

NWP Directors Retreat Annual Report 2008-2009

Submitted by Nancy Remington and Susan Connell Biggs, co-chairs

Summary of Year's Work

Since the first Directors Retreat (DR) 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 several years it has become clear that the Directors Retreat is positioned to play a key role in support of the many sites undergoing transitions in leadership. During this last year, it has also become apparent that the leadership team is positioned to become a learning community that not only plans an annual event but also works year-round to identify opportunities and develop resources to share across the NWP Network.

In 2008-2009, the leadership team facilitated the following activities:

October 2008	Directors Retreat Leadership Team (DRLT) Fall Planning Meeting, Denver, CO
November 2008	NWP Annual Meeting Directors Retreat activities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Site Development Workshop on Leadership Transitions• 2008 DR Reunion• DR LT Breakfast Planning Meeting
Nov 2008 -July 2009	Monthly DR LT conference calls
February 2009	PIA resource submitted
April 2009	PIA resources initiated
June 2009	DR LT Spring Planning Meeting, Chicago, IL
July 2009	DR LT Pre-retreat Planning Meeting, Tubac, AZ
July 29-Aug 2, 2009	NWP Directors Retreat, Tubac, AZ
Aug-Nov, 2009	DR-Sponsored Annual Meeting Session Planning
September, 2009	DR LT 2009 Directors Retreat Debrief Conference Call
October, 2009	DR LT Fall Planning Meeting, Denver, CO

Annual Meeting Presence

At the 2008 Annual Meeting in San Antonio, Texas, the DR sponsored *Re-envisioning Site Leadership*, another in a continuing series of a site development workshops focusing on leadership and leadership transitions. The workshop session featured the work of 2007 Directors Retreat participants Patricia Scanlon and Lisa Weiss, Fox Valley Writing Project; and Dawn Kirby, Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project. Sarah Robbins and Mimi Dyer, both from Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, joined the team as presenters.

Leadership Team Planning

The DR leadership team members for the 2008-2009 program year include:

Gatsinzi Basaninyenzi, Alabama A&M University Writing Project; **Susan Connell 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, Missouri; **Nancy Remington**, Field Director, National Writing Project, Chair, DRLT; **Pat Fox**, Thinking Partner, National Writing Project; **Shannon Fulton**, Program Specialist, National Writing Project

Reflections on Previous Year's Work

It is evident from the participants' written evaluations and the leadership team's reflections, 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 network in four consecutive days of hands-on activities that invite them to 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 develop plans to expand the capacity of their sites to meet the needs of their service areas. These local site leaders have access to readings, the NWP website, the NWP Site Leaders Ning, the DR leadership team, NWP staff, and the shared knowledge generated by their colleagues engaged in similar work.

Two-person teams from the following eighteen sites attended the 2009 Directors Retreat:

Longleaf Writing Project, AL
Red Mountain Writing Project, AL
Southern Arizona Writing Project
San Joaquin Valley Writing Project, CA
Rocky Mountain Writing Project, CO
Southern Colorado Writing Project
NWP at Florida Gulf Coast University
Blackwater Writing Project, GA
Southwest Georgia Writing Project
Eastern Iowa Writing Project

Northern Kentucky Writing Project
Northern Plains Writing Project, ND
Southern Nevada Writing Project
Oklahoma Writing Project
Winthrop Writing Project, SC
Central Texas Writing Project
Central Virginia Writing Project
NWP in Vermont

From their final evaluations, it is apparent that the participants appreciated the following:

- Access to NWP resources (especially human, i.e. leadership team and staff)
- Opportunities 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 and leaders from other sites
- Opportunities to consider issues of site reorganization and leadership transitions
- Thoughtful support and scaffolding of ideas
- Focus on core programs as well as time to consider connections among them
- Frequent opportunities to share both site successes and challenges

The following are examples of the participants' final reflections:

The way this retreat was run was very powerful. I thought that we would come here and get all the answers to our questions from the leaders. However, that was not the case. Instead, the leadership team invited and encouraged us to really focus in on our own site and to FIND the answers. This was by far so important and crucial to our own growth. In the entire weekend, the leaders were right there with us. They very rarely stood up and talked for more than five minutes or so. The team empowered us as leaders just as we try to do with the teachers who come to our own sites.

