyn Finlayson agreed to be the site liaison for NPWP for the coming year. She will research the achievement gap in her school, researching and sharing the work of individuals who are addressing this gap in our area. Third, Jenn Marmo agreed to stay on as the NPWP state representative for the coming year.

Please submit all future articles and ideas to

Editor, Karen Jackson Petersen at kjp75@ptd.net

What is the NPWP?

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project (NPWP) at ESU is a branch of the National Writing Project. The NPWP is committed to exploring issues of diversity as they relate to teachers as well as students and the ways in which writing and the teaching of writing can facilitate personal and academic growth for teachers and students.

Each summer, the NPWP hosts a four-week, intensive summer invitational, for teachers interested in exploring ways in which writing, teaching writing, and engaging diversity can facilitate success for ALL teachers and students.

What is the National Writing Project?

A nationwide professional development program for teachers, begun in 1974 at the University of California, Berkeley. The primary goal is to improve student writing achievement by improving the teaching of writing in the nation's schools.

Together, these teachers prepare for leadership roles by demonstrating their most effective practices, studying research, and improving their knowledge of writing by writing themselves.

After the institute, writing project teachers, known as Teacher Consultants (TCs), conduct project-sponsored programs in their own schools and in neighboring schools and districts. They attend to two purposes: developing teacher knowledge and leadership in their home communities and putting this knowledge and leadership to work to improve student achievement.

NPWP Mission Statement

The NPWP is committed to exploring diversity issues—including race, geographic and cultural backgrounds, economics, ethnicity, gender, ability levels, and teaching approaches—that are currently impacting area schools, and the ways in which writing and the teaching of writing can facilitate personal and academic growth for teachers and students.



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