



Connections

Newsletter of the Western Massachusetts Writing Project

WMWP launches 3-year outreach initiative

The Western Massachusetts Writing Project has received a three-year grant to participate in Project Outreach, an ongoing initiative of the National Writing Project. Project Outreach was founded with the goal of extending the quality and quantity of NWP services to teachers of students in communities impacted by poverty, both urban and rural.

The grant funds a three-year process of site inquiry to help increase access to the services of WMWP, develop the relevance of its programming, and increase the diversity of the leadership. Four members of the site's Project Outreach team participated in a kick-off institute in Nebraska.



WMWP's Project Outreach team at Lied Lodge in Nebraska: From left, Momodou Sarr, Karen Sumaryono, National Writing Project thinking partner Vanessa Brown, Sherril Willis, and Dawn Fontaine.

By Karen Sumaryono

How does a Writing Project site go about empowering children living in poverty? For the Western Massachusetts Writing Project, it all began July 9-16 when it sent a team of four teachers to a National Writing Project institute in Nebraska City, Nebraska.

That team, headed by Dawn Fontaine and including teachers Momodou Sarr, Karen Sumaryono, and Sherril Willis, met with teachers from 10 other NWP sites who want to involve teachers of students living in poverty.

They came from places dealing with rural and urban poverty from Oregon to Georgia, Mississippi to Montana, and California to New York.

The institute leaders guided teams

through a series of thinking, writing, and discussion exercises designed to help them better understand their Writing Project sites and programs. Cross-site activities helped participants learn from the work of those in other states, and time was given for each site to draft a plan of inquiry to be carried out in the next 12 months.

The WMWP team, which also includes Susan Biggs, Anika Nailah, and Bonnie Tipaldi, plans to read and discuss books such as Patrick Finn's *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in Their Own Self-Interest* to review the research on children in poverty.

In addition, census data will be collected to identify the school districts with the most severe urban and

rural poverty in our service area. The team also plans to collect the stories of students and teachers in these districts in an effort to formulate an action plan which will be implemented during the second year of the three-year National Writing Project grant.

While Dawn, Momodou, Karen and Sherril worked tirelessly all week on the work at hand, there was still time to take long walks through the Arbor Day Foundation's beautiful hiking areas, to visit historic spots such as a Lewis and Clark exhibit on the Missouri River, and abolitionist John Brown's Cave, and to spend a captivating evening with an American Indian storyteller.

Karen Sumaryono teaches at West Springfield High School.

WMWP Calendar for Fall 2006

(Please post! For complete listings and directions, visit www.umass.edu/wmwp/.)

N.E.W. Teachers Collaborative

2nd and 4th Tuesdays, September-June. The Teachers' Loft, Open Square Historic Mill, Holyoke.

A safe, supportive professional development group for first-year teachers. Fee: \$100. Graduate credit available through WMWP. More information and registration form at www.teachersloft.org.

Writing-and-Response Group

Saturdays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m., September 16, October 14, December 2, January 20, February 10, March 3, April 14, May 19. UMass, Bartlett Hall.

Open to all K-college teachers, the writing-and-response group provides time for writing and response in a relaxed setting. The sessions are led by Diana Callahan (dfcallahan@aol.com). Free.

Time to Write

Fridays, 3:30-6 p.m., September 22 and other dates TBA. Kasparian Prof. Dev. Center, Springfield.

A writing-and-response group for teachers in the Springfield area. This group is led by Charlotte Lak (cmlak@hotmail.com). Free.

Best Practices in the Teaching of Writing

Saturday, September 30, 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. UMass, Bartlett Hall.

See program on pages 5-6. 5 PDPs. Fee: \$25 (includes luncheon). Register by September 20.

Links to Literacy:

The Reading-Writing-Math Connection

Thursdays, 3:45-6:15, October 5, November 2, January 18, February 15, April 5. Chicopee Elks.

A series of workshops by WMWP teacher-consultants sponsored by the Pioneer Valley Reading Council. 10 PDPs. Annual membership fee: \$35. Non-member fee: \$15 per workshop. Contact Meredith Cox (belchertown@juno.com).

