You have stated in this book and elsewhere that online writing instruction (OWI)likely requires its own theory. Why is that so?

Well, my empirical studies, observations and instructional experiences tell me that there's something different about teaching and learning in online settings. Although some settings allow audio and visual instruction, and others allow synchronous chat, much of the online instruction we have is asynchronous in nature—like email and discussion postings, and written response to assignments. Oral, facial, and body language is suppressed or masked in most of those settings. In an asynchronous setting, it is practically nullified.

It's always been my thinking that there is something about communication and its relationship to instruction that differs in an online instructional setting. I think that we need a clear theory of a digital response to writing—one that acknowledges that response to writing is, in fact, teaching writing. That includes a variety of online settings both synchronous and asynchronous, modalities with voice and text, and one that encourages a range of composing and rhetorical theories and processes. It also needs to be one that particularly addresses text-based settings where the instruction comes primarily from digitally produced response, in others words, where response is typed and then shared.

At this point in your study of OWI, have any viable new theories begun to emerge?

Well, yes. I've thought a lot about composing theories for online writing instruction, and I really don't think that is where the theories need to emerge at this point. In fact, I think an eclectic use of expressivism, social construction, reader response, and process theories are probably appropriate.

Probably what isn't appropriate on the composing theory side of the house is a strict adherence to post-process theory because if writing cannot be taught (as post-process suggests to us), then there is no such thing as OWI. It's just an oxymoron.

Instead, it seems to me that we need an instructional theory, and that would be that the basics of reading and writing are of the greatest concern for a theory of OWI. We're not looking at a process or a model for writing, but a model for teaching writing that uses a variety of pedagogical tools—so instead, an instructional model.