

CONTENTS

List of Illustrations vii

Preface ix

Acknowledgments xv

PART 1: FOUNDATIONS FOR TEACHING COLLEGE WRITING

1. Introduction: Pedagogical Adaptability 5
2. Practices for Teaching Effective and Equitable Writing Courses 24
3. Thinking Like a Writer: Translating Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies to the Classroom 63

PART 2: THRESHOLD CONCEPTS FOR FIRST-YEAR WRITING

4. Writing Can Be Taught and Learned 83
5. Writers Write for Different Purposes and Audiences, and Often in Genres with Predictable Conventions 108
6. Writing Processes Are Individualized, Require Readers, and Require Revision 142
7. Reading and Writing Are Interconnected Activities 167
8. Writers Make Choices about Language within Cultural and Social Situations 191
9. Conclusion: Continuing to Develop as a College Writing Teacher 221

References 229

Index 247

About the Authors 257

PART 1

Foundations for Teaching College Writing

1

INTRODUCTION

Pedagogical Adaptability

This introductory chapter defines pedagogical adaptability and outlines reasons why first-year writing instructors and other literacy educators need to develop flexible strategies for adapting their teaching to new and evolving contexts, student communities, educational access, and initiatives aimed at transforming higher education. We explain how pedagogical adaptability helps college literacy educators adapt to different teaching contexts and the learning needs of diverse student populations. We also describe the goals of the book and provide a brief overview of each section.

The work of most postsecondary literacy educators centers on adapting to inevitable and ongoing change (Cole and Hassel 2021). Effective teaching requires instructors to respond to the local learning needs of students in writing programs and in other college literacy courses, including in reading, co-requisite, integrated reading, English as a second language (ESL) and second-language writing, dual credit, and developmental education programs. Instructors also need to develop the flexibility to work within the possibilities and constraints of their programs, institutions, and local communities. Even when writing programs and their courses are able to remain relatively stable, rapidly changing literacies and technologies used for learning require programs and instructors to engage in ongoing change to avoid creating educational opportunity gaps for their students. Engaging in change is difficult and context-specific: there is no single curriculum, reading list, or online resource that prepares instructors for the constant need to adapt their instructional strategies to meet the locally situated learning needs of their students and acknowledge the widely diverse literate lives of first-year college readers and writers. In other words, what and how we teach first-year writing can and should depend on who and where we teach.

At the same time, instructors arrive in the first-year college writing classroom from many disparate training experiences and academic backgrounds in writing studies, rhetoric, literature, creative writing,

linguistics and TESOL, education, and/or communications. As coauthors, we share many of these disciplinary backgrounds and experiences. Like others who teach writing, most of us experienced stark differences between the graduate institutions at which we were trained and the places where we ended up teaching. As a result, we weren't initially sure how to negotiate those differences when we came to be department colleagues at an open-access, two-year institution with multiple campuses throughout Wisconsin, where we taught for many years. We had to shift and adapt our thinking for new student populations, policies, practices, resources, professional support, curricula, placement mechanisms, regional norms, state oversight mandates, and local problems. As new instructors we had to adapt to a new department culture and become more independent in developing resources for our own professional and pedagogical development.

As we began to work together, we agreed that to help students transition to college reading and writing, we needed to have clear pathways for them to get from their individual literacy starting points to the end of the first-year writing curriculum and beyond. We realized that we needed to make fundamental changes to our teaching practices to support literacy development for students in an open-access teaching context, but we also needed to build our course redesign work on disciplinary practices and our own research about two-year college student learning. We conducted systematic and intensive research studies and assessment projects to trace diverse students' experiences and literacy development from the point of placement across multiple semesters to their writing program completion (Giordano and Hassel 2016; Hassel and Giordano 2009, 2011, 2015). It took us more than a decade to create, interrogate, assess, and revise our program and curriculum (Giordano and Phillips 2021; Hassel, Giordano, Heinert, and Phillips 2017; Phillips and Giordano 2016). Throughout the process of designing a program and improving our own teaching, we learned how to identify and prioritize the literacy needs of students. The process of learning how to adapt our teaching practices to local learning contexts and evolving circumstances has been invaluable as we have moved on to other writing programs.

