After Pedagogy
The Experience of Teaching
Paul Lynch
CCCF/NCTE Studies in Writing & Rhetoric Series.
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What does it mean to teach after pedagogy?
For a long time, composition’s pedagogical conversation has been defined by its theoretical disagreements. Is learning a cognitive process or a social one? Is the self expressed or distributed? Can writing be understood as a process, or is any process too messy to be understood? These debates have finally run out of steam, argues Paul Lynch, leaving composition in a “postpedagogical” moment, a moment when the field no longer believes that pedagogical theories can account for the complexities of teaching.

After Pedagogy extends the postpedagogical conversation by turning to the experience of teaching itself. Through the work of John Dewey, After Pedagogy argues that experience offers an arena in which theory and practice can coexist. Most important, experience can fashion the teachable moments of postpedagogical practice into resources for further growth. “We cannot know what precisely the student will do with what we have offered,” says Lynch, “but we can think with the student about the experience of the offer itself.”

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Editors’ Introduction

Power and the Schooling of English: Ideologies, Embodiments, and Ethical Relationships

Mary M. Juzwik
Ellen Cushman
Michigan State University

In this issue, a group of emerging scholars take up diverse and timely questions about language ideologies, literate embodiments, and the ethically consequential relationships that come to be constructed, reflected, and contested at the scenes of written communication. How are English language learners positioned in schools, communities, and testing discourses, and what are the consequences—for students—of that positioning? How can reading, teaching, and transacting with literature intervene in damaging societal discourses about women? And how does writing operate as embodied, stylized, affectively intense movement and coordination? More specifically, the collection of papers pushes English education and writing studies to address how secondary-level English language learners, particularly immigrants of color in the United States, experience and talk back to deficit discourses about them that circulate in schools and communities; how middle school literary study can disrupt rape myths—for example, that women want or deserve to be raped—circulating in society and in schools; how K–12 teachers can support, and better understand the work young people do with, mobile devices in digital composing practices; and how assumptions about the unitary nature of disciplinary styles hold up to fine-grained discursive investigation of disciplinary style in professional academic writing practices.

All these articles present further insights about where educational change and reform are located: in under-the-radar sites of advocacy and resistance, embodied practice, and new technologies for expression. With so much educational reform appearing to happen in top-down fashion, the authors in this issue remind researchers and teachers to consider local, embodied, small-scale places for the day-to-day work of schooling and educational change. Throughout all these articles, classrooms, communities, and person-to-person relationships emerge as sites for the cultivation of the promise of democratic education and socially just, asset-based curriculum and pedagogy. These articles, taken together, trace the workings of power in ideologies, embodiments, and ethical relationships.

Shawna Shapiro investigates how Black African immigrant students who attended a small-town New England high school experienced and resisted deficit discourses about them that were circulating in the school and the community. Professor Shapiro calls upon Critical Race Theory (CRT)—an approach not
previously brought into the pages of *RTE*, although it is increasingly used in education—to present students’ counternarratives. As Shapiro points out, “A critical approach requires that researchers offer nuanced perspectives on academic success and institutional integration, including students’ own interpretations of their schooling experiences” (p. 388). In her community-based critical account of youth perspectives, students reframed deficit discourses by linking them with limited educational opportunity—so echoing Gloria Ladson-Billings’s (2006) call for a reframing of the so-called “achievement gap” (focusing on individual student achievement/failure) as an “educational debt,” a societal failure to serve students of color and others historically excluded from educational opportunities and a moral mandate to address that failure at a societal level.

The students in Shapiro’s study identified particular schooling practices—for example, the public categorization and posting of African immigrant students’ language and literacy test scores—as an outgrowth and reinforcement of deficit discourse that they resisted through public protest. Students also depicted how deficit discourse around students’ physical bodies intersected with other discourses about their intellect and educational potential. [In one example], the bodies of one group of students (ELLs, mostly Black) were “marked” as potentially unclean, while those of other groups (non-ELLs, mostly White) were not. (p. 399)

