The Director’s Corner

by Jason Courtmanche

Forty years ago this summer, educators in Berkeley, California formed the Bay Area Writing Project and held their first ever summer institute. (You can read more about the NWP’s early years in James Gray’s memoir, http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/about/history.csp).

In 1982, three English professors at UConn invited James Gray to Connecticut, where he helped establish the Connecticut Writing Project. We’re holding our 32nd Summer Institute this year as one of the oldest sites in the nation, and third oldest in the Northeast.

We are fortunate to celebrate the NWP’s anniversary as one of the most stable and well-supported sites in the country. The Aetna Endowment, set up in 1986, has formed a bedrock upon which we have been able to build the project. And although the NWP (along with 56 other literacy and education programs) lost direct federal funding in 2011, the NWP has been very successful at garnering competitive grant funds from the federal government, and our site has been successful at being awarded internally competitive streams of funding for Teacher Leadership and Work in High Need Schools.

This year, $40,000 in federal grants, along with just under $5,000 in additional awards, will provide funding for a half dozen leadership positions, at least a dozen research mini-grants for teachers, the production and publication of Connecticut Student Writers and Teacher-Writer, and 30 or more hours of professional development for teachers at Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven. We’re also working with K-12 English/Language Arts teachers at 12 schools in Manchester.

But challenges to funding and support never cease, so talk up the good work of the Writing Project to your colleagues and administrators, and help us succeed into the next decade.
CWP-Storrs Awarded Two SEED Grants for Teacher Leadership and Work in a High Need School, for 2014-2016

The Connecticut Writing Project-Storrs has been awarded a $20,000 grant for Teacher Leadership Development. The CWP will use the funds to provide mini-grants to teachers who will be attending this year’s Summer Institute. Teachers will receive Fellowships from the Aetna Endowed Chair of Writing to spend four weeks studying and practicing current research in the teaching of writing. The mini-grants will allow the participating teachers to expand upon their research during the following academic year. The grant will take effect July 1st, 2014 and end August 31st, 2016.

The CWP also received word that it had been awarded a second $20,000 grant for Work in a High Need School. The CWP will partner with Metropolitan Business Academy in New Haven. The CWP is required to provide 30 or more hours of intensive professional development for a critical mass of teachers focused on supporting students in meeting rigorous college- and career-ready writing standards during the 2014-2015 school year, including summer of 2015. The CWP will continue its work with Metro to develop senior English courses into credit-bearing courses.

MA in English for Teachers Accepts First Applicants

The English Department at UConn has accepted its first three teachers into the CWP-designed Master of Arts in English for Teachers program. They are Steve Staysniak (SI 12), Kerri Brown (SI 13), and Courtney Payzant.

The MA for Teachers was developed as a result of the university’s responses to changes in state and federal law regarding teacher training and certification. In particular, now that the university offers a dual degree in both the content area and education at the undergraduate level as part of an Integrated Bachelor’s/Master’s program, and the federal government requires teachers to meet highly qualified standards that call for content area degrees, the CWP took the initiative to develop a track for qualified high school English teachers to receive their MA in English.

The requirements for the program are the same as those for the regular MA but place greater emphasis on writing courses (both rhetoric and composition as well as creative writing), and include a Summer Institute with the CWP. Upon completion of the degree, teachers are encouraged to become teachers of Early College Experience English in their schools and/or to host peer writing centers, supported by the CWP’s collaboration with the Writing Center’s Secondary Outreach Program. To find out more information about the MA in English for Teachers, visit the English Department’s website at http://www.english.uconn.edu/mateacher.html.
Once again, legislators from Connecticut, and from the Northeast in general, provided much support for continued funding for the National Writing Project and other national professional development organizations for educators, which must compete for funds from a set aside of Title II of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

This year's National Writing Project Spring Meeting was held in Washington, DC from March 26th-28th. As always, hundreds of educators from across the country converged upon the Capitol to conduct legislative visits to their senators and representatives, seeking signatures on the Dear Colleague letters that enable a bill to move forward toward law.

As in previous years, the representatives from Connecticut were highly supportive of the NWP and its three Connecticut sites at UConn, Fairfield University, and Central Connecticut State University. This year, Directors Jason Courtmanche and Bryan Crandall met with the education aides of all five representatives and both senators. Representative Courtney, as usual, met personally with the Directors, as did Representative Larson this year. Representative Courtney, who sits on the Education Committee, signed the dear colleague letter, as did Representative Jim Himes. Representatives Larson and Esty submitted their own letters of support to the Appropriations Committee. (Representative DeLauro, because she is on the Appropriations Committee, cannot sign or submit such a letter, but the Directors did meet with her education aide, Eric Anthony). Likewise, both Senators Murphy and Blumenthal signed their letter.

