

FOREWORD

POPULAR MEDIA are reporting that over the past three decades, around 30 *million people* have immigrated to the United States, many with families that have included children, children who bring unique social and emotional needs, lack English language ability, have parents who cannot communicate in English, and the list goes on. But there is one thing that is in our favor—all parents, wherever they come from, want success for their children and have hope that school will make the lives of their kids safe, productive, and socially viable. That puts a heavy burden on you, the teacher, as you are likely to have a child in your classroom who has been separated from their parents at the border or comes with the emotional trauma of having lived in a war-torn country. So, helping these students gain the skills to be productive and socially competent means addressing the needs of the whole child . . . understanding the larger ecosystem, the environment that impacts their lives and shapes their ability to learn. That is asking a lot of today's teachers.

Having spent the past fifteen years in higher education administration, I am often asked, “Do you miss being in the classroom? Did you enjoy teaching and when did you know you were really reaching your students?” The easy answer is, “Once a teacher, always a teacher,” and despite the “reforms” and political and policy environments that so complicate teaching today, it is nevertheless a profession I miss and deeply respect. That is why I am so pleased to write the foreword to this book.

As the president of Texas Woman's University, a majority-minority and Hispanic-serving institution (many having been English learner—EL—students), I see the end products of our K–12 education system every day, and I am always amazed to hear the stories of those students who came from incredibly challenging backgrounds. They often credit that very special teacher who gave them the inspiration to lift themselves up and *want* to become productive and independent citizens of our country. So, I am grateful to all of you who are reading this book and making an effort to strengthen your practice. Your efforts can help lift up those students who come your way.

Learning to teach effectively in today's multilingual classrooms is required of teachers at every grade level—from early elementary all the way through secondary. We have so many contributors who have been in these classrooms and who aim to impart their skills and knowledge to improving our profession; but, in this book, Dr. Joyce Nutta uses a technique that I believe is brilliant. She uses stories that are based in reality.

The power of stories is dramatic, but to be so, they must be relevant, recallable, and motivational, especially when used to improve professional practice. Steve Jobs told stories that made disciples out of his customers. Oprah Winfrey tells stories that her viewers never forget. That is what I love about this book and its powerful stories. One of the stories made me recall a time when I was leading a professional development session with rural teachers and how spending time listening to each individual's lived experience motivated the entire class to engage, embrace the topic, and relate at a much deeper level. And the stories in this book are not just about the didactic relationship between teacher and student. The relationship is much more dramatic than that today because it is an all-encompassing relationship that includes other students, the student's family, school administrators, and even the community where they live.

I am also inspired by this book because of Nutta's personal pathway into teaching and her commitment to the profession. Perhaps it was because as a teenager, Nutta was a second-language learner herself when her family moved to Italy. Also, her early teaching experience came out of an adult education background. That gave her special and unique insights into the needs of learners at many different levels. She became one of my doctoral students at the University of South Florida and had such passion for the requirements of effective EL teaching that we convinced her to join the faculty and help address our huge need in Florida. The state had just placed dramatic new demands on every teacher to acquire new EL skills via ongoing professional development. With her background, Nutta became a real leader in developing an effective professional development protocol to address this need.

Fortunately, today there are far more multilingual teachers than ever before, but a second-language ability only addresses a limited aspect of creating an effective classwide learning environment with students who might speak several different native languages. The ability to quickly assess speaking and writing abilities and to be sensitive to different cultures are required during the limited time teachers are trying to get to know their students. This sounds daunting, doesn't it? Just read "Dibenesha's Story." It is a great reminder to me of how difficult and important—but rewarding—this work is.

In her many years as a practitioner and academic researcher, Nutta has carefully identified key strategies that can be employed to make the classroom

experience effective, but it is her deep understanding of what life is really like for these students, their families, and teachers as told through six compelling stories that make this such an important and meaningful book. The book also prompts excellent discussion to further develop the instructional tools that need to be understood and practiced.

As an academic and former teacher still committed to the powerful mission of teaching ELs, I am so grateful to Nutta for her continuing research in this field and for her efforts to curate such powerful stories and produce this book. It is a wonderful teaching tool and so representative of the actual challenges that both novice and veteran teachers face every day. We are fortunate to have it in our repertoire of high-quality teacher professional development literature.

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