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Designed for classroom teachers, graduate students, literacy specialists, researchers, and interested members of the general public, this book offers a rich array of research-based practices to improve the academic writing of English learners (ELs).

Currently, ELs are the fastest growing group of school-age children in the United States and constitute approximately 10% of the total K–12 population (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012a). At the same time that EL enrollments have increased in U.S. public schools, researchers and policymakers have highlighted large literacy gaps based on students’ English language proficiency. Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicate that the poor reading and writing performance of ELs in the middle grades persists through high school. The 2011 administration of the NAEP revealed a significant gap between the computer-based English writing of 8th-grade ELs and their non-EL peers, with less than 1% of ELs at both 8th grade and 12th grade scoring at the proficient level (U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012b). Such status reports, coupled with the increasing numbers of ELs, suggest that serious attention must be paid to determine how best to enhance the academic literacy of ELs in secondary school.

Adolescent ELs must, at the same time, grapple with the demands of learning an additional language, negotiate the nuances of academic discourse, and master core subject matter. While all learners may face many constraints when learning to write, the difficulties ELs face are magnified because they have to compose in a second language. Teachers need effective instructional practices to help them. These practices can enable ELs to read, negotiate, and understand complex texts independently and produce thoughtful and nuanced writing that is well-reasoned and supported with evidence. These are the skills and abilities the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects call for all students, including ELs, to master in order to become college and
career ready (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Adopted by 46 states, the CCSS present a vision of what it means to be literate in the 21st century and call for all students, including ELs, to develop critical reading skills necessary for a deep understanding of complex texts, and critical writing skills needed to write about those texts. In addition to delineating specific standards for each grade level, the CCSS include College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading and Writing. As is evident from the anchor standards, the CCSS set a high bar for all students and prioritize the ability to analyze and interpret challenging texts and to write about those texts using academic discourse in extended pieces of writing. For EL students, many of whom have been in classrooms focused on literal comprehension and short-answer responses, meeting these rigorous new standards can be daunting. In fact, researchers have noted a “growing inequality” in classrooms where students designated as “honors students” are exposed to rigorous academic work designed to promote higher literacy, whereas low achievers, children of the poor, and ELs often receive instruction that emphasizes the “transmission of information, providing very little room for the exploration of ideas, which is necessary for the development of deeper understanding” (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, & Gamoran, 2003, p. 689). Given the many demands that academic writing places on them and the lack of practice many ELs have as academic writers, ELs face significant challenges as they strive to become college and career ready.

Although the CCSS acknowledge that ELs may require additional time and instructional support as they acquire English language proficiency and content knowledge, the standards look to teachers to provide “whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the standards” (National Governors Association, p. 4). This makes it imperative for teachers to identify effective ways of teaching ELs.

This book addresses the tools and knowledge teachers need in order to enhance the academic writing of ELs. It provides specific teaching strategies, activities, and extended lessons to develop ELs’ narrative, informational, and argumentative writing as well as explores the challenges each of these genres poses for ELs and suggests ways to scaffold instruction to help ELs become confident and competent academic writers. Showcasing the work of exemplary teachers who have devoted time and expertise to creating rich
learning environments for ELs, it also includes artifacts and written work produced by students with varying levels of language proficiency as models of what students can accomplish.

Readers can use this book to:

- Become better informed about best practices for teaching writing to ELs
- Plan and set goals for instruction
- Supplement existing English language arts or English language development curricula with research-based strategies, activities, and lessons
- Develop a community of learners
- Create safe classroom spaces in which students are encouraged to participate, even with less-than-perfect English
- Design and implement culturally responsive instruction, building on students’ strengths
- Help ELs meet the Common Core State Standards

Although most of the instructional practices described in this book are intended for ELs in English language arts classrooms who have expanding-to-advanced levels of English proficiency, teachers also will find practices that have been designed for ELs with an emerging level of English proficiency. Also included are practices for teaching recent arrivals to the United States as well as students who have lived in the United States for many years.

*Helping English Learners to Write—Meeting Common Core Standards, Grades 6–12* is divided into five chapters. Each chapter begins with a brief overview and ends with a short summary of the key points.

Chapter 1, “English Learners: Who Are They, and What Do They Need to Meet the Common Core Standards for Writing?” provides an overview of English learners—their diversity, the challenges they face, and what they need to know and be able to do in order to succeed in secondary school. The chapter discusses the multiple constraints faced by ELs, including but not limited to cognitive, linguistic, communicative, contextual, textual, affective, and cultural constraints. Each of these constraints makes additional and competing demands on learners’ working memory, which can confound the learning process. This is especially true in relation to the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (CCSS/ELA), which place a premium on analyzing and interpreting challenging
texts and using academic discourse in extended pieces of writing. This chapter sets the stage for what teachers can do to help ELs meet the CCSS.

Chapter 2, “Best Practices for Teaching Writing to English Learners,” summarizes the current research on writing instruction for English learners and suggests some commonly accepted best practices for teaching writing to ELs: creating culturally relevant writing instruction in a community of learners; strategy instruction; modeling with mentor texts; explicit instruction in academic language; scaffolding instruction; and using formative assessment for developing future instruction. Each of these best practices is illustrated with accompanying strategies, activities, and lessons that both scholars and practitioners alike will find useful. The chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of providing ELs with ample opportunities to practice what they have learned.

Chapter 3, “Narrative Writing and CCSS,” is dedicated to narrative writing and begins with an explanation of the importance of this genre not only in helping ELs to convey their experiences, but also in serving as a gateway into other genres such as informational and argumentative writing. The chapter outlines the language demands of narrative writing and the challenges that ELs may face in mastering this genre. It describes the elements of narrative writing—sequencing, showing, not telling, vocabulary of the senses, to name just a few—and provides multiple lessons and activities to illustrate how each element might be taught. The chapter provides several prompts for writing narratives and concludes with a lesson on how to blend narrative writing with other genres of writing.

Chapter 4, “Informative/Explanatory Texts and CCSS,” begins with a summary of the language demands of this genre and the challenges that ELs might face when engaging it. The chapter discusses how to teach the various text structures involved in reading and writing informational texts, such as description, sequence, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, and problem/solution, and provides helpful lessons and activities to accompany each one. The chapter further provides high-interest activities that reinforce essential skills such as summary writing, as well as more current and complex skills such as developing podcasts, becoming investigative journalists, and using project-based learning.

Chapter 5, “Argumentative Writing and CCSS,” begins with a discussion of the importance of argumentative writing in the context of the CCSS. It explains the various types of argumentative writing
that secondary school students typically engage in and describes the elements of the genre. The chapter discusses macroconcerns of the genre, such as using evidence and commentary to develop arguments, as well as acknowledging and refuting counterarguments. It also discusses microconcerns, such as how to properly integrate quotations and use action verbs, appositives, participles, and other grammatical devices to create vivid language. The chapter includes a section on how to transform informal language into academic English and concludes with a scaffolded lesson on how to teach the argumentative essay.

This book aims to synthesize the current research on ELs and writing in addition to summarizing the best practices for classroom instruction. We hope that in these pages readers will find information that will lead to new research and enhance classroom instruction to better serve English learners in secondary schools.