Get Published!

Mondays, 4-6 p.m., October 16, November 6, November 27, January 8 (snow date January 22), January 29, March 19, May 21. UMass, Bartlett Hall.

A series of workshops for teachers who want to provide authentic audiences for student writing. Led by Leif Riddington and other WMWP teacher-consultants, participants will develop and implement classroom or school publication projects while

learning teaching strategies and publishing technology. 30 PDPs. Details at www.umass.edu/wmwp/. Free. To apply, see page 6.

Creative Journeys

Tuesdays, November 14, December 12, 4-7 p.m.; Friday, January 12, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. (snow date January 19). UMass, Bartlett Hall.

*A series of meetings designed to provide teachers with the resources, guidance, and time to plan writing workshops aimed at bringing their love of poetry, fiction, or non-fiction to students at their own schools. In addition, participants will be able to bring 20 of their students to WMWP's day-long student writing workshop. Led by teacher-consultants Sara Palmer and Pamela Howes. 12 PDPs. Details at www.umass.edu/wmwp/. Free. To apply, see page 6. **Deadline: October 7.***

WMWP Leadership Team Meetings

Wednesdays, 4:15-5:45 p.m., September 6, October 25, December 6, January 31, March 14, May 9, June 20. Alternating between Five Colleges Building, Amherst, and Wistariahurst Museum, Holyoke.

Leadership Team meetings are open to all WMWP teacher-consultants. Each meeting includes time for writing and sharing; brief reports on recent, current, and future programs; and discussion of both planned agenda items and new business. Each meeting also includes a scheduled presentation on a WMWP or NWP initiative. Chaired by Bruce Penniman (penniman@english.umass.edu).

WMWP TC Celebration

Saturday, November 4, 9 a.m.-lunch. Location TBA.

A reunion-celebration-leadership meeting for WMWP teacher-consultants. See story on page 7.

Stump Sprouts Writing Retreat

Friday evening-Sunday morning, December 8-10. Stump Sprouts Conference Center, Hawley.

See description on page 7. Fee: \$135 (includes savory home-cooked meals and bunkhouse lodging). Limit 20. Registration deadline (with payment in full): October 25.

Learn more on-line: Visit www.umass.edu/wmwp/ for more details on these programs and for previews of WMWP's spring and summer lineups.

Reflections on the ELL Leadership Institute

For the second summer in a row, WMWP teacher-consultants Wilma Ortiz and Karen Sumaryono have conducted an ELL Leadership Institute funded by a grant from the National Writing Project. The 2006 program was hosted by the Holyoke Public Schools. Here, two participants share their final reflections.

No Longer Satisfied with Getting By

By Alan Crandall

The institute has been excellent in that it has made me do a lot of reevaluation. I have had to really look at myself, who I am, and what I know and contrast that against what I do. I know a lot; I am an advocate for ELL learners outside of my classroom. I know many strategies which can assist ELL learners, but yet I use few of them in my classes. I am not fearful to try new things and experiment in front of adults and peers – why am I fearful in the classroom? This year I need to organize myself and my classroom in order to work to my potential and to allow my students to work to theirs.

I can no longer be a seat work teacher satisfied with getting by and reaching those students that I can. I must reach all students. I must strive to be the best teacher in Dean, not a teacher in Dean. Social studies can be and is an exciting subject, and I must find the way to present it that allows all students to see that excitement and be motivated to learn.

The institute also showed me that writing is not as painful as I believed. The institute was demanding with almost too much demand on the time, but the overall learning experience made the effort worth it. Thank you Karen and Wilma for an eye-opening two weeks!

Alan Crandall teaches at William J. Dean Technical High School in Holyoke.

Getting Ready for Leadership

By Tracy Walker

Most teachers lack the training and awareness necessary to provide a truly equitable and inclusive education for students who come from diverse backgrounds. I myself feel compelled to continue to seek out professional development opportunities in this area. In the meantime, I am slowly gaining the confidence and know-how needed to take more risks with my students in the classroom. I am trying to incorporate more and more opportunities for critical literacy, and I am learning how to integrate issues of social justice with the traditional curriculum. However, I know that I need to find the courage – if not the audacity – to do more than create this culture and climate behind the closed doors of my own classroom.

