



NWP 2009 Annual Meeting fills TC with new ideas

by **Brandy De Alba**

You know that promise you make when you spring clean your whole house and you swear you are never going to let it get that bad again? Or the day after Thanksgiving when you wake up still stuffed and you are sure you will never be able to eat again? Usually, these ideas last for about a minute and then it is back to your normal routine. Attending the National Writing Project annual meeting is a

There are several ideas I gained from the many workshops offered and between session conversations that I really would like to implement through GVWP.

similar experience.

This year, the NWP Conference was hosted in Philadelphia, the city of our nation's birth. Such a fitting location since I, too, felt the start of something new. There are several ideas I gained from the many workshops and between session conversations that I really would like to implement through GVWP.

One idea is a partnership with a local museum. The Milwaukee WP hosts their Summer Institute at the Milwaukee Art Museum. What a creative surrounding! The Washington, D.C. Area WP holds professional development at the museum familiarizing TCs with it,

so that they can integrate lessons in their classrooms. I learned museum activities and online resources to use in my classroom. I also learned that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has a summer fellowship program for Writing Project TCs. In Stockton, there is the Haggin Museum, an untapped resource that I would like to utilize.

A second idea I will pursue is using the NWP book "Our Book By Us! Nuestro Libro Hecho Por Nosotros!," at my school site. This book is in English and Spanish and contains six mini-stories with writing prompts and oral language activities for Pre-K children. This book is perfect for a Parent Early Literacy Series. We invite Pre-K parents and their children to the school site for a five-session series. For the first half of each session, we demonstrate to parents how to work with their children using the book, while the children, in another classroom, work on a separate writing project. During the second half, we bring parents and children together and have the parents teach their children while we offer support. What a great way to get parents involved in their children's education early!

One final idea that stuck with me is to have a writing retreat for our TCs-- just a day together to write. We should find a time to relax and nurture our inner writer that is often neglected due to the demands of our busy schedules. A chance for us to reconnect with fellow TCs and inspire and support each other-- no dishes, no laundry, no children keeping pen from pad. No distractions! Oh, how

I'm relaxing just thinking about it.

As I write this on our six-hour flight back to California I'm trying not to let my head rest too heavily on Chris or Kathy's shoulders. I am physically tired from the hectic pace we set for ourselves; however, my inner TC is bouncing with excitement with the possibilities that are ahead. So, my fellow TCs, I vow not to let my usual spring cleaning and Turkey

However, my inner TC is bouncing with excitement with the possibilities that are ahead. So, my fellow TCs, I vow not to let my usual spring cleaning and Turkey Day promises apply to the NWP conference. I am excitedly pushing forward with these new ideas.

Day promises apply to the NWP conference. I am excitedly pushing forward with these new ideas. If any TCs are interested in exploring these ideas with me, PLEASE jump on board!

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Brandy De Alba teaches 6 - 8 graders at Roosevelt School in Stockton. She is the Stockton Inservice Coordinator and leads the EL Inquiry Group. Brandy is currently facilitating a series of family literacy nights at her site.

Experienced TCs share leadership paths during SI, inspire new TCs

by Carol Minner

Jim Gray, founder of the National Writing Project, was fond of calling the Invitational Summer Institute “the heart and soul of the Writing Project.” Jim’s vision was that the summer institute would develop a corps of teachers prepared to teach others. During the institute, selected teachers became experts “who could be called on to serve with authority.” For the past 35 years, California Writing Projects have hosted summer institutes developing literacy experts dedicated to improving the teaching of writing.

Each summer, GVWP welcomes experienced teachers to read current and classic literacy research, develop a classroom demonstration of an effective teaching approach, and publish their writing. This past summer, twelve summer fellows gathered with four coaches on the Stanislaus campus to hone their expertise as researchers, writers and leaders.

Joining the summer fellows were seven accomplished teacher consultants who described their post institute leadership paths. Janet Lenard’s shared how she facilitated classroom inquiry with Sequoia Elementary teachers as a Manteca literacy coach. Nick Silva, Manteca High history teacher demonstrated how he uses technology and collaborates with English and social

science colleagues. Middle school teacher, Frances Chamberlain explained how she facilitated student writing programs and book studies for colleagues at Wicklund Elementary

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in Mountain House. She also applied and was accepted for California Department of Education STAR range-finding committee and shared what she has learned about preparing students for on demand writing assessments. Brandy Dealba and Alejandra Ledesma, both bilingual elementary teachers described their roles in GVWP migrant education summer writing academies, family literacy programs and TC inquiry groups. School psychologist Chris Condon, a former middle school teacher, demonstrated how carefully scaffolded language instruction improved English learners ability to write. Carla Hanson, a veteran high school English teacher shared her

leadership strategy as a newcomer to Livermore High School.

