Introduction

We open this book by sharing our personal stories—how we have come to this work individually and together.

If you found Kelsey in her first years of teaching, you likely found her curriculum guides nearby—on the couch while she watched TV, on her nightstand before bed, even on her lap as she taught. Kelsey valued the teaching language and narratives suggested by curriculum writers so much that she did her best to replicate them. She told the same stories, re-created the same writing, read the same mentor texts, and crafted the same tools. Kelsey knew and delivered the curriculum *really well*. What she did not know as well, however, was herself as a writer. What she did not know as well were the writers in her classroom.

Knowing the curriculum well gave Kelsey a strong understanding of the workshop model and skills taught within each genre. It allowed her to ingrain effective teaching language for working with writers. But Kelsey's best teaching years happened when she began *referencing* curriculum instead of *memorizing* it, when she spent more time reading student writing than unit guides, when she taught with tools at her side instead of a script. The more Kelsey became present in her classroom, the more she knew the writers, and the more she knew the writers, the easier it became to be responsive in her practice. Kelsey made connections to students' lives, bringing engagement and purpose to learning. By including demonstration texts written by students in her classroom, Kelsey developed a practice of crafting her own. Kelsey found mentor texts that young writers treasured and borrowed again and again. Kids beamed, seeing their photos and writing highlighted on charts. Writing workshop buzzed with topics of excitement and passion.

When the curriculum came first, Kelsey found very little time and even less energy for the kind of work that she now realizes matters more in her quest to inspire and grow young writers:

- Reading student writing
- Establishing a professional and personal writing routine
- Planning small groups
- Studying conferring notes
- Searching for mentor texts
- Reading professional texts

When kids came first, Kelsey was able to shift the story line to the one unfolding in her curriculum guide to the one unfolding in her classroom.

Melanie's chartbooks have been a part of her teaching life for several years now. She buys blank notebooks in art supply stores—the same sort of spiral-bound notebooks that her daughters use for sketching. Melanie likes the ones with heavy covers and

thick pages—slightly oversized works best for her! When she first started making charts inside of them, Melanie usually sat with the computer by her side. She'd copy resources from curriculum guides and ones shared on blogs and social media. Melanie would scroll through other people's anchor charts, strategy charts, any other visually appealing resources she could find . . . and she'd copy them into her chartbook.

DIY Literacy, by Kate Roberts and Maggie Beattie Roberts (2016), was and still is one of Melanie's favorite professional books. Since her specialty and area of responsibility is writing, Melanie tabbed the pages that had to do with writing and—you guessed it—she copied their charts. Kate and Maggie have great companion videos where they explain how to create various charts and progressions. Melanie would stop the video on a frame so that she could copy what they'd written.

Melanie's later chartbooks developed in terms of organization, as she worked to curate narrative, information, and opinion charts in separate sections. She had charts for mindsets, workshop practices, grammar and conventions, and poetry in separate sections as well. Later versions of Melanie's chartbooks even separated early primary charts from mid-elementary ones.

But the charts Melanie had acquired still weren't all *her own;* they were organized, and they were useful, but they were still copies of other people's work. And more importantly, they weren't reflective of the students in the classrooms where she worked.

It took Melanie a couple of years to realize that the pages she used over and over are the ones she created in response to a student within her own environment. Other people's beautifully illustrated charts, other people's student-specific charts, and other people's choices of mentor texts and samples of writing didn't work for Melanie. The most useful resources *for Melanie,* in reaching her writers, are the ones she's created in response to the challenges students were having right in front of her. The most useful resources for individual students are the ones she created in front of *them*, inspired by *them,* and what *they* were working on!

A Shared Story

My job as a teacher is to seek to understand my kids as completely as possible so that I can purposefully bend curriculum to meet them.

—Cornelius Minor (2018)

Our paths merged as coauthors of a blog: *Two Writing Teachers*. We began an ongoing dialogue that we imagine will never quite end—one in which we strive to unravel the questions that frame this book. We had many conversations before considering writing a book together—conversations about students, our communities, and our own similarities and differences. We continue to grow awareness of the intersectionality of historical and systemic racism, sexism, classism, ableism, linguicism, and so forth, as shown in Figure 0.1 (Crenshaw, 1989).

