



THE MYSTIQUE OF THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the transformative nature of the National Writing Project (NWP). It employs an interpretive phenomenological analysis approach and self-efficacy theory in order to understand the perceptions of K-12 teachers who attended the NWP in Southeast Texas in the last five years. Using interviews, reflexive journals, and a reflective metaphor activity, the researcher attempts to understand the ways that the six participants see themselves as writers and teachers of writing after experiencing the summer professional development program of the NWP. Two research questions guide the study: What are the perceptions of select National Writing Project Fellows of themselves as writers after participating in a summer writing institute? What are the perceptions of select National Writing Project Fellows of the impact the NWP has had on the way they teach writing after participating in a summer writing institute? The researcher concludes that all of the participants developed a sense of self-efficacy; some of the participants viewed the program as a transformative process that changed the way they teach writing and the way that they see themselves as writers; and most of the participants immediately changed several of their teaching practices and felt a renewed sense of enthusiasm towards the teaching of writing after participating in the NWP. The researcher also concludes that the legacy of the NWP is a highly effective and transformative professional development tool for K-12 teachers in any discipline, and that the teachers teaching teachers training model is effective in professional development of teachers.

Keywords: National Writing Project, phenomenology, writing pedagogy

The mystique of the National Writing Project (NWP) is difficult to define, but one participant captures it well, stating, “A culture of warmth, empathy, and appreciation of individual and social differences characterizes the NWP’s summer institute. . . . [which is] ‘one third seminar, one third group therapy, and one third religious experience’” (Whyte et al., 2007, p. 12). As a doctoral student, I participated in the Sam Houston Writing Project Summer Institute (SI), an experience that not only enriched my classroom teaching and assessment of writing, but reignited my passion to write by inspiring me to write for myself and for publication as often as I can. The opportunity to participate as a Writing Project Fellow has been vital in developing my persona as a writer and as a teacher of writing, helping me to understand my pedagogical theories about teaching writing, and assisting me in serving my school and community to develop a writing program which implements the



ideas espoused by the legacy of the NWP. Every day of the SI was devoted to writing, sharing writing, reading mentor texts, modeling lessons, listening to others present and tell stories, workshopping, and sharing ideas with colleagues. The greatest gift I took away with me from that experience is that I am a *writer*, and that the model of teachers teaching teachers is the best mode of professional growth. Most importantly, I learned to listen to and trust my own voice.

THE LEGACY OF THE NATIONAL WRITING PROJECT

The NWP model serves as a guide for the kind of professional learning community that has proven effective in a high school setting, and “is one of the most successful networks of teachers creating opportunities for teacher growth” (Votteler, 2007, pg. 51). It focuses on teachers teaching teachers, and teachers as writers. It was so refreshing to write every day and to share our writing. All activities were designed to put theory to practice, and what emerged was a sense of community, support, respect, and value placed on the written word. People come together when they share writing. There is something about the unveiling of our thoughts, dreams, fears, wishes, and desires on the page that connects us as a community of writers. As Lieberman and Wood (2003) shared, “Many have questioned whether any other subject matter can engage teachers the way writing can” (p. 91).

The NWP model of teachers as writers and teachers teaching teachers is vital to the success of classroom teachers of writing. Fruscella (2012) discussed the life changing experience of the SI, sharing that “Every day I left, I felt challenged to view my students and teaching with a new perspective, employed with new strategies of instruction, equipped with the most confounding recent research in educational issues, and supported by a network of teachers teaching teachers” (2012, p. 18). Teachers who have been trained under the National Writing Project model are better teachers of writing (Lieberman & Wood, 2003).

As a NWP trained teacher of writing, I adopted practices which I know will enhance the learning and writing of my students, such as teaching them to write in various modes of



discourse and genres, showing them how to research topics and incorporate evidence into their writing, creating a nurturing and inviting environment that fosters confidence in themselves as writers and supports peer review, using portfolios and multiple authentic assessments, adhering to the writing process and teaching them how to find their own process, using conferencing, modeling, mentor texts, literature circles, and publication to motivate and inspire them to write. Most importantly, I write along with them so that I can better understand their experiences as a writer in my classroom and so that they feel the collaborative and constructive presence of a teacher who is also a writer and part of the community of writers in our class. As former NWP Director Robert Infantino (1990) espoused,

no matter what age, people are usually reluctant to share their writing aloud. Yet the simple but powerful tool of hearing someone else's writing read by that person has made my teaching better and my classrooms more secure [as a low risk, comfortable environment] for all of us. (p. 20)

My study searched the core of this legacy. My research questions were (a) What are the perceptions of select NWP Fellows of themselves as writers?, and (b) What are the perceptions of select NWP Fellows of the impact the NWP has had on the way they teach writing?

