

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MOONLARK PRODUCTIONS FILM PROJECT

Ethel, Louisiana, March 1, 2013

In March of this year, Moonlark Productions will begin a one-year film project which will explore the human side of educational reform. Over the last two decades many attempts have been made by educational authorities to remediate or reform what is perceived to be a failing, or at least ailing, public school system in America. Many policies have been instituted over the years, and teachers in the classroom have borne the responsibility for implementing the dictates of these varied approaches to educational reform. At the classroom level, teachers know which of these reforms have had a positive impact and which have not. More importantly, teachers can offer reasons *why* these programs have or have not succeeded. However, in the public discourse on educational reform the voices of individual classroom teachers are not present, or are poorly represented by an often confrontational “official union response.”

Moonlark founder and Artistic Director Ray Sibley has worked as a teacher in the East Baton Rouge Parish school system for 18 years, serving at three different high schools, and interacting with many teachers along the way. This experience has given Dr. Sibley a close-up view of the complexities of educational reform:

Each high school has a unique cultural identity and organizational culture as well as a different community of teachers and students. Teachers know that any attempt to change the public school system must consider these differences. When I talk to teachers and listen to their stories and experiences when speaking of their attempts to navigate the “system” and provide what their students need to improve school performance, I hear them speaking of issues that are not addressed in the public discourse. Institutional reform is most often mandated in a top-down trajectory. Given the isolation of teachers from each other and their powerlessness, as a group and individually, to affect meaningful change, many have become hopeless, and comply, often reluctantly, with mandates handed down from administrators. Almost everything I have learned about successful teaching has come from other teachers, not from “official” or “institutional” authorities. Teaching the subject is not the issue in schools; difficulties arise in teaching the individual students and accounting for student performance.

In the spirit of Anna Devere Smith’s theatrical work, in particular *Let Me Down Easy*, her production that looked at the Health Care System in America, this film and script will be based on interviews. We will interview high school teachers and record their stories; edit and then script them. Actors will perform these scripts as dramatic monologues, and these performances will be filmed and edited, culminating in a feature-length film. By staging these interviews as theatrical performances, we provide objective distance from the subject, and anonymity for the teachers involved, so that they may be open and honest about their viewpoints. Many teachers are afraid of damaging their careers or losing their jobs if they speak up publicly about what they believe is really going on in the classroom and the school. We hope that this theatre production can be a vehicle that makes it possible to insert new words, ideas, and experiences into the discussion and debate on educational reform. With this production, we hope to help create an open dialogue that includes the voices of teachers. Teachers, as much as anyone, have a seriously vested interest in the successful outcomes of our public school system; their voice is vital to that success.

As a society, we are all deeply connected to our school system: whether we work in that system, send

our children to public schools, or live in communities served by the system, we all depend on these schools to transmit our common knowledge and ideals to the next generation. Consequently, we are all vulnerable to the shortcomings of the public school system, and all have a vested interest in its success.

In short, this film is a documentary that attempts to help teachers participate in the discussion of educational reform by presenting stories expressing their heartfelt words and their real-world experiences and insights. Anyone interested in supporting or contributing to this project is welcome.

Contact:

Ray Sibley

Moonlark Productions

5158 Line Road

Ethel LA 70730

rlsibley@moonlark.org