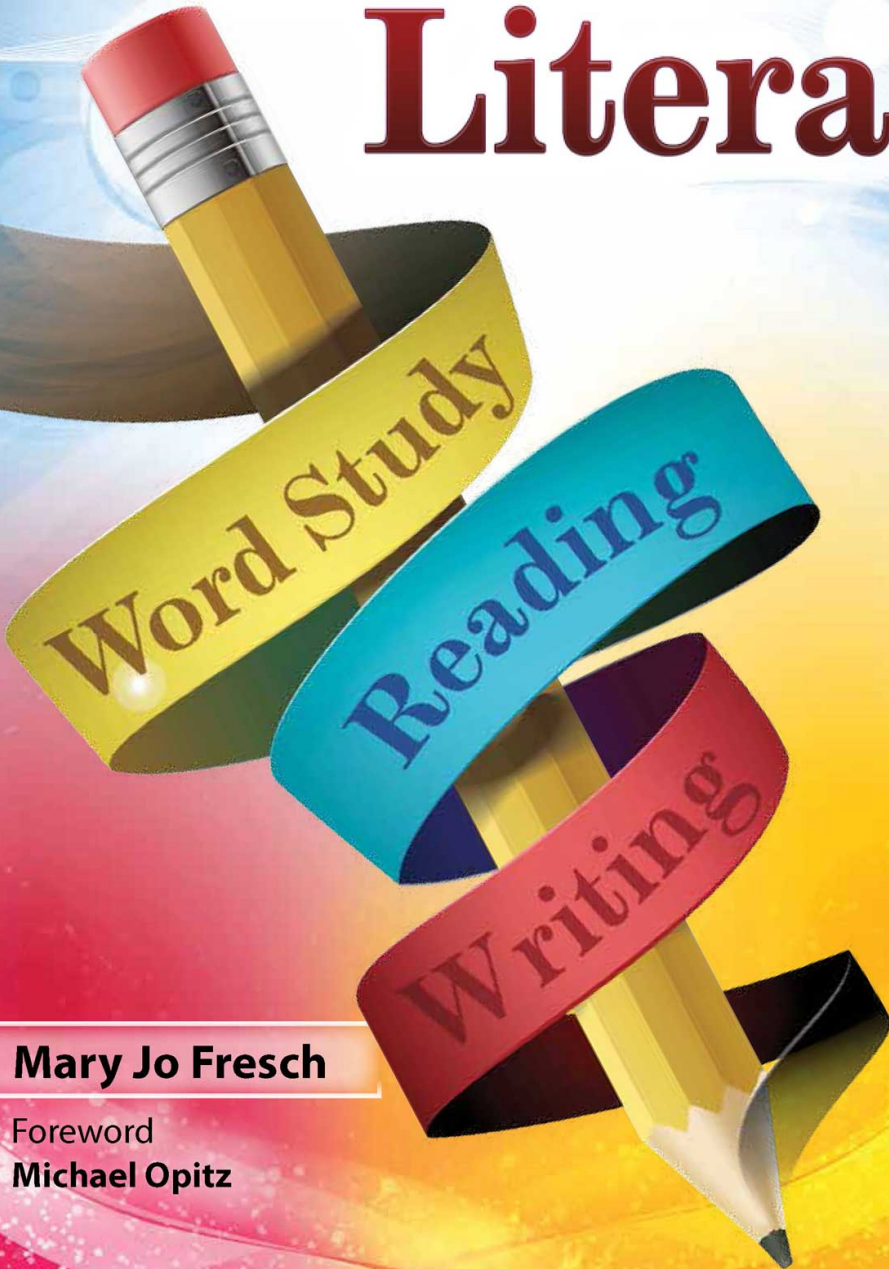




Strategies for Effective

Balanced Literacy

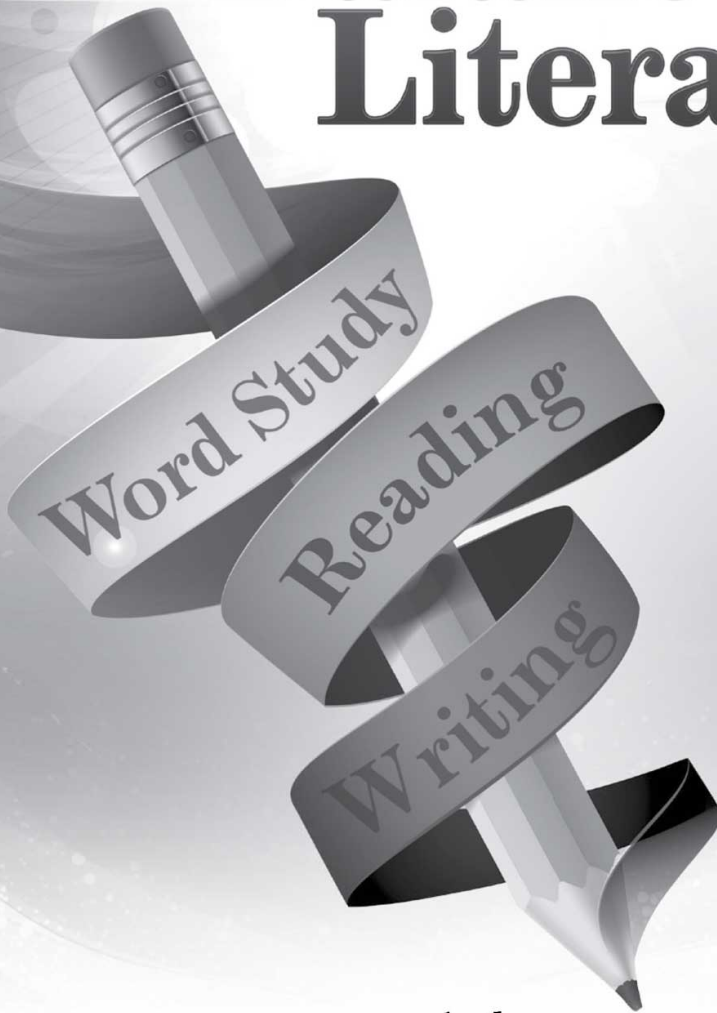


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Foreword

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Strategies for Effective **Balanced Literacy**



