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**So Much Depends Upon the Route**

**Jennifer Beech**

When scholars engage in theoretical critique, they see themselves as intervening in an important issue or problem. In this regard, in the practice of theory, the possibilities of agency and action are primarily textual. In the practice of teaching, agency and action are experienced in the moment-to-moment, day-to-day experience of teaching.

——Lisa Ede
Teaching can often remain invisible when academic maps and disciplinary boundaries are usually drawn.

—Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jeff Sommers

We might understand a ward map, then, as an ironic document, for behind it one can see simultaneous attempts both to realize the public sphere as a plethora of voices that will contend with government but also as something to be shaped according to the images of democracy that reverberate inside the heads of those powerful enough to map.

—Ralph Cintron

In his recent *JAC* article, James Thomas Zebroski begins by noting that "sometimes we do not see something until it twinkles in and out of our perceptual field" (513). Likewise, Ralph Cintron uses a similar visual metaphor to describe how mapping works: "A map, then, is one kind of optical knowledge that comes into being after real space overwhelms the eye" (29). Cintron goes on to say that mapping exhibits "the desire to conquer and colonize" (35). Having sustained a substantial knee injury in the summer of 2007 which required surgery, along with nine weeks on crutches, for me both Zebroski's and Cintron's observations took on material meaning. As Brueggemann, et al. note, disability although everywhere around us remains invisible to most of our perceptual fields. With the task of locating handicapped entrances and the most efficient, least painful routes to my fall classes, I began to map my campus in ways previously invisible to me; I felt a necessity to conquer my campus landscape. Online map services often offer several options for routes, each reflecting a different value system: 1) the most scenic route (for those with time and resources that allow them to value leisure and aesthetics); 2) the quickest route (time is money); 3) the shortest route (fuel is money); and so forth. When Zebroski sets out to map the discourses of social class in rhetoric and composition by relying heavily on Foucault's archaeological approach to discourse, which is "neither formalization nor interpretation, but description . . ." (Paras qtd. in Zebroski 530), he attempts to posit his own mapping as something more neutral than previous scholarly attempts to taxonomize. He contends, "As a theorist, I am interested in mapping not taxonomizing, describing for
now the general contours of these discourses, to begin the task of tracking
the discursive array, the shape of the discourse. I do not propose this as
a taxonomy but as an early draft of a map” (543). Upon my first reading
of Jim’s article, then, I began to wonder: is Jim’s perceptual field attuned
to what might be the academic equivalents to the scenic route, the shortest
or quickest routes, or the handicapped accessible routes—each with “its
objects, concepts, theories, and subjects constructed, as well as the ‘rules’
and mechanisms of enforcement such discourse requires” (Zebroski 517)?

Early in his essay, Zebroski sets the impetus for his mapping by
claiming that despite the early “groundbreaking work of Richard Ohmann
and Ira Shor in the 1970s, [rhetoric and composition] has everywhere
acknowledged the import of class, but . . . has fled from a larger
conversation about writing and social class” (514). This move reflects
what Susan Peck MacDonald describes as the epistemic gesture, whereby
the author makes a space for himself by identifying what he sees as a
significant gap in the scholarly conversation. Indeed, Zebroski’s gesture
especially seems an overstatement when juxtaposed with the following
editorial statement for the November 2004 College English special issue
on Social Class and English Studies:

In the past decade, attention to class in English studies has grown
dramatically, emerging as a central concern in the field, especially
in composition. Compositionists perhaps more than any other
educators have considered seriously the way class shapes students’
learning and their uses of language. . . . These interests are taking
shape as a specialty within English studies, as represented by, for
example the Working-Class Special Interest Group of the Confer­
ence on College Composition and Communication since the mid-
1990s and the more recently founded Working-Class Literature
Association. . . Conference, centers, newsletters, and special
journal issues like this one reflect the growth of interest in working-
class life and culture, as well as in class as a category of analysis.
(Linkon, Peckham, and Lanier-Nabors 149–50)

