

# Nebraska Writing Project

## 2012 IMPACT STUDY

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*“The Nebraska Writing Project makes teachers better, stronger, and smarter. In turn, this makes their students better, stronger, and smarter people who will be better people living richer lives and contributing more meaningfully in our communities.”*

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Participants from more than three decades of work by the Nebraska Writing Project (NeWP) report that their involvement with NeWP has had a significantly positive impact on their teaching, their students, their careers, and their personal lives.

Over the past year the Nebraska Writing Project sat down for interviews with several of its highly accomplished participants and surveyed the past ten years of NeWP participants in order to learn from them how the Nebraska Writing Project has affected their teaching, their students, and their lives. In their interviews and through the responses of 92 survey participants, these NeWP participants shared dramatic stories of the ways in which their involvement in NeWP has provided them with new and research-based teaching strategies, significantly improved their students’ writing performance and attitude toward writing, connected them with a vital network of other talented educators from across the state, provided them with opportunities for class room research, and lead them to important roles as educational leaders and advocates.

### **Quantitative Results of 2012 Nebraska Writing Project Impact Survey**

A survey of 92 educators who have participated in the Nebraska Writing Project in the last ten years shows:

- Over 90% of respondents agree, to varying degrees, that NeWP immediately affected how they teach writing. (Table 1)
- Over 90% of respondents agree, to varying degrees, that they still use ideas, practices, and strategies they learned in NeWP (Table 1)
- Over 90% agree or strongly agree that NeWP significantly affected how they see themselves as professionals (Table 1)
- Nearly all of those surveyed (93%) agreed, to varying degrees, that their involvement in NeWP significantly impacted the way in which they perceived themselves as professionals, while a further 72% report that their participation in NeWP contributed to the advancement of their careers. (Table 1)
- 60% of those surveyed report having established and continuing to maintain, to varying degrees, a network with other professional educators, based on their experience(s) with NeWP. (Table 1)
- Over 76% of those surveyed returned to participate in further Nebraska Writing Project institutes or activates beyond their first experience. (Table 2)
- The responses of over 80% of those surveyed suggest that they have continued writing professionally or personally after their experience(s) with NeWP and nearly 30% have submitted work for publication and/or had their writing professionally published. While 34% of those surveyed have self-published their own work and another 37% have facilitated the publication of other’s work, including that of their students. (Table 3)

**Table 1: Perception and Effects of Nebraska Writing Project Experiences**

	Degree of Agreement with Statement	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
My first involvement with the Nebraska Writing Project immediately affected the way I taught writing in my classroom	Strongly Agree 7	51	55.4%
	6	20	21.7%
	5	15	16.3%
	4	5	5.43%
	3	0	0%
	2	0	0%
	Strongly Disagree 1	1	1.1%
I continue to use teaching strategies, practices, or ideas I was exposed to during the Nebraska Writing Project.	Strongly Agree 7	52	57%
	6	22	24%
	5	9	10%
	4	6	7%
	3	2	2%
	2	0	0%
My participation in the Nebraska Writing Project has significantly affected how I see myself as a professional	Strongly Agree 7	42	46%
	6	26	32%
	5	14	15%
	4	3	3%
	3	3	3%%
	2	0	0%
8. My participation in the Nebraska Writing Project has contributed to advancements in my career (e.g. leadership, promotions, degrees, etc.).	Strongly Agree 7	38	41%
	6	16	17%
	5	13	14%
	4	16	17%
	3	2	2%
	2	2	2%
	Strongly Disagree 1	4	4%
I have maintained or pursued professional networking opportunities with individuals I met through the Nebraska Writing Project.	Strongly Agree 7	31	34%
	6	11	12%
	5	13	14%
	4	15	16%
	3	10	11%
	2	6	7%
	Strongly Disagree 1	5	5%
Since my participation in the Nebraska Writing Project, I have continued writing professionally and/or personally.	Strongly Agree 7	38	41%
	6	18	20%
	5	16	21%
	4	16	13%
	3	2	2%
	2	0	0%
	Strongly Disagree 1	2	2%

**Table 2:**  
**Participation in the Nebraska Writing Project**

Activity	Respondents	Percent
Summer Institute	76	82%
Technology Institute	26	28%
Literature Institute	28	30%
Leadership Institute	4	4%
Rural Institute	19	21%
Embedded Institute	10	11%
Young Writer's Program	15	16%
Writing Groups	33	36%
Writing Marathons	34	37%
Writing Retreats	19	20%
Teacher Research/Study Group	16	17%
Internships	6	7%
Inservice	8	9%
Advisory Board	25	27%
Other	11	12%

*“The  
Nebraska  
Writing  
Project  
Changed my  
life.”*

**Table 3:**  
**Participant Writing Activity Since Nebraska Writing Project Experience(s)**

Writing Activity	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Submitted for publication	25	27%
Published	24	26%
Self-Published my own Writing	31	34%
Facilitate publication by others	34	37%
Shared my writing with family or friends	74	81%
Shared my writing with my students	84	92%
Shared my writing with my colleagues	66	73%
None of the above	4	4%

