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ReWRITING the Basics: Literacy Learning in Children's Cultures (Language and Literacy)

Anne Haas Dyson

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"Dyson's ethnographies offer new ways of thinking about writing time and remind us of the importance of play, talk, and social relationships in children's literacy learning. If every literacy researcher could write like Dyson, teachers would want to read about research! If policymakers took her insights on board, classrooms might become more respectful and enjoyable spaces for literacy teaching and learning that soar way above the basics." -- **Barbara Comber**, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology, Australia

What are the *real* "basics" of writing, how should they be taught, and what do they look like in children's worlds? In her new book, Anne Haas Dyson shows how highly scripted writing curricula and regimented class routines work against young children's natural social learning processes. Readers will have a front-row seat in Mrs. Bee's kindergarten and Mrs. Kay's 1st-grade class, where these dedicated teachers taught writing basics in schools serving predominately low-income children of color. The children, it turns out, had their own expectations for one another's actions during writing time. Driven by desires for companionship and meaning, they used available linguistic and multimodal resources to construct their shared lives. In so doing, they stretch, enrich, and ultimately transform our own understandings of the basics.

ReWRITING the Basics goes beyond critiquing traditional writing basics to place them in the linguistic diversity and multimodal texts of children's everyday worlds. This engaging work:

* Illustrates how scripted, uniform curricula can reduce the resources of so-called "at-risk" children.

* Provides insight into how children may situate writing within the relational ethics and social structures of childhood cultures.

* Offers guiding principles for creating a program that will expand children's possibilities in ways that are compatible with human sociability.

* Includes examples of children's writing, reflections on research methods, and demographic tables.

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