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Shaped by Resistance: Work as a Topical Theme for the Composition Classroom

FOR THE PAST FOUR YEARS I HAVE TAUGHT THE TWO-COURSE SEQUENCE OF COMPOSITION at The University of Akron, a state university in Akron, Ohio, with a population of about 22,000 students and an open admission policy. More importantly, Akron is a school where most undergraduate students live at home and commute from the surrounding tri-county area and where many students hold down full or part-time jobs. Formerly known as the Rubber Capital of the World, Akron is now home to only one of the Big Four rubber companies, Goodyear. Firestone, General Tire, and Goodrich have all been bought out, moving operations to the south. According to Love and Giffels' *Wheels of Fortune*, a history of the city, Akron produced 40% of the nation's tires in 1930, but by 1983 tire building here had almost completely stopped (xiv). With the exodus of manufacturing, the power of unions to support the working class diminished. As of today, the service industry of hospitals and schools dominates Akron's economy.

Having previously taught at The Ohio State University, the flagship school for Ohio where fewer students hold down jobs while going to school, I realized the need to consider this new kind of student population when developing essay prompts for first-year composition. I began to investigate ways I could incorporate work as a topical theme into my syllabus, believing that such a theme could encourage critical thinking, despite student resistance. This essay tracks the dialectic of my experience in creating meaningful assignments, which enable students to critically consider their relationship to work.

Formal and informal surveys support work as a significant factor in the daily lives of University of Akron students. Since 2002, the university has begun administering the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) to freshmen and seniors. One of the questions on the survey looks at how issues of work affect school performance; results show that the typical freshman student at Akron spends slightly more time studying for all classes than working and about the same amount of time relaxing as working or studying. This may mean that certain courses or certain types of course preparation receive more or less attention than others.

When I informally polled my own students recently (four classes of freshmen taking

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English Composition 112, the second in a two-course sequence), their responses showed that most students work either full- or part-time. Only a few students, mainly athletes or postsecondary students, did not. Of those who work, most hold down part-time positions from 10-20 hours a week, although some work more than 20 hours a week or have two part-time jobs. In addition, most work off campus, involving even more time spent commuting to and from the job site. However, these types of jobs allow students to make more money than typical campus positions, which may start students at minimum wage.

Students also volunteered the information that in order to work and have some time for relaxation, certain types of school assignments don't get done. Those assignments usually involve preparation for daily class activities of a non-crucial or non-graded nature such as reading. From my perspective, the outcome is that many students do not come to class prepared. However, it would appear from these findings that the topic of work and issues having to do with work in American society might be of interest to University of Akron students. At the very least, students would have some built-in expertise in this topic hypothetically enabling them to write and speak with authority and expertise.[1]

Educator Ira Shor has long advocated using topics such as work in the composition classroom that are relevant to students' daily lives.[2] An early statement on this approach appears in his 1980 work, *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, where an empowering pedagogy can build on "the many strengths, skills and knowledges students themselves bring to class" (82). He suggests language projects that operate as "experiential and conceptual . . . connect[ing] a field of particular experience to general meaning" as a way to strive toward such a pedagogy. He further describes such projects as achieving "the magic of orienting students towards their reality by detaching them from it" (204). He considers work a "dynamic theme for class study" (127), one which can "merge popular experience with awareness"

1. It is interesting to consider that in 1993 a member of the University of Akron faculty, Janet Marting, created a composition text with a focus on work for her students, *Making a Living: A Real World Reader*. In a recent email, she noted her "original impetus" for creating the text book in developing an honors composition course: "I wanted to focus on a theme that would interest and be challenging to students. Because most students have summer jobs and many work part-time during the school year, I figured they'd have ample interest in and things to say about this topic."

2. A number of other studies have more recently appeared bringing Shor's emphasis on work as a topic for student discussion and composition into the new millennium. Several notable examples are James Zebroski's *Thinking Through Theory*, 1994, which uses work as a topic for an ethnographic approach to the research paper; Bruce McComiskey's *Teaching Composition as a Social Process*, 2000, which considers work a social theme to let students "see that their writing can influence the status quo" (24); Derek Owens' *Composition and Sustainability*, 2001, which, similarly to Shor, considers work a topic that students have experience with and can productively reflect on; and David Seitz's *Who Can Afford Critical Consciousness?*, 2004, which considers work a useful topic to encourage critical thinking in students.