*“The Nebraska Writing Project inspired me to remain in education.”*

# Qualitative Results of 2012 Nebraska Writing Project Impact Survey

*“Networking with other teachers and professionals rejuvenates those of us in the trenches. The NeWP facilitates sharing, good practices, and researched based classroom friendly activities and discussions. I love that you take something with you and come home with tons more to try.”*

From participants’ responses to a series of open-ended questions (see Figure 1) emerged five areas in which participants identified their Nebraska Writing Project involvement as having significantly affected their teaching, their careers, and their lives. The narrative responses which participants provided suggest that, for them, the Nebraska Writing Project:

- Has given them concrete lessons, teaching strategies, research-based pedagogies, and connections to other professional educators which they are able to bring back directly to their classrooms and implement for the benefit of students.
- Has directly benefited their students’ learning, attitudes toward writing, and performance.
- Directly contributed to participants’ career advancement, professional achievements, decision to pursue graduate degrees, and opportunity serve as leaders within their schools, districts, and states.
- Has provided them with a space to grow professionally, personally, and as a writer.

**Figure 1: Qualitative Questions**

Please describe any evidence you have that your involvement in the Nebraska Writing Project has influenced your students learning, writing, and/or achievement.

What would you describe as the key value or worth of the Nebraska Writing Project?

Why have you continued to participate in the Nebraska Writing Project?

*“The Nebraska Writing Project changes the life of a teacher. Upon completion of the summer institute I felt valued as a professional educator, I saw myself as a writer personally and professionally, and I was transformed as a writing teacher.*

*It is the most worthwhile professional development/college course I have ever taken.”*

*“I had been told that I would be forever impacted by the Nebraska Writing Project, but as with hot things on the stove, I didn't believe it until I felt the passion and heart that these teachers had for writing and the teaching of writing. It was something that was infectious, and I believe that I have only continued to grow from this capstone moment in my personal and professional life.”*

## What Teachers Are Bringing Back to their Classrooms:

NeWP teachers report bringing back a range of teaching ideas and strategies to their classrooms and continuing to draw on these ideas and resources year's after their first exposure to them. Some of these strategies and resources they report drawing on, include:

- The writing workshop model used in throughout NeWP Institutes and activities
- A variety of teaching ideas and materials drawn from NeWP colleagues' teaching presentations (EQUIPs)
- Place conscious teaching, theory, and writing
- Writing Marathons
- The creation of Writer's Clubs
- Renewed inspiration and energy for teaching
- Research-based strategies for teaching writing at all levels
- Collaboration with teachers and their students from other schools and towns.
- Ideas for better instructing and assessing students' higher level thinking skills through writing.
- Ideas for adapting writing instruction in ways that meet both district standards and allow for meaningful instruction.

### In Their Words:

- "Every day I use something that came from my own or another teacher's NeWP knowledge. Some of it is writing, some is the critical thought that went into projects, and some is application of tasks outside of writing, but each day I use something from NeWP."
- "I am more actively doing research in the area of writing pedagogy than I was prior to the Summer Institute."
- "The Nebraska Writing Project revitalizes the creative spark that teachers have. It allows them the space and freedom to engage in the expression of themselves with other professionals which leads them to find new ways to revitalize (or ignite) the spark in their own classrooms."
- "I value the conversations that are able to occur across teaching contexts. Collaborating with teachers from varying situations (i.e. grade level, geographic area, etc.) helps me better understand my relationship to my teaching context and improve my decision making as a teacher of writing."

## Benefits to Student Learning and Achievement:

NeWP participants report, since their participation in NeWP activities, both quantifiable evidence of their students' improved writing performance and anecdotal evidence of their improved writing, learning, and attitudes toward writing. Since engaging in their first NeWP experience, teachers report:

### In Their Words:

- "As an 11th grade teacher our students' writing scores were excellent. As a 12th grade teacher, students comment on being well prepared for college level writing."
- "The best evidence I had that the NeWP benefitted my students was their eagerness to write! "
- "When I taught high school, our statewide writing scores were consistently high, but better standards for success would be the number of students who told me about sharing their writing with friends and family members, who told me that "writing saved their lives," or who discovered their own voice, power, and skill in writing. On college level course evaluations and in portfolio narratives, my students consistently tell me that they appreciate what they learned about writing for real purposes and for real audiences, about working with others on their writing, and about how they rediscovered the joy in writing or how they felt themselves to be "good writers" for the first time ever in my class."
- "NeWP fosters a philosophy of teaching writing that helps a teacher embrace the growth of student writers in individualized and sustainable ways. It is an attitude that I bring to my writing instruction that allows students to learn without being intimidated because they see that I am a writer, too.."

