

Feminist Pedagogy

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What is feminist pedagogy?



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Some definitions

Feminist pedagogy is a way of thinking about teaching and learning, rather than a prescriptive method. As such, it is used in different ways and for differing purposes within and across disciplines and learning environments. (E. F. Henderson)



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Some definitions

Feminist pedagogy is defined as a set of epistemological assumptions, teaching strategies, approaches to content, classroom practices, and teacher-student relationships grounded in feminist theory. To apply this philosophy in the classroom, (...) feminist scholars must critically engage in dialogue and reflection about both what and how they teach, as well as how who they are affects how they teach (Crabtree et al. 2009)



Some definitions

Feminist and liberatory pedagogies aim to encourage the students, particularly women, working-class students, and members of underrepresented ethnic groups, to gain an education that would be relevant to their concerns, to create their own meanings, and to find their own voices in relation to the material.
(Maher and Thompson Tetreault 1994)



Some definitions

Feminist pedagogy is about teaching in a particular way: recognizing the relations of power—based on gender, class, race and sexual orientation—that permeate the classroom. It is influenced by the emphasis of the women's liberation movement on 'process' and accepts the intrinsic link between changing curricula and changing teaching practice. In this sense, feminist pedagogy is about validating the process of teaching... Feminist pedagogy makes visible the real experience of gender in society, in the school and in the classroom. It unmasks the dynamic of power/powerlessness, the devaluation of women and the invisibility of their experience (Briskin, 1990).



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Main principles of feminist pedagogy 1

- Resisting hierarchy
- Using experience as a resource
- Transformative learning

(Henderson)



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Main principles of feminist pedagogy 2

- Reformation of the relationship between professor and students
- Empowerment
- Building community
- Privileging the individual voice as a way of knowing
- Respect for diversity of personal experience
- Challenging traditional views

(Webb, Allen and Walker 2002)



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Why is feminist pedagogy relevant when introducing gender studies courses?



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Some issues in feminist pedagogy

- Methodology of teaching, teacher's role
- Voice
- Empowerment



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Using the personal voice

When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. (...) Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks. Professors who expect students to share confessional narratives but who are themselves unwilling to share are exercising power in a manner that could be coercive. (...) It is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material. (bell hooks 1994)



Responsibility as empowerment

The bottom-line assumption has to be that everyone in the classroom is able to act responsibly. (...) All too often we have been trained as professors to assume students are not capable of acting responsibly, that if we don't exert control over them, then there's just going to be mayhem. (...) Yet the classroom should be a space where we're all in power in different ways. That means we professors should be empowered by our interactions with students. (...) I'm (...) not suggesting that I don't have more power. And I'm not trying to say we're all equal here. (...) We are all equal here to the extent that we are equally committed to creating a learning context. (bell hooks 1994)



Challenges to feminist pedagogy

- *Resisting hierarchy:* Where the teacher is paid and employed to assess students by the institution, how can the students gain equality with the teacher in the classroom?
- *Using experience as a resource:* Who is able to speak out in the classroom? Which aspects of experience are further silenced by the dominant voices of the classroom? How can students and teachers both talk of their 'private' experiences and engage in a professional assessor-assessed relationship? What is the line between 'therapy' and 'academic discussion'? Who decides?
- *Transformative learning:* What changes to ways of thinking can occur in an institutionalised learning environment? What if the 'transformation' is a negative or distressing realisation? Is the learning setting adapted to deal with high levels of emotion? Is there a risk of 'transformation' occurring as a reinforcement of a dominant feminist narrative? (Henderson)



Do we use feminist pedagogy in our teaching practices?



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Thank you for your attention!

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