The Directors Retreat provided the opportunity to look at our previous year's work resulting from our reorganization and reconsider it in new ways—most particularly in relationship to the year-round work of the director and how what we do needs to support the needs of the service area and goals of our site.

It was very valuable to be joined by different members of the leadership team who, although unified in their understanding of the model and the work, each had slightly different emphases and approaches to discussion. The three-fold structure of large-group, cross-site, and site partner work allowed me to move between the general and the specific concerns of our site, thus seeing how the work of our site fits (or does not fit) into the big picture. There was an admirable balance between solitude and community.

In our own written reflections on the DR 2009, the DR leadership team members expressed a sense that we have imagined a retreat design and process that is collegial, efficient, and effective. Guided by our mission to support leadership development at local

sites, during the planning sessions for the retreat we worked to refine and deepen the experience in the following ways:

- refining the use of relevant readings both before and during the retreat;
- identifying ways to follow up and share the learning from sites using the NWP resources (website, sessions, etc.)
- exploring ways to address the issues of inclusion, access, diversity
- developing an inquiry focus to the retreat

Dedicating our time from September to January to exploring and extending our knowledge of resources, the following three inquiry questions both guided the DR LT's inquiry and informed the frame of the 2009 retreat:

- What is the work of an NWP site?
- What is the work of leading an NWP site?
- How do NWP sites build capacity for year-round work to meet the needs of their service areas?

During planning the leadership team made significant revisions in the event, working to refine the retreat to support a more connected and coherent vision of the year-round work of an NWP site. While this ambitious planning process created some anxiety for the team along the way, during the retreat we experienced the “arc of the whole” and valued the benefits of this collaborative planning. The decision to reframe the retreat as an inquiry grew from our own reading and learning as a leadership team and led us to refine the retreat in a way that not only engaged participants but also clarified our individual and collective understanding of the year-round work of an NWP site and the work of leading a site.

Plans for the Year Ahead

This year, the Directors Retreat leadership team will continue to learn together as we deepen our understanding and develop our expertise as facilitators. We've benefitted from this year of stability: there has been no rotation of team members and the retreat will be held in 2010 at the same venue in Tubac, Arizona. The only change is a most welcome one as Susan Biggs joins Nancy Remington as a co-chair. After the September conference call debrief and during the DR LT fall meeting, the team will set specific priorities and chart out the year's work.

Annual Meeting Presence

Two NWP Annual Meeting site development workshops emerged from the leadership team's work throughout the year identifying key issues and developing resources. Drawing on the impact on site work of their experiences in the Directors Retreat, 2008 DR participants will facilitate the following DR-sponsored sessions:

Leadership Transitions: Exploring Challenges and Opportunities; presenters Rodney McConnell and April Niemela, Northwest Inland Writing Project (ID); Rhonda Nowak and Mona Chock, Hawai'i Writing Project.

Visioning Retreats as a Strategy for Site Development: Presenters Karen Hamlin and Nancy Fischer, Oregon Writing Project Willamette; Tom Pankiewicz and Christy Leigan, Prairie Lands Writing Project (MO)

A reunion meeting for 2009 DR participants will be held on Thursday, November 19, 2009 at the NWP Annual Meeting in Philadelphia. Participants will be invited to reflect briefly on the impact of plans made at the retreat and share updates on their current work. This reunion will serve as an opportunity to conduct a shared inquiry of the DRLT 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?
- How can participating DR sites contribute knowledge to the NWP network?
- What resources and protocols can we identify or develop to support the development of local site leadership?

2010 Directors Retreat Planning

After yearly priorities are set during the fall planning meeting in October, the leadership team will debrief the 2009 DR Reunion and consider its impact on planning for the 2010 Directors Retreat. Planning will continue during monthly phone calls from November 2009 to July 2010 and at a full-day meeting to be held in April 2010 by which time 2010 DR participating sites will have been identified and invited. The 2010 Directors Retreat will take place from August 1 through August 5, 2010, in Tubac, Arizona, with the leadership team arriving a day early to finalize plans for the retreat.

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 develop our own leadership capacity as a team. Currently the DRLT has two PIAs in process and is charting out a multiple-year plan to identify and develop these as well as other resources for the NWP network. We plan to continue our own professional development as a team, enhancing our leadership skills and developing our own knowledge of resources, which includes exploring the use of the NWP Site Leaders NING as a forum for sharing ideas.