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) provides the theoretical framework for this study. Students must be taught how to assert themselves and express their views in their writing. Teachers need to empower them to have a sense of agency about their arguments and positions and teach them how to look at all sides of an issue when developing their assertions. Masle (2014) claimed that due to the shifting contexts for writing our students face, fostering agency is a vital part of learning to write, yet our writing classrooms do not attend to agency- the fear and loathing of writing plays a large role because it interferes with the practice of writing as well as a willingness to embrace agency.



Self-efficacy theory explores the nature of agency in teachers and students, and how it transfers from teacher to student to the larger world of being a citizen in a democratic society. A construct of socio-cognitive models of behavior and learning, it is a theory that posits the nature of a person's sense of empowerment and confidence that derives from a particular experience, defined as "a person's belief that he or she is capable of dealing with complex tasks" which is an important factor in developing human agency (Bandura, 1997, p. 122). Bandura defined perceived "self -efficacy [as] concerned with judgements of how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (p. 122). Klassen, Tze, Betts and Gordon (2011), have defined self -efficacy in teachers as "the confidence teachers hold about their individual and collective capability to influence student learning" (p. 21). Teacher's self-efficacy is the beliefs they hold about their capability to teach their subject matter even to the most challenging students, and are claimed to influence their instructional behavior (Tschannen-Moran, & Woolfolk, Hoy, 1998).

Lavelle (2006) noted that there are few studies which have explored teachers' beliefs about their own writing abilities. In an exploratory study, she examined teacher beliefs about writing competence and discovered a relationship between writing self-efficacy and writing performance. According to Locke, Whitehead, and Dix, (2013), there does not appear to be research in relation to self-efficacy in the frame of Writing Workshop teacher participation, even though Writing Workshop principles and practices are surmised by their transformational potential regarding teacher self-confidence as writers and teachers of writing. There is a long history of research on self-efficacy as an aspect of teacher competence (e.g., Klassen et al., 2011) in which teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are thought to play an important role in the educational process. Holzberger, Philipp, and Kunter (2013) asserted that as it was with prior studies, (Tschannen-Moran, et al., 1998; Woolfolk et al., 1990) teachers with higher self-efficacy beliefs showed higher instructional quality, as indicated by the three dimensions of cognitive activation, classroom management, and individual learning support. Teachers who possess self-efficacy produce students who possess self-efficacy. According to Selvester and Summers (2012), "teachers and students



need to take risks together by co-constructing opportunities for students to voice their opinions, their beliefs, and their desires without censorship” (p. 20). This self-efficacy empowers students to feel a sense of agency because literate thinking helps adolescents understand the sociocultural contexts in which they form their identities, assert their sense of agency, and participate in their own literacy development (Langer, 1987).

Darling-Hammond (2006) argued that what teachers know and do in the classroom with their students has the most influence on what their students learn. In their teaching practices, teachers must possess the confidence and ability to lead their students intellectually and ethically. Teachers who possess self-efficacy are able to acknowledge the social, political, cultural, and historical facets of literacy. They empower their students with critical skills to interrogate and rhetorically analyze texts and their purposes in order to see how texts have a sense of agency. (Selvester and Summers, 2012). This transference of agency is seen in the way students respond to texts in discussion as well as in their own writings. Selvester and Summers (2012, p. 81) shared:

When teachers and students engage in discussions to interpret a writer’s intent, students learn that there are multiple interpretations of a text’s meaning and that the interpretation is contextualized socially, culturally, linguistically, politically, and historically. They learn to value the diversity of their voices and gain confidence in the power of their own personally generated meaning.

DATA COLLECTION

For this study, I collected data from interviews, teacher reflections, and a reflective metaphor activity, which allowed me to obtain information on the perceptions of six NWP fellows who had participated in the SI in the past five years as they attempted to make sense of their experiences in the summer institute and how those experiences have transferred to the classroom setting. The interviews provided descriptive data in the participants’ own words to garner insight into the participant’s perceptions (Bodgan & Biklen, 2006).



