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## Editors' Introduction

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## Editors' Introduction

*Jennifer L. Holberg and Marcy Taylor*

What you hold in your hands is something new: a discipline-wide, mainstream research journal devoted to teaching English at the college and university level. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* seeks to create a new way of talking about teaching by fusing theoretical approaches and practical realities. As a journal dealing exclusively with pedagogical issues, it is intended as a forum for critical reflection and as a site for spirited and informed debate from a multiplicity of positions and perspectives. It strives to reverse the long-standing marginalization of teaching and the scholarship produced around it and instead to assert the centrality of teaching to our work as scholars and professionals. We envision a scholarly journal that will energize the conversation about teaching excellence in higher education; in particular, we expect to radically affect the shape of undergraduate and graduate instruction in English studies.

The time is ripe for this kind of journal. We became convinced of the need for a journal during our last years in graduate school: as teaching assistants, we found that the profession paid little attention to issues of teaching; subsequently, as teacher trainers ourselves, we had little information to provide to the new TAs in our program. Circumstances over the past five years have suggested that the profession is hungry for pedagogical discussions. The annual Modern Language Association convention has seen a steady rise in sessions on teaching; the MLA Approaches to Teaching series has produced many new volumes in recent years; and *PMLA*, *College English*, and *Profession* have devoted special issues to teaching. Certainly, *Pedagogy* owes a debt of

gratitude to these and other journals that have steadily brought the importance of teaching into view in their subfields. Yet in a profession in which a large portion of our scholarly work concerns itself with teaching, it is ironic that no single journal is exclusively devoted or consistently committed to exploring that work across the discipline and from a range of perspectives.

In some ways, this marginalization is not surprising. Again and again, as we developed *Pedagogy* and explained its mission, invariably the response was, “Oh, so it’s a ‘comp’ journal.” The assumption, of course, was that composition journals by definition were dedicated to issues of teaching. But while composition as a field has been more concerned with theorizing teaching than have the various fields of literary or linguistic study, journals like *College Composition and Communication* are devoted to the scholarship of rhetoric and composition and not to teaching, any more than *Victorian Studies* is.

Thus *Pedagogy* aims to broaden the critical discussion of teaching across English studies. Articles that are now spread throughout many journals and hence are often overlooked can here achieve concentrated force and be given the critical examination they deserve. We believe strongly that such a forum is vital to English studies. If, as Evan Watkins (1989) argues, the cultural capital of “English” primarily circulates within institutions of higher learning, and if that capital consists of people (specifically, students), then our “work” is teaching, and we need to create a way to talk about it. *Pedagogy* is that way.

This issue, which sets the tenor of the conversation that the journal hopes to foster, gathers established scholars who assess the “state of pedagogy” in their fields and reflect on the theoretical and practical issues of teaching that face the professoriate in the next century. The issue opens with George Levine’s clarion call to action, “The Two Nations.” In this stirring opinion piece Levine, taking his title from Disraeli’s indictment of nineteenth-century English society’s widening bifurcation into rich and poor, decries a similar divergence in the academy: the split in English studies between composition and literature, the split in status, and the concomitant split implied by equating composition with teaching and literature with scholarship. He also exposes the professional schizophrenia of seeing what he calls “my work” solely in terms of one’s research, as opposed to one’s teaching, and he critiques the system of rewards that encourages this point of view.

In “Hidden Intellectualism,” a continuation and indeed a rethinking of his work in *Beyond the Culture Wars* (1992), Gerald Graff asks the reader to pay attention to the teacherly biases that affect our ability to fully engage our students. In so doing, he argues for a complicated notion of “alternative intellectualism,” that is, the development of students’ latent intellectualism from

“supposedly philistine pursuits.” Though he rejects the importing of youth culture wholesale into the classroom, Graff does highlight the gains to be made both from understanding students’ nonacademic pursuits (e.g., religion and sports) and from engaging with students the question of what “intellectualism” can mean.

In a different vein, Deborah H. Holdstein’s piece, “‘Writing Across the Curriculum’ and the Paradoxes of Institutional Initiatives,” is a timely rhetorical analysis of a particular curricular movement. Holdstein is especially interested in “the ways in which faculty (inadvertently) participate in reproducing a *discourse of paradox* surrounding university-wide curricular initiatives like WAC, a discourse that subverts our best pedagogical intentions and, ultimately, dilutes the literacy education our students receive.” Well grounded in the latest composition theory and in current discussions on the politics of reform in higher education, this article analyzes the “discourse of paradox” prevalent among WAC administrators and teachers themselves. Exposing the contradictions that cripple and defeat even well-intentioned pedagogical efforts, Holdstein also argues for ways to “deflate” these paradoxes.

