



Western Kentucky University

Writing Project Newsletter

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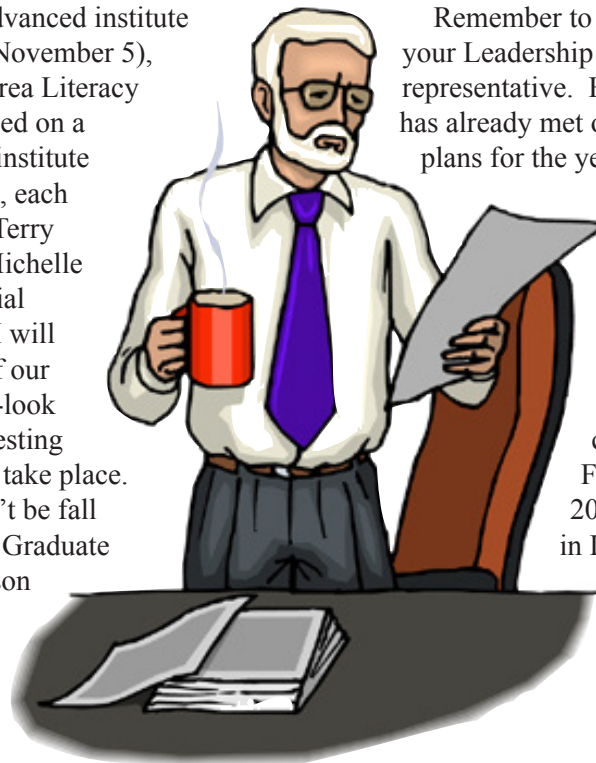
The Director's Desk

This morning, stepping over a sidewalk covered with wet, yellow leaves that last night's rain knocked down, I realized the seasons are changing. The expression "something new and something old" came to mind immediately.

The Writing Project has several new elements this fall. For example, we now have a Continuity Coordinator in Denise Henry, a member of Project VII (1992). She recently retired from Cumberland Trace Elementary School here in Bowling Green and is willing to invest some of her time and energy with us at the Project. She has some interesting ideas on a summer writing retreat, speakers, and focus groups so please respond to a survey she is contemplating this fall. We also have some excellent new workshop offerings: New Teacher Workshop (October 22), Writing for the Real World and Making a Difference (October 31 in Elizabethtown), Help! My Students Aren't Ready for College and Careers (also October 31 in Elizabethtown), Technology Demonstrations based on a Social Networking advanced institute this summer (November 5), and Content Area Literacy techniques based on a summer open institute (Dec 7). Soon, each participant in Terry Elliott's and Michelle Johnson's Social Networking SI will be in charge of our writing network--look for some interesting interactions to take place. And it wouldn't be fall without a new Graduate Assistant, Mason Broadwell, who is from the Atlanta area and plans to

focus on rhetoric and composition for his concentration.

The Project has several "old" or recurring elements that you won't want to miss. One is our November 14 Best Practice Demonstrations that Project 24 is providing. This is a great chance to meet our newest group of Fellows and to learn up-to-date literacy and technology strategies. Another is our annual reunion workshop, to be held this year as last, at the Book Fest on April 17, 2010, with a breakfast professional writer session in conjunction with the WKU Reading Project. In addition, our application for Project 25 will be available next month, and we ask you to nominate and encourage teachers who you believe would make strong candidates. While our state funding may be approximately \$10,000 less this coming year, our enthusiasm remains high. In fact, we were delighted to receive an extension of our Extending Our Offerings grant (an additional \$5000) so that Gaye Foster, Pat Puckett, Anne Padilla, and Angela Lay can continue to work with content area teachers to promote literacy.



Remember to support your Leadership Team representative. He or she has already met once to make plans for the year. And put the annual Kentucky Council of Teachers of English/Language Arts on your calendar for February 19 and 20 at the Marriott in Louisville.

Enjoy the fall and the holidays soon to follow!

John

Editorial

Failure Is Not An Option

Dianne Bowles

WKU Writing Project 2009

If daily reading begins in infancy, by the time the child is 5 years old, he or she has been fed roughly 900 hours of brain food! Reduce that experience to just 30 minutes a week and the child's hungry mind loses 770 hours of nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and stories. A kindergarten student who has not been read to could enter school with less than 60 hours of literacy nutrition. No teacher, no matter how talented, can make up for those lost hours of mental nourishment."

(USDOE, 1999)

With this information at hand, it is clear that schools must rise to the challenge and ensure that failure is not an option for any child. How, you might ask, can such a feat be accomplished? The answer according to Alan Blankstein, progenitor of The HOPE Foundation, can be found by adhering to six principles for school culture.

To create a school where failure is not an option, leaders must first create a common mission, vision, values, and goals. All stakeholders should be involved in establishing a common base upon which all efforts build (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

Next, schools must ensure achievement for all students by developing systems for prevention and intervention. This step involves having an individual improvement plan for all students. It is the school's responsibility to identify areas of students' strengths and weaknesses and then implement strategies to ensure success.

A third principle to ensure student success in school is collaborative teaming focused on teaching and learning. This principle indicates creative use of scheduling to provide teachers time to meet as professionals in book studies, analyzing student work sessions, and strategic planning sessions.

Another principle for school leaders to consider when failure is not an option is to use data to guide decision-making and continuous improvement. While this may be threatening to some teachers at the onset, leaders can reduce the threat by approaching the situation from a team standpoint. An appropriate question for school leaders might be, "What resources can we provide to support our school's effort to guarantee success for all students?"

The fifth principle, gaining active engagement from family and the community, is supported by educational research clearly showing that the support and involvement of students' families and the community at large is

fundamental to achievement in schools (Henderson, 1987; Henderson & Berla, 1995).

