CHAPTER 4

TEACHING THE OWI COURSE

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This chapter examines some foundational principles that ground instructional presence, conversational strategies, response to student writing, class management and organization, course assessment, and classroom technologies. Because of the rapid changes to technologies, the chapter pays particular attention to how to understand new technologies from their foundations before introducing them to the OWI course, or OWC.

Keywords: assessment, asynchronous, composition, conversation, hybrid, message board, OWI, presence, redundancy, response, teaching, teacher training

While there are many nuanced sub-positions within it, the CCCC OWI Committee's (2013) *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for OWI* is, in essence, about teaching writing online effectively. Even the most teaching-centric principles, the ones discussed in this chapter, do not offer a template because there are so many ways to teach writing online effectively. Like onsite teaching, OWI works or not based on context and the specific dynamics of an instructor and students—and institutions, of course. As Wilbert McKeachie (2002) pointed out, teachers must consider the various cultures and subcultures of their instructional environment (p. 4). The general "problem" that the pedagogy-specific principles address, though, is simple to articulate: *How do instructors teach writing online well?*

Framed by that question, this chapter attempts to cover a lot of ground. It discusses the five OWI principles focused on pedagogy (OWI Principles 2-6), examining such aspects of online instruction as:

- teacher presence
- strategies for building and encouraging conversation in OWCs
- responding to student writing and how, if at all, that might differ in OWI than it does in onsite courses
- class management and organization
- course evaluation and assessment
- class[room] technologies

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This chapter does not and cannot serve as a stand-in for a full instructional guide for teaching writing online. Other publications have done that essential work, and they are addressed throughout this chapter. Instead, I look at these five OWI principles and accompanying effective practices and how they consider certain obstacles, issues, and challenges that instructors will encounter in both hybrid and fully online courses. In fact, the problems teachers face can in many cases be articulated as an inversion of these instructional OWI principles. For many reasons, writing teachers are placed and/or pressured into teaching situations and scenarios that may not enable them to offer their best teaching selves, perhaps preventing them, as Peter Filene (2005) said of teaching practice, from being "true to yourself" (p. 12). The challenge may be finding ways to hold onto teaching persona and voice while cultivating and sharing good pedagogical ideas and practices. These are the issues that the instructionally driven practices discussed in this chapter are designed to address.

OWI PRINCIPLE 2

> **An online writing course should focus on writing and not on technology orientation or teaching students how to use learning and other technologies.**

Many writing courses, and FYW in particular, have a history of becoming a catch-all for college students; Wendy Bishop (2003), for example, wrote of finding composition's "pedagogical roots" (p. 65). Teachers find themselves doing everything in these courses—geographical orientation, technological orientation, psychotherapy, library skills—and the course can become so divided with these other activities that it only tangentially discusses writing. That situation, while common, is not effective for any kind of teaching; yet, technology complicates the issue in particular ways. As Diana G. Oblinger and James L. Oblinger (2005) expressed, students respond to learning activities more than they respond to any specific use of technology (p. 12). OWI teachers must use technology in the service of the compositional/pedagogical goals of their courses.

This curricular atomization can be a particular issue online, the CCCC OWI Committee's Expert/Stakeholders' panelists noted repeatedly during the research into *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for OWI* (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013). Even though composition has changed and shifted from applied rhetoric to a variety of writing studies' approaches (see Downs & Wardle [2007]), when writing instruction occurs in digital environments, the OWI teacher's goal is clear: "Whatever we need to do to help the student focus on their writing and not so much on the environment" (Shareen

Grogan, CCCC OWI Committee, 2011d). Because an OWC is facilitated with technology and FYW instructors in particular are often at the front line of interaction with an institution's students, teachers can turn into a regular (and, if they are not careful, all-hours) contact point for student technology woes. OWI Principle 2 (p. 11) is explicit: Teachers need to make sure their efforts are focused on teaching writing, and they need multi-level support to maintain that focus. Teachers will support students with all of the material and technological conditions in which they compose because those types of concerns often are inextricable from writing/composing itself, but they cannot be placed in the role of technology expert/support person.

This stance may seem obvious in terms of larger technological applications. Teachers may want to help students with issues like securing their LMS accounts. But on the practical level, this activity quickly becomes complicated. For instance, years ago an FYW student sent me this email:

> I'm having trouble veiwing the syllabus because i deleted my microsoft word on accident. I know that as drexel students we can download it for free but it does not allow me to log in. I'm doing the whole drexel\userid thing.

Teachers, especially those new at their school, could be drawn into many well-meaning hunts to help students like this. Instead, the institution should provide clear, easily accessible help through IT departments and 24/7 (or reasonably accessible) help desks.

OWI Principle 2's example effective practices supports that a teacher's focus on the writing of the course must be articulated and reinforced throughout a program and even an institution. Effective Practice 2.1 stated, "The requirement for the institution's initial technology orientation should be handled by the institution's information technology (IT) unit and not the OWI teacher of any OWC" (p. 11), and this practice is followed by 2.2: "An OWI teacher should not be considered a technology point person" and "reasonable technical assistance should be available to teachers" as well as students in person (if onsite) and by phone, email, or instant messaging during all instructional hours (p. 11).

In case of technology failure, teachers also should have an alternate lesson plan when the technology cannot be fixed on the spot. Since my earliest use of digital instructional technology, I have always used a risk-benefit-type analysis structure, accepting, as David Jonassen (2012) said in an article about educational decision making: "Risk assessment decisions assume that consequences are not in the hands of the decision maker but rather depend on chance, nature, and luck" (p. 346). I introduce or use tools and technology because I think the benefit justifies it. This decision is no different than anything we introduce to

our courses. A simple onsite teaching analogy: If I invite a guest speaker to my onsite course, I think the benefit to students outweighs the risk that the speaker may get a flat tire (which happened to me once, resulting in no speaker). Teachers do not abandon chalkboards because one day the chalk might be missing. But teachers should have a back-up plan so that when something does not go right—say the conferencing software crashes—they can still do what they need to: Maybe, in this case, use the phone. Technology opens up teaching opportunities, but the challenge is to prevent the experience from hinging on the function of a few irreplaceable tools. Sometimes, perhaps, it is best just to stay simple. OWI experts Beth Carroll and Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch said that a *least* effective practice for them and their colleagues was using anything too technology-heavy: Simple technology like Microsoft Word documents, GoogleDocs, and even telephones are good tools (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012a).

