

## Chapter 1

# Beliefs and Realities: A Framework for Decision Making

*“...[O]ne of the critical differences between expert and non-expert teachers is their capability to engage in conscious deliberation and reflection. Such engagement involves making explicit the tacit knowledge that is gained from experience.” (Tsui, 2009, p. 429)*

*“[T]eaching experience does not automatically translate into teacher expertise unless teachers consciously and actively reflect on these experiences.” (Farrell, 2013, p. 1080)*

### LEADING QUESTIONS

- What roles do teacher beliefs, assumptions, and philosophies of learning and teaching play in the decision-making process in L2 writing classes?
- To what extent are L2 writing teachers explicitly aware of their own beliefs and practices?
- How can knowledge of relevant issues in L2 writing inform teachers' decisions?
- To what extent do belief systems and practical realities of the classroom support or work against each other?

## Introduction to the Issues

The basic issues that teachers confront in face-to-face teaching, and even much online teaching, have not changed much over time. Many parts of Dan Lortie's classic 1975 book, *School-teacher*, seem as fresh and relevant today as they were decades ago (Hargreaves, 2009; Lortie, 1975). Among these unchanging realities is that teachers make hundreds of decisions in their teaching practices every day. Some decisions involve planning. With greater or lesser degrees of control over their decisions, teachers decide what content to teach; what materials to use; what sequences to present content and activities in; what pedagogical activities to set up using different participation structures; what kinds of homework and in-class work to assign; and what kinds of assessments and grading criteria to use. In this digital era, they also need to consider the fundamental question of what they mean by "writing" (see Chapter 3 on writing in a digital era), including the argument that it is no longer just about linguistic matters (Canagarajah, 2013). Other decisions need to be made on the spot: how to respond to students' questions; how to explain an activity if students misunderstand the initial set of instructions; how to handle recalcitrant or overly silent or talkative students on a particular day; how to switch gears mid-class either to take advantage of opportunities that arise unexpectedly or to adjust a lesson plan that cannot be finished in the allotted time; how to respond to a piece of writing that seems plagiarized or that contains disturbing personal information; and generally how to manage and negotiate the countless unforeseen contingencies that arise every teaching day. These decisions are based on teachers' past experiences, their current goals for and beliefs about teaching and learning, their current knowledge of their subject matter and relevant content-based issues, and the constraints of the immediate teaching context.

If asked, teachers can often explain that they are using certain materials in a particular way because they believe, for example, that students will be motivated by this approach

and therefore learn more, or that this or that approach has been shown to be effective through research on writing and second language acquisition (SLA), or that the adaptations they make in an approach stem in part from classroom factors such as class size, time constraints, and curricular mandates at the departmental level. Of course, there are unarticulated default beliefs—unexamined assumptions about teaching and learning—that may not seem like beliefs at all, but more like routines and patterns, developed and followed through habit and through teachers' own experiences with learning in their pasts (what Lortie, 1975, referred to as the “apprenticeship of observation” ) rather than through systematic reflection and conscious choice. Teachers may also choose, or be given, materials, lessons, and assessment tools without reflecting on the assumptions about teaching and learning that underlie those materials and tools. If the materials look good, if they are written by reputable authors and published by good publishers, and if they have been approved by the school or department, they must be good. Many teachers, moreover, pressed for time and short of energy, just hope to get through another day. As important as it is, reflection on beliefs and issues, which requires some intellectual and emotional investment, may not be high on their lists of daily or weekly activities (Farrell, 2007).

Nevertheless, examined or unexamined, within awareness or not, teacher choices and behaviors in the classroom reflect underlying beliefs and assumptions, even when articulated beliefs do not match well with practices (Farrell, 2007; Nishino, 2012). One of my own strong beliefs, and that of many other established scholars in education over the last several decades, is that teachers benefit from bringing underlying beliefs into conscious awareness by articulating those beliefs, reflecting on them, and modifying them as needed (Burns, 1992; Calderhead, 1989; Casanave & Schecter, 1997; Day, Calderhead, & Denicolo, 1993; Farrell, 1999, 2007, 2013; Freeman & Richards, 1996; Gebhard & Oprandy, 1999; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Richards, 1998; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Ross, 1989; Schön, 1983, 1987; Valli, 1992). Our teaching can

thus become more principled, less random, perhaps more experimental and innovative, more connected to the learning of particular students, and more subject to our own critical evaluation of techniques, methods, successes, and failures. With sets of articulated beliefs, we become more able to ask and respond to the important questions such as Why am I choosing to teach in this way? and What effect is my teaching having on my students? and Given the practical constraints in my teaching situation, how can I best implement what I feel to be good decisions?

