

Preface

As I look back on my professional journey, it is easy to see that literacy has always been the first and foremost purpose of my work. As a naive first-year teacher, I was thrust into an environment in urban Atlanta where my sixth-grade reading and language-arts students read between first- and third-grade levels. This was my introduction to below-grade-level readers and the lifelong quest to find solutions. From that time forward, my number one focus has been to research, design, implement, and evaluate strategies and systems to improve reading, writing, and hence content learning. Although my work has been grounded in research, it is confirmed in action research in diverse schools with a wide range of teachers and students.

As you consider the ideas and suggestions within this text, keep in mind that about 55% of elementary students read on grade level, about 45% of middle school students read on grade level, and only about 35% of high school students read on grade level. Much of this can be attributed to the differences in the expectations of the assessments from elementary to middle to high school, which are related to the amount of nonfiction (science and social studies) reading and levels of questions on the middle and high school assessments. This trend in reading scores will be addressed and corrected only with consistent implementation of research-based instructional strategies in all classes in all grade levels. In a recent meeting of executive administrators in a diverse district of 80,000 students, the executive director for high schools attributed the gains in the district's high school reading to the consultation and support provided by the concepts and strategies in this book. I hope that readers will find success with the practical suggestions within.