

# Introduction

## VIGNETTE

Two teachers are standing at their classroom doorways across the hall from each other. They have just been to an early morning meeting about test scores . . .

*Mr. Lou McGuire:* If you can't read, you can't do much else in school. The fact that 30 percent of the children in our nation's schools can't read is astonishing to me.

*Ms. Juanita Ramirez:* Thirty percent? This is the most literate nation in the world. You must be confusing the data.

*Mr. Lou McGuire:* Somebody's confusing something, but it's not the data on literacy in our schools. According to an article I just read, researcher Bruce Joyce says, "About one-third of our students do not learn to read in the primary years, and very few of those students learn to read effectively later. The two-thirds who learn to read adequately in the early grades rarely reach their potential then or later" (Joyce 1999b, p.129).

*Ms. Juanita Ramirez:* Are you sure about these facts? It seems so shocking to think that over 30 percent of our students aren't reading.

*Mr. Lou McGuire:* Oh, there's more to this story. Listen to this.

- 38 percent are not reading at grade level (70 percent African American and 65 percent Hispanic);
- Achievement on literacy hasn't risen for 70 years;
- The longer US students are in school, the further they fall behind the averages of other countries;

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- 90 million Americans lack basic literacy skills;
- American businesses lose \$60 million each year due to lack of employees' basic reading skills.

*Ms. Juanita Ramirez:* I think we've got our priorities confused. If we can't teach our children to read, when that is what they come to school to learn—you know, you've heard the little ones . . . "What are you going to learn in school? I'm going to learn to read!"—what's going on, why can't we reach them?

*Mr. Lou McGuire:* I agree. A nation as wealthy as ours has no business neglecting the education of our children. Why can't we teach our kids to read? If literacy truly is a national priority, all children would read, and they would want to read. They'd know they owned the key to lifelong literacy and learning.

*Ms. Juanita Ramirez:* Now, you've got me thinking. It's the \$64,000 question. How did I learn how to read? I think I was just read to by my parents, and I learned the books by heart. I would say all of the words right along with my Dad. Do you have a first memory of learning to read?

*Mr. Lou McGuire:* I remember going to the library every Saturday. Mrs. Gerad, our librarian, would read a special story, and then we would find a book to take home.

*Ms. Juanita Ramirez:* You know, I have an idea. What if we ask our students how they learned to read. And, then, we can have them ask their parents the same question. This could be a way to begin to put a huge emphasis on reading.

*Mr. Lou McGuire:* I really like your idea. We can start with the \$64,000 question about learning how to read, and then we can pursue this line of student-parent dialogue with other questions:

What do you like to read?

What do you read the most?

Do you like to read?

Or, do you like writing, better?

*Ms. Juanita Ramirez:* Wow! I think we are on to something. These are exactly the kinds of conversations I want my students to be having this year as we focus on literacy skills of all kinds.

*Mr. Lou McGuire:* Well, here they come. Time to greet the little darlings!

## ABOUT THE BOOK

Based on the premise that, while not all teachers are reading teachers, all are teachers of literacy, *Literacy Matters* addresses teachers working with students across all content areas and across all grade levels. The teaching and learning strategies support and advance literacy, within the context of the various subject areas. Using these stand-alone strategies with social studies content, or with the concepts of science, math, or literature, teachers explicitly incorporate the elements for reading, writing, speaking, and listening into their content-specific lessons.

The organization of the book is not meant to move sequentially from one chapter to the next, although it can be read and reviewed that way. Because each of the strategies work independently of the others, readers may peruse the table of contents or skim and scan the various sections of the book and dip in and out of the areas that seem most pertinent to their needs. Some may want to dive into the section on guided reading immediately, even though it appears at the end of the book, while others may prefer to start with the first strategy in the book, the learning to learn strategies that foster metacognitive reflection. As it is a small handbook of ideas, the system of offering optional approaches works quite easily, regardless of how one maneuvers through the various sections.

## THE ACRONYM: LITERACY MATTERS

For those not trained in reading instruction, *Literacy Matters* offers over 45 strategies that encourage students in the development of their literacy skills. Each letter of *Literacy Matters* represents a set of instructional activities that unpack a literacy skill. The various sections are arranged in the following order:

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## L-I-T-E-R-A-C-Y M-A-T-T-E-R-S

Learn to learn with metacognitive reflections

Interact with seven strategies to comprehend

Tap into prior knowledge to support schema theory

Extend reading to encourage flexible reading

Research the principles of the brain and learning

Analyze words to foster fluency

Collaborate with cooperative learning groups to engage learners

You-are-a-reader attitude matters

Mediate with early intervention strategies

Appeal to parents/guardians and get them involved

Teach vocabulary by building background knowledge

Tune in to technology to impact literacy

Enter literacy with a multiple intelligences approach

Read aloud, read along, read appropriately to foster flexible readers

Strategize with guided reading activities

*Literacy Matters* defines each of these sets of strategies and offers best practices teachers can use to help improve student literacy while using their subject matter materials. *Literacy Matters* is a practical guide for enhancing literacy skills at any grade level and in any content area.

Enjoy!

—Robin Fogarty  
Chicago, IL