Moore, Cindy, and Peggy O'Neill, eds. *Practice in Context: Situating the Work of Writing Teachers*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2002.

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Over twenty years ago when Ann Berthoff asked the question "Is teaching still possible?" it was not meant rhetorically. Berthoff voiced deep concerns that teaching might not be possible in a climate dominated by market, rather than educational imperatives, where teaching itself seemed out of date in the company of high theory, where ideas and contexts alike appeared immutable to change.

The thirty essays in this collection on the teaching of writing—its practices, contexts and theoretical underpinnings—suggest that Berthoff's question remains relevant; they answer it with an unqualified, sometimes perhaps too unqualified, affirmative. Teaching is possible, the authors all assert, and it's most possible when teachers practice what Kathleen Yancey calls in her Introduction to the book "reflective teaching." As she describes it, reflective teaching's primary goal is to foster connections—between students and the curriculum they participate in, between teachers and students, between actions and theories. As Yancey implies, reflective teaching occurs not only or even primarily in private, but communally, as teachers share observations and insights with others—their students and their fellow teachers.

Taking this idea of reflective practice involving communal enterprise, editors Moore and O'Neill have assembled a group of writers who recount both their "theoretical warrants" and the material conditions in which they work as a way to explain and investigate the strategies they choose in designing curriculum, and the activities and evaluations that accompany those strategies. As the editors note, the idea for the book grew from their own felt need to combine teaching strategies, contexts, and theory in order to speak to the disparate groups of students and teachers each of them worked with in their own institutions: "Secondary English

teachers pursuing an M.A., new teaching assistants preparing to teach college composition for the first time, graduate students taking the TA prep course only because it fit within their schedule, adjunct instructors with no previous course work in composition, and experienced instructors who wanted to rejuvenate their practice." The variety of the constituency in their teaching preparation courses made defining the integral, symbiotic relationship between theory and practice difficult, and their collection attempts to make that relationship visible as authors think through the warrants that inform their own practices and personal understanding.

Moore and O'Neill call their book a guide for teachers: its emphasis is placed squarely on classroom practice, its rationales and its effects. Written by a diverse group of teachers in a wide variety of settings, from high school English classes to basic writing centers to graduate level writing courses, these essays all attempt to enact reflective teaching as they draw connections, consider outcomes of practices, and even speculate about possibilities for change. Although Yancey herself doesn't cite change as a necessary factor in reflective teaching, Berthoff would insist upon it, and many of the authors suggest how integral change is to the process of reflection.

The book is divided into four sections: course design, assignments, supporting activities, and response to and assessment of student work. These categories are clearly designed to support reflective teaching as authors share with readers teaching decisions as they analyze experiences, outcomes and beliefs. Some essays use student writing; others specify institutional requirements; many include assignments and classroom activities. The format varies a little according to the pedagogical activity the author explores, but each follows a basic pattern: a statement that explains context—student and community demographics and institutional culture; a description of the activity or assignment, with examples and illustrations; and a section that provides rationales and reflections on the pedagogy. The descriptions of institutions and students in the small introductory portraits are

fascinating in themselves: the high school students writing with alternative research methods at small private Concordia Lutheran High School in Fort Wayne, Indiana; the deaf and hearing impaired writers producing narratives at Gallaudet; the online journalistic efforts of first year students at Florida State. These vignettes depict vividly, if briefly, students' circumstances and needs, institutional constraints, and cultural opportunities.

Some essays within each section offer reflection on the integration of theory with practice more directly than others. SueEllen Duffy discusses basic writing courses at Georgia Southern, and describes how her course fosters literacy development and confronts the politics of the weighted term "remedial" as she considers pedagogical aims and effects. Hildy Miller provides both a syllabus for her advanced writing course and a reflection on the challenges offered by incorporating service-learning requirements in writing courses. Stephen Wilhoit suggests strategies for making students more responsible for their own learning in his description of the "reader rhetoric" his students produce, and includes student reactions to the new roles he has offered them. These essays, like many others in the collection, consciously pull together pedagogical action and underlying philosophy in ways that should help teachers consider for themselves both method and belief.

Because the essays are all brief—none is longer than nine pages—some ideas are left unexplored or unproblematized. Some authors in the collection assume that writing courses should begin with the personal element, presumably because students find it easier to negotiate their own lives, even though experience and research might suggest otherwise at least as often as not. Katie Stahlnecker, for example, notes that some of her advanced composition students "initially (and inevitably) resist or misinterpret this personal format for a writing course" as she describes her emphasis on autobiographical writing (37). Poststructuralist and feminist arguments about what constitutes the "personal" and the limitations of personal experience could contribute to Stahlnecker's discussion, giving insight into

students' worries and offering new possibilities for approaching autobiographical tasks. A sharper edge that critiques and offers alternative arguments might allow readers of the collection to ask new questions not only about the uses and the placement of personal writing, but about other issues that beg for deeper analysis: the relationship between portfolio evaluation and high stakes assessment, the effect of new technologies on writing processes, the role of literary work in a writer's development, or the uses of small groups beyond peer review.

Still, these essays are competently, compactly written and useful to teachers for the insights they give into the always unique—but always commonly shared—concerns of those who teach writing. The reflections that conclude each essay often provide the most provocative and challenging moments in the book, especially in essays where authors go beyond affirmation to question themselves or speculate about change. Tonya Stremlau considers the implications of admitting some hearing students to her classes at Gallaudet University, an institution dedicated to the teaching of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. If hearing students arrive in her writing classroom, she muses, "They might need to think harder about how being able to hear has affected them, since as a majority trait hearing is usually transparent. I am interested to see how such an addition to the classroom might affect everyone's understanding" (81). Heather Bruce discovers new insights about gender and genre as she reflects on her synthesis assignment:

> Teaching this class, I realized that I had been pedagogically blind to what it might mean to write academically as a white woman, a working class student, or a person of color. . . It was pedagogically impossible and totally unacceptable not to take critical stock of the gendered nature of the bodies sitting in my class—a factor, I argue, that warrants consideration in every writing class. (91)

Conclusions like these offer proof of the value of reflective practice for teachers.

And several of the essays exceed their mission to provide clear accounts of reflection on theories and practices in the writing classroom. They depict symbolic moments that invite the reader to remake them for herself. Stephen Smith's honest account of portfolio instruction and assessment at his high school in Bullitt County, Kentucky, demonstrates how state initiatives and individual teacher's expertise can coexist peacefully and productively as he describes how he manages that connection in his teaching. Margrethe Alschwede writes movingly about how writing can "save the world" as students discover local concerns they can address and find new authority and engagement in the community around them. And Wendy Bishop's provocatively titled "Steal This Assignment: The Radical Revision," eloquently explains how students become engaged in making change when change matters. Her concluding address to her audience might be taken as an admonition that readers of all the essays in this collection should take to heart: "Now it's your turn. . . Make it yours" (212). Reading about practices, courses, and assessments that work well affirms and inspires. But as Bishop warns us, teachers have to remake ideas in their own images for their own students if those ideas are to work. I think Berthoff might agree that teachers' readiness to remake and willingness to change might be finally the only way teaching is really possible.

Work Cited

Berthoff, Ann. "Is Teaching Still Possible? Writing, Meaning and Higher Order Reasoning." *College English* 46. 8 (December, 1984) 743-755.