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Writing institute invigorates teachers

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

For teachers of writing at all levels, the search for new, effective methods of instruction is never ending. In Oakland University's **Meadow Brook Writing Project** (MBWP), writing instructors from across metro Detroit aren't just talking about writing, they're engaged in the act of writing while sharing ideas and inspiring each other to take innovative teaching methods back to their own classrooms.

"The Meadow Brook Writing Project is the best that's ever happened to me academically," said Regina Hendrix, a language arts and reading instructor at Winter Halter Middle School in Detroit. "Writing is something I love to do – it pulls me in by my heartstrings. And, the project connects me to other people who take writing very seriously." About 20 writing teachers from elementary to collegiate levels are invited to participate in the project's **Invitational Summer Institute**, which provides opportunities to learn innovative teaching practices and form a network of writing instructors. Partners in the project include Detroit Public Schools, Macomb County schools, Oakland Community College and OU's public school academies.

Over the course of a month, each institute participant presents a demonstration project, writes freely in personal and professional modes, participates in smaller reading groups, promotes conversation about writing across grade levels and disciplines, and reflects on their own writing and teaching practices. By engaging in these activities, instructors develop critical teaching and writing skills and become effective mentors for other writing teachers.

"We firmly believe that the best teachers of writing are other teachers," said OU Professor of Rhetoric and MBWP Director Ron Sudol. "Writing instructors can help each other make the connection between theory and practice. We also believe that teachers of writing must be writers themselves."

In a typical morning session, Darlene Egberts, an instructor at Detroit Edison Public School Academy, puts her fellow institute members to work by demonstrating teaching techniques she uses with first grade students with learning disabilities. Egberts asks institute members to write down verbs and nouns that come to mind while listening to selected pieces of music. Members write words on index cards and work in teams to construct sentences with their cards, thus demonstrating how the concept of sentence structure is introduced to young learners.

Institute members also write three thematic pieces on personal topics in different genres. In afternoon workshops, members meet in small groups to share and discuss each other's writings and work on group revision. The resulting works can be used by each individual instructor in their own classrooms to demonstrate the writing process and help students complete their own writing projects.

"Personal writing based on first-hand experience lends authenticity to the piece," Hendrix said. "Helping our students achieve this helps them find their individual voices as writers, and writing in multiple genres helps the writer look at their subject matter from a different perspective."

Karen Kline, a first grade teacher also from Detroit Edison Public School Academy, said the summer institute is an invigorating experience that not only gives her new ideas for teaching but also invigorates her enthusiasm for writing.

"I've left the institute with new ideas for teaching writing every single day," Kline said. "We have a wide variety of instructors here, from grade school to the university level, and it's helpful to see how students need to progress to be successful writers in college. We have an opportunity to learn about writing at different levels, which is something I'm not often exposed to."

"Engaging in writing also provides personal growth. It's important for kids to see adults and teachers as writers. I'll be bringing in some of my own writing to show them. The institute is just a fabulous, valuable experience."

The MBWP is part of the **National Writing Project**, a network of 176 sites nationwide dedicated to improving writing, literacy and teaching in schools K-16. For more information about institute activities and its members, visit the **Meadow Brook Writing Project** Web site or contact Ron Sudol at (248) 370-2191 or sudol@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

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