Figure 0.1

The outer ring (systems and structures of power): Education, Legal, Capitalism, Immigration, War, Colonization, Economy, Politics, Housing

The middle ring (major systems of oppression): RACISM, ABLEISM, CLASSISM, SEXISM, HETEROSEXISM, ETHNOCENTRISM, LINGICISM

The inner ring (common aspects of identity): parental status, citizenship, class, gender & sexuality, geographic location, neuro-diversity, mental health, education, ethnicity, skin color, language, marital status, ability, race, income, religion, age, job, housing

The center (a person's unique circumstances of privilege and power): unique circumstances

Legend:
- a person's unique circumstances of privilege and power
- common aspects of identity
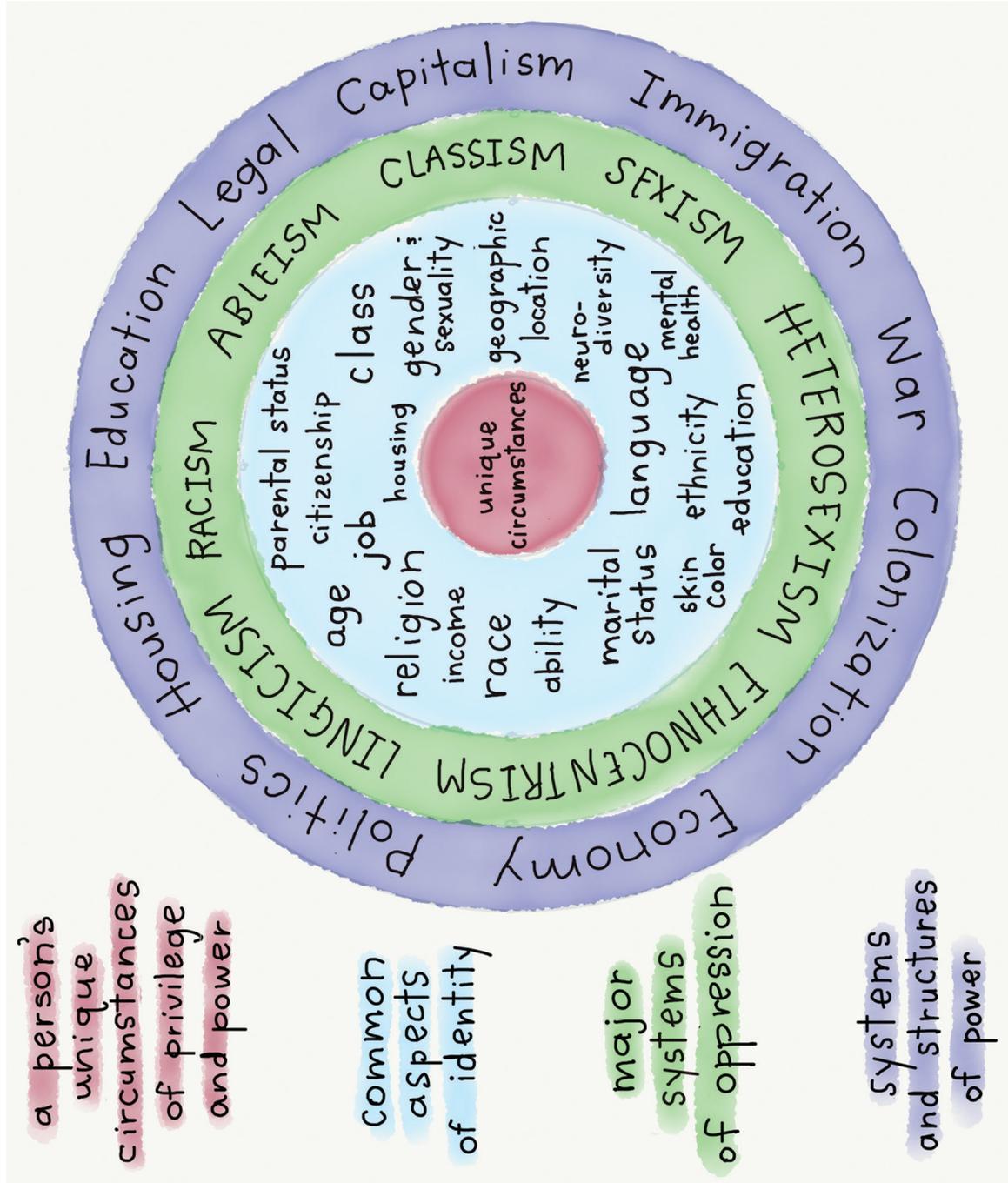- major systems of oppression
- systems and structures of power

Illustration adapted from CRIAW/ICREF's Intersectionality Wheel Diagram (2009).

