

Dr. Andrew Joseph Pegoda (“AJP”)

Professor: Dr. Patricia Webb

ENG 522: Composition Studies

4 April 2022

Analyzing *Pedagogy* and Understanding Composition Studies

Launched in January 2001 by Jennifer L. Holberg and Marcy Taylor with the objective of being solely devoted to academic discourses about teaching English Studies at the post-secondary level, the journal *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture* is going strong two decades later (1, 4).¹ Douglas Hesse notes that *Pedagogy* “generally delivers on its discipline-wide aspiration with intriguing variety” in his 2019 overview of forty-five peer reviewed journals dedicated to Composition Studies, *Composition Studies* being concerned with literacies and with how people process, assemble, and present information (369, 386). Over the last two years, *Pedagogy* has published sixty-eight articles, two reviews, and one note by 114 authors. A synthesis and analysis of how these articles embrace curiosity is the focus in this essay.

Pedagogy’s editorial offices are housed at Calvin University, and its guidelines are open-ended with a revolving call for submissions. Typically, issues have an average of ten articles, but the January 2022 issue has nineteen. Eight of the published articles are grouped in a “From the Classroom” section but other than being shorter have no distinctive features. A few details about the people involved deserve comment. Almost all authors are associated with English

¹ We should note that the publication is not called *Andragogy*, which is the specific theoretical concept for post-secondary instruction and teaching philosophies or for adult learners. *Andragogy* has never had significant traction, and most people use *pedagogy* in its broadest definitions. In a 2014 OpEd for *Inside Higher Ed*, I argued that we should embrace the distinction and use *andragogy*. I have since changed my mind (or surrendered, perhaps) and use *pedagogy* myself—it is more accessible—but attention to the specific title of this academic journal is important.

departments; although, these departments take a variety of names, with some separating linguistics, rhetoric, writing, and/or creative writing into divisions away from literature. Authors include a mixture of those who already hold a doctorate in an English Studies subject and those still working on its completion. Of the 114 authors published, only one—deandre miles-hercules (who also stylizes their name with all lowercase letters)—has pronouns outside of the privileged she/he framework. Based on a search of almost two dozen online faculty profiles, members of *Pedagogy*'s editorial board have a range of specializations characteristic of English Studies including queer theory, computers and composition, visual culture, linguistics, equity, visual rhetoric, pedagogy, race, literature and medicine, poetry, British literature, digital humanities, modern literature, creative writing, composition and rhetoric, literacy, and hermeneutics (“Editorial Board”).

An analysis of this scholarship spread across six issues offers the opportunity to understand the mission and values of Composition Studies, at least one set. While the nuances are constantly (re)created through everyday interactions in the classroom, through Facebook or Twitter conversations among professors, or through students' completion of assignments at home, an academic periodical extends beyond these ephemeral moments and provides codified records of where the field is and where it might be going, both reflecting and then creating the *what* of Composition Studies. Specifically, *Pedagogy* collectively suggests that Composition Studies is characterized by making itself relevant to students, by responding to issues of the day, and by experimenting and embracing the new. Composition Studies is curious. Authors published in *Pedagogy* combine experiential, reflective, and theoretical methodologies, along with frequent analysis of classroom artifacts, original survey data, or personal interviews.

As presented in *Pedagogy*, Composition Studies aims to make itself immediately relevant to students. Professors write about creating composition classes focused on family, on student activism, on community engagement/service learning, on racial literacy, and on class dynamics. Such approaches, they argue, are effective at inspiring students to think, read, and write with more sophistication because everything is connected to issues that tangibly impact their day-to-day lives. As one student puts it, “[It] helped me to see how action can influence change on a larger scale” (qtd. in Finn 168). Stephanie White in particular writes about how a service-learning approach encourages “personal investment...that [students are] eager to put to use in all of their academic writing” (51). She adds, “When students recognize that they are accomplishing goals with their writing that stretch beyond their own learning or goals, they can become highly-motivated...Such motivation is especially powerful when linked to social justice...Students no longer feel they can let things be ‘good enough’” (51).

Recent issues of *Pedagogy* additionally respond to present-day issues. This takes the form, in part, of Special Issues—one responding to “fake news,” the other looking at undergraduate research—both anxious about the future of English Studies. In the “fake news” issue (and in a few articles on the same theme scattered around other issues), authors consider how attacks on everyday decency and on factual information demand changes to what students need in order to hone their critical reading and writing skills. These content experts argue that attention to an assortment of newly urgent information-literacy-concerns is essential: how students learn physiologically, how students learn prior to college enrollment, how developmental education functions in community colleges, how learning and unlearning cannot happen in a single term, how screens impact comprehension, how the purpose (or “enactment,” as termed by Tiny S. Kazan, et al.) determines the approach necessary for a given literacy task,

how all texts either challenge or uphold existing mores, and how students handle their emotions. As a particular example, Kelly King-O'Brien shows that students at all types of institutions need training to decipher texts. She writes about helping her students at Cornell University learn to read screen-based news publications like *The New Yorker* and respond in a variety of written modes. Polemically, she insists that helping students navigate digital words is necessary for having "informed and responsible citizens" and for the very survival of the humanities (306-307). Of note, too, the guest editors for the Special Issue specifically name the damage done by Donald Trump and initiate the issue with the argument that "our students are not faring well as they try to navigate our current information landscape" (Carillo and Horning 198).

