Acknowledgments

It would be impossible for me to acknowledge all those who, through their conversation, through their writing, or through the example of their teaching, have helped me to become capable enough and learned enough to produce this book. It must suffice that I pay some of this debt in the text itself, through my citations of some of the writers who have influenced and inspired me. How wonderful to realize that we who share the love of language and learning can build a community through our gifts of writing.

Let me thank somewhat more explicitly, but still wholly inadequately, my colleagues at George Mason University, in the English Department and in the Plan for Alternative General Education, who each day show countless examples of concern for students and intellectual commitment to teaching. Let me particularly thank Elizabeth Hedley, Executive Assistant of the Plan for Alternative General Education, who continually demonstrates that the excellent teacher need not be defined by the classroom.

My thanks also go to Charles Suhor, Deputy Executive Director of the National Council of Teachers of English and Director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, who conceived of this project and invited me to take it on. Thanks also to Paul O'Dea, NCTE Coordinator of Publications, and Jane Christensen, NCTE Associate Executive Director, for their enthusiasm and support.

This book could not have come into being without the landmark contributions to theory and practice by the National Writing Project, whose teacher/consultants provide one of the best examples of networking in the world today. Whatever I have acquired of appreciation for the work of the elementary teacher has come to me through the talk and writing I have shared, since 1978, with the members of the Northern Virginia site of the NWP. Special thanks are due my friend and colleague Don Gallehr, director of the Northern Virginia project, whose style—of leadership and of composition—shapes the project, and whose advice I relied on in identifying the teachers who might serve as the focuses of this study.

The most obvious debt I owe is to the teachers whose thoughts, words, and deeds are displayed here. One could not ask for more gracious and enthusiastic collaborators than Cynthia Dietz, Carin Hauser, Al Lengel, Mary Browning Schulman, and Elly Uehling. Nor could one ask for more gracious hosts than the students, from six to twelve years old, who made me feel at home in their classrooms by treating me as one of the gang. Working among people like these, who would not want to write and teach?

Those for whom all thanks are inadequate, but who appreciate me far beyond all deserving, are my sons, Jeff, Jimmy, Christopher, and Flannery, who always teach the essential subjects and who never bore.

I owe the most, for this and for everything else of meaning to me, to my children's true mentor, Ann Jeffries-Thaiss, who teaches with the purest brilliance and grace I will ever know. Her school I would not want to miss for even one day.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge my debt to one member of the community of lovers of language and learning: the late John Holt, whose courage and wisdom live on in his books and in the deeds of the thousands of teachers and parents he has inspired. I dedicate this work to his memory.

C. J. T. George Mason University October 1985