

WRITING(S) ON THE WALL

Volume 3, Issue 1

*Newsletter for the Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project at
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania
Winter 2007/08*

NPWP Members Attend 2007 Annual Meeting in New York City

Twelve Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project members joined over 1,000 fellow NWP educators in New York City for the 2007 Annual Meeting in November.

The conference included lectures, roundtable discussions, workshops,



NPWP attends the Annual meeting in New York City

evening socials, and more.

It was a time of professional solidarity and true professional development for all who attended, both invigorating and enlightening. This quarter's newsletter highlights what we learned and brought back for each other, our students and ourselves.



Reflections on NYC

Kathy Dekmar, 2005

I feel so lucky to have been able to attend my third NWP Conference. I find both the sessions and the camaraderie of colleagues from around the country to be revitalizing and reenergizing professionally. There is always something to learn, a new classroom practice, and innovative ideas within the world of technology or social awareness and responsibility. My experiences and the books that I purchased have had a true impact on my teaching and awareness of all of my students, their backgrounds and cultures and have helped me give a venue to honor those diversities in my classroom while building on the repertoire of teaching strategies that



embrace diversity and maintain the integrity of my curriculum and standards. As I reflect on the experiences in New York City, there are only positive thoughts. I see our site growing and diversifying with the new faces and new talents of the NPWP fellows. It was and always is exciting to reunite with TC's from my 2005 cohort as well as meet those who have joined us. These conferences not only validate my passion for my profession but make me strive to be better in the classroom, at in-service opportunities and of course through my writing.

Special
Announcements

Congratulations to Kathy Kilker (06)! Her first grandson, Luke, was born on November 1, 2007.

Congratulations to Emily Cantilina (05)! She has been named at NPWP program Coordinator

Welcome Beth Winschuh (06) to the newsletter staff!

Congratulations to Karen Jackson Petersen (05)! She was selected as a *Classrooms of the Future* teacher.

Register Now!

NPWP Spring
Conference:

March 29, 2008.

***Writing(s) on the
Wall: Cultivating
Change***

www.esu.edu/npwp

From the Director Lucy Stanovick

National Welcomes New Executive Director

The following information was taken from the NWP website homepage, www.writingproject.org. NPWP and new NWP director share the articulated commitment to the connections between writing and writing instruction and diversity and equity as the key to academic success for all students.

Dr. Sharon J. Washington is the first woman and African American chosen to lead the NWP and is only the third individual to take the helm in its 33-year history. According to NWP Board Chairman, Dan Boggan, "Dr. Washington's clear dedication to improving writing instruction, keen understanding of the importance of school-university partnerships, and rich background exploring diversity and equity issues makes her uniquely qualified."



Dr. Washington

Dr. Washington recently completed work as the Interim Director of Faculty Equity Programs at the University of California Office of the President in Oakland, California. Before moving to California, she held a number of academic positions, including Provost and Vice-President of Academic Affairs at Spelman College in Atlanta. Throughout her career, Dr. Washington has demonstrated a strong commitment to the importance of high-quality literacy instruction for all students, and professional development for teachers across the K-16 spectrum. As the Founding Director of Project SPIRIT at Springfield College in Massachusetts, Dr. Washington developed an advising system that improved student retention and graduation, created a teacher preparation mentor program with K-12 teachers, and led a collaborative K-16 partnership that designed and implemented an academic enrichment program to encourage high school students of color to attend college.

Dr. Watson stated, "I was drawn to the NWP because of its commitment to providing high-quality professional development for all teachers to help students improve their writing and learning. NWP's mission is directly aligned with my life-long commitment to social justice and to helping all students succeed."

Check out her recent writing:

"Knowing Yourself as Social Justice Educators." In *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook for Teachers*, 2nd ed., edited by M. Adams, L. A. Bell, and P. Griffin. New York: Routledge.

"Fostering Women's Multicultural Alliances as an Academic Administrator." *On Campus with Women* 36 (1). Association of American Colleges & Universities online publication.

