

Jessica Rodriguez

Senior Bridge Reporter

STWP Hosts Fall Conference

On October 29, 2011, the STWP hosted its annual fall conference at Texas A&M International University titled, “Writing in an Era of Diversity and Transformational Education.” This year’s keynote speaker, journalist and educator, Macarena Hernandez, spoke about her personal experiences as a Mexican American growing up and teaching in the Texas school system. Over sixty teachers from the local school districts attended the conference.

The conference featured professional development sessions that were given by presenters like Professor William Nolen, Dr. Deborah Scaggs, Marco Franco, Blanca Donovan, Alicia Cruz and Cristina Ramirez. All the presenters are teachers from either the Laredo or United Independent school district or TAMIU. Each session provided by the STWP were geared toward “creating literate communities of independent thinkers, readers, and writers,” as stated by Dr. Bernice Sanchez-Perez, Director of the STWP and TAMIU Assistant Professor of Curriculum and Instruction.

Dr. Sanchez expressed that “we hope that the teachers are enlightened with the professional development and that they are able to take back this material and use it in the classroom.” During the conference, the teachers went to the different sessions and partook in the lessons and discussions the presenters provided. As part of the material provided by the STWP, the teachers were given lesson plans developed under the regulations of the TEKS and STAAR assessments aligned to the discussion topics provided by Hernandez. “We hope this offers teachers a sense of motivation and inspiration to go back to the classroom and work with the students,” explained Dr. Sanchez.

Hernandez gave the main presentation in which she focused on the development of student writing by encouraging writing through personal experiences. Just as Hernandez used her life as inspiration for her writing, she encouraged the teachers to do the same with their students. Hernandez described her first year teaching sophomore and junior high school students after she had recently graduated with a Master of Journalism from the University of California, Berkeley. She explained that in the late nineties, she began teaching at her alma mater, La Joya High School as an English teacher. “I was not a certified teacher...but I ended up doing what I knew how to do best which was how to write an interesting news story and my kids ended up doing really well in the writing part of the tests,” stated Hernandez.

Hernandez, who is also the writer of the “One-Family, Two Homelands” five-part series read excerpts from her articles and explained that “students should write what they know.” She continued by stating that “the best storytellers, are the people from la frontera; le hechan mucha crema a los tacos.” Hernandez described growing up in La Joya and the “magical place” she was

living in. Her experience as child growing up on the border in the “ranchos” was what inspired her to become a writer. “My first experience as a storyteller was the border and the border really deeply shaped my life as a human being, as a writer, as a journalist and now as a professor,” explained Hernandez.

The conference continued with another round of professional development session in the afternoon and ended with an award ceremony and the highly anticipated distribution of door prizes to the participating teachers. University College Instructor and Co-Director of the STWP, Daniela Rodriguez expressed that she would like to “thank all the administrators and the principals of the school districts who promote professional development because it is important that our teachers are supported.”

The STWP will be hosting another conference on July 13, 2012, in which Kelly Gallagher, author of “Readicide: How Schools are Killing Reading and What You can do About It,” will be featured as the keynote speaker. For more information on the STWP, visit their website at www.tamtu.edu/coas/lla/stwp. For more information on Macarena Hernandez, visit her website at www.macarenahernandez.com.

(For more information on this article, please contact Jessica Rodriguez at jess_rodz@dusty.tamtu.edu.)