In this introductory chapter, I lay out several foundational areas for decision-making in the L2 writing class. The areas fall into three broad categories that apply to teaching of any kind: philosophy of teaching and learning; knowledge of relevant issues; and the practical realities of local teaching and learning settings. First, being able to articulate a set of beliefs and assumptions about the teaching and learning of writing will help teachers evolve a consistent philosophy and match their decisions with those beliefs to the extent possible. Second, knowing what the relevant issues are, along with substantive content knowledge, will help teachers make principled decisions that are made in conjunction with what we know to date about the teaching and learning of writing (including decisions that might reject current trends). Finally, recognizing the reality of practical constraints, such as bureaucratic requirements and structural realities, the unique characteristics of particular classes and individual students, and classroom management factors, will help writing teachers make the best decisions possible when perhaps none are optimal.

### **Building a Philosophy of Teaching and Learning**

#### **Getting Started: Literacy Autobiographies**

A good place to begin considering beliefs about teaching and learning L2 writing is with a literacy autobiography. A literacy autobiography recounts the history of one's key literacy experi-

ences throughout a lifetime: memories of learning to read and write, influential moments and people that contributed to one's sense of self as a reader-writer, memorable pieces of writing, breakthroughs and blocks, struggles with and joys of writing. For those involved in L2 writing, a literacy autobiography crucially includes one's own experiences learning to read and write in an L2 (Belcher & Connor, 2001; Canagarajah, 2012). It is likely that our own L2 learning experiences influence choices we make today about teaching L2 writing. That L2 may be English, not just the stereotypical "foreign languages" that predominantly monolingual English speakers think of when they hear the term "*second/foreign language*." Some of the most influential published literacy autobiographies in the L2 writing field have been written by scholars for whom English was not a mother tongue (see Belcher & Connor, 2001; Braine, 1999; several of the pieces in Casanave & Vandrick, 2003; Hoffman, 1989; Pavlenko, 1998, 2001). These literacy autobiographies reveal issues and challenges faced by the authors as they developed a professional level of L2 literacy and provide clues about where their beliefs and assumptions about L2 literacy originated. In the broader field of SLA, diary studies that focus on second and foreign language learning achieve a similar purpose (Bailey, 1983, 1990; Carson & Longhini, 2002; Casanave, 2012; Curtis & Bailey, 2009; Hall, 2008; Numrich, 1996). Importantly, literacy practices at the graduate school level also need to be learned—they do not come naturally to either L1 or L2 students (Casanave, 2008; Casanave & Li, 2008; Hedgcock, 2008).

The polished form of a published literacy autobiography or of a finished autobiography written as a class assignment in an applied linguistics or composition studies program lends the impression that once written, the literacy autobiography is finished. However, as a piece of writing that can both reveal underlying beliefs and assumptions about writing and contribute to their further development and to the development of a philosophy of teaching and learning, a literacy autobiography can productively be revised many times over a teaching career. In revising and rethinking their own literacy

experiences, authors can add new experiences and insights, and reinterpret ones from the past, just as they can from a life story (Bell, 1997; Giddens, 1991; Linde, 1993; Mishler, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1991). The literacy autobiography is thus a piece of writing in perpetual draft form, ready to be revisited, restoried, and reinterpreted in light of new experiences and of responses of self and others with whom it is shared. It provides the initial airing of beliefs about teaching and learning that can be linked later to decisions in the classroom.

### **Examining the Sources of Beliefs from the Inside Out**

In further articulating a philosophy of L2 teaching and learning, we can also consider sometimes intangible internal factors that may or may not have been addressed in a literacy autobiography. I am thinking here of the rather amorphous factors of personality, cognitive style, emotional proclivities, preferences in learning strategies, and even influences of upbringing as to what behaviors and attitudes are considered efficient, productive, and even moral in leading to future goals for self and students. Whether we realize it or not at the time, these intangible internal factors influence decisions we make in the classroom. Understanding these influences can help us sort the reasoned decisions from knee-jerk responses in the classroom or strongly felt emotional beliefs that appear so normal that they cloud other ways of seeing.