Deputy Director Leslie Antonette travels South to Observe SI07 Fellow

In early November, Leslie Antonette, Deputy Director of the NPWP and Mentor to Scott Gibson (SI07), visited Scott at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro to observe his Action research in action. Leslie attended Scott's English 100 Freshman Composition class. The section was made up of five males (three Anglo Americans and two African Americans) and ten females (two Anglo American and eight African Americans). The day of Leslie's visit, the class was focused on processing letters they wrote to themselves on the first day of class. The letters addressed the following: what do you think people see when they look at you? On this day, Scott planned to use a modified form of Leslie's Knee-to-Knee exercise, in class, in hopes that it would reinforce the point he was trying to make with the letter exercise. The students' final project was to write an ethnographic study of a cultural group of their choosing. Many of the students only vaguely remembered writing the letters. As the class discussed their letters, one student shared that while reading her letter and considering the "knee to knee" exercise, she realized how superficial she assumed people were and then, after a moment of thought, added, "I guess that is because my understanding of myself was so superficial." Leslie deemed Gibson's class, "an unparalleled success." The students left feeling engaged and invested in their final project.



Leslie and Scott Gibson in front of Woolworth in downtown Greensboro

Look for Part 2 of Leslie's trip in the Spring 08 newsletter .

Free Professional Development and Act 48

Introducing Saturday Sessions: NPWP Teacher Consultants share effective practices for teaching writing and engaging diversity in the classroom. Learn practical strategies that can be implemented Monday morning.

First Saturday Session features Leslie Antonette

Knee to Knee: A Strategy for Understanding Ourselves in Order to Understand Others

January 26, 2008 1:00-3:00 at Lower Dansbury, ESU

Upcoming Dates: February 23 featuring Beth Winchuh (East Stroudsburg High School South)

May 10 featuring Rosi Finlayson (East Stroudsburg High School South)

NWP Session Notes: From the Eyes of our TCs and Fellows

Kathleen Dekmar, 2005

A Writing Project Tackles Reading: This session was presented by Carla Jankowski, Barbara Kato, and Roel Vivit of the Chicago Writing Project. The session offered classroom ready and applicable strategies that promise to increase reading comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and personalized meaning from the text in all content areas while maintaining the integrity of the curriculum and the precepts of the NWP.

From Day-to Day Decisions to Longer-Term Achievements—The Art and Craft of In-Service: Michael Mathis of NWP presented with Rosemary Cabe and Sue Perona of the South Coast Writing Project. As a PV Academy facilitator and a Teaching Consultant for NPWP, I am always looking for effective practices to develop and present for viable in-service. This session validated many of my practices and added to my arsenal of strategies for

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Teaching the *Write Way*

Paula Schmelz, 2005

Recently, I posed a question to an assortment of teachers from various content areas, multiple grade levels and several local school districts. I asked, "Do you assign writing activities in class or for homework; and, if so, what kind of writing do you do?"

For the most part, teachers responded that they DO assign writing activities in areas such as science, social studies, health and reading. Some of the writing activities commonly assigned are journals, letters-to-the-editor or a pen pal, responses to current events, responses to scientific articles, and responses to literature. Business students are required to write a variety of business letters and inner-office memos. One health teacher stated that he had students write about

an actual or fictional decision-making situation and then has them trade papers and follow-up with a written response to the scenario. A few primary grade teachers and learning support teachers in the upper elementary grades replied that most of their writing instruction centered on short activities that concentrated on introducing and practicing the writing process steps: pre-writing, drafting, and revising. Generally, the writing assignments were short, one or two brief paragraphs, but a few teachers said they assign research reports which are quite a bit longer. Teachers consistently listed grading criteria as accurate content, correct spelling and grammar, and relevance to the question or assignment. However, a number of science and mathematics teachers said they placed more emphasis on subject matter, rather than mechanics. Many middle school and high school teachers who responded said that they did their grading based upon the PSSA writing rubric.

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 kjp1npwp@ptd.net

Check us out at
www.esu.edu/npwp

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Academy Classes and in-school professional development.

Rosalyn Finlayson, 2006

Writing in the Digital Age—Composing with Media in the Classroom: Betty Collum, Joe Bellino, Peter Kittle, and Kevin Hodgson presented this workshop that explored how composition can change with the addition of technology. The presenters discussed how most teenagers have already created various types of media content: video, audio, text, artwork, song, music, blogs and twitter. For those (like me) who do not know, a twitter is when one instant messages what he or she is doing at that moment. Further, through the use of media, the presenters showed how to take students from the written word to digital story telling. Inherent in this process, the students learn about the SOAPS (speaker, occasion, audience, purpose and subject). James Paul Gee's book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (2003) was highly recommended.

