

“Bound to Cover Just a Little More Ground”: Teaching and Learning with the Grateful Dead

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Teaching is endemic to the Grateful Dead experience. While most of us have always known of the band from a few songs on the radio, you don't really “know” the Dead from what makes it onto the radio. No, you don't really “know” the Dead until you've been “*properly introduced*” to the Dead and the Grateful Dead subculture.

For many of us, that introduction occurred at some point in the past and may have come by way of several different sources. It may have been that stoner dude you met in high school or college who introduced you to the Dead. It may have been an older brother or sister. It may have been a boyfriend or girlfriend or may simply have been someone you became friends with and discovered you both loved the Dead and they were able to further extend your knowledge of the Dead scene. It may have been a teacher or college professor.

Indeed, even Jerry benefited from having a mentor. For Jerry, it was Wally Hedrick, an art teacher at the California School of Fine Arts (Jackson 23). Jerry's interest in art had actually been spawned a bit earlier by a teacher at Balboa High School in San Francisco (Jackson 22), who referred the young Garcia to CSFA. Even though Garcia never officially became a student at the school, he met Hedrick, who became his mentor artistically at that point in his life and heavily influenced his creative urge.

Given the longevity of the Grateful Dead phenomenon, the introduction could well have been made by one of our parents or an aunt or uncle or even grandparent. Because it's been more than 25 years since Jerry's passing, many fans who “got on the bus” after Jerry's passing have no first-hand knowledge of what it was like seeing Jerry on stage, other than what they've seen and heard in videos and taped performances, so older Deadheads are known to engage in the process of passing down their experiences to younger Deadheads in somewhat of an oral pedagogical tradition.

Regardless of who it was, that introduction was by way of someone we might think of as a mentor or teacher.

For those of us who call ourselves Deadheads, we all have memories of friends and others who served as mentors and teachers in the Grateful Dead experience. No one comes into it alone; we're all led in in some way. “*Introduced*,” as it were.

There has always been much to negotiate in learning about the Grateful Dead experience. For one thing, because the Grateful Dead are a countercultural phenomenon existing outside mainstream popular culture and popular music, it takes more of a willful effort on behalf of the listener to seek out their music and to become more involved in the countercultural lifestyle that includes different forms of music, art, fashion, expression, living, enjoying, and continued seeking, discovery, and mindfulness. It's a fairly well-defined subculture that consists not simply of the famous legion of "Deadheads," but many others as well, and has all the rituals and practices and cultural codes that are necessarily entailed in such a cultural movement. The act of assimilating into such a subculture involves learning on multiple levels, not simply on the level of the music and the band. Having a guide, mentor, or teacher along for the journey was and still is part of the undertaking, more often than not.

When meeting another Deadhead, one might ask the other the ways and means by which they became a Deadhead. The act of teaching and the transmission of that culture to another is an important ritual in the Deadhead community; therefore, Deadheads soon brought that teaching into the formal setting of the classroom and into formal pedagogy.

Pedagogical scholarship has been a regular part of the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus sessions at SWPACA for most of the Caucus' 25-year existence. The first pedagogically oriented paper was presented by Kay Alexander in 2001. Titled "Teaching the Dead: Process, Problems, Perspectives," the paper detailed Alexander's experience in and insights on teaching a class on the Dead. The following year included a roundtable discussion on "Teaching with the Grateful Dead." The panel was moderated by Rob Weiner, and panelists were Melinda Belleville, Gary Barnett, Natalie Dollar, and Alan Lehman. That roundtable was followed the next year by a "Teaching the Grateful Dead" roundtable, moderated by Nick Meriwether and consisting of panelists Kay Alexander, Barry Barnes, Gary Barnett, Alan Lehman, and Revell Carr.

While not every Caucus gathering at SWPACA has featured pedagogical presentations, pedagogy has almost always been a topic for discussion during conference sessions, in hallway conversations and also in after-hours discussions. And, as has hopefully already been established, in a sense, every exploration of the Dead is a pedagogical experience.

That said, here is a list of specifically pedagogical papers and sessions that have been presented during the first 25 years of the Caucus at SWPACA:

Table 1: Sources included conference programs available on the SWPACA web site and *Studying the Dead: The Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus — An Informal History*, edited by Nicholas G. Meriwether, Scarecrow Press, 2013.