Part of the theoretical foundation for our work is the concept of transfer—both material and epistemic.¹ We learned to consider how our students could transfer from our class to the next class (in part,

1. Like many teacher-scholars, we are interested in the work of learning transfer and transfer theory (Adler-Kassner, Majewski, and Koshnick 2012; Blaauw-Hara 2014; Hassel and Giordano 2009; Moore and Anson 2017; Tinberg 2015b).

because most open-access institutions have at least two and often three or more courses in a writing sequence). Many of our students had limited experience with academic literacy and often had gaps in their educational experiences; therefore, we had to carefully consider how students' experiences with reading and writing in our courses supported their literacy development in other general education courses and helped create pathways toward an associate degree. We also started to think about how our writing courses prepared our students to transfer to other institutions. It was difficult *not* to think about how our courses and our teaching would impact our students once they left our teaching context because of our institution's transfer mission, but we also had to think about the coursework on our own campuses that they would need to complete before becoming eligible for admission to a university.

We have learned that the concept of transfer is also essential for understanding the work literacy educators do. We've transferred and adapted our teaching strategies to new institutions, different writing programs, and unfamiliar types of literacy courses. Over time, we also realized that writing instructors need intensive support in transferring teaching strategies, professional skills, and disciplinary knowledge to working with students in an open-access institution (Giordano, Hassel, Heinert, and Phillips 2017; Hassel and Giordano 2013). Many of the pedagogical approaches and assumptions about course content instructors bring with them from graduate school at selective research institutions simply do not work for many students, especially at community colleges. Instructors who transition to new teaching contexts need time, ongoing learning, and mentoring to figure out which teaching practices to transfer from their previous experiences, which strategies to draw from but change, and which pedagogical approaches and assumptions about students to leave behind. For example, when we each started teaching at two-year campuses, we learned very quickly that we had to develop new instructional strategies because a majority of our students experienced structural inequities, financial struggles, and complicated educational trajectories in comparison to the students we had previously taught at research universities. We had to adapt our teaching to support students with diverse prior learning and linguistic experiences through their completion of general education writing requirements as well as determine how to align first-year writing and other courses with students' individual goals and literacy needs. We also recognized how gaps between developmental education programs and college writing programs can intensify the challenges of helping students successfully transition to college-level coursework.

We have continued to learn, grow, and change as college literacy educators while adapting to new student communities, colleagues, and institutional realities. Just as we were settling into our new writing programs after our institution was restructured, the Covid-19 pandemic reminded us that our own teaching practices must continue to evolve over the course of our careers to reflect changing learning environments, equity gaps for students, and the unstable nature of higher education. Throughout these constant changes, we relied heavily on evolving disciplinary knowledge and research, but we had to spend a significant amount of time finding sources and doing our own research to synthesize and distill information about teaching and students' literacy development that is relevant to the work of open-access literacy education.

Our own experiences with critically reflecting on and changing our own teaching practices to support students with diverse needs, along with working in constantly changing circumstances, inspired us to write this book. We focus on adapting teaching to meet the literacy needs of all learners so we can share what we learned in a comprehensive way with both new and experienced college writing instructors. Whether it is adjusting to teaching at a new institution, responding to institutional or program change, or managing changing student demographics, an essential part of the work of college writing teachers is adapting teaching practices to meet challenges in an equitable and inclusive way while supporting students' disciplinary learning.

PEDAGOGICAL ADAPTABILITY

The ability to adapt teaching strategies to local student communities and working environments is the most essential part of developing and teaching writing courses that support all learners. Differing institutions, courses, individual class sections, and groups of students bring both constraints and possibilities for how and what a writing teacher teaches. Through our years of working together and with other educators at two-year colleges (as well as instructors teaching developmental English and first-year writing at open-access and less selective comprehensive universities), we learned how important it is to develop *pedagogical adaptability*. Disciplinary conversations about adaptability often focus primarily on students and what they need to know about audience, purpose, and context (see Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015; Heilker and Vandenberg 2015; Malenczyk, Miller-Cochran, Wardle, and Yancey 2018; Moore 2012; Tinberg 2015a). This same attention is rarely given to instructors and teaching. The field of writing studies does offer

many professional disciplinary statements (for example, Conference on College Composition and Communication [CCCC] and National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE] position statements like “Writing Assessment Principles” and “Principles for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing”) that approach teaching writing as static outcomes and guidelines for incorporating principles into classroom teaching. However, first-year writing instructors are rarely given guidance into how pedagogical situations are shaped by their own teaching environments, the missions of their institutions, and the student communities their campuses serve.