Through counternarratives and public action, students actively resisted such deficit framing, speaking back not only to reprehensible representations of their personhood by other students and the local media, but also to enduring, historically circulating colonial imaginaries about Africa and Africans. Shapiro’s interpretation also illuminates—and shows the consequences for students—of a longstanding preoccupation in anthropology: how notions of purity and cleanliness are used to define “who we are” and to demarcate and marginalize “the other” (e.g., Douglas, 1966). By connecting Black immigrant student perspectives back to the marginalization that can happen to them in English language arts classrooms, and the regimes of literacy testing they endure at school more generally, Shapiro offers evocative material for secondary-level English teachers—as well as literacy teachers across the lifespan—to consider in working with English language learners. For example, she prompts the question: In the interest of educational justice and equity, what educational debt is due to newcomers to our country?

Victor Malo-Juvera takes a different approach to another widely circulating societal discourse—in this case, about women who are raped. Addressing rape myth acceptance, and specifically the storylines *She Wanted It* and *She Lied*, he asks whether a literary pedagogical intervention can make a difference to students’ attitudes about rape. The intervention in question is a dialogically organized, reader-response based literary unit about the young adult novel *Speak*, by Laurie Halse Anderson. This widely taught novel features a young woman, Melinda, who is raped by an acquaintance. As the plot develops, the emotional consequences of the unreported event increasingly manifest in profoundly disturbing ways. Grounded in an experimental design, within the disciplinary tradition of psychol-
The study asks whether the literary unit had any effect on individual students’ rape myth acceptance. Malo-Juvera finds that the unit did yield significant results, particularly among young men whose initial scores indicated high levels of rape myth acceptance, and particularly with the *She Wanted It* component. Interestingly, the study also finds no evidence of the backlash effect commonly seen in more didactic psychological interventions designed to reduce participants’ rape myth acceptance. Although the study does not differentiate which aspects of the unit were more and less crucial to the attitudinal shift, it does offer evidence for the impact literary study can make on students’ moral and social development—evidence that remains quite scarce in English education, despite a proliferation of grand ethical and political claims on its behalf (e.g., Juzwik, 2013).

The paper enters into broader questions about the purposes of reading and teaching literature: Is it for personal growth, as evidenced here? For the improvement of society, as hinted here? For critical engagement with societal inequality, hinted at here as well? The piece challenges current conceptualizations of reading in schools, for example the formalist emphasis on text that pervades the Common Core. And it raises broader questions about the relationship between literature and trauma in English teaching and beyond: When opening up conversation on, and exploration of, a challenging issue (and for some, a lived trauma) such as rape, what resources do teachers need to have in place to make sure they do not “rewound” students, such as those in the class who might have experienced sexual assault themselves? To what extent does reader identification with a trauma such as a young woman being raped pose ethical problems, for example by potentially trivializing the actual experiences of those who really have been raped, as distinct from those who read about it?

The final two papers offer and enact new theoretical approaches to the practice and teaching of writing, particularly through insights about the embodied and affective dimensions of writing as a coordinated activity involving bodies, feelings, and materialities as well as texts, which have heretofore been the major focus in multiliteracies theory and scholarship. Christian Ehret and Ty Hollett advance Leander and Boldt’s (2013) critique of the New London Group (1996) and the uptake of its text-based multiliteracies theory in literacy studies, as they work to account for the embodied experiences, affective intensities, and feeling-histories surrounding digital writing in a fifth-grade classroom. They use a microethnographic case-study design to follow two particular students, Yvette and Adela, and their “emergent production process[es]” (p. 431) in composing with mobile devices. They put a crucial assumption in this way:

Because we also understand that bodies are always in motion—physically, figuratively, and temporally—we consider composition as traversals within real virtualities in which affective atmospheres are generated, for example when feeling-histories emerge and evolve in present moments. During these traversals, bodies compose in tandem with environments, and they experience temporalities on multiple scales, including the retention of past, embodied experience. (p. 432)
Thus the cultural and personal histories surrounding the two students’ composition with digital devices come into play, but in a theoretical way that moves New Literacy Studies further in the direction suggested by Leander and Boldt (2013)—toward concerns for affect, emotion, and embodiment, and away from notions of social context that have become perhaps unhelpfully reified within New Literacy Studies.