This blend of enthusiastic summer fellows and experienced TCs created a rich learning environment that supported a community of writers, classroom researchers and leaders. In their post institute evaluations, summerfellowscommentedtheywere “confident in their new leadership roles,” and ready to share their new knowledge with colleagues.

In our first follow-through meeting in September, our new corps of TCs wrote snapshots from their classrooms. Dawn Meyers captured the empowerment felt by many TCs in her reflection: “I created this. I built the structure that my young authors reside in. I did it with the knowledge I gained at the SI. I fashioned it with the help from not only the brilliant minds who have published their writing research, but also the twelve talented teachers who worked all summer alongside me.”

Dawn’s thoughts on her teaching reveal the confidence and perhaps the authority Jim Gray expected of teachers who answered the invitation into the National Writing Project.

Carol Minner is the Director of Great Valley Writing Project. She is a newly-retired teacher looking forward to devoting all her energy to continuing to develop GVWP’s leadership capacity.

The following teachers were selected as 2009 Summer Institute Fellows. They are currently presenting their approaches to teaching writing in the GVWP Saturday Seminars, “Because Writing Matters,” a free professional development program for teachers, student teachers, and paraprofessionals.

Tim Buchanan • Calla High, Manteca Unified
Anna Daniels • Ceres High, Ceres Unified
Deborah Farrell • Lathrop Elementary, Manteca Unified
Brenda Madsen • Woodward Elementary, Manteca Unified
Norma Molina • Lathrop Elementary, Manteca Unified
Dawn Myers • Hawkins Elem, Jefferson School District

Cecilia Pimentel • Lathrop Elementary, Manteca Unified
Maria Shreve • Ross Middle School, Hughson Unified
Annette Steele • Keys to Learning Charter, Keyes School District
Jill Waters • Bethany Elementary, Lammersville School District

Participation in scoring provides professional development

by Janet Lenards

How much can we reasonably expect our students to grow in their analytical writing within a year? And, how can we measure that growth accurately? These are the fundamental questions that guide the two-year Increasing Students' Academic Writing, or ISAW, study conducted by the California Writing Project. The professional development helped teachers develop their ability to teach analytical reading and writing. Teachers learned to zero in on what students need to closely read a piece of non-fiction text and be able to write an essay that accurately explains the author's position as well as the student's analysis of the validity of that position. It's a tall order. But these are the skills students need to master if they are to be successful in college as well as in the nonacademic world.

I heard about the ISAW program while attending a GVWP Advanced Institute. A monstrous rubric was shown to the group with the caveat that it not be used in our classrooms without proper training. On a four-point scale the rubric covered a whopping seven areas of analytical writing. Those seven broader areas were broken down into two or more sub-categories each. It is a hefty rubric that is overwhelming at first sight. As promised, I didn't try to use it in my classroom. But it intrigued me.

This summer, Carol Minner asked me if I would be interested in reading essays for two days using the ISAW rubric. I was interested, not with the idea of reading essays for two days during my summer break, but with the idea of seeing for myself how the rubric would work. How would a teacher function in the real world using a rubric that large?

About a dozen teachers from across the state rolled into Berkeley in June

to work under the guidance of Jayne Marlink, the director of the CWP. Jayne had collected both pre and post writing samples from classroom teachers who participated in the ISAW professional development as part of a comprehensive study. Additionally, pre and post writing

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Once the two essays were read we used a series of guiding questions to situate the stronger piece on the rubric. Does the writer explore the ideas in the prompt passage and his/her own ideas? Is there a line of argument? We were told to look for those things that the writer does well. Using a tally sheet, each student set was graded looking for how well the student explored the issue in an analytical context. Surprisingly, the process was fairly quick. Jayne checked in on us occasionally, bearing gifts of chocolate as we read into the afternoon.
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samples were collected from students at a comparison school. Hundreds of essays from the 2008-2009 school year waited to be read. Each class set contained paired essays. One written in the fall as a pretest, and one writing in May as a post test. We had a lot of reading to do in the next two days. But first, Jayne spent a couple of hours with the group working through the rubric, looking at student samples and norming our

reading of the essays. Then we were given a large envelope containing a class set, and we scattered about the building finding a comfortable spot to read.