The Special Issue focused on Undergraduate Research aims to further establish a theory of said research. A common argument across the articles is that undergraduate research is often the groundwork for future scholarship or future careers as a professor. Authors name such early low-stakes research experience, with the assistance of the Writing Center and with research mentors, as a way to formalize student curiosity. The articles acknowledge labor issues but celebrate the potential of using graduate student mentors for undergraduate researchers. This issue ultimately stems from a hope toward increasing the number of English Studies majors, including those committed to Digital Humanities projects. The Special Issue closes with a small selection of articles by undergraduates, highlighting their research.

eReaders, Open Education Resources, and Learning Management Systems have all increased the amount of screen-based reading. *Pedagogy's* attention to recent trends also tackles trends that transition from the practice of holding a physical book and challenges assumptions about what good and bad reading looks like. While criticisms about the "lost art" of holding a book are seemingly ubiquitous, Doug Downs specifically explains, "Much of this deficit framing

is inaccurate or hyperbolic, a result of romanticization of book literacies and misrepresented research consistent with the historical alarmism around new literacy technologies” (206). Of the subject, Julie Sievers offers, “We are working in a time of uncertainty...Our anxieties are not unreasonable. And yet, it remains wise to meet students where they are when possible” (448). More generally, authors share their literature reviews and results from their experiments, arguing that students can successfully read with digital platforms and complete high-level analysis, with the new and added benefit of digital annotations with tools such as Hypothesis that can function as collaborative class projects. Amy Gore and Glenn Koelling write about using such opportunities to embrace a radical digital pedagogy.

Other articles in *Pedagogy* address an assortment of interests pertinent to our current historical moments. These include arguments about the uses of the trigger warning, pedagogies of diversity, pedagogies of care in the face of COVID-19, attempting to learn with the ever-present threat of shootings, and investigating what kind of writing feedback students find valuable. As often happens in Composition Studies, articles themselves address questions of definition and scope. Stephen Sutherland (and others) expresses concern about the growing divide between the branches of English Studies—composition, literature, creative writing, and rhetoric—and argues for *intradisciplinarity*. He explains:

[T]his work often involves new ways of seeing what is already right in front of us: an article we have been drafting, a book tucked under our arm on the way to class, our notes from last semester, or a memorable comment a student made in our last class meeting. It is likely that all of these fragments can be seen as having something to do with every field within English studies, via a set of connections illuminated by the legacy of reader-response criticism. (268)

The aforementioned Hesse (published as “Doug Hesse” this time) has a short article in *Pedagogy*, in part, explaining that Composition Studies now has the additional burden of having to justify itself to students and other stakeholders because of how neoliberalism has caused tuition to skyrocket and has shifted societal focus to mere credentialing.

Lastly, Composition Studies, as gleaned from *Pedagogy*, forever tries new techniques in its promotion of literacies. Sometimes this experimentation takes the form of allowing students to deviate outside the instructions, with the professor becoming the student, rather than the expert who assigns a grade to the composition. Similarly, others argue for an experimental pedagogy that encourages students to embrace learning and writing as a process that involves failure. Such condoned *failure* is especially relevant when looking at different approaches to developmental reading and writing instruction. One writer argues that having students—who test not-college-ready—take a social science lab is effective at bridging the gaps. Another writer suggests that gaps between students and between institutions can be resolved with less replication of knowledge via there being separate first-year composition organizations, one for community college professors and another for university professors.

Some experiments highlighted in *Pedagogy* focus more specifically on reading. One article investigates the uses of reading journals and seeks to debunk misconceptions. Another professor writes about experiments with courses on Shakespeare and performance, while another creates a literature course only using self-published works. In a co-authored piece, two instructors teaching a survey of British literature discuss the effectiveness of using *Word Project* to help students engage with how language changes over time. And in the conclusion to his article about experimenting with assigning unusual texts in his first-year literature class, Kenneth Lota concludes, “We should not be shy about pushing students out of what they perceive to be

their intellectual comfort zones; we should take every opportunity to challenge, surprise, bewilder, and generally discombobulate students” (394).

As this essay concludes, I am reminded that I have argued elsewhere that Douglas Hesse (in his review of academic journals) roots his major concerns for Composition Studies in fears of the future and that Adam Banks (in his address as Chair of Conference on College Composition and Communication) roots his major concerns in fears of the past—both individuals being prominent scholars in the field of Composition Studies. *Pedagogy* straddles this boundary. But *Pedagogy* does not have anything approaching Banks’s (radical?) call to abolish what he sees as the hackneyed essay, nor does *Pedagogy* have anything with his non-conventional but very effective approach. *Pedagogy* embraces a vision of Composition Studies that is both ready for and fearful of the future—one that strives to be relevant, that is past- and present-minded, that is (somewhat) experimental. It is curious.