Participating in this summer institute has truly helped me to feel more ready to take on a greater position of leadership. When I applied to participate in this institute, I was hoping that I would find the ideas, inspiration, and allies I needed to begin to bring about real change in my school community. I have begun.

What is ironic about my initial goals for the institute is that I was completely unaware of the institute's main purpose. At the time, I did not understand that new mandates from the Department of Education will soon require that all teachers who have even one ELL student in their classes obtain an ELL endorsement by completing the training in Categories I-IV. I did not understand that by completing this workshop, I would become certified to administer this DOE training for both Category I and II. I now know of a concrete and specific way to act as an advocate for English language learners – I can deliver this training to teachers who need it!

• *Continued on page 4*

Enter the 3rd Annual WMWP Teachers as Writers Contest!

WMWP invites all Massachusetts educators to submit manuscripts of up to 750 words in any genre to its third annual Teachers as Writers Contest. Only one entry per person, which must be typed (without author's name) and accompanied by a cover sheet with contact information. Visit www.umass.edu/wmwp/ for complete submission guidelines. Mail entry to WMWP, 258 Bartlett Hall, UMass, Amherst, MA 01003, by **November 30**.

First Prize: Publication in the February issue of *Connections* and on the WMWP website. The author will receive a full scholarship (double occupancy) to the WMWP annual writers' retreat at Jiminy Peak on April 27-29, 2007.

Second Prize: Publication on the WMWP website. The author will receive a \$50 credit to be used toward any WMWP Teachers as Writers program.

Looking at literature through many lenses

By Cathy Nicastro

“You’re giving up two weeks in Maine for this?” My friends and colleagues were incredulous when I told them that my summer plans included two weeks of sweating it out in Bartlett, the English building on the UMass campus, in order to take “Lenses on Literature,” a DOE Content Institute being offered through the Western Massachusetts Writing Project. As it turned out, despite the fact that the institute ran during the hottest two weeks of the summer, the trade-off was more than worth it.

Lenses on Literature appealed to me because of its focus on critical analysis in the classroom. I hadn’t seriously explored schools of criticism since early in my undergraduate days, and I hadn’t thought much about how to integrate these different lenses into my own high school classrooms.

Andrea Griswold and Kristen Iverson, co-facilitators of the institute, have been thinking about and doing that for quite some time, and they brought their collective expertise with them to the institute to share.

This institute was as well designed and implemented as any class I have ever taken. Everything from the texts we studied to classroom activities to project planning reflected an understanding of pedagogy and best practices in English Language Arts. Using Lois Tyson’s *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* as the instructional text, we practiced applying a wide range of theories to Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and Jamaica



Gail Connor, Sasha Piccione, and Cathy Nicastro take a moment for writing during the Lenses on Literature institute.

Kincaid’s *Lucy*.

Kristen and Andrea supplemented our study of individual theories with other, equally interesting and relevant readings, and when appropriate, with guest lecturers from the UMass faculty. Every day, on the hour-plus ride to and from the university, my head was swimming with new ideas and new strategies to bring to the classroom.

Because Andrea and Kristen are both veterans of the Writing Project, they brought its philosophy with them, and the institute was imbued with the very best of Writing Project strategies. Exposure, exploration, and reflection were watchwords for the two weeks, and this experience was, for me, as refreshing and rejuvenating as a plunge into the Maine ocean.

Cathy Nicastro teaches at Wachusett Regional High School.

– Reflections on the ELL Leadership Institute

• *Continued from page 3*

The idea of presenting a professional development workshop is a significant leap for me. Although my initial reaction to the idea on Day 1 was to think it was something I wouldn’t have the courage to try, I now feel it is something I could handle. Initially, I thought I did not have enough expertise in the area of ELL education to get up in front of educators and try to persuade them to modify or adapt their teaching practices in order to provide more effective learning opportunities for English language learners. However, I have now completed all the requirements for my master’s degree at UMass; with a focus in the area of language, literacy, and culture (LLC program) I do

know more than most regular classroom teachers (though I still have a lot to learn from ESL/ELL teachers).

