

Feminist Pedagogy

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bell hooks: Teaching to transgress (1994)

- Teaching as a performative act
- Excitement, pleasure in learning
- Flexibility in class planning
- Acknowledgement of everyone's presence – voice
- Shared responsibility for classroom dynamics
- Classroom as a communal space
- Being vulnerable as a teacher – taking risks
- “resisting” students – fear of transgressing boundaries



Points to discuss

1. Questioning hierarchy in the classroom – creating a learning community
2. Voice – giving voice to everyone – acknowledging presence
3. Using personal experience as a learning resource
4. Transformative learning – changing ways of thinking
5. Teaching methods of engaged/transformational/feminist/liberatory pedagogy



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 consider

1. Questioning hierarchy in the classroom

- How can power imbalance and hierarchy between teacher and students be challenged in the given power relations of the university classroom?
- How can hierarchy and power imbalances between students be handled by the teacher?
- What are our possibilities to have feminist classrooms within the institutional power relations and regulatory mechanisms of the university?



2. Voice and presence

- Who is able to speak out in the classroom?
- Who are silenced by the dominant voices of the classroom?
- How can teachers ensure that all voices speak and are heard in the classroom?



Using personal experience as a learning resource

- How can students and teachers both talk of their ‘private’ experiences and engage in a professional assessor-assessed relationship?
- How do we establish a classroom environment where it is possible at all?
- What to do when sharing personal experiences triggers traumas? Where is the line between ‘therapy’ and ‘academic discussion’?
- How do we use personal experiences to discuss theoretical work? How do we avoid the classroom discussion becoming nothing more than telling stories?

Transformative learning – changing ways of thinking

- What changes to ways of thinking can occur in an institutionalised learning environment?
- How open is the institutional environment to feminist thinking?
- What about students who resist or fear changing their ways of thinking?



Your concerns, ideas, experiences?



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