

WRITING(S) ON THE WALL

Volume 1, Issue 3

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

From the Director Lucy Stanovick

Be a Witness for Diversity

NPWP's Program Coordinator, Leslie Antonette, and I attended the Rural Sites Network conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico, March 9-10, 2007. I had never been to that part of the country—it was breathtaking. Leslie and I visited Acoma Pueblo or “Sky City,” which is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the United States, built atop a 400-foot-high mesa. There, we learned about the culture that the Spanish encountered when they entered the area in the 1500s. And we ate! Real Mexican food, every meal complete with green chilies; I thought for sure I'd be groaning with indigestion every night, but it wasn't until I had a **burger** in the airport that I felt that familiar stomach rumble.

In his keynote address, Scott Lyons, assistant professor of writing and rhetoric and Native American studies at Syracuse University, called on teachers to **witness** for diversity. No matter how new the concept of engaging diversity is to a teacher, or no matter how uncomfortable a teacher might be stepping into the territory, Lyons believes, at the very least, all teachers can witness. What does that mean? In one way, it means to simply acknowledge that which has already occurred. One way we can do this is to stop turning a blind eye to damaging language in our classrooms and hallways. As teachers, we have that authority.

According to NCLB, teachers are required to maintain a safe environment for ALL students: racist, sexist, homophobic, or other hateful language creates an unsafe environment because it reinforces intolerance, which is a leading contributor to actual violence against minorities. When we hear harmful language, we can voice our discomfort as a way to open a dialogue about words, their histories, powers, and contexts. You may not change a student's perspective, but you are educating students about the power of language and the appropriateness of certain contexts. At the same time, you stand up for those who are often silenced and hurt by those word-blows. If I say nothing for fear of discomfort, then in

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Northeastern Pennsylvania

Writing Project

Director,

Lucy Stanovick

Co-director,

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Director Lucy Stanovic and Program Coordinator Leslie Antoinette

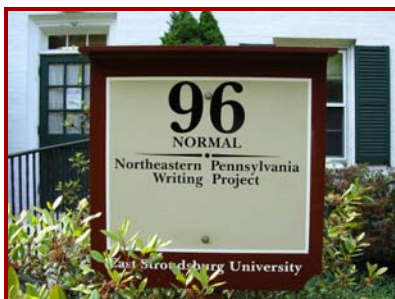
Special Announcements

Congratulations to Frank Roccanova for being voted Pocono Mountain West's and Walmart Teacher of the Year!

TCs Paula Schmelz (05), Beth Doyle (06) and Karen Jackson Petersen (05) recently completed the NPWP Advanced Institute facilitated by Leslie Antonette.

Christine Oberg is performing in the play "Desperate Hours" at Shawnee Playhouse in April and May. Break a leg Christine!

96 Normal Street finally has a proper sign to mark our place on the ESU campus.



NPWP's Continuing Relationships with Local School District

In February, Co-director Sue Rasely, TCs Kathy Kilker (06) and Kathy Dekmar (05), and Director Lucy Stanovick went to Beaver Creek School (a charter school in Wilkes-Barre). They led a professional development workshop on writing across the curriculum. Writing Project TCs found the attending faculties feedback positive and rewarding.

Co-director Sue Rasely and Kathy Dekmar (05) returned to East Stroudsburg

school district in March to lead follow-up professional development. Kathy facilitated the morning session in-service that offered writing strategies for all grade levels and content areas called "Getting Started." One of the high points for Kathy was when a "seasoned" physical education/health teacher confided that there was a lot more writing he could do in his class that he never really thought about prior to their time together. She says, "Small victories are deli-

cious."

In April and May, Kathy Dekmar (05) conducted two sessions of Diversity Training at Pleasant Valley Intermediate School faculty meetings. Her first in-service had teachers think about how they respond to diversity in their classroom using a poem, "Bonsai Tree" by Marge Piercy. The second had teachers examine their perception of diversity in their school and in their classroom using the "I am" poem activity.