Next Steps in Conversations About Promising practices for Working with African American Learners: This session was made up of several Roundtable Discussion Groups.

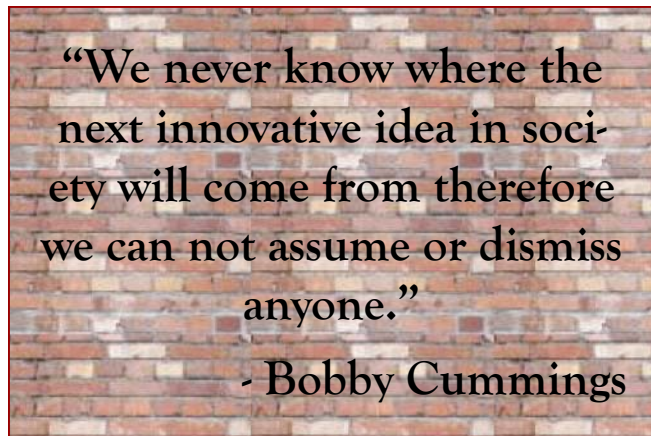
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Empowering African American Learners to Find their Voices – Denise VanBriggle from PA’s Capitol Area Writing Project presented a twenty-one day lesson plan in which students focus on their Utopia. Students use music, film, writing prompts and on-line research to format and vocalize their utopia. Midway through the project, students merge into diverse communities (created by using an online multiple intelligence survey) where they join their utopias.

Mentoring to Master Macbeth – In this session, Ben Bates (Oklahoma State University Writing Project) stressed that students should not be absolved of their responsibilities, to do so is to dehumanize the student. Struggling students need to be held to the challenge of reading Shakespeare and other difficult works. Bates hypothesized that within the resolution of the problem presented in a play, students may find advice for themselves. In addition to reading, it is encouraged that students act out the plays as student confidence will increase with such an accomplishment. *No Fear Shakespeare* and *Flowcablary* were recommended resources.

Using Student Stories to Inform Our Teaching – Bobby Cummings (Central Washington Writing Project) led participants in an exploration of why we teach the way we do through autobiographical mapping. We began by listing five of the best and worst events in our schooling. After exploring our individual stories, we discussed the “hidden curriculum” and “unspoken rules” like why certain students are selected for AP while others overlooked, and why certain teachers are assigned to certain classes. We were challenged to look at our bias and how that bias might impact our teaching. Cummings encouraged the use of autobiographical mapping with our students to uncover their



attitudes about learning and school. Resources for how to utilize Life Maps are Linda Reif’s *Seeking Diversity* and Dan Kirby’s *Inside Out*.

Jean Casamassima, 2007

Focus on In-service—Designing or Adapting New Approaches: This session discussed how NWP can meet the needs of schools and teachers. Participants shared their sites’ in-service experiences—some successful, some not. The workshop covered the planning of staff development and stressed six key points: 1. Identify

Need, 2. Think Through Program Design, 3. Consider Site Capacity, 4. Preparing to Market (be competitive), 5. Going To Work 6. Valuing Evaluation.

An Inquiry into Writing Instruction with Mandated Curricula: The presenters, representing three California sites, explained their design for an effective way to teach writing while still

adhering to a mandated curricula. They also discussed the importance of reading aloud to children regardless of their age and how “good” literature can teach grammar, punctuation, and story sense. The book, *Mechanically Inclined*, by Jeff Anderson was strongly recommended.

Elyse Vitchers, 2007

Describing Student Work—Prospect Center’s Process for Close Looking: This seminar asked participants to examine a selection of one student’s writing to learn more about that student not only as a writer, but also as a thinker and learner. The process was developed at the Prospect School in Bennington, Vermont. The Prospect Description of Work is deliberately slow and deliberately collaborative. What a group does not do is analyze, interpret, categorize, explain, or judge the student’s work. By trying to gain insight into the work, it is hoped that the teacher will gain insight into

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Pennsylvania Writing Project State Network (PWPN)

The PA Site Network is working on a NWP mini-grant to investigate conditions contributing to achievement gaps in our different service areas. Site Liaison to the PWPN, Rosalyn Finlayson (06), is representing the NPWP in this study. The liaison group has been discussing *How My Question Keeps Evolving* by Michele Simms in order to select individual teachers or students who will become the focus of their individual research. Questions to consider as the research begins:

1. How do Sims' research questions inform your questions?
2. How does Sims' experience with her research subject inform your thinking about yours?
3. How does Sims' experience as a teacher researcher inform and/or reflect yours?

