My Trip to Baltimore: A Scrapbook from the NWP Annual Meeting

Covering the NWP Annual Meeting can be a daunting task. On the one hand, we have newsy, fact-filled pieces such as the cover's, "Annual Meeting Earns High Marks." On the other hand are reflective pieces the likes of "Running the Baltimore Writing Marathon." But what about the content of the many workshops themselves—the discussions and interactions that call our brains and pens to action?

What workshops, we wondered, might a typical teacher choose? What impressions do they leave with him? And, perhaps most importantly, what ideas do they foster? To answer these questions, we've turned to the pages of "Joe's Baltimore Scrapbook." It is our hope that his thoughts and photographs, together with the above-mentioned pieces, will capture the spirit of the event.

BY JOE TEACHER (A PSEUDONYM)

Thursday, November 15

Models of Inservice from the National Writing Project at Work Monograph Series

Before this session, I wasn't quite sure what the monograph series was. Now, I have a pretty good idea. These monographs deal with a single topic about which sites need to know. The idea behind the series is to draw on sites' expertise, collecting and disseminating "how-to" pieces to the network.

This first set of monographs is about inservice; eight sites are contributing to it. In one presentation, folks from the Capital Area Writing Project in North Carolina described their work with teachers from isolated locations. Many sites face this situation, and the Capital folks offered some helpful advice for them. I also sat in on a session with the folks from the National Writing Project in Vermont. Their work centered on another vital topic: how a site gets started with inservice. Even the most successful inservice programs had fledgling beginnings, and Vermont has ideas about what to do during this stage.

The Invitational Summer Institute: Developing Teacher-Consultants from Interview to Inservice

This session generated a lot of discussion, much of which centered around the idea that we don't want the summer institute to be just a course teachers add to their transcripts. We want people to stay around, to get involved in the NWP mission of teachers teaching teachers. Here are some of the ideas that came out of the discussion:

- Institute directors should figure out what each of the participants brings to the institute. Spotlight people's special talents, and they will be more likely to stay involved.

- Tie the national network into the summer institute through publications and the E-Anthology, so that teacher-consultants see they are part of a larger movement.

- Keep the new teacher-consultants working. Ask them to give practice inservice demonstrations at a fall-winter conference.

Critical Literacy in the Life of the English Language Learner

I chose this session because I wanted to get up to speed on the big questions in English Language Learners (ELL) teaching. It seems that one of the big issues revolves around what the ELL people call "cultural fault lines." That is, what does a teacher do when she has students in her class from very different cultures that don't seem to share a common tradition?

One of the presenters, Greta Vollmer (Bay Area Writing Project, California), offered a real-life story that allowed participants to consider ways of working through such differences. In the story, pairs of Greta's students were reading and discussing each other's writing. One student had written an account of the creation as it related to her culture. She and her partner, who was from another culture, soon discovered differences between the creation story that each knew. A discussion ensued about which story was "true." Greta used this incident to get workshop participants talking about how, as teachers, they might handle such a situation. It seems like Greta's message is "look for cross-cultural connections."
Friday, November 16

(Round A Workshops)

**Empty Folders and Other Invitations: Developing Site Leadership Among Teacher-Consultants**

Every site director struggles to keep good teacher-consultants connected to the project. Developing effective continuity programs for this purpose is challenging. Leaders from the Northern Virginia Writing Project shared strategies that have worked at their site, such as recognizing teacher-consultants' strengths and talking to them about potential site roles before they leave the summer institute; developing a first-year teacher-consultant "support" group to keep them involved with the site; asking new teacher-consultants to propose new programs and seed those programs for the first year; and having experienced teacher-consultants visit the summer institute to speak about their roles and encourage participants to take on leadership positions at the site. The "empty folders" in the session title represent this site's strong support for good ideas—any teacher-consultant with a good idea is handed an empty folder and invited to create a program at the site.

(Round B Workshops)

**Developing Students' Academic Writing: Weaving Academic Essays from Multiple Sources**

In this session, folks from the New York City Writing Project discussed how recent research shows the gap between Latino/minority students and white students is growing, especially in writing and language arts. They also discussed how to break the barrier between personal and academic writing. We broke into small groups, then, and the presenters gave each person a packet of materials that included a final draft of a student essay. Without knowing the prompt, we read the student essay and talked about his work. Then, we looked at the prompt and realized that the student had satisfied the teacher's basic requirements. Next, we looked at the worksheets and previous drafts of the paper and considered that while the worksheets may have inhibited the student's writing process, they may also have helped him learn how to pass the statewide exam necessary to graduate from high school. I guess there are no easy answers.

(Round C Workshops)

**Three Ways of Looking at Publication**

The "three ways" presented at this session were a best practices anthology (Richard Louth, at the Southeastern Louisiana Writing Project), a thematic site newsletter (Jean Hicks, Louisville Writing Project), and a state-wide journal (Ron Stanley and Pete Pazmino, Northern Virginia Writing Project). As a member of a site publications staff myself, I felt a little like a spy, but my intent was pure. I wanted to listen to other publications people. There's a lot we can learn from other sites about the way they do their publications.

(Round D Workshops)

**Co-director/Director Relationships: Sharing the Leadership, Planning for Success**

Because I know that running a site involves a big chunk of work, I went to this session understanding that the director/co-director relationship needs to be strong . . . but I came away with a new understanding of the complexities of these relationships. For instance, at California's Redwood Writing Project, Co-director Bob Sizoo is in the office as a teacher on leave, but Director Susan Bennett is a full-time college teacher. So when do these folks get together? They get creative. Susan told the story of the time she was (literally) going to see a man about a horse. Since Bob has a horse trailer and Susan doesn't (but needed one for the trip), she "invited Bob along for the ride." In the course of the trip, they planned their presentation for the annual meeting (this workshop, in fact) and managed to squeeze in a visit to a school where they had an in-service program going on.

**What's a Writing Project Teacher to Do? Struggles and Strategies in the Face of High-Stakes Testing**

Christine Cziklo (Bay Area Writing Project), who led this session, gave participants much to think about around questions raised by high-stakes testing. She outlined a four-pronged approach focused on policy, politics, pedagogy, and publicity. She urged teachers to push for responsible assessment systems that are useful to their efforts to improve student performance; to introduce a third standard, the "opportunity to learn," along with existing standards of "content" and "performance"; to demand that all factors affecting student performance be taken into account; and to tell their own stories about how they assess their students' progress.

The teacher-consultants and site directors present jumped into the discussion with ideas about teaching the test as a genre, using techniques that apply to other genres such as asking students to write their own questions using the test as a model, reading and analyzing boring (test-like) text, and determining the intended audience.

**End-of-Day Final Note**

All of the sessions I attended were bursting with creativity. If we could bottle this substance and sell it, the NWP would never again need to depend on a federal funds appropriation.