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Introduction

DEMOCRACY’S UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Patrick Sullivan

I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am, also, much more than that. So are we all.
—James Baldwin

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to these pages.

Readers of this book have a number of appealing prospects before them. Perhaps foremost among these is the opportunity to visit the classrooms of fellow English teachers and see firsthand how a group of acclaimed professionals in our discipline put together their classes, design their reading and writing assignments, and theorize their work as writing instructors.

Readers also have the opportunity—which is very rare in our profession—to visit classrooms of English teachers who teach at open-admissions two-year colleges, where 41 percent of all undergraduates in America now enroll (American Association of Community Colleges 2020; Hassel and Giordano 2013).1 To my knowledge, there has never been a scholarly book quite like this one, offering readers wisdom, expertise, and a warmly personal welcome and sense of common purpose gathered from English teachers at the two-year college. It is certainly time we had one.

DOI: 10.7330/9781607325055.004
As readers will see, the individuals featured here are all deeply committed to the art of teaching, and most have spent decades honing their craft. Most are well known and highly respected scholars as well. Because these individuals teach at two-year colleges, they have spent their careers teaching three, four, or even five sections of writing classes each semester. Considered cumulatively, there is an impressive (and perhaps unprecedented) abundance of pedagogical expertise, teaching knowledge, and classroom experience reflected in these pages. Because these individuals routinely teach first-year composition and developmental classes, their areas of expertise align precisely with what English teachers at all levels of instruction spend most of their time doing: teaching reading, writing, and thinking.

This book also provides readers with the opportunity to see social justice work in action. The modern community college was created in 1947 by the Truman Commission to be—by mission and mandate—a social justice institution. The landmark book-length study produced by the Truman Commission that created the modern community college, known popularly as the Truman Commission Report (and officially titled *Higher Education for Democracy: A Report of the President’s Commission on Higher Education*), is one of the most important documents ever produced about education in America (President’s 1947). Crucially for our purposes here, the commission urged the nation to address “democracy’s unfinished business”: structural patterns of inequality related to class, race, and gender. The primary means for addressing this unfinished business was through radically expanded access to higher education (President’s 1947, 12). What the Truman Commission candidly acknowledged in 1947 still holds true today:

> By allowing the opportunity for higher education to depend so largely on the individual’s economic status, we are not only denying to millions of young people the chance in life to which they are entitled; we are also depriving the Nation of a vast amount of potential leadership and potential competence which it sorely needs. (President’s 1947, 29)

Before open-admissions institutions began appearing in great numbers across the nation in the late 1960s, colleges in America were “bastions of privilege” and not “engines of opportunity” (Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin 2005, 135). Figure 0.1 gives readers a glimpse into that fraught, tumultuous moment in our history when access to higher education became a civil rights issue—contested in boardrooms, in state and federal legislatures, and in the streets. Figure 0.1 is an artifact from the City University of New York (CUNY) system archive where open-admissions policies were pioneered in the 1960s and early 1970s by African American
and Latinx activists (Kynard 2013; Smitherman 1977), by student activism, and by individuals like Mina Shaughnessy, Marilyn Sternglass, and David Lavin (Lavin, Alba, and Silberstein 1981).

Figure 0.2, taken from table 302.20 from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Digest of Education Statistics (Snyder, de Brey, and Dillow 2017), suggests the revolutionary nature of this enterprise. The key data points for our purposes here are the long strings of “—” and “†” notations for Black and Hispanic students during the 1960s—and then the sudden jump in enrollment beginning in the early 1970s, when open-admissions policies were established across the nation at public two-year colleges. These symbols represent data that is either not available (—) or not applicable (†). We also see comparable numbers related to gender and family income during this time (Cahalan et al. 2018). This data set documents a dramatic change in college enrollment patterns in America. We must be careful about evaluating these data and drawing correlational or causal relationships from them. Nonetheless, and without attempting to simplify this complex historical moment, we can say that the Civil Rights movement, African American and Latinx activism (Kynard 2013, 151; Smitherman 1977), the Black Arts Movement (BAM) (Kynard 2014, 122), the Women’s Movement, other progressive social movements, the G.I. Bill, state and federal financial aid programs, along with postwar optimism and prosperity...
during this period helped generate a foundational event in American history: the birth of the modern open-admissions community college and the beginning of what would become the eventual democratization of our system of higher education (Boggs 2011; Lavin, Alba, Silberstein 1981; Pickett 1998; see also Anyon 1980; Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Calhoon-Dillahunt 2018; Karabel 2005).

TEACHER-SCHOLAR-ACTIVIST

It’s amazing how raw this is for me, because . . . there were so many people, when I was a high school dropout, or I was a teenage mom, or I was a community college student, who had just given up on me and written me off. And I tell you, we can’t write people off. We can’t decide that they’re done. What we have to do is figure

Figure 0.2. from , National Center for Education Statistics, Department of Education, table 302.20. Percentage of recent high school completers enrolled in two- and four-year colleges, by race/ethnicity: 1960 through 2015. Prepared: July 2016. Source: https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_302.20.asp
out how to put them back on track, and get them in the pipeline, and on the road to success and that road is going to look different for everybody. There are different ways of doing and being.

