

Rural Sites Network Annual Report 2008-2009

Submitted by Paul Epstein and Stephanie Vanderslice

Summary of the Year's Work

To support the 2008-2009 work, the Rural Sites Network Leadership Team facilitated the following activities.

October 2008	Coached RSN-sponsored 2008 Annual Meeting sessions
November 2008	NWP Annual Meeting, San Antonio, TX; Thursday site development session: <i>Navigating the Rough Road to Successful Rural Inservice</i> ; Cosponsored the Special Focus Networks Social; Cosponsored the Special Focus Networks Minigrant Session; Friday breakout session: <i>Why Rural Matters</i> ; RSN Leadership Team dinner RSN Leadership Team Fall Strategic Planning meeting: Reviewed 2009 RSN Conference proposals and selected sessions; Wrote response letters to conference proposals; Prepared for 2009 minigrant review; Reviewed 2008 Resource Development Retreat evaluations; Discussed network vision for enhancing online communication and discussions; Discussed Karen Vocke's book <i>Where Do I Go From Here</i> (Vocke was the 2009 RSN Conference keynote speaker)
December 2009	Contacted all 2009 Conference presenters and began coaching combined sessions; Continued support for Third Coast Writing Project, conference hosts
January 2009	Supported electronic review of RSN minigrant proposals; Followed up with last year's minigrant recipients on status of work Supported resource developers from the 2008 RSN RDR at the 2009 National Program Dissemination Retreat, Atlanta, GA; Continued support for 2009 RSN Conference; Launched the "Issues in Rural Education" group on the NWP Site Leaders Ning
February 2009	Participated in on-site minigrant review and recommendations, Berkeley, CA; Continued support for 2009 RSN Conference
March 2009	Rural Sites Network Conference, Kalamazoo, MI: <i>Open Spaces, Small Cities: The Landscape of Rural Education in America</i> ; Spring RSN Leadership Team Strategic Planning Meeting
April 2009	Co-chairs attended National Program Leaders Meeting, Washington, DC; Continued support for minigrant work; Began preparation for RSN-sponsored 2009 Annual Meeting

sessions

- May 2009 Began coaching RSN-sponsored 2009 Annual Meeting sessions; Leadership team began a book study. The study included a variety of place-conscience books that, once reviewed, might become RSN webpage resources.
- July 2009 Co-sponsored the Memorial Library Summer Seminar on Holocaust Education, New York City
- August 2009 2010 Resource Development Retreat Planning Team Meeting, Memphis, TN; Continued planning and coaching for 2009 Annual Meeting Sessions
- September 2009 Co-chairs attended fall National Program Leaders Meeting, Berkeley, CA; Leadership Team members began posting book reviews to the Issues in Rural Education online community; Reviewed minigrant progress and final reports for potential resources and leaders; Prepared “food for thought” letters to support the minigrant work

The members of the 2008-2009 RSN Leadership Team are:

Jennifer Conrad, Third Coast Writing Project, Michigan
Paul Epstein, Central West Virginia Writing Project, Co-chair
Brenda Johnston, Montana Writing Project
Sue McIntyre, Redwood Writing Project, California
Marla Morgan, High Plains Writing Project, New Mexico
David Pulling, National Writing Project of Acadiana, Louisiana
Amy Schrader, Upstate Writing Project, South Carolina
Stephanie Vanderslice, Great Bear Writing Project, Arkansas, Co-chair
Tanisha Westerfield, Mississippi State University Writing/Thinking Project
Lynette Herring-Harris, National Writing Project
Spike Harris, National Writing Project
Nicki Lewis, National Writing Project

Reflections on the Year's Work

As stewards of the Rural Sites Network, the RSN Leadership Team has carved out time and devoted energy in the past year to become individually and collectively more knowledgeable about issues in rural education through reading current research and participating in book studies. This knowledge supports our emphasis on increasing the visibility and discussion of issues of diversity and equity through our minigrant program, our offerings at the NWP Annual Meeting, and our biannual spring conference. We have also worked to increase our online presence by designating a listserv/Ning moderator and establishing a strong presence on the NWP Site

Leaders Ning. What follows are examples of the ways our network strives to strengthen and support local Writing Project sites and develop local and national leaders.

The Rural Sites Network Conference was held March 13–14, 2009 in Kalamazoo, Michigan. The Third Coast Writing Project hosted the event and developed a strong local team that completed local responsibilities throughout the planning year. Karen Vocke, author of *Where Do I Go From Here: Meeting the Unique Needs of Migrant Students*, spoke about her work with migrant students, a population of concern to rural educators. The conference had 40 sessions in all: 6 preconference sessions, 4 plenary sessions, and 24 concurrent sessions. Over two conference days, a total of 78 presenters represented 30 local Writing Project sites. Session topics included technology in rural education, Indian education for all, meeting inservice challenges in rural areas, and classroom techniques for improving writing. Approximately 200 people attended the conference.

RSN again partnered with the Holocaust Educators Network (HEN) to cosponsor the *Memorial Library Summer Seminar on Holocaust Education* in New York City. We are in the process of helping HEN move from a listserv for online communications to a more user-friendly private Ning. This year over 30 teachers applied. Fellowships were awarded to 24 teachers representing 20 Writing Project sites. Beginning in 2010, HEN will broaden its recruitment to include some nonrural teachers who show a critical need for Holocaust education in their schools and Writing Project service areas.

The RSN minigrant program continues to offer seed money for member sites wishing to create new programs, deepen continuity programming, support site/teacher research related to the teaching of writing in rural schools, diversify site leadership, and change the learning environments of rural schools. This year we received over 20 funding proposals. Listed below are the 2009-2010 minigrant recipient sites. For more information on RSN minigrants, go to <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/programs/rsn?x-t=grants.view>.

Great Bear Writing Project (AR)
Northern California Writing Project
Northwestern State University Writing Project (LA)
Upper Peninsula Writing Project (MI)
Saginaw Bay Writing Project (MI)
Oregon Writing Project at University of Oregon
Appalachian Writing Project (VA)
Puget Sound Writing Project (WA)

Plans for the Year Ahead

The following goals will focus the work for the Rural Sites Network leadership team in the year ahead.

- Continue the leadership team's professional development in the area of rural education issues through book and article discussions

- Develop a stronger presence for issues of rural education on the NWP website and NWP Site Leaders Ning
- Revisit the RSN's mission and goals as they relate to the new NWP mission statement
- Continue to provide opportunities for local sites to document and disseminate their work in the RSN, NWP, and other professional organizations.

In the year ahead, the Rural Sites Network will continue to support its member sites as they undertake work that examines and addresses the educational challenges facing rural areas and populations, including issues of equity, diversity, critical place-based consciousness, and funding. Specifically, a key priority will be holding the 2010 RSN Resource Development Retreat in Tubac, Arizona. The retreat will provide support for approximately 24 participants to document local site work and create resources that may be replicated by other Writing Project sites. Part of our work for the upcoming year will include reenvisioning the RSN's cycle of events. This will be RSN's last resource development retreat as we look toward the evolution of the National Programs Resource Development Retreat in 2011, which will integrate multiple networks into one large RDR. We will also focus our work toward developing the theme and the activities of the 2011 RSN Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, as we continue to finalize conference planning.

For more information about upcoming Rural Sites Network events, please visit <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/programs/rsn?x-t=events.view>.