(128). This in turn makes classroom activity relevant and the purpose of school more meaningful. Shor's purpose, as expressed in his later text, *Empowering Education*, is to enable students, to "situate curriculum in issues and language" from their life experience. Work is one such "generative theme," expressing "problematic conditions in daily life that are useful for generating class discussion" (55). For Shor, such themes can encourage critical thinking, which will ultimately result in student empowerment and the possibility for students to change their attitudes toward the system and their lives for the better.

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However, this goal seems problematic for University of Akron freshmen, many of whom believe in the capitalist system and bank on their college education to make them rich or at least give them the opportunity to lead better lives than their parents. This may be compounded by the fact that many students come from working-class backgrounds and count on college to raise their class and economic status. These factors contribute to student resistance to critiques of work and of corporate culture and add to a lack of interest in this topic.

In addition, my students may have conflicted attitudes toward work and upward mobility as a topic, attitudes that coincide with points Janet Bean makes in her essay on University of Akron students, "Manufacturing Emotions: Tactical Resistance in the Narratives of Working-Class Students." She specifically addresses the attitudes of upwardly mobile students and resistance to issues of work in relation to their working-class backgrounds: "My students believe in hard work and merit-based rewards . . . . The experience of witnessing their parents' pain creates an ethic of obligation and gratitude, however that complicates the motive of upward social mobility." She concludes, "For these students what drives them to success is not simply a desire to move upward; instead, they are striving for work that will prevent them from repeating their parents' life of pain" (108). She also notes the plight of upwardly mobile young men who must go against the "deeply rooted identities" of their working class backgrounds (109).[3]

3. Note that David Seitz in *Who Can Afford Critical Consciousness?* also makes some similar observations on the attitudes of working-class male students toward the work of composition, as well as astute observations about student resistance in general. However, in relation to working-class students in general, Carolyn Boiarsky et al. make the point in the essay, "Working-Class Students in the Academy," that "it is impossible to perceive this class as a single, monolithic group" (19).

Aside from students' backgrounds, The University of Akron's summer reading program for incoming freshmen also influenced my choice of work as a topical theme. According to a memo from the University's provost, the purpose of this program is "to provide new students with a common experience from which to draw during the fall semester" (Stroble). Three of the featured texts over the past four years have addressed issues relating to work in American society: Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*, an investigation into the lifestyles of minimum wage workers in today's society; Yvonne Thornton's *The Ditchdigger's Daughters*, an African-American family's success story in which all family members (adults and children) work hard so that all five children have the opportunity for a college education; and *Gum-Dipped* by Joyce Dyer, a memoir about growing up in Akron with close family ties to the rubber industry.

Dyer's *Gum-Dipped* has been the most relevant text thus far to the life experiences of Akron students, many of whose relatives worked in or are still connected with the rubber industry. Dyer describes her father's plight as an employee at Firestone who earned a management position through hard work only to be demoted to janitorial duties because he did not have a college degree. His downward spiral reflected the economic fate of Akron itself. The text, echoing many students' family experience, consequently challenged their positive notions about corporate America doing right by its workers. In fact, two of the three summer selections present primarily negative aspects of work, and all emphasize the hardships of working-class citizens, perhaps indirectly promoting the value and necessity of a college education for incoming students.

Fulfilling my obligation to the summer reading program involved incorporating these texts into my syllabus, minimally as extra reading material and discussion, but optimally as a basis for paper assignments and group projects. Considering Akron's predominantly working-class student body led me to incorporate the texts as much as possible into my syllabus with both a discussion and composition component. I began by focusing on the issue of work for one of the semester's required papers. Over the four years that I have been developing and expanding this theme of work, albeit in response to student resistance to this topic, the assignment has evolved so as to help students more deeply contextualize their work experiences. Ultimately, I found that the use of various texts in conjunction with personal experience encourages students to understand critically their own and their families' labor in relation to corporate America's present practices in a globalized and downsized economy. However, I started that first year with an assignment based primarily in narrative.

