How NWP Works: Measuring Our Success

An exciting study co-designed by NWP and the Academy for Educational Development (AED) is underway in 25 writing project teachers’ classrooms. Designed to help capture the complex relationships between NWP professional development and student achievement, the NWP/AED Evaluation is a three-year study of 25 third- and fourth-grade classrooms in Mississippi, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, and California.

The classroom teachers are members of the Mississippi Writing and Thinking Project, Oklahoma State University Writing Project, Philadelphia Writing Project, and the UCLA Writing Project. Judy Buchanan coordinates the evaluation for the National Writing Project and NWP staff members Christina Cantrill and Laura Paradise are working with local site coordinators Kim Patterson, Pam Brown, Marci Resnick, and Norma Mota-Altman to facilitate the process.

The goal of the evaluation is to better understand the context for writing in NWP classrooms as well as to measure and evaluate student writing on both writing prompts and extended pieces of prose. Created in response to requirements of the U.S. Department of Education, the evaluation will help to inform the complex connection between teacher professional development and student achievement in writing, to make more explicit some of the contributions of the NWP model, and to provide useful data we can share across the network, with policy makers, and with other researchers.

AED is currently working with local site coordinators to collect school, student, and teacher demographic data and teacher-assigned projects and tasks with accompanying student work. Throughout the year, participating teachers have been asked to administer two writing prompts, select two of their assignments and the accompanying student work to be scored in a separate process, and complete a survey about their classroom context for writing. At the end of the school year, they participate in a phone interview to round out the view of their classroom writing practices.

The design of the study has included a number of opportunities for collaboration among teachers, researchers, and NWP staff. In September 1999 all of the participants in the study met to generate ideas for good writing prompts and to review rubrics that were developed and used extensively with the Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS). Participating teachers were also invited to review rubrics for scoring teacher assignments and student work developed by the Consortium on Chicago School Research, to practice scoring sample pieces of student work and teacher assignments, and to debrief the process. In June, the AED evaluation team will facilitate a five-day scoring conference using a different group of experienced NWP teacher consultants to score the work.

Through this study, we expect to learn more about how NWP teacher-consultants design and implement writing instruction in their classrooms and how student writing changes and develops. Teachers involved in the first year of the evaluation are particularly interested in the careful attention being paid to teacher assignments. AED will provide reports on each year of the evaluation to the NWP, beginning in October 2000.