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Introduction

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Writing Partnerships: Theory into Practice

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Introduction

This issue of scholarlypartnerships.edu serves as a transition issue for the journal as well as a transition for the Appleseed Writing Project (AWP), an affiliate of the National Writing Project (NWP). By the time this special issue of the journal is in print, AWP Co-Site-Director Glenda Moss will be serving as the associate dean in the College of Education at Pacific University while Terry Springer, Karol Dehr, and Il-Hee Kim continue the work as codirectors of the AWP. Springer and Dehr, co-guest-editors of this special issue on writing partnerships, have served as codirectors of the AWP for the past six years. Kim participated in the AWP 2009 Invitational Summer Institute and joined the team as a codirector, maintaining the collaborative relationship between the School of Education and the Department of English and Linguistics at our university and with area P–12 schools to develop writing teacher leaders. We have designed a writing site that develops teacher leaders and promotes effective writing among K–16 teachers. We have conducted research to “explore the dialogue between narrative methods, reflection, and professional development” within our site (Moss, Springer, & Dehr, 2008). Our vision for this special issue of scholarlypartnerships.edu was to provide university site-directors and P–12 teacher partners the opportunity to write about the work of writing projects within the NWP.

The NWP, founded by James Gray (2000) when he established the original Bay Area Writing project in 1974 at the University of California Berkeley, is made up a national network made up of many local networks throughout the country. Each local site comprises a school/university partnership offering summer and year-long professional development for teachers. (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008, p. 296)
Its mission continues to be to improve writing and learning in P–12 schools and provide a professional development model that connects learning and classroom teaching (Lieberman & Wood, 2003). Founded on the idea that teachers make the best teachers of teachers, the NWP model of professional development “is not a writing curriculum or even a collection of best strategies; it is a structure that makes it possible for exemplary teachers to share with other teachers ideas that work” (Gray 2000, p. 84). The writing workshop model centers on demonstrating best practices in teaching writing and using writing effectively in instruction, with practices that are firmly grounded in theory and research.

The writing project model honors the knowledge and experience of teachers at all levels and in all curricular areas in a way that paves the way for building meaningful relationships between university and classroom teachers (Gray, 2000). The NWP sites, which now number 200 in the United States, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, are generally housed on university campuses with one or two site-directors and codirectors in K–12 schools. Each site is connected to the national network through special-focus networks including ELL, rural sites, teacher inquiry communities, technology liaisons, and urban sites. A few sites are also connected to state networks; these sites are discussed in the last article by Nicollini and Fox. The NWP provides funding for special projects within these networks through State and Regional Networks grants (www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/projects/84). This multilayered NWP network is the framework out of which the co-guest-editors of this issue became the codirectors of the AWP, which was established in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in 2003.

The AWP: The Beginning of a Writing Partnership

Meetings to imagine a writing project site at Indiana University–Purdue University Fort Wayne (IPFW) began in fall 2001. It was at those meetings that Springer, chair of the English Department at Northrop High School at the time, and Moss, assistant professor of secondary education at the time, first met. Moss and Springer were joined by five other area educators in attending the Invitational Summer Institute (ISI) at Ball State University during summer 2002. Three of the area teachers — Jaurequi, Alexander, and Wolf — coauthors with Moss of the next article in this special issue, enrolled in graduate work at IPFW the following spring, illustrating how the writing partnership between universities and schools work in harmony.

Moss provided leadership in writing a grant application to begin the AWP. The National Writing Project, which obtains its funds from a U.S. Department of Education appropriation, granted IPFW this initial funding, and with Springer as one of the facilitators, hosted its first ISI during the summer 2003. Like the other 200 sites, the AWP offers an ISI each year that affords up to 20 strong classroom teachers the...
opportunity to engage with one another in developing a writing community. The ISI is the foundation of the NWP professional development model, which addresses the critical need for better writing instruction identified by the National Commission on Writing (Lieberman & Wood, 2002, 2003). In the ISI participants write, inquire, and present demonstration lessons and receive constructive feedback in the process of developing into teacher-consultants (TC) capable of professionally developing other classroom teachers by providing teacher-to-teacher in-service. McCorkle (2004), of the Coastal Georgia Writing Project (CGWP), sees NWP teachers as the voice for writing as she describes her own experiences, which are clearly marked by her introduction to the CGWP's 1996 ISI.