Thoughts on Sharing Action Research

Beth Doyle, 2006

Participating in the "Writing(s) on the Wall" 2007 conference was a very fulfilling experience for me. After months of conducting the Action Research project, I was beginning to question exactly why this research was so important. After all, don't we all try new ideas and reflect on their effectiveness? Why would my research question be deserving of an audience of other teachers? When I arrived that morning and saw the other Writing Project Fellows, I remembered why the project was so important. Sure strategies would be shared, but more importantly, a growing community would be added to. I and the other cohorts could now share experiences with other teachers not yet familiar with the ways of the Writing Project. This project opens up lines of communication and support for all interested teachers. This would be the kind of conference that would demystify the so-called "best ways" of going about teaching and actually share real stories that could lead to real teaching. It would be the kind of conference that left the audience members feeling inspired or encouraged not intimidated and discouraged. The conference enabled me to believe that my experiments and findings were of value, even if the value could not be measured by test scores or concrete data. My findings had value because others could modify my approaches and use them in their classrooms. The conference also allowed me to feel as though I was making a contribution to the education field. I was no longer an anonymous teacher, tucked away in an anonymous classroom. I was now Beth Doyle, Action Researcher, NPWP Teacher Consultant.

Spring Conference 2007



Conference Feedback

"... I want you to know that I am looking forward to it (Summer Institute/Future Conferences) like one would a cruise or some 'exotic vacation!'"

"This conference is the best that I have attended in my professional career...I will bring what I learned today back on Monday."

"I leave with tons of ideas and inspiration for getting students to write better and make it meaningful!"

"Positive and inspiring presentation on reaching students and encouraging them to join discussions by connecting their experiences to the reading assignments."

"Very hands on and pertinent to my teaching. It would have been great to have a whole day to explore the topic."

"Showing how to teach the different strategies and modeling it was great."

One TCs Journey into the Life of her Students

We shared ideas through discussion and writing. By doing so, a sense of community was established within the classroom in a relatively short period of time.

Karen Gordon, 2006

What started out as a quest to find a way to help my students write with more varied sentence structure became so much more. During the

process of planning and implementing my action research for NPWP, I found myself embarked on a journey into the lives of my students. I learned more about them in two weeks, than I normally would have discovered in an entire school term. As I began sharing my background and experiences to demonstrate how to gain content for writing, flood gates opened. Students began to speak openly about their lives as they wrote about their experiences as it related to the novel we were reading in class. We explored fam-

ily traditions, race, culture, and stereotypes. We shared ideas through discussion and writing. By doing so, a sense of community was established within the classroom in a relatively short period of time. While conducting research in the area of revision, I found that I was reaping an additional dynamic benefit. I was building a classroom community of trust and respect.

Reading Apprenticeship

Karen Jackson Petersen, 2005

Last summer, I had the opportunity to attend Pocono Mountain School District's 2006 Reading Apprenticeship Summer Institute for Content Area Literacy. The workshop took place over three days in June and continues with monthly meetings. The group intends to meet again this June.

Through this institute, I discovered a new model for teaching literacy in the classroom: Reading Apprenticeship. The RA model focuses on four dimensions: Social, Personal, Cognitive and Knowledge Building. In the RA classroom, the teacher acts as a facilitator and mentor. He/she is literally "apprenticing" students. Thus, the student becomes the expert. The classroom becomes a community of collaborators and learners. RA helps students develop strategies, motivation and the confidence to become better readers.

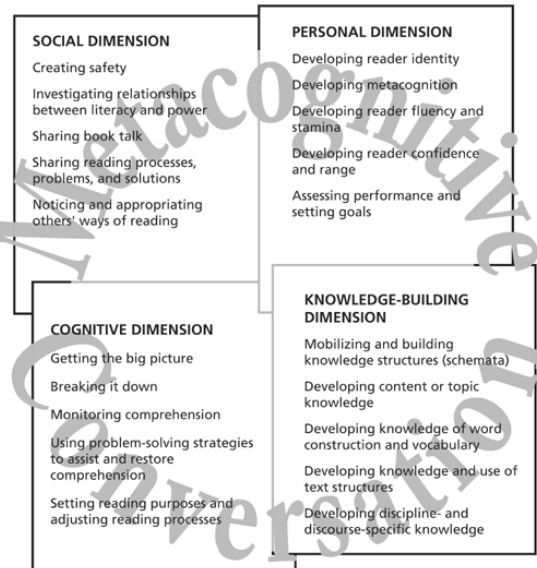
Reading Apprenticeship is grounded in the work of Vygotsky and the notion that children's cognitive development is "socially mediated." Teachers apprentice students by modeling, mentoring and providing scaffolding.

