with the conditions of corporate globalization and the mission of neoliberal ideology, it would be extremely innovative and massively important. Were it only to offer tremendous insight into the current remaking of schooling within current conditions, again it would have been an invaluable book for anyone concerned about the fate of public schooling as the public is profoundly attacked. It does all of this seamlessly and in a way that makes it hard to put down. More than this, it lends itself to the crucial work of rethinking the meaning of culture and politics in ways that might limit the unchecked expansion of the private sector and the amassing of private power by the few while lending itself as a resource for expanding public control over work, cultural production, and the critical capacities of citizens for collective democratic action.


Reviewed by Jason Arthur, University of Missouri, and Shari Stenberg, Creighton University

I propose that we understand pedagogy as the reflexive inquiry that teacher and learners undertake together.

—Chris W. Gallagher

Shari, the graduate professor of composition:
It was my first time teaching a graduate course—Composition Theory—in our small MA program. The charge: to introduce four students, who were likely familiar with composition only by way of the first-year writing courses they had taken years ago, to the field. They would know it as a service site, not a discipline. So, as I worked to prepare the course, the familiar wall of defensiveness arose, followed by the familiar response: I would have to convince them of composition's scholarly legitimacy. I would have to provide evidence: Look at our growing body of scholarship! Our PhD programs! Our journals! But I didn't want to fall into the trap of defining the discipline by something other than what we claim makes us so innovative, progressive, humanitarian in the first place: the processes and study of teaching and learning. In fact, I concluded,
maybe a discussion of composition’s precarious relationship to disciplinary status needed to be part of the course. After all, at the root of this identity crisis is a hotbed of issues: Where has the field been, and where are we going? Where should we go? What, and who, will be compromised by the path we choose? I searched for texts that would help us to grapple with these questions, to understand the values and visions out of which composition emerged, to critically examine our current, precarious status as a discipline/anti-discipline, and to spark a discussion about who we might become, especially as new voices—like those of my students—joined the conversation.

Chris Gallagher’s *Radical Departures: Composition and Progressive Pedagogy*, one of the latest additions to NCTE’s “Refiguring English Studies,” quickly found a home on my syllabus. Certainly, Gallagher’s book would offer my students some disciplinary mainstays: a well-researched history depicting composition’s roots in Deweyan progressivism; a useful examination of composition’s relationship to both “administrative” and “pedagogical” progressivism; a compelling critique of composition’s recent ties to critical pedagogy; an innovative discussion of pedagogy-centered curricula, disciplinarity, and outreach projects. But those are not finally the reasons I most wanted my students to engage the text. I wanted them to read *Radical Departures* because of what it does: it offers newcomers to the field an invitation to participate in its remaking, and it remakes the traditional notion of a scholarly text in order to create space for dialogue to begin.

*Jason, the graduate student “newcomer” to composition:*

For me that space opened up when, in the first of the “intraludes”—narratives that exist within Gallagher’s arguments, derived from ethnographic and teacher research—I read the word “dank” in reference to the first two decades of the English Journal. Had Gallagher, like me, spent hours in the lonely stacks of a research library, doing archival grunt work? I figured. He said it. Dank indeed. But to read the word... I felt as if I were standing around a water-cooler and someone mistook me for a compositionist. For a split second I shared a laugh about undesirable duties of a job I hadn’t really started. I had, however, started to translate strange conversations and to lift dank leaves and rearrange them into cohesive narratives (even though I often guessed about the meaning of some pages). As the well-intentioned researcher, I had respected my intellectual heritage as the archived antecedents of the actions and customs I would soon enact. So had Gallagher. Yet, when I read “dank,”
I thought perhaps this proponent of refiguring English Studies was reassuring me that we could figure a way out of fruitless rigor, and a way into a real conversation. By the time Gallagher’s book became an object of discussion in our seminar, we four newcomers had already gained our Berlinian bearings of the discipline’s history. We had also learned that Shari was not interested in proving that she was a member of a legit discipline, but interested in showing us that, more important than becoming literate in the discipline, was our contributions to the discipline—contributions that we could carry with us into our own classrooms and our university’s lonely stacks.

When I compared Gallagher’s “story about a conversation”—his approach to narrating composition’s emergence as a progressive enterprise—to the conventional research method I was engaging in my MA thesis project, I discovered something missing from my experience. My thesis project was the first step toward a life as a “specialist” whose intellectual work would leave me with few people to talk to—students were especially exempt from dialoguing with my work. So, the water cooler of thesis writers could only laugh off the rigor that shrank our pool of peers. We burgeoning specialists had discovered the dank enterprise, but not a way out of it.

