Preface

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ublishing the first edition of Rethinking Our Classrooms in 1994 was a landmark accomplishment for Rethinking Schools. Until then, the organization had published only a quarterly journal and occasional pamphlets. This first book marked the beginning of Rethinking Schools’ growth from a Milwaukee-based quarterly to a publisher that provides social justice resources for teachers and prospective teachers around the country. It set the tone, style, and standard for many more books to come, including a second volume of Rethinking Our Classrooms in 2001.

Thirteen years and 160,000 copies later, profound changes in the social, political, and educational landscape have intensified the need to work for social justice in public education. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has fueled the trend toward increased testing and standardization. We suffer from top-down and outside-in education reform that does not respect teachers, students, or their communities. More and more, elementary teachers must teach scripted reading curricula, and teachers in all grade levels are increasingly pressured to teach to tests. The marginalizing of multicultural, anti-racist education is making it more difficult for the histories and voices of our children’s communities to enter the classroom. Beyond our schools, war and militarism, environmental degradation, and heightened class and racial inequality threaten all of us, but especially children.

This new edition of Rethinking Our Classrooms, Volume 1, has been expanded to speak to these challenges. We’ve added essays on science and environmental education, immigration and language, military recruitment, teaching about the world through mathematics, and gay and lesbian issues. Updated essays on NCLB, standards, and testing address the intensified assaults on public education.

This revised edition, enriched by new writers addressing new topics, continues to uphold the values and aspirations of Rethinking Schools. We still see the classroom as a primary site for school reform, celebrate the work and perspectives of teachers, and maintain that anti-racist, social justice education must be at the fore of any analysis of public schooling and at the center of classroom practice.

Over the past 13 years, we have heard from K–12 teachers, university educators, and others across the country that Rethinking Our Classrooms has helped them in their efforts to ensure a quality education for every child. We hope this new edition proves even more useful than its predecessor.

—the editors