To be pedagogically adaptable means to develop and apply the following types of flexible approaches to teaching as a disciplinary expert:

- *Respond to the individual needs of students* in a particular class based on the literacy skills and strategies they bring to college (and not on predetermined ideas about what students should be able to know and do)
- *Change approaches to teaching* based on a student population, mission of an institution and its role in a community, level of a course, and purpose of a course within a sequence of other writing courses
- *Develop an ethical, flexible, and responsive understanding of how to design courses*, use instructional approaches, and apply assessment methods to a particular teaching context
- *Employ a realistic approach to assessing student learning* that responds to students’ prior experiences with literacy, their cultural and social backgrounds, and their linguistic strengths
- *Identify and evaluate relevant disciplinary scholarship and resources*; make choices about the appropriateness of applying existing work and new developments in the field based on a student population and teaching context.

The purpose of naming these characteristics of pedagogical adaptability is to help instructors begin to think about ways to bridge the gaps that often exist between their teaching realities compared to their prior learning, experiences in previous but different teaching contexts, and knowledge of disciplinary scholarship. Pedagogical adaptability is fundamental to creating an equitable and inclusive learning environment.

With this book, we hope to distill core knowledge from writing studies and related fields with accompanying teaching strategies in a way that will give new instructors and experienced instructors who are searching for ways to increase equity in their practice the tools for adapting their instructional practices to their own local working environments. Our goal is to help instructors be comfortable with the continuous process of adapting teaching over time as their professional circumstances, working

conditions, student populations, institutions, technologies, cultural and social environments, funding, and local community needs change.

Our experiences and research are shaped by the material conditions in two-year colleges and open-access institutions that are often defined by uncertainties, change, and difference, although the strategies we offer in this book are applicable across institutional types. The norms of unpredictability within and across courses that most higher education faculty have faced during the global pandemic are a constant working condition for two-year college writing and developmental English instructors. In other words, our own relatively uncertain working conditions have required us to develop pedagogical adaptability. In contrast, much of the scholarship that informs college writing pedagogy focuses on theory, teaching experiences, and studies based on the work of faculty who teach at institutions where most students have social privilege and are well prepared for college (Hassel and Phillips 2022). While we value and rely heavily on the disciplinary knowledge that has come from this scholarship, the research in this book comes from faculty who regularly teach first-year writing, working with studying the learning of the diverse range of students who enroll at community colleges.

ADAPTING TO SUPPORT EDUCATIONAL EQUITY FOR ALL STUDENTS

Pedagogical adaptability is a central skill that teachers need for supporting equitable educational opportunities to support all students' postsecondary literacy development. In the twenty-first century, a global pandemic (US Surgeon General 2021), economic crises (Bauer, Brody, Edelberg, and O'Donnell 2020; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2022), public education austerity measures (Hubler 2020), and calls for social and racial justice (Black Lives Matter 2020) have amplified inequities in communities and in higher education. Addressing inequities requires college English teachers to do more than simply apply social justice theories, change a delivery mode, or express outrage on social media. Equitable higher education requires all instructors to recognize the bias and discrimination their own students experience, critically reflect on ways teaching practices and the work of the discipline can perpetuate inequities, and take action to bring about change in their own classrooms and online learning environments. Today's college students across the board face more material challenges than ever before (e.g., student debt, mental health issues, or caregiver responsibilities), which shapes their ability to learn and succeed in college.

For example, writing instructors can expect to teach students with disabilities in every course, but it's highly unlikely that they will be able to identify all of those students. A National Center for Educational Statistics 2015–2016 study showed that 19 percent of undergraduate college students had a disability, with veterans (26%) and adults over age thirty (23%) reporting disabilities at a higher rate (Institute of Education Sciences n.d.). A later report shows that only about one-third of students who experienced a disability in college notified their institution. Of those who reported a disability to the institution, only 85 percent of four-year college students and 57 percent of two-year college students received accommodations (Institute of Education Sciences 2022). These government reports illustrate the gap between support available at four-year universities compared to community colleges in addition to the reality that instructors must expect that many (and probably most) of their students with disabilities aren't receiving formal accommodations. However, students with disabilities are accessing academic support at higher rates than other students, with more four-year students receiving support compared to two-year college students (Institute of Education Sciences 2022).

A growing number of college students also have mental health challenges, which may or may not give them access to disability accommodations for their courses. Even before the Covid-19 pandemic, an increasing number of students had long-term mental illnesses. The US Surgeon General (2021) reports that anxiety and depression rates among youth globally have doubled during the pandemic, with 20–25 percent of young people experiencing anxiety and depression. Since the Covid-19 pandemic is ongoing, most people—but children and adolescents in particular—continue to face disruptions to their learning, grief or loss related to the disease, and higher levels of distress in everyday life.

