Lynch, Paul. *After Pedagogy: The Experience of Teaching*. Urbana: CCCC/NCTE, 2013. xxiii + 171 pages. ISBN 978-0-8141-0087-5.

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How important is the distinction between theory and practice in the teaching of writing, really? If in a conference presentation I were to propose a particular theory for understanding the ways students relate to their writing in social media, for instance, but I did so without also discussing how to put these ideas to use in one's teaching, does that render the theory useless? Conversely, if I were to outline a particular writing assignment in that same presentation, but I did so without explaining how it fits within a particular pedagogical framework, does that render the assignment (or at least my understanding of it) unsound? These may come across as impertinent questions, especially for those who view theory and practice as separate sides of the same coin, but the debate over these concepts and their importance in the work of rhetoric and composition instruction is one that has been conspicuously underway in our field at least since 1990 when Maxine Hairston took to task the "very badly written, convoluted, and pretentious" articles in *College English*, ones that "are as opaque and dull as anything in *PMLA* or *Critical Inquiry*" (695). Hairston's is an early shot in what Sidney Dobrin would dub composition's "own version of the 'theory wars'" (164), which arguably came to a head in the early 2000s with the introduction of postprocess theory and the suggestion that writing can't actually be taught. It's no surprise that from that moment forward the idea of proposing a "post" anything in composition studies has been a fairly hard sell.

But in *After Pedagogy*, Paul Lynch offers a compelling argument for thinking about teaching in an era of postpedagogy, a term that in his use points to the growing body of scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies that in one way or another shrugs off our field's so-called pedagogical imperative. Pointing to the likes of Diane Davis, Byron Hawk, Cynthia Haynes, Thomas Rickert, Victor

Vitanza, and Lynn Worsham, among others, as examples of scholars engaged in postpedgaogical writing studies, Lynch suggests this scholarship has merit even though he grants that much of it demonstrates what experienced teachers implicitly know, "that pedagogy does not often survive contact with the classroom" (xv). Even though Lynch dismisses the theory-practice binary as untenable, his project is nevertheless built on the tension this binary produces, which is to say even though the conceptual divide separating theory from practice might be false, many of us still regularly ask what Lynch calls the Monday Morning Question, "the question that asks, 'This theory (or idea, or philosophy) you're proposing is great and everything, but what am I supposed to do with it when the students show up on Monday morning?'" (xi). Rather than set aside this question while letting multiple definitions of theory and practice "displace one another," as John Schilb once advised (96), Lynch opts instead to approach the question by rethinking its timing. We have grown accustomed to imagining pedagogy as something that gets worked out *before* we enter the classroom, but such inquiry is often more valuable *afterward*; after, that is (and as the book's subtitle reads), the experience of teaching.

Beginning with a reflection on Quintilian's distrust of systematic pedagogy, Lynch uses Chapter 1 to review the constraints writing teachers are increasingly up against when the efficacy of teaching has become a possibility difficult to grasp. Many writing instructors now feel adrift, that is, because postpedagogical and similar antifoundational philosophies have all but forced us to question what counts as composition's teachable knowledge. But Lynch is nevertheless hopeful, especially in his attempt to come to terms with the uncertainty that results when we realize teaching is much too particular of an activity to be treated systematically, but also too complex of an activity to be reduced to "recipe-swapping," a phrase he borrows from Ann Berthoff (17). Lynch's solution is found in revitalizing the concept of lore, Stephen North's term for the ad hoc accumulation of beliefs and practices that, according to North, constitute the

everyday knowledge of "Practitioners," those in composition studies for whom teaching is their primary responsibility. Even though the idea of lore has always had pejorative overtones because it supposedly points to knowledge that lacks rigor and theoretical grounding, Lynch recognizes the actual practice of teaching offers composition instructors something that cannot be otherwise learned: *experience*. Taking up John Dewey's pragmatic understanding of experience as "the everyday world and the methodological reflection that infuses that everyday world with meaning," Lynch sees an opening "to make a method of lore" and "to talk and write about teaching after pedagogy" (18). Here is where Lynch's book really gets its footing, especially as an extended meditation on how a pragmatic approach to experience can help us to develop habits of reflection that mediate pedagogy with practice.

In Chapter 2, Lynch steps back to review two strains of composition scholarship that have contributed to the rise of postpedagogical writing studies, postprocess theory and the third sophistic school. Using a detailed discussion of Thomas Kent's work to sketch a history of postprocess, Lynch offers a judicious overview of the key ideas that led postprocess advocates to shirk the articulation of best practices (or how-to approaches, e.g., the Monday Morning Question) to emphasize the paralogic and thus non-codifiable nature of communicative interaction, including writing. That is, understanding writing as paralogic (as something that resists instrumental control, i.e., its effects can only be guessed at before the fact) many postprocess theorists, including Kent, have argued that writing can't be taught. Even though this claim was delivered more often than not for its rhetorical effect, many critics interpreted it as an outright rejection of pedagogy altogether. But as Lynch explains, "postprocess theorists essentially argue that process pedagogy lacks *phronesis*—the kind of practical wisdom associated with situational thinking" (33). While postprocess was questioned by compositionists who thought it threatened the viability of teaching, it did contribute to the intellectual project associated with composition's third sophistic

