

A photograph of a school hallway. In the center is a dark door with a six-pane window. Above the door is a small sign with the number '115'. The door is flanked by rows of light-colored lockers. The floor is dark and reflective.

Late to Class

*Social Class and
Schooling in the
New Economy*

Edited by Jane A. Van Galen and George W. Noblit

Foreword by Michael W. Apple

Late to Class

SUNY series, Power, Social Identity, and Education

Lois Weiss, editor

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CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
Introduction	1
<i>Jane A. Van Galen</i>	

PART 1: GETTING TO CLASS

1. Growing Up as Poor, White Trash: Stories of Where I Come From	19
<i>Beth Hatt</i>	
2. Class/Culture/Action: Representation, Identity, and Agency in Educational Analysis	29
<i>Bill J. Johnston</i>	

PART 2: CLASS WORK

3. Living Class as a Girl	55
<i>Deborah Hicks and Stephanie Jones</i>	
4. Marginalization and Membership	87
<i>Jill Koyama and Margaret A. Gibson</i>	
5. Orchestrating Habitus and Figured Worlds: Chicana/o Educational Mobility and Social Class	113
<i>Luis Urrieta Jr.</i>	
6. High School Students' Exploration of Class Differences in a Multicultural Literature Class	141
<i>Richard Beach, Daryl Parks, Amanda Thein, and Timothy Lensmire</i>	
7. Social Class and African-American Parental Involvement	167
<i>Cheryl Fields-Smith</i>	

8. Social Heteroglossia: The Contentious Practice or Potential Place of Middle-Class Parents in Home–School Relations 203
Janice Kroeger

PART 3: AFTER CLASS

9. (Re)Turning to Marx to Understand the Unexpected Anger Among “Winners” in Schooling: A Critical Social Psychology Perspective 235
Ellen Brantlinger
10. The Problem of Poverty: Shifting Attention to the Non-Poor 269
Maïke Ingrid Philipsen
11. Intersections on the Back Road: Class, Culture, and Education in Rural and Appalachian Places 287
Van Dempsey
12. Class-Déclassé 313
George W. Noblit
- List of Contributors 347
- Name Index 353
- Subject Index 361

FOREWORD

As I began writing this foreword, the images of the tragedies unfolding in New Orleans were everywhere. The deaths and destruction, the human drama of trying to survive in conditions that were almost beyond comprehension, all of this and more, were ever-present, and rightly so. There were jarring words that kept emanating from the media, with sentences such as, “This was the worst natural disaster ever to be experienced by the United States.” Yet these words sat side by side with more explanations. “It could have been avoided.” This latter sentence seems much more compelling to me.

Why? The horrors of New Orleans are not explainable by phrases such as “natural disaster.” This situation had its genesis not in a hurricane, but rather in a slow-moving political and ideological storm that eroded our collective sensitivities, which consciously refused to fund public institutions, which saw public as being by definition “bad” and private as being by definition “good,” which engaged in one of the most massive programs of (upward) income redistribution in the history of our nation, and in a willful refusal to take seriously the possible effects of all of this on “our” economy, on the public infrastructure, on our educational institutions, on our social ethics, and on the structures of inequality of the larger society. In short, this was about *class* and its interconnections with race (see also Apple, 2000, 2006).

Yet, an understanding that class counts and counts in absolutely crucial ways has largely withered in the United States. This is constantly brought home to me when I am outside our borders. When I am in Brazil, or England, or Korea—or nearly anywhere else—the comparative absence of class discourses and understandings in the United States is so striking that one realizes that it has taken more than a century of creative ideological work by dominant groups to create a situation in which class talk seems either strange or somehow almost illegitimate in this nation.

Yet, I and many others have argued that class—and its complex intersections with race and gender—must be taken much more seriously

than it has been in most of the ways in which we think about this society and especially about educational policy and practice. It is interesting that some of the best work on how we might best understand class has actually been done in the United States (see, e.g., Weis, 2004; Wright, 1978, 1985, 1989, 1997). And even the popular best-seller list will occasionally feature a book on the realities of, say, the upwardly mobile fractions of affluent classes (Brooks, 2000) or on the lives of the poor (Ehrenreich, 2001; Shipler, 2004). Given all of this, however, it still feels as if we need to constantly swim upstream to take class relations as seriously as they deserve in education. The book you are about to read helps rectify this situation.

There are important questions that need to be asked about class. What are the processes by which class inequalities are reproduced over generations and thereby over decades and even over centuries? How do the affluent and the middle classes retain their privileges and power in nations like the United States as well as other parts of the world? How have the affluent and the middle classes proved successful in resisting legislative attempts, such as increased educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups, to create more equality? Does this mean that such efforts have basically been a failure? Should governments do more or less to deal with such inequalities (Devine, 2004, p. 172)?

To these questions a number of others need to be asked. What roles do our educational institutions play in reproducing or interrupting class dynamics? What are the interconnections among different dynamics of dominance and subordination inside and outside schooling? How is class *experienced*? Do these lived experiences provide the space for counterhegemonic possibilities? What can education and educators do to expand these spaces? An emerging body of literature has sought to deal with a number of these issues (see, e.g., Anyon, 2005; Apple, 2006; Apple and Buras, 2006). The book you are about to read continues this path in important ways.

In order to answer these and other questions, we need to remember that what class means is more than simply one's place in an economic structure. In essence, class needs to be seen not only as a noun but as a verb. This is made clear in the following quote: "Class has both objective and subjective components. That is, it is not simply a position, but a complex lived cultural and bodily reality. It is a process, not merely a 'thing.' Thus, it should always be seen not as a static entity, but as a set of processes that are both creative and destructive and in constant motion. Furthermore, it is a relational concept in that it is defined in opposition to other classes. Finally, it is historically contingent" (McNall, Levine, and Fantasia 1991, p. 4).

The realization of such nuances may make class analysis more complicated, but who ever said that understanding the social realities and inequalities—and the struggles to change such realities and inequalities inside and outside of schools—was easy? But even given the conceptual and historical complexity of the ways in which class functions as a structure and as a process, as both economic and cultural, it is still more than a little visible in our daily lives inside and outside of educational institutions. Let me give a concrete example of how this works in real life.

