



## INTRODUCTION

Like many books, this collection was conceived out of personal need. When the idea for the book presented itself, both of us were in the midst of either preparing new writing teachers for the classroom or designing workshops for experienced writing teachers. As we talked long distance about our respective faculty-development projects, we suddenly discovered that both of us were confronting the same problem: how to introduce teachers to effective classroom practices while at the same time stressing the importance of disciplinary and institutional contexts. As experienced teachers, we understood the necessity of situating a particular teaching method within the context of current research and theory on teaching, learning, and writing. We also understood how crucial it is to think about where one is teaching, who one's students are, and who one is as a teacher.

Although there are many resources available for preparing writing teachers, none seemed to fit our complex needs. Not only did we want to emphasize the importance of context and reflection, but also we wanted our students to see how real teachers think through various aspects of classroom practice. And because neither of us was employed by a state university with a large graduate program and the accompanying numbers of graduate teaching assistants to prepare, we needed something that would work for the assortment of graduate students and instructors we encountered: secondary English teachers pursuing an M.A., new teaching assistants preparing to teach college composition for the first time, graduate students taking the TA prep course only because it fit within their schedule, adjunct instructors with no previous course work in composition, and experienced instructors who wanted to rejuvenate their practice.

Realizing that we couldn't write the book we needed by ourselves, we sought the help of experienced teachers from across

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the country. From the responses we received, we have compiled a collection of essays composed by writing teachers that describe a particular aspect of instruction (e.g., course design, writing assignment, supporting activity, or assessment) and situate that practice within specific institutional and disciplinary contexts. Because we believe that the theoretical underpinnings of teaching writing cross contexts, we have included contributors who represent a variety of teaching locations, including high schools, community colleges, Research I universities, and regional university campuses. Equally important, these contributors are positioned in diverse ways within their institutions. With respect to the college-level faculty, for example, many are professors at various stages in their academic careers; others are full-time instructors or graduate students. Some dedicate most of their time to teaching, while others combine teaching with administrative work. (Like both of us, most of the authors have taught in a variety of contexts at different points in their careers.) Such diversity demonstrates not only that all writing teachers can (and do) engage in reflective practice, but also that, regardless of particular career circumstances, we have much in common when it comes to considering how to best help students grow as writers.

Besides representing an assortment of institutions, theoretical positions, and instructors, the essays describe a variety of writing courses, not just first-year composition. Although many instructors begin their careers teaching this course, some, if not most, will eventually teach a range of writing courses, from basic writing to advanced composition and even graduate workshops. For many instructors, adjusting to new courses can be difficult because the support structure surrounding first-year composition often isn't available for other courses. We see this book, then, not only as a collection that meets the needs of new teachers but also as one that can grow with teachers as they encounter new courses, move to new institutions, and collect more experience.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this project was clarifying theoretical contexts. The tension between theory and practice is long established in writing studies (as in other disciplines), and the call for connecting theory and practice is a common one. In many colleges and universities, however, theory—or theoretic-

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cal work—is still privileged over teaching, while in other contexts, such as community colleges and secondary schools, theory is downplayed or disparaged in favor of practical techniques. In writing studies, attempts to bridge this gap and reconfigure the relationship between theory and practice has been an ongoing enterprise. George Hillocks (1995) highlights the connection by referring to reflective practice, or “theory-driven teaching,” that requires teachers not only to develop knowledge about learning, discourse, and teaching, but also to “reason about choices, plan in light of those reasons, implement those plans, examine their impact on students and revise and reformulate reasons and plans in light of that experience” (36–37). Like Hillocks and the many others who strive to unite theory and practice, we are convinced that writing teachers need to perceive a dynamic relationship between the two. But as professionals who prepare teachers, we find it difficult to make this relationship clear for veteran instructors, let alone new or preservice writing teachers. While many of us (especially those of us who are experienced teachers) often have a strong sense of what we want to do in the classroom, we aren’t often called on to articulate *why* we do what we do. By making visible these connections, this book contributes to “demonstrating how reflection and action interact” (Roskelly and Ronald 1998, 26), enabling the pairing of theory and practice in response to particular situations, a move that is critical for all teachers but often difficult for inexperienced ones. As Pat Hinchey explains, “When the theoretical underpinnings of a practice are not clear—when the only rationale for a practice is that others say it ‘works’—there are no clear guidelines to help implementers adapt a practice soundly to local conditions” (qtd. in Dobrin 1997, 26).

