

WRITING(S) ON THE WALL

Volume 1, Issue 2

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

A Successful Second Institute for NPWP

In the NPWP's second year, 12 teachers representing Monroe and Pike counties participated in the four-week summer institute. The teachers' grade levels range from university level to first grade and across the curriculum from English to Business Math to Family and Consumer Science.

During the intense 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 that relate to their specific classrooms and interests; and develop effective practices for using writing in the classroom.

Susan Walker-Najder, Family and Consumer Science teacher at Wallenpack, said that participating in the 2006 NPWP Summer Institute has allowed her to use writing to "provide various ways for students to bring their voice to the classroom experience and aid in building classroom community so students feel accepted and safe."



Summer Institute 2006

NPWP's Continuing Relationships with Local School District

East Stroudsburg School District hired NPWP to provide two days of professional development to their grades 3-5 faculty.

On October 6, 2006, six TCs and co-director Sue Rasely led two 3-hour sessions about the various stages of the writing process while infusing the concept that the writing process, by its nature, is an opportunity to engage diversity.

Kelly Jenkins (05) and Jeanne Mohlenoff (05) focused on peer conferencing; Jennifer Marmo (05) and

Kathy Dekmar (05) facilitated getting students started with prewriting strategies; Emily Cantilina (05) and Paula Schmelz (05) focused on revision; and Sue Rasely shared ways to use poetry to teach all content areas.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive and NPWP hopes to offer another full day in January.

Northeastern Pennsylvania

Writing Project

Director,

Lucy Stanovick

Co-director,

Susanne Rasely

Program Coordinator,

Leslie Antonette

From the Director Lucy Stanovick

Special

Announcements

We Moved!

The NPWP office has moved to 96 Normal Street E. Stroudsburg.

Congratulations to Lesliee Antonette for being promoted to full professor at East Stroudsburg University!

Congratulations to Kathy Dekmar for being named the September Teacher of the Month for WBRE!

Congratulations and Best Wishes to Kelly (Jenkin) DeVita, who was married in September.



Why Diversity?

I want to share my own growth over the last three years with the term and concept of “diversity,” and as director of the NPWP, why and how I have come to believe that if our goal is to improve student academic success and use writing to do so, then the most effective way to do that is to place diversity at the center and work to make visible the ways in which diversity lies at the heart of all that has to do with teacher and student success.

Diversity is about being student-centered. If we can create a climate that invites differences, that acknowledges that there is more than one right way to interpret, process, and/or experience something, then we have begun to include more of our students in our classroom. And no one can succeed if he/she does not feel included.

My background includes being a white, middle class, female teacher, well versed in the teachings of “do not offend.” Whenever diversity came up, I was cautious. I envisioned preaching and finger-pointing, and sitting helpless as I was told all the horrible things I do and think. This was my internal definition of diversity. Bottom line, I was scared.

I had been taught over the years that to draw attention to difference was to make those who are different uncomfortable—“Don’t call her black,” “Don’t say ‘poor people’”—that was “mean,” I was told. Mean? Well, it’s only mean, I have come to realize, if I **believe** that to be black or poor *is* substandard or something to be ashamed of. Case in point: why don’t we shush a comment like, “The white guy”?

Those who are different from the mainstream, from the dominant culture in any environment, know they are different, and to have it ignored or shushed can be very offensive.

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2007 NWP Spring Meeting: March

The 2007 NWP Spring Meeting will be held March 29-30 at the Washing Court Hotel, Washington DC. This event offers an opportunity to share classroom successes with peers and members of Congress. Highlights include a kickoff meeting on Capital Hill, a reception at the Smithsonian, roundtable discussions and time for visits to the offices of senators and representatives. For more information visit <http://www.writingproject.org/>.

Please note: the registration deadline is March 12.

NPWP Joins National Writing Project Rural Sites Network

The Rural Sites Network (RSN) is a national, rural, teacher network that links teachers through sites of the National Writing Project. The Rural Sites Network was formed in 1992. Through conferences, retreats, and mini-grants, the RSN facilitates cross-site communication, furthers professional development, increases site capacity, and develops new ways of sharing rural teachers' work at local and national levels.

Writing Project Moments

Kathy Dekmar, 2005

Many times I will be involved in a lesson and have what I now call “An SI Moment.” When I, without planning or forethought, think, “I would not even have been aware of this if I wasn’t part of NPWP.” Last year I was teaching Gary Soto’s short story, “Broken Chain.” One of the discussion questions was what clues in the story give the reader an idea of the economics of the family. Many students answered that the family in the story was poor. When I asked why, many stated, “They eat rice and beans every night.” Not appreciating or understanding that in Hispanic culture, this is easily a staple food, my students instead made a judgment. Before I was a TC, I am not sure

I would have even paid much attention to this, but now my awareness of creating learning moments about diversity, cultural awareness and acceptance is so profound, I find teaching moments to encourage deep student discussions.