In the delivery of quality professional development in writing, Stokes and St. John (2008) concluded:

the NWP is unique not only in its scale, its longevity, and its adherence to principles that are respectful of teachers and the complexity of their work, but very importantly, the NWP is unique in its organizational capacity to produce, year after year, high quality professional development programs. (p. ix)

Each year in summer institutes around the country, 3,000 teachers participate in and become part of a network that Stokes and St. John (2008) determined “functions as a robust infrastructure for the improvement of the teaching profession and, as such, …a valuable and vital national resource” (p. ix). While each writing project site develops a unique ISI, each is part of that infrastructure. Córdova, Hudson, Swank, Matthiesen, and Bertels provide an in-depth look at their summer institute as preparation for teacher inquiry into practice following the ISI. Córdova, the site-director at the Pine Bluffs Writing Project at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, worked with high school, elementary school, and middle school teachers to present their work in the third article in this special issue, going beyond the notion of teachers as authors during the ISI (Moss, 2009). While engaging teachers to write and view themselves as authors during the ISI is important (Wood & Lieberman, 2000) in their development as confident writing instructors, writing professionally is also important in developing teachers’ expertise in the field of education. We hope this special issue of *scholarlypartnerships.edu* adds to examples provided by Smith (1996, 2000, 2006) and Nicolini (2006). Milner, Brannon, Brown, Cash, and Rule (2009), leaders of the North Carolina Writing Project, recently collected data that shows higher achievement in writing among students whose teachers have attended an ISI.

Like Pine Bluffs and other NWP sites represented in this special issue, the AWP, where we do our work, could provide an extensive list of partnerships that have
developed as a result of our work. We highlight only a few here to demonstrate the depth and value of NWP sites on professional development. Karol Dehr, an English instructor for IPFW, moved from participating in the AWP 2003 ISI to becoming a co-site-director in 2004. Area K–12 classroom teachers Naragon, Rutledge, Deitche, Halley, and Sholl also participated in the AWP 2003 ISI. Naragon (2006) immediately implemented writing-to-learn journals in her classroom, and following the 2004 ISI, attended by her colleague Ray (2006), she and Ray obtained IRB approval to research their classroom practices. Teacher-consultant Naragon investigated her use of writing-to-learn journals, and teacher-consultant Ray collected data on the use of writer’s notebook in her classroom for the next three years. In subsequent summers, they presented action research to ISI participants, at the IPFW School of Education October 2006 research forum, and at the Midwestern Educational Research Conference.

Laidroo also attended the 2004 ISI. She and teacher-consultant Sholl from the 2003 ISI joined Moss, Swim, and Cross to develop an edited Annual Edition: Early Childhood and Elementary Literacy, which reviewed and compiled a collection of current literature for P–6 classroom teachers and university educators. Teacher-consultant Laidroo went on to complete a master’s degree in educational leadership at IPFW, engaged with Batagiannis (2007) in a scholar-practitioner dialogue, and now serves as principal of an elementary school.

Teacher-consultant Rutledge imagined an urban youth camp, prompting Moss to write an Urban Sites grant to bring in teacher-consultant Lockhart from the Bay Area Writing Project. Rutledge, co-camp-facilitator, and Springer and Moss engaged with teacher-consultant Lockhart in an electronic correspondence, which resulted in a successful Urban Site’s minigrant. Rutledge and 2003 teacher-consultant Deitche, who teaches English in an urban high school in Fort Wayne, cofacilitated the AWP’s first Urban Youth Camp 2004 with 18 middle school writers, representing a wide range of schools, writing abilities, and ethnicities. Although we will not provide an in-depth look at the AWP Urban Youth Camp, Higgs-Coulthard and Fox, from the Hoosier Writing Project, present a rich description of their first camp in the fourth article of this special issue.

DePew, Moss, and Swim, in the fifth article in this special issue, illustrate how one high school English teacher integrated her experience in the AWP 2006 ISI within the complexity of teaching a test preparation class in a district that expects all teachers to implement project-based learning. Some teachers might have thrown up their hands in the middle of the tension created by the challenge to teach mandated test-taking skills classes and meet the district’s curriculum requirement. DePew, however, used it as an opportunity to engage her assigned students in creative writing and business skills development, showing how the NWP mission of teacher development can be accomplished in unique ways.
Developing a Writing Site Focus and Annual Conference

