

# RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

## Agents of Change: Modeling Two-Year College English Teachers' Change Resilience and Saturation during COVID and (we hope) Beyond

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The classroom is one of the most dynamic work settings precisely because we are given such a short amount of time to do so much. To perform with excellence and grace, teachers must be totally present in the moment, totally concentrated and focused. When we are not fully present, when our minds are elsewhere, our teaching is diminished.

- bell hooks, *Teaching Community, A Pedagogy of Hope*

We dedicate this work to bell hooks (1952-2021), for indefatigably challenging us to become our richer, more resourced selves, and to all of the teachers who continue teaching, continuing surviving—and thriving—under the mountainous stress and strain of educational neoliberalism while juggling the triple pandemic of COVID-19, structural racism, and economic insecurity.

**I**n the spring of 2020, public health emergencies forced teachers around the globe to shift our teaching to predominantly online and remote modes. This change simultaneously contributed to the physical distancing of teachers from their colleagues, institutions, and—frequently—the teaching supports that sustained them. These changes were challenging for nearly everyone. Teachers drew on their existing knowledge of teaching, professional networks, and institutional support to maximize flexibility in course preparation and lesson implementation. This *en masse* transition required many teachers to incorporate new technologies (e.g., streaming software, video lectures, jam boards) into their teaching for the first time. Meanwhile, teachers sought to maintain or expand support for their students during this extreme crisis. Both changes added new dimensions to many teachers' perceptions of their teaching effectiveness and their experiences of joy for the craft itself.

As teachers and scholars, we have found this period at turns overwhelming and exhausting—but also intriguing. During the same spring that the United States first shuttered businesses in response to the pandemic, the authors of this paper were analyzing survey results from two-year college English instructors about their work expectations and constraints. In response to the shifting context of the pandemic, we developed a follow-up survey and solicited the same instructors to participate with the aim of capturing the lived experiences, frustrations, and triumphs of this time. We reported the initial results of the follow-up survey in three publications (Giordano et al., 2021; Griffiths et al., 2021; Tinoco et al., 2022); however, these summaries of broad themes could not adequately represent the depth and nuances of our data related to teachers' change responses. We asked: What strategies do teachers draw on to sustain themselves and their students during a crisis? What processes can help us to understand the affordances and limitations of adaptations available to teachers in such a time?

Our initial findings summarized changes in workloads and listed institutional and disciplinary resources available

to support that increase (Griffiths et al., 2021). These findings fairly represent the responses' central theme, but they belie an additional complicating theme we identified. Some teachers reported an initial (extreme) increase in workload followed by what they described as more effective teaching strategies and improved connections with students. We were heartened by this thin thread of silver lining: teachers who, burdened in a tempest of demands and a cacophony of novel yet disconnected resources, were finding salve for the teaching soul.

The challenge for us in writing this article has been to simultaneously articulate the responses we received and to present frameworks that coherently showcase the impact of the pandemic on these teachers, their descriptions of increased empathy and compassion, while also honoring the burnout and fatigue described by the majority of respondents. We also attempt to highlight a subtle but important thread where respondents described overall improvements to their teaching and work experiences. Here, we invite you to witness with us the experiences our respondents described—those that showcase burnout, those that demonstrate compassion, and those that offer hope. These findings suggest that some changes made during crisis can contribute to greater resilience, affording the thoughtspace and energy for radical teachers to adapt their curriculum and connect better with students.

## Literature: Teaching, Emotional Labor, and Burnout

Several writing instructors have published their experiences teaching after a crisis (Borrowman 2005; DeBacher & Harris-Moore, 2016; Murphy et al., 2005); however, few address the emotional dimensions of teaching during a crisis, in particular one as extended as the COVID-19 pandemic. Schlachte (2020) argues that “despite the recognition that disaster is increasingly a pressing concern for the discipline of composition, we still lack a more comprehensive approach to teaching through disaster” (p. 147). During our present crisis, many teachers needed to acclimate to the demands of incorporating technology into their teaching, as well as the increased emotional labor of supporting students, families, colleagues, and themselves during a time of uncertainty and often with decentralized resources.

Like public K-12 educators, community college instructors historically work with limited resources. Prior to the pandemic, two-year English teachers described rising levels of participant-defined burnout (Giordano et al., 2021). Heavy and unevenly distributed workloads (institutional service, curriculum reform, and equity-focused initiatives) contributed to discontent and reduced availability for students, leaving the most highly-engaged faculty burned out. School stoppages due to teacher shortages nationwide reinforce our belief that extreme teacher burnout and exhaustion continue (Fox, 2021). Indeed, teacher retirements and resignations are rising everywhere, increasing as much as 67% in some states (Sainato, 2021).