But Gallagher takes a different path. He weaves the story gleaned from dank journals with both an argument toward mutually facilitated learning (as I had expected to encounter from a “refigurer”), and a dialogue that assumes the primacy of such learning. His audience, we five, seemed to be on the receiving end of a desire for exchange. I was glad, and a little jealous. I was glad to see that intellectual work “progressed” through rigor, but in the form of listening, especially to those whose work did not count enough to be given space in the dominant narratives of the field. Gallagher contends that the researcher must listen for the voices that do not speak directly in the stacks, where yesterday’s loudest are bound and fraying. But Radical Departures is not the work of a researcher bent on deriding the dominant discourse for marginalizing certain voices. It seeks no such closed way of making sense of the discipline’s history. It is rather a disruptive and creative book that shows how voices usually left outside of the traditional disciplinary gate—voices of students and teachers—are better understood as enacting the real work of the discipline. Their interactions, our interactions, should constitute disciplinary work. Maybe I had to start rewriting my thesis.
Shari and Jason, composition colleagues:

Radical Departures is written with those "new to the teaching and study of writing" in mind, but its aim is not to supply newcomers with the "correct" knowledge or critical perspective; rather, it invites readers to join in refiguring the field. Indeed, the five of us seemed to agree that there was something about Gallagher's book that made us all feel that we each had a seat—and a voice—at the disciplinary table, not merely the classroom. Of course, this is what a good composition teacher does—whether in a classroom or in a text. He or she gets students (or readers) involved in debates about issues in which they are invested, creates a space for their knowledge, and assumes that the incoming knowledge will extend his or her own. But is this—the interaction between teachers and learners—really disciplinary work?

This, after all, is the question that so plagues the field at this historical moment: Should we define ourselves via our teaching (or our service via first-year writing?) or should we base our disciplinarity on our growing body of knowledge? Neither, and both, Gallagher argues. We should make use of our precarious, tenuous position in order to push the academy to "rethink and reconfigure the relationship between disciplinarity and pedagogy": pedagogy-centered disciplinarity, he calls it. This means we act instead of re-act, not so much radically departing into new territory, but returning to our roots in Deweyan progressivism that places pedagogy—"reflexive, shared inquiry that teachers and learners undertake together"—at its center. In fact, at the crux of pedagogy-centered disciplinarity are "ordinary people" who have come together to dialogue, to produce immediately vital, but not always archivable, knowledge. Indeed, according to Gallagher's own definition, what sanctions his book as a disciplinary contribution is not (only) the knowledge it adds to the field, but the dialogue among teachers and students that it enables.

Of course, we know from his text that Gallagher is an untenured professor at a large research institution. We know that like most of us, Gallagher's day-to-day institutional life is probably influenced by normative conceptions of disciplinarity (publish the "right" kind of scholarship or perish). And in some ways, Radical Departures seems to enact this internal tug-of-war over how to present itself. The book is comprised of six chapters, fairly traditional in form, with "intraludes"—narratives written in collage-form—woven between them. At first glance, it might seem that the chapters are theoretical, scholarly, and academic, while the intraludes are practical, teaching-oriented, and creative. Of course, it is through these limited and limiting terms that our traditional disciplinary
lens teaches us to classify what "counts" versus what doesn't. A closer engagement of *Radical Departures* shows that the intraludes are composed so as to "preserve the idea of interrupting that interlude suggests," but also to "indicate that the narratives are within—part of—the arguments and claims made, rather than simply between the chapters." The intraludes are to be read in dialogue with the chapters, so that they interrupt, extend and challenge his arguments and claims—and make space for a community of readers to do the same.

Indeed, it was the intraludes that fueled the most generative and lively discussion in our seminar. They invited us to discuss the complexities of representing teaching, to examine the relationship in composition scholarship between the arguments made and what Jennifer Gore calls "the pedagogy of the argument," and, as so many students did, to change the way we composed our own composition scholarship. But what most interested us was the lingering fear at which Gallagher hints, regarding his choice to include the intraludes at all. He mentions a reviewer who named them "cute" and notes that some readers may object to the "creative" form in a book that claims scholarly status. His fears of taking such a risk are not unfounded, certainly, even in a field that seeks to challenge the normative mode of scholarly texts. But when we imagined Gallagher's text without the intraludes, many of us argued that it would fail to enact its argument and become another document of "administrative progressivism." Indeed, if we were truly a pedagogy-centered discipline, the distinction between the intraludes and the chapters would not be so great. In fact, Gallagher may not have needed to separate them at all. The interruption would not be perceived as an inappropriate break from the intellectual work in the chapters, but as a voice that anchors the book not to an intellectual tradition but to a living readership.

