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# Preface

**W**riting instruction is receiving renewed attention in policy circles as well as in state and local curriculum meetings because of new communication technologies and escalating assessment practices in schools. This book, filled with real-life vignettes, examples, and practical advice on writing instruction in K–8 classrooms, is meant for the teacher or soon-to-be teacher who is endeavoring to blend all the purposes and reasons for teaching writing into his or her instruction. This teacher sees writing instruction as more than preparation for national, state, or local assessment measures. He or she values multiple reasons for student writing that include having students use writing as a means of discovering, communicating, and demonstrating knowledge.

To help teachers understand the expectations for student writing today, we share historical perspectives throughout. This historical grounding allows teachers to see that many instructional practices and assessments have a rich history in American schools. Teachers become more aware of today's practices by understanding their historical roots.

In noting the importance of remembering past writing endeavors and using them to improve or understand current instruction, Graves (2004) wrote:

Children want to write. These words are just as true now as they were 20 years ago when I first wrote them at the beginning of *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (1983). I would only add . . . if we let them. For the classroom environment has changed. Teachers are expected to teach twice as much curriculum within the same number of hours under the many number of classroom specialists. Time is in short supply—especially for writing. (p. 88)

Our book takes the words of Graves to heart and offers teachers ways to use writing to extend thinking and to develop the craft of writing. The

craft of writing is important throughout the book, and we provide teachers with strategies to support the refinement of student writing.

Numerous examples are presented of young writers engaging in narrative, informational, descriptive, and persuasive texts with real purposes and audiences throughout the book. Reluctant writers, difficult writing situations, and various writing assessment formats are described, as is the use of writing as a window into a child's understanding of his or her intellectual and social self. Complementing the examples are real conversations shared between students and teachers so that readers can come to understand how teachers scaffold current student learning to more advanced knowledge in supportive ways. This book provides practical information to help teachers facilitate the writing development of all of their students.

Two of us have joined together to write this book. While we both have spent the majority of our careers as classroom teachers, each of us now has unique understandings and experiences that contribute to the strength and thoroughness of this book.

We first met, approximately 20 years ago, as classroom teachers at a summer institute for Northern Nevada Writing Project (a National Writing Project site). Diane was then embarking on the challenge of teaching a multiage classroom in a demonstration setting at the university while pursuing her doctoral degree. Her research has continued to focus on young children's literacy development, particularly in high poverty schools. Joan was a middle school teacher working on her master's degree and juggling a career and single parenthood. Her research has continued to focus on literacy instruction with an emphasis on writing.

We continued our friendship and collaboration intermittently over the years as Diane became a professor of literacy at the University of Nevada, Reno, and Joan worked as director of the Northern Nevada Writing Project and at the Nevada Department of Education as the state writing assessment consultant. Currently, we are both working on school reform issues in literacy within schools and among colleagues in Nevada.

We have organized this book to include both theoretical and practical considerations about writing instruction. Chapter 1 provides the foundation of the book with an exploration of writing to learn and understand. This chapter explores historical and current challenges to writing instruction. Literacy connections within a classroom that include speaking and writing, reading and writing, and finally listening/viewing and writing are described. The chapter ends with a discussion of the hardest parts of supporting student writers.

Chapter 2 builds from this base and moves to a consideration of writing to understand information. Readers might be surprised to see a chapter about informational writing precede discussion of narrative writing. We

have placed this chapter purposely because we see informal and formal writing about content to be critical to student achievement in all subject areas. This chapter is organized around informal writing to learn and formal writing to learn. There is also discussion centered on the structure of informational text and helping students come to understand these structures and replicate them in their writing.

Chapter 3 moves from informational writing and reading to narrative writing. In this chapter we share overviews of the writing process and a writing workshop. Following this discussion is an exploration of writing development and gender differences in writing performance. As seen in Chapter 2, we explore informal and formal narrative writing.

Chapter 4 centers on writing as a craft. Within this chapter readers explore supporting students in their writing to real audiences and for real purposes. We also detail supporting students in revision and editing.

Chapter 5 looks deeply at assessment and preparing students for assessments. A historical perspective is shared about assessment methods so that readers understand today's concerns. Within the chapter, there are discussions centered on direct methods of assessment such as holistic scoring, primary trait scoring, multiple/analytic scoring, and portfolio assessments. The chapter includes pragmatic ways to support students in successfully responding to divergent and convergent writing assessment items.

Chapter 6, the final chapter in the book, is targeted to academic conversations that support students as they develop proficiency in writing. Many examples are showcased that allow teachers to view the subtleties within conversations that facilitate student writer development. Some of these conversations are informal and often occur during moments of teaching or transitions. Other conversations are more formal and occur during conferences or are written and targeted to student writing.

The focus of this book is supporting student writers from kindergarten through Grade 8. We recognize that it is the teacher who makes the difference in the writing experiences of students. The teacher is the only person who can create a classroom that nurtures student writers by providing numerous opportunities for supportive practice. It is our hope that this book serves teachers well as they strive to have all children become successful writers.