Helping students regulate their learning and their social and emotional experiences of learning is integral to two-year

college English instruction. For teachers, this means maintaining students' energy and motivation for learning in the face of challenges. Emotional labor refers to "labor that requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, 2012, p. 7). Teachers' emotional labor is evident in both tone (praise, moral support) and curricular modifications (extended due dates, supplemental assignment components, graded revisions and rework). Existing studies suggest such *ad hoc* adaptations can increase work for teachers and amplify burnout, particularly when teachers engage in prolonged compassionate pedagogies without broader structural support (Griffiths & Toth, 2017).

As hooks (2003) notes in *Teaching Community*, "The most negative consequence of this type of burnout is manifest when teachers begin to abhor and hate students" (p. 15), and, while we want to clarify that we did not observe this negative affect in our data, we also recognize this kind of burnout manifests when teachers begin to feel powerless to change the contexts in which they teach or the outcomes for student learning in those contexts. This form of hopelessness, what hooks calls "a prison of work" (p. 15), is a visceral danger of extended work in circumstances that teachers feel powerless to change and unable to avoid.

Experiences of burnout are higher when workers must perform emotions they do not feel (Jeung et al., 2018). Surface acting, or pretending to feel emotions for others' direct or indirect benefits, can exacerbate or accelerate burnout (Pienaar & Willemse, 2008). In contrast, deep acting, the intentional display of genuine emotions to facilitate connection with others, can mitigate feelings of burnout. Deep acting, a reflective engagement with students as other humans not just learners, is at the core of what bell hooks (1994) and others have called compassionate teaching.

In response to compounding stress in students' lives, many two-year college English instructors center their teaching in compassion, operating with increased love and care for students. Compassion is not just a feeling, but an intentional action (Goetz et al., 2010). hooks (2003) reminds us that teaching requires "an act of love, the act of entering and embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our own" (p. 132). Perhaps because the pandemic afforded us "entry" into one another's homes by way of web-cameras, we also had unprecedented entry into one another's realities.

Some teachers found themselves for the first time seeing and embracing students' lived realities in previously impossible ways. What we saw—and what our students told us when we listened—generated several and overlapping public discussions, calling educators to recognize and validate the lived realities we all bring to our screens (Finders & Muñoz, 2021). Simultaneously, teachers needed to decide how much of our own realities we wanted to share with our students—and how much of students' realities we could ethically require them to share without significant changes to our teaching praxis. Combined with quixotic changes in public health policy, disparate roll out of measures across government locales, and the integration of

persistently evolving technologies into our teaching, compassion was at the forefront of support for our students and ourselves. As we show, it was also a driving force—though not singular and not sufficient—affecting the ways teachers adapted during the first two semesters of the pandemic.

## Modeling Change: Stress Reaction and Teaching Modifications

Two theoretical frameworks conceptualize how humans respond to stress: the stress reaction model and the stress adaptation model (Michel et al., 2021). The stress reaction model describes stressors as cumulative; successive stressors increase the overall stress burden on an individual, leading to higher levels of burnout and exhaustion. Alternatively, stress adaptation posits that individuals adapt to stressful changes in their environments progressively. In this model, the initial stress caused by new circumstances decreases over time as an individual's capacity to adapt to stressors increases (Michel et al., 2021). This adaptation is made possible through the process of acclimation: people become accustomed to required changes in the stress-informed environment. Acclimation is informed by the circumstances of the work (e.g., in person, remote, etc.) and the availability of recovery behaviors (Michel et al., 2021). Importantly, stress reaction and stress adaptation may inform each other. When stressors continue beyond the point at which people can acclimate, the effect of acclimation may decrease, and reaction responses, such as burnout, increase. Within our examination of ongoing pandemic-induced stressors, we explore how stress reaction and stress adaptation frameworks can guide our understanding of how instructors interpreted, revised, and acclimated to their new learning experiences.

In addition to understanding how teachers responded to the stress of the current teaching environment, we also needed language for how they took up technology to enact change. We apply the definitional taxonomy of SAMR, substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition (Puentedura, 2014) to name and categorize teachers' new technology integrations. Substitution refers to the lowest level of integration, one in which teachers substitute one tool for another (e.g., discussions on Zoom replace but do not reimagine in-class discussions). Augmentation describes ways technology use adds to teaching (e.g., Zoom discussions with collaborative whiteboard or shared annotations). Modification refers to significant task redesign (i.e., an interactive classroom Youtube channel in which both students and instructors post videos). Redefinition refers to broad curricular changes in teaching afforded by technology, such as assignment and course design changes due to technological integrations (e.g., film adaptations of research papers, virtual visits from field specialists). SAMR offers interpretational definitions for the contexts and responses—both individual and institutional—that support or impede teaching. We applied the stress models and SAMR to understand the stress experiences and responses of instructors adapting to new and sudden demands to adapt their instruction and technology use *in situ*.

