

# The Maryland Writing Project's Statewide Conference

by Judy Nudelman, T-C '03  
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I wonder how I might be different today as a reader and writer if thirty years ago, Linda Rief had been my teacher! I would have known that my thoughts were valued. I would have had self-confidence. I would have known that my knowledge was valued and my "voice" appreciated and encouraged. I would have learned a lot about me and the world around me that I could tap into. I would have learned to read as a writer and to write as a reader.

An eighth grader in Ms. Rief's current Language Arts class states, "Some teachers teach children for a job, with a steady paycheck. Linda Rief teaches children to become better adults. What have I learned? I have learned to look outside the box, to see a world that has the ability to teach a person to see a place full of opportunities and memories. I like to think of Linda Rief as the person holding the key to unlock this world."

Linda Rief, eighth grade language arts teacher at Oyster River Middle School in New Hampshire, instructor at the Summer Literacy Institute at the University of New Hampshire and Northeastern University, author of *Seeking Diversity: Language Arts with Adolescents*, *Vision and Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum*, and *100 Quickwrites* was the keynote speaker at



TU faculty member Lijun Jin

the MWP Statewide Writing Conference at Towson University on October 3, 2003.

Tall, lean, bespectacled, and highly energetic, the twenty-year teacher veteran spoke with expertise to an audience of educators on the necessity of developing literacy for life within our students. She strongly adhered to the reading-writing-thinking connection. "We can read without writing, but we can't write without reading. They're so interwoven that you cannot

disconnect them. Students should be reading as writers and writing as readers," she emphasized.

Ms. Rief began her workshop by sharing the diversity of her students' writings, noting strengths and weaknesses, and sharing what she has learned from each student. Each student's "voice" taught the



Linda Rief, signing copies of her new book, *100 Quick Writes*

teacher-author a valuable lesson. After reading a student's poem that focused on particular teacher assignments Ms. Rief declared to her captured audience, "He taught me to stop giving senseless assignments!"

In her classroom the students' "voices" matter, in their honesty and uniqueness. Learning is knowledge-based and based on personal experience. Students are taught to write with intent to show how they feel and what they're really good at. The teacher is open to the student's VOICE and CHOICE of writing topics and formats. She gives her students TIME to write and read in large chunks.

Ms. Rief uses "Quickwrites," first draft written responses to reading selections of the highest quality, including her own, to inspire students to think, feel and to learn how to read all writings critically and thoughtfully. She states in her book *100 Quickwrites*, "Writing is thinking. When we write we discover meaning in the world

around us and in our own lives."

Although students can decide what they write, how they write, and what they read, Ms. Rief's classroom is run with a rigorous workload and high expectations. Students must produce 3-5 pages of rough draft writing per week, take two to three writing pieces to final draft every four weeks along with process papers whereby students explain how their writing pieces came to be, read for a total of 2 hours per week at home, keep a list of books read, identify 3-5 unknown words in context per week and record the sentence and the definition written in their own words. A Reader's-Writer's Notebook/Journal requires the student to respond and reflect on readings, writings, and artwork with 3-5 pages of writing and drawing each week, and to collect one poem each month. Ms. Rief's workshop includes a daily read-aloud and/or mini-lesson, individual conferences and biweekly student response groups.

Co-founder and co-editor of "Voices from the Middle," published by the National Council of Teachers of English and the year 2000's recipient of the NCTE Edwin A. Hoey Award for outstanding

middle school English-Language Arts teacher, Ms. Rief summarizes her teaching philosophy stating, "Our students have important things that they think and believe and we have to find ways to tap into that. The most important way is for teachers to be what we teach. We must be writers and readers ourselves."

Following Ms. Rief's workshop on literacy, registrants enjoyed a catered lunch before attending afternoon presentations led by Maryland Writing Project Teacher-Consultants. These sessions focused on teaching strategies to promote writing in the content areas.

At 3:30p.m. the all-day MWP conference concluded, and all educators left with a much richer knowledge-base and understanding of the best practices for teaching reading, writing, and thinking.



Judy Nudelman



Our youngest participant, Josh Rozmiarek, brought his mom, Rebecca