Year	Author	Title	Panelists
2001	Kay Alexander	"Teaching the Dead: Process, Problems, Perspectives"	
2002	Roundtable	"Teaching with the Grateful Dead"	Rob Weiner (moderator), Melinda Belleville, Gary Burnett, Natalie J. Dollar, Alan R. Lehman
2003	Roundtable	"Teaching the Grateful Dead"	Nicholas G. Meriwether (moderator), Kay Alexander, Barry Barnes, Gary Burnett, Alan R. Lehman, Revell Carr
2007	Barry Barnes	"Teaching with the Grateful Dead"	
2010	Natalie J. Dollar	"A Pedagogical Experiment: Using Cultural Communication Theory to Explore Musical Speech Communities and American Culture"	
2011	Ryan Slesinger	"'To Learn and Love and Grow': Improvisation and Inspiration in the Grateful Dead Classroom"	
2012	Ryan Slesinger	"'The Forces Tear Lose from the Axis': Teaching the Dead through Geoffrey Sirc and the Pedagogy of the Happening"	
2013	Ryan Slesinger	"'Please Help Them to Learn As Well As to See': Ethics, Pedagogy, and Extending the Grateful Dead Classroom."	
2014	Roundtable	"Teaching the Dead"	Bob Trudeau (moderator), Timothy Ray, Natalie Dollar, Ryan Slesinger, Pyra Intihar
2016	Timothy Ray	"'Think This Through with Me': Reflections on Teaching a Senior Seminar on the Grateful Dead to English Majors"	
2017	Bob Trudeau	"Teaching the Dead: A Report"	
2018	Susan Peterson	"Teaching the Dead"	
2021	Rebecca Adams	"Collaborative Pedagogy: Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead on Tour, on Campus, and Online" (interdisciplinary roundtable)	

The contributions to this volume bolster that scholarship considerably and we hope will spur even more contributions to the growing scholarship in Dead pedagogy.

THE ARTICLES

While the articles included in this collection focus primarily on the college classroom, there is a broad range of disciplines addressed in the articles presented here.

- The volume opens with music theorist Brian Felix's perspective on the "why" and "how" of teaching the Dead in his contribution "Teaching (and Studying) the Music of the Grateful Dead." Felix discusses the complexities of teaching about the Dead and the challenge of working all of that into a semester. He shares his thoughts on approaching the complexities from a musical perspective, focusing particularly on the change in keyboard players over the years, since those changes mark different eras of the band.
- Next is sociologist and longtime Dead scholar Rebecca Adams' article "Collaborative Pedagogy: Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead on Tour, on Campus, and Online," in which she discusses a form of cooperative pedagogy she calls "collaborative pedagogy" that she used with her students in three different iterations of courses she taught on the Grateful Dead and how those three approaches reflected on each other pedagogically. She also addresses the pedagogical problems that she encountered in various learning environments.
- Historian, archivist, and curator Nicholas Meriwether follows with his contribution, "The Discourse Communities of the Grateful Dead: The Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association," in which he discusses how the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus annual gathering at SWPACA reflects a learning and discourse community of scholars engaged in a synergistic act of learning and teaching as they bring their diverse disciplinary backgrounds to the conversation each year and in ongoing online discussions throughout the year. In doing so, he reflects on both the benefits and problems of this dynamic.
- Philosopher Stanley Specter's contribution, "Teaching the Grateful Dead with Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*," shifts the conversation from teaching about the Grateful Dead to using the Dead to teach Frederick Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. Specter discusses how Nietzsche's emphasis on the idea of life affirmation and vitality is similar to the Grateful Dead experience and explores the Apollonian-Dionysian duality that, he argues, is inherent in both. Specter discusses his approach to teaching Nietzsche and the Grateful Dead together and the adjustments he has made, depending on students' familiarity with either subject.
- Communications scholar Natalie Dollar discusses how the Grateful Dead can be used to teach cultural communications and vice versa in her contribution "Teaching Cultural Communication and the Grateful Dead Phenomenon." In her essay, Dollar discusses how the multidisciplinary nature of Grateful Dead studies lends itself well to teaching cultural communication and how students from various disciplines can use their unique perspectives to shed new light on the Grateful Dead phenomenon.
- American literature specialist Ryan Slesinger explores the application of "happening" pedagogy (in the spirit of Charles Deemer's landmark 1967 *College English* essay "English Composition as a Happening" and Geoffrey Sirc's 2002 book *English Composition as a Happening*) in his teaching of the Dead as literature, music, and poetry in his contribution "Teaching the Grateful Dead and Happening Pedagogy." Slesinger describes how he arrived at a pedagogical approach that he calls "spontaneous pedagogy" that depends on a collaborative effort between students and the pedagogue as practitioner and how that aligns with the collaborative nature of a Dead/Deadhead (band/audience) relationship and the spontaneity (and teachable moments) that arise therein.