The contributors to this collection have taken time to both think through the theoretical warrants for a particular assignment or activity and assess how the practice actually works for their students, thus demonstrating how other teachers might adapt practices for local needs. While most invoke names of scholars and researchers whose work supports what they do in their classrooms, they are careful to present their rationales in language that is accessible to teachers with varying levels of experience. Much of the theoretical work drawn on falls into familiar cat-

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egories, those delineated in taxonomies of the discipline by scholars such as James Berlin (1987) and Richard Fulkerson (1990). These categories include expressivism, social constructionism, cognitivism, feminism, and cultural studies. Yet, as we know from our own experience—and then rediscovered by reading the contributions we received—many people draw from various theoretical conversations. After all, in practice theoretical taxonomies rarely if ever exist in their pure form but rather tend to blur along the edges. In addition to formal theory (what we usually term Theory), contributors consider more personal beliefs about teaching and learning. In this way, we are using theory to mean what Louise Phelps (1989) calls the “deep structure” for teaching practice (37), or, as James Zebroski (1994), Sidney Dobrin (1997), and others explain it, theory with a small *t*. Particularly compelling are the essays that successfully bridge formal and informal theory, public and private knowing—that make theoretical justifications appear highly important but deeply personal. As they consider the theoretical discussions included in each essay, readers should think about theory in two ways: as both a scholarly conversation carried on among prominent academics in journals and books and as more of an everyday intuitive endeavor carried on by teachers in their classrooms.

Of course, as new teachers learn about theory and practice, they also must find their own voices among the many that participate in professional discussions about teaching. As Hephzibah Roskelly and Kate Ronald (1998) have recently argued: “[T]eachers, especially student-teachers, are often frustrated by their attempts to make someone else’s experience their own” (16). Learning how to incorporate the ideas or practices one encounters in a text on teaching into one’s own classroom approach can be especially frustrating when a new teacher finds herself or himself in a different type of institution, teaching different students, or teaching a different curriculum than that described in the text. By considering explanations of what teachers do in their classrooms and why, as well as how they have tailored their instruction to the particulars of their situations, readers should begin to see the dynamics involved in teaching writing and the importance of adapting methods to fit individual needs.

## Contents

Each of our contributors offers a description of an approach, assignment, or activity that he or she has identified as particularly effective. We use *effective* to mean that through the activity students learn something about writing or being a writer and that what they learn coincides with the teacher's goals and the goals of the program or department. Sample classroom materials and student responses are provided throughout to help readers design their own activities and consider how students might benefit from them. To give readers an idea of how institutional histories and values shape classroom practice, contributors have also included discussions of their specific teaching sites and students. These discussions provide both demographic information and a sense of the character of individual classrooms and/or schools—those qualities that distinguish them from other contexts and have influenced the particular approach or practice featured in the essay.

Because this collection is also a guide meant to provide teachers with examples of useful classroom methods, the contents have been arranged in terms of practice, with sections on course design, assignments, supporting activities, and response and assessment. Each of the sections includes seven to nine essays or chapters written by different teachers and highlighting different teaching ideas.

