

# WRITING(S) ON THE WALL

Volume 3, Issue 4

*Newsletter for the Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project at  
East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania  
Winter 2008/09*

## **NPWP Attends 2008 NWP Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas**

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project made its annual trek to the NWP Annual Meeting in November. This event brought Director Lucy Stanovick, Deputy Director Lesliee Antoinette, Site Leaders Kathleen Deckmar, Karen Jackson Petersen, Beth Ward, Rosi Finlayson and Fellow, Shannon Brown to San Antonio, Texas. The highlights were many, including General Session speeches by the new NWP Executive Director Sharon J. Washington and Sabal Palms Writing Project TC Dolores Perez, invigorating workshops and meaningful learning experiences, the Riverwalk, the Writing Marathon, seemingly endless supplies of fresh and delicious guacamole and innumerable moments of connection with each other as writers, teachers and friends. Enjoy our experience via our photographs and reflections from Kathleen Deckmar and Rosi Finlayson.

### **Experiencing San Antonio with Journal and Pen**

Kathleen Dekmar (ISI 05)

I have always enjoyed traveling to new cities. There is always an excitement about the unknown—a new culture, different foods, and learning how to get around.

I was not sure what to expect in San Antonio, but I had formed ideas as to what I thought this city would be: western city that oozed cowboy flair with a mix of history (think the Alamo). What I found was an unexpected surprise. There was a huge Mexican infusion in décor, food, music and attitude, mixed with the Texan cowboy feel. The beautiful San Antonio River Walk was always on my daily list of to-do. There is so much there—shops, sculpture, restaurants: awesome Mexican food, an Irish pub, fun southern barbeque. However, there was also a deep, and as I was to find out, painful history to this area. Further, it seemed that this was a city searching for an identity.

Before Texas, I had never participated in a Writing Marathon, but our group decided it would be a fun and meaningful

*(Continued on page 3)*



### ***From the Director: Fears and Assumptions***

Director Lucy Stanovick and  
Deputy Director Leslie Antonette

“Without struggle there is no change.”

—Frederick Douglass

As teachers, we know that the words of Frederick Douglass are true. And we know that fear is almost always at the heart of why so many teachers are afraid to engage in the struggle that will produce the change they want. “The simple truth is that most classrooms today are managed by one thing and one thing only: fear,” states Esquivel, who writes deeply about the fears teachers face everyday: “The teacher is afraid of looking bad, of not being liked, of not being listened to, of losing control” (4).

To us, it is no surprise that feelings of fear are not addressed. Julian Weisglass, professor of Mathematics and Education at UC–Santa Barbara writes, “The dominant culture values calmness, coolness, and an image of strength” (353). In addition, “Schools are not always a safe place to talk...If teachers admit to fear or inadequacy, they may open themselves up to criticism” (354).

As both of us have watched teacher fear de-

rail conversations and alienate people in our classrooms, the ISI, and the site itself, we knew that something would have to be done about it. We have learned that if we invite teachers to share their fear, we can often begin to unpack the assumptions and beliefs that support that fear. Once we begin to dismantle the structure that holds fear in place, we can rid ourselves of the assumptions, rework the beliefs, and begin to build an environment in which we can feel safe (for the most part).

We began working together as colleagues in 2004, building the NPWP, without knowing each other except in a brief, professional way. This lack of understanding one another on a personal level led to a strained relationship. We each assumed that the other did not *really* value our unique talents. Unfortunate timing with poorly made jokes, office gossip, and outright arguments only seemed to solidify those assumptions into firmly held beliefs. Upon that bedrock of belief, fears began to pile up and morph into resentment until one day, at the New Site Leadership Retreat, we engaged in a full-fledged break up. We discussed divorce sincerely, and as we

*(Continued on page 4)*



Lucy Stanovick and Leslie Antonette at the annual meeting

### **NPWP Spring Conference**

The NPWP will hold its fourth annual *The Writing(s) on the Wall* spring conference on April 5, 2009, at East Stroudsburg University. The conference is open to K-16 teachers and pre-service teachers. For more information, visit us on the web at [www.esu.edu/npwp](http://www.esu.edu/npwp).

