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From the Classroom Editor's Introduction

Elizabeth Blackburn-Brockman

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Editor's Introduction

Elizabeth Blackburn-Brockman

Despite the title, we didn't actually think of the classroom when we initially imagined this section of *Pedagogy*. Instead, we thought of conversations. We thought of faculty office hours, evening study groups, and chance hallway encounters. We remembered department meetings, student confrontations, and e-mail exchanges. We recalled idly chatting or hotly debating over coffee cups, beer mugs, or wineglasses, depending on the topic, our choice of beverage, and the time of day or night. In short, we imagined teacher talk. The kind of talk we do at work (when we're supposed to be working). The kind of talk we do at play (when we're not supposed to be thinking about work).

What do we, as teachers and mentors, discuss in these informal settings? We talk about everything. We talk about classroom triumphs and failures. We argue against or advocate for pedagogical procedures and policies. We share "teaching moments" that help or hinder us in defining our classroom personas and climates. We agonize over grading standards, manuscript rejections, and working conditions. We revel in favorite assignments and student bloopers. We empathize. We theorize. We conceptualize. We contextualize. We moralize. The list goes on and on and on.

What is the connection between these informal conversations and the From the Classroom section of *Pedagogy*? One could describe the pieces in this section as more formalized versions of the conversations, because they do not simply report practitioner lore, what "has worked or is working or might work" (North 1987: 24), without asking why. Even then, however, the section is not designed to re-create the sustained line of theoretical inquiry that Mary Cayton (1991: 654) claims could be represented in Kenneth Burke's (1967: 110) parlor metaphor (which more accurately represents the main articles in the journal): "Imagine that you enter a parlor. . . . When you arrive, others

have preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. . . . You listen . . . until [catching] the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar.”

Perhaps the best way to understand the purpose of *From the Classroom*, then, is to imagine teachers’ informal and lively conversations as an agent for enriching and enlivening current scholarship in English studies. Echoing Juanita Rogers Comfort (2000: 543), the section provides an invitation for teachers to “animate [disciplinary] discourse by inventing complex and versatile [teacherly] selves who are able to place their [pedagogical] worlds into a carefully constructed relationship with those discourse communities.” We imagine informed, reflective discussions on focused, concrete pedagogical ideas, problems, and questions. As the first five *From the Classroom* articles suggest, we anticipate that authors will investigate these pedagogical issues by placing them in larger conceptual, historical, or theoretical frameworks. They will do so, however, without losing sight of the issues raised in the first place. In other words, the section won’t feature articles in which theory is foregrounded for its own sake; instead, theory will function as a means to inform, illuminate, and celebrate the praxis of teaching and mentoring.

Like *Pedagogy*, *From the Classroom* will not focus solely on composition, literature, or language. It’s designed to encompass all areas of English studies and, further, to feature authors from all backgrounds and institutional levels. Unlike the journal as a whole, though, *From the Classroom* will move the conversation from the parlor into the kitchen, the room where men and women alike tend to congregate nowadays during social gatherings. In that central location where talk and work intermingle, we can imagine, to borrow from Chef Emeril Lagasse, kicking conversations regarding teaching “BAM! Up a notch!”

Please send submissions for *From the Classroom* to Elizabeth Blackburn-Brockman, Department of English, Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859. Submissions should be between 500 and 2,000 words long and should be provided on hard copy.