

The Real Thing: NWP and Educational Reform

Like the light at the end of the tunnel, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, or the multi-million dollar jackpot, an amorphous something called school reform is being trumpeted as the answer to the complex issues of teaching and learning that will confront us in this new century.

Educational reports proliferate. We have the reports that say children cannot write, that say vouchers are the hot ticket, that say partnerships with business will solve funding problems, that say American children spend too little, too much, or the wrong kind of time in the classroom, that say Japanese students, or German students, or Swiss students are better motivated and better educated. And, most recently, we have an international report from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development which takes an analytical look at the teaching of reading, writing, math, and science and points out strengths and weaknesses in five industrial nations. Amazingly, this report characterizes many practices in American schools that are indeed successful and points out that in many ways, American schools are doing as well as those in other countries.

Concurrent with this growth industry of education report making, we have had twenty-one years of growth in the National Writing Project. Without

fanfare or public relations, NWP has changed the lives of 1,150,000 teachers, helped teachers to change their schools and districts, helped to energize many of these teachers to become educational leaders — curriculum developers, principals, school board members and so on.

In our work here at *The Quarterly*, we are often amazed by the good will we encounter as we solicit articles and talk to contributors. Enthusiasm and support for NWP runs deep and wide. Jim Gray is right when he says, "Today, teachers are recognized as never before and I know this is largely because of us. More and more teachers are now empowered in important ways."

Over the years, researchers, statisticians, educators, and investigators of all sorts have passed through Writing Project corridors, asking those of us who have been around a while questions about what makes the Writing Project tick. About ten years ago, one of them asked me, "Do you think without Jim Gray the National Writing Project will survive?" At that time I was not sure but now I am. The Writing Project stands on its own two feet, taught to walk by Jim Gray, now looking forward, inward, and outward toward new directions and new empowerments.

--M.Y.