Among college students, the rates of mental health issues had been on an upward trajectory even pre-pandemic. For example, the nationwide Healthy Minds Study showed that between 2007 to 2017, the percentage of postsecondary students with a lifetime mental health diagnosis increased from 22 percent to 36 percent (Lipson, Lattie, and Eisenberg 2018). In the 2021 National College Health Assessment survey, almost three-fourths of college students reported moderate to severe “psychological distress,” with about 16 percent of cisgender men, 24 percent of cisgender women, and about 46 percent of trans and gender non-conforming students reporting severe psychological distress (American College Health Association 2021, 12). The survey also indicated that most cisgender students (67% of men and 65% of women) experience a

sense of belonging in response to the question “I feel that I belong at my college/university”; however, only half of trans/gender nonconforming students reported a similar sense of belonging in college (3). College courses that support equity for all students need to be designed around the reality that many students have disabilities, a majority have mental health challenges, and some can experience additional distress and exclusion based on their gender, social, or racial identities.

Today’s students also face an ever accelerating and intensifying demand for more advanced and complex literacy skills in a digital world (Keller 2013; National Council of Teachers of English 2019). A carefully designed college writing course can provide students with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need for developing twenty-first-century literacies and achieving their educational goals. However, some students have unequal access to the technology and financial resources required for developing and practicing digital literacy skills. For example, some of our students from rural communities close to our Wisconsin campuses didn’t (and still don’t) have high-speed internet or reliable cell phone service in their home communities. Some also didn’t have access to computers or technology education in school while their peers from urban high schools received take-home iPads or electronic devices from their schools, which they used throughout their secondary education. Inequities in resources can contribute to lower college degree attainment rates in rural communities (Fain 2019). However, a majority of the more than 20 million US residents without broadband internet access in the United States live in urban areas (Federal Communications Commission 2019; Horrigan 2019). Effective writing instruction in the twenty-first century requires instructors to prepare students for a digital world, but educational equity also means recognizing and accounting for the learning needs of students who have had limited access to technology in their K–12 education and who may continue to experience barriers to using technology for learning as college students.

The promise of social justice and transformation that could potentially take place in college writing courses isn’t realized unless instructors at the individual level recognize the educational inequities that students experience, take action, and adapt their teaching to support and sustain equity in their own courses. This book describes effective teaching practices that help new college writing teachers as well as instructors who want to change their teaching practices support equitable and inclusive learning opportunities for students. However, we hope it is especially useful for teaching students whose backgrounds and learning experiences are different from those of more educationally privileged

students. For a first-year writing course, we define *educational privilege* as having access to resources and cultural capital that supports and sustains smooth transitions to college reading, writing, and learning. Educationally privileged students have not experienced intersectional inequities in their prior learning experiences or faced barriers to going to college, staying in college, and receiving a degree. While all first-year college students experience challenges both inside and outside of school (even more since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic), some students face multiple inequities because of their past educational experiences, language backgrounds, social and cultural identities, life circumstances, access to financial resources, lack of family or social support, and physical or mental health statuses.

Equitable writing courses adapted to student needs take into account the ways college students may be disenfranchised or empowered through their race, class, abled-ness, gender identities, sexualities, first-generation status, language background, or prior educational experiences. Writing instructors can take direct action to address inequities, racism, discrimination, and privilege in their local community, institutional contexts, and courses.² Adapting pedagogy for equity and inclusion can sometimes require instructors to rethink their entire approaches to course design, assignments, assessment of student learning, classroom time, online activities, and policies. This type of change can be difficult, disruptive, and uncomfortable. It can be new to recent graduates who may have relied on faculty advisers, program administrators, or department leaders for guidance. It can also require adaptations to teaching that evolve slowly over many semesters and years through collaboration with colleagues.

Similarly, equitable writing programs must recognize the material realities of the majority of college writing teachers—graduate students, adjunct faculty, contingent full-time lecturers—who don't enjoy the full protections of tenure, power, or a voice within an institution. Equitable and inclusive writing programs must account for the consequences of pedagogical, curricular, or assessment practices. This includes assessing how existing practices and potential changes affect teaching and learning conditions in a way that will make it either more or less likely for students to achieve their literacy goals and for instructors to have sustainable, manageable, and equitable working conditions.

2. The Community College Research Center has conducted many large-scale national studies on the needs of community colleges and their students and teachers. See, for example, Barnett, Kopko, Cullinan, and Belfield 2020; Bickerstaff et al. 2021; Cullinan and Biedzio 2021; Griffin 2018; Jenkins, Lahr, and Mazzariello 2021; Ran and Lin 2019.