Adding her voice to the controversial “canon wars,” Susan VanZanten Gallagher explores in “Contingencies and Intersections: The Formation of Pedagogical Canons” how the practical issue of choosing texts for a course is compassed round by theoretical issues. “Better understanding the complex dynamics of pedagogical canons,” she claims, “will provide new ways of thinking about the construction of our own classroom canons that move beyond simplistic appeals either to tradition or to innovation.” Although much of her argument could be applied across disciplines, Gallagher teases out the implications of her theory by using the relatively new field of African literature as an illustration. Her article is important because it refuses to come to an either-or answer and instead grapples with the range of theoretical and practical considerations the teacher faces when composing a syllabus.

While Gallagher focuses on a specific curricular issue, Marshall Gregory concentrates on teaching rather than on curriculum, with which teaching is often conflated (and to which he claims most of our attention is paid, if indeed scholarly attention is paid to either). In “Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Teacherly Ethos,” Gregory draws a line firmly separating the two and then seeks to provide an alternative approach by constructing a model of such an ethos. In doing so, he diverts our attention from what we teach in our English courses to how we teach it.

In “How It Is: Teaching Women’s Poetry in British Romanticism Classes,” Harriet Kramer Linkin replicates a seminal 1982 article in *Studies in*

*Romanticism*, called “How It Was.” In the earlier article major Romantic scholars were asked to describe the field over the previous twenty years (that is, from the early 1960s on). In the updated version Linkin surveys the impact of feminist and historicist literary theory on teaching in the field of British Romanticism. Like the earlier article, “How It Is” includes responses from many leading critics in British Romanticism, who discuss their own theoretical and practical struggles in remaking their field today.

In “The Materiality of Language and the Pedagogy of Exchange,” David Bleich offers a theoretical argument for connecting our discussions of genre with a view of language as material. “Together,” he asserts, “the materiality of language and the genre idea represent a new foundation for the understanding of language, a subject now better understood as (and called) *language use*.” Bleich explores the pedagogical implications of this new subject, particularly the underlying notion of “exchange.” Such a pedagogy asks us to radically reconceive the divisions in English studies between literature, language, and composition; to “de[sacralize] the texts of ‘canonical’ literature, [make] the speech and text genres of knowledge available for language critique, and [teach] how language use is an essential ingredient in social relations.” Whereas many articles in this issue focus on a subdiscipline of English studies, Bleich offers a truly interdisciplinary, utopian vision of teaching the range of texts, genres, issues, questions, and conflicts subsumed in the concept of language use.

Finally, in “‘Reading Fiction/Teaching Fiction’: A Pedagogical Experiment,” Jerome McGann describes a paired undergraduate-graduate course at the University of Virginia. McGann raises some important issues: the state of graduate professional training in teaching, the question of how we define undergraduate “reading skills,” and the articulation between our graduate and undergraduate programs. He also makes an interesting connection between the teaching of undergraduates, the teaching of graduate students, and the teaching of undergraduates by graduate students. While the literature on training graduate assistants in composition is well established, relatively little has been written on training graduate students to teach literature. McGann highlights the problems inherent in such a “pedagogical experiment,” but he also fixes a point from which we might pursue more advanced thinking about graduate professional development.

Despite the range of these contributions, there is, of course, a danger in seeing any one collection of essays as representative of the journal’s scholarly focus. Instead, these essays should be seen as indicative of a possible range of genres, as well as of the types of scholarship we would like to publish

in *Pedagogy*. The charge given to the authors in this issue was to respond in some way to the state of pedagogy in their fields. Hence, while the essays focus on particular subfields, they are not meant to codify the genres or topics that are admissible. Above all, we believe that the essays represent a starting point: they engage the idea of devoting our scholarly energy to teaching. Because there is little tradition of critical work on teaching, we lack a language for speaking about it. In his commentary George Levine claims, in fact, that one reason the special issue of *PMLA* failed was that as a discipline we do not have the means to write critically about our teaching; our “scholarly” models are often inadequate for the theorizing of teaching. This journal, we hope, will help create the necessary discourse. Its early issues might be considered attempts—“essays” in the Montaignian sense—in that direction.

To develop this discourse, the journal is committed to publishing authors from a range of institutions and teaching experiences. At the same time, just as our conversations about teaching take place at different sites, so too the journal has multiple sections: a Commentary section for short opinion pieces; a From the Classroom section, edited by Elizabeth Blackburn-Brockman, for contributions that explore ideas and problems concerned with practical issues of the classroom; Reviews, edited by Christine Chaney, of critical texts, anthologies, and other pertinent pedagogical materials; letters about and responses to past issues; and, of course, the expected articles.

No undertaking of this magnitude is accomplished alone. We would like to thank the members of *Pedagogy*'s editorial board, who have been enthusiastically supportive throughout the long process of development. The staff of Duke University Press also have been generous with their guidance and creativity. We have likewise benefited from the moral and financial support of our respective institutions, Calvin College and Central Michigan University. Finally, to our colleagues, friends, and family, our heartfelt thanks.

### **Works Cited**

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