

National Writing Project & Nagin, C. (2003). *Because Writing Matters: Improving Student Writing in Our Schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass. 138 pp. \$24.95 Cloth.

A common lament of classroom teachers, from kindergarten through graduate school, is the seeming inability of their students to write and to write well. Admittedly the contexts in which writing takes place are different yet the premise remains the same – students struggle with writing effectively and efficiently. No longer the domain of the educational elite in which writing was seen as a means of maintaining political, cultural and economic hegemony, writing is now the “common language” of the commoner, an essential skill needed in a modern society. Though society demands a “writing literate” society, why do schools struggle with producing writing-proficient students? *Because Writing Matters* just may be both the answer and the solution to this problem.

*Because Writing Matters* is a publication of the National Writing Project whose goal, for over 25 years, is to seek and promote ways in which schools can improve the art of writing. With over 175 affiliates in all 50 states, the NWP promotes the facilitation of proven methodologies in which student achievement, teacher innovation, and administrative support focus on the common objective of increasing student proficiency and confidence in writing.

The book is divided into six easily digested and extremely pragmatic chapters. The initial chapters provide the theoretical and conceptual foundation as it is argued that writing matters at all levels of formal education. Writing is an educationally universal ideal and, thus, is an educationally universal challenge. The authors argue that this challenge can be tempered by requiring writing across the curriculum as well as allowing students to write in and for different contexts. Yet what is paramount are the consistent expectations that teachers and administrators must have in the belief that writing is important, that it matters. Practical approaches and applications to the pedagogy of writing are also offered here which provides the reader useful tips on how to effectively teach writing. These tips are presented in the form of both research based conclusions as well as a series of “casual conversations” by teachers of writing. In this manner, an effective blend of research and reason is provided, making the argument that writing matters more empirical and more immediate.

What, arguably, may be the most important concept in the book concerns the role that teachers and administrators play in the development of student-writers. Teacher buy-in, if you will, is essential to the success of any pedagogical, school-based initiative, and the promotion of writing is no exception. The authors contend that teachers must start by believing that writing does indeed matter and that every student can write to the best of their ability. Teachers need to be challengingly innovative in the ways in which they teach writing. Administrators must encourage teacher promotion and innovation of writing competence and, most importantly, provide practical means by which teachers can become better teachers of writing. At the core is the facilitation of systematic faculty development by which teachers are given the physical resources (books, materials, etc.)

to teach writing and the professional resources (in-services, peer collaborations, access to workshops or conferences) by which skills new skills can be learned and tried skills can be honed. It is easy to say that writing matters; it is much more difficult to make the ideal a reality.

*Because Writing Matters* has sweeping appeal to teachers, administrators, and parents alike. It is full of pragmatic tools to increase both the quantity and the quality of writing in schools. Not haughty or esoteric, it is relevant, accessible and, above all, a practical guidebook that presents ways by which writing within the educational landscape can be improved. Schools and school districts should buy this book and use it as a roadmap to start the process of increasing student writing. Writing does matter, and it matters greatly. If educators genuinely believe this to be true, then it is high time they put notion into action. What may be the first step in moving any writing initiative forward is the reading of this book. And if writing matter's enough, they will.

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