During the Institute, we talked about making the invisible visible, "talking to the text" and making the classroom a safe place to take risks. Sound familiar? Further, we looked at the theory and foundations of RA; we learned about the framework of Reading Apprenticeship and practiced several relevant strategies and activities.

I urge you all to check out the Reading Apprenticeship Framework at

<http://www.wested.org/stratlit/about/RA-2pg.pdf>

Dimensions of Reading Apprenticeship®



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my silence, I condone it.

Another way to witness is to allow for multiple voices. This semester, in my *Writing about Young Adult Literature* class, we read Walter Dean Meyers' *Monster*, which is about a black male teen who finds himself on trial for murder for his alleged role as a lookout in a robbery that resulted in the shooting death of the store owner. According to Myers, he wrote this book, in part, as a wake up call to young black males to consider choices they make. Myers wants young black males to realize, that for better or worse, decisions young black males make can have dire consequences because our culture sees a black male teen differently than a white male teen: it isn't right, it isn't fair, but it is.

In response, a student of mine shared two recent, separate news stories about two black teenagers, Shaquanda Cotton (14 years old) of Paris, Texas, and Genarlow Wilson (17 years old) of Douglasville, Georgia, who found themselves behind bars. Without going into the details of each case (you can easily Google the names to read the full stories), what was disturbing was the disconnect between the offense and the sentence of each, especially in light of evidence of similar or more egregious crimes committed by white people with lesser sentences. By allowing my students to share these news stories during class, I witnessed for diversity. I had the power to let these stories be shared or not.

In response to the stories, one student replied, "I feel so helpless. I can't do anything," to which I responded, "Yes, you can. You can write about it." Thus we have begun a letter-writing campaign. My students are writing letters to local newspapers, to Georgian and Texan newspapers, legislators, school board members, and even Oprah Winfrey and Montel Williams. All students are required to write to someone. They are required to obtain the mailing information, and on May 1, we will ceremoniously mail each letter. What good will it do? Will it free Genarlow? Will Oprah even respond? That is not the point. The point is that the letters bear witness to the reality of the events. And by witnessing, it becomes more concrete, less abstract. But in addition to witnessing for the events, the letter writing bears witness to individual action where before there was none.

At the NPWP, we are constantly investigating the intersections between language, writing, agency, voice, and equity. It doesn't matter if we are talking about journals, learning logs, essays or mathematical equations, or kindergartners or seniors—language affects thought which affects action and the more we can get students to see the connections between themselves, their writing, and their surroundings, the more connected they'll feel to themselves, each other and their culture.

The Rural Sites conference is an annual event, designed for rural sites across the country to share ideas and strategies: how to recruit, how to reach across long distances, what diversity means in rural areas, and ways to address it. TCs interested in attending the conference should contact NPWP Director, Lucy Stanovick..

Site-seeing for Educators

Standard-Aligned Strategies and Lesson Plans for the Teaching of Writing by the Pa Writing Project Network
<<http://www.lv.psu.edu/ce/pwppn/>>

Wordplay and Etymology <http://ask.yahoo.com/ask/Reference/Words___Wordplay/>

Teaching Tolerance <<http://www.tolerance.org/teach/index.jsp>>

Advanced Institute 2007

Beth Doyle, 2006

On Wednesday nights the green-shuttered-white house on 96 Normal Street turns into a planning room for members of the Advanced Institute. It is in the upstairs room that we talk about questions we still have about education, research, and disseminating information. Our goal is two-fold. One, we want to create in-service workshops that address the needs of the teachers in our school districts. Two, we want to transform the dynamic of the standard in-service. It is the intent of the Writing Project to not just hand over information, but instead actually have teachers participate in the learning experience. The experience is comparable to the Action Research project completed in the Summer institute, but moves the focus from a personal question about teaching practices to a districts' needs concerning teaching practices.

2007 NWP Annual Meeting: November

The National Writing Project has set the time and place for the 2007 Annual Meeting. This year's event will be held November 15-17 in New York City.

The conference promises interactive workshops, round-table discussions, and demonstrations of successful practices. All sessions will be conducted by project directors, site leaders, and teacher-consultants.