I have taught at the University of Wisconsin in Madison for over three decades. Certain conditions have now had predictable effects, such things as budget cuts, the ever-rising cost of going to college, the fact that employment security for many working-class and middle-class people is now nearly nonexistent, and the high rates of under- and unemployment; the list could go on and on—all of these conditions have changed the character of my university and of so many others. Thus, the average family income of the entering class at Wisconsin is reported to be over twenty thousand dollars higher than before (and rising), this at a time when family incomes among many groups have either stagnated or fallen. This is one of the best indicators of who gets to study at “world-class” universities and who does not. It stands as a mute witness to the ways in which income is linked to social advantage in complicated ways.

To say that there are connections between income and advantage is to repeat a truism. However, is this condition totally explained by economic resources? We might say, along with Fiona Devine (2004), that income is usually a necessary condition, but it is not sufficient. Cultural and social resources are crucial as well. Particular dispositions, propensities, and appreciations—and an “ease” in displaying them—as well as who you know, play important roles here. Readers familiar with Pierre Bourdieu will recognize that this equates with his taxonomy of various kinds of capital: economic, cultural, and social. Bourdieu has argued that in terms of class advantage, symbolic struggles count and they count in important ways. At the same time, however, they are also struggles over economic and political power, as well as cultural power. There are complicated conversion strategies at play here, in which the accumulation of one form of capital—say, cultural capital—is used to “trade” for social and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1984). The ways in which such class conversion strategies privilege particular class actors in education, and de-power others, is striking and an analysis of these strategies is crucial if we are to more fully comprehend the ways in which the struggle over what counts as “legitimate” culture versus “popular” culture are so important in this society (Apple, 2006).

The authors included here, recognize the importance of these struggles and of the ways in which differently positioned actors engage in them. The authors are unusually reflective about their own structural location and about the dangers of imposing their “solutions” on others. All too much of the socially and culturally critical literature in education is written in such a way that it is either largely rhetorical or so overly theorized that its style itself serves to latently act as a new rule of exclusion. The authors are aware of the need for conceptual and empirical substance.

But this is not all. In the process of demonstrating the realities of class and of why we need to focus on class analysis, they are also fully aware of the ways in which class experiences are formed out of the intersections of race and gender as well. The word “experiences” is important here. The book illuminates not simply structural positions, but *lived* experiences. In this way, it is able to show us class as a process that includes moments of meaning making, struggle and resistance as well as domination (see also, Dance, 2002; Fine and Weis, 1998).

Finally, and in my mind one of the most important characteristics of the book, is its attempt to answer the question of “What is to be done?” By taking seriously the issue of “emancipatory” pedagogies (the plural is crucial here), they are not satisfied with bearing witness to negativity—although this is a crucial act for researchers to engage in. They also want to open the spaces for possible interruption and intervention. As I have argued at length elsewhere, this is one of the more significant roles that critical scholars can play in a time of conservative attacks on everything we hold dear (Apple, 1996, 2006, Apple et al., 2003). For all of these reasons and more, this is a book that deserves our attention.

Michael W. Apple

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INTRODUCTION

Jane A. Van Galen

Nowhere is there a more intense silence about the realities of class differences than in educational settings.

—bell hooks

What does it mean to speak of social class in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century? In times when the social terrain between the “haves” and “have-nots” has grown ever wider, how can renewed consideration of social class deepen our analyses of educational reform—reform that has been invoked in the name of global economic competitiveness and opportunity? Why, even as we’ve come far in our understanding of race, ethnicity, and gender in schooling, do we seem to be late to class?

The authors in this volume, who found such questions particularly compelling, present theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical perspectives on social class and schooling in the United States. In compiling this collection, we hope to provoke a critique of the assumptions of “classlessness” (Reay, 1998) within which educational reform and education research has too often been constructed, toward the eventual goal of generating dialogue about the new meanings of “class” in U.S. schools in a rapidly shifting economy.

We believe that we have been late in coming to these conversations. As Sherry L. Linkon (1999, pp. 2–3) has observed, “the principles of inclusion and recognition that have been so important in creating spaces for gender studies, black studies, queer studies, and ethnic studies [in educational settings] have generally not been extended to class.” Within the litany of “race class and gender” among critical scholars, class analyses

are by far the least developed. Apart from a long tradition of study of the schooling of poor urban children of color, educational researchers have paid relatively limited attention to the complexities of social class in shaping educational experiences in the “new economy” of knowledge and service work (Brantlinger, 1993, 2003; Brown, 1998; Chafel, 1996; Faulkner, 1995; Grant and Sleeter, 1996; O’Dair, 1993; Van Galen, 2000, 2004; Weis, 1990; Zandy, 1990).

While the academy is relatively silent about class, public discourse about the purposes of schooling actively denies its existence. As state and federal policy resonates with promises of opportunity if only individuals learn more, neither students nor their teachers have access to alternative interpretive lenses for explaining and navigating the constraints of their shared institutional lives. As Julie Bettie (2003, p. 195) observes, “class is largely missing as a category of identity offered by popular culture and political discourse in the early twenty-first century United States. Class is not a central category of thought, making it difficult to have a cultural or political class identity.”

How, then, do we revive conversations about class? Marxist analyses and functionalist justifications no longer seem to work, but scholars have been less clear about how to conceive of class within newer theoretical perspectives. As Susan L. Robertson (2000, p. 19) observes, scholarship on class is confounded by

. . . profound economic, political, and intellectual changes marking our time. The numerical decline of the old manual or “working class”, the emergence of new forms of “post-Fordist” production, the shift in employment and investment from production to consumption, together with the new intellectual currents centred around feminist/identity politics and the individualism of neoliberalism, have all worked to challenge the sovereignty of class and dislodge it as a fundamental analytical tool in social theory. . . . It has become unfashionable in academic circles to talk about class, as if class suddenly no longer mattered and the historic concerns of class theorists—such as inequality—have disappeared.

The authors in this volume have worked to illuminate what few in their research settings could even have named: the shifting landscape of social class in the lives of young people and their families, and in the work of their schools.

