NWP Launches Monograph Series

by Liz Simon, Joye Alberts, and Lisa Howard

This winter, the National Writing Project will launch National Writing Project at Work, a new monograph series written by teachers and site leaders about the work of their sites. The series begins with a set of four monographs, Models of Inservice, that describe models of professional development from the Capital Area Writing Project/Johnston Area Writing Partnership (North Carolina); the New York City Writing Project; the National Writing Project in Vermont; and the Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute.

Beginnings: A Need to Document NWP Work

Over the years, NWP teachers and site leaders have recognized a need to document and disseminate the knowledge and models being developed at local writing project sites. The NWP at Work series will help sites “go public” with their local work and knowledge, and also provide professional development models for other writing project sites. The NWP at Work series will provide models for how to write about the work going on at sites throughout the country.

As a new NWP initiative, NWP at Work was developed with input from writing project site leaders, teachers, and NWP staff. Teams of writers from sites who were asked to create the first set of monographs initially met at the 1999 NWP Annual Meeting in Denver and then participated in a two-and-a-half-day writing retreat the following spring. Since there were no similar NWP publications for the participants to use as models, the group worked on developing a format that would serve their primary audience—colleagues from writing project sites across the country—and also be useful to a secondary audience—policymakers, academics, school administrators, and others. They discussed the challenges of documenting the work and the difficulty of finding time to write about it, and they took time to consider different models of professional development and current school-reform issues.

As a result of these conversations, participants created a format that provides an overview of their models while offering practical information and tools. The monograph from the Capital Area Writing Project ended up with appendices that were almost as long as the monograph narrative. The authors write: “The monograph is our journey; the appendices are the tools and processes we developed along the way.”

The First Set in the Series

The first four monographs focus on inservice, an integral part of NWP's professional development model of “teachers teaching teachers.” The programs described are inspired by the mission and vision of the NWP and illustrate the local creativity and autonomy of individual writing project sites. Written by teams, the texts reflect different voices and points of view and bring a rich perspective to the work described.

The Capital Area Writing Project/Johnston Area Writing Partnership (CAWP/JAWP) monograph, written by Teacher-Consultants Patsy Butler and Sandra O’Berry and Director Ruie Pritchard, is a detailed account of how a district-based writing partnership was created and sustained by local teachers with the guidance of CAWP. The monograph describes how they gathered data about teachers and students, formed a cadre of teacher-leaders throughout the district to help develop the program, and planned and implemented open summer institutes within the district that mirror the NWP model.

The New York City Writing Project's (NYCWP) monograph consists of two pieces, written by Teacher-Consultants Nancy Mintz and Alan Stein, and an introduction by Director Marcie Wolfe. Wolfe's introduction provides an overview of how the NYCWP developed an inservice model and how it operates now. Mintz's piece uses journal entries to illustrate the dilemmas of her role as a new consultant; Stein's piece looks at school-reform efforts at a school in Brooklyn slated for remediation and documents the successes and challenges that occurred there over a five-year period.

The monograph from the National Writing Project in Vermont, written by Director Patricia McGonegal and Program Coordinator Anne Watson, takes a two-part look at what it is like for a new writing project site to develop inservice programs. McGonegal gives an overview of the educational climate in Vermont and how the site developed out of local needs. Watson profiles two inservice series, one successful and one not-so-successful, that gives insights into what they learned from the experience, and offers tools they use to avoid common pitfalls, including tips from their inservice coordinator's handbook.

The Mississippi Writing/Thinking Institute monograph, written by Teacher-Consultants Lynette Herrin-Harris, Mississippi State University Writing/Thinking Project, and Cassandra B. Henshaw, Mississippi Valley State University Writing Project, describes a professional development program for secondary reading that began as a passing comment in a staff meeting and grew into a statewide model for secondary reading instruction (called Secondary Content Opening to Reading Excellence, or SCORE). Herrin-Harris covers the story of MWI's response to a state department's request for proposals and the development of the inservice model. Henshaw served on the planning team and writes about SCORE from the perspective of a presenter.

Strength of the Series

Into each of the monographs, the authors bring their extensive experience in schools, their reputations as leaders, and their insider knowledge of schools, districts, and states. One of the strengths of the monographs is the honest voices in which they are written. The

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authors take on roles they never played before, and, consequently, they take risks, which involve failures as well as successes. These monographs have much to add to the debate about what is effective professional development; they are models of school reform that keep teachers teaching.

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