### *Part I: Course Design*

This section offers seven illustrations of how a writing course might be designed to meet the needs of a particular group of students and to reflect current trends in writing research and theory. Following a typical sequence of writing instruction, the section moves from first-year composition through advanced undergraduate courses and ends with a discussion of a graduate-level writing workshop course. The main principle guiding our selection process was that the course design and rationale be clear and well integrated, demonstrating to others the crucial connections between theory, practice, and location. Readers should note

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that although many of the courses described here are informed by multiple theories, they reflect a deliberate attempt to achieve internal coherence: a noticeable alignment between assignments, supporting activities, and assessment methods that helps students succeed. It is this sense of coherence, more than a particular theory or theme, that readers can apply to their particular teaching situations.

The section opens with Suellynn Duffey's essay on basic writing. Duffey explains how she and her colleagues at Ohio State University revised the basic writing curriculum as part of a proactive response to the institution's changing commitment to "remediation." By building on what they knew about literacy, their student population, and their institution, program administrators were able to create courses rich in reading and writing that not only benefited at-risk students but also addressed the concerns of university administrators. Following Duffey's discussion of basic writing is Catherine Latterell's presentation of a first-year composition course that requires students to think critically about technology. Drawing on the work of critical theorists such as Ira Shor and Anthony Giddens, Latterell describes how her course "desocializes" students, encouraging them to experience "habits or routines" in new and important ways. The next selection, Pavel Zemliansky's "Writing about Growing Up behind the Iron Curtain," depicts another theme-based course. Informed by Zemliansky's experience growing up in the former Soviet Union, the course offers students opportunities to consider their own lives in relation to those described by authors from former Soviet bloc countries. By the end of the semester, students understand how personal beliefs are shaped by social circumstances. Like Zemliansky's course, Katie Stahlnecker's builds on her interests as well as the students' own experiences, but this time more explicitly since the focus is on autobiography. Although Stahlnecker's course appears to be informed more by expressivist theories than social construction, it still requires that students think in terms of the larger culture as they explore personal topics such as family heritage.

Following these discussions of composition courses are essays that focus on two upper-level writing-in-the-disciplines courses. Hildy Miller's course incorporates service-learning as a

means for preparing English majors for writing beyond the academy, thus highlighting the relevance of English degrees for undergraduate majors. Students in Miller's course spent nine hours a week in writing internships, where they experienced firsthand the difference between academic discourse forms and the various workplace genres they would encounter after graduation. Though Mark Schaub's writing-in-the-disciplines course focuses on many of the same concepts as Miller's, it places greater emphasis on academic genres and depends on a more traditional structure. Students learn how "discursive systems" operate by completing a series of assignments asking them to identify, analyze, and evaluate genres specific to both the world of work and their academic disciplines. The section closes with a discussion of a graduate-level nonfiction writing workshop that, like Miller's and Schaub's courses, emphasizes genre. Designed by Stephen Wilhoit to reflect his learner-centered teaching philosophy and address his students' particular needs, the course requires class members to compile their own "reader-rhetoric," which they use as a reference for class discussions and major writing assignments.

## ***Part II: Writing Assignments***

Writing assignments are the fundamental elements of a writing course, as demonstrated in Part I. Because they provide the focal points around which all other class activities revolve, assignments bear much of the burden for enacting an instructor's theories and pedagogy. They also make up the largest portion of a student's course grade. In this section, contributors offer a detailed description of an assignment (or assignment sequence) that has proven successful in helping students improve as writers, thinkers, and readers. They also discuss the theoretical and institutional contexts that inform the tasks they present. While readers may not be able to import these assignments directly into their own courses, the detailed explanations and rationales provide direction for adapting them to meet individual needs.

Reflecting the common classroom progression from personal to more objective forms of writing, the section opens with Tonya Stremlau's discussion of an autobiography assignment used in the beginning of her "accelerated" first-year course. Informed by

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expressivist theories that emphasize the development of a sense of personal “voice” or authority, this assignment, argues Stremlau, is beneficial for students like hers who have been traditionally marginalized. Stremlau shows how hearing-impaired students in particular can benefit from both writing about their own struggles within a hearing-centered society and examining their stories in the light of published narratives about deaf culture. The next assignment, designed by Heather Bruce, also emphasizes students’ personal experience but this time in relation to academic ways of knowing. Drawing on the work of critical and feminist theorists, Bruce outlines a synthesis project that invites students to consider how they have come to know what they know about a topic of personal interest and then to compare their personal epistemologies with those revealed in scholarly discussions of the topic. The assignment helps students recognize the constructed nature of both personal and public knowledge.

