FOREWORD

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Before you is a collection of chapters describing better online writing instruction (OWI) practices (also, often termed online literacy instruction, or OLI). Amy Cicchino and Troy Hicks use the term *better* in this collection deliberately. As they point out in their introduction to *Better Practices: Exploring the Teaching of Writing in Online and Hybrid Spaces*, educators have debated the usefulness and accuracy of adjectives to describe their practices: Are they "best"? "most effective"? Or, should teachers accept that we're on a developmental continuum, like an asymptote that moves toward a curve of idealized/best teaching but never quite gets there?

In short, *better* is this book's target, and we think it is a useful and empowering aim. Teachers work constantly to improve, to provide something that helps students a little more than last class, last term, last year. There's always more to be done. As Ingrid Bowman and Briana Westmacott point out, "This is the beauty of being an educator—we are, in fact, innovators, continually working to solve problems" (Chapter 8, this collection). That is especially true with OWI/OLI, which doesn't hold a monopoly on innovation, but its foundation in digital teaching invites the use of technologies that are always changing and, thus, always opening new opportunities for educators and students.

This perpetual change, while exciting, can be a source of stress for educators new to OWI/OLI. It is not unusual to hear teachers say they are confused by changing technologies or hesitant to learn new interfaces well enough to put them into practice, but that's part of the power of this book: Its 19 chapters and six themes show readers how innovative, better teaching and learning practices to achieve focused goals can often be accomplished with accessible technologies. And it is imperative that we describe and share these practices, as Cicchino and Hicks say: ". . . our current context demands closer attention to the kinds of pedagogies that can improve student writing, no matter the course modality" (Introduction, this collection).

The many authors included in this volume are clearly skilled all around as teachers, yet we are struck that they do not lose sight of their role as online educators. If we intend to get better at OWI/OLI, we must continue to invest in the specific

thread of scholarship that is demonstrated in this volume. We must acknowledge the legitimacy of OWI/OLI as its own learning space: The value this expanded approach to the delivery of education brings to students, the scholarship informing our practices, the rigor of inclusive and accessible course design in digital spaces, and the desire our students have to be challenged to meet the world's latest exigencies.

WE ARE ALL ONLINE TEACHERS

The pandemic heavily underscored the fact that, if we were not before, we are now all online teachers in some manner. Anyone who uses an LMS, has flipped their classroom, or relies on any technological tool to teach a lesson is an online teacher who could benefit from OWI/OLI-specific professional development. While the pandemic has been devastating to so many lives and livelihoods, it has also been maieutic in focusing our attention on what we wish we'd seen more clearly all along: OWI/OLI is a mainstay of education and teaching with some virtual component that fosters improved learning will continue to be the norm. To dismiss that reality limits ourselves and our students' options.

Cicchino and Hicks describe three goals for this book:

1. to bring together diverse online writing educators to make their teaching practices more explicit,
2. to feature a set of replicable *better* practices that show ideas articulated by professional organizations in national statements in-action, and
3. to validate online teacher-scholars and make their intellectual contributions to writing studies more visible.

This collection offers a jumpstart for teachers to engage in those goals and seek specific classroom practices that meet the field's highest standards as well as for administrators looking for professional development in their earnest (yet often nascent) effort to support their departments. We, Miranda and Scott, have done much of that sort of administrative support of new and new-to-online teachers and find that a community of well-intentioned educators with clear ideas to share is one key ingredient necessary to foster the confidence needed to step into that virtual classroom space. This volume evokes a form of grassroots professional development that features teachers teaching teachers (a long-standing National Writing Project principle[1]) by sharing detailed ideas throughout. Here is a menu of such ideas.

This book welcomes all writing teachers—and their students—into the world of OWI/OLI. Some chapters reify, clarify, and expand commonly accepted tenets

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1   Please learn more about the National Writing Project at https://www.nwp.org.

of better practices (Brielle Campos and Candie Moonshower's use of templates, Chapter 2, this collection; or Shawn Bowers and Jennifer Smith Daniel's application of ungrading to OWI/OLI, Chapter 16, this collection; or Syndee Wood and Mary Stewart's application of multimodality as a means of promoting social justice, Chapter 11, this collection) while some challenge those tenets (Anna Barritt and Ada Hubrig's description of neurodivergent approaches to the writing process, Chapter 9, this collection; or Kevin DePew and Kole Matheson's use of grading contracts in online courses to promote radical equity, Chapter 17, this collection). Meanwhile, other better practices offer new ways to achieve accepted goals (Tess Evans and A. J. Rivera's use of push notifications to foster teacher presence, Chapter 1, this collection). Of note, while there are indeed big, provocative conversations in OWI/OLI's journals, conferences, and books among the teacher-scholars of the field related to antiracist languaging, accessibility, transfer, and the proper place for and subject of first-year writing, this book converts many of those conversations into actionable classroom practices.