Christine Oberg, 2006

I am reading *Night* with my seniors. We began a discussion on genocide, race and class. The conversation wound around to Hurricane Katrina and how the country didn’t seem to care about the poor people or getting them out. One of my female students said that she believed they were “just lazy” and that if “they wanted to get out, they could.” I was shocked. So I said, “We are going to table this discussion because I want

to bring in a pair of articles that we can read together and discuss to really look at poverty.” I photocopied the article on poverty by Ruby Payne from the Summer Institute and my class and I talked about what “resources” and “lack of resources” mean. We then talked about how middle class values are often imposed on the poor, and many don’t really understand the value system of the generational poor. By the end of the discussion, my seniors really understood. The female student girl who made the original comment apologized, saying, “Perhaps I need to really understand how others live and think before I talk about them.”

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NPWP Out and About

Program coordinator Lesliee Antonette spent a week in Harrisburg serving on a review **committee for sensitivity and bias on the new PSSAs** in math, reading and writing. She hopes to develop an in-service on how to improve student scores.

Co-director Sue Rasely and Program coordinator Lesliee Antonette spent a week in Portland, Oregon at the **Summer Institute for Intercultural Communications (SIIC)**.

TCs Paula Schmelz (05) and Jennifer Marmo (05) are **liaisons to the state network initiative** to identify factors contributing to academic achievement gaps. Paula and Jenn are gathering demographic information from school districts in our service area, looking for trends among at recent PSSA scores, SAT scores, and graduation rates.

TC Karen Jackson Petersen (05) at-

tended a **Reading Apprenticeship** Institute last summer and is working on incorporating what she learned into her classroom.

TC Kathy Dekmar (05) continues as TC representative to the PA State Writing Network. Kathy also recently facilitated a 7 hour flex class, **“Making Writing Workshop Work in the 21st Century”** at the Pleasant Valley District. Twenty-six participants experienced the writing process and how to implement new strategies into their curriculums and writing lessons.

Director Lucy Stanovick, Co-director Susanne Rasely: Program coordinator, Lesliee Antonette and TC Jennifer Marmo (05) attended an overnight writing retreat, **Scratchings on Paper**, at the Shawnee Inn with local playwright (and SI guest speaker) Betsy Jackson. Lucy said one of the most

useful things was “Betsy’s insistence that we talk about all writing as fiction, so we never addressed the writer as ‘you’; it was always, ‘the writer, the character,’ and that helped to separate the writer from the writing.”

Director Lucy Stanovick and TCs Paula Schmelz (05) and Kathy Dekmar (05) headed to Nashville in November to represent our site at the **National Convention**. The tri learned to line-dance in an authentic Honky Tonk and attended some awesome sessions on diversity, gender and sexuality.



(L to R) Paula Schmelz, Kathy Dekmar and Lucy Stanovick in Nashville

Second Annual Writing(s) on the Wall Conference, Spring 2007

The NPWP will host its second spring conference Saturday, March 24, 2007, at East Stroudsburg University: *The Writing(s) on the Wall* is open to all K-16 and pre-service teachers. The keynote speaker will be multicultural educational expert, Professor Carlos Cortés, from the University of California-Davis. Professor Cortés will perform his one-man play, "A Conversation with Alana: One Boy's Multicultural Rite of Passage," and talk about his writing process, his motivations for writing the play, and implications for today's classrooms. This conference is dedicated to the memory of Diane Kovaleski, SI 2006.



Carlos Cortez

NPWP TCs will offer interactive sessions on various topics, including:

- Drama as prewriting for informative, persuasive writing
- Creating community, getting to know one another with the aid of inventories
- Using writing to engage diversity in consumer science
- Building fluency with first grade writers
- Reflective writing as a way to deepen engagement with elementary content picture books.
- Re-defining comprehension and relevance with more open-ended writing prompts in response to literature.

Writing Project Moments cont. from page 3

Beth Doyle, 2006

Over the summer, my newspaper staff and I met to discuss possible topics for the first issue of the school newspaper. While my students brainstormed a list of ideas, I overheard one staffer, Jane say to Jolie, "That idea is retarded." The comment really seemed to strike Jolie as offensive as she winced when it was said. Automatically, Jane apologized and realized her mistake. Normally I would redirect the comment with some type of verbal correction, but this time I wanted to capitalize on

the moment. If I learned anything through the NPWP, I've learned to take action. I wanted to get my students to observe the power of words and see the effects. I brought it to the staff's attention that words such as "retarded" and "gay" often develop negative connotations when they should not and then suggested that someone on staff should write an article making this distinction for the entire student body. The article was written and published in the first issue of the paper. I am doubly proud that I was able to turn a nega-

tive occurrence into an educational one and that the message reached more than just one student. If it were not for NPWP, I may have never realized and taken the opportunity to have a student write on such a topic and publish it in the school paper.

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***Why Diversity?* Cont from page 2**

So the question becomes who am I really protecting by “not offending”? Myself.

I didn't want to be shaken out of my comfort zone; I didn't want to think about diversity in different ways because I was afraid, and at the time, I'm not even sure I knew what I was afraid of—the unknown? Of changing? I think part of me was afraid that literally, if I said what was really on my mind, maybe that I stereotype or that I don't know something, I would be struck down, ostracized, hated. It was safer to stay quiet or vague or superficial. And the reality is that if I wanted to stay that way, I could. As a member of the dominant culture, I could easily whitewash everything around me—all I had to do was not talk about difference.