Zebroski does offer a few scholars who “may be beginning to change”
the course of the conversation. Specifically, he names the 1998 Shepard,
McMillan, and Tate Collection; Sherry Linkon’s 1999 edited collection;
Julie Lindquist’s ethnography; the November 2004 College English
special issue; and William DeGenaro's recent edited collection on *Working-Class Rhetorics*. As someone who has for the last four years co-chaired the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC's) Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy Special Interest Group, I suppose I expected to see a few more acknowledgments of work being done in the field with respect to this important subject. While I want to agree with Zebroski that there is far too little conversation concerning social class and composition, I cannot agree that the conversation is as slim as he paints it. For instance, Zebroski claims that "social class and writing could hardly be considered the hot topic for dissertation research of doctoral students or scholarship of established faculty" (515). Yet the works of Seitz and Lindquist that he lists on his works cited page stem from each author's dissertation research while at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Also, by punching into *Dissertation Abstracts International* the key terms "composition" and "working class," I easily located seventeen other doctoral dissertations written in such prominent composition and rhetoric programs as University of Pennsylvania; Miami University of Ohio; CUNY; and University of Arizona (the dissertation of William DeGenaro, editor of the new University of Pittsburgh Press book Zebroski cites, was amongst those listed in *DAI*), to name a few. While we probably cannot agree on how many dissertations it takes to make the topic a hot one, I think we can measure some recognition of the topic's importance by the fact that Katherine Kelleher Sohn's dissertation written in 1999 for the Ph.D. program at Indian University of Pennsylvania won the James Berlin Dissertation Award and is now published in CCCC's Studies in Writing and Rhetoric series. Sohn's work, *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia*, represents sound ethnographic research into the literacy practices of a small group of nontraditional, rural, working-class, Appalachian white women after returning to college. Of course, I understand that Zebroski's purpose was not to provide a bibliography for working-class research in rhetoric and composition. (Rebecca Moore Howard has nicely begun this on her website.) I suppose, though, I was a bit disconcerted that Jim's perceptual field so radically differed from mine.

Let me make clear that I think Zebroski's article begins some important work, particularly with respect to considering how the social
class discourse systems we employ structure consciousness and emotions, construct subjects, include and exclude, and (dis)allow for certain subjectivities and senses of agency. What I want to put pressure on is how Zebroski’s own language, particularly towards the end of his article, constructs (perhaps unwittingly) the subject of his very own discourse about social class in a way that largely excludes the primary body of practitioners of first-year writing instruction that he seems to care about. That Jim’s perceptual field seems to disallow citations of other important rhetoric and composition work currently being done in the area of working-class studies may seem a minor bone to pick. Nonetheless, I’ll briefly pick it because I believe the limits of Jim’s perceptual field with respect to citation are directly related to the biases—the blinders, if we follow the sight metaphor—that disallow him to consciously employ language that does not alienate those who primarily teach first-year composition. While I certainly do not wish to add more fuel to what Olson has termed the older or more recent “theory wars,” as someone who considers herself a teacher-theorist, I have difficulty reading Jim’s article without seeing it as adding a bit of fuel to the fire.

First, let us briefly consider the claim that little is being done with respect to social class and writing instruction. To Zebroski’s brief list, I would add that in 1998, Ira Shor and Caroline Pari offered CCC’s first all-day workshop on social class and composition. I attended this workshop, so I can attest that at least the first four of the six definitions for working class that Zebroski names in his piece were explored during it: namely, what the author labels “Discourse 1: The Discourse of Position,” which is the most common American way of imagining social class as some position in a grade of hierarchies (usually income or education) (543–44); “Discourse 2: The Discourse of Social Relations,” which plays off the Marxist concept that classes exist in (power) relations to one another (545–46); “Discourse 3: The Discourse of Work and the Workplace,” which “focuses on social interactions and social stratification at work” (546–47); and “Discourse 4: The Discourse of Cultural Heritage,” which imagines working-class culture from an anthropological notion as a way of life with values and heritage that are passed on (548–50). Shor and Pari’s CCC’s workshop struck a fine balance between the theoretical and the pedagogical. Both strains of discussion from that workshop
have been carried on in the CCCC's Working-Class Culture and Pedagogy SIG. Under the leadership of Ira Shor, William Thelin, and me, this SIG has alternated between very practical discussions of assignments that either focus on class-based writing assignments or strategies for reaching students from various class backgrounds and more theoretical discussions about how our definitions of social class inform our theories about writing and subjectivity.