- Improvements in their students' scores on standardized district and state level writing assessments.
- An increase in the number of students who identify themselves as writers.
- Encouraging students to submit their work for publication and many students having their work published in a variety of print and electronic venues.
- The publication of students' writing through self-published books and literary journals.
- Students continue to receive recognition for their writing through national contests and local ones including the Nebraska Poetry of Place contest.
- By becoming writers themselves again, teachers have an increased ability to empathize with the writing experiences of their students and thereby compose better writing asks and create better instruction.
- Students beginning their own independent writing projects (such as novels, essays, and poetry) and eagerly sharing them with their teachers.

### In Students' Words

- "Writing groups this semester were very helpful. A thing I liked about them was talking to kids who were going through the same struggles with writing a paper and having them give me help or me helping them."
- "I enjoyed working in a group as my peers always offered valuable insight on my papers. It was interesting to gather their opinions and take them into consideration. It helped to strengthen many areas of my essays."
- "I love hearing others' opinions. It is so interesting to put many ideas together so you can have the best approach to the topic possible."
- "I found the writing groups to be very helpful in the writing progress of each paper. The group affected my writing because it made me look at my paper from a reader's perspective. I tried to detach myself from the writer and read my papers as I was reading them for the first time. I thought the writing groups were effective because they gave good feedback. I liked the use of author's notes because they helped the discussions go smoothly and positively because the group knew exactly what kind of feedback the author was looking for."

## Career Advancement and Teacher Leadership:

Nebraska Writing Project participants suggest that their involvement with NeWP has dramatically impacted the trajectory of their careers and professional lives. Moreover, many report that because of the confidence and knowledge they gained through their NeWP experiences, they have become leaders within their schools, districts, and even state educational communities. NeWP teachers report:

- Going on to pursue careers (in addition to or in lieu of their K-12 teaching careers) in community college and university teaching, university administration, library sciences, writing, publishing, and at the State Department of Education.
- Pursuing advanced leadership roles, like positions as department head, because of the confidence they gained from their NeWP participation
- After participating in NeWP activities, taking active leadership roles in designing school and district wide curriculum.
- Designing and facilitating school and district-wide workshops for other teachers.
- Being encouraged by their NeWP colleagues to pursue higher level degrees, including second Masters degrees and PhDs, and National Teacher Certification.

### In Their Words:

- “Being part of the NeWP and the NWP gives me a sense of being part of a community of teachers and writers. It's my intellectual and professional home. Being part of NWP also gives me a stronger voice in professional conversations.”
- “Prior to the SI I got the impression from colleagues and administrators that as a first year teacher, I knew nothing and had little to offer to the profession. I truly thought that I couldn't be a voice or an asset to education until a few years later in my career. It was during the SI when a teacher mentor in my writing group told me that my voice mattered and that I needed to speak up. That comment from another teacher and the affirmation I received during the SI totally changed the way I viewed myself. I left the SI feeling like a professional who could impact positive change in education, and then I actively sought out opportunities to do so.”
- “NeWP reflects the spirit of NWP in that it respects the professional status of teachers and the space to grow personally and professionally in community where relationships that are sustained over the length and breadth of careers.”
- “When I'm thinking about NeWP I see myself as a professional, with opinions and ideas to share and a desire to continue learning as a professional. When I'm in the elementary school with programmed curriculum I feel like the school system is ignoring my professional knowledge in favor of preparing students for testing. I don't disagree with tests, I disagree with letting outside testing determine curriculum.”

## Why Teachers Say They Value the Nebraska Writing Project:

Those involved with NeWP say that not only do its programs provide the best professional development they have experienced, but it has provided them with opportunities for professional and personal networking, and encouraged them to grow as writers themselves. According to teachers, NeWP:

### In Their Words:

- “I am reminded of the wide range of writing that I am doing and helping to sponsor because of my NeWP experience. This is simply the most effective teacher development program I've ever encountered in more than 18 years of teaching..”
  - “Some of my closest professional relationships are with teachers I met through the NeWP, and the opportunities that these relationships open up are endless.”
  - “NeWP work has allowed me to create an identity and practice that is not constricted to one school building or department and thus made me more of a cosmopolitan educator, even while remaining rural..”
  - “For me the key value or worth of NeWP was the professionalism of the networking with other writers. Often in our schools we tend to become isolated. NeWP offers support and professional connections so isolation becomes obsolete.”
  - “NeWP creates the "intellectual home" that all of us need to continue doing this work.”
  - “NeWP is my professional home, a retreat, a prod, a reality check, a perfect mix of work and fun.”
- Allows teachers to develop strong networks of other dedicated educators with whom they can work and from whom they can learn.
  - Offers a space for teachers to develop meaningful and on-going relationships.
  - Encourages teachers to continue writing for both professional and personal reasons.
  - Provides meaningful professional development in spite of the increased standardization of curriculum and teaching practices.
  - Provides a space for on-going research and exploration of pedagogical practices by practicing teachers.
  - Affirms teachers’ status as professionals and authorities in their fields.