ABSTRACT

STEPHEN TAYLOR. Fallacy Instruction in First-Year Writing Textbooks. (Under the direction of Professor Stacey Pigg, PhD.)

Despite how prevalent logic instruction seems to be in writing courses, few scholars to date have gathered actual evidence to support any kind of logic instruction in the writing classroom. Teaching about fallacies, in particular, rarely has an impact on a student’s ability to think critically or to write logical arguments. This is likely neither because fallacy instruction is impossible, nor because logic training does not enhance argumentative skills. Rather, it appears that writing instructors at large have yet to implement optimal methods of instruction in these topics. The most thorough available studies on fallacy instruction in writing courses are regrettably out-of-date, with only anecdotal evidence supporting any developments across the last two decades or more. Also, few scholars have published even quasi-experimental studies on writing and logic instruction, let alone serious, data-driven findings. To begin more rigorous inquiry into contemporary fallacy instruction, this document presents an analysis of 26 textbooks currently in use in first-year writing courses at colleges and universities in the state of North Carolina. This analysis focuses on the following research question: How do current composition textbooks approach fallacy instruction? Taking in-use textbooks as a marker of the discipline’s current state, this analysis sheds light on dated, problematic, and potentially confusing practices and pedagogies where fallacies are concerned. The findings evince that many in-use composition textbooks employ ineffective approaches to fallacy instruction. It is also clear, however, that these problematic approaches are not the only approaches in use. Findings suggest a groundwork for new pedagogical experiments, refined teaching practices, and overdue textbook revisions in this area.