

Urban Sites Network Annual Report 2007-2008

Submitted by Ben Bates

Summary of the Year's Work

2007-2008 was a very productive year for the Urban Sites Network. Below is a summary of the work accomplished by the network this year.

- October 2007 Preparation for 2007 Annual Meeting presentations and Special-Focus Networks Social
- November 2007 USN-sponsored Site Development workshops at Annual Meeting: *Conversations About Promising Practices for Working with African American Learners; Next Steps in Conversations About Promising Practices for Working with African American Learners; Special-Focus Network Minigrants: How to Access Supplemental Funding to Grow Your Site Strategically*; Co-sponsor for Thursday Special-Focus Networks Social; SFN PowerPoint presentation
- Dissemination of African American Learners Project (AALP) work to a broader audience at National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) Convention
- Fall USN Leadership Team meeting (at Annual Meeting)
Introduction of new members Linda Christensen, Irina McGrath, and Chris Tsang; Mary Coleman and Marie Blake rotate off team;
Revisiting USN mission statement; Full review of the USN Minigrant process; AALP resources/reactions to Thursday and Friday sessions and next steps; Resource Development committee: How can USN continue to support the development and dissemination of resources for urban sites?; 2007 USN Conference report (Washington, D.C.); 2009 USN Conference update (Denver Writing Project (DWP), Denver, CO); Work plan development for 2007-2008
- January 2008 Preparation for and participation in NWP Dissemination Retreat in Atlanta; USN-sponsored participants UNC-Charlotte WP (Anthony Iannone), UCLA WP (Erin Peterson, Carrie Usui) and Lehigh Valley WP (Kari Weidner-Gonzalez) attend retreat to develop programs in action; Ben Bates and Vanessa Brown coach
- February 2008 Conference calls with DWP, Host Site for 2008 USN Conference
Minigrant review and recommendations
2008 Conference documents posted on NWP/USN events page

Planning for 2009 USN conference, to be held in Louisville, Kentucky (ongoing): Toured venues and met with local site conference planning team (Ben Bates, Vanessa Brown, Natalia Cooper), Confirmed keynote speaker and hotel accommodations
Finalized 2008 USN conference documents (logo, registration, and call for proposals) with host site

March 2008

Follow-up with minigrant recipients (ongoing)

April 2008

USN Conference, Denver, CO: theme, "Reading and Writing for Understanding and Social Change in the Urban Classroom"; Keynote speaker, Richard Sterling, NWP Executive Director Emeritus; approximately 200 attendees during Friday and Saturday activities; Friday: School visits, writing marathon in Denver's Writers' Square, facilitated conversation with Dr. Louann Reid on writing for publication, guided walking tour with historian Kevin Rucker; Evening reception and dinner with entertainment ; DWP "After Hours" post-dinner gathering; Saturday: 32 workshop sessions across 4 rounds; Town Meeting; USN LT-led workshop, "A Facilitated Discussion on the keynote address by Richard Sterling"

Spring Leadership Team Meeting (at USN Conference)
Rotations of leadership, budget and work plan; Update on Denver Conference; Update from Louisville Writing Project (2009 host site); 2009 USN Conference theme, "Writing and Resiliency: Tapping the Potential of Urban Students"; Reintroducing ourselves: what keeps urban educators going?; Reports: NPL, continued discussion on resources and resource development, USN Web presence, minigrant reports; USN LT Next Steps: Are there other ways we need to think about supporting the sites within our network?; 2008 Annual Meeting in San Antonio planning: Thursday social, LT site development workshops (Thursday and/or Friday)

May-Aug 2008

Prepared and submitted USN-sponsored Annual Meeting workshop proposals: "Appreciative Inquiry into Site Development," and "Hard Talk: Tough Conversations About Teaching Writing and About Learning"

September 2008

Reviewed progress and final reports of USN minigrant recipients using a protocol developed by Vanessa Brown
Nancy Mintz, Ben Bates, Astra Cherry mined the reports for future resource development and wrote letters to sites with feedback and suggestions.

Currently, the USN Leadership team comprises the following members:

Ben Bates, Oklahoma State University Writing Project, Chair
Kevin Brooks, Denver Writing Project
Astra Cherry, Gateway Writing Project
Linda Christensen, Oregon WP at Lewis and Clark College
Azalie Hightower, District of Columbia Area Writing Project
Irina McGrath, Louisville Writing Project
Nancy Mintz, New York City Writing Project, Chair
Pamela Morgan, Maryland Writing Project
Christina Puntel, Philadelphia Writing Project
Chris Tsang, Boston Writing Project
Vanessa Brown, Thinking Partner, National Writing Project
Nicki Lewis, Program Specialist, National Writing Project

Reflections on the Year's Work

The goals of the Urban Sites Network are to promote site development, build community and collegueship among urban teacher-leaders, and sponsor programs of national interest. These objectives have guided USN since its inception in 1988 and remain the focus of our activities during 2007-2008.