This book was crafted against a backdrop of unprecedented policy work that presupposes that schools can equalize opportunity for all (Aronowitz, 2003, p. 25). State and federal educational policy reverberates with confidence in the inherent fairness of life outside of school; stan-

dards-based reform policies promise that after a long history of sorting and stratification, schools, will, at long last, bring poor and working-class children into opportunity limited only by their own ambitions.

Yet the promise of personal and global prosperity toward which young people are encouraged to aspire is contradicted by basic labor market data: the most rapid job growth is not among high-tech, high-wage sectors of the economy, but rather among low-wage service-sector jobs, few of which require high levels of education or skill (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). Recent volatility in technology sectors and in the stock market, outsourcing, and the rise of contract work have left even highly educated workers experiencing an unprecedented sense of economic vulnerability (Berhnhardt et al., 2001; Ehrenreich, 1989; Perucci and Wyson, 1999). Even as academic and political interest in social class may have waned, movement through and within the rules of a new economic landscape has become turbulent for many families.

As recent social theorists have noted, the lived experience of class runs more deeply than economics. As M. Zweig (2000, p. 11) succinctly notes, "Class is about the power some people have over the lives of others, and the powerlessness most people experience as a result." If power does matter in the shifting landscapes of economic stratification, the challenge of closing achievement gaps (and ultimately, economic gaps) between poor and working-class children and their more privileged peers would not be a matter of simply enabling the lower-achieving students to "catch up" in competitiveness for a diminishing number of middle-class jobs. Instead, in times of volatile wealth and eroding job security across class lines, those with the power to do so are likely to position their own children at the winning ends of ever-more uneven playing fields (Brantlinger, 2003; Lareau, 1989, 2003; Lareau and Shumar, 1996; Reay, 1998). Quite simply, if children who currently are not doing well in school begin to do well, those for whom schooling *now* works would find ways to do even better. While business leaders and policy makers may have envisioned a generally stronger and smarter workforce for a global economy coming from school reform, middle-class parents sensing their own economic vulnerability are likely to infer that in a rapidly changing and very competitive labor market, their *own* children had very well better become stronger and smarter than everyone else.

As Pierre Bourdieu (1984, p. 133) notes:

When class factions who previously made little use of the school system enter the race for academic qualifications, the effect is to force the groups whose reproduction was mainly or exclusively achieved through education to step up their investments so as to maintain the relative

scarcity of their qualifications and, consequently, their positions in the class structure. Academic qualifications and the school system which awards them thus become one of the key stakes in an interclass competition which generates a general and continuous growth in the demand for education and an inflation of academic qualifications.

In this volume, then, scholars will examine the educational experiences of poor, working-class and middle-class students against the backdrop of complicated class stratification generated by a shifting global economy. Together, the chapters will explore the salience of class in understanding the social, economic, and cultural landscapes within which young people in the United States come to understand the meaning of their formal education in times of shifting opportunity.

The Chapters

As readers consider these individual chapters and the collection as a whole, we hope to generate dialogue in several areas.

Coming of Age in the Shifting Landscape of Class

First, the collection offers intriguing glimpses into the meaning that young people make of schooling as they come to terms with their relative power and status, even as they are likely to have little formal understanding of the myriad ways in which their lives are shaped by class stratification. In the new economy, class has been rendered nearly invisible. As Valerie Walkerdine (2003, p. 241) has observed, “We no longer have a large manufacturing base which provides the pivot for an understanding of class stratification based on class divisions. What used to be the working class is now dispersed into service industries based on individual contracts, piecework, home work and work in call centres, with jobs for life having disappeared.”

Unlike the lads of Paul Willis’s (1977) classic study of working-class youths in an industrial community, young people today cannot frame their sense of the meaning of school within alternate, oppositional identities. Today, young people growing up at the margins of the economy do not face the more stark tensions between identities as workers and aspirations toward “more”; instead, the children and grandchildren of factory workers are more likely to embark upon career paths such as those that culminate, after years of shuffling documents, in their appointment as assistant manager of the night shift of the copy center. Meanwhile, those who in previous generations may have assumed that the professional positions were theirs for the taking are now more likely to contract

themselves (and in the process, reinvent themselves) through a series of shifting corporate alliances and career changes.

How then, do young people coming of age in today's economy come to understand who they might become? As Ellen A. Brantlinger notes in her chapter, whether consciously or not, identity *is* shaped around social class markers, and in the shifting landscape of the new economy, even middle-class students experience commodification, alienation, and exploitation in the processes through which social distinctions are generated and sustained.

A number of chapters in this volume, then, consider the ways in which poor, working-, and middle-class students form identities of possibility, even while explicit identities of class may elude them. Deborah Hicks and Stephanie Jones draw us into the lives of young girls on the far social fringes of their communities, weighing the invitation to venture further into the alien but communal terrain of literacy. In the work of Luis Urrieta Jr. and of Jill Kayoma and Stephanie Jones, we encounter ambitious, talented, and academically driven working-class students of color whose sense of self is crafted within daily interactions with more privileged peers, many of whom assume that they have already earned the right to disdainfully exclude the lower-status students by virtue of their superior academic and social accomplishments (Bullock, 1995, p. 125). In the chapter by Richard Beach, Daryl Parks, Amanda Thein, and Timothy Lensmire, we observe working-class youths who have earned a place in a program for students with academic aspirations, struggling with acknowledging the privileges of their whiteness while at the same time grappling with their class oppression.

In each of these chapters, we see poor and working-class students tallying the relative costs of loyal identification with their economically vulnerable families, against the untested hope that schooling can, and will, serve the interests of people like them. Meanwhile, in Brantlinger's recasting of her previous work on class, we see the "winners" also coming to slowly understand that while they may be on top, they have precious little idea of how to navigate the rules of a game that are no longer stable nor clear, even though they had thought that success in school would have assured them of their capacity to succeed "as a constantly changing successful entrepreneur of oneself" (Walkerdine, 2003, p. 241).

We see these young people living out the central questions of class, always at the intersections of gender and ethnicity and geography, yet rarely able to name the myriad ways in which their lives are shaped by cultural and economic influences that operate well beyond the reaches of own agency.