We recognize our privileges as white educators, reflecting upon and acknowledging moments in which such privileges have caused harm—in the classroom, in schools, and beyond. Together, our teaching experience ranges from schools in predominantly white, middle- to upper-class suburban communities to socioeconomically and racially diverse urban communities. *This work has mattered in each of these settings in many different ways.* We share successes and failures, new learning and struggles, inroads and barriers. Our conversations led to reflections and a greater commitment to knowing and responding to writers.

The Four Domains of Responsiveness

"But *how* do we become responsive writing teachers?" The question hung in the air on one of Melanie and Kelsey's many phone calls. Adamant for something tangible, Kelsey (the visual partner) began scribbling boxes and notes as Melanie (the auditory partner) talked through processes. Four domains emerged, anchoring and weaving together the research, structure, and stories within the chapters of this book. Though the practice of responsiveness is not new, we propose responsive writing instruction be framed as *academic responsiveness*, *linguistic responsiveness*, *cultural responsiveness*, and *social-emotional responsiveness*.

1. *Academic responsiveness:* Academic responsiveness begins with understanding where students are in their learning process—the skills that are firm, the barriers in the way of new learning, and the entry points that provide access for instruction. Vygotsky's (1978) wisdom around the zone of proximal development (ZPD) guides responsive modifications to instruction, ensuring that skills and strategies are within each student's reach.

2. *Linguistic responsiveness:* Linguistic responsiveness begins with knowing students' development of language, home language(s) and dialect(s), language processing, and content-related structures and vocabulary so that the many ways children communicate are honored and included in the community. The languages used in instruction, charts, shared texts, and mentor texts matter, vitally, to the accessibility of content and representation students experience. Linguistic responsiveness involves asking these questions: Whose voices need to be uplifted in the classroom? Who needs to see their spoken language(s) on paper? Whose languages and dialects have been historically marginalized? When "English" is referred to in academic discourse, it often refers to white-dominant *Academic English.* Linguistic responsiveness recognizes, values, and leans on the languages and dialects of children in classrooms. Linguistic responsiveness considers the development of English as an *expansion* of aperture, an *additional* language to deploy when communicating through writing. It does not abandon home languages but rather provides opportunities for children to explore nuance and imagination in home languages and then provides support for processes of code-switching, translating, and expressing with the same effectiveness and voice in English.

3. *Cultural responsiveness:* Cultural responsiveness begins with recognizing, honoring, and reflecting diverse cultural and social identities and experiences. In school communities that are racially diverse, this builds a sense of

authentic belonging for students within authorship and within the content of books. In school communities that are predominantly white, this widens and recenters the scope in which literacy is conveyed in the world, combating racialized and stereotypical narratives. Across school communities, representation and inclusion matter while working to build equitable environments and empathetic citizens (Gloria Ladson-Billings, Sonia Nieto, Zaretta Hammond).

4. *Social-emotional responsiveness:* Social-emotional responsiveness begins with honoring the whole child: interests, the social-emotional tendencies, and habits of mind. Each of these areas is then integrated in the writing process and thus contribute to students' identities as writers.

Type of Responsiveness		Description
Academic responsiveness		*Ensuring new skills and content match students' abilities and goals*
Linguistic responsiveness		*Ensuring language(s) used in instruction and in the classroom environment are accessible and inclusive of home languages*
Cultural responsiveness		*Ensuring a diverse representation of authorship and within the content of texts*
Social-emotional responsiveness		*Ensuring a safe and supportive environment for taking risks and overcoming challenges in the writing process*

We will refer to and expand upon the following chart throughout the following chapters and sections.

The Structure of This Book

While composing the academic, linguistic, cultural, and social-emotional canvas of a classroom, teachers collect data, modify or create plans, construct tools, and provide texts for support—all while being responsible for a classroom full of children and a day filled with other content areas. We recognize the organizational, emotional, and logistical challenge of this through firsthand experience.

"What do I need?" you might ask. "Where do I begin?" In each chapter, you'll find starting points, places to return to, and a consistent structure. You might take some of the tools and use them just the way we've created them. You might also find inspiration in the thought processes and stories of teachers that we have shared. We urge you not to try to do everything at once. Rather, begin with aspects of

instruction and responsiveness that are most needed and most relevant for students in *your classroom* so that you modify and create tools for your own assessments, plans, and instruction.

The sequence of chapters aligns with components of writing instruction: *assessment*, *planning*, *charts*, *mentor texts*, and *demonstration texts*. Within each of these chapters, there are actionable steps, tools, classroom examples, resources, and tips for responsiveness across the four domains, ones that we hope communicate clarity, purpose, and joy. Each chapter ends with an example to portray the integration of the domains in practice. You will find a downloadable, printable template for every chart online at resources.corwin.com/responsivewritingteacher.