The excessive focus on technology can be a problem not just in terms of students emailing or phoning teachers because they cannot get their LMS working or a teacher's overreliance on breakable apps. Online environments by nature lend themselves to multimedia and Web-based/focused assignments and work. This nature provides tremendous opportunities for students to work with a mindset toward the capabilities and affordances of the digital writing environment (see also Chapter 14). Of course, composition broadly conceived includes images, sounds, and other media, but FYW and most other writing teachers and students do not and should not have to know the technological and rhetorical nuances of HTML code, for instance—especially now, when so many tools provide easy ways to do everything from design work to video recording. According to Effective Practice 2.3, the instructional focus should be on "the rhetorical nature of writing for the Web," on the *compositional* aspects of using technology to create writing (p. 11). Aside from access obstacles—outlined thoroughly in OWI Principle 1—most students, despite technological skill, can create a blog in a minute. Asking them to create a blog is well within the scope of many writing courses because blogs are a contemporary genre with teachable writing conventions for reaching particular audiences. In asking students to write a blog, however, as Effective Practice 2.3 emphasized, students should "focus on learning composition and not on learning technological platforms or software" (p. 11). In other words, students should not have to create a homepage or specialized Web page outside the affordances of their institutional LMS in order to accomplish a typical writing assignment. Significant access and inclusivity concerns arise when students are required to learn such technological skills in the typical writing course without training in the tool's use. In other circumstances, these tools themselves might lack accessibility or might be incompatible with the student's adaptive technology. Worse yet, such technology might not be suitable

for certain students due to particular learning styles and abilities. Note, however, that if instructors—and, more importantly, their writing programs—want to incorporate a rhetorical exploration of platforms and tools, particularly in advanced writing courses, they should do so while conscientiously taking on the responsibility for providing access and inclusivity, as well as necessary teacher and student preparation. *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for OWI* (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013) was developed not to forbid changes in composition studies but to protect those who may have such instruction forced upon them without essential technical support and training.

Of course, planning always helps maintain course focus. According to Effective Practice 2.4 (p. 11), a teacher's focus on writing can be aided significantly if the teacher receives institution-supported professional development *before* the course starts (also see Chapters 11 & 14). The real world of staffing involves pressure to get things done quickly and sometimes without adequate planning, particularly when contingent faculty are hired late (see Chapter 7), but ideally teachers would have a full semester or more *before teaching online* to become trained in the necessary pedagogies and technologies.

Ultimately, this conversation is centered in *access*. As Larry LaFond (2002) stated more than a decade ago, many have viewed distance learning as a way to broaden access, but the promise of access also brings problems; the digital divide still prevents many students—and even teachers—from full access to OWI. By being mindful of access and overall composition goals, teachers are better positioned to maintain an environment that is inclusive for all.

OWI PRINCIPLE 3

> **Appropriate composition teaching/learning strategies should be developed for the unique features of the online instructional environment.**

OWI courses are writing courses, first and foremost, but, as I have argued elsewhere (Warnock 2009), teaching writing with digital technology tools opens up incredible opportunities. Technologies should not control what teachers do, but teachers would be remiss not to take advantage of the *affordances* of educational technologies for writing courses. In fact, after using digital tools, most teachers develop new approaches that influence their core pedagogy. Susan Lowes (2008) called teachers who move back and forth from face-to-face to online platforms "trans-classroom teachers." She stated:

> And as a teacher moves, either simultaneously or serially, from one environment to the other, the course being taught will

> also be transformed as it is shaped and reshaped to fit first one context and then the other. Much like immigrants who leave the cultural comfort of their home societies and move to places with very different cultures and social practices, those who teach online leave the familiarity of the face-to-face classroom for the uncharted terrain of the online environment, whose constraints and affordances often lead to very different practices. (para. 2)

These "different practices" can—and probably should—compel teachers to look closely at their teaching selves, helping them find new ways to work with and engage students.

However, the astonishing rapidity of digital technology change means teachers must think about technologies in foundational ways before introducing them to an OWI course. This point returns us to how teachers conceptualize themselves: They should consider what they are trying to accomplish and then think about ways that technology complements those goals and philosophies, as discussed to some degree in Chapters 2 and 3. Doing so may require some earnest (and perhaps painful) self-reflection. Teachers do not want to become pigeon-holed into particular, highly specific types of technology; instead, they should think about how various applications help them accomplish their course goals.

Straightforward Communication and Clear Textual Teaching Practices

Online courses put more pressure on teachers' communication skills (Hewett, 2015a) because most of what is communicated and taught is mediated by technology. In asynchronous courses, almost all instruction, content, and teaching through feedback to student writing is done with text and provided to students without the certainty of future in-person meetings. In synchronous courses, which are rarer, the same largely holds true. When spoken language is used in real time or in audio and audio/video recordings, for example, specificity of language and what Beth Hewett calls semantic integrity (i.e., fidelity between the writer's intention and the reader's inference) also are crucial (Hewett, 2010, 2015a, 2015b). Effective Practice 3.1 provided overt guidance in this way: OWI teachers should use "written language that is readable and comprehensible," and the many written instructions should be "straightforward, plain, and linguistically direct" (p. 12).

Teachers should re-consider how their messages appear to their students, beginning with the initial design and practices in course documents. CCCC OWI

Committee Expert/Stakeholder Jim Porter said:

> Early on I was too reliant on emails and long narratives on description of things and that just wasn't very effective [for] presenting information. But I think shorter, more compact things, shorter presentations, shorter videos, shorter agenda […] I think focusing and cutting the extra verbosity and making the information design really sharp helps students to understand what's due when and what the main principles are. (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011d).

OWCs need various new "ground rules," Porter said, about things like "How are we going to communicate with one another? How are we going to have discussions?" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011d), and the articulation of the rules themselves must be clear. CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Rich Rice said that "a best practice" he applies is to create an "expanded" syllabus with lots of hyperlinks "to lead individual students to different things, giving them more active practice" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012a).

As Hewett (2015a) argued extensively in *Reading to Learn and Writing to Teach: Literacy Strategies for Online Writing Instruction*, cultivating good OWI practices also requires developing a culture of reading and re-reading in the course—for both teacher and students. Text-rich settings also are text heavy, as Hewett says in Chapter 1. Indeed, the reading for students in OWI can be incredibly different than in comparable onsite courses. June Griffin and Deborah Minter (2013) compared the required reading of students in one fully online and two traditional onsite writing courses, finding that "the reading load of the online classes was more than 2.75 times greater than the face-to-face classes" (p. 153). Given this reading load, a teacher's incomplete or underdeveloped thought in an email or discussion post can lead to multiple problems of student comprehension and teacher *ethos*. Instructors must carefully proofread their own work for content and clarity; this work places them in the role of *modeling* communication behavior *and strong writing skills*, a key point for me (Warnock, 2009) and for Hewett (2010, 2015a, 2015b). It is interesting how such modeling can change practice; for instance, in my message board conversations, I ask students to use cited evidence whenever possible. Online, with search engines at your fingertips, there is little excuse to say, "I once heard about a study." Of course, as a teacher I am pressed for time occasionally and want to say, "I once heard about a study," but I just cannot say that and expect students not to do so, too. Everything I write in an OWC provides a model—strong or weak—for student writers. These points all connect with issues of instructor *presence*. CCCC OWI Committee Member Jason Snart[1] said in a meeting of expert/stakeholders: "So

I think from my perspective on the instructor side of it, is the more I can make my involvement obvious to the students on a regular basis, the more effective that seems to be for me to get them to feel like they need to be involved with the class, with each other, with me on a regular basis as well" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011d).