Writing of girls at the center of these social confluences, Julie Bettie (2003, p. 190) observes: "Girls sorted through all of this and began drawing conclusions about what is or is not 'for the likes of me and my

kind' as friendships were increasingly organized by race/ethnicity and class as girls began to formulate identities based on the possible futures they imagined for themselves."

While academic attainment is certainly a part of the construction of a possible future, the complex social fabric of school and community offers much more powerful messages of what one is entitled to imagine for oneself. For children coming of age in decaying industrial towns, in isolated rural communities, in schools in which "the haves" display clear and exclusionary advantage, much more than rising test scores would be needed to invigorate the imagination.

Because identity is formed within particular social spaces, these chapters suggest that we can learn much more about the formation of class identities by also considering more carefully the geographic and cultural contexts of schooling. Most of the studies in this volume were conducted in diverse urban settings, in which relative privilege is always visible to young people. Whether to suggest things that might be possible for themselves, or to underscore the seemingly insurmountable social distances between themselves and others, young people in metropolitan areas have regular encounters with individuals from broad class backgrounds. One can imagine the "coalition building" advocated in Noblit's chapter taking place in vibrant metropolitan areas, in which young people will have daily encounters with those living very different lives. Yet as Van Dempsey reminds us, most poor and working-class students live in small towns and rural areas, and the social cohesion and relative homogeneity of these communities may simultaneously mask their relative disadvantage while also narrowing the range of possible futures to which they might aspire. What might we better understand about stratification and opportunity by becoming more mindful of the cultural geographies within which identities are formed?

And finally, how might we imagine ways in which repressive educational structures might be circumvented? Might we imagine new possibilities for pedagogies of the poor and working class through which young people might come to imagine new possibilities for themselves and for their communities? The authors of these chapters offer a foretaste of possible new frameworks for exploring class, in part by reconsidering what it might mean to envision schooling as a genuine instrument of possibility.

Social Mobility: Probing the Fractures in the System

While clearly documenting the numerous ways in which poor and working-class students come to understand the limits of what is "for the likes of me and my kind," the chapters also offer intriguing glimpses of fractures within the system, as we encounter those for whom schooling seems to be working

as an avenue of social mobility. We are long overdue for scrutiny of the experiences of the “ones who got away” (Reay, 1997, p. 20) in spite of the obvious constraints of schooling and the economy. While we have amassed considerable data about achievement gaps between more privileged students and their less-privileged peers, we know relatively little about the experiences of those for whom education has opened doors. While each of the authors in this volume would concede that social mobility through schooling is very much the exception rather than the norm, each would also likely concede that we can understand more about oppressive social structures when we better understand the limits of their reach.

We venture cautiously into this discussion, for as Brantlinger wisely cautions, we must distinguish between social mobility that genuinely does mark fractures in the system and other forms of mobility that merely foster mythical ideologies of opportunity for those who work hard. For too long, Brantlinger observes, success stories have been used to merely “bolster and mystify” divisive relationships between more privileged and subordinate students, as the successes of a few are then turned against their many peers.

Yet these chapters complicate each of these positions, and closer scrutiny of the schooling of the young people in these chapters suggest rich terrain for further study.

Across these chapters, for example, we see much more than the individual ambitions of particular students. We see, instead, students being supported by quietly subversive teachers, by educational programs built to counterbalance formal school structures, by the advocacy of parents (their own and others), and by community activists offering young people alternative narratives for understanding the work of their schools. We simply do not see students making it through the complicated social structures of school on their own merit alone.

As we meet these young people who are poised to circumvent the limits of their lives and their schooling, we most often do so in places other than the traditional classroom. Beach and his colleagues write of a rare and rigorous college prep program created for students in a working-class high school. Urrieta powerfully documents the processes by which some poor and working-class Chicana/o students are actively recruited into educational structures that will provide material and symbolic capital for their educational success. In his work, the synchronized advocacy of community activists, teachers, and parents enabled students to imagine new possibilities for themselves. Kayoma and Gibson write of support systems created explicitly to enable students to construct identities other than those ascribed to them by higher-status students and by teachers and that enable them to envision success in school on their own terms. Hicks and Jones, in their after school literacy program, invite young girls to more

closely read their communities and their formal schooling and to imagine other possibilities for themselves.

Other chapters suggest more possibilities. Both Fields-Smith and Kroeger portray families exercising agency that includes action for the collective good, and their work enriches a literature that too often represents parent involvement in single dimensions. These chapters suggest (as Noblit notes in his chapter) that teachers and parents might well move beyond adversarial relationships to explore potential alliances in the interest of creating better schools for all children.

Yet there is more beneath the telling of these stories than mere inspirational accounts of attaining the American Dream. Instead, these stories collectively reveal how complicated the work of upward mobility is. For example, it's clear that the resources available to the successful students in these chapters are simply not available to all who might benefit from their supports. In defining recipients of these resources as distinctively talented, school structures that sort on the basis of race, class, and gender remain unchallenged. In Urrieta's chapter, for example, access to the advocacy of teachers was often dependent upon allowing oneself to be defined as smarter and otherwise "different" from one's peers, complicating the development of a healthy ethnic identity. Often too, the strategies used to facilitate the success of students are merely borrowed from the strategies long invoked by middle-class white students and by their parents, strategies that obviously intensify the competition for limited resources but do nothing to broaden the discourse about why resources are so limited in the first place. One might ask the parents in the Fields-Smith chapter, for example, if rather than stepping into the traditionally supportive and subservient roles of parent involvement, African-American (and other) parents might also negotiate new roles for themselves—roles that Kroeger suggests will be essential if schools are to serve diverse populations well.

Clearly, then, in some schools, poor and working-class students are being invited to the game, and in others, the very rules of the game are being subject to greater scrutiny by students who enjoy the advocacy of mentors and advocates. Yet it's clear that this is not enough. The "game" itself continues as privilege defends itself. The rules still favor more privileged students, and the costs of the game are still extraordinarily high for poor and working-class students.