Chapter 6 outlines a shift in each of these instructional components from teacher-driven to student-driven (peer-driven and self-driven), which is, we suggest, the highest level of responsiveness—one that fosters agency and empowerment. While this book was started before March of 2020, we were revising it throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and the widespread movement against systemic oppression and structural racism sparked by the murders of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. These events pushed us forward in our thinking about how to engage students in work that is meaningful, actionable, and healing—and how we might do this even without sharing a physical space.

We build upon each element of writing instruction from a foundation of our own beliefs about best practices. We hold steadfast to the structure writing workshop, leaning on the work of Donald Graves (1983)—students need instruction as well as time for independent practice and choice in topic. We hold steadfast to the importance of a literacy-rich environment, as described by Lucy Calkins (1986/2008)—an environment in which tools and resources support student learning. We hold steadfast to a framework of balanced literacy, an important component being the balance of small- and whole-group instruction as well as direct instruction and the curriculum of talk (Fisher, Frey, & Akhavan, 2019)—in which each day is structured to include interactive writing, shared writing, small-group instruction, and independent writing. We hold steadfast to the interconnectedness of reading and writing; students learn to write from studying the craft moves of published authors (Dorfman & Capelli, 2017). Finally, and possibly most important, we hold steadfast to the simultaneous engagement of teachers as writers—to the deep understanding, authenticity, and empathy that is cultivated when teachers are writers.

It is our hope that this book will provide you with the tools you need to be a responsive writing teacher for the young writers in your classroom and that you will make these tools your own as you become more comfortable with these concepts and with the children in your care.

The Importance of Word Choice and Nuances

Words carry implicit messages and are especially important when working in communities and with children. Though we continue to unpack language used in the education realm, here a few relevant revisions made while writing:

- *Multilingual:* In an episode of the *Leading Equity* podcast titled "A Discussion on Linguistic Equity With Dr. Barbara (BK) Kennedy," host Dr. Sheldon Eakins (2020) expressed that referring to students as English learners or English language learners "privileges those who are English speakers first. Obviously, that's a deficit mindset that we're perpetuating." Therefore, within the linguistic domain, we have maintained the lens and terminology of students who are multilingual and on a continuum of Academic English proficiency.

- *Home language(s):* In efforts to expand and recenter language considerations from white-dominant Academic English, we use *home language(s)* when referring to language(s) children speak outside of school.

- *Inclusive language:* In this book, on tools, in stories, while teaching language, and in communication with families, we consider the inclusiveness of language, including *home* instead of *house*, *grown-ups* or *caregivers* instead of *parents*, *writers* instead of *boys and girls,* and gender-neutral pronouns (e.g., *they/them).*

- *"My students" and other possessive language use:* Kelsey had a conversation with LaToya Nelson (personal communication, April 2020), a friend and expert on trauma-informed practices, who nudged our thinking around languages and actions that implies ownership of children. We revised *our* students with *students in* our *classrooms.*

- *Use of* we*:* During the Coaching for Equity conference in February 2020 (hosted by the NYC Leadership Academy), Derrick Spaulding challenged attendees to monitor their use of *we* as opposed to *I.* The use of the plural first person can imply an assumption. In this book and in other areas of our lives, we—Kelsey and Melanie—have tried to increase our awareness of when we use first-person plural, making sure that we are using it with intention and agreement.

- *Language that centers dominant groups:* We've revised *children in front of us* to *children alongside us* after Kelsey asked, "Who does that phrase center?" We are also cognizant of the use of any language that intends *other* for the same reason, such as the term *diverse,* which centers whiteness, as explained by Chad Everett (2017) in "There Is No Diverse Book," on his blog, *ImagineLit.*

- *Capitalizing Black:* Alexandria Neason, from the *Columbia Journalism Review*, explains, "I view the term *Black* as both a recognition of an ethnic identity in the States that doesn't rely on hyphenated Americanness . . . and is also transnational and inclusive of our Caribbean [and] Central/South American siblings . . . . *African American* is not wrong, and some prefer it, but if we are going to capitalize *Asian* and *South Asian* and *Indigenous,* for example, groups that include myriad ethnic identities united by shared race and geography and, to some degree, culture, then we also have to capitalize *Black"* (Laws, 2020).

- *Person-first and asset-based language:* After attending a session at the 2018 NCTE Annual Convention with M. Colleen Cruz, we are cognizant of language that implies a deficit. Continuously, we avoid the attachment labels or identities on children and therefore use *children/students who are/who have* whenever possible.

online resources   Available for download at **resources.corwin.com/responsivewritingteacher.**