From these explicitly personal assignments, the section moves to an argument assignment that requires students to consider their beliefs and values through a more objective, critical lens. Drawing on feminist notions of argument as well as traditional rhetorical concepts such as *kairos*, Margaret Strain explains how she complicates and deconstructs the adversarial, two-sided argument form by requiring students to create polylogues on controversial topics. According to Strain, the assignment helps students understand not only the complexity of most social issues but also the highly constructed nature of personal opinions. Approaching argument from another angle, Mary Mulder shows how critical and liberal-humanist pedagogies can be successfully mingled to promote thoughtful analysis, meaningful research, and compelling persuasive writing. By examining an issue of personal importance to them from both traditional and poststructuralist perspectives, the community college students in Mulder’s class are encouraged to embrace the idea of a shared American experience while at the same time recognizing the history and contingency of that experience.

The section continues with three essays that explicitly challenge conventional notions of research writing. Addressing her students’ discomfort with academic discourse in general and persuasive forms in particular, Margrethe Ahlschwede offers a sequence

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of activities that helps students realize the power of language and their own powers as language users. Through her Save the World project, which encourages students to use a variety of research methods and persuasive forms, Ahlschwede makes the point that anyone can inspire change. Eve Gerken's discussion of her recent move to a flexible research-writing process and assignment, which replaces the traditional research paper required of high school seniors, confirms many of the points made by Ahlschwede. Yet, while they both emphasize the benefits of uniting form with function, Gerken focuses more on how experimenting with nontraditional research forms can help students express their own voices and develop a sense of themselves as writers. Like Ahlschwede and Gerken, David Seitz is interested in nontraditional forms. His ethnographic research assignment, which requires four to five weeks of observations and interviews, offers students an important alternative to traditional library research and prompts them to investigate innovative reporting methods. Because of its emphasis on the connections between culture and individuals—an emphasis supported by social constructionist theories—students in Seitz's class (like those in Bruce's and Mulder's) gain important insights about the nature of knowledge, language, and community.

The section closes with Dan Melzer's description of a semester-long online newspaper project. The collaborative project, which prompts multiple forms of writing, gives students a chance to imagine audiences outside of the immediate classroom. Because they compare their work to that of traditional print newspapers, students learn much about the different rhetorical challenges that accompany different discourse forms.

### ***Part III: Supporting Practices***

Since the process movement took hold in the 1980s, invention, drafting, responding, revising, and editing have been accepted as important aspects of the writer's work. Teachers, therefore, are expected to incorporate these activities into the classroom while allowing for the recursiveness and uniqueness that accompany individual writing efforts. At the same time, teachers must include a range of other activities that encourage student development

but may not lead explicitly to the production of a final, polished text—activities that improve critical reading, research, or discussion skills. Besides illustrating numerous practices that directly support the completion of major writing assignments, then, contributors to this section describe a variety of ancillary activities, including dialogic reading responses and journal writing. They also demonstrate how seemingly universal methods are shaped by local needs and values.

The section opens with veteran high school teacher P. L. Thomas sharing his struggle to get students “to practice a writing process that is open-ended and chaotic.” Influenced by traditional, conservative, small-town values, Thomas’s students tend to see writing in terms of rigid formulas and inflexible rules. They resist, at first, his unconventional approach but eventually come to understand that the key to good writing is making effective rhetorical choices—choices that may or may not conform to traditional conventions. Following Thomas’s essay, which emphasizes development of authorial identity or agency, Annette Powell describes how she revised her classroom practices to emphasize the social forces that shape attitudes and beliefs. Through reading and reflection, Powell realized how her own subject position as a woman of color at a predominantly white university contributed to classroom dynamics, but, instead of blaming the students, she adjusted her methods, incorporating student-centered discussions, informal response papers, and rhetorical analysis to help students grapple with contested topics.