Speaking of mapping, at the 2006 CCCC's in Chicago, SIG member Gloria MacMillan worked with local arrangements chairs to sponsor as part of the official program a "Working Class Walking Tour of Chicago." As Gloria explained to me personally, in designing the tour her aim was "to go to sites that were represented in Chicago literature, a body of texts largely characterized as working class, dealing with common people, rather than socialites." Among the stops on the tour was the Chicago Cultural Center, originally the Landmark 1890s Main Library on East Washington Street, where as Gloria noted on her tour handout, "Working class people learned to read and mixed with society in the first permanent structure of the city's public library system." Our SIG has, under the direction of William J. Macauley, Jr., now for number of years sponsored the Bring-A-Book project, through CCCC's, in which books are collected at the conference and directed towards a literacy sponsor in the host city. Also notable is Donna LeCourt's recent book Identity Matters: Schooling the Student Body in Academic Discourse, in which the author examines hundreds of literacy narratives from working-class students in order to theorize the relationship of student bodies to the materiality of writing instruction. A professor of composition at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, LeCourt recently directed Michael Edwards' dissertation, "Writing Class and Value in the Information Economy: Toward a new Understanding of Economic Activity in the Composition Classroom." My own position as SIG leader and as discussion leader for the CCCC's Research Network Forum has brought to my attention dissertations like Mike's and others that are in the works. The topic seems to be a bit hotter than Zebroski, perhaps, believes. For instance, in December of 2005, under the editorship of Howard Tinberg (and guest editorship of Ira Shor), Teaching English in the Two-Year College published a special issue, The Invisible "C": Class and the Community College. Likewise, in
the new Prentice Hall journal *Open Words: Access and English Studies*, co-editors William Thelin and John Tassoni dedicated the second issue to "Open Access and the Working Class." Both special issues present articles that range nicely from the theoretical to the pedagogical; in fact, I would argue that both special issues tend to the values and emotions of both teachers and theorists, but more so, of teacher-theorists.

Let's return then to Zebroski's essay to examine the subject constructed by his emotion-laden language. Zebroski's professed purpose is to "propose that we shift our disciplinary concept of social class from viewing it as an essentially economic or cultural phenomenon, and turn instead to thinking about social class primarily as discourses—or, more properly, as a set of discourses" (516). To help make this move, Zebroski adds to Foucault's concept of discourse Lynn Worsham's important point in "Going Postal" that we cannot ignore the role of emotional labor inherent or made possible by the very discourses we employ or are subjected to. Following from Worsham, Zebroski contends, "Emotion is tied to values and values are often how social class conflicts are made visible in our daily lives and in our work" (516). Zebroski champions "a rhetorical approach . . . that is less interested in the intent of the subject [of history] than the effects of language practices" (531). With all of these points, I essentially agree; it is mainly the effects of Jim's concluding language that concern me, for he seems to value the language and practice of theory almost to the exclusion of what Lisa Ede terms the language and practice of teaching. To clarify, let's consider the following point Zebroski forwards near the end of his discussion:

To the extent that social class has been studied in rhetoric and composition, it has been overdetermined by a pervasive individualism that is part and parcel of what might be called a will to service, the need to make all work in rhetoric and composition into some new gimmick to be applied either in the classroom, in the curriculum, or in administration. (566)