I found the dual format of the institute – to train participants to be in-service providers and to promote teacher leadership on ELL related issues – to be both challenging and empowering. Not only did I learn more about how to effectively provide sheltered instruction, but I also, in a very short time, began to see the potential for advancement in my professional career. As I pass the milestone of obtaining my master’s degree, it feels good to look ahead at my next challenge and feel ready to begin.

Tracy Walker teaches at Baird Middle School in Ludlow.

Best Practices in the Teaching of Writing

Workshops by Western Mass. Writing Project Teacher-Consultants

September 30, 2006

Bartlett Hall, University of Massachusetts/Amherst
\$25 fee (includes coffee and luncheon) 5 PDPs

Register by September 20. Note: Fee is non-refundable, but registration may be transferred to another person.

Schedule

- 8:30 Coffee & registration
8:45 A workshop sessions
10:15 Break
10:30 B workshop sessions
12:00 Luncheon, Pat Hunter Award, & keynote speech by ANIKA NAILAH, author of *Free and Other Stories*
1:30 C workshop sessions
3:00 Closing & PDP certificate pickup

A Workshop Sessions

A1. The Big Picture: Extended Writing Projects. *Kevin M. Brown, West Street School, Granby.* E/M. Extended writing projects are a great way to incorporate authentic publishing, multiple language skills, peer revision, and work across the genres. Participants will explore several ideas for extended projects, with an emphasis on folk tales, myth, and fables, and examine student work.

A2. Greetings and Salutations: Using Real-World Writing to Teach Voice. *Kathleen Gillis, Monument Valley Reg. Middle School, Great Barrington.* E/M. Writer's voice can be a difficult concept to address in the writing class. Participants will use everyday forms of writing, such as greeting cards, to explore voice and how it relates to audience and purpose.

A3. Parody in the Classroom. *Michael Braidman, Hampshire Reg. High School, Westhampton.* M/H. Can we learn and laugh at the same time? Of course! This workshop will examine different forms of parody and satire and the value they could have for in an academic setting. Participants will learn how to use parody as a teaching tool and construct their own parodies.

A4. Weblogging for Beginners. *Kevin Hodgson, Norris Elementary School, Southampton.* E/M/H.

Have you wondered about the applications of Weblogs for the classroom? This workshop will show how Weblogs are being used for professional development and student writing. Participants will be provided with free Weblogs through Edublogs and assisted in setting them up.

A5. Introduction to Inquiry Projects. *Jan Demers, Crocker Farm School, Amherst; Jenna Kakimoto, Chester Elementary School; and Erin Smith, Holyoke High School.* E/M/H. This session will explain the process of doing research in your classroom and demonstrate three inquiry projects: first graders' development of genre; the use of color-coding to assist special needs students in organizing writing, and "reluctant" readers' use of journals as a dialogue between student and instructor.

B Workshop Sessions

B1. It's Time to Remake the Bed: Ways to Shift Student Writing. *Ellen Lowell, Center Street School, Easthampton.* E/M. Students are writing more, but is their writing getting any better? A case study will demonstrate ways to shift student writing from "bed-to-bed" stories to clear and focused pieces. Participants will use a writing continuum and benchmarks to assess student progress and determine next steps to develop the writer.

B2. Poetry Unit: From Packet to Café. *Tammy Man Wai Wong, JFK Middle School, Northampton.* M/H. Poetry is a difficult unit for many teachers due to poor experiences in their own education. Participants will learn how to create the poetry unit they can't wait to teach. They will begin to create their own poetry packets to guide their students' writing and take part in a café that can be brought back to their classrooms for authentic audience.

B3. Writing Down the World. *Lily Newman, Four Rivers Charter Public School, Greenfield.* M/H. Come investigate the power of writing and authenticity, going beyond the product and entering real-world writing experience.