From Thomas’s and Powell’s comprehensive approaches to supporting writing assignments, the section moves to illustrations of more self-contained activities. Margaret McLaughlin’s “The Focused Reading Response,” for example, illustrates how brief dialogic reading responses foster comprehension while generating potential topics for future writing assignments. This technique, which McLaughlin adapted from Ann Berthoff’s depictions of the double-entry journal, requires students to select and copy a quote from the text, explain its significance, and then make a personal connection to it. While McLaughlin’s discussion centers on assigned reading, the next essay, by Janis Haswell, describes a research journal that students complete as they read and select sources for a research-based essay. In “Locating Stu-

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dents in Academic Dialogue,” Haswell shows how such a journal helps students develop their abilities to evaluate sources and synthesize ideas.

The journals that Haswell and McLaughlin describe function as prewriting or invention strategies because they help students generate ideas before they draft more formal texts. With the next essay, the section turns toward strategies that can be used after students complete a draft. In “Moving beyond ‘This is good’ in Peer Response,” Peggy Woods explains how she encourages students to provide useful comments for one another during peer review sessions. By drawing on the students’ previous experiences with feedback, Woods helps them distinguish between discouraging comments and the types of comments that encourage revision and foster a sense of community among writers. Paul Johnson’s essay takes a different approach to facilitating effective peer response: he advocates using an electronic bulletin board for anonymous draft workshops. According to Johnson, his students “are subject to the prevailing cultural condition known as Minnesota Nice, which requires politeness in all exchanges, even at the expense of honesty or critique.” Because the aliases are assigned by Johnson, students are accountable for their work but don’t feel pressured to build social relationships as they might when responding face to face.

Wendy Bishop’s essay shifts the discussion from response to revision. For her “radical revision” assignment, students not only have to substantially revise an essay but also write a meta-essay that focuses on what they have learned through the process of revision. Bishop attests to the success of this activity for a variety of writing students; it is fun yet theoretically informed, it requires rule following as well as rule breaking, it places conventions in dialogue with experimentation, and, finally, “it teaches writing as a writer experiences it.” The next essay, by Brian Huot, offers numerous strategies for teaching students how to proofread and edit their texts. Most students, Huot contends, don’t have a systematic approach to proofreading because they have had little if any formal instruction in it. He offers a set of practices that are situated “within a rich understanding of the process of writing” to illustrate how teachers can emphasize correctness in more productive ways.

The section closes with Janice McIntire-Strasburg’s “Reading the Writing Process on the Web,” which addresses process within the context of an end-of-semester hypertext portfolio. Like a traditional hard-copy collection, a hypertext portfolio demands that students bring together everything they have learned throughout the semester. Yet, as McIntire-Strasburg explains, because Web portfolios require different reading strategies, they can provide unique opportunities to emphasize rhetorical principles such as audience.

#### ***Part IV: Teacher Response and Evaluation***

Responding to and evaluating student writing are critical components of the work of writing teachers. Activities such as commenting on drafts in progress, grading final papers, evaluating portfolios, and assigning course grades not only absorb much of a teacher’s time and energy, but also help students gauge their development as writers. Because writing teachers always seem to be looking for ways to make their evaluations more useful and meaningful, there is a long and rich history of advice on how to respond and evaluate—from using checklists and rubrics, to conferencing, to employing holistic grading. Contributors to this section discuss these methods and other, more recent trends, such as reflection and self-evaluation, which offer important opportunities for students to become critical readers of their own texts and to participate more fully in the assessment process.

