studies will have to be discarded as a result of problems of design, implementation, or interpretation. Perhaps if enough people read this book carefully, including doctoral students and—just as importantly—their advisors, we will have less wasted effort in the field of writing research.

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Jonathan H. Lovell

The Art of Teaching Writing by Lucy McCormick Calkins Heinemann, 1986

In her slim, memorable volume, Lessons From a Child (Heinemann, 1983), which recounts the story of Susan Sible’s growth as a writer through her third and fourth grade years, Lucy Calkins muses on the surprising applicability of the “lessons learned in [the] white clapboard schoolhouse in rural New Hampshire [where Susie went to school]” to the classrooms “which hold 35 children, often speaking a total of ten different native languages” that she was beginning to work with in New York City.

In many ways The Art of Teaching Writing is the story of the first six years of this involvement, and of the Teachers College Writing Project (not connected to the National Writing Project) that grew up around Calkins’ work with this much larger, more culturally various group of elementary students and their teachers.

Read as such a story, it is a remarkable narrative. “There are sixteen of us in the [Teachers College] Writing Project,” Calkins explains, “a team comprised of researchers and teacher-trainers.” Their goal is nothing less than the transformation of “the largest and most complex school system in the world into [the sort of] warm and human place” in which growth in writing can occur.

Sprinkled throughout the six sections of the book—“The Essentials of Teaching Writing,” “How Children Change as Writers,” “Writing Conferences,” “High Teacher Input,” “Reading-Writing Connections,” and “Modes of Writing”—we catch glimpses of this team at work. We look over the shoulder of Shelley Harwayne, Assistant Director of the Project, as she begins a classroom mini-lesson with a quick tip to students to reread what they have written in order to “have a little conference with yourself. Ask yourself questions: How [do] you feel about the piece? [Are] there ways you could make it better?” Or Georgia Heard, greeting Rose Napoli’s sixth grade class with the words, “For me, poems have to be about something that is so important to me, I need to have a physical feeling of that topic inside me.” Or finally, in an episode reminiscent of the university/school district collaborative practices of the National Writing Project, Lucy Calkins describing herself working with third grade teacher Mrs. Cohen to improve students’ fiction writing abilities and discovering that “Mrs. Cohen and I never asked ourselves, ‘What does the process of writing fiction entail?’ . . . We needed to wonder, ‘What is essential here?’ and ‘What is at the heart of writing fiction?’ We needed, perhaps, to have our own experiences with fiction writing so we could answer those questions with heart and soul.”

Similarly, the most extended narrative account we read in The Art of Teaching Writing of Calkins’ project-in-action focuses on the author and sixth grade teacher Rose Napoli figuring out a context for connecting reading and writing that neither had envisioned when they began their work together. It is a tale that closely resembles the main narrative sequence of Lessons From a Child. The classroom teacher begins with a frenzy of teacher-directed activities designed to impress the visiting university researcher; the researcher becomes embarrassed that these activities, in this case inspired by her own summer institute lectures, are having the opposite of their intended effect; the teacher and researcher turn from their pre-set theoretical concerns to a common focus on the individual students in the class; and finally, a new, unanticipated agenda emerges.

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Like the classrooms described in Lessons From a Child, moreover, the voices of the children that emerge from such acts of attention on the part of teacher and researcher are astonishing. Here's Jung, one of Rose Napoli's sixth graders, talking about the way that the authors the class is reading have influenced the class's writing:

Everybody's authors are different. When we have writing conferences, we teach each other what we learn from our authors. I pick a book that has a famous author because if you read famous books, not goofyies, you learn to be a better author. In an excellent book like Alfred Hitchcock, I pick out things to put in my story, to make my story more better. My writing got better because I started reading more better books and it was like talking with other authors, when I read their books (p. 257).

The larger purpose of this book, however, is to move beyond these episodes drawn from the teachers and students with whom the Teachers College Writing Project has worked and to make bolder, more wide-ranging assertions about the art and craft of teaching writing at the elementary and middle school levels. Consequently, the book is organized to lead the reader from an initial focus on the essential ingredients of a successful writing-centered classroom to sections which address the possible developmental stages in writer's growth from kindergarten through middle school, the types of writing conferences teachers can promote in their classrooms, the importance of mini-lessons within these classrooms, the importance of connecting students' reading and writing as similarly interactive processes, and finally a focus on some of the ways that teachers might use learning logs, report writing, poetry writing, and fiction writing within the context of these reading and writing "workshop" settings.

With a vibrant and persuasive call to action, a call that rings with personal conviction, Calkins combines a rich immersion in students' voices from classrooms once considered hopeless by many observers.

The Art of Teaching Writing is a confirmation of the best we've done as teachers of writing, and a provocative invitation toward new directions and insights as yet unexplored.

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