—Rep. Jahana Hayes (D-CT)

Access to higher education at two-year colleges continues to be a contested, high-stakes civil rights and social justice issue today. A select list of notable recent developments in this regard would include the following:

- Florida’s Senate Bill 1720 in 2013 (Hassel et al. 2015)
- Connecticut’s PA 12–40 legislation in 2014 (Sullivan 2015a)
- Wisconsin’s higher education restructuring, which began in 2017 (Hassell 2018; Kaufman 2018; Lafer 2017, 44–77)
- Growing impatience with two-year college success and graduation rates among legislators and politicians (Attewell et al. 2006; Flores 2011; Bailey, Jaggers, and Jenkins 2015; Schnee 2014; Schnee and Shakoor 2017; see also Sternglass 1997)
- Proposals to move to a performance-funding model for community colleges that link government funding to community college completion rates (Bailey, Jaggars, and Jenkins 2015; Fain 2018)
- Controversies about assessment practices that can imperil access to higher education, especially for nontraditional students, in a variety of ways (Belfield and Crosta 2012; Belfield 2014; Hassel and Giordano 2011; Hassel and Giordano 2015; Klausman et al. 2016; Scott-Clayton 2012)
- State legislatures systematically disinvesting in higher education across the nation (Mitchell et al. 2018)
- Cuts to and reformulations of financial aid formulas and eligibility requirements
- The federal government working with an outdated assessment model to measure the effectiveness of open admissions institutions. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (United States 2020), uses the following metrics to measure the effectiveness of community colleges: first time, full-time; 3 years to complete; graduation (United States). These metrics are obviously adapted from a traditional, four-year residential model. The most current data using IPEDS calculates student “success” at community colleges at 25% (American 2020). Using the Voluntary Framework of Accountability (American 2012)—a system developed by community college professionals which measures success for all entering students, provides six years to completion, and tracks nine separate outcomes—calculates student success at 59% (American 2020). As the authors of The Voluntary Framework of Accountability: Developing Measures of Community College Effectiveness and Outcomes (2012) note, “traditional measures address only a fraction of the ways students succeed in community colleges” (5).
All of this emphatically affirms that politics, ideology, economics, and history continue to play a decisive role in the lives of English teachers at the two-year college—as they always have, of course, and as they undoubtedly always will (Said 1996; Sen 1999). Although this volume focuses on what teachers do inside the classroom, it has become increasingly clear that teachers at the two-year college must also be active outside the classroom as well (Sullivan 2015b). In fact, the work teachers do outside the classroom may be at least as important for their students and institutions as the work they do inside the classroom (Toth, Sullivan, and Calhoon-Dillahunt 2019, 405; Lee and Kahn 2020).

New teachers of writing at all levels of instruction, and especially those teaching at the two-year college, are entering a complex, highly politicized, and often contentious professional environment (Bousquet 2008; Giroux 2014; Newfield 2011, 2016). It is imperative that new English faculty members—even if they teach at four-year institutions (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. 2017)—become knowledgeable about the history of the community college and the many crucially important issues related to open-admissions institutions currently being debated at academic conferences, in the pages of professional journals, and in state legislatures. In response to these pressing political and economic conditions, a number of scholars have advocated that English teachers at two-year colleges position themselves as teacher-scholar-activists. This is scholarship that all new two-year college English teachers should be familiar with.3

Christopher Mullin, in a policy brief written for the American Association of Community Colleges, sums up the current situation this way: “In policy conversations, especially those concerned with policies related to access and choice, there is a silent movement to redirect educational opportunity to ‘deserving’ students” (2012a, 4). Of course, most community college professionals believe that all students are deserving, no matter how unimpressive their placement scores may be or how modest their high school transcripts are. Given the right kinds of support and opportunity, most community college teachers believe that all students are capable of great things—and, of course, we see this kind of achievement and transformation enacted every day in our classrooms.

A recent special issue of Teaching English at the Two-Year College devoted to academic freedom provides an important overview of these political and economic complexities, all of which have profound implications for anyone teaching English at the two-year college (Lynch-Biniek and Hassel 2018). Mike Rose’s book Back to School (2012) also examines the many complex, often hidden dynamics at play in the lives of individual
community college students and adult learners attending adult education programs. Rose’s book helps us understand what is at stake with open-admissions policies and what can potentially be lost when access to higher education is restricted or compromised.

An important new social justice organization—the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice—has recently been founded by a group of community leaders, scholars, and researchers to address these issues. This action research and advocacy group builds on Sara Goldrick-Rab’s research on food and housing insecurity on college campuses (Goldrick-Rab 2016; Goldrick-Rab et al. 2016). This group’s work focuses on conditions outside of the college classroom that affect student achievement: “Too many students leave college without credentials because life, logistics, and a lack of money got in the way” (Hope 2019). The Hope Center agenda includes addressing food and housing insecurity and revising financial aid formulas. This organization is also engaged in public relations work, seeking to modernize the public perception of college students and to reshape higher education policy and practice. Their website is located here: https://hope4college.com.