For example, it is possible that a teacher who is fundamentally outgoing, social, and confident will tend to set up class activities that differ from those set up by a teacher who is shy, inward, and solitary by nature. I have sometimes found myself questioning my decisions in the classroom: Should I ask students to do what I could not do at their age, or what I still dislike doing today? For instance, I was, and am, particularly resistant to games and competitions in the classroom, both as a learner and a teacher. A second example, more directly connected to writing, concerns the extent to which a writing teacher is by nature a “radical outliner” or a “radical brainstormer” (Reid, 1984). I have never been able to outline before

I write, at least according to the textbook rules, so for years never asked my students to do outlines either. But by turning my own predisposition into an unreflective belief about how to teach, I was probably limiting students' choices in unfair ways, in that some people benefit greatly from making very detailed outlines. My beliefs about how people plan their writing needed to expand and to become more accessible to self-analysis and critique, and as they did, my messages to students in the writing classroom changed.

The point is that our internal beliefs and predispositions tend to be less clearly visible and articulatable than those we can trace to external influences. They thus merit careful attention through self-observation, interaction with colleagues, reflective journal writing, and open discussion with students. Once articulated, beliefs that develop from the inside-out can be acted upon, or not, as teachers decide how to construct and respond to teaching and learning situations in the L2 writing class.

### **Examining the Sources of Beliefs from the Outside In**

Adding further to the development of an articulated philosophy of teaching and learning, we can point to the influence of external factors on our belief systems and concomitant classroom decision-making behaviors (see also the discussion in the next section, "The Reality of Practical Constraints"). For example, teachers may have first learned to teach primarily by using certain textbooks and not others. Textbooks embody (often inconsistent) philosophies of teaching and learning in the kinds of exercises they ask students to do, the sequences of those exercises, and the implicit or suggested roles of teachers. Teachers who are required to use certain textbooks and not others, or who have favorite textbooks, methods, or tasks, or who have free rein to choose and develop materials can profit from examining the assumptions about teaching and learning inherent in those materials and tasks. The assumptions may or may not accord with teachers' own articulated beliefs and may or may not contribute to the development of those beliefs.

Another external influence on teachers' beliefs includes the lessons learned from mentors, master teachers, or colleagues. These influential people may be part of a graduate school program as one's professors and peers, they may be charismatic and inspiring presenters at conferences, or they may be other teachers or even students with whom one is working. As an example, I recall one of my first encounters with second language educator John Fanselow at a conference many years ago, where he was speaking to a hall of enthusiastic admirers. Through his presentation, and later through collegial contact (see Casanave, 2002, Chap. 6, and Fanselow, 1997), I learned to *see* in a different, more open way, even though my teaching style was not modeled on his. Another important influence on me was the persona and work of the late Elliot Eisner, a charismatic teacher and eloquent writer in whom I saw a passion for qualitative inquiry and the arts, and from whom I learned that academic writing can be beautiful and accessible (e.g., Eisner, 1991). An even more profound influence on me was the late Arthur Applebee, whose vast knowledge of writing and composition and gentle persona initially drew me in to the study of writing.

A third external influence on teachers' beliefs comes from books and articles in the field, through self-study or schooling, that express views about approaches to teaching, often regrettably to the exclusion of currently unpopular or "old-fashioned" approaches. For example, strong and persuasive voices in the field can intimidate teachers into believing that attention to grammar is wrong or right, that communicative competence is or is not the central goal of language education, or that students either should or need not learn to express themselves personally in their writing. However, strong and persuasive voices can also advocate openness, flexibility, and change. By attending to and comparing many voices in the field, teachers discover consistencies and conflicts, allies and enemies, inspiration and trivia, and can selectively merge and adapt the views of others as they build their own belief systems.

As an example of some of the early external influences on my beliefs and practices in second language education, when I



first began teaching ESL (English as a Second Language) many years ago, my only (lamentable) qualification was that I was a native speaker of English and that I had always liked language and languages. I had not yet studied anything in applied linguistics or education, and relied heavily on the textbook that I was assigned to teach, Robert Lado's now classic audiolingual text series, *English 900*. I "learned" to believe in the primacy of speech, the importance of habit formation and pattern drills, and the need for students to practice, repeat, and practice some more. In the several years that followed I worked as a part-timer with only one other teacher, and she was thoroughly schooled in the same audiolingual behaviorist camp. My teaching and materials development followed in her footsteps. My beliefs in the audiolingual approach began to erode thanks to another external influence, a publisher's review of the draft of a grammar textbook this colleague and I had submitted. Although two of the three reviews had been quite positive, the third claimed in no uncertain terms that our approach was dated, that attention to grammar was passé, and that we needed to go back to the drawing board and familiarize ourselves with the (then) new communicative approach to language teaching. Like many others, I jumped on the communicative language teaching and process-writing bandwagon, read all the right books, didn't talk about grammar for a number of years, and rethought my whole approach to teaching and learning. When I eventually recognized the bandwagon I had jumped on and tried to find more balance in my beliefs and practices, I once mentioned the importance of grammar in communicative approaches to language teaching at a conference talk I was giving, before it became fashionable to do so. I was publicly put down by an assertive-voiced male in the audience who walked out of the room when I countered *his* strongly held belief that grammar did not belong in communicative approaches. Although several members of the audience later expressed support for my then controversial view about the need for grammar study, the experience of not being on the bandwagon was difficult for me as a relatively new scholar in the ESL field.