In asynchronous, text-based courses, the pressures of heavy reading and writing loads and the need for clarity and teacher modeling increase. The course is primarily, if not exclusively, textual. As we mention throughout this book, this text-centric nature of the asynchronous course (and of many features in online synchronous writing courses as well) provides many opportunities to help students learn to write. However, teachers must step back and think in a usability-centered way (see Redish, 2012) about the documents as well as the communication experiences in the course. Access issues are monumental when writing is taught through text primarily and students, some of whom are poor readers of instructional text, must teach themselves through what they read (Hewett, 2015a).

Time is a factor in OWI, and time is necessary to communicate well with students. Initially, the time to teach an OWC can be daunting, as many argue. But I have found that teachers will (or *should*) develop a vast pool of carefully crafted communications. I have files of easily searchable message board prompts, general pieces of advice, even course announcements, and I believe teachers can *leverage* their time rapidly in online environments if they use these tools well. While OWI teachers may not have the onsite room of students with whom to discuss general issues in a writing project, they can create a document or post of such observations, which students can revisit as often as they want. There is a quality of thoughtful repetition in OWI that gives online students, who cannot line up outside the office after class asking for a repeat performance of the "General issues with Project 1" speech, opportunity to access needed answers to their questions.

Using Audio and Visual Technology

While technology can be integral to response, in line with broader OWI principles, the *strategies* are what matter. This *thinking digitally* also means that teaching writing online, interacting with students' documents, and writing in ways that are exclusively digital open up communication opportunities teachers might not have considered onsite. Using audio/video is one-way technology can enhance communications, whether the course is text-centric and asynchronous or live video-based and synchronous, as Effective Practice 3.2 suggested. Those audio/video technologies can be used either asynchronously in recorded form in

response to student writing (J. Sommers, 2002; Warnock, 2008) or as a means of facilitating synchronous conferences. In line with other key ideas in *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for OWI* (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013), as long as access issues have been addressed adequately, using these modalities helps learners in various ways while also providing crucial communicative *redundancy* in course lessons.

Because of modeling and other text-centric teaching philosophies, WPAs and instructors can make strong arguments to use text-based writing as the core of course communications, but in the interest of clarity, textual experiences in the course can be enhanced significantly by multimedia. The barriers that might impede the use of audio and video are dropping precipitously, so instructors can more easily and effectively incorporate audio/video technologies into their courses. Nonetheless, it is crucial to remember that although teachers' communications may be in audio and video as well as text, even audio/video technologies do not relieve instructors of the challenges of conciseness and clarity. Audio and video—even synchronous, video dialogue— still rely on clear and unambiguous messages, as even the best technologies obstruct common in-person cues of facial and body language.

Responding to Student Writing

In OWI, teachers may have to think differently in the area of the classic writing teacher communications to students—response to student writing projects. As any writing teacher knows, responding to writing is one of the most significant aspects of our interaction with students, and we do much individualized teaching in this process. Although response once was dominated by teachers' (mostly) one-way interactions with students' major written projects, OWI teachers and students are in a constant cycle of response that can be much more dialogic and complex (Hewett, 2015a). Researchers have long described patterns of vagueness, terseness, and sometimes outright meanness in teaching response (N. Sommers, 1982)—the product of writing thousands of words about similar problems in a short period of time. Writing is difficult, no matter who you are, and that does not change at all—at all!—when teachers write to students. In fact, an audience of developing students seeking advice for writing may be the most challenging audience a writer can face.

Teachers have to consider the use of stylistic approaches such as rhetorical questions, idioms, and metaphorical/figurative language. Will they work? In many cases, Hewett thinks they will not (2010, 2015b), advocating linguistically direct (not necessarily *directive*) response instead. Is it better to be as direct as possible? How much does a teacher balance prescriptive advice with Socratic

questions? Is certain redundancy necessary in these stylistic and rhetorical choices to accommodate the cognitive needs of students with differing learning abilities? How helpful will it be for comments to be anchored to a rubric? Effective Practice 3.5 suggests one approach, a problem-centered approach to write to students. As Hewett (2015a) indicated, such a problem-centered approach could include asking open-ended questions; demonstrating; illustrating; and, again, modeling (specifically modeling at the level "being required of the student"). Teachers cannot assume that the ambiguity inherent in open-ended questions is appropriate for all learners, and they should provide additional scaffolds for those who might process information differently. Teachers need to think about the clarity of writing vocabulary and other instructional terms (Hewett, 2011, p. 12). Developing revision strategies is integral, and teachers must think about such strategies differently than in onsite instruction. CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder panelist Errol Sull said a top problem students cite in OWI course is "that they get lack of instructor feedback or get lack of instructor's feedback in time"; to maintain the student-teacher connection, he indicated "that custom feedback has to be there" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2011d).

While strategy matters most, technologies exist to make written response to student writing more efficient *and* effective. CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder panelist Angela Solic revealed that, "another best practice is using software to help grading" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012a). Such technologies are not exclusive to online learning, of course; their use simply represents another way writing instruction in general can be inflected by digital environments.

Responding to Small Assignments

In an OWC, teachers often will look at many smaller writing assignments as well as multiple essay drafts, so that classic teacher response to larger projects may change. CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Rich Rice said in his technical writing course he does not grade many papers but he sees lots of message board posts: "A best practice would also be realizing as an instructor you do not have to read every single post or grade every single thing to be effective. The point is they are contributing; the point is not that you are grading everything that they are contributing." CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Melody Pickle, elaborating on that point, indicated that looking at and grading "discussion boards and things like that" are "significantly going to change the grading time or time in the class" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012b). In fact, responding to these small assignments might not be best thought of as grading, as CCCC OWI Committee Member Web Newbold said: "Perhaps 'assessment' would be a good term to use" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012b).

Interestingly, even though evaluating a stack of projects is time consuming, teachers quickly understand the time expectations. Working with small assignments, especially in a dialogic way, can disrupt those expectations. CCCC OWI Committee Member Heidi Harris cautioned that instructors might supplant large projects with "a bunch of small assignments" and then "they can't get student feedback there on time and this pushes that feeling that students have to constantly be doing something to be constantly connecting with the class" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012a). Such actions actually are counter-productive, as Snart indicates in Chapter 2. It is too easy to think students need to be online more hours per week than they would when engaging onsite course work, and such tasks can become busy work both to students and teachers.

Text-Wise, Medium Meets Message

Many writers decry the use of emoticons, and exclamation point overuse is rampant; yet, word processing and HTML writing environments offer a variety of communication and rhetorical opportunities that OWI teachers should consider. Although instructors may not want to create an intricate, layered hypertext narrative every time they write a course announcement, they can take advantage of those tools. Effective Practice 3.3 addressed teachers' uses of different writing tools if for no other reason than "to mirror the types of online writing students most often read" (p. 12) This practice is in line with the central pedagogical principle that OWI is about writing instruction, not Web design, and using the various text-production capabilities can help clarify a message. Such tools include such simple strategies like emphasizing text by strike-through, highlighting, and graphics and drawing. As writers and rhetoricians themselves, OWI teacher-writers should make the most of the opportunities and tools available for textual communication with students.

