

NWP Directors Retreat Annual Report 2007-2008

Submitted by Nancy Remington

Summary of Year's Work

Since the first Directors Retreat in 1996, the yearly event has grown into a unique working opportunity for local site leadership teams to gather for four days to share expertise, connect with NWP colleagues and resources, and develop plans to expand the capacity of their sites to serve teachers and schools. In the past year it has become clear that the Directors Retreat (DR) is positioned to play a key role in support of the many sites undergoing transitions in leadership.

In 2007-2008, the leadership team facilitated the following activities:

October	Directors Retreat Leadership Team (DR LT) fall planning meeting, Red Lodge, MT. The team held their meeting at Rock Creek Resort, the venue for the 2008 retreat, to plan for the upcoming summer event.
November 2007	DR Reunion meeting, at Annual Meeting, New York, NY
November 2007	DR LT breakfast meeting at Annual Meeting, New York, NY
Nov 2007–June 2008	Monthly DR LT conference calls
June 2008	DR LT Spring planning meeting, Denver, CO
July 2008	DR LT final planning day, Red Lodge, MT
July 31–Aug 3, 2008	NWP Directors Retreat, Red Lodge, MT
October 2008	DR LT Fall meeting, Denver, CO

Annual Meeting Presence

At the 2007 Annual Meeting in New York, the DR sponsored a site development workshop, *Working Through Transitions in Writing Project Leadership*. It was the third time that the session had been offered. In 2007, the session featured the work of Directors Retreat participants Nikola Hobbel and Sue McIntire, Redwood Writing Project; Jonna Perrillo, West Texas Writing Project; Lucy Ware, Western Pennsylvania Writing Project; and Nick Coles, NWP field director.

Leadership Team planning

The DR leadership team members for the 2008–2009 program year are:

Gatsinzi Basaninyenzi, Alabama A&M University Writing Project

Susan Biggs, Western Massachusetts Writing Project

Ellen Brinkley, Third Coast Writing Project, Michigan

Karen Hamlin, Oregon Writing Project at Willamette University

Janice Jones, Connecticut Writing Project—Fairfield

Tom Pankiewicz, Prairie Lands Writing Project

Nancy Remington, Field Director, National Writing Project

Pat Fox, Thinking Partner, National Writing Project,

Shannon Fulton, Program Specialist, National Writing Project

Reflections on Previous Year's Work

It is clear from the participants' written evaluations and the leadership team's reflections, as well as anecdotal evidence, that the DR leadership team designs and facilitates an event that supports site leaders and strengthens local writing project sites. It does so by engaging directors, co-directors, and teacher-leaders from sites across the country in four consecutive days, plus optional evenings, of hands-on workshops that reexamine the NWP model and mission.

During the event, leaders from local sites work as individuals, as part of their local site team, and as members of cross-site groups to explore site work and site leadership and to make plans to expand the capacity of their sites. These local site leaders have access to readings, the NWP website, the DR leadership team, NWP staff, and the shared knowledge generated by their colleagues engaged in similar work.

Two-person teams from seventeen sites attended the 2008 Directors Retreat:

Alabama A&M University Writing Project

Bay Area Writing Project

Central California Writing Project

Central Connecticut Writing Project

Connecticut Writing Project – Fairfield

Florida State Writing Project

Hawaii Writing Project

Northwest Inland Writing Project

Prairie Lands Writing Project

Minnesota Writing Project

Montana Writing Project

Oregon Writing Project at University of Oregon

Oregon Writing Project at Willamette University
Southcentral Pennsylvania Writing Project
Swamp Fox Writing Project
Middle Tennessee Writing Project
National Writing Project at West Virginia University

From the evaluations, it is clear that the participants appreciated the following:

- Access to NWP resources (especially human—leadership team and staff)
- The opportunity to engage in inquiry into the work of an NWP site and the role of site leadership in supporting that work
- Time and space for working with site partners
- Time and space for working with leaders from other sites
- The opportunity to consider issues of site reorganization and leadership transitions
- Thoughtful scaffolding of the ideas
- The focus on core programs with time to consider connections among them
- Frequent opportunities to share both site successes and challenges

The following quotations from the evaluations offer examples of the participants' thoughtful responses:

As with other NWP events, the knowledge and experiences that each participant brought to the retreat were valued. We were given the opportunity to learn from one another. I certainly left the retreat with new ideas for our site (ideas that I hope will address the areas that challenge us most right now). I also left the retreat with a new appreciation for the work we do as an NWP site and with an affirmation of the efficacy of the model that guides the ways in which we facilitate the professional development of teachers.

Although my expectations were vague, I came to realize that what I needed as a neophyte was what was provided: helping with a deeper understanding of continuity, leadership, and capacity; opportunity to reflect on site organization; and engagement in activities to foster creative thinking as well as to design a strategic plan.

I appreciated the lead-in, purposeful writing that we did at the beginning of each day. I love how the topics of each day built upon the last, driving our thinking forward from the institute to continuity to our inservice, using leadership capacity and program-building.... We had the opportunity to take what we have learned in PO3 and think deeply about how to implement and sustain change processes that will further grow our site. Giving us supported time to interact and learn about other sites' ideas was structured just enough to allow for open communication and genuine collaboration, showing us that there are multiple ways of thinking about what a "healthy" site could be.

In our own written reflections on the DR 2008 and in our early October 2008 meeting in Denver, DR leadership team members expressed a sense that we have imagined a retreat design and process that is collegial, efficient, and effective. Guided by a clear sense of our particular mission to support leadership development at local sites, we're working on plans to expand and deepen the experience in several ways: a more refined use of relevant readings both before and during the retreat; ways to follow and share the learning from sites using the NWP resources (website, sessions, etc.); ways to address the issues of inclusion, access, diversity; and honing in on defining "the what"—the work of leading a site.

Plans for the Year Ahead

This year, the Directors Retreat leadership team is working through transition. Three long-time members—Lucy Ware, Western Pennsylvania Writing Project; Marty Williams, Bay Area Writing Project; and Chair Nick Coles, NWP Field Director—have rotated off the team. Three new members—Janice Jones, Connecticut Writing Project-Fairfield; Tom Pankiewicz, Prairie Lands Writing Project; and Karen Hamlin, Oregon Writing Project at Willamette University—have joined the DR LT. All three new team members were able to attend the 2008 DR, and were able to bring both their participants' and leaders' perspective to the team's October 2008 meeting. We found this invaluable.

Annual Meeting Presence

A reunion meeting for 2008 DR participants will be held on Thursday, November 20 at the NWP Annual Meeting in San Antonio. After viewing a brief slideshow of the retreat, participants had a chance to reflect briefly on plans made at the retreat, and, moving forward, a time to reconnect and to share current progress and future plans.

This reunion will serve as an opportunity to conduct a shared inquiry of the DR LT for the coming year as we continue to explore the following questions:

- What do we know about the impact and outcomes of the Directors Retreat?
- What tools do we have that support the development of local site leadership?
- What resources do we have to share and how do we best share them with the larger audience of NWP sites?

2009 Directors Retreat Planning

Planning for the 2009 Directors Retreat will continue at a leadership team breakfast on Saturday, November 22, in San Antonio; during monthly phone calls; and at a full-day meeting to be held in spring 2008 after applications are in and participants have been invited.

The 2009 Directors Retreat will take place from July 29 through August 2, 2009, with the leadership team coming in a day early to finalize plans for the event.

In addition to developing a planning calendar for the year-round cycle of DR leadership team work, we continue to refine our processes and our vision of the work as we develop resources for site leaders and leadership capacity within the team.

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