I am embarrassed today about my earlier bandwagon escapades, but realize that as an inexperienced teacher without a strong graduate education at the time, I developed my beliefs and practices in quite normal ways. Now, many years later, I continue to study and to learn from external sources such as published literature, colleagues, and even students, but hope I am not deceiving myself into thinking that I am impervious to the latest hot topic fads. They lurk around every corner waiting to capture my attention. Nevertheless, by becoming close observers of the influences on and characteristics of our own belief systems, I and other teachers become able to render these systems into the flexible, dynamic, growing philosophies of teaching and learning that they deserve to be and that can contribute to reasoned decision-making in the classroom. The challenges involve developing a coherent and internally consistent belief system in the first place, then recognizing it not as dogma, fixed in stone (or print and electronic text, as the case is more likely to be), but as a dynamic evolving system that continues to grow over a lifetime.

### **Knowledge of Relevant Issues**

It is not enough to know thyself. Teachers must also know the content of their fields and which issues are historically important and currently unresolved. In the field of language teacher education in general, teachers need to build a knowledge base that includes theories of teaching, knowledge of teaching and communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision-making skills, and knowledge of the contexts of teaching (Hedgcock, 2002; Mull-ock, 2006; Richards, 1998). In the broader field of education, Shulman (1987) added curricular knowledge, knowledge of educational purposes and philosophies, and (Shulman, 1986) case knowledge (understanding of specific cases in teaching) to the knowledge base of effective teachers. In the field of L2 writing, this expertise is based on thorough knowledge about the target language, including knowledge of the conventions

of writing and rhetoric in the target language and relevant disciplines, and something about the languages, cultures, and writing conventions pertinent to the students they are teaching. It includes as well knowledge about theories of L2 writing, such as they are, about methods and processes of teaching writing, and about key issues in writing research and practice (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Silva, 1990, 1993). Finally, it includes knowledge of the many different kinds of L2 writers from a diversity of contexts we might find in our classrooms, not just the postsecondary students that the L2 writing literature usually focuses on (Belcher, 2012, 2013) and not just ESL, but EFL students as well (Leki, 2001; Reichelt, 2009). In this section, I discuss primarily the need for teachers to build knowledge of relevant content and issues in L2 writing, many of which are taken up in other monographs in this series and which are dealt with in the remaining chapters of this book. With the help of such knowledge teachers are in a position to make principled and informed decisions in the face of sometimes conflicting ideas in the field or dilemmas that arise in the classroom itself. Questions that integrate such information with teaching methods and processes are taken up as well in books on teaching L2 writing (e.g., Ferris & Hedgcock, 2014; Leki, 1992; Reid, 1993; Swales & Feak, 2012).

Where does writing teachers' knowledge come from? One essential source is intuitions about writing processes, products, and problems that teachers develop over a lifetime of their own experiences with writing. Intuitions about writing can be considered a kind of felt knowledge, and may or may not be fully accessible to conscious reflection. (This is one reason why teachers can benefit from writing a literacy autobiography, discussed earlier.) Many of us, for example, can state unequivocally that we find it difficult to write in our first languages, to say nothing of our second (or third) languages. It is not just our students who find writing difficult. However, it is more challenging to try to explain to someone, or to ourselves, just why it is difficult to write. In attempting such an explanation, both teachers and students may identify some of the relevant issues in writing: I worry so much about getting

every word and phrase right that I lose the forest for the trees and so become stuck, and can't move on (a problem of fluency and accuracy); I fear being judged (critiqued, assessed, graded) (a problem of assessment); I don't know what is expected of me in terms of content or rhetorical structure in a particular piece of writing (a problem of genre, topic knowledge, and explicitness of instruction); I don't know who I am really writing for or how to incorporate the voices of others in my writing without plagiarizing (problems of audience and writing from sources); I don't know whether I should take a stand or innovate in a piece of writing or just paraphrase the ideas and formal conventions of others (a problem of accommodation, resistance, and standards). The more experience that L2 writing teachers have as writers themselves, the more likely it is they will be able to articulate issues such as these and to help their students identify them as well. But these issues have all been researched in the L2 writing field, so teachers do not need to rely solely on their intuitions and experiences. The books in this series on teaching multilingual writers, and *Controversies* in particular, are designed to help writing teachers and their students identify, bring under conscious control, and put to good use relevant issues in L2 writing.

