Teachers’ Writing Groups offers a portrait of richly productive work … that we have not seen before. This collection, emerging from the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project, provides an instructive view of a variety of ways in which NWP teacher consultants use writing to conduct, reflect on, and publish inquiries about the teaching of writing K–university.

Patricia Lambert Stock
Michigan State University
Past President, National Council of Teachers of English
Co-founder, Red Cedar Writing Group

Inspiring! Readers will want to start their own writing groups after following these teachers on their journey to build unique “communities of practice” that exist to support their development as writers and teachers.

Shanti Bruce
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Accessible and easy to read, Teachers’ Writing Groups … illustrates multiple ways in which peer groups support changes in a contributor’s writing and/or teaching. The book collapses the political distances between K–12 teachers and university professors.

Kathleen Dudden Rowlands
California State University, Northridge

Teachers’ Writing Groups: Collaborative Inquiry and Reflection for Professional Growth

Edited by

Sarah Robbins
George Seaman
Kathleen Blake Yancey
Dede Yow

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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.
Acknowledgments

The authors sharing their learning experiences in this book benefited enormously from working together. Along the way, a number of others made important contributions to our collaboration.

We thank the National Writing Project (NWP) for providing a mini-grant to our NWP site in the initial phase of our inquiry. That seed grant provided several release days for teachers to attend meetings, funds for the purchase of reading materials, and small stipends for our project participants.

Kennesaw State University also gave substantial support to our work, including a place to gather for writing group and whole-team meetings, access to computer labs for social writing opportunities, and permission to use such essentials as photocopying machines. In particular, we thank the English Department and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, as well as the Bagwell College of Education, for hosting our project on numerous occasions.

Members of the community of local Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project (KMWP) NWP affiliates provided important encouragement for our research and writing. At a number of workshops and presentations sponsored by the KMWP, where we had the chance to share our work in progress, teacher colleagues asked probing questions and made insightful suggestions.

Special thanks go to the Kennesaw Mountain Writing Project’s program staff, including Joe Cawley, Stacie Janecki, Amy Hopper, and Becky Ramsay.

Most of all, we are grateful to the many students whose classroom work is chronicled here. Their eagerness to contribute to our exploration helped each of us maintain faith that we would all grow together in ways beneficial to classroom teaching.