

New-Site Leadership Institute Annual Report 2007-2008

Submitted by Richard VanDeWeghe

Summary of the Year's Work

Planning for the 2008 New-Site Leadership Institute (NSLI) began with a leadership team conference call in September to review the 2007 NSLI registrations and anticipate the details of the planning meeting in Denver in October. While the NSLI is planned and facilitated by a leadership team of experienced site leaders including directors, codirectors, and teacher-leaders, it is designed to respond to the questions and draw upon the expertise of all participants attending the institute.

With that in mind, the leadership team met in Denver for two days and was guided in its planning by the final reflections of the previous year's NSLI participants as well as by the critical questions and key issues named by new sites in their registrations for the event. Review of the previous year's final reflections led the leadership team to affirm the strengths of the institute and also to identify issues that called for rethinking and revision.

Review of the topics of particular interest to 2008 NSLI sites helped the team with participant-centered planning and included the following:

- Defining the role of an NWP site director and the roles of site leadership in the site's organizational structure
- Exploring the relationship between the summer invitational institute and the development of year-round programs
- Exploring the relationship between site development and the development of teacher-leaders
- Understanding how site-university relations can work from a business-planning perspective
- Clarifying the National Writing Project's annual cycle of reporting
- Understanding leadership paradigms in schools and universities as they complement or challenge the leadership paradigm of the NWP
- Understanding realistic expectations for a new site and site leadership in the early years
- Clarifying key terms and concepts in the NWP organization and culture.

The October planning meeting was followed by email correspondence to coordinate session planning and continue resource development in anticipation of a second daylong planning meeting at the Annual Meeting in New York, where institute materials were reviewed and revised. Those materials, including schedules, protocols,

and related resources, were then further refined and finalized by early December, when a pre-institute mailing of readings and resources was sent to the 2008 NSLI participants. The leadership team met again for a final full day of planning the day before the institute began in January.

Twenty-two site leaders from ten sites (listed below) participated in the 2008 New-Site Leadership Institute at the Emory Conference Center at Emory University outside Atlanta, January 12–15.

Longleaf Writing Project (AL)
Central Georgia Writing Project
Cherokee Rose Writing Project (GA)
Wayne State Writing Project (MI)
Genesee Valley Writing Project (NY)
Tar River Writing Project (NC)
Ohio University Appalachian Writing Project
Aiken Writing Project (SC)
Sam Houston Writing Project (TX)
Wasatch Range Writing Project (UT)

New-Site Leadership Institute Leadership Team

The NSLI leadership team represents a range of experience and leadership roles at local sites—from directors, to co-directors, to teacher-leaders. In assembling the team, we have kept in mind the importance of diversity of experience and perspective, including that of new sites and new-site leaders so that we stay in touch with the developmental needs of NSLI participants. Team members serve for an initial period of three years with an option to renew for an additional year.

The current NSLI leadership team consists of the following members:

Zsa Boykin, Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project
Cheryl Canada, Mid Ohio Writing Project
Katherine Frank, Southern Colorado Writing Project
Alexa Sandmann, Kent State Writing Project
Rick VanDeWeghe, Field Director, National Writing Project
Robert Yagelski, Capitol District Writing Project
Pat Fox, Thinking Partner, National Writing Project
Shannon Fulton, Program Specialist, National Writing Project

Katherine Frank and Robert Yagelski joined the team in 2008, while Zsa Boykin and Cheryl Canada joined in 2006. Alexa Sandman will rotate off and a new member will join the leadership team after the January 2009 NSLI. Keeping in mind the goal of developing capacity to serve sites by developing leadership, in October 2007 Rick VanDeWeghe took over the role of NSLI coordinator from Pat Fox, who moved to the role of thinking partner for this program.

Reflections on the Year's Work

Providing opportunities for participants' feedback and debriefing at regular intervals throughout the 2007 institute and considering participants' final 2007 evaluations, the leadership team posed the following questions to help us refine the scope of its work:

- How can the institute be designed to combine communicating specific information, responding to individual questions, and collaborative sharing of knowledge?
- How can the institute celebrate and validate the achievement of participating sites to date?
- What structures/schedules will best support the learning?
- How will the team function to facilitate the event?
- What can/should sites do to prepare (e.g., read monographs) for the event, and how should their preparations be utilized during the institute?

The NSLI 2008 planning built on the successes of previous institutes while implementing some revisions to the institute schedule, most notably some adjustments designed to balance the leadership team's roles as facilitators with the goal of providing sufficient time for working teams of site leaders to collaborate and receive feedback in developing strategic plans for their sites.