At most institutions, first-year writing serves as a gateway course to any degree because it is often a general education requirement that all students must complete without other options. In other words, when students cannot complete required writing courses, they cannot attain a college degree. First-year writing is thus a site and an opportunity to directly address how institutional cultures create barriers for structurally disadvantaged and historically excluded college students. The stakes are very high for students whose experiences before and during their college writing courses keep them from developing the skills, learning strategies, and rhetorical knowledge writing instructors expect from them, especially if those expectations don't reflect students' access to educational resources and prior learning experiences. This is true regardless of institutional context or type. Reaching all college writers and helping them successfully complete first-year writing depends on critical self-assessment about teaching practices and ongoing efforts to adapt teaching to meet individual and collective student needs.

ADAPTING TO OPEN-ACCESS TEACHING CONTEXTS

Pedagogical adaptability is critical for achieving social justice in writing courses and programs, especially for students who would be excluded from higher education at institutions with admissions standards. Achieving equity in writing studies as a field demands that our teaching and assessment practices account for the students who enroll in literacy courses at community colleges and open-access four-year institutions in addition to university students from communities that have historically been excluded and marginalized in higher education. Writing studies professionals from all types of institutions need to be prepared to teach students who begin college at community colleges because many of them transfer to four-year institutions where university faculty will need to support their continued literacy development. Closing educational equity gaps and achieving social justice in writing programs requires our field to critically examine assumptions about teaching and learning that are often grounded in research and instructional experiences at selective universities. The student populations we have taught and studied and the pedagogies we have developed for open-access teaching are grounded in careful assessment of how to adapt teaching strategies for a wide range of learners who experience structural and academic inequities that create barriers to completing first-year writing courses.

Although most scholarship on college writers focuses on students at more selective research institutions, nearly half of all college students

(49%) enroll in a community college at some point in their academic careers (Community College Research Center n.d.; NSC Research Center 2017). The student population at two-year colleges differs from the traditional but misconceived norm of a first-year US college student who is immediately out of high school, is traditionally aged (eighteen to twenty), and attends school full-time while living on campus and working limited hours. The college experiences of many (but not all) community college students are fundamentally different from those of students at selective institutions. The average age of a community college student is twenty-eight (American Association of Community Colleges 2022), 65 percent of them attend college part-time (American Association of Community Colleges 2022), and they have diverse backgrounds and circumstances. In addition, community colleges are the place where 53 percent of Native American students start college, as do 40 percent of Black students, 50 percent of Hispanic students (Breedlove 2021), and 36 percent of Asian students. The majority of both part-time and full-time two-year college students work (American Association of Community Colleges 2022).

Writing programs at open-admissions institutions have long been forced to confront issues of equity in ways other programs haven't. A scholarly history has documented (and contested) the role of two-year colleges and their literacy programs in social mobility and social justice (see Andelora 2005; Calhoon-Dillahunt 2018; Clark 1960; Giordano and Hassel 2019; Hassel and Giordano 2013; Lovas 2002; Tsao 2005). Community colleges serve the broadest range of students in higher education, ranging from high school valedictorians and students with graduate degrees returning for other credentials to students with limited or interrupted schooling who have nontraditional pathways toward completing high school and enrolling in college. Writing instructors at community colleges need to be prepared to adapt how and what they teach to the student communities their courses serve, which can vary from institution to institution and even within the same program.

All graduate students in writing studies and other subfields of English who plan to stay in academia need to prepare for the possibility that they will teach at a two-year college or an open-admissions university. A large percentage of jobs in the field are at open-access campuses with a teaching-intensive workload focused on first-year writing, developmental literacy courses, or both. To truly serve the majority of students well, graduate students need to be trained beyond a particular pedagogical approach or school of thought. They need to be equipped with flexible habits of mind and the ability to create responsive teaching practices that match the students they have and the courses they teach at a

particular moment in time. Rhetorical adaptability develops slowly over time, and instructors continue to learn and apply strategies for adapting their teaching to support students' literacy development in new contexts long after they finish graduate school. However, graduate students can begin to build a foundation for effective, equitable, and inclusive pedagogy by developing a set of teaching skills and strategies they can adapt to new student communities and working environments at open-access institutions and less selective universities.

Teaching first-year writing to support the diverse range of students who take college writing courses requires rhetorical knowledge about audiences, purposes, and contexts for college teaching—and the ability to adapt course design, assignments, instructional activities, and assessment to different teaching situations. Even when an instructor moves from one research institution to another, the conditions for teaching writing change. For this reason, our book has a clear and specific purpose: to help instructors adapt their teaching and learning environments to the overlooked majority of college students who are not considered experienced readers and writers, have not developed the academic behaviors and strategies many instructors expect of them, are encumbered with financial and family responsibilities, and are not able to dedicate nearly all of their time to their studies and the college experience. As a consequence of the Covid-19 global pandemic, even traditionally well-prepared students admissible to more selective campuses often have gaps in learning, academic experiences, and social-emotional growth they would not have had in the past. Likewise, students without educational privilege can and do attend all kinds of college campuses.