During the interview process, I asked open-ended questions to obtain detailed information from the participants without leading their responses. Additionally, teachers were prompted to write a journal entry in which they reflected upon their philosophy of teaching writing and the “take-aways” from their experiences. These journals were coded according to first and second cycle coding (Saldana, 2013) to identify patterns and themes that emerged. The journals served to convey descriptive data regarding how the teacher teaches writing and how they believe the NWP has affected their philosophy of teaching writing.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of data included thoroughly evaluating data and determining the themes that emerged using an In Vivo coding scheme (Saldana, 2013). I engaged in careful and concise data analysis, which is defined as the re-examination, re-categorizing, or otherwise recombining the data in order to derive empirically based conclusions (Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Yin 2014), employing a constant comparative approach and coding to cultivate and categorize the themes and patterns and developing themes identified during the study.

DATA CODING PROCESS

All responses from participants, either in writing or by verbal interview, were transcribed, then coded using Saldana’s (2013) descriptions as a guide. As themes emerged, I analyzed cases through cross-case analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2013), which can help to focus themes and identify generalizability of teacher perceptions. Initially, I coded the interviews and journals through an inductive descriptive coding approach. I then employed In Vivo coding, in which I recorded codes using the words or short phrases from the participant’s own language” (p. 74). In looking at the transformations that may occur as a result of participating in the NWPSI over time, I employed process coding, because it “connote[s] observable and conceptual action in the data. . .[by] imply[ing] actions intertwined with the dynamics of time, such as things that emerge, change, occur in particular sequences, or



become strategically implemented” (p. 75). In the first cycle of inductive coding, I summarized and organized the data, and in the second cycle of coding, I categorized the data according to themes and constructs which generated pattern codes, which tended to consist of the following summarizers: “categories or themes, causes/explanations, relationships among people, and theoretical constructs” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014, p.87). I mapped these pattern codes, weaving first cycle codes into the narrative and supporting it with field note data.

INTERPRETIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

In answering my research questions, I employed a phenomenological approach, in which I attempted to understand the perspectives of my participants as they attempted to understand their perspectives. According to Smith (2011), “Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a recently developed qualitative approach which has rapidly become one of the best known and most commonly used qualitative methodologies” (p. 9).

Phenomenology (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Smith et al., 2009; van Manen, 1990; Wertz et al., 2011) is the philosophical movement concerned with lived experience and the desire to construct the detailed examination of experience on one’s own terms. Saldana (2013) describes it as “the study of the nature or meaning of everyday or significant experiences” (p. 272).

In IPA research, the researcher talks to the participants in order to analyze how they make sense of what they say regarding the experiences that they have had. In this process, the researcher attempts to discover their perceptions of what the participants think is happening to them. Smith and Osborn (2007) defined it as a way “to explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world” (p. 53). In this form of analysis, the researcher attempts to get close to the participant’s personal world through the process of interpretive actions based on the researcher’s perceptions of the participant’s meaning-making of their experiences. This method poses the question: does the researcher see something that the participant may not even be aware of? Smith & Osborn posited (p. 53):



Thus, a two-stage interpretation process, or a double hermeneutic, is involved [in which] the participants are trying to make sense of their world, [and] the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world.

IPA is therefore theoretically connected to hermeneutics and theories of interpretation (Packer & Addison, 1989; Palmer, 1969; Smith & Osborne, 2007).

Smith and Osborn (2007) asserted that “the power of the IPA study is judged by the light it sheds within the broader context” (p. 56). They also added that IPA researchers wish to analyze in great depth and detail how participants perceive and make sense of things, which are happening to them. This analysis method is appropriate for this study because this particular study attempts to investigate teacher perceptions, and in doing so the researcher must employ a double hermeneutic in order to understand the way in which the participants understand their experiences. Smith (2011) argued that a paramount goal of IPA research is to make a contribution to research through “interrogating or illuminating existing research” (p. 43).

Additionally, Smith, Flowers, and Larking (2009) advocated for analytical processes to be iterative, fluid, engaged, and multi-directional. As such, analysis involves immersive and intense reading and re-reading of the text, initial noting on exploratory levels of relationships, processes, places, events, values and principles, fluid textual analysis of exploratory noting, developing themes, and searching for connections and patterns. Additionally, analyzing data involves a pre-analysis decision model to explore biases, assumptions in data analysis, and intra-coder agreement through member checking for informant feedback (Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L., 2007).