Pedagogy largely lives up to its mission. It depicts a Composition Studies that is both inter- and intra-disciplinary, that takes risks, and that embraces unsteady knowledge. Its articles center pedagogy and inspire fresh thinking about teaching and research, although within a certain range of acceptability. It negotiates the boundaries between theory and praxis. The mission falls somewhat short, however, when it comes to addressing “pedagogical issues spanning the entire discipline” (“About the Journal”). Indeed, only one of the sixty-eight articles across two years discusses postgraduate pedagogies. This set of articles does not embrace a version of Composition Studies that advocates for multimodal products or one interested in film studies or disability studies, for example. Across over one thousand pages on academic writing, there are only thirty-seven in-text uses of *disability*, twenty-seven of these in two articles. And ultimately, the articles, often with significant overlap, remain mostly focused on basic reading and writing

skills, perhaps too much so. But, *Pedagogy* absolutely reflects and perpetuates a Composition Studies dedicated to promoting literacy and helping bring attention to the range of possibilities. It shows that there are those who care. It suggests that Composition Studies is everywhere because writing and composing are everywhere. And reading and writing remain essential skills that continue to be devalued and assumed so basic as to forgo concern. As Linda Adler-Kassner says, “Writing is never just writing.”

Based on this analysis of *Pedagogy*, I am concerned that English Studies, Composition Studies in particular, is being given and is assuming increasingly responsibility for (basic) college instruction: Literacy issues are seen as only belonging to professionals in English Studies. The trend cannot be sustained. Conversations about the literacies necessary for the twenty-first century need to extend beyond English Studies, and educators in other fields, including professors in the neoliberal-approved STEM (science, technology, engineering mathematics) fields, need to assume tangible responsibilities, too. And as contemporary technology becomes ever-more ubiquitous, students of Composition Studies will have yet more to grapple with in our efforts to promote literacies, to challenge conventions, and to encourage the creation of compositions. Asking “what is Composition Studies” requires accepting that answers will only evolve and that curiosity remains necessary.

Works Cited

- “About the Journal.” *Pedagogy*, read.dukeupress.edu/pedagogy/pages/About. Accessed 6 Apr. 2022.
- Adler-Kassner, Linda. “2017 CCCC Chair’s Address: Because Writing is Never Just Writing.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 69, no. 2, 2017, pp. 317-340.
- Banks, Adams. “2015 CCCC Chair's Address: Ain’t No Walls behind the Sky, Baby! Funk, Flight, Freedom.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 67, no. 2, 2015, pp. 267-79.
- Carillo, Ellen C. and Alice S. Horning. “Guest Editors’ Introduction.” *Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2021, pp. 197-203.
- Downs, Doug. “Critical Reading in a Screen Paradigm: From Deficit to Default.” *Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2021, pp. 205-24.
- “Editorial Board.” *Pedagogy*, read.dukeupress.edu/pedagogy/pages/Editorial_Board. Accessed 4 Apr. 2022.
- Finn, Sarah. “Broadening the Scope of Community Engagement: Student Work for Social Change with Student Activist Groups on Campus.” *Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2021, pp. 159-69.
- Gore, Amy and Glenn Koelling. “Embodied Learning in a Digital Age: Collaborative Undergraduate Instruction in Material Archives and Special Collections.” *Pedagogy*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2020, pp. 453-72.
- Hesse, Doug. “Breach Disciplinary Levees: Help Fix Democracy.” *Pedagogy*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2020, pp. 229-33.

- Hesse, Douglas. "Journals in Composition Studies, Thirty-Five Years After." *College English*, vol. 81, no. 4, 2019, pp. 367-96.
- Holberg, Jennifer L. and Marcy Taylor. "Editors' Introduction." *Pedagogy*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2001, pp. 1-5.
- Kazan, Tina S., et al. "Writing Faculty and Librarians Collaborate: Mapping Successful Writing, Reading, and Information Literacy Practices for Students in a Post-truth Era." *Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2021, pp. 311-28.
- King-O'Brien, Kelly. "'Writing Back to the News': Reading the News as a Pedagogical Strategy to Empower Students, Improve Their Critical Reading Skills, and Fight 'Fake News.'" *Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2021, pp. 295-309.
- Pedagogy*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2020, pp. 201-400.
- Pedagogy*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2020, pp. 401-571.
- Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-197.
- Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2021, pp. 198-388.
- Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2021, pp. 389-567.
- Pedagogy*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1-182.
- Pegoda, Andrew Joseph. "It's Andragogy, Not Pedagogy." *Inside Higher Ed*, 17 June 2014, www.insidehighered.com/views/2014/06/17/essay-questions-use-term-pedagogy-describe-ideas-regard-college-teaching. Accessed 7 Apr. 2022.
- Sievers, Julie. "Writing between the Lines: Teaching Digital Reading with Social Annotation In an Introductory Literature Course." *Pedagogy*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2021, pp. 427-53.
- Sutherland, Stephen. "Building Intradisciplinary in English Studies through Textual Hybridity and Performance." *Pedagogy*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2020, pp. 257-70.

White, Stephanie. “‘When It’s Outside of You’: Writing as Advocacy in First-Year Composition.” *Pedagogy*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2022, pp. 27-54.