The first paper's prompt asked students to write about a memorable work experience, either good or bad, and to consider how it may have affected their attitude toward work both in the past and present. I required that they use Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*

as background and a model for their stories. Since many students had had the kind of low-paying, lower-level jobs that she described, it was fairly easy for them to relate to the prompt. In addition, I had used peer groups to role play the different kinds of job experiences that Ehrenreich had investigated to help students imagine how they might dramatize this book for a television documentary. This proved a challenging group project but one that also enabled students to come up with work memories for their personal narratives. However, although many students were able to vividly tell stories about the negative experiences they had had in the work world with unfair pay, mistreatment by bosses, or dangerous situations, emotional narratives predominated with often only the concluding paragraph left to describe the significance of the experience. This was due to a lack of foresight on my part and a too simplistically phrased prompt. In this case, student resistance was directed primarily to Ehrenreich herself, whom students saw as an impostor in the world of the working class. Her research was carried out undercover, as she impersonated a working-class maid, waitress, and sales associate, and students responded to what they perceived to be her middle-class condescension.

In an attempt to move from a focus on personal narrative to one on analysis and critical thought, the second year I asked students to consider work-related issues that were important to them in relation to achieving the American Dream, using *The Ditchdigger's Daughters* as basis. This memoir, supposedly a model of the American success story, showed the rise of a working-class family in the 1950s. Many student papers commented on the changing nature of the American Dream and work ethic, believing society now devalued hard work and physical labor; they focused their critique against what they thought was a new work ethic. Students found examples of this new work ethic especially evident in the media, where the lives of the rich and famous are featured. One student commented that "the road to success has been altered, from that of hard work and gratification deferred . . . to the idea of 'get rich quick' and the belief that gratification deferred is gratification lost." Students pointed out that in today's globalized and service-based economy, a family in Akron with all members working at minimum wage, some even working two jobs, couldn't make enough to send five children to college, as in *Ditchdigger's Daughters*, without incurring huge student debt. Again student resistance here was directed more at the text, which they found boring and outdated, than at the assignment. However, the idea of the American Dream was much more appealing to write about than students' personal work experience.

The next year with *Gum-Dipped* as the student summer text, I wanted to get students to return to an analysis and critique of work itself by having them include counterarguments about that experience. In keeping with the book's theme, this paper focused on relations between employer and employee and the responsibilities of corporations and businesses to

workers exemplified by the experience of Dyer's father, of whom Firestone's corporate management took advantage. Perhaps because of the direct connection to life in Akron, this prompt and text proved especially adept at provoking critical thinking. One student wrote about how his father had lost his job due to outsourcing, which he linked to the fact that "companies do not care about their workers anymore." He ended his paper by presenting a solution to this problem. However, the downside of the assignment was that it generated more student resistance in the form of complaints about writing the paper. The greater demands of argument over personal narrative explains part of this resistance, but many students wrote about family members' negative experiences with job loss or downsizing, which made this a depressing paper to write and more likely contributed the bulk of the resistance.

In order to combat resistance, I expanded the text option the next semester to include Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*, a critique of the fast food industry. Since many students have work experience in fast food, I figured they could use this text to comment on their own experience, rather than dwelling on the more emotionally charged experiences of parents or grandparents in the rubber industry. In addition to being more relevant to them personally, the text, while still enabling critical thought, was more upbeat than Dyer's somewhat depressing look at the death of the rubber industry in Akron. One student commented on the problems of "untrained teens," stating that "at the McDonalds I worked for there was never a feeling of unity or safety. No one believed the company was there to help us." The greater ability of students to generate such insights shows the necessity of taking the emotional needs and experiences of students into consideration when picking a text, as well as to let students bring out positive and negative emotions in an effort to understand where they come from and what life situations generated such feelings.

Remembering that students had been interested in media presentations of work, especially in relation to the American Dream and issues of class, I decided for the next semester to have students compare their work experiences with those of characters in a favorite movie or television show. Classes chose which movies they wanted to watch as a group, choosing *Office Space* and *Antz*, among others. One student wrote about her job at a discount store in comparison to the movie *Win a Date with Tad Hamilton* that "movies are often an escape for most people from the drudgery and problems they face in their everyday life . . . . As an avid movie watcher, I prefer the glamorized version because just maybe, I will find the type of dream portrayed in the movie." Another student compared her job working at a country club as a food server with *Caddyshack*, stating that "we as a culture, rely on this form of the media to make us feel better about the jokes we secretly dream of playing on our wicked bosses and superiors in order to exact sweet revenge for all of the grief they put their employees through." These were two of many insightful comments that stu-

dents made in response to this prompt. One benefit of letting students choose the movie was that the class had a great deal of enthusiasm before beginning to write the paper. In addition, many students saw how the reality of their working lives compared to the fantasy of work, as presented in the movies and on television, and the commodification of daily life. This countered working-class students' uncritical reliance on upward mobility as the ethos behind their analyses and their resistance to critically thinking through their relationship to corporate America.