So, I had to choose to. *I* had to be willing to come out of my comfort zone in order to make those in my classroom and in my life feel more comfortable. *I* had to take the responsibility to learn new ways to talk and think about difference. The most profound epiphany for me has been the lesson of listening, to make space for different voices and experiences to be heard and **valued**.

I have learned that to engage diversity requires a curiosity for that with which I am not familiar. I have learned that it is useful for me to acknowledge my privilege, not for the purpose of apologizing or relinquishing, but for the purpose of understanding how others may experience similar things in very different ways. All of us know that writing is a powerful means of voice, discovery, and learning, no matter what the content or grade level.

To use writing as a means of engaging diversity motivates students which translates into effort which translates into greater attention to instruction which translates into improvement. It can happen all kinds of ways and already is; for example, Karen Gordon invites her 7th graders to list on the board where they come from and to write about their own experiences with food and culture in response to reading *Seedfolk*; Beth Doyle is researching how asking students to write and talk about their own responses to a text motivates critical thinking and engagement in ways more meaningful than writing about plot, style, setting, or character; and Karen Jackson Petersen's word wall invites not only school-sponsored vocabulary words but student-sponsored words, including slang and other languages.

Diversity is about opening pathways and listening to each other in hopes that folks drop defenses and pick up on ways to meet the needs of all our students.

A Memorial for a Friend and Colleague

Kathy Kilker (o6)

Our friend and fellow writer Diane Kovalski died Saturday January 13, 2007. Diane worked and wrote and talked and laughed with us, her NPWP Summer Institute colleagues, through June/July 2006. Could we imagine that lively, strong, red-haired young woman not being here 6 months later to prepare her Workshop, as we are? The Writing Project helped each of us to better articulate our thoughts and ideas. What a wonderful legacy, that our writing will keep her with us. Our circle will remain unbroken.

What do the Numbers Say?

Part of the annual grant renewal process involves reporting the work NPWP does. The report is divided into three sections: the Invitational, Continuity, and In-service.

The Invitational refers to the Summer Institute, including the interview and orientation processes. We report how many attend, for how many days, and how many hours a day.

Continuity refers to programs that are for TCS, that either TCs lead

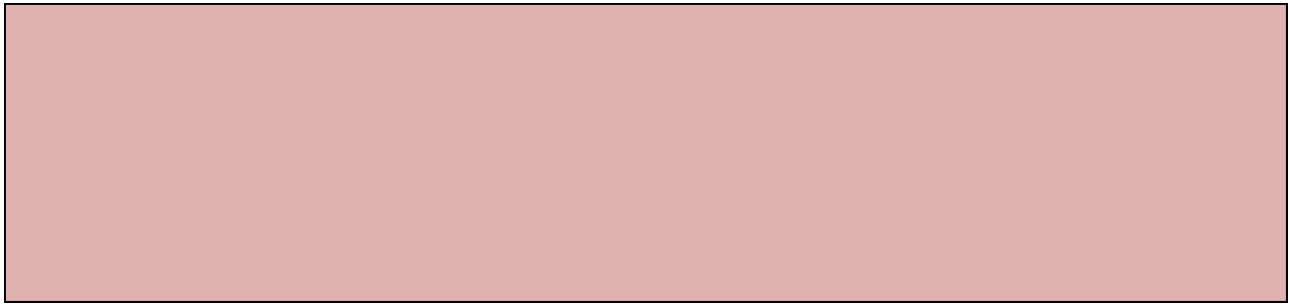
and/or take part in. Continuity is designed for TCs to “make and re-make their writing project home over time, creating space that maintains the intellectual life of teaching throughout their careers...continuity programs keep the project’s knowledge dynamic and growing” (pg 11, Essential Program in NWP resource notebook). Examples include but are not limited to advanced institutes, small meeting groups, dinner seminars, retreats, young writers programs. We report all of our activities, how many attended, and how many contact hours (so if a meeting with

three people lasted two hours, that is six contact hours.)

In-service is offered in summer and during the school year and its primary purpose is to provide professional development to teachers, teacher candidates, administrators, schools (K-University) and districts in a site’s area. In-service is usually provided by TCs. We report all in-service, how many TCs were involved and how many teachers/educators were served.

For the year 2005-2006 (which runs from September 1, 2005 to August 31, 2006):

- The NPWP Summer Invitational had 11 participants and a total of 1,173 contact hours.
- The NPWP reported 10 Continuity Programs with a total of 104 participants and 887 contact hours.
- The NPWP reported two in-service programs led by two TCs with a total of 71 participants and 415 contact hours.
- In the year 2005-2006, the NPWP logged 2,475 contact hours of professional development with teachers in the northeastern PA region.



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.

Special thanks to Kathy Dekmar for laying the foundations for this newsletter.

Please submit all future articles, ideas or submissions to Karen Jackson Petersen at kjp75@ptd.net