My home institution, Manchester Community College in Manchester, Connecticut, recently opened a food pantry on campus, and we were astonished to discover how many of our students used this support service (Moore 2019; Goldrick-Rab, Cady, and Coca 2018). When finances are tight—as they often are for a significant cohort of two-year college students—many students are forced to go hungry in order to make ends meet (Goldrick-Rab et al. 2018). Sara Goldrick-Rab’s work has helped us understand how these powerful, often invisible economic conditions shape students’ lives and learning. These material conditions complicate in profound ways any simplistic numbers-driven understanding of retention and completion rates at two-year colleges (see Sullivan 2017a, 205–240 and 323–340).

All of this work suggests that there are powerful, structural, and systemic conditions outside the classroom that affect student performance, attendance, persistence, and success. Some of these are economic, of course (Case and Deaton 2020; Chetty et al. 2016; Goldrick-Rab 2016; Kalleberg 2011; Lafer 2017; Mullin 2012b; Mullin 2017; Piketty 2014, 2020; Rose 2012; Sen 1999; Sullivan 2017a). Others are related to race and racism, along with other forms of oppression like misogyny, homophobia, and xenophobia (Alexander 2012; Bateman, Katzenelson, and Lapinski 2018; Diangelo 2018; Dunbar-Ortiz 2015; Ginwright 2015; Hung et al. 2019; Inoue 2015, 2019a; Kendi 2016; Rothstein 2004; Treuer 2019; Waite 2017; Whitman 2017). Scholars using critical race theory
(CRT) have documented the many ways that racism (and other forms of oppression) affect academic achievement in America (Crenshaw et al. 1996; Delgado and Stefancic 2017; Ladson-Billings 1998). This is work all two-year college teachers must be familiar with.

Recent work in our discipline has brought attention to the role that positionality, privilege, identity formation, and racism play in student engagement, achievement, persistence, and learning. This work includes Asao Inoue’s book *Antiracist Writing Assessment Ecologies: Teaching and Assessing Writing for a Socially Just Future* (2015) and his 2019 CCCC keynote address (2019a) and landmark articles in *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* (*TETYC*) including “The Risky Business of Engaging Racial Equity in Writing Instruction: A Tragedy in Five Acts” by Taiyon J. Coleman, Renee DeLong, Kathleen Sheerin DeVore, Shannon Gibney, and Michael C. Kuhne (2016, reprinted in this volume); Mara Lee Grayson’s “Race Talk in the Composition Classroom: Narrative Song Lyrics as Texts for Racial Literacy” (2017); and “A Critical Race Analysis of Transition-Level Writing Curriculum to Support the Racially Diverse Two-Year College” by Jamila Kareem (2019). Scholarship informed by CRT candidly addresses the long history of racism and violence in America and seeks to examine the many ways that racism—along with other forms of physical and psychological violence—continues to silence, marginalize, and disadvantage students in academic settings.

One of the core principles of CRT is that “racism is ordinary, not aberrational—‘normal science,’ the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (Delgado and Stefancic 2017, 8). Richard Rothstein’s (2017) book *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* provides one powerful example of this lethal condition, documenting the many ways that federal, state, and local governments helped segregate American neighborhoods beginning in the 1930s. As Rothstein notes, “Today’s residential segregation in the North, South, Midwest, and West is not the unintended consequence of individual choices and of otherwise well-meaning law or regulation but of hidden public policy that explicitly segregated every metropolitan area in the United States” (2017, viii). These segregated neighborhoods—along with the segregated school systems that accompany them—continue to plague us today and play a key role in student academic achievement and success. CRT scholars note that race is often an “absent presence” in discussions of educational achievement (Prendergast 1998). Despite this absence, race and racism nonetheless play a central role in student learning and persistence in community college classrooms across America.
CRT also complicates theoretical models for teaching and encouraging resilience (Masten 2015) and “grit” (Duckworth 2016). Dispositional characteristics like persistence and perseverance are essential for success in any endeavor, of course. But we must also acknowledge the role that social conditions like poverty, economic inequality, and racism play in our understanding of these concepts (McGee and Stovall 2015; Rose 2018; Schreiner 2017; see also Kidd, Palmeria, and Aตลinab 2013; Mullainathan and Shafir 2014). A focus on grit as a key to student success overlooks the role that privilege plays in individual lives. It also draws attention away from structural inequities that impact the lives of many students in our classrooms. McGee and Stovall (2015) urge us to build theoretical models of resiliency and grit that also account for the “vulnerability of people of color who are burdened by unique and often underexamined levels of risk” and exposure to trauma (492). While we must always help promote agency, self-determination, self-authorship (Baxter Magolda 2004), self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), and positive identity development (Ginwright 2010), we must also acknowledge “the systematic inequality and interlocking systems of oppression” that affect student learning on our campuses as well (Velez and Spencer 2018, 75; see also Kareem 2018). One way we can begin countering these oppressive systems is to develop culturally sustaining pedagogies in our classrooms and campuses (Aronson and Laughter 2016; Ladson-Billings 1995, 1998). As Paris and Alim (2017) note in the introduction to their book Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies the key question for educators today is not “What is the purpose of schooling?” but, rather, “What is the purpose of schooling in pluralistic societies?” (1). Culturally sustaining pedagogies seek to foster and sustain “linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism” in all educational spaces (Paris and Alim 2017, 1).

