



## Western Massachusetts Writing Project

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## Who We Are

The Western Massachusetts Writing Project was founded in 1993. The site grew out of an established professional development program begun 20 years earlier by University of Massachusetts English Department faculty and initially funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities. We grew into an informal regional network, hosted as one of the Five College/Public School Partnership programs until becoming a National Writing Project site. Now, as the Western Massachusetts Writing Project, we are one of over 200 sites of the National Writing Project, with the English Department and the College of Humanities and Fine Arts at the University of Massachusetts Amherst as our home base.

Since our founding as a National Writing Project site, we have grown to become a network of over 200 pre-K through college teachers serving the urban, rural, and suburban areas of Western Massachusetts from the Berkshires to Worcester through professional development programs for area schools, advanced institutes and conferences, and contracted programs through the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. During the 2010-2011 school year, over 1,000 teachers participated in our offerings. We are also active in our state network, the Massachusetts Writing Project. All programs follow the National Writing Project's researched-based model of "teachers teaching teachers," shown to be effective in improving student performance and developing teacher leadership.

### Program Highlights

- **Invitational Summer Institute to Improve Literacy Instruction:** In this intensive program, 16 pre-K through college teachers from all content areas spend four weeks deeply engaged in writing, reading current research and theory, and planning and conducting classroom-based action research. They then return to their schools to apply their new learning in their classrooms, to share their learning with other teachers, and to take on leadership roles. Since 1993, over 200 institute fellows have received leadership training, enabling WMWP to offer professional development programs to over 1,000 teachers per year.
- **English Language Learners Initiative:** Since 1997, our network of ELL teacher-leaders has been providing Massachusetts-mandated professional development Category 1-4 training for teachers in all content areas, covering the skills and knowledge they need to work with the English language learners in their classrooms. WMWP also offers ongoing learning and support in the form of Leadership Institutes for ELL teachers.
- **Digital Literacy:** WMWP teachers explore ways to use technology to enhance learning of 21<sup>st</sup>-century literacy skills. Under the leadership of a WMWP Technology Team, our site regularly hosts a technology conference for Western Massachusetts educators, including this year's "Digital Composing and the Common Core: Using Pop Culture to Nurture Diverse Voices." Past themes

have included using digital storytelling and social networking for learning in all content areas. WMWP teachers have also contributed to the emerging *Digital Is* website, which is hosted by the National Writing Project and was funded by a grant from the MacArthur Foundation.

- **Common Core Standards Literacy Design Collaborative Team:** WMWP, as part of the Massachusetts Writing Project network, was one of five teams invited to participate in an NWP/Gates Foundation action research project associated with the new Common Core State Standards in 2010-2011. The aim of the project is to help teachers design rigorous curriculum modules that align standards, instruction, and assessment. As a result of this work, we have a team well trained to conduct professional development on achieving Common Core goals.
- **Best Practices in the Teaching of Writing:** Our annual one-day fall conference, drawing approximately 80 teachers, features sessions derived from classroom-based teacher-inquiry research by WMWP teachers and a keynote address by a valuable contributor to the field of education like 2011 Massachusetts Teacher of the Year Wilma Ortiz, a WMWP teacher.
- **Summer Youth Writing Programs:** We have offered one- and two-week youth writing programs in partnership with the Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School Middle School Enrichment Program, the YMCA of Greater Springfield, and the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Past programs include Digital Storytelling, Graphic Novels, and Cartooning and Gaming.

## The Multiplier Effect

Since 1993, 212 teachers have completed the WMWP Invitational Summer Institute. Since the institute prepares participants to be teacher leaders, their impact is felt not only by their students, but also their colleagues. Each of the 16 teachers in a summer institute works with, on average, 115 students, so over 1,500 students are impacted each year, and that number grows over time. The teachers also work with colleagues in their schools to improve instruction. Further, WMWP draws the most talented and experienced teachers from the pool of Summer Institute alumni to conduct professional development programs at area schools. Dozens of WMWP-trained teacher-consultants have conducted in-service workshops for thousands of teachers.



## Impact

In 2009-10, WMW offered 34 programs for a total of 1,496 program hours and attendance of 1,243 educators in our region. These programs ranged from one day workshops and conferences to one-week courses to our four-week Invitational Summer Institute and included both open programs offered by WMWP and school-based professional development programs.

WMWP offers schools and districts a rich array of professional development programs, distinctive because they are led by practicing teachers, trained through our Invitational Summer Institutes, and because they are tailored to each school's needs, not pre-packaged.

We work with a wide range of Western Massachusetts public, charter, and private schools annually including, in the past few years, Springfield, Holyoke, Greenfield, Worcester, Sturbridge, Athol, Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, Chicopee, Pioneer Valley Regional, Hampshire Regional, Berkshire Arts and Technology Charter School, Amherst, Hadley, and Hatfield schools.

The WMWP Invitational Summer Institute is designed on the National Writing Project model of

“teachers teaching teachers” that research has shown to be effective in improving student performance (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/results.csp>) and developing teacher leadership (Lieberman and Friedrich, *How Teachers Become Leaders*, Teachers College Press, 2010):

- In nine independent studies conducted by NWP, the improvement of students whose teachers participated in NWP professional development exceeded that of students whose teachers were not participants.
- In a WMWP study of two elementary schools—one with a cohort of WMWP teachers and one with only one WMWP teacher—students in the WMWP school achieved greater gains in writing than those in the other school.
- The Invitational Summer Institute helps retain teachers: An NWP study indicates that nationally, 97% of institute participants stay in classrooms and in the profession for over 17 years (NWP Legacy Study, March 2011).

### **Snapshots of Key Program Leaders**

**Susan Biggs**, Special Projects Coordinator, WMWP. Teacher of English, Tantasqua Regional High School, Fiskdale, MA. Former Field Director of Site Development with the National Writing Project.

**Anne Herrington**, WMWP Site Director. Distinguished Professor of English, University of Massachusetts Amherst. Recipient of the 2002 National Council of Teachers of English Award for Distinguished Research in the Teaching of English and University of Massachusetts Roy J. Zuckerberg Endowed Leadership Chair, 2007-08.

**Kevin Hodgson**, WMWP Technology Leader. Teacher of English, William E. Norris Elementary School, Southampton, MA. Recipient of Pioneer Valley Award for Excellence in Education.

**Wilma Ortiz-Marrero**, WMWP ELL Initiative Leader. ELL Teacher at Amherst Regional Middle School, Amherst, MA. Adjunct instructor, School of Education, University of Massachusetts Amherst and member of the NWP ELL Network Leadership Team. Massachusetts Teacher of the Year, 2011.

**Bruce M. Penniman**, WMWP Interim Coordinator of Professional Development. Retired teacher of English, Amherst Regional High School, Amherst, MA. Adjunct Instructor of English, University of Massachusetts Amherst. Massachusetts Teacher of the Year and National Teacher of the Year Finalist, 1999; President, New England Association of Teachers of English, 2000-2003.

### **Recent Book Publications**

Biggs, Susan, Kevin Hodgson, and Bruce Penniman. *The Challenge of Change: Growth through Inquiry at the Western Massachusetts Writing Project*. National Writing Project at Work Monograph Series. Berkeley, CA: National Writing Project, 2008.

Herrington, Anne, Kevin Hodgson and Charles Moran, eds. *Teaching the New Writing: Technology, Change, and Assessment in the 21st-Century Classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2009.

Penniman, Bruce M. *Building the English Classroom: Foundations, Support, Success*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2009.