The sixth and final principle for creating a school culture where failure is not an option is building sustainable leadership capacity. Leaders can develop sustainability by how they approach, commit to, and protect deep learning in their school; by how they sustain others around them to promote and support learning; by how they sustain themselves in doing so, and by how they try to ensure that the improvements they bring about last over time.



The phrase, "Failure is not an option" was used by the Mission Control crew who was largely responsible for bringing the Apollo 13 crew home in 1970.

TEACHER AS WRITER SUMMER RETREAT

Watch for additional information through emails and on the website: www.wku.edu/wp. Please contact Denise Henry if you have suggestions for: location, date, mini workshop presenters, visiting author etc.
denise.henry76@yahoo.com.



coming soon!

When: Probably June of 2010

Day 1 – arrive noon, **Day 2** – all day, **Day 3** – depart noon.

Where: To be Announced

Why: Good writing teachers are most effective when they are active writers.

What: Come for three days of writing and learning opportunities:

- * Write for large chunks of personal time
- * Attend optional mini writing workshops
 - * Choose one-on-one editing sessions
- * Participate in small-group conference sessions
 - * Hear a visiting author
 - * Renew old friendships
 - * Make new friends
- * Read your way through the Gallery Walk
 - * Re-energize your love for writing
- * Receive two days Professional Development credit
 - * Build your network of teacher experts

The Teacher-Writer

By Denise Henry

The Writing Teacher: Monday, she tries to write with her students as they interrupt to ask questions and the principal enters asking for a form to be signed. There sits a piece of writing unfinished. Tuesday, she tries to write with her students as they repeat the questions from yesterday and the secretary buzzes, "Is Kathy present today?" Another piece of writing unfinished. You know the scenario. I didn't realize how many unfinished pieces I had until one of my students mentioned it to me. Veronica and I were conferencing a piece when she asked about the contents of the bright yellow folder. "Those are stories and articles I have started writing with students," I answered.

"Why don't you finish them?" she challenged. (Yes, why don't I?)

"Because I don't have time," I answered sadly. The yellow folder went back in the filing cabinet behind the tab, "My Writing." It would not be considered again until I cleaned out the files two months later. I held the folder in my hands as if it were something precious ... because it *was* something precious. It contained my incomplete thoughts and ideas, waiting for a time I could place the final period on each of them.

Then, for three days this summer I took the time not only to place the final period but also to begin a new paragraph. The summer retreat I read about online appeared to have been designed just for me, the writer. Oh, I learned some new strategies I could use with students but that was not the motivation when I signed up. My goal was to be a writer *first* with a little teacher in the mix. Yes, fellow colleagues, you CAN separate the two, at least some times. Where did I find the opportunity to switch roles? It was through the inaugural Kentucky Writing Project Advanced Institute. There was at least one representative from every project across the state. I was joined by two other WKU Project alumni: Jeremy Tucker from Bowling Green City Schools and Summer Garris from Larue County. Jean Wolph served as the administrator and Denise Amos and Kathie Wrightson were facilitators.

Participants arrived at the Kavanaugh Learning Center in Crestwood on Monday, June 29th. We were greeted with a quote from Jane Yolen, "Exercise the writing muscle every day, even if it is only a letter, notes, a title list, a character sketch, a journal entry. Writers are like dancers, like athletes. Without that exercise, the muscles seize up." So here I was, at the writing training camp for teachers. The first piece of equipment given to us for our time at the training camp was a beautiful journal that would be used to stretch our writing muscles.

After a brief "get to know you" activity, Tim Johnson,

one of the trainers, got us started with a monologue/dialogue warm-up exercise. Then, we were given four uninterrupted hours to write. Forget sitting in a stuffy, dark, air-conditioner-cold, sterile room as that would not be conducive for the best writing. Kavanaugh Center was the perfect setting where one could get lost in writing, melting into the white pages of the journal. A few writers returned to their cabins, some found grassy areas under trees; others made themselves comfortable on wooden benches by the lake while others (like I did) chose a rocking chair on the wrap-around porch of the lodge. I selected this setting because I love to rock (not crazy about rollin', but love to rock); the view of the woods and lake was beautiful and quiet. As is typical, it took a while to shake the cobwebs from my head and start the writing process. It had been too long since I had exercised my writing muscles. I had to spend some time stretching by looking over notes I had made in other journals and reviewing several of the unfinished pieces from the yellow folder.

Once I connected with my pencil, the writing came freely and comfortably. It was like seeing an old friend after years of being apart. At first, the conversation is slow and a little awkward, but then you realized you have been talking for hours. When my writing muscles began to get tight and I had to take a break I looked at my watch. What? It couldn't be! I had written, almost non-stop, for over three hours. It felt good ... I felt good: I was once again a writer.

Dinner time was spent making new friends and discussing our writing. Most were very excited about their afternoon's work; some were frustrated because their thoughts had not produced what they had hoped. The program after dinner, "Feeding Your Writerly Life," gave additional writing tips and encouraged us to include these tips in the piece we had started earlier. Friendships were strengthened that evening while sitting around the campfire or sharing tales around the cabin table.

The next day began with introductions to the members of our response groups while enjoying breakfast. The morning offered optional sessions and writing time. I attended a session on revising with metaphors, setting and emotions. Each time I heard a new idea or was reminded of one from the past, I added more weight to my writing. "Yes, I need to try that or I must include this," I thought. My writing time was spent experimenting with the new tips: one-two-three, stretch – stretch.

After having lunch with my response group the decision was made to attend another optional session so we could strengthen our muscles even further. Kathie demonstrated the art of stealing in her session, "How to be a Thief."