Perhaps the best way to begin accruing already researched knowledge of the fundamental issues that characterize the field of L2 writing is through a good graduate-level education. Writing teachers and future writing teachers become acquainted with central ideas, issues, and theories through books, journal articles, and lectures and discussions. By learning about relevant content and issues, teachers can then integrate this knowledge with the intuitive and experiential knowledge they have gained throughout their lifetimes. Important conflicts and contradictions will no doubt surface, providing teachers with the opportunity to wrestle with issues at deep levels of analysis and reflection. Reflective journals and learning logs are especially useful for this purpose (Burton, Quirke, Reichmann, & Peyton, 2009; Casanave, 2011; Lee, 2008; Richards & Ho, 1998).

Although a good graduate level education can start novice teachers on the road to a life of study of relevant content and issues, equally important is a commitment to ongoing study after graduate education ends. By continuing to read key books and journals, attending occasional conferences, discussing issues with colleagues, and perhaps writing for publication, teachers build relevant content knowledge over the lifetime of their careers and keep up with current issues and controversies. This knowledge in turn contributes to their evolving intuitions, philosophies, and ability to make reasoned decisions in their classrooms.

Knowledge of relevant issues and content will rarely provide teachers with clear answers, however. As I suggest in this book, there are enough debates and controversies in the L2 writing field to keep L2 writing teachers thinking, studying, learning, and reflecting for many years to come. Building knowledge over our professional lifetimes will complicate, not simplify, our teaching lives. But it will enable us to see, understand, and where practically feasible act on choices that were once invisible.

### **The Reality of Practical Constraints**

Fortunate teachers are able to integrate their beliefs and assumptions about teaching and learning L2 writing, their knowledge of relevant content and issues, and the practical realities of their teaching situations. However, it is often the case that practical realities get in the way of what we believe and know, with the result that teaching materials and practices conflict with deeply held philosophies. Graduate language teacher education programs that have a substantial practicum in actual teaching as part of their requirements can begin to deal with this integration in that novice teachers soon discover that their energies are often taken up more with practical concerns than with content and theory they learned from course work. For instance, teaching journals and follow-up discus-

sions in the practicum class might focus less on the benefits of small group peer reading in a writing class than on how to get students efficiently into groups and interacting productively with each other in the first place. The problem is exacerbated if there are no movable desks in the classroom. Wonderful ideas learned in course work and readings, in other words, may be difficult to implement in specific teaching settings.

Structural and systemic constraints that have plagued my own teaching (some of which took place in Japan) include undergraduate writing classes that met only once a week for 90 minutes, just 13 times a semester, large classes that prevented my being able to work with student writers as closely as I would have liked, and schedules so heavy for students in the Japanese university system that students did not have time or focus to read or write regularly. At the graduate level, where I have felt most strongly the need for students to write regularly, mid-career masters and doctoral students at the American university campus in Japan where I was teaching worked full time and had little time or energy to devote to concentrated writing. These constraints continue to clash with my beliefs that learning to write requires years of practice, not weeks, that writing is a social practice requiring deep engagement with readings and with other writers and mentors, and that focused rather than fragmented time is needed if writers are to move their writing forward. I have myself tried to write a paper along with students within the one-semester time period and found that the “term paper assignment” when applied to myself brings out many of these structural and systemic constraints. Weeks would go by when I did not or could not make time to write; colleagues who were my potential peer readers were busy; other obligations in my life interfered with my ability to concentrate. What got turned in at the end was as much an artificially concluded and incomplete draft as were those drafts that my students turned in, and I had a great advantage over them in that I chose topics about which I already had a great deal of organized knowledge. At the same time, the artificial deadlines imposed by the realities of the classroom situation ensured that we all got something written.