Our contributions to the NWP Annual Meeting reflect our commitment to local site development. USN cosponsored two Thursday sessions in 2007, one to highlight our minigrant program, the other to share the findings of our inquiry into working with African American learners. We also coordinated a Friday session on fostering change in urban school districts and participated in the Special-Focus Networks Social and Poster Session. Our minigrant program is a vital catalyst; USN supported the Greater New Orleans Writing Project as they sought to replenish their archive of inservice programs and reenergize their teacher-consultants in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project used a grant to share NWP core values with urban teachers during a workshop series at Agnes Scott College.

The African American Learners Project seeks to address perhaps the greatest challenge urban teachers face—the achievement/opportunity gap. Our site development workshop at the 2007 Annual Meeting and another at the National Council of Teachers of English Conference involved six teacher-consultants sharing experiences and strategies for working with African American students. The annotated bibliography developed by the AALP Thinking and Development Team, which is currently accessible on the USN web page (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/2549>), is a resource for teachers who grapple with this issue.

As for building community among teacher-leaders from urban school districts, USN supported work by the Long Island Writing Project, University of North Carolina - Charlotte Writing Project and the Philadelphia Writing Project in projects to inquire into the impact of race on student/teacher/community relationships (Long Island); explore the

intersection of home and school literacies for English language learners (Charlotte); and develop a diverse pool of leaders for inservice work (Philadelphia). Each project involved collaborative effort from teacher-consultants working to support their own professional development.

The USN leadership team believes that sharing this work throughout the network is a priority. Teacher-leaders from Long Island and Charlotte shared their experience at the 2007 Annual Meeting, along with teachers from the Boston Writing Project. Teacher-consultants from the UNC-Charlotte, UCLA, and Lehigh Valley (PA) Writing Projects attended the Dissemination Retreat in Atlanta in January 2008 to develop “programs in action” articles for the USN Web page. Our cycle of work with minigrant recipients continues year-round and demonstrates our commitment to promote “teachers teaching teachers” and broadcast exemplary work in every venue.

Planning and preparation for the annual Urban Sites Conference, USN’s showcase for programs of national interest, is also year-round. This year’s conference was a productive, stimulating event, highlighted by Richard Sterling’s keynote address, which managed to be both nostalgic and forward-looking at once. We (Vanessa Brown and Ben Bates) met an enthusiastic group of teacher-consultants in February when we visited next year’s conference hosts in Louisville. The Louisville Writing Project planning committee has made substantial progress on the 2009 conference. With continued support from national staff, we hope to plan future conferences more systematically, largely by starting the process earlier. We will visit hotels in Portland, Oregon, the 2010 conference site, in mid-October.

Plans for the Year Ahead

The Urban Sites Network’s mission is unchanged. USN will continue to support teachers who “tackle the critical concerns of urban schools.” That means encouraging local sites to apply for supplemental funds, and reviewing minigrant applications, progress reports, and final reports for resources that can be shared across the network. It means supporting local sites as they provide continuity and leadership opportunities to their teacher-consultants on projects ranging from inquiry groups to conference planning. In the last year, at the NWP Annual Meeting, the Dissemination Retreat, the Urban Sites Conference, and everywhere teachers gather, I have found teachers engaged in committed, creative work. USN nurtures that work and encourages teachers to share their research and their stories with a wide audience. I think the “appreciative inquiry” approach USN will employ during the site development workshop at the 2008 Annual Meeting offers a framework for that task.

The site development workshop emphasis on attracting a diverse group of teacher-leaders to local sites affords an opportunity to say a word about the African American Learners Project, a response to an overwhelming problem. The determination among urban teachers to address this problem is still strong. The achievement/opportunity (choose your adjective) gap is our most critical concern.

2008-2009 Minigrants

In combination with the annual Urban Sites Network conference, the USN minigrant program continues as a prime vehicle to promote inquiry, collaboration, and professional development throughout the network. USN seeks to publicize, stimulate, and support the work of teacher-consultants in urban settings across the country.

We will continue to carefully craft minigrant review teams to ensure that members understand the role of supplemental funding, are familiar with the USN scoring rubric, and are willing to engage in the back-and-forth of online review. The 2008 review committee members (Ben Bates, Nancy Mintz, Christina Puntel, and Astra Cherry) also indicated that the process works more smoothly when members receive hard copies of the proposals by mail, in addition to online access.

The list of seven sites to receive funding in 2008-2009 concludes this report. For a description of their projects, please visit <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/projects/65>.

2008-2009 Sites Receiving USN Minigrants

San Diego Area Writing Project

Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project

Greater New Orleans Writing Project

Gateway Writing Project

UNC Charlotte Writing Project

Columbus Area Writing Project

Philadelphia Writing Project

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