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Shell Education

A division of Teacher Created Materials
5301 Oceanus Drive
Huntington Beach, CA 92649-1030
www.tcmpub.com/shell-education
ISBN 978-1-4258-1519-6
© 2016 Shell Educational Publishing, Inc.

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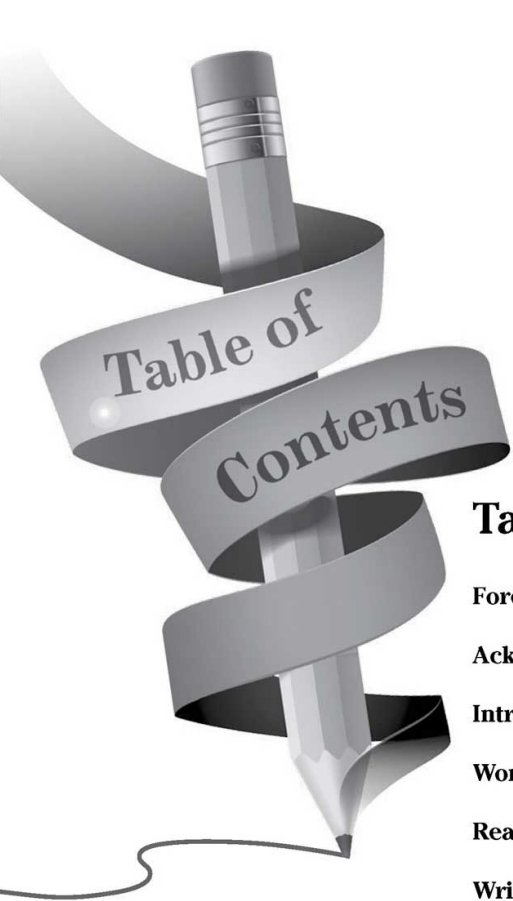


