

# Preface

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Welcome to a new era of literacy leadership that is a result of a number of recent changes in education and the nation's economy. As you know, from the 1990s to the present day, there has been an upsurge in national and state policies related to literacy instruction, particularly reading instruction. From *No Child Left Behind* to *Race to the Top*, stakes for student performance as measured by test-based accountability have increased. States and school districts have felt the thumb of policy intervention on their backs and have reacted in various ways, from standards adoption to mandated curriculum compliance. Scientific research has become the driver of the reform and accountability movements. To top it off, the nation's economy has been slipping. Funding for education has decreased nationally, both within most states and for a majority of our local school districts. Administrators often have no choice but to cut back positions, services, programs, and materials and equipment.

As a result, the role of literacy leadership has been and is currently in the process of evolving, and in many contexts it is changing rapidly. Districts that used to have a literacy coach in each building—a position that was hailed as a powerful strategy for increasing students' literacy performance in the early 2000s—are now assigning one literacy coach or reading specialist to multiple schools. Job responsibilities are being combined as positions are cut. There is less support for classroom teachers and fewer positions that identify literacy leadership as their primary job description.

However, rather than provide fewer services to children, many educators are stepping up to the plate and taking on literacy-leadership roles themselves. Administrators, classroom teachers, staff, and community members are advocating for students' literacy needs in ways they may never have had to before. Collaboration among colleagues has sprouted to meet needs in a district. Technology has become a tool to disseminate information while saving money. Professional literacy communities are forming to provide support so that no educator or school district has to feel isolated. Educators who are speaking up and taking on these new leadership roles need our support and guidance to become agents of change in these days of education reform. That's what this book is all about.

*The Literacy Leadership Handbook: Best Practices for Developing Professional Literacy Communities* takes a proactive stance to help school districts' literacy leaders—whomever they may be—not only to see themselves as agents of change and growth, but also to facilitate their growth as professionals who promote growth in themselves, their colleagues, their students, the school culture, and the general profession. Each chapter integrates this theme of growth and development.

Anyone can be a literacy leader if they take it upon themselves to advocate for the development of a school culture that supports the democratic growth of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to escalate and motivate students' literacy learning. This book will help educators reach their goals as literacy advocates and leaders in their districts.

## Literacy Leadership as an Art

Lucy Calkins's classic book *The Art of Teaching Writing* (1994) came to mind when we started writing this book. We see literacy leadership the way Calkins sees writing pedagogy—as an artful endeavor. It is philosophical, creative, and reflects an intrinsic and emergent process. Also, we see both writing and leadership as talents that can be cultivated, especially with the help of a good mentor. We know of highly effective, thoughtful literacy leaders. We also know others who try their best but don't possess the underlying artistic talent and the heart needed to feel and to be as effective as they possibly could be in the role. These observations are what lead us to make connections between the qualities and dispositions of an artist and those of a literacy leader.

Readers will notice right away that *The Literacy Leadership Handbook* follows an artistic metaphor. We selected the cover art because the mosaic tree reflects our vision of collaboration and growth among the literacy leaders of a school. Based on our vision of leadership as an artistic endeavor and talent, we have named and outlined each chapter with titles and headings that reflect art terms. We begin each chapter with a quote from an artist and an artistic image and have tied the quotes into the meaning of the chapters' content. We propose that after reading this book, readers will be able to paint a masterpiece of literacy leadership that reflects a democratic experience involving the collaboration of a literacy-learning community.

## How to Use This Book

To best meet the needs of educators new to the field of literacy leadership, whether they are in college training programs right now and reading this book for a course or experienced teachers in the field who are taking on new leadership roles, we have chosen to integrate chapters demonstrating an overarching view of literacy leadership spotlighting multiple perspectives and the roles of numerous leaders within a system. Gone are the days when singular individuals—the principal, supervisor, or coach—led literacy learning. We must re-envision a system with literacy leadership valued as a shared and mutually enhancing responsibility—where learning is synergistic throughout the many niches of a school.

We recommend that this book be used within the context of a literacy-learning community so that the role of literacy leadership within a school building or district can be explored and discussed as groups of educators interact with the book. As ideas and issues arise, educators can discuss how their district envisions and negotiates the leadership roles and the literacy program. At the end of each chapter we have included Questions for Reflection and Discussion to spark conversations around the literacy portrait your school hopes to paint and a Practical Applications section that suggests ideas for applying the concepts in each chapter to classroom and professional development activities.

Another feature of this book is the incorporation of voices of practicing literacy leaders who are serving in schools across the nation. Each chapter exhibits features written by experts in the field that connect literacy leadership to the Common Core State Standards and Response to Intervention. In the Critical Voices and the Ethical Literacy Leader features in each chapter, educators speak honestly about personal issues and experiences they have had that relate to the chapter topics. Furthermore, Chapter 3 includes two interviews: the first with Linda Sullivan, elementary educator and literacy leader in Newton, New Jersey; the second with Dana Jackson, secondary educator and high school literacy coach in Franklin, New Jersey. In addition, Chapter 6 includes an interview with the literacy-leadership team at Ridge and Valley Charter School in Blirstown, New Jersey. Our contributors include classroom teachers across grade levels, literacy coaches and reading specialists working in school districts, representatives from outside agencies, teacher educators, administrators, and parents. We have reached out to colleagues from across the country and have represented both urban and rural school districts. See our About the Contributors pages for biographies of each contributor.

## Welcome to the World of Literacy Leadership

You truly are one of a rare breed of people. You have chosen to become a school leader, a literacy leader. It is no easy job. It comes with many challenges and sometimes few accolades of recognition outside of knowing deep inside that you want the best for your students, your colleagues, and yourself. We are all learners and need to support and nurture each other.

We hope our book becomes an invaluable tool for you as you develop as a literacy leader. We would love to hear from you. Tell us what you're doing; share your triumphs and challenges. Let us know how we can help further. We don't have all of the answers, but with our combined experience in the field, we have strong networks upon which we can draw.

Be strong in your new role. Your colleagues and students are depending on you!

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## Reference

Calkins, L. M. (1994). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.