THE BALLOON METAPHOR

In order to get a better sense of how my participants perceived themselves as writers on their writing journey, and to see the influences along the way as they developed as writers, I asked them to create balloon metaphors, visualizing the balloons as the writers who had



influenced their pedagogy and philosophy of writing and writing instruction. I used this visual from Bishop (1999), who imagined Don Murray and Peter Elbow as “individuals, in their author functions or rhetorical constructions, [are] raised and dismissed, treated as fatherly Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade balloons, floated through critiques as unitary. . . figures” (p. 11). This is especially significant to the work we do in the NWP because we are a network of teachers teaching teachers. We build a legacy that influences others before us and after us.

To illustrate the data which emerged from the balloon metaphors, I have created a balloon matrix of themes that “floated” through the data, as conveyed in figure 1. This cross-case display (Miles & Huberman, 1994) illustrates the contrasts and ranges of perceptions (Saldana, 2013).



Figure 1. Balloon Metaphor Themes

EXPLICATING THEMES

In an attempt to simplify the themes, and since so many of them overlap and interconnect, I created the following ten sub themes (which were distilled from a list of 30 themes):

Theme 1: first teaching writing honing experience ever



Theme 2: valuing and cherishing the writing journal

Theme 3: the collaborative experience of sharing writing with other participants and garnering new perspectives

Theme 4: entry into a discourse community of scholars in the field

Theme 5: gained confidence/empowerment/self-efficacy, voice

Theme 6: creative release/therapeutic nature of the experience/self-discovery

Theme 7: immediate transfer of skills and strategies to the classroom/changed the way I teach

Theme 8: writing as a way of life/freedom to write/a space to write

Theme 9: teachers teaching teachers

Theme 10: Teacher Writer/Writer Teacher dichotomy: discovering that you are a writer on some level (rediscovery, validated, emerged).

FIRST TEACHING WRITING EXPERIENCE EVER

Most of the participants stated that their experience as a fellow in the NWPSI was their first “course” ever on the teaching of writing. Only one participant who had her master’s degree in education had a previous course on the teaching of writing. All participants stated that they felt uncomfortable teaching writing, and that they were never trained prior to the NWP on how to teach writing. They described their previous writing pedagogy as a journey of trial and error, in which they navigated the process alone. Several participants shared that they worked in English departments and elementary schools where their colleagues never discussed teaching writing with the exception of the research paper or writing workshop. Each of the participants stated that the focus in their schools had always been on teaching reading rather than on teaching writing. When immersed in a discourse community whose primary aim was to focus on best practices in the teaching of



writing, these NWP Fellows expressed feelings of relief, joy, validation, excitement, enthusiasm, uneasiness, and anxiety.

VALUING AND CHERISHING THE WRITING JOURNAL

Each participant mentioned the personal journal and class book, which was published at the end of the SI. They spoke very fondly of their journals, recalling the process of creating it and stating that it was an extremely profound and personal experience for them. Each of them stated that they cherished their journals, and that they still had them and often revisited them when they wanted to recall where they were at that time in their life emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. This idea struck me as significant, not only because it was echoed time and again in the interviews, but because it resonates with Parker Palmer's (2017) notion of "who is the self that teaches?" (p.4), validating that an effective teacher must engage in continuous reflection, stillness, and contemplation as they attempt to understand who they are emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Palmer mused (p. 4):

Who is the self that teaches? How does the quality of my selfhood form the way I relate to my students, my subject, my colleagues, my world? How can [we] sustain and deepen the selfhood from which good teaching comes?

In this regard, the journal serves not only as an impetus for personal expression, contemplation, introspection, and reflection, but also as a tool to fully develop as an educator. One participant discussed how she profoundly remembers writing about the loss of her grandmother as a child, another recalls writing about her childhood, and another celebrates writing poetry. Whatever the content, the journal was a vital tool in the metacognitive work fellows endured to reflect upon their lives, ideas, values, feelings, discoveries, musings, and speculations.