For all of the obvious limitations of the avenues to mobility represented here, these chapters also suggest that there is much more going on "beneath the radar" that warrants our collective curiosity. We see here the potential of extra-institutional structures, of student support groups that enable the formation of alternative identities, of the alternative renditions of parent involvement, and of community cultural

brokers who name the obstacles that they have faced in pursuing possibilities that schooling itself did not open to them. We need to understand these possibilities.

In these chapters there also are glimpses of how the very structure of school itself might be otherwise.

Poor and Working-Class Pedagogy

While we have come to envision varieties of feminist pedagogy or of critical multicultural education, we are harder pressed to imagine schooling in which poor and working-class students recognize themselves in the curriculum and discover their voices within the pedagogy. In these times in which the purposes of formal education have been narrowed to preparation for work in an increasingly competitive labor market, it has become difficult to imagine how school might serve deeper purposes of justice and equity. What alternatives can we imagine? What would the ends of such a new pedagogy be? As the authors of this volume attest, we cannot simply settle for enabling more students to attain individual mobility; nor can we settle simply for more working-class students acquiring the analytic and intellectual capital of middle-class peers. These questions point us toward questions of a pedagogy of class.

Critical scholars have long embraced a political project of critical pedagogy for public schooling. Lynch and O'Neill (1994, p. 313), however, question the very assumption that government-sponsored schools that now serve the interests of the powerful will ever become sites of emancipatory curriculum and pedagogy. Apart from isolated pockets of critical practice, there is little evidence that years of academic writing of the possibilities of a Friere-ian model of learning have led to significant changes in the schools of poor and working-class children, and while we might continue our advocacy for more politicized forms of schooling, we might also expand the conversation to consider additional possibilities.

In pursuing these projects, we must first acknowledge that focusing on the schools of lower-status children can never be enough, for as Noblit writes in this volume, "From race we have learned that what must be changed is whiteness, from gender we have learned that what must be changed is patriarchy, and from class I will argue we learn that what must be changed is hierarchy." Maike Ingrid Philipsen and Brantlinger each write in their chapters that we must imagine a pedagogy of privilege in which "the haves" come to realize how they benefit from the hierarchies that suppress the accomplishments of poor and working-class children.

How, then, to begin? The chapters in this volume suggest that we might explore two interconnected avenues: The first is to pursue what we have begun here: to examine extraschool structures and supports that are

working to open new ways of creating meaning out of the formal structures of school, and the second is to explore what a pedagogy of class itself might entail.

LOOKING MORE CLOSELY AT WHAT IS THERE. As academics have examined schools for evidence that classrooms are invoking particularly politicized forms of curriculum and pedagogy, we are perhaps missing more subtle ways in which teachers work on behalf of poor and working class children. Michael Apple (1995, p. 146) suggests that in early efforts within critical research traditions to cast teachers as powerless agents of capitalist forces, scholars have missed the potential in teacher's "resistance" to formal and informal mechanisms of stratification. He notes: "Just as blue- and white-collar workers have constantly found ways to retain their humanity and continually struggle to integrate conception and execution in their work . . . so too will teachers and students find ways, in the cracks, so to speak, to do the same things. The real question is not whether such resistances exist . . . but whether they are contradictory themselves, whether they lead anywhere beyond the reproduction of the ideological hegemony of the most power classes in our society, whether they can be employed for political education and intervention. . . . Our task is first to find them."

Resistance is evident in many of the chapters in this book. Noblit suggests that we look more carefully at the ways in which teachers invoke caring and relation to shelter students from the harshest manifestations of school reforms. Urrieta writes of teachers who actively resisted stereotypes of Chicano/a students to formally designate some as "smart" and worthy of extra school recourses. Facing prescriptive literacy curriculum in the schools in the neighborhood in which they were working, Hicks and Jones created alternative literacies in their after school program. In few of these examples did teachers invoke explicitly political motivations; in none did the curriculum formally politicize the work of the school. Yet perhaps, while some may find these efforts incomplete, there are lessons in many schools about ways in which quiet resistance is working on behalf of children.

RETHINKING A PEDAGOGY OF CLASS. Yet quiet resistance cannot ultimately be enough, and we must continue to press our understanding of what a pedagogy of class might involve. Beach and his colleagues reference the work of scholars such as Renny Christopher (1999) or Sherry L. Linkon (1999) who have begun to write to broader audiences about working-class pedagogy. Ironically, this work is being done mainly in the college classroom, where relatively few poor and working-class students will ever be found.

This work is complicated in part by our confused discourse about class. Unlike race, ethnicity, and gender, Lawrence MacKenzie (1998) posits, class identity is often not considered to contribute to cultural pluralism. “Why? Because non-middle class identity is *supposed* to be invisible; it is viewed not as a cross-cultural asset but a condition to be repaired” (p. 103, italics in original).

He elaborates: “From what I’ve seen, life for many poor and working class students is erosively perplexed by the clinging, deep-rooted suggestion that their class identity is a badge of cognitive failure, an identity that an individual of sufficient merit can and should leave behind—and that one’s parents, if clever and enterprising enough, and unless they’re first-generation immigrants, should have already left behind. The message is this: Working class students must remediate their identities, and most of them will receive little or no respect until they do” (p. 100).

Arguing instead for a “pedagogy of respect,” MacKenzie admonishes educators to move beyond conventional approaches to multicultural curriculum, to move beyond required reading on race, class, and gender to think about “what might be learned from the groundskeepers at work outside the . . . window, the electrician remodeling the library’s lighting, the heating engineers. . . .” (MacKenzie, 1998) and the relationships between all of these and the professional staff of schools. In the very halls of educational institutions, he argues, are the seeds of powerful lessons on class hierarchies.

Challenges to imagining a more deliberate pedagogy of class clearly remain, and resolving them is beyond the scope of this volume. Yet the lives of the young people in these chapters illuminate many of these challenges. Students who might once have grown up understanding the inherently contradictory interests of bosses and workers from the artifacts of their parents’ union involvement, now have little or no access to discourse about worker interests. Public deliberation about the need for higher academic standards is disconnected from labor market data that predicts that most students will face low-wage work involving only minimum cognitive skills. The tensions inherent in making success in school contingent upon assuming an identity that distances oneself from family and community, make it clear that broader conceptualizations of academic achievement are necessary.