Redundancy and Support

OWI teachers should employ *redundancy* in their OWCs—in the content, instructional texts, and any documents students must read or ideas that are crucial to their writing growth. In line with Effective Practice 3.6 (serendipitously also expressed in Effective Practice 4.6), it is important to consider that strategic redundancy provides students with various ways of receiving the same information (p. 15). In *Teaching Writing Online* (2009), one of my own guidelines is that "Redundancy is crucial when you deliver information in your OWcourses"; for example, I suggested that teachers provide information about the due date of a final project using the syllabus, specific project instructions, course announce-

ments, and even email (pp. 56-57). If teachers provide information in different ways using various tools *and* media, they can help students—especially those who may have a disability impeding their comprehension in one medium—to understand both the information and its importance to the course. (By the way, this type of redundancy is different from the "Redundancy Principle" of Ruth C. Clark and Richard E. Mayer (2011), which advised against *simultaneous* redundancy in multimedia, such as the triple-presentation (e.g., text on slide, spoken, hand-out) of information in a presentation).

Teachers can use electronic tools to replicate—and I believe strengthen—their communicative approaches in the course. This redundancy is not nagging because it provides all learners, and perhaps particularly those with disability-based obstacles to textual comprehension, with a better chance to succeed. Most institutional LMSs offer multiple "places" for teachers to give students information, such as individual pages for the digital syllabus and a static downloadable syllabus, discussion post spaces, class announcement spaces, individualized spaces like email or journals, and the like. It is standard practice for many teachers to provide library modules, connections to student support services (in line with OWI Principles 1 and 13), and other helpful materials. Students should have particular places to discuss assignments (and not just with the teacher but with each other), to pose questions (my "Questions about the course" thread often is the most high-traffic thread in a class), and to provide meeting spaces for students, whether synchronous or asynchronous. Such variety lends itself to teachers posting messages, assignments, and comments redundantly.

Finally, teachers also will want to think about ways that digital tools can replicate behaviors they perhaps do not even think about as part of teaching. For instance, the end-of-class onsite verbal assignment reminder may be a common practice, but education technology can provide other, sometimes better ways to keep students on track, such as a weekly video assignment reminder.

Remember to Connect Via Writing

Again, a great—and perhaps revolutionary—thing in OWI is that students will engage in most course interactions via writing, and, although plenty of technologies exist to connect students and teachers without writing (including the humble phone), OWI teachers may want to encourage students deliberately to pose logistical questions via writing. In doing so, students can learn by practicing the "how to" variety of exposition while seeing how teachers and peers explain step-by-step directions. After all, students can learn from these transactional written interactions, including simple things like how to provide a good subject line or how to name documents effectively. While teachers all have

amusing teaching anecdotes of receiving emails with subjects like "Yo dude" or receiving a pool of student project files and discovering 50 of them are named "Essay1," there are deeper rhetorical ideas at work in such practices—especially in terms of providing students with reflective moments in fast-paced digital communications.

Hybrid Articulation Between Onsite and Online Activities

As Snart addresses in Chapter 2, it is crucial to plan what onsite and online activities will occur, particularly in hybrid courses. I like teaching hybrid courses and try to do a good job when I do. But something that continues to bedevil me is how teachers can maximize the articulation between onsite and online experiences. Teachers should seek ways to "expand" the class[room] productively, using the differentiation among modalities not only to help students write and learn but to conduct arguments and discussions using the different skills demanded by different communication modalities—all of which can improve their overall digital communication skills. Teachers certainly can have conversations face-to-face and online to complement and draw on the strengths of different environments. They can develop an invention exercise for a major project as an in-person group, drawing on brainstorming and frenetic discussion, and then productively take the conversation onto a message board in which the individual authors describe their ideas more formally in writing.

Teachers should be thinking along those lines. Effective Practice 3.9 stated, "From a writing instructional perspective, teachers should take full advantage of the flexibility of electronic communications in the planning and guiding of projects and activities" (p. 13). To this end, teachers should conceive their use of electronic tools around the general concept of "expanding the classroom." The notion of a "flipped classroom" currently is in vogue. A quick Internet search of "flipped classroom" provided numerous perspectives on this teaching strategy (EDUCAUSE, 2012, offered a good summary), but in essence, this is a new term/frame for an old teaching approach: Have students do their passive learning (which might include listening to a lecture) outside of the class[room] and use the onsite/in-class time to collaborate, write, or work in a lab. Hybrid teaching, as Snart (2010) said in *Hybrid Learning,* "does present the opportunity for truly re-imagined teaching" (p. 112).

To experienced OWI teachers, it may seem rudimentary to read in Effective Practice 3.9 that "The concept of the 'classroom' can be expanded productively to include time when students and teacher are not physically present in a room" (p. 13). Nonetheless, a complex notion underlies this idea—learning is continuous. "Continuous" is a deliberate word choice because it invites students into

an ongoing relationship with their learning experiences, a relationship that helps them challenge the idea that learning takes place exclusively "in" school settings. This notion helps set up undergraduate students for the goal of lifelong learning that we see most often in effective adult learners and workers.

Moderation Is an Art

Moderating a good conversation in any venue is both art and craft, but online moderation, whether asynchronous or synchronous, introduces additional challenges. In my observation of OWCs and reading student evaluations associated with them, a common disappointment that students voice is the lack of engagement in the asynchronous discussions by their teachers. Effective Practice 3.10 stated, "Teachers should moderate online class discussions to develop a collaborative OWC and to ensure participation of all students, the free and productive exchange of ideas, and a constant habit of written expression with a genuine audience" (p. 14). Fortunately, teachers can respond to this practice by learning more about moderating conversations online. George Collison et al. (2000) wrote an excellent book about teaching in these environments (*Facilitating Online Learning: Effective Strategies for Moderators*), as did Tisha Bender (2003) (*Discussion-Based Online Teaching to Enhance Student Learning: Theory, Practice and Assessment*) and Gilly Salmon (2000) (*E-Moderating: The Key to Teaching and Learning Online*).

Teachers unaccustomed to the dynamics of a group of students having a textual discussion will need to be ready for something quite different from their typical onsite experience. I mentioned in *Teaching Writing Online* (2009):

> In synchronous or onsite environments, the conversation is fairly linear, almost always meaning that not everyone can participate. With message boards, conversations can build in parallel fashion. Some students may be shy about speaking their minds in a classroom conversation or even a fast-paced chat setting, where by the time you respond, the rest of the group is on to another topic. (pp. 69-70)

Teachers can capitalize on the anonymity (or at least suppressed presence) of messages boards, which two decades ago Gail Hawisher (1992) found open to more equitable participation (p. 88). The class conversation forum is in theory an open place with opportunity for "talking" that students may especially enjoy because, even though they are experienced with texting and Facebooking, they may have never been pushed to have a serious conversation about something that does not involve their personal lives (and personal affinities). Remember,

though, that students' "digital nativeness" can be an impediment in this way as well, leading some to respond to formal discussion requests with informal language, a lack of thoughtfulness, and too much personal information. The technology of threaded conversations itself can be a barrier for others with neurological or visual disabilities who might miss social cues or who might experience confusion when confronted with a volley of little-structured, impromptu verbal exchanges.