• Continued on page 6

periences that inspire students with enthusiasm for the craft. Through studies of student work, small-group sharing, and resource exploration, participants will examine many of the options available to them for connecting their students to the world of writing in meaningful ways.

B4. The Camera in Your Mind. *Jane Urban, Converse Middle School, Palmer.* E/M/H. "Creativity consists of an array of vivid images lodged in our muscles, our minds, and our words." Looking at the "image" in imagination, this workshop will connect creativity, visualization, and image-making with writing. Participants will engage in some creative writing with guided imagery and reflect on the power of images in reading and writing.

B5. A Roundtable on English Language Learners. *Olga Escalera, Donahue Elementary School, Holyoke; Frances Ortiz, Greenfield Middle School; Abbey Dick, Quabog Reg. Middle/High School; and Jenny Hertel, Worcester State College.* E/M/H. This session will offer a series of small-group presentations and discussions led by ELL and mainstream teachers who participated in WMWP's ELL Leadership Institute. Topics will include using the five senses, writing a paragraph autobiography, developing vocabulary, and writing business letters.

C Workshop Sessions

C1. Family Writing Workshops. *Leslie Skantz-Hodgson, Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, Northampton, and Pamela Howes, Michael E. Smith Middle School, South Hadley.* E/M/H. Family writing nights are a great way to get two generations writing side by side and to involve parents in their children's learning. Participants will learn how students, family members, and teachers come together to brainstorm, write, share, and respond to each other's work and how to organize one- or two-part writing nights at their schools.

C2. Student Writing Programs. *Sara Palmer, Coburn Elementary School, West Springfield, and Leif Riddington, Four Rivers Charter Public School, Greenfield.* E/M/H. This session will provide information on WMWP's Creative Journeys and Get Published! programs, which help teachers organize student writing workshops and publications in their classrooms or schools.

C3. 2006 Summer Institute Research Workshop
C4. 2005-2006 ELL Leadership Institute Meeting
C5. 2006 Professional Writing Workshop Reunion
 These follow-up sessions for participants in WMWP summer programs will focus on renewal and next steps.

Registration Form for WMWP Fall Programs

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____
 E-mail _____
 Home phone _____ Cell phone _____

Best Practices Conference

Please write in below your choice of workshops:
A _____ **B** _____ **C** _____

- Check the program(s) for which you are registering/applying:
 ___ **Best Practices:** \$25 (includes lunch). See box at right.
 ___ **Get Published!** Free. See application process at right.
 ___ **Creative Journeys:** Free. See application process in box.
 ___ **Stump Sprouts Writing Retreat:** \$135 (deadline Oct. 25).
 ___ **Teachers as Writers Contest:** See p. 3 (deadline Nov. 30).
- Make checks payable to the University of Massachusetts.
- Send this form to WMWP, 258 Bartlett Hall, University of Massachusetts, 130 Hicks Way, Amherst, MA 01003.

Get Published! or Creative Journeys

Please write a paragraph explaining why you are interested in the program.
 Note: These programs require principal approval for publication project (GP) or release time (CJ).
Deadline: Oct. 7

Celebrating WMWP: Past, Present, Future

Attention all WMWP teacher-consultants! We're planning a **reunion-celebration-leadership meeting** just for you! It's going to happen on Saturday, November 4, starting at 9 a.m. and running through lunch, at a yet site

**Save the date:
November 4**

to be determined. Co-Director Mary Farrin and Executive Board member Jan Demers are leading the planning.

This event will provide an opportunity to reconnect with members of your Summer Institute class, to learn about current WMWP initiatives through a "gallery walk," to join a new or existing WMWP interest group (some possibilities: math and science, reading, social justice, retired teachers), and to hear an engaging speaker. Watch for an invitation with more details in a few weeks.

– E-dispatches from the S.I.