As Thomas Piketty (2020) notes, “Every human society must justify its inequalities: unless reasons for them are found, the whole political and social edifice stands in danger of collapse. Every epoch therefore develops a range of contradictory discourses and ideologies for the purpose of legitimizing the inequality that already exists or that people believe should exist” (1). These explanations are ideologically driven, of course, and the current narrative explaining inequality in America is built around a deified business model that celebrates freedom, choice, and the opportunities the marketplace provides (Friedman 1990; Hayek 2007, 2011). In this theoretical model, the market is self-sustaining and self-correcting, and success or failure is explained by luck, choice, and personal responsibility. This model does not take into account, however, systemic oppression and unequal opportunity, and thus conceals from view very powerful forces
shaping the lives of students and citizens (Bourdieu 2010; Bourdieu and Passeron 2000; Hung et al. 2019; Sen 1999; Sullivan 2017a). One of the primary goals of our pedagogy, our committee work, and our engagement off campus—in everything we do, in fact, as citizens and teachers—must be to dismantle these systems of oppression.

EDUCATION THAT LIBERATES AND ENNOBLES

A great nation is a compassionate nation.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

The documented record of the modern community college in the service of the public good can only be regarded as inspiring—and revolutionary. Since 1947, millions of students have graduated from two-year colleges who never would have had the opportunity to attend college without them (Attewell and Lavin 2007; Attewell et al. 2006). For the academic year 2017–2018, for example, 852,504 associate’s degrees were awarded nationwide, along with 579,822 certificates (American Association of Community Colleges 2020). Since 1947, the modern two-year college has actively helped disrupt entrenched social inequalities and subvert conditions that reproduce very old and pernicious patterns of privilege and privation (Attewell and Lavin 2007; Bourdieu and Passeron 2000; Sullivan 2017a; Cahalan et al. 2018). The modern two-year college is founded on the transformative power of personal agency (Bandura 1997), self-authorship (Baxter Magolda 2004), and the belief in new beginnings, fresh starts, and second and third chances (Rose 2012). It is an institution built on the understanding that anything is possible for individual students, no matter where they may come from or what their past might seem to predict. As the many stories about students shared by teachers and by student contributors themselves in this volume suggest, given the right kind of support and opportunity, students who attend two-year colleges create futures for themselves that are, to borrow a phrase from Russian Nobel Laureate Svetlana Alexievich (n.d.), “impossible to imagine or invent” (Sullivan 2017a, 15–142; Sullivan 2019).

The Truman Commission emphasizes this point on virtually every page of its report, but perhaps nowhere more memorably than here:

American colleges and universities must envision a much larger role for higher education in the national life. They can no longer consider themselves merely the instrument for producing an intellectual elite; they must become the means by which every citizen, youth, and adult is enabled and encouraged to carry his education, formal and informal, as far as his native capacities permit.
This conception is the inevitable consequence of the democratic faith; universal education is indispensable to the full and living realization of the democratic ideal. No society can long remain free unless its members are freemen, and men are not free where ignorance prevails. No more in mind than in body can this Nation or any endure half slave, half free. Education that liberates and ennobles must be made equally available to all. Justice to the individual demands this; the safety and progress of the Nation depend upon it. America cannot afford to let any of its potential human resources go undiscovered and undeveloped. (President’s 1947, 101)

Readers can see this revolutionary work firsthand in this book as it is realized today in English classrooms across the nation. This work is perhaps best understood, following the Truman Commission, as liberating and ennobling. It is devoted to the foundational belief in human dignity and potential, and to James Baldwin’s core assertion about the luminous potential that resides in us all: “I am what time, circumstance, history, have made of me, certainly, but I am, also, much more than that. So are we all” (1998, 810). The modern open-admissions two-year college is devoted to precisely this proposition.

**DEMOCRACY IN ACTION**

*The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy.*

—bell hooks

One strength of this book is the great diversity of students acknowledged and represented. By design and necessity, this diversity informs in profound ways the teaching practices described here. We live in a vibrant, complex, transnational, translingual era—a “highly plural and interdependent world,” in the words of philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1997, 299; see also Young 2009; hooks 2003; Canagarajah 2013; Paris and Alim 2017). For this reason, the perspectives and experiences of two-year college English teachers are particularly valuable for our profession. The modern open-admissions two-year college is one of the most dynamically diverse public institutions in America. The two-year college currently enrolls roughly half of all students of color (Native American, Hispanic, African American, and Asian/Pacific Islanders), 39 percent of all first-generation college students, along with large numbers of single parents, veterans, multilingual and Generation 1.5 students, immigrants, students with disabilities, and students with prior bachelor’s degrees (American Association of Community Colleges 2020). These institutions have become key sites where classist, racist, and sexist structures
in America are challenged and disrupted. As Nell Ann Pickett famously observed, community colleges are “democracy in action” (1998, 98).

One essential site on campus where this important work is accomplished is in gateway English classes—first-year composition classes and developmental reading and writing courses. There is much we can learn, therefore, from the teachers featured in this book, not only about teaching reading and writing, but also about promoting diversity, access, and social justice in our profession (Freire 1994; Tinberg 1997; Shaughnessy 1979; Sternglass 1997; Goldblatt 2007; Steele 2010; Stuber 2011).