Effective Practice 3.10 suggested that teachers should find ways to capitalize on the positive traits of the digital dialogic environment (p. 14). Teachers can push students in ways they may not be comfortable doing in class. For instance, I find that I am more effective at calling students out in constructive ways when working with them online. If they make an unsupported assertion, I am quick to ask them for necessary support in online conversations. Onsite, if students struggle to make a point, to articulate their perspective, I sometimes find myself shying away from pressing them in the interest of avoiding embarrassing them. Online, my class culture allows for this kind of pushing: *"What do you mean?—and being clear about what you mean is a natural part of the course."*

Teachers can take advantage of the gaps in online dialogue, which occurs in part because reflection time is built-in and is particularly conducive to asynchronous environments, to ask highly difficult questions. In a way, that also is a kind of class flipping. In an onsite class, teachers might be concerned about having a room full of students turning pages or scrolling in an effort to mine texts for specific concepts, but online, I assume they have the space and time to hunt and reflect. I *want* them to do so. The use of research represents a major shift in my expectations for students' communications practices. I can ask them for research in ways I could not do onsite *because every student in the conversation has the Web immediately available*. But teachers need to find out when to query, to prod, to challenge—all while having built a structure that keeps students engaged. This type of teaching does not come easy, but the opportunities are rich.

Meta Learning

Teachers should maximize the inherently archival nature of OWI as much as possible. *Students in an OWC have virtual piles of their own low-stakes writing to work with and analyze*, and teachers should think rhetorically and metacognitively to help students write more effectively. Effective Practice 3.11 suggested that metacognitive activities are ideal opportunities for process-based work and even for approaches like writing portfolios:

> The inherently archival nature of the online environment should be used for learning. To this end, teachers should use

> the digital setting to encourage students to rhetorically and metacognitively analyze their own learning/writing processes and progress. Such strategies can identify growth areas and points for further assistance. (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013, p. 12)

Why is low-stakes writing important in encouraging students to work on meta aspects of writing? Consider this in-class exercise, which I admit to cruelly administering to my students. Students come to an onsite class with a hard-copy paper to turn in, and, right before they do so, I ask them to pair up and read the paper aloud to each other. Ouch. Of course, the well-meaning teacher only does this to demonstrate the power of collaborative proofing, but singed students who really engage with the exercise find errors in a paper that *is about to be turned in for a grade*. The high-stakes nature of the project—an essay due that day—could undermine the endeavor. Using the vast amount of low-stakes materials assembled in most asynchronous courses, teachers can achieve similar meta/reflective practices while students can do what we really hope they do: look at their own work critically but without too much pressure that can *obstruct their ability to see the text as it is.* When I write on deadline, I know I will myself into believing my text is error-free because that is what I need to believe at that time; students should learn that all writers have this need and editing still may be necessary.

Timing of Response and Feedback

Responding to students is crucial teaching work because feedback provides students' with their most individualized teaching experience in online settings. It also is time-intensive and time sensitive. Remember that in an OWC, teachers are *not* spending that three hours or more a week in a classroom, even if some of their time is spent in synchronous interactions via virtual classrooms or onsite for hybrid courses. The interactions they do have often are presented in a written form to students, and teachers will need to define with some care and precision the parameters of that response. Effective Practice 3.12 indicated, "The feedback loop both for essay response and question/issue response as well as the expected timing for these processes should be well-defined in any OWC" (p. 14). One reason for establishing feedback timing is to aid students in their writing and planning, but another important reason is for the teachers' benefits. OWI teachers do not want students to have unreasonable (maybe on a human endurance level) expectations of response. As CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Joanna Paul said simply, "I think it's important not to overload ourselves with graded writing to review" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012a). Whether OWI

teachers provide response windows or give students timing expectations in days or hours, they should create an understanding of expectations of how issues might be resolved; in the language of Effective Practice 3.12, "Doing so builds appropriate boundaries, trust, and a sense of relationship" (p. 12).

Timeframes for essay, journal, and discussion post responses might best be set program-wide by the WPA, but, in keeping with OWI Principle 5, individual teachers should retain reasonable control over the amount of time they spend and when they write those responses (p. 15).

OWI PRINCIPLE 4

> **Appropriate onsite composition theories, pedagogies, and strategies should be migrated and adapted to the online instructional environment.**

In line with remembering they are teaching a *writing* course—albeit online—and that there are nuances to OWI that lend themselves to new theories and strategies, OWI teachers also need to foreground, perhaps in a more fundamental way, their role as *teacher*. Many teachers still come to online teaching from onsite teaching. Migration of pedagogy is key. In other words, OWI teachers—particularly novice instructors—should begin with what they do best onsite and adapt those strategies to online settings. I remember, while working on my dissertation in 2000, sitting down with a senior faculty member. Our conversation turned to education technologies. In a pleasant conversation, he told me that his concerns about educational technology took this form: While he was well regarded as a teacher and took his teaching seriously, he believed there was an assumption that he would change to accommodate educational technologies. In short, he expressed that he felt "colonized" by teaching technologies. I think it is important not just for teachers but also for those involved with faculty development and instruction design to understand this thread of colonization

OWI Principle 4 (p. 14) highlights the concept of *migration*, or taking what we know of writing pedagogy and "moving" it to an online setting, albeit with adaptation, as OWI Principle 4 indicated and Snart explains in Chapter 2. The world of educational technology offers much that is new. But it does not mean that dedicated teachers have to abandon what has made them effective. Instead, this principle recognized prior effectiveness and encouraged: "Teachers should seek opportunities to use their established practices when moving online while seeking alternative ways of offering those practices within digital spaces and using electronic tools" (p. 14). While shifting to OWI can be a heady experience, modality, media, and technology change should offer opportunity and promise,

not chaos and anxiety.

Building Assignments

For many writing instructors, building assignments piecemeal, in components, is integral to good instruction. As many chapters in this book describe, technology facilitates division of work into process components. Some simple asynchronous technologies—message boards, blogs—facilitate the kinds of conversations that help build dialogue around course projects and assignments.

In my own courses, I have always felt good about having open, in-class, onsite conversations about topics for major projects. These have been lively and productive, and I often end up listing the topics on the board and providing every student with an opportunity to contribute. In moving online (both hybrid and fully online), I realized that this useful in-class discussion practice could be even better. Providing a message board on which students can openly discuss project topics through text has proven excellent; in this case, they are writing their responses, providing additional time to reflect and offer substantive commentary. Meanwhile, I also have the time provided by asynchronous environments to look at all of the topics *in toto* and to generate, in addition to focused responses to individual students, a collective message—with quoted evidence—to the whole group. All our work becomes an artifact for the course that we refer to through the process of developing the writing project, which is a useful way for teaching students how to scaffold their own thinking and writing.

