Title: Northwest Writing Teachers’ Collective

Primary Applicant: Tracy L. Coskie (Associate Professor /Literacy Faculty)

Other Collaborators: Michelle Hornof (NBCT/5th grade teacher); Stephanie Dethlefs (Director – Whatcom Young Writers/WWU Literacy Instructor); Jackie Brown (1st grade teacher)

What is the Northwest Writing Teachers’ Collective?

This innovative, teacher-centered group is focused on improving the teaching of writing K-12. It is for pre-service and in-service teachers who want to understand and support the writers in their classrooms, learn with and from other writing teachers, and take their writing instruction to the next level. Using an inquiry-oriented approach, the work of the Collective is based on reading, action research, discussion, and teachers’ own writing. To learn more, please visit http://nwwritingteachers.org/.

What was accomplished through the grant?

“This was a powerful experience which has changed the way I write and teach writing. Thanks again for the insightful, powerful and supportive environment you created for us.” - Kelly Joy, 6th grade, Mt. Vernon

Funding from the College’s Innovation Grant provided stipends for development and facilitation of the core series, materials for the sessions (including the beginnings of a professional lending library), and for promotion of the organization.

Development and Facilitation of the Core Series

• Facilitators designed the organization’s “core series” – six three-hour foundational sessions that incorporate both teacher as writer and a project in which the teacher investigates his or her own writing instruction. Our intent is that this series will be offered at least once each year and can be repeated by participants.

• Facilitators then offered the core series winter quarter 2012 for a group of 50 teachers from the region. These teachers included pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as novice (one year of experience) through expert (twenty-five year plus years of experience), and spanned the range from Kindergarten teachers to twelfth grade AP English teachers. The group included teachers from nine different districts and three independent schools.

• As a part of the core series teachers developed an inquiry project on some aspect of their writing instruction. For example, teachers investigated gathering data via anecdotal notes, structuring their writing conferences, implementing engagement strategies, using effective student self-assessment, supporting students throughout the writing process, modeling during
instruction, and creating year-long sequences for the curriculum while still being responsive to student needs. As one teacher noted, understanding how to engage in inquiry in her own classroom was even more important than the actual question she investigated during the series.

- Each teacher also chose individual writing projects to develop. Some chose personal or creative projects – letters to daughters getting married, collections of poetry, etc. – while others developed professional pieces – portfolio entries, journal articles, etc. Participants noted that the writing experience was as important as the inquiry project, especially in terms of impacting their enthusiasm and confidence during their own teaching.

Outcomes Summary
- Developed and refined Core Series curriculum
- Served 50 teachers in the first offering (Wtr 2012)
- Served 30 teachers in the second offering (Fall 2013)
- Purchased resource books for a lending library

What are NWTC’s “Next Steps”?

We have already accomplished one of our “next steps” which was to offer a repeat of the core series. This fall we accommodated 30 teachers (again, a wide range of teachers from across the region) in the six session series.

This winter we will offer a book study focused on assessing writers, which was by far the most requested topic teachers wanted to see from NWTC.

We are currently in the process of bringing teachers into leadership positions, and beginning to develop our leadership strand.

We also met with the Director of the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession as well as the Direct of the Puget Sound Writing Project to collaborate and support one another in our work. This collaboration includes future funding, such as grant applications, and non-profit status for NWTC.

Thank You

Funding from the College of Education allowed us to foster community relationships and a culture of learning. We have been able to bring together a diverse array of teaching professionals from the region and are continuing to work with them to develop the practices that will best support all of the young writers in their classrooms.