The intended audience for this book is anyone teaching reading and writing, grades 6–14. I have endeavored to make this volume as pragmatic and classroom-centered as possible and to provide a variety of accessible entry points for readers. When contributors discuss theory and scholarship, I have encouraged them to talk about how they translate this theory into practice in their classrooms (Larson 2018; Reynolds 2005; Tinberg 1997).

Perhaps most importantly, there is a great deal of hope, optimism, and joy expressed by our contributors about the work they do and the students they work with. This enthusiasm for teaching at the two-year college is often unacknowledged in many public and scholarly discussions of open-admissions institutions, so it is a very real pleasure to document—and to submit for the public record—evidence of the passion and hope that courses through so much of what English teachers bring to their work as educators at the two-year college. Teachers at all levels of instruction can draw inspiration from this commitment to potential and possibility (Duncan-Andrade 2009; Dweck 2007; Schnee and Shakoor 2017).

Secondary school teachers can draw insight and inspiration from the teachers featured in this book because our contributors all teach classes that most high school graduates will take when they get to college (Hansen and Farris 2010; Sullivan and Tinberg 2006). This book therefore offers high school teachers an extraordinary opportunity to learn firsthand about the kind of work their students will be doing in college. Since institutional alignment and college readiness continue to be urgent professional concerns, secondary English teachers can use this book as a kind of practical guide to college readiness. This book can help further our understanding of the best ways to help high school students prepare for college—and thrive once they get there.

This book is also designed, of course, for teachers of English at two-year colleges. This includes colleagues new to the profession or in graduate school training to be English teachers, as well as seasoned veterans looking for new ideas, inspiration, and sources for professional
renewal and growth. There is a rich abundance of practical advice in these pages, including writing assignments and classroom activities that can be put to use in classrooms on Monday morning when you meet your classes. Since roughly half of all basic writing and first-year composition classes are now taught at two-year colleges by two-year college writing teachers (Hassel and Giordano 2013), the need for this kind of book—and the sharing of pragmatic classroom advice, experience, and wisdom—is obvious.

We also bear witness in these pages to examples of two-year college teachers finding ways to stay current with scholarship and to stay actively engaged with the discipline despite busy teaching schedules and heavy workloads. It is my hope that these examples of professional engagement will inspire others to find ways to become involved with scholarship, research, and disciplinary knowledge-making. This work has the potential to enrich an educator’s teaching practice in profound ways, as it has for me and for all of the teachers featured here. This book is also designed to be a companion volume to Teaching Composition at the Two-Year College, a book in Bedford/St. Martin’s Professional Resources Series (Sullivan and Toth 2016). Both books are designed to provide professional development opportunities for two-year college faculty.

There is also an urgent need for a book like this in graduate schools preparing future teachers of English. The complex nature of this need is articulated perhaps most eloquently in the recent “TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College” (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. 2017; see also Jensen and Toth 2017; Toth and Jensen 2017; Lovas 2002). This document calls for individuals who design graduate programs for training writing teachers and others who work as teachers, scholars, and researchers at four-year institutions to make the two-year college visible:

> Given the growth of community colleges, both in terms of enrollment and prominence in national education policy, now is the time to call on graduate programs to take seriously the work of educating future faculty for the full range of institutional contexts in which they might teach. The millions of students whose first experiences with postsecondary writing are in two-year college English classrooms deserve to learn with engaged professionals who employ context-appropriate best practices in our field. (Calhoon-Dillahunt et al. 2017, 550)

This book is designed to directly address this urgent need.

Teachers of writing at four-year institutions can draw wisdom and inspiration from this book as well because it features some of the
most accomplished, reflective, and highly successful teacher-scholar-activists in our field. Regardless of where we may teach, all of us have something we can learn from the extraordinary educators featured in these pages.

If we believe, following Ken Bain, that the creation of a successful classroom learning environment is “an important and serious intellectual (or artistic) act,” and perhaps even “a kind of scholarship” (2004, 49), then that understanding is certainly realized in important ways by the teachers featured here. This book has been designed to be a source of inspiration and hope to English teachers at all levels of instruction as they go about their daily work in the classroom.

**CELEBRATION**

*Teaching is the greatest act of optimism.*

—Colleen Wilcox

A book like this can be assembled in many different ways. Nonetheless, and to offer readers full transparency, once I had the original idea for this book and began thinking about who to invite to contribute, the list of contributors essentially assembled itself. Given how well-known most of these individuals are, how comprehensively they have demonstrated their commitment to the craft of teaching, and how actively involved they have been as scholars and researchers, our list of contributors represents a consensus group of key disciplinary leaders in our profession today. Each contributor embodies the aspirational ideal of the two-year college teacher-scholar-activist. Each contributor is also committed to the profoundly transformative role that education can play in students’ lives. Each contributor has also embraced the inescapably political nature of all literacy work.


Both Straub and Lunsford’s book and Coxwell-Teague and Lunsford’s volume feature well-known compositionists and scholars. I have adopted a modified version of this model. It is a great honor to include work in this book featuring some of the most engaged, innovative, highly
respected two-year college teachers currently at work today. This group includes Peter Adams, Jeff Andelora, Helane Adams Androne, Taiyon J. Coleman, Renee DeLong, Kathleen Sheerin DeVore, Shannon Gibney, Joanne Baird Giordano, Holly Hassel, Jeff Klausman, Michael C. Kuhne, Hope Parisi, and Howard Tinberg. Holly is the current editor of *Teaching English at the Two-Year College*, and Hope is the current co-editor of *The Journal of Basic Writing*. Readers will be spending time in distinguished company, indeed, and they will have the chance to visit the classrooms of accomplished professionals in our field.