If you have any questions or comments, please call Director Lucy Stanovick at 570-422-3753. Please submit all future special announcements, articles and ideas to Editor, Karen Jackson Petersen at [kjp1npwp@ptd.net](mailto:kjp1npwp@ptd.net)

*Northeastern Pennsylvania*

*Writing Project*

*Director,*

**Lucy Stanovick**

*Deputy Director,*

**Leslie Antonette**

*Co-director,*

**Susanne Rasely**



*(Continued from page 1)*

activity to close our convention experience. The marathon encouraged participants to walk the city and make time to write observations, feelings, and thoughts. It was a great way to see the city and to create a reflective written remembrance of the activity, the moments and the city itself.

We met in a conference room, each holding a journal and making sure we had enough ink in our pens. We received a city map and worked out a plan. There were definite target locations—The Alamo, the San Fernando Cathedral, the capitol building, The O. Henry House, an authentic Mexican bakery and restaurant. Being the...most compulsive in the group, I became the map reader.

Before our group even left the hotel, we had a writing moment. It is such an amazing experience when, at any given moment, a group of women whose normal lives are full with activities from sun up to sun down, can embrace the idea of just sitting and writing. The only “ground rules” of a writing marathon is everyone reads, and the response is just a simple “thank you”—an honor, respect, and gratitude for each other’s words. We walked and observed, noticed our own highlights and also the observations of others: a home-

less man with a Spalding Golf bag, deteriorating architecture on an historic building attached to a hotel of affluence, bullet holes in the Alamo, and an old wired-together tree.

I wondered how I could apply this experience to my classes. I decided that this spring, we will examine and observe what has been around us every day. I want my students to know that I want them to find their voice and write and be validated by just a simple but fulfilling “thank you.”

**NPWP introduces**

## **Finding Your Voice:**

A unique professional development program for all levels and disciplines consisting of two five-hour meetings facilitated by NPWP Teacher Consultants—teachers just like you. These meetings will provide the opportunity to gain insight and a sense of community in a safe and professional environment.

**Cost of attendance is \$25 for all ten hours.**

**Act 48 Hours available.**

**Registration space is limited; call 570-422-3753 or e-mail Lucy Stanovick at [lstanovick@po-box.esu.edu](mailto:lstanovick@po-box.esu.edu).**

*(Continued from page 2)*

moved into discussing custody of the site—for, you see, it was no longer big enough for the both of us—we began to get a glimpse of how small our fears were in comparison to the work we could do helping the teachers in our service area.

We did not resolve our fear at that moment or even begin to shift our beliefs; what we did was realize that we both had a right to our investment in the site and that we were much more effective together than we were apart. What we've realized while working with teachers is that many are more comfortable in their fear than out of it. Fears are fed by assumptions, which can be mistaken for beliefs. However, beliefs have some kind of evidence. It could be

evidence valued only by the holder of the belief, but something—an event or moment—has occurred that allows that person to hold that belief, and they can tell you about that experience. An assumption has no evidence tied to it. It is difficult for someone to articulate an experience that supports an assumption.

This is important because when assumptions are taken as beliefs, they remain unquestioned and unarticulated. When teachers and site leaders learn to separate their beliefs and assumptions, they can begin to learn how to make decisions that are supportable, which then begins to alleviate anxiety and fear. They can “see” that the outcome they have projected that gives rise to the fear is not necessarily the only possible outcome.

### ***Writing the Numbers with Charlie Mathers***

Co-director Susanne Rasely-Philipps

“The Act of Writing Enhances Learning.” You would expect to hear this from an English teacher, wouldn't you? But on Saturday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, it was a math teacher who was saying it. Surprised? It was Algebra and Statistics professor, Charlie Mathers (ISI 2005), from the Monroe Campus of Northampton Community College, who explained the value of using writing and journals as part of math instruction at a NPWP Saturday Session.

A once-upon-a-time skeptic, he showed us how rewriting a problem in our own words helps the student “focus” on what the question is really asking. Additionally, according to attending elementary teacher Anita Cosslett, writing skills are essential to success on standardized math assessments: “Almost all of the questions on the PSSA math test are in writing.” Using



words with numbers also emphasizes procedure, because, as stated by elementary teacher Laura Appert, when students can verbally identify the work they are doing, they will understand better “which operations to use.”