## Methods

We surveyed two-year English faculty about their experiences teaching during the pandemic. A total of 438 teachers completed our 22-question survey, sharing about their instructional and workload changes during spring 2020 at the beginning of the pandemic and during the subsequent fall 2020 semester. We compiled responses to the survey's four open-ended questions related to teacher perceptions of how the pandemic has affected current workload, teaching of English, support of students, and emotional labor. Through an inductive approach to qualitative analysis (Thomas, 2003), we analyzed the data iteratively, creating a list of emerging themes (Appendix). We then independently coded overlapping data sections to confirm our applied themes. Throughout the process, we met to discuss code themes and resolve discrepancies. This article resulted from our reflections upon what we can learn from teaching during a crisis. In discussing our findings, we theorize the paradigms of *change resilience* and *change saturation* in order to articulate the benefits and limits of compassion to sustain our resilience as teachers.

## What Teachers Say

In this article, we share three key findings to help teachers make sense of their labor during and beyond the pandemic. The first is related to compassion for students and experiences of change. Notably, teachers' overwhelming response was one of empathy for students' experiences of living, working, and learning during this time—while also caring for or grieving their own family members affected by the pandemic. Second, despite the great importance respondents placed on compassion, it was often an insufficient mediator for the new demands of pandemic teaching. Finally, we were surprised and motivated to discover that a small but vocal subcohort of our respondents described what we labeled *silver lining* teaching adaptations that they reported sustainably improved their overall teaching. These included more efficient delivery and grading practices, as well as increased emotional and social support for students resulting from redistributions of time. While our study is small, we believe the nuances between these responses offer more than mere hope or distinction. They document teaching adaptations that can improve teachers' experiences of stress during times of crisis and change, as well as a set of choices available for mitigating against—if not preventing—burnout and exhaustion. We present these findings as a nascent model for understanding how teachers adapt to extensive stressors and redefine teaching and learning in ways that sustain both their students and themselves.

## Compassion in the Face of Crisis

Teachers discussed or demonstrated *empathy for students* 271 times. For some, the pandemic illuminated aspects of students' lives these teachers had not previously considered:

I think I spend more time considering the educational backgrounds of my students than before. I rarely

considered the impact of economics on education at the secondary level. I teach a number of dual credit students who have struggled with access. Emotionally, I want to help them all while I also know that I can't and I find this frustrating. I am more aware.

The pandemic inspired many teachers to recommit to seeing their students as humans with lives and responsibilities beyond the classroom. One teacher, trained in trauma-informed pedagogy, described trying to "understand their heartache, ... the stress and the conditions they live in." Among the many challenges students faced, teachers identified new homelessness, illness, mental health challenges, and unemployment as the most pressing during the pandemic. As one teacher noted, "Many of my students are working harder than ever—sometimes teaching and caring for kids, caring for sick family members, and holding down jobs while also trying to go to school full time online (without quiet spaces to study, without reliable WiFi access, etc.)."

Teachers frequently described their students using phrases such as "stressed, depressed, and isolated," and they recognized the impact on students' ability to learn. Notably, these teacher-reported stressors were not new for many students but were exacerbated by the pandemic. Respondents suggest that the pandemic illuminated the many contingencies at play in the lives of most community college students (Parisi, 2020; Sullivan, 2017).

Our findings support recent work such as Nicole Mirra's *Educating for Empathy* (2018), Lisa Westman's *Teaching With Empathy* (2021), and Brené Brown's *The Gifts of Imperfection* (2010). These volumes and others put compassion and empathy at the heart of effective teaching and living. Griffiths (2020) recommends precisely this in her advice to new two-year college teachers: "To teach effectively and equitably requires that we hold compassion always at the center of our interactions with students" (p. 72). In centering compassion, these teachers' responses illustrated their reflexive and intentional teaching practices, which required—perhaps most essentially—their willingness to work situationally and creatively with students to help students achieve their goals. However, our findings also suggest that compassion for students alone is insufficient for sustaining these practices.

While we saw several teachers' increasing awareness of students' material realities and need for compassion, some teachers discussed the personal toll intense and extended compassion exacted:

Listening to my students and hearing their heartbreaking stories has hurt my own emotional health and weighs very heavily on my mind all hours of the day. It feels unescapable. I sometimes feel powerless. Virtual/online teaching during this pandemic has been heartbreaking and has resulted in endless hours of emotional labor. While I try to focus on my students and their needs, the lack of support or empathy from my college toward faculty is hurtful, too.

Those who acknowledged the increased emotional investment required for this level of care often expressed feelings of powerlessness or concern about the sustainability

of their pandemic-driven student support. This kind of powerlessness is precisely the lack of control and efficacy that drives burnout and exhaustion.