Readers will also have the opportunity to consider Taiyon J. Coleman, Renee DeLong, Kathleen Sheerin DeVore, Shannon Gibney, and Michael C. Kuhne’s landmark essay on race and diversity at the two-year college, “The Risky Business of Engaging Racial Equity in Writing Instruction: A Tragedy in Five Acts.” This essay was originally published in *Teaching English at the Two-Year College (TETYC)* and won the 2017 Mark Reynolds Prize from *TETYC*. This essay is essential reading for anyone teaching at a two-year college. Kathleen Sheerin DeVore has written a new postscript for this volume—updating the social justice work this group of educators has been pursuing and describing the reception this essay received at their home institution and across the nation.

I have also included two chapters written by teachers working with the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), a corequisite model for teaching developmental reading and writing developed by Peter Adams and his colleagues at the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC). This approach to developmental education, which mainstreams basic writing students with a peer cohort of FYC students, is one of the most important curricular innovations in the history of developmental education. The ALP model has been adopted by more than three hundred schools around the country, and to date, eight states have launched wide-scale adoptions of co-requisite models like ALP: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Michigan, Texas, and West Virginia (Adams et al. 2009; “ALP” 2019; Cho et al. 2012). Additionally, California’s recent AB 705 legislation, which took effect January 1, 2018, has mandated a corequisite model like ALP as the default developmental option in California (California 2018). Under this legislation, the burden of proof now shifts to colleges to prove that students should not be in a transfer-level course.

One of the founders of this curricular model, Peter Adams, has written a chapter for us. Another chapter is provided by Jamey Gallagher, who Peter recommended as both an accomplished teacher and an individual who is deeply knowledgeable about developments with ALP at CCBC and across the nation. ALP is poised to become the new “normal”
in developmental education nationwide and these chapters can serve as a resource for teachers looking to understand how this approach works and how to implement ALP in their classrooms and on their campuses. Readers who wish to learn more about ALP and Peter’s approach to teaching reading and writing can consult his new textbook, *The Hub: A Place for Reading and Writing* (2020).

To add additional perspective, I have included chapters authored by two newer voices in the field. Brett Griffiths is a recent PhD, active with NCTE’s Two-Year College English Association (TYCA), and a member of TYCA’s Research Committee (I am also a member of this committee). In addition to 16 years of experience teaching college-level writing and a PhD in English and Education, Brett draws on previous professional experience as a teacher and scholar, including eight years working as a crisis intervention specialist. Brett currently directs The Reading and Writing Studios at Macomb Community College, a large community college located north of Detroit. Her chapter advocates for compassion in pedagogy as a means toward fostering student learning and growth.

Darin Jensen has also been teaching for many years at a variety of institutions. He has taught in high schools, as a Teaching Assistant, as an ESL instructor, and as an English teacher. He is, he suggests, a “well-travelled nomad teacher.” Like Brett, Darin is a recent PhD, active with TYCA, and already widely published. Until very recently, Darin was a part-time instructor, and I asked him to share with us the challenges of teaching from a non-tenure track position. His chapter provides readers with a candid, often humorous, no-holds-barred overview of the field of two-year college teaching from the perspective of an adjunct professor—an enterprise that is complex, daunting, and inspiring all at the same time. Readers will be happy to learn that Darin has been hired full-time and is now teaching at Des Moines Area Community College in Iowa.

To add variety, and to provide opportunities for knowledge building that do not rely exclusively on single-authored or coauthored academic essays, I have also included a number of interviews in this book—with Helane Adams Androne, Jeff Andelora, and Howard Tinberg. I have always admired the interview Howard conducted with Ira Shor (Tinberg 1999a, 1999b), and I have had an interest in helping liberate academic writing from the restrictive single model we currently employ almost exclusively—the seven-thousand-word thesis-driven essay with citations (Sullivan 2014, 2015c; Smith 2019a, 2019b). I admire how collaborative, dialogic, and fluid Howard’s interview with Ira is, and I have sought to capture some of that spirit in the interviews featured here. There are
many ways to produce knowledge, and it is my hope that readers will find that these interviews offer an engaging and accessible way to talk about teaching and learning.

COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

*Listening with an open heart, we are able to keep compassion alive.*

—Thich Nhat Hanh

Another unique feature of this book is that readers get to hear directly from two-year college students themselves about effective teaching. I invited a number of two-year college students (mostly from my home institution, Manchester Community College in Manchester, Connecticut) to share their thoughts about effective teaching strategies at the two-year college. Readers will find these student-authored chapters distributed throughout the book. By including student perspectives, I am seeking to honor calls by Susanmarie Harrington, Wendy Bishop, bell hooks, Alison Cook-Sather, Cornelius Minor, Django Paris, and H. Samy Alim, and others for scholarship that is, to use Bishop’s phrase, “student-present” (1993, 199). This type of research, Harrington suggests, devotes “serious attention to student voices” (1999, 96–97). In *We Got This.: Equity, Access, and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be*, Cornelius Minor suggests that great teaching begins with listening: “authentic listening and the actions that result from it” are “the most radical of all teacher behaviors” (2018, 15; see also 9–24, 77–100). Culturally sustaining pedagogies are built around the core belief in the transformative power of listening to students, in all their great variety (Paris and Alim 2017). These student-authored chapters have precisely this focus. In this way, following Sheryl Fontaine and Susan Hunter (1993), we are helping students “write themselves into the story” of teaching and learning at the two-year college.