As mentioned briefly during my discussion of the first assignment, I supplemented the writing of papers these past four years with collaborative projects using work as a topic. These major assignments had fairly long time frames, approximately from mid-semester on. Students would choose groups according to their type of work experience: physical or manual labor, food service, sales and service, recreational, technical or white collar, etc. The goal of the collaboration was to come up with a common problem encountered by students in the group and to propose a solution, using field research methods of observation, survey, or interview. The groups would present their findings to the class during the last week of the semester, and the groups were graded as a whole. I also required that the groups turn in a brief report to document their oral presentation in writing. These projects had a positive impact on developing critical thinking in students as well as having a synergistic relation with the paper. Since I assigned the paper and project simultaneously, students would finish the paper before the project was due, enabling them to think about their collaborative project as they wrote their papers. In addition, the group work added inspiration to the writing of the paper.

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Although many groups simply would have each member speak about their job experience with one student as moderator, some of the group projects ended up being quite creative and thought-provoking. For example, an honors white-collar group all wore business attire, bringing their own computers to a non-computerized classroom to make their power point presentation. Members of a group representing grocery work, specifically the job of bagger, all wore bags over their heads at the beginning of their presentation to emphasize their job's title, relative anonymity, and low status. This group comprised stu-

dents who didn't normally participate or speak up much in class, but who really came alive in the group planning sessions and presentation. A group who did factory work acted out a typical day in their work lives from waking up to punching in to the assembly line with its repetitive motion to punching out and going home exhausted. Another memorable moment involved the research methods used by a group of seven food service workers who put up their multi-colored pie chart printouts of individual survey findings on the board creating a rainbow effect. Thus the group projects were successful in promoting creativity, as well as giving students the opportunity to consider problems relative to their job types and possible solutions to those problems.

Perhaps these collaborative projects were more immediately successful than the essay assignments because the projects dealt with issues directly involving the students. Many of them worked at jobs simultaneously as they researched the project and could do some of the research while working. However, the group project also generated an element of resistance. Issues of ethics came into play with the need to get releases from those they interviewed or surveyed and with the need to discuss with their bosses the fact that they were carrying on research. Some students feared to discuss or expose aspects of their job or even to tell their employers what they were doing, especially if the students thought they might uncover a real problem. This happened specifically with food service workers who presented health risks about their restaurant or grocery jobs to the class. One student solved this dilemma by deciding to report on a fellow worker's job in the store, not his own. In addition, the group project generated some complaints because students dislike receiving a group grade.

Interestingly, resistance to group work itself can be seen as an aspect of labor, a point made by John Trimbur in his essay, "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning." The first step toward creating a "critical version" of collaborative learning is to "distinguish between consensus as an acculturative practice that reproduces business as usual and consensus as an oppositional one that challenges the prevailing conditions of production." For Trimbur, "the point of collaborative learning is not simply to demystify the authority of knowledge by revealing its social character but to transform the productive apparatus, to change the social character of production" (451).

Collaborative groups generate resistance partly because they require students to consider a different mode of production of the educational product—one produced without traditional student/teacher hierarchy in place. Non-hierarchal work arrangements also run counter to the typical working-class job site with one boss having power and many workers obeying implicitly with little say in their deployment. Students are also used to school's emphasis on individual production and the reassurance that their hard work will be recog-

nized and rewarded by the system. The perceived lack of individuality confuses some students. A compromise position here has been to offer a group grade with an additional individual graded component for each member to ease students into true collaboration.

The group project for my class added an even more difficult aspect for students—its seemingly open-ended nature and the amount of class time I was able to devote to the project. Students had to come up with their own problems and research methods toward a solution, which would cause some chaos in early stages of the meetings. Typically students would take a while to get involved with the project and to figure out a group focus. I tried to give students at least three class periods for these group meetings. If additional meetings were needed outside of class, students would complain about time constraints. In fact, they would resist doing any of the work outside of class, citing their work commitments. For some this was simply an excuse, but for most this was a reality and a way that working-class status and the necessity to work to pay tuition limits class and campus involvement.