FRESH APPROACHES TO BOTH CONTENT AND DELIVERY

Chapters are solidly grounded in key OWI/OLI principles and composition position statements, but the book also takes fresh, and in some cases unique, approaches to its construction and delivery. First, the editors invited an unusual type of collaboration among co-authors: They asked an OWI/OLI "expert" specializing in a theoretical approach to pair with a "colleague teaching the approach for the first time" to collaboratively write explorations of practices anchored in OWI/OLI research and expertise "delivered across multiple institutional contexts." These expert-novice labels were productively complicated throughout, and we found it interesting to consider what exactly constituted an expert and a novice—even in our own writing partnership. The editors initially asked Scott to write this foreword and provided suggestions for a collaborator who was newer to the field; however, when he asked Miranda, whom he knew from other OWI/OLI contexts (especially her heavy-lifting work when the Global Society of Online Literacy Educators offered resources to instructors during the pandemic's onset[2]), it was apparent immediately that while she may have just earned her doctorate, she was a long-experienced, talented educator, administrator, and scholar. You will see similar complexities in the chapters that follow, as ostensible differences in experience produce interesting conclusions throughout.

Second, the editors not only invited co-author teams but also supported them through the composition process by providing structured times during an

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2 Learn more about GSOLE at https://gsole.org/

eight-week period to meet and collaborate with one another and with the editors. The editors nurtured the collaborative writing process, in an online setting, using tools similar to those the authors themselves use in their own teaching practices. Interestingly, although writing instruction is a pillar of our professional lives, we often create our own texts in opaque, enigmatic ways. Cicchino and Hicks, however, chose to exercise our field's *better* practices by supporting the authors through the complicated collaborative writing process, helping demystify the process of drafting scholarly texts.

Third, the chapters open with vignettes that help focus these better practices around student experiences. These vignettes, stories of people, remind us consistently of the importance of humanistic approaches to OWI/OLI. The practices are designed explicitly with individual students in local contexts in mind. In many chapters, student experiences are not just assumed to be present and valuable: Teachers seek student input, too. At the end of "Scaffolding for Collaboration and Multimodal Assignments," for example, Ashleah Wimberly, Amanda Ayers, Amory Orchard, and Michael Neal say,

> Taking the time to articulate what we wanted our students to learn and how we wanted to help our students to learn is what inspired our re-visioning of this course. The ongoing reflection and discussions we had amongst ourselves and with students helped us make decisions that centered student experiences, scaffolded their learning, and fostered collaboration . . . (Chapter 4, this collection)

There is a risky honesty at work here, as Wood and Stewart point out: They notice "most 'best practices' articles tell a positive story" in which "authors' pedagogical goals and intentions were met and the students experienced valuable learning," but their work "found a much more complicated reality." Many chapters comfortably linger in that "complicated reality," one that reifies the need to travel asymptotically toward idealized teaching rather than adhere to a simple linear model in which we learn a practice, succeed, and move on.

Finally, following the guiding lights of "better," "innovation," and "individuality," the book offers different paths—themes that structure the reading experience around specific OWI/OLI topics and goals. The editors codify and organize a variety of pedagogical experiences: Choose your adventure!

ELIMINATING DISCIPLINARY UNCERTAINTY

Cicchino and Hicks call for us to be aware of OWI/OLI's precariousness. We could all write books and articles and deliver presentations and lectures worrying

about precarity, but they do something about this problem. This book grounds us in a more clearly articulated sense of better practices, rooted in OWI/OLI principles, as applied in humanistic fashion (teachers seeking student input throughout), and it is the kind of solid footing we think will help eliminate disciplinary uncertainty. This book gives us all a strong place from which to enter critical conversations in our scholarship, and we think the audience will be pleased to discover that the scholars sharing their work show new ways to enact *better* practices in their teaching—and overtly invite readers to do the same with their own.

REFERENCES

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