In addition to asking us to rethink our disciplinary values and behaviors, *Radical Departures* also invites us to rethink our notions of progress and progressivism. Progressivism, as Gallagher demonstrates, is a far more contested term than we usually conceive it: a signifier that distinguishes forward-moving thinkers from blind conformers to the status quo. Because progressivism has been given little or no mention in our field's histories—and when it has, it is often described as a monolithic enterprise—Gallagher's discussion of how competing and conflicting progressivisms not only influenced the emergence of composition but continue to impact our work today offers us important food for thought. But even more important is Gallagher's invitation to us to critically examine our own self-proclaimed "progressivism." We newcomers often
see ourselves at the height of all that is cutting-edge, radical, new. We abide by suspect evolution myths of our field, where radical contributions lead to the illumination of enlightenment, and progress forward into the "post-s." In fact, Shari remembers that in her own introduction to composition, she begrudgingly read the current-traditional, process-based, expressivist, and cognitive thinkers, just waiting for the new material—the material that was most theoretically current, and therefore "mattered" most: social turn scholarship. In his introduction to the field, though, Gallagher asks us to depart from our usual thinking and to reclaim the pedagogically progressive work that has always been present in our field.

Gallagher does paint a clear picture of the dominant and often dominating role administrative progressivism has played in our history—which we see as early as the 1880s, when administrative progressives appropriated the new first-year writing course as a site of development of "human capital" for corporate ends, and as recently as the 1980s and 1990s in Linda Brodkey's well-documented "Trouble at Texas" story or in the dismantling of open admissions at CUNY. But he refuses to tell stories of winners and losers, and uses his voice as an outlet to give volume to the grassroots voices—socialists, trade unionists, women's groups, parents' groups—that challenged administrative progressivism nearly to the point of banishment from the archives. From Gallagher we learn to read for faint voices, to find historical community with whom we share projects, rather than to dismiss our ancestors as somehow "in the dark."

But he also asks us to read our contemporary alliances with a more critical eye—namely, the recent marriage of composition to critical pedagogy. As Gallagher notes, many graduate students are now introduced to the two discourses as synonymous. While critical pedagogy seeks to promote critical literacy, to envision teachers as "transformative intellectuals" and students as critical thinkers and potential change agents, Gallagher joins the growing number of compositionists who question the "progressive" claims of critical pedagogy. Although he doesn't bluntly argue that critical pedagogy is a form of administrative progressivism, he does contend that the discourse's tendency to abide by a top-down (theorist to practitioner) dynamic, to assume that teachers "have" critical knowledge (and students do not) ultimately renders the project more a traditional disciplinary, rather than pedagogical, project.

Where Gallagher makes his most important contribution to these debates, though, is in his discussion of critical pedagogy's lack of
attention to assessment. This gap is important since assessment is the "primary tool through which remote 'experts' control the work of teachers and students." Indeed, it is easy for those of us whose goals are tied to student empowerment and critical thinking to view assessment as, at worst, inherently evil—as something that "gets in the way" of our critical visions—or, at best, as something that is merely a "Monday morning" practical issue. But Gallagher helps us to understand assessment as a central means by which teachers—not to mention students—are excluded from pedagogical decisions. Rather than ignoring assessment, assuming that we know what it is and we don't want to touch it, he asks us instead to re-envision it as a tool that brings the work of teachers and students together. Though the two of us share a commitment to (a version of) critical pedagogy, engaging with Radical Departures has helped us—in a first-year writing course we taught together, and in the courses we now teach on our own—to consider how we want assessment to function in our courses, how we can make our means of assessment explicit to students, and how we can include them in the decision-making process.

Of course, we are aware that the mention of including students in our pedagogies is likely to be met with strong response—both from those who agree that students need to be at the center of our pedagogies and from those who would argue that including students in our pedagogical decisions either gives them too much agency or turns them into consumers to whom we pander and oblige. But this is another dichotomy Gallagher helps us rethink, as he is careful to argue not for student-centered, but pedagogy-centered, classrooms, curricula and disciplines. "If 'pedagogy' names the work that teachers and students do together," he argues, "...then a pedagogy-centered curriculum by definition evolves not around students' or teachers' experiences, interests, or knowledge, but precisely from the meeting of these." Pedagogy-centered curricula cannot be prepackaged or commodified; they are context-specific and must be remade anew every time, depending on which teachers and students enact them, and they evolve out of local practices that require what Gallagher calls "institutional literacy"—the ability to read institutional discourses and to speak, write back, and ultimately revise, them.

While Gallagher may be calling for radical changes, his argument does not take the shape of an abstract social vision; rather, he points to
local, specific examples of teachers, students, and scholars already enacting pedagogical progressivism. Whether it is inviting teachers and students to describe their participation in a pedagogy-centered writing curriculum, or detailing the complexities of doing teacher-outreach through the National Writing Project, he makes clear that it is in these types of local efforts that he pins his hope for future change. Indeed, Gallagher makes clear that his book is not an answer, but a beginning. By using his voice to let readers hear of pedagogically progressive projects that have already been (and are being) enacted by teachers and students, he shows that his vision is possible. Pedagogical progressivism will not be furthered, he seems to argue, by consuming, but by interacting with—by radical departures.

Reviews Reviewed

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