Thinking about equitable access to literacy instruction for all students (regardless of their access to educational resources and social privileges) should be the foundation for teaching first-year writing and developing postsecondary literacy programs. Equitable and inclusive teaching for all students requires instructors to move away from personal teaching preferences, and sometimes they have to leave behind what they learned about teaching and literacy from their own experiences as students and as graduate teachers in training. Instead, equity-minded literacy educators center their courses on what students need to know and practice to develop literacy strategies as college readers and writers.

ADAPTING TO EDUCATIONAL REFORM INITIATIVES

Instructors who are new to teaching in different contexts often have to do on-the-job learning to teach unfamiliar types of courses in program

structures that are tied to reform initiatives aimed at increasing student retention and college completion.³ Even instructors who have been teaching in a writing program for many years may have to make major changes to their course design and instruction to adapt to initiatives adopted by their state systems or institutions. Many instructors at two-year colleges and other open-access campuses can anticipate that they will be required to change (if they haven't already) their teaching strategies to accommodate what has become a continual process of mandatory changes to literacy programs and placement processes.

Current national reform movements aimed at reducing the costs of college and time to degree completion have reshaped program development, curriculum, and pedagogy for writing and developmental English programs at community colleges and other open-access institutions (Hassel et al. 2015; Klausman et al. 2016). Some of these initiatives, like co-requisite support courses, come from equity-minded instructional models in our discipline (Adams, Gearhart, Miller, and Roberts 2009; Glau 2007; Grego and Thompson 1996, 2007). However, mandates are often imposed on writing programs and their instructors administratively or legislatively (Rutschow and Schneider 2011; Whinnery and Pompelia 2019). These initiatives include reforming the way students are placed into writing and developmental English courses (Klausman et al. 2016), integrating reading and writing courses (Doran 2019; Saxon, Martirosyan, and Vick 2016a), accelerating students through a writing program more quickly (Adams, Gearhart, Miller, and Roberts 2009), controlling the pathways students take through general education courses (Bailey, Jagers, and Jenkins 2015), and sometimes eliminating developmental education courses entirely (California Acceleration Project n.d.).

Consequently, pedagogical adaptability often means changing instruction and course design in response to factors that are external to a writing program. The likelihood that an instructor will need to participate in ongoing literacy program reform initiatives increases for those employed at institutions that serve the widest range of student needs. In contrast, instructors who teach at more selective institutions that

3. Reform initiatives are literacy program changes that are often mandated by legislation, state system requirements, or top-down institutional decisions. For example, legislation in some states (including California, Florida, and Texas) has reshaped developmental education, writing, and academic reading curricula by requiring co-requisite and integrated reading and writing programs or by requiring the elimination of non-degree-credit courses. Sometimes, reforms are initiated by administrative commitment to particular kinds of philanthropic projects from organizations like the Gates Foundation and the Lumina Foundation.

exclude students based on admissions standards rarely (if ever) have to account for mandated literacy initiatives; they typically don't work in programs that support students with nontraditional educational pathways beyond participating in bridge programs, dual credit high school teaching, or other programs that serve the needs of students who are not yet admitted to the university and may never enroll at that campus full-time. Mandated reform initiatives, along with changes to education because of the Covid-19 pandemic, demonstrate that it is not possible to anticipate minor let alone major disruptions to what we assume are stable teaching conditions. The best way to prepare for uncertain shifts in higher education is to develop flexible strategies and an orientation toward pedagogical adaptability.

Participating in educational reform initiatives and program change work frequently requires faculty to develop new knowledge and skills that will help them advocate for students and other instructors. Reform efforts are often framed as social justice work because they are aimed at limiting students' time in a writing program and reducing coursework that doesn't count toward a college degree. However, some reforms can also be austerity measures aimed at reducing cost while masquerading as social justice accomplishments. Other reforms can be disconnected from the realities of teaching, learning, and the locally situated needs of the diverse student communities an institution serves. Imposed mandates can also remove control from faculty over course offerings, course sequencing, methods for instruction, and sometimes even course content. At other times, literacy program reforms have equity-minded goals but can become inequitable even when they meet the needs of students if they place an unfair and uncompensated burden on instructors' time and workload, especially for already underpaid adjunct faculty working off the tenure track.

