We have just completed our fifth Southern Arizona Writing Project. Like the other four, it was a great success—if success be measured in terms of good times, good experiences, a great deal of writing produced, and a feeling of group solidarity. It is, we have found, difficult to measure success in any other way. We have wanted to accomplish long-term changes in curriculum as a result of SAWP, better writing by students of SAWP teachers, more understanding of writing processes and products on the part of teachers, increased support for writing by administrators, and more participation in future writing projects on the part of teachers. Have we accomplished all this? And if we have, how can we document it? At the end of five years, there is much to be thankful for, but we find ourselves full of misgivings. By sharing them, we hope to discover whether other sites share our concerns.

LOGISTICAL MISGIVINGS

We didn’t know whether we could even have a SAWP this year. Although last year we had twenty-six participants—the largest group ever—and still had to turn away ten or twelve applicants, this year we ended up with only fifteen. An odd circumstance was that all fifteen were women, something that has never happened before. It seems likely that both the size of the group and its makeup are directly attributable to economic circumstances.

First of all, since we have had no funding since SAWP I, when we had a National Endowment for the Humanities grant to pay stipends, participants have had to pay their own way. In the past many participants elected to do so, since they could not receive salary credit for units paid for by their districts; they found they did better financially in the long run by paying their own tuition. Increasingly, however, our largest school districts are staffed by teachers who have tenure, who have master’s degrees, and who have achieved their maximum salary level. They no longer need graduate credit. The few young teachers who do perhaps need such credit are too badly off economically to be able to give up the income from their summer jobs in order to accumulate graduate credit. The one man we expected this year could not attend because he found at the last minute that he could not get together the money for tuition. Over half of our fifteen were married women whose husbands had incomes; the others—all but one—were single without children to support.

Many Writing Projects, we know, have been successful in getting school districts to pay the way for teachers; we have been able to do that in a few cases, but our local school districts have been hard hit with budget problems, and writing has not always been a high priority. One very large district has announced as one of its goals the raising of achievement test scores but has apparently not seen improved teaching of writing as in any way related to that goal.

And so we wonder . . .

1. whether we can continue to run a bootstrap operation;
2. whether we have exhausted the pool of eligible and interested participants;
3. whether we should try to attract a different clientele;
4. whether we can succeed in our effort to get state financing for Writing Projects, as we have recently proposed to our state legislature, and as some states have already been able to do;
5. whether the National Writing Project can get funding for local sites, even those which have not (like us) been able to contribute the requested $1,000 to the nationwide fundraising effort.

IDEOLOGICAL MISGIVINGS

As we survey our group at the end of this, as other, sessions, we wonder as we always do what ideas about writing participants are actually taking away with them. In spite of our stated "No party line in the Writing Project" and our effort to have speakers representing widely divergent views, we are afraid that participants—or some of them—may go away believing that
1. process is good, product is bad;
2. traditional is bad; innovative is good;
3. practical is good; theoretical is bad;
4. formal is bad; informal is good;
5. analysis is bad; self-expression is good;
6. confessional or autobiographical writing is better than transactional;
7. peer editing is *de rigueur*;
8. the alternative to stifling students is to let them do whatever they want;
9. if students write enough, all else will follow.

We also have misgivings about terminology used without complete understanding; participants who come in with fixed ideas and leave with the same; guest speakers being heard inaccurately (this is more than a misgiving; we *know* from follow-up discussions that listeners often tend to overgeneralize, or to hear what they want to hear, or to draw inferences not intended by the speaker).

We wonder whether we have required enough academic rigor; whether we have promoted acquisition of basic knowledge or have unintentionally bolstered a dangerous and hazy eclecticism.

**THEORETICAL MISGIVINGS**

Our greatest misgiving is probably shared by all Writing Project sites—the difficulty of proving that Writing Projects have produced any positive benefit to students. The Scriver report, in a very thorough report, was unable to document conclusively improved writing by students of Writing Project teachers. A few studies have been able to document some improvement in writing, but close examination of them shows insufficient control of variables to be convincing empirically. In fact, it may not be possible to design and carry out a study without flaws just because of the impossibility of controlling the necessary variables. And so we have to fall back on anecdotal documentation, testimonials, and argument as to probability.

In our own case, we have been frustrated not only by the difficulty of designing a good research study, but by the difficulty of carrying it out. Our Project directors applied last year for a joint sabbatical to do some research and observation of SAWPers, but were turned down. We intend to apply again but are not certain of success, since we have a new university administration and an acting college dean and are not sure how high a priority writing has for either. Furthermore, although we had hoped to be able to document attitude changes in the teachers from SAWP, using instruments we have administered every year, we find that we have made errors in data collection that invalidate some of the data. Besides that, we wonder if attitudes can change—and stay changed—in the short space of four weeks. Perhaps what we need is to design a five-year follow-up, but that involves the inevitable problem of tracking down those who have moved, making sure to get returns from everyone, and hiring someone to analyze the data, preferably someone with computer expertise (which none of us has).

And all this involves time, time, time—yet because of economic problems within the university, we have larger teaching and supervision loads than ever before.

This all sounds very depressing, but probably should not. We do have many successes to report (anecdotally) and can enumerate inservices and teacher referrals (statistically). We may get our sabbatical and be able to carry out our study, the design of which seems to us sound. We’ll continue trying to convince administrators, businesses, and colleagues of the value of writing. We’ll continue trying to get funding. We’ll try to maintain better communication with our alumni. We’ll keep trying to improve our summer workshops academically, practically, ideologically.

Do others share our frustrations? We’d be happy to discover that we are an anomaly.

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