Building Course Knowledge

Long-standing ideas about knowledge creation and rhetorical theory make for tremendous partners with online writing environments. Electronic platforms and conventional modalities and tools provide strong opportunities for students to think about their own composing processes and thinking processes together (for example, see Bruffee, 1984).

For instance, message boards—a simple way to enable students to have asynchronous written conversations—provide many meta-writing opportunities to help students think through their writing process and practices as well as those of other students. As I described in "The Low-Stakes, Risk-Friendly Message Board Text?" (2010), I have asked students to "share your secrets" about research:

> "Where do you start? How do you do it? What techniques do you use? How do you stay organized? How do you remember how to incorporate quotes? ... Let us know some of your research tricks." Although one might think students would

> respond tepidly to a post about research process, that has not been the case. In fact, they have revealed so many interesting aspects of their research process that I have abstracted the best of these responses into one file and provided them as a "gift" to the whole class at the term's end. (p. 103)

Through these types of practices, we rip through the silence surrounding many student writing practices. Rather than just learning "best practices" from me—one voice—they see strategies their peers use. Some of these practices are sophisticated, and peers immediately remark on that. They learn a whole crowd-sourced array of research practices. While teachers could do this kind of work onsite, the asynchronicity and lack of face-to-face immediacy seem to provide opportunities for students to have deep online conversations that might fall flat onsite.

Teachers certainly can use the vast amount of student-generated writing to ask students to proof their own work, to reread and re-evaluate their arguments, and even to think through how they converse rhetorically in an online forum versus a similar argument made in a "formal" project. At the 2007 Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, I discussed my student "Nick," who wrote a superb message board counterargument to several classmates during a debate about intelligent design. After I suggested he convert this counterargument into a major project, he *deflated* his writing. In the presentation, I pointed out changes from the message board conversation to Nick's "official" paper: "'Thesis statement' runs on grammatically; voice is strained: seems afraid to say, 'In my opinion,' giving the prose a contrived, inflated sense of objectivity" (Warnock, 2007, July). Somehow, the writing changed—perhaps to Ken Macrorie's (1970) "Engfish"—and it lost its edge, but in our discussions about the post, Nick seemed to realize that his writing could have power.

Using the Technology to Facilitate Dialogue

Many onsite teachers may wonder what will happen to their course interactions when they move to OWI. But teachers have an opportunity to, as Effective Practice 4.4 pointed out, "extend the reach of classroom interactions" (p. 14), while helping students at all times to be cognizant of the rhetorical nuances of the electronic realm. As I mentioned earlier regarding moderating online discussions, electronic tools for writing and thinking provide opportunities to create a collaboration- and writing-centered course experiences.

Leslie Blair (2005) wrote about the potential of message boards for students' writing: "The practice they receive through writing to communicate with their instructor and peers can be as influential to their writing skills as major essay

assignments." When students begin to communicate online, Blair said, "Their perception of audience begins to shift," as the instructor and other students create a multifaceted audience and "they begin to recognize the biases, opinions, and preconceived notions of their audience, which allows them to practice writing for the addressee." Also, quiet students now "are much more likely to make their opinions known in an online environment where they can contemplate their words before the rest of the group has access to them" (sect. 2, para. 5). Blair suggests the ideal of what can happen in an OWC, making the digital environment a cornerstone of a good composition course.

OWI PRINCIPLE 5

> **Online writing teachers should retain reasonable control over their own content and/or techniques for conveying, teaching, and assessing their students' writing in their OWCs.**

As writing teachers, let us acknowledge that our teaching may not be ours to control fully. The CCCC OWI Committee developed OWI Principle 5 (p. 15) to account for this teaching reality; it provides WPAs and their OWI teachers with language that will prevent teaching from morphing into a mass-produced good or service.

In the CCCC OWI Committee's conversations with CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder panelists, a recurring theme arose about teaching from prescribed syllabi: it is not a recommended practice, to say the least. CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Angela Solic said, "The least effective strategy for me has been to use content that another instructor created." CCCC OWI Committee member Web Newbold said, "I strongly support Angela's point about using someone else's course. It's often tempting (or required) to use pre-packaged content, and some may be able to do that well, but it hasn't worked for me." CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Melody Pickle reinforced this thought, saying, "I think a best practice would allow the teacher to have some of his or her own content" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012a). CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Rich Rice took the conversation a pedagogical step further, pointing out that even teaching one's own "core syllabus" can be a problem: "One of the least effective strategies has always been if I just copy and paste a previous course into a new semester and then don't leave room to change the nature of the course based on where students take it without taking into consideration the students and what their interests are, reading and writing assignments things like that" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012a). The ex-

perts strongly expressed that there was a responsibly to personalizing courses, in line with what D. Randy Garrison and Terry D. Anderson (1999) called "little distance education" (LDE), a structure reducing industrialization and maximizing aspects like interaction, meaningful learning outcomes, and active learning. LDE is considered to be "flexible in design," and "course materials are created […] and stored such that they can easily be modified, augmented, annotated" by students and teachers (p. 54). These CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholders seem to be pointing to a similar model.

When a Template or Core Might Be Useful

The word "reasonable" appears in OWI Principle 5 because the CCCC OWI Committee recognized, particularly with FYW, that many institutions and programs have some understandable levels of uniformity or standardization in their syllabi and outcomes. Students travel through the writing requirements and courses in some progression, and most teachers would agree that Technical Writing II should extend logically from the work in Technical Writing I. I think back to a thought-experiment conversation I had with one of the best teachers I know. We were talking about sequencing a FYW program, and, in defending a core syllabus and outcomes for such an approach, I asked, "What if students took an English 101 that featured *War and Peace* and then they took an English 102 and discovered that instructor also wanted to use *War and Peace*?" My colleague said she could envision a situation in which students would learn a tremendous amount from two such courses. Perhaps she was right (especially if she were one of the teachers), but in most situations, students in required course sequences have expectations that they will build on knowledge they acquired in the previous course and will not be reliant on a kind of super-teacher who can make the most of repeated content. This expectation seems obvious in a math curriculum (where Algebra I content would mostly not be retaught in an Algebra II course), and it seems obvious for writing courses if outcomes are clearly defined. Hence, the idea of reasonable control for an instructor of a given OWC, we understand, has to exist in the context of program and course requirements.

Certainly, a writing program should encourage that core syllabi may contain supports, structures, and pacing that can work for students with disabilities, different learning styles, challenged socioeconomic backgrounds, multilingual skills, and the like. WPAs rightly can expect some standardization and uniformity with issues of access and inclusivity, as OWI Principle 1 indicated. These are reasonable areas where template language can be helpful.

Such templates and core requirements also provide areas of certainty for teachers—in other words, some boundaries and well-defined limits are helpful.