From our perspectives and experiences, equitable reform work in writing programs and other types of postsecondary literacy education means that students receive the support and instruction they need for achieving their literacy goals, successfully completing courses, and making progress toward receiving a college degree or other credential. Efforts to fulfill the ideals promised by reforms to college literacy programs are only successful when instructors can translate those aspirational goals to their own teaching. When program changes are disconnected from the experiences of teachers and students, efforts to reform literacy programs can fail to take into account that equity requires that all students have access to educational opportunities and learning experiences that create a foundation for helping them develop as college learners.

Achieving the social justice goals of reform movements and the promise of equity-minded approaches to first-year writing requires instructors in a program to continually adapt their teaching strategies and thinking as the needs of students and their life circumstances change. We hope this book will help instructors and literacy program coordinators who are engaged in equity-minded reform initiatives to ground their work in disciplinary knowledge and inclusive teaching practices.

OVERVIEW OF *REACHING ALL WRITERS*

Drawing from years of our own research, reading, assessment, teaching, and program development work, this book builds on existing writing studies scholarship and brings together effective practices and key concepts for teaching first-year writing, especially (but not only) for instructors who work in open-access learning environments and less selective institutions. This book is designed to help instructors work with all students, not just those who are eligible for admission at selective institutions (although research shows that the strategies in this book also work for those students). Our goal for this book is to create a guide for teaching first-year writing that helps instructors develop strategies for supporting postsecondary literacy development for students from diverse educational, cultural, social, racial, and linguistic communities and backgrounds—in other words, *all* writers. This book is the guide we wanted when we were learning how to teach first-year writing in new contexts outside of the research institutions where we completed our graduate training and had our initial experiences with teaching. We hope it will be a useful resource for all writing instructors.

The teaching principles in this book draw from our own experiences as teacher-scholars, along with student-centered pedagogies and intersectional values. The primary focus of this book is to help instructors improve their teaching and develop flexible strategies for adapting what and how they teach based on the literacy needs of their own students. In *Bad Ideas about Writing*, Seth Kahn (2021) authors a chapter called “Anyone Can Teach Writing,” which, as the title suggests, dismantles “the myth that anybody can teach writing.” This myth, which Kahn explains as “all too often ‘Anybody can teach writing’ translates to ‘It doesn’t matter who teaches writing,’ and as a result, nobody needs to pay attention to writing instructors at all,” is part of the exigency of this book. The field of writing studies has for many decades worked to establish itself as an independent discipline and has done so through many of the forms of professional distinction that mark disciplinarity—coursework,

graduate degrees, independent departments, journals, conferences, and virtual webinars.⁴ That being said, instructors have relatively few organized resources for building on their expertise and adapting their teaching to work with a broad range of diverse learners who take writing courses at community colleges, open-access four-year institutions, and less selective universities.

This book bridges the gaps many college writing teachers experience between earning a graduate degree and taking on responsibility for teaching new students in new contexts, including having more autonomy over their courses as they transition to work after graduate school. Many books used to train teaching assistants or new instructors rely on anthologies of peer-reviewed journal articles or excerpts from landmark books on the topic or narrowly focus on preparing a syllabus or on classroom management. *Reaching All Writers* is intended to provide support for instructors who are committed to improving their teaching and building a sustainable approach to a changing environment but also for equitable teaching environments that will increase student retention and learning. Becoming a better teacher is one component of building a culture of access, inclusion, professional engagement, and consistency.

Reaching All Writers has two parts. Part 1: Foundations for Teaching College Writing, consists of this chapter with an introduction to pedagogical adaptability; chapter 2, “Practices for Teaching Effective and Equitable Writing Courses”; and chapter 3, “Thinking Like a Writer: Translating Threshold Concepts in Writing Studies to the Classroom.” These chapters provide a foundation for the book’s theoretical approaches, disciplinary values, and structural design. Chapter 2 helps instructors reorient their thinking about how to design and teach courses by aligning their expectations with students’ diverse academic and literacy needs. Chapter 3 introduces threshold concepts and explains how and why they are useful for understanding the teaching and learning of first-year writing.