- Rob Weiner, founding area chair for the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus and a longtime participant in SWPACA, offers a reflective practitioner's view on teaching the Grateful Dead as a popular culture phenomenon and offers a possible model syllabus in his contribution "Teaching the Dead: A Short Personal Remembrance."
- Professor emeritus Robert Trudeau offers a unique perspective on teaching about the Grateful Dead to senior citizens in his contribution "A Touch of Grey: Reflections on Teaching the Dead."
- We wrap up the issue with Christopher Coffman's insightful review of Brent Wood's 2020 monograph *The Tragic Odes of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead*.

In keeping with the pedagogical focus of this special issue, we believe these essays provide an impressive array of pedagogical scholarship in popular culture/counterculture studies.

Putting together an issue such as this involves the efforts of a considerable number of people, and we are deeply indebted to everyone who helped to bring this issue to fruition.

Firstly, we would like to thank the contributors themselves. They not only responded to the call for submissions, they also did so with outstanding examples of scholarship in general and pedagogical scholarship in popular culture more specifically. When considered collectively, we feel these examples of Dead-related scholarship are critically important. We would also like to thank the authors for their patience with the publication process during Covid.

We would like to thank the readers that we worked with along the way. They did not have to give of their time, but they did so because they feel strongly about the field of Grateful Dead studies. They also provided excellent critical feedback to our contributors. Their insights were particularly helpful and extremely thoughtful, and for that, we are grateful. Those readers were Susan Balter-Reitz, Barry Barnes, Jeremy Berg, Geoffrey V. Carter, Justin Everett, Horace "Bud" Fairlamb, Jimmy Guignard, Clayton "Scott" Garthwait, Brent House, Richard Monture, Deirdre Pettipiece, Daniel Pinti, Peter Richardson, and Timothy Rupert.

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We hope you find these contributions as thought-provoking and insightful as we have and hope you will take them into consideration in terms of teaching about the Grateful Dead or using the Dead as a vehicle to teach about a topic in your field, be that in pop culture or any other field. For those of you not familiar with Grateful Dead studies or the band itself, we hope this has been an eye-opener of sorts. One of the underlying goals of Dead studies seems to be not just discussing the field among ourselves, but also initiating the conversation in other disciplines by bringing the Grateful Dead into those conversations. In the Graffian sense, Dead scholars are generally inclined toward "teaching the contact zones"--the areas of disciplinary overlap. We hope these essays inspire you to find "contact zones" between your own field and Dead studies.

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AUTHOR BIOS

Timothy Ray is an associate professor of English at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, where he teaches a wide variety of undergraduate courses in rhetoric and writing, popular culture, counterculture, and digital culture. He has taught two senior seminars on the Grateful Dead, and he is currently working on developing an undergraduate general-education writing course about the Grateful Dead. He is a frequent presenter at the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus at SWPACA, focusing particularly on the rhetorical aspects of the Grateful Dead and also on pedagogical approaches to teaching the Dead.

Julie DeLong is an independent scholar who has been both a presenter and an invited speaker at the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus at SWPACA over the years. Her research interests include thematic analysis of the lyrics of the Grateful Dead, memento mori art, and the English sonnet tradition. She has used this research to develop pedagogy for English literature courses in her former career as a community college professor. Her research on how the Deadhead community has historically used the internet for subcultural recruitment has been featured on the official podcast of the Grateful Dead, the Good Ol' Grateful Deadcast. She is the creator and host of the So Many Reads Grateful Dead Book Club, hosted on Zoom monthly.

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