Comprehension in mathematics is critical. According to Charlie, there is something called the “snowball effect.” If a student doesn't understand the concepts in chapter 3, it is less likely s/he will be successful with the work in chapters 4-12. Writing can improve understanding of foundational skills required for a student to progress. Further, the writing allows a teacher to “get into their heads” to find out not only where a student is struggling but the source of the confusion. Appert said a journal is, “...a great idea. . . the students are not as intimidated to write something . . . . I'm go-

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Glad I Had the Time

Rosalyn Finlayson aka Rosi (ISI 06)

San Antonio, Texas. I was lucky enough to arrive just in time to witness one of the most phenomenal sunsets that I have ever seen. At my hotel window I relaxed on the chaise lounge and gazed at the vibrant changing colors of the sky as the sun set on the western horizon, a vivid reminder that the end of one day opens the door for the beginning of a new day. Another day to live, love and laugh. Each day provides us with 1440 minutes to act, react, and make choices. There are no do-overs for time. A minute gone is a moment gone, only to be recaptured by memory.

Tucked within my memory bank, I have retained many moments from the NWP conference in San Antonio. A few of which are the eclectic 1960s meets the 21st century chic decor of our hotel, warm 70 degree weather one day and cool rainy weather the next day, the River Walk in all its turisto glory and the infamous Alamo tucked in the middle of center city between a high rise office building and a strip of stores selling everything from cheap tchotchke to expensive bedazzled clothing.

Of the 1440 minutes of each day at the conference, I am glad that I spent a substantial portion of that time in the presence of educators

from around the country who are interested in developing themselves as writers. We explored strategies for how to drop your reader into the middle of an event when you write a memoir and how to develop poetry from lines of grace or complaint. We engaged in quick-writes inspired by static visual images and short clips of video. And we shared our poems, the excerpts from our memoirs and our visually inspired innermost creativity with laughter and tears.

From the San Antonio conference, I bring back with me a bit of new knowledge, a handful of strategies, several new contacts in the field of creative writing and memories of time well spent. Muchas Gracias por el tiempo!



(Continued from page 4)

ing to use that.”

In order to really empathize with struggling students, participants were given problems to calculate in base 8. Try this for yourself:

How would you explain how to solve  $44 + 36$  to Maggie Simpson? (The catch is that Maggie, like all of the Simpsons, has only eight fingers, so the problem has to be solved in base 8.) See the end of the article for the answer.

To understand the concept of solving the problem—the calculations, one must visualize what is happening in the computation—which values the process of learning. Charlie explained that this exercise “really makes you think about what we mean by saying *divide* or *multiple*,” so that students can understand what they do instead of relying on memorized answers.

(Continued on page 7)

**Special  
Announcements**

Congratulations to Rosalyn Finlayson! Her first screenplay "Lesson Plans" has been officially registered with the Writers Guild of America in Los Angeles, CA.

Congratulations to Co-Director Susanne Rasely-Philipps who was awarded the *William G. Carr Award* by the National Education Association!

**January 20, 2009**  
by Rosi Finlayson

I cheered  
for progress made  
with hope for change  
long overdue  
in a country gone astray.

I cried  
for pain and suffering  
inflicted on others  
by the meanest of people  
our society breeds.

I laughed  
about the reversal of fortune  
passage of time rendered  
to that big white house  
built by slaves.

And then I smiled...

## Putting Practices into Practice

Karen Gordon (ISI 06)

Last March at NPWP's Writing(s) on the Wall Conference, I attended TC Amber Hyde's workshop on teaching vocabulary to high school students. In her classroom, Amber encouraged her students to become engaged with district mandated vocabulary terms. She divided her students into groups. Each group was asked to creatively teach the words to the rest of the class. Some groups wrote songs or raps, and other groups developed games.

During Amber's workshop, I visualized how this practice might work with my classes. I began using it with my seventh graders this year. My students worked enthusiastically on their lessons and most were quite proud of the final form their presentations took. The first set of vocabulary words were used in stories, poems, songs, raps and games.