While it is tempting, and perhaps all too typical, to regard writing assessment as something added on to the end of an assignment or semester, the contributors see their response and evaluation methods as fully integrated into their course designs. Although the assessment methods presented here may not be radically new, each essay offers a unique glimpse into how particular methods can be adapted to meet specific needs and goals.

The first essay, “Taking Out the Guesswork: Using Checklists in the Composition Classroom” by Lee Nickoson-Massey, offers a structured response and evaluation technique that incorporates student reflection. Using checklists for response, argues Nickoson-Massey, helps make criteria explicit because it guides both the feedback students receive and the discussions they have

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about writing and revising. In addition to the response checklist, Nickoson-Massey uses a list of grading criteria that students develop collaboratively for the final course portfolios. Through this collaborative activity, “learning about assessment practices is integrated into the students’ learning experience.”

In the next essay, which also highlights reflective writing, Kate Freeland shows how she uses student conferencing as an effective response strategy for her basic writing students. By requiring pre- and postconference reflections, asking open-ended questions, learning to listen, allowing for silence, and mirroring students’ ideas, Freeland has been able to make fifteen- to twenty-minute conferences more productive. Carl Gerriets’s essay, “Building Relationships through Written Dialogue,” incorporates some of the same strategies and rationales that Freeland uses, but the focus here is on written communication. With the help of student Jennifer Lowe, Gerriets explains how he employs reflective cover letters to establish a written dialogue with students at his community and technical college who “are on campus only long enough to attend class before rushing off to a part- or full-time job or to relieve the babysitter.”

Following Gerriets and Lowe is a chapter by Jeff Sommers, who teaches at a two-year branch campus. In “A Comprehensive Plan to Respond to Student Writing,” Sommers explains how he responds to students’ reflective memos and drafts by tape-recording his comments. As students listen to Sommers’s comments, they annotate their drafts. This approach allows him to cover more ground in less time and encourages students to be active participants in the response process. All of this fits within a portfolio system of assessment that requires students to include reflective, metacognitive letters with all of their revised work.

Up to this point, the contributors have been college writing teachers discussing college classrooms. The section moves into the secondary classroom with Steven Smith’s essay, “Why Use Portfolios? One Teacher’s Response,” in which Smith explains a curriculum for ninth- through twelfth-grade students based on year-long portfolios. According to Smith, his students, most of whom “are working class, will be the first in their families to attend college, and have rarely been encouraged to make connections between education and an improved life,” respond favorably to

the recursive process of collection, reflection, and selection emphasized in his approach.

The section closes with an essay that demonstrates how teachers' writing assignments can be incorporated into the evaluation process. "Criteria for Measuring Authentic Intellectual Achievements in Writing," by Kendra Sisserson, Carmen K. Manning, Annie Knepler, and David Jolliffe, reports on the results of a collaboration between the authors and Chicago public school teachers. The authors discuss a comprehensive rubric that, unlike other assessment methods, does not focus exclusively on student writing. One part of the rubric "evaluates the extent to which writing assignments ask students to construct knowledge, elaborate, and relate their writing to their own lives," while the other part "examines the extent to which students demonstrate these skills." The rubric allows teachers to gauge both the success of students' writing and the quality of their own assignments.

## **Final Note**

Although this collection addresses both theory and practice, suggesting that it can stand alone, we see it as being most usefully placed in dialogue with other texts and with teachers' own experiences. A teacher preparation course, for example, might successfully use this book as a way to illustrate ideas developed in a collection of theoretical essays. Similarly, because it shows how pedagogical trends actually play out in classrooms, this collection also could be used to complement a practice-oriented instructional guide. Teachers not enrolled in a theory and pedagogy course but eager to learn more about good teaching might use the book as a guide for drawing connections between practice, theory, and institutional location. However readers use the book, we hope it offers a way to think about what writing teachers do—and how disciplinary and institutional contexts shape instruction and students' responses to it.

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