

## Preface

This book was written by and for teachers interested in using writing and related collaborative learning processes to better understand classroom practice.

Many educators encourage their students to use writing as a tool for learning. However, writing is not as likely to be touted as a professional development strategy for teachers themselves. Recently, experts in staff development have been promoting teachers' study groups that use reading for shared learning. We are longtime fans of such work. But we also believe that professional growth can be enhanced substantially when teachers write, reflect, and revise as well as read together. This book comes out of a project based on that belief.

In a multi-year initiative, our project team formed several writing groups for teachers, and each group created its own protocols for managing its collaborative work. As our groups met to revise and reflect on our emerging narratives, we helped each other consider more deeply the theories that were driving the instructional practices we were writing about. In polishing our writing, we honed our thinking. In collaboratively shaping ideas about our teaching experiences, we improved our writing. Through this interactive process, we also enhanced our sense of ourselves as professionals.

Numerous times throughout the project, all three writing groups gathered to share stories of our processes, ask questions about our progress, and refine our ideas about writing to learn. A major strategy we used to promote this ongoing analysis was to generate individual and small-group reflections in response to structured prompts. Meanwhile, by thinking critically about the approaches we were developing for managing our writing groups, we identified strategies other educators can adapt to support collaborative learning.

Besides drawing on our book as a framework to support professional development, readers will also find vivid, engaging stories of individual teachers reflecting deeply on their own practices. Through writing these stories, all of us have strengthened our professional identities, in the classroom and beyond. Although ranging from primary through university-level educators, we came to see ourselves as a unified community of practice, meeting regularly and using shared reflection to grow together. In addition, we began to recognize how our particular community of practice was connected to other professionals engaged in related inquiry about teaching.

As you read this book now, we hope you will find helpful ways to use writing for professional development. And we also hope you will find colleagues with whom you can identify—educators like you, dedicated to teaching, committed to continued professionalization, and eager to share stories about our work.