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Foreword

I have seen balanced literacy defined in numerous ways over the last forty years, but never before have I seen it defined as it is in this book—and the definition is refreshing. Like others who have written about balanced literacy, Fresch points out that careful assessment and selecting oral or written literacy teaching strategies are important attributes. She extends the definition, however, by including the importance of teaching students how to self-direct learning and, just as important, having fun all the while. Consequently, this book is so much more than a book of literacy teaching strategies. It's about the joy of knowing and using literacy to enrich and broaden learners' and teachers' minds and lives. To that end, the book offers several unique characteristics.

- It is grounded on four key principles:
 - Students are unique individuals with varying strengths and needs.
 - Students need to engage with targeted, applicable instruction.
 - Formative assessment enables teachers to plan instruction.
 - Student-centered classrooms are essential.
- All teaching strategies follow a similar format, which includes instructional steps as well as assessment ideas.
- The teaching strategies are designed to enable teachers to pick and choose those that are most appropriate for their students. In this way, the book is more of a resource that serves teachers rather than a book that teachers serve.
- The teaching strategies extend into middle school, enabling students to receive targeted instruction as they advance in their literacy development.

Taken together, this book brings some continuity to teachers from grades K–8. School district staffs that provide this book as a resource for staff development will equip their teachers with a common language and set of strategies to use.

The new millennium has brought forth several initiatives for novice and practicing teachers alike. Sometimes, managing the initiatives can leave little time for teachers to reflect on why they do what they do. With this book, however, teachers are encouraged to do just that because of the way the activities are designed. The result is empowered teachers who make deliberate, knowing decisions about how to best help their students advance in all areas of literacy—not only to lead more literate lives but, as important, more joyful lives, too.

—Michael F. Opitz, Ph.D.
Professor Emeritus, University of Northern Colorado

Acknowledgments

Many thanks go to Andrea Barton, whose classroom is highlighted in the stories shared in this resource. Without hesitation, you shared your classroom and let me be the “fly on the wall.” Together we discovered so much, thanks to the balanced literacy setting you provided every single day for every single child. Now you are preparing the next generation of teachers, and they will learn greatly from you.

Thanks to Jerry Zutell. I benefit from your knowledge and insights into spelling, phonics, and vocabulary. Thank you for mentoring me all those years ago!

Thanks to David L. Harrison, my friend, colleague, and poet extraordinaire. You care about children and teachers—and that is a very good thing.

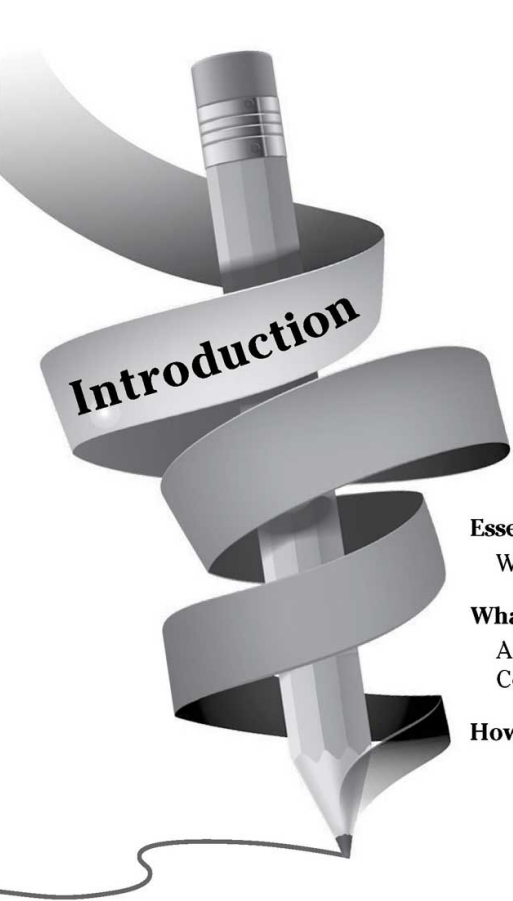
I must acknowledge two other friends and colleagues: Mike Opitz and Mike Ford. You two have inspired teachers everywhere to have enriched and joy-filled classrooms. You lead by example.