Interestingly, I've found that honors classes seem to be least enthusiastic about group work. Perhaps the emphasis on past job experience students have had rather than on future employment aspirations (from the mundane and minimum wage jobs they have been forced by circumstance to take to the more glamorous top wage jobs they envision they will have on graduation) is part of the problem for them. They have generally higher expectations than other students and a stronger work ethic. This was demonstrated in their responses to the movie *Office Space*, which glorified the slacker mentality of the movie's hero, Peter. In a typical response, one student wrote that she had "always worked my hardest at everything I do." In addition, more honors students hold down white-collar or technical jobs during school and seem less interested or inclined to criticize these jobs to which they aspire. One student couldn't or wouldn't write about his negative experiences in telemarketing, resulting in a case of writer's block in relation to freewriting the first draft of his essay. Part of his fear was that eventually someone involved with his job would read the essay, and his words would come back to haunt him.

Contributing to this double bind situation, many of the honors students in the class I taught this past semester (and some of the most vehement protesters of the group project) were from working-class backgrounds and were often the first students in their families to go to college. Thus, their protests may also have stemmed from resistance to dwelling on the kinds of non-professional jobs in their backgrounds or that of their parents, which relates to a point made by bell hooks in her essay, "Confronting Class in the Classroom." Regarding student behavior, hooks writes, "Silencing enforced by bourgeois values is sanctioned in the classroom by everyone" (180). Although hooks here refers to the literal silence of controlled and polite classroom behavior, I extend it to students' self-imposed silence about their work-

ing-class background in front of other students whom they may perceive as being middle or upper class.

In relation to silencing and class, Pierre Bourdieu makes the point in *The Logic of Practice* that "the most successful ideological effects are the ones that have no need of words, but only of *laissez-faire* and complicitous silence" (133). He comes to this conclusion in a discussion of how the established order is legitimized, pointing out that "the system of cultural goods production and the system producing the producers also fulfill ideological functions, as a by-product, through the very logic of their functioning, owing to the fact that the mechanisms through which they contribute to the reproduction of the social order . . . remain hidden" (132-33). Here, he specifically refers to the educational system.

Having students consider how the system silences discussions of class may be useful in overcoming resistance to this issue. One way I have led discussion in this direction is to have students read Gregory Mantsios' essay, "Media Magic: Making Class Invisible," which claims that the media privilege the rich and famous and make the poor virtually invisible. In the fall of 2005, we also effectively discussed the media's presentation of the poor during Hurricane Katrina, a vivid reminder that the poor are still very much part of American life.

In evaluating both of the components of the work unit, I have found that additional activities, such as the Mantsios reading, are needed to optimize critical thinking outcomes. Despite what Ira Shor reports about his own successful use of such relevant, real-life assignments, students don't seem to want to think about work while in school or school while at work. They have what some of my students have called a "work sucks" attitude.[4] In addition, as pointed out in discussing the honors classroom, some students also seem less willing or able to critique their jobs or the corporate world in general.

A further strategy I have used to counter student resistance has been to ask students to write a self-reflective journal about the process of writing the work essay. This came about when I noted that many students did better than expected on this essay, despite complaints. Trying to understand this disparity, I created the following journal prompt: "Although some of you claimed that work was a distasteful topic, many of you wrote interesting and meaningful essays. How do you account for this? Did writing this essay enable any critical thinking you would not ordinarily have done?"

Some students responded insightfully; their responses bear sharing. One student noted that work wasn't so much a distasteful topic as it was a difficult one. Critical thinking was involved because the issues weren't "in plain sight, they must be interpreted."

4. However in a 1977 essay, "Reinventing Daily Life: Self-Study and the Theme of 'Work,'" Shor acknowledges that writing about work generates a kind of double negative situation where two negatives, writing as work and work as theme combine for a truly negative situation or "formula for grief" (502).