This idea of the “presence of the past”—as embodied in persons’ corporal habitus and dispositions—also travels into the paper by Andrea Olinger, who sets out to question unitary assumptions about disciplinary style in conversations on, and teaching of, disciplinary writing. This paper, perhaps more than any of the others, explicitly brings forth the language ideologies shaping the (inter)action of texts, bodies, talk, and other semiotic systems, calling to mind performing artist Anna Deveare Smith’s (2001) manner of listening to style in spoken language:

> From time to time we are betrayed by language, if not in the words themselves, in the rhythm with which we deliver our words. Over time, I would learn to listen for those wonderful moments when people spoke a kind of personal music, which left a rhythmic architecture of who they were. I would be much more interested in those rhythmic architectures than in the information they might or might not reveal. (Smith, 2001, p. 36)

It is the rhythmic architecture of persons interacting with disciplinary fields that Olinger is interested in here. She captures it through innovative transcriptions of discourse-based interviews with a group of coauthors from the field of ecology, transcriptions that do in some ways resemble musical scores (here she draws on the work of Julie Hengst, Paul Prior, and others). One insight to emerge is the highly idiosyncratic nature of stylization, at least in the academic field she studies. Moreover, in the interactions among authors, stylistic preferences and the metaphorical and gestural resources used to enact those preferences seem rather to “betray” linguistic ideologies that underpin writers’ notions of how language works, what language is, and how power and control work (and should operate) within and through language. The fine-grained approach taken here reveals a good deal of conflict and contestation around stylistic rhythms, oftentimes within individual persons at different points in time, and more so among coauthors who have different senses of what formulations might work best stylistically in an academic paper.

An intriguing question raised by this paper is how various fields think about mentoring emerging scholars into the available diversity of disciplinary styles. In our capacities as editors and reviewers, we ourselves have stylistic peculiarities or preferences that we each tend to zoom in on when working with manuscripts (much to the annoyance of some *RTE* authors, no doubt). We can furthermore think of specific *RTE* reviewers who can be identified by seasoned authors through their idiosyncratic style of review writing. We wonder to what extent reviewers, editors (both of journals and books), doctoral advisors, and others might exert influence on the stylistic realms of possibility within given fields. This entire issue has certainly caused us to consider the disciplining work of teachers, professors, media personnel, and editors as socially and ethically consequential.
Implications and Further Questions

It strikes us that in the present moment of educational reform in K–12 schools and universities, the complex stances toward language enacted in each of these studies run the danger of being marginalized or dismissed by policy makers. This issue is explicitly taken up by Malo-Juvera and Shapiro, who put their studies into dialogue with the broader scene of what kinds of values are being attached to language, for example in such domains as the Common Core State Standards and accompanying assessments emerging in the United States. Unsurprisingly, the emphasis seems to fall on literary formalism, textual types, and a unitary notion of style that doesn’t even account for the idea of disciplinary difference that Olinger sets out to complicate. We learn from colleagues in the United Kingdom that the situation there is far worse, because the agenda of deprofessionalizing teaching and dismantling colleges of education seems to be further along. As we see in Shapiro’s paper, the consequences of such testing regimes—and how test scores get aggregated and shared—can be far-reaching in the lives of students. Is it the case that, as Malo-Juvera hints, the onus is on educators or scholars to argue against such policies that ignore the polysemous world of language as situated in rich systems and histories of semiotic activity? At work in each of the articles is the understanding that change happens through ideological shift, commanding discourses, and embodied practices. Educational reform, then, can be seen as an everyday practice of social justice that happens in the accrual of small changes across time. Its outcomes are evidenced in the stories students tell, in their shifts in attitudes, in their learning to command discursive styles, and in embodied engagements with technologies and other materialities surrounding literacy.

As we reflect on the collective understanding of these articles, we also observe the passing of a beloved RTE editorial board member, Shelby Anne Wolf, who devoted her professional work to engaging these and other challenging questions, especially those related to literary transaction with children, with the teachers and preservice teachers who were her students at the University of Colorado–Boulder, and with colleagues in the field who learned from her brilliance. We thank her for all she did to contribute to the profession and to our own engagements with reading and teaching literary texts. We, along with many RTE readers, mourn her passing.

REFERENCES