We imagine a pedagogy of class that will be created not by middle-class academics, but with members of the community who can name the “in between-ness” of the upwardly mobile. We envision work by community advocates who can envision alternative routes to mobility that sometimes challenge the structures of school, and sometimes sidestep school altogether. Cultural brokers with one foot firmly in the community and the other working with and beside the school may someday make the rules of success more clear and more subject to critical scrutiny.

Someday, middle-class students may understand that becoming educated obligates one to examine one's own privilege.

And, we believe, a pedagogy of class may well also contain the lessons of thousands of committed and caring teachers who have long served students well.

Carrying the Project Forward

As we've compiled this volume, we found ourselves asking ever more questions about the scholarly work that remains to be done at the intersections of social class and schooling. As we considered the next steps, we were reminded of Bettie's accounts of high school girls imagining only limited futures for ourselves, as we realized that the imagination of even middle-class scholars can be limited by the contexts of work and of our lives. We will work in these final pages to stretch our imaginations, in part to imagine decentering our status as middle-class intellectuals as we wonder about ways to move forward.

First, we want to imagine multiple ways of capturing the life trajectories of young people from all economic backgrounds. While we've learned much from reading and rereading these works, we fully realize the limitations of point-in-time studies such as these for understanding class dynamics. Given what we know about the complex intertwining of K-12 schooling, higher education, labor markets, idiosyncratic circumstances, and structural obstacles to mobility, we find ourselves wanting to look far beyond the end of the book to see how things turned out for the young people whose lives are represented here. We want to know where their lives have taken them, and we want especially to know what they will come to understand about the many possible permutations of "turning out well." But such is not the nature of educational research, that we can place ourselves in the position of chronicling life trajectories. We believe that if we are to understand social class, we need research that follows young people through the milestones of their lives. Examples such as Michael Apted's series of "7 and Up" films, or Lois Weis's (2004) project revisiting students in young adulthood that she first interviewed when they were in high school, suggest the richness that we're missing in our more limited conceptualizations of educational research.

Second, we continue to try to imagine schooling in which class stratification is named but not reproduced. How do we imagine the possibilities of poor and working-class pedagogy, in which class is finally named and analyzed? How do we conceive of education in which poor, working-class, and more privileged students all come to better understand how social class has been at very core of their imaginations of who they might be and become? We believe that these questions can only be addressed by

scholarly work done in collaboration with public schoolteachers, and with parents and community activists who serve as advocates for young people. We need to better understand what schools are now doing “beneath the radar,” whether as quiet resistance or as explicit practice, which disrupts the day-to-day work of schooling. We encourage our colleagues to imagine ways in which such scholarly partnerships might be realized.

Finally, we want to imagine how our work might become part of a project in which class is named in broader social settings. What would studies look like that foregrounded class, and from there, went on to considerations of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity? Or, as Noblit so cogently argues, might we “start” with either race or gender (or disability or sexuality) and then eventually come to the place where the oppressions of class can be seen and named? Drawing from critical race theory, what might we learn about educating young people for the political work of coalition building and local activism? What if our work went beyond analyses of the schools to projects of social change?

We trust that this volume is *a* beginning.

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PART 1

GETTING TO CLASS

We came up with the title *Late to Class* on a walk through downtown Seattle with Bill Johnston. We liked it because of its double entendre. We are both late in coming to a different understanding of social class and late in rethinking education in terms of social class. We also liked the title because it signaled a small transgression (in school and in social thought). We will likely be “disciplined” by the adherents of various theoretical schools of thought. Much like the student coming to class late—we expect some public reprimand and sanctioning as well. Nevertheless, the volume achieves more than we could have hoped on that long walk in Seattle. We are late to class and potentially in a liminal space where the authors in this volume reveal our assumptions and try to think much more clearly about social class and education.

The interconnections between the chapters are multiple, complex, and contested. This volume opens up our contestations about class even as it provides a rich base for future thought and action around social class and education. We decided to organize the text so that the reader was first faced with the juxtaposition of how we understand class.

On the one hand, class is lived experience and on the other hand, a history of ideas that people and states use to understand themselves. This opening section “gets us to class” in these two different ways. It also gets us to class in two of the competing views about social class: as warranted social theory and as narrative. Beth Hatt grounds class in a narrative of her life. For her, narrative is both a powerful way to unpack the dynamics of social class and education and a pedagogy she is employing for “educated” people. William Johnston was one of the trio that designed this volume. His ideas about class have informed ours in many ways. In his chapter, Bill gets us to class by examining the history of ideas about class that now exists as both implicit and explicit theories about the nature of social class, stratification, and identity. Together these chapters give us a basis to rethink how class works.

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1

GROWING UP AS POOR, WHITE TRASH STORIES OF WHERE I COME FROM

Beth Hatt

The idea of “poor, white trash” conjures many different images in people’s minds. For some, they think of raggedy clothes, bad teeth, and dirty hair. People also picture trailers and roaches crawling across kitchen counters. A final assumption would probably be that they have “no education.” For me, I think of my family, of people I care deeply about. I think about where I come from.

I would like to think that the following narrative about my own life is part of an education of “educated” people. Literature concerning the working class has taught us a lot about working-class culture, gender, and race construction within the working class, and about schooling within working class life. However, I am hesitant to think that it has personalized the working-class beyond the stereotype. It has not typically made the issue of growing up poor a personal one or as something urgently needing to be eradicated. Furthermore, the focus of critique has often stayed upon the working class rather than highlighting the destruction caused by hegemonic middle-class culture joined with capitalist ideals.

In this chapter I will provide a personal narrative of rural, white working-class life and the people who live it. It will be grounded in Dorothy Smith’s (1990) perspective of the “feminist sociology of knowledge.” She claims that within academia we, as women, are forced to work under the dominance of the “father tongue,” which was constructed through years of the disciplines being dominated by men. The father tongue is characterized by impersonal and objectified relations with the right to speak for others, whom Smith specifically identifies as women.

