

The Project Post



Quarterly Newsletter from the Central West Virginia Writing Project

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Spring Series Workshops

As the spring begins to creep in, two workshop series are winding down to their final sessions. At Riverside high school, Carol Buckalew and Jennifer Allen, both Writing Project teachers, are coordinating a series entitled, “Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test.” The writing project participants are showing wonderful enthusiasm, and there have been a variety of great presenters. Carol Buckalew stated, “From *Where I’m From* to burying dead verbs, “Blowing Away the State Writing Assessment Test” participants have been busy understanding the scoring of the writing samples, creating rubrics with students, implementing new strategies with cubing, and wind-sock publishing! This is an exciting and enriching first venture in the eastern end of the county!”

The other CWVWP Kanawha County series taking place this semester is called, “Teaching Students to Write with Clarity, Style and Flashes of Brilliance.” The series is led by Travis and Brianne Vandal. The workshop participants include eleven Kanawha County teachers and one teacher from Cross Lanes Christian. The teachers are passionate about their work and are more than eager to accept new ideas. One participant stated that in her thirty year experience as a teacher, this was “the best professional development workshop” she has taken.

During the final meeting, each participant will receive a digital camera to use in his or her classroom. Also, several of these teachers have expressed interest in the 2010 Invitational Summer Institute (ISI) which is just around the corner.

Ruffner Writes! is Working Wonders!

A key benefit to attending the ISI is to share ideas on the teaching of writing with other educators. One activity is the publishing method behind *Ruffner Writes*, an anthology-based student publication. This idea was originated by CWVWP co-director, Paul Epstein who teaches Title I at Ruffner Elementary. *Ruffner Writes* is a school wide anthology that, throughout the course of a year, is created multiple times allowing **every** student to publish. Each summer, Paul shares this fantastic project with the ISI fellows and it seems that at least three area teachers have made it a part of their instruction.

Travis Vandal is a seventh grade English teacher at Elkview Middle School. This year he taught a unit on ten different types of poetry. Throughout the course of the unit, his students made their own poetry books containing all ten poems. At the end of the unit, every student selected one poem from his or her poetry book to be included in a class poem anthology. The finished product exceeded everyone’s expectations. The book is titled, *A Poet and Didn’t Know it*. It features one poem from each of Mr. Vandal’s 118 students, including a new couplet by Mr. Vandal himself. Two hundred copies were printed by the Kanawha County Board Office print shop and the books are being sold throughout the school and the community. Profits are used to buy books for Mr. Vandal’s classroom library.

Becky Ryder teaches at Sissonville Elementary and she publishes an anthology called, *Sissonville Writes*. The teachers in her building selected the students’ pieces to be included.

Sissonville Writes features stories and poems of all different genres. Clipart was included to go along with the writing. After publication, an author signing session took place in which the student authors autographed their work. It turned out to be a fantastic experience for everyone involved. Mrs. Ryder said, “This has been a positive activity at Sissonville



Photograph: Sissonville students autograph their work

Elementary. The students are becoming more excited about writing and want to be authors also. I hope to continue this activity again next year.”

This wonderful idea has even stretched outside Kanawha County borders. Marsha Cobb, a 2008 ISI fellow, teaches at Scott Teays Elementary in Putnam County. Her class anthology called, *Tiger Tales* has been an enormous success with the community. Because her county does not have a print shop like Kanawha, the Parent Teacher Organization has agreed to fund the project. Mrs. Cobb has published four anthologies in the first couple of years. Each edition features pieces by twenty-five percent of the student body. It is simply a winning idea all the way around!

Take Five with Jennifer Allen

The Spring 2010 edition's "Take Five" Q & A session focuses on Jennifer Allen, a 2008 Summer Institute fellow. Jennifer teaches English at Riverside High School and has recently become part of the CWVWP leadership team, taking on numerous roles.

Q1: Why did you want to become involved with the CWVWP leadership team? I gained so much from the ISI, I wanted to continue working with such inspiring teachers, best practices from the classroom and amazing writing experiences. My participation in the CWVWP (as a Fellow and as part of the leadership team) continues to take my teaching to the next level.

Q2: In what capacity are you involved? In other words, what are your duties? I attend the leadership meetings to offer anything I can to further the work of the writing project. I am conducting professional development workshops in both Kanawha and Webster Counties. I have also attended the annual meeting of the NWP, scored young writer's essays, and attended various writing excursions/activities.

Q3: What is the biggest challenge of leadership? Finding the time to be involved in everything I would like to be involved in.

Q4: What has been your most exciting experience being on the leadership team thus far? Being involved in new endeavors with the writing project, and seeing our hard work pay off is amazingly rewarding. It reminds me of the best parts of teaching!

Q5: Do you plan on continuing with leadership roles in the future? I will continue to work with the leadership team as long as they will have me. I love the camaraderie, the opportunities, and of course, the writing!

CWVWP and Diana School in Webster County

In the fall of 2009, CWVWP was contacted by Mrs. Rondlynn Cool, principal of Diana Elementary School in Diana, Webster County. While searching for professional development opportunities for her teachers to become better teachers of writing, she located the writing project via the CWVWP website, and Director Barbara Holmes agreed to bring writing project professional development to Diana School for a year or more. This is not only an opportunity for our teacher consultants to expand their repertoire to another county, but it also provides research opportunities as CWVWP analyzes the effects of their professional development design on teacher pedagogy and student writing.

During this calendar year, eleven talented and dedicated writing project teachers travel in teams of four to share their classroom-tested ideas for writing with Diana teachers. Each trip between South Charleston and the town of Diana takes seven hours, including three hours of classroom time. Every teacher in Diana School shows an equal level of commitment by giving up his or her Thursday evenings, by taking writing ideas back to the students, and by bringing the results to class to share. Our hats are off to the teachers of Diana Elementary School and to the teachers of Central West Virginia Writing Project for their collaborative work on behalf of Diana students. We expect to see great things happening as a result of their hard work and we are thrilled to be a part of Webster County's learning community



Holly Clark, Diana (Grades 3/4)

Letter from Dr. Cindy Daniel

In recent years, the Central WV Writing Project has had a great deal of support from key professionals at the Kanawha County central office. One of our most outstanding and dedicated supporters is Dr. Cindy Daniel, assistant superintendent of Kanawha County Schools. She is a major factor in our continued partnership with the school system and she has always shown her appreciation for what we do as a writing project. After attending our Invitational Summer Institute follow-up dinner in September, Dr. Daniel wrote a personal thank you card to our project director, Dr. Barbara Holmes.

Thank you so much for inviting me to the CWVWP dinner. I thoroughly enjoyed the evening. It was so wonderful to hear the "testimonials" from the teachers and to learn how they were integrating writing into their classrooms. I can't wait to visit some of their classrooms! I look forward to our continuing partnership next year. You and your staff have done an outstanding job and you are to be commended!

*Talk to you soon,
Cindy*

Due to the dedication of our directors, our leadership team, and our Writing Project teachers, our work at the CWVWP will continue to gain notice by gracious county leaders such as Dr. Daniel. The CWVWP certainly appreciates her kind words and acknowledgments.

Reminder: Leadership meetings are held on the second Monday of each month and open to all writing project teachers. Next meeting: May 10, 2010.