The first step was to read both essays and decide which one was the stronger. Some of us would be reading essays from teachers using the ISAW curriculum and some would be reading essays from the comparison group. We were not told which group our packet of essays came from. Once the two essays were read we used a series of guiding questions to situate the stronger piece on the rubric. Does the writer explore the ideas in the prompt passage and his/her own ideas? Is there a line of argument? We were told to look for those things that the writer does well. Using a tally sheet, each student set was graded looking for how well the student explored the issue in an analytical context. Surprisingly, the process was fairly quick. Jayne checked in on us occasionally, bearing gifts of chocolate as we read into the afternoon.

What emerged, as I read through my stack, was a pattern of growth in specific skills which were laid out on the rubric. The teacher had obviously taught the students how to look at a piece of non-fiction and break down the author's argument. From there they were taught to incorporate and support their own opinions on the issue. Even among the lowest scoring essays there was obvious growth in the writing. It was exciting to see and well worth giving up two days of my summer. My next question is how to become part of ISAW so that I can use these approaches in my own classroom.

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Janet Lenards teaches English at Sierra High School in Manteca. She has been a TC with GVWP since 2006 and looks forward to more opportunities to participate in ISAW-related activities.

Content Literacy team returns to expand GVWP work with

Debra Schneider:

In July 2009, a team of TCs from the GVWP participated in the NWP's National Reading Initiative Summer Institute. The NWP's National Reading Initiative (NRI) "supports local writing project sites in expanding their knowledge base about the teaching of reading and in developing high-quality programs, for teachers across the curriculum, that address reading comprehension as a companion to work in writing." The GVWP team attended to learn ways to bring more teachers from content areas other than ELA into the project. We hope that through the work and eventual leadership of teachers from new content areas, the GVWP will do better content literacy work and have more expertise to share with the school sites we serve.

The NRI focused on reading across all content areas. TCs working in science, math, history, business, vocational education, home economics, foreign languages and other content areas attended from all over the nation. Our work in the SI was to learn how content areas (other than the one(s) we teach) look at literacy. Readings and discussions expanded our notions of text and "what counts" as literacy practices for many content areas outside our own expertise.

During a discussion of content literacy practices, I was a bit taken aback by the way that teachers in the SI who did not teach in my discipline (history) characterized the work of that discipline; they did not know about it or understand it, yet were making judgments based on their limited understanding. It made me realize the work we all need to do (history teachers included) to be open to all content areas and to see teachers from other content areas as knowledgeable and capable, instead of seeing them as needing a writing project's help to understand their own disciplines, in which they are already experts.

My take away from the conference

was that we in the different disciplines know that our disciplines have different ways of reading and writing. To better attract and serve teachers across content areas, we need to make this more explicit in our own work, and project sites must learn and use this information in creating programs for teacher. Our project has some exciting work ahead.

Carla Hanson:

A speaker at the 2008 National Writing Project Meeting in San Antonio, Texas said that the Writing Project was *the* professional in professional development, and that statement was born out in the "Expanding Our Offerings" Summer Institute.

The NWP agenda for the four days is a lean document, and I went to the institute thinking that I might not come away with much. But I was wrong. The planners and facilitators of the event were indeed professionals. They orchestrated four intense days, which wove together and modeled a professional learning community.

What I most appreciated about the structure of the institute was in fact the pared down approach and the thoughtful way we were allowed to deal with provocative material.

We were given meaty texts to read and discuss. The protocols that we used were simple and elegant, allowing us time to think, write, reflect, and discuss.

Our task was to consider the notion of content literacy and then create a plan for our site that would expand our offerings to content areas. We quickly realized that Language Arts teachers had to relinquish our role as "Keeper of the Treasure"; and if we were to truly expand our offerings, we had to expand our vision and understanding. We soon saw that content literacy is a complicated and often invisible entity—invisible even

to its best practitioners. Much of the discussion centered on "surfacing" issues and elements of those invisible literacies.