For example, while having some teaching independence was widely supported in CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder conversations, several panelists discussed how templates can be useful, especially for first-time OWI instructors. For instance, CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder Shareen Grogan said, "It's really nice to have a parameter so that you know, maybe a template that helps you decide how much is appropriate for a given week in an online course, but then with a lot of freedom to add, to embellish, to adapt to tweak the assignments" (CCCC OWI Committee, 2012a). What appeared important was not just the freedom to do whatever one wishes for the sake of freedom, but a sense that independence of choice is better for teaching and, thus, for OWI students.

As an inherent part of teaching, OWI instructors still need to conduct courses in ways allowing them to provide the best of themselves, and the example effective practices associated with OWI Principle 5 attempt to reflect that through a focus on flexibility, as discussed below.

Working with Teachers and Flexibility

Good communication is a key practice in which flexibility is critical. Teachers must be informed about alterations to their programs, for example, via reliable communications. Embedded in this idea of flexibility is the quality of *trust*: Teachers need to be trusted to provide quality OWI. WPAs and institutions must work *with* teachers and should communicate with them about the shape, progress, and direction of OWI initiatives. WPAs should work closely with faculty in their programs to design curricula that account for expected and anticipated OWI aspects of these programs. Faculty and administrators also must have a clear means of communication about OWI, as indicated in OWI Principle 11 (p. 23) and explored in Chapters 11 and 12.

Interviews with the CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholders suggested concerns that any standardization in online learning may lead to teachers losing their freedom to create and deliver writing courses that match their strengths and educational philosophies. However, nothing inherent to OWI leads to such an outcome; administrations and institutions that want standardized education will seek it regardless of the course learning environment. Additionally, the threat posed by some online models, in which teachers could lose control of the intellectual property of a first-time-generated course and then be replaced in subsequent semesters, seems more difficult to enact in writing courses, since the subject matter is so different from "content" courses (a key point about OWI made throughout this book).

Flexible teaching takes shape in many different ways, and the CCCC OWI

Committee focused on articulating some of these ways in the example effective practices for OWI Principle 5 in a "while/should" structure that addresses strategies for retaining reasonable instructional control in relation to institutional realities:

- Effective Practice 5.2: While institutions and programs should have clear-cut ways of providing accommodations for all students, teachers should still have flexibility in offering help, such as, if necessary, moving outside an LMS to provide a more accessible environment.
- Effective Practice 5.3: While it is reasonable that programs have unified textbook choices (maybe for cost relief alone), teachers should have some choice in their own subject matter and be able to focus text-driven conversation in the way that best suits their teaching. This is especially relevant in OWI courses; a link is an easy thing to share with students, and teachers need to be able to engage in perhaps one of the most enjoyable aspects of OWI: Providing an "aha" moment in the term when they come across a reading that they think ties in beautifully with what they are teaching.
- Effective Practice 5.4: While many teachers must work with core assignments, OWI teachers should have flexibility in assignment specifics. Teachers should be able to embed assignments within the particular "class culture" of their course. For writing courses in particular, this flexibility has a practical side: It enables programs to avoid the problem of having hundreds and maybe thousands of similar student writing submissions at the same time, a heterogeneity that discourages plagiarism.
- Effective Practice 5.5: While programs should develop methods of collecting teaching materials, teachers should also have ways not only of individually adding and sharing such materials. Again, communication is invaluable.
- Effective Practice 5.6: While programs should provide ways of consistent response to student writing, OWI teachers should have the room to explore ways of engaging and communicating with students. Like moderating, interpersonal contact is one of the great arts of teaching, and this only increases in written forums or through audio/video-type synchronous discussions, which require different approaches.
- Effective Practice 5.7: While programs should have consistent grading and assessment practices, OWI teachers need flexibility in grading and course-level assessment. Teachers might answer to an overall grading approach—e.g., As, Bs, and Cs—but still should be able to establish methods of grading online discussions and weighting various course components. Programs should encourage program-wide conversations about

> grading. (Warning!: From my faculty development experience, these conversations might be hotly contested.) (p. 16).

A culture of reasonable control and flexibility gives an OWI program the best chance of doing what it is there to do: teach students to write more effectively.

OWI PRINCIPLE 6

> **Alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI models should be subject to the same principles of pedagogical soundness, teacher/designer preparation, and oversight detailed in this document.**

Readers will have heard a great deal about Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), a highly touted experimental educational platform. In preparing for a conference in 2013, I compiled over 100 news stories about MOOCs in less than six months. Yet, in delivering MOOCs or the next greatest teaching innovation, OWI teachers should not forego what makes great teaching and what makes institutions of higher education work.

Of course, as Patrick Deneen (2013) said, institutions and their faculty are having trouble articulating the logic against MOOCs because we in higher education have long been complicit in many practices that discourage good teaching and student-teacher interactions. How many students have sat in a class of 600 and/or taken a course with an adjunct that was not provided professional development opportunities and was paid a mere $1,500 for that course? (see Chapter 7). By their actions, institutions have said, "We will stick you in a huge lecture hall and let you gawk at the oak trim while hoping you would not notice that you could get this kind of education in many other ways"—other ways that include, astonishingly enough, *reading a book, having your friends read the same book, and then talking to them about it.* Some MOOCs have been shown to be effective, and why not? People who want to learn are pretty good at doing so, and that is something all institutions of higher education should think about. The real challenge may not be getting the stuff into learners' heads, but in *motivating* them in the first place. I probably should not admit this, but one of my children had the recurring issue of having his elbow pop out of the socket when he was little. Using Web instructions from an orthopedics journal, I once re-set his arm. Please do not extrapolate too much from my quackery, but people can learn specialized things from the Web. If higher education thinks its forte is guarding and disseminating that knowledge, it is in big trouble.

Soon after publishing *A Position Statement of Principles and Example Effective Practices for OWI* (CCCC OWI Committee, 2013), one of the first requests

the CCCC OWI Committee received was to take a stronger stance specific to MOOCs. While OWI Principle 6 does address these alternative forms, we state our case more overtly regarding such delivery systems in OWI Principle 9: "OWCs should be capped responsibly at 20 students per course with 15 being a preferable number" (pp. 20-21). There is an interesting kind of logic at work here. While OWI Principle 9 was written inductively based on the experiences of many writing teachers, extrapolating its use for MOOCs or other teaching structures, we hope, will be a deductive exercise. Thus, a 60,000-person digital experience is not a *course* and does not fit any reasonable description of one. In fact, Hewett and I believe our conversations regarding MOOCs actually should be about but MOOEEs: Massive Open Online *Educational Experiences*. Can people learn to write in such an environment? Sure. As mentioned, the time of the autodidact is upon us. But such an experience should not be confused with the disciplinary concept of a *writing* course, in which interaction with the instructor is integral. Because, for better or worse, many content courses onsite have already been instructor-less in many ways, those involved cannot complain about MOOCs. But that situation does not fit the composition community, and we must consider such experimental forms differently.