Another student made the point that writing about such topics "quite often forces me to think and try harder than I normally would. When writing about something that I like, I don't try as hard because it seems easier to me." Another student noted that at first, work seemed like a boring topic, but once she had begun to explore aspects of the topic in freewrites, she found that she "felt strongly about many of them such as benefits, salary, and safety in the workplace." This student had experience working in fast food and brought up criticisms from *Fast Food Nation* in relation to safety issues. Another student simply stated that "we had a lot to say about what we disliked about our jobs." Along those same lines, a student wrote that because "we experienced work we had a lot to talk about," reinforcing Shor's ideas about the benefits of having students write from their own lives. The downside for this student was that "it was a lot of bad experiences that we didn't want to bring back up or remember." In relation to such negative memories, several students wrote about work experiences in which parents were laid off or forced to take low-paying jobs by uncaring companies and corporate executives.

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Even more significantly, several students indicated that writing about the topic created positive changes in their lives. One African-American student who had written about discrimination against her mother in the work place noted that in writing the paper she realized the importance of this issue for her, mentioning "the big effect discrimination had had on my life as an African-American." A student who liked his summer job as a roofer and claimed that his experience had led him to write a "meaningful and interesting essay" also recognized that writing the paper forced him to contemplate the job's dangers; he concluded with ways that he could keep himself and fellow workers safe in the future. Another student who had claimed to dislike the topic and had written a paper critical of unions ended up feeling more empowered to remedy negative issues of fair pay in her job as grocery store checkout worker, issues which had not been addressed or resolved by her union. She noted that writing the paper enabled her "to think in depth about [her] current employment." As a result, she wrote a letter to the corporate office, and "they answered with fairness . . . . If I had never written this paper I may have never worked up the nerve to have my voice heard." This response was perhaps the most dramatic effect of writing the paper, although other students also noted a feeling of empowerment and self-realization in their responses.

Additionally, I have found that writing on this topic brought a kind of closure for stu-

dents and demonstrated more pros than cons about this rather difficult essay. It also gave students an additional way to look at their reactions to and outcomes for future assignments or topics not of their own choosing. Reading students' self-reflections was also important for me in considering whether to continue to have students write on this topic. Although I have not had students write a self-reflection on the collaborative project, I realize now that that would also have been useful for the students and me.

In general, my experience demonstrates that open-ended, interactive, and creative collaborative projects dealing with the topic of work generate positive outcomes, perhaps because they are often grounded in students' full or part-time jobs. However, the essay, combining personal narrative and argument, despite student resistance, was also able to generate some critical thought, perhaps because students were forced to look at positive and negative aspects of their relation to work. This became more apparent, however, only after I added a self-reflective journal component. My synergistic approach combining individual essays with a group project allows students to move from the personal to the collective sphere gaining energy from each others' experiences.

Writing this paper and reflecting on my experience with work as a topic to encourage students' critical thinking has been, for me, an act of self-reflection on my own pedagogy and values as a compositionist. In the future, I plan on making the final format of work-related assignments a decision guided by students rather than one imposed on them. Inspired by the experience of the student who worked as grocery store checkout clerk, I am considering giving students the option to write a more practical document, a letter to the editor, a letter to their boss, or even a letter to a parent or fellow worker, as a follow-up to the essay or even as an alternative assignment.[5] I am also considering giving students a choice of issues about work to consider for the group project. Instead of having them focus on a problem they are having in their present job, they may consider the pros and cons of jobs they are preparing for, a topic which may engender more enthusiasm. In this regard, Marting noted in response to my queries regarding her success with *Making a Living* that students were most interested in sections that dealt with "the meaning of work, the work ethic, and personal narratives about work."

Most importantly, what I have learned about developing essay and collaborative group prompts around the topic of work is that one must take student resistance into consideration. This may be more important in an economically depressed area such as Akron; hence, context is also important to consider. Ultimately, I have developed these assignments counter to or in dialogue with student resistance. The process has been a dialectical one and

5. See McComiskey for similar approaches to writing about work.

in accordance with Shor's ideas about student-teacher interaction in the democratic classroom. Is resistance shaped into acceptance here or are both students and teacher changed in the process? Ideally the situation should be that of Paulo Freire's problem-posing education where teacher and students "become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (80). Whatever the specific assignments and issues that students and I will create together focusing on work as a theme, and despite initial resistance to this topic, I believe that the study of students' working lives enables growth, furthers lively discussion and critical thinking about the commodified and class stratified world in which we live, and has present and future relevance for students at The University of Akron.

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