Prior to the January meeting, liaisons are to read *Chapter 3: The Artist's Toolbox* from the textbook *The Art of Classroom Inquiry, Revised Edition*. We look forward to reading about Rosi's research.

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the perspectives of the child.

Nora Goodwin, 2006

Student' Drawing and Teaching Writing: In a roundtable session, participants reviewed a writing process developed by the Hudson Valley Writing Project. Students were asked to not only write about why they liked/disliked writing but were also instructed to draw a picture of themselves writing. I found the pictures to be as revealing and valuable as the writing.

Karen Jackson Petersen, 2005

Planning Your Site's Online Presence—Using Technology as a Tool

for Inquiry: This was a very helpful session for me, NPWP's tech liaison. Through writing and discussion, we explored what identity we each want our NWP site to have on the web, our website's purpose/intended audience and future possibilities. Further, I was able to talk with many other tech liaisons (representing Minnesota, Florida, Michigan, South Carolina, Georgia, California and Alabama) some who were more lost than I (believe it or not) and those that were willing to lend the rest of us a hand.



Teachers teaching teachers: NWP members from across the country met in New York City to learn from each other.

Beth Winschuh, 2006

Starting and Sustaining Diversity and Equity Conversations in Classrooms and Writing Project Sites: This session was hosted by four groups all of whom presented a different way to acknowledge and engage diversity. Some Highlights...

Identity: To start the session, everyone was asked to write about his or her physical, cultural, and national identities. The Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project directors asked the group to go "knee to knee" with each other. Participants were

asked to pair up and observe each other's identities. The next step in this exercise was for each person to share how he or she would classify him or herself. After the ice was broken, it was time to share what each person wrote about the other. Some realized that they made assumptions about their partners using their own background knowledge or had reservations sharing the information observed because of internalized taboos. *Is it okay to call someone short? Will he be offended because men are supposed to be tall? Will she be offended if I say she is in her forties? Women are self-*

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conscious of their age.

Positionality: Presenters from the UCLA Writing project broke up the large group into smaller table groups. In this setting, each person was asked to introduce themselves to the group in terms of positionality (race, class, language, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, and age). After each person had shared, we reflected on how our positionality and our awareness of it gave us advantages and disadvantages in the classroom and on the school site.

Civil Discourse: Civil Discourse was the topic of the third presentation out of the Colorado State University Writing Project. As educators, we want our students to engage in conversations that can be difficult so that breakthroughs can happen. Unfortunately, students do not always have the needed skills to reach those breakthroughs because of breakdowns in the conversation. To help alleviate this problem, role playing is a suggested method. Students should be cognizant of their roles in conversations so that the “difficult talk” doesn’t stop short of yielding positive results.

Please submit all future articles and ideas to Editor, Karen Jackson Petersen at
kjp1npwp@ptd.net

Call for "Proposals"
**Getting It in Writing: The Quest to Become Outstanding
and Effective Teachers of Writing**

The Northwest Arkansas Writing Project, is seeking one page "proposals" for a book of personal essays on teaching writing and incorporating writing into the extant curriculum (social studies, English, science, mathematics, etc.) by K-12 teachers and teacher educators.

The focus of such essays is as follows: how one learned to teach writing; initial successes, frustrations, barriers and how one overcame them; the impact of the latter on one's students and the type of writing they produced; lessons learned throughout one's careers (from fellow teachers, readings, school-based staff development programs, local, state, regional and national conferences, summer seminars/institutes, etc.).

Questions regarding this project should be directed to Samuel Totten at stotten@uark.edu

Northeastern Pennsylvania

Writing Project

Director,

Lucy Stanovick

Co-director,

Susanne Rasely

Deputy Director,

Leslie Antonette

**Teachers Teaching
Teachers**

The Annual Meeting provided a wealth of knowledge and fond memories.



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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