As a teacher of English myself, I continue to be astonished by how much I learn from my students—about courage, strength, and hope, about living in the world, and about so many other things as well. Although I have been teaching at a community college for many years now, I continue to be deeply thankful for these gifts. Teaching at a two-year college is a humbling, inspiring, and rewarding enterprise. I encourage teachers at all levels of instruction to welcome the profound gifts we receive from our students—opportunities for learning, growth, and personal transformation.

Readers interested in learning more about community college students are invited to visit the Community College Success Stories Project,
an archive of essays written by community college students about their journeys to and from open-admissions institutions. This project is designed to help students write themselves into the story of the two-year college. I designed and created this website, which officially launched in 2018, with the support of a 2016 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) Research Award Grant from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). The goal of the Community College Success Stories Project is to build an archive of thousands of stories written by community college students that can be searched and accessed by new and returning community college students looking for inspiration and direction, and by scholars, researchers, and teachers interested in learning more about students who attend open-admissions institutions. The homepage for the project is here: https://www.communitycollegesuccessstories.org/. This project privileges writing by community college students themselves, and therefore provides a unique, personal, and rare glimpse into the kinds of lives being lived right now by students at two-year colleges in America. The database is fully searchable, so individuals interested in learning more about community college students can personalize their search depending on their needs and interests. This site has the potential to be a very valuable resource for teachers new to the two-year college and can supplement the contents of this book in productive ways. I cordially invite teachers to help strengthen this archive by encouraging their own students to submit essays for this project.

Another unique feature of this book is the photo essay documenting everyday campus life at the two-year college produced by Dan Long, my colleague at Manchester Community College. These photos were all taken at MCC, and they are dispersed throughout the book at the beginning of most chapters. These photos document the experience of community college students in all its vitality and variety. We see individuals—most of whom are community college students—baking bread, playing the piano, browsing through books at the library, working on the wheel in a ceramics class, studying, strolling to class, tending to plants at MCC’s community garden, and graduating. We even have a photo of fresh produce taken at MCC’s farmer’s market. Our goal with these photos, as with this book in general, is to help readers see beyond reductive caricatures and to understand the two-year college in fresh new ways—as a site devoted to agency, personal transformation, and equality of opportunity. These images appear in black and white in the print edition of the book and in full color in the electronic version.
AN ABUNDANCE OF RICHES

I tell my students, “When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.”

—Toni Morrison

Part I of this book is designed to provide readers with a general introduction to teaching English at the two-year college. It features Darin Jensen’s essay about the joys and challenges of teaching at a two-year college as an adjunct professor along with my interview with Helane Adams Androne (Androne 2014; Androne 2016). These chapters are followed by our first two student contributors, Bridgette Stepule and Lydia Sekscenski, who offer advice to teachers at the two-year college about effective teaching. One of the reasons we begin the book with Darin’s essay is because he offers readers a candid, heartfelt introduction to teaching at the two-year college, but also because most writing courses across the nation are now taught by adjunct faculty at both two- and four-year institutions. These teachers are the new teaching majority (Kezar and Maxey 2014a; Kezar and Maxey 2014b; Klausman 2018; see also Kalleberg 2011; Lafer 2017). By beginning the book with Darin’s essay, I seek to honor—and enact a form of solidarity with—our part-time colleagues. I also seek to publicly acknowledge the important—but underappreciated and certainly undercompensated—work of our adjunct faculty.

Part II of the book focuses on two vitally important aspects of teaching at the two-year college—teaching with compassion and teaching with scholarship and theory (see Bain 2004). This chapter includes Brett Griffiths’s essay about the transformative power of empathy and compassion in the classroom and in writing centers, and Jeff Klausman’s essay about the essential role that theory and scholarship play in his pedagogy and teaching practice. These essays are followed by my interview with Jeff Andelora, who has combined compassion and theory in his own teaching practice in inspiring ways. This interview is followed by two more student perspectives, written by Darlene Pierpont and Kevin Rodriguez, which address compassion and theory.

Part III of the book is devoted to examining equity and social justice at the two-year college. This section includes Holly Hassel’s essay about social justice and open-admissions institutions and Hope Parisi’s essay about inversive teaching, which invites teachers at the two-year college to think in innovative new ways about presence and absence in the classroom. At its core, inversive teaching is about accommodating for the disparate
impacts of racialized educations, K–12, and those leading from the range of challenges, obstacles, and obligations our diverse students face. Parisi suggests that the community college classroom must become the epitome for “making room.” This section also features a student essay written by Lauren Sills that addresses issues of diversity, equity, and community. We conclude this section with Taiyon J. Coleman, Renee DeLong, Kathleen Sheerin DeVore, Shannon Gibney, and Michael C. Kuhne’s essay about race, equity, and white institutional, pedagogical, and curricular heteronormativity at the two-year college, “The Risky Business of Engaging Racial Equity in Writing Instruction: A Tragedy in Five Acts.” Social and cultural identity positions have become an important issue in our discipline, in part because of this essay. Taiyon J. Coleman, Kathleen Sheerin DeVore, Shannon Gibney, Michael C. Kuhne, and Valérie Déus’s new book on the subject of racial equity in the college writing classroom, Working Toward Racial Equity in First-Year Composition: Six Perspectives (2019) is essential reading for all teachers at the two-year college.