## The Limits of Compassion

Unsurprisingly, many teachers also described what they viewed as limitations or decreases in their teaching effectiveness. The pandemic and resulting instructional changes added yet more pressures to adapt their teaching by relying largely upon resources already exhausted prior to March of 2020—unsurprisingly, some teachers reported experiencing minimal effectiveness. We view these teachers as having reached what we call *change saturation*, a threshold after which one can no longer acclimate to new stressors, having already exercised one's fullest flexibility. In other words, faculty experiencing change saturation often recognized the benefits of adapting to support their students, but they had already been stretched thin by previous and constant adaptation demands. Importantly, many faculty experiencing change saturation continued to make changes—extending assignment deadlines or meeting students online outside class and office hours, but descriptions of these additional changes often corresponded with negative physical and mental well-being, including exhaustion, poor work-life balance, and—in some cases—even leaving the profession. Altogether, there were 52 examples of the theme of *exhaustion or decreased energy*. We found 62 additional examples of *frustration or low morale*.

As one teacher explained, "I'm constantly told to be empathetic to students but not given additional time or ideas on how to do so." This challenge compounded existing professional stressors. The material contexts of teaching can substantially impact instructors' feelings of satisfaction related to their teaching responsibilities, as well as their engagement with college service and their disciplinary communities (Griffiths et al., 2021). Two-year faculty have responded to austerity measures for decades, and since many were already stretched thin before the pandemic (Giordano et al., 2021; Griffiths et al., 2021), these teachers may have felt constrained in their ability to react to the crisis. One teacher's response echoed the weariness expressed by many others: "The lack of guidance and support from my college is one thing I've come to expect, but adding additional work responsibilities during this pandemic added insult to injury." Many instructors felt called upon to teach with greater compassion while their emotional, psychological, and physical reserves were simultaneously overtaxed by pandemic-induced additional emotional labor (Hochschild, 2012). Furthermore, perceptions of limited or nonexistent institutional support seemed to compound faculty exhaustion.

At times, this exhaustion struck deeply into respondents' foundational commitments to the profession. One respondent explained, "I can no longer say I love my life's work. I dread logging on to try to connect with students who signed up for classes they thought would be delivered in person." This comment highlights this teacher's empathy for students. It also illustrates a perception of limited ability to adapt teaching in crisis, seen in terms of the limitations

resulting from the instructional mode; this teacher's role became limited to responding to the crisis through redefinition rather than reimagining instruction altogether to meet students' (and their own) needs differently. In this respondent's description—a common one among our sample—the mode of instruction ("logging on") is viewed as the primary barrier to effective teaching ability, which the participant emphasizes "would have been delivered in person." The adaptation from in-person to online instruction without a corresponding reimagining of what instruction looks like fits Puentedura's (2006, 2014) notion of technology integration at the level of substitution. Substitution is the most basic form of technology integration and does not enhance students' learning experience. In fact, it may be in this case that trying to achieve the "in person" experience at a time when so many restrictions pressed down on our professional and personal lives only amplified the crisis experience by emphasizing what we were *not* doing.

Indeed, one respondent linked the forced transition in instructional modality to decreased teaching effectiveness: "It's hard to funnel a ton of energy into blank screens with no feedback. It's hard to send emails out into the ether never knowing if they're actually getting to students. It's hard to watch them not getting the material." Another instructor described the limits of teaching effectiveness:

My students don't get the lecture material unless they actually go through them whereas in a f2f class, they would get the info by being present. My struggling students who would previously make it through are disappearing. I reach out to students via telephone now, which I wouldn't have done before.

Here, similar to the previous example, the mode of instruction—moving from in-person lecture, described as "actually going through," is juxtaposed with online instruction, which the participant suggests limits their students' ability to be "present." The teacher augments instruction through individual outreach to students in an effort to improve—or even only maintain—pre pandemic levels of teaching effectiveness. However, this outreach is always *in addition to* their other teaching responsibilities, asking them to do more and to do so individually, compounding the work already required to adapt their teaching. This kind of augmentation was common in participants' responses, which showcased time and again teachers' commitment to supporting students. At the same time, these individual phone calls—clearly a demonstration of compassion—also loaded increased responsibility on the teacher with none of the integrated support that might make them sustainable.

Teachers described a desire for—and efforts to create—stronger connections to their professional community. Many teachers experiencing change saturation emphasized the toll of compounding "emotional labor" from simultaneously increasing efforts to support students and decreasing opportunities to interact with other teaching professionals. Even as some instructors returned to in-person teaching, this return seemed to exacerbate awareness of their isolation. Several teachers described "miss[ing] my colleagues" or other previous forms of collegial interaction.

As one teacher noted, “While I still connect with my colleagues, it’s not the same.” Beyond a sense of community, these teachers may have been missing the kinds of social connections and support Griffiths and Jensen (2019) highlight as essential for team resilience—a social structure that can reinforce and extend individual resilience to stress, prolonging and amplifying the change efforts of individual teachers.