school, which is rooted in a concern about "composition's will-to-control" (38). The third sophistic school is unlike postprocess, however, because the latter focuses on interpretation and what Kent calls hermeneutic guesswork, the process through which we make sense of one another's utterances. "Rather than paralogic interpretation," Lynch explains, "third sophistic is more interested in paralogic invention, which will not manage utterances already made but rather produce utterances not yet made or even imagined" (38). Third sophistic theory is notable for its style, which is often playful, recursive, and fragmented, especially in the work of Victor Vitanza whom Lynch points to as its founder. More importantly, however, the third sophistic is the school that has most clearly articulated the postpedagogical claim that rejects teaching. As Lynch writes, Vitanza argues "that if something can be known, it should not be taught, since teaching it would inevitably require reducing it" (i.e., limit the potential for invention), a claim that "directly addresses composition's investment in pedagogy" (41). While it should go without saying, this kind of talk makes teachers uncomfortable. For Lynch, though, postprocess and third sophistic theory point to ideas we need to at least partially grant. What these approaches lack, and what Lynch turns to in Chapter 3, is a postpedagogical method that can account for our unique experiences.

If nothing else, Lynch has a knack for weaving together composition's critical vocabulary in ways that render such theoretical complexity approachable, even inviting. As a case in point, he begins Chapter 3 by considering how his interest in pedagogy can be illuminated using the classical notions of *techne* and *tuche*. The former term refers to intelligent practice, the knowledge that aligns skill with prediction much like the way an experienced painter can will her brush to depict a particular image. *Tuche*, however, refers to the unpredictable. As Lynch writes, it "is what happens when you are making other plans. A carpenter may build a house well enough to withstand a storm but not the earthquake that collapses it" (60). Accordingly, if we treat pedagogy as a *techne*, a kind of knowledge with predictive powers,

what happens to pedagogy in the wake of *tuche*, those moments when our experience calls into question the very possibility of such knowledge itself? The remainder of Chapter 3 tackles the idea of experience, which Lynch sees as the mediating principle that allows us to approach pedagogy as a *techne* while remaining attuned to the unpredictable dimensions of teaching. "If pedagogy is a *techne*," he suggests, "experience is simultaneously its occasion and its material. Skills, strategies, and techniques may not be easily portable, but experience—both the teacher's and the learner's—cannot help but be portable, for it carries us as much as we carry it" (64). What follows is a clear and careful review of Dewey's philosophy of experience, which includes discussion of how this early-twentieth century philosopher of education proposed a method for using reflection to cultivate uncertainty, the attitude necessary for welcoming moments of disruption as opportunities for growth.

To a skeptical reader, all of this may sound well and good while nevertheless coming across as somewhat impossible. As Lynch himself puts it, the basic requirement for grasping Dewey's version of postpedagogy "is easy to understand but more difficult to implement: How does one expect the unexpected?" (98). Lynch's answer comes in Chapter 4, the book's final chapter, in which he outlines the practice of pedagogical casuistry. While it has classical roots, casuistry is a case-based method for ethical reasoning that was popularized by the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In brief, casuistry relies on situational thinking about established rules and maxims. When a case arises that requires deliberation, we can (and should) use our established knowledge to the extent that it aligns with the facts of the particular case at hand. But we must be prepared to revise these rules, at least temporarily, if there are extenuating circumstances that make the case unique. As Lynch summarizes after giving a hypothetical example, "there is a principle that normally should not be violated, yet there is a particular case that defies deductive application of the principle. The result is that what seems unjust suddenly seems just under the given circumstances" (107). When

it comes to teaching, then, we should foster pedagogical maxims that can guide our pedagogy while allowing us to remain flexible to contingency. In other words, we should develop rules of thumb—"*A lesson should never work three times*" is one hypothetical example Lynch offers (136)—that can help us make experience intelligible, that can help us identify the reasons why Lesson A, for instance, went over swimmingly in my 8am section of first-year writing, but not in my 10am section. In this way, what Lynch offers is a proposal for adapting the tradition of casuistry into a practical method for fostering the uncertainty that Dewey insists gives experience its value. In its most basic sense, it is a call to turn our classroom experiences into cases, ones that we can use to reflect upon and revise our pedagogy on the ad hoc basis that such experience demands.

As it should be clear by now, Lynch neither embraces nor rejects the postpedagogical arguments that challenge us to stop asking after the classroom. Like the pragmatist philosophy he embraces, Lynch finds generative value in mediating the potentials for invention that postpedagogy celebrates alongside the very real limitations that make postpedagogy impractical. Indeed, by offering Dewey's theory of experience, Lynch helps to identify a deliberate method for systematically acknowledging the theories that inform how we approach the work of teaching while allowing us to check these theories—and revise them if necessary—in the wake of further experience. In the end, I'm a fan of this book and recommend it to compositionists who, like me, are weary of arguments that presume we can directly connect our theories to our practices. But it will also appeal to those who are suspicious of the third sophistic claim that teaching is ultimately an impossible task. To be sure, our pedagogies can and often do go wrong. But this is why we need a robust philosophy of experience, because, and as Lynch notes, "the pedagogical moment is too complex to be either accurately predicted or exploited" (xix). The trick is to figure out how to put this experience to use, and Lynch is a helpful guide.

Works Cited

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