Visioning Retreat

The site held its first Visioning Retreat at Thetford Lodge on April 18 and 19.   The purpose of the Retreat was to collaboratively create a "big picture" (identity) of the site, identify new program opportunities, resources, and site leaders, and build a strategic plan. Many National Writing Project sites are finding Visioning Retreats to be an effective way to bring together directors and teacher leaders to take stock of where the site has been and how they hope to see it grow in the future. This seemed a particularly good time for our site to ask these questions. We are looking at a couple of significant changes in leadership, we have a healthy and functioning infrastructure that will support growth, and we have a new group of positive, talented, energetic future site leaders. Writing Project sites are described as professional homes for teacher leaders. This seemed a good way for us to come together and construct a professional home that serves site needs and will support us in meeting the needs of teachers in our area.

Some of the questions that guided our work were:
- What is the work of Writing Project sites?
- What does the work look like at our site?
- What is the purpose and goal of each program and how do our Summer Institute, Inservice and Continuity programs support each other?
- Who leads the work and how do we support new leadership?

Participants were asked to prepare for the Retreat by doing some reading about the work of Writing Project sites. At the Retreat, the group talked about the Writing Project model, strengths of the site, and developed a "wish list" of ideas for future growth. As the group organized and refined their ideas, the most compelling ideas around the top focus areas were the following:

Technology
- *Recruit a team to support the Technology Liaison*
- *Establish a Facebook site*
- *Survey the Summer Institute participants, maybe through small focus groups about their continuing needs and interests*
- *Connect teachers with and through online community.*
- *Create a Study Group or Open Institute around the topics of online tools, video, fun ideas*

Inservice
- *Recruit a teacher to develop opportunities with SKSD*
- *Establish long-term partnerships with schools and districts*
- *Decide what we want inservice to be*
- *Look at how we are recruiting*

The Summer Institute

- *Invite TCs (former Summer Institute participants) back to coach demonstration lessons*
- *Inquiry: Use questioning in demonstrations to inform practice*
- *Transition folks from SI into the OWP community.*
- *Work toward a balance between self-selection and informing teachers about opportunities.*
- *Make personal contacts after panel or focus groups*
- *Mentoring by Board of new TCs*
- *Look collaboratively at student work*
- *Develop what coaching now means with inquiry piece for SI team and add to model demonstrations.*

Continuity

- *Design Saturday sessions: spelling, revision, etc*
- *Make personal connections:*
    - *Exit interview from SI. Follow up with these folks*
    - *Pair experienced presenters with new presenters*
- *Blog and Facebook*
- *Invite TCs back to coach Summer Institute demonstrations*
- *Resource links on website for TCs – link to online tools*
- *Establish partnerships with schools, districts, others.*
- *Plan regional events close to where we have clusters of TCs*
- *Marathon*
- *TC Writing Club*

"Other"

- *Get thank you cards and magnets, lanyards, temporary tattoos, etc.*
- *Mentoring our own leadership: being "three deep"*
- *Recruiting for diversity*
- *Support for native language learners*
- *Young Authors Day*

The Advisory Board has already made progress implementing these ideas. The technology group has tentatively identified a team to work with our Tech Liaison, Grant Huhn. We have a Facebook site, and we are exploring ways to create a Blog and develop an Open Institute around issues in technology. Melody Munger has joined the site Leadership team to coordinate our Continuity efforts; Saturday Sessions, led by Linda Wallmark, Pam Prosise, Megan Garcia, Karen Kinnett, and Lois Rosen have been scheduled; and members of the Board have written personal notes to recent TCs to invite them to reconnect with the site through various activities planned for this summer and fall. The team of Steve Jones, incoming Summer Institute director Nancy Fischer, and Heather Woodward have shifted the design of demonstration lessons to include an inquiry focus and coaching sessions by TCs.

If you are interested in working with us in any of these areas, please contact
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