## Modeling Change Resilience

Although many comments suggested teachers had reached change saturation, our data also contained several instances of successful, sustainable changes and feelings of renewed hope. We describe these responses as illustrating *change resilience*. We define change resilience as the ability to continue acclimating to stressors through redefinition of one’s teaching perspective and approaches in new ways that support long-term pedagogical change and work-life balance. In some instances, change resilience altered the very learning and relationship building possible within the (virtual) English classroom. Importantly, the cases we highlight here seem to showcase global adaptations in teaching. Teachers were not recreating their in-person courses online but entirely rethinking—modifying and redefining—their roles as teachers and the shape of their courses entirely (Puentedura, 2014). Faculty who engaged in change resilience noted in particular how they used the pandemic as an “opportunity to be more thoughtful and intentional about the course content and delivery.” Frequently, the forced move to new online modes and the integration of new teaching technologies motivated them to envision the utility of their changes beyond the pandemic.

Oftentimes, teachers who demonstrated change resilience also described themselves as “[being] more creative, [having] more room to listen, [and being] more merciful.” Other respondents similarly modified their hours, means/frequency of student communication, and assessment practices. They also connected students to resources and increased their support of the technological and noncognitive aspects of learning. Their actions enact teaching as a “caring profession” (hooks, 2003, p. 86) and Griffith’s (2020) call to “incorporate any knowledge we have about the psychological and material realities of students’ lives” (p. 76).

The ability to reciprocally reflect upon and alter one’s practice was another important aspect of change resilience. Some teachers noted how shifting to remote teaching freed them to refocus and establish balance:

Without the stresses that come from in-person teaching (like a long commute), I find myself having even more patience, empathy, and consideration for student needs, mainly because I have more time and energy to devote to those things than ever before. I am, overall, a dramatically happier, more productive, and more helpful instructor thanks to being able to focus most on what matters.

Similarly, another participant described:

I am using new technologies that augment my particular teaching style and in some ways have improved my interactions with the students, more opportunities for formative feedback. I am also more engaged, more animated, more motion driven. I am now more of a cheerleader than I have ever been before.

Finally, some respondents noted that the shift to online teaching afforded them more opportunities to engage professionally with their discipline, which further allowed them to restructure their courses and redefine their roles as teachers:

I feel like I am a better teacher. This has given me more time for professional development, getting certified to teach online, revising my peer workshop online practice and allowed me to create better work life balance. I don’t have to commute between so many schools as an adjunct which has really benefited my mental health.

As these responses indicated, the shift to online teaching created significant modifications to the tasks of teaching and also positively affected respondents’ mental health. Such online teaching went beyond attempts to replicate “in-person” instruction to reconceptualize connectivity within the course structure and curriculum (Puentedura, 2014). We also consider how our envisioning and integrating of technology into our courses in times of crisis has the potential to improve students’ learning experiences and the experiences of teachers. Teachers who were able to exercise change resilience were better positioned to sustain their energy for change rather than extend themselves to the point of burnout. These changes to teaching were transformational—reimagined and redefined by teachers for the pandemic and beyond.

## Redefining the Meaning of Teaching

Sustained, adaptive change required modification and redefinition of how to use technology as in Puentedura’s (2014) SAMR taxonomy, and also the meaning of teaching and connecting with students. Change resilience necessitated a combination of individual efforts and a network of human, institutional structure, and technological resources for introducing and supporting adaptation. Differences in adaptability seemed to inform the sustainability of teaching and teachers’ satisfaction with their work.

In particular, teachers who engaged in change resilience had sufficient resources to revise their teaching preparations post-pivot (March 2020) so that their subsequent teaching became easier and more efficient, and/or their ability to connect and support students’ individual needs improved. In particular, we found tentative connections between institutional or professional support and teachers’ proactive and positive response to pandemic-instigated change. While several instructors reported receiving limited institutional support and being simultaneously overwhelmed by new/increasing responsibilities, others described positive instructional and professional consequences of being able to control their own time,

While teaching entirely online from home, I am more relaxed and am able to spend more time interacting with students individually and planning course content.... I love it and hope I never have to go back to the way things were. Even though the amount of work is the same, it's better work.

Perhaps because this instructor felt ownership of their decision to not return to the classroom, they were also better equipped for sustainable changes in their course redesign. Our data illustrate the important role that agency and autonomy play in mitigating against frustration and burnout.

When institutional supports were insufficient or absent, some faculty sought out professional opportunities beyond their colleges. For example, teachers participated in remote professional development opportunities:

I took the initiative to take free or discounted online course design courses and webinars. I have quite the stack of certificates attesting to the number and nature of programs I attended. All of those informed my online course design.... Since the pivot last March, I have done nothing but train in online course design and best practices. I've overhauled my previous online classes and built others.

This sense of control over time and circumstances was present among many teachers demonstrating change resilience.