This is particularly applicable to dominant notions of what is appropriate academic writing and rhetoric, which often distances itself from the emotional and relational aspects of the writer's life as well as those with whom we conduct research.

Smith's work could be expanded to include notions of whiteness and elitism as being part of the father tongue. Intellectual, political, and cultural worlds are not only structured through patriarchy but also through notions of white racial superiority and economic elitism. These worlds are dominated by men but are also very white and wealthy spaces and ways of being. We need to work against, and move beyond, the father tongue in order to allow greater, more diverse participation in various spaces such as the intellectual and political. For these reasons, I purposefully aim for my writing to be personal and reflective in opposition to a very formal or overly academic style.

Before beginning my narrative, I must first make some concessions. This is "my" story rather than "our" story. To clarify, I fully realize that I cannot speak for all of the rural, working class. Additionally, I cannot say our story because I left. I no longer live in the same small town nor live the same life. Instead, I see myself as being somewhere in between Karl Marx's categories of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. I have wine and dined too much to be considered a proletariat, yet my working-class roots and identification keep me from being completely accepted and comfortable with/by the bourgeoisie. It makes my identity a bit schizophrenic. Also, I am torn between romanticizing the white working-class way of life while also being aware of the bigotry that is often included.

Finally, I do not want my narrative to be read as a success story nor as a story of hardship. I do not define it as a success story because success to me is about much more than schooling. I do not see it as a story of hardship because mixed in with the story is my privilege in being white. Additionally, I am well aware of the fact that I did not grow up as poor as many other people. I know that many children have struggled much more than I ever have or will. What I hope my story does, is shift how we think about class, people who are poor or working class, and the lived experience of class.

(De)Valued Knowledge

My environment growing up included blue-collar parents, a single-parent household, limited adult supervision, and a low-level family income. I believe my family background provided me with a unique perspective from that of many people in academia. Also, it enabled me to be aware of some of the ways in which financial and educational power can be used to oppress the working class.

Growing up, our food came from either the garden or from my father's hunting trips. We never ate beef. Instead we had deer, squirrel, and rabbit that my father hunted himself, not to mention, rocky mountain oysters (i.e., pig testicles) fresh from my grandpa's hog farm. My dad taught me a lot about nature. When accompanying him on hunting trips, I learned how to look at deer tracks in the sand and know whether it was made by a doe or a buck. I also learned how to recognize deer paths, skin a squirrel, and look for mussels in the river.

Some other lessons I learned included the importance of the value of family. Rarely do people in my community move outside of the county. Even those who move away to attend college often choose to stay and work in a factory rather than move away to begin a career in their field of study. In fact at one point in time, a large portion of my family all lived on the same road. I have also observed my aunts and father take care of my grandmother by cooking, cleaning, and driving her to her appointments. My decision to move away to attend graduate school was difficult for my family to understand I since had been taught to value "home" and "community."

Learning to Labor

My mother has worked in a glass factory for the past fifteen years, while my father has worked for the past twenty-eight years in a millwright factory. I began working in the eighth grade busing tables at a local cafeteria and continued to work in food service until I entered college. Being from a small town, I was often serving food and cleaning up after my fellow, wealthier classmates and their families. A few years ago, I ran into an old classmate of mine whose father was the town doctor. He told me that while in college he had to work fifteen to twenty hours a week.

He then proceeded to tell me that he would think of me. His family were regulars at the cafeteria where I bussed tables from the time I was thirteen to fifteen years old. To keep going, he would say to himself, "If Beth could manage working in middle school and high school, then surely I can do this [tool]." His romanticization of my "hard work" denies the different material realities that he and I operated under as classmates. It denies the inequities inherent within our different material realities and makes them appear "normal." This romanticization toward the working-class way of life glosses over the real-life struggles of making enough money to have food to eat, worrying about a lack of medical coverage, being forced to work under dangerous conditions, and lacking job security.

My family has experienced literal pain for their labors. Two years ago, my mother mangled her hand in a piece of machinery and will never regain full use of it. Her employer forced her to return to work two days

later to avoid increasing their accidental rate of injury. My father broke his leg while working and has a hole in his foot, while my older brother is missing a thumb as a result of an accident in a furniture factory. Just in this past year, my sister broke her kneecap and femur while working at a puppy day care and will never regain full mobility in her knee. If “murder” was redefined as deaths due to poor working conditions, the number would be significantly more than the amount of traditional murders. In 1990, 2.4 times more people were killed in the workplace due to purposeful violations of the law than were murdered at home or in the street (Lynch, Michalowski, and Groves, 2000).

Gender also plays a large role in being working class, particularly when most of the available high-paying jobs involve physical labor. Time and time again I have witnessed the women in my family “stuck” in miserable marriages due to financial dependence and husbands who abused this economical power they had over their wives. My parents divorced when I was ten years old and my mother was devastated emotionally and economically. Good paying work was hard to find, food was scarce, and I remember searching harvested cornfields for leftover corn to sell for cash, which was then used to buy groceries.

I also remember my mother going through trash dumpsters to see what treasures others had thrown away. In fact, my most favorite childhood stuffed animal, a sheep dog I named “Snuffy,” came from a Dumpster. Those times gave me strength and determination that I don’t think I would have had otherwise. I swore I would never be financially dependent upon a man and I perceived education as my way out. Acquiring an education became an act of independence and would ensure my future children that they would never want for their basic needs.

(Mis)education

It wasn’t until I entered school that I remember being treated differently due to my social class and being ashamed for the first time. One of my best friends through grade school was Nicole. Nicole entered kindergarten knowing how to read. Everyday she was taken to the “special” room to receive advanced instruction in reading. In an effort for us to stay side-by-side, Nicole told the teacher that I could also read. The teacher believed her and the next day I went to the special room with Nicole. Of course, I could not read. Despite Nicole’s efforts at whispering the words in my ear, the specialist was not fooled and I never went back to the special room with Nicole again.

Then there were the spelling bees. I really wanted to win! But every year, kindergarten through the fifth grade, it always came down to Nicole and me and she always came out ahead. She cried along with me when I lost. Her mother forced her to study for the spelling bees while my efforts

were more self-motivated. I envied Nicole for her mother's attention, but Nicole resented it.

