Foreword

The book you are holding in your hands is a compelling book, compelling for a number of different reasons and uses and for educators in a variety of roles.

This book is rooted in the real world of classrooms, schools, and districts. It is rooted in the work of beginning teachers, beginning and veteran mentors, principals, supervisors of mentors, those who want to start a mentoring program, and those who want to improve their mentoring programs. This is also a book I would rely on if I were working with student teachers.

This book is compelling because the United States is edging closer each year to a drought in the teaching profession. The authors comment, "Teachers do not leave the profession due to lack of content knowledge but rather due to lack of support within the system." They cite credible resources about school staffing problems, including Ingersoll (2007), who "asserts that school staffing problems are not a result of a deficit in the supply of teachers, but rather a result of the excess demand for teachers resulting from a 'revolving door' within the profession." The retirement of "baby boom" teachers in the next decade is enough of a challenge to those who lead our educational systems. What's more challenging is the fact that their replacements aren't staying long because they are insufficiently supported by their colleagues and their supervisors and because they face instructional problems the prim marms of a century ago could hardly have imagined.

This book is compelling because it's not enough that we merely replace the numbers of exiting teachers; we must replace them with quality teachers. What was good enough for that marm in 1910 is not good enough today. The damage a "bad" teacher can do to one child (never mind the 27 in his class) is one reason that "quality" must be added to our "Help Wanted" ad for more teachers soon.

This book is compelling because it represents the real work of the authors, over time, as professional partners working with mentors and the beginning teachers they guide. The processes and forms these authors created and used have been honed. It is clear that the authors have worked in classrooms and schools—they know the language of support; they know the hallways of schools; they know the demands students today make of first-year teachers. This is not a hypothetical book.

This book is compelling because it does not ignore the problems and pitfalls that can beset mentoring relationships. There are even processes and forms that deal with these problems, such as a tool that helps prevent things from going bad, the Mentor-Teacher Agreement, and what to do when they do go bad: the Breaking Confidentiality Protocol:

The model undergirding the work of the authors—as constituted in this book—is an inspiring one. It posits that mentors need support and mentoring as much as the new teachers they mentor. Even for veteran mentors each new teacher presents a new mentoring context, so the veteran mentor must continue to be a learner.

I am an advocate of professional learning, as differentiated from professional development. Not all professional development is bad—far from it—but teachers who are learners need to feel safe and respected; they need to feel as if they are among learners themselves, and this book and its processes and forms help them feel that way. Professional learning is collaborative, not isolated, and the authors understand deeply the power of collaboration, a side-by-side stance that invites "quality" into the conversation. I am reminded of one of the 10 Common Principles from the Coalition of Essential Schools. One of them calls for a culture of "unanxious expectations," and that's the culture mentors and their teachers need for learning (essentialschools.org).

This is a compelling book because it makes sense of matters that can be quite complicated. Through the Transformational Learning Stages and the Conference Data Conference (CDC) Cycle, the authors set up a vehicle that carries all of the processes, strategies, and tools a mentor needs to do a superb job working with beginning educators. The use of data is authentic, driven by need and exercised through reflection. As the authors claim, "Through the use of these tools, teachers have an opportunity to view the classroom through an objective lens." I would add that the mentor, too, has a lens through which to view the classroom and real information to share and puzzle over with the beginning teacher.

The Transformational Learning stages alone will help you understand what new teachers (and all learners, including yourself) go through. Who am I as a teacher learner? How can I affect the context or environment for learning so that all, including myself, learn? How can I focus on individual learning needs, including my own? The first is a role question; the second is about the possibilities within the role; and the third focuses on impact. These are important questions, and the authors use the stages as a way to organize the processes and tools that help people learn.

Other words can be used to describe this book—"forceful, "convincing," "pragmatic," but the best word is "compelling." This is a book that professionals who care about the future of education cannot afford to ignore.

—Lois Brown Easton