The leadership team identified a variety of resources that address key issues of particular interest to new-site leaders and built a space for addressing those issues in our planning. As a result, we included in the pre-institute mailing a copy of "The National Writing Project: Scaling Up, Scaling Down," the NWP monograph "A Work in Progress: The Benefits of Early Recruitment for the Summer Institute," and the *Educational Leadership* article "Teachers, Writers, Leaders," along with a prompt that invited participants to wrestle with the issues raised by the texts, to embrace and resist the ideas they found there, and to identify questions about site work that arose during their reading. Participants' careful reading of the texts served as the basis for our discussions on Saturday and allowed us to identify key issues and terms that framed our work throughout the institute.

In addition to planning and facilitating the institute, the NSLI leadership team sees an essential part of its work as offering site development workshops of special interest to new sites at the NWP Annual Meeting. In 2007, in New York, NSLI sponsored *Developing Site Leadership* and *How New Sites Recruit, Develop, and Organize Site Leadership* workshops. With the goal of continuing to develop leadership both locally and nationally, in planning and presenting these workshops we called upon the expertise of leadership teams from seven new sites that had previously participated

in NSLI, each of whom shared their strategies and experiences on the two workshop topics.

Plans for the year ahead

2009 New-Site Leadership Institute Planning

Site leaders from ten new NWP sites (listed below) have registered to participate in the 2009 NSLI. The NSLI leadership team, along with members of the NWP staff, met in Denver in October, to continue the task of identifying and developing resources and planning for the 2009 New-Site Leadership Institute to be held in Atlanta, at the Emory Conference Center, January 16–19.

Taking to heart what we are learning from NSLI participants and from other work with new sites as mentors and colleagues, the NSLI leadership team continues to refine its understanding of its members' roles as facilitators. In addition the team continues to refine the institute schedule, keeping in mind the need to provide specific resources and essential information while, at the same time, honoring both the questions and concerns as well as the expertise that new-site leaders bring to our work together.

To begin our planning we considered the 2008 NSLI reflections, which echoed many of the themes present in previous years' reflections: Participants told us that in addition to the readings and specific information on the business of running a site (e.g. budgets, reporting, annual cycle of work), they particularly valued the opportunities for extended time to work in teams on issues of key importance to their local sites, and they wanted more time to extend that work. As a result, the leadership team revised the institute to provide more time for "consultancies" and extended blocks of time for site teams to work together to identify key issues, develop action plans, and receive critical feedback from colleagues.

The leadership team also attended to participants' reading preparation for the institute and determined to be more utilitarian in how those preparations are integrated into the institute activities. Finally, the team collaborated on planning for more purposeful ways that we can facilitate discussions at the institute through more deliberate cognitive questioning and coaching.

An ongoing focus of the work of the NSLI leadership team is to identify and develop appropriate new resources to support the work of new sites. As a team, we now think of our NSLI work in the broader context of the NWP, and we are more deliberate in our ways of thinking about existing resources that may be helpful to new sites as well as developing new resources to facilitate the work of these sites. With this goal in mind, the leadership team spent time in Denver reviewing current NWP web resources as well as opening an ongoing discussion on potential new resources to be developed by leadership team members as well as by leaders from new sites that have participated in earlier New-Site Leadership Institutes.

Participating 2009 sites

East Texas Writing Project
Eastern Illinois Writing Project
Kean University Writing Project (NJ)
Maryland Writing Project at UMCP
MayaWest Writing Project (PR)
Piasa Bluffs Writing Project (IL)
Seven Valleys Writing Project (NY)
University of Illinois Writing Project
University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee Writing Project
Upper Cumberland Writing Project (TN)

Annual Meeting Presence

At the 2008 annual meeting in San Antonio, three members of the NSLI leadership team will facilitate three sessions that speak directly to the issues of leadership development and organization, key concerns expressed by new-site leaders that we have studied in our work with new sites over the past four years. Facilitators for these sessions include twelve site leaders from six sites that have participated in previous New-Site Leadership Institutes, as we continue to build leadership capacity in our own ranks.

Resource Development

As we work, we continue to add to our growing list of resources a list that includes the newest volume of the NWP at Work monographs on continuity, along with several articles and chapters that address issues of particular interest to new sites. We also draw attention to these resources in the pre-institute mailing that prepares sites for NSLI and in the institute itself. In the past year, a new NSLI Web resource has appeared: NSLI past participant Vicki Holmsten's (Bisti WP) "Knowing When to Make Coffee: Lessons in Leadership and Change for a New Site Leader." The leadership team sees as an essential and ongoing part of its work not only to continue to identify and develop resources but also to consider useful ways to frame them. Our focus over the next year will include imagining ways to make resources, including strategies for local sites to work with these resources, available through the NWP website.

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