## Practical Implications for Radical Teachers, Colleagues, and Administrators

We authors are faculty and dual-role faculty-administrators. These roles have positioned us variously to shape the conditions in which other faculty work while sustaining our own well-being during a period of educational austerity and a global pandemic. We, too, are tired. As we discuss the implications of this study, we draw on our experiences at our institutions, an exercise that points to both the importance of developing a framework for fostering change resilience and to the vulnerability of doing so. Here, we suggest an emergent framework for establishing and fostering change resilience among ourselves as radical teachers, our radical colleagues, administrators, and institutions. The essential components of a change-resilience framework are autonomy, action, disposition, and time—time to reflect on one's own teaching, to reimagine student learning, and to re-envision the teacher-learner relationship globally, supported by colleagues and institutions as outlined below.

The criteria of autonomy and action in this change-resilience framework make visible a fundamental tension between located agency and community cooperation. Both agency and cooperation are essential for teachers to autonomously adapt their teaching. We define professional autonomy as the ability to make theoretically-sound, student-responsive choices adhering to the recognized and regulated field of knowledge informing and advancing that work (Griffiths, 2017). Action depends on teachers' located agency to revise courses in a timely manner, and to

construct our own teaching spaces and design assessments for learning in the classroom and online (Griffiths, 2017; Suh & Jensen, 2020).

Disposition, among all of these, is the most individual and personalized characteristic—and the most difficult to foster. Cultivating dispositions of hope, engagement, and compassion among faculty, colleagues, and staff calls upon administrators and lead faculty to curate and perform these dispositions. We cannot help colleagues adopt and adapt novel theories and praxis if we, ourselves, are disengaged from or unaware of disciplinary scholarship and the professional organizations that sustain our active dialogues. In contrast, time, the fourth element, depends most on institutional affordances over individual dispositions. Below, we draw on the framework's essential elements to offer practical implications for creating and fostering resilience in our teaching communities.

Although our data reveals change resilience as an individual characteristic, we recognize that our framework may be incomplete in addressing the interrelation between individual motivation and the social structures (i.e., classrooms, departments, institutions, disciplinary organizations) impacting change resilience. It might be daunting to consider one's individual responsibility for creating compassionate learning environments, but as hooks (1994) encourages, "As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another's voices, in recognizing one another's presence" (p. 8). We offer change resilience as a conceptual conversation to generate such interest in each other's experiences and voices, to find ways that colleagues and institutions can limit conditions fostering change saturation.

## Radical Teacher: Critical Self Reflection (Disposition)

Before we can enact hooks's (1994) "recognizing one another's presence" (p. 8), we must start with ourselves and critical self-reflection in our immediate capacity, or disposition, for change resilience as radical teachers. We offer the following questions for reflecting upon our individual needs and agencies before we turn to the collective community cooperation necessary to move forward together:

- What is my current capacity for change resilience?
- How does my change resilience capacity affect my community?

Our answers to these questions can help gauge our disposition towards change resilience to enact hooks's classroom community through action, autonomy and time.

## Radical Pedagogy: The Change Resilience-Compassion Intersection (Action)

Depending on where you are in your change resilience journey, here are some points to reflect on and share with colleagues:

Related to online-synchronous pedagogical modalities:

- How could the chat box or private message function create new, supportive lines of communication for students who may not traditionally be included in class discussions such as shy/introverted, multilingual, and differently-abled students?
- How do these modalities fit student learning needs, especially among working parents or first-generation college students?

Related to applying new understandings of compassion and change resilience to understanding past experiences:

How might students benefit from complicating the notion of grades (e.g., labor-based contract grading, ungrading, delayed grading) and grade deadlines (e.g., “best by” dates)? How do we compassionately and justly communicate students’ options regarding assignment submissions and how those options can be empowering?

How does a flexible working environment impact student-facing services such as office hours? Is physical presence required, or can technological affordances make virtual teaching and office hours more convenient and effective?

Related to applying change resilience and compassion to inform programmatic issues such as directed self-placement, inclusive curriculum building, and assessment.

We offer these questions to complicate our pedagogical understanding, to stimulate reflection in collegial conversations about what is valued after the pandemic learning experience. Although it may be shared at this point by primarily individual voices more so than in chorus, such an understanding is one of the most important steps that radical teachers can take to transform their capacity for change resilience and compassion.

## Radical Colleguing (Disposition and Autonomy)

Perhaps even more essential to fostering change resilience is the work of colleguing for resilience. We use *colleagu* as a verb to emphasize the action involved in supporting other educators’ praxis and change resilience within our institutions and our professional communities. Further, we recognize how disposition and autonomy impact our ability to colleague. Colleguing for resilience resists the “prison of work” (hooks, 2003, p. 15), that hopelessness resulting from feelings of powerlessness, and begins with the disposition of compassion for our coworkers. But it does not end there. Indeed, the radical shift of being a colleague—

being in league with another—occurs when we move beyond feelings of empathy to recognizing our shared experience engaging in this work together.