By no means had every detail

## PWPN Update

Jennifer Marmo (ISI 05)

The Pennsylvania Writing Project Network (PWPN) met on December 6, 2008. The session focused on the Vision of PWPN for the next 3-5 years. We were fortunate to have Bruce Penniman and Carol Minner from NWP to help us to define our plans. Diana Simaska of PDE also joined us to give insight into what schools across PA could use from PWPN. Our new mission statement is, "Redefining Writing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Each committee within PWPN came up with an action plan to further our mission. The committees are Advocacy, Marketing, Professional Development, and Publications. PWPN is also gearing up to help NWP with plans for the next national convention in November 2009 in Philadelphia.

gone as planned, but the end results were well worth the constant adaptations I made as the activity evolved. When the day came for the classes to present, the students had a ball entertaining, encouraging, and supporting one another. Most importantly, it was quite evident that the students understood the meanings of the words. The second set of vocabulary words gave the students an opportunity to shine once more. This time, the students' lessons encompassed a wider variety of modes. Groups wrote short stories, performed skits and staged TV newscasts. I was greatly impressed. Today, many students actually look forward to new vocabulary lists.

Have you attended a NPWP event? Is there a practice which caught your attention? Did you say to yourself "This would be good to use with my class"? Have you tried it yet? Positive results await you if you start putting practices into practice.

## Meaningful Research for Pocono Mountain School District

On January 14, six TCs brought “Meaningful Research Projects in the Classroom” to fifty 8<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade Pocono Mountain Language Arts teachers. Teacher Leaders Emily Cantilina, Jenn Marmo, and Karen Jackson Petersen presented. The teachers spent the morning engaging in an “I-Search,” creating “Found Poems,” and free writing about their own experiences with the research paper. “It was a banner day for the Writing Project,” Jenn stated when the morning was complete. Karen Gordon (SI 06), who shadowed Jenn, said, “The unique approach to research presented in the workshop prompted the sharing of effective practices by many of the participants. I came away thinking of ways I could use some of these ideas with my students.” Kelly Devita (SI 05) shadowed Emily, and Beth Ward (SI 07) was a shadow in Karen’s classroom. Research writing is an area that the teachers were eager to discuss. In the end, presenters and participants alike benefited from the discussion. As one person wrote in her evaluation, “The presenter was knowledgeable and energetic; so were my peers, who also contributed to the success of the session.”

Please contact Program Coordinator Emily Cantilina, [programcoordinator@goemc2.com](mailto:programcoordinator@goemc2.com), if you are interested in this kind of presentation at your school.

*(Continued from page 5)*

Two other key issues that Charlie has used journals to address are math anxiety and classroom behavior. Questions he uses that help him gauge a student’s level of comfort or discomfort include:

- With which topic/concept do you need help?
- Why don’t you seek help?
- What was the point of that activity?
- How’s the class going so far for you?
- What behavior of other students should I address?
- What are some career paths you’re considering?

Information he gleans from the journals helps him improve the learning environment and address what he calls the “pink elephants” in the room that can often go unidentified. To anyone who thinks that writing does not belong in or does not work in the math classroom, I would say, “Talk to Charlie.” If you do, ask him about shnebolshnoblin.

*The answer to the question  $44 + 36$  in base 8 is 102. Break down the question by columns. When we add 4 and 6, we get 10. In base 10, that is 1 whole, so the entire amount is carried into the tens column. In base 8, however, there is 1 whole with a remainder of 2, so the 2 is brought down and the one is carried over. Then we add  $4 + 3 + 1$  (carried over), which gives us 8. Again, we have a whole, but this time with no remainder, so 0 is brought down and the 1 is carried over to the hundreds column. Since there are no other numbers in the hundreds column, we just have the one. Get it? Hey this writing stuff really works – I NEVER understood alternate bases in grade school. Wait until I tell my math professor brother that his English teacher sister finally got it! Thanks, Charlie.*



**For assistance or special accommodations, call 570-422-3753.**

**Notice of Nondiscrimination:** East Stroudsburg University of Pennsylvania does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, veteran status, disability or age in its programs and activities in accordance with state and federal laws. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding this policy: Director of Diversity/Ombudsperson, 200 Prospect Street, 115 Reibman Building, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301, 570-422-3656.

### What is the NPWP?

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Writing Project (NPWP) at ESU is a branch of the National Writing Project. 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.

At the NPWP, we believe that through diversity we grow; writing is a process of learning and self-discovery; and writing connects us to each other across time, place and culture.

### 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 dedicated to exploring the ways in which writing, teaching writing, and engaging diversity can facilitate success for all teachers and students.



Northeastern PA Writing Project  
at East Stroudsburg University  
200 Prospect St./96 Normal St.  
East Stroudsburg, PA 18301

NONPROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
EAST STROUDSBURG  
UNIVERSITY