THE COLLABORATIVE EXPERIENCE OF THE NWP

Each participant discussed the value of the collaborative nature of the NWP. One of the most significant experiences for them was the multiple opportunities they were given each



day to share, collaborate, and discuss ideas with their table groups or as a class. Sharing their writing was a valuable experience for all of them, and many of the fellows stated that they appreciated having an audience for their work. They welcomed feedback and enjoyed going through the stages of the writing process with their colleagues in a workshop environment. They also stated they enjoyed the lesson demonstrations and that they gleaned several new ideas of implementing strategies teaching writing in their classrooms across grade levels and content areas. Perhaps the most impactful statement about the collaborative nature of the NWP was the opportunity to see other teacher's perspectives and to understand idiosyncratic ways of teaching and learning. One participant even noted that the director and other faculty members took the journals home every night and commented on them with sticky notes, and that ever since then that is something that she has implemented with her own students because the authentic feedback made such a powerful impact on her.

ENTRY INTO A DISCOURSE COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS IN THE FIELD

Half of the participants stated their experience with the personal writing served as the impetus to help them develop their voices as scholarly writers, equipped with the self-efficacy to do so. Most participants echoed that they gained exposure to seminal texts literacy scholars, and the articles, guest speakers, texts, and discussion topics immersed them into a discourse community of scholars where for once in their lifetimes they felt a part of the dialectic. This fruitful dynamic offered these teachers the opportunity to contribute and be a part of a conversation about best practices teaching writing that they had never before experienced. Four of the participants shared that the books and articles that they were exposed to motivated them to read more scholarship in the field, enabling them to discover more authors and gain exposure to new ideas regarding teaching reading and writing.

CONFIDENCE/EMPOWERMENT/SELF-EFFICACY/VOICE

NWP Fellows may have used different words to describe it, but every single one of them spoke or wrote about how the experience empowered them to use their voice and



knowledge to implement change in their classrooms, schools, and districts. Each of them shared that at the end of the four or five weeks, they left the SI feeling more confident and assured about who they were as professional educators, and that they felt as if their voice was important and vital to embracing change. Not only that, they felt heard and encouraged. With a renewed sense of authority that quickly transferred to agency, these teachers possessed the self-efficacy to share what they knew and had learned with other teachers, administrators, district leaders, fellow graduate students, and most importantly, the students who would enter their classrooms in the fall.

CREATIVE RELEASE/THERAPEUTIC/SELF DISCOVERY

NWP Fellows claimed that there was something magical about their way of thinking that “opened up their mind[s]”. They described the feeling as being that of a much-needed creative release, or as a vital outlet for a school year’s worth of pent-up stress and mental exhaustion. They talked about the therapeutic nature of journaling, sharing, reflecting, pondering, meditating, and even going outside to write in the summer sun and be alone with one’s thoughts for a time. Each of the participants stated that the SI offered them stillness, a pause, a third space all their own to write, think, and reflect.

The notion of a “third space”, which comes from [post-colonial theory](#) and is an offshoot of [post-structuralism](#), acts as an ambiguous area that develops when two or more individuals interact, challenging our sense of our identity as a homogenizing, unifying force. In this ambivalent area of discourse, “cultural statements and systems are constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation, [implying] that individuals have no fixity and even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, re-historicized, and read anew” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7).

The SI was neither their own classroom nor the university classroom, rather it was a “third space” all their own that they looked forward to every day with anticipation. It was a neutral space carved out just for them, a place to be a writer, and only a writer, if even for an ephemeral moment in time. In that space they discovered themselves. They explored their fears, dreams, desires, ambitions, goals, and writing baggage. The NWP Fellows made



it clear that they have never experienced anything like this in any other professional development experience before, nor do they think they will ever experience it again.

IMMEDIATE TRANSFERABILITY TO THE CLASSROOM WRITING AS A WAY OF LIFE/FREEDOM TO WRITE

Most participants celebrated the fact that they finally felt the freedom to write and to continue writing for themselves and their students long after their final session had met. They shared that they looked forward to writing each day, and that although it was a lot of work, it was by far the most rewarding work they had done in a professional development setting. They offered that their way of thinking shifted and that they began to value time and space for writing more. Many of them lamented the end of the SI, stating that they felt an emptiness when it was over and they were no longer immersed in the daily rhythms of writing. Their remedy was a commitment to this renewed way of existing as a teacher who is free to write.

