

Update



Executive Director Richard Sterling

Director's

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

It is still difficult to get back to everyday tasks after the September 11 attack on the United States. With the breadth of our national network, many of us know people directly affected by the event—friends or relatives who have lost someone close to them or who were injured or killed

themselves. For many others among us, the attack simply raises old spectres. As I was born in England at the beginning of World War II, my earliest memories are those of London during the Blitz. Though I was too young to be scared at the time, memories of those events have

remained buried for forty years, only to return quite suddenly in my dreams these last few weeks.

As teachers, however, we have a charge beyond our personal associations. On the one hand, we have our own fears, our own families, and our own reactions to the trauma of the event. But on the other, we have our students, who have also needed to talk and to understand what these events mean in their lives.

A colleague and I teach a class of undergraduates who are thinking of becoming teachers. Our class was scheduled for 2 p.m. on September 12. We put aside our plan for the class and simply asked who would like to talk or raise questions about the September 11 attacks.

We spent almost an hour hearing from students. What we heard that day was remarkable in many ways. As they worked their way across a broad spectrum of views, attitudes, concerns, and fears, the students slowly circled back to what it was that teachers need to do for younger students in such circumstances. Because our teacher candidates are still young themselves, their concerns focused on how to make students feel safe. That reaction, of course, raises a conundrum. Can we really say we can guarantee the safety of children, or for that matter, anyone? During our class, many of us acknowledged that our job as teachers is to help young people understand the nature of this kind of violence and reassure them that, as caring adults, we will do everything we can to ensure their safety.

Writing, of course, is a powerful way to help students explain to themselves what they understand and think and to shine a light on subjects about which they would like to know more. For many students, writing exposes huge gaps in their knowledge, even though the questions they write about may have answers in recent events.

"Why are we controlling the air space over Iraq?" one student asked. He, like many others,

was either too young to remember or had not paid particular attention to the events that unfolded during the Gulf War.

Another student wanted to know why we were the object of such hatred; another asked what the tenets of Islam were and whether they were antithetical to western mores. As teachers, we can use writing to help unpack the complexities of events and piece together rational and responsible strategies to create a more informed citizenry.

Teachers will play an important role in our national recovery. As we know, writing project teachers are among the strongest teachers in the nation, and they have been enabling students to become more aware, more knowledgeable, and more compassionate through writing. As a national network, we are bound together by our commitment to learn from and teach each other. If you have examples of how you have responded to the events of September 11, we welcome them. Send them to us at nwp@writingproject.org. Samples of student writing are especially enlightening. As many of you have no doubt seen, we now have resources on our website to help teachers, caregivers, and students respond to these events. If you have more resources and ideas, please let us know.

And, finally, I hope you decide to come to the NWP Annual Meeting and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference in Baltimore this year. I cannot imagine a more important time than now for strengthening our sense of community. Let us not be undermined in our task.

Sincerely,

Richard Sterling
Executive Director

NWP

The Voice is a publication of the National Writing Project. Support for the NWP is provided by a major grant from the U.S. Department of Education.

Communications

Director: Roxanne Barber
Senior Editors: Amy Bauman
 Art Peterson
Associate Editor: Rebekah Truemper
Communications Specialist: My Lac
Executive Director: Richard Sterling
Co-directors: Judy Buchanan
 Elyse Eidman-Aadahl
 Mary Ann Smith
Finance Director: Michel Mathis
Associate Director: Joye Alberts
Board Chairman: Dan Boggan, Jr.

National Writing Project
 2105 Bancroft Way #1042, University of California
 Berkeley, California 94720-1042
 Phone: 510/642-0963; Fax: 510/643-5717
nwp@writingproject.org www.writingproject.org

**To subscribe to NWP publications or
 to order our books,
 visit the NWP website at**

**www.writingproject.org/Publications/orders.html
 or call 510/642-0963.**