Registration for Thursday and Friday workshops will begin in September.

For more information, visit
<http://www.writingproject.org/>

or contact the NWP at
amprogram@writingproject.org.

TC on Sabbatical

Linda Rogers, 2007

My official sabbatical plan was to teach with my daughter, Sarah, and her husband, Chris. Sarah teaches first grade, and I began in her classroom after the Christmas break, teaching a geography unit to her class and her teaching partner's class...very humbling! Everything in first grade takes longer than you expect until you "get the rhythm." I taught Social Studies and Science in Chris's third grade class. I found my rhythm immediately...I was delighted by the students' success with the content I was teaching. Teaching in both classrooms was a rich experience: planning and teaching were enjoyable, but re-reminded me of how physically, emotionally, and intellectually challenging this vocation is! Also, it had been quite a while since I'd taught every day in an elementary classroom, and life is really different. Chris's school and class were much different from Sarah's economically and socially. The principal's approach to meeting students' needs included a much more structured day which led to challenges for some of

what I was hoping to do beyond the basic curriculum. Certainly another learning experience. I truly enjoyed working with all three classes and was pleased to return to my love—classroom teaching. I was able to use some of the geography content in both teaching units in the book (for k-4 teachers) I wrote about using children's literature to teach geographic literacy when I got home. The editor is currently reading the manuscript. The upcoming event in my sabbatical is a two week trip to Uganda where I will have the opportunity to spend three days with children in an elementary school in the southwest. Of the 175 students, about 25% are pygmy children whose families have been "relocated" from the rainforest by the government. I will also have the opportunity to visit schools and hospitals in Masaka. Currently I can only imagine how different the Epiphany School will be from Sarah's and Chris's Virginia schools and those I visit regularly in this area. I know that they have no running water or electricity—things I take for granted. The children are taught in English and want to practice their English, so as a minimum I'll be able to interact with them socially.

NPWP Out and About

TC Jennifer Marmo (05) presented at the PWPN Retreat on Achievement Gap. She studied a female Italian-American 9th grader. Although, she did not come to any definitive answers as to why the student is achieving at an average level as opposed to above average, she will be continuing to monitor the student on a non-official level. Further, Jenn will remain a PWPN Council member.

TCs Karen Gordon (06) and Karen Jackson Petersen (05) are currently preparing to work with the R. Benjamin Wiley Partnership this summer. The TCs will help high school juniors of unrepresented groups on college

campuses with their writing skills during the two-week "college experience."

Co-director Susanne Rasely and TC Jennifer Marmo (05) are taking currently part in Governor Edward Rendell's landmark high school reform program, *Classrooms of the Future*. Their classrooms have been equipped with laptops, digital and video cameras, interactive "smart" boards and projectors.

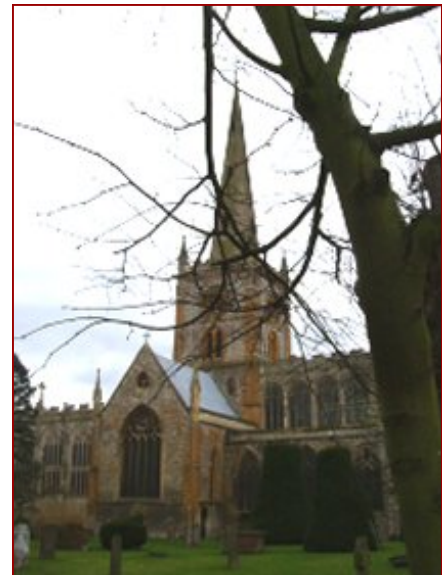
A Worthy Cause

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, England – Adopt a gargoyle. Sponsor a spire

The 800-year-old Holy Trinity Church has fallen into major disrepair. The spire is cracked, windows are broken, the roof is leaking and the bricks are eroding. The Friends of Shakespeare have put out a desperate request for donations in hopes to collect \$6.3 million dollars to preserve the final resting place of William Shakespeare.

For more information on the Friends of Shakespeare's Church or to donate check out <http://www.shakespearechurch.org/>

Check out the Associated Press article on this dire situation at <http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory?id=2788236>



Please submit all future articles and ideas to editor Karen Jackson Petersen at kjp75@ptd.net

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.