As noted above, four members of our writing team have held or currently hold administrative duties. We have found ourselves best able to engage in change resilience and collectively seek sustainable change when we can overcome divisions between faculty, staff, and administrators. This requires us to act autonomously while simultaneously supporting others’ autonomy. At some institutions, this might involve flattening administrative hierarchies so that those instituting pedagogical changes are better represented in policy decisions. However, we recognize in our own limited spheres of influence that this work begins by focusing on changes that need not wait for large-scale structural change. For example, before program-level goal setting, we examine whether our proposed goals fit our vision of community member affirmation. We further examine the anticipated workload required to meet those goals, seeking to assign tasks to equitably draw upon colleagues’ time and talents.

Additionally, those of us who facilitate meetings can model rhetorical listening and radical empathy, thus fostering a culture for teaching reflection and growth. This rhetorical listening “has the potential to generate more productive discourses about and across both commonalities and differences” (Ratcliffe, 1999, p. 220). This listening can precipitate belonging. We can also share about our involvement in professional organizations, inter-departmental and inter-institutional collaborations, and other ongoing research or service. Such sharing structures space for learning with and from colleagues and establishes a program environment of professional engagement, communication, and collaboration. We create similar opportunities within our professional organizations by seeking out and engaging in working groups or networks. Importantly, the resulting colleguing supports our agency to choose how we engage in the field and affirms our existing interests and work. We further encourage radical teachers to consider:

- How might we adapt our watercooler conversations to expand the perspectives included in our “community”?
- How could we structure our departments to better support pedagogical colleguing and community?
- How can we support each other’s emotional labor needs?

Through addressing these questions, we orient ourselves to consider how reshaping the elements of a resilience framework—autonomy, action, disposition, and time—can contribute to individual and organization-level changes that foster resilience—and by extension, better teaching and learning.

## Radical Administration: Institutional Support (Time)

While individual critical reflection, pedagogical considerations, and colleaguery will be helpful in moving forward together, we do not wish to perpetuate neoliberal fallacies that individual actions solve systemic issues. Change resiliency is materially affected by many institutional conditions, including orientations to professional development, (mis)understandings of academic disciplines (e.g., rhetoric and composition), and students' pedagogical and emotional labor needs. While radical teachers engage with those things (sometimes) within our control, we also need radical administrators and radical institutions to act for optimal change resiliency.

First and foremost, faculty need to be trusted to guide their own professional development. Establishing institutional value for professional development is the most important opportunity that administrators can contribute to continuing education, specifically by offering incentive systems and protected time for professional development.

Second, radical administrators and radical teachers must collaborate to make teaching modality (e.g., online synchronous, asynchronous, in person) a merit-based assignment. The professional development structure can encourage this dialogue while enhancing student-facing flexibility. A merit-based approach explicitly recognizes that synchronous and asynchronous online teaching are not easier (and often are more difficult) than in-person teaching. Further, these modalities require high levels of technical writing and pedagogical skill, and modification and redefinition of how to use technology, as in Puentedura's (2014) SAMR taxonomy, and how the technology can change pedagogy and best practices. Adaptation of online synchronous modality en masse is the largest pedagogical advancement to date in postsecondary education and requires inquiry and development. Administrators who incentivize this inquiry through professional development support will be rewarded by faculty ingenuity and increased capacity for change resilience.

Finally, radical administrators must support their faculty through institutional conditions that reflect understanding of the field's pedagogical needs—faculty working conditions that maximize student learning. Fields that teach highly political and socially-situated subjects such as language or writing, and that are often “gateway” courses in a student's first semester, need more material and institutional support. These classes require greater emotional labor—and change resilience—to optimize learning conditions for an increasingly non-traditional population of students, especially while we all cope with the long-standing ramifications of a pandemic/endemic. Instead of offering self-care and webinars, the most radically compassionate move is to acknowledge and improve teachers' material working conditions. Any resiliency, but especially change resiliency, requires financial stability and adequate workload considerations. The National Two-Year College English Association describes a field in crisis due to a cornucopia of inadequate working conditions, specifically in teaching first-year composition (Klausman & Hassel, 2020; Suh et al.,

2020). With this documentation of the inequity of exploitative adjunct labor, crushing workloads of many full-time faculty (especially at community colleges), and high institutional service and emotional labor expectations, our change-saturated condition is unsurprising at colleges and universities throughout the nation. Ultimately, this harms not only students, but also faculty morale and institutional culture. Radical administrators who recognize these issues and work with faculty to change them will see palpable shifts in change resilience, which will then radically enhance their institution's missions.