In the previous two years, the NWP was awarded $23 and $15 millions dollar grants.
Rhode Island WP Director Jenn Cook dies tragically in traffic accident

Jenn Cook has been a good friend of many at the CWP since she began as the director of the Rhode Island Writing Project in 2010. Many TCs from Connecticut have attended RIWP’s annual spring conference, and CWP Director Jason Courtmanche has been a regular presenter during the last three years.

Tragically, Jenn was killed after being struck by a pick-up truck in Syracuse on March 14th. Jenn’s mother was also injured in the accident. Sadly, Jenn was visiting her father at the time, who was terminally ill and died shortly after the accident.

CWP Teachers Work with Scholastic

The Connect Writing Project hosted a Region-at-Large scoring of student writing as part of the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers’ Scholastic Art and Writing Award contest. Twenty-two teachers scored more than 2,000 submissions. The contest raised $2250 for CWP.

Many TCs, notably Vicky Nordlund (SI 95) of Rockville High, had students perform well in Scholastic’s annual contest.

Awards and Accolades for CWP TCs

Emily Hernberg (SI 12) and her colleague Christian Bonarrigo of New Canaan High School was awarded the Joseph Zola Memorial Holocaust Educators Award. According to the University of Hartford website, the two educators were given this award “for their proposal, ‘Senior English Elective: Literature of the Holocaust.’ The course integrates the works of writers of fiction and non-fiction on the Holocaust, poetry from ghettos and camps, as well as novels and movies by survivors.”

Emily Wojcik (SI 10) was named Managing Editor of the Massachusetts Review, which can be found here: http://www.massreview.org/.

Ricki Ginsberg (SI 09) joins Dani King and Wendy Glenn as co-editors of the ALAN Review, which can be found here: http://www.alan-ya.org/the-alan-review/.

Joe Anastasio (SI 07) is now assistant principal of Old Saybrook High School.
**Pitney Bowes Grant Funds CSW Magazine**

Each year Pitney-Bowes awards approximately $1.4 million in Literacy and Education grants. This money is focused on improving the access to books, closing the achievement gap and preparing people for successful employment. This year, the CWP-Storrs was the recipient of a $2,500 Literacy and Education grant that defrayed the cost of printing *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine.

While a $2,500 grant may seem small, it covers most of the cost of printing the 500 copies of CSW magazine the CWP distributes each year, which reach hundreds of teachers and thousands of students.

This year, as happens every year, there were many heartening stories that cannot be calculated on merit reports or data sheets. One teacher wrote the CWP office to tell the story of a student in protective custody with DCF whose teacher and case worker brought her to Recognition Night so she could receive her award. Another teacher posted a video he created on his district’s website showing his two students receiving their awards. A set of grandparents who had driven down from Massachusetts mailed in a donation to the CWP in honor of their “beloved granddaughter.”

Some 500 teachers, students, and parents drove to Storrs to eat good food in the lobby, hear good writing read aloud by K-12 students, and to hear Rita Williams-Garcia talk about her childhood memories of the first time she was published.

In the lobby, Ms. Williams-Garcia greeted students and signed copies of her books at a table provided by Suzy Staubach of the UConn Coop Bookstore.

“Chills! Nothing but chills and a lot of smiling. ... So glad to have been a part of everything. Thank you for putting this together. You all are doing a greater thing than you know. Just wonderful!” said Ms. Williams-Garcia.

North Windham Compañeros teacher Danna Irons and her 3rd grade student Joana at Recognition Night. Photo courtesy of TC Helen Martin.
Professors Courtmanche and Forbes were among many faculty members and local writers who helped the UConn Coop Bookstore inaugurate its first year.

Sean Forbes joined his predecessors as Director of Creative Writing, Penelope Pelizzon and Ellen Litman, as part of the Creative Writing Program’s reading series, while Jason Courtmanche and CWP TC Michelle Vigue (SI 08) were part of the Roar Reading Series, sponsored by Elephant Rock Books, a local book publisher run by Jotham Burrello.

Forbes read from his first book of poetry, *Providencia*, named for the small Caribbean island where he was born. Courtmanche read a draft of a memoir in progress about his recently deceased father.


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