

HOLDING
ON TO
GOOD IDEAS
IN A TIME
OF BAD ONES

SIX LITERACY
PRINCIPLES
WORTH
FIGHTING FOR

Holding On to Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones is my new favorite book about how to live as a teacher. Finishing it, I experienced what I can only describe as a state of grace—moved, renewed, and grateful that a mind like Tom Newkirk's has been intrigued by classroom matters for almost forty years now. In this new book Tom invites teachers to decide and lay claim to what's worth fighting for, and he offers us substantive ammunition. His eclectic scholarship, spanning ages and disciplines, pierces the dogma and cant that can cloud our professional vision. He reminds us that we are professionals, not technicians, and he illuminates teaching as an intellectual endeavor: a continuous process of observations, small experiments, and reflections that inform and change what we do in the classroom. His realistic, humane argument for "the wisdom of practice" dignifies the work of a teacher. Both the classroom veteran and the novice will be heartened and braced by this brilliant book.

—Nancie Atwell, author of *In the Middle*, Second Edition

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THOMAS NEWKIRK



THOMAS NEWKIRK is the author of numerous Heinemann titles. His *Misreading Masculinity* was cited by *Instructor Magazine* as one of the most significant books for teachers in the past decade. And his *The Performance of Self in Student Writing* won NCTE's David H. Russell Award for Research. A former teacher at an at-risk high school in Boston, Tom now teaches at the University of New Hampshire and directs the New Hampshire Literacy Institutes.

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Lately, we teachers have been suffering through some truly bad times. But as Tom Newkirk observes in this brilliant and stirring book, we and our educational forbears have been fighting this battle for centuries. There is always a struggle to put children first, to honor knowledge over compliance, and to place humanity above the aims of the state. Newkirk's good news: today we have an extraordinary opportunity to get things right. Always one of the most distinctive and thoughtful voices in education, Newkirk asserts that no curriculum can ever work unless it fits on the back of an envelope. And then he offers his own envelope-sized curriculum for teaching writing, four questions and sixteen focal points. That's it. Classic Newkirk: direct, incisive, and brimming with wisdom.

—**Harvey "Smokey" Daniels**, coauthor of *Comprehension & Collaboration*

Rich with pedagogy and human enough to make you burst out laughing, Thomas Newkirk's thoughts made me feel both heartened and head-slapping awakened. This book is one of the best teacher books ever. I'll be giving copies of it to lots of teacher friends as we find our way back to trusting what we know about kids, about learning, and about teaching writing. The book is written for anyone who grapples with the modern quagmire: the chasm between why we became teachers and what schools have become. The discussions have already begun, and Thomas Newkirk's book will shed light and warmth where they're so sorely needed.

—**Gretchen Bernabei**, author of *Reviving the Essay*

*This is a wise, insightful, and thought-provoking book that offers important and useful perspectives on many of the central issues in literacy education. What I like best about *Holding On to Big Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones* is (1) it's a BIG book, not in word count but in range, scope, and ambitiousness, and (2) it practices exactly what it preaches. In other words, the goals that Tom argues for—such as suggesting that literacy educators should de-clutter our curricula by identifying and focusing on just a few key goals, that we should connect and balance reading and writing, that we should accept and encourage the role of pleasure and personal connection in learning—are supported by evidence and research but are also modeled by the way this book is written.*

—**Lad Tobin**, author of *Reading Student Writing*

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