Part 2: Threshold Concepts for First-Year Writing examines key threshold concepts instructors and programs can use as a framework for designing first-year writing courses. These chapters focus on foundational concepts that support disciplinary learning for all college writers but especially for students who have limited experience with the

4. We use the term *writing studies* rather than composition and rhetoric throughout this book. Writing studies reflects our focus on first-year composition curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy practices, as well as the related fields of professional writing and the central role academic writing plays in many first-year writing courses and programs.

knowledge, skills, and strategies required for successfully completing college writing courses. These essential disciplinary threshold concepts help first-year writers transition to postsecondary reading and writing while also creating a foundation for subsequent learning about literacy:

- Chapter 4: Writing Can Be Taught and Learned
- Chapter 5: Writers Write for Different Purposes and Audiences, and Often in Genres with Predictable Conventions
- Chapter 6: Writing Processes Are Individualized, Require Readers, and Require Revision
- Chapter 7: Reading and Writing Are Interconnected Activities
- Chapter 8: Writers Make Choices about Language within Cultural and Social Situations.

Each chapter includes an overview of a threshold concept, disciplinary background readings, related concepts and principles, practical teaching strategies, assignment or learning activity ideas or both, principles and practices for assessing student learning, and examples from student and instructor perspectives. The suggestions in each chapter can help both new and experienced writing instructors make flexible choices about how to design their courses around key disciplinary concepts while also adapting their teaching strategies to their own working conditions and institutional contexts. Each chapter in part 2 includes opportunities to apply the concept to a variety of student, instructor, disciplinary and program scenarios drawn from experience and research, with prompts to help readers think through how the chapter concepts and scenarios apply to their own local context and situation.

Together, the threshold concepts in the second part of the book help instructors create curriculum, instruction, and assessment models with the goal of supporting students' development as readers and writers in the writing classroom, as well as across the disciplines and beyond college in their literate lives. This book will help instructors prioritize concepts that are crucial for postsecondary literacy and design courses for students with diverse backgrounds and learning needs. No single class can prepare students for all types of literacy circumstances, and all students have literacy needs beyond college. The threshold concepts of writing studies that we discuss in this book (discussed in more detail in chapter 3) provide new instructors with a framework for adapting their current knowledge, training, and preparation to new contexts. They also provide instructors with a starting point for assessing how effectively their curricular and pedagogical approaches serve their students and their programs.

As our introduction to pedagogical adaptability demonstrates, this book's purposes and audiences vary with the context of its readers. This text can be a resource for instructors as they transition from graduate school to full-time teaching, move between institutional contexts, or adjust to changing student populations. We also hope this book helps writing instructors with a variety of options for making choices about how to adapt their teaching to support student learning and literacy development. As instructors move from the graduate programs in which they were trained into full-time or part-time positions across more than one institution, they usually revise and update their course materials to align with the expectations of those departments and to meet the needs of the differing student populations at those campuses. They may also be teaching new course levels—non-degree-credit writing, co-requisite support courses, integrated reading and writing, first-semester writing, second-semester writing, upper-division required writing courses—or in new mediums such as online or blended course models. As writing teachers work to adapt their instructional, curricular, and assessment approaches to these new spaces and students, we see the book as offering them a set of concepts, instructional principles, and resources. We hope this book will help instructors answer their own questions about adapting teaching strategies to support students with diverse learning needs, which might include the following questions.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

PEDAGOGICAL ADAPTABILITY AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- How have your experiences with literacy shaped your understanding of effective teaching and learning practices?
- What training or experiences have helped you adjust to different teaching contexts?
- How do your teaching practices respond to students' individual learning needs?
- How does your process for course design incorporate flexible and adaptable practices for teaching and learning?
- In what ways does your assessment of student learning reflect the needs of individual students?
- What resources help support your disciplinary approaches to teaching and learning? What other resources do you need?
- What goals do you have for your ongoing growth as a writing teacher?

Reaching All Writers can also support writing program administrators, community college literacy program coordinators, and faculty engaged

in collective work to revise programs think about the student populations they are working with, the curriculum they are developing, and the training they offer to new and continuing instructors who teach first-year writing (and sometimes developmental writing, integrated reading and writing, or upper-division courses). This book invites individuals and groups who develop writing courses and programs to consider first and foremost the literacy and learning needs of their students. The threshold concepts and related teaching strategies in this book can provide a framework for articulating core knowledge about writing and writers to support program design work and the development of course outcomes, assignments, learning activities, and course materials.

Finally, this book can help instructors, department chairs, and program administrators at institutions without many writing studies-trained faculty develop their programs, orient new teachers to their courses, and help faculty both on and off the tenure track teach effective, equitable, and inclusive courses. The chapters in this book help ground faculty development work in principles of inclusive teaching and writing studies. We hope that *Reaching All Writers* will equip all stakeholders in conversations about student-centered writing courses with references, disciplinary knowledge, and practical pedagogical suggestions to support their teaching and program development work.