We created several drafts of our plan for GVWP, and the one we finally settled on was pared down to the kernel of the original. But within the kernel is huge potential. We finally decided to bring back to other TCs the experience we had had. We saw that creating a prescription for expanding our offerings would actually be a narrowing of options, and we didn't want to cheat other TCs of the experience, and we didn't want to cheat our site of that potential.

Providing committed teachers with good material, polished protocols, and time to work is an excellent model—one that is all but non-existent in today's so-called professional development. Seeing what such an uncluttered approach can produce helps me to realize that this is a tact we need to emulate as we reach out to content teachers. Language Arts teachers do have to step aside from that treasure; it seems that a critical part of our work is to do just what the National team did for us: We have to focus on helping content teachers understand and own their literacies. As Debra says, we do have "exciting work ahead."

Nick Silva:

Attending the National Writing Project's National Literacy Initiative this summer was quite a unique experience for me. I am relatively new to the Writing Project having only attended the Summer Institute in 2008. In 2008, I could not have fathomed that being part of the Great Valley Writing Project would afford my wife and me so many leadership opportunities. I have now become part of a network unlike any I have been part of in my tenure as a secondary teacher. It is through GVWP that I have met wonderful and dedicated educators

from NWP retreat, makes plans local content teachers

with a common goal: to pursue innovative teaching strategies that increase the literacy of our students. As a result, I am truly honored to have been so lucky.

Upon arrival, I started to feel that maybe there was some kind of mistake. Here I was attending a national conference with a select group of Writing Projects from around the country, not to mention three highly accomplished members of my own writing project. There were definitely a few moments where I thought that this had to be a dream. I quickly realized that I was not dreaming and began to focus on the work we had ahead of us. This allowed me to begin to acclimate to our purpose at the conference. However, at times I still felt as if I was an illiterate commoner mistakenly invited to the royal ball of content area literacy. All the while I kept thinking about the road I had taken to get to the gala.

The abridged version is that I feel like an unlikely candidate for the heights that my education has afforded me. I never knew that conferences like the National Reading Initiative existed or that I would be involved in focusing the direction regarding where we go from here in content area literacy on a national stage. The royal court, if you will, was welcoming and supportive. In a similar vein so were my esteemed colleagues Stephanie, Carla, and Debra. More and more I am reminded of the power of literacy. Although we all come from different backgrounds and experiences, education, the thread that binds us together allows a commoner like me to take part in the forum that is content area literacy.

Stephanie Paterson:

I am proud of the team that attended the conference at Wellesley, Massachusetts (Carol called us

“the GATE kids”) and proud that GVWP was selected as one of only nine National Writing Project sites to apply for a grant that will allow us to expand our professional development offerings for content area teachers at the secondary level. We know that “each academic discipline or content-area presupposes special kinds of background knowledge about how to read texts in that area, and also requires a particular type of reading” (Carnegie Report 2). Our goal is to get better at explicitly teaching and talking about *disciplinary literacy*, so that we can offer the sophisticated and specific support adolescents desperately need to read successfully and productively in the content-areas.

We have already taken the first baby step. Building on work already accomplished, the successful venture of two Professional Learning and Leadership Academies, GVWP offered PLLA 2.5 on Saturday, September 26, 2009, a one-day academy focused on content area literacy. Special thanks to Nick and Elyce Silva, Anna Daniels, Beth King, Mary Asgill, Juliet Wahleithner, Carla Hanson, Carol Minner and Tom O’Hara for your great ideas and insights on this day.

What Can You Do?

Three things:

Please join the **Content Area Literacy Group** on our **GVWP Teacher Leaders Ning**:

gvwpteacherleaders.ning.com

There, you can access a great article, “Teaching Disciplinary Literacy to Adolescents: Rethinking Content Area Literacy,” by Timothy and Cynthia Shanahan. Team leaders found one graphic particularly useful in this article. Visualize adolescents’ literacy progression as a pyramid that at the base begins with *basic literacy* (decoding and knowledge of high frequency words), and moves

to *intermediate literacy* (generic comprehension strategies, such as questioning, connecting, predicting, inferring), and ends with the pinnacle of the pyramid, the *disciplinary literacy* (the literacy skills specialized to history, science, mathematics, literature or other subject matter). Our focus in the next months and next few years is on disciplinary literacy and attracting more content area teachers to the Great Valley Writing Project.

Consider nominating some of your best content-area colleagues to participate on the 2010 GVWP Invitational Summer Institute. Jane Baker coined the acronym F.A.T. to describe the type of educator we’re looking for—F.A.T. stands for *faithful, available and teachable*.