TEACHERS TEACHING TEACHERS

Perhaps the next most significant notion that emerged from the participants is the concept of “teachers teaching teachers.” Teachers lauded the idea that they learn best from each other, that they are praised for being knowledgeable, skilled professionals who have a lot to offer their colleagues, and that they are given the opportunity to share what they know with each other. In most professional development programs, teachers are talked to from an expert who shows little value and respect for what they do on a daily basis in their classrooms. They are rarely asked to contribute their own ideas or share their unique experiences and perspectives, and sit passively as knowledge is imparted to them from someone in a position of power. In the NWP model, teachers are invited to share what they know. Teachers are ushered into the conversation by the director who facilitates their whole class discussion and listens as they share in their table groups. This kind of social constructive environment creates an atmosphere where knowledge is constructed together, and where authentic learning occurs.

TEACHER WRITER/WRITER/TEACHER DICHOTOMY



Most teachers feel a tension between the Teacher Writer/Writer/Teacher Dichotomy without actually being cognizant of it. They are torn between being a teacher who writes and a writer who teaches. Typically, the teacher overshadows the writer and the writing falls by the wayside due to the myriad of responsibilities teachers face in a school day. The participants leave feeling as though this tension has been dissolved into a new identity. Many of the fellows share that they emerged with the conviction that they are “a teacher who writes.” They claim that they discover that they are in fact a writer on some level, whether it be that they rediscovered their love of writing and feeling of being a writer, that they already felt that way but that feeling was finally validated by the NWP, or that they emerged as a writer for the first time.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Founded in 1974, The National Writing Project has a legacy as being the best professional development model for K-12 teachers because of its effective timeless practices, sound philosophy and theoretical underpinnings, and the valuable people at the core of its mission who pledge to uphold the integrity of the legacy. The notion of teachers teaching teachers, cemented in a collaborative learning environment that is rich with academic scholarship, grounded in research, and yet encourages personal reflection while upholding a commitment to best practices teaching writing, is what ensures its success. In an era where standardized testing and teacher and school accountability rein, where STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics) is revered and literacy often forgotten, and where students are navigating a digital age with less and less focus on writing, thinking, reading, interpreting, and analyzing texts, students need NWP trained teachers who are passionate about writing, who are adept at teaching it, and who are writers themselves. Furthermore, teachers need the space and solace that the NWPSI provides for rejuvenation, reflection, introspection, and collaboration. Good writing teachers will nurture and create students who write well and who enjoy writing as well as reading, and quite frankly, our students deserve it. The NWP is an exemplar for models of professional development in any content area and grade level, and teachers who are trained in the practices of the NWP are better teachers of all disciplines across the curriculum. District leaders, school



administrators, teachers, literacy coaches, and university professors and deans need to work together to support and utilize the 180 local NWP sites throughout the country. The NWP is approaching its 50th birthday, and new generations of teacher consultants and directors are working hard all year long to ensure the continuation of a legacy of excellence in writing education.

CONCLUSION

In my attempt to glean the perceptions of the participants about how they viewed themselves as writers and teachers of writing, I uncovered much more: the impressive legacy of the NWP, the mystique of the local sites and their ability to make writers out of non-writers and scholars out of school teachers, and the notion of writing as a way of life. Adrienne Rich once said that we must read and write as if our lives depend upon it, and that is generally not taught in school (<http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/540t>). I ask why not? As a former NWP Fellow myself, I too was transformed as a writer, teacher, scholar, and person. In fact, almost everything I do in the classroom has its roots in the pedagogical philosophy and theoretically underpinnings of the NWP. After 20 years of teaching high school and college level English, I am now a professor of teacher education, and I approach every class that I teach as if I am directing a writing project. Why? Because the strategies of collaboration, daily reading and writing, creating a community of writers, and nudging students to ask questions and explore ideas with each other, (while providing them with a nurturing and safe environment to do so), are what good writing teachers do. I am committed to encouraging my teachers to teach other teachers, while approaching my classes both as a writer who teaches and a teacher who writes, and providing my students with the freedom, space, and time to write and reflect. I am hopeful that this will instill in them the notion that writing is a way of life, encouraging them to publish their work, exposing them to mentor texts and good models while writing alongside them, and making it my goal each semester to foster a sense of confidence, self-efficacy, and empowerment in my students and encourage them to discover their voices. These are not only the marks of good



teaching, but the tenets, best practices, and mystique of a national organization that tries daily to do the same.

This article is dedicated to the legacy of Robert L. Infantino, Ed.D., Professor of Education, Emeritus, and Director of the San Diego Area Writing Project (1980-91), who encouraged me to attend the National Writing Project Summer Institute, and who was my mentor, professor, advisor, and friend for 27 years. He is the reason I am the teacher I am today.

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