Thanks to Sara Johnson, content director for Shell Education. A few years ago I showed you the developmental continuum chart I created and shared with teachers across the country. You saw the chart as a seed. Thanks for the meetings, emails, calls, and encouragement to make it blossom!

Thanks to Kristina Mazaika, my trusty editor on this project. Your experience as a teacher helped as we worked together to define and refine this resource.

Finally, thanks to my family. Angela and Nate, Mike and Lori, thanks for always encouraging and celebrating my professional accomplishments. You are great parents and my five grandchildren inspire me to ask teachers everywhere to focus on what matters, helping children find joy in learning. Biggest thanks go to my husband, Hank. You have, always, been the wind beneath my wings.

To Nicholas, Vincent, Gavin, Christopher, and Avery—who are the joy of my (and Grandpa’s) life. May all your teachers not only teach you to read and write, but show you how to love to read and write.



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Essentials of Literacy Development

*One child, one teacher, one book, one pen
can change the world.*

—Malala Yousafzai

Each and every day a teacher is presented with the opportunity to make a difference in a child's life. For some of our students, coming to school is the best part of the day. What can teachers do to make it memorable, and what can they do to help students move forward with confidence? A teacher's day-to-day life is sometimes like being a juggler keeping all the plates spinning. You've seen it...the juggler starts to spin a plate on a pole, moves to the next plate and pole, then the next, then runs back to the first to keep it going, and so on. Balance is what it is all about—but so are timing, skill, and monitoring of the plates.

Teaching literacy—word study, reading, and writing—is a balancing act. Teachers need to equip themselves with the best strategies for instruction. In word study, teachers must address foundational skills, such as phonics and spelling, as well as vocabulary development across the curriculum. In reading, consider experiences that boost comprehension, using complex texts, requiring close reading, delving into content reading, and examining the author's craft. In writing, have students examine and produce a range of text types and genres. And across all of these areas, plan opportunities for students to develop listening and speaking skills. Keeping students engaged in all of these areas takes careful planning. Some days students need an extra “spin” with reading; other days they seem to be whirling along in writing but need a little “whirl” to try something new or use more complex vocabulary to convey their ideas. How can a teacher accomplish this balance in the classroom? Is it possible to keep the word study, reading, and writing “plates” all spinning at once? Teachers know for students to become literacy proficient they must address all of these areas and recognize that each student has his or her particular strengths and challenges. Selecting the best tools presents the best possibility for engaging learners. Careful assessment, selection of mini-lessons, and teaching students how to self-direct learning are all part of the balancing act.

Why Balanced Literacy?

Ask any adult how to achieve balance in life and you will hear suggestions about work and fun. Balanced literacy is the same. Teachers want students to work but have fun at the same time. Research shows that having students engaged *and* having fun while learning improves memory (Willingham 2008/2009). Choosing how students will work in word study, reading, and writing to advance learning and make them feel successful is the key to a balanced literacy approach. Select a complex text for students to read and consider giving them opportunities to utilize their comprehension skills to engage in a discussion. In that discussion, students may need to return to the text and do another close reading to answer questions or draw conclusions from what was read. Students may also discover unfamiliar vocabulary they must understand to better comprehend what they read. It's important students want to *learn* the skills of literacy so they can *apply* the skills independently.

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