Content-Area Symposium: Let Carol or I know if you’re interested in planning our first Disciplinary Literacy Symposium, patterned on GVWP’s very successful annual Fall EL Symposium. A Content-Area Symposium might feature a morning panel of teachers in the content areas (a math, science, and history teacher) talking about the ways mathematicians, scientists and historians write and think followed by two rounds of content-area morning teaching demos.

Book Groups: Consider leading a book group at your school site focused on content-area literacy. There are some great books that are hot-off-the-press that might work well including: *Background Knowledge: The Missing Piece of the Comprehension Puzzle* and *Word Wise & Content Rich: Five Essential Steps To Teaching Academic Vocabulary*, both by Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey (2009). *Engaged Writers and Dynamic Disciplines: Research on the Academic Writing Life*, by Chris Thaiss and Terry Myers Zawacki (2006) would also work quite well.

GVWP launches Know ELLs

by Debra Schneider

Brandy De Alba and I attended the NWP's Resource Development Retreat in July 2009 with a plan to create an online resource for our GVWP site. The retreat gave all participants a coach, teams for feedback, and long uninterrupted blocks of time to create their resources.

Using this support system, Brandy and I created a social network for teachers of ELLs, called Know ELLs, on Ning. Encouraged by colleagues from around the nation, we decided to make it a national resource, not just for the GVWP, and invite participants from all NWP sites. The goal was to attract 25 members each

To that end, we have asked two GVWP members to join us as weekly bloggers, with a new post every Friday. We have added text sources and links to useful websites for teachers of ELLs onto Know ELLs' front page.

month for the first three months. In mid September, the site already had 100 members.

Now the challenge is to make the site a lively, useful community. To that end, we have asked two GVWP members to join us as weekly bloggers, with a new post every Friday. We have added text sources and links to useful websites for teachers of ELLs onto Know ELLs' front page. In September, we inaugurated a book group discussion, the first of many, we hope.

Future plans for the community include inviting bloggers and reading group discussion leaders from other WP sites, to give the site a more national focus.

The Know ELLs ning can be accessed by visiting <http://knowells.ning.com/>

NWP scoring provides insight into strength of rubric

by Brandy DeAlba

Universal Writing Rubric? Okay, let's face it. Writing is hard to teach. If it wasn't, there would be no need for our beloved Writing Project. We are continually exploring writing topics across disciplines and at grade levels, writing for personal growth and exploration, writing for district and state mandates, and we debate when and how to score writing. Our exploration will never cease. However, I did gain teaching insights by participating in the NWP Scoring Conference last June.

NWP has been developing a universal rubric that works with all grade levels and writing genres. Can you imagine, the same rubric for kindergarten as twelfth grade? No, probably not. How could one rubric cover such a grade span and genres? I would have been a skeptic if I had not participated in the NWP Scoring Conference in Chicago.

NWP uses this conference to pilot, test, and support the rubric. At first,

I was skeptical. I had to step outside my personal ideas and philosophies in order to try to understand this new rubric. On the first day, we spent six hours just exploring and

On the first day, we actually spent six hours just exploring and practice-scoring student samples. This was the key: Time invested to really understand how to use it. The following two days we, ate, drank, and slept the rubric.

practice-scoring student samples. This was the key-- investing time to really understand how to use the rubric. The following two days we, ate, drank, and slept the rubric. We scored middle school student papers from all over the country in order to

master using the rubric. Thousands of papers were scored and rescored to check for personal bias. About 10 percent were scored a third time. It was an amazing process to experience.

Our middle school group scored sixth through ninth grade papers with amazing consistency. Our reliability in using the rubric consistently was in the high 90 percent range. For all you science experiment lovers, that's well over the 80 percent needed for validity.

Back in my classroom I use this rubric that pinpoints the writer's strengths and areas of need. Using this rubric, my EL and At-Risk students now have concrete small steps that they can work on to improve their writing. What an asset!

Brandy was joined at the NWP scoring conference by GVWP TCs Kathy Harvey, Theresa Gill, and Andrea Jennings. This scoring conference supports the NWP's Local Sites Research Initiative.

In Print, the Great Valley Writing Project newsletter, is edited by Juliet Wahleithner. Comments or concerns can be directed to juliet@wahleithner.com.