Part IV offers readers a group of essays devoted to developmental education. Writing teachers at two-year colleges are routinely called upon to teach basic reading and writing courses, and these chapters provide readers of the book with a kind of professional summit meeting on developmental curriculum. Readers will be learning from a group of experienced, accomplished developmental educators—Jamey Gallagher, Joanne Baird Giordano, and Peter Adams. The approaches to teaching developmental reading and writing in these chapters reflect the most current scholarly advances in the field today. Included with these essays is an important student-authored chapter written by a former developmental student, Jamil Shakoor, who began his academic career at Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York (CUNY), in Brooklyn, New York, as a developmental student in 2008. Jamil has very positive things to say about developmental education and what developmental courses have meant to him. Jamil has since earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology from Queens College, CUNY. He has also coauthored a scholarly essay about his experience as a developmental writing student with his former teacher, Emily Schnee, an English professor at Kingsborough Community College in (Schnee and Shakoor 2017).

The need for professional development material like this related to developmental education is urgent, especially in graduate school. Peter Adams notes in his chapter that as he has been visiting campuses around the nation as a consultant for the Accelerated Learning Program, he
has asked faculty and staff to respond to a variety of survey questions before he meets with them to discuss the ALP model. Thus far, he has surveyed 361 basic writing faculty teaching at forty different institutions. The most significant question on his survey has turned out to be this: “Which of the following best describes your graduate preparation to teach basic writing?” Of the 343 English faculty who have responded to this question, 267, or 78 percent, had taken no courses in their graduate programs to prepare them to teach basic writing (see also Jensen and Ely 2017). It is my hope that the section in this book focusing on developmental education will provide important professional development opportunities for those new to basic reading and writing and those unfamiliar with the ALP model.

Part V, which serves as the conclusion for the book, features a deeply heartfelt “call out” to English teachers by MCC student Leah McNeir along with an interview with Howard Tinberg, who has been an inspiration and role model for many of us who teach English at two-year colleges. It is an honor to have Howard providing the final words in this volume.

CONCLUSION

Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife.
—John Dewey

This book celebrates the joys of teaching at the two-year college. It is my hope that readers will feel the same sense of gratitude, honor, and hopefulness that I feel about my job. Teaching English at the two-year college is a grand, high-stakes enterprise—with profound implications for the health and vitality of our democracy. The American community college is not just a convenient alternative to traditional four-year colleges. It is a social justice institution—where we enact our most foundational ideals about freedom, equity, and opportunity.

To members of our profession who don’t routinely read academic books and journals—this book is for you. I have often heard colleagues admit, “I don’t read scholarship.” When I ask them why, I hear very good reasons: “It’s inaccessible.” “It’s never written about students like mine.” “It always seems to be written by theorists rather than actual classroom teachers.” “It never contains anything I can actually use in my own classes on Monday morning when I meet my students.” This is feedback that deserves careful attention (Toth and Sullivan 2016). Building on this wisdom, I have endeavored to address these concerns in this book.
by asking contributors to focus as much as possible on pragmatic classroom activities and assignments. It is my hope that these efforts will offer reluctant scholars an entry point, a way to begin engaging our ongoing scholarly conversation about the art of teaching English.

I dedicate this book to classroom English teachers across America, grades 6–14, especially to those of you who work at open-admissions two-year colleges. Thank you for all that you do.

NOTES

1. A note about terminology: the vast majority of public two-year colleges are open-admissions institutions. Most of these public two-year institutions refer to themselves as “community colleges.” “Open-admissions institution,” “community college,” and “two-year college” have thus come to be used interchangeably, as they are throughout this book.

2. Quoted in Newfield “Crisis.”

3. To avoid disrupting the flow of the narrative too much by including lengthy parenthetical citations, I am employing footnotes in a few places here to direct readers to additional readings and citations. For more discussion of the emerging teacher-scholar-activist professional identity model, please see Tinberg 1997; Lewiecki-Wilson and Sommers 1999; Lovas 2002; Andelora 2005; Andelora 2008; Kroll 2012; Andelora 2013; Sullivan 2015b; Griffiths 2017; Jensen, Sullivan, and Toth 2017; Suh and Jensen 2017; Sullivan 2017a; Sullivan 2017b; Warnke and Higgins 2018; Toth, Sullivan, and Calhoon-Dillahunt 2019; Jensen, Sullivan, and Toth 2019; see also Alford and Kroll 2001; Bousquet 2008; Adler-Kassner 2008; Adler-Kassner 2012; Ravitch 2013; Scott 2015; Welch and Scott 2016; Adler-Kassner 2017.


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