• *Continued from page 8*

high school classes crashed to an end? Am I really back in the grind? Fortunately I can answer that with an emphatic "no." ... What yesterday showed me was there is no grind when it comes to the Western Massachusetts Writing Project. In fact, it's a group of really inspiring teachers, joining together over breakfast, workshop ideas, classroom ideas, and the world of writing. It's something I want to be doing, something that already is opening new doors of thought and action ... – *Lily Newman*

July 6. ... For our final [writing marathon] destination, we went into the quiet seclusion of the Cape Cod Lounge. ... Shoes off, feet up, we wrote for the next hour. It was a brilliant hour of thoughts and re-writing. Then, our dreaming had to come to an end as we re-grouped and shared our writings. Again, we were supportive, yet critical, when the reader asked for it. We gave our responses as friends as writers, not just as teachers as writers, by the end of our marathon. ... – *Tammy Wong*

July 10. If the first three days last week were dipping our toes in, then this full second week will be getting thrown into the deep end (in a good but challenging and intensive way). ... We began the day with a discussion of our readings about reflecting on writing. I thought the 40 minutes allotted for discussion of the 3 articles ... was going to be a struggle. However, the time flew by, and there were some great comments and input Next we were introduced to our inquiry research project. I thought

Give yourself a holiday present!

Come to WMWP's

Stump Sprouts Writing Retreat

December 8 (evening) – 10 (morning).

Relax, write, and rejuvenate in the pines in Hawley. Led by co-director Tina Browne, this informal retreat will offer workshops and response groups, as well as plenty of time to hike, enjoy the fireplace, and write in solitude.

Fee: \$135 (includes savory home-cooked meals and bunkhouse lodging). Limit 20. Registration deadline (with payment in full): **October 25.** Register on-line or use the form on page 7.

Note: Registration fee is non-refundable, but your reservation may be transferred to another person.

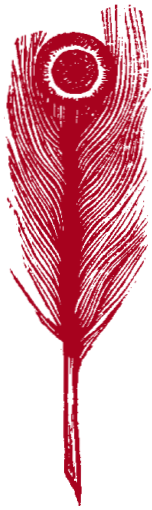
the Focus/Expand/Refocus sheet we used as a guideline was a powerful tool that allowed for ideas to come easily and helped to narrow our topic. ... – *Kevin Brown*

July 14. It is the end of a long week of the summer writing institute. It is Friday; it is 4 p.m. Right after we end our business meeting, I dart out the nearest door and skip to my car. I haven't skipped in years — it is a very underrated form of travel. The breeze is blowing through my hair, and I can almost taste the frozen strawberry margarita waiting for me on my front porch. I'm skipping faster now, like a schoolgirl in a yellow dress. – *Felice Lesser*

July 19. I sort of cheated during "writing in" today because I wrote my Dad a birthday card. But I don't know if it really was cheating because I had drafted my ideas for this the day before during free write. Either way, I'm glad I took the time to write a thoughtful message Move over Hallmark! Make way for summer institute writers. We are about authentic writing for authentic purposes. That's a theme we have been working with this week during workshop presentations. ... – *Jane Costello*

July 24. Ellen's workshop, "It's Time to Remake the Bed," was extremely useful. She gave us the writing benchmarks ... she uses to help her compose small groups in which she can target skills to improve students' writing. We had a chance to practice using this tool, see how she used it, and see the results she got. Excellent! I'm very excited about sharing this model ... – *Debbi Friedlander*

To see more photos of the Summer Institute and a video of the writing marathon, visit WMWP News at <http://blogs.writingproject.org/blogwrite60/>.



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Summer institute stories, Best Practices program, writing contest, and more!



At the Summer Institute: Tawnya Tiskus and Tammy Wong

E-posts from the Summer Institute

This year's Summer Institute participants used a wide range of technology, including the National Writing Project E-Anthology's "A Day in the Life" section. The following excerpts from their postings offer some glimpses of their four weeks at UMass:

July 5. "Summertime, when the living is easy..." Yeah, you all know the tune. Summertime is supposed to be one of relaxation, sleeping late, breakfast on the front porch, drinking in the warm sunshine, or better yet on the beach. Not this year. I couldn't help but ask myself, "What was I thinking?!" as my alarm jolted me out of bed at the ungodly summer hour of 6 a.m. ... Did I really do this to myself, only one week after my

• *Continued on page 7*