WPAs and Writing Instructors Need to Approve Even Experimental Writing Courses

Decisions about online writing curricula (and, of course, all writing curricula) need to be made by writing teachers. In some institutions, there may be a temptation or even overt desire by administrators to suggest the way that a writing course curriculum will be developed and taught. Many of the effective practices associated with OWI Principle 6 are designed to support and empower WPAs to make decisions crucial to writing programs. To this end, the CCCC OWI Committee also believes WPAs "should have final approval of alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI models integrated into the online curriculum." These courses and structures should not just emerge from administrators who have little understanding of writing studies and then be foisted upon the writing program. Similarly, WPAs should be able to select teachers for OWI courses—experimental and otherwise—in ways that make sense for the pedagogy and philosophy of that writing program.

WPA- and Teacher-Centric Training

Faculty training is a big, underappreciated—certainly it is under-*discussed*—problem in OWI, as OWI Principle 7 (p. 17) and Chapter 11 reveal. WPAs need

to have a clear, ever-present voice in how writing program faculty not only are selected but are trained to teach writing courses. A primary consideration in this area, which is addressed more fully in Chapter 11, is how administrations must provide space and support for training and ongoing professional development.

Effective Practice 6.3 makes clear that teachers of any OWI course, experimental or otherwise, should be offered the same professional training and development opportunities as other OWI faculty (p. 17). Because that strategy assumes a more functional training structure for onsite, face-to-face writing programs than perhaps is occurring in many institutions, the CCCC OWI Committee hopes OWI Principle 6 may be extended to writing instruction more generally.

WPA- and Teacher-Centric Assessment and Evaluation

Another weak point in OWI and some onsite writing programs is assessment and evaluation of teachers. In particular, writing programs may not observe and assess teachers adequately. Effective Practice 6.4 stated that any "alternative, self-paced, or experimental" OWC should be observed regularly by a WPA or teaching peer and assessed based on quality markers of online instruction (p. 17). These evaluators and the evaluations on which they are working cannot just come out of nowhere. As Vincenza Benigno and Guglielmo Trentin (2000) said, evaluation of online courses often is based on faulty comparisons to onsite instruction and/or is conducted by teachers who do not have OWI training or experience; indeed, sometimes they do not even have training or experience in *writing instruction* itself. Effective Practice 6.5 could be helpful for assessment of writing instruction in general: "Alternative, self-paced, or experimental OWI course teachers should be evaluated/assessed by a peer or supervisor who has similar training and equal or superior abilities/experience in writing instruction generally and OWI particularly" (p. 17). The onus, thus, is placed on programs and perhaps institutions to find quality people who understand the theories and pedagogies of OWI and provide them with reasonable and fair means to evaluate such courses.

Cristie Cowles Charles (2002), in "Why We Need More Assessment of Online Composition Courses: A Brief History," indicated that the complexity and sometimes rigidity of OWI makes the need for fair and adequate evaluation even more important: "For example, the more funding, administration, programming, video production, graphic design, and structured curriculum go into creating a course, the harder it is to change that course's content." Furthermore, "In fact, I submit that the more fixed a course's content and environment become (whether the course is traditional or online), the more evaluation becomes

absolutely necessary because the instructor and students become increasingly restricted in their ability to adapt the course to their needs" (sect. 2, para. 3). Charles' words have particular meaning under OWI Principle 6 because even experimental OWI structures can be seen as written in stone after a semester or two of teaching, making the experimental course's efficacy and its teachers' abilities less well understood even while they become standardized and fixed.

As a final point on evaluation, Effective Practice 6.6 (p. 17) emanated from the idea that often OWI courses are subjected to a kind of evaluative scrutiny and rigor that few onsite courses have (see, for example, Warnock, 2007). There are various reasons for this unbalanced assessment, including institutions' and particular administrators' poor understanding of educational outcomes and the difficulty of measuring educational cause-and-effect. At times, when asked about the effectiveness of online and hybrid courses, as a WPA, I have responded with: "Well, where is our outcome data about our onsite courses?" Or, I have said: "Where is our ironclad and empirical outcome data about the usefulness of attending this institution over the one across town or about students taking the 200k and *not going to college*?" My words have been spoken in the spirit of what Peter Thiel (n.d.) was attempting with his Thiel Fellowships (The Thiel Foundation). At some point, teachers have to believe in what they are doing as educators despite the astonishing pressure driven by standardized assessments and testing.

Pedagogically sound OWCs, even experimental ones, should not be subjected to a gauntlet of assessment that an institution's onsite writing courses have not been subjected to. Effective Practice 6.6 helps steer writing teachers in this way; if teachers want information to stave off such assessments, they might look to a CompPile bibliography prepared about such comparisons (Warnock, 2013). They also can view the extensive *No Significant Difference* website. Although the CCCC OWI Committee certainly wants alternative courses to be good, we also want standard online and onsite courses to be good. Teacher evaluation is one area that requires a broader conversation about a program's pedagogy, and online writing programs should encourage that type of dialogue and self-reflection.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Readers will have noted that this chapter is not about the nuts and bolts of an OWC; they also will have noted that the OWI principles, even with their associated effective practices, do not represent an out-of-the-box recipe for teaching composition online. OWI is a vast, open mission such as befits any writing instructional setting. Recommendations and ideas are good, but it is impossible to say generally, "Yes, this is the one way to be successful." The adventure and diversity of OWI and of teaching in higher education provide more opportunities

and challenges than that simplistic statement would allow.

The five instructionally-framed OWI principles addressed in this chapter were designed to create a structure upon which well-trained and knowledgeable OWI teachers can build specific instructional approaches and philosophies. They emphasize key concerns regarding writing in online settings to help WPAs and teachers to orient and direct themselves in the online setting. The effective practices offer details and examples to spur OWI faculty thinking for localized settings. Experienced onsite teachers moving into OWI need to think deeply about who they are as teachers and then work forward as they initially delve into electronic environments, being always mindful of the ways many students will access OWCs, as Chapter 16 addresses. Nonetheless, OWI teachers should take advantage of the many helpful tools and approaches facilitated and enabled by technology.

The CCCC OWI Committee has provided these guidelines to facilitate in-course OWI practice, not to dictate it. In short:

- The course is a writing course. Teachers should not let it slip into being something else, such as a course orienting students to institutional technologies.
- Teachers will want to develop new theory and pedagogy to account for the many exciting attributes and opportunities of digital tools ...
- ... and they also should migrate and adapt their best teaching practices and approaches from onsite to online teaching.
- Writing programs—and institutions themselves—should provide teachers with appropriate flexibility and independence in how they teach their courses.
- While OWI is inherently an innovative way to teach writing, teachers cannot abandon effective practices just because they have found a new technology platform or modality. OWCs should maintain core effective teaching practices.

I want to end this chapter with one final, admittedly redundant point: OWI WPAs and instructors always should remember that we are writing teachers first. If we do that, a world of teaching opportunity opens up in online settings. The pedagogy-focused OWI principles are designed to support teachers as they work to capitalize on that opportunity.

NOTES

1. At the time of these CCCC OWI Committee Expert/Stakeholder panel meetings, both Jason Snart and Heidi Harris were panelists; they since have been invited to the CCCC OWI Committee. Herein, they are named simply as CCCC OWI Committee members.

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