Other institutional realities may require that teachers use materials that have been selected by others, such as administrators or committees of teachers, or that have been selected from a limited pool of choices approved by a government or educational board. Teachers' choices are also severely constrained when there is an institutional mandate to cover a certain amount of material within a semester or a school year, or to work in lockstep with other teachers who are forced to use the same material. A pervasive problem in many settings that further undermines the good ideas and intentions of teachers is institutional (and cultural and parental) concern with students' examination scores rather than with their learning to write (see Chapter 7 on Assessment). In my own experience working with graduate students who are high school teachers in Japan, for example, I find that frustrated teachers may be able to squeeze in just 10 minutes a class session for real writing activities. The rest of the time they follow a mandated, exam-oriented curriculum.

Another practical reality of every classroom concerns classroom management and the ways that interactions with individual students and groups of students influence how teachers' decisions play out and how their beliefs and knowledge are enacted. By listening to teachers talk around the lunch table it is possible to get a sense of how pervasive these concerns are. I seldom hear teachers talking about their beliefs, about current issues in the field, about what it means to learn to write in a second language, about relevant books or articles they are reading, or about ways to enact their beliefs and knowledge in their classes. It is more likely that teachers focus on problem situations that impinge in very real ways on what happens on a day-to-day basis in their classes. How can I get students to stop chatting and to listen to me when I am giving them important information or instructions? What do I do with the disruptive student who refuses to cooperate and who damages the whole atmosphere of the class? How do I get quiet students to participate actively? How do I get students to turn off their mobile phones and devices and make eye contact with me and other students? What if students show no interest in

revising their writing, believing perhaps that what they need is grammar lessons, and so do not turn in required drafts? How do I handle the student who communicates to me or to other students (orally, electronically, or in print) in ways that seem disrespectful? What do I do with the small group of students in the back that insists on chatting or texting rather than on completing in-class writing activities? How do I react to the busy graduate student whose work and personal life get in the way of sustained concentration on reading and writing? These concerns and others can consume the time and energy of well-meaning teachers who really want to be spending every possible precious moment helping their students learn to write in their second language.

In sum, teachers who are forced to follow imposed materials, practices, and deadlines may inevitably find that materials and decisions imposed by others clash in ways that range from frustrating to enraging with their own evolving philosophies about how their students can best learn to write (or speak or read in their second language). Additionally, structural constraints such as large class size, immovable student desks, and minimal time available for writing instruction and practice can easily take precedence over teachers' belief systems and knowledge of their field. And finally, the daily grind of classroom management or the intrusion of students' personal or work lives into their ability to concentrate or develop interest in writing can subvert teachers' enactment of what they believe and know about learning to write in a second language. This picture may sound bleak, but it does not necessarily have to be so. I have found that some teachers working under constraints that make me want to escape the field are able to find clever, inspiring, and forward-looking ways to work with and around the realities of practical constraints. These teachers have developed a strong sense of what they believe about teaching and learning L2 writing, and their beliefs and knowledge help provide them with a vision that gives direction to the daily grind. Their students—in the long run at any rate—benefit.



### Ongoing Questions

This chapter has laid out some of the basic factors that influence the decisions that teachers make in their L2 writing classes and in their writing-heavy subject matter classes. It urges that teachers consider not only what they do on a daily basis, but what they believe and know about teaching and learning. Such reflection is part of an ongoing lifetime effort to develop a consistent and coherent belief system that can help guide teachers through the practical realities and constraints they face in each classroom setting and provide a sense of vision when the daily grind seems to want to swallow us up. However, the controversies in L2 writing that I discuss in this book and around which I pose ongoing questions have no easy resolution—hence the word *dilemmas* rather than *problems* appears in my subtitle. Dilemmas, Cuban (1992, p. 6) pointed out long ago, are “often intractable to routine solutions.” Dilemmas, therefore, involve decisions and choices that may lead to “good-enough” compromises rather than ideal outcomes (p. 7). Whatever the outcomes, if teachers’ decisions are based on thoughtful reflection and a solid knowledge base, L2 writing students stand to benefit.

Many specific questions remain, and I hope readers will approach each chapter in this book, and each book in this series, with questions about their own beliefs and practices. Why am I teaching in the way I do? Why do I believe that this or that kind of exercise will improve my students’ writing? Why am I using the particular materials that I have and why in the particular way I am adapting them? Whose voices in the field make most sense to me? Whose agendas am I following, and should I resist or accommodate and encourage my students to resist or accommodate? And perhaps one of the most important questions of all, how do all of my questions pertain to me as a writer, in my first and second languages? What teachers believe about themselves as writers influences their decisions as teachers of writing in ways that can be enlightening and inspiring.

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