## A Call for National Composition Workload Reform: 4x4

Given what we have learned from our survey about the importance of teaching with compassion and empathy, and also what we have learned about change saturation—a threshold after which teachers can no longer acclimate to new stressors, having already exercised one's fullest flexibility—we call for a 4 x 4 teaching schedule for all two-year college composition teachers—teaching four classes each semester instead of five (Giordano et al., 2021; Toth & Sullivan, 2016). This is a structural way to promote change resilience instead of overwork and burnout. If we understand teaching conditions as student learning conditions, this national workload model puts student learning, sustainable compassion and empathy, and social justice front and center. We also echo calls for class sizes no greater than 20 students for all composition and writing-intensive classes across the disciplines. This policy model is supported by many (if not all) of the relevant national organizations in our field, including Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC, 2015), Two-Year College English Association (Giordano et al., 2021), and Association of Departments of English ([MLA Academic Program Services, 2020](#)). Indeed, CCCC states that “Ideally, classes should be limited to 15. Remedial or developmental sections should be limited to a maximum of 15 students. No English faculty members should teach more than 60 writing students a term” (CCCC, 2015, n.p.). Many of these best practice recommendations were in place pre-pandemic and are even more important now as we explore new models of serving students and faculty in college teaching. Enforcing this workload standard nationwide is one way to redefine the meaning of post-pandemic teaching and to empower departments, institutions, disciplines, and legislative bodies to structure change resilience into the daily lives of community college teachers.

## Conclusion

The teachers' responses shared here powerfully illustrate what is most important for teaching and learning. Although many teachers described instructional changes and increasing flexibility as an enactment of their efforts to teach with compassion, their responses also illustrated the limits of compassion when teachers are stretched too thin, lack structural support to modify their work environment or conditions, or do not extend compassion to themselves. Our data suggest that change resilience is essential if teachers

are to sustain their ability to teach with compassion. Change resilience is made possible (but not inevitable) through autonomy, action, disposition, and time. In particular, the disposition of hope motivates our reconceptualization of teaching from a focus on content and instructional mode to a focus on relationships and the learning activities sustaining them. Where we saw change resilience, teachers prioritized communication, flexibility, and learning over communication mode or assessment.

We have important things to learn from the experiences of change saturation and change resilience. In particular, the gift of teachers experiencing change saturation have given us an increased understanding and sensitivity to the emotional labor required for teaching, especially for teaching composition and the limits of that labor (and not just during a pandemic). The responses shared here help us appreciate our vulnerability and encourage us to take care of our mental health, to seek out teaching practices that support our long-term professional development. They also demonstrate that we need to take care of each other. This may be among the most radical proposals we are tendering: *radical colleagu-ing* (not just teaching) with compassion is essential if we want to foster and support the conditions for sustaining radical teaching. Change resilience allows colleges to react to new situations with agility. As this will not be the last pandemic or catastrophe, such resilience will only be at our disposal if it is supported and actively fostered individually and collectively—and scaled institutionally.

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## Coding Scheme and Quoted Examples

PARENT CODE	CHILD CODE	EXAMPLE
<b>Opportunities</b>		I took the initiative to take free or discounted online course design courses and webinars. . . .
<b>Perceived Pandemic Pressure</b>	Additional Responsibilities	I spend a lot more time teaching students how to navigate and use the virtual/online Canvas [and]the emotional and mental health ....
	Empathy for Students	Listening to my students and hearing their heartbreaking stories has hurt my own emotional health.... It feels unescapable. I sometimes feel powerless.
	Exhaustion Decreased Energy	or It's emotionally exhausting for all of us.
	Frustration Morale	or Low The lack of guidance and support from my college is one thing I've come to expect, but adding additional work responsibilities during this pandemic added insult to injury.
	Ranger (Increased Pressure to Solve Issues Alone)	Model I'm left holding the bag, trying to counsel in ways I should not be, have no expertise in,....
	Sickness/Crisis	Massive loss on a grand scale. Then there's fear of getting COVID. And then there's the uncertainty of when anything's going to get better. . . .
	Technology	Zoom is a soul-sucking nightmare.
Work-Life Challenges	Boundary I wake up in the middle of the night to grade/work when my small children are asleep....	
<b>Pandemic-Inspired Change</b>	Assessment	I excuse students from assignments when they are suffering as long as the skill is assessed at other times.
	Changes for the Better	. . . more patience, empathy, and consideration for student needs, mainly because I have more time and energy to devote to those things than ever before.
	Departmentally-Mediated Behaviors	. . . a fine line between upholding academic standards or letting them go . . .
	Individually-Mediated Changes	. . . reflect and focus more on my teaching practice.
Institutionally-Mediated Behaviors	The institution [instituted]... structural changes [and]...propose[d] significant changes to faculty contracts	

without faculty input...necessitat[ing] paying closer attention, engaging more with colleagues.

Instructor Personal . . . better work-life balance. I don't have to commute between so many schools . . .

Pedagogical/Class-room I have gotten really good at online teaching strategies.

Student-Teacher Relationship Communicating on Zoom has allowed a kind of close-up interaction and follow up with individual students not previously as manageable with in-person classes.

Technology I am thrilled to record all my classes now. If a student is absent, they can "attend" that way.

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**No Difference**

My committee/service work has remained the same.

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