A page later, he bemoans "the nearly obsessive impulse in the discipline to turn scholarly work, especially theory, within even an article or essay, into some classroom practice" (567). At several points in his essay, Zebroski contends that our attention to the discourse systems we operate
has necessary implications for first-year composition. Yet, the very
language he employs towards his conclusion has the effect of construct­
ing the privileged scholar subject, alienating or making little room for the
majority of people who actually teach first-year composition. Again, the
opening epigraph from Ede can help us better consider the emotional
work that Zebroski’s language performs for various subjects: Zebroski,
the theorist, locates “the possibilities for agency and action [as] primarily
textual” (Ede 150), while describing pedagogical applications of theory
as gimmicky. As Zebroski contends, “Emotion is ever present” (540), for
we can only imagine the structures of feeling that the author’s language
emotes from those who either produce or make use of pedagogical
scholarship. In Zebroski’s terminology, those who extract from theory
practical applications are “gimmicky” (566); “obsessive” (567); or seem­
ingly simplistic seekers of “immediate sure-fire classroom, curricular or
administrative implications” (567). Hence, I could not agree more with
Zebroski’s contention that “we need to begin with the fact that the
discourse constructs the subject” (568), for it seems that Zebroski’s
language unfortunately constructs the theorist subject in binary opposi­
tion to the practitioner subject. This has a certain irony, for as many
scholars have noted, the majority of first-year composition classes are
taught by what might be called the working-class of composition:
contingent faculty. Zebroski even makes reference to this class-based
aspect of academic labor in his discussion of “The Discourses of Work
and the Workplace.” In fact, he admits, “Rhetoric and composition is
classed not simply in its appropriation of post-Fordist methods, among
them the hiring of contingent labor. It is classed in its teaching, its
scholarship, and its professional practice” (547).

Despite his acknowledgment of classed teaching and scholarship,
Zebroski’s language clearly sets himself apart from those who have little
choice but to take the practical or even handicapped routes to their first­
year writing classes. As a tenured professor and established scholar,
Zebroski is one of those “powerful enough to map” (Cintron 25). With a
smaller teaching load than those employed at what John Alberti has called
“second-tier, working-class universities” or in other situations with
heavy teaching and paper loads, many self-professed composition theo­
rists can afford to take the academic equivalent of the scenic route to
scholarship. Zebroski can afford to locate agency in textual practices, rather than in classroom practices.

A recent teaching experience of my own highlighted for me the disabled teaching conditions under which the majority of first-year writing instructors labor. Last spring, when a senior-level rhetoric seminar I was slated to teach did not make, at the last minute an adjunct was fired, and I was re-assigned to teach her first-year research writing class. As a tenure-track faculty member, I was used to being assigned classrooms in the very building that houses our English department, but with this last-minute shift, I found myself trekking up what campus residents affectionately call "cardiac hill" to a classroom in one of our oldest buildings. Instead of whiteboards and smart boards and computer technology, I was now in a room whose best technology included electricity and a chalkboard. My perceptual field changed radically, and I began to search for new teaching practices, even gimmicks, for discussing online library databases in a room that contained no computer or Internet services. I became obsessed with making sure that my students, many of whom come from working-class backgrounds, gained access to the technologies so readily available to their peers in classrooms just down the hill.

Handicapped by their very teaching conditions, many first-year composition teachers cannot afford to take the scenic route when it comes to larger university pressures for them to fulfill what theorists bemoan as the service mission of first-year composition. With little time to read (let alone write) lengthy academic articles, many first-year composition teachers find valuable the short, practical articles found in a journal like *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*. That *TE2YC*’s special issue *The Invisible "C": Class and the Community College* remained beyond Zebroski’s perceptual field bears out the point brought forth in the opening epigraph from Lewiecki-Wilson and Sommers.

If we hope to open up theoretical discussions for the practitioners and pedagogical discussions for theorists, folks on both sides of the theory wars need to better attend to the pedagogic work their language and scholarship perform. Here, I use the term *pedagogy* in the broader sense that Lynn Worsham, following from Bourdieu and Passerson, has used
the term. In "Going Postal: Pedagogic Violence and the Schooling of Emotion," Worsham differentiates Bourdieu and Passeron's use of *pedagogy* from "the familiar and specialized sense of pedagogy as a philosophy...of teaching, including classroom practices and instruction methods," clarifying their use of it to refer to "education in general" (221). Let us, then, extend Zebroski's discussion of how discourse structures feelings to consider how scholarship and journals (even special issues) *educate* us or teach us to (de)value certain lines of thinking. First, we must consider how scholarly journals function. In his 1984 review essay, Robert Connors identifies three primary functions that composition journals perform. The first, he calls a "public" function: "journals exist to keep their readers current with the best work being done in the field..." (351). Next, he identifies "the function of field journals as 'filers,' defining what sorts of work are acceptable and unacceptable to the discipline, creating implicit criteria for work to be done in the future, wielding institutional authority to create...intellectual authority" (351). Finally, Connors asserts that journals function as measuring sticks for the success and respectability of scholars; we measure authors' success by the frequency of their publication in our most respected journals (352).