To create other opportunities for professional development, we held a focus group study conference in Fort Wayne on October 23, 2004. Lockhart facilitated our discussion to set goals and needs of our site. Twelve participants gathered for a study of teaching African American students. This workshop contributed to the knowledge base of how teachers can work with teachers across state boundaries and contribute to the professional development of one another and the development of the African American students they teach. We recognized that we were focused on developing a multicultural community and addressing teachers’ needs for developing understanding of the role that cultural dynamics play in building successful learning environments. The workshop also resulted in three subsequent book studies in the AWP, including Peter Murrell’s (2002) *African Centered Pedagogy* (2004-2005), Sonia Nieto’s (1999) *The Light in Their Eyes* (2005–2006), and Gloria Ladson-Billings’s (1994) *The Dreamkeepers* (2006–2007). An average of eight participants gathered once a month for three hours to read and discuss a book chapter and analyze practice. Rutledge, Deitche, Moss, and Lockhart (2005) presented their work at the NWP’s Urban Sites Conference in St. Louis in the spring.

As we continued to develop the AWP site in 2005, Dehr and Moss attended a new directors’ leadership retreat, which resulted in their expanded view of recruitment for the ISI. Two NWP leaders, Joye Alberts (NWP associate director) and Alexa Sandmann, NWP at Kent State University, visited with the leadership team at our site and helped us reflect on the direction we were heading and the needs of our partner schools. As a result of these discussions, we decided to build onto our study group foci and host our first writing conference, “Building Multicultural Learning Communities: Conversations among Educators,” on September 23, 2006.

The AWP inaugural conference began with a welcome from Superintendent Wendy Robinson of our primary partner school district, Fort Wayne Community Schools. Robinson’s welcome was followed by a keynote address by Sonia Nieto and first-grade teacher/author Mary Cowhey, *Black Ants and Buddhists: Thinking Critically and Teaching Differently in the Primary Grades*. Breakout sessions following the keynote address provided leadership opportunities as six AWP teacher-consultants presented. Teacher-consultant Elizabeth Davis from the D.C. Writing Project provided a noon keynote address followed by a dialogue session around seven tables with pairs of facilitators from the university and area schools to facilitate deep and meaningful conversations about multicultural education.

Building on the inaugural 2006 conference, the AWP has hosted an annual fall conference to bring in national speakers and create space for classroom teachers to reflect on their practice of teaching writing and present professionally. Keeping with the focus of addressing urban issues, Codirector Linda Christensen, Oregon Writing Project and
author of *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up*, led participants in the fall 2008 conference, sharing how she has helped create literate, engaging classrooms by grounding curriculum in the language and lives of students.

Activities such as book studies, writing groups, and conferences are referred to as continuity programs, an integral aspect of all NWP sites. These programs are intended to continue to develop teachers who have completed the ISI, preparing them to in-service other teachers. Although we will not go in-depth into the role that NWP sites play in delivering professional development, in the second-to-last article in this issue, Moss, Sloan, and Sandor present the AWP’s use of a peer-coaching model in providing three years of professional development to one school.

One additional component of the NWP network is the existence of a state network, which allows for greater integration of ideas and sharing of information between and among the sites within a given state. Indiana is one of a few states that has developed a working network that meets twice a year in Indianapolis. It was during the annual 2007 Indiana Network Retreat that Moss first introduced the idea of a book or special issue of a journal to engage codirectors and classroom teachers in writing professionally about the work of our sites. As mentioned above, Codirectors Nicolini and Fox have contributed the final article of this special issue to present a glimpse of teachers writing and researching writing development.

It is our hope that this issue will have served to create space for more K–12 teachers and their university partners in higher education to research their writing sites’ work and write professionally, further developing teachers within a community of inquiring writers, the key to educational reform (Lieberman & Wood, 2000, 2002; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Moss, 2009). As Mary Ann Smith (1996), executive director of the California Writing Project and codirector of the National Writing Project at the University of California, Berkeley, stated,

> In order to offer students the kinds of experiences that reformers want them to have, teachers need to immerse themselves in similar experiences: to build, to analyze, to solve, to cooperate — in short, to try out the kinds of activities they might extend to their students. (p. 690)

The NWP is committed to engaging teachers in writing, building communities of writing, and promoting inquiry as ongoing professional development. This mission is aligned with the goal of *scholarlypartnershipsedu*: The focus of this journal centers on the professional development of both parties as they coconstruct meaning from their research relationships (inside back cover). In this way, *scholarlypartnershipsedu*, and this issue in particular, actualizes the potential of communities of writers.
References


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