Her mother was a kindergarten teacher and her father worked at the local power plant—for a white, working-class town, they were the upper class. Nicole had the hippest clothes, always received compliments from teachers, and had a swimming pool, which was *the* sign of wealth in my community.

I have a distinct memory of standing in line beside Nicole during grade school as a teacher complimented her on a new outfit. I looked at Nicole's new, neatly pressed clothes and compared them to my worn-out shoes and hand-me-down blue jeans while feeling ashamed. It was one of the first times I realized that my family was not necessarily poor (depending on your point of view) but that I was "without." A large part of my memories connected to schooling are about feeling shame—embarrassment of being without, of being ugly. At one point in time, I even got lice and to this day still vividly remember the names I was called. I had been marked with the true stamp of being poor, white trash—I had gotten lice.

Throughout my schooling, success was typically narrowly defined to mean educational achievement. At times, I have struggled with the question, "If education equals success, then are my parents and brother failures because they do not have a formal education?" Also, throughout college I encountered numerous downcast faces and eyes accompanied by silence when I answered the question, "What do your parents do for a living?" When I receive this reaction, I think about when I worked with my mother in her factory. I saw her pass out due to working in extreme heat without any breaks and forced to work at the fastest pace possible. I also think about how she worked a swing shift (i.e., a weekly shift from days to evenings to midnights) for many years and I have seen the toll it has taken on her. My mother works much harder than I ever have in undergraduate or graduate school. I want to look at the people asking those questions and tell them these things. But this is a voice that has been silenced by "educated" people because of the higher esteem placed on educational credentials than working-class experience or knowledge. I continue to struggle with understanding how much value should be given to educational credentials because I have chosen to be a part of the institution of education.

Finally, my working-class roots taught me that no matter how many degrees a person has after their name, they do not automatically deserve your respect. In my community, posturing resulted in isolation rather than admiration. I was taught that you earn respect by being humble rather than by reminding people how great you are. That's your family's job. The rules in academia are quite different. We are often implicitly and explicitly taught that acquiring "an education" entitles respect from others, or rather from those without "an education." This still confuses me—especially since being humble can be so much harder than acquiring an education.

Race and Class

A part of white, working-class, rural culture is a careful construction of an “us versus them” dichotomy. The category of “them” can include people who are not white, academics, people who live outside the county, and people from the city. The most deeply embedded construction is that of people of color. Growing up, my community was 99 percent white except for the only doctor in the county and his family, who were Filipino-Canadian. I used to argue with my grandmother for saying negative things about African-Americans and with my mother’s racist comments always framed by a fear of African-Americans. Through my own reasoning, I had concluded that skin color was not enough of a reason to judge a person, but that was the limit to the depth of my understanding. At that point in time, my ideology was that everyone should be “color-blind” when it came to race.

While a freshman in college, I decided to take African-American Literature. Little did I know how it would change my life. Within the classes, for the first time I was a racial minority. We read works by W. E. B. Dubois, Maya Angelou, Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and Malcolm X. I heard a discourse that contradicted my life. I learned the history of racial bigotry in the United States that had been omitted from my previous education. My K–12 schooling had not even included the common surface level attempt at celebrating diversity through the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

Not until years later was I confronted with the reality of a middle class that was not 100 percent white. How was I to fit this into my schema of seeing all people of color as having suffered more than myself? How was I to make sense of the notion that all white people had more privileges than people of color when meeting a person of color who grew up with parents that were physicians? Due to growing up in a white, working-class family, I believed that all someone needed in order to have an easy life was money. It was then that I began to understand white privilege. I had previously connected my privilege with economic capital—not with the actual color of my skin. Through this realization, I began to understand that I was privileged just by simply being white.

My first academic job was in my home state of Indiana. Going home, however, was a very different experience. I had married a Mexican man and had a beautiful baby girl. So going home meant experiencing lessons in white oppression. Suddenly, a world that once seemed so familiar had become strange by “seeing” things that the presence of my husband and daughter brought into view. I especially became aware of the assumptions embedded in white privilege. For example, despite my husband’s impeccable English laced with a Southern drawl, many people from my commu-

nity assumed that he still needed to learn English. My biracial marriage allowed me to be aware of the practice of racial oppression where previously it had been blind to my “white” (blue) eyes. While standing beside my husband, I saw us being ignored by sales clerks in stores, and felt the constant gaze upon us as we walked through the mall.¹

I may have grown up working class, but I also grew up with privileges in speaking English, largely experiencing cultural continuity between home and school, and always having authority (teachers, bosses, professors, etc.) figures who looked similar to me. I had lived most of my life without having to think about my race and how it influenced the ways in which people perceived me and the numerous spaces it allowed me to occupy.

Turning Points

At times I’ve wondered how I managed to get to college and then through graduate school. Consequently, I decided to write about the turning points, which had a strong influence on my education. As I think about these turning points, I want to be clear that it was never about hard work. It was about being provided with opportunities and being connected with people who had cultural and financial capital. When you’re poor, you can work as hard as you want, but if someone doesn’t provide a bridge so that you can cross the gulf of poverty, then it doesn’t matter.

Figuring out how to get to college was difficult for me because I didn’t have anyone who could guide me. The bottom line was money. I didn’t have the money for application fees and knew that if I didn’t get financial aid, that I couldn’t go at all. I only applied to two schools because that was what I could afford. I remember that I really wanted to go to Cornell University but the application fee was fifty dollars and there was no way I could come up with the money. It wasn’t until years later that that I learned I could have had those fees waived.

The summer before my junior year of high school, I participated in an eight-week summer science program at Indiana University for “economically disadvantaged” youths. Through this program, I was able to get a glimpse of college life and began to believe that I was capable of doing college level work. I also became connected with a faculty member who had a huge impact on my life. I ended up attending Indiana University. That faculty member got me into the honors program, and talked to me about applying to graduate school. Without her intervention in my life, I most definitely would not be writing this chapter. The summer science program ended two years after I had participated due to federal funding cuts.