In "Making All the Right Moves: Foucault, Journals, and the Authorization of Discourse," Richard McNabb takes Connors' second category as his primary focus for exploring the work of composition journals, arguing that our journals "authorize both institutional and intellectual works" through external and internal frameworks of control (20). McNabb acknowledges that "Stephen Toulmin makes the same point, arguing that one of the dimensions by which a discipline certifies knowledge production is through formation of 'forums of competition' (e.g., journals) and authoritative reference groups (e.g., editors, peer review boards)" (31). Likewise, I would argue that such forums and reference groups wield what Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Claude Passeron term *pedagogic authority*, the ability to impose a cultural authority (under the guise of objectivity) upon a group (11–12).

For the purpose of extending Zebroski's discussion, I am most concerned with the two means through which journals, according to McNabb, authorize discourse (or wield pedagogic authority) internally: editorial statements and special issues. McNabb asserts, "Like editorial
statements, special issues have the effect of ordering and classifying discourse. As Toulmin notes, they tend to act as a conceptual platform on which future research should be based. Special issues not only influence what can be said but also perpetuate the ideas they convey by requiring future scholars to locate their arguments within the conversation” (34). As McNabb explains, scholars take editorial statements for regular and special issues as statements reflecting larger attitudes within the field; this appearance of being value neutral serves, then, to discourage critique of the hidden editorial agendas operating in journals (33-34). McNabb joins scholars such as Peter Vandenberg and Maureen Daly Goggin who have noted one prevailing underlying agenda in composition journals: that of classifying “scholars and researchers as ‘rational’ and practitioners as ‘irrational’” (McNabb 23). There are, thankfully, several new journals that defy this trend, most notably Duke UP’s journal Pedagogy, from which Zebroski cites Nancy Mack’s fine article. Further, as William H. Thelin notes in his “Editor’s Introduction: Open Access and the Working Class,” “Members of [the editorial board for the new journal Open Words] have been prominent in bringing class to the attention of compositionists” (1-2). Thelin goes on to name the work of Mike Rose, Julie Lindquist, William DeGenaro, and others. Thus, his editorial statement, like the one that introduced the College English special issue, authorizes social class as a valuable academic topic for composition studies.

Returning to Zebroski’s piece, one of the most important points that he brings up as he examines the news coverage during and after Hurricane Katrina has to do with how the media images of the devastation and poverty represented a disruption or breach in how social class is usually figured in America: “The way we collectively began to talk and write about social class underwent a shift almost as we were watching television of the events” (522). Occasionally, something intentional or not can make for the breach in the hegemonic structure that allows for a brief moment of insight, allows for, if you will, a different perceptual field. As I noted earlier, on a personal level, for me the breach has been a cancelled class, a trek up cardiac hill, and a literal breach in my anterior cruciate ligament. On a disciplinary level, what might widen a particular theorist or teacher’s perceptual field may be a special issue or a metaphorical jab
in the knee for those who can afford to take the scenic route. Sometimes, a view from the ground is radically different from that proffered by a room with a view.

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Works Cited


White-Collar Proletariat:  
The Case of Becky Meadows

Marc Bousquet

Why would decent quality wizards live in poverty?  
Couldn’t they perform basic magic to gain material goods?  
—Alex Wang (high school student, writing in response to the first four Harry Potter books)

Equally important, the creation of a reserve army of underemployed skilled white-collar workers whose jobs by no means exhausts the limits of their skills or abilities has increased the pool of available labor. By reducing job security this reserve army acts as a critical buttress to the power of employers over their workers.

The case of teaching provides a good example of this shift. It is easy to imagine teaching as relatively integrated, unalienated labor. The teacher is in direct contact with his or her material and has at least a modicum of